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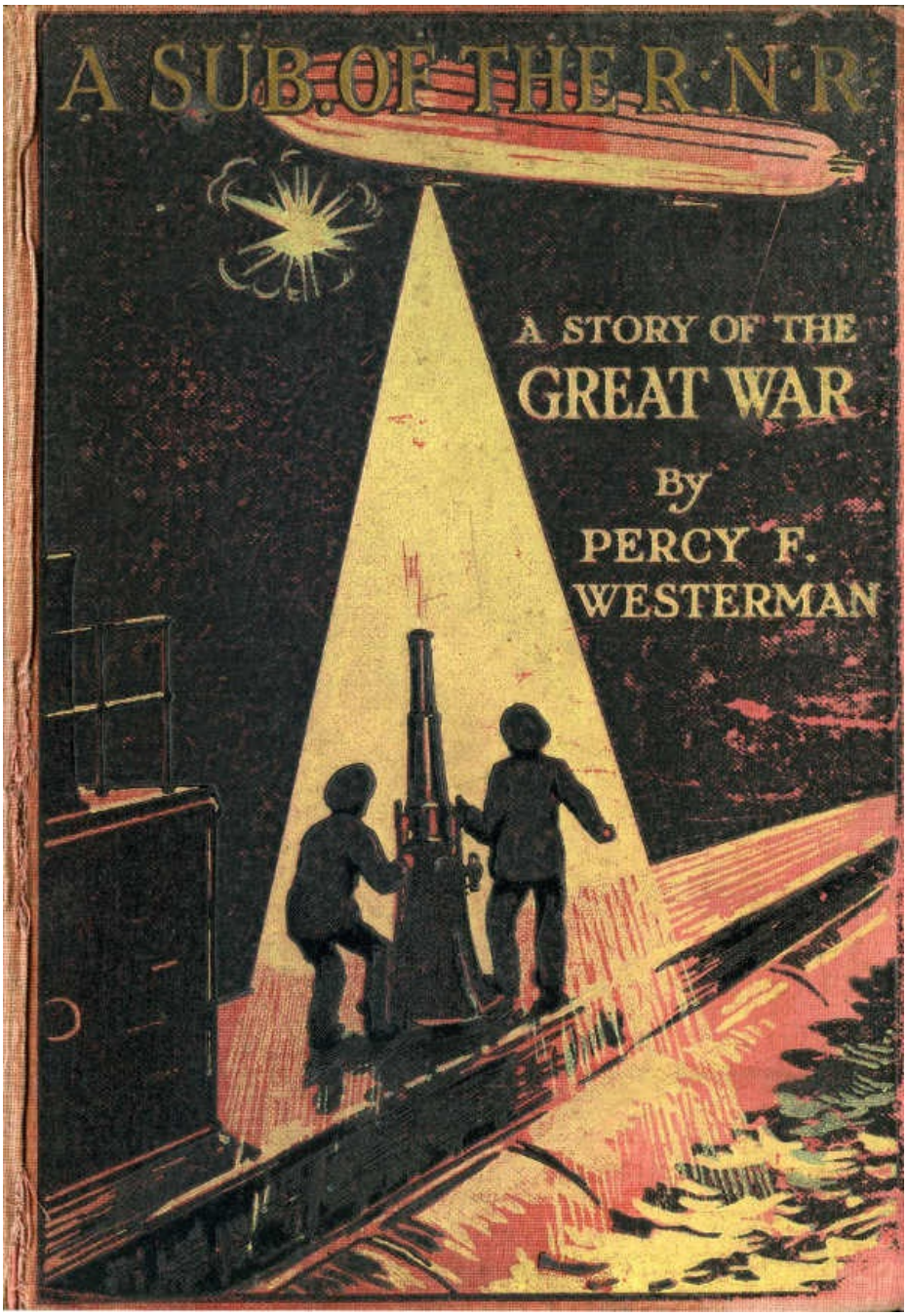
Title: A Sub. of the R.N.R.: A Story of the Great War

Author: Percy F. Westerman
Illustrator: W. Edward Wigfull

Release date: November 30, 2015 [EBook #50578]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by R.G.P.M. van Giesen



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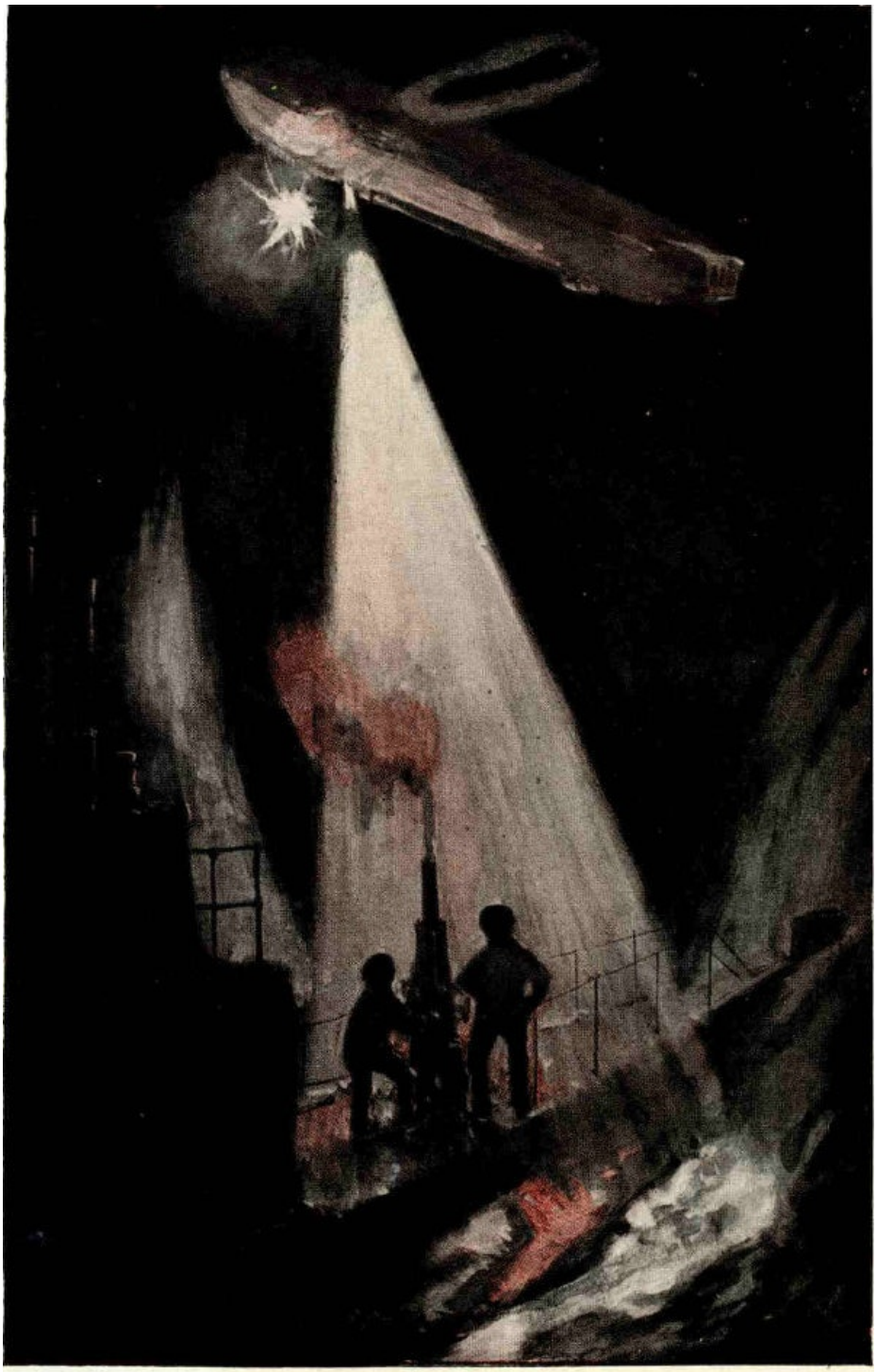

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A SUB. OF THE R.N.R.

A STORY OF THE GREAT WAR

BY

PERCY F. WESTERMAN

AUTHOR OF "THE RIVAL SUBMARINES," "THE DREADNOUGHT OF THE AIR" ETC., ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY W. E. WIGFULL

LONDON
S. W. PARTRIDGE & CO., LTD.
OLD BAILEY

CONTENTS.

ILLUSTRATIONS

A SUB. OF THE R.N.R.

CHAPTER I

FOUL PLAY IN THE ENGINE-ROOM.

"Well, Mr. McBride?"

"It's verra far from weel, sir," replied Jock McBride, chief engineer of the SS. "Saraband." Captain Ramshaw folded his arms and waited. He knew that it was practically a matter of impossibility to urge the rugged Scottish engineer beyond his usual gait. McBride could and did work at high pressure, but when it came to making a report he was as slow and stolid as the proverbial obstinate mule.

The SS. "Saraband," 5260 tons, intermediate boat of the Red Band Line, had developed engine troubles shortly after leaving Cape Town. In spite of the assiduous care and attention of the staff the fault developed. Two hundred miles from Las Palmas the breakdown reached a climax. Wallowing like a porpoise the steamer lay helpless in the trough of the Atlantic rollers.

"Ye ken ye tauld me to do three things, sir," resumed McBride. "Firstly, to discover the fault, secondly, to remedy it, an' lastly, to prevent it from occurring again? We'll take case the furrst: here 'tis."

The chief engineer extended a black greasy hand. In the outstretched palm was an oily mass of metal chippings.

"This is a sample from the high-pressure slide valves. They're badly scored. It's nae fair play, for as sure as ma name's Jock McBride, this muck has been put in the gear deliberately. I'll hae ye to ken that both port and starboard engines are damaged."

"While we were in Table Bay?"

"Of course, sir, when we took down the high-pressure cylinders."

"The work was performed by our own staff?"

"Aye, wurrst luck, by one of our ain people."

McBride's lean, tanned face was purple with ill-suppressed anger. "If I could discover the mon I'd not wait for the law to wurrk its course; I'd lay him oot an' stand the consequences. The remedy, sir, is simple, but 'tis the prevention that troubles me. If it is done wance, 'twill most likely occur again—unless I lay my hand on the mon."

"How many of the staff know of this?" asked Captain Ramshaw, pointing to the steel filings.

"Only Meester Raeburn, sir, and he's as guid a lad as ever I hope to have under me. It was he who removed the stuff an' showed it me."

"Then caution him to keep his mouth shut on the business, Mr. McBride. When can you promise to have steam raised?"

"A matter of twa' hours after we've re-assembled the high-pressure slide valves and the auxiliary starting valves, sir."

"Very good, Mr. McBride, that will do."

The chief engineer saluted and hurried off to the engine-room, while Captain Ramshaw made his way to the bridge, which was in charge of Chief Officer Lymore and the fourth officer, Terence Aubyn.

Mr. Lymore, a short, broad-shouldered, powerfully built man, looked inquiringly at his superior officer as the skipper mounted the bridge.

"McBride's found the cause of the mischief, Mr. Lymore," announced Captain Ramshaw. "I do not want either you or Mr. Aubyn to mention the matter to any of the passengers and crew, and Mr. McBride has undertaken to conceal the knowledge from his staff with the exception of Mr. Raeburn. I think the secret can be safely trusted with those whose names I've mentioned."

"You can rely upon us, sir," said the chief officer, and Terence Aubyn touched his cap in acquiescence.

"There's underhand work somewhere," continued the "old man." "McBride informs me that metal scrap has been surreptitiously placed in the high-pressure cylinders, and that it must have been done while the engines were being overhauled at Cape Town. As we had no outside help, the culprit or culprits must have been one of our own men."

"For what reason, do you suppose, sir?"

"That I cannot say. The engineers are, I think, absolutely trustworthy. The firemen are apparently contented. They are paid at rates considerably higher than those demanded by their Union. They have no cause to be affected by labour troubles. And yet some one has deliberately attempted to delay the ship by maliciously tampering with the engines.

"Will it be a long job, sir?" asked Lymore.

"I think not. One blessing, the sea's fairly calm and the passengers don't appear to be unduly anxious. There is now no necessity to send a call for assistance. You might go to the wireless-room, Mr. Aubyn, and tell the operator to inform our agents that the repairs are well in hand, and that we hope to arrive at Las Palmas by daybreak to-morrow."

Terence Aubyn saluted and hurried off. Keen on his work he realized the desirability of executing all orders "at the double." Alacrity afloat, he knew, is a sure password for success, and already he had the reputation of being a smart young officer.

He was barely twenty-two years of age, tall, slimly built yet well-proportioned. His complexion was normally fresh, but constant exposure to a tropical sun and the stinging salt spray of the Atlantic had tanned his skin to a rich deep red. His dark brown hair, in spite of being closely cut,

showed a decided tendency to wave. His eyes were rather deep set and of a greyish hue, and were surrounded by a pair of regularly curved eyebrows. The depth of his forehead indicated a sound judgment, while his powerful square jaw betokened a firmness almost bordering on obstinacy.

Terence Aubyn had from his earliest days a strong and passionate love of the sea. He came of an old naval family. For generations back the Aubyns had served their sovereign worthily as officers in the Royal Navy, and Terence fondly hoped to tread the quarter deck of a British battleship as a fully commissioned naval officer.

But hitherto the fates had not been kind to the lad.

While he was still a lieutenant Terence's father had to retire, owing to ill-health. His disability pension was absolutely insufficient for him to hope to send his son to Osborne. Two years later Mr. Aubyn died, leaving Terence, then a promising youth of fourteen, to make his own way in the world.

The lad had plenty of grit. He was determined to go to sea, although the immediate prospect of service under the White Ensign seemed to be very remote. There was a way—the hitherto somewhat despised "back door" method via the Red and Blue ensigns; and although he could not hope to be anything more than a Royal Naval Reserve officer, the chance of serving as such in a British man-of-war slowly but surely changed from a shadow to a substance.

So Terence offered himself at the "Red Band" Line offices as an apprentice and was accepted. Perhaps it was a mistake. It might have been better for him to have served part of his apprenticeship in a sailing vessel. Be that as it may his application and activity gained him the good opinion of the various masters under whom he served, and with flying colours he obtained his Mate's and First Mate's certificates.

Two years later, having secured his "Master's Ticket," he was appointed to SS. "Saraband." The way was now clear for him to apply for a sub-lieutenancy in the Royal Naval Reserve, for, although only fourth officer, the ship exceeded 5000 tons; otherwise he would have to wait until he was advanced another grade in mercantile rank. At the end of the present voyage he hoped to put in his first twenty-eight days training on board a battleship or cruiser.

The "Saraband," though by no means a crack liner, was a fairly swift boat. Built before the days of turbine engines she could even now develop nineteen knots. She was homeward bound, carrying thirty first-class passengers, seventy second-class, and a hundred and seventy "steerage." In addition to a heavy cargo, specie and bullion to the value of a quarter of a million was locked up in her strong-room.

