Title: Pincher Martin, O.D.: A Story of the Inner Life of the Royal Navy

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Release date: January 4, 2013 [EBook #41774]
Most recently updated: February 1, 2013

Language: English

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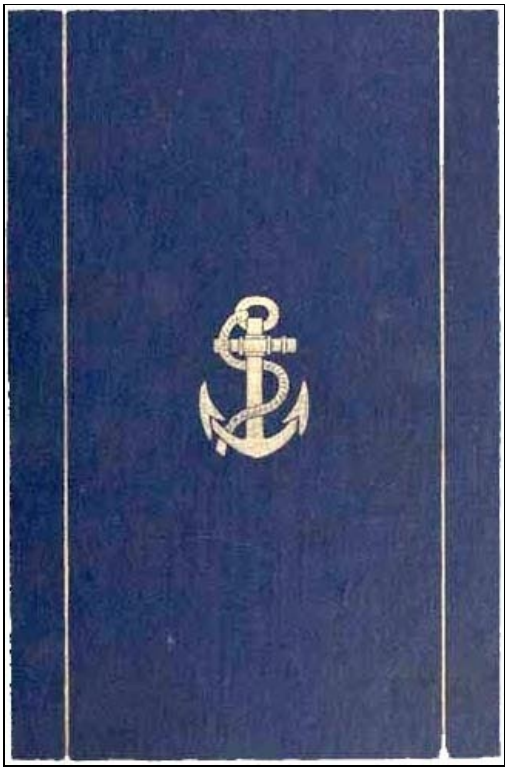

'That's 'er.'
''Oo?'

PAGE 1.

Pincher Martin, O.D.

A STORY OF THE INNER LIFE OF THE ROYAL NAVY

By

'TAFFRAIL'

Author of 'Carry On,' &c., &c.

ILLUSTRATED BY

C. Fleming Williams

LONDON: 38 Soho Square, W.
W. & R. CHAMBERS, LIMITED
EDINBURGH: 339 High Street
1916

Edinburgh:
Printed by W. & R. Chambers, Limited.

PREFACE.

This story was written in rather difficult circumstances, and subject to frequent interruption. Indeed, when the first chapters appeared in *Chambers's Journal* early in 1916 the narrative was barely half-finished. Sometimes I almost despaired of ever completing it, for it can perhaps be understood that writing on board a small ship actually at sea in time of war is impossible for more reasons than one.

The reader is cautioned against accepting the story as an official account of the part played by a certain section of the Navy during the war. Incidents described are true; but, for reasons which must be obvious, it has been necessary to give them fictitious colouring. It also seems desirable to add that all my characters are fictitious, and that each chapter was submitted to the censors at the Press Bureau before publication.

It should be added that a considerable amount of matter is contained in this volume which did not appear in *Chambers's Journal* when the story appeared in serial form.

More than ever am I deeply sensible of the very real debt which I owe to my wife, both for her help in revising and correcting the proofs, and for her many suggestions for improvements.

TAFFRAIL.

1916.

TO MY WIFE.

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PINCHER MARTIN, O.D.

CHAPTER I.

HIS FIRST SHIP.

'There ye are, Martin. That's 'er.'

The leading seaman in charge of the party paused, and waved a hand toward a squat gray battleship lying on the other side of one of the basins in Portsmouth Dockyard.

The little expedition of which he was the leader consisted of himself; Martin, the man he had spoken to; and a small hand-cart propelled by another ordinary seaman, breathing heavily. The cart contained a sausage-shaped, khaki-coloured hammock, bound with its seven regulation turns of lashing, and a bulbous brown kit-bag. They were Martin's belongings. He was joining his first seagoing ship.

''Er?' he queried in answer to the leading seaman's remark, shivering and looking rather puzzled. ''Oo?'

He was a puny, undersized little rat of a man, with a pallid, freckled face and a crop of sandy hair. It was early winter, and the piercing wind bit through to his very marrow, while the drizzling rain had already found its way through his oilskin and down the back of his neck. It was distinctly chilly. The tip of his nose and his fingers were blue with cold, and he looked, and felt, supremely miserable.

He repeated his question as the leading seaman executed a few violent steps of a clog-dance, and flapped his arms like an elderly penguin to restore his circulation. ''Er?' he said at last, pausing for breath and seemingly rather surprised at Martin's ignorance. 'That there's the *Belligerent*. That's the ship we're goin' to join—you're goin' to join, that is.'

'That 'er?' Martin ejaculated, gazing with awe at the battleship's great bulk. 'That 'er? Gor' blimy!' He seemed rather appalled.

The leading seaman tittered and sucked his teeth. 'Lor'!' he laughed, not unkindly, noticing the anxiety in the youngster's eyes, 'you needn't look like that. They can't eat yer; leastways not if you be'aves yourself they won't. 'Er commander's a werry nice gentleman; 'e wus shipmates along o' me in th' *Duncan* up the Straits [1] six year ago. 'E wus a lootenant then, an' a bit of a flyer; but 'e's a gent so long as you don't get in the rattle.' [2]

He paused and eyed the ordinary seaman with the hand-cart, who had released the shafts and was swinging his arms. ''Ere, young fella, not so much of it!' he ordered abruptly, quite forgetting that he had called the halt himself. 'Get a move on yer! You ain't no bloomin' baronite drivin' your own motor-car, to stop 'ere an' stop there has you thinks fit. You ain't wheelin' no perishin' whelk-barrer down Commercial Road neither. Show a leg, me lad!'

The ordinary seaman seized the shafts, and the procession moved forward.

Ten minutes later Martin, with his bag and hammock, was standing on the quarterdeck of his Majesty's first-class pre-Dreadnought battleship *Belligerent*. The leading seaman and the man with the hand-cart were already on their way back to the Royal Naval Barracks, and Pincher Martin, alone, for the first time, felt horribly nervous and uncomfortable. He had been received with scant courtesy or interest by the marine corporal of the watch, who had told him to remain where he was while he fetched a ship's corporal; and now, eyed critically by the grinning side-boy and the messenger, youngsters like himself, who made facetious, rather uncomplimentary, and very audible remarks about his personal appearance, he shivered and waited.

Over on the other side of the deck a tall officer, clad in a greatcoat and swinging a telescope, was walking up and down dodging the rain-drips from the awning. He was a lieutenant, from the two gold stripes and the curl on his shoulder-straps, and was, as a matter of fact, the officer of the watch. Presently the merriment at Martin's expense became rather raucous, and the officer turned round and saw the messenger and the side-boy laughing together. The chubby-faced youths caught his eye roving over them, and immediately both became rigid, with an innocent expression on their faces.

'Come here, you two!' he called, beckoning with his telescope.

The two youngsters trotted up and halted before him with a salute.

'Skylarking again, eh?' the lieutenant asked.

'Oh no, sir. We wusn't skylarkin',' the elder of the two protested.

'Humph! I don't know so much about that. I suppose you were making fun of that man who's just joined, eh?'

'Oh no, sir. I only said to Horrigan'——

'I don't want to hear what you said to Horrigan, or what Horrigan said to you,' interrupted the officer of the watch, smiling to himself. 'Evidently the time hangs heavily on your hands, and I'll not have the quarterdeck turned into a bally music hall.' He looked round the deck, and noticed some untidy ends of rope near the ship's side.

'You, Bates,' he went on, 'can amuse yourself by coiling down the ends of these boats' falls and awning jiggers; and you, Horrigan, can broom all that water into the scuppers.' He waved his hand toward some pools of rain-water near the edge of the deck. 'When you've done that you can let me know, and I'll find you another job. Go on—away you go!'

The boys pattered off, and the lieutenant resumed his perambulation.

Presently a ship's corporal, accompanied by the marine who had gone in search of him, came through the battery door and went up to Martin.

'Name and rating?' he demanded abruptly, referring to a book in his hand.

'Martin. Ord'nary seaman.'

'You'll be in No. 47 mess,' said Ship's Corporal Puddicombe, 'and will be in the forecastle division, starboard watch, first part, first sub. The capten of your top—Petty Officer Casey's 'is name—will tell you off for your stations in your part of the ship. You'll stow your bag in the fore cable flat, starboard side, and your 'ammick in the starboard forecastle rack. I'll show you where to put 'em, and if you comes along to my office after tea to-day I'll give you a card with it all written on—see?'

'Yessir,' said Martin, looking very bewildered, for he had hardly understood a word of what the man had said.

'It's all right, me lad,' the corporal went on, more kindly. 'You needn't look so scared. You'll soon shake down. Is this your first ship?'

'Yessir.'

The corporal nodded and went off to report to the officer of the watch, who presently returned with him.

'Ord'nary Seaman Martin, sir. Come to join the ship from the barricks.'

The lieutenant eyed the new arrival critically. 'What division's he in, corporal?' he queried.

'Yours, sir. Forecastle division.'

'How long have you been in the service?' the officer asked next.

'Six an' a narf months, sir,' said Martin.

'Well, it's about time you got your hair cut, my lad. It's much too long. The forecastle division's my division, and the smartest in the ship, so look out you uphold its reputation. Is your kit complete, by the way?'

'Yessir, all but one pair o' socks.'

'All right; we'll see to that another day. Show him where to put his bag and hammock, corporal, and tell him where his mess is. You'd better introduce him to the barber, too. I can't have the men of my division looking like a beauty chorus.—You,' he added, addressing Martin, 'had better get yourself thoroughly warm. We don't want you to start off by catching a chill.'

'Thank you, sir.'

'Come along o' me,' said the ship's corporal gruffly; and Pincher, picking up his bag and hammock, followed him along the deck.

In another minute they were on the mess-deck. It was a strange place to Martin, accustomed as he was to the large and airy rooms in the barracks ashore. It seemed cramped and restricted. The steel beams supporting the deck above were barely eighteen inches over his head, and every inch of space seemed occupied with something or other. But a sense of order and cleanliness prevailed; for, though the ship was in dockyard hands, and the first lieutenant would have described the mess-deck as 'filthy,' it seemed specklessly clean to an outsider. The glare of the electric lights shone on the spotless white enamel and polished metal-work, and every inch of wood-work which was not varnished and polished was well scrubbed and white.

Moving along a narrow gangway about eight feet wide, they passed the officers' and men's galleys or kitchens. These were placed amidships, and the great cooking-ranges, newly blacked and with their polished steel knobs and utensils winking in the glare, vomited wisps of steam and savoury smells. The black-and-white tiled floors were spotless, and so were the wooden slabs upon which the meat and the vegetables were cut up. Farther forward came small, curtained-off

enclosures serving as messes for the chief petty officers; and then, forward again, white enamelled steel bulkheads stretching from floor to ceiling.

Extending out from the ship's side, with its row of scuttles and wooden mess shelves and boot-racks, were numbers of white wooden mess tables and narrow wooden forms. They were spaced at precisely equal intervals, and at the end of each table was a neatly rolled strip of white linoleum which served as a tablecloth at meal-times, a couple of shining tin mess kettles, and a teapot. On the deck at the foot of each table was a bread-barge, a squat-shaped tub, to contain the bread belonging to the mess. The barges were all exactly similar, having scrubbed teak sides and polished brass hoops, with the number of the mess in neat brass figures, and each stood at precisely the same distance from its own table.

From the ceiling or deck overhead hung racks for the reception of the men's circular, black-japanned cap-boxes, and others for their white straw hats—each in its duck cover to keep out dust and dirt—and the newly scrubbed ditty-boxes. These, of white wood, are the receptacles in which sailors keep their small personal belongings. They contain, as a rule, photographs of wives, sweethearts, relations, and friends; letters; and other purely private and valued relics; but, though provided with a lock and key, it is an unwritten and invariable law of the mess-deck that they shall be left unlocked. A man must show his trust in his messmates, and a thief has no place on board one of his Majesty's ships. If petty pilfering does occur, there is no mercy for the culprit, and he is speedily discovered and removed.

It was a Saturday afternoon, and, as the ship was in dockyard hands undergoing a refit, more than half the men were on leave, and the mess-deck was comparatively empty. Those men who were left on board were spending the half-holiday in blissful slumber, for many of the tables and forms bore sleeping figures wrapped in blankets or greatcoats. They snored melodiously and in many keys.

Here and there a man writing a letter or reading looked up with some curiosity as Martin passed, but otherwise he attracted little attention. The advent of another ordinary seaman was too common an occurrence to call for remark, though to the ordinary seaman himself the day of his arrival on board his first seagoing ship would thereafter be mentally marked with a red figure in the calendar of his life.

The ship's corporal, anxious to resume his interrupted sleep in the police-office, hurried on; and soon, after climbing down one slippery steel ladder and up another, they arrived in the foremost bag-flat. This compartment was provided with tiers of numbered racks stretching from deck above to deck below. Each division in the racks held its own brown canvas or painted kit-bag, with the brightly polished brass tally on the bottom stamped with the owner's name, all the tallies being set at precisely the same angle. The guide halted and pointed to a vacant space. 'There you are,' he said. 'That's where you stow your bag.'

Martin dropped his hammock, and after some difficulty succeeded in insinuating his bag into its appointed place.

''Ere, that won't do,' observed the ship's corporal, shaking his head with a pained expression on his face. 'Slew 'er round till the letters on your tally are 'orizontal. The first lootenant'll 'ave a fit if 'e sees it shoved in any'ow like that.'

Martin did as he was told, and when at last he had stowed his bag to the corporal's satisfaction, was taken to another flat somewhere in the bowels of the ship, where he was shown where to put his hammock.

He was next taken to his mess, and was introduced to the leading seaman who acted as senior member and caterer. This worthy, a ruddy-faced, heavily built man called Strumbles, was discovered asleep on the table, and was none too pleased when the ship's corporal tapped him on the shoulder and woke him up.

'Strumbles,' he said, ''ere's another O.D. [3] come to join your mess. Martin's 'is name. Just keep an eye on 'im. 'E's a bit noo to the service. 'E wants 'is 'air cut, too, so you might send 'im along to the 'aircutter after tea.'

Strumbles sat up sleepily and signified his willingness to perform these favours, but the moment the corporal was safely out of sight glared unpleasantly at the new arrival. 'Bit noo to the navy, are yer?' he demanded. 'Name o' Martin, eh?'

'Yessir.'

'Don't call me "sir." My name's Strumbles. Nutty Strumbles they calls me. Is this yer first ship?'

'Yes.'

'Thought so. If it wasn't, you'd know better than to come wakin' up a bloke wot's 'avin' 'is Saturday arternoon caulk.'

'I'm sorry,' Martin stammered. 'It wusn't my fault. I didn't know'——

'Course you didn't. 'Owever, now you're 'ere you can just wake me up at seven bells. Know what seven bells is, eh?'

'Yes. 'Arf-parst three.'

'Right. At 'arf-parst three you wakes me up, an' when you done that you can go along to the galley an' wet the tea. Me, an' Ginger Strudwick, an' Nobby Clarke, an' one or two others, is the only blokes o' this 'ere mess aboard. Them two's on watch now, but they'll be down at eight bells clamourin' for their scran like a lot o' wolves; so look out you 'as it ready. When you've wetted the tea you can run along to the canteen an' git height heggs an' height rashers for our supper—I'll give you a *chit* for it when I wakes up; an' when you done that you can tidy up them there mess shelves an' polish the mess kettle an' teapot ready for the rounds to-morrow. Understan'?'

'Yes,' said Martin, hesitatingly.

'Orl rite, look out you does it, then,' remarked Strumbles, laying his head back and resuming his interrupted slumbers.

Martin began to feel rather sorry he had ever joined the navy, for as a young and very ordinary seaman on board a ship it appeared as if every one was his master. The recruiting posters which had been responsible for his entry had said something about 'seeing the world, with plenty of pocket-money.' This was what they meant, evidently. He sniffed dubiously. In the barracks where he had undergone his preliminary training he had been one of many others of his own age; but here he was cast entirely on his own resources. He felt lonely and miserable; nobody seemed to take any interest in him, and everybody ordered him about in a dictatorial way which he didn't like at all. He gulped suspiciously, and then looked round with a nervous expression lest the slight sound should have awakened Strumbles.

When, seven months before, Martin had put on his bluejacket's uniform for the first time, he had felt immensely proud of himself. Everybody in his own small village had turned round to stare when he first appeared in it; and he was rather disappointed when, on his arrival in Portsmouth, people in the street neglected to notice him. He liked his jumper, with the V-shaped opening in front, and the blue woollen jersey underneath. He was proud of his blue jean collar with its three rows of narrow white tape, which, he had been told, commemorated Nelson's three great victories of the Nile, Copenhagen, and Trafalgar. He had heard, too, that the black silk handkerchief worn round his neck and tied in front was a badge of mourning for the same great naval hero. But both in the matter of the collar and the handkerchief he had been led into believing a very popular fallacy.

The square collar was first introduced in the latter portion of the eighteenth century as a means of preventing the grease and flour with which the sailors anointed their pigtails from soiling their clothes. The three rows of tape, moreover, were placed upon it merely for ornament, for there is no evidence to support the belief that they commemorate the three famous victories. The black silk handkerchief came in at much the same time. In early sea-fights the heat on the gun-decks was stifling, so much so that the men were forced to strip to the waist. To prevent the perspiration from running down into their eyes and blinding them, they were in the habit of tying handkerchiefs round their foreheads, and at ordinary times these were worn round the neck for the sake of convenience. It is true that up till a few years ago our modern bluejackets wore their spare black silk handkerchiefs tied in a bow on the left arm when attending funerals; but there is nothing to support the theory that they were introduced as badges of mourning for the immortal Nelson.

But Martin believed these things implicitly, and perhaps, as it fostered the traditions of the service, it did him no harm.

Another portion of his attire of which he was inordinately proud was his bell-bottomed trousers. He firmly imagined that these had been introduced merely to give the sailor a rakish appearance, and was not aware that they were brought in so that the garments could conveniently be rolled up to the knee when their barefooted wearers were giving the decks their usual morning scrub.

Some few years ago a proposal was on foot to do away with the loose trousers, and to clothe the seamen in garments shaped like those in everyday use ashore. As a reason for the change it was urged, with some truth, that in modern ships the men seldom went barefooted, and that less flowing trousers would be less likely to catch in the intricate machinery with which modern ships were supposed to be crammed. But the storm of indignation with which the proposal was received by the men speedily caused it to be dropped. The seamen take no small pride in their nether garments; some of them even go to the trouble and expense of providing themselves with specially wide pairs in which to go ashore on leave.

The wide-brimmed straw hat, which constitutes the modern bluejacket's full-dress headgear, was first introduced in the West Indies early in the nineteenth century, but was not made an article of uniform until much later. Before that time, and up till thirty or forty years ago, shiny black tarpaulin hats, much the same shape as the straw 'boater' of commerce, were *de rigueur* in the navy. The term 'bluejacket,' too, owes its origin to the short, blue, brass-buttoned jacket—rather similar in shape to an Eton jacket, but with no point at the back—which was worn until 1891.

But all Martin's ideas as to his own importance were speedily knocked on the head. By the time he sought his hammock at nine-thirty on that first eventful day he had come to realise that he was very small beer indeed, a mere excrescence on the face of the earth; and that, like Agag, it behoved him to walk warily and with circumspection.

The captain of the forecastle, Petty-Officer Casey—'Mister Casey,' as he insisted on being called—had taken him to his bosom in a gruff, fatherly sort of way, and had given him a few words of advice.

'It's like this 'ere, me lad,' he had pointed out, but not unkindly. 'You're an ordinary seaman, an' wot you've got to do is to carry out other people's orders. If you're told off to do a thing, do it at once, an' cheerful like; don't slouch about th' ship like a ploughboy, nor yet a Portugee militiaman neither. 'Old yourself erec'; take a pride in yourself, an' obey all orders at the rush. If you gives no trouble I'm yer friend, remember that; but if you gits up agin me, an' starts givin' trouble, I won't raise a finger to 'elp you, an' you'd best stan' clear. Don't forget, neither, that I've got my eye on you the 'ole time; an' don't run away wi' the idea that you're doin' the navy a good turn by joinin', like so many on 'em do. It's the navy wot's doin' you a favour by 'avin' you. If you bears orl this in mind me an' you'll get along orl right, an' some day, p'r'aps, you'll be a petty-orficer the same as me.'

Martin remembered Casey's words of wisdom, and derived no small benefit therefrom.

CHAPTER II.

THE DAILY ROUND.

I.

A considerable amount of art is necessary in laying out a kit for inspection; but when he had folded his clothes, and had placed the neat rolls and bundles, together with his cap-box, ditty-box, hairbrush, comb, toothbrush, type, and other small belongings, in the exact order prescribed by the clothing regulations, Martin was by no means dissatisfied with his attempt.

Now, Mr Midshipman Taut, R.N., was used to the wiles and deceptions of those men who would sooner do anything than purchase new clothes. He had known individuals who borrowed garments from their friends to make up for the deficiencies in their own kits when these were being inspected. Sometimes, to heighten the deception, they even went to the trouble of marking the loaned clothes with their own names. The regulations on the subject lay it down that blue articles shall be marked with white paint and white garments in black, each man being provided with a wooden type inscribed with his name for this purpose. But the gay deceivers had discovered that white chalk and ordinary boot-blacking were very efficient substitutes for the paint, for the temporary markings so caused could easily be brushed out before the garments were returned to their rightful owners after kit inspection. Moreover, unless the mustering officer was particularly inquisitive or suspicious, the chances were fully fifty-four to one that the deception would never be noticed.

But the midshipman, though he had left the college at Dartmouth less than a year before, was up to all these dodges. He kept the divisional clothing-book, wherein was recorded the contents of the bag of each seaman in the division, whether the clothes therein were in a state of thorough repair and cleanliness, and whether the condition of the man's hammock was 'V.G.,' 'G.,' 'Mod.' or merely 'Bad.' He regarded all men with a certain amount of suspicion unless he had positive truth that they were guileless; while newly joined ordinary seamen, in particular, were brands to be snatched from the burning.

'Serge jumpers?' he asked, sucking his pencil.

'Two 'ere, sir,' said Martin, holding up a couple of neat bundles; 'an' one on.'

The officer took one, unrolled it, and lifted the square collar to look at the marking underneath. There was no deception, for the name W. Martin stared at him in large white letters. He gently rubbed it with a finger, but it did not brush off; and, holding the garment up by its sleeves, he examined it with a critical eye. There was nothing the matter with it.

'That's all right,' he remarked, handing it back, and making a note in the book. 'Let me see your serge trousers.'

One by one the articles comprising Martin's kit, even down to his 'pusser's dagger' or seaman's knife, the more intimate garments of underwear, towels, socks, toothbrush, blacking-brushes, were minutely examined. The midshipman even went to the length of producing a tape measure, wherewith he measured the distance between the three rows of tape on the collars, the depth of the V-shaped opening in the front of the jumpers, and the width of the trousers at the foot. But nothing was really wrong. One pair of socks was missing and another required darning, one flannel shirt was unwashed, a pair of white duck trousers had been left unmarked, and one pair of blue serge ditto proved slightly wider in the leg than was permissible; but everything else was in good order and of the proper uniform pattern.

He seemed slightly surprised. 'Hm,' he observed, making further hieroglyphics in the clothing-book; 'not at all bad. Look out you keep it so.'

He went off to make his report to the lieutenant of the division, who presently arrived to make his own inspection. But he also was tolerably satisfied, and Martin was told that he could restore his belongings to his bag, and report himself to Petty Officer Casey for work.

For many a long day Pincher was sorely puzzled by the different varieties of uniform he was called upon to wear. They were all designated by numbers, and the 'rig of the day' was always piped at breakfast-time, when the men were allowed the necessary extra minutes to change their clothes. On Sundays, for instance, the boatswain's mates, after a preliminary twitter on their pipes, would bellow, 'Dress o' the day, No. 1, an' 'ats!' This meant that the men were required to array themselves in their best blue serge suits, with gold good-conduct badges and badges of rating, and their white straw hats, for the Sunday inspection by the captain. These garments constituted the seamen's full dress, for the expensive blue cloth trousers, worn over the jumper and tied behind with black silk ribbons, had been obsolete for some time. They are retained,

however, in the royal yachts; and here, also, as a distinctive mark, the men wear their badges in silver and white, instead of the customary gold and red.

Dress No. 2, Martin found, was a similar rig to No. 1, except that a cap was usually worn instead of the hat, and the badges were red instead of gold. No. 3, again, was the same as No. 2, except that the jumper was not buttoned at the wrists; while No. 4 (known as 'night clothing') was an old suit of No. 3, worn without the collar. No. 5 was of white duck, and was worn without the collar, and with a white-topped cap. The suit was washable, and hence was usually donned by men doing dirty work or in hot weather in the summer. White caps, or blue caps with white covers, both of which were kept pipeclayed for the sake of appearance, were worn at home from May to the end of September, or with white clothing at other times.

The *Belligerent*, like every other large vessel in the navy, carried a stock of ready-made garments of various sizes, besides underclothing, boots, shoes, stockings, socks, shirts, collars, rolls of serge and flannel, and sixty-and-one other articles necessary to the bodily comfort and personal adornment of the ship's company. There was hardly a thing in the clothing line which could not be obtained from the paymaster; and the 'slops,' as they were called, were issued about once a month, their value being deducted from the men's pay.

When Martin joined his first ship, toward the end of 1913, ready-made garments, supplied by the Government, were almost universally worn. Within the past fifteen years or so the blue-jackets have lost much of their original handiness with the needle and the sewing-machine. It is hardly to be wondered at, for in the days of sailing-ships the men were sailors pure and simple. Now they are seamen-specialists, with an expert and highly technical knowledge of gunnery, torpedo-work, electricity, wireless telegraphy, signals, or some other highly important subject. They are essentially busy men, with little time to spend on making their own clothes. Twenty years ago one afternoon of the week (Thursday) was always set aside as a half-holiday, or 'make and mend clothes afternoon.' Then it was no uncommon sight to see the sheltered corners of the upper deck and mess-deck crowded with men, some busy with sewing-machines, making clothes from the raw serge or duck as issued from the store; others furbishing up their wardrobes; and the rest either sleeping or looking on. The term 'jewing,' as sewing is still called, came in because the men with the machines manufactured their shipmates' clothes for a consideration, such things as 'reach-me-downs' being still undreamt of. By Pincher's day, however, the 'make and mend' day had been altered to Saturday, to allow the men to indulge at intervals in the week-end habit. Moreover, most of the clothes were issued ready-made, being afterwards altered to fit individuals by the ship's tailors, seamen with sewing-machines, who had a special aptitude for the work, and were entitled to charge stipulated sums for their labours. They were still known as 'jews,' and, like the 'snobs' (bootmakers) and the barbers, often had considerable sums standing to their credit in the savings bank.

On the afternoon of the day on which he had had his kit inspected Martin found himself detailed as a member of a working-party told off to draw stores from the dockyard. Eleven other men went with him; and, taking a small hand-cart, the little expedition set off at one-thirty P.M. in the charge of a petty officer. The rain had stopped, and it was a sunny winter day, with a touch of frost; and, as it gave him an opportunity of looking about him, Martin rather enjoyed the experience. Before joining the navy he had lived in the depths of the country, and had spent most of his days trundling the local baker's hand-cart. His experience of the sea and ships had been limited to a single visit to Skegness as a member of the village choir; and even during his training in the barracks he had seen practically nothing of men-of-war. Now for the first time in his life he came across battleships, cruisers, destroyers, torpedo-boats, and submarines at close quarters.

'Gosh!' he ejaculated, marvelling exceedingly.

''Ullo! Wot's up wi' you, Pincher?' asked another ordinary seaman, Hawkins by name. Martin had already been nicknamed, and 'Pincher,' he understood, was the sobriquet accorded to all men with his particular surname.

'I wus only wonderin' to meself if'—he hesitated timidly.

'Wonderin' wot?' persisted his companion.

'Wonderin' if this wus the 'ole navy. There seems plenty o' ships 'ere.'

'Lawks, 'ark at 'im!' exclaimed the other youngster, going off into a shrill cackle of amusement 'Jist 'ark at 'im, you blokes! Arskin' if the 'ole navy is 'ere. 'Strewth! there ain't a quarter nor a 'undredth of 'em in this 'ere bunch.'

Martin, rather ashamed of his ignorance, reddened and nodded. 'Wot's that there?' he asked, changing the subject, and pointing to a gray, cigar-shaped vessel lying in a dry dock, with dockyard 'maties' swarming on board her.

'That there's a submarine,' Hawkins explained; 'one o' them there craft wot goes under water.'

'Gosh! She's a funny-lookin' thing. Wot sort o' blokes serves in 'em?'

'Matloes, [4] Pincher, the same as you an' me. They doesn't carry O.D.'s, though; only A.B.'s an'

E.R.A.'s, [5] an' such like. They get extra pay for wot they does. It's a bit dangerous like.'

Martin thought for a minute, looking interestedly at the submarine as they trundled past. ''Ow does men jine 'em?' he asked eventually.

''Ow does they qualify for 'em, d'you mean?' Hawkins queried.

Martin nodded.

'Well,' his neighbour explained, with a broad grin on his face, and inventing a still broader fiction on the spur of the moment, 'they fu'st ties a five-'underweight sinker to yer feet an' a rope round yer neck. Then they lowers you down to nineteen fathom, an' leaves you there for two minutes.—Let's see, Shorty,' he added, pretending to consider, and, turning to another ordinary seaman with a solemn wink, 'is it two minutes or three minutes they leaves yer down?'

'Three minutes, chum,' answered the other unblushingly.

'Well, they leaves you down three minutes, an' they pulls you up again, an' if yer nose ain't bleedin' they reckons as 'ow you're fit an' proper for submarines. If you are bleedin' you ain't no good—see?'

'That's a bit 'ard, ain't it?' Martin queried innocently.

'Yus, it is a bit 'ard,' Hawkins replied, without a smile on his face. 'But then, o' course, the men wot man the submarines 'as to be extra special sort o' blokes wot 'as got plenty o' guts.'

Martin drank it all in; but at that moment the story-teller's face failed him, and he burst into uncontrollable laughter. 'Oh Pincher!' he gasped, spluttering, 'I believes you'd swaller anythink any one tells yer!'

'D' you mean that wot you said ain't true?' Martin asked.

'Course it ain't, fat'ead. I wus only kiddin' yer,' guffawed the other, with tears of amusement trickling down his cheeks. 'Lawks! you'll be the death o' me yet.—Did yer 'ear wot he arsked, you blokes?'

But the 'blokes' had no opportunity of replying, for at that instant Petty Officer Simpson turned round. 'Not so much noise there!' he ordered abruptly.—' 'Awkins, if I sees you larfin' an' shoutin' agen I takes you before the orficer of the watch when we gets back to the ship!'

Their faces fell. There was dead silence.

Rattling over the cobbled roadways and railway lines, they presently came to a store, where, in return for paper demand-notes handed in by the petty officer, they received sundry drums of paint, turpentine, and varnish. Then on again to another building, where an apoplectic-looking storekeeper condescended to allow them to load the cart still further with coils of rope and spun-yarn, and hanks of cod and mackerel line. Presently there came another stoppage to receive a bundle of broomsticks and some boathook staves. By this time the cart was heavily laden, and its manipulators were perspiring and far from cheerful; but, stopping again, they were solemnly presented with half-a-dozen shallow tin baths. They were the 'baths, sponge, thirty inches, pattern seventeen,' commonly seen suspended from the ceilings in the officers' cabins on board a man-of-war; and Martin, as he helped to drag the conveyance back to the ship, with the last consignment lodged precariously on the summit of the other articles and threatening every instant to descend in a noisy avalanche, wondered vaguely to himself if the dockyard was a sort of glorified general store, and if, by the simple presentation of a demand-note, they could obtain, say, half-a-dozen kippers or a cargo of tinned salmon. He was frightened to ask the question for fear of having his leg pulled again; but as everything in the way of ironmongery, furniture, ship's stores, paint, rope, and blocks seemed obtainable, why not also provisions?

They got back to the *Belligerent* without further incident, and the articles were carried on board and stowed in the various storerooms.

II.

At first, until he got used to it, the regular routine of the ship was not altogether to Martin's liking. At five-thirty each morning they were all roused out of their warm hammocks by the strident shouting of the boatswain's mates and the ship's corporals. 'All hands! turn out, turn out, turn out! show a leg, show a leg, show a leg!' they yelled with insistent monotony. He soon learnt, from being shot violently out of his hammock, and from sundry threats of being taken before the officer of the watch for slackness in turning out, that it did not pay to disregard the noisy summons to wake up. Other men had tried the game, and it generally ended in their being turned out at five A.M. for several days together.

By five-forty-five, therefore, Martin had stowed his hammock, had given his face and neck a perfunctory dab with a damp towel, and was having a bowl of steaming hot ship's cocoa in his mess. Splendid stuff this, so thick that a spoon would nearly stand upright in it; and he little

realised that the long-suffering cooks were turned out of their hammocks at about three each morning to prepare it. The cocoa was issued in large slabs the best part of an inch thick. It was the best of its kind; and though it required a deal of boiling, it was an excellent drink wherewith to start the day's work.

At six o'clock both watches were piped to fall in on the upper deck; and when parties had been told off for various other odd jobs, the rest of the men were detailed to scrub decks under the supervision of their petty officers. Cold work this, with the thermometer nearly down to freezing, the hoses spouting water, and one's feet bare and trousers turned up to the knee. Lines of men armed with hard, short-haired brooms went solemnly up and down, scrubbing as they went, and woe betide the hapless individual who did not exhibit the necessary energy! On Saturdays the routine was varied, for then the decks were sprinkled with sand and were well holystoned. This work was more back-breaking and chilly than ever, for one had to get down on one's knees and manipulate a heavy holystone in each hand.

When Martin joined, the ship was in dockyard hands, and a special routine was in force; and at seven o'clock, by which time the men who had been granted night-leave had returned, the decks had been finished and the guns cleaned. A quarter of an hour later the bugle sounded off 'Cooks,' when the men detailed as cooks of messes went to the galley to procure their own and their messmates' breakfasts; and at seven-twenty-five the boatswain's mates heralded the first meal by more shrill whistling, and the hungry men trooped below.

Breakfast, Martin always thought, was quite the most satisfactory meal of the day, and with the addition of a couple of canteen kippers, or eggs and bacon, he generally managed to acquit himself pretty well. The dietary of the modern bluejacket is a liberal one, while a paternal Government allows each man the sum of fourpence a day with which to purchase extra articles. An hour was allowed for the meal, for washing, for changing into the 'rig of the day,' and for smoking; and at eight-twenty-five the men were once more summoned to work. Shortly before nine o'clock the guard of marines and the band marched on to the quarterdeck; and when two bells struck, the marine bugler sounded the 'Attention,' the guard presented arms, the band played 'God Save the King,' and every officer and man on deck stood rigidly at the salute while the White Ensign was slowly hoisted. This ceremony is carried out at nine A.M. in winter, and an hour earlier in summer.

At nine-five came a warning blast on the bugle, followed five minutes afterwards by 'Divisions.' This was the usual morning muster, at which the entire ship's company—seamen, marines, stokers, and artisan ratings—fell in in their respective groups. The seamen themselves were divided up into four 'parts of the ship'—forecastlemen, foretopmen, maintopmen, and quarterdeckmen; and each was responsible for, and so far as possible manned, the guns in its own particular portion of the vessel. Each division, moreover, had its own lieutenant in charge, one or two midshipmen, and its quota of petty officers and leading seamen.

Now, Martin knew all about saluting. He had learnt how to do it by spending many weary hours in a windy barrack square at Portsmouth paying obeisance to a red brick wall under the horny eye of an irascible gunner's mate. He was aware that one saluted when addressed by an officer, when meeting an officer in uniform ashore, and the first time each morning one passed any particular officer on board ship. He had also been taught that it was customary to raise a hand to one's cap when the band played 'God Save the King,' and, for some reason unknown to him, whenever one had occasion to go on the quarterdeck. He was not aware that in medieval days the ship's shrine or crucifix was always kept on the quarterdeck under the break of the poop, and that, on passing, officers and men made an obeisance. Hence the origin of 'saluting the quarterdeck.'

But all this was nothing to the saluting which took place every morning at divisions.

The game started by the 'captain of the top'—the senior petty officer—calling the division to attention, saluting, and reporting it 'Present' to the midshipman, Mr Henry Taut. The midshipman, returning the salute, produced a notebook, mustered the men by name, and satisfied himself that the petty officer's statement was correct; and then, touching his cap, made known the fact to Lieutenant Tobias Tickle, R.N. The lieutenant, walking round the ranks, found fault with irregularities in the men's attire, or asked searching and personal questions as to when they had last washed, shaved, or had their hair cut, and requested the midshipman to make a note of the delinquents' names.

Taut acquiesced, with a salute.

The inspection complete, Taut saluted Tickle, and Tickle saluted Taut, and the lieutenant then walked aft to the quarterdeck, saluted as he reached it, approached the commander, saluted again, and reported his men 'Present.'

The commander returned the courtesy, and murmured, 'Thank you.'

When all the divisions had been reported present, the commander, in his turn, reported the fact to the captain, with another salute. The latter raised his hand to his gold-peaked cap and muttered, 'Carry on, please;' whereupon the commander held up his hand, a bugle blew, some

one forward tolled a bell, the band on the after shelter-deck played a lively march, and the divisions marched aft to the quarterdeck for prayers. Here they were halted, and presently the chaplain appeared from one of the after-hatches, with his surplice flapping in the breeze. He did not salute. He was bareheaded.

'Ship's company! 'Shun!' from the commander. 'Off caps! Stand easy!'

The chaplain read the prayers, followed by the usual intercession for those at sea: 'O Eternal Lord God, who alone spreadest out the heavens, and rulest the raging of the sea; who hast compassed the waters with bounds until day and night come to an end: Be pleased to receive into Thy almighty and most gracious protection the persons of us Thy servants, and the fleet in which we serve. Preserve us from the dangers of the sea and from the violence of the enemy; that we may be a safeguard unto our most gracious Sovereign Lord King George and his Dominions, and a security for such as pass on the seas upon their lawful occasions.'...

'The dangers of the sea,' 'the violence of the enemy,' 'a safeguard,' 'a security.' The words conveyed little to Martin's mind when first he heard them. Less than a year later, in the autumn of 1914, he had come to learn their true meaning.

The short service was over by nine-twenty, and was followed by a quarter of an hour's hard physical drill, conducted by the lieutenants of divisions. This strenuous exercise was a daily feature of the routine, and there was no doubt that it kept the men in excellent condition. At any rate, Pincher was generally perspiring freely by the time it was over.

This finished, both watches were piped to fall in, and the various parties of men were detailed for the day's work. The commander, with a notebook, would be present on the quarterdeck, and would hold a hurried conversation with the first lieutenant, the gunner, the boatswain, and the carpenter, all of whom required men for the performance of various odd jobs.

'Party painting on the mess-deck yesterday, fall in aft!' would come the first order. A group of about a dozen men and a petty officer, clad in ancient, paint-stained overalls, would detach themselves from the remainder. The first lieutenant, in charge of the mess-decks, gave his detailed orders to the petty officer, and he, in turn, doubled his men off to their work. 'Two hands from each part of the ship of the starboard watch, and a leading hand from the foretop, fall in aft!' The captain of the top told off the men, who were then taken charge of by the gunner—a warrant officer—who required them for restowing the small-arm magazine. Next the boatswain wanted a party, some for refitting rigging, and others for drawing stores from the dockyard; and, lastly, the carpenter took his toll for some purpose best known to himself.

The Royal Marines, meanwhile, had been sent down below to clean the flats, under the orders of their own non-commissioned officers; and when the various flat-sweepers and the mess-deck sweepers had been detached to their work, the remainder of the seamen were detailed for their labours, under the direction and supervision of their petty officers. There were always a hundred and one different jobs to be done. Nobody was ever idle in working-hours, and sometimes Martin found himself armed with a pot of gray paint and a brush to touch up bare portions of the superstructure. On other mornings he was detailed to scrape and red-lead rusty plates on the ship's side, or to holystone a particularly obstinate section of deck which was not quite up to the mark. At other times he found himself told off as assistant to a fully qualified A.B., one Joshua Billings, who was quite the best hand in the ship at splicing or putting an eye in a wire hawser, neither of which is a job for an amateur. Martin liked this sort of work, for he was keen and anxious to learn, and the able seaman taught him far more in an hour than he could pick up elsewhere in a fortnight.

The worthy Joshua, by reason of an inordinate thirst and capacity for malt liquor, had served in his present rank for seven years, and did not hesitate to give the youngster good advice. 'It's like this 'ere,' he would remark, deftly tucking in an obstinate strand of springy wire. 'It's beer wot's bin the ruin o' me, and I don't mind ownin' it. I've bin in the navy ten years come January, and most o' them men wot served along o' me as boys in the trainin'-ship is now petty orficers. I reckons I'm as good a man as they is aboard a ship; but, though I was rated leadin' seaman once, I dipped the killick [6] abart six weeks later for comin' off drunk. It's beer wot done it; I carn't keep orf it, some'ow, w'en I gits ashore. Give us that there ball o' spun-yarn, young fella.'

''Ard luck,' Martin murmured, handing the spun-yarn across.

The hoary-headed old sinner shook his head and gave vent to a throaty sigh. 'No,' he said sadly, 'I reckons it wus orl right. The commander 'e sez to me, "Billings," 'e sez, "w'y is it you carn't go ashore without gittin' a skinful?" "It's like this 'ere, sir," I tells 'im. "I 'as the rheumatics werry bad, an' as soon as I gits 'longside a pub I comes orl over a tremble, an' directly I gits inside I meets with hevil companions." "Rheumatics!" 'e sez. "I've 'eard that yarn before; an' has for your hevil companions, my man, you ain't a baby!" "No, sir," sez I, gittin' rattled, "I ain't; but directly I gits a pint inside me my legs orl gits dizzy like." "A pint!" sez 'e, werry surprised. "Surely it wus more'n a pint?" "Well, sir," I sez to 'im, "maybe it wus a quart; I carn't 'xactly remember." "Several quarts, I should think," sez 'e, waggin' 'is 'ead; "you wus werry drunk." "No, sir, not drunk, only a bit shaky like," I sez, though I knowed orl the time I'd bin properly tin 'ats. "Well,"

'e sed, shakin' 'is 'ead werry sad, "I should 'ave liked to 'ave given you another chance; but I'm afraid you ain't fit to be a leadin' seaman. You must go before the capt'in." I sees the owner, an' has a consequence wus dipped to A.B.; an' now I shall never be anythin' else. Sad 'istory, ain't it?' concluded Joshua sadly. 'But it's beer wot's done it, so look out you don't git meetin' with hevil companions.' He solemnly winked one eye.

Now, Joshua Billings, A.B., though officially a bad hat, was one of the best seamen in the ship when there was any work on hand, and the commander knew it. Only that fatal predilection for beer kept him from rising to the top of the tree. Martin took his advice to heart, and was rather proud to have him as a friend.

At ten-thirty in the forenoon came a ten-minute stand easy for smoking; after which work was resumed until eleven-forty-five, when the decks were cleared up and the bugle sounded 'Cooks.' At noon there was dinner, the staple meal of the day; and half-an-hour later the cooks of messes were summoned on deck to receive the allowance of grog for the members of their messes. The rum, mingled with its due proportion of water, was served out with some ceremony. It stood in a huge brass-bound tub bearing in brass letters the words, 'The King: God bless him;' and when the recipients had assembled in a long queue with their mess kettles and other receptacles, the liquid was solemnly measured out by the ship's steward, under the supervision of the warrant officer and the petty officer of the day. Martin, being under twenty, was not officially allowed to partake of the beverage. He tasted it once, and it made him cough and splutter.

At one-ten the bugle sounded 'Out pipes,' and the decks were cleared up; and at one-thirty the forenoon's work was resumed. At three-forty-five labour, except for odd jobs done by the watch on board, was over for the day; and at four o'clock came 'evening quarters,' a repetition of the morning 'divisions,' without the prayers and the music. Immediately afterwards the men went to tea, and the watch whose turn it was to go ashore were sent on leave till seven o'clock the next morning. Each man, provided his character was good, thus got leave every alternate night; but Martin, with the rest of the newly joined ordinary seamen, was not allowed out of the ship after ten P.M.

Saturday afternoon was generally a half-holiday, and a portion of the ship's company went away till seven o'clock on the following Monday; while on Sundays those men left on board had the usual service in the forenoon, and did no work that was not absolutely necessary.

Every day of the week supper came at seven-fifteen P.M., and after this the hammocks were piped down and were slung on the mess-decks. At eight-thirty came another clearing up of the ship, and at nine o'clock the commander, preceded by the master-at-arms with a lighted lantern, and followed by the sergeant-major of marines, made his final rounds of the ship to see that everything was correct for the night, and that the galley fires were extinguished. At ten o'clock the boatswain's mates 'piped down,' and everybody was chased off to his hammock. So ended the day.

III.

In a mixed company of eight hundred and fifty odd souls, comprising seamen, marines, and stokers; boiler-makers, copper-smiths, and moulders; blacksmiths, plumbers, shipwrights, caulkers, carpenters, and joiners; butchers, bakers, and bandsmen; signalmen and telegraphists; ship's police, stewards, and writers—men of all ranks and ratings, of forty-and-one different trades and persuasions—it took Martin some little time to find his own level. The subtle little differences between the various grades and ranks were rather puzzling, and, as a new-comer fresh to the navy and its traditions, he was constantly making mistakes. At first he imagined that any one who wore clothes of the ordinary shore-going cut, with a collar and tie, was a person to be respected and called 'sir.' On one never-to-be-forgotten occasion he used the title in addressing a 'dusty-boy,' or ship's steward's assistant, a youth scarcely older than himself. For this he was seriously taken to book by his messmates, and had his leg pulled unmercifully.

Some of his shipmates, moreover, were not slow to take advantage of his ignorance as a 'softy' to amuse themselves at his expense. One ordinary seaman in particular, a fresh-complexioned Irish youth of bullying propensities, rejoicing in the name of Peter Flannagan, regarded a newly joined ordinary seaman as a gift sent from heaven for his especial amusement, though he himself had joined the ship only a few months before. He was for ever devising new schemes of petty persecution, until Martin's soul grew bitter, and he longed to retaliate. But Flannagan was larger and heavier than himself, and a direct assault could only end in defeat; so for a fortnight he stood the ragging without complaint, and nursed his grievance in silence. Then one morning he came late to breakfast to find powdered soap mingled with his food, pepper in his coffee, and Flannagan sniggering on an adjacent seat. He did nothing at the time, but that morning sought the advice of Joshua Billings.

That same afternoon Flannagan happened to be watch ashore. He had asked a messmate to sling a hammock for him, and when, at ten o'clock, he returned to the ship he promptly undressed and turned in. He had barely had time to get comfortably to sleep, however, when his foot lanyard

gave an ominous crack. He knew what was about to happen, and tried to save himself, but in an instant found himself precipitated abruptly to the deck, feet first. Falling from a height of five odd feet, and landing in rather scanty attire across the sharp edge of a mess-table, is necessarily a painful business; and Martin, who was lying four tiers away, with one cautious eye peering over the edge of his hammock, could hardly restrain his merriment as the victim hopped round on one leg, swearing and rubbing a badly barked shin.

'Wot yer makin' all that bally row abart?' demanded the Irishman's next-door neighbour with a chuckle. 'Fallen out o' yer 'ammick, 'ave yer?'

'Did you cut me foot lanyard?' demanded the angry Flannagan.

'Me? Lord, no!' guffawed the other.

'Well, you knows 'oo did it, any'ow!'

'I knows nothin',' retorted the A.B., getting angry in his turn. 'If yer says I did it you're a bally liar. I'll give yer a clip 'longside the ear'ole if you ain't careful. Don't act so wet. Wot 'ave I to do wi' yer rotten 'ammick?'

'Some one's cut it,' the Irishman replied furiously, examining a clean cut through two strands of the rope. 'If it ain't you wot done it, you must know 'oo it was. 'Oo was it? tell us.' He looked round to see if anybody else was awake, but every one seemed to be snoring peacefully. Sailors are very heavy sleepers sometimes.

It took Flannagan fully a quarter of an hour to repair damages and turn in again. It was bitterly cold, and he cursed vehemently.

But his troubles were not over yet. Towards eleven-thirty, when he had got thoroughly warm and was dozing off, he felt an uncomfortable, prickly sensation down his back and legs. He sat up blinking, and put a hand under the blanket to find a thin film of something warm and sticky. It resembled glue. The best part of a pound of finely ground brown sugar, cunningly insinuated between the bedclothes, is not a pleasant bedfellow. It melts with the heat of the body. The results are nasty in the extreme.

He leapt out, fuming. ''Ere!' he shouted, violently shaking the A.B. next to him. ''Ave you bin puttin' sugar in my 'ammick?'

'Look 'ere!' exclaimed the newly awakened man, 'I'm fair sick o' yer. I told you afore I 'adn't touched yer 'ammick, an' I sed I'd give yer a thick ear if yer went on worryin' me. Now I'm goin' to do it.' He hopped out, gave the astonished Irishman a box on the ear which sent him sprawling, and then stood over him with clenched fists. 'D'you want any more?' he asked grimly.

Flannagan did not.

Martin and the other men in the neighbourhood, meanwhile, had been waked by the disturbance, and were enjoying the fun. 'Go on, Ginger! Give 'im another!' somebody advised the A.B. 'Give 'im a clip under the lug! Slosh 'im one on the ruddy boko! Wakin' of us orl up at this time o' night!'

'Look 'ere, you blokes,' protested the still recumbent victim, 'some one 'as put sugar in my 'ammick!'

A roar of laughter greeted his words. His hearers were not sympathetic. They longed to see a really good fight, and there would have been more bloodshed if Flannagan, terrorised by the A.B.'s fists, had not thought discretion the better part of valour. He retired grumbling, to spend the rest of the chilly night on the hard mess-table, wrapped in a greatcoat.

At five-forty-five the next morning he sidled up to Martin, as the latter sat drinking his cocoa. 'Look 'ere!' he exclaimed aggressively, 'was it you wot done that to my 'ammick last night?'

'Done wot?' asked Pincher, grinning innocently.

'Cut my ruddy foot lanyard an' put sugar on my blanket,' the Irishman shouted, advancing threateningly with his fists clenched. 'I see'd yer larfin' last night, an' yer larfin' now. If it wos you 'oo done it I'll'——

'Stop yer bloomin' noise, Paddy!' chipped in Strumbles, who was always inclined to be irascible in the early morning. 'If yer wants ter fight Pincher you'd best take 'im on in the dog watches arter tea, not at this un'oly hour o' the mornin'.'

'But if it was 'im wot cut'——

'Don't chaw yer fat!' growled the leading seaman, giving the Irishman a push in the chest. 'If it was Pincher wot done it, I reckons you arsked for it. If you comes makin' a row 'ere I'll land you one on the conk, so you'd best clear out!'

Popular opinion was evidently not on his side; and, seeing how affairs stood, Flannagan slouched off, vowing vengeance on some person or persons unknown.

But he never had his revenge; for, though he had a shrewd suspicion that Martin was somehow responsible for his discomfiture, he could never fix the blame on him for certain. The tables were turned at last, and Pincher suffered no further inconvenience at the hands of Peter Flannagan. The end had justified the means. Joshua Billings, A.B., was an adept at dealing with a young and bumptious ordinary seaman who made himself objectionable.

CHAPTER III.

WORK AND PLAY.

I.

'Nice sort o' craft, isn't she?' growled the first lieutenant, eyeing the grimy collier lying alongside. 'Enough to break the heart of a plaster saint!'

Tickle, the junior watch-keeping lieutenant, nodded in agreement. 'She's broken mine already,' he observed dolefully. 'How on earth we're going to take in six hundred tons from her the Lord alone knows.'

Chase, the first lieutenant, refilled his pipe. 'I'd like to get hold of the blighter who charters these colliers,' he mumbled savagely. 'This one doesn't appear to have a winch that'll lift more than half-a-ton; and as for her hatches—lord! they're only the size of—of that.' He could think of no suitable simile, so held his hands out a couple of feet apart.

'You should just see her whips, No. 1,' put in the watch-keeper. 'They were new in the year one; used by Admiral Noah in the Ark, by the look of 'em. I tried to lift one of the cross beams in No. 1 hold just now. Took me about twenty minutes to get the winch to gee to start with. Then, when I'd gingered it up, and had got the beam in mid-air, the whip parted, and the whole caboodle came down with a crash. It would have gone clean through her bottom if there'd been no coal in the hold.'

'M'yes. I heard the yelling,' observed Chase. 'Any one hurt?'

'No. A silly young ass of an ordinary seaman—chap called Martin, who's just joined—jolly nearly got it in the neck, but not quite, luckily for him. It weighed the best part of half-a-ton, and it missed him by about six inches. He'd have been done in all right if his head had been in the way.'

'Silly blighter!' said the first lieutenant unsympathetically. 'What the dooce did he want to get in the way for?'

'Ask me another,' laughed Tickle. 'Some of these O.D.'s keep their eyes in the back of their head. However, this chap seems a bit better than some of 'em, though that's not saying much. He had the fright of his life, though, and won't do it again, I'll bet.'

The first lieutenant snorted.

S.S. *Ben Macdhui* certainly deserved all the strictures passed upon her by both officers. She was no chicken, merely a nine-and-a-half knot, pot-bellied monstrosity of a tramp built in the early 'eighties, which, by inadvertence on somebody's part, or through a shortage of more suitable craft, had temporarily been chartered as an Admiralty collier. She belonged to a small company who appeared to earn their dividends by buying all the old crocks of ships they could lay their hands upon, and then running them on the cheap, for all her gear and fittings were as elderly and unsafe as herself. Her middle-aged winches wheezed cheerfully, and vomited forth jets of steam, scalding water, and gouts of oil when they could be persuaded to revolve. Her derricks groaned and sagged perilously when they lifted half their proper load; while the less said about her coaling-whips—supposed to be brand-new two-and-a-half-inch steel wire of the best quality—the better. The officers and men were thoroughly in keeping with their ship. The former, according to their own account, had all seen better days; while the latter, bleary-eyed and stiff in the joints, looked more like a party of workhouse inmates than the crew of a British merchant ship. A more decrepit and ancient set of mariners it would be impossible to find. They all had bald heads, several were grandfathers with flowing white whiskers—when they washed; but then, of course, Messrs Catchem & Flintskin preferred men of experience to mere scatter-brained youngsters. They were more reliable, they said; but they also got them cheaper, and their appetites were smaller.

The 'Belligerents' swore lustily when the venerable *Ben Macdhui* secured alongside. The commander shared their feelings; while the first lieutenant—who was in general charge of the collier during coaling—nearly wept, and retired to the wardroom to seek liquid consolation. The lieutenants in charge of the holds, who would have to bear the brunt of the whole business if the coal did not come in at its usual rate, cursed long and loud. They were all justified, poor souls, for a bad collier may mean a long coaling; and a long coaling in the winter is the 'perishin' limit,' as some one put it.

The collier came alongside before dark, and that evening new whips were rove, derricks were rigged and topped, bags and shovels were brought up from the dim recesses of the *Belligerent's* bowels and distributed among the holds, the battleship's deck was brushed over with a moist mixture of sand and lime to prevent the coal-dust from soaking in, and all paintwork on the upper

deck was swathed in canvas for the same reason.

Martin, as Lieutenant Tickle has already explained, had nearly lost the number of his mess when assisting in the collier. He thought his narrow escape was deserving of a certain amount of sympathy, but precious little he got. He was bluntly called a '—— young fool,' and asked 'why the —— he wanted to get his —— head in the way.' Even his messmates laughed at him, for to all bluejackets a miss is as good as a mile. In the course of their careers, even in time of peace, they look death in the face so often as to be utterly unmindful of narrow squeaks. Their calling is essentially a risky one, and to become inured to danger is part and parcel of their training. If a man has a close shave he is chaffed unmercifully; if he is killed, his shipmates express their sympathy, shrug their shoulders, attend the funeral with tears in their eyes and a glass case of wax flowers in their hands, and subscribe their shillings and pennies toward providing for the widow and children. It is all in the day's work.

Punctually at five-thirty the next morning, while it was yet dark, the boatswain's mates were piping, 'Clear lower deck! 'Ands fall in for coaling ship!' and officers and men, clad in the oldest and grimiest of garments, repaired to the quarterdeck. Coaling ship was always a 'clear lower deck' evolution, and nobody was excused except a few privileged officers and men.

On the quarterdeck was the commander; and presently, when the men had been reported present, he gave them a few words.

'Men,' he said, 'we've got a bad collier this time, just about the worst thing in colliers I've ever seen. We have six hundred tons to take in, so let's see if we can't make an evolution of it. We've been a pretty good ship for coaling up to date, remember, so don't let us spoil our good record now. Coal ship!'

The groups of men scattered and fled to their several stations. The forecastlemen, foretopmen, maintopmen, and quarterdeckmen repaired to their respective holds in the collier, where they were divided up into gangs of five for shovelling the coal into the two-hundredweight bags, which were hoisted on board ten at a time. The 'dumping-ground parties,' composed principally of artisan ratings like the carpenter's mates, shipwrights, plumbers, and blacksmiths, were sent to the places on the battleship's deck where the hoists would presently be coming in. Their duty was to unhook and unstrap the bags as they arrived, and to place them on the barrows, which were then trundled to the various bunker-openings in the deck by the Royal Marines. Here the bags were seized by the 'tippers,' and their contents emptied down the shoots into the bunkers below, where they were stowed by the stokers doing duty as 'trimmers.' The empty bags were collected by a number of ordinary seamen and boys, who returned them to the holds in the collier; and woe betide these youths if the men digging in the holds were delayed through a shortage of empties!

Practically all the officers coaled with their men. The commander was in general charge of the whole operation, while the first lieutenant exercised supervision in the collier. The lieutenants and midshipmen of divisions worked with their men in the holds; while Vernon Hatherley, the lieutenant-commander (T.), clad in an ancient Panamá hat and a suit of indescribable overalls, acted the part of traffic manager on the upper deck. He had the assistance of a couple of midshipmen, and among them they organised the movement of barrows between the dumping-grounds and the bunker-openings, so that no two streams moving in opposite directions should come into sudden and violent contact, and so cause a congestion in the traffic. The captain of marines, Hannibal Chance, supervised his barrow-men, and, assisted by the sergeant-major, exhorted them when they became languid. Nearly every other officer in the ship, save only the fleet surgeon, the fleet paymaster, the surgeon, and the assistant-paymasters, was in charge of something or other. The lieutenant-commander (N.), Christopher Colomb, otherwise the navigator, kept the 'day on' as officer of the watch; while even the chaplain, the Reverend Stephen Holiman, set an example by shedding his clerical garments and trundling a barrow. The men loved seeing Holy Joe 'sweatin' hisself,' as they put it; but, for all that, they voted him a good fellow, and he was immensely popular on the lower deck.

Martin found himself detailed as a member of one of the gangs of diggers in the forecastlemen's hold. The work of shovelling the coal into bags was back-breaking, for no two consecutive shovelfuls were exactly the same weight; in addition, he found it extremely difficult to keep his footing. The confined space reeked of coal-dust, and before long he and his companions were jet-black from head to foot. He breathed the fine powder down into his lungs. He perspired profusely. His back, shoulders, arms, and thighs ached with the strain; but he was game, and managed to struggle on somehow. Five other gangs were at work besides his own. Each one was responsible for a hoist of ten bags, and had to have them filled and strapped together by the time the whip was ready to hoist them. They occasionally had a few minutes' rest between the hoists, but otherwise the work went on continuously; and it was a point of honour that the whip, which visited all the gangs in rotation, should not be kept waiting. If there was any undue delay in hooking on, there were loud shouts from above, and angry, nautical exhortations from the lieutenant, midshipmen, and petty officers working in the hold.

It was sultry work, very sultry, though it was winter. The dust was so thick that the powerful arc lights could only be seen in a blurred glare across the hold. Jet-black figures whirled in and out of the murky cloud like demons on the brink of the nethermost pit. Shouts of 'Stand from under!'

and empty bags came from the deck above; and every now and then there came a shrill screech on a whistle, a frenzied shout of 'Mind your backs! Stand clear!' a frantic clattering from the long-suffering winch, and a hoist would go hurtling, swinging, and banging across the hold as the wire whip strained and tautened out. The labouring men would spring aside to get clear, for a ton of coal in the small of the back will send a twelve-stone man flying, and may cause him serious injury. But still the work went on without a stop, and hoist after hoist left the hold, disappeared in the darkness above, swung through space, and finally landed with a thud and more shouts on the battleship's deck.

The *Ben Macdhui* was certainly a bad collier. Twice during the first hour did two of her winches break down, and each time they caused a delay of fully twenty minutes. Another time a block on the head of a derrick carried away, and the suspended hoist fell back into the hold with a crash, knocking over two men. They were not seriously hurt, and picked themselves up with many full-blooded sea oaths, to resume their work as if nothing had happened.

The 'Belligerents' prided themselves on their coaling. With a good collier they had been known to average one hundred and seventy-seven tons per hour; but this time they had only embarked one hundred and ninety-eight by eight o'clock, at which time there came half-an-hour's respite for breakfast. They had been at it since about five-forty (two hours twenty minutes), and the commander was not at all pleased. But even he realised that it was not the fault of the men. 'Bad!' he growled. 'Damned bad! We're only averaging eighty-four point eight an hour. What can one do with a collier like this?'

During breakfast-time, wardroom, gunroom, and mess-decks were invaded by hordes of black-faced demons, ravenous and clamouring for food. Some of the more fastidious among them had washed their hands and had cleared a circle of grime from about their mouths; but time was short, and most of them had not troubled to do even this. Officers' messes, cabins, and mess-decks were pervaded with the strange, penetrating smell of coal. The dust hung and lodged everywhere, and even the porridge, eggs and bacon, and milk were covered with films of black powder. But what did it matter? They were hungry, and the food tasted just as good, dust or no dust.

At eight-thirty work was resumed, and the ship's company, rejuvenated by breakfast, set to with redoubled energy. The *Belligerent's* once white deck was covered with black dust, caked by the wheels of the barrows. Officers and men alike were black from head to foot; but still the hoists crashed in, still the barrows flew round the deck, and still the coal went tumbling down the shoots into the bunkers. On the after shelter-deck the bandsmen were doing their share of the work by braying out the latest music-hall songs; but even their strident and not very tuneful efforts could only be heard at intervals in the clatter of the winches and the hollow rumble of the barrows.

The best hour's work was done between ten and eleven, when one hundred and twenty-four tons were taken in, and shortly before noon the full six hundred had been embarked. The bugle sounded the 'Cease firing,' the last hoists of empty bags and shovels came clattering inboard from the collier with throaty cheers from the tired men, and swarms of bluejackets set about lowering the derricks and unrigging the gear.

Soon afterwards, when the *Ben Macdhui's* chief engineer had raised sufficient steam in his tin-pot boiler to revolve the engines, and when the ancient crew could be induced to bestir themselves, the collier let go her wires and waddled off. The 'Belligerents' cheered and waved ironical farewells as she departed. They were heartily glad to see the last of her.

'Gosh!' muttered Martin, with a heartfelt sigh, as he watched her go from the forecastle, 'I ain't sorry that job's done!' His back ached, and he felt very weary. He also wanted his dinner.

Able Seaman Billings heard his remark and smiled. 'Garn!' he jeered good-naturedly; 'this 'ere coalin' ain't bin nothin', only six 'undred ton. You wait till we joins up wi' the fleet, me lad, w'en we coals once a fortnight reg'lar.'

It was quite true, as Martin afterwards discovered.

That afternoon, armed with the hose, scrubbers, and soap, they set about cleaning the ship, themselves, and their clothes. Coal-dust seemed to be everywhere; it had lodged in every nook and cranny, but by dark most of it was removed and the battleship was looking more or less like her old self. So ended Martin's first experience of 'coaling ship,' an evolution which subsequently was carried out with such frequency that it became a mere incident.

The next day they took in ammunition and explosives enough to send a whole squadron of Dreadnoughts to the bottom. Innocent-looking lighters and barges, crammed to the hatches with shell for the twelve-inch, six-inch, and smaller guns; cases of cordite-cartridges; boxes containing the copper war-heads for the torpedoes, filled with gun-cotton; small-arm ammunition; gun-cotton charges in cylindrical red-painted cases, and detonators, came alongside in the early morning while it was yet dark.

Soon after eight o'clock the work began. It was preferable to coaling, as it was cleaner; but the

labour was very strenuous. There were three lighters on each side, and each had its own party of men employed in hooking on the projectiles and metal cordite-cases, which were then hoisted on board by the battleship's winches. Other men on deck with barrows transported the shell and cases as they arrived to square hatches in different parts of the deck, through which they were lowered to the magazines and shell-rooms in the bowels of the ship, to be stowed in their proper racks, bays, and compartments.

The great eight hundred and fifty pound projectiles for the twelve-inch guns dwarfed all the others, and they were slung inboard singly on account of their weight. The hundred-pound shell for the six-inch guns came in in canvas bags a couple at a time, while the lighter projectiles for the smaller weapons were hoisted in consignments.

Such a variety of shell there was! Some had bright-yellow bodies with red bands round their middles, and sundry stencil-marks on their sides denoting the date and place of manufacture, date of filling with explosive, and other purely personal details. These were the lyddite high-explosive shell Martin had often heard about; and he was informed, by an A.B. who was lowering them below as if they had been mere sacks of potatoes, that they burst into thousands of minute fragments on impact, and that they were designed primarily for use as man-killing projectiles against the unarmoured portions of an enemy's ship. Then there were the common shell with black-painted bodies and red-and-white bands round their noses. They, too, were deadly in their way, but not quite so deadly as the lyddite, since they were filled only with black powder, and did not burst so violently on striking. The armour-piercers were also black, and had white-red-white bands round their heads. They, Martin was told, had very thick walls and specially toughened points, and were designed to bore their way through an enemy's armoured sides and to burst inside. Then came the shrapnel shell for the lighter guns, with their red tips and red bands; they were provided with a small bursting charge, were filled with bullets, and had time-fuses, so that they could be burst in the air at any moment, to send their leaden bullets flying on over a cone-shaped region of destruction. The practice projectiles were black, with yellow bands round their middles and white tips. They were quite harmless, being made of cast-iron, with small quantities of salt inside to bring them up to the exact weight.

It was quite six o'clock in the evening by the time the ammunition had all been taken in, and even then there were many hours' work in stowing the shell, cordite, and explosives in their several shellrooms and magazines.

The next morning, at cock-crow, they started another very similar job, taking in slops and stores of provisions from the victualling yard. This time the deck was littered with bundles of clothing done up in sacking, bags of flour, boxes and cases containing boots, shoes, straw hats, caps, biscuits, condensed milk, tea, coffee, chocolate, jam, preserved meat, tinned salmon and rabbit, mustard, pepper, salt, raisins, rice, dried beans and peas, pickles, suet, compressed vegetables, oatmeal, split peas, celery-seed for flavouring pea-soup, soap, and tobacco. There were also casks or drums of rum, vinegar, and sugar. The total consignment ran into well over a hundred tons dead weight, and all the hundred and one different articles had to be hoisted on board, sorted out, transported, and stowed in their proper storerooms.

The ship's steward and his assistant 'dusty boys' had a very busy day. Quite early in the proceedings a flour-bag burst like a shell and deluged the steward with its contents. He was powdered from head to foot, and remained so for the rest of the day; and the little runnels of perspiration running down his whitened face made a strange criss-cross pattern which transformed his ordinarily rubicund countenance into a very fair representation of a map of the planet Mars, with all the canals clearly marked. His appearance caused titters of amusement and howls of derisive merriment when his back was turned, as, armed with an enormous note-book and a sheaf of coloured pencils, he flitted in and out of the piles of boxes and packing-cases like a lost soul. He was endeavouring to trace odd cases of raisins, or errant boxes of jam or pickles, and looked very worried, poor man! At any rate, it was hardly safe to talk to him, for finding the mislaid things among the heaps of barrels, drums, cases, and boxes, which covered the deck in places to a height of fully five feet, was for the time being rather like searching for a pebble on the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.

II.

The *Belligerent* was a 'Pompey' [7] ship. Many of her officers and men had their homes in or near the port, so the 'funny party'—otherwise the ship's concert troupe—prevailed upon the first lieutenant, their honorary president, to petition the commander for permission to give a farewell entertainment on board the evening before they sailed to rejoin the squadron.

The commander, with visions of endless trouble in rigging a stage for the performance, and the sacred quarterdeck being littered with cigarette-ends, banana-skins, and orange-peel, was not altogether pleased at the prospect. 'They want to give a show!' he said, in surprise, when the first lieutenant mooted the subject. 'Great Scott! they must be mad. It's mid-winter. Suppose it's raining or blowing a gale o' wind?'

'Yes, sir. I pointed that out to them,' answered No. 1. 'I quite realise there are serious objections.

They're so jolly keen on it, though, that I couldn't choke 'em off.'

'And they propose that we shall bring all the guests off in our boats, eh?'

Chase nodded. 'They do, sir,' he said. 'But I'll take the management of all that off your hands if you'll let me. They want the show to start at eight o'clock.'

'The devil they do!' laughed the commander, beginning to relent. 'You'll have to cut the encores, though. It'll have to be over by ten-fifteen at the latest. We're sailing the next morning.'

'I'll see to that, sir.'

'Are the officers and their wives to be asked?' the commander wanted to know.

'Oh yes, sir. They specially mentioned that.'

'Well, for goodness' sake censor the programme. Last time we gave a show and had ladies on board, one of the songs was altogether too—er—spicy. I can't remember who sang it, but one of the captain's guests was very much shocked. For heaven's sake make certain it doesn't occur again!'

'Yes, I'll do that, sir,' smiled No. 1, with vivid recollections of the incident.

'All right. I'll ask the captain, then. I don't expect he'll object. You'd better tell me beforehand how many boats you want to bring the people off, and I'll leave all the rest in your hands.'

'Thank you, sir.'

The captain raised no objections; and on the afternoon of the entertainment the carpenter and his men, assisted by the members of the 'funny party' and many willing volunteers, set about preparing the quarterdeck. The day, luckily, was fine, but bitterly cold. A temporary stage, built up of planks placed upon biscuit-boxes, was rigged right aft athwartships. It was provided with the necessary scenery painted on board, was decorated with flags and coloured bunting, and was flanked by a brightly polished twelve-pounder gun and a Maxim on their field-carriages. The awning overhead was shrouded in enormous foreign ensigns, while canvas side-curtains were laced all round the quarterdeck to keep off the wind. Seating accommodation for several hundred people was provided by bringing all the available stools from the mess-decks, and placing them in rows on the deck and the top of the after-barbette with its two 12-inch guns. The first two rows of stalls, so to speak, were reserved for the officers, and consisted of arm-chairs and other chairs borrowed at the last moment from the officers' cabins and messes.

By seven-forty-five the preparations were complete, and the guests were beginning to arrive. As they stepped over the gangway they were claimed by their respective hosts, presented with printed programmes, and conducted to seats. By seven-fifty-five the last boats had come off, and the quarterdeck was tightly packed with men and their female belongings. They were all very much on their best behaviour, talked in hushed, expectant whispers, and spent the time criticising their neighbours and admiring the drop-scene.

The drop-scene was a truly terrific representation of the *Belligerent* in action. It had been painted on board, and the artist had allowed his colours to run riot. The sea, well covered with shell-splashes, was very, very blue, and so was the sky. The ship herself, with flaunting White Ensigns hoisted everywhere, was fiercely blazing away with every gun at some invisible enemy over the horizon. Here and there the blue expanse of sky was punctuated with large yellow and white blotches. Whether or not they represented clouds, the bursting of hostile shell, or cordite smoke, nobody but the artist could say. They did equally well for any one of them. At the bottom was an elaborate scroll, royal blue in colour, inscribed with the battle honours of previous *Belligerents* in gold letters; while in the centre came the ship's crest and motto, '*Ut Veniant Omnes*' the Latin equivalent of 'Let 'em all come!'