Almost as soon as the "Saraband" cleared Table Bay trouble developed in her engines. Unaccountably the bearings of the main shafting became badly overheated, then a peculiar grinding noise, so foreign to the smoothly purring engines that were the pride and delight of Chief Engineer McBride, became apparent. Finally, to prevent a complete breakdown, the "Saraband" was stopped in mid-ocean while McBride and his staff ascertained and rectified the damage.

The old Scotsman was right. Some one had maliciously tampered with the machinery—but for what purpose?

The fourth officer made his way to the wireless-room and knocked at the door. He was answered by Wilcox, the second operator. A glimpse into the room revealed Grant, the senior man, seated at a table with the receivers clipped to his ears.

"Anything special?" asked Aubyn casually, after he had delivered the "old man's" instructions.

"Slightly," drawled Wilcox. He invariably drawled, no matter the importance of whatever he was about to convey. "Message just come through. Germany has declared war on Russia and has invaded French territory."

"By Jove! That sounds exciting," commented Aubyn.

"Perhaps," rejoined the wireless operator. "For one thing it will give the ship's newspaper a friendly lead. There's been precious little in it for the last three days. I'm just sending out the notices," and he held up a sheaf of duplicated papers for distribution in various parts of the ship. "Would you mind taking them to the bridge."

In five minutes the news had spread all over the "Saraband." The hitherto lethargic passengers developed intense excitement, and great was the speculation as to when the trouble would end.

"A jolly good thing for us," observed one of the first-class passengers, as Terence passed along the promenade deck. "It will spoil Germany's trade for a while, and we can collar the lot while her hands are full."

"Unless we are drawn in," remarked another.

"Rot!" ejaculated the first contemptuously. "The Government would never allow it. Take my word for it: we'll adopt the same attitude as we did in '70—strict neutrality and make as much as we can out of all the belligerents. The idea of war between Great Britain and Germany is preposterous."

The fourth officer passed on. Much as he would have liked to hear the continuation of the argument he was unable to delay returning to his post.

Shortly after Aubyn's arrival on the bridge, a large German liner, the "Hertzolf," bore down upon the "Saraband." She had some time previously picked up the British vessel's wireless reports of her disabled condition, and in spite of Captain Ramshaw's refusal to accept assistance, had steamed out of her course to investigate.

After receiving reiterated assurances that the work of repairing the machinery was well in hand, the "Hertzolf" inquired how long the task would take.

"Tell them we are almost ready to get up steam," ordered the "old man," somewhat nettled. "Thank them for their inquiries, and say that we will not detain them longer."

Five minutes later the "Hertzolfs" propellers began to churn the water. Gathering way she dipped her red, white, and black ensign, a compliment that the "Saraband" promptly returned. This done she shaped a course to the sou'-west and was soon hull-down.

"Too jolly inquisitive for my liking," muttered Captain Ramshaw. "I wish to goodness old McBride would get his job finished." He moved towards the telephone communicating with the engine-room, then, abruptly wheeling:—

"Mr. Aubyn," he exclaimed. "Present my compliments to the chief engineer, and ask him if he can give me any definite information as to when he will be able to raise steam."

CHAPTER II.

ON THE SCENT.

FOURTH Officer Aubyn knew that it was for no ordinary purpose that he had been sent with a message to the chief engineer. It was most unusual for a deck-officer to have to go to the engine-room on duty. There was something beyond a normal anxiety to know when the ship would be able to raise steam that caused Captain Ramshaw to make an inquiry from the bridge without using the telephone.

It was a diplomatic stroke on the part of the "old man." He knew by experience that McBride could be easily led, while on the other hand the dour old Scotsman would not be driven. It was not a case of preferential treatment in the case of the chief engineer. Captain Ramshaw invariably treated all his subordinates alike, giving his orders in a bland, courteous manner that rarely failed to produce an instant response on the part of those with whom he had to come in contact. Yet from the chief officer down to the pantry-boy no one on board would dare to take undue advantage of the skipper's courtesy. Woe betide the unlucky man to whom Captain Ramshaw had to give the same order twice. There had been instances, but not on board the SS. "Saraband." The good understanding between the captain, officers, and crew made her the counterpart of a "happy ship" in the Royal Navy.

But now, for the first time on record during Captain Ramshaw's command, a dirty piece of work had been done on board—seemingly unaccountably. Some one in the engine-room had committed a dastardly crime. Captain Ramshaw would not rest until the culprit had been spotted; for with the safety of the ship, passengers, crew, and cargo, and in the interests of the owners, it was absolutely necessary to discover the identity of the offender.

Terence opened the door of the engine-room and paused. Between the bars of the "fidley" wafts of hot air and steam, mingled with the nauseating odours of burning oil, eddied upwards. At his feet gaped a vague, ill-lighted cavern, the only approach to which was by means of a series of short, shining steel ladders.

As his eyes grew accustomed to the semi-gloom the outlines of the gleaming masses of intricate machinery became apparent; a bewildering array of polished steel, copper, and brass. A subdued roar, mingled with the clatter of drills and tapping of hammers and men's voices shouting peremptory orders came from the metal cavern. The auxiliary engines, for supplying power to the derricks and for lighting purposes, were fortunately intact.

It was new ground to Terence Aubyn, and hardly a place where "white ducks" could be considered *de rigeur*. Grasping the hand-rail he descended cautiously till his feet came in contact with the slippery iron gangway by the side of the now motionless piston-heads. At the extremity of the platform, confronted by a number of indicators, the senior engineers on duty were generally to be found; but McBride was not there.

Another length of vertical ladder had to be negotiated, with seemingly little space for the descending man between the rungs and a complication of gleaming copper pipes that threatened to hit him in the back. To add to Aubyn's discomfort, the motion of the vessel in the trough of the sullen rollers was unpleasantly noticeable. On deck he revelled in the undulating movement. In the stuffy engine-room it was very different.

"A proper death-trap if anything goes wrong," thought he. "Thank goodness I'm a deck-officer."

Terence had to descend three more lengths of ladder before he reached the plates of the engine-bed. Here there were men in swarms, for the most part greasers in dungaree suits. Amongst them Aubyn spotted Kenneth Raeburn, looking very different from his spruce appearance in the engineers' mess or when he went ashore.

Raeburn and Aubyn were good pals. Whenever, between the intervals of stowing and unloading the cargo in the holds, Terence was able to get ashore, they generally contrived to be in each other's company.

The third engineer was generally voted "a decent sort" by his messmates. His case was very similar to that of Terence Aubyn; for he had been intended for the Royal Navy until a drastic modification of the regulations, whereby cadets had eventually to specialize in marine engineering, had put him out of the running. He, too, held a commission in the Royal Naval Reserve, and in the natural buoyancy of his spirits, Kenneth Raeburn often hoped for the time when Great Britain and Germany were to measure their strength for the supremacy of the sea. Then, he realized, would be the chance for mercantile officers in the R.N.R. to prove their worth as effective assistants to their comrades of the Royal Navy.

"Looking for McBride?" repeated Raeburn. "He's down the tunnel. The main-shaft bearings are seized up. Beastly job. You won't be able to get to him, old chap."

"I must," said Terence firmly.

"At the expense of your uniform then. I'll find him. Follow me."

At the head of the next ladder Raeburn paused.

"I think I've spotted the rascal," he announced. "Keep behind me. When I drop a spanner, have a look at the fellow we're passing. I'll tell you more later on."

Along the electrically lighted platform the two young officers made their way, frequently stepping over the prostrate bodies of greasers who were tackling an intricate job under the supervision of the second engineer.

With a clatter the spanner dropped on the metal floor within a few inches of a tall, broad-shouldered, fair-haired man, dressed like his companions in a very dirty boiler suit. The fellow was lying on his side with his hands above his face as he secured an intricately-placed hexagonal nut. Hearing the clatter he turned his head, stifled an imprecation, and grasping the spanner, held it at arm's length for Raeburn to take.

Aubyn glanced at the man's face. Although outwardly a casual look he marked the fellow's features. He was convinced that he had not seen him before, but that was not to be wondered at, as there is no necessity for the deck-officers to know the greasers and firemen individually as in the case of the deckhands. Nevertheless, he felt certain that he would know the man again.

"Hang on a few moments," bawled Raeburn, for the noise in this quarter was deafening. He vanished, leaving Terence in his unaccustomed and distasteful surroundings while he went to find his chief.

Presently McBride appeared, dirty, smothered in oil and perspiring like the proverbial bull. The chief engineer was one of those officers who was not content with mere supervision. When work of an urgent nature, such as the present, was at hand, he tackled it methodically and deliberately.

"Ma compliments to Captain Ramshaw," said McBride, when Terence had delivered his message, "but I'll nae commit mesel'. The wurrk is takin' longer than I anticipated, and we're doin' double shifts to set things aright. Gie' him to onderstan' that directly we are able to raise steam, steam will be raised, but not before."

"Haven't you any idea?" asked Aubyn.

"Nay, I'll nae commit mesel'," reiterated the chief engineer, and without another word he hastened back to his cramped quarters in the tunnel of the starboard main shafting.

Raeburn followed his chum to the engine-room door.

"Look me up at seven bells to-night," he said. "We'll do a little amateur detective business. That greaser I pointed out is new to the ship. Joined us at Southampton. There's nothing out of the ordinary about that, but on one or two nights I've noticed him talking to a second-class passenger. On the first occasion I stumbled upon them by accident, and they shut up like oysters.

Then when the trouble developed, I remarked this somewhat unusual meeting and kept a watch. At the same hour these two met, and the passenger handed our man a small packet of something. It might have been tobacco, of course; but curiously enough we've discovered the cause of the bearings of the two main shafts seizing and getting almost red-hot. There were phosphor-bronze filings in the drip lubricators. Now, it's a remarkable thing that it was part of this greaser's duties —Stone is his name, by the by—to attend to the lubrication of these bearings; and I'll swear he couldn't get hold of phosphor-bronze filings from the engineers' stores. So I want you to keep a lookout on the passenger; I don't know his name, but if you see them you can easily find that out."

"Why not inform McBride?" asked Terence.

"When I have proof," replied Raeburn. "So look out for me at seven bells."

The fourth officer returned to the bridge and reported the result of his brief interview.

"Very good, Mr. Aubyn," was Captain Ramshaw's only comment.

The "old man" was disappointed but not nettled by McBride's message. H e had great faith in the old Scotsman, and only sheer anxiety had prompted him to obtain a report of the progress of operations from the chief engineer. There was nothing to do but to wait patiently.

The rest of the day passed almost without incident, except that Grant, the wireless operator, reported a partial "jamming" of the aerial waves. Messages were received in a very disjointed form, and in spite of the fact that Grant requested the unknown disturber to release the "jamb," owing to the receipt of unintelligible reports, his efforts were in vain. Some vessels on shore-stations using a differently "tuned" installation were literally holding the air. The curious part of the business was that the "Saraband" received several messages in which the words "neutrality of Belgium" figured largely, but beyond that no enlightening context was obtainable.

During the afternoon Terence Aubyn had to exercise the gun-crews at drill with one of the two 4.7's that had recently been fitted to the ship. These weapons, mounted aft, one on each quarter, were for the purpose of keeping up a running fight in the event of the outbreak of war. They would enable the ship to beat off the possible attack of a hostile commerce-destroyer, or at any rate prolong the action until the arrival of a British cruiser.

Aubyn was very keen on this part of his duties. It was, until he had undergone his training in the Royal Navy, a purely honorary task. Later on he might hope to draw a modest ten pounds a year from the National Exchequer for his ability to perform a combatant duty. From a pecuniary point of view it did not seem very promising, but the fourth officer was used to meagre pay for much work. He had to be able to "read the heavens," to use at least a dozen highly complicated nautical instruments, to undergo a strenuous scientific training, and to take sole charge of a ship during his watch. Lives and property of incalculable value were in his hands, yet his pay was an amount at which many a sleek, discontented clerk would turn up his nose in utter disgust.

For half an hour Terence kept his gun's crew hard at it, going through imaginary loading exercises and training the docile weapon at imaginary targets, to the great interest of most of the passengers and to the ill-bred scorn of others who derided the whole business as idiotic make-believe.

This done the fourth officer was at leisure for rest and sleep until turned out at 4 a.m. to take his watch.

At the hour agreed upon Aubyn met Raeburn outside the engineers' mess. It was now pitch dark, for in the Tropics there is little or no twilight. The sky was overcast, although the glass was steady, and not a star shed its light on the waste of waters. The "Saraband," brilliantly lighted, still floated idly, drifting at the rate of fifteen miles a day under the influence of the weak Counter Equatorial Current.

Selecting a hiding-place in a corner thrown into deep shadow by the glare of a powerful lamp, the churns waited. Half an hour passed without result. They began to feel stiff and cramped in their confined quarters.

Presently Raeburn nudged the fourth officer.

Strolling along the alley-way was a short, sparely built man. He was dressed in a white flannel suit with a dark red cummer-bund. He was bareheaded, and as a ray of light fell upon his features Terence could see that his were of a yellow cadaverous appearance. His hair was black, thick, and closely cut. His moustache was heavy and drooping. His eyes turned furtively from side to side as he advanced, although he kept his head as rigid as if immovably fixed to his body.

He passed by their place of concealment. Aubyn could hear his soft shoes pattering upon the deck. Presently he returned, promenading the whole length of the alley-way. Thrice he did this, then, giving a swift glance behind him, stepped into a store-room immediately opposite the companion to the greasers' and firemen's quarters, the after bulkhead of which formed with the side of the ship the recess in which the two chums lay concealed.

The fellow was breathing heavily. Through the iron partition the two watchers could hear his laboured gasps which were the result not of unusual activity but of intense mental strain.

Again Raeburn touched his companion on the shoulder. Some one else was approaching—not from the engine-room hands' quarters but along the alley-way.

It was a woman, slight of build, and in spite of the heat, closely veiled. Without hesitation she went straight to the place where the suspected man was waiting.

For ten minutes the pair talked, rapidly and in low, excited tones; then together they made their way aft.

"A rotten sell," remarked Aubyn, as soon as the coast was clear. "We came to spot a pair of conspirators—not to witness a meeting between a pair of lovers."

"Shouldn't think the woman was sweet on that chap, but there's no accounting for taste," rejoined Raeburn. "That's the fellow right enough. Did you hear what they were talking about?"

"Not I; it wasn't my business," replied Terence.

"It ought to. They were talking in German."

"Don't understand the lingo," declared the fourth officer. "Besides, what if they did? There are seven German passengers on board; and it's hard lines if they can't speak in their own tongue if they want to, especially if they avoid lacerating the ears of their fellow-passengers with the saw-edged language."

"There's more in it than you imagine, old man. That fellow is an intermediary between the woman and Stone, the greaser. Apparently Stone—referred to by the woman as Hans, although the name he gave is Henry—is holding out for more money for doing something. The woman maintains that he failed to do his allotted task satisfactorily—that he bungled badly over it. She wanted to tackle Stone himself, and the passenger fellow, whose name is Karl, objected. Possibly it was owing to her presence that Stone failed to put in an appearance."

"By Jove, Raeburn, I believe you're on the right track after all!"

"I think I am," replied the third engineer quietly. "At all events we'll keep this to ourselves for a little until we obtain further evidence. If I don't see you before, we'll meet here to-morrow night at seven bells, and trust that Stone will show his hand."

CHAPTER III.

THE DECLARATION OF WAR.

JUST before eight bells (4 a.m.) Terence Aubyn was called to prepare for his spell of duty on the bridge. Hastily dressing and donning his pilot-coat—for in spite of being within a few degrees of the line the air was cold compared with the temperature during the day—the fourth officer drank a cup of coffee and hurried on deck.

Exchanging a few words with the officer he was relieving Terence began to pace the bridge. On this occasion there was little to do, since the "Saraband" was not making way. Men were on the watch on the fo'c'sle, and hands were stationed in the crow's-nest in order to report the possible approach of other vessels. The apprentices on duty—termed, by courtesy, midshipmen—made their stereotyped reports, the quartermasters went the rounds and announced that all was correct on and 'tween decks. Not being actually under way the ship did not display her customary red and green navigation lamps. The white light on the forestay was the only one visible. Even the chart-room window had been screened, in order to avoid dazzling the eyes of the officer of the watch.

Down below the passengers were sleeping more or less soundly in their bunks. Most of the crew were also asleep in the forepeak. From the depths of the engine-room came the muffled, barely audible sounds of men still hard at work, under the tireless and energetic supervision of Chief Engineer McBride.

Terence had barely been on duty for ten minutes when Wilcox, the junior wireless operator, mounted the bridge ladder.

"Something rather important," he drawled. "Guess Captain Ramshaw ought to be informed."

He handed Aubyn a slip of paper, and without waiting further backed slowly down the ladder.

"Quartermaster!" exclaimed Terence.

"Sir?"

"Stand by, will you? I am going into the charthouse."

The man saluted. Aubyn entered the screened compartment and shut the door. Here by the aid of the electric light he was able to read the momentous message at which Wilcox had hinted.

"That fellow ought to have been an undertaker's mute!" he ejaculated under his breath. "Fancy hardly turning a hair over a thing like this."

For the wireless message was one that had stirred the British Empire, nay, the whole of the civilized world:—

"Great Britain has declared war on Germany." Aubyn's heart gave a bound. He realized that the chance of a lifetime was in front of him. In the titanic struggle that seemed bound to take place on the High Seas every officer and man of the Royal Naval Reserve would be called upon to assist their comrades of the Royal Navy. The Reserve would be put upon its mettle; it had a high duty to perform. It had to vindicate its existence and prove to captious critics that it was a fighting force that carried weight. It had to carry out its work as one of the triple barbs of Britannia's trident.

The news was far too important to entrust to a messenger. Again telling the quartermaster to stand by, and giving a comprehensive glance over the expanse of sea to make sure that there were no vessels' navigation lights visible, Aubyn hastened towards the captain's cabin.

As he passed the wireless-room he pushed open the door. Both operators were on duty. Wilcox was vainly endeavouring to "call up" a station; Grant was "standing by."

"You haven't mentioned the news?" asked the fourth officer.

Grant shook his head.

"We're getting out the notices for distribution," he said.

"Better not," declared Aubyn authoritatively. "Keep the news dark until Captain Ramshaw decides what is to be done."

At the door of the captain's cabin Terence paused, then knocked. Under ordinary circumstances the panelled door was tapped discreetly, but Aubyn gave a decisive double knock.

"Come in!" exclaimed a very tired voice.

Captain Ramshaw was in his bunk. At the first sound he had switched on a light.

"Well, Mr. Aubyn?"

Terence did not say a word in reply. He handed his chief the paper bearing the momentous news.

"I am not surprised," was Captain Ramshaw's comment. Already he was out of his bunk and dressing with the swift, deft manner of men who are apt to be roused from sleep to face danger at any moment of the night. "You may return to the bridge."

Terence flushed slightly. He knew that he had committed a breach of discipline in leaving his post during his watch.

"I would respectfully suggest, sir," he began, "that this news be kept back from the passengers."

"For why, Mr. Aubyn?"

"There are Germans on board."

"Bless my soul, what if there are? Surely you don't expect me to put non-combatants under arrest?"

"I have good reason to believe, sir, that some of them are responsible for the breakdown of the engines.

"When did you first have suspicions?"

"Last night, sir."

"Then why was I not instantly informed?"

"That I can explain, sir."

"Carry on, Mr. Aubyn," rejoined Captain Ramshaw quietly.

As briefly as possible Terence related the circumstances under which he and Raeburn waited for an expected secret interview between the German passenger and Stone, the greaser; how, in the absence of conclusive evidence, the two young officers had decided to keep the result of their

investigations to themselves until further developments justified their suspicions.

"I suppose you two were out for kudos?" remarked Captain Ramshaw grimly.

"Oh, no, sir," Aubyn hastened to explain. "We were hoping to witness the meeting between Stone and the German passenger to-night. Then there might be enough evidence to justify an accusation. But the declaration of war has altered matters, sir."

"It has," agreed the "old man." "I have my orders in the event of hostilities. I did not think they would ever be put into force. The Admiralty instructions are that if homeward bound, or within forty-eight hours' steaming of a British port, the ship must make for home waters at full speed. And at present she's as helpless as a log," he added mirthlessly.

Captain Ramshaw had now finished dressing. With his hands behind his back he paced the cabin floor deep in thought.

"Very good, Mr. Aubyn," he continued, after a lengthy pause, "I'll take steps to prevent the news getting amongst the passengers. You and Mr. Raeburn can carry on with your investigations, but I would advise you to have a couple of reliable hands within hail. You can go."

Terence saluted and withdrew. Left to himself the skipper rapidly formulated his plans. He was in an awkward position. The "Saraband" was temporarily crippled, not by accident but by design. The time by which she would be able to get under way was indefinite. There was a frequent and apparently deliberate "jamming" of the wireless. He knew that there was a German liner in the vicinity. He also knew something that many Englishmen derided: that this liner, like scores of others, was ready to be converted at a few hours' notice into a commerce destroyer.

The wireless message had said that Great Britain had declared war. His keen insight told him that the declaration had been forced upon her. Germany had been preparing more or less secretly for years, and unless he was greatly mistaken she had forestalled the momentous time-limit.

Yes, Aubyn was right. It was not a private or personal reason that was responsible for the outrage to the machinery. There were German agents on board, who had already been given to understand that war would be declared before the "Saraband" reached Southampton. Crippled, she would be an easy and valuable prize to the first hostile armed merchantman that she fell in with.

Presently he left his cabin and ascended the bridge. His first act was to ring for Lymore, the first officer.

"What do you think of this, Lymore?" he asked.

The first officer took the paper and was about to make off to the charthouse when Captain Ramshaw stopped him.

"It's war with Germany," he said.

Lymore set his jaw tightly. He was a middle-aged man, and realized more forcibly than did Aubyn the possibilities of a conflict with the second naval power of the world.

"If it's not over in a week, sir," he remarked, "it will be a long drawn-out business. Either the Germans will attempt a surprise raid on our fleet or else they'll sit tight and carry on a sniping warfare with submarines and mines."

"Think so?" asked the "old man." "Mines aren't much use if you don't hold command of the sea. They can only be used to defend their own harbours."

"They'll be dumping them overboard in shoals, sir.

"What, adrift? Remember Germany is a highly civilized country, bound by the laws of the Geneva Convention and the Hague Conference."

"Let's hope she will respect those laws, sir. Personally, I don't think she will."

"Well, Mr. Lymore, it's no use talking. We must act. I propose to keep the information from the passengers, but to take officers and crew into my confidence. Will you pass the word to muster both watches for'ard? Instruct the bos'un that the men make no unnecessary noise. We don't want to alarm or excite the passengers."

Ten minutes later the officers, deckhands, and engine-room staff were mustered abaft the foremast. Those who were keeping "watch below" were not unreasonably curious to know why they were turned out early in the morning, before it was yet light. Every available member of the crew, including firemen and greasers who could be spared from the boiler and engine-rooms, the large staff of stewards and cooks formed up till the space between the fo'c'sle and the for'ard bulkhead of the promenade and boat decks was a seething mass of humanity. The men conversed in whispers, striving to solve the mystery of being mustered at such an unearthly hour, but when Captain Ramshaw stepped upon a hatch cover and held up his hand a hush fell upon the

representative throng of the British Mercantile Marine.

The sole means of illumination was a hurricane lamp held by one of the messenger boys. The feeble rays fell upon the captain's face. It was stern and resolute.

"My men!" he exclaimed, speaking slowly and deliberately. He did not roar, after the manner of the old sea-dogs, but his voice carried with perfect distinctness. "My men, I have great news. But first let me impress upon you the extreme urgency for silence and secrecy. The matter can be discussed amongst yourselves, but should the news travel beyond you the safety of the old 'Saraband' is gravely imperilled.

"War was declared between Great Britain and Germany at eleven o'clock last night. That is all I know, being the news received by wireless. My duty is to get the ship back to port as quickly as possible, and hand her over to the Admiralty for whatever purpose they think fit.

"Meanwhile, an accident to the engine has left us helpless. It is proposed to rectify the damage with the utmost dispatch. German commerce destroyers are, in all probability, lying in wait on the recognized trade routes. We can only hope that there are also British cruisers to foil their little game.

"In spite of our adverse circumstances I know I can rely upon every man jack of you to do his duty cheerfully and manfully, and to help to keep the old flag flying. Now, dismiss."

Before daybreak the "Saraband" was ready as far as possible for eventualities. Ammunition was served up for the two 4.7 in. guns. The vital part of the bridge was protected by plates of boiler iron backed with bags of flour. Hoses were coupled up, water poured over boats hanging in the davits, in case of fire caused by the explosion of a hostile shell.

Below, Chief Engineer McBride and his staff were still striving their utmost to bring the engines up to their customary state of efficiency.

CHAPTER IV.

A DOUBLE ARREST.

Captain Ramshaw's next step was to hold a consultation with some of his officers as to the advisability of coping with the internal peril that threatened the ship.

Accordingly Lymore and Aubyn, as representatives of the deck-officers, and McBride and Raeburn for the engine-room staff, were called to the captain's cabin. For once that cosily-furnished apartment reeked of paraffin, for the chief engineer and his assistant had come practically straight from their work, merely stopping to remove from their faces and hands the greasy black oil and had used paraffin for that purpose.

"Don't apologize, Mr. McBride," said the "old man" affably. "Circumstances alter cases, and it is far preferable to have the reek of honest oil than the fumes of a German shell. Now to get straight to the point: have you a plan, Mr. McBride, whereby we can secure this man of yours, Stone, without occasioning comment amongst his comrades; and especially not to alarm the passenger who has taken such a violent fancy to him?"

The chief engineer rubbed his chin and knitted his shaggy brows.

"I can arrange, sir, to have him sent on deck, the miserable worrm. Beyond that, sir, I venture to suggest 'tis a matter for yoursel' to keep the passenger in the dark."

"Now, Mr. Lymore, have you made inquiries about the passenger Mr. Aubyn described?"

"I've interviewed the chief steward, sir. He says that this man registered as Mr. Duncan McDonald, of Port Elizabeth."

"There's by far too many of these rascally Germans going about with guid old Scots names," declared McBride vehemently.

"Quite so," agreed Captain Ramshaw, "but unfortunately we have no evidence to prove that this fellow is a German, except that he spoke the Teuton language. He might be a Britisher after all."

"He's nae Scot, then," said the chief engineer hotly.

"I think I can suggest a good plan, sir," said Raeburn.

"Carry on, then," remarked Captain Ramshaw encouragingly.

"One of the greasers in my watch—a rattling good fellow—he's made five trips in the ship, sir—strongly resembles Stone in appearance. If you could arrest Stone and clap him in irons, we could get Tretheway, the man I refer to, to impersonate him and lure this Duncan McDonald——"

"Steady, laddie; 'tes nae Duncan McDonald," remonstrated McBride.

"The passenger who goes by the name of McDonald," corrected Raeburn. "He could be lured into putting in an appearance. Then we could nab him, too."

"It's feasible, certainly," said Captain Ramshaw. "You think you can arrange this?"

"Yes, sir," replied Raeburn.

"Very good; then perhaps Mr. Aubyn and you will be at the rendezvous at seven bells. Mr. Aubyn will tell off a couple of hands in the event of any display of resistance. The man may be armed."

"We'll take the risk, sir," said Terence.

"Then that's settled. If you'll send Stone on deck, Mr. McBride, the sooner we have him under arrest the better."

"And the sooner I'm back in the engine-room the better, I'm thinking, sir," asserted McBride. "Nae doubt the dirty rogue will be up to his tricks again while I'm not there tae keep an eye on him."

A few minutes later Stone, sent under the pretence of fetching some article from the bos'un's store, was promptly pounced upon by a couple of quartermasters.

"What's the game, old sports?" he asked in a strong Cockney accent and with well-feigned innocence.

His captors made no reply, but led their unresisting prisoner for'ard and placed him in a compartment under lock and key.

As soon as the greaser's arrest was reported, Chief Officer Lymore and Aubyn went to inform him of the charge.

"Attempting to cripple the engines, eh? Strikes me, sir, you're on the wrong tack," muttered the man.

"Your fellow-conspirator does not seem to think so," remarked Lymore at a venture.

The accused's features flushed, then turned deadly pale.

"You've got von Eckenhardt, then?" he asked, taken completely aback.

"Yes, the game's up," assented the chief officer, who, although equally astonished, had the presence of mind to entirely conceal his feelings.

"Then I may as well make the best of things. It won't be for long," declared the prisoner nonchalantly. "Our cruisers will soon make short work of the 'Saraband,' and then the boot will be on the other foot."

"Your cruisers?" exclaimed Lymore.

"Yes; I'm a German subject, Mr. Chief Officer, and don't you forget it. I demand to receive proper treatment as a prisoner of war."

"You'd get it, my man, if I had my way," retorted Lymore grimly.

"Von Eckenhardt!" exclaimed Captain Ramshaw when his subordinate reported the result of their interview. "Then that is the real name of the so-called Duncan McDonald. It was a cute move of yours, Mr. Lymore."

The chief officer flushed with pleasure.

"I presume, sir, we can now arrest him, without waiting till this evening?"

"No, we'll stick to our original plan, Mr. Lymore. I have good reasons."