Before long the guests thawed a little, and the place began to hum like a beehive. The ladies produced chocolate and other edibles from handbags, and thrust them on their neighbours in token of friendship. The men lit pipes and cigarettes until the air was blue with tobacco-smoke. Martin, with several other youngsters, had installed himself in an excellent position on the top of the after-turret, and waited anxiously for the performance to start.

The chattering ceased as the orchestra filed out from the wings and took their places behind a zareba of bunting-covered biscuit-boxes and hired palms erected in front of the stage. They all wore their best tunics, had their hair well parted and greased, and seemed very full of their own importance. They concealed themselves behind their barricade until only the tops of their heads were visible, leaving the bandmaster perched precariously on a chair set on a couple of rather insecure boxes. He wore a brand-new pair of white gloves in honour of the occasion, twirled his moustache, and tried hard not to look self-conscious.

'Swanker!' came a loud and very raucous remark from the top of the after-turret. Martin, greatly daring, but carried away by the excitement of the moment, had been responsible for the utterance. He looked round apprehensively, half-expecting to get into trouble for his temerity; but every one seemed quite pleased. The audience was actually tittering. The titter became a

laugh, and the laugh a roar of delighted amusement. The bandmaster, with his back to the gathering, seemed rather agitated. He half-turned on his chair, thought better of it when it gave a dangerous wobble, and then pretended he had not heard.

The culprit, undiscovered save by his immediate neighbours, hugged himself at the success of his sally.

A minute later, when the band began to tune up for the overture, the first lieutenant appeared from one of the after-hatches. He had the reputation of being a 'taut hand;' but the men loved him dearly, and his arrival was the signal for a volley of cheers and hand-claps. He faced the audience nervously, bowed and smiled, and then, watch in hand, walked across to the bandmaster and held a whispered conversation.

Other officers came up the after-hatches and filed into their places. They were greeted with round after round of applause, as, very red in the face and very uncomfortable, they settled down in their seats. The *Belligerent* was notoriously a happy ship, and on occasions of this kind her ship's company were not slow in showing their appreciation for their officers.

The captain had been having a dinner-party in his cabin for some of the married officers and their wives; and he, the commander, the engineer-commander, the fleet surgeon, Hatherley, and Tickle, with their respective wives, arrived last. They, too, received their share of cheers while taking their seats. The captain, however, remained standing, and held up his hand for silence.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' he said when the uproar had subsided, 'I am very glad to see you all here to-night, and I hope you will enjoy the entertainment. The first lieutenant asked me to sing you a song myself, but I'm afraid I'm getting too old for that sort'——

Loud cries of 'No, no!' and more cheering.

'I am,' he continued, laughing, 'though you may not believe it. What I want to tell you is that I have arranged for light refreshments to be served in the battery during the interval, so I hope you will all—er—do full justice to them.'

Loud cheers, during which Captain Spencer sat down and nodded to the first lieutenant for the entertainment to begin.

The latter rose from his chair and glanced at his programme. 'Ladies and gentlemen,' he said, 'the first item on the list is a selection by the band. It is called—er—"Down Channel," and has been specially composed for the occasion by Mr Johnson, the bandmaster.' He sat down again.

The bandmaster rapped twice with his baton, and with a rattle of drums the music began. The selection was a strange pot-pourri of every nautical song that Mr Johnson had ever heard. It started off with a variation of 'Hearts of Oak,' wandered into 'The Bay of Biscay,' 'Tom Bowling,' 'They all love Jack,' and several other tunes, ancient and modern, and finished off with 'The Red, White, and Blue' and 'Rule Britannia.' It was hardly original, but it was received with vociferous applause. The bandmaster, highly satisfied, turned and bowed his acknowledgments with great dignity.

'The next item on the programme,' said the first lieutenant, rising to his feet again, 'is a comic song entitled "Archibald," by Stoker Williams.'

The footlights were turned on, and the curtain went up to disclose Stoker Williams dressed in the height of fashion. He wore a morning coat, gray trousers, patent-leather boots and spats, eyeglass, immaculate shirt, collar, and tie. He represented, it would seem, a young man about town looking for a friend named Archibald. Presumably he had some difficulty in finding him, for he walked mincingly across the stage, grasping a cane and a pair of gloves in one horny hand, and in the other a very glossy top-hat, which he twirled violently when the spirit moved him. The first lieutenant fidgeted uneasily. The hat, a brand-new Lincoln & Bennett, belonged to him. So did the clothes. The chorus of the song went something like this:

Har-ar-chibald! Har-ar-chibald!
Son of a belted hearl.
Har-ar-chibald! Har-ar-chibald!
I'll bet 'e's mashin' 'is girl.
'E promised to meet me at 'arf-past three;
But 'e's such a nut that 'e's gone on the spree,
With 'is girls, girls, girls.
(*Spoken*) 'Har-ar-chibald! where are you?'

The words were not conspicuous for their wit or cleverness, but the tune went with a swing, and the audience, highly appreciative, rocked with laughter; and after the performer's 'Now all together, please,' at the end of the first verse, joined in the inane chorus until the roar of 'Har-ar-chibald! where are you?' could have been heard as far as the dockyard gates.

The song eventually came to a close with Archibald still missing, and Stoker Williams, very pleased with himself, left the stage amidst clapping, cat-calls, and loud cries of 'Encore!' But

encores were barred, and the curtain came down with a crash.

The next turn was by the P.T.I. (Physical Training Instructor). He was a magnificently built man, and appeared, despite the weather, clad in flesh-coloured tights, sandals, and an imitation tiger-skin. 'Ladies and gentlemen,' he said, advancing to the front of the stage and addressing the audience in the approved music-hall manner, 'with your kind indulgence I will now introduce a few lifting feats without apparatus of any kind. After that I shall have pleasure in giving a display with the Indian clubs. For the first part of my performance I must ask a member of the audience weighing at least ten stone to join me on the stage.'

After some hesitation and tittering, the challenge was presently accepted by Able Seaman M'Sweeny. Tubby, as he was called by his shipmates, was a short, rotund, and very bulbous person, who was a source of unfailing amusement to his friends. He had a fat red face rather like an apple, and a pair of humorous blue eyes; and, being something of a buffoon, was delighted at the idea of making himself conspicuous. He pretended to be very nervous, left his seat amid shouts of laughter and cries of 'Good old Tubby boy!' from the lookers-on, and presently appeared on the stage with the P.T.I.

'This gentleman informs me that he weighs thirteen stone,' said the P.T.I., producing a broad strap; 'one hundred and eighty-two pounds. I first place the strap round him, so'—buckling it round Tubby's middle—'and will now ask him to lie flat on the deck in the centre of the stage.'

This was rather more than M'Sweeny had bargained for, for he guessed what was coming next. But he acquiesced nevertheless, and, turning his funny face toward the audience with a solemn wink, began to agitate his arms and legs as if he were swimming.

Martin, on the verge of hysterics, was slowly becoming purple in the face. He had never seen anything quite so funny in all his life.

'Look at our Tubby boy!' came another loud remark from a youth seated near him. 'Ain't 'e the limit?'

The P.T.I., seeing that Tubby was getting all the applause, became very wroth. 'Look here!' he growled in a very audible whisper, 'is this your turn or is it mine? Knock off playing the fool, can't you!'

The victim, breathing heavily and balanced on his most prominent part, with the tips of his toes just touching the floor, looked up with a grin. ''Ere,' he asked loudly, 'w'ere do I come in?'

The audience rocked in their seats, with tears streaming down their faces.

'Shut your fat head!' whispered the gentleman in the tiger-skin.—'Ladies and gentlemen,' he went on, producing another short strap fitted with a stout hook, 'I hook this into the strap passing round the gentleman's body, so, and shall now carry him round the stage in my mouth.'

The 'gentleman' seemed distinctly nervous, but it was too late to back out now.

The band broke into slow music. The P.T.I, bent down, seized the strap in his mouth, and, bracing himself with his hands on his knees, lifted M'Sweeny a few inches off the floor. Then, with another heave which very nearly precipitated his victim and himself into the middle of the orchestra, he swung his burden waist-high, and staggered slowly round the stage with his back bowed and his muscles bulging.

Tubby, suspended by his centre of gravity, hung limply, with drops of perspiration trickling off his face. He was desperately alarmed lest he should be dropped with a crash, poor man!

The P.T.I., who, judging from his stertorous breathing, had undertaken more than he had bargained for, tottered once round the stage, and then went to the side and lowered his prey gently to the floor out of sight of the audience. At the same time the big drum gave a prearranged and very resounding crash. The audience laughed themselves hoarse, and cheered uproariously. After sundry other feats of strength with a long wooden bar from which depended the limp figures of two Royal Marines, one ordinary seaman, and one stoker, the performer gave his club-swinging display with lively music from the band. It was quite effective, and came to a close with great *éclat*.

The next item was a very doleful sentimental ditty about a lonely robin. It was sung by an intensely serious A.B., and the bird, it appeared, was on terms of great intimacy with a lady suffering from an incurable disease, who was slowly dying in the top back-room of a cottage. Every morning at breakfast-time the robin appeared on the window-sill; but on one memorable occasion he came rather late, to find the undertakers in the house. The shock unnerved him to such an extent that he died too, poor bird! It was so intensely pathetic that some of the ladies in the back-rows actually wept. The two rows of officers and their wives blew their noses and hid their faces in their programmes. Their shoulders shook visibly, but not with grief.

'The next thing,' said the master of ceremonies—rather perturbed because the last man had exceeded his appointed time by three minutes—'is a song called "Slattery's Mounted Foot," by the members of the troupe.'

The curtain went up to show a man clad more or less as a soldier. He wore a marine's red tunic, baggy blue trousers with broad yellow stripes, a cocked hat with an enormous plume, a naval cutlass, and a pair of leather sea-boots with huge tin spurs. He sang the first verse of a song amidst much amusement, and then started the rollicking chorus:

> Down from the mountains came the squadrons and platoons,
> Four-and-twenty fighting men and a couple of stout gossoons.

At the cue 'squadrons and platoons' the Mounted Foot, riding home-made hobby-horses with flowing manes and tails, galloped on to the stage. Their appearance was the signal for a volley of shouts and laughter, in which the music was quite inaudible, and truly they were comical. There were six others besides the first man, who, it would appear, was General Slattery himself. They all wore burlesque military uniforms. One was a hussar, another a lancer, a third a soldier in a British line regiment, a fourth an Indian cavalryman with lance and turban all complete, a fifth a cross between a Chasseur d'Afrique and a Chinese brave, and the last an artilleryman. The *pièce de résistance* was the artillery itself, for the last man to arrive led the very unwilling Nellie, the ship's pet pig, to which was attached a large cardboard cannon. Headed by their General, they pranced about the stage enjoying themselves hugely. Their efforts brought the house down, for they quite succeeded in making fools of themselves, and 'Slattery's Mounted Foot' was a long way the best event of the evening.

The remaining turns were too numerous to be mentioned in detail. They included further ditties by the singers of 'Archibald' and 'The Lonely Robin,' a banjo solo, some really clever conjuring and lightning sketching by an engine-room artificer, and an absurd sketch, written on board, called 'The Broker's Man.' The plot of this production, if it could be called by such a name, can be deduced from the list of characters:

> *Mr Stony-Broke*—an impoverished aristocrat.
> *Mrs Stony-Broke*—his wife.
> *Miss Gertrude Stony-Broke.*
> *General Sir Thomas Dammit, K.C.B.*—a rich uncle.
> *Mr Hardcash*—a hard-hearted landlord.
> *Mr Theodore Buggins*—the broker's man.
> *Hon. Bertie de Montmorency*—Gertrude's fiancé.
> *Giles*—a footman.
>
> Scene—The Stony-Brokes' drawing-room in London.
>
> Time—The present.

The parts of Mrs and Miss Stony-Broke were played by seamen. Mrs Stony-Broke appeared in black satin and a shawl, and the fair Gertrude in an evening-dress of pale yellow. Both mother and daughter were very shapeless, while their home-made wigs, white cotton gloves, bare red arms, and enormous feet brought tears of joy to the eyes of the audience. So did the gallant General Sir Thomas Dammit, who, it would seem, made a habit of wearing his full-dress uniform, cocked hat, and sword on all occasions.

Mr Hardcash, the villain of the piece, was loudly hissed; while his emissary, Mr Theodore Buggins, a truly dissolute fellow, became hilariously intoxicated at Mr Stony-Broke's expense. But everything ended happily. Gertrude and the Hon. Bertie plighted their troth, and were duly set up for life with a handsome cheque from Sir Thomas.

The curtain came down amidst scenes of the wildest enthusiasm from the audience, and the orchestra playing Mendelssohn's 'Wedding March.'

When finally the band played 'God Save the King,' Pincher Martin was convinced that it was quite the best entertainment he had ever seen. His shipmates agreed with him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STRENUOUS LIFE.

I.

Twenty-four hours later the *Belligerent* was at bleak, wind-swept Portland; and during the next fortnight Martin began to realise what life in the navy really meant. He fondly imagined that he had been hard-worked at Portsmouth, but it was mere child's-play compared with what went on when they were with the squadron.

The anchorage was full of men-of-war. First came seven other battleships precisely similar to the *Belligerent* herself, squat, ponderous-looking vessels, with piled-up superstructures and heavy gun-turrets which gave them an aspect of strength rather than of speed. They were commanded by a vice-admiral, who flew his flag in the *Tremendous*. Next came an independent cruiser squadron of four sister-ships under the orders of a rear-admiral. They were long, lean craft, with four funnels like factory chimneys, and raking masts. They had an ungainly appearance, but looked fast. Then came a couple of light cruisers, slender, graceful vessels, with beautiful lines. They, too, had four funnels, and gave the impression that they were fliers, as indeed they were. Innumerable black destroyers, with another light cruiser as their flagship, lay in glorified sheep-pens jutting out from the shore. They were evil-looking craft, and could do their thirty knots with ease.

But the ships were not always in harbour. Most days of the week they spent outside the breakwater, indulging in what was officially known as 'aiming rifle practice.' It meant that 1-inch or .303-inch aiming rifles were placed in all the guns, and that the ship steamed past a minute target, firing as she went. It kept the gunlayers and guns' crews proficient, for the weapons were worked, aimed, and fired exactly as if they had been using their proper ammunition. Unofficially, this practice was known as *piff*, from the feeble sound of the reports.

Sometimes the whole battle-squadron went to sea for steam tactics under the orders of the vice-admiral; while at least one night a week was spent somewhere out in the Channel without lights, to give the destroyers practice in making torpedo attacks under war conditions.

It was all very wonderful to Martin; but what impressed him most was the way in which the entire squadron of eight battleships steamed about as a whole. Each vessel remained at precisely the same distance from her next ahead, until it seemed as if they were all joined together by some invisible string, rather than free units capable of independent motion and movement. How they managed to achieve this result he could not imagine. It savoured of necromancy. He did not know until later that on the bridge of each vessel was a young lieutenant with a sextant, whose duty it was to measure the angle between the masthead and the water-line of the next ship ahead. Briefly, if the angle grew larger it meant that the ship was drawing up on her next ahead; if smaller, that she was dropping behind; and the revolutions of the engines were accordingly decreased or increased to get her back into her correct position. 'Station keeping!'—the officers of watches would have laughed if they had been asked how they did it. 'My dear chap, it's as easy as falling off a log. Any fool could do it.' Perhaps he could; but then there are fools and fools. Some of them are wise fools.

Steam tactics, too, were very impressive. The eight battleships would be steaming along in two ordered columns of four ships each. A string of gaily coloured bunting would suddenly appear at the flagship's masthead, to be repeated by the rear-admiral leading the other line. Hardly had the flags blown out clear than every other vessel would be flying a white-and-red 'answering pendant,' meaning 'I have seen and understood.' The flagship's signal would come down with a rush, and after a brief interval of suspense every ship would be swinging round under the influence of her helm. They formed single line ahead, line abreast, and quarter line, each gray ram cutting the water at precisely the same distance from the next ahead. Now and then they broke off into pairs. Sometimes they circled round in succession, each vessel following dead in the wake of her leader. Occasionally they wheeled, the pivot ship reducing her speed, the wing ship increasing, and the intermediate vessels adjusting the revolutions of their engines until every foremast was exactly in line. They twisted themselves into knots, and unravelled themselves again. The effect was really rather wonderful. The squadron seemed to manœuvre this way and that with the same ease and flexibility as a company of well-drilled soldiers.

It must be very difficult, Martin concluded; but he wondered vaguely why the admiral should take it upon himself to act the part of a glorified drill-sergeant. He did not know that flexibility of movement and ability to change formation with rapidity and precision are even more important in a squadron at sea than with a regiment ashore.

The admiral, experienced officer though he was, was merely accustoming himself to handling his

squadron as a compact and organised whole against the time when he might be called upon to do it with an enemy's fleet looming up over the horizon. Moreover, no two ships are ever handled in quite the same way, and he was giving his captains—who, provided they lived, would be admirals themselves one day—an opportunity of learning the ways and tricks of their several ships, so that, when the time came, they should not fail him. Practice makes perfect, even with such gilded potentates as admirals and captains.

The destroyer attacks after dark, too, were very spectacular. The long winter nights were usually overcast and very dark, and the squadron would be steaming without lights; but even then the lynx-eyed young gentlemen on the bridge would not admit that they had any real difficulty in keeping station. They were used to it. On such occasions the men kept their watches, and the lighter guns and the searchlights were manned exactly as they would be in war. Martin, being an ignorant new-comer, found himself detailed as a bridge messenger; and there, in the very nerve-centre of the ship, he had an excellent opportunity of seeing everything that went on. He never forgot the first destroyer attack he ever saw.

Looking ahead, he could just see the next ship as an intense black blur against the lighter darkness of the sky and sea. Astern came another ponderous mass. The intervals seemed dangerously close, but the officer of the watch showed no anxiety. On the contrary, he stood at the standard compass on the upper bridge, using his binoculars every now and then, and giving occasional muffled orders in a calm voice through the voice-pipe communicating with the man stationed at the engine-room revolution telegraph below. Even the captain and the navigator, who were up there as well, did not seem to be taking things very seriously, though in reality they both had their weather-eyes very much lifting, and were using their glasses constantly. They were always on very friendly terms, and were carrying on an animated conversation about nothing more important than—golf!

'Well, sir,' Colomb was chuckling, 'if your putting hadn't been so bad you'd have knocked me endways. You were shocking on the greens.'

'Yes; but you wait till I get used to that new putter of mine,' the skipper returned, not in the least offended. 'I botched every single putt, and if I hadn't done that—— Hallo!' he suddenly broke off, sniffing; 'd'you smell that?'

'That' was a pungent whiff of crude petroleum floating down from windward, and Captain Spencer knew well enough that it meant the attacking craft were somewhere fairly close. The greater number of modern destroyers consume nothing but oil-fuel in their furnaces, and in a strong wind the reek of its burning can often be smelt for several miles.

'M'yes. They're pretty close, sir,' Colomb agreed.

'Keep your eyes skinned, officer of the watch,' the captain cautioned, busy with his own glasses. 'Warn the group officers and guns' crews!'

'Ay, ay, sir,' said the lieutenant, pressing a push by his side, which caused an alarm-bell to sound at all the anti-torpedo-craft guns throughout the ship.

For some minutes there was silence, broken only by the humming of the wind through the rigging and the liquid plop of breaking seas. But all the time the smell of oil-fuel became gradually stronger; and then, quite suddenly, the flagship—two ships ahead—switched on a searchlight. She had seen something!

The powerful blue-white beam flickered out, swung round slightly, and then fell on a black phantom shape rushing through the water. She was a destroyer, and came along with the wind and sea dead astern; but even then sheets of spray were flying over her low decks and bridge.

Martin held his breath.

The moment the attacker was lit up by the ray there came the loud crash of a gun, and an instant later more searchlights joined the first.

Boomp! Bang! Boom! Boomp! went the guns in an irregular volley, as the first and second ships in the line got to work. Sharp stabs of red flame danced in and out of the beams of the lights. The thick smoke of the blank discharges wreathed and eddied through the rays as it drifted down the line on the wind; but the destroyers—two of them—still came on at full speed, pitching and rolling horribly.

They seemed to be about six hundred yards on the starboard bow of the flagship, travelling down the line of battleships in an opposite direction to that in which the latter were steaming, and so brilliantly were they illuminated in the glare that even the figures of the men crouching on deck round the torpedo-tubes were clearly visible through glasses. The water was washing knee-deep over their decks as they rolled, but it was not until they were nearly abeam of the flagship that a ball of red fire shot up into the air from each of them. This indicated the moment at which, if it had been the real thing, their torpedoes would actually have been discharged.

'That pair were sunk all right,' muttered Captain Spencer, watching them through his glasses as

they swept past barely three hundred yards off. 'They were under fire for quite half-a-minute before they let go their torpedoes. Poor devils! they're having a pretty rotten time. Great Scott! just look at that sea!'

The leading destroyer had put her helm over to alter course outwards. It brought her nearly head on to the sea, and she had shoved her nose straight into the heart of an advancing wave. It was not really rough, as seas go, but the speed with which she was travelling caused the mass to break on board until she seemed literally to be buried in a smother of gray-white water, while sheets of spray swept high over her mastheads and funnels. For quite an appreciable time she was hidden, but then slid back into sight on the crest of a sea, with her twin propellers revolving wildly in the air, to disappear in the darkness as suddenly as she had come, with her consort still in close station behind her.

'Thank the Lord I'm not in a T.B.D.!' muttered the officer of the watch to the navigator.

Martin shared his feelings.

For the next forty minutes the guns' crews in the battleships were very busy; for, having sighted the searchlights during the first attack, the remainder of the flotilla, attracted to the spot like wasps to a honey-pot, came dashing in from all directions to deliver their assaults. They came on gallantly, some singly, others in pairs or fours at a time; and though, naturally enough, the battleships claimed to have sunk every mother's son of them long before they had had a chance of getting home with their torpedoes, the destroyers themselves thought otherwise.

The attacks were over by two A.M., and at this time the weary men at the guns and searchlights were free to go to their hammocks, the scattered destroyers were collected by their senior officer, and attackers and attacked, with navigation lights burning, turned their bows homeward.

By eight o'clock the battleships had moored in Portland Harbour, and the destroyers, in a long single line, headed by their light cruiser, came silently in through the northern entrance on their way to the pens. Their funnels were caked white with dried salt, but they steamed past jauntily, showing few traces of their buffeting.

Martin watched them with a new interest, for to him it seemed nothing short of miraculous how such slender-looking vessels could stand the weather he had seen them in a few hours before.

'Wot yer lookin' at, Pincher?' asked Billings, stopping on his way to his mess for breakfast.

'Them,' said Martin, jerking his head in the direction of the destroyers.

'Them!' said Joshua, rather surprised. 'Wot's up wi' 'em?'

'I wus thinkin' it must be a dawg's life to be aboard one o' 'em. They looked somethink horful larst night.'

Billings, who had served in a destroyer himself in his young and palmy days, grinned broadly. 'They ain't so bad,' he murmured. 'You gits a tanner a day, [8] 'ard lyers in 'em, an' that's a hextry three an' a tanner a week. It's werry welcome in these 'ere 'ard times.' The old reprobate smacked his lips longingly, for three-and-six a week meant many pints of beer.

'I reckons they deserves it,' Martin remarked.

'I reckons all matloes deserves double wot they gits,' laughed his companion. 'But larst night weren't nothin'. You wait till yer sees 'em in a gale o' wind; then they carries on somethin' horful. Larst night it weren't blowin' nothin' to speak o'. They 'ad a bit o' a dustin' p'r'aps, an' got their shirts wet, but that ain't nothin'!'

Martin gasped. He had seen the destroyers plunging about like maddened racehorses, with water breaking over their decks; but yet Billings referred to it casually as a 'bit o' a dustin'.' If their behaviour of last night was nothing out of the ordinary, he prayed his gods he might never serve in one of them. 'A bit o' a dustin',' indeed! What must they be like in a gale of wind? It nearly made him seasick to think of it.

II.

As a start to his seagoing training, Martin found himself put in the gunnery-training class with eleven other youngsters like himself; and here, under the expert guidance of Petty Officer Samuel Breech, he was soon being initiated into the mysteries of squad drill, the rifle and field exercise, the various parts of a rifle and their uses, gun drill, the anatomy and interior economy of lighter weapons and machine-guns, and their ammunition. Much of it he had already learnt before, during his period of preliminary training at the barracks, and the instruction, essentially practical, did not overtax his intelligence.

Petty Officer Breech, a fully qualified gunner's mate, was a strict disciplinarian and something of a martinet. He was a short, burly little man, with a bull-neck and a rasping voice; and the former, combined with a closely clipped red beard and a pair of piercing gray eyes, gave him an air of

ferocity which he really did not possess. He was naturally kind-hearted, and the buxom Mrs Breech could twiddle him round her little finger. But on board ship he upheld his dignity with firmness. After long experience with ordinary seamen and their ways, he had come to the conclusion that the only way of getting them thoroughly in hand was to frighten them at the start, and to keep them frightened; so he invariably commenced operations by giving each new class a short lecture.

'You 'ave joined the navy,' he used to say, glaring fiercely, 'to learn discipline, an' you've come to me to learn somethin' about gunnery, or as much of it as I can drive into your thick 'eads. The sooner we understand each other the better; an' before we start work I warns you that I'll stand no sauce from the likes o' you, so just bear it in mind. W'en I gives you an order I expects it to be obeyed at once, an' at the rush. I don't want no shufflin' about in the ranks, nor skylarkin' neither,' he added, gazing ferociously at Martin, who was endeavouring to remove a spot of moisture from the end of his nose without using a handkerchief.

'I wants to blow me nose,' murmured the culprit, reddening.

'An' I wants no back answers unless I asks you a question,' Breech went on, wagging an admonitory finger. 'Wen you're standin' at attention you must keep still, no matter whether a moskeeter's bitin' you 'longside the ear'ole, or a wild monkey's chewin' your stummick. I wants you to look like a squad o' Henglish sailors, not a party o' mourners at a Hirishman's funeral, nor yet a gals' school out for a airin.' It's no laughin' matter, neither,' he continued, eyeing one of his pupils who had a suspicion of a smile hovering round the corners of his mouth. 'Wen I makes a joke you can laugh—bu'st if you like; but if I sees you laughin' w'en I'm not, that's hinsolence, an' you knows wot to expect.'

The smile vanished.

'I'm 'ere to enforce discipline,' the petty officer resumed, 'an' discipline I'll 'ave. I wants you to be smart, an' if I sees you're tryin' to learn I'll do my best for you. If I sees any one skylarkin' or talkin' in the ranks I runs 'im in at once, so don't forget it. To start with, I'm goin' to teach you the parts o' the rifle; an' w'en you knows that, we passes on to squad drill with an' without arms. Squad!—stand easy! This 'ere,' he explained, balancing a Lee-Enfield in his hand, 'is a magazine rifle, Lee-Enfield, Mark 1 star. Its weight is a trifle over nine pounds, as you'll find w'en you 'ave to carry it; an' its length, without the bay'nit, is four foot one an' a narf inches. This 'ere's the bay'nit, with a blade 'xactly twelve inches long, an' 'e fixes on to the muzzle o' the rifle, so. The bay'nit is only sharpened on the outbreak o' 'ostilities, an' is provided for stickin' your enemy; not, as most sailors thinks it's for, for openin' corned-beef tins, an' such like. 'Owever, we'll 'ave plenty o' bay'nit exercise later on.'

It took them a full day and a half to learn the ins and outs of the rifle; and, having mastered it thoroughly, the class passed on to squad drill and the rifle and field exercise. The greater number of them already had some smattering of these, but that fact did not prevent Petty Officer Breech marching and counter-marching them up and down the deck as if their very lives depended upon it. He kept up a running commentary the whole time.

'Squad!—'shun! Stand at—ease! A little more life in it; an' keep still w'en you're standin' at attention, can't you? Knees straight, 'ead an' body erect, eyes straight to the front.—'Awkins, you're waggin' your 'ead.—Flannagan, keep your knees straight, an' stand up.—Now then, try again. Squad!—'shun! Ah, that's more like it now. Number! Form fours! As you were! A little life in it, please! Form fours! Right turn! Quick march! Come along, come along, step out smartly with the left foot, an' take a full pace. Left—left—left—right—left! Mark time! Pick your feet up! Pick 'em up! Bend the knees! That's more like it! Forward! About turn! Not a bit like it. Squad!—halt! Left turn! Stand easy! Look 'ere, now. Wen I says, "About turn!" I don't want you to shuffle round any'ow. I gives the order "turn" as the left foot comes to the ground, an' each man turns on 'is own ground in three paces. At the fourth pace step off with the left foot in this manner.' He marked time himself, and proceeded to demonstrate how easy it really was.

For a whole week they were hard at it, learning to march, side step, change step, double, form fours, turn, and change direction. Sometimes, when one or other of the pupils was called out to drill the class, they got tied up into inextricable knots, with the rear rank facing the front, and the men in their wrong places; but after seven hard days even Breech admitted that he was fairly satisfied with their progress.

Then they spent hours fixing and unfixing bayonets, ordering, shouldering, sloping, trailing, changing, grounding, and securing arms, until they were sick of the very sight of a rifle. It was dreary work—very dreary; and if they showed the least signs of slackness or inattention they were doubled round the deck until they were ready to drop from sheer fatigue, or did 'muscle drill' until their biceps ached.

They saluted mythical officers, varying in rank from the sovereign himself to second lieutenants and midshipmen, and attended imaginary funerals as the escort or firing-party. On these occasions Breech walked solemnly up and down to represent the officer or party to be saluted, or, in the case of the funerals, the corpse on its gun-carriage. 'The next time I passes I represents

'is Majesty the King inspectin' a guard o' honour, mounted at Bucking'am Palace,' or 'Now I'm a Field-Marshal,' and 'Now I'm a lootenant in the navy,' he would say, approaching with what he considered the slow and stately gait befitting his exalted rank. 'Now I represents a regiment o' soldiers with their colours flyin'.' 'Now I'm the corpse comin' out o' the mortu-ary.'

The first time he made this last remark it caused the second man from the left in the rear rank to burst out into a raucous chuckle of amusement, and in another instant the whole class was tittering.

Breech fixed the culprit with a horny eye. 'There's not nothin' to laugh at, 'Awkins,' he observed without the ghost of a smile. 'This is a very sad occasion. You'll be the corpse yourself one day.'

They made pretty good progress on the whole—all except Peter Flannagan, that is. He was by way of being a 'bird'—a man who is constantly in trouble—and had already been through the gunnery-training class once, but had failed in the examination at the end of it. As a result he had been put back for a further period. He was naturally as obstinate as a mule, and unusually thick-headed; but, instead of doing his best with what wits he possessed, he endeavoured to show his superiority by taking as little trouble as he dared. He was Breech's *bête noire*; and, if ever anybody was wrong, it was pretty certain to be Flannagan. But he deserved everything he got, and was very unpopular with the others.

On one never-to-be-forgotten occasion the petty officer cautioned him for talking and joking in the ranks whilst at drill. The Irishman, in some fit of devilment, promptly repeated the offence, and, not content with that, put out his tongue to show his contempt.

Breech saw it. 'Flannagan,' he thundered in a voice of iron, 'come out to the front!'

The Irishman came out and stood before him with a sullen scowl.

'You disobeys my order wilfully, an' puts out your tongue,' the petty officer said. 'Disobedience an' hinsolence. 'Ave you anythin' to say?'

'Nothin', except that I'm fair fed up wi' bein' chased about this 'ere deck like a dawg.'

'Fed up, are you?' Breech answered, keeping his temper, but with a dangerous ring in his voice. 'You 'ave the himpertinence to spin me a yarn like that! If I chooses to take you on the quarterdeck, you gets a couple o' months in the detention quarters for hinsolence. But you're long past the stage where punishment'll do you any good. No; I shall 'ave to deal wi' you another way, my lad. I'll see that you're taken out o' the trainin' class, to start with, an' you comes an' reports yourself to me at five o'clock this evenin'. Now you takes off your accoutrements, returns your rifle, an' reports yourself to the capt'n o' your top. Perhaps 'e'll find some use for you; you're no good to me.'

Flannagan, rather ashamed of himself, slouched off.

What happened at five o'clock that afternoon the class never discovered; but the fact remains that Mr Peter Flannagan trod rather delicately, and had some slight difficulty in sitting down for the next ten days or so. Rumour had it that Breech, who was a powerful little man, had armed himself with a singlestick, and had taken the law into his own hands. Very reprehensible conduct on his part, no doubt, for it was strictly against the regulations, and might have got him into trouble if the Irishman had lodged an official complaint. But Breech knew his victim to a nicety, and was perfectly well aware that he lacked the necessary courage to make the matter public. He knew, moreover, that to a man of Flannagan's type a little concentrated physical pain was far and away a better deterrent than any other form of punishment. Whatever his method was, it had the desired effect, for thereafter Ordinary Seaman Peter Flannagan treated Petty Officer Samuel Breech with a respect which almost amounted to reverence. A strong arm and a thick stick do sometimes achieve wonders.

Martin and the remainder of the class waxed hilarious over Peter's downfall. He was not popular. He was a K.H.B., [9] and they were not sorry to be rid of his presence.

III.

The life, however, was not all work, and Martin found he had a certain amount of leisure for amusement. He was allowed ashore every alternate day from four o'clock in the afternoon till ten o'clock at night, and on Saturdays and Sundays from one-thirty.

The *Belligerent* ran her own football team—she ran everything, from a concert-party, a pipe-band, and a tame pig, to a monthly magazine (written, edited, and produced on board); and Pincher, who had been rather a shining light as a wing forward in his village team at home, invariably went ashore to watch the matches.

The squadron always played a football league competition during the winter, each ship playing every other vessel in turn, and the winner of the most points at the end of the season holding a challenge cup—presented by the flag officers and captains—for the ensuing year. In addition to

this, the members of the winning team received personal prizes in the shape of inscribed silver medallions. The *Belligerent* had come out top in the league the year before, and the victorious team had promptly had their photographs taken, with, of course, the medallions and the cup; and the latter, enshrined in its glass case, now lived on the fore mess-deck as a tribute to their prowess. They were very proud of it. They were keen to win again, but rumour had it that the *Tremendous*, which had been newly commissioned, had a remarkably good team. Two of them were reported to be county players, so the 'Belligerents' were rather fearful of their laurels.

Now Martin, small and puny though he was, was fleet of foot and very tricky with his feet, but he was far too modest to let anybody know it. He always watched the matches, however, and took an intelligent interest in the games, and eventually, by dint of being present on many occasions, found himself installed as a sort of honorary member of the team in the shape of their recognised touch-judge. He was even permitted to appear in the photograph which was taken soon after the ship arrived at Portland. He was in the back row, it is true, and wore his seaman's clothes instead of a highly coloured shirt, blue shorts, stockings, and football boots. But he carried a small hand-flag as his insignia of office, and considered himself no small beer in consequence. It was an honour to be associated with the team in any way; and as most of the officers, and practically the whole of the ship's company who happened to be ashore, made a point of attending the matches, Martin, running about with his flag, felt he was a—if not the—centre of attraction. At any rate, he was quite a personage, and talked about the game to the other ordinary seamen and boys with an air of great authority.

The scenes of excitement during some of the matches baffled description. 'Play up, Yaller-bellies!' two hundred of the *Belligerent's* men would shout in unison. The yellow referred to the canary-coloured shirts worn by their team, while the other rather inelegant word was the abbreviated name of the ship.

'Come on, the Cockneys!' or 'the Duffos!' would come the answering roar from the partisans of the other team, according to whether their ship hailed from Chatham or Devonport. 'Down wi' the Pompeyites!'

For minutes at a time the repartee bandied to and fro was so vociferous that the whistle was well-nigh inaudible; but the referee was used to it. He had an unenviable time in other ways, poor man! for whatever decision he gave was quite certain to be wrong from the point of view of fully half the spectators, in spite of the fact that he was a strictly neutral man from some other ship. 'Foul!' somebody would bellow, as the whistle blew for a free kick. 'Garn! That ain't no foul!' was hurled back from the men of the ship against which the penalty had been given. 'Play the game! Play the game, carn't you?' 'Goal! Well shot! Good old Yaller-bellies!' would come a roar, accompanied by a shower of caps in the air, as the ball flew past the white posts into the net. 'That's the style! Knock 'em end-ways!' 'Offside! Offside!' came louder yells from the other side. 'Where's the referee? What's 'e thinkin' of?' And so it went on.

But the referee, used to the ways of seamen, merely smiled, and paid no attention whatever to the ribald remarks hurled at his head, personal as some of them were. He was proof against such attacks, and his decisions were always fair.

Occasionally there were stormy scenes at the end of the matches; for when a favourite team had lost, their adherents were sometimes anxious to take on the partisans of the other side with their fists to discover which really was the better ship. More than once men returned on board with black eyes and swollen noses; but actual bloodshed was rare, though feeling always ran high. More often than not, victors and vanquished alike repaired to the canteen, and absorbed malt liquor at each other's expense, the former to celebrate the victory and the latter to drown their sorrow. They were very keen on the result of the league matches. The canteen did a roaring trade.

At one of the most important matches a member of the *Belligerent's* eleven happened to be absent at the time the game was due to start, and Lieutenant Boyle, who captained the team, was at his wits' end to find a suitable substitute. 'Have any of you men played this game?' he asked, going up to a group of seamen belonging to the *Belligerent* who had come to watch. 'Parkins hasn't turned up. We want a forward badly.'

Pincher, seizing the opportunity, stepped forward before any one else had a chance of answering. 'I've played at 'ome, sir,' he said, reddening at his own temerity. 'I used to be on the right wing.'

Boyle seemed rather surprised. 'You!' he said. 'Can you run? D' you know how to dribble and shoot?'

'Yessir.'

The officer looked at him for a moment without replying. He seemed rather doubtful.

''E's orl right, sir,' chipped in Billings, who happened to be present. ''E's pretty nippy on 'is feet. I've seen 'im kickin' the ball abart.'

The lieutenant looked up with a laugh. 'All right, Billings; we'll take him on your

recommendation.—Martin, rush across to the pavilion and borrow some gear. Hurry up about it; we're late already.'

Pincher, overjoyed and very proud of himself, flew off like the wind, and presently reappeared clad in full regalia, yellow shirt and all. It was his first really important match; but he felt he was on his mettle, and played well, almost brilliantly. At any rate, he shot two goals; whereat the 'Belligerents' howled themselves hoarse, raised cheers for 'young Pincher,' and wished to treat him with much beer at the end of the game. It was the first time in his life he had ever received adulation, and he was a proud man. His play had undoubtedly helped to win the match.

He was prouder still when Boyle sought him out afterwards. 'You played excellently, Martin,' he said. 'Why on earth didn't you let us know you played?'

'Didn't like to, sir.'

The officer laughed. 'I wish you men wouldn't be quite so modest,' he remarked. 'How d' you expect us to raise a decent team if you all hide your lights under bushels? You're the very man we've been looking for.'

'I'm sorry, sir,' said Martin sheepishly. 'I didn't know as 'ow I wus wanted.'

'We didn't know you were a player. However, now we've got you, you will remain in the team; so look out you keep yourself in decent training. A pint of beer after each game, and no more, mind. If you come to my cabin this evening I'll give you your jersey and other gear.' The lieutenant strolled off to change.

Martin could have jumped for joy. He was a full-fledged 'Yellow-belly' at last, and would appear before the whole ship's company in all the glory of a canary-yellow shirt with a large blue 'B' on the left breast. It was one of the things in this world he had been longing for. He was no longer a mere excrescence on the face of the earth—a poor, puny Pincher who was everybody's whipping-boy. On the contrary, he was a very proud Pincher, for at last he had come into his own. The *Belligerent* had some use for him, after all.

CHAPTER V.

THE OFFICERS.

The *Belligerent's* captain, John Horatio Spencer, D.S.O., was a fine type of the modern British naval officer, and a thorough seaman, who had risen in his profession through sheer merit and force of character. He had been lucky, it is true, for as a young lieutenant he had seen much active service in West Africa, had been severely wounded, was mentioned in despatches for 'great gallantry and resource,' and had received the Distinguished Service Order. In 1900, again, as the senior lieutenant of a second-class cruiser on the Cape of Good Hope station, he was landed with the naval guns for the relief of Ladysmith. He again did excellent service, was promoted to commander in 1901, to captain seven years later, and 1914 found him commanding a first-class battleship at the comparatively early age of forty-three.

In appearance he was a big, thick-set man, nearly six feet tall, and broad in proportion. He had a red, clean-shaven face, a pair of penetrating blue eyes which seemed to read one's innermost thoughts, and dark hair slightly shot with gray over the temples.

Every ship he had ever commanded, from a destroyer upwards, had been a happy one. His officers loved him as a friend and admired him as a superior, and 'Our John,' as they affectionately called him, spent far more time in their company than he did in the fastnesses of his own cabin. He hated the solitude of life in his own apartments in the after-end of the ship, and, when he had no guests of his own, frequently had meals in the wardroom as an honorary member, and played bridge and spun yarns in the smoking-room. He had the happy knack of being friendly with every one with whom he came in contact, and invariably treated his officers as equals when he was off duty.

On deck, of course, it was a different matter, for there he was very much their commanding officer, and they his subordinates; and, as Tickle, the junior watch-keeper, once put it, 'the owner [10] was the whitest and the straightest man on God's earth; but Heaven help you if you make a fool of yourself on deck!'

Captain Spencer did bite sometimes, and bite hard; but the culprit generally deserved all he got, and bore no grudge whatsoever. More often than not he would be discovered the same evening in the smoking-room having a sherry-and-bitters with 'the old man,' just to show there was no ill-feeling on either side.

On the mess-deck the captain was revered in rather a different way, for the men, while admiring him, regarded him with a certain amount of awe. Some of the younger and more timid ordinary seamen and boys, indeed, looked upon him as a sort of awful deity, an ogre almost, who sat in his cabin all day long inventing new schemes for their eternal damnation. They were frightened of him, and, on the rare occasions when they did catch sight of his four gold stripes on deck, felt rather inclined to run away and hide their faces. It was foolish of them, for a kinder-hearted man than the skipper it would be impossible to imagine.

But the men saw comparatively little of him, and had few opportunities of discovering his true character. He appeared on deck for 'divisions' every morning; walked round on Sundays criticising their clothes, the length of their hair, and the cleanliness of the ship; was always on the bridge at sea; and punished them when they misbehaved themselves. They realised he was just, and justice is what the bluejacket most admires; but they were not aware that he took a deep interest in them and their affairs, and that he knew everything that went on on board. Neither did they perceive that he frequently went to a great deal of trouble to stretch points in their favour in the way of leave and other privileges.

'Our John' hated advertisement in any form; and this, perhaps, was why the men never really understood his true kindliness of heart. For instance, when he subscribed five pounds towards a fund for the benefit of the widow of one of his men who had died, or two pounds towards the ship's concert party, he gave the money anonymously. When he granted the men an extra forty-eight hours' leave on his own responsibility, and because he considered they had earned it by their good behaviour, he never told them so.

So, from the lower-deck point of view, Captain Spencer was justly admired and greatly feared; but there was not a man on board who had not the fullest confidence in him and his judgment, or who would not cheerfully have followed him to the very gates of hell if he had asked them. Neither was there a more efficient or a happier ship than the *Belligerent*. Her officers and men knew it, and gloried in the fact.

But no small credit for this excellent state of affairs was due to the commander and other officers. The former, the Honourable Algernon D'Arcy Travers, was the direct antithesis of the captain in appearance. He was tall and very thin, but was a pleasant messmate with a very pronounced sense of humour, and on occasions behaved with all the boisterous bonhomie of a

junior sub-lieutenant. His excessive leanness did not worry him in the least, though he did once say that he wished his 'hinge' were a little better padded and the wardroom chairs rather softer. It was a matter of some import to his wife, though, for that lady sent him bottles of malt extract to thicken the flesh on his bones. This nutritive compound, however, was generally handed over to his bluejacket messenger, who liked the sweet taste of it; and that youth, already chubby and well-favoured, was gradually assuming the proportions of a young elephant. The commander found that being thin was an advantage in some ways; and on riotous guest nights, when he made as much noise as anybody present, it certainly permitted him to scramble through the square opening in the back of one of the wardroom chairs without much difficulty.

It was a feat few of his messmates could perform. The engineer-commander, George Piston, a well-covered officer, had tried it on one occasion, and had stuck half-way through. His messmates, headed by the commander himself, cheered him on with howls of merriment; but the victim was laughing so much that he seemed to have swelled. He could not budge one way or the other, and there was every prospect of his having to go through life with a chair securely fastened round his portly middle. They took off his garments one by one; but it was no use. They used vaseline and oil as lubricants, and endeavoured to tuck the folds of flesh through the narrow opening, but without avail.

'For heaven's sake send for a saw!' spluttered the gasping officer, relapsing uncomfortably on the sofa and beginning to feel rather alarmed. 'I can hardly breathe. Give me a whisky-and-soda, some one, or I shall burst!'

The saw arrived in due course, and the chair was removed with some damage to itself. The gallant officer never attempted the feat again.

The commander, an ex-torpedo specialist, was a good officer at his work, and the *Belligerent* always looked as clean and as smart as a new pin. Her organisation, too, was as perfect as it could be. The ship's company were very fond of 'the Bloke,' as they called him; and when men did misbehave themselves he generally made the punishment fit the crime. When two ordinary seamen, Barter and Hitchcock, began to give trouble, for instance, he hit upon rather an original method of dealing with them. He provided both of them with an ordinary singlestick and a face-mask, but no body-pads, and then promised them one penny each for every visible wale inflicted on the anatomy of the other. The instigator imagined that he would have to shell out a shilling at the most; but after a bout lasting for a fierce fifteen minutes, examination in the bathroom at the hands of a ship's corporal showed that Barter had earned one shilling and eightpence, and Hitchcock two and a penny. They were never obstreperous again, and the ship's company, instead of offering them sympathy, laughed immoderately.

The commander, like other naval officers, had his bad moments, and sometimes the watch-keepers found it advisable to steer clear of him before breakfast. But even if an explosion did occur no bones were ever broken, for they all knew he said a great deal more than he meant. After breakfast and a pipe he was amiability itself, provided nothing went wrong.

Chase, the senior lieutenant-commander and gunnery officer, has already been described; and the next in seniority was Vernon Hatherley, the lieutenant-commander (T.). He was something of an exquisite. He took a great pride in his personal appearance, was reported to wear silk slumber-wear, and kept a store of cosmetics and unguents in his cabin for the anointing of his face and hair. His messmates knew this, and, headed by No. 1, sometimes shampooed him with whisky-and-soda after dinner. But Torps, as they called him, was an excellent fellow, and took the ragging all in good part. Moreover, he generally succeeded in getting his own back by discovering something wrong with the electric lights in his tormentors' cabins at times when they most wanted to use them. He was an x-chaser, in that he had done remarkably well in all his different examinations; but besides being an expert theorist, he was an officer who knew the practical side of his business from A to Z.

The navigator, Christopher Colomb, had just married a young and pretty wife, and did not spend more time on board than he could possibly help. As a consequence, his messmates saw comparatively little of him, unless the *Belligerent* was cruising, and Mrs Colomb could not follow her husband. The captain occasionally succeeded in getting him to play golf in the afternoons; but Colomb preferred his wife's society to that of any one else. When he was on board in the evenings he shut himself in his cabin, and spent the time writing a learned treatise on *Magnetic Influences at Sea*. The book is still being written.

Peter Wooten, the next senior non-specialist officer of the military branch, was doing a two-year spell in a battleship, after having been in command of destroyers and gunboats for the past six years. He hated the drudgery of big-ship life, where he acted as the commander's understudy on the upper deck, had charge of the midshipmen and their instruction, arranged the ordinary seamen's training classes, worked the derrick for hoisting in and out boats, and generally acted as a sort of 'odd job' man. The life was fairly comfortable, it is true; but he much preferred the joys of commanding his own small ship to being a comparative nobody in a vessel the size of the *Belligerent*. He was a burly, deep-chested man, with fair, curly hair, tanned face, and a pair of clear, humorous blue eyes. He was fresh from China, where he had commanded a tiny river gunboat up the Yang-tse-kiang; and there, miles up the great river, far away from any admiral,

and completely 'on his own,' he had made history in a small way. He was a great character, and his stories of the Chinese revolution, when he could be induced to tell them, were sometimes amusing and always interesting. (He was the commanding officer of Martin's destroyer when that ordinary seaman joined the 'black navy' soon after the outbreak of the present war, so perhaps we may be pardoned for allowing him to spin one of his yarns. It has the advantage of being true.)

'It was quite a pretty little show,' he said one evening in the smoking-room after dinner, when somebody had egged him on to talk after a second glass of port. 'Have any of you fellows ever heard of a place called Kiang-fu, up the Yang-tse? You might know it, No. 1; you're an old China bird.'

Chase shook his head. 'Sorry I don't, Peter. But let's have the yarn, all the same.'

Wooten lit his pipe. 'Kiang-fu,' he started, 'is one of their walled towns on the banks of the river. It's a beastly place, full of stinks and bugs and abominations generally; and the only white people there are the consul and his wife, a couple of missionaries, and two merchants. Well, one morning my old *Kingfisher* was lying about twenty miles downstream, and a Chinaman from the consulate at Kiang-fu arrived in a sampan with a note from the consul to say that five thousand rebels had arrived before the place, and that there was going to be some scrapping. There were about a thousand Imperial troops inside the town, Johnson the consul said, and he was in a bit of a funk as to what would happen when the rebels took the place. They'd have butchered every one, of course, Europeans included. My orders were to protect British interests, but not to fight, so I upped killick[11] and steamed for Kiang-fu for all I was worth. We got about six and an onion[12] out of the old bus, I remember, and reached there about noon.' He paused and sucked thoughtfully at his pipe.

'And what happened then?' queried some one.

'I found the bally battle in full swing,' Wooten went on. 'Guy Fawkes Day wasn't in it, and both sides were blazing away for all they were worth, and making a hell of a row. However, they weren't doing much damage to each other. I anchored my hooker about a couple of hundred yards from the shore, where we could get a decent view of what went on, manned my two six-pounders and the Maxim, and hoisted an ensign and a large white flag—wardroom tablecloth it was—in a boat, and then went ashore to see Johnson. Things were pretty lively, and shells were bursting and bullets were whistling all over the place. The rebel attack was to come off that night, and as there could be only one end to it, I took Johnson and his missus, the two missionaries, the two shopkeepers, and Heaven alone knows how many Christian Chinese off to my ship. The upper deck was fairly packed with 'em. Then we sat down to watch the sport. One of the shopkeepers, I may say, was a Scotsman, and the other a Yank, and they wanted me to order the rebs. to shove off out of it and leave Kiang-fu alone. They had a lot of valuable stuff in their godowns[13] waiting to be shipped down the river, and said the whole lot of it 'u'd be looted if the city fell.

'I cursed them for a couple of tizzy-snatchers,' he resumed, grinning at the recollection; 'I told 'em they ought to be jolly thankful to have got off with their lives; and asked 'em how the dooce I could dictate to five thousand ruddy cut-throats with Mauser rifles and Lord knows how many field guns—decent guns, too; none of your clap-trap rubbish. I had exactly thirty men all told, a broken-winded eighty-ton gun-boat, two six-pounders, and one Maxim. Pretty tall order, wasn't it? However, I was still yapping to 'em on deck when I heard a sort of *phut*, and a bally bullet buried itself in the deck about a foot off my leg. It came from the direction of the rebel trenches, about five hundred yards off, and some silly blighter had evidently eased off a rifle at us for the fun of the thing. I heard one or two more bullets come whistling overhead—damned bad shooting they made—so sent all the refugees over to the lee side of the deck out of harm's way. Then I trained my guns on the rebs., and hoisted all the ensigns I had. They knocked off firing then, so I got into the boat with the consul, the wardroom tablecloth, and the largest ensign I could find, and pulled ashore.' He paused.

'Had you any weapons with you?' somebody asked.

'Lord, no!' said Wooten. 'Doesn't do to let a Chinaman see you're frightened of him. I took a walking-stick, and Johnson had a white umbrella. I was in a dooce of a funk, though, and when we landed we found a whole bally company of soldiers waiting to receive us.'

'What! a guard of honour?' asked Chase.

'Don't you believe it. They had fixed bayonets and loaded rifles, and I felt rather nervous as to what was going to happen. You see, there wasn't another British ship within a hundred miles of us. However, I landed with the consul, and a Chinese officer with a drawn sword came forward to receive us. He wasn't a bad fellow, and talked quite decent English, with an American accent. I asked him what the dooce they meant by having the troops there as if they wanted to scupper us, and told him who the consul was, and that I was the C.O. of the man-of-war, and that, on behalf of his Britannic Majesty, we wished to see his General. He said the old bloke was having his afternoon caulk, and that they daren't wake him. I said he'd better roust the old josser out, and

be damned smart about it. He hummed and hawed a bit over that, and then said that if we'd come along with him he'd take us to the headquarters, and see if we could have an interview. I wasn't going to kow-tow to any bally Chinaman, though, so I told him that if he didn't take steps to have the General brought to us in less than half-an-hour I'd raise hell's delight. It's no use being anything but dictatorial with Chinamen,' he went on to explain; 'and if you can bluff 'em into believing that you've got the whip-hand they generally knuckle under. We had some more talkee-talkee, and then he did go off with his men, and jolly glad I was to see the last of 'em. Twenty minutes later the General arrived. He was rather a fine-looking old boy, with no pigtail, and was dressed up in khaki and a sword. He had a couple of A.D.C.'s with him. He couldn't talk English, so I asked him through the consul what he meant by allowing his troops to fire on my ship, and said that I should have to report it, and so on. He said they hadn't done it. I said they had, and that if he came on board I'd jolly soon prove it. Well, after a lot of jawbation we got him into the boat, with the A.D.C.'s, took him off to the ship, and showed him the bullet-mark in the deck. He got in a bit of a funk then, so Johnson and I drew up a document in Chinese and English, in which he said he was sorry for what had occurred, and so on. It went on to say that he agreed to abandon the siege of Kiang-fu, as British interests were at stake, so we'd more or less cornered him. He signed like a lamb, wily old devil; but then we remembered that no document is valid in China unless it's stamped with the official seal of the man who signed it. We asked him where the seal was, but he hadn't got it on him. Johnson asked him where it was, and he said he'd got it in his old headquarters, about ten miles downstream. He volunteered to go and fetch it, but we weren't having any. The upshot of the whole affair was that we sent one of the A.D.C.'s ashore to order the siege to be stopped, and the rebels to retire, and took the General and the other A.D.C. down the river. Then we sent the A.D.C. ashore to get the seal, and had the document properly stamped. That's all, I think.'

'But did the rebels retire?' asked the commander.

Wooten nodded. 'Yes,' he said. 'They left the place like lambs, and the Imperialist colonel inside nearly fell on my neck and wept. The two shopkeepers gave me a box of a hundred cigars between them! Damned nasty cigars, too!'

His listeners laughed.

'And what happened to you?' asked Chase.

'Oh,' smiled Wooten, 'I sent the document to the admiral, with a covering letter, and jolly nearly got badly scrubbed for exceeding my duty and abducting the General. However, it was all right in the end, and I believe the old man was secretly rather pleased with what I'd done.'

'So he jolly well ought to have been,' remarked one of the watch-keepers.

'M'yes, but he was a man who didn't say much. However, a month later a British colonel and a couple of other officers came down from Pekin to confer with me about putting Kiang-fu in a state of defence in case the rebels came again, for by that time the powers that be had come to the conclusion that if they did capture it, it wouldn't do us any good. The colonel and I went ashore together, he with his two officers, and I with a sheet of paper and a pencil.

'"You'd better loophole that wall," he started off, pointing at a solid stone affair about three feet thick. "This house had better be demolished, and you'll have to dig a trench along here, with decent sand-bag head-cover. I should think a hundred and fifty rifles will be enough to man it, provided you have a couple of Maxims at each corner. Over there we'll have an emplacement for a field-gun, and there another trench."

'He went on like that the whole of one grilling forenoon, and by the time he'd finished I'd totted up my figures, and found he'd used the best part of a thousand men.

'"That's all right, sir," said I; "and when may I expect the regiment?"

'"Regiment!" he said, rather surprised. "What regiment d'you mean?"

'"The regiment for doing all this work and garrisoning the place, sir," said I innocently. "You've been talking about knocking down houses, erecting barricades, and digging trenches right and left. I've only got thirty men."

'"The deuce you have!" he said thoughtfully. "We'd better"——

'"Go and have lunch, sir," I chipped in.

'"Excellent idea," said he, mopping his face.

'So off we went, had a top-hole *tiffin*, and that was the last we ever heard of it. Kiang-fu never was put in a state of defence so far as I know. However, the rebels never came there again, so every one was quite happy. I tell you,' Wooten concluded with a grin, 'one occasionally has some pretty rummy times up the Yang-tse.'

One had, apparently, and Peter Wooten was an officer of great initiative and resource, who had served his country well, and had upheld the dignity of her flag on more than one occasion.

Chinese generals, mandarins, and other Celestial potentates were nothing to him. He bullied or bluffed them all into doing what he wanted, and they used to walk in terror of 'the red-faced devil with the loud voice,' as they called him. No wonder, then, that Peter felt himself tied by the leg in a battleship, where, to use his own expression, he was a 'mere dog's body.'

The watch-keeping lieutenants were George English, Aubrey Plantagenet Fitz-Johnson (usually known in the wardroom as 'the Dook'), Henry Archer Boyle, and Tobias Tickle.

English was a mild, inoffensive little man, whose chief ambition in life was to retire from the navy while he was still young, marry a wife, live in a small whitewashed cottage miles away from any sea, rear pigs and chickens, and collect butterflies. For all his lack of ambition, however, he was a good and zealous officer. He never made a bad mistake; but never, on the other hand, did anything very brilliant. He was a conscientious plodder.

'The Dook' was a tall, dashing, immaculate person, with sleek and shiny hair. He had a wonderful taste in dress, and how many different suits of plain clothes he possessed nobody but himself and his servant knew. How much he owed his tailor and his haberdasher nobody was aware of but those long-suffering tradesmen themselves, for Fitz-Johnson cast all his bills into the fire immediately on their receipt. His garments were always fashionable and well cut; his ties, collars, shirts, and socks of the newest and most exclusive pattern. His uniform frock-coat fitted his *svelte* figure like a glove; his trousers were always perfectly creased; and on Sundays he always appeared at 'divisions' with a brand-new pair of kid gloves—he never wore the same pair twice. The men called him Algy. He looked it. He was essentially a lady-killer. His cabin was full of autographed photographs of feminine admirers and mementoes in the shape of faded dance-programmes and little knots and bows of ribbon. His bedspread, a wonderful creation in blue silk, embroidered with his crest and monogram, had been worked by one set of fair fingers; his door and scuttle curtains, of chintz, by some one else; and a little bag for his hairbrushes by a third lady. When the mail arrived his letter-rack in the wardroom was crammed with bills, and letters in feminine handwriting. He kept up a voluminous correspondence, but was wise enough never to have more than one ardent admirer in any one place. He was a regular 'devyl with the girls,' there was no doubt about that; and if the ship arrived at some new place, and the wardroom took it into its head it would like to give a tea-fight, 'the Dook' was immediately sent ashore to prospect. How he did it nobody quite knew; but at the end of twenty-four hours he would be on friendly terms not only with all the young and pretty girls in the place, but also with their mothers, aunts, and female cousins. He was always on the verge of being engaged to be married, but never quite pulled it off. His host of unpaid bills, and the fact that he had little or no money besides his pay, probably frightened him. But, at any rate, he was a valuable acquisition as a messmate, for he sang well, and could play almost any musical instrument under the sun.

His chief failing was that he was never less than a quarter of an hour late for his watch. 'I'm deuced sorry, old chap,' was his usual excuse to the officer he had to relieve. 'The fella didn't call me properly.'

'Oh, to hell with you and your rotten excuses!' would growl the irritated watch-keeper who had been kept up. 'You're about the frozen limit! The corporal of the watch was hammering on your cabin door for at least a quarter of an hour!'

'It really wasn't my fault, though,' Fitz-Johnson would protest mildly. 'Please don't get shirty, old chap.'

It was impossible to be really angry with him; but he continued to relieve late until the other watch-keepers hit upon a scheme of keeping him up for an extra half-hour at the end of his own watch. That cured him eventually.

Boyle, the next in seniority, was a young, enthusiastic, and very energetic officer, who wished one day to become a gunnery officer. He had charge of the after-turret, with its pair of twelve-inch guns, and spent much of his time in a suit of oily overalls scrambling about in the depths of the hydraulic machinery. He was of an inventive turn of mind too, and even at the comparatively early age of twenty-four had already designed a self-stabilising seaplane, a non-capsizable boat, a patent razor-stropper, and an adjustable chair. This last, which he used in his cabin, was really most ingenious. It had hidden springs all over it, and you pushed a button and it did the rest. You could use it for anything, from an operating-table to a trousers-press; and it was often brought into the wardroom after dinner on guest-nights for its various uses to be demonstrated. It worked beautifully, until one night the *padre*, who was reclining gracefully at full length, pressed the wrong button in a sudden fit of exuberance. The chair promptly bucked like a kicking mule. The front shot up and the back fell down, and the reverend occupant hurtled adroitly backwards straight into the arms of an astonished marine servant with a tray full of whiskies and sodas. He came to the ground with a crash, with the marine and the liquid on top of him, and everybody laughed.

The servant, drenched through, retired grumbling to change his garments; and the Rev. Stephen Holiman scrambled to his feet, surveyed the mess of broken glass and liquor on the deck, and then felt his pulped collar and examined his clothes.

'Boyle, you silly ass!' he expostulated, justifiably annoyed, and trying to mop himself dry with a handkerchief, 'why the d-dickens couldn't you tell me the thing was going to pitch me over backwards like that?'

'I'm awfully sorry, *padre*,' spluttered the inventor, weak with laughing. 'You must have pressed the wrong button; but even then I've never known it do that before. Perhaps it wants oiling.'

'Take the rotten thing away and drown it!' retorted the *padre*, as angry as he ever got. 'It oughtn't to be allowed on board. It's ruined my clothes!' But the *padre* was a sportsman with a sense of humour, and after a little more grumbling, during which he got no sympathy from his messmates, cheered up and went off to change. Ever afterwards, when the chair appeared, he endeavoured to make it play the same trick on some unsuspecting guest. But it never would.

Tobias Tickle, commonly known as 'Toby,' was the officer of Martin's division, whom we have already met. He had married very young, and had a rich and pretty wife, who was as popular as himself; but this did not prevent Toby from being a very riotous member of society on occasions. He was loved by his men; for, while very strict, he took a great interest in them and their affairs. He knew the surname and Christian name of every bluejacket in his division; knew whether they were married, engaged to be married, courting, or single; and always gave them good advice when they asked for it. They often did. On more than one occasion he or his wife had helped them in other ways.

Once, when Mrs Buttings, the wife of an able seaman, had been ailing, and had had to undergo a rather serious operation, Mrs Toby heard of it through her husband. She promptly visited the patient, found her living in a miserable little dwelling in a back street in Landport, with four children between the ages of six months and five years, and nobody to look after her except the neighbours. This would not do for Mrs Tickle. She promptly engaged a trained nurse, sent the children off to a farmhouse in the country, visited the invalid daily, saw that she had a proper diet, and provided her with many sovereigns' worth of coal and luxuries.

Buttings himself, when he went ashore and saw the transformation in his usually rather slovenly home, was furious. Like most bluejackets, he hated the idea of charity in any form, and went straight off to see Tickle.

'Look 'ere, sir,' he said; 'with orl my doo respects to you, it ain't playin' the game!'

'Not playing the game!' answered the lieutenant, quite at a loss to understand what the man was driving at. 'What d'you mean?'

'Well, sir, it's like this 'ere. I goes 'ome an' finds my 'ouse rigged up like a bloomin' 'orspitle, an' the missus lyin' in bed with flowers, an' beef-tea, an' port wine, an' sich like. I finds another 'ooman there a-lookin' 'arter 'er—dressed up like a 'orspitle nurse, she wus—an' w'en I arsks 'er wot she done with the kids, she sez as 'ow they'd bin sent to the country. W'en I wants to know 'oo's done it, she sezs Mrs Tickle. It ain't fair on a man, sir, doin' a thing like that, an' habductin' of 'is kids. S'welp me, it ain't!' Buttings paused for breath.

'I'm sorry you think that, Buttings,' said Tickle gently. 'Your wife has been very ill, and what she wants is good food and proper treatment. She's getting that now. The children, too, are out in the country having an excellent time. After all, my wife didn't do it without asking Mrs Buttings.'

'Yessir. That's all werry well; but I pays the rent o' the bally 'ouse.'

'Of course I understand that. But surely you don't grudge your wife a little comfort after she's been so ill?'

'No, sir, o' course not,' said the seaman, scratching his head. 'But 'oo's goin' to pay for orl this 'ere? Port wine an' chicken jelly ain't got for nothin'.'

Tickle felt half-inclined to tell him outright that he, or, rather, his wife, was prepared to pay for everything; but if he had, the able seaman would at once have been in open rebellion. The nurse alone came to two guineas a week, and the food and little luxuries for the invalid to as much again. 'Well, Buttings,' he said, pretending to consider, 'suppose it costs about seven-and-six a week. That's about it, I should imagine.'

Buttings seemed rather relieved. 'Seven an' a tanner,' he said, more happily. 'I kin manage that, sir. I ain't got much money to splosh abart, o' course,' he hastened to explain; 'but I don't like ter think as 'ow I ain't payin' for what my old 'ooman's gettin'.'

And so, for the time being, the matter ended, and both parties were satisfied.

Mrs Buttings recovered in due course, and became her old buxom self, and then it was that she enlightened her husband as to what the Tickles had really done. Buttings was speechless with rage.

But Christmas came soon afterwards, and on the morning itself, as Tickle was having his bath, there came a knock at his cabin door. 'Hallo, what is it?' he asked, springing up and wrapping a towel round himself.

'It's Buttings, sir,' said the seaman, pulling aside the curtain. 'I've got this 'ere for you, sir, from my missus an' meself; an' this, sir, is for your lady. We both wishes you an' your lady a 'Appy Christmas, sir.' There was a suspicious huskiness in his voice; and, after pushing two small parcels into the astonished officer's hands, he fled before Tickle could say so much as 'Thank you.'

One package contained a highly ornamental silver cigarette-case, and the other a small gold brooch of impossible design. Accompanying each gift was a flamboyant card with a chaste design of clasped hands, wreaths and sprigs of forget-me-nots, and true-lovers' knots. Below were the words: 'In friendship we are united.' Inside, in very laborious handwriting, came the inscription: 'With great gratitude from Able Seaman and Mrs Reuben Buttings.'

'Well, I'm damned!' muttered the lieutenant, gazing at the presents, deeply touched. The little gifts, which had cost Buttings and his wife many of their hard-earned shillings, were their way of showing that they had not forgotten.

Mrs Toby was so overcome when she received her brooch that she nearly wept with emotion. 'Dear, dear people!' she murmured gently; 'I love them!'

And still some folk have the effrontery to say that there is no bond of sympathy between the officers and men of the Royal Navy.

CHAPTER VI.

'THE 'ORRIBLE DEN.'

I.

From the quarterdeck one climbed down a steep ladder, walked aft along the maindeck past the wardroom, descended another ladder, and finally emerged into a large flat lit by electricity. To starboard was a bulkhead with rifles in racks, their blued barrels gleaming dully in the glare of the electric bulbs. Behind the rifle-racks came some of the officers' cabins, through the open doorways of which one was vouchsafed an occasional fleeting glimpse of sea and sky framed in the circular opening of a scuttle in the ship's side.

The small habitations seemed to reflect the personalities and tastes of their several occupants. Some were gay with pictures, photographs, brightly coloured bedspreads and curtains, and had easy-chairs, well-filled bookcases, and a glittering array of silver-backed brushes, photograph-frames, and ornaments on the chests of drawers serving as toilet-tables. In others there was little or no attempt at decoration, and they were furnished with almost Spartan simplicity, with nothing but what the Admiralty allowed. This consisted of a bunk with drawers underneath, a solid mahogany chest of drawers, a book-shelf, a folding washstand, a minute writing-table, a straight-backed cane-bottomed chair, a small strip of carpet, ugly maroon-coloured scuttle and door curtains, and, by way of decoration, the inevitable shallow circular tin bath suspended from the roof.

Amidships in the flat, in ordered rows, came the midshipmen's sea-chests. They were painted white, with black lids, and bore their owners' names on small brass plates. Each was exactly three feet six inches long, one foot eight and a half inches broad, and three feet seven and three-quarter inches high, neither more nor less. Admiralty regulations are explicit and precise, even on the subject of midshipmen's sea-chests. In these receptacles the 'snotties'[14] kept, or were supposed to keep, all their worldly belongings, and woe betide them if the first lieutenant discovered their clothes or boots lying about when he went his rounds twice a day! The garments were promptly impounded and placed in the scran-bag, which was opened only once a week. Moreover, one inch of soap—which went toward cleaning the ship—had to be paid for each article claimed.

On the opposite side of the flat were more rifle-racks and two curtained doorways. One of these gave access to a pantry, the other to what the commander called 'the 'Orrible Den,' otherwise the gunroom. It was the habitat of the junior officers, and provided accommodation for two sub-lieutenants, an assistant-paymaster, ten midshipmen, and Mr Hubert Green, the assistant-clerk.

Imagine an apartment about thirty feet long by twenty feet wide, with plenty of head-room. It ran fore and aft, and on the ship's side opposite to the door were four circular scuttles. They were about six feet above the water-line, and could be left open in harbour or in the calmest weather at sea. If it was blowing at all hard, however, they had to be kept tight shut to prevent the entry of the water. On these occasions the atmosphere, well impregnated with the smell of food from the pantry, could be cut with a knife. The sub-lieutenant, complaining bitterly of the 'fug' or 'frowst,' sometimes ordered a junior midshipman to carry out what was known as 'scuttle drill.' This meant that the unfortunate youth had to open the port gingerly to let in the air, but that he must bang it to again whenever a sea came rushing past. If he allowed water or spray to enter he was chastised. He generally was, but not really hard. Underneath the scuttles, and along the after bulkhead, were narrow cushioned settees serving as seats. Then came two long tables, with, outside them again, padded forms. Altogether there was seating accommodation for about twenty-four people at meals.

On the inner bulkhead near the door was a stove, and beyond this again a small piano. This instrument had been quite a good one once upon a time, but, owing to an accumulation of foreign matter in its interior, caused no doubt by a youthful officers' steward, who found it a convenient receptacle for dirty cotton-waste, polishing-paste, bathbrick, and emery-paper, was long past its palmy days. However, it still made a noise, and was useful for sing-songs.

On the foremost bulkhead was a small hatch with a sliding door communicating with the pantry, and underneath it a mahogany sideboard. The appointments were completed by three wicker arm-chairs, provided by the occupants themselves, a sofa, a rack for the midshipmen's dirks, a mahogany letter-rack and notice-board, and rows of small lockers, just under the ceiling, round two sides over the settees. In these the 'snotties' kept their small personal belongings, books, and pots of jam or potted meat. But we have forgotten the beer-barrel. It occupied a conspicuous position near the sideboard.