During the day the passengers were restricted to a limited portion of the decks allotted to the various classes. None were permitted to approach the 4.7-in. guns. The sight of the ammunition and the gun's crew standing by would occasion comment. A simple excuse was given for this restriction, and the passengers accepted it without demur.

For several hours the wireless was still "jammed." Occasionally messages were received, but none could be sent. Those that did get through were of slight importance and had no reference to the war.

At noon McBride's strenuous efforts were crowned with success. The engines were once more in working, order and speed was soon worked up to sixteen knots. A course was immediately shaped for Las Palmas, where the "Saraband" would have to coal before resuming her homeward

voyage.

Just after four bells (2 p.m.) the wireless resumed uninterrupted activity. A message asking the name and position of the ship was recorded and referred to the bridge. "Ask them what ship is calling," ordered Captain Ramshaw.

"H.M.S. 'Padstow,' lat. 5°0'30" N., long. 30°1'15" W. Shape a course towards me. Enemy cruisers are about," was the reply.

Captain Ramshaw called for a Navy List. H.M.S. "Padstow" was found to be a light cruiser of 4600 tons.

"Very good; I am acting according to your directions," was his answer by wireless, but in reality it was very different. He ordered the course to be altered until the "Saraband" would pass three hundred miles to the eastward of the position given by the supposed British cruiser. In addition he gave instructions that no wireless messages were to be sent from the ship, in order that she might not betray her presence, for he felt convinced that the call was a decoy sent by one of the German commerce destroyers.

During the afternoon the chief steward reported the result of his observations upon the pseudo Duncan McDonald. The man, he declared, was a regular "hanger-on" to his fellow-passengers. He seemed to have plenty of money and squandered it at card-playing. Yet he did not associate with the German passengers, nor could the steward discover who was the woman that had conferred with McDonald on the night when Aubyn and Raeburn had him under observation.

Just before seven bells the arrangements were completed for von Eckenhardt's arrest. Terence and the fourth engineer took up their positions in the empty storeroom; two burly quartermasters were hiding just inside the engine-room door, while Tretheway, in the guise of the now detained Stone, was idling in the alley-way.

Presently von Eckenhardt appeared. Tretheway, keeping his face from the light, turned his back upon the approaching German.

Twice the fellow walked softly past the supposed Stone, then tapping him on the shoulder said something in German. What it was Tretheway did not understand, but acting upon instructions he turned and grasped the Teuton by the wrists. Aubyn and Raeburn dashed from their place of concealment and the two quartermasters ran towards the spot.

Taken wholly at a disadvantage von Eckenhardt at first offered no resistance. He sullenly regarded his captors, without uttering a word. Then, with a sudden effort, he almost wrenched himself clear.

Raeburn, doubled up by a knee-punch in the wind, subsided heavily against the metal wall of the alley-way. The two quartermasters cannoned into each other in attempting to regain their grip upon the captive. Tretheway, hit upon the point of the chin, tripped over the coaming of the engine-room doorway; while Terence, in spite of a vicious kick on the shin, managed to retain his hold upon von Eckenhardt's collar.

To and fro they swayed, now locked in a deathly embrace. Before the quartermasters could recover their wits, Aubyn and the German toppled over the coaming, and on top of the body of the prostrate Tretheway.

Inside the door was a slippery steel platform, barely three feet in width and protected by a light handrail. To the right and left iron ladders led to the floor of the engine-room. Seven feet below the edge of the platform was the piston-head of one of the cylinders—a vision of gleaming metal partly veiled by wreathes of eddying steam.

In an instant Terence realized his adversary's plan. Rather than submit to being made a prisoner von Eckenhardt was striving to throw himself into the midst of the moving machinery. And not only that: he meant to take one at least of his antagonists with him. He, Terence, was the one singled out for this wholly unwelcome attention.

In vain Aubyn tried to get a foothold. The slippery iron plate afforded no grip. His arms, locked about the body of the German, were imprisoned by the fellow's powerful grasp, for although small in stature and sparely built, frenzy had given the German the strength of a Hercules. Suddenly von Eckenhardt planted his feet against the inside sill of the door. With a terrific jerk he hurled himself under the handrail. Aubyn had just time to bend his partially held wrist and grasp the stanchion; then both men dropped over the edge immediately above the ponderous machinery.

There they hung, swaying with the result of the sudden jerk. Aubyn's hand retained his grasp upon the oiled metal stanchion in spite of the fact that he was sustaining the weight of himself and another, and that the edge of the platform was pressing cruelly against his arm. All the while von Eckenhardt, clinging to his antagonist like a monkey, was punching blindly with his disengaged left hand in the hope of making the fourth officer relax his hold.

It was now that the quartermasters were able to come to the aid of their young officer. During

the struggle on the platform there was no opportunity for them to intervene—no foothold on that slippery surface. Raeburn, too, was temporarily "out of action," but by this time was beginning to take a renewed interest in life.

One of the quartermasters grasped Aubyn by the collar of his white drill uniform coat. Even in his dire peril Terence wondered whether his tailor had put good stitches into his work. He fully expected to find the collar being torn from the rest of the garment.

Then the second quartermaster helped. Lying at full length on the metal platform he seized the still struggling Eckenhardt by the waist. Then with a powerful blow with his disengaged fist the man struck the Teuton full on the temple.

"Both men dropped over the edge immediately above the ponderous machinery."

[Illustration: "Both men dropped over the edge immediately above the ponderous machinery."]

Stunned by the force of the blow the German relaxed his hold. Were it not for the quartermaster's iron grasp he would have fallen into the maze of machinery.

"Now's your chance, Tom," exclaimed the man breathlessly. "I'll hold this chap while you haul up Mr. Aubyn."

Assisted by Raeburn the first quartermaster succeeded in raising Terence on the platform and thence into the alley-way. Well-nigh exhausted Aubyn was glad to sit down while the others proceeded to secure the senseless von Eckenhardt.

CHAPTER V.

BOARDED.

WHILE von Eckenhardt was recovering consciousness and the two young officers were pulling themselves together after their trying ordeal, Captain Ramshaw, who had been informed of the successful issue of the affair, proceeded to the cabin taken by the German under the name of Duncan McDonald.

It was a single berth cabin, furnished in the luxuriant style that the Red Band Line provided for their first-class passengers.

The "old man" first directed his attention to an unlocked portmanteau. It was filled with clothes. Methodically the chief steward, under Captain Ramshaw's supervision, went through the pockets. He found nothing incriminating. There was some correspondence in English of a commonplace order, which gave no rise to suspicion.

A second portmanteau was doubly locked. The steward cut the Gordian knot by ripping the cowhide with his pocket-knife. Inside the case were more clothes, but between the folds was a metal case half filled with phosphor-bronze filings. There were also a revolver and two hundred rounds of ammunition, the presence of which in a passenger's possession was in itself a breach of the Company's regulations.

"Now, that cabin trunk, Saunders," exclaimed Captain Ramshaw, pointing to a large, strongly made box. "You won't open that with your penknife, my man."

"One minute, sir," said the steward.

He left the cabin, returning in a very short space of time with a heavy hammer and a cold chisel.

He was about to attack the lock when the "old man" interposed.

"Avast there, Saunders!" he ejaculated. "We'll have the job tackled a little more quietly. Go and ask the doctor for a small bottle of the strongest acid he has."

"That's good, Saunders," he remarked when the man returned. "Now lay on the acid all round the lock. Mind your eyes: it will splash a bit. We'll ruin the carpet, I fancy; but there'll be more serious damage done to the Company's property before long, unless I'm much mistaken."

Rapidly the powerful acid ate its way into the metal. The cabin reeked with the pungent fumes.

Captain Ramshaw waited until he considered that the corrosive fluid had sufficiently weakened the metal, then he soused the side of the trunk with water.

A gentle pressure of his boot brought the lock clean away. He raised the lid. The portmanteau was apparently full of clothes. Von Eckenhardt evidently had an extensive wardrobe.

"There's a double bottom, sir," announced the steward.

"I thought so," replied the captain quietly. "Be careful, Saunders. You will find a secret spring. Don't use unnecessary force."

Wondering why the skipper harped upon the necessity for caution the steward continued his investigations. At length he discovered an invisible push, close to the bottom of the trunk. As he pressed it, the false bottom opened upon a pair of hinges. The space contained several sealed envelopes and a tin case measuring about ten inches by six, and two inches in depth.

"You might hand over those papers," said the captain. "Now, open that tin."

"It's full of gummy string, sir ."

"Powerful explosive, Saunders, enough to blow a big hole in the old 'Saraband.' There are fuses and detonators, too. I wonder the fool hadn't more sense than to stow this stuff in a cabin trunk."

"What shall I do with it, sir?" asked the steward, eyeing the box of latent death and destruction

with undisguised apprehension.

"Overboard with it," decided the "old man" promptly.

Before Captain Ramshaw could proceed further with his investigations a messenger brought the news that a strange vessel, apparently a warship, was bearing down in the direction of the "Saraband."

The skipper broke all records in his dash for the bridge. Bringing his binoculars to bear in the direction indicated by the chief officer he saw that a large grey-painted cruiser was shaping a course to cut him off.

"If she's a German we're nabbed, Lymore," said the captain. "She's heavily armed, and we are within range of her guns. Unless I'm much mistaken, she can give us points in speed."

"Will you alter our course and run for it, sir?" asked the chief officer.

"Useless," decided Captain Ramshaw, with a shrug of his shoulders. "If she were a hostile armed merchantman I'd engage her in a running fight, but she'd blow us out of the water in two minutes. There are the passengers to consider."

Rapidly the cruiser approached. She made no attempt to communicate with wireless, but when within signalling distance she hoisted the letters E.C. meaning, in the International Code, "What ship is that?"

The "Saraband" immediately "made her number" and hoisted her ensign. By this time the approach of the cruiser had been noticed by the passengers, whose interest became intense, although they were still in ignorance of the fact that a state of war existed between Great Britain and Germany.

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated Lymore fervently, as the White Ensign was hoisted to the masthead of the cruiser, which was, it was remarked, fully cleared for action.

"Don't be too cocksure," remonstrated the "old man."

"She's a British cruiser, sir," protested the chief officer. "One of the 'Town' class, that I'll swear. There she goes: code flag over 'H,' sir."

The signal to stop was quickly complied with. Orders were telegraphed to the engine-room for half-speed astern until the "Saraband" lost way. The cruiser swung round in a semi-circle and likewise stopped within two cables' length. A boat was lowered, manned, and rowed towards the "Saraband."

"Clear the promenade deck, Mr. Lymore," ordered the captain. "Request the passengers to go below. Don't give them any reason—let them think what they jolly well like. Mr. Aubyn, see that the accommodation ladder is shipped. You will receive the naval officer and pay him the proper compliments."

The boarding officer proved to be a youthful lieutenant. Terence escorted him to the bridge, where he immediately subjected Captain Ramshaw to a close examination.

"Have you sighted any German armed merchantmen?" asked the officer, whose ship, it transpired, was the light cruiser "Padstow."

"The 'Hertzolf:' that was before war was declared."

"Have you communicated by wireless with any craft?"

"Only your ship," replied Captain Ramshaw. "You may remember you requested us to alter our course and fall in with you in a certain latitude and longitude."

"Rather lucky for you that you didn't, then," rejoined the lieutenant. "We sent out no wireless message. We had good reason to keep the knowledge of our presence south of Las Palmas a secret. Do you remember the position?"

Captain Ramshaw gave the desired information, Chief Officer Lymore corroborating the statement by a reference to the log-book.

"It's a decoy message from the 'Hertzolf,'" announced the naval officer, "she's been particularly active. Sunk the 'Walrus' and 'The Star of Hope,' and captured two colliers. We're on her track now. If I were you, Captain Ramshaw, I'd give Las Palmas a wide berth. Coal at Gib., if you can fetch there with what coal you've on board."

"Very good, I will," answered the master of the "Saraband."

Courteously declining an offer of refreshments the lieutenant went over the side and was rowed back to the "Padstow." Almost before the boat was hoisted up the cruiser pelted off at twenty-five knots to attempt to intercept the already too active "Hertzolf."

It was now no longer necessary in the interests of the ship to withhold the momentous news of the outbreak of war from the passengers. Notices were posted on the various saloons, their appearance being hailed by rousing cheers. Instructions were also given that in the event of the "Saraband" being chased, the passengers were to assemble for'ard in such places as would be pointed out, in order to be as safe as possible from shells from the pursuing vessel.

At two bells in the second dog watch the ship's doctor reported to the captain that von Eckenhardt was sufficiently recovered to be interrogated. Accordingly Captain Ramshaw, Aubyn, Raeburn, and the two quartermasters proceeded to the cabin in which the German had been kept a prisoner.

"Now, von Eckenhardt, what have you to say in answer to the charge of conspiring to cripple the vessel?" demanded Captain Ramshaw.

At the name von Eckenhardt the Teuton started wildly. He had, like his companion in the outrageous attempt, been completely taken aback.

"So Slieber has given me away," he exclaimed passionately. "I am not surprised. Slieber is not a true German. He worked for money. I did what I could for the sake of the Fatherland. Remember I demand to be treated as a prisoner of war."

Captain Ramshaw did not immediately reply. He, too, was taken by surprise. Von Eckenhardt had blundered badly. He had revealed the fact that the real name of the greaser who passed under the name of Stone was Slieber. Also von Eckenhardt was fully aware that a state of war existed between Great Britain and Germany. He claimed a similar privilege to that demanded by Slieber, yet the passengers had been kept in ignorance of the news until half an hour ago. In the captain's mind there was no doubt that both Germans had received information from official sources that a rupture was planned to occur on or about the 4th day of August; and that, even had Great Britain not delivered her ultimatum, the German Empire would have taken the initiative almost at the same time as she threw down the gauntlet to France and Russia.

"The pair of you have quaint notions concerning the rights of prisoners of war," remarked Captain Ramshaw. "No doubt they are perfectly in accord with the views of the German Government, but unfortunately for you, you are not in uniform. In that case you are liable to be placed upon your trial as a spy."

Von Eckenhardt shrugged his shoulders. Although at the moment of detection he had attempted to put an end to his existence by throwing himself into the engine-room, it was because he feared summary vengeance on the part of the officers and men of the "Saraband." Now that that immediate danger was over he took a calm view of the situation. Previous experience told him that German spies brought to trial in England were treated lightly as compared with the severe punishment meted out in the Fatherland to Englishmen accused of espionage.

"I am not a spy," he declared vehemently.

"That remains to be proved, Major von Eckenhardt," rejoined the "old man," in his cool, deliberate manner. "At the same time I may as well express my opinion that, with these documents in the hands of the public prosecutor, you will have some difficulty to prove to the contrary," and he held up the bundle of papers he had removed from the German's cabin.