Pictures and prints hung on the white enamelled walls, rugs were scattered about the floor, and

the two long tables were covered with crimson cloths of the usual Admiralty pattern, and were adorned with palms in pots and vases of flowers. So, taking it all round, 'the 'Orrible Den' was not quite so bad as it was painted. In fact, it was quite a cheerful apartment.

Sub-Lieutenant Archibald Bertrain Cook—commonly known as Alphabetical Cook—was the senior member of the mess and *ex officio* president. He was a lusty, riotous, red-faced fellow of twenty-two, and ruled the midshipmen with a rod of iron. The other sub was Roger More, six months junior to him. Wilfrid Shilling, the A.P.,[15] was a tall, anæmic-looking officer, with an incipient beard and rather long hair. He wore glasses, and was deeply in love with a young lady at Weymouth. He went by the name of Blinkers.

Next came the senior midshipmen, Antony Charles Trevelyan, Roderick MacDonald, William Augustus Trevor, and Henry Taut. They varied in age between eighteen and a half and nineteen and a half; and the first, on account of his rather blue chin and heavy growth of hair, went by the elegant name of Whiskers. MacDonald, who was short and had rather a barrel-like appearance, was nicknamed Shorty or Tubby; while Trevor, a small youth, sometimes answered to Winkle. Taut, the midshipman of Martin's division, was the Long Slab. He was tall and very thin, rather like a lighthouse.

Then came the six junior 'snotties,' whose names do not really matter. They were all under eighteen, and had only just joined the ship from the training-cruiser. They were, in consequence, very small beer indeed—mere excrescences on the face of the earth. Collectively they were referred to as the Warts, Crabs, or Dogs' Bodies, and had to do what everybody else chose to tell them.

The Wart of all the Warts was Mr Hubert Green, the assistant-clerk. He was a small, freckle-faced youth, with a squeaky voice and ginger hair, and had only just come to sea. He was only seventeen and a half, the baby of the gunroom, and on account of his youth and general ignorance of the navy and naval affairs, spent his life having his leg pulled by the midshipmen.

Both the subs and the A.P. had cabins of their own. The midshipmen 'lived in chests,' as the saying is; slept in hammocks in the gunroom flat; and performed their ablutions in a small tiled bathroom farther forward. Publicity was a thing they had no qualms about whatsoever, and between seven o'clock and seven-forty-five in the morning, when they were dressing or parading about with or without towels, waiting for their turns to wash, the flat was no fit place for the general public.

Except on Sundays, when they lay in till seven o'clock, the 'snotties' turned out at six-fifteen, and from six-forty till seven were on deck at physical drill. At seven, therefore, came the rush for baths, the usual exaggerated tin saucers, of which there were only six. The bandsmen servants procured their respective masters' hot water beforehand; but it was always a case of first come first served, and nobody hesitated to use anybody else's belongings if he were big and strong enough to do so with impunity. Such things as hot water, sponges, soap, and nail-brushes were regarded as common property unless their owners chose to retain them by force. Towels and toothbrushes alone were sacred to the individual.

The subs and the senior midshipmen bathed first, and woe betide any Crab who was discovered in the bathroom when they arrived! He was promptly hurled out. Then came the junior 'snotties,' and lastly the assistant-clerk, who, poor wight, usually had to be content with cold water. But they were all quite happy, and made a great deal of noise.

Pay of one shilling and ninepence *per diem*, plus a compulsory allowance of fifty pounds a year from one's people, which was what the midshipmen received, is not great affluence, even in the navy, where living is comparatively cheap. It amounts in all to six pounds fifteen shillings and tenpence per month of thirty days.

Mr Tubbs, the long-suffering gunroom-messman, and a bit of a villain, undertook to provide breakfast, luncheon, and dinner for the sum of thirty shillings a month a head from each member; but in addition to this he also took the ten-pence *per diem* allowed to each officer by the Government in lieu of rations. Afternoon tea, cake, bread-and-butter, tins of biscuits, potted meat, jam, fruit, and other extraneous edibles were charged for as extras, in which category also came such things as soap, bootlaces, drawing-paper, pens, ink, pencils, &c. The sum of ten shillings *per mensem* was supposed, by Admiralty regulation, to suffice for the midshipmen's needs in the way of extras; but the most of them, with the connivance of the messman, ran what they called 'extra-extra bills.' It was on the profit made on these that Mr Tubbs was able to make two ends meet at all, for one and tenpence a day is not much wherewith to satisfy the food capacity of a young and lusty lad with a healthy appetite.

'Snotties' over eighteen were allowed to expend fifteen shillings a month on wine, and those under this age five shillings less; but nobody under twenty was permitted to touch spirits. The mess fund—for newspapers, breakages, washing, and other small incidental expenses—came to a nominal five shillings a month, but generally exceeded it; servant's wages were ten shillings; personal washing, say, ten shillings; and tobacco—if the officer was over eighteen, and allowed to smoke—about seven shillings and sixpence or half-a-sovereign. The monthly balance-sheet,

omitting all extravagances, therefore, worked out somewhat as follows:

RECEIPTS.

1s. 9d. a day for 30 days	£	2	12 6
One-twelfth of £50		4	3 4
Total	£	6	15 10

DEBITS.

30 days' messing at 1s. a day	£	1	10 0
Mess Fund		0	5 0
Wine		0	15 0
Tobacco		0	7 6
Extras		0	10 0
Servant		0	10 0
Washing		0	10 0
Total	£	4	7 6

This, omitting the 'extra-extra,' left a nominal credit balance of two pounds eight shillings and fourpence wherewith to last out the month. Only one or two of the 'snotties' received anything extra in the way of allowances from their people, though their outfitters' bills for all necessaries in the way of clothing were usually met by their parents. But even this did not improve matters to any great extent, and not one of the young officers was ever known to have much in the way of money unless parents or relations behaved handsomely on birthdays or at Christmas. Even then the gift dwindled rapidly, for if one of them did receive a windfall of an odd pound or two, he took care that his messmates shared his good fortune. The clothes they had, too, were in a perpetual state of being lost; and if one of them was asked out to dine in another ship, everybody contributed something towards his attire. One provided a shirt, and others handkerchief, collar, tie, and evening shoes; but in spite of it all they somehow always managed to look smart and well-dressed.

This state of chronic hardupness is hereditary in midshipmen. History relates that a youth once came home from China, and landed at Portsmouth with no soles to his boots, a hole in the crown of his straw hat—it had been eaten by cockroaches—the seat of his trousers darned by himself with sail-makers' twine, and no tails to any of his shirts. With the ready resource of the sailor, he had removed these for use as pocket-handkerchiefs.

The Royal Navy is essentially a poor man's service, and comparatively few of its officers have anything considerable in the way of means over and beyond their pay. It is sometimes difficult to keep out of debt, for they are expected to go everywhere and do everything, while uniform is expensive, and the cost of living is always increasing. It seems to be part of a midshipman's job to be poor, and one would as soon expect to find a dustman with a gold-mounted shaving-set as a 'snotty' with more than half-a-crown in his pocket on the 28th of the month.

The 'snotties' of the *Belligerent* were no exception to the general rule. They were quite irrepressible, and were as happy and cheerful as they could be, though sometimes they did complain bitterly that they were half-starved. On occasions, to the accompaniment of spoons beaten on the table, they chanted a mournful dirge anent the iniquities of the messman. It was long and rather ribald, but the last two lines of the chorus ran:

> We're starving! we're starving!
> And the messman's name is Mr Tubbs!

They weren't really so famished as they pretended to be, but Tubbs certainly was an old rogue. One celebrated morning, when the senior sub-lieutenant was absent, he peered through the pantry hatch at breakfast-time.

'Now, gennelmen,' he said, 'wot we 'ave for breakfast is 'ot sardines an' 'am. Sardines is a bit orf, the 'am is tainted, an' fruit is extra. Wot'll you 'ave?'

The ship was half-way across the Bay of Biscay at the time, and had been at sea for several days, so perhaps there was some slight excuse for the inadequacies of the morning meal. But Tubbs had tried this game before; and, headed by Roger More, the junior sub-lieutenant, the members of the mess rose *en bloc* and hastily armed themselves with dirks.

The messman, scenting trouble, promptly fled from the pantry with his satellites after him, while the hungry officers rushed in, broke open various cupboards, and helped themselves liberally to Tubbs's private store of tinned kippers and haddock. He complained bitterly, but got no redress.

Another time the members of the mess were sitting round the table waiting impatiently for lunch. Noon was the proper time for the meal; but at twelve-ten nothing had appeared on the table except the vegetables. The hungry officers commenced to bang on the table with eating implements, and started the inevitable dirge, and in the middle of it Tubbs's face appeared

framed in the pantry hatch.

'I'm sorry, gennelmen,' he said when he could make himself heard in the uproar. 'The boy's fallen down the 'atch with the joint, an' it ain't fit be to seen. I've some werry nice corned beef'——

A chorus of groans drowned his utterance. 'Let's see the joint,' some one demanded.

'It's bin thrown overboard, sir,' the messman explained glibly, disappearing from view.

Several of the junior midshipmen and the assistant-clerk were despatched to visit the scene of the alleged accident, and to report on what traces they found. There were none. There never had been any joint.

'Tubbs!' they yelled in unison when the spies came back.

The messman's head appeared, and the minute it bobbed up into sight it was greeted with a volley of vegetables. On the whole the shooting was good, and Tubbs made an excellent Aunt Sally. Potatoes baked in their jackets spattered and burst all round the pantry hatch like a *rafale* of shrapnel-shell, while some, passing through, exploded on impact with the messman's head. The *pièce de résistance* was a cauliflower. It struck the ledge and detonated like a high-explosive projectile, and the messman received its disintegrated stickiness full in the face. He slammed the hatch up with a bang, and rushed into the mess with his face, beard, and hair dripping with vegetable products; while the culprits, wildly excited, shrieked with laughter. The bombardment would have continued, but the available ammunition was expended.

Tubbs was furious. 'I'll 'ave the law on yer!' he shouted wildly, waving his fists. 'I'll report yer to the commander, and 'ave yer court-martialled, see if I don't! It's disgraceful, that's wot it is, an' wot the navy's comin' to I don't know! Calls yerselves gennelmen, do yer?'

He went on for quite a long time; but nothing further ever came of it. He knew well enough that he had brought it on himself, and thereafter he became rather more particular over the matter of providing meals.

It must not be imagined that the inhabitants of the *Belligerent*'s gunroom always behaved like this. On the contrary, they were an unusually well-conducted mess, and they broke out only when they were really exasperated, and their feelings got the better of them.

The sub, assisted by the senior 'snotties,' had drilled the Crabs into a high state of discipline and efficiency. He believed in using the terror of the stick as a deterrent rather than in employing the weapon itself, and as a consequence the junior midshipmen were never beaten really hard unless they misbehaved themselves. But as Cook himself once remarked, 'You can bet your bottom dollar that for every sin they've been bowled out committing, there are fully fifty more that we haven't discovered;' and there was some truth in the remark.

One of the methods of smartening up the Crabs was an evolution known as 'fork in the beam.' This was a time-honoured custom which must have started in the days of wooden sailing-ships, since it is hardly possible to stick an ordinary table-fork into the steel beams of a modern vessel. It generally took place during dinner, when the younger members of the mess had been making too much noise.

The sub, standing up at his place at the end of the table, would insinuate a fork into the electric wires overhead, and at this signal all the junior midshipmen and the assistant-clerk had to leave the mess, scamper twice round the boat-deck, and return in the shortest possible time. In the old-time evolution itself the 'snotties' used to run up the rigging and over the masthead, but Cook substituted the race round the boat-deck as being less dangerous. The last officer back had to repeat the performance; and, as the loser generally found that somebody had drunk his beer during his absence, there was always great competition to be away first. It usually started by a seething mass of seven Crabs being stuck in the doorway. After much struggling and pushing, they would eventually fall through into the flat amidst shrill yelps from the young gentlemen who happened to be underneath, and remarks of 'Get off my face!' 'Ow! let go my leg, you beast!' Then, sorting themselves out one by one, they would dart off, to return a few minutes later flushed and breathless after their exercise.

They were also organised as what were known as the 'dogs of war,' with the idea, as the sub explained, of instilling them with martial ardour and making them fierce. On the order, 'Dogs of war out—so and so!' they were expected to growl viciously, hurl themselves upon the person named, and cast him forth from the mess. Sometimes the assistant-clerk was the victim, sometimes one of the 'snotties' themselves; but, to make things really exciting, the 'dogs' were occasionally divided into two sides, Red and Blue, and each party endeavoured to expel the other. It always meant a frantic struggle, for the victim or victims resisted violently. They were none too gentle either, for clothes were torn, shirts and collars were destroyed, and bruises were by no means infrequent. Sometimes people's noses bled, and the fight waxed really furious; but cases of lost temper were comparatively rare, and the 'dogs' usually enjoyed the fun as much as any one else. Their parents, had they been present during the strife, might not have been quite so amused. They paid for the clothes.

The star turn, however, was the Crabs' *corps de ballet*, and it occasionally disported itself on guest nights for the amusement and edification of any strangers who happened to be present. Trevelyan, the senior midshipman, was the stage manager, and what the ballet lost through lack of histrionic power on the part of the performers it more than made up for by its originality. Their attire was sketchy, to say the least of it. It consisted mainly of bath-towels, sea-boots, and straw hats; and the songs and dances, to the strains of the elderly, asthmatic piano, and bagpipes played by a Scots midshipman, MacDonald, usually brought down the house. If by any chance the performance fell at all flat through a lack of energy on the part of the performers, they were promptly converted into 'dogs of war,' with the inevitable result. So, taking it all round, the occupants of 'the 'Orrible Den' managed to amuse themselves.

But because they sometimes became riotous and irresponsible in the gunroom, it must not be imagined that the younger officers were not learning their trade. Far from it; they worked really very hard, on deck, in the engine-room, and in pursuit of the wily and elusive *x*. Their day started at six-fifteen, and between six-forty and seven o'clock they were either away boat-pulling or at physical drill or rifle exercise. After this came baths, and from seven-forty-five till eight instruction in signals. Breakfast was at eight; and from nine till eleven-forty-five, and again in the afternoon from one-fifteen to three-fifteen, they were at instruction in seamanship, gunnery, torpedo, navigation, or engineering. Voluntary instruction in theoretical subjects took place for one and a half hours on three evenings of the week, and those more backward youths who did not volunteer were compelled to attend. Two nights a week, from eight-thirty till nine, there were signal exercises with the Morse lamp, and these had to be attended by all the midshipmen until they attained a certain standard of proficiency.

In addition to this, they had their regular watches to keep—day and night at sea, and from eight-thirty A.M. till eight P.M. in harbour; while no boat ever left the ship under steam or sail without a 'snotty' in charge. Their days, therefore, were pretty busy.

They generally managed to get ashore between three-thirty and seven P.M. about two days out of every four, and on Saturdays and Sundays from one-thirty; but no late leave was granted save in very exceptional circumstances. They amused themselves with hockey and football in the winter, and golf, tennis, and cricket in the summer; and at places where games could not be played, solaced their feelings by borrowing one of the ship's boats on Sunday afternoons, stocking her with great hampers containing provender of all kinds, and then sailing off for a picnic. There is an irresistible fascination in cooking sausages and boiling a kettle over a home-made fire on some unfrequented island or beach which appeals to the most sober-minded of us.

Your modern midshipmen are no longer the rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed little cherubs of fiction. Many of them are over six feet, some of them shave, and nobody but their aunts and female cousins refer to them as 'middies.' To call them by that diminutive term to their faces would make them squirm. They refer to themselves as 'snotties,' and 'snotties' they will remain till the end of the chapter. The name, rather inelegant perhaps, owes its origin to the three buttons on the cuffs of their full-dress short jackets, which ribald people used to say were first placed there to prevent their sleeves being put to the use generally delegated to pocket-handkerchiefs. Any schoolboy will tell you what a 'snot rag' is; but I have never yet heard of a modern midshipman being without this rather important article of dress.

'Snotties' are a strange mixture. They possess all the love of fun and excitement of schoolboys, but once on duty are very much officers. They have to undertake responsibility very young, and at an age when their shore-going brothers are still at public schools their careers in the service have started.

Seamanship is not an exact science; it is an art. It comprises, amongst other things, experience, sound judgment, good nerve, a vast deal of common-sense, and a happy knack of knowing when risks are justifiable and when they are not. It is a subject which cannot be taught by rule of thumb after the first groundwork of elementary knowledge has been assimilated, and circumstances alter cases so greatly that no preceptor on this earth could lay down hard-and-fast rules for each of the thousand-and-fifty contingencies which may arise at sea, and which may one day have to be guarded against or overcome. The sea, moreover, is a fickle mistress. The navy is always on active service, in peace or in war, for its men and its ships are for ever pitting their skill and strength against the might of the most merciless of enemies—the elements. From the very moment that midshipmen join their first ship they are expected to take part in the great game, and sometimes it is a game of life and death. They start off by being placed in charge of boats in all weathers. They may be steamboats, or boats under sail; but whichever they are, the 'snotties' are learning their trade. If they do something foolish they may cause great damage to valuable property, may even be the means of men losing their lives; but they generally succeed in getting out of scrapes and difficulties with some credit to themselves.

The strenuous training and habit of early responsibility may convert them into men before their time; but they still manage to retain their boyish instincts, and when they are off duty these generally appear uppermost. At times they are noisy, riotous, and altogether irrepressible; but when it comes to work they are very much all there.

'Ain't got a fill o' bacca abart yer, 'ave yer?' asked Joshua Billings, A.B., producing an abbreviated, blackened, and very foul clay pipe from the lining of his cap and gazing at it pensively. It was twelve-forty-five P.M., the middle of the dinner-hour, and Joshua, having just assimilated his tot of navy rum, was at peace with himself and the world in general.

'Sorry,' Martin answered, 'I ain't got nothin' but fags.'

'Fags!' the able seaman growled. 'Why you young blokes smokes nothin' but them things I dunno. They tastes like smokin' 'ay. W'en I fu'st jined I takes up me pun' o' bacca reg'lar, an' I done it ever since. It's got some taste abart it. Fags! S'welp me, I dunno wot th' blessed navy's comin' to!'

Martin looked rather sheepish.

Billings grinned. 'Seein' as 'ow you ain't got no bacca, then I s'pose I've got ter use me own,' he went on, producing a well-filled pouch from the waistband of his trousers, and proceeding to ram some coarse, dark tobacco into his pipe. 'I never believes in usin' me own s'long as I kin git a fill orf another bloke. Got a match?'

The ordinary seaman handed a box across, and his companion lit up.

'Comin' ashore along o' me this arternoon?' Joshua asked, puffing out a cloud of smoke with a satisfied grunt.

Martin thought for a moment. For an ordinary seaman to be asked to go ashore with a man of Billings's age was undoubtedly a great honour; but, at the same time, he was rather doubtful as to what might happen. Joshua, on his own statement, had an unquenchable thirst for malt liquor, and always felt 'dizzy like' outside public-houses, and Martin had no wish to join him in a carouse, with the prospect of ending the afternoon under the supervision of the local constabulary.

'Goin' on th' razzle?'[16] he asked cautiously.

Billings laughed. 'Razzle!' he exclaimed. 'No, I ain't on that lay. I'll 'ave jist one pint w'en I gits ashore, but no more'n that. The fac' o' the matter is, Pincher, I'm in love.' He paused to give his words time to sink in.

'In love!' Martin echoed with some astonishment.

The A.B. nodded gravely. 'Yus,' he said; 'an' I want some one to come along an' 'old me 'and like, some bloke wot looks young an' innercent like you.' He endeavoured to look young and innocent himself, gazed heavenwards with a rapt expression on his homely face, contorted his mouth into what he considered was a sweet smile, and sighed deeply. 'I tell yer,' he added, resuming his normal appearance and winking solemnly, 'she's a bit o' orl right, an' I reckons she's took a fancy ter me. Leastways she 'inted that she'd come to th' pictures along o' me ter-night if I arsked 'er polite like, an' 'ave a bit o' somethin' t' eat arterwards.'

'You in love!' Martin gasped again, for to him it seemed impossible that any woman could succumb to the doubtful charms of the hoary-headed old reprobate. 'Garn! you're 'avin' me on.'

Joshua seemed rather annoyed. 'Oh no, I ain't,' he retorted testily. 'An' if yer gits talkin' like that me an' you'll part brassrags.[17] She ain't th' sort o' 'ooman ter take a fancy to a young bloke. Wot she wants is some one ter look arter 'er an' 'er property. A bloke wi' hexperience, the same as me.'

'Property! 'Oo is she, then?'

'You mustn't go tellin' the other blokes if I tells yer,' Billings said, sinking his voice to a whisper. 'Promise yer won't.'

'Orl right, I won't.'

'She's a widder 'ooman wot keeps a sweet an' bacca shop, an' sells noospapers. She's makin' a good thing out o' it, too—clearin' 'bout three pun' a week, she sez she is; an' as my time's comin' along for pension, it's abart time I started lookin' round fur somethin' ter do w'en I leaves the navy. She ain't no young an' flighty female neither, I gives yer my word. Got a growed-up darter, she 'as, seventeen year old, an' I reckons it's abart time th' poor gal 'ad another father ter look arter 'er. You see,' he added, 'if I gits married to th' old un orl the blokes wot knows me'll come to the shop to buy their fags an' noospapers, so it ain't as if I was bringin' nothin' to th' business. I'm a bloke wi' inflooence, I am. 'Er larst 'usband drove a cab, 'e did, an' I reckons she's betterin' 'erself by marryin' a bloke wot's bin in the navy.'

'An' wot's this 'ere gal o' 'ers like?' Pincher wanted to know. 'Is she a cosy bit o' fluff too?'

'Cosy bit o' fluff!' exclaimed Joshua with some warmth. 'Wot d'yer mean, yer lop-eared tickler?[18] She ain't fur the likes o' you, any'ow.'

'Oh, ain't she?' Martin retorted. 'Well, I ain't comin' ashore along o' yer, then!'

''Ere, don't git yer dander up,' Billings interrupted, changing his tone; 'I didn't mean nothin'.' He was really very anxious that Martin should accompany him, for he had a vague idea in his head that the presence of a younger man would lend tone to the proceedings, and to him a certain air of respectability.

'Don't act so snappy, then,' the ordinary seaman returned. 'I'm as good as any other bloke.' He remembered that he was a member of the ship's football team, and this alone made him a person of some importance.

'Well, if yer really wants ter know, th' gal's name's Hemmeline, an' she's walkin' out wi' a ship's stooard's assistant bloke from the flagship.'

'Ship's stooards ain't no class!' Pincher snorted, expanding his chest to its full capacity. 'They ain't fightin' blokes same as me an' you.'

'No, they ain't,' Billings agreed, puffing slowly at his pipe. 'They ain't got no prospex neither. Look 'ere, Pincher,' he added, 'she's only bin along wi' 'im fur a week, an' if yer fancies 'er, my inflooence wi' 'er ma'——

'Meanin' that I can take 'er out?' Martin queried.

Joshua nodded. 'That's the wheeze,' he said, expectorating with deadly precision into a spit-kid at least eight feet distant.

'But wot's she look like?' Pincher demanded with caution. Up to the present he had felt rather frightened of women; but to have a proper sweetheart in tow was one of the things he really longed for. It would complete his new-found manhood. But he had his own ideas of feminine beauty, and, whatever happened, the young lady must be pretty.

Billings grinned. 'She's orl right,' he explained. 'She ain't 'xactly tall, nor yet 'xactly short. Sort o' betwixt an' between like. She ain't too fat, nor yet too lean; she's sort o' plump. Yaller 'air, she 'as, an' blue eyes, an' plays th' pianner wonderful, 'er ma sez.'

This rather vague description of the fair Emmeline's charms seemed quite enough for Martin. 'She sounds orl right,' he said. 'I think I'll come along o' you.'

Joshua seemed rather pleased. 'That's th' ticket,' he said. 'We goes ashore in th' four o'clock boat, mind. Say, chum,' he added in a hoarse whisper, 'you ain't got 'arf-a-dollar to lend us, 'ave yer?'

Martin looked rather dubious. ''Arf-a-dollar!' he sniffed.

'Yus,' urged the A.B. 'I've only got three bob o' me own, an' I've got ter take th' lady to th' pictures, an' give 'er a bit o' supper arterwards. The show's orf 'less I kin raise some splosh some'ow. W'y don't yer come along too, an' bring the gal?'

'Carn't do it,' the ordinary seaman murmured. 'Me leaf's up at seven, an' I don't want to go gittin' in th' rattle fur breakin' it. But I'll lend yer a couple o' bob if yer promises faithful to pay me back. I'll give it yer afore we goes ashore.'

'Good on yer, chum,' said Billings effusively. 'I reckons yer knows 'ow to be'ave to blokes wot takes a hinterest in yer. You take my tip, though,' he added, wagging an admonitory forefinger. 'Don't yer go lendin' money to any other blokes wot ain't fit to be trusted.'

'I'll watch it,' Martin laughed.

And so it was arranged, and this was how Pincher Martin embarked on his first love affair.

CHAPTER VII.

AN AFFAIR OF THE HEART.

I.

Miss Emmeline Figgins was a well-built, capable-looking young lady of seventeen. She wore her hair neatly coiled in a golden aureole on the top of her head. Her blue eyes were attractive and full of mirth, her mouth was well-shaped, and she possessed a pair of very red lips and twin rows of even white teeth. She seemed literally bursting with health, and her rosy, slightly sunburnt cheeks somehow reminded Pincher of the girls at home in his own village. She was dressed in a white blouse and plain dark-blue skirt, and a small gold locket hung round her neck.

The first time Martin saw her standing behind the counter in the little sweet and tobacco shop he thought her quite adorable. He experienced a vague feeling of jealousy when he saw the locket, though, for he thought it probable that it contained the photograph of the ship's steward's assistant from the flagship.

Billings, strangely redolent of violets—he had purchased a pennyworth of cachous subsequent to absorbing one pint of beer immediately on getting ashore—advanced with a sheepish grin. Martin followed close behind.

'Good-evenin', miss,' the former remarked, touching his forelock. 'I 'ope I finds yer well?'

The girl laughed. 'Thank you, Mister Billings,' she said; 'I am enjoying the best of health, and I hope you are the same.' She regarded Pincher out of the corner of her eye; and that youth, very ill at ease, shuffled nervously and began to get red in the face. He was always rather frightened of women.

'I'm quite fit, miss,' said Joshua. 'This 'ere's Mr Martin—Pincher Martin we calls 'im. Friend o' mine, 'e is. Brought 'im along o' me ter be interjooced.' He pushed the ordinary seaman forward by the arm.

'Pleased ter meet yer, miss,' said Pincher awkwardly, advancing and shaking hands over a row of glass bottles filled with sweets. 'I've 'eard a lot abart yer from my frien' Mister Billings.'

The A.B. warned him of his indiscretion by a violent nudge in the side.

'I'm glad I'm a celebrity,' the girl remarked, a trifle suspiciously. 'And what did Mr Billings say about me? I hope it was something nice.'

'Where's yer ma, miss?' Joshua himself interrupted, hastily changing the subject.

'She's out now, Mr Billings, but she'll be back home to tea at half-past five. She's expecting you then, I believe; and if this gentleman would join us I'm sure he'd be very welcome.' She looked at Martin.

'Wot say, Pincher?' asked Joshua with a wink. 'Like ter 'ave a cup o' tea wi' th' ladies?'

'Don't mind if I does,' said the youth shyly.

'Needn't come if you don't want to, mister,' the girl retorted sarcastically, tossing her head. 'There are plenty who'd be glad to be asked.'

Pincher felt more awkward and sheepish than ever. 'I should like ter come, miss, thankin' yer for yer kindness in arskin' me,' he managed to stammer. 'No offence meant, I'm sure, miss. 'Fraid I said it a bit awk'ard like.'

'No offence taken,' laughed Emmeline, moving off to attend to three customers.

'Now, Mister Billings,' she said, coming back in a few minutes, 'I can't stand gossiping here all the afternoon. This is our busy time, and the shop will be filling up soon, and I sha'n't know whether I'm standing on my head or my heels. What with mother being out, and that plaguy boy having a holiday, I don't know how I shall be able to manage. If you drop in again at half-past five, mother will be in then. Is there anything I can serve you with before you go?'

'I'll 'ave two packets o' woodbines, miss,' Joshua had to reply, quite forgetting that he did not smoke cigarettes, but unable to ignore the hint. He put down twopence.—'Wot abart you, Pincher?'

Martin looked blankly round the shop.

'A penn'orth of bull's-eyes or almond rock?' suggested the girl, with a malicious twinkle in her

eyes. 'Or perhaps you'd fancy some jujubes or acid drops, fresh in to-day?'

'Thank you, miss, I don't fancy sweets,' the ordinary seaman returned, painfully aware that he was being made fun of. 'I'll 'ave one o' them there packets o' Egyptian fags. The sixpenny ones.'

'We generally call them cigarettes,' Emmeline remarked.

'Lor,' Billings ejaculated, 'we ain't 'arf goin' a bu'st!'

'Let the boy have what he wants, mister,' retorted Miss Figgins tartly, her business instinct uppermost, and a little anxious lest Pincher should change his mind and choose something cheaper. 'They're very good cigarettes, I'm sure, and excellent value for the money. Don't know what he wants to go smoking for, though,' she added sweetly, gazing at Pincher with an innocent smile. 'I'm sure sweets are more in his line.'

Joshua laughed, but Martin felt he had never been so insulted in his life. 'Boy,' indeed! She had called him a boy, and had offered him sweets!

More prospective customers arrived; and, paying for their purchases, the two bluejackets started to leave the establishment, when Billings, remembering something rather important, turned back. 'Say, miss,' he queried in an anxious, confidential whisper in the young lady's ear, 'did yer ma say anythin' abart comin' ter the pictures along o' me ter-night?'

Emmeline paused in the act of weighing out half-an-ounce of shag tobacco and laughed merrily. 'Go on with you!' she exclaimed roguishly. 'You're a proper caution, Mister Billings!'

'Did she say nothin' abart it?'

'I'm not my mother's keeper. She said nothing to me.'

'Sure?' queried the lovesick one, rather disappointed.

The girl winked twice and pointed to the door. 'Hop it!' she giggled. 'Don't come worrying round me when I'm busy with customers. Take your Mister—er—Martin with you; and if I were you I should buy him'—she sank her voice to a whisper and glanced in Pincher's direction—'a nice rattle! Ta-ta; see you both later.'

'Wot did she say yer wus ter buy me?' Martin wanted to know when they got outside.

'Didn't 'ear, chum,' Joshua answered hastily, unwilling to hurt the other's feelings. 'Wot d' yer think o' 'er? Bit o' orl right—wot?'

'She looks orl right,' Martin agreed, rather depressed. 'But she seems a bit 'orty-like for a kid o' seventeen. Tryin' ter 'ave me on, she was, abart them there sweets.'

'Garn! That's only 'er way. She don't mean nothin'. Yer carn't expec' a gal ter take a fancy ter a bloke orl of a sudden like. Don't get rattled abart wot she said. Come on,' Joshua added, glancing at a clock in a jeweller's window. 'It's only a quarter ter five, plenty o' time ter go an' 'ave a wet afore we goes back there ter tea.' He made off across the road in the direction of a public-house.

'No, yer bloomin' well don't!' Pincher exclaimed, overtaking him, seizing him by the arm, and swinging him round in the opposite direction. 'Yer said yer was only goin' ter 'ave one pint. S'welp me, yer did.'

'Don't act so barmy, Pincher,' Joshua expostulated, bitterly aggrieved. 'W'en I sez a pint I only means a pint directly I gits ashore. I didn't say 'ow much I'd 'ave arterwards.'

'Well, yer ain't goin' ter 'ave one now, any'ow,' Martin retorted. 'If you goes drinkin' now, I sha'n't come ter tea along o' yer an' Missis Figgins; an' I wants me two bob back, strite, I do.'

'Wot d' yer want ter go spoilin' a chap's bit o' sport fur?' Billings grumbled feelingly. 'I'm that dry I could jist do wi' a pint. No more'n a pint, I promises yer.'

But Pincher was adamant. 'If yer feels dry yer kin go and buy yerself some lemonade. Yer don't git no beer while yer along o' me.'

'Lemonade! 'Oo wants lemonade, 'orrible pisenous stuff full o' hacids an' sich like! Only fit fur kids ter swaffle!'

'Yer won't git no beer, so it ain't no use yer talkin'.'

'Oh, ain't it bloomin' well?' the A.B. exclaimed, beginning to get angry. 'Yer ain't lookin' arter me, yer knows. It's me wot's lookin' arter you.'

Pincher held out his hand. 'Orl right, then,' he said quietly; 'give me back me two bob wot yer borrowed.'

Joshua glared at him in speechless astonishment 'Give it back to yer?' he almost shouted. 'Not 'arf I don't!'

'Orl right. S' long, then; I'm not comin' along ter tea wi' Missis Figgins. Yer knows werry well yer carn't go takin' ladies along ter th' pictures if yer starts drinkin' now.' Martin pretended to move off.

There was some truth in the remark, and Billings felt rather foolish. ''Ere, 'arf a mo'!' he expostulated. 'Don't shove orf. Look 'ere, chum; she 'as a drop 'erself now an' then. Allus 'as a bottle o' stout along wi' 'er dinner, an' another along o' 'er supper. Told me so 'erself.' He looked hopefully to see if this information would have the desired effect, but Martin merely shook his head.

It took at least five minutes further argument, and much backing and filling between the two pavements, before Billings could be drawn off from the glaring portals of the 'Rose and Crown.' He seemed attracted to the place like a steel filing to a magnet; and it was all Martin could do to entice him away. But he succeeded eventually, and, with Joshua still complaining bitterly, the two adventurers entered a barber's shop to have their hair cut.

At five-thirty precisely they both returned to the shop to find Mrs Figgins there. She was a short, bulbous little woman of uncertain age, with her dark hair, slightly streaked with gray, drawn tightly over her head and tied in a knob behind. Except for her blue eyes, which twinkled through her spectacles as she talked, she bore little resemblance to her daughter, but, for all that, possessed a certain vivacity of manner and speech which more than made up for lack of good looks. She greeted them with cordiality.

'It's pleased I am to see you an' your friend, Mister Billings,' she said, when Pincher had been solemnly introduced. 'Such a day I 'ave 'ad you never would believe. Went to see my poor John's brother's wife at Dorchester. 'Er youngest, Halfred, 'im that was born last Easter, 'as come out all over in red spots, an' the doctor doesn't know wot to make of 'em. 'E's a fraud, I think,' she went on—speaking with great rapidity, and nodding her head to emphasise the point—'a reg'lar fraud, same as all doctors. I don't 'old wi' them an' their speriments. I said to Jane that the boy was sickenin' for measles, 'cause the spots are the same as wot Hemmeline 'ad when she was a baby; but the doctor'——

'Measles!' Joshua ejaculated, with vague visions of being put in quarantine. 'Infectious, ain't it?'

'Don't be scared,' the lady laughed. 'It's all right so long as you've 'ad it before.—Hemmeline!'

'Yes, mother?' came the girl's answer from the sitting-room at the back of the shop.

'Is that kettle boilin' yet? 'Ere's Mister Billings an' 'is friend ready for their teas.'

'All ready, mother. Look out you shut the outer door in case of customers coming.'

Mrs Figgins shut the door, and then ushered her guests into the sitting-room. It was a bright little apartment, with a cheerful fire blazing in an old-fashioned grate, before which, judging from the smell, Emmeline had been making hot buttered toast. The room was crammed with furniture, and was decorated with china ornaments, velvet hangings, and pictures, conspicuous among these being a large photographic enlargement of the late Mr John Figgins. It hung in a massive gilt frame, and the defunct gentleman was shown in black cut-away coat, dark trousers, high choker collar, white tie, and a very shiny top-hat. He gripped a walking-stick and a pair of gloves in one hand, while the other rested in *négligé* fashion upon a large marble column bearing a very palpable imitation palm. He had side whiskers and rather a fierce expression. There were also three large, highly coloured oleographs. One depicted the late Queen Victoria at the time of her 1887 Jubilee; another, entitled 'Lead, Kindly Light,' showed a sailing-ship in dangerous proximity to the Eddystone Lighthouse during a terrible storm; and the third, some immaculate soldiers in tight red tunics saying good-bye to a number of lachrymose, slim-waisted ladies on the platform at Waterloo Station. They were, it would appear, about to sail for South Africa—the soldiers, I mean, not the ladies.

On the mantelpiece stood a cabinet photograph of Joshua Billings in an ornate aluminium frame painted with forget-me-nots. The original glanced at it with a self-conscious smirk. It had been his last present to Mrs Figgins, and he felt it augured well for his prospects to see it in the place of honour.

But Pincher was not so much interested in the appearance of the room as in that of the round table in the centre of the apartment. It was spread for tea, and such a tea! There was a fine crusty cottage loaf and a generous plate of sliced ham; a mountain of shrimps lay cheek by jowl with an enormous pot of jam; while rounds of hot buttered toast, a large currant-cake, and a pile of mixed pastry stood on the outskirts of the more substantial comestibles. Martin sucked his teeth appreciatively. There were only four places laid, he was glad to see. The ship's steward's assistant from the flagship was evidently not coming.

Mrs Figgins settled herself in front of the teapot, and began pouring out, keeping up a rapid flow of conversation the while. 'Mister Billings,' she said, motioning with her head to the place on her right, 'will you sit 'ere? an' you, Mister Martin, 'ere? Hemmeline will be opposite me. I 'ope you will 'elp yourselves to anything you fancy, and if hanybody likes heggs, I've got some werry nice

ones fresh in from the country to-day. My poor John was fond of a hegg to 'is tea,' she added, gazing sadly at the representation of her late husband.

'I reckons we kin do werry well wi' wot we 'ave 'ere,' remarked Billings, glancing round the table with an approving smile, and helping himself to ham and hot buttered toast. 'Thank yer, Missis Figgins,' he continued, 'two lumps fur me.' He took the proffered cup with a coy smile, put it down, and began to masticate noisily.

Pincher fancied shrimps to start with; but Emmeline, who had her own ideas as to how a lady should behave, scorned the more substantial eatables, and nibbled daintily at a piece of thin bread and jam.

''Ave a bit of 'am, my gal,' said her mother, helping herself to that delicacy, and handing the plate across.

'No, thanks, mother. I'll spoil my supper if I do.'

'Quite right, miss,' murmured Billings, with his mouth rather full. 'I never could understan' 'ow folks wot 'as a reg'lar supper kin stow their kites full at tea-time. 'Orrible 'abit, I calls it. On board, ye see,' he hastened to explain, lest he himself should be thought a glutton, 'we 'as a sort o' 'igh tea, an' a bit o' biscuit or sich like fur our suppers. It ain't wot you'd call a proper meal.'

Martin gasped. He knew that on board the *Belligerent* Joshua frequently had kippers for his tea, while six rashers of bacon and six fried eggs often formed his evening meal at a quarter past seven.

Emmeline raised her eyebrows. 'Kites?' she asked, rather surprised. 'What's kites?'

'Stummick, 'e means, miss,' put in Pincher, anxious to air his knowledge. 'Mister Billings'—— He heard a horrified gasp, looked up, saw Emmeline frowning at him fiercely, thought better of what he was going to say, and then stared at his plate, with his face getting redder and redder. He had evidently put his foot into it rather badly.

But the girl did not intend to let him off. 'We don't mention those things in polite society,' she pointed out acidly. 'It's not nice.'

Pincher said nothing, but wished that the floor might open and swallow him whole.

'Yer promised ye'd come along o' me ter th' pictures ter-night, Missis Figgins,' remarked Joshua, finishing his ham and looking round the table. 'Thought we'd go an' 'ave a bit o' supper at a restorong arterwards.'

'Promised you, did I?' the widow returned, handing him a plate of jam-puffs with a sweet smile.' 'Ave one o' these? Or do you fancy a piece o' cake? It's 'ome-made.'

Joshua helped himself to the pastry. 'Yus,' he said, 'yer promised ye'd come.'

'Oh, did I?' the lady said archly, determined to keep him on tenter-hooks. 'Think I've got nothin' to do but to go to them silly pictures? 'Oo's goin' to mind the shop, I should like to know?'

'I don't want to go out, mother,' Emmeline put in.

'Course you don't, my gal,' said her mother. 'It's not respectable for gals to be hout after dark unless they're hescorted.'

'No,' Billings agreed, pausing in the act of biting a large chunk off his jam-puff; 'it ain't fit an' proper fur gals o' your age to go abart unpertected like.'

Emmeline glared at him. 'Oh, isn't it?' she retorted. 'And who asked you to put your oar in, Mister Billings? I'll have you know I'm quite capable of looking after myself, and I wouldn't go along of you if you were the last man on earth. You'd best take mother along to the pictures, and not worry your head about what I'm going to do.' She tossed her head.

Billings, covered with confusion, retired from the contest and resumed his meal.

Mrs Figgins, anxious to keep the peace, looked up apprehensively. 'No need to let your tongue run away wi' you, Hemmeline,' she chided. 'Mister Billings agrees wi' what I think about it, an' there's no call for you to get snappy.—All right, Josh—Mister Billings,' she added; 'I'll come with you. What about your friend?'

Joshua, insinuating a massive fist under the tablecloth, squeezed his loved one affectionately by the hand. 'That's orl right,' he murmured, greatly relieved and very happy.

'But what about Mister Martin?'

''Is leaf's up at seven,' Joshua explained. ''E carn't come.'

'Thank goodness for that!' Emmeline remarked with a loud sniff. What she meant exactly Pincher could not imagine, but it was quite obvious that she meant to hurt his feelings. She succeeded,

for he felt more of a fool than ever; and it was just as well, perhaps, that at that moment the shop door opened with a clang to admit a customer, and the girl left the room.

From a purely gastronomic point of view, though Martin did not do full justice to it, the meal was undoubtedly a success; but he returned to the ship that evening in a very saddened frame of mind. He was bitterly disappointed with Emmeline. She was pretty and attractive, he felt bound to admit; but it was only too evident that she was not the least taken with him, and, moreover, had no hesitation in showing it. She had a nasty, snappy way of saying things, too. Billings had wilfully misled him, and had borrowed two shillings under false pretences. He had led Pincher to believe that he would be received with open arms; but all that Joshua really cared about, apparently, was the feathering of his own downy nest, ungrateful old sinner that he was! Drat Billings! Drat Emme—— No; drat the ship's steward's assistant from the flagship!

II.

Wilfrid Parkin, the ship's steward's assistant from the *Tremendous*, was a gay young dog. He was a tall youth of about Pincher's own age, with sleek, well-greased black hair. His clothes were always immaculate and well brushed; he affected a crease down the legs of his trousers; and, when he was ashore, the odour of scent and pomatum generally emanated from his person. With his peaked cap set jauntily on the side of his head, a cigarette pendulous from his lower lip, and his double-breasted coat, white linen collar, and black tie, he imagined himself to be vastly superior in breeding and deportment to any man clad in the uniform of a bluejacket. Sometimes he even wore brown kid gloves, hoping that this would cause ignorant people to take him for an officer.

He was not beautiful to gaze upon, but downright ugly, in fact, for his putty-coloured face was covered with pimples, which he vainly endeavoured to eradicate with somebody's patent ointment. But in spite of this, and other blemishes, he had female admirers by the score; and even the level-headed Emmeline, for some inscrutable reason, had fallen a victim to his charms. She would not have admitted it if she had been asked, of course; but the giddy Wilfrid had shown a preference for her society, and Emmeline had not objected.

Men disliked Parkin for his affectation and conceit. On board his ship he had a very poor time; but ashore he was absolutely it, so far as the ladies were concerned. He was a shining light at the local skating-rink, where, in company with one or other of his girl friends, he waltzed and two-stepped to his heart's content. When he could obtain the necessary leave he always attended dances—'Entrance fee, one shilling; evening dress optional'—and was never averse to singing 'They all love Jack,' or some other very nautical song, at a tea-party at which ladies were present.

It came to pass that one wet afternoon, when there was no football, Pincher, feeling the want of exercise, was forced to take refuge in the skating-rink, and almost the first person he saw was Emmeline Figgins gliding round with the immaculate Wilfrid. They both skated well; but whereas the girl did it with a really natural grace, her companion, desperately anxious to create an impression, put in sundry little kicks and twirls of his own invention which made his performance border on the ridiculous. He was showing off, in fact.

Now Pincher could barely skate at all, much less dance, pirouette on one leg, or hurtle round backwards; and, seeing Emmeline, he became rather nervous, and wished to seek safety in flight. But he had paid sixpence to come in, and could not very well demand his money back; so, with a pair of skates in his hand, he stood sheepishly by the edge of the rink watching the others. Emmeline spotted him the next time she came round, smiled cheerily over her shoulder, and said something to her companion, who shook his head. She was evidently in a good temper, and Martin smiled back at her.

The next time she drew near, it was more slowly. Checking her speed, she came gracefully to rest by the padded balustrade immediately opposite where Pincher stood. She was flushed with the exercise, and looked quite adorable. Parkin hovered in the background.

'Well,' she asked gaily, extending her hand, 'aren't you going to say, "How d' you do?" Mister Martin?'

'How d'ye do, miss?' said Pincher, shaking it, but half-suspecting she was about to make a fool of him.

'This is Mister Parkin,' Emmeline went on, presenting the spotty-faced one. 'Mister Parkin—Mister Martin of the *Belligerent*.'

''Ow do, Parkin?' remarked Pincher with a nod.

'Pleased to meet yer,' murmured the other, with a low bow and a lofty expression. 'What terrible weather we are 'avin' for the time of year, are we not?'

The ordinary seaman stared at him in astonishment; while Emmeline, unable to restrain herself, burst out into a little chuckle of amusement.

'What's the matter now, Miss Figgins?' Parkin asked, rather aggrieved.

'I'm amused at your polite talk,' she said, laughing openly. 'You do put on such airs sometimes, Mister Parkin. I can't help laughing.'

'Oh, can't you?' retorted the pimply gentleman. 'You needn't go saying them things in front of—er'—he was going to say 'ordinary seamen,' but noticed Martin was looking at him, and substituted 'other people.'

'I'll say exactly what I please, Mister Parkin,' she returned with asperity, deliberately turning her back upon him.—'Can you skate well?' she asked Martin.

'I kin jest git round, miss, but can do none o' them there fancy touches.'

'Well, be quick, and get your skates on,' she said. 'I'll help you. Mister Parkin is tired of my company, I think.—You'd better go and look for some one else to skate with,' she added to Wilfrid over her shoulder.

'You said you was going to skate with me the 'ole afternoon,' he protested angrily.

'Can't help what I said,' Emmeline retorted, tossing her head. 'I've changed my mind. Run away, like a good boy, or I shall get angry with you.'

Parkin, after further useless expostulation, eventually skated off, greatly annoyed. To think that Emmeline, his Emmeline, as he chose to consider her, should dare to throw herself at the head of an ordinary seaman, while he, Wilfrid Parkin, admittedly one of the best skaters in the place, should be sent packing! It was insufferable—absolutely insufferable! Assuredly he must teach this young woman that it was an honour for her to be seen in his company at all.

Martin himself hardly knew what to make of it. The last time he had met the girl she had been deliberately rude, and had done her best to hurt his feelings and to make him feel awkward. But now she was all smiles, and was looking at him in quite a friendly way. He half-suspected a trap of some kind, and that she intended to make a fool of him, after all; but, murmuring his thanks, he strapped on his skates, removed his cap, and stepped gingerly on to the floor. He got on better than he expected, though he took good care not to try any rash experiments, and rather enjoyed it. He was skating with quite the prettiest girl on the rink, for one thing, and he was pleased to see Parkin's sullen scowl of jealousy every time he flashed by with another lady on his arm.

'Look at that horrid little thing, Jane Crawley!' Emmeline whispered in Martin's ear. 'Stuck-up little minx! Giggling and laughing with Mister Parkin, she is. Thinks it'll annoy me, I suppose.'

'She don't look up ter much,' Pincher agreed, glancing at Wilfrid's companion as they went past.

Emmeline sniffed. 'She's not. She's in Skeets the draper's. Early closing day to-day; that's why she's out. Never could stand them shoppies; they give themselves such airs. Can't think what he sees in her.'

'Carn't think why you likes Mister Parkin,' murmured Pincher, blurting out his thoughts without really meaning to.

To his great surprise, Emmeline laughed. 'I don't like him,' she said. 'I thought I did at first, but I'm beginning to find him out now. He's that conceited, you've no idea. Thinks he can order me about, too; and I won't stick that.'

'I don't think 'e's much class,' Martin observed, holding her hand tighter. 'Puts on a lot o' swank fur a bloomin' dusty boy.'[19]

Emmeline nodded. 'I'm fair sick of him. He's—— Hallo! Hold up!' But it was too late, for Pincher stumbled heavily and sat down with a thump. His partner released him just in time to save herself.

Parkin, passing with Jane Crawley, had just touched Pincher's outer skate. Whether it had been done intentionally or by accident Martin never really knew; but if it was deliberate, the result far exceeded Wilfrid's expectations. Pincher merely sat down on the floor rather too hard to be pleasant; but Parkin, letting go his partner, pitched forward, and came into violent contact with the wooden flooring with a resounding bump.

The two girls went to the rescue of their respective men, and a crowd soon collected. Pincher, little damaged, picked himself up with a laugh; but Parkin's injuries, though not really serious, were far more spectacular. The front of his coat was thick with dirt, both the knees of his trousers were badly torn, and he applied a handkerchief to his dirty face to stanch a copious flow of blood from his damaged nose.

'Look 'ere!' he exclaimed, quivering with passion and advancing on Pincher with his fists clenched; 'you did that a purpose!'

'He did nothing of the kind!' Emmeline burst out. 'And well you know it. It was your own fault. You and your showing off!'

'It was 'is fault! I saw 'im stick 'is foot out!'

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'It was 'is fault!' shrilled Jane Crawley, pointing an accusing finger at Martin. 'I saw 'im stick 'is foot out!'

'No, I didn't,' Pincher protested. 'Never see'd yer comin'!'

'Course he didn't,' Emmeline corroborated. 'How could he see you if you were behind him?'

'I tell you 'e did!' shouted Jane, becoming excited.

'I didn't,' Martin expostulated.

The crowd peered over each other's shoulders and laughed, for there seemed every prospect of a fight on skates between Emmeline Figgins and Jane Crawley, and another between Pincher Martin and Wilfrid Parkin. The situation was most exciting.

'You'll 'ave to pay for my trousers, any'ow!' Wilfrid blustered, looking down at his torn garments.

The onlookers tittered. 'That's it,' some one said jocularly; 'you 'ave the law on 'im, my son.'

'Sha'n't pay a penny!' Pincher said.

'That's right, little un!' came a voice from the crowd; 'don't you be put upon!'

'I'll bloomin' well make you!' shouted Parkin, squaring up. 'I'll give you a thick ear if you don't!'

'I ain't afraid o' you!' Pincher retorted, glaring at him. 'You 'it me an' see wot you gits!'

'Go on, Will. Give 'im one,' advised the pugnacious Jane.

'You'll do nothing of the sort,' said Emmeline quietly, stepping between the two men. 'If you want to kick up a shindy, Mister Parkin, you'd best do it outside.'

'I say it was the sailor's fault!' reiterated the other lady shrilly. 'I saw 'im'——

'Now then, what's all the fuss about?' asked the rink manager severely, pushing his way through the throng. 'We can't 'ave these sort of goings-on 'ere. You've 'eld up the 'ole proceedings. Somebody fallen down—what?'

''E tried ter knock me down a purpose,' said Pincher, indicating his adversary.

'You're a liar!' retorted Parkin. 'It's like this,' he went on, trying to explain the situation. 'I was skatin' parst this man, w'en all of a sudden 'e puts out 'is foot an''——

'He did nothing of the kind,' Emmeline interrupted. 'It's him who's telling lies, and well he knows it.'

'Well, I can't 'ave these goings-on 'ere,' the manager returned, glaring at them all in turn. 'I must ask the ladies and gentlemen concerned to step outside and settle their differences elsewhere.

Come on, please.'

'Come on, Mister Martin. We'd best go. I hate all this fuss,' Emmeline whispered. She moved off.

Pincher, nothing loath, unstrapped his other skate—one had already come off in his tumble—and followed her, but not before Parkin had hurled a final remark.

'Orl right, Mister Martin!' he said very venomously. 'I'll be even wi' you over this 'ere!'

'I'll take you on any day you likes!' Pincher threw back. 'I ain't afraid o' you, you great skinny lamplighter!'

'And I'll never speak to you again, Wilfrid Parkin,' Emmeline put in, 'Call yourself a gentleman! I don't think!' She snorted loudly to show her contempt.

'Come on, come on! Don't let's 'ave any more o' this, please!' from the manager.

'Orl right, old puddin'-face. Keep yer 'air on!' Pincher observed with a smile.

The lookers-on laughed loudly, for the manager was rather unpopular, and his face really was too fat to be pleasant.

'Pudding-face!' he gasped. 'Who are you calling pudding-face?'

But Pincher was out of earshot.

III.

'Request-men an' defaulters—'shun!' bawled the master-at-arms, as the commander passed aft along the quarterdeck and took his stand behind a small scrubbed table upon which were a pile of papers and several ponderous-looking books.

'Petty Officer Weatherley!'

The petty officer left the line, stepped smartly forward to the table, clicked his heels, and saluted.

'Petty Officer William Weatherley,' the M.A.A. [20] went on, 'requests hextension o' leaf till two P.M. on Monday.'

The commander looked up. 'Can he be spared?' was his first question.

'Request's signed by the torpedo lootenant, sir,' the M.A.A. explained; for Weatherley, being a torpedo gunner's mate by calling, was one of Hatherley's myrmidons.

'Why d'you want this extension?' the commander asked, playing with a pencil.

'Urgent private affairs, sir.'

'Yes, quite so. But what are the private affairs, and why are they urgent? Week-end leave expires at nine o'clock on Monday, you know.'

'I can't very well say, sir,' the petty officer said, glancing at the crowd of ship's corporals round the table. 'My reasons are rather private, sir.'

'Oh, I see. Can you tell me?'

'Yes, sir.'

The commander left the table, beckoned the man to follow him, and walked aft out of earshot of every one else. For quite a minute they talked together, and then the officer nodded, and Weatherley, with a pleased grin, saluted and marched off.

'Request granted, master-at-arms,' the commander observed, coming back to the table. 'Next man.'

The M.A.A. made a note in his book. 'Able Seaman Billings!' he called.

Joshua ambled aft at a jog-trot, halted in front of the table, and, from sheer force of habit, removed his cap.

'Keep yer 'at on!' growled one of the ship's corporals in an undertone. 'You ain't a defaulter!'

The commander turned his face away to hide a smile, and Billings, covered with confusion and rather redder in the face than usual, resumed his headgear.

'Able Seaman Joshua Billings. Requests a turn o' week-end leaf out o' watch.'

'Has he got a substitute?'

'Yessir.'

'Why d' you want leave out of your turn?' the commander asked, eyeing the A.B. with a half-smile hovering round his mouth. 'You've been ashore a good bit lately, haven't you?'

'Yessir, I 'as,' Joshua answered, fidgeting. 'But ye see, sir, it's like this 'ere. I've got werry himportant business ashore 'ere, sir, an' I wants to git it fixed up.'

'What sort of business? Money, or something of that kind?'

'No, sir. 'Ardly that. It's ter do wi' a lady, sir—lady wot lives ashore 'ere an' keeps a sweet an' bacca shop wot sells noospapers. I'm—I'm'—— Joshua paused, licked his lips, and shifted his feet nervously.

The commander smiled. 'Are you—er—in love with the lady?' he asked.

The master-at-arms and one of the ship's corporals cleared their throats noisily.

'Yessir, that's abart it. Yer see, sir,' Billings went on, in a sudden burst of confidence, 'I sez ter meself that it's abart time I started lookin' round fur somethin' ter do w'en I leaves the service, seein' as 'ow I'm close on me pension, an' I sez ter meself'——

'Yes. I quite understand,' the commander interposed kindly. 'Time is short, and you needn't go into details as to how it happened. You've behaved yourself well for the last couple of months, so I'll grant your request. You mustn't make a habit of it, that's all. Look out, too, you don't get into trouble, and, above all'—he looked up with a smile—'beware of evil companions. I wish you luck in your affair, Billings.'

'Thank you, sir. Same to you, sir.'

'Request granted. 'Bout turn, double march!' broke in the M.A.A.

Joshua saluted and trotted off, very much pleased with himself.

Several other requests were dealt with, and then came the turn of the defaulters.

'Ord'nary Seaman Martin!' shouted the M.A.A.

Pincher, arrayed in his best serge suit, in the hope that his smart appearance might mitigate his offence, ran nervously forward and halted in front of the table.

'Orf cap! Ord'nary Seaman William Martin. First, did remain habsent over leaf two an' a narf hours, an' was happrehended an' brought aboard by the naval patrol. Second, did create a disturbance in St John's Street, Weymouth, at 'arf-parst nine P.M. hon th' night o' the eleventh hinstant.'

The commander rubbed his chin thoughtfully and gazed at the buff charge-sheet on the table in front of him. 'Where's the petty officer of the patrol?' he asked, without looking up.

'Petty Officer Bartlett!'

The petty officer hurried forward, and halted with a salute.

'Make your report,' said the commander.

'The night before last, sir, at 'arf-parst nine, I was in St John's Street with the patrol, w'en I sees a bit o' a crowd collected, an' some one tells me that two sailors was fightin'. I 'urries forward, sir, disperses the people with the hassistance o' a policeman, an' finds this 'ere man, sir'—he indicated Martin with his thumb—'fightin' with hanother man.'

'Who was the other man?'

'Ship's stooard's hassistant from the flagship, sir. I've forgot 'is exac' name.'

'Well, go on.'

'Well, sir, I happrehends 'em both, an' takes 'em off an' keeps 'em under harrest, at the same time hinformin' the orficer o' the picket wot I done.'

'Who was the officer of the picket?'

'I was, sir,' said Lieutenant English, coming forward.

'Did you see those men fighting?' asked the commander.

'No, sir, not actually fighting. I saw them both immediately afterwards.'

'Were they drunk?'

'No, sir. They were excited, and the ship's steward's assistant's nose was bleeding badly.' There was no necessity for the officer to describe Pincher's injuries, for that youth had a remarkably fine specimen of a black eye.

'Did they resist the patrol?' the commander asked, turning to Petty Officer Bartlett.

'Not this man, sir. 'E came along quite quiet. The other man kicked up a bit o' a dust.'

'H'm! I see,' the commander observed with his lips twitching.—'What have you got to say?' he added, addressing Martin. 'First, why did you break your leave?'

'Please, sir,' Pincher explained with the air of an injured innocent, 'I 'adn't no intention o' doin' it. I comes down ter th' pier at seven o'clock an' finds the boat jest shoved orf. The clocks wus all wrong, sir. I sez ter meself I'll come orf by the late orficers' boat at 'arf-parst ten; so I goes back, sir, 'as a bit o' supper, an' then, at 'bout 'arf-parst nine, I meets Parkin'——

'Who's Parkin?'

''Im wot I was fightin' wi', sir.'

'Go on.'

'I meets 'im in the street, sir. We ain't the best o' friends, 'cos me an' 'im 'ad a bit o' a shimozzle'——

'Shimozzle!' echoed the commander, looking rather puzzled. 'What on earth's that?'

'Bit o' a dust-up, sir,' Pincher explained.

'Well, go on.'

'Well, sir,' the culprit resumed, 'we 'ad a bit o' a hargument at th' skatin'-rink abart a week ago. 'E was walkin' in the street along o' a lady, sir; but as soon as 'e sees me 'e leaves 'er an' comes across ter me. "You dirty little 'ound!" 'e sez, usin' 'orrible langwidge, "I've got yer now!" "You keep a civil tongue in yer 'ead, Mister Parkin," I sez, polite like. 'E don't wait fur no more, sir, but ups an' 'its me on th' 'ead. I couldn't stand that, sir, so I 'its 'im back. We 'adn't bin at it no more 'n five minutes,' he added regretfully, 'w'en the patrol comes along, sir.' Martin, who had been carefully drilled as to what he had to say by Billings, himself a past-master at the art of inventing excuses, reeled off his tale glibly enough, and then paused for breath.

The commander seemed rather perplexed. 'Why is it that Parkin and yourself are such bitter enemies?' he asked, looking up with a frown. 'Why can't you behave yourselves like ordinary people?'

'It's like this 'ere, sir,' Pincher said, going off into a long-winded and very complicated explanation, which brought in Emmeline, the affair at the skating-rink, and how it had all happened.

'Oh, I see,' the commander observed. 'A girl's really at the bottom of it—what?'

Martin hung his head and made no reply.

'You've got a very good black eye, I see, and a swollen mouth. Did you do him any other damage besides making his nose bleed?'

'Yessir,' said Pincher hopefully, looking up with the ghost of a smile. 'I thinks one o' 'is eyes is bunged up too.'

'Indeed! Well, so far as I can see, it's a question of six of one and half-a-dozen of the other.—Where's his record?' the commander asked, turning to a ship's corporal, who was holding an enormous conduct-book open against his bosom. 'H'm! No entries. Clean sheet. What division's he in?'

'Mine, sir,' said Lieutenant Tickle, coming forward.

'What sort of a man is he? Had any trouble with him?'

'None at all, sir. Does his work quite well.'

The commander turned to the misdemeanant. 'Well,' he said, speaking quite kindly and quietly, 'you haven't been in the service very long, my lad; but the sooner you realise we can't have this sort of thing going on the better. I don't object to fighting—we're all paid to do that when the time comes; but if you want to take on one of your squadron-mates, you'd better do it somewhere where you won't be seen. Brawling in the streets only gets the navy into disrepute, so bear it in mind.' He paused.

Pincher hung his head.

'I can't say which of you was to blame,' the commander went on, 'but I can't overlook your offence. However, it's the first time you've been up before me, so I'll let you off lightly. You'll have seven days No. 10; [21] and next time you want to fight anybody, or anybody wants to fight you, you let me know, and we'll provide you with boxing-gloves, and let you hammer each other on board during the dog watches. This man was bigger than you, eh?'

'Yessir.'

'Well, I'm glad to see you've got pluck, and that you gave him more than he gave you. That's all. Don't come up before me again, mind.'

'Seven days No. 10! 'Bout turn! Double march!' ordered the master-at-arms.

Pincher ran off, rather pleased with himself. It was the first time he had been a defaulter, and he had dreaded the ordeal; but he found the commander was quite human, after all. Moreover, he had expected to be punished far more severely for the affray; while the leave-breaking offence, for which he was liable to a mulet of one day's pay and stoppage of one day's leave, had been completely ignored. The fact of the matter was that the commander, though he took good care not to say so, sympathised with Pincher in his heart of hearts. He liked a man who stood up for himself, and when he had interviewed the other defaulters he called Tickle to his side.

'That fellow Martin of yours,' he said; 'he seems a plucky young devil for his age?'

'He is, sir,' the lieutenant agreed; 'quite a promising lad. I've had my eye on him for some time. He's got plenty of—er—guts too, sir. English tells me that fellow who went for him was double his size.'

'So much the better,' the senior officer grinned. 'I wish he had knocked him out.'

For the next week Pincher was undergoing the rigours of No. 10 punishment. He didn't like it at all. To start with, he had to turn out of his warm hammock at four-thirty A.M., had his meal-times cut down to the barest minimum, while all his spare time was taken up in rifle exercise, physical drill, or extra work of some kind. It was far too strenuous to be pleasant, particularly as his leave was stopped, and he could not go ashore. However, with Billings's assistance, he found time to write a letter to Emmeline, which the A.B. delivered.

> 'Dere Miss Figgins'—it ran—'i am in trubble, having got in the rattle for fighting Mister Parkin larst thursday night in Weymouth. i made his nose bleed agen, and bunged up one of his eyes. i got a black eye and a swollen mouth, and seven days No. 10 for my trubble; but i hopes to come ashore agen next sunday. i'm glad he got the wurst of it. Hoping this finds You as it leaves me—[It is to be hoped that Emmeline, also, had not got a black eye and a swollen mouth]—I remains, miss, your obedient servant,
>
> 'Wm. Martin.'

The missive elicited a reply.

> 'Dear Mr Martin'—it said—'I am sorry to hear that you have been punished, but Mr Billings says it is not serious. I am glad to hear that Mr Parkin got the worst of it. I do not like him. The shindy at the skating-rink was all of his making, and he deserves what he got and more. Mother will be pleased if you will come to tea next Sunday at five o'clock P.M. I will be in, and you can tell us all about it. I hope your face will soon be all right. My Mother says Zambuk ointment cured Father's face when he fell off a cab once, and I have asked Mr Billings to get you some. With compliments, I am yours sincerely,
>
> Emmeline Figgins.'

For several nights Pincher slept with Emmeline's note beneath his pillow.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FAIR SKY.

I.

'Leaf!' sniffed Pincher disconsolately. 'Wot's the good o' seven days' leaf ter a bloke wot ain't got no money?'

'No money!' exclaimed Billings, rather surprised. 'Why ain't yer got none? Thought yer wus one o' these 'ere chaps wot counted every penny.'

'I've bin spendin' a good bit lately one way an' another,' Martin explained, removing a half-used cigarette from the interior of his cap and lighting it.

Joshua grinned. He knew well enough that an ordinary seaman's pay of one shilling and threepence *per diem*, less various necessary personal expenses, did not go far when one was 'walking out' with a young lady.

Pincher loved his Emmeline very dearly, and Emmeline, she said, had come to love him; but he was bound to admit she was rather an expensive luxury. Moreover, he was far too proud to allow her to pay her share of their amusements when he was with her, which was pretty often. So, what with picture-palaces and visits to confectioners' shops, his eight-and-ninepence a week went nowhere. He had even been forced to borrow from his shipmates—always a difficult matter.

Then there had been the affair of the locket, over which Pincher felt he had been badly done. He had had his photograph taken, and had had it mounted in a rolled-gold ornament of chaste design for which he had paid the sum of seven shillings and sixpence, and this he had presented to Emmeline to be worn round her neck in place of the one which already hung there. He had imagined that this nine-carat gold case hid the features of some other admirer. It did nothing of the kind. Its interior, when he was allowed to investigate it personally, contained nothing but a faithful likeness of the girl's father—top-hat, side-whiskers, and all. Emmeline seemed rather amused. Pincher never quite got over it.

'Carn't yer get a hadvance o' money from th' paybob?' [22] Joshua suggested. "E ain't a bad old bloke so long as yer goes ter 'im wi' a yarn o' bein' desperate 'ard up, an' yer pore ole farther's 'ome bein' sold up, an' 'im an' yer ma an' the kids goin' ter th' work'ouse.'

'I've tried that,' Pincher answered glumly. 'Leastways, orl excep' the yarn wot yer said. 'E simply tells me I'm in debt ter the Crown 'cos o' clothes an' other gear wot I've bought, an' that 'e carn't do nothink.'

'I calls it a houtrage!' said Billings sympathetically, looking very solemn. 'The way they bleeds us pore matloes is enuf—enuf—I carn't think o' wot I wus goin' ter say,' he added lamely; 'but it's abart time somethin' wus done. S'welp me, it is!'

'An' abart time you pays back that two bob wot you borrowed off me,' Pincher chipped in, remembering the debt.

'Two bob!' cried Joshua, screwing up his face and trying hard to appear as if he didn't know what Pincher was driving at. 'Wot two bob?'

'Th' two bob I lends yer the night yer took Missis Figgins along ter th' pictures. You knows orl abart it.'

'Thought it wus a present ter me,' said the old sinner, unable to feign further forgetfulness, but affecting to be very grieved. 'A bit o' a return like fur me trubble in introjoocin' yer to th' gal. That's wot I thought it wus; strite I did.'

Pincher laughed, for Billings's dissimulation was so very palpable. 'Don't act so barmy,' he observed. 'Yer knows it wasn't. Yer don't 'ave me on like that.'

'But two bob ain't no good ter yer fur Christmas leaf,' protested the A.B., veering off on another tack.

'Carn't 'elp that. I wants it back.'

'Well, you shall 'ave it,' Joshua grumbled. 'But I calls it a dirty sort o' way ter treat a chap wot's done for you wot I 'ave.'

'Garn! don't act so wet, I tell yer.'

'Orl right! orl right! Don't go an' git rattled abart it,' said Billings resignedly. 'You shall 'ave yer

money. You shall 'ave it if I 'as ter go without bacca fur a month; but where'd you be, I should like ter know, if yer 'adn't got a bloke like me ter look arter yer? Look wot I done fur yer since yer jined this ship! Bin yer sea-daddy, I 'ave, same as if you were my own son, an' yet yer treats me like this! Hingratitoode's wot I calls it. 'Orrible hingratitoode! Orl you young blokes is the same!' He sighed deeply, and regarded Pincher with a pained expression.

The latter seemed rather concerned. 'If yer looks on it like that, Billings, o' course I carn't'——

The A.B. waved an arm with a gesture of dissent. 'It's too late ter start talkin' now,' he observed sadly. 'Th' 'arm's done. You shall 'ave yer money, but you've gorn back on a pal, an' orl fur the sake o' two bob. Two bob! Wot is it?'

'Let's 'ave it, then,' said Pincher, holding out a tentative hand.

''Ave it! Yer don't reely want it, do yer?'

'Course I do.'

'I'll give it yer afore I goes on leaf.'

'I wants it now,' Pincher persisted, remembering Joshua's extremely short memory.

'D' you think I ain't honest?' the latter demanded. ''Cos, if yer do, jest say th' word, an' see wot yer gits!'

'I never sez you wasn't honest; but I wants me money back!'

Billings saw that further argument was useless, sighed once more, replaced his pipe in his mouth, fumbled under his jumper, and produced a leather purse from the money-belt round his waist. Its contents chinked opulently; but, shielding it from Pincher's wistful gaze, he extracted a shilling and two sixpenny-pieces and handed them across. 'There ye are!' he grunted. 'Don't git sayin' as 'ow I doesn't pay me debts.'

'Yer pays 'em a bit be'ind time,' Pincher retorted with some truth, secreting the coins on his own person.

Joshua laughed in quite a friendly way. 'Tizzy-snatcher!' he growled, with his eyes twinkling.

But Pincher was bitterly disappointed about the leave. The men were to be sent away for seven days, one party being at home for Christmas and the other for the New Year. His watch were to start the following day; but, beyond the two shillings he had just obtained from Billings, he literally had not a penny to pay his train fare home. He could get the usual third-class return ticket from Weymouth to London, and from there on to his home, for the single fare; but even that would cost him the best part of a sovereign. He had tried hard to induce the fleet paymaster to give him an advance of pay, but that harassed officer, pointing out that Pincher was already in debt to the Crown, firmly declined to do so. Then Martin had endeavoured to borrow money from his shipmates; but they, though sympathetic, wanted every penny they could lay their hands on for their own purposes. He then thought of writing to his people for the necessary sum, but abandoned the idea, because he knew well enough that they, on their very limited income, always had great difficulty in making both ends meet. Christmas, moreover, was always an expensive time, and there were three younger Martins to be considered.

It was really rather galling, and he half-regretted having spent all his money on Emmeline. Since joining the service he had been home on leave before, of course, but not as an ordinary seaman of a first-class battleship, and he was well aware that as such he would be a person of some importance in the village. The blacksmith's son, Tom Sellon, had left Caxton a mere country yokel to join the army. The winter previous, as a strapping, full-fledged private of one of his Majesty's line regiments, he had come home on a few days' furlough resplendent in a wonderful red tunic. His arrival created no small stir, for Caxton lay in the heart of the Midlands, and its inhabitants were unused to the pomp and circumstance of war. Sellon, moreover, thought a great deal of himself. According to him, Great Britain was inhabited by two classes of people, those who were in the army and those who were not, and he treated all 'civvies,' as he called them, with kindly tolerance. He stood treat in a lordly sort of way at the 'Flying Swan,' and condescended to drink what beer the village magnates offered him in return for this hospitality. He was not averse to being friendly with their pretty daughters either. In short, a scarlet tunic and an air of self-assurance had worked wonders, for before he donned the red coat Tom had been a mere nonentity. Now he was a personage, with a capital P, and had even pretended to be rather diffident about accepting half-a-sovereign which the squire, who had known him since childhood, pressed into his palm one Sunday after church.

Now Pincher, who knew little of the army, cordially despised soldiers in his heart of hearts. He longed to cut out Tom Sellon, but this cursed lack of money at the critical moment had upset all his plans. He could have wept from sheer vexation, for there seemed no alternative to spending Christmas on board.

But it so happened that the railway company wished to know the number of men proceeding by rail the next morning, and at 'Quarters' that afternoon Tickle ordered all the men of the starboard

watch of his division to fall in on the right. Pincher went with them.

'Are any of you men not going away by rail to-morrow morning?' the officer asked.

Four hands went up at once.

'Why aren't you going?' Tickle asked the first man.

'Spendin' the leaf in Weymouth, sir.'

'And you?' to the next.

'I lives in Dorchester, sir. Goin' on by a later train.'

'Ain't takin' th' leaf, sir,' said the third.

'Why not?'

'Nowhere to go, sir.'

'Have you no parents, or relations, or any one else you can go and stay with?'

'I'm an orphing, sir,' the man rather flummoxed him by replying. 'I'd rather stay aboard the ship than go an' see me old uncle wot lives in Peckham, sir. 'E's married agen, sir, an' 'is wife keeps a fried-fish shop.'

Tickle smiled and passed on. 'And what about you?' he queried, coming to Martin.

'Ain't got no money, sir.'

'Have you been to the paymaster for an advance?'

'Yessir.'

'What did he say?'

'Said I was in debt, sir.'

'How much does it cost you to get home?'

'Best part of a quid—sovereign, I means, sir.'

Tickle thought for a minute, nodded, numbered those men who were going, and then dismissed them.

Pincher thought nothing more of the conversation, but that evening he was told to go to the ship's office.

'Is your name Martin?' asked an assistant-paymaster when he arrived.

'Yessir.'

'You want some money to go on leave with, eh?'

'Yessir, please,' said the ordinary seaman, feeling hopeful.

'We can let you have thirty shillings. Is that enough?'

'Yessir,' Pincher exclaimed, his eyes glistening.

'Are you willing to pay it back at the rate of three shillings a month?'

'Yessir.'

'All right. Sign that receipt.'

Pincher, astounded at his good fortune, hurriedly scrawled his name, was handed a golden sovereign and ten shillings in silver, and left the office with a satisfied grin all over his face and the coins jingling in his hand. He was so pleased at his good luck that he didn't stop to consider where the money came from. All he cared about was that he had got it, and that he could go home and cut out Tom Sellon, after all.

As a matter of fact, it was Tickle himself who had acted the part of a nautical fairy godmother. He had noticed that Pincher seemed very unhappy, and had guessed the reason, and at first thought of lending him the money outright. Thirty shillings more or less meant nothing to him. But then, remembering that Martin would probably refuse the loan from feelings of pride, he hit upon a better plan; so he went to the fleet paymaster, handed him the money, and requested him to pay it over to Pincher as if it were an official advance.

'My dear Tickle,' protested Cashley, 'you'll never get it back! The boy's already in debt to the Crown, and his pay's only one-and-three a day!'

'Let him pay it back at the rate of three bob a month, sir,' suggested the lieutenant. 'I'm not

particular. He looks so damned miserable at not being able to get away on leave that I must do something. Don't tell him it comes from me, though. He won't take it if he knows that.'

'All right. I'll see to it,' the fleet paymaster acquiesced, smiling. 'I suppose,' he asked jokingly, 'you wouldn't lend a poor old buffer like me twenty or thirty pounds to buy the wife a turkey and a plum-pudding?'

'I'd watch it, sir!' Tickle laughed. 'What about that new car you bought a fortnight ago?'

'That's why I want to borrow from you,' Cashley grinned. 'However, I'll fix Martin's money up for you, though I must say I think you're a tender-hearted fool, Tickle. You'll be badly had one of these days.'

Tickle merely smiled. The prospect did not alarm him.

So the next morning, at seven-thirty, Pincher, arrayed in his best clothes, left the ship with a sweet smile and a little bundle of necessaries done up in a blue-striped handkerchief. An hour later he was sitting in a third-class carriage on his way to London, munching a doubtful-looking sausage-roll, and listening to a slightly intoxicated sailor next to him, who insisted on giving the company what he called 'a little moosic.' It consisted of a few fragmentary remarks in a deep-bass rumble about the perils of a sailor's life, sudden hiccups as full stops, and frequent gurgling noises and sounds of enjoyment as the songster upended a quart bottle of Bass's light dinner ale, and applied the business end to his mouth. He eventually finished the song and the bottle at the same time, and, shying the latter playfully through the open window, volunteered to fight the whole carriage. This pleasure being denied him, he solemnly kissed the company all round, and then went comfortably off to sleep with his mouth wide open, his head resting affectionately on Pincher's shoulder, and his feet on the opposite man's lap. Thus he remained until they arrived at Waterloo, where, on disembarking, he never noticed that one of his carriage-mates, by the skilful use of a burnt cork, had decorated his upper lip with a large black moustache.

History does not relate if he arrived home in this condition, for, after vainly endeavouring to induce various laughing porters and the amused guard of the train to 'come an' 'ave a wet, ole dear!' and then, when they refused, wanting to show there was no ill-feeling by exchanging headgear, he was last seen proceeding at three and a quarter knots on rather an erratic course towards the nearest refreshment-room.

But Pincher got home safe and sound without any difficulties of this kind, and by four o'clock was in the bosom of his admiring family.

II.

The leave was all too short, though Pincher did succeed in attracting more attention than Tom Sellon, and was, after church on Christmas Day, the bashful recipient of a congratulatory speech and a golden sovereign from the squire.

Captain the Hon. James Lawson, J.P., the lord of the manor and a good many other things besides, was an old naval officer himself. He knew all the villagers by name, and took more than a passing interest in any of the boys who joined either the navy or the army. Pincher was aware of this, and imagined that he had received a pound, as against Tom Sellon's ten shillings the year before, because he happened to be a member of the senior service. As a matter of fact, it was due to nothing of the kind. It so happened that the squire had no smaller change in his waistcoat pocket.

But, at any rate, the news of Pincher's windfall was blurted far and wide, and his reputation rose accordingly. It was quite simple. If Thomas Sellon got ten shillings and William Martin a sovereign, obviously 1 Martin = 2 Sellons;∴ the two families almost came to blows to settle which was the better. Sellon père, in fact, felt himself so bitterly offended that he nearly went to the squire to complain. It was lucky for Captain Lawson that he didn't, for that would have cost the worthy squire another ten shillings to soothe his injured feelings.

The week flew by, and when Pincher returned to the ship and his Emmeline he soon settled down into the old routine. The girl, who seemed to have adopted him as her permanent 'young man,' now took it upon herself to correct the defects in his speech.

'Billy,' she said one day as they were walking arm-in-arm along the front at Weymouth, 'I don't like the way you talk.'

'You don't like my talk!' he returned, rather nettled. 'It's orl right, ain't it? Good enuf ter git on wi' aboard th' ship, any'ow!'

'There you go again!' she pointed out, smiling. 'You say "ain't" instead of "isn't," and "ter" instead of "to," and you drop your h's something horrid.'

'Wot's it matter if I do?' he demanded. 'I ain't—'aven't, I mean—'ad th' hadvantage o' a heddication same as you.'

The girl laughed outright. 'Don't get angry. I'm only telling you for your own good.'

'Orl right!' he retorted with asperity, disengaging his arm from hers; 'if I ain't good enuf for yer we'd best chuck the 'ole show, an' you can go back to yer Mister Parkin—'im wot smells o' 'air-oil!'

'Don't be silly, stupid!' she chided, slipping her arm through his again and squeezing it affectionately. 'You know I don't like him a little bit.'

'You carn't like me, any'ow,' he remarked, bitterly offended.

'Leastways, if yer did yer wouldn't go talkin' the same as yer do.'

'Oh! don't I, indeed? Think I'd go walking out with you, and let you—er—behave as you do, if I wasn't fond of you?'

'Let's 'ave a kiss now,' Pincher suggested, drawing a little closer.

Emmeline pulled back. 'Go away, you naughty boy!' she laughed, blushing becomingly. 'Not in public, anyhow.'

'Yer knows I loves yer, Hemmeline, don't yer?' Pincher asked.

'M'yes,' she answered softly. 'If you didn't I don't suppose you'd carry on the way you do. But plenty of boys have said the same thing before, so you're not the only one—no, not by a long chalk.'

'D' you love me, Hemmeline?' Pincher wanted to know.

'Ah,' she said archly, 'now you're asking.'

'Come on, tell us if yer do.'

'Well,' she answered coyly, looking up at him through her long eyelashes, 'just a little, perhaps, when you're a good boy. That's why I want to tell you how to talk properly,' she went on to explain. 'I want you to get on—see?'

'Oh!' said Pincher, slightly mollified, but not knowing in the least how a correct pronunciation would make him rise in his profession, 'that's the lay, is it?'

Emmeline nodded.

III.

By the end of February Martin had passed his examination in gunnery without much difficulty, and was half-way through his seamanship course. Here, under the guidance of Petty Officer Bartlett, he and several others like him were taught the rudiments of boat-work under oars and sail, the use of the compass and the helm, the rule of the road at sea, heaving the lead, knotting and splicing, signalling, and a hundred and one other things. The practical boat-work Pincher enjoyed, and soon got into; while the knots and splices, thanks to private tuition in his spare time from Joshua Billings, were comparatively easy to master. The more theoretical part of the business, however, was a little more difficult to absorb.

'The compass,' Petty Officer Bartlett explained to the class, as they sat round on stools in the foremost bag-flat—'the compass is what we steers the ship with—see? It's supposed to point to the north pole, but it don't really. On the cont'ary, it points to wot we calls the north magnetic pole—see?'

The pupils looked rather puzzled.

''Owever,' the petty officer went on hurriedly, as one youth opened his mouth to ask what might have been an awkward question, 'we needn't worry our 'eads about that this arternoon, and you can take it from me that it does point pretty nearly to the north—see?

'This,' he continued, drawing an irregular circle on the blackboard, 'represents our compass-card, and 'ere we 'ave wot we calls the four cardinal points—north, south, east, and west.' He divided the circle into four parts by means of a vertical and a horizontal line, and labelled their extremities. ''As anybody not got 'old o' that?'

Everybody appeared to have grasped it, for they all sucked their teeth and remained silent.

The explanation continued, but half-way through his lecture Bartlett had reason to suppose that certain members of the class were not paying attention.

''Udson!' he said, pausing, chalk in hand, and addressing a freckle-faced youth, who had spent the afternoon surreptitiously eating apples and sticking pins into the most prominent portion of the anatomy of the man immediately in front of him, 'wot is the hopposite to west-nor'-west?'

'Sou'-sou'-west,' the youngster replied glibly.

'Look 'ere, my son, you're not payin' hattention; that's wot's the matter wi' you. D' you think I'm standin' up 'ere 'longside a blackboard chawin' my fat [23] for the good o' my 'ealth, or wot? Try agen.'

'Sou'-sou'-east,' the ordinary seaman attempted.

'You thick-'eaded galoot!' Bartlett growled. 'Don't you want to learn nothin'? Cos, if you don't, you're goin' the right way about it. Didn't you 'ave no teachin' afore you joined the navy? Think it's a 'ome for lost dogs, or wot? I asked you wot was hopposite to west-nor'-west—see?'

'East-sou'-east,' said Hudson at last.

'Right! Why couldn't you 'ave said so before, 'stead o' wastin' my time like this 'ere, you lop-eared, razor-necked son of a sea-cook? You perishin' O.D.'s don't seem to 'ave no common-sense, some'ow.'

And so, point by point, degree by degree, the petty officer gradually hammered the subject into their skulls until their brains whirled and their heads ached. Much of what he told them went in at one ear and out at the other; but something stuck, and at the end of a fortnight most of them could box the compass with a fair degree of accuracy, knew that its circumference was divided into thirty-two points and three hundred and sixty degrees, and were aware that each point was exactly eleven degrees fifteen minutes from the next. In short, they came to regard it as what it really is, an instrument whereby 'the mariner is able to guide a ship in any required direction,' and not merely as a complicated invention of the Evil One specially designed to involve the moribund brains of ordinary seamen in intricate mental gymnastics. What little wizard inside the compass-needle induced it to keep pointing towards the magnetic pole, a spot which most of them pictured as a desolate region of Esquimaux, icebergs, and polar bears, they did not know. They were quite content to take it for granted that it did so. The science of terrestrial magnetism, luckily for them, did not enter into their curriculum.

The learning of the marks and other details of the hand lead-line was quite a simple matter, and all the class—even Hudson, the fool of the party—could recite it all, poll-parrot fashion, at the end of the first day's instruction.

'Th' weight o' th' lead is ten ter fourteen pound, an' at th' bottom of 'im is a 'ole ter take a lump o' taller or soap ter hascertain th' nature o' th' bottom.' Here the reciter took a deep breath, and gazed anxiously at the instructor to see if he was correct.

Bartlett nodded encouragingly.

'Th' line is one an' a heighth hinches in circumference, an' is twenty-five fadum long, an' one end is secured ter an 'ide becket at th' top o' th' lead by means of a heye-splice. Th' hother end is made fast to a stanchion in th' chains. Th' line is marked as follers: at two fadum, two strips o' leather; at three fadum, three strips; five an' fifteen, a piece o' white buntin'; seven an' seventeen, red buntin'; thirteen, blue buntin'; ten, a piece o' leather wi' a 'ole in 'im; twenty, two knots. These is orl known as marks, cos they are marked, an' orl them fadums wot ain't marked is called deeps.'

Even Hudson knew all about the theoretical part of the business, so we need go no further.

But actually heaving the lead was a very different matter, for here the learner was forced to take up his stand in the chains, a small platform on a level with the forecastle, projecting perilously out over the water. The victim rested his middle against the breast-rope, grasped the line about two fathoms from the lead, and coiled the rest of the line in his free hand. Then, very nervously, he proceeded to swing the lead like an ordinary pendulum over the side of the ship to obtain impetus, until, when the line was horizontal on its forward swing, he was supposed to—what Bartlett called—'swing it over the 'ead in a circle by bendin' the harm smartly in at the helbow as the lead is risin', an' then let the harm go hout agen w'en the lead 'as passed the perpendicular. Then, arter completin' two circles, slip the line from orf the 'and, just before the lead comes 'orizontal, let 'im fly for'ard into the water, release the coil o' line in the other 'and as 'e goes, gather up the slack w'en 'e reaches the bottom, an' call out the depth o' water w'en the ship passes over the spot w'ere the lead dropped—see?'

He then proceeded to demonstrate, and, stepping into the chains, whizzed the lead round his head with such ease and rapidity that his pupils were gulled into the belief that it was quite simple.

They all tried it in turn, but speedily found that a fourteen-pound weight on the end of twelve feet of thin line is not really a pleasant plaything. When they were at it by themselves the lead seemed horribly unwieldy and dangerous, and, as often as not, through sheer fright, they forgot to give the line at the right moment the vigorous twitch which brought the lead circling round in a beautiful curve. The consequence was that it would either descend perpendicularly from the air in close proximity to their heads, or else would fall with a jerk which nearly pulled their arms out of their sockets, neither of which alternatives was exactly pleasant. But they practised it steadily

for half-an-hour daily, with the ship at sea and in harbour, and, notwithstanding a few misadventures like heaving the lead on to the forecastle in the midst of a group of men, or nearly braining themselves, they improved by degrees.

And so, in course of time, Pincher became rather less of a hobbledehoy and rather more of a seaman. Fresh air and regular exercise worked their usual wonders, for his pasty face became ruddy and his flabby muscles hard; while plenty of good beef, bread, and potatoes caused his spare figure to swell until he had to have his clothes let out by the ship's tailors. Moreover, he was no longer the meek and timid Pincher who had joined the ship a few months before. He was not behind-hand in using his fists, and had come to find his own level; and many of the youths who used to amuse themselves at his expense while he was still in the verdant stage now found their little attentions repaid with interest. Peter Flannagan, even, still an ordinary seaman, always in trouble, and rapidly going to the dogs, shunned him like the plague.

But Pincher, whatever his qualities, was no plaster saint. He did not drink to excess, and never became what is known as 'tin 'ats,' [24] but was not averse to visiting public-houses when he went ashore. There was really no reason why he shouldn't, provided he behaved himself.

Emmeline's influence, moreover, kept him straight in other ways; and on one occasion she saved him from getting into serious trouble for breaking his leave. It was rather a long story, involving an evening entertainment to which the girl had been invited, and to which Pincher dearly longed to accompany her. He would have done it, too, if he had been left to his own devices, quite regardless of the fact that all leave expired at seven o'clock that night, as the ship was due to go to sea at eight the next morning.

Now, breaking one's leave is a serious offence at all times; but doing it with the ship under sailing orders is far and away worse, and Emmeline knew this. So at six-forty P.M. precisely she sallied out with the unsuspecting Pincher on the pretext of going for a walk, took him towards the pier, and, before he could stop her, marched him straight up to a petty officer wearing a *Belligerent* cap-ribbon.

'D'you mind taking this young man off to the ship with you?' she asked. 'I'm afraid he's going to do something silly.'

''Ere!' Pincher exclaimed angrily, 'wot's up wi' you? Wot's it got ter do wi' you?'

The P.O. seemed rather surprised at the girl's request. 'Wot's 'e bin doin', miss?' he asked, touching his forelock.

'It's not what he's been doing,' Emmeline explained; 'it's what he's going to do. Says he's going to break his leave and get himself into trouble.'

Pincher looked round with the obvious intention of breaking away; but the P.O. nodded and grabbed him by the arm. 'You come along o' me, my son,' he remarked gruffly. 'Come on! Don't git kickin' up a shindy 'ere!'

'Interferin'!' Pincher blustered, wild with rage and struggling hard to get free. 'Interferin'—that's wot I calls it! Wot's it got ter do wi' you? Think becos you've got a killick [25] on yer arm yer can do wot yer likes, I suppose!—Has fur you, Miss Figgins, I'll'——

But the girl had discreetly turned her back, and was hurrying homewards.

'Come on!' growled the P.O., dragging him along. 'I reckons you ought to be jolly thankful to the gal for takin' such a hinterest in you. None o' that, now!' as Pincher began to struggle again. 'If you don't come quiet like I'll call the patrol an' have you harrested. S' welp me, I will! Come on! We've not got too much time on our 'ands!'

Pincher, very chastened, saw that further resistance was useless, and suffered himself to be conducted on board the boat without more trouble.

The ship was at sea for only a few days; and a week later, when he went to see Emmeline again, he arrived in a very repentant mood, carrying a bunch of violets as a peace-offering.

'Well,' she said severely, as he entered the shop, 'I didn't think you'd dare to come here again after what happened last Monday night.'

Pincher hung his head and got very red. 'Wouldn't dare!' he repeated. 'Why not?'

'You know very well why not,' she said, eyeing him. 'What's that you've got in your hand?'

'Wilets,' he said.

'Who for?'

'I got 'em fur you,' he stammered. 'Thought p'r'aps you'd like 'em.'

Emmeline's heart softened. 'Bill,' she said kindly, 'you know I didn't want to make a fool of you, don't you?'

No answer.

'I only did it to save you getting into trouble,' she continued, emerging from behind the counter and coming very close to him. 'It's very kind of you to bring me the violets, dear Bill; I'll wear 'em in my dress. You're not angry with me, are you?'

Pincher looked up at her with a slow smile hovering round his lips. She had called him 'dear,' a thing she had never done before, and that showed he was forgiven.

'Angry!' he said, tucking his offering clumsily into the front of her blouse. 'Course I ain't. I wus a bit rattled at th' time, but I shouldn't 'a bin 'ere if I 'ad broke me leaf. I reckons you done me a good turn, Hemmeline.' He gulped, and gazed wistfully at a little strand of golden hair which curled tantalisingly behind her left ear. 'Give us a kiss, ole gal?' he pleaded softly. 'I've bin longin' ter see yer agen.' He put his arm round her waist, drew her towards him, and touched her face with his lips.

Emmeline squeaked, pushed him away, and darted behind the counter with a flutter of a white petticoat and a momentary glimpse of a pair of well-shaped ankles clad in black silk stockings. 'You're a naughty boy!' she scolded, safe in her refuge—'a very naughty boy, to behave like that when customers may come in at any minute! You've rumpled my new blouse, too,' she added, patting herself and rearranging the violets. 'My, they do smell nice!' She bent her head and buried the tip of a very fascinating and somewhat *retroussé* nose in the flowers.

Pincher laughed happily. He felt he was very lucky.

'You go through into the sitting-room, Mister Martin,' she went on, with a mischievous wink and a jerk of her thumb. 'I'll be along in a minute, and—and mother's out!'

IV.

Soon afterwards, when the bleak and stormy winter was nearly over, the *Belligerent* and the other vessels of the squadron started off on their first real cruise since Pincher had joined. They had had plenty of time at sea before this, of course; for gunnery, gunnery, *toujours* gunnery—unless it was torpedo-running, steam tactics, or P.Z. Exercises [26] —was carried on throughout the year, winter, spring, summer, and autumn alike. They were always at it; and though the frequent south-westerly gales made the winter work very unpleasant and trying, though officers and men bemoaned their fate and swore 'twas a 'mug's game,' it did them all the good in the world. So, at the end of February, the squadron left the short, choppy seas of the Channel and the familiar hump of Portland behind them, and waddled south, for all the world like a family of turtles migrating to a sunnier sea. It was then, for the first time, that Pincher knew what it was to be really seasick.

Their first port of call was Arosa Bay, in Spain, just to the southward of Cape Finisterre, and for once the much maligned Bay of Biscay upheld its reputation by providing a very fair sample of a south-westerly blow for Pincher's especial benefit. But he was by no means the only sufferer, though.

It was a snorter of a gale, a regular snorter, and the short, snappy little seas of the Channel were nothing to these long, gigantic, foam-crested mountains of water rolling in with all the might of the Atlantic behind them. The battleships wallowed and plunged about to their hearts' content Their movements were slow, deliberate, and very stately; but how they rolled! One could feel their enormous weight smashing through the seas instead of riding over them. Water came over the fore-castle in solid gray-green masses, until the deck was buried and the fore-turret, with its pair of twelve-inch guns, looked like a half-tide rock. Sheets of spray drove over the bridges. The quarterdecks were untenable; and at times gigantic, white-capped billows would blot out every vestige of the next ship astern—only five hundred yards away—except her topmasts.

The *Belligerent* was battened down, but even then a considerable amount of water found its way below. The atmosphere on the mess-decks, well impregnated with the mingled odours of cooking, damp clothes, and crowded humanity, was nauseating. Tables and other fittings had carried away from their fastenings, and a horrible mixture of sea-water, hats, caps, boots, food, broken crockery, pickle-jars, tins of condensed milk, and pots of jam swished to and fro across the deck every time the ship heeled over. Each roll added something fresh to the collection.

On one particularly heavy lurch the door of the officers' galley shot open, and the wardroom cook slid gracefully out on to the mess-deck, accompanied by an avalanche of frying-pans and saucepans, the stock-pot, and a large receptacle full of Irish stew for the officers' lunch.

'If this ain't the ruddy limit!' he observed dismally, picking himself up and gazing at the débris with disgust written on his pea-green face. 'They'll git nothin' 'ot fur lunch ter-day, that I'm bloomin' well certain!' Nobody listened to what he said; and, after surveying the scene for another instant, he yawned twice, and then bolted hastily towards the upper deck. He got there just in time, poor man!

Most of the younger men were past caring whether it was Christmas or Easter. They merely became as limp and as pale as pocket-handkerchiefs, wedged themselves in convenient corners, unconscious of the water and rubbish washing round them, and wished that they might die. Some of them nearly did. It was only the old stagers like Billings who were not affected, and they, instead of offering consolation to their suffering shipmates, went about casting rude gibes at the poor wretches.

''Ullo!' remarked Joshua, strolling aft to his mess at dinner-time, and coming to a halt opposite a miserable little party sitting with their backs up against the ship's side. ''Ullo! 'ere we 'ave Mister Pincher Martin, Rile Navy! 'Ow are we, ole son? Feelin' a bit squeamish—wot?'

The 'ole son,' whose face was a ghastly yellow, whose eyes were closed, and whose head rested carelessly on the shoulder of his next-door neighbour, a man whose name he didn't even know, looked up with a sickly grin, and then relapsed into torpitude.

Billings, swaying easily to the violent rolling of the ship, looked at him with amusement. ''Ave a bit o' somethin' t' eat?' he suggested, with horrible cheeriness. 'Nice little bit o' corned beef, or a drop o' pea-soup? Pea-soup's fine scran fur blokes wot's seasick.' He smacked his lips appreciatively.

Pincher shook his head.

'Then 'ave a nice bit o' fat 'am?' suggested his tormentor. 'Slips down nice an' easy like, an' don't rest 'eavy on th' stummick, fat 'am don't.'

Pincher groaned at the idea.

''Strewth! you ain't 'arf a sailor, you ain't!' the elder man snorted contemptuously, moving off.

Pincher expressed no emotion at all. The very sight of Billings's rubicund countenance made him feel worse than ever, while a man who could mention food at such a time was surely beyond the pale. Moreover, a sailor's life was the very last thing that he took any interest in at that particular time.

Even some of the officers were unwell. The *padre* retired to his bunk, and was fed by his marine servant on soda-water and Bath Oliver biscuits; while Cutting, the young surgeon, Hannibal Chance, the captain of Marines, and the fleet pay-master refused nourishment of any kind whatsoever. Nearly all the others made some attempt to eat their meals; but all except the most hardened sea-dogs bolted a few mouthfuls, and then beat a hasty retreat to their cabins. The only person who did really enjoy it was Harry Derrick, the Royal Naval Reserve lieutenant, or 'Cargo Bill,' as his messmates invariably called him. He always had an insatiable appetite, whatever the weather, and a 'little bit of a sea like this' did not incommode him in the slightest. It was nothing to what he had experienced off Cape Horn in the wind-jammer days he never tired of talking about when he could persuade any one to listen.

But all things come to an end in time; and, after thirty-six hours of absolute misery, Pincher revived to find the squadron steaming into Arosa Bay.

So this was Spain! he thought to himself, looking round with interest as they passed into the sheltered anchorage. He had imagined it to be rather a wonderful country, but if this was a fair sample, he didn't go much on it. A large indented bay; a few blue hills in the distance; a low-lying, arid-looking country, dotted here and there with wooded clumps and patches of cultivated ground; a few small white houses and a gray stone church or two; a straggling town and a long pier at the head of the bay; and many fishing-boats with strangely cut sails. There was a peculiar tang in the air, the nature of which he could not at first determine. It was neither the sweet odour of freshly turned earth, new-mown hay, or heather, nor yet the honest salty smell of the open sea. It was something far more pungent and overpowering. He found out afterwards that it emanated from various sardine-preserving factories, and the discovery put him off canteen 'sharks' for quite a week. There are sardines and sardines; let us be thankful they are not all Spanish sardines!

No, Pincher's impressions of the first foreign country he had ever visited were not exactly enthralling. Spain looked a very ordinary place from the water, and it did not improve on further acquaintance when he went ashore with Billings the same afternoon.

The town, Villagarçia, was not a delectable spot. It smelt of garlic and ancient fish. Its streets, badly paved and odoriferous with heaps of nameless garbage, seemed to provide a happy hunting-ground for many lean, fierce dogs, perambulating pigs and goats accompanied by their families, and prowling poultry. The people, too, looked dirty and ill-favoured, and the better-class men all smoked cigarettes and wore long black cloaks and wideawake hats, like clergymen at home in England. Numbers of barefooted boys and girls of all ages between three and seventeen followed Pincher and Billings about wherever they went. 'I say! On' penni!' they demanded persistently, holding out their grubby hands. 'I say, Jack! Damn you! I say, on' penni!' There was no getting rid of them until the pennies were forthcoming; and their stock phrases—all the English they knew—seemed to have been handed down from generation to generation, ever since British men-of-war first started to visit the place in the year one. It was a paying game, for the

bluejacket is always free with his hard-earned money.

No, Villagarçia was not attractive. There was nothing to do except to drink vinegary *vino blanco* in the taverns, and to buy picture post-cards, silk shawls, paper fans showing fierce and bloodthirsty bullfights, and hideous tambourines depicting plump, gaily dressed ladies in short skirts dancing the *mattiche*. On the whole, Pincher was not sorry to get back to the ship, and he did not trouble to go ashore again.

A fortnight later they arrived at Gibraltar, where the ships went alongside the Mole in the inner harbour to take in coal. But here the operation was quite gentlemanly compared with coaling from a collier, for the fuel was carried on board in small baskets on the backs of nondescript, garlic-scented aliens known as 'rock scorpions,' and all the ship's company had to do was to stow it in the bunkers as it came on board. There was none of the back-breaking work of shovelling.

Coaling completed, the ships went out almost daily for aiming rifle practice; and then came the annual 'gunlayers' test' with the twelve-inch, six-inch, and lighter guns.

'Wot is this 'ere gunlayers' test they talks abart?' Pincher, rather mystified, asked Billings.

'Gunlayers' test!' the A.B. returned, staring at him very much surprised. 'You've bin in this 'ere ship nigh on six months, an' yer don't know wot a gunlayers' test is?'

''Ow can I know wot it is?' Martin sniffed. 'I ain't see'd it, 'ave I?'

'Ain't see'd it, ain't yer?' Joshua snorted. 'Ignerance, that's wot it is! 'Owever, I'll larn yer. Gunlayers' test is wot we carries art every year wi' orl th' guns in th' ship—see? Th' ship steams parst a targit at fairly close range, an' orl th' gunlayers fires in turn. It's a bit of a competition like, an' they orl 'as a certain number o' rounds ter fire in a certain time—see? It's just ter see if'——

''Ow fur orf is th' targit?' Pincher wanted to know, for even he could understand that this was rather a vital point.

'Don't yer git interruptin' w'en I'm spinnin' a yarn!' Joshua remonstrated. 'I loses th' thread o' wot I'm sayin'.' It was fairly early in the morning, and he was still feeling cantankerous.

The ordinary seaman apologised. 'Sorry,' he said. 'I didn't mean no 'arm.'

'Course yer didn't; but if yer gits arskin' stoopid questions, 'ow kin a bloke remember wot 'e's sayin'? Wot wus it yer wanted ter know?'

''Ow fur orf th' targit wus.'

'Not werry fur,' Joshua explained. 'Leastways, it ain't exac'ly fur, an' it ain't exac'ly close. You oughter know wot I means; I carn't remember th' exac' distance. Any'ow, gunlayers' test ain't th' same as battle practice, 'cos then we fires orl th' guns at once, same as we do in haction, likewise at long range—see? Gunlayers' test is simply a competition like, ter see if th' blokes kin shoot strite—see?'

'An' wot 'appens then?' Pincher asked, still rather hazy as to what really did take place.

'Wot 'appens? Orficers comes aboard from other ships as humpires, an' they takes th' time each bloke takes ter fire 'is rounds, an' counts th' number o' rounds 'e gits orf; likewise th' number of 'its an' misses on th' targit. The results is then packed up an' sent ter th' Admiralty, an' them blokes wot's done extry well gits medals an' money prizes, an' them wot ain't 'as a court o' hinquiry on 'em, an' probably gits disrated from bein' gunlayers—see?'

'An' kin I git a medal fur this 'ere?' Martin eagerly asked, for he, also, was a humble member of one of the twelve-pounder guns' crews.

Joshua was amused. 'Kin you git a medal?' he laughed. 'A little cock-sparrer like you! Course yer bloomin' well carn't! They only whacks 'em art ter them gunlayers wot's done extry well, an' there's werry few on 'em given. You ain't a gunlayer, an' ain't likely to be one neither. Gunlayers 'as brains.'

'But 'oo gives these 'ere medals?' Pincher asked, ignoring the insult. 'The admiral?'

'No; th' King gives 'em. Leastways they 'as 'is likeness on 'em, so I reckons they comes from 'im. Nutty Buttolph, th' gunlayer o' my gun, 'ad one larst year. 'E wears it Sundays wi' 'is No. 1's. I reckons I oughter got it too, 'cos I'm th' loadin' number wot shoves in th' projectile, an' each six-inch projectile weighs a 'undred pounds. We got orf eight rounds an' got eight 'its on th' targit, an' I reckons it wus me wot done it just as well as 'im.' Billings's chest swelled with pride at the recollection.

''Ard luck!' Pincher murmured.

''Ard luck?' remarked Joshua. 'Course it wus 'ard luck! 'Owever, I took ten bob orf my opposite number in th' flagship, an' fifteen bob orf another bloke wot thought 'is gun could shoot strite.

We were top o' th' 'ole bloomin' squadron larst year,' he added; 'precious near top o' th' 'ole navy, an' don't yer bloomin' well forgit it. Our ship's company made a bit of a pay-day over it.'

'Pay-day! 'Ow d' yer mean?'

Joshua grinned and winked one eye. 'Bettin'!' he said in a hoarse whisper.

'But I thought bettin' wusn't allowed?' Martin remonstrated, remembering the regulations.

'No more it is, me son; but th' skipper won 'is ten quid from th' flagship's skipper, 'oo said 'is ship 'u'd beat us; an' w'en 'e won it 'e whacked it art among th' guns' crews, 'e did. Proper gennelman, 'e is. Th' Bloke, an' Jimmy the One, [27] an' most o' th' other orficers made a bit too. We're wot we calls 'ot stuff in th' shootin' line, I kin tell yer.'

Billings was quite right. There was certainly no lack of rivalry, for the officers and men of the squadron were as keen on the results obtained by their respective ships as they possibly could be. The gunlayers' test was treated in much the same way as a regatta or a race-meeting, for sweepstakes were got up and bets were freely offered and taken on the performances of individual gunlayers. Strictly against the regulations, of course, but nobody seemed to mind, and the favourites themselves became very important personages for the time being.

To the ship's company of any man-of-war, 'our ship' is invariably the best shooting and the smartest ship not only in the whole squadron, but also in the entire British navy. Disputes as to the merits of two crack vessels have been known to lead to regrettable incidents ashore. Pewter beer-mugs are handy missiles, and black eyes and contusions, though rare, are by no means unheard of. Moreover, if a smart ship which fancies herself is beaten at gunnery by some dark horse, the obvious inferences, from her men's point of view, are: (1) that the umpires have been bribed; (2) that the ammunition was bad, and it therefore affected the shooting; (3) that the sea was much rougher and the ship had far more motion than when H.M.S. So-and-so fired; (4) that the sun was in the wrong place, and that the light was bad; (5) that the weather was misty; and so on, *ad infinitum*, all the excuses being equally futile.

But rivalry between ships, despite occasional bickerings ashore when their respective partisans wax argumentative, does no harm. On the contrary, it is a good sign. It shows there is *esprit de corps*.

On this occasion, however, the *Belligerent's* guns were possessed of a devil. She did very well, it is true, and came out second in the squadron, but was just beaten by the *Tremendous*. The defeat came as a severe blow, particularly as a treasured silver challenge cup, presented by the admiral and awarded annually to the best ship, now left its resting-place on the *Belligerent's* mess-deck and found its way to the flagship. It was carried off in triumph by the winners; but the *Belligerent's* gunlayers cursed long and loud, and swore by all their gods that it had been won by a fluke. So did some of the officers.

'This 'ere's th' ruddy limit!' Billings muttered fiercely. 'Ter think o' these 'ere Duffos [28] 'avin' th' imperence ter say they 'ave beaten us! They ain't done it fair! S' welp me, they ain't! It's enuf ter make a bloke take ter—ter anythin'!' He was going to say 'beer;' but, remembering Mrs Figgins and his new-found respectability, he wisely refrained.

After spending a month at Gibraltar, they returned to Portland to give four days' Easter leave, and then sailed off to Berehaven, where they did more gunnery. Then on to the west coast of Scotland for a cruise, and finally back to Portland again.

The time passed very rapidly. Spring gave way to summer, and in due course Pincher found himself passed out of the seamanship training-class and handed over to the tender mercies of a torpedo gunner's mate, who crammed his head with an astounding number of facts pertaining to electricity and torpedo work generally.

One Sunday in the early summer, however, the chaplain rather electrified his congregation. 'I publish the banns of marriage,' he read, 'between Able Seaman Joshua Billings, bachelor, of this ship, and Martha Ann Figgins, widow, of the parish of St Cuthbert's, Weymouth. If any of you know cause or just impediment why these two persons should not be joined together in holy matrimony, you are to declare it. This is for the first time of asking.'

The commander, and various other officers who knew Joshua intimately, could hardly restrain their mirth.

'The old devil!' Tickle exclaimed in the smoking-room after the service. 'To think of any woman wanting to marry him!'

'There are plenty of worse men than Billings,' the commander disagreed. 'He's not very attractive to look at, I'll admit; but, provided he keeps off beer, he and his Martha'll get on all right. What he wants is a woman to rule him with a rod of iron.'

'You'd better give the lady a few tips, sir,' Tickle suggested.

'Not I!' laughed the commander. 'I shall merely present them with an ormolu timepiece—

whatever that may be. It shall be suitably inscribed, too. You see,' he added, 'Billings, in spite of beer, is quite one of the best seamen in the ship, and I shall be very sorry to lose him when he takes his pension.'

There is no need to describe Joshua's wedding, or to tell how some of the officers and a goodly proportion of the ship's company attended the ceremony, how Pincher performed his duties as 'best man,' and how the commander himself was prevailed upon to make a speech and to drink the health of the happy couple in grocers' port wine. It all went off like a house on fire; but at the tea-party afterwards Pincher seemed rather distracted.

''Ullo, chum!' the beaming bridegroom asked him, 'wot's up wi' yer? You've got a face on yer like a sea-boot.'

'I'm just thinkin' somethin',' Pincher explained.

'Thinkin' wot?' Joshua wanted to know. 'Wot an 'appy hoccasion this is, or wot?'

'No, 'ardly that.'

'Wot is it, then?'

'I wus thinkin' that now you've gorn an' married Missis Figgins you are Hemmeline's farther, ain't yer?'

'S'pose I am,' Billings assented, scratching his head, for the question had not occurred to him before. 'Leastways, 'er step-farther.'

'An' s'pose I marries Hemmeline, wot relation are yer to me?'

'You ain't arsked my leaf to court 'er,' Joshua pointed out. 'An' s'pose yer does, I don't know as 'ow I shall give my consent. These haffairs is important—see? I'll 'ave ter hinquire as ter yer prospex, an' suchlike. Supposin' yer wusn't respeccable?'

'Respeccable!' Pincher retorted. 'Don't talk so wet! If I ain't good enuf ter marry Hemmeline, you ain't good enuf fur Missis Figgins—see? She's 'er mother, ain't she?'

'Don't go an' git dizzy on this 'appy day,' Joshua went on with mock gravity. 'Don't go gittin' rattled! Carn't you see w'en a bloke's 'avin' a joke like?'

'It ain't no subjec' ter make fun o',' Pincher answered, rather mollified. 'But, any'ow, s'posin' I does marry 'er, wot relation would you be ter me? That's wot I wants ter know.'

'I reckons I'd be yer step-farther-in-lor,' Joshua answered after due consideration. 'Leastways, that's 'ow I looks at it. I'll arsk th' missis, though. Come an' 'ave a wet.'

Pincher, nothing loath, acquiesced. They went off arm-in-arm.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CLOUD.

I.

It all happened very suddenly. The fleet had been reviewed by his Majesty the King at Spithead in the middle of July, and after this certain exercises were carried out in lieu of the usual summer manœuvres. They did not last very long, however, for on Friday, 24th July, the *Belligerent* arrived at her home port to effect some necessary repairs, and, incidentally, to give four days' leave to her men; so the next morning half the ship's company, including Pincher, left for their homes.

Now the Martin family, being country-people, did not worry their heads with newspapers on weekdays. For one thing, the papers cost money and were difficult to get; and, for another, they had little time to read them. Mr Martin usually bought *Reynolds's Weekly* on Sunday; but on that particular Sunday, 26th July, there was nothing in it to give rise to any anxiety. He did notice that there was some sort of trouble between Austria and Serbia; but that could not possibly affect his weekly wages, and beyond remarking casually to his wife that 'them there Balkan nations is 'oly 'orrors for gettin' up rows,' he paid no further attention to it.

On the following Tuesday, 28th July, at ten-forty-three A.M. precisely, Pincher left the cottage to buy a packet of cigarettes at the village shop. Albert, his youngest brother, aged five, clutching a penny with which he proposed to purchase two sticks of glutinous but very succulent pink nougat, accompanied him. They were away exactly fourteen minutes, and on their return found Mrs Martin, fresh from her wash-tub and with her arms covered in soapsuds to the elbows, bubbling over with suppressed excitement. She was gazing in a perturbed manner at a telegram; for, to the Martin *ménage*, the arrival of an orange envelope was a matter of some importance. It generally spelt trouble. The last one had arrived over a year before to announce that Mrs Martin's sister had been run over by an omnibus.

''Ullo, ma!' Pincher exclaimed, noticing his parent's agitated condition; 'wot's th' racket?'

'This 'ere's just come,' she said excitedly, handing the telegram across with very damp fingers. 'For you, it is. You've got to go back to the ship at once!'

'Go back!' he echoed indignantly, taking the offending missive. 'My leaf ain't up till fu'st train ter-morrer mornin'!'

'Ye'd best read it, son,' remarked the lady, wiping her arms on her apron. 'See for yerself.'

Pincher did so. 'Gosh!' he exclaimed with a whistle of surprise, 'there ain't no bloomin' error abart this 'ere.'

There was not. It was addressed to him personally, and was signed, 'Commanding Officer.' 'Leave cancelled,' it said abruptly, almost brutally. 'Rejoin ship immediately.'

''Strewth! Wot's th' buzz, I wonder?' he murmured, very much puzzled, and looking at the back of the paper as if to find the answer to his question there. 'Wot's it mean?'

'That's wot I'm wonderin',' said his mother. 'Wot does it mean? Ye're not in trouble, are yer?' She had a vague suspicion at the back of her mind that Pincher might have absented himself without leave.

'Trouble! Course I ain't. It ain't that. There's somethin' else in th' wind. One o' these 'ere bloomin' war buzzes, I reckons.' He spoke as if wars and rumours of wars were of everyday occurrence.

Mrs Martin seemed rather alarmed. 'War!' she gasped, looking up with a horrified expression. 'Wot d' you mean, Bill? Surely we're not goin' to war?'

'Course we ain't, ma,' he replied, laughing, and patting her consolingly on the shoulder. 'This 'ere don't mean nothin'; only a bit of a buzz round like. Yer see,' he pointed out with pride, 'we—th' navy, that is—always 'as ter be ready fur these 'ere shows, 'cos if anythin' did 'appen an' we wasn't ready things 'u'd be in a pretty hot mess. S'pose I'd best be makin' a move, though,' he added ruefully. 'Bit orf, I calls it!'

'Gosh! there ain't no bloomin' error abart this 'ere.'

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'Goin' now?'

'Fu'st train,' he said, nodding. 'This 'ere telegraph says rejoin immediate. I expec's th' ship's goin' ter sea in an 'urry like, an' they wants me back perticular.'

Mrs Martin gazed at her son with motherly pride. She did not like the idea of his leaving so soon; but it was very consoling to think that he was a person of such importance on board the *Belligerent* that the ship could not go to sea without him. He must be very valuable, otherwise they would not have telegraphed.

Albert, who had already assimilated half a piece of nougat, and had covered his face with pink stickiness, looked up inquiringly. 'Bill goin'?' he queried fretfully.

'Yes, ducky,' answered his mother. 'Called back to 'is ship. 'E's goin' now.'

The information was too much for Albert. He withdrew the sweetmeat from his mouth, screwed up his face, and suddenly burst into a howl. 'Ow!' he bellowed; 'Bill's goin' back to 'is ship! Bill's goin' back!' It was a matter of some importance to him, for the presence of his elder brother meant an occasional honorarium of one penny, and one penny meant a plentiful supply of nougat. His little soul delighted in nougat. His mother never gave him pennies.

'Stop yer 'owlin', Albert!' Mrs Martin ordered severely. 'Has if I 'adn't enough to think about without listenin' to yer noise!—Bill,' she went on, glancing at the clock, 'you'd best be off. The Lunnon train stops at the station at eleven-forty-four, same one yer uncle Charles come by yesterday. There's not another till the arternoon. The clock's a bit fast, but it's about quarter-past eleven now, an' the station's a good couple o' miles.'

''Strewth!' muttered Pincher, darting from the room, 'I'll 'ave ter run.' He went to his bedroom, collected his few belongings, and presently reappeared with an oilskin over his shoulder and a small blue bundle in his hand.

Albert, with his mouth wide open, gazed at him tearfully.

'S' long, ma,' Pincher said, putting his arm round his mother's neck and kissing her gently. 'Say good-bye ter farther w'en 'e comes 'ome, an' th' kids w'en they gits back from school.'

'Good-bye, son. Good luck to yer,' she answered, drawing his head down and embracing him, with the tears in her eyes. 'I do 'ope it's not nothin' serious. Write an' let me know 'ow yer gets on.'

'Right you are, ma.—S'long, Halbert,' he went on cheerfully, bending down and kissing his small brother. 'Be a good boy, now, an' don't git worritin' ma, now I'm goin'.'

The tears streamed down the youngster's cheeks. He began to whimper loudly.

'Be a good boy, I tells yer,' Pincher went on, patting him. 'If ma writes an' tells me you've be'aved yerself I'll send yer another penny nex' week. If yer don't, yer won't git no penny—see? Gosh!' he

added hastily, 'it's 'igh time I wus orf.' He gave his mother another hurried kiss, and a second later was out of the cottage and racing down the road as fast as his legs would carry him. The shrieks of the inconsolable Albert pursued him.

Mrs Martin watched him till he gave a final wave before disappearing round a bend in the lane, and then returned to admonish her small son. 'Ye're a naughty boy, ye are!' she scolded shrilly. 'If yer don't stop it I'll put yer across my knee an' give yer wot for; straight, I will! Stop it. D'you 'ear wot I say?'

Albert's howls gradually died away into sobs.

Mrs Martin returned to her wash-tub with dismal forebodings in her heart. Telegrams always meant trouble.

II.

'Bless yer 'eart an' soul!' exclaimed Billings, with a loud snort, ''e ain't goin' ter fight. Orl this 'ere racket's only a bit o' bounce like. Same as wot 'e did in that 'ere show in nineteen eleven.' He rammed the tobacco down into his pipe and relit it, with one watchful eye on his companion.

'I presooms ye're talkin' abart that there Meroccer bizness,' said Tubby M'Sweeny, producing a cigarette from the lining of his cap. 'Aggie-dear wus wot they called it.' He seemed rather proud of his superior knowledge.

'Yus, that's it,' Joshua agreed with a nod. 'I knowed it wus Aggie somethin'. But, any'ow, look wot this 'ere Kayser Bill does then! Directly 'e see'd we meant bizness 'e piped down smart, an' sed 'e wus sorry for wot 'e'd done. That's wot 'e'll do this time, I reckons.'

'I dunno so much abart that,' M'Sweeny disagreed. 'Look 'ow them Germans downed France an' done th' dirty on them! I reckons they thinks they kin do the same wi' us—s'welp me, I do.'

'Garn!' jeered the other. 'They've got ter reckon wi' our bloomin' navy, an' it's more'n double as good as theirs. I'm not sayin' they doesn't mean ter fight us later on,' he added, wagging a finger; 'but I says they won't try it on now. 'Sides, they ain't sailors!' To show his contempt he expectorated violently, and with deadly precision, into an adjacent spitkid.

M'Sweeny seemed sceptical. 'Maybe they ain't sailors,' he pointed out solemnly; 'but we ain't see'd nothin' of 'em. We knows nothin' of 'em, either. I've 'eard tell, too, that that there Kayser bloke o' theirs 'as gingered 'em up somethin' crool, an' a navy wot's been gingered up must be on th' top line same as us, mustn't it?'

Joshua shook his head. 'I tell yer they ain't goin' ter fight yet awhile,' he persisted. 'Orl this 'ere racket's only a bit o' bounce. D' you think they doesn't know wot our navy's like? Ain't they bloomin' well scared of it?' Billings, a staunch and very insular Briton, still held to the belief that his own countrymen were the only really good seamen in the world. Those of other nationalities were either 'Dagoes' or 'niggers,' and which of the two terms was the more opprobrious was rather a moot point.

'An' wot abart our army?' came an irrelevant remark from Pincher, who happened to be listening. 'I knows a bloke wot's in th' Black Watch—lance-corporal 'e is—an' 'e reckons our army's bin properly gingered up an' is properly on th' top line.'

'Th' men is orl right,' said M'Sweeny mournfully, 'an' so is the orficers; but we ain't got enuf of 'em. We ain't got a million men in th' army, nor yet 'arf that number, an' that there Kayser's got millions an' millions!' He waved a hand vaguely to give some idea of the Teuton hordes.

'But if we goes ter war our army 'as a slap at somethin', I suppose?' Pincher queried.

'Course they does, fat'ead,' Joshua replied with fatherly condescension. 'They goes an' 'elps th' Frenchies ter take Berlin, while we—th' navy, that is—'as a desprit battle in th' North Sea, an' wipes th' deck with their bloomin' 'Igh Sea Fleet. The army blokes'll be at Berlin in a month or six weeks, an' we'll 'ave done our job in 'arf th' time. W'en we've done it we orl goes 'ome on leaf wi' our medals an' V.C.'s, an' becomes public 'eroes wot saved the country. But you mark my words, the 'ole bloomin' war'll be over in three months w'en it comes. 'Owever, they ain't goin' ter fight now, so wot's the use o' yarnin' abart it? This 'ere racket's only a spasm like. It don't mean nothin'.'

But M'Sweeny, obviously a pessimist, shook his head. 'I dunno so much,' he answered sadly. 'I've bin 'avin' feelin's in me 'ead that somethin' 's goin' ter 'appen soon, an' me feelin's allus comes true. W'en you wus made a leadin' seaman, Josh, I 'ad a feelin' that you'd be an A.B. agen afore long; an' w'en'——

'Wot! d' yer mean yer 'ad a feelin' abart me?' Billings interrupted, rather annoyed. ''Ow dare yer?'

'I 'as feelin's in me 'ead abart lots o' people,' Tubby reiterated solemnly. 'They allus comes true.'

Joshua lifted up his head and laughed. 'Feelin's in yer 'ead!' he jeered. 'Feelin's in yer stummick, more like. It's beer wot's done it, Tubby; an' if it ain't beer, it wus them canteen termarters yer 'ad fur supper larst night!'

'Termarters be damned!' retorted M'Sweeny.

Now this conversation took place during the dinner-hour of Thursday, 30th July, two days after the watch on leave had been hurriedly recalled, and all further shore-going had been cancelled.

Neither Billings, M'Sweeny, nor Pincher—nor, for that matter, any other member of the ship's company—knew exactly how they could become embroiled. They were all painfully aware that there was trouble in Eastern Europe, and that, in some remote sort of way, this trouble transmitted itself to them. But beyond anathematising the 'spasm,' as they called it, on somebody's part which had caused their leave to be stopped, and extra work in the way of coaling and embarking ammunition to be carried out, they regarded the affair as of no more importance than the annual summer manœuvres. War was utterly unthinkable.

But by this time, if they had only known it, practically the whole of the British fleet was on a war footing, and ready for instant action. The newspapers had remained discreetly silent, and the whereabouts of squadrons, flotillas, and individual ships was unknown to the public. They had vanished into the air; but, except in isolated cases, every vessel in the navy was already at her war station or on her way there. Dockyards were working night and day. Naval reservists and pensioners were flocking to their depots; retired officers were coming forward in dozens to volunteer their services. Colliers, oil-fuel ships, ammunition ships, and a thousand and one other fleet auxiliaries had been chartered, and the Admiralty had taken their 'precautionary measures' so rapidly and so unostentatiously that hardly a soul in the country realised that anything untoward was happening.

The fleet was ready, and well it was for Britain that it was so. Germany, relying perhaps on a surprise attack at some 'selected moment' before an actual declaration of war, and while our fleets and squadrons were still dispersed, had bungled badly. She may not have expected us to join in the war; may have imagined that Britain, fettered with the possibility of complications in Ireland, preferred to keep out of a Continental struggle at all costs. But she had made a grievous mistake, an error which, combined with the wisest forethought on the part of the British Admiralty, made it practically impossible for the trident of Britannia ever to pass into the hands of the Teutonic Michael.

Early the next morning, 31st July, the *Belligerent* left her home port, and steamed to her base in the English Channel to rejoin the rest of the squadron. It was quite a short trip, but it was on the passage that the eyes of the ship's company were opened to the fact that something serious really was in the wind. For one thing, the ammunition for all the six-inch and lighter guns was brought up from the magazines and shell-rooms and distributed to the casemates and batteries; while certain of the weapons were kept constantly manned—what for, exactly, none of the men quite knew. The captain and the commander looked graver than usual; and Chase, the gunnery lieutenant-commander, rather worried, held hurried consultations with the gunner about shell and cartridges, and had a party of armourers constantly at work throughout the day testing and adjusting the mechanism of his weapons.

The commander and the carpenter, too, the latter armed with a large piece of chalk and a note-book, made a solemn peregrination of the ship, decorating various wooden fittings with cabbalistic signs as they went. Pincher, who happened to be working on the boat-deck at the time, heard part of their conversation. It rather frightened him.

'All this wood of yours will have to be landed or slung overboard, Mr Chipping,' the senior officer remarked, coming to a halt beside a pile of spars and planks on the boat-deck, and eyeing it with evident disfavour. 'If a shell burst in the middle of this little lot we'd have a bonfire in a couple of seconds.'

Pincher pricked up his ears.

'It's all on charge, sir,' the carpenter answered ruefully, with horrible visions of subsequent discrepancies in his store-books. 'I've got to account for every inch of it.'

The commander laughed. 'You storekeeping officers are born obstructionists, Mr Chipping,' he exclaimed. 'If we go to war your store-books will go to the devil, anyhow, so what on earth does it matter? I'm always greeted with the same remark when I'm trying to make the ship a little less like a bonfire. They're invariably "on charge," dammit!'

'And so they are, sir,' put in the carpenter. 'I have to account for 'em.'

'Can't help that. You'd better send in your bill to the Kaiser. Anyhow, we can't have all this lumber up here; it's a regular death-trap.'

Mr Chipping scratched his grizzled head. 'I'll land all what I can't strike below, sir,' he grudgingly assented at last.

'Yes, see to it at once, please. If this pile of wood catches fire it'll play Old Harry on the upper deck with the twelve-pounders and their ammunition.'

Pincher listened open-mouthed, for it was quite obvious from the way they talked that things were far more serious than Joshua had led him to believe. Moreover, he, Martin, was in full agreement with the commander as to the expediency of removing the pile of wood from the boat-deck. His station in action was at one of the upper-deck twelve-pounder guns, and he had no wish to emulate Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego of the Old Testament in their blazing, fiery furnace.

The carpenter got busy with his chalk, and before long the whole pile of lumber was ornamented with little noughts and crosses. The noughts, Pincher assumed, meant that the articles so marked were to be retained, and the crosses that those bearing this mark were to be thrown overboard or landed; and when, a little later, he had occasion to go on to the upper deck he found many other things decorated with the same mystic signs. Certain of the smaller boats, spare spars, cabin doors, accommodation ladders, gratings, lockers, anything and everything wooden, inflammable, or likely to make splinters, were apparently to go by the board. It gave him furiously to think.

The ship arrived at her base during the afternoon, and Captain Spencer went on board the flagship to report his arrival. He was away for an hour and a half, and came back with what the officer of the watch called 'a face like a sea-boot,' and the information that the situation was very serious. Beyond that he professed to know nothing, but every one noticed that the commander was closeted with him in his cabin for fully three-quarters of an hour on his return from the flagship. Petty Officer Finnigan, moreover, the captain's coxswain and a great friend of the admiral's cook on board the flagship *Tremendous*, told his messmates with much gusto that the cook had informed him that the admiral's steward had told him (the cook) that war with Germany was only a matter of hours.

We have heard of yarns emanating from ships' cooks generally being treated with derision, but presumably admirals' cooks are above suspicion in this respect, for the news spread rapidly, and the 'Belligerents,' believing it implicitly, were flung into a state of ill-suppressed excitement in consequence. Most of them had never seen a shot fired in anger; but the prospect of war—the awful prospect of the unknown—did not seem to alarm them. On the contrary, officers and men went about their business with light hearts and smiles on their faces, for, as Tickle had once pointed out when referring to the same subject, 'it's a bit thick if we're doomed to fire our guns at a canvas target all our lives.' Most of them longed for a run for their money, and to all appearances they were going to have it. The graver possibilities of war did not intrude themselves upon their minds until long afterwards. They all felt cocksure that they, individually, were not fated to die violent deaths by the enemy's shell, torpedoes, mines, bombs, or by drowning. If any one was to be killed, it was not they. They merely pictured to themselves a short and triumphant struggle, at the conclusion of which—in six months at the very most—they, having sunk the enemy's navy, would go home on leave with medals on their manly bosoms, to be hailed as the saviours of their country. Alas for their dreams!

The squadron was in a state of feverish activity. Some ships were taking in final supplies of coal and ammunition, working night and day; while others were landing all their superfluous wooden or inflammable fittings and non-necessary stores. The 'Belligerents' themselves started on the job early the next morning. Such a collection there was! Many tons of paint and varnish; some of the smaller boats; quantities of timber for building targets; wooden accommodation ladders; baulks, spars, and planks; chests of drawers from the officers' cabins, and tin cases and trunks containing their personal effects and more treasured possessions; the midshipmen's and chief petty officers' chests; doors of cabins; gratings; even the wardroom pianola, an instrument which was being paid for on the instalment system, were taken ashore and lodged in a place of security. The work took them a full forty-eight hours.

The *Belligerent*, being a pre-Dreadnought battleship, had to have more done to her to make her ready for battle than a similar vessel of a later class, and Sunday, 2nd August, brought no cessation of labour. If anything, it was a more strenuous day than the previous one, for except for a brief service on the quarterdeck, lasting exactly ten minutes, officers and men alike were hard at work preparing the ship for war. There was plenty to be done. Extra lifts and tackles were put upon the yards on the foremast to prevent them crashing down from aloft if struck by a shell, the rigging was snaked down with hawsers to stop it flying away if severed, and extra protection, in the shape of tightly rolled-up canvas awnings, thick enough to stop a substantial shell-splinter, was improvised round the bridge and fire-control positions up aloft.

Fire, first-aid, and stretcher parties were told off and organised, and everything was done, beyond the final wetting of decks, to make the ship ready for immediate action, and to lessen the chances of damage to vessel or men through fire or fragments of flying débris almost as dangerous as the shell-splinters themselves.

Surgical bags containing bandages, dressings, splints, and tourniquets were placed ready to hand in all the gun positions in case men were wounded; morphia tabloids were served out to all the officers of quarters for administration to badly injured men; while the fleet surgeon and Cutting,

the 'young doctor,' saw to the gruesome implements of their profession, and caused the operating-table to be transferred from the sick-bay to a convenient site behind armour on the lower deck.

Tickle's cabin was next to the 'young doc's' in Rogues' Alley, as it was called; and, happening to go below during the forenoon, he noticed Cutting through the half-drawn curtain busy with a chamois leather and an array of murderous-looking knives, probes, and forceps laid out on his bunk.

'Hallo, Sawbones!' he remarked, putting his head inside; 'I see you've got all your ironmongery out. Think you're going to have something to do at last—eh?'

'Hallo, Toby! That you? Come inside and have a look. I've an excellent line in cutlery, guaranteed to kill or cure while you wait. What d'you think of that?' He held out a horrible-looking knife with a thin curved blade.

'Ugh!' shuddered Tickle. 'Take the beastly thing away! What d'you do with it?'

'Cut, my dear chap,' the doctor gloated. 'One sharp snick like that'—and he gave the blade a downward jerk, and clicked suggestively with his tongue—'and then we get to work and remove—er—anything you like. Ripping little thing, isn't it?' he laughed. 'This,' the medico continued, laying the knife down and picking up a probe and a pair of forceps, 'is what we use for feeling for a bit of shell inside a chap, and this is what we fish it out with. Quite simply done. Topping little operation to watch.'

'You bloodthirsty little blighter!' Tickle ejaculated.

'Bloodthirsty! Why, it's my job, isn't it? We hardly ever get a chance of doing any decent operations in peace, worse luck!' he added regretfully; 'your sailors are so disgustingly healthy; and if they do get really ill and promise to be interesting cases, they're packed straight off to hospital. Sickening, I call it!'

'M'yes, that's true, I suppose,' Tickle agreed, smiling. 'Look here, though, doc; if you ever have to—er—extract a bit of shell or other foreign substance from my anatomy, look out you don't chuck it away. I want to keep it as a relic.'

Cutting grinned. 'Right-o, Toby; I'll see to it. Now you'd better clear out of here, young fellow, and get on with your work. I'm busy, and I'm sure you ought to be.'

Tickle departed.

III.

The marine postman, who should have been off at eight o'clock, was delayed, and did not come on board with the mails and Sunday papers for the ship's company until nearly noon. But when he did finally turn up he was nearly carried off his feet by the rush of men.

''Ere, posty!' shouted some one, 'got my *Dispatch*?'

'Wot abart my *Lloyd's* and *People*?' roared another man, elbowing his way through the throng.

'Ain't ye got my *Reynolds's?* from somebody else.

'Oh, go to 'ell!' retorted the exasperated marine, vainly endeavouring to make his way forward through the crowd with a large leather satchel slung over his shoulder and three bulbous mail-bags on his back. 'Oh, go to 'ell, the 'ole boilin' lot o' you! Orl in good time! 'Aven't none o' you blokes got no patience?' He was annoyed, poor man, and had every right to be, for he had gone breakfastless, and the mail, arriving late, had delayed him many hours.

'Well, tell us th' noos!' some one bellowed above the uproar.

'Noos!' he replied. 'Germany's declared war on Russia, an' all the naval reserves an' pensioners is called out! Wot more d'you want?'

It was quite sufficient; enough, indeed, to reduce a good many of them to a state of excited incoherence. It seemed practically impossible that Great Britain could keep out of the conflict; and, though throughout the ship the general feeling was one of warlike joy, it was tempered here and there by a touch of subdued solemnity. The mail despatched the same evening constituted a 'bloomin' record,' as the long-suffering postman put it, for every officer and man on board had spent the afternoon in writing letters.

'I know'd my feelin's 'u'd come true,' remarked M'Sweeny in his mess during supper. 'I know'd this 'ere wus comin' orl along. I know'd yer wus wrong, Josh.' He wagged his head wisely, and looked at Billings, who was sitting opposite.

'Don't start chawin' yer fat, Tubby,' Joshua retorted. 'Things is quite bad enuf without yer makin' of 'em worse.' He was feeling rather peevish and irritable. He was thinking of his wife, and

wondered vaguely when he was likely to see her again.

''Owever,' he added, putting down his fork with a throaty sigh, 'I don't much care wot 'appens now so long as we 'as a decent smack at them blighters. I owes 'em one fur gittin' me bloomin' leaf stopped, an', by gum, they'll git it w'en I runs acrost 'em!' He glared savagely at the man opposite as if he, too, was a potential enemy.

''Ear, 'ear!' shouted another man, banging heavily on the table. 'Them's my feelin's.'

'There, there, me boy-o!' snapped M'Sweeny. 'W'en ye've finished upsettin' me tea, Mister Jones, I'll git along wi' me supper, thankin' yer orl the same. Them bloomin' Germans can wait. Supper carn't.'

''Ark at 'im,' jeered 'Mister Jones.' 'Just 'ark at him! Allus worryin' abart 'is vittles!'

'An' why shouldn't 'e?' suddenly demanded Billings, veering round and taking M'Sweeny's part. 'Better ter be a well-covered bloke like 'im than a lop-eared, spindle-shanked son of a perishin' light'ouse like you. It makes me feel 'ungry ter look at yer.'

Both M'Sweeny and Jones promptly became covered in confusion; for, whereas the former's adiposity was his sore point, Jones was as touchy on the subject of his excessive leanness.

That same night, or, rather, early the next morning, they had their first alarm. The immaculate Aubrey Plantagenet FitzJohnson happened to be the officer of the middle watch—midnight till four A.M.—and at two-thirty, having absorbed two large cups of hot cocoa and half-a-dozen tongue sandwiches, he was sauntering up and down the silent quarterdeck, pipe in mouth, and longing for his bunk. It was chilly for the time of year. There was no moon, and though here and there stars peeped out between rifts in the clouds moving down from windward on the gentle breeze, the sky generally was overcast and the night was dark.

Quite suddenly the silence was broken by the sound of footsteps running along the boat-deck. Next came the clattering of a ladder and a muffled exclamation as some one fell down the last few steps and landed painfully on the deck, and then the footsteps advanced on to the quarterdeck. Whoever it was was evidently in great haste. FitzJohnson turned round.

'I wants th' orficer o' th' watch,' he heard an agitated voice telling the quartermaster. 'Where is 'e?'

'Here I am. What's the matter? Who's that?'

'It's me, sir—Grimes, ord'nary signalman,' the man panted breathlessly. 'Please, sir, th' yeoman o' th' watch on th' bridge told me to tell you there's a Zeppeling comin' over th' 'ill!'

'A Zeppelin coming over the hill!' the officer echoed, in astonishment, half-suspecting that some one was pulling his leg. 'What the devil d'you mean, my man?'

'It's gawspul truth, sir. 'E's burnin' lights, an' me an' th' yeoman saw 'im quite plain.'

Grimes was obviously in earnest, and the lieutenant did not wait to hear any more. He crammed his cap firmly on his head, darted from the quarterdeck, ran up the ladder leading to the after shelter-deck, sped along the boat-deck, barking both shins badly as he went, and finally clambered up the ladder leading to the fore-bridge, breathless and limp with excitement. 'Where is it?' he gasped.

'Over there on the port bow, sir!' answered an equally agitated yeoman of signals, busy with a pair of binoculars. 'D'ye see where that 'ump sticks up on top o' the 'ill, sir?'

'Yes!'

'There's a bit o' dark cloud on top of it, and just to the left, sir. 'E's be'ind that now. We'll see 'im agen in a minute w'en the cloud passes.'

They both gazed at it anxiously, and presently the mass of vapour thinned and drifted away on the light breeze.

'There, sir!' exclaimed the yeoman, triumphantly waving an arm. 'See 'im now, sir? 'E seems to 'ave altered course to port a bit since I see'd 'im first; but 'e's there all right. See 'is lights, sir!'

The man was quite right; for, looking in the direction indicated, the lieutenant distinctly saw in the sky a bright white light, with, just below and to the left of it, a green light They both seemed to be moving rapidly in a north-easterly direction, and looked for all the world like the steaming and starboard bow lights of a ship suspended in mid-air. He snatched the glasses from the yeoman's hand and looked intently through them. Yes, the white and green lights were quite distinct. They seemed to twinkle as he watched them, and behind them there appeared to be a dark phantom shape rushing through the sky. A Zeppelin, without a shadow of doubt.

Dashing down the glasses with an exclamation, he fled from the bridge as if Satan himself was after him, and running aft, hastily told the marine corporal of the watch to turn out twenty

marines with their rifles and ball ammunition, and then to inform Captain Hannibal Chance, R.M.L.I., that a Zeppelin was in sight.

Aubrey P. FitzJohnson was no fool. Not he. He knew that hostilities had not started, but he had read enough history to be aware that hostile acts had frequently been committed before actual declaration of war. Moreover, he was officer of the watch, and as such was responsible for the safety of the ship, and it would never do if he were to be caught napping by a bomb-dropping dirigible. Therefore he must take precautions. There were no anti-aircraft guns mounted in the *Belligerent*, so the next best thing which occurred to him was twenty marines with their rifles. He might just as well have paraded five thousand schoolboys armed with catapults or pea-shooters, for all the good they could do.

A few seconds later he was knocking frantically on the door of the commander's upper-deck sleeping-cabin.

'Who's making that infernal din?' growled the sleepy occupant, waking up with a start. 'What the devil d'you want?' The commander, poor man, had had a long and busy day, and was inclined to be irritable.

'It's me, sir—FitzJohnson,' the lieutenant exclaimed, putting his head inside the curtain. 'There's a Zeppelin in sight!'

'A *what*!' ejaculated Commander Travers, sitting up in his bunk and switching on the electric light.

'A Zeppelin, sir. I saw her quite distinctly. She's on our port bow, steering to the north-east'ard, and travelling pretty fast. You can see her from the fore-bridge. I've turned out twenty marines with their rifles!'

The commander glared at him for an instant, and seeing he was in earnest, hopped out of his bunk, crammed his feet into a pair of rubber sea-boots, flung on a purple dressing-gown, and dashed out of his cabin. 'You'd better go and call the captain,' he cried back over his shoulder.

Captain Spencer, who had been sleeping soundly, was at first inclined to be sceptical and annoyed; but, convinced from FitzJohnson's manner that an airship really was in sight, he too left his bunk, and, arrayed in a suit of green-striped pyjamas and a uniform cap, joined the commander on the fore-bridge.

The marines meanwhile, in various stages of deshabille, were mustering on the quarterdeck under the orders of their imperturbable sergeant-major.

'Have you served out ball ammunition?' FitzJohnson demanded.

'Yessir; five rounds a man.'

'Well, double your men on to the forecastle, load your rifles, and stand by to open fire as soon as you get orders.'

'Party! 'shon! Trail arrms! Left turn! Double marrch!'

At that moment Captain Chance appeared up one of the quarterdeck ladders. He was wearing a uniform tunic, pink pyjama trousers, dancing-pumps, and a monocle. 'What the dooce is happenin'?' he wanted to know. 'That damfool of a corporal came down to my cabin; but the silly ass was so bally excited, I couldn't make head or tail of what he was talkin' about. For the Lord's sake, old man, what the devil is the matter?'

'There's a Zeppelin in sight,' FitzJohnson told him. 'I've just sent the marines on to the forecastle.'

'Great Cæsar's aunt!' gasped the marine officer, running forward after his men.

The quartermaster, boatswain's mate, corporal of the watch, and Ordinary Signalman Grimes, meanwhile, had spread the news far and wide. Officers in scanty raiment, armed with binoculars, came up the after-hatches and congregated on the quarterdeck; and most of the ship's company, determined not to miss the fun, seemed to have left their hammocks and repaired to the upper deck. It was literally crowded with excited men, who were all talking at the top of their voices.

'There 'e is!' FitzJohnson heard a shrill voice saying as he retraced his footsteps to the bridge. 'See 'im?'

'Where?'

'There!'

'No, that ain't 'im. That's one o' them lights ashore.'

'No, it ain't; not wot I'm lookin' at!'

'I tells yer it is!'

'It ain't, I sez. Ye're lookin' at th' wrong one!'

FitzJohnson eventually arrived on the bridge, to find the captain, the commander, and the first lieutenant already there. The last-named seemed to be rather amused.