Von Eckenhardt's jaw dropped, but only for a moment. Then his teeth closed together with a snap like those of a rat-trap. He seemed to be on the point of hurling himself upon the skipper. Then, controlling himself with an effort:—

"There is nothing more for me to say at present," he remarked with a slight inclination of his head.

"Very well. You will be under close arrest till we arrive at Southampton."

The German smiled sarcastically. Under his breath, just loud enough for his captor to hear, he muttered "Perhaps."

Captain Ramshaw resisted the inclination to answer. Obviously the taunt was meant as an insult. More, it suggested the possibility that hostile commerce destroyers had marked the "Saraband" with her precious cargo as a most desirable prey. Without another word he left the cabin, signing to the quartermasters to double-lock the steel door.

The captain was convinced that he had made an important capture. From the documents found in von Eckenhardt's cabin it was clear that the prisoner was a major in the Prussian Guards, and that he had been detailed for secret service to report upon the military and political situation in South Africa. Von Eckenhardt's instructions were written in guarded language and signed by the initial X. Captain Ramshaw had yet to learn who the mysterious X was, and the most important part he played in the extensive and highly active espionage system fostered by the Government of the German Empire.

CHAPTER VI.

AN OCEAN DUEL.

THE new course taken by the "Saraband" was in accordance with the instructions given by the lieutenant of H.M.S. "Padstow." Avoiding Las Palmas the vessel made for the African coast, making a landfall in the neighbourhood of Cape Verd. Thence by a judicious use of his coal, and by hugging the shore as close as possible without risk of grounding on the outlying shoals, Captain Ramshaw hoped to bring his command safely into Gibraltar.

At nights all lights were screened. Board of Trade regulations in the matter of the use of navigation lamps were deliberately ignored. The "Saraband," at a steady seventeen knots, forged blindly ahead through the black waters.

During this anxious period Captain Ramshaw rarely quitted the bridge. If he did so it was only for a few minutes. When compelled by the demands of nature to rest, he slept on a deck-chair in the chart-room, ready at an instant's notice to give orders for the safety of the ship.

On the second night after the meeting of the "Padstow" the quartermaster had just reported four bells—the actual ringing had been dispensed with as a matter of precaution—when a wireless S.O.S. call was received.

It was Terence Aubyn's watch. Promptly the young officer informed the skipper of the call—a summons for aid that is never ignored by the vessels that are within range of wireless.

"S.O.S. call, sir; H.Q.C.P. reports being in collision with a derelict—lat. 22°5'10" N., long. 15°50'20" W."

The thought flashed through the "old man's" mind that the message might be a decoy; yet the claims of humanity urged him to alter course and steam at full speed to the rescue.

Meanwhile Aubyn had referred to the "British Code List," in which he found that the signal letters H.Q.C.P. denoted the SS. "Corona," of West Hartlepool, of 2576 registered tonnage and of 720 horse-power. The "Corona," he knew, was a tramp engaged in running between the Tyne Ports and the Gold Coast.

Captain Ramshaw gave no inkling of the doubt that existed in his mind. He immediately ordered the "Saraband" to be steered towards the position indicated, although he would not allow the wireless to be made use of in order to acquaint the distressed vessel that help was forthcoming. This was one of the steps he took to guard against the base misuse of the hitherto inviolate S.O.S. call. In addition, as previously, the guns' crews stood by their two powerful weapons.

Hour after hour passed as the "Saraband" sped on her errand of mercy. Fitfully the S.O.S. was received as if the ill-fated crew of the "Corona," despairing at not having news that their message had been picked up, were still calling for aid from passing vessels.

Down below McBride's staff was working heroically. The firemen, stripped to the waist, were shovelling coal with rapid yet dexterous haste. Stoking is an art: it requires more than merely piling fuel into the furnaces; but there was no lack of capability on the part of the "Saraband's" stokehold staff. Quickly the old boat worked up to her maximum speed.

"Light on the port bow, sir," sung out the mastheadman. "Red flame throwing out red stars."

"That's the 'Corona' then," declared the "old man." "Starboard your helm, quartermaster: keep her at that. Mr. Lymore, see that the cutter is cleared away."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the chief officer.

The signal of distress flare was calculated to be seen from twelve to fourteen miles off In three-quarters of an hour the "Saraband" would be on the spot, by which time daylight would have dawned.

As the distance decreased the frequent flares could be observed from the bridge of the "Saraband." Anxiously the officers brought their night-glasses to bear upon the scene, as the dull patch of ruddy light rose higher and higher above the horizon.

"It's a four-masted vessel, sir!" exclaimed Terence. "The 'Corona' has only two. She looks to be about six thousand tons displacement."

"By Jove, you're, right Mr. Aubyn!" said the "old man." "Hard a-port, quartermaster. It's a ruse."

The steam steering-gear snorted as the helm flew hard over. Listing heavily outwards as she swung round the "Saraband" sought to avoid the danger. Alarmed by the sudden heel several of the passengers rushed from below.

"Reassure these people and send them to their cabins," ordered Captain Ramshaw, addressing

his third officer. "Stand by——"

A vivid flash burst from the supposed disabled ship, and a shell, hurtling a cable's length astern on the now fleeing "Saraband" announced the stranger in her true colours. She was a German armed liner. Her keen lookout had detected the phosphorescent swirl from the bows of the British vessel as she swung to starboard.

The peremptory greeting was quickly followed by a wireless order:—

"Heave-to, or I'll sink you. Disconnect your wireless. Stand by to receive a boat."

To this demand Captain Ramshaw paid no attention. His true British blood was up. As long as he could run and fight he would keep the Old Flag flying.

With the whole of her fabric trembling under the vibrations of her powerful engines the "Saraband" began her bid for safety. The passengers, according to previous instructions, were ordered forward, while the stewards calmly went about distributing life-belts, at the same time assuring the more timorous of their charges that the procedure was merely a matter of precaution.

From her wireless-room messages were sent for aid from any British cruisers likely to be in the vicinity, while at the same time warnings were issued for all merchantmen to avoid the danger that now threatened the hard-pressed "Saraband."

For hard-pressed she certainly was. When day broke the German liner, identified as the 25-knot "Osnabruck," was now five miles astern. In spite of her supposed superior speed she was not doing her best, although her two huge funnels were belching out enormous clouds of black smoke.

That she was prepared for the work of destruction there was no doubt. Her black hull, white deck houses, and lofty yellow funnels had been repainted a neutral grey. For'ard she mounted two guns, while the muzzles of several others could be discovered trained abeam.

She was steadily gaining. Shells from her guns were ricochetting on either side of the fleeing "Saraband," throwing up columns of spray fifty feet into the air.

"You'll have to do better than that, my friend," said the "old man" grimly. The spirit of fight—the old Bersark strain in his blood—was strong within him. But for his passengers he would have risked an engagement. As it was, he had to run for it, but he meant to show that even a British merchantman could show her teeth.

Meanwhile, Terence Aubyn had made his way aft to take charge of the starboard quarter 4.7-in. gun, the other one being under the orders of the third officer, a hot-blooded Irishman, named O'Reilly, who could hardly prevent himself from giving a premature order to open fire.

"Let her have it: at six thousand yards," came the order from the bridge.

Both guns spoke simultaneously. Almost before the powerful weapons had recovered from the recoil, which was taken up by the hydraulic mountings, the breech blocks were thrown open and another shell in a gleaming brass cylinder was thrust into each gun.

"A hit, sir!" shouted one of the gun's crews, for even with the naked eye a dense haze of yellow smoke was seen to be enveloping the fore part of the "Osnabruck."

Whatever the damage it did not compel the German vessel to cease pursuit. Soon her grey outlines were observed to be emerging from the mist of smoke that partly hid her from view. Spurts of yellow flame, stabbing the early morning air, showed that her bow guns were still in action.

An appalling crash, outvoicing the simultaneous barks of the British guns, denoted the disconcerting fact that one, at least, of the hostile projectiles had "got home."

Pungent fumes drifted aft; splinters, hurled high in the air, began to fall all around the gun's crews.

"Steady, men, steady!" shouted Aubyn encouragingly, for some of the crew were attracted by the sound and were endeavouring to ascertain the result of the havoc. "Never mind that. Keep at it."

Even as he spoke the "Saraband" swung round quite fifteen degrees to port, thus exposing her length and lofty freeboard to the German vessel. The gunners of the latter were not slow to take advantage. One shell crashed through the side amidships, just above the water-line, and completely wrecked the passengers' third-class dining-room. Fortunately, owing to Captain Ramshaw's precautions, this part of the ship was unoccupied.

A second shell, ricochetting a hundred yards off, leapt up and wrecked the after-funnel, causing dense volumes of smoke to eddy along the alleyways.

The first projectile that hit the "Saraband" was responsible for the damage done by the other two. Bursting underneath the bridge it demolished that structure, sending the breastwork of sacks of flour far and wide like an avalanche.

Captain Ramshaw and Chief Officer Lymore were both flung from the crumbling structure on to the cargo hatch abaft the foremost. Fortunately beyond being considerably shaken, they were not seriously hurt, but with the destruction of the bridge the steam steering-gear was affected, and this caused the "Saraband" to begin to circle to port.

Although partly dazed by the fall, the "old man," with a true seaman's instinctive sense, knew that the ship was fairly off her course. Staggering to his feet he made his way across the chaotic pile of flour-sacks, many of which had been ripped open by fragments of shell, and ordered the hand steering-gear to be manned. In five minutes the "Saraband" was once more under control, although the demolition of one of her funnels and the consequent reduction of draft caused an appreciable diminution in speed.

While the ship was broadside on to the enemy the gun under Aubyn's orders was temporarily out of action. It could not be trained upon the "Osnabruck" without a serious risk of injury to the second gun's crew by the blast from the weapon.

It was indeed fortunate that while in this position she was not sent to the bottom. According to the rules of naval strategy and tactics she ought to have been, were it not for the indifferent aim of the German gun-layers.

On the other hand, the British 4.7-in. guns were getting in hit after hit with admirable precision. Already the "Osnabruck's" upper works appeared to be a mass of scrap iron. Fires had broken out in several places, yet she held grimly in pursuit, under the erroneous impression that the few shells she did get home would terrorise the "Saraband" into surrendering.

Presently the fourth officer's gun made a splendid hit. Striking the German vessel's bows almost on the water-line the shell made a clean hole before exploding. When it did the damage in the confined space was terrific. Her thin bow plates were burst outwards, while the for'ard watertight bulkhead was strained till it admitted the sea like a mill sluice.

A cheer broke from the parched lips of the "Saraband's" crew. Her antagonist was settling down by the head. Her speed slackened rapidly. Her engines were going half-speed astern in the hope of checking the inrush of water.

"She's done for, sir!" exclaimed Terence excitedly, as Chief Officer Lymore, his face and clothes mottled with flour and smoke, came aft.

"Ay, she's settled with," agreed Lymore grimly. "Cease firing. It's no use wasting ammunition."

"If only we would slow down and pepper her till she surrenders," declared Terence, the lust of battle in his heart.

"She will, right enough," said the chief officer consolingly. "We've our passengers to consider. The 'old man' is going to take the ship out of range and wait. We'll have to pick up the survivors somehow, but there isn't a boat that won't leak like a sieve."

Such, indeed, was the case. Those of the boats that were not shattered by direct hits or holed by flying fragments of shell, were so utterly strained by the concussion as to be unfit for use. Already the carpenter's crew were setting to work, caulking the gaping seams of the boats which seemed likely to be used for the forthcoming work of rescue.

When well out of range, the "Saraband" swung round and stopped, her bows pointing in the direction of the foundering "Osnabruck," that appeared to be little more than a dot upon the horizon. By the aid of glasses brought to bear upon the scene, the German vessel was observed to be listing slightly to starboard and very much down by the head. All her upper works were hidden by a thick cloud of smoke.

Meanwhile, Captain Ramshaw took up his position on the boat-deck, owing to the demolition of the bridge. Here receiving reports from various officers concerning the amount of damage done to the ship and giving brief and concise orders as to what was to be done, he was as busy as ever he had been in the whole course of his thirty-odd years at sea.

Now that the danger was over the passengers were allowed to leave their cramped quarters, and, subject to certain restrictions, allowed to make use of most of the decks. One, a short, pompouslooking individual, holding a camera, boldly approached the skipper.

"I say, Captain Ramshaw," he began in a high, affected voice, "don't you think you could take us a little nearer, so as to get a view of the object of our triumph? The sinking ship would be a unique object to snapshot, don't you think?"

The "old man" showed not the slightest sign of annoyance or surprise at the interruption.

"My dear sir," he replied affably, "would you put your fingers within snapping range of a mad

dog, even if the animal were chained up and dying? I think not. Yonder vessel will bark as long as the muzzles of her guns are above water. Remember, sir, that this is the real thing, and that we are up against an enemy that we cannot afford to underestimate. I am sorry that I cannot comply with your request."

The passenger went away. Captain Ramshaw and the chief officer exchanged glances. The latter uttered a short laugh.

"I think if I'd been in your place, sir, I would have booted him out of it," declared Lymore.

"So I should have done," rejoined the skipper, "if I had been in my own place—but I'm not. I'm an employee of the Company, and have to study their interests. By Jove, Lymore, we do look a pair of ragamuffins! Talk about the dignity of the Company's uniform! But I wouldn't have missed the fun for a thousand pounds."

Captain Ramshaw was as elated as a young subaltern who had donned uniform for the first time. He had reason to be so. He had fought against considerable odds, and had come out "top dog." It was but one of many instances where the peaceful British mercantile marine officer shows that the training he has had amid the perils of the sea can be utilized as a powerful asset to the armed strength of the Empire upon whose banner the sun never sets.

CHAPTER VII.

VON ECKENHARDT SCORES.

"SHE'S surrendered, sir; she's hoisted the white flag," shouted the crow's-nest man.

Ordering full speed ahead, Captain Ramshaw directed a course to be steered for the sinking "Osnabruck." While the carpenter and his men were still working feverishly in the boats, others of the crew were preparing lifelines and getting life-buoys ready to throw to the luckless wretches who, up till half an hour ago, had done their utmost to send the "Saraband" and her passengers and crew to "Davy Jones' Locker."

Rapidly the foundering vessel came clearer and clearer into view. Already her fo'c'sle was awash. Her crew had mustered aft, waiting for the final plunge; there was not one of her boats that was not rendered useless by the straight firing of the two 4.7-in. guns of her antagonist.

"By Jove, those fellows are brave and disciplined!" remarked Lymore, who was standing close to Terence. "Germany has a comparatively new navy, without any of the glorious traditions that ours has; yet——"

"They copy us, as much as possible, in that respect," added Aubyn. "I believe the Kaiser had the story of our 'Birkenhead' printed and distributed amongst his fleet as an example of what they ought to do in the face of death. Look, there she goes."