'You can fall your men out, Captain Chance,' Captain Spencer called out to the forecastle. 'I'm afraid there's nothing for you to shoot at to-night.'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said FitzJohnson, coming forward. 'Did you see the Zeppelin? There, sir,' he added, waving an arm; 'you can still see her green and white lights; and when I looked through the glasses just now I distinctly saw her shape.' He was rather afraid that the marines were being sent away prematurely.

Chase, the first lieutenant, unable to bottle himself up any longer, burst out into a hoarse chuckle.

The captain turned round. 'Is that you, Mr FitzJohnson?' he snapped.

'Yes, sir. I'——

'Are you trying to make damfools of the commander and myself?' demanded Captain Spencer. He seemed very much put out about something.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' stuttered the lieutenant. 'I don't quite understand what you mean.'

The commander suddenly flung back his head, and went off into a roar of laughter. 'Oh,' he gasped, 'this is the limit!'

FitzJohnson stared. Had they all taken leave of their senses?

'Did you really see a Zeppelin,' the skipper asked sarcastically, 'or did you merely get me up here in these garments so that I should catch my death of cold?'

'Yes, sir, I really did see it,' the lieutenant faltered, beginning to realise that he had made some horrible mistake.

'What! showing its white and green lights?'

'Yes, sir.'

The captain glowered. 'I believe you're a zealous officer, Mr FitzJohnson,' he said grimly; 'otherwise I should believe that you were treating me with unseemly levity.'

'I'm afraid I don't understand what you mean, sir.'

'You don't understand—eh? Well, next time you report a Zeppelin, kindly make quite certain that it is a Zeppelin. This time you've dragged us all out of our beds to look at a couple of rather bright stars.'

'Stars, sir! But I saw the shape behind the lights!'

The captain shook his head. 'Merely a cloud,' he explained. 'If you look at your so-called lights now, you'll see they haven't moved a fraction of an inch since you first saw them. The nearer clouds travelling across them gave you the impression that they were moving. One of 'em does look rather like a green light, I'll admit, but that's merely the dampness in the air.'

'I'm awfully sorry, sir,' FitzJohnson stammered, covered with confusion. 'I had no idea'——

'Of course you hadn't,' Captain Spencer interrupted. 'Nobody realises he's made a fool of himself until afterwards. However,' he added with a chuckle of amusement, 'I'm not really angry; but nobody, except perhaps the Astronomer-Royal, likes being dragged out of bed to look at celestial bodies. Good-night.'

'Good-night, sir,' said the culprit sheepishly.

The captain and the commander left the bridge together. They both seemed amused.

Chase came across to FitzJohnson. 'Dook, old man,' he laughed, digging him in the ribs, 'you've made a bally ass of yourself. The least you can do, after digging me out of my cabin at this unearthly hour, is to give me a cup of your cocoa. Grr, it's beastly cold!'

'Of course I will, No. 1. Come along.'

They left the bridge chuckling.

'Well,' remarked the yeoman of signals when they disappeared, 'I could 'a swore I'd seen 'im!'

Perhaps he could; but he, the cause of all the trouble in the first instance, had taken very good care to maintain a discreet position in the background during the captain's presence.

CHAPTER X.

WAR.

I.

Dinner in the wardroom had been over for some time, and the long table in the centre of the apartment was cleared. The mess, though it was close on ten o'clock, seemed very full of officers, far more crowded than on ordinary evenings, and it was noticeable that all wore 'monkey-jackets'—the ordinary eight-buttoned reefer coats usually seen in the daytime—instead of the customary mess-jackets, low waistcoats, and starched white shirts.

The unusual size of the gathering was accounted for partly by the fact that it happened to be the evening of 4th August 1914, when people were expecting things to happen, and partly because a six-inch gun casemate, which ordinarily served as an officers' smoking-room, had been bereft of its furniture, supplied with a number of evil-looking shell, and had otherwise been converted to the grim legitimate function for which it had originally been intended—that is, as an armoured position for the gun and its crew.

Pipes and cigarettes were going full blast, and the air in the wardroom was blue with tobacco-smoke. A few of the occupants were seated in arm-chairs or on the sofas, re-reading the morning papers or assimilating the latest news from the early evening editions, which had arrived with the last post at eight o'clock. But by far the greater number were arguing and talking loudly, as was their habit.

The mess itself looked rather bare, for pictures had vanished from the bulkheads, and the carpet, the piano, and certain other not strictly necessary articles of furniture had disappeared. They had gone the way of a good many other things—ashore out of harm's way, where their presence could not be the cause of possible fires or splinters. Less than a fortnight later, however, the younger members of the mess were all clamouring for the return of the piano. They couldn't have their sing-songs without it, they explained—which was perfectly true. Moreover, they said, they were sick unto death of Peter Wooten's bagpipes, the *padre's* banjo, and Boyle's penny whistle, the only other musical instruments in the mess; and so, after some discussion, the piano came back, like the landlady's cat. The cabins, too, were practically gutted. FitzJohnson, who loved comfort, nearly wept when he entered his. His silk hangings and curtains, pictures, and photographs had been torn ruthlessly from their fastenings and sent ashore. They had filched his carpet and his chest of drawers. A score or so of exquisite striped shirts, many suits of plain clothes, his uniform full dress, frock-coats, and mess-jackets, which fitted his figure like a glove, and shore-going boots of all kinds, shapes, and colours, had been packed up in a box and sent to his long-suffering outfitter's for storage. Little had been left him beyond his shallow bath, the drawers under the bunk, a bookcase containing the King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions, the Addenda thereto, and a washstand. Everything else seemed to have gone. He complained bitterly, poor fellow, for his exquisite soul rebelled at this wholesale desecration.

The general atmosphere in the wardroom was by no means gloomy or sad. On the contrary, every one seemed to be bubbling over with good spirits. In some cases, perhaps, the hilarity was a trifle forced, for when folk realise that war is practically inevitable they think they must appear to be cheerful whatever their personal feelings may be. As a consequence, they sometimes overdo it. But there were no signs of depression; neither did one see the fierce aspect, tightly shut mouth, puckered brow, and general 'do or die' appearance usually associated with the eve of hostilities by sensational writers. They all knew that the chances were fully 100 to 1 that they were about to take part in the greatest struggle the world had ever known. Germany was already at war with Russia; Teuton troops had violated the neutrality of Lùxemburg and Belgium, and had crossed the French frontier at various points; so it seemed impossible that Great Britain could refrain from joining in the conflict.

Ever since the early afternoon things had been humming. Urgent telegrams in cipher and wireless signals in code, the purport whereof was unknown to any but the senior officers, had been pouring in all day. Steam for full speed had been raised, and the ships were ready to move at an instant's notice; while Captain Spencer had been on board the flagship during the afternoon, and was away for a very long time. But not till afterwards did any of them know that the British ultimatum had already been handed to Germany.

Nobody was anything but cheerful. Their loyalty to their king, their anxiety to fight and overcome in a just cause, and, if need be, their readiness to die could not be expressed in mere words. There was no necessity for it. They took all that as a matter of course. They had been brought up to the idea ever since they had joined the service, so why talk about it?

Cashley, the fleet paymaster, was vainly endeavouring to get up a four at auction bridge. 'What

about it, *padre*?' he asked. 'Going to take a hand?'

His reverence, deep in the *Globe*, looked up. 'Bridge,' he said, shaking his head; 'not to-night, Pay; thanks, all the same.'

'What about you, No. 1?'

'Can't be done, Pay. Too busy, I'm afraid.'

'Busy! You're not busy now?'

Chase laughed. 'It's all jolly well for you to talk,' he answered good-naturedly. 'You've the prospect of a night in your bunk. I may be dragged out at any time to get the anchor up if we go to sea. Besides, the sailors are at night defence stations, and it's my morning watch. Heigho! it's jolly nigh time I turned in.' He glanced up at the clock.

'Won't any one play bridge?' the fleet paymaster inquired plaintively, looking round. 'The night's still young.'

All the usual habitués of the game shook their heads in dissent.

'This isn't an evening for bridge at all,' chipped in the engineer-commander disapprovingly, looking up over the edge of his paper. 'We don't want to be like Nero, fiddling while Rome burnt.'

'What bunkum you talk, chief!' retorted Cashley. 'Because we're going to war is no reason why we shouldn't have a little innocent amusement. What about Drake and his game of bowls on Plymouth Hoe?'

'That yarn's all rot!' said the engineer-commander. 'I know it's quoted in all the history books; but I don't believe it's true, all the same.'

'And I,' said Chase, knocking out his pipe, 'would most respectfully submit, my dear Pay, that the defeat of the Spanish Armada took place in Anno Domini 1588.'

'And what the deuce has that got to do with it?'

'Merely that such things as wireless telegraphy, submarines, and destroyers steaming thirty-five knots weren't invented when Sir Francis served in the Home Fleet under Lord Howard of Effingham.'

'Well,' Cashley observed with a sigh, seeing his efforts were quite futile, 'I'm sure bridge wasn't invented in Drake's time either, or he'd have taken to the game at once. It's an excellent stimulant for one's brain. However, since you're all so mouldy, I suppose I must hie me to the fastnesses of my apartment and turn in. Good-night, everybody.' He left the wardroom and closed the door behind him.

'Poor old Pay!' the first lieutenant remarked with a yawn; 'he's so devilish keen on his bridge. This is the first evening he's not had it for weeks, and the old dear misses it. However, I shall follow his most excellent example by retiring to my cabin.—Peter, old son,' he added, kicking the senior watch-keeper gently as he sprawled in an arm-chair, 'you're keeping the middle watch at the guns, aren't you?'

'I am, No. 1,' Wooten nodded. 'What of it?'

'Be a good chap, and have me called if war's declared, if any one fires a torpedo at us, or if you sight another Zeppelin.' He winked slyly at FitzJohnson. 'Also, at ten minutes to four; and tell the messenger to drag me out of bed. If you love me very much, Peter boy, you can have a nice cup of hot cocoa waiting for me when I come up.'

Peter rose from his chair and blinked sleepily. 'My love for you, No. 1' he declared with great gravity, making a low bow with his hand on his heart, 'has long since passed its platonic stage. I will prepare your cocoa with mine own fair hands, and would even embrace your chaste cheek before you retire to your couch.' He stretched out his arms and advanced.

'Touch me if you dare, varlet!' Chase exclaimed, avoiding him neatly, and darting to the door. —'Well, s'long, all you chaps; sleep well' He paused with the door open.—'I say, Dook, old man!'

FitzJohnson looked up.

'If you see another Zep, old bird, you might take a photo of it. There's a camera in my cabin.' He vanished, chuckling.

Some time after eleven P.M., when the wardroom had been closed for the night and the officers had retired to their cabins, the sound of frantic cheering suddenly echoed out over the water. It came from the direction of the flagship; and Tickle, the officer of the watch in the *Belligerent*, paused in his perambulation. It could only mean one thing.

Ten minutes later he was reading his Majesty's message to Sir John Jellicoe, the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet:

'At this grave moment in our national history, I send to you, and through you to the officers and men of the fleet of which you have assumed command, the assurance of my confidence that under your direction they will revive and renew the glories of the Royal Navy, and prove once again the sure shield of Britain and her Empire in her hour of trial.'

'And a jolly fine message, too,' Tickle muttered to himself. 'God bless him!'

Almost simultaneously came the official intimation that a state of war existed between Great Britain and Germany as from eleven P.M. on 4th August. The news spread like wildfire, and the 'Belligerents,' not to be outdone, left their hammocks *en masse*, crowded on the upper deck, and gave vent to their pent-up feelings and enthusiasm in volley after volley of cheers. They were quite irrepressible, and before very long the 'squeegee band,' [29] composed of two drums, a dozen fifes, many mouth-organs, and an unholy number of mess kettles and other noisy utensils, was marching round the deck making the night hideous. The noise did not cease till well after midnight.

War had come.

II.

The chaplain leant back in his chair with a yawn, knocked out and refilled his pipe, lit it, and then gazed wearily and with great distaste at the pile of letters and post-cards on the table in front of him. He, Peter Wooten, the senior watch-keeper, and Hannibal Chance, the captain of marines, were the three officers whose unenviable duty it was to censor all the outgoing private correspondence of the officers and men. As a rule they took the days in turn; but on Saturdays and Sundays, when the men had had more time to themselves and more opportunities for writing, the mail bound London-wards assumed colossal proportions, and all three censors had to buckle to to get the work done in time. To-day happened to be a Sunday, and his reverence had retired to his cabin after tea with a bag full of letters and post-cards to be read through before he took his evening service at six o'clock. Wooten and Chance were in their respective apartments doing the same.

It was a dismal job at the best of times, this prying into other people's private correspondence, and the *padre*, for one, hated it. But he realised it was necessary. The censorship had been enforced from the very outbreak of hostilities; and though letters could be written, provided they were presented unsealed, post-cards seemed more fashionable. They were examined, stamped 'Passed by Ship's Censor,' and then despatched in sealed bags to the G.P.O., London, whence they were forwarded to their destinations. Sealed letters, uncensored, could also be sent in the ordinary way; but these were subject to considerable delay in transmission, and were not very popular. They could, moreover, be examined at any time if considered at all suspicious. The movements of the fleet or of individual ships, and details of other vital matters which might be of use to the ever-inquisitive Hun, were rigidly taboo. The restrictions, sweeping as they were, did away at one fell swoop with practically all the subject-matter for an ordinary peace-time communication; but in spite of it officers and men found plenty to write about, and plenty of people to write to. Long-forgotten grandmothers, aunts, female cousins, and other people's sisters seemed to have come up to the scratch in a most extraordinary way, and those men who had few friends and relations, and whose correspondence was limited in ordinary times to perhaps one letter a month, now received and wrote three or four a week. Very nice for the men, no doubt, to be able to feel that those at home took an interest in their welfare, but rather trying for the censors in a ship with a company of eight to nine hundred souls.

Taking up his blue pencil, the *padre* selected a missive from the pile in front of him. It was from FitzJohnson, and was addressed to his outfitter:

> 'DEAR SIR,—I shall be much obliged if you will kindly send me as soon as possible one pair of uniform trousers, one pair of patent leather evening pumps, and one uniform cap, size 6⅞. The last monkey-jacket I had from you a week ago I am returning for alteration. It is rather tight across the'——

Having got thus far, his reverence inserted the letter in its envelope, moistened the flap with a small sponge, and then dabbed at it with a large rubber stamp and pushed it aside. It was 'passed' all right; but he vaguely wondered what on earth the Dook proposed to do with dancing-pumps on board a battleship in time of war.

The next missive, a post-card, written by some one to his wife, was slightly more exciting:

> 'MY DEAR WIFE,—a p.-c. to let you know that I am still alright, dear, hoping you and the children are the same dear. received your letter alright dear and I was pleased to hear that you are getting on alright also the children. well, Darling, I am sending you the flannel dear hope you will get it alright. I hope you get my Post-cards regular. I see by your letter you have not got any yet. let me know if you have got the money yet dear if not I will send you a letter to copy out and send for it it will be

quite alright dear. let me know as soon as possible Dear. so now with love to you dear and the children with many kisses from your loving husband,

'BERT.'

The *padre* chuckled, stamped the affectionate and strangely punctuated effusion, and passed on to the next.

It was a letter from one of the sub-lieutenants to his aunt Janet—a rich Aunt Janet, judging from the letter. He thanked her affectionately for one pound of peppermints, a beautiful knitted muffler, and a pair of mittens, and assured her that they would keep him as warm as toast during the rigours of the coming winter. And did Aunt Janet know of any place where one could buy cheap but reliable vacuum flasks to hold a quart, and a decent pair of six-power prism binoculars? He had broken his own, he said, but had heard that those made by Messrs Ross of Cockspur Street, London, were very good. He was not quite certain, however, and would like to have her advice before buying them. He added one or two bloodthirsty remarks about Huns, remarks calculated to reduce the good lady to a state of considerable alarm if she was at all inclined to be timid, furnished the information that he was as fit as a fiddle, and remained her loving nephew.

The censor smiled, remembered that the young officer in question had written to numerous other ladies thanking them for winter comforts, and asked himself how many mufflers, mittens, balaclava helmets, body belts, and pairs of socks the sub really possessed. They must run into dozens.

He stamped and sealed the letter, took the next envelope which came to hand, but, having read a few lines of its contents, frowned:

'DERE WIFE'—it ran—'i hope this finds you as it leaves me. we have had a terrible time, and last week we had a fierce and bloody battle in the North sea with the Germans, sinking many of them and some of ours likewise was sunk and many brave lads killed, we come back into harbour with the mainmast gorn and the funnels nearly falling down with the holes in them the ship was a terrible sight and the skipper was wounded bad but still fought on, the commander was killed and 40 men likewise the engineer commander and the chief pusser wot was in the sick bay at the time. Our ship done gallant and our decks running in blood i am alright and did not suffer a scratch but still feel the strain it was awful and now dere wife goodbye and many kisses from your loving husband

TED.'

The *Belligerent*, to the great disgust of her ship's company, had not as yet been in action, while every one of her officers and men was still very much alive and kicking. The whole letter was a tissue of lies from beginning to end, and what had induced the man to write it, or had led him to imagine that the censors would pass it, the *padre* could not think. He glanced through the bloodthirsty missive again, picked up the envelope and looked at the address, and then stretched out a hand and pressed an electric bell-push.

'I want to see Stoker Walley of No. 67 mess,' he said when a bluejacket messenger answered his ring.

Ten minutes later there came a knock at the door. 'Did ye send for Stoker Walley, surr?' inquired a voice.

'Yes,' said the *padre* wearily. 'Come inside, Walley.'

The stoker, a burly fellow six feet tall, and broad in proportion, removed his cap, entered gingerly, and stood strictly to attention. He was unused to being invited into officers' cabins.

'Did you write this letter to your wife, Walley? the chaplain asked, picking up the offending missive.

'Oi did, surr,' said the man, not the least abashed.

'Don't you know that the censorship regulations forbid you to say anything about the movements of ships or what they're doing?'

'Oi do, surr. But what Oi've put in me letter isn't what's been happenin', surr.' He was perfectly correct in his statement, for what he had written was nothing but the wildest fiction.

The *padre* smiled. 'No,' he remarked, turning round in his chair and looking up at him, 'I dare say it isn't true. But doesn't it strike you, Walley, that you're doing a very wrong thing in writing like this? The letter's a falsehood from beginning to end.'

'Oi didn't mean no harm, surr,' the stoker protested, rather puzzled.

'No, perhaps not. Have you ever heard of the Defence of the Realm Act?'

'Oi have not, surr.'

'Well, I believe the Act lays it down that any one spreading false information is liable to a very severe penalty. You don't want to be punished, do you?'

'Oi do not, surr,' said Walley stolidly, quite unable to understand how he had offended. 'Oi've never been a defaulter since I joined the navy.'

'You'll soon get into trouble if you write letters like this,' the *padre* observed grimly. 'Suppose I took this one to the captain, and asked him to read it? I think you'd find he would regard it as a very serious offence.'

'Oi'm sorry, surr, if Oi've done wrong, surr,' the stoker answered, nervously fidgeting with his cap. 'Oi only wrote a bit of a yarn like t' amuse the missis.'

'To amuse your wife!' ejaculated the chaplain. 'Surely, surely your wife must be feeling a little anxious about you?'

'P'r'aps, surr. Oi don't rightly know,' admitted the culprit. 'P'r'aps she is a bit anxious like, surr.'

'Of course she is, Walley. Any woman is bound to be anxious with her husband at sea in war-time. Tell me now, truthfully, do you really think that a letter like this will make her feel any less anxious? You go into gruesome details of a fight at sea which has never taken place, and expect her to be—er—amused. 'Pon my soul, I've never heard of such a thing.'

'Oi'm sorry, surr. Oi didn't mean no harm.'

The chaplain sighed. 'Well,' he pointed out, 'I consider you acted very wrongly in writing this letter at all; and besides that, you're being very unfair to your wife. After all, she deserves a little consideration—what?'

'Ye haven't seen me wife, surr,' said the stoker. 'She likes a bit of excitement now and then.'

The chaplain got rather annoyed. 'I dare say she does,' he answered; 'but that is no excuse for your sending her a letter which is nothing but a pack of lies. Now look here, Walley,' he added very sternly, 'if I took this matter forward you would find yourself in serious trouble. I don't want that to happen, though, so I'll tear it up; but you must promise me faithfully you'll never write a letter like this again. Will you promise?'

'Oi will, surr,' said the man, looking genuinely frightened. 'Thankin' ye very much all the same, surr.'

The censor tore the letter into minute fragments and dropped it into the waste-paper basket. 'There,' he said, 'that's the last you'll hear of it, Walley; but don't let it occur again. You can keep the envelope, and if you're quick you'll just have time to write another letter before the mail leaves. No horrors this time, mind. Tell your wife you're well and happy, and all that sort of thing. D'you understand?'

'Oi do, surr,' the stoker replied sheepishly, taking the envelope. 'Thank ye, surr.' He left the cabin.

'Heigho!' yawned the *padre*, resuming his unwelcome occupation; 'I've been in the service for seven years, but it seems I don't understand the men yet. I wonder if I ever shall!' He often asks himself the same question.

III.

'I'm fed up wi' this 'ere war!' exclaimed Pincher Martin, flinging away the fag-end of a cigarette with a petulant gesture. 'It's bin goin' on fur over four bloomin' months, an' we ain't see'd a ruddy thing yet!'

'Th' way some o' you blokes talks makes me fair sick,' Able Seaman Billings retorted. 'S'pose yer 'ad see'd somethin', as yer calls it, yer might 'ave lost th' number o' yer mess. W'y carn't yer be content wi' wot ye've got? That's wot I wants ter know.'

Pincher snorted. 'Content wi' wot I've got!' he jeered. ''Ow kin I be? I reckons I wants ter fight, same as other blokes.'

Joshua laughed. ''Ark at th' little cock-sparrer!' he said, turning to M'Sweeny. 'Did ye 'ear wot 'e sed, Tubby?'

'I did, chum,' agreed M'Sweeny severely, sucking hard at a particularly evil-smelling pipe. ''E sez 'e wants ter fight, an' I reckons 'e'll git orl 'e wants afore long. We'll all git more'n we wants in th' way o' fightin' afore we've finished this 'ere war. Them Germans ain't fools.'

'Don't yer want ter fight yerself, Tubby?' Pincher inquired.

M'Sweeny thought for a moment. 'Carn't say 'xactly as 'ow I don't, Pincher, an' carn't say as 'ow I

does.'

'Wot yer jine th' navy fur else?'

'Jine the navy! W'y, I jines th' navy 'cos I thought it wus a good perfession.'

'Fightin' perfession,' Pincher supplemented.

'Yus; but yer don't seem t' understand wot I means,' Tubby explained. 'It's like this 'ere. I don't mind fightin' if it comes ter fightin'; but I sez that any bloke wot sez 'e likes it arter 'e's once 'ad it is a bloomin' liar. I ain't afraid o' them Germans,' he added. 'I ain't afraid o' any one wot I knows of; but I sez war's a norrible thing.'

'An' so it is,' agreed Joshua. 'You wait till yer 'as yer fu'st little bu'st up, Pincher; yer won't want another fur a bit. It's orl right ter talk th' same as yer do, but yer don't know wot it's like same as me an' Tubby.'

'But you an' Tubby ain't never bin in action,' Pincher protested.

'No, we ain't,' said Billings. 'But we ain't 'ot-'eaded young blokes same as you. We thinks abart things, an' looks at things more serious like. We doesn't mind fightin' w'en it comes; but we ain't anxious ter fight 'cos we likes it—see? I reckons no bloke really does, an' them as talks most gen'rally does least w'en it comes ter th' time. Me an' Tubby 'as seen things you 'aven't,' he added; 'so we two knows wot we're talkin' abart.'

M'Sweeny gave an assenting nod.

''Ow d'yer mean?' Pincher wanted to know. 'Wot is it ye've seen wot I ain't?'

'I'll tell yer,' said Billings.—'Tubby, d'yer remember that 'ere gun explosion we 'ad w'en me an' you wus shipmates up th' Straits?'

'Yus, I do, chum.'

'Explosion! 'Ow did it 'appen?' Pincher demanded. 'Spin us th' yarn.'

'Ain't I spinnin' it as fast as I can?' said Joshua, rather testily. 'Don't be so impatient! Well, we 'ad our six-inch guns in that ship in casemates like we've got 'ere. Yer knows wot a casemate is, don't yer?'

Pincher did not condescend to reply.

'Well, they wus firin' at th' time, an' somethin' 'appened, an' a cartridge hexploded afore th' breech o' th' gun was properly closed.' Joshua paused.

'An' wot 'appened?'

'There was an 'ell of an explosion an' a big flare up, an' four blokes belongin' ter th' gun wus blowed sky-'igh, an' orl th' others wus badly messed up. I wus in there soon arter it 'appened. It makes me fair sick ter think of it.'

'Wot! blood?' Pincher queried breathlessly.

'Blood!' Billings sniffed. 'Buckets of it, an' bits o' poor blokes wot 'ad bin breathin' men a few minutes afore plastered orl over th' sides an' roof. 'Orrors ain't in it. Arms an' legs blowed orf, an' th' 'ole place drippin' somethin' crool!—Wasn't it, Tubby?'

'It wus, chum,' M'Sweeny corroborated.

'I reckons that if ye'd seen that, Pincher, ye'd never say as 'ow ye likes th' idea o' fightin',' Joshua went on. 'If we goes into action it'll be somethin' like that, only wuss.'

'Don't sound good,' Pincher admitted grudgingly.

'Don't look good neither, w'en bits o' blokes 'as ter be scraped up in shovels,' said M'Sweeny grimly. 'We ain't frightened o' fightin', me an' Billings isn't, yer see, but we've see'd things wot you youngsters 'asn't, an' we knows wot it's like.'

Martin made no reply.

So, on the whole, their only feelings, after four months of war, were those of regret and envy—regret because they themselves had not been in action, envy for those of their comrades who had. They were sorry for those of their relations and friends who had been killed in action ashore and afloat, but, like the inscrutable people they were, accepted their fate in a calm and philosophical spirit which must have seemed positively callous to any outsider. To people who do not understand them, however, our seamen always do appear callous. They seem to treat death in a very casual and light-hearted fashion, due, perhaps, to the fact that they themselves have stared Him in the face so often that they have become inured to His presence. Familiarity with danger does breed contempt for death.

But yet, in reality, bluejackets are among the kindest-hearted men alive, and the sight of a howling infant in a street will attract the hard-earned coppers from their pockets like steel filings to a magnet. It is said that one child in a certain naval port discovered this generous trait, and invented a new profession on the strength of it. He did not beg or whine—did not utter a word, in fact; but, with true commercial instinct, plastered his face with mud, stationed himself near the dockyard gates when the libertymen were streaming back to their ships in the evening, and wept bitterly—merely wept. The pathetic sight aroused the bluejackets' sympathy and opened their purse-strings, and at the end of the nightly performance the youth—aged eight—went home with a cheerful grin and his pockets bulging with pennies. The game could not go on for long, of course; but it was a very paying one while it lasted.

But though Christmas was nearly upon them, and they had never had a 'scrap,' as they termed it, the men secretly revelled in the thought that they, in common with the remainder of the navy and army, also came under the category of what to the great British public were 'our gallant defenders.' Their natural modesty forbade them thinking about themselves as 'gallant,' 'brave,' or 'heroic,' adjectives which were sometimes hurled at their heads by people at home. They were merely doing their ordinary peace-time job, with a few extra dangers thrown in in the shape of submarines and mines; but they did derive no small satisfaction in realising that folk at home recognised that they were doing their bit, and liked to know that a sudden and very overwhelming interest was being taken in their welfare. Overwhelming in more senses than one.

Wives, mothers, aunts, female cousins, sweethearts, and lady friends seemed to be consoling themselves for the absence at sea of their husbands, sons, nephews, cousins, 'young men,' and acquaintances by an orgy of knitting. Avalanches of woollen home-knitted mufflers, balaclava helmets, mittens, gloves, jerseys, and body-belts, besides shoals of socks, soon came pouring in by every mail, until every officer and man in the *Belligerent* had received a full outfit of everything necessary to keep out the cold. They were duly grateful for the kind attention, for the mufflers of thick blue wool and the warm socks were as different from the ordinary articles of commerce as cheese is from chalk. Some of the things had stamped post-cards attached on which the fair knitters desired an acknowledgment; and, judging from what the censors said, the ladies were not disappointed. Others bore little silver paper horseshoes for good luck, while many of the socks arrived with cigarettes and chocolates, either loose or in packets, snugly ensconced inside.

'I thought there wus somethin' wrong wi' this 'ere!' Pincher remarked one day, removing his right sock, turning it inside-out, and discovering the coagulated remains of several chocolate creams. 'I thought it felt a bit knobby-like w'en I puts 'im on, an' now I've bin an' gorn an' wasted 'em!' It was a dire calamity, for Pincher had a sweet tooth, and regretted the loss of his chocolates far more than the energy he would presently have to expend on cleansing the sock of its stickiness.

People who did not knit sent other things instead. Well-to-do folk provided gramophones and records, boxes of fruit and game, vacuum flasks, warm waistcoats, books, jig-saw puzzles, and games, all of which were very welcome. One public-spirited gentleman, a yacht-owner, forwarded a consignment of many dozen brand-new 'sevenpennies,' and was blessed for his gift. Societies and clubs sent more reading matter; and though it is true that *Chatterbox* for 1891 and bound copies of a poultry journal for 1887 do not appeal to modern sailors as they should, the greater portion of what arrived was eagerly seized upon and as eagerly read.

The men's friends themselves contributed regular consignments of newspapers, tobacco, cigarettes, soap, tooth-powder, biscuits, home-made cakes, sweets of all kinds, fruit, tomatoes done up in flimsy brown-paper parcels, and many other articles of food and utility too numerous to be mentioned in detail. These gifts also were most acceptable, though it was found that bull's-eyes and peppermints sometimes had an unhappy knack of melting in transit, while as often as not the fruit and tomatoes were found at the very bottom of the mail-bags in the form of a nauseating, ready-made salad well impregnated with brown paper, string, and the rapidly disintegrating contents of other people's parcels.

What with the extra food and their warm garments, the figures of the 'gallant defenders' rapidly assumed elephantine proportions. Thin sailors became bulbous; fat sailors became colossal. They had never had such a time in all their lives.

IV.

Christmas came and went; but, though the ship's company made a point of keeping up the time-honoured traditions and customs, things were hardly the same as usual. They did not suffer from lack of seasonable fare, for volleys of plum-puddings and other comestibles from home had temporarily superseded the deluge of mufflers, mittens, and cigarettes; while the canteen did a roaring trade in turkeys, geese, boiled hams, fruit, holly, and chains of coloured paper for decorations.

On the morning of the 25th itself the squadron happened to be in harbour, and at daylight the *Belligerent* and every other ship appeared with the customary branches of fir and evergreen lashed to the mastheads and the yardarms.

At eight o'clock came a signal from the vice-admiral wishing all the officers and men under his command 'A Happy Christmas;' and at divisions at nine-thirty the officers took the opportunity of saying the same.

Then came church and the issue of Princess Mary's gifts; and if the donors to the fund could have seen the way these gilt boxes, with their cards, pipes, packets of tobacco, and cigarettes, were appreciated by their recipients they would have felt that their generosity had been repaid. A gift was always a gift and something to be appreciated, but a gift from a Royal Princess was to be treasured as an heirloom. As a consequence, the greater number of the men sent their boxes home by registered post without smoking the contents. They were far too valuable to be kept on board when there was a chance of the ship being torpedoed by a hostile submarine or sunk by a mine.

Shortly before noon the band assembled outside the captain's cabin, and as eight bells struck, Captain Spencer, preceded by the musicians playing 'The Roast Beef of Old England' and the 'funny party' with blackened faces and attired in a variety of strange costumes, and followed by a procession of all the officers, made the usual tour of the mess-deck. Some of the messes were embellished with festoons of paper chains, sprigs and bunches of holly and mistletoe, and home-made mottoes. Others were hardly decorated at all, but all the tables were well laden with food. At the foot of each mess stood a man with a plate of cake, pastry, or pudding, which he offered to all the officers in turn as they passed by. Every one of them took a small piece, wished the occupants of the mess 'A Happy Christmas,' nibbled the cake or whatever it was, and then hastily secreted the remains in his pocket. There were several dozen messes to be visited, and a few ounces of stodgy cake from each of them would provide more than enough for a schoolboy.

Opposite one of the chief petty officers' messes the procession came to a halt close to a blackboard on which was chalked in large letters:

'The Ship's Company of H.M.S. *Belligerent* wish Captain Spencer and the officers a very happy Christmas and a bright and joyful New Year. They deeply regret that up to the present Captain Spencer has not had the opportunity of taking them into action, but are anxiously awaiting the time when he will.'

The captain smiled, took the proffered chalk, and made his reply.

'The same to you,' he wrote. 'Captain Spencer will be only too pleased to take the ship into action whenever the enemy give him the chance. When the time comes he and the officers know that they may rely on the "Belligerents" to give a good account of themselves. Let 'em all come!'

Loud and prolonged cheering before the procession moved on.

It took fully half-an-hour to do the whole round of the messes; but at last the officers disappeared to their own lunch, and left the men to go on with their meal. They acquitted themselves nobly.

Soon after lunch, when Tickle had retired to his cabin and was composing himself for his usual afternoon slumber, there came a knock at his door. 'Well, what is it?' he inquired lazily.

'It's me, sir,' said Petty Officer Casey, insinuating his head through the curtain. 'The foc's'lemen sends their compliments, sir, an' would yer be so kind as to visit 'em in their messes for a few minutes?'

Tickle yawned, hoisted himself out of his bunk, and stepped outside. Here he was promptly seized by four stalwart A.B.'s, hoisted shoulder-high, and, with a man in front playing triumphantly upon a mouth-organ, was carried off. Down ladders and up ladders they went, through cheering crowds on the mess-deck, until they finally allowed him to slide gracefully to earth among the men of his own forecastle division.

They proceeded to drink his health in navy rum, a compliment which he was bound to return; but even then the ordeal was not over.

'They'd like yer to say a few words, sir,' Petty Officer Casey prompted him hoarsely.

Tickle cleared his throat nervously. 'I'm not much of a hand at making a speech,' he began; 'but I'm very glad to come here and wish you all a happy Christmas again. From what I can see'—he looked round the tables—'you all seem to have been enjoying yourselves. My only regret—our only regret, I should say—is that we haven't had a chance of meeting the enemy yet; but that's a pleasure we all look forward to'——

Here he was interrupted by loud cheers and bangings on the tables.

'It's quite unnecessary for me to tell you that I know the *Belligerent* will do jolly well when the time comes, and that the men of the forecastle division will do better than any one else'——

Loud cries of ''Ear, 'ear!' and more shouting.

'I've clean forgotten what I was going to say,' he went on, laughing. 'Oh yes. I'm sure the forecastlemen will do better than any one else when it comes to a scrap; but don't get down-

hearted if we have to wait for some time before we get it. Other ships have had a run for their money, and we haven't; but we're all doing our bit for the country, and it's up to us to do our duty wherever the Admiralty choose to send us. At the same time, I hope the war will not be over before we have our look in. Well,' he concluded, 'I don't think there is anything else I can say, except to wish you all the best of luck.' He lifted the fanny [30] to his lips and sipped its contents.

'An' th' same to you, sir!' came a roar. 'Three cheers for Lootenant Tickle!'

'One more, boys!' somebody yelled excitedly. 'Hip, hip, hip, HURRAH!'

Tickle, feeling very awkward and red in the face, bowed his acknowledgments. 'Thank you very much indeed,' he said quietly. He could not express his feelings in mere words.

The *Belligerent* was a happy ship, and the officers were popular with their men, and many of them, including the commander, the engineer-commander, all the officers of divisions, captain of marines, and most of the midshipmen and warrant-officers, were ruthlessly dragged from their afternoon slumber and carried forward to the mess-decks to make speeches. Christmas, the time of good-fellowship and goodwill, only came once a year, but it was one of the rare occasions when the men were able to show their officers what they really thought of them.

So, taking it all round, they managed to enjoy themselves, for bluejackets always succeed in being cheerful under any circumstances; but nobody could help having a feeling at the back of his mind that this particular Christmas was not quite the same as others, as indeed it was not. They were thinking of their homes and of what was happening there, and many of them, officers as well as men, had not set foot on shore for weeks—months, in some cases.

Boxing Day found the squadron at sea.

CHAPTER XI.

BLACK FRIDAY.

I.

''Appy Noo Year, chum,' said the lookout-man on the starboard side of the *Belligerent's* bridge, as Pincher Martin came up to relieve him at five minutes past midnight on the morning of 1st January. 'Lawd!' he added with a shiver, stamping his sea-booted feet, 'I shall be glad ter git inter me bloomin' 'ammick.'

'Noo Year, is it?' Pincher queried with a prolonged yawn. 'Well, th' compliments o' th' season to yer, Shiner White. 'Strewth!' he added, 'it's a bit parky, ain't it?' He undid the toggles of his thick lammy coat, [31] and gave the muffler another turn round his neck.

The other man nodded. 'There ain't nothink in sight,' he went on hastily, anxious not to prolong the conversation; 'but if yer sees a light or anythink, look out yer sings out sharp an' loud, so that th' orficer o' the watch'll 'ear yer. S'long, chum!'

'S'long, Shiner! 'Appy dreams.'

Pincher, left to his own devices, looked about him. The squadron was at sea, and to his unpractised eye the night seemed unusually fine. What little wind there was seemed to be coming in from the south-westward in fitful, erratic puffs, and the great ship rode over a smooth, gradually increasing swell without perceptible movement. If he had been a weather prophet the state of the sea and the sky would have warned him to expect a change in the weather; but he was a novice at such things, and the signs and portents of sky and sea conveyed little to his mind.

The moon was up, and the night was not really dark as nights go; but every now and then the brilliance of the moon was temporarily dimmed by great high cloud-masses travelling down from windward across the face of the blue, star-spangled heavens. Away to the south-westward a heavy piled-up bank of dark hue, looking for all the world like a gigantic mountain range overtopping the horizon, was gradually encroaching on the sky as it mounted up and up into space. Its upper edges were frayed and fretted by the wind, and occasional wisps of cloud torn from the main mass were being flung off into space by the upper air-currents, to come scurrying to leeward in low-lying, streaky fragments like spun silk. They were mares'-tails, and the swell and the watery halo round the moon were other bad tokens. They portended wind—wind, and plenty of it. Soon the sky would be completely overcast. Before daylight it would probably be blowing hard.

The *Belligerent* was somewhere near the tail of the line of battleships. A short distance in front of her came the huge hull of the next ahead clearly silhouetted against the sky. Farther ahead again were the dark outlines of other vessels, their shapes getting smaller and less distinct as they merged in the deep shadows on the horizon.

On board the *Belligerent* herself half the seamen were at their stations at the guns ready for repelling a possible torpedo attack, and the other half, who had been relieved at midnight, had just retired to their hammocks for four hours' rest before being called up for the morning watch at four o'clock. The ship was in the charge of the officer of the watch, who leant placidly against the standard compass on the upper bridge gazing at the next ahead; while Colomb, the navigator, was asleep on the settee in the charthouse. Captain Spencer was in his sleeping-cabin just underneath, and was dozing, fully dressed, in an arm-chair in front of the stove. The book he had been reading had dropped to the floor, and Joe, his fox-terrier, lay curled up in a tight little bundle at his feet. The captain was a light sleeper at the best of times, and the least unusual sound, even the opening of the door, would have brought him to his feet in an instant. As an extra precaution there was an electric bell screwed to the bulkhead close beside his left ear, and if the officer of the watch desired his immediate presence all he had to do was to place a finger on a push close by the standard compass. The resulting jangle would have roused the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, let alone the skipper, who never indulged in anything but cat-naps at sea. The officers of watches were well aware of it, for Captain Spencer had a habit of prowling about at night, and frequently came on to the bridge when he was least expected. Once or twice he had found the ship some distance out of station, and then there had been trouble.

Of what really occurred, how long it lasted, and of the actual sequence of events, Pincher had a very hazy recollection. He remembered noticing the captain come on to the bridge and start walking up and down with his hands in his great-coat pockets and his dog padding softly after him. Then, quite suddenly, and for no apparent reason, there came the shattering roar of a heavy explosion. The ship quivered and shook violently; and, glancing aft with his heart in his mouth, Pincher saw a great column of whity-gray water towering high over the boat-deck half-way along

the starboard side. He watched it spell-bound. The mass hung for a moment glimmering in the half-light, and then tottered and fell with a sound like a waterfall. He could feel the damp spray of it on his face.

The familiar throb of the engines died away, and there came the roaring bellow of escaping steam; and the ship, evidently holed far below the water-line, heeled over to starboard. Then the roaring of the steam ceased, and there came a moment's dead silence, followed by excited shouting as the men who had been asleep in their hammocks thronged on to the upper deck.

The whole thing happened so suddenly and unexpectedly that for the moment Captain Spencer was taken by surprise; and, running to the after side of the bridge, he stood there gripping the rail spasmodically, with a look of utter astonishment on his face. A bare instant later, however, he turned forward again with a gesture of annoyance; while Joe, taking it for some new game for his especial benefit, frisked beside him. 'Down, Joe! down!' Pincher heard him say in his ordinary voice.—'Stop both engines!' came his first order.—'Officer of the watch!'

'Sir.'

'Go down and tell the commander to get the collision-mat out, and then to turn out all boats. He's not to lower them without orders from me; and tell him to let me know the damage as soon as he can!'

'Ay, ay, sir,' said English quite calmly, leaving the bridge.

The captain turned on his heel and dictated a signal informing the flagship of what had occurred. Pincher watched, for even now Captain Spencer's face was absolutely inscrutable, and showed nothing of the awful anxiety which must have been in his heart.

The commander, who had rushed from his cabin when the crash came, had already taken charge on deck. Order was evolved out of chaos, and the shouting had ceased. An instant later a bugle blared the 'Still,' and the boatswain's mates could be heard piping.

There was dead silence among the men as the word was passed, and then the bugle sounded 'Carry on,' and the tramping of feet could be heard as the ship's company ran to their stations.

All except a few unimportant watertight doors, which were closed at the last moment by specially detailed men, were always kept shut at sea; so little could be done to add to the safety of the ship beyond endeavouring to prevent the ingress of water.

The men were well disciplined. They must have felt nervous, must have realised that there was an enormous hole below the water-line through which the water was pouring like a mill-race; added to this, it was dark, and there were no lights on deck. But there were not the smallest signs of panic or confusion. They behaved splendidly, and worked silently under the orders of their officers as if it were an ordinary peace-time evolution instead of grim reality.

Pincher himself was undecided for the moment as to what he should do. Ought he to join his part of the ship and assist in getting out the collision-mat, or should he remain where he was? He had no orders to leave his post, but it was hardly likely that any one would trouble his head about him now. For a moment he was torn with doubt, but finally made up his mind that he would stay on the bridge. He might be of some use in carrying messages, he thought.

The stricken vessel seemed to be leaning more and more over to starboard; but before very long the collision-mat, a large square of several thicknesses of the stoutest canvas well thrummed with oakum, was being lowered into place under the bottom. It was designed, by being stretched taut over the orifice, to reduce the flow of water through a comparatively small hole caused by a collision with another ship, and it seemed hardly likely that it would be of any use in checking the inrush through the gigantic rent caused by an underwater explosion; but there was no harm in trying it. It might do some good.

'Haul away the bottom line!' the first lieutenant's voice could be heard. 'That's the way, lads! Away with her!'

''Vast hauling!' came the next order, accompanied by the shrill trilling of a boatswain's whistle. 'Away with the fore and afters!'

The mat was out of sight below the water, its bottom corner dragged taut against the ship's side by the bottom line passing under the keel and hauled taut on the opposite side of the deck, and the upper corner held in place by the depth-line. The fore and afters were the ropes secured to the side corners, and they, on being hauled taut and belayed, held it out square.

'Mat's placed, sir!' came Chase's voice again.

The wind had increased, and white-capped seas had replaced the smooth swell of an hour before. The ship, listing to an angle of about fifteen degrees, seemed to be remaining fairly steady, but she was appreciably lower in the water, and the starboard edge of the forecastle was barely six feet above the crests of the waves as they raced by.

The cutters at the davits had been turned out ready for lowering, but all the smaller boats, galley, whalers, and gigs, had been landed. Hatherley, who was working the steam boat-hoist used for getting out the heavier boats stowed on the booms between the after funnel and the mainmast, had the derrick topped and the largest rowing-boat in the ship—the forty-two-foot launch, which, at a pinch, could carry one hundred and forty men—hooked on all ready for swinging out into the water as soon as he got orders to do so.

Circling round the injured ship were a couple of light cruisers which had been sent by the vice-admiral to render what assistance they could. Flashing-signals were passing between them and the *Belligerent*, and they were evidently asking if they should lower their boats.

'Tell 'em to wait,' Pincher heard Captain Spencer say to a signalman, without a tremor in his voice. 'Tell 'em to wait. I think we shall be able to keep afloat.'

The sky was nearly overcast, and the night had become very dark, and all the remainder of the squadron had vanished. They were only acting in accordance with their orders, however, for since the loss of the *Aboukir*, the *Cressy*, and the *Hogue* in the North Sea the previous September, it had been definitely laid down that heavy, deep-draught ships were not to go to the assistance of vessels which had been torpedoed or mined, lest they should share the same fate. It went sadly against the grain for British officers to be forced to leave comrades in distress; but every one realised the necessity for the order, and the two small cruisers were the only ships available for the work of rescue.

'Messenger!' the captain called.

No reply.

'Here, boy, come here!' he went on, catching sight of Pincher on the starboard side of the bridge.

Martin went forward, and felt himself grabbed by the sleeve.

'Go down and tell the commander that I'm waiting to know what damage there is,' Captain Spencer said hurriedly. 'Away you go!'

Pincher scrambled down the sloping ladder with difficulty, but had barely reached the boat-deck to go aft when he cannoned into Commander Travers coming in the opposite direction. 'The capten would like ter know wot th' damage is, sir,' he explained.

'All right, I'm on my way to tell him,' the officer returned curtly. 'Get out of the way, boy!'

Martin stood aside, and followed him up the ladder again, without really meaning to overhear his conversation with the captain.

'How goes it, Travers?' was Captain Spencer's first anxious question.

'Pretty bad, sir,' the commander replied with the least trace of anxiety in his voice. 'Some of the boiler-rooms are flooded, and the water seems to be making its way forward and aft. One or two bulkheads have gone already!'

'Good God!' the captain exclaimed; 'is it as bad as that? Is the mat doing any good?'

The commander shook his head. 'Might just as well try to stop the hole with a bit o' stickin'-plaster, sir,' he said tersely. 'I've just seen the engineer-commander,' he went on, 'and he tells me he's doing all he can, but that the water's gaining on us fast. I've got men down below shoring up bulkheads to prevent their bursting, but I doubt if they'll do much good. However, sir,' he added hopefully, 'she hasn't listed much during the last few minutes, and perhaps we'll be able to save her yet.'

'Pray God we shall, Travers!' Captain Spencer returned gravely. 'You'd better get all the boats out as soon as you can, and keep 'em alongside; but don't allow the men into them until I give orders. I'll tell the cruisers to send theirs across, but we'll make 'em lie off for the time being. Well, so long, commander, in case we don't meet each other again. Do all you can.'

'I hope it's not so bad as I think, sir,' Travers said with a forced laugh as he turned to leave the bridge. 'It's a damned nasty night to go swimmin', I must say. It was a submarine, I suppose, sir?'

'Must have been. By the way, you'd better warn 'em to blow up their swimming-collars.' The captain was ever mindful of his men.

'I will, sir. What about you?'

'Don't worry about me, man. You see to the ship's company. I'll look out for myself.'

The commander disappeared.

The time passed. There was still a chance of the ship remaining afloat, and by about three o'clock, merely as a precautionary measure, the launch and the pinnace had been hoisted out and the boats lowered; though one cutter, lowered too rapidly, had capsized and disappeared. During the interval the ship did not seem to have listed any more to starboard, and favourable reports

had come from down below as to the chances of remaining afloat. In fact, they were all congratulating themselves that the damage had been overrated, when another heavy explosion roared out from the port side aft.

'By God!' muttered the captain under his breath; 'that's another torpedo!'

The *Belligerent*, with a fresh wound open to the sea, shuddered violently, and then gave a sickening lurch to starboard, and lay over until her masts were at an angle of thirty degrees from the vertical. The starboard side of the upper deck was under water, and the other lifted high in the air, while the inclination was so great that it was barely possible to walk. Realising that the end could not be long delayed, Captain Spencer dragged himself to the bridge-rail and raised a megaphone to his lips. 'Abandon ship!' he roared in a voice which could be heard above the howling of the wind and the raging of the sea. 'Save yourselves, men! Save yourselves!'

The word was passed along, but still there was no undue haste or confusion. Stokers and other men of the engine-room department who had been employed below until the last moment, some of them clad in their grimy working-clothes, others nearly naked, came pouring up the hatchways leading to the upper deck.

A cloud drifted away from the face of the moon, and a subdued silvery light lit up the awful scene.

The boats, plunging wildly on the rapidly rising sea, pounded and crashed alongside. A small group of officers stood beside each one superintending the disembarkation, and the men, standing in long queues, could be seen jumping into them one by one. Several, leaping too late or too early, fell between the boats and the ship's side, and were never seen again.

The doctors and the sick-berth staff, unmindful of their own safety, passed their sick and ailing into the boats, and remained behind themselves.

'Steady, lads! steady!' the chaplain, gallant man that he was, could be heard saying coolly. 'One at a time! Keep cool, boys! Keep cool!'

Many men, relying on their life-belts or swimming-collars, had flung themselves overboard and were swimming in the direction of the cruisers, whose rescuing boats were on their way across as fast as their eager crews could drive them. A certain number of the swimmers were eventually picked up and saved, but by far the greater proportion perished in the wild tumult. Every one knew that there was room for barely more than a fifth of the ship's company in the boats; but, in the face of almost certain death, there was no panic.

''Ullo, 'Orace,' a burly stoker remarked to a friend with a laugh, 'comin' swimmin'?'

'Looks like it, chum,' answered the other glumly, eyeing the white-capped seas with nervous apprehension. 'Ain't much of a night fur a picnic like, this 'ere, is it?'

'Rottenest bloomin' regatta ever I saw,' rejoined the first speaker, who was attired in nothing but a singlet and an inflated swimming-collar. ''Ow's this fur a bathin'-costoom? What'd my ole 'ooman say if she see'd me on th' beach at Margit in this 'ere? Ow!' he yelled, as a breaking wave deluged him with icy spray. 'Gawd! ain't it cold? Come on, boys; come an' 'ave a dip! Any more fur th' shore?'

The others hung back.

'Wot! not comin'?' he went on, walking to the edge of the boat-deck and gazing out at the sea. 'Well, s'long, blokes. 'Ere goes!'

He clambered down the ship's side on to the net-shelf, waited till a large sea came swishing past, and then slipped into the water, to vanish in a smother of foam. An instant later he reappeared, swimming strongly in the direction of the nearer cruiser. He was never seen again.

Somebody started the chorus of 'Tipperary' to cheer the flagging spirits of his shipmates, but the gallant effort met with little response. Numbers of men, trying to nerve themselves for the ordeal of leaping overboard and of saving themselves by swimming, shrank back at the sight of the raging sea. It was enough to appal the bravest heart, and the ship, though sinking fast, still seemed to offer a safer refuge than that wild waste of water.

The captain, holding on to the bridge-rail to prevent himself from being carried off his feet, surveyed the scene calmly. 'Jump, men! jump!' he bellowed to a hesitating group on the boat-deck. 'For God's sake, jump! It's your only chance!' Turning round, he noticed that Pincher and one or two signalmen were still on the bridge. 'What are you doing here?' he demanded with a touch of his old asperity. 'The ship's sinking! Get down out of it, and save yourselves!'

Pincher and some of the others obeyed, but the chief yeoman of signals, noticing that the captain wore no life-belt or swimming-collar, calmly proceeded to divest himself of a cork jacket. 'Take this, sir,' he said, handing it across; 'I've got my collar.'

Captain Spencer pushed it away. 'Use it yourself, man!' he said firmly. 'Use it yourself!'

'But I don't want it, sir,' the chief yeoman persisted.

'Do what you're told, Morris,' came the answer. 'Leave the bridge and save yourself; she'll go in another minute or two! I'll look out for myself!'

Morris hesitated for another instant, saw his commanding officer was in earnest, and left the bridge.

'Good luck to you, Morris!' the captain called out after him.

'Good luck, sir.'

Captain Spencer, alone with his dog, leant down and lifted him into his arms. 'I'm afraid we're done in this time, old man,' he whispered sadly. 'We may as well go together. Good-bye, old Joe!' His voice was husky with emotion as he buried his face in the animal's warm coat; and the dog, seeming to understand, turned his head and licked his master's cheek.

The end came almost immediately, for before some of the boats had got clear the ship lurched drunkenly to starboard, to hurl men and movable fittings in one awful chaotic avalanche into the water. For one moment there was wild confusion, and the sea was covered with the heads of swimmers fighting for their lives; the next, there came the muffled roar of bursting bulkheads, and the *Belligerent* hove herself back on to an even keel, with the water washing across her decks.

A searchlight flickered out from one of the cruisers and lit up the scene. Lower and lower sank the doomed ship, until at last the waves were breaking across the top of the boat-deck, and only the two masts, the funnels, and the bridge showed above the surface. She seemed to hesitate for a moment as if unwilling to take the final plunge, and then, with a dull, booming sound as the water reached the boilers, slowly slid from view.

There was no vortex or upheaval of spray, merely a swift rush of sparks and a cloud of smoke and steam, which rapidly dissolved on the wind, and in a few more seconds the ship had vanished for ever. Nothing remained to tell of her presence except the boats, the dark heads of the battling survivors, some débris, and an ever-widening circle of calm, oil-strewn water, on the outskirts of which the waves leapt tumultously. But on the bridge, game to the very last, two heroic spirits, a man and a dog, had gone to their long last rest together.

II.

To this day Pincher never really remembers how he got into the water. The events of that night still seem like some ghastly nightmare, a horrible dream in which incidents and impressions succeeded each other with such rapidity that the memory of them seems almost unreal. He recollects standing on the boat-deck with a group of other men and divesting himself of his thick duffel coat. He did it reluctantly, for it was bitterly cold. Then, after inflating the rubber swimming-collar round his neck, he waited. The ship lay over at an alarming angle, and it was all he could do to stand upright.

'Jump, men! jump!' an officer kept on shouting. 'For God's sake, save yourselves!'

A few, nerving themselves for the effort, cast themselves overboard, and were lost to sight in the raging sea; but Pincher and many others, eyeing the tumult with horror, instinctively hung back. Life was very dear at that moment, and it seemed sheer madness to cast one's self into that seething maelstrom of one's own free-will. Then it was that he remembered his heavy sea-boots. Fool! They would infallibly drag him under if he had to swim for it; and, bending down, he kicked and wriggled his right foot free. He was repeating the process with the other when the end came. The ship lurched horribly to starboard, and flung him to the deck with a shock which jarred every bone in his body. The next instant he started slithering and sliding down a steep slope, to bring up with a thud against a projection on the deck. The impact nearly knocked the wind out of his body; but, stretching out his arms with an instinct of self-preservation, he grasped something solid with both hands, and clung madly on to it with all his strength. For a second or two he hung there, gasping for breath, with sheets of spray flying over his head. Then something soft cannoned into him and tore him from his hold. He felt himself sliding again, then falling, falling.

Next a feeling of bitter cold and utter darkness as a sea snatched him in its grasp and flung him away. He went down and down until his lungs seemed on the point of bursting for want of air; but the swimming-collar was still round his neck, and with a swift upward rush he felt himself borne to the surface. On opening his mouth for air a gigantic white-cap promptly broke over his head and left him spluttering and gasping. At one moment he was carried high on the crest of a sea, and the next he was deep down in a hollow; but by some miracle he still managed to breathe, and retained sufficient presence of mind to strike out away from the sinking ship.

Raising his voice, he tried to shout for help.

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He could see nothing, but the sea all round him was dotted with the heads of other swimmers. Some had life-belts, some swimming-collars or flotsam, and, like Pincher, were making the best of their way from the scene of the disaster. Others had no life-saving appliances at all, and were drowning in dozens.

Twice was Pincher clutched round the body, but each time he fought with the mad energy of despair, and wrenched himself free of the suffocating embrace of a shipmate less lucky than himself. He was no coward, but it was a case of each man for himself, and his desire to live was overwhelming.

How long he was in the water he never knew. He merely battled on, fighting for breath. Presently, when all but exhausted and numb through and through with cold, he was carried to the summit of a huge wave to see the dark shape of a boat barely twenty feet from him. In the dim half-light he could see it was crowded with men, and raising his voice, he tried to shout for help. He emitted no sound but a feeble croak, and the next time he was borne aloft the boat had vanished. Then it was that Pincher commended his soul to his Maker. He could do no more.

He seemed to have been swimming for hours, and was breathless and very weary. His limbs felt incapable of further movement, and it was with almost a feeling of relief that he gave up the struggle as hopeless. But for his swimming-collar he would have sunk then and there. How long he remained quiescent he could not tell; but during this awful time his senses never left him, and he found himself wondering how long it would take him to die. He did not dread the prospect; anything seemed better than this awful shortness of breath and the constant buffeting by the seas. The most trivial events and the most important happenings of his short life crowded into his overwrought brain. His thoughts travelled to his home, and he pictured his mother the last time he had seen her, framed in the doorway of her cottage. He almost laughed when he remembered himself tearing down the road to catch the train. He must have looked funny, excruciatingly funny, but he felt a slight pang of regret on thinking that he would never tread that road again. Next his mind reverted to Billings, and he wondered hazily what had become of him. Poor Joshua, he had been a good friend to him! He hoped he was not drowned. What was Emmeline doing at this moment? The recollection of her seemed indistinct and shadowy, somehow. He could not picture her face, merely remembered that she was pretty and fascinating. What would she say when she heard he had been drowned? Would she go into mourning and cry her pretty eyes out? Perhaps she would marry some one else.

Then, quite suddenly, he heard a voice. ''Ere's another on 'em!' it said gruffly. He felt his head come into violent contact with something solid and unyielding, and the next moment he was seized by the hair. The pain of it hurt him abominably, but he was far too weak and short of breath to expostulate. Then he was grasped under the armpits, and, after describing what seemed a giddy and interminable parabola through the air, heard himself descend with a crash on to something very hard. The impact should have hurt him, but he felt nothing, and merely realised in a hazy sort of way that he was in the bottom of a boat.

It was bitterly cold. He shivered as with ague, while constant showers of spray left him coughing and gasping for breath. Water washed over him perpetually, and a horrible, never-ceasing oscillation flung him violently to and fro. It was almost as bad as being in the water. But he was past caring. Then came a feeling of terrible nausea, and, rolling over abjectly, he was violently sick. Next, darkness, the utter blackness of absolute oblivion. Pincher Martin had fainted.

When he recovered his senses some hours later he could not for the moment recollect where he was or what had happened. He felt chilled through and through with the cold, but some kind Samaritan had removed his sodden garments, and had left him lying in the bottom of the boat covered with a portion of the sail and its tarpaulin cover. Several other men lay there with him. Then he remembered. He felt bruised all over, stiff, miserable, and very weak; but he could breathe, and found, on trying to shift his position, that he had recovered the use of his limbs, though the effort caused him agony. Glancing round, he saw he was in the stern-sheets of the *Belligerent's* forty-two-foot launch, the largest pulling-boat she had carried.

The sea was still running very high, and the boat pitched and rolled violently and unceasingly, while constant showers of spray came driving aft as her bluff bows plunged into the waves. At one moment he found himself watching the dark clouds chasing each other across the gray sky overhead; and the next, as the boat rolled, he was vouchsafed momentary glimpses of a heaving expanse of gray-green sea, lashed and torn into white, insensate fury by the wind. It was blowing a full gale.

The boat was half-full of water, and amidships some men were busy bailing, one with a bucket, and others with boots and caps. Crouching down under the thwarts, with the water washing over them, were many more men in the last stages of misery. Some showed signs of life; some looked almost dead. Another melancholy party were clustered in the stern, huddling together to get some warmth into their numbed limbs. All sorts and conditions of men were there—stokers in their grimy flannel shirts and fearnought trousers, just as they had come up out of the stokehold; bluejackets in jerseys and blue serge trousers; some marines; and a ship's steward's assistant with nothing but a swimming-collar and a sodden white cotton shirt. Their lips were blue with cold, their teeth were chattering, they looked abject and utterly forlorn, but they were still alive. One or two of them were actually talking.

Standing up in the stern with the gunner and the boatswain was Petty Officer Bartlett. The last-named was attired in his undergarments, a cholera-belt, and one blue stocking, and in the intervals of gazing anxiously round the horizon he was flapping his arms to restore his circulation. How he managed to keep on his feet at all was a marvel.

'Anythink in sight?' somebody asked in a husky whisper.

'Not a ruddy thing!' Bartlett returned. 'I thought I seen somethin' 'bout ten minutes since, the smoke of a steamer on the 'orizon, but she ain't there now.'

The questioner, an able seaman, cursed under his breath. ''Ow long's this —— show goin' ter last?' he queried plaintively. 'I'm so —— cold. Such a —— picnic I never did see. Gawd! why didn't I join th' ruddy army? They kills yer quick there, not like this 'ere. I'll be a gonner in another hour, see if I ain't,' he added weakly, trying to get a little sympathy. 'Carn't feel me bloomin' legs no'ow; ain't got none p'r'aps.'

'Cheer up, Joe!' said the man alongside him, who seemed a little happier; 'we ain't dead yet. Like me ter give yer another rub dahn?'

Joe nodded wearily and closed his eyes.

Pincher, unwilling to leave the shelter of his canvas, tried to attract some one's attention. He endeavoured to speak, but could get no more than a husky, almost inaudible, whisper; so, withdrawing one arm from its covering, he moved it feebly up and down. After a lengthy pause one of the marines noticed him.

''Ere,' he said, patting Petty Officer Bartlett on the leg, 'one o' them 'ere deaders 'as come back ter life!'

Bartlett turned round. 'Deader!' he said. 'Which one?'

'One o' them 'ere blokes yer pulled out o' th' ditch,' the marine answered.

'Blimy! So 'e 'as!' the petty officer exclaimed, rather surprised. 'I thought 'e'd chucked 'is hand in long ago.—'Ere, me son,' he added, coming across to where Martin lay, ''ow goes it?'

Pincher smiled wearily.

'Carn't talk, eh?' Bartlett remarked with rough kindliness. 'Like a drop o' rum [32] an' a bit o' somethin' t' eat?'

Martin nodded.

'Hand us that there rum-jar,' the petty officer said over his shoulder. 'Easy now—easy!' as the

man he had spoken to nearly let it fall. 'That there may 'ave to last us for days!' He extracted the cork from the wicker-covered jar and poured some of the spirit into a small tin mug. 'Damn me eyes!' came an angry ejaculation, as the boat gave a particularly violent lurch and a few drops of the precious liquid slopped over the edge. He replaced the cork carefully, and, putting one arm under Pincher's head, held the pannikin to his lips. 'Try to swaller it,' he said. 'It'll do you good.'

Martin obeyed; and, though a certain amount of the liquor trickled over his face, the greater proportion went down his throat. The burning fieriness of the neat spirit made him choke and splutter, but the feeling of warmth it induced was very comforting.

''Ere's a bit o' biscuit,' said Bartlett again, extracting a broken fragment from the waistband of his nether garments, where he had been keeping it dry. 'Put that inside you, an' w'en you've finished it I'll come along an' give you a bit of a rub down like to warm you up—see?'

Pincher, still too weak to bite, consumed the flinty fragment by nibbling round its edge until he could nibble no more, and then, when the petty officer had rubbed his numbed and aching body with a pair of horny hands, which rasped him like a file and threatened to take every inch of skin off his long-suffering limbs, he felt tolerably warm and much better. The blood coursed through his veins. Life was again worth living.

'Thanks!' he was able to murmur feebly when the painful ordeal was over.

'That's all right, me son. See if you carn't git a bit of a caulk,' said Bartlett, getting up from his knees.

It may have been the dose of rum, a spirit to which he was entirely unaccustomed, which had the desired effect, but five minutes later Pincher Martin was asleep.

Immediately on being hoisted out, the launch had been dashed bows on into the ship. She had been badly damaged; but men, stripping themselves, had stuffed their clothes into the rents to keep the water out. Time after time breaking seas had nearly swamped her; but by dint of constant bailing with boots, caps, and anything they could lay their hands upon, they had somehow managed to keep her afloat.

Most of the oars had been broken in frantic efforts to fend the boat off from the ship, and none remained to keep her head on to the sea when they finally got clear of the wreck. Then they had lashed all the boat's lumber together, and had dropped it overboard to form a floating sea-anchor; and the launch, secured to it by a rope, rode head on to the waves. But still the wretched survivors were in a bad way. They had yearned, with all the longing their souls possessed, that a ship would be in sight when morning came. They had practically pinned their faith to it, for they were aware that they were in a part of the English Channel where traffic was constant. But when the night lifted and the gray dawn gave way to full daylight there was nothing in sight. Not the least vestige of a steamer or the welcome gleam of a rescuing sail; only the gray-white expanse of the raging sea, and the sombre, wind-driven clouds chasing each other across the gray void overhead. Then a faint feather of smoke had shown up over the rim of the horizon to the southward. It was fully ten miles off, but they all thought for one wild moment that salvation was at hand. Their drooping spirits revived; but a minute later the smoke had disappeared, and their hopes were dashed to the ground.

They were exhausted, wet through, chilled to the bone, and utterly miserable, and some of that little band of two warrant-officers and seventy odd men resigned themselves to their fate. They could not last much longer. And so the launch, with a woollen scarf lashed to an oar amidships fluttering as a mute signal of distress, drifted on at the mercy of the wind and sea. Her crew were past caring.

III.

Early in the morning of that fateful New Year's Day the Brixham trawler *Providence* was running back to her port for shelter from the gale; but when she was off Start Point the wind and sea had increased to such an extent that there was nothing to be done but to heave-to and ride out the storm. Between eleven o'clock and noon the smack was hove-to on the starboard tack, when the third hand, who was on deck, saw a large gray open boat to leeward. She was full of men, and was flying a muffler tied to an upright oar as a signal of distress; but so heavy was the sea that she was obscured for minutes at a time in the trough of the waves.

The smack's crew of three men and a boy, Little Dan, were soon on deck, and promptly got to work to take another reef in the mainsail and to set their small storm jib. It was a hard tussle, for the wind was blowing with hurricane force, and seas were constantly breaking over the deck; but it was the only thing to be done if a rescue was to be effected.

The *Providence* was on the starboard tack, let it be understood. This meant that the wind was blowing from her starboard side; but, to reach the launch at all, she had to pass round on to the port tack. There are two ways of manœuvring a sailing-vessel from one tack to the other. The first, the shortest method, is by 'going about,' or turning the vessel round head to wind, and then

allowing her sails to fill on the other side. The second way, a longer method, in which more ground is lost, is by 'gybing' or 'wearing,' in which the ship passes from tack to tack by turning her stern to the wind. Both are comparatively simple evolutions in calm weather, but any sailor will say that in a small fore-and-aft rigged craft both are dangerous in a heavy sea and a gale of wind. Of the two, however, gybing is by far the more hazardous, even perilous, for there is a grave risk of the craft being pooped by a heavy sea, or of her being dismasted when the large mainsail swings across the deck and suddenly bellies out on the other side. But Captain Pillar, the skipper, realised it was the only thing to be done. He was a thorough seaman, who knew his craft well, and he decided to take the risk.

The helm was put hard up, and the *Providence* paid off gradually until her stern was in the wind's eye, and then, sweeping round on the crest of a gigantic billow, came on to the port tack. An enormous sea broke on board as she did so, and the heavy mainsail came across with a crash and a jerk which nearly wrenched the mast out. But the men who had built the sturdy *Providence* knew their work, and the mast was a good sound stick, and the rigging honest steel wire. It was a good test of their workmanship, for by some miracle the gear held.

Drawing close to windward of the launch, the smacksmen hove a rope across as they drifted by. It missed. Another attempt, and yet another, but on each occasion the line fell short. Then, when those in the boat had almost given it up as hopeless, a fourth heave was successful. The rope was caught by the bluejackets, held, and belayed, and slowly but surely the launch was hauled toward the stern of her rescuer. Then the warp was passed forward along the lee side of the *Providence*, and the man-of-war's boat was drawn cautiously ahead until her bows were level with the lee quarter of the smack.

The exhausted bluejackets were ordered to jump on board, and one by one they obeyed. It was a perilous business, for the waves were running twenty to thirty feet high, and at one moment both craft were lifted high in the air, while the next they were deep down in a hollow, with an awful, roaring breaker threatening to overwhelm them. It took half-an-hour before the whole seventy of them reached their haven of refuge; but the work was accomplished without the loss of a single soul; while the senior officer present, the torpedo gunner, true to the traditions of the service, was the last man to leave. Then the launch was cast adrift. She had served her purpose, and was never seen again.

The rescued men, many of them in the last stages of exhaustion and numbness after their frightful ordeal, were accommodated wherever room could be found for them. What food and tobacco the smack carried were shared out equally, and hot coffee was served out all round.

The *Providence* then shaped her course for home, and, after being taken in tow by another vessel when close to her destination, eventually berthed alongside the quay at Brixham at eight o'clock in the evening. And so, from the very jaws of death, Pincher Martin stepped ashore.

CHAPTER XII.

H.M.S. 'MARINER.'

I.

Your modern destroyer differs from her prototype of twenty years ago in much the same way as the present-day Rolls-Royce differs from the early motor-car of 1895. She is just about four times as large, is infinitely more seaworthy, is much faster, and better armed. She is an ocean-going craft which, with judicious handling, can keep the sea in practically any weather, whereas her more elderly sister usually had to run for shelter in a really bad gale of wind, and was unfit for constant work in the North Sea except in summer.

Pincher had seen destroyers at work, and had heard a great deal about them in one way and another; and when, in the first week of February, he found himself detailed as one of the crew of a new craft of this type on the verge of completion in a northern port, he was happy. True, he knew he 'wouldn't be 'arf seasick,' as he put it, and did not at all relish the idea, though the extra sixpence a day 'hard-lying money' was always something to be grateful for. He was aware, moreover, that life in a destroyer in war-time was considered rather a hard and risky existence; but he would probably be in the thick of anything which took place in the North Sea, and he owed 'them 'Uns' something for sinking his first ship and drowning many of his shipmates.

He wondered why he had been sent to a destroyer at all, however, for he knew that as a rule ordinary seamen were not eligible. As a matter of fact, it was Peter Wooten, the late senior watch-keeper of the *Belligerent*, who had worked the oracle. Wooten was the sort of person whom nothing could kill. I don't know how many times he had been wrecked, or how often his life had been in danger; but after the battleship sank he had been in the water for half-an-hour in nothing but a singlet and a pair of socks, in one of which was stuffed his last five-pound note. He had been picked up by a boat from one of the cruisers at the last moment, and purely by a lucky accident; but even then he had been rather annoyed with his rescuers because they laughed at his scanty and unofficer-like attire. He also had a grievance because he had lost his best uniform cap, a brand-new article which, he informed any one who cared to listen, had cost him the sum of twenty-two shillings and sixpence, and had last been on his head when he jumped overboard. Incidentally he had saved the lives of two men by helping them to reach pieces of wreckage; but, being as hard as nails himself, he was not one whit the worse for his aquatic adventures.

He eventually got ashore in a borrowed overcoat, proceeded on a fortnight's leave, and then, as the result of a visit to a friend at the Admiralty, found himself appointed to the *Mariner*, a new destroyer. Naturally he was delighted, and at once set about collecting a good ship's company for his new ship. He far preferred having men he knew to strangers who had never served with him before; and, by dint of a little judicious conversation with the officer in charge of the drafting-office at the barracks, Petty Officer Casey, Billings, M'Sweeny, and Pincher were officially detailed for his ship. It was Casey himself who had suggested Martin's inclusion, though that youth was unaware who had caused a point to be stretched in his favour.

Pincher was not really a nervous, highly strung individual with a vivid and preying imagination; but even so, five weeks had elapsed before the doctors consented to allow him to go to sea again. His nerves had been badly shaken, and the sudden banging of a door or unusual sounds of any kind brought him out in a cold and horrible perspiration. Crossing a street through traffic or entering a boat was an ordeal which caused him many moments of poignant mental agony.

They had sent him on three weeks' leave, and the twenty-and-one days of blissful ease, during which he saw nothing of the sea, and was treated as more or less of an invalid and as very much of a war-worn hero, helped to restore him to his normal self. The presence of Emmeline, by special request, also had its effect, for with the girl as his constant companion he was able to forget many painful incidents which it was as well should be forgotten.

But the advent of Emmeline certainly did involve him in complications of another kind. A porter had told the stationmaster that he had seen Mrs Martin embrace the girl when she arrived at the railway station. The stationmaster imparted the information to his wife; and that lady, an inveterate gossip, spread the news far and wide. It caused no small flutter among the maidens of Caxton. It was neither correct nor proper for the mother of an eligible youth to go kissing a girl in public unless the youth himself regarded the maiden as his 'intended,' on approval, as it were; so Mrs Martin, quite inadvertently, put her foot in it, and caused the cat to leap out of the bag in one act.

Not that Emmeline or Pincher cared a jot who knew. It was bound to come out sooner or later, and each found the company of the other quite sufficient and pleasant enough to make life well worth living. The fact that the village girls were bitterly incensed and obviously jealous was

rather amusing than otherwise. Though not admitting it, they would have regarded it as an honour to be seen about with a sailor or a soldier in uniform now that it was war-time. They considered that Pincher had played them a low-down trick in ignoring their charms and in going elsewhere for an object for his affections, and they did not hesitate to say so. They took the precaution of making their remarks in private, however, for with their parents Pincher was something of a hero. Their mothers knitted him socks and comforters, and at the 'Bull and Bottle' he could, if he had wished it, have absorbed sufficient malt liquor at the fathers' expense to float a battleship. So when he heard that busy tongues were wagging in his direction he laughed happily and said nothing. Emmeline, wise girl, did the same.

Some of the *Mariner's* ship's company and all the officers had been sent up north beforehand to become acquainted with their new ship; but at last came the day when the remainder—some sixty odd seamen and stokers—were put into a train with their bags, hammocks, and some mascots, in the shape of a monkey, two cats, and one small goat, for which they had not taken tickets.

The goat, Pompey, was young, but had a voracious appetite, for before they got to London he had eaten two pork-pies, the property of Pincher Martin, three packets of Wild Woodbine cigarettes of M'Sweeny's, and half a magazine belonging to some one else, while the respective owners slumbered peacefully. On arrival in the Metropolis he was so overcome by his miscellaneous diet as to be violently and unexpectedly ill in the omnibus on the way to King's Cross; whereupon the conveyance was stopped for brandy to revive him. As a consequence, they very nearly missed their train to the north; while Pompey, unused to potations in any form, spent the remainder of the journey in a state of coma.

The two cats behaved well; but, in the small hours of the morning, just before the train was due to start from one station, Jane the monkey was discovered to be missing. The whistle had already blown, but the train was stopped, and forty-three bluejackets, vowing that nothing on earth would induce them to be parted from their pet, swarmed from their carriages and went off in search of the truant. Ten minutes later, Jane, gibbering like a lunatic, but with absolutely no malicious intent, was discovered chasing a middle-aged, portly, highly respectable, and very terrified female round and round the table in the third-class waiting-room. The monkey was enjoying herself hugely; not so the lady.

'Such goin's on didn't oughter be allowed, young man!' she panted breathlessly when Billings stormed her retreat, and Jane abandoned the pursuit.

'Lor' bless yer, marm!' laughed Joshua, helping her to collect her scattered parcels, 'she's that tame she'd feed out o' yer 'and.—Come 'ere, Jane,' he added coaxingly. 'Come an' show th' lady 'ow nice ye kin be'ave.'

The animal, busily investigating the contents of the water-carafe on the table, clucked twice, and evinced no further interest.

'Them wild hanimals didn't oughter be allowed!' the woman retorted nervously. 'An' you, young man,' she went on, fixing Joshua with a horny eye, 'is a disgrace to your uniform! You oughter be fightin' them Germans instead o' chasin' monkeys round railway stations at this time o' night. I'm a respectable married woman, I am, an' if my 'usband knoo o' these goin's on 'e'd be very angry. My 'usband's a foreman bricklayer'——

'I'm sorry yer takes it that way, marm,' said Joshua apologetically, picking up the protesting animal by the scruff of her neck, and then touching his forelock. 'I'm sure our Jane didn't mean no 'arm. I'm a respeccable married man meself, an''——

'Married man, are you?' interrupted the lady, with a snort, as the seaman, with Jane perched on his shoulder, prepared to take his departure. 'Married? Shame on you! What'd your poor wife say if she see'd you be'avin' like this, an' chasin' respectable women with your wild hanimals instead o' fightin' for your country? I've a good mind to 'ave the lor on you! The wild beast nearly bit me; would 'ave done if I 'adn't run'——

There was no pacifying her, and Joshua, smothering his amusement, beat a hasty retreat. Her strident remarks followed him down the platform.

It took some time to collect the others, who had scattered all over the station in search of the deserter; but eventually, after a long and heated altercation with two ticket-collectors and three porters, reinforced by the guard and a sleepy station-master, the train was suffered to proceed on its journey twenty minutes late. The travellers, hungry, irritable, and very peevish, arrived at their destination at six o'clock in the morning, in a thick fog and a depressing north-country drizzle, to discover, on disembarking with their menagerie, that half-a-dozen hammocks and three kit-bags had, by inadvertence on some one's part, been left behind in London.

But all's well that ends well; and, two hours later, after breakfast, the party, slightly more cheerful, arrived at the shipyard where the *Mariner* was being completed. They found the workmen still busy upon her; and as she would not be ready for commissioning for another week, the men were billeted in lodgings for the time being.

But they were not allowed to kick their heels in idleness. There is always plenty to be done before a new ship is ready for sea; while in war, when every one is working at full pressure, the labour of a fortnight has often to be crammed into three or four days. Ammunition had to be transferred from railway trucks to the magazines and shellrooms; torpedoes had to be placed in their tubes; and a whole trainload of stores unloaded, sorted out, checked, and carried on board—dozens of drums of oil, tons of paint, bolts of canvas, bundles of cotton-waste, coils of wire and hemp rope, broomsticks and boat-hook staves, oars, cooking utensils, crockery, knives, spoons, forks, bedding, provisions, rum, and many other things too numerous to mention! It was like furnishing a new and empty house, except that a dwelling is not expected to cruise about the countryside at something over thirty knots, and does not as a rule contain sufficient in the way of lethal weapons and explosives to sink a squadron of battleships. Neither does the average residence accommodate eighty odd people. It was hard work, for the men were busy all day and every day, from early morn till dewy eve.

In the meantime, the contractors' workmen, using every effort to get the ship completed by the proper date, swarmed on board in their dozens. All day and all night the air resounded with the clanging of their hammers and the deafening rattle of their pneumatic drills. A party of bluejackets, under the orders of Mr Daniel Menotti, the gunner (T), once spent the whole of a bitterly cold forenoon stowing shell in the after shellroom. At eleven-thirty, when the men were looking forward to their midday meal, and were congratulating themselves that their labours were nearly finished, one of the contractors' foremen suddenly appeared.

'Hallo!' he remarked affably; 'what's going on here?'

'We're stowin' the after shellroom,' said Mr Menotti blithely. 'Reckon we've done it in record time, too.' He rubbed his hands contentedly.

The foreman scratched his right ear. 'That's rather unfortunate,' he observed, with a smile hovering round his mouth. 'We've not finished the woodwork yet, and we can't get on with it if all your projectiles are stowed.'

'Can't get on with it!' echoed the gunner. 'Why, Mr Scroggins—your Mr Scroggins—told me it was all right to carry on with the job!'

'I,' retorted the foreman dourly, tapping his bosom—'I am the man in charge, and Mr Scroggins isn't. You shouldn't have taken his word. If you'd come to me I could have told you that'——

'Mean to say you want the whole blessed lot humped out again?' the gunner demanded wildly. 'We've spent the whole bloomin' forenoon over the job, and'——

'That's just exactly what I do mean,' interrupted the foreman, smiling benignly. 'We can't put the woodwork up if your shell are there, and if the woodwork's not put up the ship'll be delayed. That's all about it.' It was his ultimatum, and with a polite nod to the exasperated officer he walked off.

'Lord love us!' Mr Menotti ejaculated; 'd'you mean to say'—— Words failed him, and he contented himself with shaking his fist at the foreman's retreating back. 'Damn an blast!' he muttered fiercely, recovering his breath but not his composure; 'of all the ruddy sons o' Ham you're about the worst! Why couldn't you have told me this three hours earlier, you lop-eared tinker? Why didn't you—— Oh, you perishin' swab, you!—Come on, lads,' he added mournfully, shrugging his shoulders; 'we'll have to hump the whole bloomin' lot out again, damn an' blast him!' He ground his teeth with rage.

The 'lads' expressed their disapproval of things in general and contractors' foremen in particular in loud, full-blooded nautical blasphemy. But uncompleted ships are still under the control of the firm building them, and the firm—well, the firm takes precedence next to the Admiralty itself. So there was nothing for it but to undo the work of hours. Every single projectile had to be removed. There were one hundred and fifty of them, and each weighed thirty-one pounds, neither more nor less.

But they were all busy. Wooten kept a watchful eye upon everything that went on, and in the intervals of interviewing Admiralty overseers and foremen wrestled with his correspondence and confidential books and documents. MacDonald, the Scots first lieutenant, grappled with his watch and station bills, arranged the men in their various messes and boats, and detailed them for their guns, torpedo-tubes, and stations. He, as the executive officer, was entirely responsible for the organisation and interior economy of the ship, and found it a difficult job to think of and provide for all the possible contingencies which might arise when once they got to sea. Sometimes he tore his hair and cursed aloud, more particularly over the matter of the Smiths.

It so happened that some person at the drafting-office at the barracks, with a sense of misguided humour, had thought fit to include no fewer than four Smiths in the *Mariner's* crew. There was Reuben Smith, an able seaman; John Smith, a stoker; Peter Smith, the cook's mate; and Harry Smith, a long-haired officers' steward of the second class, with a pale face and a mournful aspect. The ubiquitous surname, cropping up at every turn, became the first lieutenant's bugbear. It haunted him night and day. Once, after a couple of hours' hard work, he discovered that he had

placed Reuben Smith in the stokers' mess, John Smith with the seamen, Peter Smith in the wardroom, and the undesirable Harry with the petty officers. He had made out a fair copy of his list before discovering the error, and then, adding up the total, found he had two men too many. He checked it again, to discover that he had included not four but five Smiths, while yet another man had been counted twice over.

Thompson, the engineer-lieutenant-commander, who had stood by the ship while she was being built, wore a suit of brown overalls and a harassed expression. It was not to be wondered at, for, amongst other things, he was responsible for all the stores, and nearly every morning he received pathetic or peremptory missives from the officials of the dockyard whence the destroyer had been supplied. His stores reminded him of the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle. He had packing-cases, crates, and parcels of every imaginable shape, size, description, and weight, all of which had to be unpacked, checked, and acknowledged. He hoped fervently that the things would sort themselves out and fit into their proper places at some period in the dim future; but every train which arrived brought him fresh consignments, until his pile reached such colossal proportions that he had serious doubts if they would be able to get it all on board.

However, he had no time to worry too much about the stores, for he had quite enough to think about with the machinery and boilers of the ship herself. He had seen all his air-pumps, feed-pumps, air-compressors, and what-nots erected and tested in the shop before they had been built into his ship. He had examined his boilers, bearings, and thrust-blocks, and had supervised the delicate adjustments of the turbines; and now he spent all his days and most of his nights in the engine-room seeing if everything worked in harmony. Occasionally things went wrong, and he found himself embroiled in long and highly technical arguments with the representatives of the firm. They wanted things done in their way because they were building the ship; while he, quite rightly, preferred his own method because he would have to run her when she got to sea. They generally came to some sort of a compromise; but Thompson always avers that that last awful week took at least ten years off his life, and I am inclined to believe him.

The sub-lieutenant, Hargreaves, who had only his charts to correct, was perhaps the lightest-worked officer of them all; but Mr Menotti became apoplectic about the face, and was brought to the verge of lunacy thrice daily. First he had discovered that he had too much ammunition; and then, on counting again, that he had thirty projectiles too few. He promptly sent a frantic telegram to the ordnance depot which had supplied the ammunition in the first instance, to receive in reply a curt message stating that so many shell—the proper number—had been despatched on such and such a date. They held his signed receipt for them, so would he kindly verify his statement? Their meaning could not have been plainer if they had wired, 'If YOU'RE such a silly juggins as to go losing shell, it is certainly not OUR fault!'

The gunner, with awful visions of courts of inquiry and courts-martial for the loss of valuable Government stores—to wit, shell, lyddite, thirty in number—searched high and low, but without success. They eventually turned up the day the ship sailed, arriving in a hand-cart propelled by two small youths, who said they—the shell, not the youths—had been found in a remote storehouse in the shipyard where Mr Menotti himself had put them for safety. The gunner always had a very short memory when he was harassed.

The shipyard was a depressing place, full of gaunt cranes, overhead gantries, grimy buildings, and huge corrugated-iron erections with tall chimneys which befouled and blotted out every vestige of the sky with their oily black smoke. Besides two destroyers and some other small craft, the firm were building a battleship, and the noise and clatter of the pneumatic riveters and drilling-machines was deafening. Cranes, with steel plates hanging precariously from their jibs, staggered drunkenly to and fro on their lines, screeching as they went. Piles of rusty plates, which presently would be built into some ship, lay everywhere in seeming confusion for people to bark their shins against after dark; while pale, apathetic youths stood here and there working the bellows of huge brazier affairs with coke fires for heating rivets. A shout from a grimy gentleman perilously balanced on a plank some ten feet overhead would warn them that another rivet was wanted; and, seizing the morsel of red-hot steel in a pair of tongs, the boys, with a dexterous flick of their wrists, would send it flying through space, to be caught as cleverly by a man with a bucket. To an outsider the whole yard seemed to be in a state of chaotic confusion, but in reality it was very highly organised, for gang relieved gang, and the work went on night and day.

It was nearly always raining, and the horrible slime was carried on board the *Mariner* until her decks and living-spaces were literally an inch deep in black filth well trodden in by the feet of many workmen. The white wooden tables and stools on the mess-decks were caked in grime and covered with paint-splashes and candle-grease, while workmen shocked the susceptibilities of the first lieutenant by their monotonous and indiscriminate expectoration. He nearly wept every time he went on board. He would have to get the ship clean some day, and at present the labours of Hercules in the Augean stables seemed nothing to what he would have to undertake.

II.

At last came the day when the *Mariner* left the river to carry out the first of a series of steam

trials. As yet she was not a full-fledged man-of-war, and, being still in the hands of the contractors, was in the charge of a pilot. Wooten was present merely as a spectator, and to take over the command in the rare eventuality of their happening to sight an enemy. They sighted no enemy; but the trip shook many of the civilian voyagers to the core.

It was a cold and blustery day. The wind was off the shore, and had raised what Wooten called 'a little bit of a lop,' but what, in the opinion of the contractors' men, was 'a terrible storm.' It is true that the motion was supremely uncomfortable, and that when the destroyer was travelling at something over thirty knots she was deluged fore and aft in sheets of spray. The ship was very crowded, too. To start with, she carried the eighty odd souls who formed her proper naval crew. Then there were the Admiralty officers, overseers, and officials, the builders' representatives and foremen, and others from different sub-contracting firms who had supplied various portions of the machinery. The firm, who never did anything by halves, provided lunch in the wardroom for the officers and the more important officials. And such a lunch it was, brought on board in three enormous wicker hampers which filled the officers' bathroom! It would seem that food and drink were presently to circulate as freely in the wardroom as would lubricating oil and north-country blasphemy in the engine-room. But most of them had no food until the ship returned into harbour in the afternoon. They had reckoned without that fickle mistress, the sea, and she flattened many of them out. Bovril and brandy were more to their liking than solid food. Moreover, some of them were rather nervous about going out of the harbour at all.

'I say, commander,' one of the firm's bigwigs had said to Wooten as they steamed down the river, 'is it true that the Germans have been laying mines off the coast?'

'M'yes,' said the lieutenant-commander; 'I believe it is.'

'Is there any chance of our being blown up?'

'No-o,' said Wooten slowly; 'I don't really think there is, though of course this bad weather we've been having lately will have broken many of 'em adrift.'

'And what'll happen if we hit one?' his companion wanted to know.

'Happen!' said the naval officer. 'The bloomin' thing'll probably go off, and we shall take single tickets to heaven in a puff of smoke. We're chock-full of lyddite and gun-cotton, and'——

The civilian seemed rather perturbed. 'Of course, I'm not really nervous,' he hastened to explain, looking rather white about the gills as he fidgeted with an inflatable rubber life-belt round his middle; 'but I do hope you'll keep a careful eye on the pilot.'

'Of course I will. I'm not going to let him bump one of the bally things unless I can't help it. She's still your ship, though,' added Wooten, 'and I'm not really responsible.'

'No, I quite understand that,' said the other; 'but, you see, I'm not used to—er—risks of this kind. I'm not paid for it, and I've a wife and five children.'

'You're insured, I suppose?' asked Wooten, smiling to himself.

'Yes; but my policy doesn't cover war risks.'

'H'm! that's bad; but I shouldn't worry about it if I were you. If we do go sky-high'—— Wooten paused.

'What were you going to say?' the bigwig asked apprehensively.

'I was thinking,' Wooten went on with a malicious twinkle in his eye—'well, I was thinking that if we are blown up there will be quite a merry little lot of us—nearly a couple of hundred—what? I can almost see myself as a nice fat little cherub sitting on a damp cloud twanging a harp—eh? They'll probably serve you out with a trombone. Can you play one?' He laughed, for somehow his companion reminded him of the man who had played that instrument in the orchestra of the Portsmouth Hippodrome in pre-war days.

'I do wish you'd be serious,' the contractors' representative observed sadly. 'This is no joking matter.'

'I am serious,' Wooten protested, trying hard to control his face.

'But you seem to like the idea.'

Wooten shook his head. 'Don't you believe it,' he replied. 'But just think what a glorious death it would be for you if you did go sky-high! Why, your name would be in the Roll of Honour, and your photo in the *Daily Mirror*. You'd be a public hero!'

'Better be a live convict than a dead hero,' observed the bigwig glumly, going off to seek consolation elsewhere.

But when they did get to sea, and the *Mariner* started first to bob and curtsy, and then, as she gathered speed, to kick and dance like a bucking mule, the violent motion drove all thoughts of

mines or German submarines out of their heads. They were seasick—fearfully and wonderfully seasick. The joys of a sailor's life were not for them, and most of the contractors' men and not a few of the ship's company wished that they might die. The very thought of food made their gorges rise in disgust, so lunch was delayed until their return into harbour just before dark.

Wooten and the officers were enthusiastic about the ship. 'She's a rattling good sea-boat,' the former remarked, rubbing the caked salt out of his eyes as he sat down in the wardroom when the ship had secured alongside her wharf. 'We hardly took a green sea on board the whole time. —Give me some of that game-pie and a whisky-and-soda, steward! I'm perishing with hunger.'

'Green seas!' laughed a lately revived contractors' official, busy with a plate of galantine on the opposite side of the table; 'the water seemed to be coming on board everywhere. I thought the weather was absolutely poisonous.'

'Poisonous!' echoed the skipper, looking up with his mouth full. 'My dear sir, it was a ripping day. Nearly flat calm.'

'You call that nearly flat calm?'

'Course I do. There was nothing but a little bit of a lop.'

'A lop, d'you call it? And what the deuce are these craft like in a gale?'

'A bit lively, and most damnably wet,' said Wooten.

'Well, thank God I'm not a destroyer sailor!' exclaimed the civilian with a sigh of heartfelt relief. 'I think you fellows ought to get treble pay in bad weather.'

'So do I,' the naval officer agreed. 'But none of us get our deserts, thank Heaven!'

Every one laughed.

The first trial was not a complete success, and the ship was delayed for a few days with defective fan engines. Then, with the faults rectified, they went to sea again, and this time everything worked smoothly—far more smoothly than Thompson, the engineer-lieutenant-commander, had dared to hope.

The *Mariner* was a flyer, or at least she flew faster than any other ship most of them had ever been in before. The ship's company talked of her being able to do thirty-seven knots, and thought themselves no small beer in consequence; but as a matter of fact their estimate was exaggerated.

They carried out several more trials, and eventually, in the third week of February, the ship commissioned. Her officers and men shifted themselves and their belongings on board from their respective hotels and lodgings. Pompey, Jane, the two cats, and a newly acquired fox-terrier puppy rejoicing in the name of Tirpitz were dragged ruthlessly on board, and the destroyer hoisted her pendant and ensign. She was a man-of-war at last.

Two days later she sailed to the southward. The good wishes of her builders went with her; for, if anything serious went wrong with her interior economy within the next few months, they, by their contract, were due to pay the piper.

And so the *Mariner* put out to sea.

III.

All things are said to have their uses; but I have never yet been able to discover any utilitarian purpose attached to a fog. I believe that the men serving in lighthouses and lightships benefit by them to the extent that they receive extra pay in return for their want of sleep while their hooters and sirens are working; but I am more than certain that this small addition to their salaries would be more than made up by annual subscriptions from cheerful captains, masters, and officers of His Majesty's Royal Navy and the Mercantile Marine were fogs to be abolished altogether.

There are fogs and fogs. A fog ashore is a nuisance which may cause one to arrive as much as an hour late at the office, may make one miss an appointment with one's dentist, or, worse still, an appointment to lunch or dinner with some opulent acquaintance. I have even heard of a London fog which was so thick that the conductor of a motor-omnibus, who had left his vehicle to discover his whereabouts, was unable to find it again. I feel sorry for that man, for a fog ashore is always an inconvenience and a nuisance, sometimes even a positive danger. But a real fog at sea is ever a ghastly nightmare; while thick weather in war-time, when one has to pursue a zigzag and serpentine track along a coast to dodge well-sown minefields laid for one's especial discomfiture and disintegration by an obliging and thoughtful cousin from the other side of the North Sea—well, the less said about it the better. Moreover, when the restricted navigable channels are crowded with merchant ships which the presence of mines and enemy submarines does not seem to deter, and when most of the buoys and navigational safeguards have been removed for the annoyance of the afore-mentioned Hun submarine, the difficulties are increased. Piloting a vessel in such circumstances might perhaps appeal to some jaded individual in search

of new thrills; but to the ordinary simple sailor, who gets his thrills as regularly as clockwork free, gratis, and for nothing, an off-shore fog is an invention of the Evil One.

So when, during the *Mariner's* first passage, Wooten noticed the horizon to seaward was gradually becoming obliterated in a luminous haze, and the outline of the land was rapidly becoming less and less distinct in white, cotton-wool-like puffs of vapour, he cursed gently and felt anxious.

'Yes,' he growled disgustedly to the first lieutenant, whose watch it was, 'we're in for a regular thick un. D'you see this little lot?' He placed a finger on a large red oblong outlined on the chart.

MacDonald nodded.

'That's their latest minefield,' the skipper continued. 'According to all accounts it's a pretty good un, as four steamers have been blown up there within the last two days. We shall be up to this corner of it in about a quarter of an hour, and we've got to snuggle in between it and the shore somehow. I don't much fancy running along within a mile of the coast if we can't see a yard in front of our faces. However,' he added with a sigh, 'I suppose it's got to be done.'

The first lieutenant looked at the chart. 'We can ease down and run a line of soundings, sir,' he observed; 'but even then I doubt if the lead'll tell us much. The water's under ten fathoms the whole way, and we might pile up on one of these banks before we know where we are. They're steep to.' [33] He pointed to some patches of closely clustered dots representing sandbanks. 'Perhaps we might pick up one of the buoys, sir?' he added hopefully.

Wooten seemed doubtful. 'Most of 'em have been taken away,' he answered. 'I do wish these perishin' Huns would go and do their dirty work somewhere else! Our compasses are none too accurate, and Heaven alone knows exactly what the tide is doing.' He was very much annoyed, and not a little apprehensive; for the haze over the land was getting thicker every minute, and there was no breeze to dispel it.

Ten minutes later the *Mariner* was travelling in a cold and clammy mist through which it was impossible to see more than a mile; while five minutes afterwards she had run into a solid wall of thick gray fog, and their range of vision was bounded by a narrow circle with a radius of barely a hundred yards.

'Damn!' Wooten muttered fiercely, stepping to the engine-room telegraph and turning the handle until the pointer showed the revolutions of the turbines for ten knots.

With the sounding-machine going every five minutes, the siren wailing mournfully every two, and extra lookouts placed on the forecastle, they groped their way blindly on. It was trying work; for, now that the fog had shut down, the neighbourhood at once seemed crowded with other ships, the dismal hooting of whose sirens and steam-whistles came from all directions at the same time. The noises they made were curious. Some barked like dogs; others cleared their throats noisily, or stammered and yelped shrilly; while more boomed and bellowed like cattle, howled liked wolves, or laughed like jackasses.

'I've heard a farmyard in the early mornin',' Wooten observed; 'but the racket that's going on now fairly licks creation.'

Once they sighted a huge dull blur in the haze right ahead, and the skipper, holding his breath, jammed the helm over just in time to avoid a large Norwegian tramp laden with timber. The vessels slid by each other barely twenty feet apart, and as they passed a man with an excited purple face and a white beard leant over her bridge-rail gesticulating wildly. 'Why for you no look where you come?' he bellowed in incoherent and very bad English.

'Don't get excited, Father Christmas!' Wooten retaliated, justly annoyed. 'Why the deuce don't you sound your hooter, you perishin' pirate?'

The master of the steamer waved his fists excitedly, but before he could collect his wits and think of anything further to say the vessels had slid past each other and were out of sight and earshot.

For an hour the *Mariner* travelled on, with the fog as thick as ever. They were running down the Channel between the minefield and the banks lying off the shore; but in spite of the fact that they were working entirely by dead reckoning, and the tide was an unknown quantity, nothing unforeseen occurred.

'What the deuce is that?' asked MacDonald, as an excited, irregular, and strident 'He-he-haw-haw-haw!' burst out from the murk ahead.

Wooten laughed. 'Sounds exactly like a donkey braying,' he said. 'As a matter of fact, it's some blighter playing on one of those hand fog-horns. Sailing-craft of sorts. He's right ahead, too. Keep your eyes skinned!'

A moment later there came a wild yell from the forecastle, 'Ship right a'ead, sir!'

'Starboard! Hard a-starboard!' the skipper ordered at once, as a blurred silhouette came out of

the mist right under the destroyer's bows. 'By George! we've got her!' His heart was in his mouth, and he gripped the rail convulsively and waited for the crash.

But they didn't hit her quite; for the *Mariner*, turning sharply to port under her helm, just shaved past within a fathom of a small decked sailing-boat with brown, idly flapping sails. An ancient mariner in a billycock hat at her wheel stared up open-mouthed at the destroyer's bridge, and then, yelling like a maniac, darted aft and hauled in on the painter of the dinghy towing astern. He did it just in time to save his small boat from being run into and destroyed. Farther forward a red-faced boy, with one hand on the pump-handle of a battered brass fog-horn, looked up with frightened eyes, as they passed so close that Wooten could almost see the drops of moisture on his rough blue jersey.

The midship gun's crew happened to be cleaning their weapon as the boat drifted by.

''Ow do, granfer?' said the irrepressible Billings, stepping to the rail and removing his cap with a low bow. 'Where did yer git that 'at?'

'You keep a civil tongue in yer —— 'ead!' retorted the aged fisherman with some heat.

'Now then, yer naughty boy,' answered the seaman, wagging a finger reprovingly, 'don't git usin' sich langwidge. Comin' aboard ter 'ave a nice drop o' rum?'

'Go to 'ell!' shouted the naughty boy, purple in the face. 'You —— torpeder deestroyers'll be the —— death o' th' likes o' me! Second —— time we've bin nearly run down this marnin'! W'y can't you —— look where you're —— well goin'? We've got our —— livin' to get'—— The remainder of his remarks were inaudible as his craft dropped astern and was swallowed up in the fog.

'Nice ole gent, ain't 'e?' Billings remarked with a grin, gazing after the boat with admiration. 'Don't 'e talk well? I 'specs, if we really know'd it, that ole bloke is a shinin' light in one o' these 'ere chapels ashore. Don't matter wot yer sez an' does in the week, s'long as yer good an' goes ter chapel reg'lar o' Sundays.'

''Ow often does we git these 'ere fogs?' queried Pincher, a trifle anxiously. ''Ow in 'ell does the skipper know where-abouts th' bloomin' ship is if 'e carn't see nothink?'

''Ow do, granfer? Where did yer git that 'at?'

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Joshua smiled condescendingly. 'Fawgs!' he said. 'Sometimes we 'as 'em in th' North Sea fur days an' days on end—weeks sometimes.'

'But 'ow does ships find their way abart then?' Pincher persisted.

'Find their way abart?' Billings repeated, scratching his nose with an oily forefinger. 'I dunno rightly. They eases down an' keeps their soundin'-machines goin' reg'lar, an' uses their compasses; but I reckons they doesn't allus know where they is. They pretends to, o' course, but I believe they trusts ter luck more 'n 'arf th' time.'

Martin sucked his teeth. 'But supposin' we 'its somethink?' he asked. 'Supposin' we 'ad a bargin' match wi' another ship, or runs ashore?'

Billings grunted. 'W'en that 'appens yer kin start thinkin' abart it,' he returned. 'It's no good yer troublin' yer 'ead abart wot may 'appen; yer won't git no sleep, an' won't 'ave no happetite, if yer does. S'pose we gits blowed up by a mine or by one o' them there ruddy submarines; s'pose we 'as a collision wi' somethink a bit bigger'n ourselves, or per'aps 'as a bomb dropped on our 'eads from a bloomin' hairyoplane or a Zeppeling?'

'Well, an' wot abart it?' demanded the ordinary seaman, rather perturbed at Billings's summing up of the different ways in which they might meet their fate.

'Wot abart it? Why, I tells yer it ain't no use yer worryin'. If we does 'ave bad luck an' 'as an 'orrible disaster, shove yer life-belt on an' trust ter luck, same as yer did in th' ole *Belligerent*. It takes an 'ell of a lot to sink a deestroyer,' Joshua added. 'I've seen 'em 'arter collisions wi' their bows cut orf, their starns missin', an' chopped clean in 'alves, I 'ave; but still they floated some'ow, an' wus towed back 'ome inter 'arbour.'

'I don't fancy seein' this 'ere ship chopped in 'alves,' said Pincher dubiously.

'Don't talk so wet,' Joshua growled. 'Yer ain't frightened, are yer?'

'Course I ain't!' came the indignant reply.

'Yer looks ter me as if yer wus,' said the A.B. 'But, any'ow, don't worry yer 'ead. A deestroyer's a ruddy sight safer'n some other ships. We've got speed, we 'ave, an' kin run away if we're chased by an 'ostile cruiser, an' we don't draw too much water fur bumpin' mines and sichlike. Jolly sight safer 'n livin' ashore, I calls it.'

'I dunno so much.'

'Course it is. Look at th' ways yer kin lose th' number o' yer mess w'en ye're livin' on th' beach,' Billings replied with a snort. 'Yer kin be run over an' laid out by a motor-bus. Yer kin be drownded in yer barth, or git a chimney-pot dropped on yer napper in a gale o' wind. Yer kin be suffocated in yer bed if yer leaves th' gas burnin', an''——

'An' yer nearly dies o' suffocation if yer drinks more 'n a gallon o' beer,' chimed in another man, who knew Billings's past history.

Joshua turned round wrathfully. 'I don't stan' no sauce from th' likes o' you, Dogo!' he exclaimed, advancing threateningly.

'It's true, ain't it?' queried Dogo, retreating to a convenient distance. 'Besides, I never said 'oo it wus 'oo nearly died o' suffocation, did I?'

'No, but I knows ruddy well 'oo yer means, yer perishin' lop-eared milkman; an' nex' time yer sez things ter me I'll give yer a clip 'longside th' ear'ole as'll keep yer thinkin' abart it fur a week!'

The bystanders laughed.

'Don't you take no notice o' 'im, Pincher,' Joshua went on. ''E ain't no sailor. Afore this 'ere war started 'e wus drivin' one o' these 'ere milk-carts an' shoutin' "Milk-o!" artside th' 'ouses, an' makin' love ter th' slaveys!' It was perfectly true so far as the driving of the milk-chariot was concerned, for Dogo Pearson, after serving his first period in the navy, had retired into civil life as a milkman, only to be called up again on the outbreak of war.

It was Dogo's turn to get angry. 'Look 'ere, Billin's!' he said angrily; 'I'll 'ave yer know'——

'You men had better be gettin' on with cleanin' that gun!' came the wrathful voice of Mr Menotti, who had come forward unseen. 'It's not half done, red rust everywhere, an' you're all standin' round spinnin' yarns. Get a move on, or I'll have you up here cleanin' it in your spare time!'

The argument ceased, and the gun's crew, stifling their amusement, busied themselves with their emery-paper, bath-brick, and polishing-rags.

'You wait till I gits yer on th' mess-deck, me boy-o!' growled Joshua *sotto voce* when the gunner's back was turned.

'Orl right, chum,' Dogo grinned unconcernedly; 'don't go gittin' rattled.'

Billings was really a great friend of his.

All things come to an end in time, even sea fogs, and that same evening the *Mariner* steamed jauntily into her first port of call and dropped her anchor.

'I'm glad you've arrived all right,' said the senior naval officer when Wooten went over to report himself. 'To tell the truth, we were a bit anxious about you.'

'Anxious, sir! Why?'

'We've had to close the Channel to all traffic until it's been swept,' said the S.N.O. 'A steamer went up on a mine bang in the middle of the fairway about an hour after you must have passed the place.'

'Good Lord!' the lieutenant-commander ejaculated with a sigh of relief.

The S.N.O., who was used to such things, smiled blandly. 'Have a cigarette,' he said, pushing the box across. 'What about a glass of brown sherry? I've just got a new lot in, and it's rather good stuff.' He reached up and fingered a hanging bell-push.

'Thank you, sir. I think I will.'

The S.N.O. rang the bell for his steward.

CHAPTER XIII.

FRITZ THE FRIGHTFUL.

I.

Pincher soon discovered that life on board a battleship and life in a destroyer were two totally different existences.

In the *Belligerent* a cast-iron routine had always been adhered to, at sea or in harbour, fair weather or foul. Nothing was suffered to disturb that routine, unless it were occasional excursions to sea in the small hours of the morning and frequent coalings. Times were laid down for everything. Day after day bugles blew or pipes twittered at exactly the same hours; and to the ship's company, the actual workers, things seemed to run as smoothly as clockwork with a minimum of effort on the part of every one. They all knew what to do, and when to do it; and the men themselves never realised the forethought, the energy, and the capacity for organisation on the part of the commander and other responsible officers which were necessary to produce such a result. They took it for granted. Their groove was made for them, so to speak, and they suffered themselves to slide along its well-oiled length without troubling their heads as to what supplied the motive-power. Moreover, men were told off for their jobs collectively, not individually. Their bodies seemed to be regarded as machines capable of so many units of work, and there were such numbers of them in the ship, and the vessel herself was so huge, that the labours of any single person, provided always he was not a very important person, did not seem to have any effect on the community as a whole. Indeed, a seaman could even go on the sick-list, or leave the ship altogether, without his absence being noticed or felt except by his own messmates and friends.

But in the *Mariner* things were very different, for here the labours of every single individual counted. If a man neglected his work or idled his time away, his shortcomings had their effect on some one else. They were soon noticed, and the laggard speedily found himself chased and goaded into a proper state of activity by Petty Officer Casey; and Casey, a glutton for work himself, always had a persuasive way with him, and a horny fist to back up his arguments.

There was a routine, of course, and very nice it looked on paper; but the life was so full of sudden surprises that as often as not any preconceived time-table went by the board. It was not surprising, for the *Mariner* and the other destroyers of her flotilla had always to be ready for service at the shortest notice, and her men frequently found themselves bundled unceremoniously out of their hammocks in the middle of the night to get the ship to sea. It did not matter whether it was blowing a gale, raining, or snowing; go to sea they must, and did.

Sometimes they chivied Fritz; and he—a wise man, but no gentleman—waited for no one. It was not the fault of the destroyers that he had usually vanished into space by the time they arrived to strafe him. Fritz was the ubiquitous Hun submarine, any 'untersee-boot' which happened to come into their domain, and a merry little dance he sometimes led them. Occasionally, to vary the monotony, they called him Hans, Adolf, Karl, or some other Teutonic appellation; but more often than not he was just Fritz, and Fritz he will remain until the end of the war. Sometimes, though reported as such, he was not really Fritz at all.

'The skipper of the trawler *Adam and Eve* reports having sighted a periscope flying a large flag in latitude *xy*^° *z*^′ N., longitude *a*^° *bc*^′ E., at six-thirty this morning,' was the sort of thing they were sometimes told. 'Proceed to the vicinity with all despatch, and search.'

Proceed they did, hot-foot and full of warlike energy, only to find that the skipper of the *Adam and Eve* had been mistaken, and that his periscope with its large flag was nothing but some other fisherman's dan buoy broken adrift from its nets. Dan buoys, seen in the half-light of the early morning or evening, are apt to be deceptive, particularly when the imagination is stirred at the thought of the substantial honorarium to be earned for authentic information of the enemy.

But even battleships and cruisers make mistakes sometimes. The newspapers have never mentioned one fierce engagement which took place in a certain northern harbour, in the chill gray light of an early dawn, when a long black submarine was suddenly seen approaching the outer cruiser of a line of men-of-war lying peacefully at their anchors. He came in on the flood-tide, grim and menacing, causing a great commotion in the water, and with his periscope raising its flutter of spray. Now and then he disappeared altogether.

It was Fritz, they thought, come to pay them an early morning visit, and with all the joy in the world the officer of the watch in the cruiser opened fire. It was easy shooting. The guns barked angrily, and four-inch shell spouted, foamed, and burst round the invader until he was a submarine no longer. The fleet was flung into a state of considerable excitement; but the

submarine sank gracefully to the bottom, while the officer of the watch, metaphorically patting himself on the back, told his agitated pyjama-clad commanding officer of what had occurred.

'Are you quite certain you got him?' the latter inquired anxiously.

'Absolutely certain, sir,' the lieutenant replied. 'We all saw him hit several times. He sank by the bows.'

'Have sunk hostile submarine,' was the signal made to the flagship a few minutes later. 'Request permission to send down divers to investigate.'

'Approved!' came back the answer. 'Report results.'

'Divers have been down, but report they can find no traces of the alleged submarine,' another semaphore message went across three hours afterwards.

The flagship did not deign to answer, but her signalmen tittered; the 'alleged' tickled them.

'I'm absolutely certain he was hit, sir,' the officer who had opened fire reiterated for the thousandth time. 'I'm positive I saw him sink—absolutely positive!'

'Well, where the deuce has he got to, then?' the captain wanted to know, shrugging his shoulders unbelievingly. 'The damned thing surely can't sink and not leave a trace of anything behind him!' He seemed rather irritable.

Three days later a light cruiser anchored towards the entrance of the harbour, and started talking. 'There is a large black object stranded on the beach abreast the ship,' she said by semaphore. 'Am sending boat to investigate.'

'Object previously reported is a whale,' came a supplementary message in less than half-an-hour. 'It has been dead some days, and appears to have been killed by shell-fire.'

The defunct monster advertised his presence far and wide when the tide fell. People approached him wearing gas-masks and with ammonia-soaked handkerchiefs held to their noses. How the authorities got rid of him history does not relate. One cannot very well bury a thing the size of a house. Perhaps they sold him for fertiliser.

There were no C.B.'s or D.S.O.'s conferred for that battle, though the shooting certainly had been good.

But all this has carried us rather far from the *Mariner* and her men. They always found Fritz, Hans, Adolf, Karl, or whatever they chose to call him, as cunning as a hatful of monkeys; but the destroyers and other craft which sought to compass his destruction admired him for his efficiency, for efficient he certainly was. He combined boldness with seaman-like caution, and would suddenly appear in an area crowded with traffic, sink a merchant ship or two, and then disappear into space. Occasionally he behaved as a sportsman, and towed the boats containing the crews of the ships he had just sunk in towards the shore. Sometimes, when it came to sinking liners and passenger-ships with women and children on board, his reputation was unsavoury; but even the righteous wrath and indignation of his pursuers, who always played the game themselves, were not levelled so much at Fritz himself as at those who had given him orders to go out and do his dirty work.

The *Mariner* was once working in an area in which Fritz was very active indeed, when Hills the telegraphist clambered on to the bridge in a state of purple excitement, flourishing a sheet of paper.

'Well, what is it?' Wooten demanded. 'What's the matter?'

'There's a steamer down to the south-east'ard makin' the S.O.S. call, sir!' the man ejaculated agitatedly. 'Says she's bein' overhauled by a submarine, who's firin' on her. I've got her position, course, and speed!'

'The devil you have!' said Wooten, putting the telegraphs to 'Full speed,' and giving the helmsman a new course. 'Let's have her position.' He took the paper from the telegraphist, and laid the latitude and longitude off on the chart. 'Lord!' he remarked, rather perturbed, 'we're a good forty miles off. It'll take us over an hour to reach her. They'll be strafed by then, poor devils!'

The *Mariner*, meanwhile, with smoke pouring from her funnels and a great bow-wave creaming aft from her sharp stem, was dashing off at something over thirty knots.

Wooten scratched his head. 'Hills,' he said at last, as an inspiration seized him, 'call her up by wireless, and make her in plain English—not in code, mind—"Hang on. Destroyer will be with you in twenty minutes." Got that?'

'Yessir,' said the man, writing it down.

'Very well. Don't make our name, but use all the juice you can, so that they'll think we're very

close. Understand?'

'Yessir,' nodded Hills, leaving the bridge rather mystified.

'You see, sub,' the skipper went on, 'we can't possibly get to this chap in time to save him from being sunk. All we can do is to try to frighten Fritz and to make him abandon the chase. D'you see?'

Hargreaves nodded vaguely.

'I don't believe you understand in the least what I'm driving at,' Wooten continued, smiling. 'Fritz has got wireless, and is on the surface. If he's the wily bird I imagine him to be, he'll have a fellow in his box-office listening to what's going on. He'll hear my signal, will take it in, translate it—they all know English—and there's just a chance it'll scare the life out of him, and make him shove off out of it. Savvy?'

Hargreaves nodded.

The scheme actually did work successfully, and Fritz was badly had, for in less than twenty minutes the unknown steamer was talking again. 'Submarine has abandoned chase, and has dived,' she said abruptly. 'Who are you?'

'Mind your own perishing business!' went back the reply in rather politer language.

Fritz seemed to work in spasms, for a fortnight would go by without a sign of him; and then, quite suddenly, there would come another recrudescence of his activity in another and quite unexpected locality. But the small craft were always hot on the scent the moment he bobbed up. They made his life a misery and a burden; and, though it is true he succeeded in sinking many a merchant ship, many of his species did not return to Wilhelmshaven. There were various effective ways of dealing with him, though exactly what those methods were must perforce be left a secret.

II.

But Fritz was not the only thing they hunted; for once, in the English Channel, the *Mariner* was sent to sea to look for Fritz's mother, a suspicious sailing-vessel supposed to be supplying him with petrol and other commodities.

It was midnight when the orders came, pitch-dark, snowing hard, and blowing half a gale of wind, and there was considerable risk in taking the ship to sea at all. First they had an altercation with the side of the jetty, the brunt of which was taken by the whaler at her davits, and caused that boat to open her seams and crack her ribs in resentful indignation. Then, since there was no room to turn, Wooten had to perform the rather ticklish manœuvre, in the midst of a snow-flurry, of steering stern first through a line of closely anchored ships with no lights. Any naval officer will agree that handling a destroyer in such circumstances, with a strong wind broad on the beam, the night so dark that it is impossible to see more than a hundred yards, and clouds of black, oil-fuel smoke making it darker still, is apt to be hair-raising and startling. Wooten found it so at any rate, and congratulated himself that he succeeded in getting to sea with no further damage than a badly squeezed whaler.

Shortly before daylight they arrived at the spot where the suspicious sailing-vessel had been sighted from the shore. They were all in a state of suppressed excitement, for they fully believed they were in for something at last; while the guns' crews, fidgeting with impatience, were standing by their weapons ready to open fire.

Wooten himself was very hopeful. 'If this report is true,' he said to the first lieutenant, 'I shouldn't at all wonder if we found a submarine taking in petrol alongside her.'

MacDonald, inclined to be sceptical, shook his head and smiled. 'I have my doubts, sir,' he said with true Scottish caution. 'It's my opinion that the whole yarn is pure bunkum.'

When the dawn broke in a blaze of scarlet and orange there was a sailing-craft in sight, and she was barely a mile away from the place where the submarine supply-ship had been reported. She seemed rather an ordinary-looking vessel, ketch rigged, with a sturdy, broad-beamed hull, and was hove-to under the lee of the land. Her sails were patched and dingy, and, like Joseph's coat, were of many colours. But really and truly there was nothing at all remarkable about her, though most of the officers and fully half the men were firmly convinced that she was a Hun of most immoral character.

The *Mariner* approached her warily, with guns trained, and the men's fingers itching on their triggers. They longed to fire. The *Jessie and Eva*, however, evinced no particular interest in the proceedings; and when the destroyer steamed up close alongside, and went astern to check her way, only a small, sleepy-eyed boy was visible on deck.

'Where d'you come from?' Wooten bellowed through a megaphone.

'Brixham, surr!' answered the youth with a broad west-country burr, as a tousled head appeared

up the after-companion and stared at the destroyer in amazement.

'Where's your skipper?' the lieutenant-commander asked.

'Here Oi be, surr!' said the owner of the head, scrambling out of his cubby-hole, and appearing on deck in jersey and sea-boots. 'What'll you be waantin', surr?'

'Where d'you come from?'

'Brixham, surr.'

'How long have you been out?'

'Nigh on three-fourr days, surr.'

'What's your name?'

'Jarge, surr—Jarge Willyum Cobley,' answered the man, in unmistakable Devonshire accents.

Wooten turned to the first lieutenant. 'Lower the dinghy, and go on board and have a look at her,' he said rather disappointedly. 'Seems to me she's as innocent as a new-born babe; but ask 'em if they've seen any men-of-war or submarines about, and find out how long they've been here. Get back as soon as you can.'

'Ay, ay, sir.'

The boat was lowered, and the *Jessie and Eva*, for the first time in her career, found herself boarded by an officer and two men armed to the teeth.

'Whaat du th' li'l man-o'-warr waant, surr?' queried the skipper, eyeing MacDonald's holstered weapon with some apprehension. 'Us is from Brixham, surr.'

'Yes, that's all right. I merely want to have a look round.'

He examined the smack fore and aft; but there was not the least vestige of anything incriminating about her. Her papers were in order, her two men and the boy were obvious west-countrymen, and she herself was full of fish. She had been in her present position or thereabouts for the last three days, the skipper said, and he intended returning to Brixham with her catch that afternoon.

'Well, there's nothing the matter with you,' said the first lieutenant with a laugh, as he prepared to get back to his boat. 'Care for a bit of navy plug?' He knew well enough how to get the right side of fishermen, and never dreamt of boarding a trawler without a couple of inches of strong navy plug tobacco in his pocket.

Old Cobley beamed. 'Ay, surr,' he said, accepting the gift. 'Us doan't of'en get navy 'bacca. Would 'e care fur some fish, surr? 'Tis fine fresh caught.'

'Thanks very much,' answered the lieutenant, who had taken the precaution of bringing two buckets across in the boat with him; 'I should.'

'Peterr!' the old fisherman bellowed to the boy, 'put some fish inter th' orficer's boat, an' luk lively naow.'

Peter obeyed his orders, and the dinghy eventually returned to the ship with the buckets full and her bottom covered with a slippery, sliding mass of newly caught herrings, a turbot or two, and dozens of other varieties which nobody could put a name to. They had sufficient to provide the ship's company of the *Mariner* with two excellent meals, and the total value of the haul, if brought ashore, could not have been far short of thirty shillings. Tobacco to the approximate value of four-pence sometimes does work wonders, and well MacDonald knew it. He was a Scotsman.

But Wooten was anxious to find out how the report had originated. His orders to search for a suspicious vessel had mentioned 'a black-hulled, ketch-rigged craft, with several white patches in her mainsail,' and this description suited old Jarge Cobley's smack to a T. Moreover, she had been found close to the position mentioned in the report.

'Any silly juggins could have seen that she was innocent!' the lieutenant-commander declared wrathfully. He forgot that it was easy to be wise after the event, and that, barely half-an-hour before, he and most of his men had been quite firm in their conviction that the *Jessie and Eva* was a Hun in disguise.

The *Mariner* first signalled to a coastguard station ashore, but the coastguardmen declined all responsibility, and merely stated that they had heard a rumour that, the previous afternoon, some agitation had been caused amongst the military authorities in the neighbouring coast town of Baymouth by a report that a strange vessel had been seen hovering in a most suspicious manner off the coast. The coastguardmen, having satisfied themselves that there was no such craft in the neighbourhood, had taken no further interest in the matter. That was all they professed to know about it.

Wooten himself did not know until afterwards that the garrison of Baymouth consisted of a small detachment of the 8th (Service) battalion of the Midshire Rangers. It was commanded by a major who, having contracted a chill, was absent on sick-leave. Next came a captain, and he, the day being Sunday, had gone off on his motor-bicycle to see his wife, leaving Second Lieutenant Tarry-Diddle, a newly caught subaltern, in charge of the gallant troops. Tarry-Diddle, a most promising and zealous youth, was the 'military authority' referred to.

The *Mariner* steamed three miles along the coast to Baymouth, and here the first lieutenant was landed in the dinghy to make inquiries. There was some surf on the beach, and he was very wet before he got ashore; but, escorted by a local constable and a tribe of urchins, who were firmly convinced that he was a prisoner from a German submarine just sunk in the bay by the destroyer, he was eventually ushered into the presence of the senior military officer in the town. This time it was Captain Bumble-Dyke, and he was having his breakfast.

An hour later MacDonald returned to the ship and described the scene to Wooten. 'I got ashore,' he said, 'and asked for the boss military man in the place. He was having his breakfast when I arrived, and was quite affable; asked me if I'd care for some of his bacon and eggs, in fact. I was wet through and beastly cold, so said I'd have a cup of coffee. Then I asked him about the suspicious sailing-vessel of his. He evidently thought at first that I'd come to pay an official call, though why he should imagine I'd come at that hour in the morning, wet through, and wearing a dirty muffler and sea-boots, I'm sure I don't know. He seemed rather surprised, and stared at me for a bit, and then asked what suspicious sailing-vessel I meant. He said he hadn't heard of one, and went off into a yarn about his having been away all the day before, his motor-bike having punctured, and his only having got back at two o'clock that morning.' No. 1 smiled at the recollection.

'Go on with the yarn,' said Wooten, beginning to laugh.

'Well, sir, I told him that the military people at Baymouth had reported a suspicious craft off the coast yesterday evening. "It's the first I've heard of it," he said. "Well, your people reported her, anyhow," I told him. "It must have been Tarry-Diddle!" he answered. "He was in charge here all yesterday. He's not said anything to me about it, though it's true I haven't seen him since I returned." "Who's Tarry-Diddle?" I asked. "He's my subaltern," he said. "We'd better send along for him." We did, and he fetched up in about ten minutes. Seemed a decent little chap, but a bit nervous. "What's this about a suspicious vessel off the coast?" asked the captain. "Yes, sir. We sighted one yesterday, and reported it," says Tarry-Diddle, looking at me rather anxiously. "Most suspicious-looking craft. Ketch rigged, black hull, and several white patches in her mainsail. She's been hovering round the bay for three days, sir." I laughed; couldn't very well help it, for he'd described the *Jessie and Eva* exactly. "What's the matter?" the captain asked me. "Matter!" I said. "Why, your suspicious craft is nothing but an ordinary Brixham trawler. We've just examined her." "The deuce she is!—Whom did you report her to, Tarry-Diddle?" "I sent a wire straight to the Admiralty, sir," the poor little chap said. The captain got rather purple in the face. "Good God!" he shouted, jumping up, "d'you mean to say that you wired to the Admiralty to tell 'em that—— Oh Lord! you'll get me hanged! What the deuce d'you mean by it?" "I'm awfully sorry, sir," said Tarry-Diddle, rather frightened and very white about the gills. "I thought I'd done the right thing." "Done the right thing, you blithering young jackass!" roared the captain. "Why the devil didn't you get the naval people to have a look at her? How on earth can you tell whether a ship's suspicious or whether she isn't? I go away for twelve hours, and leave you in charge, and this sort of thing happens! I tell you, Tarry-Diddle, it won't do. It won't do at all! I shall have to report the matter to the colonel!" He started stamping up and down the room in a fearful state of excitement. I couldn't help laughing.'

Wooten was laughing himself. 'What happened then?' he spluttered.

'Tarry-Diddle got in a bit of a funk, sir. "It happened like this, sir," he explained. "The sergeant-major was walking along the front yesterday afternoon"—— "To hell with the sergeant-major!" shouted Bumble-Dyke; "where the deuce does he come in?" "That's just what I'm trying to explain, sir," said Tarry-Diddle; and I do believe the young devil was laughing. "Oh, go on, and let's hear what you have to say!" spluttered the captain. "Well, sir, the sergeant-major was walking along the front yesterday afternoon behind two retired naval officers—at least, he said they were retired naval officers. They were talking, and one of them drew the attention of the other to the sailing-craft, and said he thought she looked rather suspicious. The other chap agreed, and said the Admiralty ought to be asked to send a ship to have a look at her." "I've never met any retired naval officers here," grumbled Bumble-Dyke. "I've seen most of the residents in the club, too." "I'm only telling you what the sergeant-major said, sir," Tarry-Diddle went on. "He came back to me at once, and told me what he'd heard, so I sent the wire off to the Admiralty on one of those yellow forms." "That accounts for our little excursion, then," I chipped in.'

'Oh Lord!' gasped Wooten, 'this is the limit. Go on. What happened then?'

'Well, sir,' MacDonald continued, laughing, 'the captain called the poor little chap all the names he could think of; told him he ought to be court-martialled, and shot at dawn, and all the rest of it. They were still at it hammer and tongs when I came away.'

Wooten smiled. 'I feel rather sorry for Tarry-Diddle,' he said. 'But I'm not certain he didn't deserve it, draggin' us out of harbour in the middle of the night all for a ruddy craft which any darned son of a gun could have seen was only a Brixham trawler.' It did not occur to him that he had been badly taken in himself. 'By the way,' he added, 'who were the two retired naval officers?'

'They were invented by the sergeant-major,' MacDonald chuckled. 'One of them was the steward at the yacht club, who goes about in a yachting-cap and a gold badge, and t' other was the man who's in charge of the bathing-machines in the summer. That's what I was told, at any rate.'

'Lord!' said the skipper, laughing, 'it reminds me of that parson, at the other place, who said he had seen the periscope of a submarine at seventeen miles. Seventeen perishin' miles, mark you! He sent a wire to the Admiralty, too, and they called out every destroyer within a hundred miles. But it wasn't Fritz at all, merely the mast of a ship hull down on the horizon. It was rather a clearer day than usual, that's all!'

No. 1 laughed. 'They're all so jolly keen on reporting things, sir; but I must say this sort of thing is the limit.'

'I agree,' said Wooten, chuckling. 'However, we mustn't let Tarry What's-his-name get into trouble. I'll send in a report sayin' we couldn't find any rakish-lookin' craft in the neighbourhood, and that I expect the military people were mistaken. You know,' he added, 'these fellows who've joined the new army are devilish good chaps and devilish keen, and one doesn't want to have 'em strafed unless one can't help it—what?'

'I quite agree, sir.'

'And when we get in I'll write a letter to Bumble-Dyke, asking him not to be too hard on him.'

He was as good as his word, and never regretted it, for less than a year later the name of Temporary Lieutenant Richard Tarry-Diddle, as he was then, appeared in the Honours List. He had won his Victoria Cross at Ypres.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NORTH SEA.

I.

There were many different topics of conversation in the wardroom of the *Mariner*. The seven members of the mess talked learnedly upon dozens of subjects, no matter whether they knew much about them or not. Nothing was too abstruse. They discussed the Mendel theory, atavism, and how onions acquired their flavour and violets their scent with as much zest and freedom as they argued about the possibilities of a German invasion of Britain, and the rights and wrongs of universal service. Conversation frequently became strident, and heated argument occasionally gave way to flat contradiction; while contradiction sometimes terminated in a babel in which every one aired opinions to which nobody listened. One can hardly expect anything else when seven men of widely divergent views and ideals, and with different characters and temperaments, live cheek by jowl in the same small ship. The subjects most often brought under discussion, however—the hardy perennials, so to speak—were:

(1) Whether or not the High Sea Fleet of his Imperial Majesty the Emperor of all the Germans was likely to emerge into the North Sea.

(2) Former ships.

(3) The iniquities of one Harry Smith, officers' steward of the second class.

Opinions on No. 1 varied, and need not be entered into here; but No. 2 provided them with many hours' conversation.

'When I was in the old *Somerset*, in nineteen-nine,' somebody would start the ball rolling, 'we had a fellow who'——

'By George, yes!' continued some one else; 'that reminds me of the *Saturn* in China in nought-five. Did you ever hear the yarn about the watch-keeper who'—— And straightway the floodgates of reminiscence were opened.

It was perfectly natural, for there were seven of them, and among them they had served his Majesty or his predecessors for nearly eighty years. Moreover, they had been in every imaginable type of ship, in many different parts of the world, and had never been shipmates before. Five of the seven we have already met. The other two were Augustus Black, the surgeon-probationer of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, and George Bonar, the midshipman of the Royal Naval Reserve. Of them, more anon.

Topic No. 3, the sins and omissions of Harry Smith, came up for consideration at least twice daily. He was an unkempt individual, with long black hair and sallow complexion, who had just entered the service. Before deciding to serve the King he had, or had not, been a shining light in a livery and bait stable. He may have been an excellent ostler, but did not scintillate as an officers' steward. Nominally he was supposed to assist Watkins, the senior steward, who, under the supervision of Mr Menotti, did for the officers as regards their messing. Watkins himself was all that could be desired, but the redoubtable Harry frequently 'did for' the members of the mess in more senses than one.

The galley, where all the cooking was done, lived forward, and though it must have been painful for Smith to fall on the slippery steel deck on the way aft with the joint for the evening meal, it was still more annoying for seven officers with healthy appetites to discover that their leg of mutton, together with its dish, had flopped gracefully overboard and had sunk to the bottom of the harbour. On one occasion the dish of bacon for breakfast came to grief; whereupon Smith, trusting that nobody was looking, gathered up what remained on the deck, and replaced it in the dish with his fingers. But the eagle eye of the first lieutenant was upon him, and there was trouble.

Besides being the food-carrier to and from the galley, Smith acted as the wine steward in Watkins's absence, was supposed to clean and wash up the table silver and crockery, and to keep a watchful eye upon the table-napkins and tablecloths. It was unfortunate that he poured the sherry into a decanter half-full of port; but he was forgiven, for the mixture, under the guise of 'madeira,' was offered to, and accepted as a *quid pro quo* by, unsuspecting dockyard employees who had provided the first lieutenant with—well, certain things which he required for the ship. Smith was not pardoned for losing the upper half of an expensive silver-plated entrée-dish, for breaking or losing in ten days no fewer than seventeen tumblers, four plates, two cups, and a butter-dish, or for using the best damask table-napkins as dishcloths or for boot-polishing, for all those articles had to be accounted for. Wooten was also extremely annoyed one Sunday morning

when, on going the rounds, he discovered the hairbrushes and celluloid dickey of the culprit, together with one toothbrush, a shirt, six raw and juicy chops done up in newspaper, some emery-paper, knife-powder, and three loaves of wardroom bread, nestling side by side in the same cupboard. No! Harry Smith, though undoubtedly a feature of the ship, and a source of abundant and animated conversation, was not an acquisition.

'Let's get rid of the blighter!' some one suggested.

They tried to, but the only substitute available was a callow, pimply faced youth who, before the war, had been a railway porter.

'Lord!' laughed the skipper, 'if he comes we sha'n't have any crockery at all at the end of a fortnight.'

And so Smith remained.

Augustus Black was a medical student at one of the London hospitals who had volunteered his services on the outbreak of war. The powers that be had accepted his offer, enrolled him in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve as a surgeon-probationer, provided him with the sum of twenty pounds wherewith to purchase the necessary uniform, and presently desired him to repair forthwith to his duties on board H.M.S. *Mariner*.

The ship's company as a whole were disgustingly healthy; but Black attended to their minor ailments, cuts, and contusions, packed them off to the depot ship or hospital if they became really ill, held what he vulgarly called 'belly musters' once a month or oftener, and gave them lectures on first-aid and personal hygiene. In the ordinary piping times of peace a destroyer carries nothing but a medical chest containing the simpler remedies, together with bandages, splints, tourniquets, and dressings. She has no doctor, and if a man is hurt or becomes ill he is given first-aid or relief by one of his shipmates, and is sent to the depot ship or hospital for treatment as soon as possible. In war, however, when any ship may conceivably be in action at any moment, and when twenty-four hours or more may elapse before wounded men can see a medical officer, valuable lives may be saved if injuries are properly attended to and dressed on the spot. That was why Black and many others like him had been sent to destroyers.

In addition to his other duties, he acted as wine-caterer for the mess, and, since there was no cabin available, slept on a settee in the wardroom, and shaved, bathed, dressed, and kept his clothes and other belongings in the sub-lieutenant's cabin, or wherever else he could find room. His existence must have had its drawbacks and inconveniences; but, being adaptable, he did not seem to mind them, for he was an excellent messmate, always cheerful, and was not in the least addicted to sea-sickness.

Bonar, the R.N.R. 'snotty,' slept in a hammock in the tiny flat outside the officers' cabins, and where he kept his possessions was always something of a mystery. He had been at sea in the mercantile marine before the war, and, in spite of his youth, was a most useful member of society. He helped the sub with his charts, assisted Wooten with his official correspondence, wrote up the fair log, and justified his existence in many other ways.

The authorities realised that life in small ships was sometimes apt to breed staleness; so, though the *Mariner* and her flotilla were often at sea, and while in harbour were always ready to sail at short notice, officers and men were allowed ashore in the afternoons whenever they could be spared. They were always liable to instant recall, of course, and never got very far from their ships; but this did not prevent them from playing games or otherwise amusing themselves. It did them all the good in the world, and kept them fit and contented.

On board, their amusements were simple. They all read a great deal, and their expenditure on 'sevenpennies,' cheap books at one shilling, and magazines must have put considerable profit into the pockets of the publishers who catered for their needs, notwithstanding the enhanced price of paper and the shortage of labour. One thing all agreed upon was their debt of gratitude to Jack London. They read his books not once, but a dozen times; and, prolific writer though he is, they wished he were more prolific, for there was a snap and a liveliness about his work which appealed to them. In the evenings in harbour the officers either read, argued, listened to the gramophone, played with the doctor's Meccano set, or indulged in ping-pong. It is true that the wardroom of a destroyer is not an ideal place for this game. The table was small; collisions with hanging lamps, furniture, and Harry Smith with his arms full of newly cleaned glasses and cutlery were frequent and sometimes painful; while the balls had an unhappy knack of losing themselves under settees and cupboards. But in spite of these disadvantages the players became expert.

Farther forward the men also contrived to keep themselves happy. They had their band—consisting of a drum, a couple of concertinas, many mouth-organs, and a flute—which disported itself on deck on fine evenings. They also sang loudly and sentimentally; while one versatile person imitated Mr Charles Chaplin, bowler hat, moustache, baggy trousers, and all. They had their racing crews for the whaler and the dinghy, and in the dog-watches were not slow in challenging other destroyers to races. Sometimes they won and sometimes they did not; but the contests always gave the onlookers the opportunity of indulging in ribald and strident remarks at

other people's expense.

Amongst the ship's company were a certain number of men who had done their time in the navy, had retired into civil life after their various periods of service, and had either volunteered or been recalled on the outbreak of war. They were all excellent men, just as good as any of their shipmates, while what little rustiness there was about them wore off within a month of their joining the ship. Their experiences and occupations ashore had been varied, to say the least of it.

'Dogo' Pearson, the milkman, has appeared before; but besides him there was an ex-member of the Liverpool police, an Edinburgh fireman, a cattle-puncher from Arizona, and a man who had served as a steward-valet on board a yacht belonging to some rich potentate in the Argentine. Then there was David MacLeod, who hailed from Stornoway; Donald MacIver, from the Orkneys; and Roderick Mackay, from Lerwick. They were all fishermen and members of the Royal Naval Reserve, and naturally were good seamen. Moreover, Wooten found them most useful as reliable weather prophets.

'Well,' he would say to MacLeod on the bridge at sea, 'what d'you make of the weather?'

The Scotsman would look up at the sky and note the direction and force of the wind. 'Sur,' he would answer slowly, 'we'll ha'e a wee bit blaw afore the mornin'.'

'Blow!' Wooten would echo, rather surprised. 'Why d'you say that? The glass is high, and there's a fine enough sky; isn't there?'

MacLeod would wag his head wisely. 'I dinna ken why,' he would say. 'The wund'll ha'e gone roond tae the north-east, an'll start blawin' fresh afore the mornin'.'

And blow it invariably did, precisely from the quarter MacLeod had mentioned.

The torpedo coxswain of a destroyer is a very important person indeed. He is always a chief petty officer or petty officer who acts as *ex officio* master-at-arms of the ship, and as such supervises the discipline, is the mouthpiece between the men and the officers, brings men up for punishment when they have misconducted themselves, and makes out and forwards the punishment returns to the depot ship. This, since serious offences are infrequent in torpedo-craft, is perhaps the least of all his duties. He also performs the work carried out by the ship's steward in a big ship, being responsible, under the supervision of the C.O., for the drawing and issue of all clothing, victuals, and rum, besides keeping the store-books for the same. As these have to be forwarded to the victualling paymaster of the depot ship at certain intervals, this, since it involves no small amount of paper work and much calculation, may be called the most onerous of his tasks.

But the coxswain's chief function, his *raison d'être*, is to act as a skilled helmsman. He is generally a man of long service and tried experience, who has done all his time in torpedo-craft. He knows, or should know, the individual idiosyncrasies of practically every type of destroyer in the navy; and, this being the case, he is the commanding officer's right-hand man if he is good—and he usually is—and his *bête noir* if he is bad. He steers the ship going in or out of harbour, when she is moving away from or going alongside a jetty or another ship, during steam tactics and manœuvres, or in action. In short, he is the qualified helmsman whose presence is required at the wheel in any circumstances calling for special skill and knowledge. He draws extra pay for his attainments, and has been through special courses to fit him for his rating; but his value lies in the fact that he has learnt his trade through long experience at sea.

William Willis, the coxswain of the *Mariner*, was a short, well-covered little man, with a laughing red face and a pair of twinkling blue eyes. He was always laughing, no matter how bad the weather, no matter what happened; while he had the peculiar knack of always appearing on the bridge at the very instant he was wanted, and without having to be sent for. How, when, and where he slept or ate at sea Wooten never discovered; for no sooner had the next destroyer ahead hauled out of the line to avoid a floating mine, or an important signal been made, than Willis, breathing like a grampus, clambered ponderously up on to the bridge and relieved the helmsman. It seemed second nature to him to arrive at the moment he was most needed. One peculiar trait of his was that he never would admit that the weather was really bad.

'Bit rotten, cox'n, eh?' Wooten would remark, shaking the drops of water out of his eyes after a green sea had lolloped over the forecastle and deluged every one on the bridge with spray.

'Not near so bad as I 'ave 'ad, sir,' Willis always answered stolidly. 'When I was in the *Boxer* we was once 'ove-to for three days in weather like this 'ere.' He occasionally varied the formula by mentioning the *Zephyr*, the *Angler*, the *Kangaroo*, the *Albatross*, the *Garry*, the *Mohawk*, or various others of the destroyers in which he had served; but no matter if the barometer had dropped half-an-inch in an hour, or the wind was blowing with almost hurricane force, or the ship was rolling and pitching to an extent that nobody would have believed possible if he had not seen and felt it, her weather, in the coxswain's opinion, was never so bad as that experienced by the other craft he had been in.

Sometimes, in the days when Wooten was still new to the ship, and before he had come to

understand the ways and tricks of handling her—and a destroyer does occasionally take a deal of handling—they got into difficulties. Perhaps they would be going alongside an oiler [34] at dead of night to replenish their fuel, and the wind would get on the wrong bow, and a strong tide sweep the ship the wrong way. Willis rarely talked on the bridge, but then it was that he considered himself entitled to speak.

'Why not try 'er with a touch astern starboard, sir?' would come a hoarse remark. 'Slew 'er stern round—see?' He never spoke as if he were offering advice; he merely made a suggestion, as it were, and oftener than not Wooten acted upon it, and found it good.

Daniel Bulpit, the chief engine-room artificer, Thompson's trusted assistant and second in command, had few peculiarities. He was a hard-working, conscientious, and thoroughly capable west-countryman, who was always cheerful and always obliging. In appearance he was short and thick-set, with a fresh complexion, hair slightly tinged with gray, and blue eyes; and what he didn't know about the *Mariner* and her internal economy was not worth thinking about. Before joining the destroyer he had been at the College at Dartmouth, teaching the naval cadets their business in the pattern-shop. He had evidently been popular there, for when he went ashore he was frequently recognised and accosted by certain of his 'young gentlemen,' most of whom by this time had attained the dignity and single gold stripes of sub-lieutenants.

Gartin, the chief stoker, was a character, and, among other duties, had charge of the engineer's stores and tools. He was a tall man, with shaggy eyebrows, black hair, and a black beard, and, judging from the conversation occasionally heard issuing from the storeroom hatch, took his job very seriously indeed, and regarded most people, certainly all seamen, as disciples of Barabbas.

'Please, will yer let us 'ave the loan of a cold chisel an' a nammer?' once asked Pincher Martin.

The chief stoker glared. He had a rooted antipathy to all men who came to borrow tools, for as often as not they omitted to return them. This necessitated a game of hide-and-seek throughout the ship on the part of Gartin himself; while, when the implements were eventually retrieved, the edges of the chisels were generally found to be jagged, the saws blunt, and the punches broken. 'What d'you want 'em for?' he asked suspiciously.

'Ter cut a length o' three an' a narf wire in 'alves.'

'Ain't got none!' snapped Gartin.

Pincher knew full well that he had. 'We carn't do th' job without 'em,' he expostulated mildly.