Quietly, without any suspicion of a swirl, the sea closed over the ill-fated "Osnabruck." She did not turn turtle. In fact, she partly righted herself as she disappeared, leaving a pall of smoke that obscured the awful vision of two hundred human beings struggling for life, to mark the spot where she took her last plunge.

Fortunately the sea was calm and the water warm. The cannonading had frightened away the tigers of the deep, so that the terrible danger of being seized by sharks was not added to the horrors of the scene. All around the surface was dotted with the heads of men swimming for dear life. Many of the German sailors were supporting their wounded comrades. They swam in silence, neither indulging in careless jest nor appealing for aid. They were too stolid to meet danger with the light-hearted bravery of the British tars; they were too confident in their belief that their enemies would do their utmost to save them to waste their breath in shouting for help.

The three boats were lowered almost simultaneously, and urged by the powerful strokes of the oarsmen as they bent to the ash blades, were quickly upon the scene. Men were hauled into the boats with all possible despatch, the officers in charge giving their crews special orders to pick up those who were wounded and exhausted.

Other Germans were saved by lifelines, while in several instances members of the "Saraband's" crew dived overboard from a height of thirty feet to rescue hapless Teutons who were on the point of sinking.

In all, eleven officers and one hundred and sixteen men, most of them partly dazed by the ordeal through which they had passed, were saved. F Provided with dry clothing by their captors, the officers were marched aft and placed under lock and key in the second-class passengers' smoking-room, while the men, save those whose state required medical or surgical attention, were secured in the fore part of the ship.

The German officers took their defeat badly. They had been informed of the "Saraband's"

approximate position by wireless from their consort, the armed liner "Hertzolf," and had hoped to make an easy capture. Nor could they credit that the casualties on the British vessel numbered only eight men slightly wounded. They scoffed openly at the statement, till Captain Ramshaw, indignant that his word should be doubted, invited the German commander to witness a muster of the crew and compare the numbers with those on the ship's papers.

Without further incident the "Saraband" arrived at the Rock. Here, escorted by a naval vessel, since Gibraltar was under war conditions, she went inside the Mole and coaled. Temporary repairs, beyond the resources of the ship, were also carried out. The authorities, however, declined to take off the German prisoners, nor would they allow any of the passengers to land.

Four days later the "Saraband" brought up in Sandown Bay, off the Isle of Wight—the recognized "Examination Ground" for all merchant vessels making for either Portsmouth or Southampton. Here she was boarded by a naval officer who was detailed to pilot her through the intricate channel between the submarine defences of Spithead. In war-time nothing was left to chance in the safeguarding of the kingdom's greatest naval port. No vessels were permitted to enter by the Needles Channel. All movements of craft other than naval were forbidden to take place after dark, while at night the approaches to the historic anchorage were swept by dozens of powerful searchlights.

Terence Aubyn was naturally curious to know in what capacity he was to be employed by the Admiralty. He knew that with the calling up of the naval reserve he would for the time being sever his connexion with the Red Band Line. He hoped he would be appointed to a battleship or cruiser.

He was not long left in suspense. As the ship rounded the Nab Lightship her orders were received:—

"Make for Southampton and disembark passengers: then proceed to Portsmouth. 'Saraband' is to be converted with all due haste into an armed merchant cruiser."

No patriotic demonstrations, no outbursts of cheering greeted the badly battered vessel as, under reduced speed, she glided up the land-locked Southampton Water and made fast alongside the dock-wall. Save for a gang of stevedores and the mooring-party the docks were absolutely devoid of the civilian element. Khaki and naval uniforms were strongly in evidence, for the great commercial port had been given over entirely for warlike purposes, chiefly in connexion with the secret departure of the British Expeditionary Force.

Almost five hundred years previously an English army had embarked at that self-same town to wage a glorious campaign on French soil. Fifteen hundred small vessels, bedecked with banners, their lofty bulwarks lined with the shields of the flower of English chivalry, carried the array commanded by Henry V in person. With shouts and fanfares of trumpets and amid the acclamations of the worthy townsfolk, the fleet dropped down Southampton Water, bearing the knights, men-at-arms, and archers who were destined to win immortal glory on the field of Agincourt.

And now history was repeating itself—but with a difference. The forces of the Mighty Empire were once more leaving Southampton for the land of France: not as enemies of that country but as sworn allies against a common, powerful, and unscrupulous foe. These forces were working silently. There were no boisterous farewells, no braying of brass bands, no flamboyant speeches. The silent armies meant business.

Berthed in a secluded portion of the docks the "Saraband" immediately began to disembark her passengers. A train was waiting to take them away from the scene of military activity, for the sooner they were out of the way the quicker was the Embarkation Officer pleased. Then came the turn of the survivors of the "Osnabruck."

At the dock-side a strong body of khaki troops with fixed bayonets was drawn up, ready to form an escort to the prisoners. Two closed cabs were waiting for Major Karl von Eckenhardt and his confederate, Hans Slieber, who were to be indicted on several counts before a civil court.

The German sailors, finding that they were well treated, gave no trouble. In a quiet, orderly manner they trooped down the gangway and formed up in fours. In spite of their nondescript garments they presented a military bearing that characterizes the German seaman whether he be a member of the Imperial Navy or of the Mercantile Marine. One and all were permeated by the cast-iron discipline that is one of the results of a rigid system of conscription.

Surrounded by their guards they were marched off to cool their heels in a concentration camp.

"Now, Mr. Aubyn," said Captain Ramshaw, after the captive seamen had departed, "take the quartermaster with you and accompany these gentlemen."

He pointed to the four police officers who had been detailed to conduct the German spies to prison.

"We'll soon relieve you of further responsibility, sir," remarked one of the police. "According to information these gentlemen have caused a lot of trouble: I reckon they won't do so again, once

we've laid hold of them."

"I won't be sorry to see the last of them," agreed Terence. "I only hope I shan't be kept about in connexion with the trial. I want to be afloat again."

The quartermaster unlocked the door of the cell in which Hans Slieber, alias Stone, was confined. The man sullenly submitted to be handcuffed; then, escorted by two of the police, was taken on deck.

"You didn't keep your two birds together, I see," commented one of the remaining officers.

"Rather not," replied Aubyn. "The two of them might put their heads together and do mischief. Alone, each can be kept in perfect safety. Now, quartermaster."

The quartermaster unlocked the door of the cabin in which Major von Eckenhardt had been placed. Then he gave a gasp of astonishment. The room was empty.

Unable to disguise his chagrin Terence dashed into the cabin, followed by the two police officers.

"It's as clear as daylight how he managed it," announced one of the representatives of the law, pointing to a portion of the steel bulkhead that lay on the floor. An oval section, wide enough for a man to crawl through, had been filed out of the partition. The aperture communicated with the second-class passengers' smoking-room in which the surviving officers of the "Osnabruck" had been quartered. Von Eckenhardt had been released from his place of confinement by them. Once in their company he shaved off his moustache and donned a naval uniform. Since some of the prisoners wore civilian garb, it was a comparatively easy matter for the spy to march out of the ship with the others.

"Anyway, we'll nab him at the concentration camp," declared one of the policemen confidently. "I'm afraid, sir, you'll be one of those who will have to identify him."

"If you can manage to stop the train you'll save me a lot of bother," declared Terence. "I must inform Captain Ramshaw at once."

Acting upon the fourth officer's suggestion the police succeeded in intercepting the train before it got clear of the docks. The German officers were closely inspected, but without result. By means of an astounding sang-froid the redoubtable spy, von Eckenhardt, had slipped past the guards while the prisoners were entraining, and was no doubt well on his way to liberty, and, what was worse, to renew his activities against the British Government.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DUTCH TRAWLER.

FOR the next five weeks workmen were toiling day and night upon the "Saraband," from the moment she arrived at Portsmouth Dockyard.

A clean sweep was made of her sumptuous cabin fittings. The white enamelled woodwork of the promenade and boat-decks was ruthlessly "scrapped." Over the engine and boiler-rooms a protective steel deck was built, while light armour, sufficient to stop any hostile shell from the light guns of the German commerce destroyers, was placed in position round the water-line, and also in other important and otherwise vulnerable parts of the ship.

In addition to the two 4.7-in. guns already carried four more of the same calibre were provided, two on the fo'c'sle and two amidships, while on the promenade-deck four twelve-pounders were mounted behind armoured shields. Finally the ship from truck to water-line was painted a neutral grey; her name was changed, and under the White Ensign appeared in the Navy List as H.M. Armed Merchant Cruiser "Strongbow."

During that six weeks Sub-Lieutenant Terence Aubyn, R.N.R., had been far from idle. In company with the rest of the ship's deck officers he had been sent to Whale Island, the Naval Gunnery School, to undergo a rapid though none the less thorough preliminary course of gunnery. Aubyn simply revelled in the work. Gunlaying, position finding, gunnery control, both in theory and practice, kept him hard at it, and when the examination took place he came off with flying colours, somewhat to the astonishment and great satisfaction of the authorities, who had hitherto regarded the R. N. R. officers in a rather tolerant spirit.

Just before the date fixed for commissioning H.M.S. "Strongbow" Terence was accorded weekend leave—from three o'clock on Friday to nine a.m. on Monday. Needless to say he employed the time by paying a visit to his home.

Mrs. Aubyn lived in a picturesque little house on the East Coast, between Caistor and Yarmouth, standing within fifty yards of the low cliffs. The house had been designed by Captain Aubyn, who did not live long to enjoy his well-earned retirement. It was a low rambling building.

Over the two end rooms was a flat roof, accessible by means of a "hatchway." This was the worthy captain's "quarter-deck," on which was mounted on a tripod a powerful telescope. There was also a flagstaff set at a rake from the centre of the side wall. From this staff Captain Aubyn regularly hoisted the ensign at the regulation hour, hauling it down at sunset. This he did regularly until a few days before his death. In one of the rooms under the flat roof was a semicircular projection, pierced with several small windows that commanded an extensive marine view. This room the captain was wont to dub the "casemate."

People in the neighbourhood were apt to regard the house as the output of a somewhat eccentric mind; but it was rather the result of a life-long career in various ships of the Royal Navy, and so strong were the traits of the service that Captain Aubyn introduced them as far as possible into his private life. Whenever his friends rallied him up on the subject of "Aubyn's Battery" the captain smiled complacently. The reference pleased him far more than his acquaintances were aware.

Terence Aubyn's irregular and hasty visits were always a source of deep pleasure to his mother. In his breezy way the lad would take his parent by storm, converting her usually quiet existence into a brief round of excitement.

It was after eleven o'clock at night when the sub. reached Yarmouth. He had previously wired to the effect that he would be home, as quickly as the unpunctual train service would permit.

Once clear of the town Terence set off at a steady swinging pace along the Denes. Several times he was challenged by patrols, incidents that served to remind him that war was close at home. He vaguely wondered whether such precautions were necessary, with the Grand Fleet holding the North Sea and keeping every German warship skulking in harbour. It seemed so unreal, even with vast armies fighting on the Continent, and the sound of their guns almost within hearing distance of Dover, that the peaceful Norfolk coast should have to be protected against possible raids.

At length Aubyn reached the commencement of the cliff path. It was a starry night, sufficiently light to enable him to follow the well-known track without risk of blundering over the edge of the miniature precipice on to the sands twenty feet below.

After a mile or so the path skirted a slight indentation of the cliff. As Terence passed this spot he saw a light flash at the bottom of the hollow. Then the gleam vanished.

In the starlight Terence could discern the figure of a man. In spite of the chilliness of the night air he wore no overcoat. He was standing motionless, with his back towards the sub.

"The fellow's dropped something," soliloquised Aubyn. "I'll go and bear a hand."

The sand muffled his footsteps till he was within ten yards of the stranger. Hearing the sound the man faced about and flashed an electric torch upon the ground.

"Lost something, sir?" asked Terence affably. "Can I help you?"

"My pipe," returned the other. "It must have fallen out of my pocket."

The voice seemed strangely familiar, yet the sub. could not call the owner to memory.

"You live about here, I presume?" asked Aubyn. "I think I recognize your voice——"

The next moment he uttered an involuntary cry of pain and clasped his hand to his eyes. The stranger had suddenly thrown a handful of some burning substance straight into the young officer's face.

For some moments Terence stood still, with his hands up to his face. The pain was excruciating. He could do nothing, but he could hear the footsteps of the rascal as he ran from the scene of his dastardly work.

"The brute has thrown quicklime in my eyes," thought the sub. "I'll have to find my way to the sea and try to save my sight. Good heavens!"

Like a flash he now recognized the voice. It was that of the spy, Major Karl von Eckenhardt.

Gradually Aubyn made his way down the gently shelving sands, guided by the murmurs of the waves breaking on shore. Before he had gone many yards he gave vent to a prodigious sneeze, quickly followed by another.

"That's luck indeed," muttered the young officer. "It isn't lime after all; it's pepper."

Presently the involuntary flow of tears cleared the irritating grains from his eyes, and though they still smarted terribly he was now able to see. In addition a veil had been lifted from before his mental vision: hitherto rather sceptical concerning the reports of German spies on the East Coast he was no longer in doubt on that score.

There was also another aspect to the situation. Perhaps von Eckenhardt had learnt the home

address of the young officer who had materially assisted in thwarting his designs upon the "Saraband." Motives of revenge may have brought the German hither, possibly to strike a blow at Aubyn through his parent. Terence tried to dismiss the suggestion as absurd, but the presentiment grew upon him. He resolved to get his mother to move into either Yarmouth or Norwich at the first opportunity.

Thus reasoning Terence retraced his steps. He meant to inform the nearest patrol of what had occurred, and if the telegraph and telephone could be pressed into immediate service the spy ought to be apprehended before morning.

"'Alt. Who goes there?"

"Friend!" replied Terence promptly.

"Rummy time of night to be taking a constitutional," commented the sentry, stepping from the shelter afforded by a clump of furze; then recognizing Aubyn's naval cap and great-coat—

"Beg pardon, sir," he said apologetically.

"Have you seen anyone else pass this way recently?" demanded Terence.

"No, sir; not during the last three-quarters of an hour. Is anything wrong, sir?

"I stumbled across a fellow using a flash lamp."

"I wish I had, sir," declared the sentry, a smart young Territorial. "Just my luck I didn't. If I had ——" and he tapped the magazine of his rifle significantly.

All thoughts of making his way home had vanished from Aubyn's mind. The demands of duty completely eclipsed the call of home. He hastened back to Yarmouth and reported the matter to the naval authorities.

Energetic steps were taken to capture the daring spy. Telegraph and telephone were resorted to, verbal descriptions being transmitted to all police stations in the vicinity, while orders were issued to the Territorial troops guarding the railway stations to exercise particular vigilance in this direction.

It was also equally desirable to ascertain the vessel or vessels to whom von Eckenhardt was signalling, and a number of small craft was despatched to search Yarmouth Roads and an area bounded by imaginary lines drawn through the Would, Smith's Knoll, Cross Sands, and Corton Lights.