'Can't 'elp that; you'll 'ave to do the best you can, or else borrow 'em off some one else. I ain't got no 'ammers nor chisels, I tells you!'

'But I see'd'——

'Can't 'elp what you see'd. I ain't got none; that's flat, ain't it?'

'Well, if yer really 'aven't got 'em I s'pose I'll 'ave ter go an' tell the bloke wot sent me ter borrow 'em,' said Martin with an air of resignation.

Gartin pricked up his ears. ''Oo was it 'oo sent you?'

'Fu'st lootenant,' said Pincher, inventing a polite fiction on the spur of the moment.

'Why didn't you say so afore?' Gartin demanded wrathfully, opening a tool-box. 'Think I'm 'ere to 'ave my time wasted like this? You're quite certain it was th' fu'st lootenant sent you?' He thought he had seen a twinkle in Pincher's eye.

'Well, 'e said 'e wanted the job done this mornin', any'ow,' the ordinary seaman prevaricated.

The chief stoker produced the hammer and the chisel, and handed them across as if he were making a gift of the Crown Jewels. ''Ere you are. Look out you returns 'em. If you don't'—— He glared fiercely and shook his head.

'If I doesn't?'

'If you don't I'll take you afore the engineer horficer an' the captin, an' 'ave the price of 'em stopped outa your pay. I'm fed up wi' chasin' people round the ship. They comes to me borrowin' things right an' left, never says so much as "Thank you," an' never troubles to return the gear wot they borrowed. I ain't 'ere to get runnin' round arter seamen wot isn't no better'n a pack o' thieves!'

'I'll look out I returns 'em orl right,' said Pincher, retreating up the ladder with a broad grin all over his face.

'I'll look out you pays for 'em if you don't!' was the chief stoker's final remark.

Pincher retired chuckling, with the tools in his possession. He did not feel the least bit uneasy. Gartin's bark was always worse than his bite, and nobody ever took him really seriously.

Hills, the petty officer telegraphist, was a burly, powerful-looking man of average height. His eyebrows, like Gartin's, were long and bushy, the hair on his head was thick and luxuriant, while his chin, though he shaved every morning regularly, was always bristly and blue by the evening. At sea he spent most of his time in the wireless office abaft the charthouse. It was a tiny apartment, about eight feet by five, and every conceivable nook and cranny, and almost every square inch of the walls and ceiling, was occupied by instruments. Where there was room on the walls Hills had decorated his little den with photographs of his wife, children, relations, and friends, and sundry flamboyant and highly coloured picture post-cards. There was just room for a mahogany slab which served as a table, and a chair bolted to the deck, in which, with a pair of telephone-receivers clipped over his ears, Hills sat enthroned like some mysterious wizard in his cave. The wireless office was soundproof and practically airtight. Its occupant detested draughts, and at sea in winter, when the two small side windows were kept tightly shut, the atmosphere could almost be cut with a knife. In the early mornings, when Hills had had an all-night sitting, and felt peevish and looked dishevelled, his shipmates always said his hairy face assumed a simian aspect, and that he himself reminded them of a gorilla in his cage. It was a libel, but this did not prevent certain irreverent persons from forgathering outside his den at cockcrow, opening the door gently, and then, scratching themselves after the manner of apes, inquiring tenderly as to his health.

''Ullo, "Birdie," 'ow goes the zoo? Wot time does th' hanimals feed this mornin'?'

'Oh, go to 'ell!' 'Birdie' would exclaim irritably. Sometimes he adopted stronger measures, emerged from his lair with a ferocious expression, and, armed with a broom-handle, pursued his tormentors round the forecastle to the accompaniment of yelps of pain and howls for mercy as he belaboured them roundly.

But Hills was popular on board, and was thoroughly good at his work; so, taking things all round, Wooten and the officers had reason to congratulate themselves upon having a good ship's company.

II.

Who would not sell a farm and go to sea? Life in the navy, even in war, has its compensations. At any rate, the sailor's commodious residence conveys him, his belongings, his food, and his weapons to the scene of his activities at a speed of anything between seven and a half and thirty-six knots, according to circumstances. The soldier, on the other hand, though he may sometimes ride upon a horse or travel in a train, generally has to rely upon his own flat feet for locomotion. Moreover, he carries on his person several days' provisions, spare clothing, a rifle, a bayonet, ammunition, and equipment, together with an assortment of bombs, gas-masks, and entrenching tools. Any spare space or weight-carrying capacity which may remain to him is presumably at his own disposal, and may be utilised for accommodating gifts of tobacco, magazines, and socks from home. So the sailor is lucky in a way; while he also escapes the mud of the trenches, the plagues of flies, and other abominations—for which he is duly grateful. It is true, though, that his floating home, particularly if it is a small one like a destroyer, is very subject to the vicissitudes of the weather, and has a knack of being abominably wet and very unstable in a seaway. But life at sea in peace and life at sea in war are not so very different. The ocean, with its gales, calms, and fogs, is always the same, and hostilities only mean more time spent at sea, a few extra dangers thrown in, in the shape of mines and submarines, and the chance of a 'scrap' with the enemy.

Sometimes, during their expeditions to that region known as 'the other side,' for the express purpose of discomforting the Hun, the *Mariner* and the light cruisers and other destroyers with her had bad weather. Occasionally it was very bad indeed, and until they got used to it some of the ship's company wished fervently that they had never joined the navy at all. When their little ship was punching home against a rapidly rising gale, the green seas had a playful habit of breaking over the bows and of washing waist-deep over the upper deck; while, even in the quiet intervals, sheets of spray came flying on board until every one was soaked through and through, in spite of oilskins.

The movement was dizzy and maddening. It was usually a combined pitch and roll, a horrible corkscrew motion which left one wondering what antics the ship was going to indulge in next. At one instant the bows would be flung high into the air on the crest of a wave until the forefoot and some length of the bottom were clean out of the water. Then the sea would fall away from underneath, and, after hesitating a little, the bows would fall into the next hollow with a sickening downward plunge. Then a great gray wall of advancing water, topped with a mass of yeasty foam, would rear itself up and obliterate the horizon ahead. Sometimes the ship lifted in time to ride over it. Sometimes she seemed to hang, and the liquid avalanche broke on board and surged over the forecastle with a crashing and a thudding which made the whole ship quiver and tremble. At such times the mess-decks, the wardroom, and the cabins, however watertight they were supposed to be, were usually inundated with several inches of water. Hot food was often out of the question, for even if the cook were not seasick, or his fire were not extinguished by the sea, he, not being blessed with the tentacles of an octopus, could hardly prevent himself from being hurled violently forth through his galley door, let alone retain an array of saucepans,

kettles, and frying-pans on the top of a nearly red-hot stove. Something was bound to go, and 'cookie' took very good care it was not he. Then it was that officers and men ate and drank what they could. Wooten favoured Bovril from a vacuum flask, corned beef sandwiches, and cheese; but some people, having no appetites, preferred to fast.

Destroyers cannot steam very fast against a heavy head-sea, and with bad weather from the west there was always the possibility that the enemy's battle-cruisers might emerge from their lair and chase and sink the retiring British ships one by one as they punched slowly homewards. Small craft are not suited for fighting in very bad weather, and such an eventuality might have been disastrous; but nobody seemed to trouble his head about it.

Life at sea in the summer, when there was hardly a ripple on the water, with a brilliant sun and no fog, was enjoyable, though it is true that they always ran a certain amount of risk from mines, floating or otherwise. The dangerous red squares, oblongs, and circles on the chart were abundant and well scattered. Ships did not willingly venture over them; but summer sun and absence of wind breed fogs, and they might be at sea in misty weather for a couple or more days with no glimpse of the land, no chance of taking an observation of the sun, and nothing but a dead reckoning position to work from. This—since tides, currents, and wind have a variable effect—might sometimes be anything up to twenty miles wrong, so destroyers occasionally trespassed upon the red danger areas without really meaning to do so. How could they help it?

Liberties should not be taken with mines. They are inventions of the Evil One, and at the beginning of the war caused many people to suffer from insomnia; but later on those who did nothing but traverse waters in which some unscrupulous mine-layer had deposited her eggs lost much of their dread of them. Familiarity had bred not actually contempt, but a species of fatalistic indifference which is rather difficult to describe. A mine explosion is always serious, sometimes disastrous, and it is never exactly pleasant to know that your ship may be blown up at any moment, and that you and your shipmates may have to take to the boats, if there is room in them for all hands and the cook, or if there is not, to go bathing in life-belts or swimming-collars. Moreover, some of you may be killed or wounded by the explosion itself, particularly if it occurs under a magazine; and if it happens close to the enemy's coast one may possibly be rescued by the Huns and incarcerated in Germany for the duration of the war. There is a chance of being saved by a British ship if one is anywhere near; but whichever way one looks at it, an under-water explosion is never anything but unpleasant to the victim thereof.

But there is nothing to be gained by worrying. In war one can go to Kingdom Come in such a variety of ways, all equally violent and all horrible, that it is as well never to allow the mind to dwell on any particular method of extinction. People never run unnecessary risks, naturally; but risks have to be taken, and mines moored beneath the surface are invisible at any time. 'Floaters,' too, are a source of danger; and, though mines which have become parted from their moorings are nominally supposed to be harmless, Hague Conventions and the tenets of International Law are sometimes disregarded. War has lost its old-time chivalry. It is now a dirty and an ungentlemanly business—one at which the modern Hun excels.

III.

One dark winter evening the *Mariner* and three other destroyers were groping their way back toward the British coast after being at sea for two days and two nights. They had had the usual North Sea weather, thick haze and some rain; but during the later portion of the trip there had been a gale of wind from the south-west and an unusually bad sea. Even now, when they were close to the coast, and should have been more or less under the lee of the land, it still blew hard, with a heavy perpendicular lop which made the little ships pitch and wallow as they drove through it. The evening was as black as the mouth of the nethermost pit, and the sky was completely overcast, while for the last forty-eight hours they had never had a glimpse of the sun or the land. Their position, as usual in such circumstances, was more or less an unknown thing, a mere matter of dead reckoning and guesswork, which even the constant use of the sounding-machine could not verify.

Making the land after dark in peace-time, with all shore lights blazing, sometimes gives cause for anxiety; but in war, when all the lighthouses and lightships are extinguished, when many buoys are removed, and there are various dangerous mined areas to be dodged and avoided, it becomes something more than a joke. If mines are known to be present, the feeling is not at all a pleasant one. It is rather like being blindfolded and trying to find the door in a pitch-dark room, the floor of which is well strewn with bombs ready to explode on being touched. That was the sort of sensation at the back of Wooten's mind.

The *Mariner* happened to be the third ship in the line of four, and at five-fifty-one precisely, when the skipper, the sub-lieutenant, and the usual quartermaster, signalman, and lookouts were on the bridge watching the next ahead, there came a rumbling, crashing roar from somewhere close astern. It made the ship dance and tremble, and was nothing the least like the sharp report of a gun. The sound was more or less muffled, and the violent, reverberating thud could only be compared with the sudden banging of a heavy steel velvet-covered door in a jerry-built villa, if

such a thing can be imagined.

Wooten, who had heard such reports before, knew at once what it was. 'God!' he exclaimed anxiously, looking astern; 'some one's got it in the neck!'

Some one had—the *Monsoon*, the ship astern—and a moment later her signal-lamp was flickering agitatedly in and out in the darkness. 'Have struck a mine!' she spelt out hastily.

Wooten cursed under his breath. 'These things always happen on nights like this!' he observed bitterly. 'Just like our rotten luck!—Signalman!'

'Sir?'

'Tell *Monsoon* I'm coming to her assistance,' Wooten gave the necessary orders to the quartermaster at the wheel.—'Hargreaves, have the boats turned out ready for lowering in case she goes, and send down to No. 1, and tell him to be ready for taking her in tow. As fast as you can!'

The sub. hurriedly left the bridge, and Wooten, working the helm and the twin screws, circled round until his ship was about fifty yards away from and abreast of the damaged vessel, which had fallen off into the trough of the sea. The *Mariner's* men, meanwhile, in all stages of deshabille, had thronged to the upper deck at the sound of the explosion, and were making the various necessary preparations.

'Are you all right?' the skipper bellowed as the ship slid slowly past, rolling heavily.

'I don't know about being all right,' came back a voice. 'My stern, with the rudder, screws, and the whole bag o' tricks, is missing. I think she'll float, though.'

'Right! I'll take you in tow!' went back the reply.—'Good Lord!' added Wooten, swaying to the heavy rolling and looking at the sea; 'it's going to be the devil's own job, though.'

It was. When a searchlight shone out and illuminated the scene, the *Monsoon* seemed to be in a very bad way. She was not rolling very heavily, for some portion of her damaged stern was still connected to the hull, causing her to lie over to starboard toward the wind until the mast was at an angle of thirty degrees to the vertical, and broken water could be seen washing half-way across her upper deck. The spectacle was an alarming one, for she seemed to be in some danger of capsizing.

The *Mariner*, meanwhile, had drawn slightly ahead. She was rolling so heavily that at one moment her rails were under water, and the next were high in the air, while the men working on the wet and slippery deck had the greatest difficulty in preventing themselves from being hurled bodily overboard.

Wooten manœuvred his ship until her stern was on a level with the *Monsoon's* bows, and about thirty feet distant; where-upon men stationed aft endeavoured to hurl heaving-lines across on to the forecastle of the damaged vessel. If a small line could be got across from ship to ship, the end of it would be made fast to a coir hawser in the *Monsoon*. The coir would then be dragged over to the *Mariner*, and on the end of it would be secured the steel-wire towing-hawser, one end of which would be hauled on board and secured in the towing ship, and the other in the vessel being towed. But, try as they might, they could not bridge the space. The wind simply laughed at them, and hurled their lines back in their faces, while all the time the throwers were in constant danger of being shot into the sea by the movement. Except for the glare of the searchlight, it was pitch-dark. Wooten could not approach any closer for fear of bringing the vulnerable stern, with its rudder and screws, into collision with the *Monsoon's* bows, and if he allowed that to happen his own ship would be disabled and rendered helpless, and the last state of affairs would be worse than the first. There was only one alternative, and that was to lower a boat to take the lines across; but this again was easier said than done.

Hargreaves, the sub-lieutenant, and five men took their places in the whaler hanging at her davits, and the boat was then lowered gradually toward the water. The skipper watched them with his heart in his mouth, for as she descended, and the falls lengthened, the scope of her oscillation became longer and longer, and dizzier and dizzier. The ship herself was still rolling horribly, and at one instant the whaler was swung giddily out at an impossible angle over the water, while the next she came into contact with the ship's side with a crash and a thump which threatened to stave in her planks and to precipitate every mother's son of her crew into the sea. Watching the business was a ghastly nightmare which seemed to last for minutes. In reality it must have been over in a few seconds, but Wooten heaved a sigh of heartfelt relief when he saw the boat fall with a splash on to the top of a gigantic sea. But the next moment he held his breath again, for she was flung bodily aft on the crest of the billow until she was all but deposited on deck as the ship rolled drunkenly toward her. Then she sank out of sight somewhere under the bottom as the *Mariner* lurched over the other way, to reappear a few seconds later, with her crew plying their oars lustily. How they ever succeeded in getting clear nobody quite knew, for in that sea only a merciful Providence saved Hargreaves and his five men from disaster.

The line was passed across by the boat, and the end of the *Monsoon's* wire hawser was shackled

on to a length of chain cable at the *Mariner's* stern, and when this had been done the two ships were connected and everything was ready for going ahead. The whaler was then rehoisted after another series of hairbreadth experiences, and the struggle began to get the damaged ship head on to the sea and wind preparatory to towing her into safety. A bare hour and twenty-four minutes had passed since the explosion had occurred. To Wooten and his men it had seemed like half the night.

Pincher Martin, who was on the bridge at one of the engine-room telegraphs up till midnight, saw and heard all that went on. By the time the *Monsoon* was safely in tow both vessels were lying broadside on to the wind and sea, with their heads to the south-eastward. The course to get the damaged ship head on to the waves and toward the shelter of the coast was south-west, and at first Wooten went dead slow ahead with both engines to tug her round. But it was a more difficult task than he had bargained for. He could not go fast, for the violent motion on his ship and the consequent jerking on the towing-wire would have caused the latter to part like a piece of thread; and even as it was, the wire was jerking out of the sea one minute, humming like a harp-string, while the next the bight of it was sagging loosely under the water. Moreover, a destroyer is not an ideal ship for towing another at the best of times. The tow-rope necessarily has to be made fast in the extreme stern, not, as is the case in a properly fitted tug, more or less amidships in the spot where the vessel pivots when turning. The consequence is that manœuvring-power is reduced almost to a minimum, while on this particular occasion the *Monsoon*, with her stern cut off and some of the wreckage trailing behind her, lay like a log on the water, and did her very utmost to pull the *Mariner* round the wrong way—that is, to the east, instead of through south to south-west. It was rather like trying to tow a derelict motor-bus with a bicycle.

The skipper worked his engines very gingerly, and tautened out the tow with his helm to port. Then he gradually increased the revolutions of the turbines until they should have been travelling at eight knots.

'How's her head, coxswain?' he asked after an interval.

'South sixty-five east, sir,' said Willis.

Wooten sighed deeply, and verified the statement by glancing at the compass. 'Lord!' he said, 'she was there ten minutes ago. Isn't she moving at all?'

'Wagglin' about a bit,' the coxswain answered, gazing at his compass-card in his usual imperturbable way. 'She's all over the shop. Up to sou'-east one minute, an' back to south-eighty the next. She's just startin' to move to starboard now, sir,' he added eagerly an instant later. 'Blarst!' in a very audible undertone; 'no, she ain't. She's startin' to fall off the wrong way.'

'Damn!' Wooten muttered; 'I don't believe we'll ever get her round.'

Willis gave vent to a throaty sigh. He evidently thought the same.

It certainly did seem an impossible job, for with the drag on her stern the *Mariner* was practically stationary, while using more speed was out of the question without running a dangerous risk of snapping the towing-wire. Time after time the ship's head came round to south-east, sometimes a few degrees farther; but on each occasion, after hesitating for a moment or so, she fell back to her original starting-point, south sixty-five degrees east.

They tugged and tugged for over an hour with no effect. Wooten exhausted all his unparliamentary vocabulary, and Willis became speechless and purple about the face; but nothing happened—absolutely nothing. The *Monsoon* was making signals all the while—urgent signals, signals of real distress. 'Please tow me head to sea and wind as soon as you possibly can,' they said. 'Sea may smash in my after bulkheads, and cause ship to sink.'

'Am doing my very utmost,' said the *Mariner* in reply.

They certainly were. They could do no more.

By about eight-thirty, at which time both ships were still in the trough of the sea, and the *Mariner* was oscillating like the pendulum of a clock, thin, drizzling rain came to add to their discomfort.

'Damn it all!' growled Wooten between his teeth, 'we must do something drastic. We haven't budged an inch since we started.'

'Please don't go any faster, sir!' protested MacDonald. 'The wire won't stand it. It's on the verge of carrying away as it is.'

'We shall have to chance it, No. 1. We can't spend the whole night messing about here like this.'

Wooten solved the difficulty by going slow astern with the starboard propeller and putting the port engine-room telegraph to 'half-speed ahead,' and gradually increasing the revolutions of the port screw to sixteen knots. This exerted a greater thrust, tending to turn the ship to starboard, and at last, after ten minutes of it, she actually began to move.

'How's she going now?' Wooten inquired five minutes later.

'Comin' round very, very slow, sir,' said Willis. 'She's at south-forty east.'

They persevered. Sometimes the ship swung round a matter of ten degrees or so in the right direction with a rush, only to fall back seven of them a moment later. Sometimes the lubber's line of the compass went back beyond the original starting-point, but generally they managed to gain a degree or two. The *Monsoon* had been in tow at seven-fifteen, and it was not until three hours later that they finally got her on to the desired course of south-west.

The mere recital of the incident seems commonplace and trivial enough; but to Wooten the period was one of poignant anxiety, for the damaged ship, judging from what could be seen of her in the glare of the searchlight, seemed to be on the verge of capsizing. Her signals said as much, too; and if her bulkheads had burst, and she had turned over, the *Mariner*, with a wire made fast to her stern, and a gale of wind blowing, and a sea running in which a small, heavily laden boat had very little chance of remaining afloat, would have been able to do little toward saving her crew. They would have attempted it, of course, but all would probably have perished together. Moreover, in the darkness and generally bad conditions which prevailed, there was always the chance that Wooten would have bad luck, and damage, if not lose, his ship. If he did that people would call him a silly fool behind his back, and would say he should have known better than to attempt the impossible, while his career in the service might be marred. If, on the other hand, he succeeded in doing what he set out to do, the powers that be might pat him on the back and call him a good boy, but very possibly would refrain from doing anything of the kind. The standard in the navy is ever a high one, and in time of war incidents of this kind are all in the day's work.

But all's well that ends well, and on this particular occasion they did succeed, and the *Mariner*, with the *Monsoon* in tow, steamed slowly off toward the land. The speed they made was roughly three and a quarter knots, perhaps a trifle less; but it was all in the right direction, and by midnight the damaged vessel was under the lee of the shore and in safety. They finally dropped the tow at six o'clock the next morning, when the skipper, in a sudden fit of exuberance, went on faster than he really should have done, and promptly parted the wire. But no harm was done, for by this time they were in calm water, and a light cruiser was in attendance.

The same afternoon he met the commanding officer of the *Monsoon*.

'Well, Peter,' said the latter, 'we got jolly well out of that show last night.'

'By George! yes,' Wooten agreed. 'I thought we'd never get you round head to wind. How did your chaps take it?'

'They weren't particularly cheery at first,' said the other, laughing. 'But as soon as you got us in tow they spent their time singing "Lead, kindly Light." You know how it brings in "The night is dark, and I am far from home," so it was quite suitable to the occasion. The ship was in a shocking mess, though; and when the mine went up it blew the after storerooms and most of the wardroom into the sea, so we hadn't any food. We were all jolly glad to get back into harbour again, and it was only by the mercy of God that we had no casualties.'

Wooten nodded.

'I suppose you know, Peter,' continued the other, 'that we were bang on the top of a Hun minefield.'

'Minefield! I thought the one that got you was a floater.'

'Don't you believe it. They tell me the place we were in is fairly thick with 'em. You can thank your lucky stars you didn't bump one.'

The possibility of the *Mariner* also being blown up had never really occurred to Wooten at the time. Perhaps it was just as well for him that it didn't, and that the taking of the *Monsoon* in tow gave him little or no time to think of anything else. 'Great Scott!' he observed, with his usual slow smile and a little whistle of astonishment; 'I'm glad we didn't come a mucker—jolly glad! What about a glass of sherry to celebrate the auspicious occasion?'

'I'm on, Peter,' said his friend; 'but I really think it's up to me to pay for it.'

CHAPTER XV.

COMINGS AND GOINGS.

I.

''Ere, wot's that over there?' inquired Pincher Martin, coming on to the forecastle early one morning with a basin of hot cocoa for one Billings, able seaman.

Joshua looked round. 'Na then, young fella, don't go spillin' the ruddy stuff,' he grunted agitatedly, taking the bowl with a nod of thanks. 'Wot's wot?'

'That there,' said the ordinary seaman, pointing.

''Er?' remarked the A.B. huskily, breathing heavily on to the hot liquid to cool it. 'That there? Only a bloomin' Zeppeling, Pincher. You've see'd 'em afore, ain't yer?'

'Course I 'as. Only I thort to meself as 'ow she looked a bit different, some'ow. Quite pretty like, ain't she?'

The distant airship, floating apparently motionless above the eastern horizon, certainly did appear a thing of beauty for the time being. Her elongated body, dwarfed by the distance until it appeared barely an inch long, was plainly silhouetted as a gray-blue shape against the clear, rosy sky of the dawn, while her curved under-side reflected the scarlet and orange of the rapidly rising sun. She looked graceful and almost ethereal—not a thing of bombs, terror, and destruction.

Joshua drank his cocoa with noisy gulps. 'I don't know abart wot she looks like,' he observed at length, wiping his mouth with the back of a particularly grimy hand. 'You wait till she starts droppin' 'er bombs. I reckons them blokes is no better'n murderers.'

'Why doesn't we 'ave a pop at 'er?'

''Ave a pop at 'er! She's twenty mile orf, if she's a hinch, an' yer knows as well as I does that none o' our ships 'ere 'as got hanti-haircraft guns wot'll 'it 'er at that range.' Joshua sucked his teeth, and proceeded to explore the inner recesses of his mouth with the end of a burnt match.

'Why doesn't we chase 'er, then?'

'Chase 'er! Wot's the good? She kin go 'er fifty knots, an'll be orf like a rigger afore we gits anywheres near 'er. She'll watch it she don't git inter trouble. You ain't got a fag or a fill o' bacca abart yer, I s'pose?'

Pincher shook his head firmly. He knew Joshua of old.

Billings smiled affably, produced a well-blackened clay from the pocket of his lammy coat, and proceeded to light it. 'Ah!' he sighed contentedly, patting himself gently on the stomach and puffing out a cloud of smoke, 'that drop o' cocoa done me orl th' good in the world. I feels has bright an' has fresh as a li'l dicky-bird.'

Pincher smiled, for the simile was hardly an apt one. Joshua had kept the first watch till midnight, and, after four hours' sleep in his clothes, had been up again since four o'clock as a member of the duty gun's crew. His eyes were sleepy and bloodshot, his hands and face were indescribably filthy, and his chin sported an ugly stubble of three days' growth. He was not a pleasant sight. Moreover, it was summer, and the weather was perfectly fine and unusually warm; but, true to the custom of the British bluejacket, he was wearing sufficient clothing to keep the cold from an Antarctic explorer. His figure was ponderous at the best of times; it was now elephantine, and anything less like a dicky-bird it was impossible to imagine.

'That bloke,' he went on, pointing with his pipe-stem at the far-away airship, 'is spyin' art th' land. She's 'avin' a "looksee" at wot we're doin' of, an' I shouldn't wonder but wot ole Zep wus up there hisself. I did 'ear as 'ow 'e'd bin given th' Iron Cross.'

'Garn!' chortled Pincher rudely. 'Wot for?'

'Strafin', fat'ead; wot else d'you think? Probably 'e's usin' 'is wireless an' tellin' ole Tirpitz as 'ow we've come 'ere to pay 'im a visit. "Tirps, ole fella," 'e sez, "these 'ere gordamned Henglish swine 'ounds 'ave come agen." "Sorry, Zep, ole chum," sez Tirps; "I carn't attend to 'em now. I'm hinvited ter breakfuss wi' th' Hadmiral o' th' 'Igh Sea Fleet, an' I carn't git wastin' of 'is bacon an' heggs in these 'ere 'ard times. Tell th' Henglish ter shove orf outa it, an' ter come agen, an' I'll 'ave a few submarines an' mines awaitin' for 'em. Th' navy's 'avin' its make an' mend, [35] an' carn't be disturbed." That's wot ole man Tirps is sayin', I'll give yer my word.'

The men round about laughed.

'I reckons they'll never come out o' their 'arbour 'cept they knows Jellicoe an' Beatty is outa th' way,' some one observed.

'An' our boss!' [36] chipped in another man. ''E's a 'oly 'orror for scrappin'. Look wot 'e done at 'Eligoland! "If yer sees a 'Un, go fur 'im;" that's 'is motter.'

'An' a damn good motter, too,' said Joshua approvingly. 'But I reckon they knows wot they're up against. This 'ere war's like 'ide an' seek. W'en we pops inter 'arbour fur a bit, they pops art, takin' mighty good care not ter git too far from 'ome, mind yer; an' w'en we pops art arter 'em, they pops back 'ome agen. It ain't play in' the game, in a manner o' speakin'. 'Ow many times 'as we bin scullin' round th' North Sea an' never see'd a ruddy thing? Dozens an' dozens! It makes me fair sick sometimes.'

'But they 'ave bin acrost once or twice, an' bombarded places,' Pincher ventured.

Billings snorted loudly. 'Course they 'as; but it don't take much guts ter come scuttlin' acrost th' North Sea durin' th' night, an' ter start pluggin' shell at an undefended town th' nex' mornin'! They takes jolly good care they doesn't stay too long, I hobserves, an' they shoves orf back 'ome agen afore anythin' big 'as a chawnce o' gettin' a slap at 'em. Arter orl, wotever blokes ashore may say abart th' navy not bein' there ter pertect 'em, we carn't ruddy well be everywheres. Th' North Sea ain't no bloomin' duck-pond; an' look at th' time we spends on th' briny!'

His hearers nodded in agreement.

'I reckons some o' these 'ere shore-loafers don't know w'en they're well orf,' Joshua went on. 'They gits orl their meals reg'lar; but a good many on 'em don't recollec' as 'ow it's th' likes of us wot's keepin' their stummicks full. They 'as ter pay a bit extry fur their vittles p'r'aps; but that ain't nothink ter start 'owlin' abart in war-time.'

'That's a fac',' said Pincher wisely.

'Course it is; but a good many o' th' blokes wot I'm talkin' abart starts yellin' somethink horful w'en they gits a few shells plugged at 'em, an' wants ter know wot th' navy's doin' of. I don't 'xactly blame 'em, fur no blokes wot ain't mad likes bein' shot at; but they might recollec' that we're keepin' 'em from starvin', in a manner o' speakin', an' that we is doin' our bit; damn sight bigger bit than wot some of 'em himagines.' Joshua paused for breath.

'If them Germans 'ad a coast as long as ourn,' he went on—for when once he started to give vent to his opinions little could stop him—'an' if they 'ad undefended seaside towns th' same as we 'ave, I reckons we could go an' do th' dirty on 'em. Only we wouldn't, 'cos it ain't war ter go killin' a lot of innercent wimmin an' children wot ain't done no 'arm. I reckons we treats them 'Uns too good; fur wi' their submarines, an' Zeppelings, an' the way they treats our prisoners, they're no better 'n murderers!' He cleared his throat noisily, and expectorated with extraordinary violence into the sea. They were somewhere near the German coast at the time, so perhaps that accounted for his expression of contempt.

Billings only voiced the opinions of the remainder of his shipmates. Nobody thought for a single instant that Zeppelins would have any real effect on the war, and as often as not their advent, even at home, was taken as a joke; while people flocked from their houses to see the fun, thereby running a far greater risk than they themselves imagined.

Billings happened to be on shore leave during one raid, and in the midst of a very heavy fire from the anti-aircraft guns he discovered an elderly, scantily attired, and very irate female standing in the road. She had her umbrella up to ward off stray fragments of bombs or pieces of shell, and indeed splinters from the A.A. guns were falling far too close to be pleasant. The Zeppelin, illuminated by the glare of many searchlights, and surrounded by the flashes and little puffs of smoke of exploding projectiles, was almost immediately overhead; but the woman was far too wrathful to be frightened.

''Ere, missis,' said Joshua gallantly, ''adn't you better go 'ome?'

'Go 'ome!' she retorted; 'what for?'

''Er,' said Billings, pointing at the sky.

''Er!' snorted the lady contemptuously. 'I'm not afraid of the likes of 'er.—You dirty dog!' she added angrily, shaking her fist at the invader. 'Come down, you dirty 'ound!'

The 'dirty 'ound' evinced no particular emotion.

If the German public believed the mendacious Berlin *communiqués* as to the damage inflicted on the hated British by their perambulating gas-bags they must have been very well pleased.

'A detachment of our naval airships visited London on the night of the 26th,' wrote Von Ananias, his tongue in his cheek. 'Several important points were attacked. At Poplar three shipbuilding yards were set on fire and completely destroyed, and a battleship in course of completion for the

British navy was badly damaged. At Houndsditch a heavy battery was completely demolished, while bombs were successfully dropped on the barracks at Whitechapel, flinging the troops into a state of the utmost consternation and causing many casualties. Near Ludgate Hill a munition factory was observed to be in flames. One light cruiser and three destroyers anchored in the Thames near Gravesend were struck by bombs and sank with enormous loss of life. The inhabitants of the invaded districts are said to be petitioning the Government to stop the war, while many of them are leaving the neighbourhood. Our airships, though fired upon heavily from many points, have all returned in safety.'

No Zeppelin had been anywhere near Poplar, no battleship had been damaged, while Houndsditch was as innocent of heavy guns as Whitechapel was of soldiers. Neither was there a munition factory near Ludgate Hill; while the light cruiser and three destroyers which had foundered off Gravesend were nothing more or less than one old and empty barge sunk, and one waterman's wherry badly damaged. A more truthful account would have read as follows:

'Near X. a bomb fell into a kitchen-garden and completely overwhelmed a detachment of early lettuces and uprooted three apple-trees. A brigade of spring onions was also completely annihilated, while a regiment of tomatoes in their billets in a greenhouse suffered severe casualties. The owner of the garden is now charging threepence admission to view the damage. The proceeds will be handed over to the local Red Cross Funds, and the sum of twenty-four pounds three shillings and ninepence has already been collected. Fragments of the bomb are on view at Mr Button's shop at 45 High Street, and will be sold by auction at the next Red Cross sale.

'On the outskirts of Y. one aged donkey and four chickens were killed, while one cow, two pigs, and twenty-three fowls were wounded. A black tom-cat, which was visiting the chicken-run at the time of the raid, is also suffering from shock and nervous prostration, but is expected to recover.

'At B. a bomb exploded with terrific force in the street near the statue of the late Alderman Theophilus Buggins, J.P. This well-known work of art was hurled from its pedestal and badly shattered. It is feared it cannot be repaired.'

Truly 'tis an ill wind that blows nobody any good.

Purely from a spectacular point of view I should imagine that all Zeppelin raids are much the same. They generally seem to take place late at night or in the small hours of the morning, while their usual accompaniment is the glare of many searchlights, the barking of guns, the bursting of shell, and the dropping of bombs with or without loss of life and damage to property. The *Mariner's* men saw several raids; but it was the first one they witnessed which left the most lasting impression on their minds.

There had been the usual report early in the evening to the effect that Zeps might be expected; but they had been warned so often before that, beyond taking the usual precautions in regard to lights, nobody on board really paid very much attention to it. The first intimation of the arrival of the invader was the sullen report of a distant anti-aircraft gun; whereupon Wooten, always a light sleeper, rose hastily from his bunk, attired himself in a green dressing-gown and a pair of sea-boots, and repaired to the deck with his binoculars. The other officers and the men, determined not to miss their share of the entertainment, followed his example, and in less than two minutes the deck was thronged with an excited, inquisitive crowd, all peering anxiously at the sky. It was rather like a regatta or a race meeting, except that the greater proportion of the spectators were far too lightly clothed to be strictly presentable.

The long pencils of light from many searchlights streamed forth and swept slowly across the starlit heavens.

'Where is the bloomer?' some one asked impatiently, as if he were at a music-hall waiting for a new turn. 'Why don't she come?'

'She's got cold feet, an' ain't comin',' laughed another man. 'There'll be no show ter-night.'

'I think I'll go back to me 'ammick,' cried somebody else. 'I carn't git standin' abart 'ere in these 'ere clo'es. Grr! ain't it parky?' It must have been, for the speaker was simply attired in a flannel shirt. His legs were bare, and his teeth were chattering.

'There she is!' exclaimed a stoker, pointing vaguely overhead. 'See 'er?'

'That ain't 'er. That's a bloomin' cloud!'

'Garn! That ain't no cloud. Not wot I'm lookin' at.'

'Tell yer it is.'

'No, it ain't. It's 'er, right enuf!'

Further conversation was rudely interrupted by the crash of a gun from ashore, and a thin trail of dim light climbed skywards in a curve as a tracer shell [37] hurtled its way through the air.

More guns roared out. More trails of light in the air, rather like the sparks from the tails of rockets!

The sky to the eastward suddenly began to flash and twinkle with momentary spurts of vivid orange flame as the shell started to burst; the searchlights swung round and became stationary, with their beams all pointed at one particular spot in the heavens. But still the spectators could see nothing of the raider. Before very long all the anti-aircraft guns in the place were hard at work pumping projectiles into the atmosphere as fast as they could. Streaks of light sped upwards like the stars from a Roman candle, and presently the heavens toward the point of junction of the searchlight-rays sparkled wickedly and with redoubled energy. Puffs of smoke from the shell explosions filtered slowly through the blue-white beams of the lights; but though the gunners could obviously see what they were firing at, the men on board the *Mariner* had not been vouchsafed a glimpse of anything.

'Ow!' yelled some one, stamping on the deck in his excitement and impatience, 'why cawn't we see 'er? Where is she?'

'Keep yer flat feet 'orf o' me toes!' expostulated a gruff and much-injured voice. 'I ain't got no boots on. Knock orf jumpin' abart like a perishin' loonatic, carn't yer?'

The air was as full of sound as were the heavens of bursting shrapnel. Little guns and big guns were having the time of their lives. They banged, boomed, coughed, and spluttered together, and every now and then in the ear-splitting medley of sound one heard the hiccuping, deep-throated *poom-poom* of an anti-aircraft pom-pom, the shrill staccato *ra-ta-ta-ta* of a little ·303-inch high-angle Maxim, and the faint but quite unmistakable whistle and report of the shell as they clove their way through the air and exploded.

'Lord!' muttered Wooten with a laugh, his eyes glued to his glasses, 'I wonder where all the bits are coming down. We'll have to get under cover if they start loosin' off anywhere near us.'

It was a magnificent sight, quite the best fireworks display most of them had ever seen. The many searchlights made the night as light as day. The heavens were ablaze with the tell-tale sparkling flashes, while the earth seemed to vomit the fiery trails of tracer shell which crossed and recrossed in all directions. Brock's Benefit at the Crystal Palace was not in it.

Then, quite unexpectedly, there came a roaring thud from somewhere far away. Another, another, and yet another! The reports were loud and reverberating, and almost drowned the sound of the guns. They were bomb explosions, and the onlookers held their breath and glanced anxiously round to see how their neighbours were taking it. Nobody seemed unduly anxious, but some of them wondered vaguely what would happen if a missile fell on board the *Mariner*. Her thin decks offered no protection whatsoever, and if a bomb did hit her——

At last, after what seemed an eternity of waiting, a great, elongated, silvery-looking mass slid rapidly into view at the point of intersection of two of the searchlight-beams. It looked like an enormous hexagonal pencil suspended from the sky, and travelled with awe-inspiring sedateness and solemnity. It was the Zeppelin; but, from her size, she seemed to be at least ten thousand feet up. The searchlights followed her unremittingly. Her great bulk became indistinct and nebulous amidst wreathing eddies of smoke, while the shell-flashes seemed to be bursting out into space all round her.

'Ow!' yelled the excitable, dancing gentleman, as a particularly brilliant gout of flame flashed out immediately in line with the airship's blunt bows; 'that's got 'er! Did yer see 'er waggle?'

But shooting at a rapidly moving object high up in the air and almost immediately overhead is a much more difficult task than people imagine; and though some of the shell may have caused the Hun a certain amount of annoyance, it was tolerably certain that a good many more expended their energy in space.

But whatever the result, the raider evidently received a warmer reception than she had bargained for, for after being in sight for barely a minute she swung off and disappeared from view at a good fifty miles an hour. Whether or not she had been hit remained a mystery. Every anti-aircraft gunner in the place, even the man at the little ·303 Maxim, would have taken his solemn affidavit that missiles from his own particular weapon had hit her not once, but many times; while the *Mariner's* men, judging from their conversation, were of the same opinion. Some of them were even prepared to swear that they had seen gaping holes in the Zeppelin's bows, stern, and amidships—all over her, in fact; but if their accounts were to be believed their eyesight must have been abnormally abnormal, while the Zep should have come down a mass of punctured fabric and twisted aluminium framework. She had done nothing of the kind.

The guns ceased firing; one by one the searchlights flickered, glowed redly, and went out. All was peace.

The men, chattering like monkeys, sought their hammocks. Their officers repaired to the wardroom and indulged in a nocturnal orgy of sardines, bread-and-butter, and bottled stout. The mixture was hardly a good one to sleep upon, but the sardines of Jean Peneau and the stout of

Messrs Guinness were the invariable concomitants to a Zeppelin raid if the *Mariner* was anywhere in the neighbourhood.

'I hope nobody got strafed by those bombs,' observed the sub. with his mouth full.

'I think they fell clear of the town,' said the skipper, removing the froth from a tumbler with a spoon.

They had. There had been no casualties.

II.

Altercations with Hun seaplanes were by no means uncommon, and their novelty soon wore off.

The North Sea is not celebrated for its clear weather, and in it one's horizontal range of vision is frequently restricted to four miles or less. The vertical visibility, when the clouds are lying low, is sometimes a few hundred feet, while in summer the absence of wind and the heat of the sun often bring fog or a luminous low-lying haze. Moreover, when there is any mist it is presumably easier for an aeroplane to see the comparatively large bulk of a ship upon the sea than it is for the ship to spot the slender shape of the aeroplane overhead.

In the earlier days of the war, when the flotilla and a couple or more light cruisers in massed formation were nosing round not far from the German coast, according to their habit, it was disconcerting, to say the least of it, suddenly to see a neat little line of four or five equally spaced upheavals of water close alongside one or other of the ships. It was more disconcerting still to hear the loud thud of the explosions, and to realise that they were caused by bombs dropped from the heavens for one's benefit by an aerial Hun of most immoral character. An aeroplane bomb exploding ashore may quite conceivably do comparatively little damage; but if the same missile descends upon the deck of a small ship the vessel will be severely injured, and may possibly sink. It is not pleasant to get into difficulties and to have one's ship incapable of movement within a short distance of a hostile coast. It is still more unpleasant to have her sink in the same locality.

On seeing the explosions one instinctively looked overhead, and there, flying low and dimly outlined in the haze, was usually the shape of a hostile seaplane, the inevitable black crosses on his wings proclaiming his nationality. In misty weather he often succeeded in approaching unseen, and sometimes dropped his unsavoury eggs before the anti-aircraft guns could get to work and make his life a misery and a burden. No sooner had he done his dirty work, moreover, than he either climbed and vanished in the clouds, or else circled rapidly round and disappeared whence he had come. His departure was always hastened by a burst of fire from every gun which would bear, but one rarely had a real chance of strafing him, for the whole affair was usually all over and done with in a minute or two. It was good luck that his aim was bad and that his bombs invariably missed, though sometimes they missed so close that people on deck were drenched with spray, and spent the rest of the day searching for splinters to keep as mementoes. If one had struck—— But what was the good of considering the possibility? At any rate, it was always very comforting to realise that a ship under way presents a very small and difficult target to a seaplane at the best of times; while, however numerous and thickly clustered a fleet, squadron, or flotilla may be, there is always far and away more area of water than there is of ships.

When the weather was really clear the boot was generally on the other foot, for then the seaplanes were usually driven off before they could get overhead. A good lookout was always kept, and at the first sight of a speck like a mosquito on the horizon, a mosquito which presently assumed the shape and proportions of a dragon-fly, the anti-aircraft guns' crews came tumbling up to their stations, and the muzzles of their weapons started twitching ominously. Then, when the Hun arrived within range, they let drive and let him have it.

With the older type of anti-aircraft gun, shooting at an aeroplane reminded one of trying to bring down a snipe with a Webley revolver. But now that we are provided with the best sort of weapon which brains and money can produce, the process of strafing the aerial Hun may be likened to dealing with the aforesaid bird with a 12-bore hammerless ejector loaded with No. 8 shot. The odds, of course, are usually on the snipe or the Hun, as the case may be, but more often than not we succeed in being accurate enough to make him supremely uncomfortable.

So the shooting with the A.A. guns was generally good. Puffs of smoke from the exploding shell darted out into space all round their target. The blue sky speedily became pock-marked with the white, bulbous, cotton-wool-like clusters, each one contributing its share of splinters to the unpleasantness of the upper atmosphere. The Hun as speedily retired. But not always. Sometimes he climbed high to get out of range, and then, at a height of twelve thousand to fourteen thousand feet, when scarcely visible, dropped his bombs. But the higher he went the more erratic became his practice, so really it did not matter much.

Occasionally, in the vicinity of their own coast, he and his friends attacked in coveys of six, seven, or a dozen at a time, and then things became very lively, and the A.A. guns had the time of their lives. Once the Huns attacked continuously from eight A.M. until noon. There were never less

than three of them in range at any one time, and each one, after dropping his noisome cargo, hurried back to his base for a fresh consignment, and then returned for another strafe. But the bombs always fell wide, and in course of time people came to treat seaplane attacks with positive indifference. In early days all in the ship who could get away came on deck to watch the fun. They indulged in loud and ribald remarks, and gave the benefit of their advice to the men at the guns, to the Hun or Huns, and to anybody else who cared to listen. They also jeered uproariously when bombs fell a few yards wide and deluged them with water, and fought madly for any splinters which might fall on board. But later on, when they got used to the feeling, the advent of a seaplane or two did not disturb them very much, particularly if it was soon after the midday meal, and they had composed themselves for short naps on the sunny deck before recommencing their labours in the afternoon.

It seems that the British sailor, like his comrade in the trenches, can get used to anything. Moreover, the war seems to have set a new standard of excitement, and what will happen when hostilities cease and the men have to go back to the humdrum life of peace I really do not know. It would seem impossible to raise much real enthusiasm over regattas, boxing competitions, picture-palaces, or football matches after playing the far more thrilling game with men's lives and ships for the stakes.

But bluejackets are always peculiar people, and the most trivial happenings in the midst of the most appalling danger cause them the greatest amusement. In one merry little destroyer action in the North Sea one of the British vessels was having a very hot time, and a bursting shell caused a small fire in the engine-room. It was promptly extinguished by the fire-party under the charge of the chief stoker, and shortly afterwards an officer noticed this worthy coming aft with broad grins all over his face.

'What's the joke?' he wanted to know, for it struck him as rather peculiar that a man should be so much amused at such a time.

'I carn't 'elp larfin', sir!' said the man, bubbling over with glee. 'We 'ad a bit of a bonfire in the hengine-room jest now, sir, an' w'en I 'ears 'em 'ollerin' I runs along with the 'ose-pipe, shoves the end of 'im down the hengine-room 'atch, an' switches the water on.'

'What is there funny about that?' queried the officer.

'Only that we 'arf-drownded the Chief E.R.A., 'oo was standin' at the foot o' the ladder, sir,' gurgled the man. 'Funniest thing I've see'd fur a long time. 'E ain't got a dry stitch on 'im, and 'is langwidge was somethink 'orrid.' He finished with another cackle of amusement, and went off to spin the yarn to some one else.

At the time of the incident, which has the merit of being quite true, the ship was undergoing a very hot fire. Shell were falling all round her, and splinters were whistling through the air in all directions, and for the man to be convulsed with genuine merriment at the wetting of the chief engine-room artificer, at a moment when he himself was in imminent peril of his life, speaks well for his nerve. It rather reminds one of the true story of two marines, the loading numbers at the after-gun of a light cruiser which shall be nameless. She too was in the middle of a strenuous little action when a shell burst on board, and shortly afterwards both men saw a most desirable memento in the shape of a splinter lying on the deck. They made a simultaneous dart to secure the trophy, but Jones got there first.

''Ere!' said Smith, bitterly aggrieved, ''old on. I saw 'im first!'

'I've got 'im first!' chortled Jones, stooping down and picking up the morsel of steel. 'Ow!' he yelled the next instant, dropping it as if it had stung him, and sucking his fingers; 'the bloomin' thing's red-'ot!'

'Serve you ruddy well right,' retorted Smith. 'It ain't yourn, any'ow. You leave it alone!'

'I tell you it is mine,' answered the burnt gentleman. 'I got 'im first!'

'Look 'ere, Jones, if you carn't play fair I'll give you a punch on the jaw; s'welp me I will. I'm bigger'n wot you are, and I tells you I see'd the bloomin' thing first!'

'I got 'old of 'im first, an' don't care wot you says an' does,' exclaimed Jones, putting his foot on the coveted fragment. 'I'——

Further conversation was interrupted by the advance of Smith, and in another instant the quarterdeck of H.M.S. —— was the scene of an impromptu battle. It would have been quite a pretty little tussle, for Smith was large, breathless, and bulky, while Jones was thin and wiry; but unfortunately the gunlayer, a sergeant, noticed that something was amiss with his weapon, and removed his eye from the telescopic sight.

'Here, you two,' he shouted, 'behave yourselves, and get on with loading the gun!'

''E's tryin' to pinch my splinter, sargint!' wailed Jones, applying a grimy hand to a rapidly swelling eye. 'I got 'im first!'

'No, sargint, 'e's a liar,' Smith cried with an air of injured innocence; 'I see'd it first!'

'Can't help that!' roared the N.C.O. 'Get along with the loading of the gun, and hafter the haction don't you forget I takes you both before the officer of the watch for unseemly conduc' and neglec' of dooty in the face of the enemy!'

The malcontents, rather crestfallen, ceased their bickering, and the gun went on firing. But the sergeant, a strict disciplinarian, was as good as his word. Smith and Jones, both good characters, were let off lightly. They each received fourteen days' No. 10 punishment for their misdeeds. The sergeant, a Solomon in his way, appropriated the shell-splinter and presented it to his wife.

III.

There was once a German steam-trawler called the *Anna Schrœder*. That was not her real name; but as she now flies the White Ensign and is known as the *Anita*, her original appellation does not matter. Hargreaves, the sub-lieutenant of the *Mariner*; Joshua Billings, A.B.; Pincher Martin, ordinary seaman; and several more of the destroyer's men, can tell you all about her, for they spent four days on board. They were four unforgettable days, and rumour says that the sub. and his braves are scratching themselves still.

From the *Anna Schrœder*, too, the 'Mariners,' in exchange for sundry excellent British cigarettes and a pound or so of ship's tobacco, procured some samples of particularly noisome 'war bread' and a small female pig. The bread, they said, was an excellent 'coorio' to send home to their friends; and, having the consistency and appearance of wood, it could, with due diligence, be manufactured into photograph-frames and tobacco-boxes. It took a beautiful polish. The sow, Annie, was retained on board as a mascot, and within a week of changing hands became quite friendly with her new masters. Inside a month she was sleeping in a specially made hammock, wore her own life-belt at sea, and ate her meals off a plate like a proper Christian. It is true that the rest of the menagerie on board—Jane, the monkey; Tiger and Mossyface, the two cats; Pompey, the goat; and Tirpitz, the fox-terrier—at first regarded her with some suspicion, but before long they appeared to have combined forces, and to have formed an alliance for the carrying on of offensive operations against any animal from any other ship which dared to come on board the *Mariner*. Annie's severest tussle was with the wire-haired terrier of the *Monsoon*, a plebeian but very conceited dog, who treated all vessels but his own with lordly contempt. She was ably assisted in the struggle by her willing allies, and for some minutes the battle raged furiously, to the accompaniment of barks, growls, squeals, shrill yelps, and much snorting from the fighters. But before much damage had been done on either side the engagement was brought to a sudden and wholly unexpected termination by both the principal combatants falling overboard in their excitement. They were duly rescued in the dinghy; and the contest, since they were both exhausted by swimming, was postponed *sine die*.

But all this has little to do with the *Anna Schrœder*. It so happened that at one period of the war the enemy was making himself particularly obnoxious by sinking many of our fishing-vessels in the North Sea. It was no very gallant mode of warfare; and, partly in a spirit of retaliation, and partly because My Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty may have conceived a sudden desire for some steam-trawlers for mine-sweeping and other purposes, it was determined to pay the Hun back in his own coin. The authorities were always eager to save money if they possibly could, and acquiring the necessary craft free, gratis, and for nothing from the enemy was obviously far cheaper than chartering them from British owners.

That is how it came about that the *Mariner*, many more destroyers, and several light cruisers suddenly appeared one early morning in the midst of a German fishing-fleet engaged in its occupation not very far from its own coast. The visit came as a bolt from the blue, and since there was nobody present to protect them, the trawlers had no alternative but to surrender. Twenty-three of them, I think, were captured; while several more, too ancient and too rickety to be worth taking home as prizes, were sunk.

The serene atmosphere of that calm and peaceful summer morn was befouled with Teutonic oaths and much profanity. One could not help having some sympathy for the execrators, snatched off as they were practically within hailing distance of their own coast. But every German male person of a certain age and not a cripple is *ipso facto* a soldier or a sailor; while every harmless trawler is a potential mine-layer or mine-sweeper. Most of the prisoners were young and lusty, and Fritz, Hans, Adolf, Karl, Heinrich, and many more of them had the not altogether joyful prospect of spending the rest of the war in British hands. Some of them disliked the idea intensely, and their scowling, sullen faces showed as much. Others, after making anxious inquiries as to how they would be treated and fed, expressed the opinion that things were not quite so bad after all, and that being a prisoner was far and away a happier prospect than serving in trenches at the front, whence they might never return.

It was this early morning strafe which accounted for the *Mariner's* dealings with the *Anna Schrœder*; the adoption of Annie, the pig; and the adventures of the sub-lieutenant and his merry men.

The prize crew consisted of Hargreaves, one stoker petty officer, Joshua Billings, Pincher Martin, and three others whose names do not matter; and after ten minutes spent in transferring them, their belongings, food, water, weapons, a chart, and sundry other impedimenta to the trawler, and in removing certain of the prisoners to the destroyer, the *Mariner* steamed off on her business, and left the sub. to his own devices, with orders to make the best of his way to the nearest British port.

How he proposed to get there he did not quite know. The deviation of the *Anna Schrœder's* compass might be anything, and he had no means of checking it; but the fact did not seem to worry him much. He knew that if he steered west or thereabouts he would hit the English coast in time; and, having hit it, he proposed to steam north or south along it, and go into the nearest and most convenient harbour which happened to come into sight. What harbour it was he probably would not find out until after his arrival.

He was intensely proud of his first independent command, and his first care was to commandeer all the German ensigns he could find for trophies, to hoist an enormous White Ensign at the mizzen, and to display his badge of authority in the shape of a long white man-of-war pendant at the masthead. Then, when some one had persuaded the German engineer to raise a full head of steam in the antiquated boiler, and to start the engines, one of the *Mariner's* men was put at the wheel, armed sentries were posted on deck and in the engine-room, and course was shaped for home. The men, inquisitive as usual, set about exploring the prize. She had on board more than three hundred pounds' worth of fresh-caught fish, but even the thought of this excellent food could not reconcile the bluejackets to certain other things they discovered. The first complaint came from Billings, who, as the eldest A.B. on board, had been selected as a spokesman by the others.

'Beggin' yer pardon, Mister 'Argreaves, sir,' he said, first expectorating over the ship's side, and then approaching the sub. with a very wry face, 'would yer mind 'avin' a look at th' quarters lately hoccupied by them Germans?'

'What's the matter with them?' asked the officer.

'They ain't fit fur 'uman 'abitation, sir; an' we 'as ter sleep there.'

'Why aren't they fit to live in?'

'Crawlin', sir,' said Billings disgustedly. 'Crawlin' wi' li'l hanimals! Cockroaches I don't mind, sir, bein' used to 'em in a manner o' speakin', an' there's plenty on 'em there; but there's hother hanimals present in hinnumerable quantities; creepin' things wi' legs the likes o' which I've never see'd afore.'

'Vermin?' queried the sub. in a whisper.

'Yessir. The beddin' 's one mass on 'em.'

'Well, I'm determined to have the ship clean before I've finished with her,' said Hargreaves, as if he were the commander of the latest Dreadnought, 'so heave all the bedding overboard. When you've done that, collect three of the German deckhands and make 'em scrub the place out. I'll inspect it when it's clean.'

'We ain't got no carbolic, I s'pose, sir?' Joshua queried anxiously. 'I doubts if soap an' water'll shift 'em.'

The sub. laughed. 'We brought none with us, I'm afraid. But find the man who looks after the stores, get what you can, and do your best.'

Joshua saluted and walked off. Five minutes afterwards a long line of blankets and straw mattresses was floating gaily astern.

But their troubles had only started, for a quarter of an hour later Billings reappeared with Pincher Martin, and between them they dragged the resisting figure of one of the prisoners, a small, dark man with a pair of shifty black eyes. Pincher, Hargreaves noticed, was armed with a cutlass and a revolver, and displayed the latter weapon ostentatiously.

'Good Lord!' he muttered; 'what's the matter now?'

'Prisoner an' hescort, 'alt!' bellowed Joshua.—'I brings this man afore you, sir, fur refoosin' ter scrub art 'is quarters w'en hordered, an' fur hassaultin' me.'

'And I haf von gomplaint to make,' put in the prisoner truculently. 'Von of ze sailors heet me!'

'What happened?' asked the sub. with a sigh.

'Well, sir,' Billings explained, 'it wus like this 'ere. I tells this man—'e knows Henglish just as well as I does, sir—ter start scrubbin' art, an' ter be smart abart it. 'E sezs 'e won't, 'cos 'e 'as 'is rights as a prisoner o' war, an' ain't goin' ter do no work.'

'Oh! did he?'

'Yessir, 'e did; an' I sez to 'im that if 'e doesn't hobey horders 'e'd best look out; an' wi' that 'e tries ter dot me one in the face.'

Hargreaves, stifling his amusement as best he could, scowled fiercely, and endeavoured to look judicial. 'And what happened then?' he inquired.

'Well, sir, ord'nary seaman Martin sees wot wus 'appenin', an' catches 'im one acrost th' 'ead wi' a broom-'andle.'

Pincher's bosom swelled with pride at the recollection.

'What have you got to say?' demanded the sub., turning to the German.

'My name ees Charrlie Smeeth, an' I haf lif in Englan' many year. I serve in Engleesh sheeps, an' I say to zis man'——

'I don't want to hear all that. What d'you mean by refusing duty?'

Smith, or Schmidt, as he probably was, licked his lips. 'I say to zis man, why he treat me like zat? And zen zis man,' indicating Martin, 'heet me on ze head with ze steeck and hurt me mooch.' He pointed to a large lump on the side of his cranium.

'That ain't true, sir,' Joshua interrupted. 'If Pinch—ordinary seaman Martin—'adn't sloshed 'im 'e'd 'a got me.'

The sub. scratched his beardless chin thoughtfully, for he hardly knew what to do. 'Look here,' he said at last, addressing the culprit sternly, 'you are a prisoner of war, and have to obey orders. If I have any further trouble with you, your hands and feet will be tied, and you will be put in the fish-hold for the rest of the passage. I will also report you on arrival in England, and have you court-martialled and shot. I mean what I say, mind; but I will give you this one warning, so you had better take it to heart. Do you understand what I say?'

'I onterstan',' said Schmidt, fidgeting nervously.

'Remove the prisoner and let him carry on with his work,' the officer ordered. 'If he offers any further violence shoot him at once.' He winked. Billings grinned understandingly, and the hapless German was led away in a cold and clammy perspiration. They had no further trouble with him.

Hargreaves was no fool, and, being fully aware that idleness only breeds discontent and bickering, took very good care to keep his prisoners busy. They were not treated with undue severity, and received exactly the same food as their captors; but they experienced for the first time the rigours of British naval discipline. All day long they were kept hard at work in scrubbing and scraping the *Anna* to a state of hitherto undreamt-of cleanliness; while at night all of them—except the cook and the man on watch in the engine and boiler room, who perforce had to be allowed a certain amount of liberty, but were kept under constant supervision—slept in the stuffy little forecastle, with an armed sentry standing guard at the door.

Nothing on earth would induce the bluejackets to poke their noses inside the place, much less to inhabit it. They preferred to snatch what sleep they could under the stars; for though—thanks to the energy instilled into the unwilling Germans—the forecastle had been scrubbed far cleaner than it had ever been before, its cleanliness was merely superficial, and it was still well infested with 'hanimals,' as Billings called them.

'Them bugs is pisenous German bugs,' he had remarked, wrinkling his nose in disgust. 'Maybe them 'Uns is used ter 'em. I ain't, an' I'll watch it I don't go ter sleep in a place wi' wild hinsects a-suckin' o' me blood. It ain't fit an' proper, an' I sleeps on deck.'

Incidentally, it was the cook who gave Hargreaves one of the finest frights of his life. At midnight on the night they had come on board, the sub., leaving Billings in charge as officer of the watch, with orders to steer west and to call him at once if anything happened, retired to rest in a small compartment under the wheelhouse which had evidently been used as a charthouse, cabin, and storeroom all rolled into one. It was innocent of insects other than cockroaches, and had a cushioned locker at one side; while the rest of the space was filled with nets, cordage, canvas, paint, oil, and a quantity of food. Dependent from hooks in the ceiling were several dried fish, two bloated sausages, and a large raw ham. The place was stuffy and odorous; but Hargreaves was tired, and so, swathed in a blanket, he soon settled off to sleep on the locker with the door wide open.

Towards two in the morning some slight sound caused him to wake up with a start, and on opening his eyes his blood nearly froze in his veins. There, in the door, clearly silhouetted against the flood of moonlight beyond, was the dark figure of a man peering into the room in an attitude of rapt, listening attention. He was the German cook, from the shape of his bullet-head, and in one hand he held a murderous-looking knife with a long and glittering blade. He could only be there for one purpose, and his knife could only be intended for Hargreaves's throat.

The sub.'s first impulse was to shout for help, for an armed sentry should have been on the deck outside. Then he scouted the idea as impracticable, for the man would be upon him the instant he

raised his voice, so he lay still, hardly daring to breathe. Then, with a feeling of great relief, he suddenly remembered the loaded automatic pistol under his pillow. He withdrew it softly, cocked the hammer without making a sound, and then, with the weapon poised, his finger on the trigger, and his nerves tingling, made up his mind to fire on the first sign of aggression.

The cook, treading stealthily, entered the room and looked round to the right and left. He next came towards the locker on which the sub. lay, and seemed to be examining the ceiling intently. Then he raised his knife for the blow.

The muzzle of the pistol went up and followed his every movement, but an instant later the sub. dropped the weapon with a chuckle of amusement.... The German was busily cutting a couple of inches off a particularly succulent sausage hanging from its hook.

When Hargreaves laughed his visitor dropped the knife with a clatter, and leapt from the room like a rabbit. The sub.'s mirth overcame him completely.

'Is everythink orl right, sir?' queried the anxious voice of Pincher Martin, who had been just outside the door the whole time.

'Yes,' spluttered the officer; 'there's nothing the m-matter.'

'Beg pardon, sir; only th' cook jumped art o' this 'ere door as if 'e'd see'd a ghost, sir. 'E seems a bit scared like.'

He was, poor man, badly scared, nearly as frightened as the sub. himself had been a few moments before; but he never quite realised how very near death the cravings of his stomach had led him. After all, no ordinary person is in the habit of making a hearty meal off a pungent, onion-flavoured sausage at two o'clock in the morning! All's well that ends well, but cookie escaped sudden death by the skin of his teeth.

Hargreaves never suffered his discipline to relax, and all through the second day of the passage the work of cleaning the ship went on. Even the German skipper, a very fat person, was pressed into service, and, since nothing else could be found for him to do, he volunteered to spend the morning in scrubbing out the wheelhouse.

'I hope onter-see boot com' an' tak' us all back to Germany!' he remarked feelingly in very bad English after half-an-hour's hard work on his hands and knees.

'If one does I'm afraid you won't get there,' retorted the hard-hearted sub-lieutenant with a wicked twinkle in his eye.

'If we sight a German submarine all the prisoners will be thrown overboard in life-belts, so that she'll have to stop to pick you up. Then, while she's doing it, I shall ram her at full speed.'

The German believed him implicitly. The brutal British were capable of anything. '*Ach!*' he exclaimed, sitting up on his haunches and wiping the drops of perspiration from a very scared face, 'dey vill nod pick us op. Ve shall be drown!'

'But surely your own countrymen won't stand by and see that happen?' said Hargreaves with pleasant curiosity.

'I do not know. Bot efen ef dem pick us op, you dry do sink der onter-see boot, so ve drown anyhows! I haf wife an' childrens, capitan,' he added agitatedly; 'many childrens. Von, do, dree, four, fif, six childrens. I doo old do fight. *Ach!*' he suggested with an oily smile, 'you safe me an' drown de ozzers. Dey not marriet. Dey not care!'

The sub. shook his head. 'I'm sorry,' he said; 'war is a very terrible thing.'

'I hope ve do not see onter-see boot!' murmured the other. '*Ach!*' he nodded, noticing Hargreaves's grinning face; 'you choke, es et nod?'

'I beg your pardon?'

'You make fon, hey? You no drown der prisoners?'

'Depends upon how you behave yourselves,' came the noncommittal reply.

The skipper fell to with redoubled energy.

The weather was fine and the sea calm, but the *Anna's* engines and boiler were long past their early youth, and they had steamed across the North Sea at a speed of barely seven knots. It was a heart-rending performance; and though Coggins, the stoker petty officer, exhorted the German fireman to shovel coal on the furnace until he was purple with passion and they were limp with weariness, the steam pressure to the engines dropped and dropped.

Shortly after noon on the second day, by which time they were on the Dogger Bank with not a vestige of another vessel in sight—there is not much fishing done in war-time—the climax came. It was not exactly due to the boiler, though the propeller had been revolving more and more slowly; but all of a sudden there came a peculiar grinding sound from the engine-room, and the

screw refused duty altogether.

A moment or two later Coggins, breathless and blasphemous, appeared at the top of the hatch. 'It's no good, sir,' he wailed; 'it's no —— good. I've done me best to tinker up they damned hengines to get 'em to 'eave round, but now the metal's bin and run in the cross'ead, and they won't 'eave round no more.'

'Is there nothing we can do to it?' queried the sub.

'I ain't seen nothin' aboard we can patch 'im up with, sir. Them hengines—them —— hengines—ain't fit to crack nuts, let alone be aboard a ship!'

The sub. bit his lip, for there they were, well out of sight of land, the ship helpless, and nothing in sight. But he had been trained as an engineer himself, and was better at the job than some people imagined.

'I'll come and have a look at it,' he announced. 'We must do something. I can't sail the damned ship home, and there's nobody here to tow us!'

Eventually, after three hours' hard labour, they succeeded in repairing the damage with a piece of sheet-brass filched from somewhere else. It is doubtful if any fully qualified engineer would have passed the repair as either safe or satisfactory; but by the time they had finished, and were black, bad-tempered, and greasy, the engines were persuaded to produce the revolutions for four knots without running very hot. Even four knots was better than drifting aimlessly about the sea with the prospect of being bagged by a submarine or dying of thirst and starvation.

The next thing which refused duty was the boiler itself. It gave out at eight o'clock the same evening, and once more Coggins, looking more like a demon from the nethermost pit than a respectable stoker petty officer of his Majesty's Navy, a rabid teetotaler, a strict chapel-goer, and the father of four children who attended Sunday school regularly, arrived on deck in a state of incoherent vituperation.

'And what's the matter now?' Hargreaves inquired.

'The biler, sir. 'E ain't bin cleaned for eight months, them Germans says. The uptake and toobes is all sooted up, and we carn't get no steam to the hengines no'ow!'

The sub. sighed. 'How long's it going to take to clean it?'

''Bout six or seven hours, sir.'

'Well, carry on with it at once.'

In ordinary circumstances a boiler is cleaned when it is stone-cold and the fires are drawn; but Coggins, in some miraculous manner unknown to any one save himself and his victims, goaded the Germans into such a state of frenzied activity that they swept the tubes and uptakes in five hours. They did it with the fires damped down but still alight, and what they suffered from the heat only they themselves knew. But the job was done somehow, the firemen were revived with neat navy rum, and by one o'clock the next morning the *Anna Schrœder* resumed her journey at the exasperating speed of 3·75 knots.

They eventually arrived in a certain harbour late the same evening without further mishap; and Hargreaves, after seeing the prize and the prisoners turned over to the responsible authorities, and his own men comfortably housed and fed in the Sailors' Home, retired to an hotel, ate a hearty meal, had a hot bath well impregnated with Jeyes's Fluid, borrowed a suit of pyjamas, a razor, and a new toothbrush from the manager, and then turned in and slept for nearly twelve hours.

Little more remains to be told, for the next morning they left by train to rejoin their ship, taking with them sundry mementoes from the prize. They have passed through many vicissitudes since, but neither the sub. nor his men will ever forget the *Anna Schrœder*.

CHAPTER XVI.

MINOR INCIDENTS.

I.

'Signal just come through, sir,' said Rosser, the signal-man, thumping on the door of Wooten's cabin at half-past one in the morning.

The skipper grunted, sat up, switched on the light, and blinked. He was used to sudden calls and excursions in the middle of the night, and knew instinctively from the tone of the man's voice that the message was urgent.

'Read it out,' he sighed, throwing one leg out of the bunk.

'Menelaus, *Monsoon*, *Manner*, and *Minx* raise steam, and report when ready to proceed.'

'I thought so. What's the weather?'

'Very dark, and blowing a bit, sir,' said Rosser cheerfully, the moisture from his dripping oilskins forming a nice little puddle on the skipper's carpet. 'It's been raining hard this last half-hour.'

Wooten groaned. 'Right! Tell all the officers, and ask Mr Thompson to let me know how soon he'll be ready. And on your way forward tell Spry I want him.'

Spry, able seaman, was the captain's body-servant and general factotum.

Wooten threw open the small scuttle over his bunk and looked out. It was as black as pitch, the wind whistled and moaned mournfully, and a wave of moisture smote him in the face. It would be a wild and wet night at sea. Altogether a depressing night, there was not the least doubt about that. 'Ugh!' he grunted, slamming the scuttle to and drawing the bedclothes up to his chin.

Enter Spry.

'Usual sea-gear,' his master murmured.

The man nodded. He knew exactly what was wanted.

'We're in for a dusting, Spry.'

'We are that, sir. Will you 'ave your blue muffler or the white one?'

'The blue one, and the clean sweater.'

'You can't 'ave 'im, sir,' said the bluejacket, busy opening drawers and cupboards and pulling out clothes like a juggler. ''E's at the wash.'

'At the wash?'

'Yessir, and so's most of our flannel shirts and stiff collars. If we 're to be away long I'll 'ave to wash some shirts out, and you'll 'ave to wear them soft collars of yours.' Spry was always a pessimist in the small hours of the morning. 'Is there anything else you'll be wanting, sir?'

'No, thanks. Nothing bar the cocoa.'

Spry took a vacuum flask from a cupboard, and left the cabin to fill it. This also was a matter of routine; for cocoa, a cushion, and a rug were always put in the charthouse every night for Wooten's use when the ship was at sea.

The skipper clambered out of his bunk, lit a pipe, and dressed. This operation took him quite ten minutes. First came his ordinary garments, and a heavy woollen sweater and blue muffler; then a pair of thick socks; next a pair of fisherman's white woollen stockings worn over his trousers and reaching well above his knees; over them, a pair of rubber sea-boots. Next a uniform jacket, a lammy coat, another muffler, and an oilskin on top of everything. It was wet, and the weather was cold, and Wooten did not intend to be chilled through to the marrow if he could help it. His apparel was completed by a sou'-wester and a pair of glasses slung round his neck; and, thus arrayed, he clambered slowly up the ladder and waddled forward along the deck to the charthouse. It was too dark, and he was too bloated, to proceed briskly.

Hargreaves, the sub., yawning his head off, was already up there sorting out his charts.

'Morning, sir. D'you know where we're going?'

'Haven't the vaguest notion. The *Menelaus* is the boss, and will get the orders. She may tell us when we get outside.'

'How long are we likely to be away?'

'Don't know. Last time we left in a hurry we didn't come back for a fortnight. The time before, we were away for six weeks.'

'What'——

'If you ask me any more questions I shall be peevish,' Wooten interrupted. 'It's high time you knew that I'm not fit for polite conversation at this unholy hour of the morning.'

'Sorry, sir. I forgot.'

Half-an-hour afterwards, by which time steam had been raised, and the fact had been reported, Wooten climbed the ladder on to the bridge.