By this time Aubyn had given up all idea of going home that night. Rather than disturb his parent by knocking at the door at an unearthly hour of the morning, he decided to crave the hospitality of the naval officers attached to the Yarmouth base.

"Hello, Aubyn, old chap! what brings you in these parts?" asked a tall, broad-shouldered man in the uniform of a sub-lieutenant of the Motor Boat Reserve.

Terence looked keenly at his questioner. He was mystified, and the officer keenly enjoyed his discomfiture.

"You have the advantage of me," said Aubyn.

"What. You don't remember Dick Waynsford? Come, come, that's base ingratitude."

"Well, old chap, if you will shave off that inelegant moustache of yours—congratulations, old man."

Dick Waynsford was a yachtsman who on the outbreak of the war had applied for and had been given a commission in the newly formed Motor Boat Reserve. His intimate knowledge of the intricate harbours and creeks of the Suffolk and Essex coasts, combined with a strong liking for the sea, made him fully qualified for the post.

In Yarmouth Harbour were a dozen or so weatherly motor-boats, whose duty it was to act as tenders for the fleet in the Roads, and to undertake patrolling work. At all hours and in almost every state of the weather these staunch little craft could be seen as they sped upon their various duties. Unthinking people regarded the Motor Boat Reserve as a soft job—an opportunity to wear His Majesty's uniform and at the same time to be out of any possibility of danger. They had yet to learn that the war was to be brought actually to the shores of Old England, which they had hitherto considered impregnable. Then the slighted "harbour patrol" boats would have their chance.

"Have a run out with us, Aubyn?" suggested Waynsford. "We've just had orders to look for a suspicious trawler—possibly the one to which your friend the spy was signalling. Since you have partly spoiled the game you may just as well see the end of it."

"Right-o," assented Terence. "Lead on."

Aubyn followed his friend to the quayside. Here, floating idly on the dark waters of the tidal river, were four motor-boats, each painted a dark grey and distinguished by a number on the bows, their outlines feebly discernible by the feeble light of a partly shaded light on the wharf.

"That's my packet—the 'Lonette,'" announced Waynsford, indicating the outermost of the tier. "Mind that ladder: it's horribly slippery."

"Fine little craft," declared Terence enthusiastically, as he stepped into the diminutive cockpit of the motor-boat.

"Yes, I'm lucky to get her. One of the swiftest of the whole crowd, and a ripping sea-boat. Cast off there!" he ordered, addressing the two deckhands, who with the engineer constituted the crew of the "Lonette."

Five minutes later the "Lonette" was gliding over the sullen undulations of the North Sea, shaping a course towards the N.E. Cockle buoy, marking the edge of a dangerous bank.

A cable's length astern followed the "Pixie," another armed motor-boat detailed to act in consort with the craft under Waynsford's command. Neither vessel showed navigation lights, their position being determined by the phosphorescent swirl as they cut through the water. Overhead the stars shone dully, for a slight haze was beginning to gather.

Suddenly a dark shape loomed up in the darkness—an object that resolved itself into a large unwieldy lighter attended by a small tug which was lashed alongside.

"Shifting the buoys," explained Waynsford laconically.

"Shifting?" inquired Terence. "Surely you mean removing them altogether."

"Not much," replied his companion. "We've had orders to shift the whole lot two miles to the east'ard. Should any of these rotten German cruisers dare to come out—I don't fancy they will, worse luck—the altered position of these buoys will puzzle them a bit: unless your friend Eckenhardt has already signalled the fact to an enemy vessel."

Five minutes later the two patrol vessels ran across a number of trawlers making their way to Yarmouth. These there was no need to stop and examine. Their bona-fides were above suspicion, especially as a long, lean destroyer was steaming slowly in their wake.

For the next two hours the "Lonette" and the "Pixie" cruised between the Newarp and the Cross Sands without sighting a suspicious craft. It was now nearly dawn.

"Sleepy?" inquired Waynsford, as Aubyn stifled a yawn. "Have a caulk in the cabin: you'll find the cushions fairly comfortable, and they were well aired this morning—yesterday morning, I mean."

"Thanks, I'll stick it," replied Terence. "It's been a fairly long day, but one must get used to it."

"Trawler, or some such craft on the starboard bow, sir," announced one of the "Lonette's" crew. "She's showing no lights."

Waynsford immediately altered helm; the skipper of the "Pixie", quickly followed suit, and the two motor-boats slowed down, one on each quarter of the trawler, whose nets were out.

"Trawler, ahoy. What ship is that?" shouted Waynsford.

"Dis de 'Vanhuit' of Scheveningen, Hollander trawler," replied a voice in broken English. "We goot way outside dree mile limit, mynheer."

"Stand by with a rope, then," rejoined the skipper of the "Lonette." "We want to have a look at you."

Somewhat reluctantly the Dutchman threw a coil of rope, the end of which the bowman of the "Lonette" deftly made fast to a bollard. The "Pixie" remained a boat's length or so off.

"May as well come, Aubyn," suggested Waynsford. "A little exercise won't do you any harm." The two subs, followed by one of the crew, swarmed up the tarry side of the trawler and gained the deck.

The strange craft was of about forty tons displacement, with a considerable amount of sheer and ample beam. Steam was escaping gently through the steam-pipe, while a faint wreath of smoke drifted from her squat funnel.

"Why no lights?" inquired Waynsford.

"Accident, mynheer ver' bad accident," replied the Dutchman apologetically. "See you here."

He led the way for'ard. On the fo'c'sle were two burly fishermen holding the remains of two lanterns.

"Forestay halliard him part," explained the master. "Lights, dey come down wit a run an' broke to pieces.

"Then the sooner you send another pair of lamps aloft the better," remarked Waynsford. "Now let's have a look round below."

The Dutch skipper led the way. Aubyn lingered on the fo'c'sle. His quick eye detected something that his comrade had overlooked. The lanterns had obviously pitched on the deck, but there were no signs of oil being spilled.

At the head of the little companion ladder Waynsford paused to see if Aubyn were following. The Dutchman had already disappeared.

"Where's Mr. Aubyn?" asked the skipper of the "Lonette," addressing his deck-hand.

"For'ard, sir," replied that worthy. "I can just make him out in the dark."

"Coming below, Aubyn?" asked Waynsford, raising his voice.

"Hold hard, I want to get something out of 'Lonette's' cabin," replied Terence.

Curiosity prompted Waynsford to delay his visit below. Going for'ard he met Aubyn, who was making his way aft.

"There's something queer about this craft," remarked Terence hurriedly. "I'm going to smuggle myself on board, if you don't find anything sufficiently suspicious to justify her detention. So if you don't see me when you come on deck again, don't wait, but push off, and come back for me in a couple of hours' time. If you can get in touch with a destroyer, so much the better."

"Right-o," assented Waynsford. He was perfectly willing to allow Terence to put his plan into execution, but at the same time, his suspicions aroused, he meant to do his level best to find sufficient evidence to place the Dutch trawler under arrest. Extreme caution was necessary, since he had been specially warned not to commit anything that could be construed by a neutral state into an unfriendly act.

Without another word Waynsford descended to the cabin. With rough courtesy the Dutch skipper produced his papers, at the same time offering the boarding-officer a glass of schnapps—an invitation that was firmly yet kindly declined.

"Your papers are quite in order," announced the sub. "Perhaps you have no objection to my looking round?"

"I no objec'," declared the Dutch skipper.

Although his suspicions were aroused Sub-Lieutenant Waynsford had no fear of treachery. One of his men had accompanied him below, while in the interval a deck-hand from the "Pixie" had scrambled up the side and was pacing the "Vanhuit's" planks. The engine-room, fo'c'sle, fish-holds, and storerooms were each in turn visited, but there was apparently nothing to give rise to any question that the vessel was anything but a harmless trawler.

At length Waynsford made his way on deck. The two fishermen on the fo'c'sle were still devoting their attention to the damaged lamps. Another was leaning over the low bulwark and engaging in conversation in a queer sort of English with the crew of the "Pixie."

"Thanks, mynheer," said Waynsford. "I'll wish you good-night. Sorry to have caused you any inconvenience.

"Der vas no drouble at all," rejoined the Dutchman. "Goot-night to you."

The sub descended the side and gained the cockpit of the "Lonette." The rope was cast off and the motor-boat slipped astern. Not one word did Waynsford say until the little craft was out of hearing distance, then—

"Where's Mr. Aubyn? he asked.

"Aboard yonder packet, sir," replied the member of the crew who had been left in charge of the motorboat. "He asked me to drop a few feet astern and then he slipped up over the Dutchman's quarter. Shall I give a hail, sir?"

"No," replied Waynsford. "Easy ahead."

CHAPTER IX.

THE SECRET WIRELESS.

UPON regaining the "Lonette," Aubyn descended into the diminutive cabin and made hasty

preparations for his adventure. Unbuttoning his great-coat he drew a small revolver from the inside breast pocket of his monkey-jacket. Assuring himself that it was fully loaded, the sub. thrust it into the right-hand pocket of his outer garment, then, having readjusted his muffler, rebuttoned his coat, so that the turned-up collar hid the white woollen comforter.

He felt justified in making the attempt. During his brief visit to the trawler the lack of oil from the broken lamps had first aroused his suspicions. Secondly, he had made the discovery that the foremast, although painted to resemble pitch-pine, was made of metal, and was consequently hollow. A steel mast for a vessel of that tonnage was a decided rarity, especially when the vessel was supposed to be a trawler. Consequently Aubyn had already made up his mind to investigate.

It was impracticable to give Waynsford details of his plan. Without demur the skipper of the "Lonette" had agreed to his chum's proposition—for which Terence was truly grateful. Had Waynsford been of a jealous or inquisitive disposition he might have wrecked his friend's plans. Instead he had unquestionably complied with Aubyn's wishes.

Presently Terence emerged from the cabin and peered cautiously at the high sides of the trawler. Fortunately none of the crew was visible. Six feet abaft the motor-boat's quarter the outlines of the trawler's mizzen chain-plates were just discernible in the darkness.

Softly calling to the "Lonette's" bowman, Aubyn asked him to drop a few feet astern. The man who in civil life had been a deck-hand on a crack racing-yacht, immediately did so. His wonderment at the request was overpowered by a sense of obedience acquired by years of training that demanded instant response to the order of the sailing-master.

As soon as the chain-plates came within arm's length Terence grasped the tarred lanyards and swung himself up till his head was on a level with the bulwarks. He peered cautiously along the deck. Aft the trawler was deserted. Forward the two hands were fumbling with the lanterns and the ends of the severed forestay halliard. They evidently were in no hurry to rectify the damage, Terence decided a deft-handed man could have re-spliced the rope in a quarter of the time.

Silently the sub. crawled over the bulwarks and made his way to the lee side of the engine-room coamings. Here he paused to survey the scene of action, at the same time devotedly hoping that his boots would not creak and betray his presence. From below came the guttural voice of the Dutch skipper punctuated by the clear decisive tones of Dick Waynsford. Amidships, on the port side, one of the crew, invisible from the place where Terence crouched, was still keeping up a running fire of banter with the "Pixie's" crew.

He began to unlace his boots, regretting that he had not left them on board the "Lonette." Then he remembered that if they were discovered suspicions would be aroused. He could not drop them overboard without making a splash—and the footgear had cost him a guinea a pair. Lying about on a wet deck with stockinged feet, he reflected, was a cruel job on a cold night, so he hurriedly re-tied the laces.

"It will be a ticklish job to give an account of myself if they find me," he soliloquised, "that is, if the trawler's what she pretends she is. Ten to one I'm on the right tack, though, so here goes."

On all fours he crossed the only uninterrupted part of deck space between the companion and the side of the fish-hold coaming. Here he was fairly safe from observation unless one of the for'ard hands chanced to come aft.

The fish-hold hatches occupied the greater portion of the 'midships part of the trawler. Two of the after-coverings had been removed. The others were in place, a heavy tarpaulin being loosely thrown over them, the canvas slack at the for'ard end.

Beneath this covering, and wedged in between the coaming and the deck, Aubyn crawled. Here he was within ten feet of the foremast—the object of his suspicions. Thanks to the tarpaulin he was able to keep fairly warm in his cramped quarters, while by means of a fold in the canvas he was able to command a wide view of the fore part of the vessel.

Presently he heard Waynsford and the Dutch skipper, followed by the "Lonette's" man, emerge from the cabin and make the round of the deck. Once Waynsford's foot nearly trod upon him as he crouched under the still tarpaulin. Then, after a seemingly endless delay, Terence heard the farewell greetings and the gentle purring of the "Lonette's" motors, as, followed by the "Pixie," she forged ahead, circled and was lost to hearing in the darkness.

For the next ten minutes Terence heard nothing but the heavy measured tread of the skipper of the trawler as he paced the deck. Then, stopping at the forward end of his beat, he said something in a low tone. The words were German, not Dutch—Aubyn was certain of that. Bitterly he regretted his almost total ignorance of the language of Britain's greatest foe.

Then came the clank of a steam winch. Apparently the men were hauling in their nets.

"I hope the old hooker won't make off towards the Dutch coast without the 'Lonette' spotting her," observed Aubyn. "If it come overmisty I won't give much for my chance. By Jove! I am getting stiff."

Soon the winch was stopped, and men came for'ard. Two of them stopped at the foot of the foremast and set to work silently and rapidly. Slightly raising the fold of the tarpaulin the sub. could see that they were removing a plate from the bulky steel mast. Others—for more of the crew than had previously appeared came on the scene—rove light steel wire rigging furnished with small circular objects that the sub. recognised as insulators for wireless gear.

His suspicions were well-founded. Inside the steel mast was a telescopic spar that could be hoisted thirty feet above the truck. From the head of this staff a line of light rope running through a block automatically uncoiled itself, the falls dropping on deck. To one end of this line the aerial was bent and sent aloft.

Two men then came staggering forward with a huge cask. Upon knocking off the upper and lower bands the barrel opened like an exaggerated locket—the remaining bands being dummies—and disclosed a small but powerful wireless apparatus.

Hardly pausing to weigh the consequences, the sub. threw aside the folds of the tarpaulin and sprang to his feet. A howl of rage and surprise greeted his appearance.

"Surrender!" exclaimed Aubyn sternly.

For some minutes there was a dead silence on the part of the astonished Germans, broken only by the moaning of the wind through the rigging and the lap of the water against the trawler's sides. Then, giving a hasty glance round to assure himself that no vessel was within hailing distance, and realising that the daring Englishman was alone, the skipper gave a hurried order.