'Signal for destroyers to slip, sir,' came from Rosser a minute or two later, as a lamp winked frenziedly in and out in the darkness about a mile away. 'Form single line a'ead; speed ten knots.'

'Let go forward!' went the order to the first lieutenant on the forecastle.

There came the splash of the end of the wire as it fell into the water, and a moment later a hail from MacDonald. 'All gone, sir!'

'Half ahead port. Half astern starboard. Helm hard aport.'

The engine-room reply-gongs clanged, and the *Mariner* began to turn on her heel.

'Slow astern starboard—Stop starboard—Half ahead both—one-eighty revolutions,' in succession. 'Helm amidships. Steady!'

The four destroyers, falling into line astern of each other, groped their way down the congested harbour like wraiths in the night. Wooten glanced at the dark shapes of the other ships as they slid by. 'Lucky dogs!' he murmured. 'You've got a lie in. I envy you. This is not a night for poor old Peter to be at sea.'

He was right. By the time they reached the entrance the rain was coming down in sheets, and the wind had increased. Then the bows lifted to the first swell, and a dollop of spray flew over them, and rattled against the bridge-screens.

'It's going to be wet,' Hargreaves observed glumly, securing the top button of his oilskin.

'It is,' the skipper agreed; 'damned wet!'

In ten minutes, by which time they were clear of the harbour, and speed had been increased to eighteen knots, the ship was prancing and curveting like a frisky pony, and the spray was flying over in sheets. Five minutes later the seas were coming in green over the upper deck.

'Oh hell!' the captain groused, stowing away his useless pipe after vainly endeavouring to relight its sodden contents; 'this is the limit!—Look out, sub.,' he added, glancing at the next ship ahead, whose dim shadow danced through a welter of spray a cable and a half in front. 'Shove her on a bit. You're astern of station, and dropping fast. Lord!' he added, 'I wish I knew where we're off to.'

His prayer was not answered until daylight, by which time they were far to the southward, and the *Menelaus* informed them of their destination. They were going to the warmest spot most of them had ever known, though they were not aware of it at the time. Warmth can come from the Huns as well as from the sun.

II.

The intermittent rumble of heavy guns had sounded continuously all through the night, and with the approach of dawn and the commencement of the usual 'early morning hate,' the intensity of the dull reverberations increased. The *Mariner* and her consorts were within about twelve miles of the spot where the long line of opposing trenches debouched into the North Sea; but even at this distance they could see the brilliant illumination caused by the star-shell as they burst. The dark-blue sky above the horizon to the south-east was never free of them.

'Lor'!' said Billings in an awed whisper, watching the blue-white flashes as they burst suddenly out in the air, hung for a moment, and then waned slowly away, to be replaced by others; 'some poor blokes ain't arf gittin' it in the neck!'

There was a romance and an interest about the spectacle which it is rather difficult to define. For one thing, it was the closest they had ever been to the front; but here, on board the ship, everything was going on in the same old way, and the men went about their business as usual. But there, a bare twelve miles off, the deep-throated murmur of the guns showed that men were striving to kill each other, while the star-shell must have been flooding the closely packed trenches with unwelcome light. It seemed a little difficult to realise it, somehow.

The morning was cloudless and calm. The light increased, and as the sun neared the horizon a band of pale rose-madder and dull orange slowly began to encroach on the dark blue of the upper sky to the eastward. Before long they could see the hostile coast itself as a thin, blue-gray streak punctuated here and there by the spires and houses of the coast towns, magnified out of all proportion by the deceptive light. Hanging in the air, and all but invisible to the naked eye, was the bloated, caterpillar-shape of a German observation balloon. It looked ominous and menacing, and the Hun in the basket suspended beneath it was evidently going aloft to see whom his guns might devour for breakfast. The coast was reputed to bristle with weapons, some of them of prodigious range, and the men in the destroyer hoped fervently that they might not be victims of his wrath.

Then, quite suddenly, the dull blue above the broadening band of colour began to twinkle and sparkle with little spurts and splashes of bright yellow flame. They did not appear in ones, twos, or threes, but in batches of twenty or thirty at a time. The rumbling of the guns started afresh, for the flashes were the bursts of the enemy's anti-aircraft shell, fired at a swarm of allied aeroplanes making an early morning bombing attack; and, from the look of things, somebody was getting a tolerably hot time. More killing! It was rather like watching a gladiatorial combat in the arena; but it was a fine sight, and the 'Mariners' would not have missed it for worlds.

Presently, when the rosy light of the dawn had mounted up into space, the thudding of the distant guns ceased. The attack was over, and the bombs had evidently been dropped; but the clear sky over the shore was still flecked and stained with hundreds of smoke-puffs slowly dissolving on the gentle breeze. They showed blue and purple against the vivid contrasting colour beyond.

Air raids, and their subsequent reprisals, were a speciality of this locality. They took place nearly every morning and evening the *Mariner* was there; and as the visiting machines had a comparatively short distance to travel before reaching their objective, they were carried out by too many aeroplanes, and with too great a frequency, to be pleasant.

In the French town within reach of the aerial Hun business went on as usual; but at the first wailing of the warning hooter the inhabitants bolted to earth like rabbits to their burrow. Every house which possessed a cellar showed a small red flag over the doorway, and any one who cared to claim admittance was given shelter. Trams stopped and disgorged their living freights. Adipose tram conductors, elderly women dragging frightened children, ancient male civilians, *poilus* in their slate-blue uniforms, any one and every one, made a bee-line for the nearest symbol of a cellar and safety. It was a wise precaution which must have saved many lives; for, though the Hun may be given the credit of only wishing to damage places of 'military importance,' and to kill members of 'the armed forces of the enemy,' his bombs, as often as not, were liberally sprinkled upon the residential and commercial portions of the town. Added to this, every anti-aircraft gun in the neighbourhood—and there were many of them—sent its shell hurtling skywards to drive the invaders away. The bits had to fall somewhere; and if a jagged morsel of steel weighing one ounce falls on the head of a human being from a height, say, of ten thousand feet, there is nothing for it but a funeral and mourners. So it is wise to keep indoors in any case, wiser still to repair to somebody else's cellar if you do not possess one of your own.

But after the raids, when the inhabitants emerged from their burrows, the small boys and girls collected splinters and sold them as mementoes. The trade was very brisk, and prices sometimes ran high. Bomb fragments—and one could not help suspecting that many of these were manufactured at home in the quiet intervals—commanded fabulous sums. I still treasure a fleeting vision of a British army captain in khaki, flourishing five-franc notes, pursuing a sky-blue *poilu* down the street in the midst of an air raid. The Frenchman hugged to his bosom the dangerous remains of an aeroplane bomb, a wicked-looking affair painted bright yellow, and filled with some devilish compound guaranteed to kill or to cure. The Englishman wanted it badly, and, being the faster of the two, eventually overtook his quarry, and obtained the relic for fifteen francs. What he did with it I cannot say. One can hardly think that it was received with gratitude by his loving parents, or that it occupied the niche of honour in the hall of his rich but nervous aunt.

But whatever we may have said about bombing attacks at sea, air raids on a town are not the least bit amusing until afterwards. The whistle of a descending bomb is the most uncanny and unpleasant sound it is possible to imagine, far and away nastier than the howling and screeching of a passing shell. Moreover, in an air raid on a town the visitors can hardly fail to hit some one or something, and it may possibly be us.

III.

'The Secretary of the Admiralty announces that an action took place yesterday afternoon between British and German destroyers. The enemy suffered considerable damage, and were forced to retire. Our casualties were insignificant.'—*Daily Press.*

It is rather galling to find one of the most eventful and crowded hours of one's existence disposed of in four lines of cold print, not even the name of a ship mentioned!

It made the ship's company of the *Mariner* feel very small and insignificant, and the puffed-up, proud sort of feeling they had when they came out of their first real action oozed from them like gas from a punctured Zeppelin.

Sailors are peculiar animals. They long to frustrate and confound the Hun—that goes without saying; but, having done their best in this direction, they are equally desirous that their friends and relations shall be aware of the fact. Most of the men expected at least to see the *Mariner's* name in the newspapers. A good many of them, though they would not have admitted it, would have been highly flattered had their likenesses appeared in the *Morning Mirror*. 'A naval hero who has been doing his bit' would have sounded well as a superscription, though perhaps a trifle fulsome; while further photographs of the 'naval hero's' wife and family, his father and mother, the schoolmaster who had taught him, and the public-house which he sometimes patronised, would also have been suitable to the occasion. But unfortunately the newspapers took no notice of the affair; and, since the censorship of naval news was strict, they probably never even realised that such a ship as the *Mariner* existed. It was a pity, for, from the point of view of the men and their friends, anything and everything which appeared in the Press must, of necessity, be a fact. If a man went home and said he had been in an action which had never publicly been announced, it was possible that his immediate neighbours might believe what he said. It was more than probable, however, that 50 per cent. of outsiders would treat his story *cum grano salis*, and think that he had exaggerated. Corroborative evidence is always useful.

To Pincher Martin the recollection of his first action at sea is still a vague and shadowy impression of mingled fact and fancy. He had kept the forenoon watch, and on going below at noon had consumed his usual midday meal with great relish. Then, with a satisfied feeling of repletion, he stretched himself at full length on a hard and very uncomfortable mess-stool, and went off to sleep. He was not the only one; but he had kept the middle watch, so there was some excuse for him.

Towards three o'clock he was suddenly brought back to his senses by the prolonged and irritating jangle of an electric alarm-bell. 'Gawd!' he murmured, sitting up with a start, and rubbing his sleepy eyes; 'wot's the buzz now?'

He was not long in finding out, for at that same moment Petty Officer Casey put his head down the hatch. 'Below there!' he howled cheerfully. 'Tumble up! Enemy in sight! General Quarters!'

His words were punctuated by the sound of men running along the upper deck and the rumble of a gun. The report was faint but unmistakable, and it did not come from the *Mariner*.

Followed by various of his messmates, Pincher darted for the hatch, clambered up the steep ladder, and ten seconds later appeared at his gun on the forecastle breathless and inquisitive.

''Ere,' he queried, more by instinctive curiosity than because he really wanted the opinion of any one else, 'wot's up?'

'You stan' by to 'ump them projectiles!' grunted an A.B. 'This 'ere ain't the time to git askin' stoopid questions!'

Pincher obediently placed a lyddite shell in the loading-tray and waited.

Three British destroyers were in single line ahead, the fourth being away on some business best known to herself. The *Mariner* was the centre ship, and she quivered and shook to the thrust of her turbines; while, from the sensation of speed, and the great mass of white water heaped up under the stern of the next ahead, Pincher guessed they must be travelling at about thirty knots. Three or four miles away to port, rather difficult to see against the gray background of shore beyond, were the lean shapes of three other torpedo-craft. They also were steaming at high speed, and left a long white trail in the water astern of them, and seemed to be steering an approximately parallel course. They were German, of course, and as he watched a ripple of bright flame and a cloud of brown smoke leapt out from their leading vessel. They were firing, and at him. He felt rather frightened, and suddenly became possessed of a bitter resentment against the enemy who were striving to kill him and his shipmates. He had done them no personal wrong, so why should they try to take his life?

He held his breath and waited for the shell to drop, but the pause seemed interminable. Then he heard the sound of the reports, and saw three or four whity-gray splashes in the water between him and the enemy. The shell were fully six hundred yards short, and harmless. He breathed again.

Some order came through a voice-pipe to the gun; whereupon the sight-setter twiddled a small wheel and peered anxiously at a graduated dial, while the gunlayer, breathing heavily, applied his eye to the telescope. The muzzle of the gun began to move up and down in the air as the sights were kept on the enemy.

'Train right a bit, Bill!' came a smothered remark. 'Train right, damn yer eyes! That'll do! Keep her like that!'

A bell rang somewhere. A moment's pause, and then, with a sheet of flame and a crash, the

weapon went off.

When once the business really started Pincher felt better. The anticipation, that awful period of suspense between the time of the enemy being sighted and the first shot being fired, was far and away worse than the actual fight itself. The noise and excitement acted as a sort of anæsthetic. They had a deadening effect which dulled the finer workings of his mind, and did away with most of his previous and poignant mental agony. He realised in a vague sort of a way that he might be killed; but the process of being under fire, when once it had started and the enemy was being fired at in return, was not nearly so bad as he had imagined it would be.

He had the task of placing a projectile in the loading-tray every time after the gun had fired, recoiled, ejected the spent cylinder neatly to the rear, and then had run out again and had been reloaded. He did it almost automatically, and without having to think about it. Time became an unknown quantity. Seconds sometimes seemed like hours, and hours may have dwindled to minutes for all he knew. All the sensations he was really conscious of at the time were a supreme desire to keep up the supply of shell, an overwhelming hatred for the enemy who dared to fire upon him, a most unpleasant feeling of heat, and an intolerable and raging thirst. The acrid taste and smell of the burning cordite may have produced the thirst; but, after five minutes of firing, Martin would have bartered everything he possessed for a mug of really cold water.

Incident succeeded incident with such rapidity that he could not concentrate his attention on any one particular thing. He saw great white splashes in the water, some of them perilously close. The noise of the *Mariner's* own guns overpowered every other sound, but between their reports he heard the fainter thudding of the enemy's weapons, the peculiar whining drone of hostile shell as they hurtled through the air, and the fiendish whirring and whizzing of their fragments as they burst. There came a jar and a metallic crash which told him that the ship had been hit somewhere close. He had no time to look round, but waited anxiously for the missile to pulverise; waited for what seemed minutes for the flame and roar of an appalling detonation and a shower of splinters which would sweep him to eternity. They never came. The shell had passed through the forecastle, and out again through the side of the ship, without exploding.

His own gun was firing very fast, and he could not see much, but in the rifts between the sheets of flame and clouds of smoke caused by its discharge he caught occasional glimpses of the enemy. They were still steaming fast, and seemed rather closer than before, and from the sea round about them spout after spout of spray leapt into the air as the British shell pitched. The brilliant gun-flashes still twinkled up and down their sides as they fired; but he was glad they were having a hot time.

The next time he saw them they seemed to have turned shorewards, while the British, still firing heavily, steamed in pursuit. Then, in the after-part of the middle German destroyer, the one the *Mariner* was firing at, he suddenly noticed a wicked red flash and a cloud of oily black smoke. A shell had gone home. He could have shouted in glee had he not been so breathless.

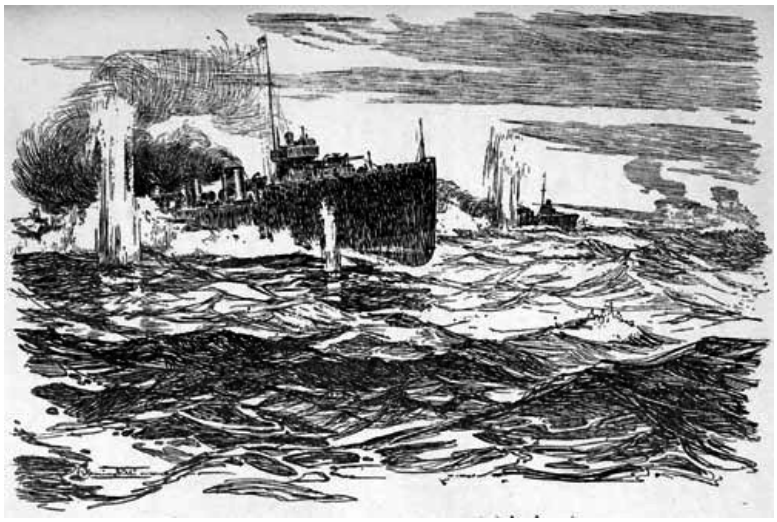
The long-range action lasted for a full fifty-five minutes, with both sides blazing away merrily the whole time. What damage was done to the enemy it was impossible to say, but it was clear that they suffered considerably, and that they were forced back to their own coast. As regards their numbers, guns, size, and speed the opposing craft were pretty evenly matched; and if the action had taken place in the open sea it would have been fought to a finish at close range, or until one or other of the combatants retired post-haste from the contest. In this eventuality, given average luck, it would not have been the British; not because the German is any less brave than his antagonist, but because he has fewer ships to risk, and is supposed to have orders not to give battle unless he has a good chance of winning. But man proposes and God disposes, and the fight was more or less a drawn one.

At length there came the time when the enemy could be pursued no longer, on account of the proximity of the shore. So close in had they steamed that some one in the *Mariner* even declared that he was able to count the windows in the buildings and the tiles on the red roofs; and though the tile part may have been an exaggeration, the window-counting certainly was not. The yellow, wave-lapped beach, with the turf-covered sand-dunes beyond it, looked strangely calm and peaceful; but concealed in those dunes were guns of almost every imaginable size from fourteen-inch downwards, some of which were reputed to be able to pitch their shell on a sixpence at a range of fifteen miles. The *Mariner* and her consorts were a long, long way inside this distance, and there was nothing for it but to discontinue the action, and to beat a hasty retreat.

Brother Boche, with his guns in among the dunes, was no fool. He was merely waiting for a good opportunity to open fire, and his chance came at the precise moment when the British helms went over and the destroyers started to steam seawards. Then the whole line of coast suddenly began to sparkle from end to end, and before one had time to think the shell were pitching. The fire of the destroyers, both as regards its volume and its accuracy, had been as nothing to this. Great white-water fountains seemed to spout up everywhere at the same moment, ahead, astern, and on either side. How many projectiles fell within a few feet of the ship during the next ten minutes it is impossible to say. The shooting was very accurate indeed—far too accurate to be pleasant. It was extremely unpleasant.

Words can convey no conception of the breathless sort of sensation caused by those falling shell. They howled like wolves and screeched like express trains passing through wayside stations. They fell into the water with heavy liquid plops, detonated in gigantic upheavals of water and with roaring concussions compared with which the reports of heavy guns faded into insignificance, and sent their jagged-edged fragments whirring off into space with the humming and buzzing of angry hornets. It was a sickening, uncanny feeling to see a fifty-foot geyser-like spout spring into the air a bare fathom off the stem, to notice the black patch at the spot in the water where the shell had burst as if one had emptied a bucket of ashes, and then to steam through the descending spray, and to smell the horrible, reeking stench of the explosive. It was more alarming still to see a bouquet of four or five such splashes jump into the air within a few feet of the stern or on either side of the ship. If a single one of these projectiles drove home the *Mariner* would probably be brought to a standstill, in which case her subsequent demolition and the slaughter of her crew would only be a matter of time. If three or four shells struck at once she would probably founder immediately.

It is one thing to be fired at by a similar vessel, and to be able to fire at her in reply; but it is something quite different to be subjected to the individual attention in broad daylight of a heavy ship, or many shore batteries, when there is no possible chance of retaliation. It leaves one breathless and cold; and though, perhaps, one may not actually show one's fear, one would give much to be elsewhere. It is only natural.



"The shooting was very accurate, far too accurate to be pleasant."

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Shell from modern heavy guns can drive their way through the armoured sides of a battleship, but they will pulverise a destroyer into mere powder. There are no bombproofs, no funk-holes, no armour, not even a conning-tower—not that it would be used if there were. The officers and the men at the guns and torpedo-tubes are all on deck and in the open, while those below in the engine and boiler rooms have nothing between them and the deep sea but a steel skin barely thicker than a substantial biscuit-tin. Moreover, the greater portion of the hull is crammed with machinery, ammunition, and explosives; and, however much of a safeguard a destroyer's speed and small size may be, she must always seem very vulnerable to those who serve in her. I say 'seem' advisedly, for it is surprising how much hammering the tough little craft can withstand without being knocked out; while, as any gunner who is used to the game will tell you, she is not a very easy target to hit. But, for all that, one lucky shell may do the trick, in which case every man-jack of her crew may be killed or drowned. There is never much chance of escape if once the ship goes, and any man who says he relishes being under heavy fire in a T.B.D. is either a born hero or an Ananias. It is easy to make light of things after they have happened, but no words can adequately portray the inner feelings of the ordinary mortal while the ordeal is still in progress. They are indescribable.

But by some miraculous intervention of Providence the *Mariner* and her sister-ships escaped practically scot-free. According to people who witnessed the withdrawal from a distance, people who well knew the range and accuracy of the coast guns, the odds were a thousand to one that they would never escape, for at times they were hardly visible in the spray fountains leaping up all around them. They were literally buried in the splashes, but still they came on—and escaped.

It was not until afterwards that the men thoroughly realised how lucky they were. At the time, whatever they may have felt in their hearts or minds, there were no suggestions of fear in their faces, no trace of nervousness in their demeanour. They behaved just the same as usual—jeered uproariously when a shell fell a few feet short and deluged them with spray, and made facetious remarks when projectiles from 'Fractious Fanny,' as some one adroitly christened a particularly

obnoxious 11·2, lumbered gracefully over their heads and exploded merrily in the sea a hundred feet or so beyond them. Perhaps they were a little more talkative than usual; perhaps their laughter was sometimes a little forced; but, for all that, they behaved as British bluejackets always do.

'I wouldn't 'a missed that there show fur a lot,' said Pincher Martin after supper the same evening.

'I reckons we kin think ourselves lucky ter git outa it,' Billings murmured with his mouth full. 'It's orl right lookin' back on it w'en once it's orl over; but it takes a bloomin' 'ero not ter 'ave a cold feelin' in 'is stummick wi' them there guns a-pluggin' at 'im.'

'Did you 'ave a cold feelin' in yer inside, Josh?' M'Sweeny queried anxiously.

'Course I 'ad. I wus cold orl over. I ain't no bloomin' 'ero. But, orl the same, Tubby boy, I reckons it's done us orl good ter 'ave a bit of a shake up like this 'ere. Makes us a sort of understan' 'ow every bloke aboard 'as 'is own job ter do; don't it?'

Joshua's way of expressing himself may have been crude, but M'Sweeny quite understood what he meant.

The engagement, short as it had been, had given the men confidence in themselves, each other, their officers, and their ship. It had banded them together in some extraordinary and quite inexplicable manner which no years of peace training could have done. Together they had been tried and had not been found wanting; and now, more than ever, they had become 'we few, we happy few, we band of brothers.' They felt themselves inspired with a new patriotism and a new ardour, and it was that very feeling which, on 21st October 1805, had helped their forebears to win the battle of Trafalgar.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DAY.

I.

All through the peaceful night of 30th May 1916 British squadrons were at sea steaming steadily eastward. Fighting-ships of almost every class were represented; great battleships and battle-cruisers, armoured cruisers of an older type, new and very fast light cruisers, the ubiquitous destroyers in their dozens, all converging silently towards the area on the other side of the North Sea which was presently to become the scene of the mightiest and most terrible battle in British naval history.

The Commander-in-Chief and the Admirals in command of squadrons may possibly have known that something unusual was in the air; but it is doubtful if any subordinate officers or men had the least inkling of what the next day would bring forth. They knew that a battle was always possible, and were ready and anxious for it. Off and on for nearly twenty-two months they had scoured the gray wastes of the North Sea, and had explored its grayer fogs, always hoping that the next dawn would bless their tired eyes with a view of the far-flung battle-line of the enemy stretched out across the horizon before them. But morning after morning the sun had risen to display the same bare and monotonous vista of sea and sky.

Sometimes the ocean was calm and peaceful, the sun shone undimmed, and the blue sky towards the horizon was piled high with mass upon mass of mountainous white cumulus. Sometimes they had fogs, when they could see barely a hundred yards; sometimes the prevailing North Sea mists, in which the visibility alternated between two and five miles. At other times the wind howled, and the leaden sea was whipped into fury by gales; while the sky became overcast with dark clouds and streaked with the white, frayed-out streamers of mares' tails. They had come to know the vagaries of their cruising ground by heart; but whatever its aspect the sea was ever innocent of the one thing they all wished to see—the German High Sea Fleet.

Their wistful longing was just as acute as that of the men in the storm-battered ships of Columbus when straining their eyes towards the western horizon for the first dim blue traces of the new continent; and now, through sheer disappointment, not a few of them had come to believe that the chance they all prayed and longed for would never come.

Daylight on 31st May found the *Mariner* and many other destroyers still steaming eastward in company with the battle-cruiser fleet under the command of Vice-Admiral Sir David Beatty in the *Lion*. Certain light-cruiser squadrons, acting as scouts, were stationed some distance ahead of the heavier vessels. The morning—which had broken beautifully fine, with a calm sea—passed without incident, and it was not until shortly after half-past two in the afternoon that the advanced squadrons reported the enemy in force to the eastward.

It is impossible to give any idea of the thrill of excitement which passed through the officers and men of the ships when the facts became known. The bugles blared, and they hurried to their action stations. 'Enemy in force!' Did it mean that they were in touch with the High Sea Fleet? Had their chance come at last, the chance for which they had all been hoping ever since that fateful 4th August 1914?

Men looked anxiously at their neighbours to see how they took the momentous news; but nowhere did a face show signs of fear. On the contrary, their expression and demeanour testified to their implicit and unshaken confidence in themselves and their leaders. They laughed, jests passed from man to man and from group to group, and they went about their business with an intense keenness born of a new hope.

The big battle-cruisers swung rapidly into fighting formation and increased speed, their wash churning the calm sea into great waves. They presented a magnificent spectacle as they steamed into action with the smoke curling from their funnel-tops, white ensigns flying at each masthead, and the huge guns in their turrets pointing their lean muzzles skywards.

At two-thirty-five P.M. a considerable amount of smoke was sighted to the eastward, and a little less than an hour later the gigantic shapes of five hostile battle-cruisers were looming up over the horizon.

'All guns, load!' came the first order from the control positions. 'Salvos by director! Guns—ready!'

Inside a turret a burly A.B., clad in flannel shirt and trousers, spat solemnly on his hands, stretched out a hairy tattooed arm, and moved a small, brightly polished steel lever. Instantly a clattering hydraulic chain rammer uncoiled itself like a snake, and an enormous shell weighing three-quarters of a ton was pushed bodily out of the loading-tray to vanish into the open breech

of the gun with a smack and a thud. The rammer was withdrawn, another man manipulated a handle, and two cream-coloured, sausage-shaped bundles with red ends rolled into the space just vacated by the projectile. They were the cordite charges, swathed in innocent-looking silk coverings, the red extremities being the muslin bags containing the powder-igniters. The silk, somehow, seemed strangely out of place in the gun-turret of a battle-cruiser. It reminded one irresistibly of the counter of a drapery establishment; but for many a long year artillery experts have known that a silk-covered cartridge leaves little or no burning residue in the breech of the gun when the weapon is fired. Hence its use.

Again the hairy, tattooed gentleman moved his lever, and the rammer, darting forward, propelled two quarter charges into the yawning breech of the gun. The operation was repeated, while a man fiddled for a moment with the lock, and then the great steel breech-block swung to with a clang.

'Right gun, loaded!' some one bawled, as something slipped into place with a click.

'Right gun, ready!' from another man.

The gunlayer watched a dial, and the gun's crew stood tense and expectant, while the huge breeches of the weapons moved ponderously up and down, with a wheezing and a groaning of the water through the hydraulic machinery. The turret twitched slowly to the right, stopped, and then moved again. Ammunition-cages containing more shell and cartridges ready for the next round came clattering up from the loading-chambers.

The officer in charge, a lieutenant with absurdly pink cheeks and curly hair, was stationed at his periscope, one end of which protruded through a hole in the armoured roof of the turret, and gave him a view of the surrounding sea.

'Can yer see anythink, sir?' some one asked in a hoarse whisper, his curiosity getting the better of him as the officer bent down to wipe the eyepiece of his instrument with a gaudy bandana handkerchief.

'Yes,' he answered cheerily, 'five battle-cruisers, some light cruisers, and a good many destroyers! Stand by. It'll be starting in a minute.' He replaced the handkerchief in his pocket, and applied his eyes to the periscope again.

The loading number of the right gun, he with the hairy arms, was busy with a piece of chalk, and the other members of the gun's crew who had nothing particular to do watched him with some amusement. 'To Hunny, with love from Bill Mason, A.B.,' he traced out laboriously on the sleek, yellow-painted side of the huge lyddite projectile. He stepped back to survey his handiwork with a little chuckle of glee. 'That'll tickle 'em!' he remarked, winking solemnly.

The men tittered.

The lieutenant at the periscope suddenly held his breath as a muffled, whistling shriek and the roar of an explosion from outside brought the men's heads up in eager, listening attention.

'Garn!' said Mason with a grin; 'that ain't gone nowhere near us. 'Ave another go, ole son!'

'Stand by, men!' cautioned the officer, who was the only person who could see what went on in the outside world.

Mason licked his hands and rubbed them unconcernedly on the seat of his trousers.

Whe-e-e-w! whe-e-e-e-w! B-o-o-m! from the outside again, followed by the sound of another detonation and a slight jar, which showed that the ship had been struck somewhere.

The gun's crew looked at each other. The turret moved slowly to the right, and went on moving. The breeches of the guns began to see-saw gently up and down in rhythm with the movement of the ship. Then a bell rang, and with a roar and a thud the right gun suddenly went off and recoiled backwards along its slide. It ran out again with a wheezing, sucking sound, and the massive breech-block flew open with a metallic crash.

'Left gun, ready!' came a shout.

The turret became filled with the warm, acrid smoke of burnt cordite. There came the swishing sound of the washing-out apparatus, and the clatter of the chain rammer.

The bell rang again. B-o-o-m! roared the left gun. The great battle had begun.

II.

It is impossible for any single spectator to describe a naval action as a whole from his own personal observations and experiences, particularly a battle which divides itself into many different phases, lasts intermittently from about three-thirty in the afternoon until the same time next morning, and is fought over many miles of sea.

The *Mariner* and various other destroyers were present with the battle-cruisers throughout the first shock of the engagement and the running fight which ensued. Some of them, the *Mariner* included, assisted to repel the attacks of hostile torpedo-craft during daylight, and delivered their own attacks on the heavy ships of the enemy during the afternoon and night; but though Pincher Martin saw a great deal of the fighting, he had no very clear conception of how the engagement went as a whole or of how the time passed.

When he first saw the enemy they appeared as a row of immense gray shapes stretched out across the horizon. They were battle-cruisers—he knew that from their build; and though they must have been fully ten miles distant, they looked grim and menacing. With them were several light cruisers, looking absolute pygmies alongside their overgrown sisters; while on the farther side he saw, or thought he could see, a swarm of destroyers. It was now about three-thirty P.M., and the weather was quite clear.

The *Mariner* was stationed close to the line of battle-cruisers, and between them and the enemy. She occupied one of the best seats in the house, the front row of the stalls, so to speak, a position from which, but for the clouds of smoke and masses of spray flung up by the falling shell, those on board her would have seen practically everything that happened. But the billet was not exactly a comfortable one. Indeed, it was most unpleasant; for when the firing began the shot from both the British and the German guns whistled and thundered overhead, while there was always the chance that the destroyers would receive the benefit of hostile shell falling short of their intended target.

Pincher watched the enemy with a certain amount of fascinated apprehension. They seemed to swing into a single line, and then, quite suddenly, he noticed five or six tongues of bright orange flame and clouds of brown smoke leap out from the side of their leader. There was a lengthy pause, followed by a terrifying crescendo of howling and screeching as the giant projectiles came hurtling through the air. They fell in a bunch a bare fifty yards short of one of the battle-cruisers, and exploded with a roar, the great upheaval in the sea almost completely shutting out all traces of the ship beyond. The British guns instantly flashed out in reply, and the next moment the engagement became general.

From this time forward the whole affair seemed ghastly and unreal, an awful nightmare in which it was quite impossible to remember exactly what had happened. The air shook and trembled with a turmoil of ear-splitting sound, in which one heard the deep booming note of the British guns as they gave tongue, the shrill whistling or droning of shell as they passed overhead, and the sharper concussion of the hostile projectiles as they fell and burst.

Looked at from a distance, the huge hulls of the German ships seemed literally buried in a spouting maelstrom of shell fountains rising from the sea all round them. At times a shadowy gray mass, sparkling with wicked-looking gun-flashes, slid slowly into view behind some great upheaval in the water, to disappear the next instant as another salvo of shell fell and burst. The British guns seemed to be making very good shooting, but it was impossible to note exact results from the low deck of the destroyer.

Pincher glanced at the *Lion* and the other ships, and the spectacle held him spell-bound and made him feel almost dizzy. They were enduring a veritable tornado of shell, and the sea all round them leapt and boiled until at times the rushing shapes of the great vessels, close as they were, seemed actually hidden in the turmoil of flung-up water. Some of the shell were going home, too, for here and there in the rifts in the spray and smoke he saw the deep-red flash, a cloud of oily smoke, and a shower of flying débris as they struck and exploded. There were a few ragged holes in the gray steel sides; here and there the symmetrical shape of a ship's superstructure was marred by a twisted and distorted mass of steelwork, and pierced funnels vomited forth their black contributions to add to the already smoke-laden atmosphere. Star-shaped splashes of yellow and white showed where shell had struck armour, had exploded, and had failed to penetrate; but it seemed nothing short of a miracle how any ships built by human agency could withstand such a terrific hammering without being battered to pieces. It was an awesome sight.

It was well for the *Mariner* and her neighbours that the German shooting was so accurate. The hostile fire was concentrated on the battle-cruisers, and every shell seemed either to strike or else to fall within a few yards of them. The destroyers in their precarious position were untouched, but for all that the experience was nerve-racking, and Pincher had a feeling of intense relief when he saw the brilliant flashes and rolling clouds of brown, rapidly dissolving smoke from the British guns. They were firing fast, and it was no small consolation to think that the enemy were enduring the same terrible ordeal themselves.

One of the most awful incidents of that eventful day was the blowing up of the *Indefatigable*. The catastrophe, utterly unexpected, was appalling in its suddenness. At one moment the huge, nineteen-thousand-ton ship was steaming bravely along with her guns firing; the next, a salvo of five or six shell seemed to strike her simultaneously amidships. There came the splintering crash of the explosions, some spurts of flame, and upheavals of yellow, brown, black, gray, and white smoke. The great ship seemed literally to be divided in two, for both the bow and the stern reared themselves out of the water at the same moment. The thundering, shattering roar of the

explosion made the nearer ships dance and tremble. The report seemed to compress the air until one's ear-drums threatened to burst, and masses of débris, large and small, were precipitated skywards, presently to come raining down into the sea in all directions.

The smoke-cloud spread and rose into the air to a height of three or four hundred feet. Soon it completely blotted out the scene of the disaster, and hung there impalpably, wreathing and eddying in thick, rolling masses. Then some freakish air-current caused another cloud of brown vapour to rise and overtop the first, until the whole mass looked for all the world like some gigantic, overbaked cottage loaf sitting squarely on the sea.

Within two minutes the ship had disappeared for ever, taking with her her gallant crew of nearly eight hundred officers and men. Barely a soul was saved, though destroyers, hurrying to the scene at imminent danger to themselves, searched the flotsam-strewn area for survivors.

The *Queen Mary* met a precisely similar fate. Again there came the terrible roar and flare of an explosion, followed by the cloud of smoke, in which the great ship sank almost instantly to the bottom. It was an awful moment; but one of the most magnificent spectacles of the battle was the sight of the great three-funnelled *Tiger* steaming at full speed through the pall a few moments after her unfortunate sister met her fate. At one moment she was in full view; the next her bows disappeared, then her midship portion with its three great funnels, and finally her stern, until the whole enormous length of the ship was completely swallowed up in the mass of brown vapour. Then her sharp stem with its creaming bow-wave emerged into sight on the other side of the pall, to be followed by the rest of the vessel as she drove clear of the scene of the catastrophe with her guns flashing defiance and her glorious white ensigns fluttering. It was an inspiring sight, but of the gallant crew of the stricken *Queen Mary*, comprising nearly a thousand souls, only four young midshipmen and under twenty men were rescued.

The loss of these vessels was a sad blow, but still the battle raged furiously. The hostile shooting, however, seemed to be becoming erratic, a fact which told its own tale, while ours steadily improved. Indeed, the next time Pincher was vouch-safed a fleeting glimpse of the enemy, two of their largest ships seemed to be badly on fire, while a third had quitted the line and was some distance astern of her consorts. But it was with a feeling of intense relief that the sorely tried British saw a welcome reinforcement of four battleships approaching at full speed, firing heavily as they came.

It was at about this time that some signal was hoisted in the *Lion*, and before Pincher quite realised what was happening, the *Mariner* and most of the other destroyers swung round and steamed for the enemy as hard as they could go.

'Gawd!' he whispered breathlessly; 'we're goin' in to attack!'

It seemed a suicidal sort of business, another charge of the Light Brigade, as the ship, quivering and shaking to the thrust of her turbines, drove on at full speed. They were between the lines, and the screeching and howling of the heavy projectiles as the two squadrons fired at each other became fainter and more distant. They drew nearer and nearer to the enemy. They were travelling at something over thirty knots—fifty feet a second, one thousand yards a minute.

'Lie down!' came a sudden order to the guns' crews, for in another moment the enemy's secondary guns would be opening fire. The men flung themselves to the deck and watched.

It was at this moment that Pincher first saw a cloud of enemy destroyers and some light cruisers coming from behind the line of German heavy ships. They darted out at full speed to ward off the British attack, perhaps to deliver one of their own; but whatever happened they were too late, for the British small craft, swinging round, turned to meet them.

'Guns' crews, close up!' came an order. 'Load with lyddite!' The men scrambled to their feet and waited.

'Enemy destroyers bearing green four-five,' came through the voice-pipe. 'Rapid independent! Commence!'

For the next few minutes Pincher was so hard at work cramming shell into his gun that he could hardly see what was happening, much less understand it all. He realised the ship was being fired at, for there were splashes in the sea all round, and he could hear the shrieking whistle of the shell-splinters; but the roaring of the *Mariner's* own guns drowned every other sound. It was glorious to think that his own gun was firing at last, and somehow he did not very much care what happened so long as the enemy suffered.

It was an exciting experience. The hostile flotilla appeared as a drove of rushing gray shapes in the midst of a turmoil of shell fountains, smoke, and gun-flashes. There were so many of them, and they were so closely packed, that it was unnecessary to single out any one particular vessel as a target, and the British guns merely fired into 'the brown,' with the almost absolute certainty of hitting something.

Nearer and nearer they came—four thousand yards, three thousand five hundred, three thousand. In numbers the two forces were about equal, but the effects of the heavier British guns

soon made themselves felt, for before long two of the enemy seemed to crumple up and vanish in a cloud of smoke and steam. A bare thirty seconds later another shared the same fate, while a fourth, badly hit, lay nearly motionless on the water and very much down by the bows, with a storm of shell spurting, foaming, and bursting all round her. The hostile attack was beaten off, for after a very sharp close-range action the enemy's flotillas turned tail and scuttled back to the shelter of their heavier ships.

Then the British flotillas, with the ground cleared, charged on again to press home the attack on the German battle-cruisers. The moment they came within range they were fired upon, and within a few seconds all the enemy's lighter guns came into action in a furious and frantic endeavour to drive them off. The gray shapes of the hostile vessels scintillated with gun-flashes and became shrouded in smoke, and once more the sea started to spout and boil angrily. But the destroyers were not to be denied, and after the gigantic shell fountains of the earlier portion of the battle, these smaller splashes, alarming as they might have been in ordinary circumstances, seemed puny and insignificant. Indeed, they came as a positive relief, and nobody worried his head about them.

The little craft still drove on under an awful fire, and the *Mariner*, following round in the wake of her leader, turned and fired two torpedoes in rapid succession when she came within range. Others did the same, some ships arriving within three thousand yards of the enemy to do so. Some of the torpedoes must have gone home; but before they reached the enemy the attackers had turned about and were steaming hard to get out of range.

The *Mariner* had been hit by only one small projectile, which burst aft, but did no damage to speak of except inflicting slight flesh-wounds on two men, much to their subsequent satisfaction. Other ships had not been so lucky, and Pincher noticed one destroyer which had been struck in the engine-room and could not steam. The last time he saw her she lay motionless between the two fleets, enduring a terrible fire from every German gun which would bear. The greater number of her men must have been killed and her deck converted into a reeking shambles, but her colours were still flying.

The action between the opposing battle-cruisers had continued with unabated fury, both forces steaming to the southward on roughly parallel courses; but at four-forty-two the German High Sea Fleet had been sighted to the south-eastward from the *Lion*. Sir David Beatty thereupon swung round to an opposite course to lead the new-comers towards Sir John Jellicoe, who, with the battleships of the Grand Fleet, was somewhere to the north. The enemy's battle-cruisers, maintaining their station ahead of the High Sea Fleet, conformed to the movement of the British shortly afterwards.

The Fifth Battle-Squadron, under the orders of Rear-Admiral Evan Thomas in the *Barham*, with the sister-ships *Valiant*, *Malaya*, and *Warspite*, were now approaching from the north, firing heavily as they came on to the head of the hostile line; but shortly before five o'clock they swung round into line astern of the battle-cruisers, coming under a heavy but more or less ineffectual fire from the leading German battleships as they did so.

Up to now the weather conditions had been favourable alike to both sides, but at about four-forty-five a thick mist and a great mass of dark cloud settled on the eastern horizon, and blurred the outlines of the enemy's vessels until they appeared vague, shadowy, and indistinct. To the westward, however, the sky was still quite clear, and the British were plainly silhouetted against the horizon, which gave the Germans the advantage in so far as the light was concerned.

Between five and six P.M. the action continued, Sir David Beatty's force, with the four battleships astern of it, gradually drawing ahead of the enemy, and concentrating a very heavy fire on the battle-cruisers at the head of his line at a range of about fourteen thousand yards. The hostile battleships, meanwhile, farther astern, could do little to reply, and ship after ship of the enemy was badly battered, while one of their battle-cruisers, terribly damaged, was observed to quit the line.

At about six o'clock the leading British battleships were sighted to the north from the *Lion*, and at this time Sir David Beatty, to clear the way for them to come into action, altered course to the east and crossed the enemy's **T**, reducing the range to twelve thousand yards as he did so, and inflicting terrible damage with his heavy fire. At this time only four hostile vessels were in sight, three battle-cruisers and one battleship, the others being obliterated in the mist.

Twenty minutes later the Third Battle-Cruiser Squadron, commanded by Rear-Admiral the Hon. H. L. A. Hood, joined Sir David Beatty. The reinforcement was ordered to take station ahead, and steamed gallantly into action at a range of eight thousand yards. The *Invincible*, subjected to a concentrated fire from every hostile gun which would bear, was sunk.

Previous to this, between five-fifty and six P.M., Rear-Admiral Sir Robert Arbuthnot, with the older cruisers *Defence* and *Warrior*, had steamed in to attack the enemy's light cruisers, and the two vessels, with their 9·2 and 7·5 inch guns, sank or inflicted severe damage upon their opponents. But in doing so, unaware, on account of the mist, of the immediate presence of the enemy's heavier ships, they suddenly came within easy range of monster weapons against which

their comparatively light armaments were impotent.

An awful fire was concentrated upon them. The *Defence*, to use the words of an eye-witness, was 'blown clean out of the water' by a salvo of shell. The *Warrior* was hit repeatedly by heavy shell, and suffered terrible injury, for before escaping from her unenviable position she had arrived within a range of about five thousand four hundred yards of two hostile battle-cruisers.

The ship was little more than a battered wreck. A distance of five thousand four hundred yards is nothing at sea. It is point-blank range, and may be compared with using a rifle at fifty yards. Her casualties in killed and wounded had been very severe. The engine-rooms and stokeholds were flooded through shell striking and penetrating below the water-line, while she was blazing furiously aft, and was making water fast. The whole vessel was pierced and perforated until she resembled a gigantic nutmeg-grater, and as time went on she settled lower and lower in the water. Certain of the survivors tried to quench the fire with hoses, while the remainder set to work to build rafts, practically all the boats having been demolished. The conflagration was eventually subdued, and then came the piteous and gruesome task of identifying the dead, while the wounded were brought on deck in case it should be necessary to abandon the ship.

For over an hour she lay there helpless, and we can imagine the relief of officers and men when, later in the evening, the *Engadine*, a cross-Channel steamer converted into a seaplane depot ship, arrived on the scene and took her in tow. The energy of every soul on board was then concentrated on keeping the ship afloat; and, as the steam-pumping arrangements were useless, the exhausted men were at the hand-pumps all through the hours of darkness.

But it was not to be. The weather during the night grew rapidly worse, and when the next dawn came the wind and sea had risen, and waves were breaking over the quarterdeck. The cruiser could not last much longer. She was sinking fast, and there was nothing for it but to abandon her.

One by one the wounded were passed down into boats and were ferried across to the rescuing vessel. They were followed in turn by the remainder of the ship's company, the officers, and finally the captain; and when last seen, between nine and ten in the morning, the *Warrior* was sinking by the stern. But she had upheld her name. She came to a noble end, for she had fought valiantly against overwhelming odds until she could fight no more, and her name, together with those of other brave ships lost on that eventful day, will never be forgotten. Her heroic dead did not sacrifice their lives in vain.

Of the gallant work of the *Engadine*, which towed the cruiser for seventy-five miles between eight-forty P.M. and seven-fifteen A.M. the next morning, and was instrumental in saving the lives of her ship's company, we need make no mention here. The exploit occupies its deserved position of prominence in Sir John Jellicoe's official despatch.

III.

It was immediately after the destroyer action between the lines that the *Mariner* first sighted another body of ships looming up to the southward. The new-comers, about sixteen large ships accompanied by many smaller vessels, came on at full speed towards the scene of action, and at first the men in the destroyers imagined them to be the battleships of the British Grand Fleet. Their spirits rose accordingly, for with the arrival of these powerful units the enemy's battle-cruisers, cut off from their base, could not escape annihilation. But a few minutes later, when the great ships had come nearer, their unfamiliar shape and unusual light-gray colouring proclaimed them for what they really were—the battleship squadrons of the German High Sea Fleet.

Some of the destroyers which were favourably placed at once dashed in to attack with torpedoes, retiring as soon as they had fired, and before very long most of them had rejoined the heavier vessels. [38] Their next chance of doing something was to come after nightfall.

From about six-fifteen onwards it is very difficult to give a comprehensive account of what occurred, for with the arrival on the scene of the British Grand Fleet, the German main squadrons turned and retired to the southward. Sir John Jellicoe chased at full speed; and, as he says in his despatch, 'the enemy's tactics were of a nature generally to avoid further action,' while he refers to his own ships as the 'following' or 'chasing' fleet. Moreover, in the engagements which ensued, the enemy were favoured by the weather, for banks of heavy mist and smoke-clouds from the hostile destroyers reduced the visibility to six miles or less, and periodically screened the opponents from each other's view.

The fighting between the opposing battleships, which began at six-seventeen P.M., seems to have resolved itself into a series of ship to ship and squadron to squadron encounters rather than a formal fleet action; but, while our vessels remained in their organised divisions throughout, the enemy, soon after the fight began, seem to have become more or less scattered, and to have had a trail of injured ships struggling along in rear of their main body.

A hostile vessel would suddenly loom up out of the haze a bare eight or ten thousand yards distant, to be greeted with salvo after salvo of shell as the British battleships drove by. She would reply to the best of her ability; but, whereas our vessels had just come into action, and their

shooting was very accurate, the German firing was not good, and had little or no result. Ship after ship of the enemy appeared through the murk to be fired at heavily for three, four, or five minutes, then to disappear in the haze, badly hammered and perhaps on fire.

To give some idea of what took place during this period it is advisable to quote largely from the official despatches of Sir John Jellicoe and Sir David Beatty. There was the battleship *Marlborough*, which, with the First Battle-Squadron, came into action with the retiring enemy at six-seventeen P.M. at a range of eleven thousand yards. She first fired seven rapid salvos at a German vessel of the *Kaiser* class, then engaged a cruiser, and again a battleship, doing them all serious injury. At six-fifty-four she was struck by a torpedo, the only one which took effect out of the many fired by the hostile destroyers; but, though damaged and with a considerable list to starboard, she remained in the line, and opened fire again at a cruiser at seven-three P.M. Nine minutes later she started to fire fourteen rapid salvos at another battleship, hitting her badly and forcing her out of the line. Her firing throughout was most effective and accurate, and this in spite of the injury caused by the underwater explosion of the torpedo.

The First Battle-Squadron closed the range to nine thousand yards, and wrought great havoc with its fire, but only one of its vessels, the *Colossus*, was struck, despite the hail of shell from the enemy.

The Second Battle-Squadron was in action with other German battleships between six-thirty and seven-twenty P.M., and also with a battle-cruiser which had dropped astern seriously injured; while the Fourth Battle-Squadron, with which was Sir John Jellicoe's flagship the *Iron Duke*, engaged two battleships, as well as battle-cruisers, cruisers, and light cruisers. The vessels of the Fourth Light-Cruiser Squadron remained ahead of the British battleships until seven-twenty P.M., when they moved out to counter the attack of hostile destroyers, and successfully drove them off. They did it again an hour later, in company with the Eleventh Destroyer Flotilla, and came under a heavy fire from the enemy's battleships at ranges of between six thousand five hundred and eight thousand yards. It was then that the *Calliope*, flying the broad pendant of Commodore Le Mesurier, was hit several times, and suffered casualties, but luckily escaped serious injury. In the course of these attacks torpedoes were fired at the foe, while four hostile destroyers were sunk by the British fire.

At seven-fourteen Sir David Beatty, who, with his battle-cruisers, was apparently separated from Sir John Jellicoe, sighted two battle-cruisers and two battleships in the mist. He promptly engaged them, and, setting one on fire, so damaged another that she was forced to haul out of the line. The enemy's destroyers thereupon emitted dense volumes of gray smoke, under cover of which the enemy turned away and disappeared.

But they were very soon relocated by the British light cruisers acting as scouts, and between eight-twenty and eight-thirty-eight P.M. Sir David was once more in action at ten thousand yards. During this period the *Lion* forced one of the enemy, badly on fire and with a heavy list to port, out of the line; the *Princess Royal* set fire to a three-funnelled battleship; and the *New Zealand* and the *Indomitable* caused another vessel to leave the line heeling over and blazing furiously. The enemy then disappeared in the mist and were no more seen.

These various semi-isolated actions, and particularly the performance of the *Marlborough*, which fired at no fewer than five different ships between six-seventeen and seven-twelve, show only too well how the mist aided the foe; but in spite of it, the enemy was badly beaten, and suffered far greater casualties than the British.

At nine P.M. darkness was rapidly approaching, and at about this time the British heavy forces retired temporarily from the immediate neighbourhood to avoid hostile destroyer attacks, remaining, however, in positions between the enemy and his base from which the battle could be renewed at daylight. At the same time the light cruisers and destroyers were ordered in to do what damage they could.

To those in certain of the destroyers which were present during the latter part of the afternoon and evening, and happened to be unengaged, the sensation was a most uncanny one. Their area of vision was bounded by a narrow circle of four or five miles radius, but all round them until nightfall the air resounded and shook with the distant rumble and the nearer thudding of heavy guns as the great ships engaged each other. The uproar never ceased. Fighting seemed to be furious and continuous; but though the vessels of the *Mariner's* flotilla were steaming to the southward with their guns ready and torpedo-tubes manned, it was not until after darkness had fallen that they were vouchsafed another chance of using them. But they saw many signs of the battle. At one moment they would catch a glimpse of a huge British battleship vomiting flame and smoke as she engaged some invisible opponent. She would fade away in the mist, to be followed presently by a fleeting vision of two light cruisers, one British and the other German, their sides a quivering spangle of gun-flashes as they mutually hammered each other. They also would disappear, swallowed up in the haze; and a British destroyer, steaming at full speed, would dash across the horizon on some errand of destruction, with smoke pouring from her funnels and an immense white wave piled up in her wake.

They passed the bows of a sunken enemy light cruiser standing up out of the sea like some

gigantic spearhead; and once, just before dark, they sighted what remained of a sorely wounded German cruiser. She was sinking fast. Her guns were silent, and she lay over to an alarming angle, with a blaze of orange and cherry-coloured flame leaping and playing about her from end to end. The whole interior of the ship must have been a raging furnace; and a mushroom-shaped pall of dark smoke, its under-side stained a vivid carmine by the flames, hung over her like a canopy, and added its contribution to the thickness of the atmosphere. The sea was strewn with wreckage, masses of débris, and floating corpses wearing life-belts.

And so the night came.

IV.

> 'And I will prepare destroyers against thee, every one with his weapons.'—*Jeremiah* xxii. 7.

The fighting and the destroyer attacks of the night are even more difficult to follow than the actions which took place during the afternoon and evening. The British heavy squadrons had withdrawn at dark to avoid the expected torpedo attacks of the hostile flotillas, and the retreating enemy, meanwhile, damaged and undamaged ships, some singly, others in pairs or in groups of four or five, still steamed hard for their own waters. It was upon these scattered units and divisions that the British destroyer attacks presently took place.

The *Mariner* and her next ahead had somehow become separated from the others after dark, and to Pincher this desperate rush after the enemy was an awesome business. Owing to the mist and the haze the night was unusually dark; but though with the retirement of the larger ships the incessant booming and thudding of the heavy guns ceased, frequent outbursts of fire from lighter weapons, sharp, blinding flashes of flame, the redder glare of exploding shell, the white gleam of searchlights, and the occasional thud of a distant, heavy explosion showed where torpedo attacks were being delivered. The night was an inferno.

It was very difficult to tell which were the attackers and which the attacked, and it was this very uncertainty, and the not knowing what was happening, which were so trying to the nerves. All they were aware of was that the German fleet, with many of its ships badly battered, was somewhere ahead of them. They all realised that a torpedo attack after dark was a desperate game at the best of times; but they had witnessed a succession of such awful scenes during the fighting of the afternoon and evening that their feelings of personal danger and the dread of being killed seemed to have gone. They felt themselves keyed up to the highest pitch of excitement, excitement so intense and so utterly abnormal that they had neither the time nor the inclination to think of themselves and their own danger. The German fleet was somewhere in the darkness ahead of them, and it was their duty to sink and destroy what they could. Nothing else seemed to matter.

Their chance was not very long in coming. The two destroyers were steering on a south-south-westerly course at twenty-five knots, and shortly after ten o'clock a band of lighter colour began slowly to encroach on the dark sky on the eastern horizon. Ten minutes later the dense blackness from about south-east to north-east had given way to the usual indigo blue of the night; and there, some distance abaft the port beam, and dimly silhouetted against the sky, were the blurred shapes of two vessels. They were fully two miles distant, perhaps more, and seemed to be steaming slowly on much the same course as the *Mariner* and her consort. What class of vessel they were it was quite impossible to determine. But, from their position and course, they were certainly not British; while, from the background of intensely dark cloud to the south-westward, it seemed unlikely that they had seen the destroyers.

The *Mariner's* next ahead must have seen the ships at much the same time, for she suddenly increased speed and turned slightly to port until she was steaming across the strangers' bows. The *Mariner* conformed to her movements.

Wooten, gazing through his glasses, felt himself quivering with excitement. Had his chance come, the chance for which they had all hoped and prayed? He gave some order over his shoulder to a man at a voice-pipe, who passed it to the torpedo-tubes. 'Lord!' he ejaculated to the first lieutenant, still busy with his binoculars, 'they look to me like two lame ducks, No. 1; but they're big ships, whatever they are.'

'I sincerely hope they are, sir,' MacDonald replied calmly. 'It's time we had a look in at something. Shall I go down to the tubes?'

The dark hulls of the enemy were hidden in the blinding glare of their searchlights.

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'Yes, do. And fire when your sights come on if you get no further orders. For God's sake, don't miss!'

The two great vessels were drawing rapidly nearer, and became more and more distinct. The leading destroyer was still altering her course gradually to port, until at last she remained steady on the opposite and parallel course to the enemy. The *Mariner* travelled in her wake, and the track they were following seemed as if it would take them past the ships, now nearly a mile and a half distant, at a range of about six hundred yards.

It was at this moment that the enemy first seemed to realise what was happening, for a gun suddenly boomed out from the leading vessel and a shell went screeching by overhead. Where it fell nobody saw. Almost instantaneously a searchlight flickered out, and after sweeping slowly across the water, fell full on the *Mariner's* leader and remained steady. Another beam shone out, another, and yet a fourth, until both destroyers were illuminated in a dazzling glare which for the moment blinded everybody on board. Then the guns started in in earnest.

The destroyers were steaming at about thirty knots, and the enemy at ten or twelve. In other words, attackers and attacked were nearing each other at the combined rate of about forty knots, or one and a half miles in two minutes fifteen seconds. It was the longest and most trying two and a quarter minutes that Wooten or any of his crew had ever experienced, for, though the speed of the approach tended to make accurate shooting difficult, the difficulty was largely mitigated by the point-blank range.

The dark hulls of the enemy were hidden in the blinding glare of their searchlights and the incessant sparkle and spurting of bright golden flame as their guns were fired as fast as they could be loaded. Filmy streamers of smoke from the discharges wreathed and eddied fantastically through the blue-white rays of the lights. The air suddenly began to reverberate with a succession of ear-splitting crashes, the screeching whistle of shell passing overhead, and the dull *plop* of others as they pitched in the water to raise their shimmering, ghostly spray fountains. There came the roaring thud of the explosions, and the same old familiar humming and buzzing as fragments drove through the air. But above the din and turmoil of the firing there was another and quite new noise: a short, sharp, metallic-sounding explosion in the air, followed by a hissing and soughing like the wind among trees—the enemy were using shrapnel.

There came a crash, and a sheet of brilliant greenish flame from aft. The ship seemed to wince, but still drove on. Another shell, bursting on the water a few feet short, sent its jagged splinters flying over the bridge and across the upper deck. Something whizzed within a few inches of Wooten's head, and there was an infernal clanging and clattering as slivers of steel drove through and against the ship's side and funnels. It was followed by the thud of a falling body, as one of the signalmen, standing just behind the coxswain at the wheel, slithered to the deck.

'Gawd!' he muttered, with an air of intense astonishment, sitting up and nursing his side; 'they've 'it me! Gawd blimy, blokes, they've 'it me?' But nobody had time to pay attention to him.

Another jar, the roar of a detonation, a burst of flame from the forecastle, and a whining and whirring of splinters! Another, close beside the foremost funnel, and a sound of splintering and crashing as some object fell and went overboard! Something red-hot and sharp grazed Wooten's cheek. He put up his hand to brush it aside, and his fingers came down sticky and wet.

A hideous metallic explosion in the air and a fiendish rattling of bullets upon steel, as a shrapnel burst and sent its contents flying on board. Willis, the coxswain, hit through the left shoulder, released his hold on the wheel and fell to his knees; but in an instant he was up again, steering the ship with his uninjured right hand.

Wooten suddenly felt a burning sensation in his left arm as if a red-hot knitting-needle had been passed through the flesh. The shock of it sent him staggering backwards, and he gritted his teeth with the pain. His left arm seemed numbed and useless, and a little trickle of blood ran down inside his coat-sleeve and pattered to the deck. The air was full of the sickening stench of explosives.

They were very close now. The enemy seemed to be nearly on top of them, and their huge blurred shapes, almost invisible in the glare of the searchlights and the vivid gun-flashes, seemed literally to obscure the horizon. But the destroyers still drove on. They had not been stopped.

The lights of the nearer ship suddenly went out, and a column of water and smoke shot into the air at her side. It hung there for a moment, glistening in the ruby and orange flashes of the guns, and then there came the thundering reverberation of a heavy underwater explosion quite close at hand. It seemed to compress the air, and caused the destroyers to stagger in their stride. A torpedo from the leading destroyer had gone home.

Wooten instinctively looked aft, and as he did so a little puff of dull flame flickered out amidships. It was followed by a loud, snorting hiss and a heavy splash as a torpedo left its tube. Another came almost instantaneously with the first.

The enemy's fire, though still furious, became very wild; and two minutes later, with the sound of a couple more thudding explosions ringing in their ears, the destroyers were out of danger. The roaring of the guns gradually died away, and then ceased altogether.

'Good God!' muttered Wooten, trembling in his excitement.

Daylight found the *Mariner* and her leader some distance across the North Sea, steaming slowly homewards. They were battered and leaking, while the *Mariner* was badly down by the stern and listed slightly to starboard. Her funnels were riddled through and through; there were gaping holes in her side and her deck where shell had penetrated, and many smaller punctures where splinters had struck and gone through. A large projectile, bursting on the forecastle, had torn the deck and the ship's side, and had flung the foremost gun off its mounting, killing or wounding every member of the gun's crew except one. The wardroom and one mess-deck were open to the sea; boats were splintered and useless; and the topmast, taking with it the aerial of the wireless telegraphy, had been shorn off and had gone overboard. The mizzen-mast also had disappeared, and a brand-new white ensign now fluttered from an improvised flagstaff in the stern. It was the only respectable-looking thing in the ship.

But the surprising thing was that neither vessel was vitally injured. They could both steam, though slowly, and by dint of plugging the more serious holes and keeping the pumps going, they were still tolerably seaworthy. How they had escaped from the inferno without being blown clean out of the water was nothing short of a miracle.

Casualties had been heavy. Wooten went about with his arm in a sling and a bandage round his head; but his hurts, though painful, were not sufficiently severe to incapacitate him for duty. The first lieutenant had not been so lucky, for he, peppered badly by a shell, had been confined to his bunk with more serious injuries.

The eight dead had been buried at dawn, and now the wounded lay in their hammocks on the battered mess-deck under the forecastle. Some of the slighter cases, with their hurts bandaged, were smoking cigarettes and talking quite cheerfully; others were asleep.

Pincher Martin was one of them. He had three neat little splinter-wounds in his back—three insignificant-looking and trivial little punctures which caused Brown, the surgeon-probationer, to purse his lips and to frown in his most professional manner when first he saw them. 'D'you feel any pain?' he had asked.

'Not unless I moves, sir,' the patient had answered with a wan smile, his tightly compressed lips giving the lie to his words.

An operation was impossible, and they dressed the wounds as best they could and made him comfortable; but the slivers of steel somewhere inside him hurt atrociously, and it was all he could do to refrain from moaning when they touched him. So Brown, seeing how things stood,

dozed him with morphia, and poor Pincher, with his young face unnaturally haggard, drawn, and very white, was presently slumbering as peacefully as a child.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

I.

'Am safe,' the telegram said tersely, in Billings's ungrammatical English. 'Martin wounded, progressing favourable.—JOSHUA.'

Mrs Billings, drying her eyes with a handkerchief, read it for the third time. 'Emmeline!' she called softly, going to the door of the sitting-room at the back of the shop.

'Yes, mother.'

'There's news, my gal!'

'News!' cried her daughter, darting forward.

The elder woman sniffed loudly and held out the flimsy paper. 'Read that, my dear.'

The girl snatched it in her agitation. 'Martin wounded, progressing favourable,' she read slowly. 'My Bill wounded!' She stood there for a moment wide-eyed and swaying ominously. Then her pent-up feelings overcame her, and, collapsing suddenly on to a chair, she fell forward with her head on the table and her face buried in her hands. Her whole body shook with sobs.

Her mother was at her side in an instant. 'There, there, my pretty,' she murmured consolingly, patting her daughter on the shoulder; 'don't take on so. Don't cry, my gal. He's only wounded.' She was crying herself.

But Emmeline refused to be comforted. 'My Bill's wounded!' she moaned again and again.

Mrs Billings leant down and put her arms round the girl's neck. 'Don't take on so, dear,' she said huskily, with the tears streaming down her own face; 'it's all right, my pet. There, there,' as Emmeline shook with another paroxysm of sobbing, 'don't fret; it's all right; he's only wounded. We've—b-both got a—deal to be thankful for.'

Mother and daughter wept together.

For the last forty-eight hours they had both been living in a state of awful suspense. First had come the tidings of the engagement in the North Sea, with the depressing information that the British losses had been very heavy. Then came the news that eight destroyers had been sunk; but no mention of the *Mariner*. They had no means of finding out whether or not she had even taken part in the battle; but both of them, with dismal forebodings in their hearts, had made up their minds for the worst.

All day and all night the two women had prayed and hoped. The agony of their suspense was almost more than they could bear, and their hearts nearly broke during that frightful period of waiting. Emmeline, pale-faced and red-eyed, went to the railway station twice a day to procure the earliest copies of the morning and evening newspapers. Together they had read them eagerly, trying to piece together some sort of a connected narrative to relieve their tortured minds. But still there was nothing about the *Mariner*. They read about the desperate destroyer attacks on the German fleet, and of the losses incurred by the British flotillas. They could not bring themselves to believe that 'no news was good news.'

Emmeline looked up with the tears still trickling down her face, and reaching for her handkerchief, proceeded to dab her eyes. 'I'm a fool,' she said, sniffing; 'I suppose I ought to be thankful he isn't killed.'

Her mother kissed her gently. 'There, there, my dear,' she said softly; 'that's better. Be brave. It's all over now.'

The girl dried her eyes, rose from her chair, and walked slowly across to the mirror over the mantelpiece. 'Lor'!' she said bravely, a little smile hovering round the corners of her quivering mouth; 'I do look a sight, and no mistake!'

II.

When the *Mariner* struggled home to her east coast port after the engagement, Martin was one of the first to be packed off to the local hospital. Then had followed an operation, and a fortnight's delay before he was sufficiently recovered to be sent to the Royal Naval Hospital at Haslar. It was here that he again saw his mother and father, who came down for the day, called

him a brave boy, and inconsiderately wept over him through sheer thankfulness.

Then, at four o'clock on one never-to-be-forgotten afternoon, Joshua Billings suddenly appeared. He was grinning sheepishly, and Pincher noticed at once that he wore the badge of a leading seaman.

''Allo, Josh!' he exclaimed, very much pleased to see him, and shaking his horny hand; ''ow goes it?'

'Orl right, Pinch. 'Ow's yerself?'

'Gittin' along fine, chum. They're sendin' me 'ome on leaf in four days. Wot's th' noos; an' wot's that?' Pincher pointed to the single anchor which adorned the sleeve of his friend's jumper.

Joshua looked solemn. 'I gits rated up ten days ago,' he explained; 'death vacancy. Poor ole Byles got laid out, yer remember. I'd sooner 'e wus still wearin' th' killick, poor bloke!' He spoke huskily.

Pincher nodded. 'Wot are yer doin' 'ere?' he asked.

'The ship's in dock, an' they gave us ten days' leaf,' answered his friend. 'By the way,' he added, 'I suppose you 'eard as 'ow you'd bin rated up.'

'Wot?'

'They've made yer an A.B.'

'S'welp me!' Pincher ejaculated; ''ave they?'

'Yus, they 'ave, Pinch; an' if yer don't watch it we'll see yer a leadin' seaman afore long.'

'Yer didn't come 'ere a purpose ter tell me that, did yer?' Martin queried suspiciously.

''Ow d'yer mean?'

''Ow's Hemmeline an' Mrs Fig—— yer ole woman? I've 'ad a letter from Hemmeline every day 'cept yesterday an' ter-day, an' I thought—— 'Ere!' Pincher suddenly blurted out, a vague hope dawning in his heart, 'why ain't you on leaf at Weymouth?'

'We come round 'ere ter give yer a chuck up, Pincher.'

'We! 'Oo d'yer mean? 'Er an' 'er mother?'

'Yus. They're outside. I come in fu'st to prepare yer like.'

'W'y couldn't yer 'ave said so afore?' Pincher demanded wrathfully. 'Bring 'er in!'

'Orl right, ole son; don't go gittin' rattled abart it. Me an' my missis'll go an' see Dogo Pearson, wot's wounded an' in another ward. I'll tell Hemmeline as 'ow you'd like ter see 'er, an' me an' the missis'll be back afore long.' Joshua winked twice and went away.

Two minutes later Emmeline was sitting by Pincher's bed. Her eyes were full of tears, tears of happiness, and to Pincher she was the most adorable thing in the world.

'Oh Hemmeline!' he sighed huskily, his throat working and his fingers clutching her hand. 'Oh Hemmeline!'

'Well, Bill, what's the matter?' she asked dreamily, turning her head and smiling at him through her long lashes.

''Ow I love you!'

'Silly boy!' she chided softly.

We will draw a veil over what happened next. The ward was a very public place; but the other patients discreetly turned their heads away and pretended not to see.

Mr and Mrs Joshua Billings were away for fully half-an-hour. To Emmeline and Pincher it seemed more like five minutes.

III.

The wedding, a month later, was a very quiet one.

THE END.

Edinburgh: Printed by W. & R. Chambers, Limited.

Footnotes

[1]
'The Straits' = the Mediterranean.

[2]
'In the rattle' = in trouble.

[3]
O.D. = the slang term for 'ordinary seaman.' 'O.S.' is one official naval contraction, and 'Ord.' another. 'O.D.' is derived from the latter, in the same way as an able seaman is known as an 'A.B.'

[4]
The term 'matlo,' derived from the French for 'sailor,' is always used by bluejackets in referring to themselves.

[5]
E.R.A. = engine-room artificer.

[6]
A 'killick' is an anchor, which is the badge worn by a leading seaman. 'Dipping the killick' means that the badge is removed, and that its wearer has been disrated to A.B.

[7]
'Pompey' is the naval slang term for Portsmouth.

[8]
Men serving in destroyers receive sixpence a day extra pay. It is known as 'hard-lying money.'

[9]
K.H.B. = King's hard bargain, a term used in connection with a man who is an undesirable character.

[10]
The commanding officer of a man-of-war is frequently referred to as 'the owner,' or 'the old man.'

[11]
Weighed anchor.

[12]
A fraction of a knot.

[13]
A 'godown' is a warehouse.

[14]
'Snotty' is the naval slang term for midshipman.

[15]
Assistant-paymaster.

[16]
Going on the 'razzle' = going on the spree.

[17]
To 'part brassrags' is to sever friendly intercourse with a chum. Chums frequently use one another's rags in polishing the brasswork of the ship; when they quarrel they naturally cease to do this.

[18]
'Tickler' is a derogatory term for an ordinary seaman.

[19]
A ship's steward's assistant is always known as a 'dusty boy.'

[20]
M.A.A., master-at-arms.

[21]
No. 10 = a particular form of punishment.

[22]
Paymaster.

[23]
'Chawing the fat' = spinning a yarn.

[24]
'Tin 'ats' = drunk.

[25]
A 'killick' is an anchor, and a petty officer wears crossed anchors as his distinctive badge.

[26]
'P.Z. Exercises'—that is, mock actions, fought between two opposing squadrons; so called from the two-flag signal directing the fleet to carry out these manœuvres.

[27]
'The Bloke' = the commander. 'Jimmy the One' = the first lieutenant.

[28]
The ship's company of a ship hailing from Devonport are known as 'Duffos' to the men of ships with Portsmouth and Chatham crews. A 'duff' is a pudding, and the term probably originated on account of the west-countrymen's supposed liking for that comestible.

[29]
Most ships, even those carrying proper musicians, have a home-made band formed by the men themselves. It always goes by the name of the 'squeegee band,' though why I cannot say.

[30]
'Fanny,' the receptacle from which a bluejacket drinks his rum.

[31]
'Lammy coats,' the name given by the men to the thick duffel coats with hoods served out in cold weather. They are fastened with toggles and beckets instead of buttons and button-holes.

[32]
When a ship is abandoned a certain amount of water, biscuit, and rum is placed in all the boats.

[33]
A coast or a shoal is said to be 'steep to' when comparatively deep water extends right up to its seaward edge. The lead, therefore, gives little indication of a ship's proximity to danger.

[34]
Oil-fuel supply ship.

[35]
'Make and mend' = an afternoon set apart for making and mending clothes—that is, a half-holiday.

[36]
'Our boss,' the commodore in command of the force to which the *Mariner* was attached.

[37]
A tracer shell for use against aircraft has a small cavity in its base filled with composition which is ignited when the gun fires. It emits a thin trail of smoke in the daytime and a luminous track at night, so that the gunners are able to see where their projectiles are going.

[38]
That is, those destroyers attached to Sir David Beatty's squadron.

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