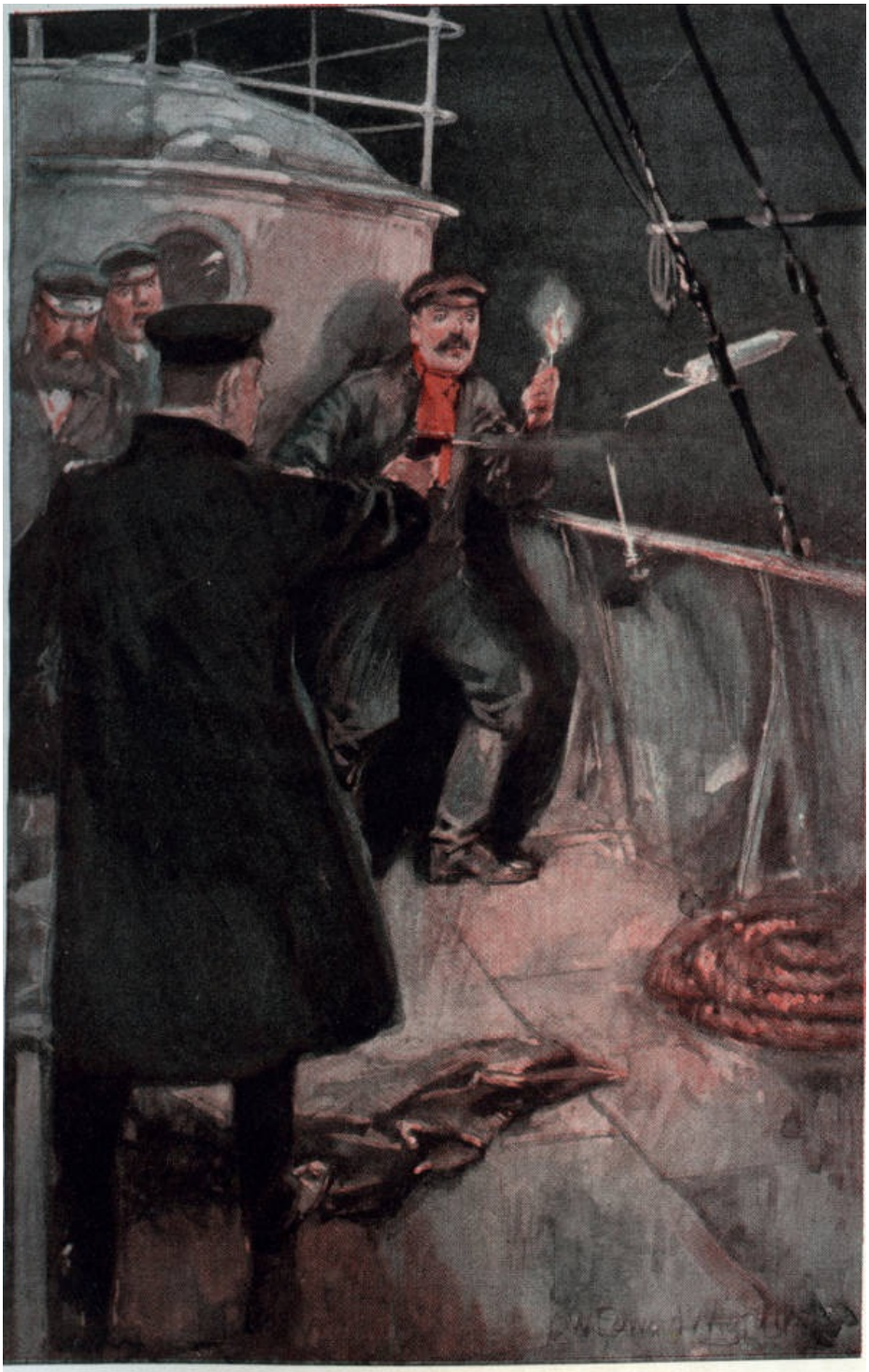
The next moment Terence was confronted by the muzzles of half a dozen automatic pistols.

"Surrender yourself, Englishman," replied the skipper. "You mad; you all alone. Hands up, or you dead man."

"Perhaps," remarked Terence, with outward calmness, although he remembered with some misgivings that the hair trigger of an automatic pistol is a delicate piece of mechanism for a horny-handed seaman to play with. "If you shoot you'll make things a jolly sight worse for you than they are already. You're properly cornered. The two motor-boats are waiting a short distance off, and there's a destroyer only too ready to bear a hand."

"Vot you going der do?" asked the German, in a chastened tone.

"To summon assistance and take possession of an enemy ship. The more trouble you give, my friend, the worse it will be for you."



"Taking a quick yet steady aim, the Sub. pressed the trigger."

[Illustration: "Taking a quick yet steady aim, the Sub. pressed the trigger."]

The skipper shrugged his shoulders, then hastily addressed his crew. The latter put up their pistols, sullenly and almost mutinously. One of the men hurried across the deck and drew a signal rocket from a locker. This he affixed to the vessel's side and produced a match.

"Stop!" exclaimed Aubyn authoritatively.

"Dies still Zherman sheep," protested the skipper.

The match flared, shielded from the wind by the partly clasped hand of the man who was holding it. In obedience to a further order he began to apply the light to the rocket.

Terence whipped out his revolver. Hitherto, realising that a premature display of the weapon might result in a volley from the hostile pistols, he had kept the weapon out of sight. Now that the crew were practically cowed that danger was over.

The seaman hesitated only for a brief instant, then ignoring the levelled weapon, bent over his task. One of his comrades chuckled derisively.

Taking a quick yet steady aim the sub. pressed the trigger. The heavy ball went true to the mark, severing the rocket-stick and causing the rocket to fall over the side. Luck more than good management had enabled him to hit a target the thickness of a lead pencil on a dark night, with only the flicker of a match to assist his aim.

"If any man attempt to go below I'll wing him—tell them that," said Terence sternly, addressing the master. "Order them to fall in on the starboard side."

All sign of resistance having disappeared the crew, ten in number, formed up at the place indicated, while Aubyn drew his cigarette case from his pocket and smoked.

It was not an act of bravado on his part. Now that the crisis was over he had an uncontrollable craving for a cigarette. So he smoked contentedly as he awaited the return of the "Lonette" and her consort.

He had not long to wait. Already grey dawn was breaking. The wind had dropped, and the short steep waves had subsided into a sullen roll. Long before the two motor-boats came into view the purr of the engines and the muffled roar of their exhausts could be distinctly heard in the still morning air.

"I thought the fellows had potted you when I heard that shot," exclaimed Waynsford, as he clambered over the side. "Well done, old man," he added cordially, as his glance fell upon the tell-tale wireless gear.

"You might send 'Pixie' to bring up the destroyer," suggested Aubyn. "It will save a lot of trouble if she tows this packet into port. Tell her to give the destroyer the tip: there may be German submarines about."

"What makes you think that?" asked Waynsford.

"The anxiety on the part of one of those fellows to let off a rocket. I'm glad I was able to stop his little game."

"How?"

"Oh, a pot-shot at five yards—sent the rocket-stick flying out of his hands. Wonder I didn't hit him."

"Serve him jolly well right if you had," added Waynsford. Already he was fairly conversant with German methods of kultur in connexion with nautical affairs, and to him every Teuton appeared in the light of a skulking treacherous foe.

"'Pixie,' ahoy!" he shouted, addressing his consort, which had now slowed down about half a cable's length away on the port quarter. "Get into touch with that destroyer: she's heading our way. Inform her commanding officer that we suspect hostile submarines in the vicinity."

CHAPTER X.

H.M.S. "STRONGBOW" SAILS.

ALREADY the vessel indicated—H.M.T.B.D. "Lawley"—was within three miles of the captured trawler, and at a good twenty-five knots was momentarily decreasing the distance. Her lynx-eyed lieutenant-commander had spotted the so-called "Vanhuit," and the tell-tale wireless mast, and the presence of one of the patrolling motor-boats alongside gave him a right impression that the trawler had been engaged in illegal work.

The "Lawley" made a fine picture as she pelted through the leaden-hued water on that grey autumnal morning. She was cleared for action. Men were standing by the three 4-inch guns ready to let fly at the first sign of a hostile periscope, for German submarines had been reported in the vicinity of Yarmouth Roads, and each of her mast-heads had the White Ensign floating proudly in the breeze created by her speed. The bunting was the only dash of colour about her; all the rest of the destroyer was a sombre hue, from the black hull and funnels to the great-coated forms of the crew.

The skipper of the "Pixie," balancing himself on the cabin-top of his lively craft, was semaphoring the warning. Almost as soon as his message ended a triangular strip of bunting—the answering pennant—was hoisted to the "Lawley's" signal yard-arm. Then, by means of a megaphone, the lieutenant-commander shouted to the crew of the "Pixie." The words were unintelligible to the watchers on the captured trawler, but the skipper of the "Pixie" understood. With a wave of his arm he descended from his precarious perch just in time to prevent himself being capsized by the swell of the passing destroyer, which, instead of making for the trawler, sharply ported helm and made off in the opposite direction.

"We're to take the prize into Yarmouth under our own steam," announced the sub. in charge of

the "Pixie," as he came within hailing distance.

"Right-o," assented Waynsford cheerfully. "Come aboard and we'll tow both our boats. Now then, below there," he added, addressing the German skipper and his crestfallen men.

Waynsford literally hustled them into the forepeak and shut the hatch. The German engineer and the fireman required no compulsion to remain at their posts. In one sense they were glad at being captured; it meant the end of the nerve-racking ordeal within sight of the English coast and miles of mine-strewn waters—the work of their fellow-countrymen—between them and their Friesian home.

The crew of the motor-boats quickly buoyed and severed the nets that the pseudo-trawler had out to cloak her true rôle, and having drifted clear of these entanglements, the captured craft forged ahead at a modest seven knots with the "Lonette" and "Pixie" towing sedately astern.

Terence Aubyn, feeling somewhat heavy-eyed by reason of his voluntary night's work, was pacing the deck, his gaze directed towards the town of Yarmouth and the low-lying Norfolk coast, now momentarily becoming clearer in the rays of the early morning sun.

Suddenly his thoughts were interrupted by a hurried shout from one of the deck-hands, followed by a heavy list of the trawler as Waynsford put the helm hard over.

Fifty yards on the starboard bow was a black object resembling a short spar floating vertically, yet the object had movement, for a streak of foam marked the resistance of the water to its progress.

It was Aubyn's first impression of the periscope of a submarine, and a German one at that.

With admirable presence of mind Waynsford had decided to ram the lurking peril. Evidently the commander of the submarine had realized his danger, for the periscope was sinking.

Aubyn held his breath as the heavy hull of the trawler passed immediately over the spot where the periscope had disappeared. He waited for the dull grinding sound as the vessel's keel ripped through the comparatively thin steel hull of the submerged vessel—but he waited in vain. True, there was a slight tremor—nothing more.

"I believe we hit her," exclaimed Waynsford. "Did your hear anything?"

Aubyn was obliged to confess that he had not. The prize crew crowding to the side looked for signs of a successful issue to their effort.

"Oil and bubbles," declared the sub. in charge of the "Pixie." "She's done for."

Waynsford, far from being convinced, ordered one of his men to heave a mark-buoy overboard and mark the spot where the periscope had been last seen, at the same time a code signal was hoisted indicating the fact that a hostile submarine had been rammed.

Quickly the destroyer arrived within hailing distance, and Aubyn was able to see what steps the Navy took to combat the unseen foe. Slowly the "Lawley" circled round the mark-buoy, paying out over her stern what appeared to be an exaggerated string of sausages—in reality a "necklace" of guncotton ready to be fired by means of electricity.

"Prize ahoy! you're much too close," sang out the bronzed lieutenant-commander impatiently.

Before the trawler was a cable's length from the mark-buoy a series of columns of water rose two hundred feet in the air, accompanied by a muffled crash and a haze of smoke. When the water had subsided and the vapour had drifted on the light breeze the mark-buoy was no longer to be seen. All around were the bodies of fish killed by the submarine explosion.

"That's settled her hash," declared Waynsford. "If she survived the hit we gave her she didn't get over that little attention. See, the 'Lawley' is sending a diver down to report."

"More copy for the Press," remarked his chum, the sub. from the "Pixie."

Waynsford shook his head.

"Not much," he replied. "It's part of the game to keep this sort of thing quiet. We don't want to frighten our friends the German submarines, we want to lure them out and make an end of 'em."

Terence made no remark. He was thinking, striving to picture the shattered hull with its crew of corpses, lying fifteen fathoms below on the sandy bed of the North Sea.

Half an hour later the prize was moored alongside one of the Yarmouth quays, while the German crew were marched off under an armed guard.

Declining an invitation to breakfast with the naval officers of the port, Aubyn hurried ashore. It was now six o'clock. Already a wireless report had been received from the "Lawley" stating that her divers had discovered the wreck of the hostile submarine, which was a matter for

congratulation. But there were no tidings of the spy von Eckenhardt. In spite of a rigorous search he had contrived to get clear away, and von Eckenhardt at liberty in in England was a more serious menace than a dozen German submarines operating in British waters.

"I say, mater," remarked Terence, while Mrs. Aubyn and her son were at breakfast, "I think you ought to evacuate 'Aubyn's Battery '—at least while the war lasts."

Mrs. Aubyn looked at her son in utter astonishment.

"What, leave my home? For why? Surely you don't mean to suggest that German troops are likely to land in England?"

Terence shook his head. He scouted the idea of invasion, yet he knew there was a possibility—that a raiding squadron might visit the Norfolk coast.

"No, I was thinking of the winter coming on," he said equivocally. "You see, it's rather bleak and lonely for you here. Why not shut the house up for the next six months and go and live with Aunt Margaret?"

Mrs. Aubyn wavered. Her sister had a large house at Purbrook, a few miles from Portsmouth. It certainly would be a pleasant change to spend the winter in the south of England with her nearest relative rather than exist in solitary state in her home on the bleak East Coast.

"Besides," continued her son, taking advantage of his parent's obvious wavering, "the 'Strongbow'—that's the new name for the old 'Saraband'—is fitting out of Portsmouth, and more than likely she'll make that place here home port. In that case, whenever we put in for supplies or refit, I ought to be able to see you pretty frequently."

The explanation was a lame one. Terence knew perfectly well that on being commissioned the "Strongbow" would proceed to the North Sea for patrol-work. Her connexion with Portsmouth would then be severed. But to his satisfaction Mrs. Aubyn figuratively hauled down her colours.

A telegram was despatched to her sister, accepting a long-standing invitation, and at the expiration of his week-end leave, Sub-Lieutenant Aubyn was accompanied by his mother on his journey to Portsmouth to rejoin his ship.

Three days later the "Strongbow," looking most business-like in her garb of neutral grey, slipped unostentatiously between the old fortifications at the mouth of Portsmouth Harbour, negotiated the narrow gateway of the boom-defence, and in the pale dawn of a misty October day shaped her course for the North Sea.

She was one of perhaps a hundred vessels of whose very existence not decimal one per cent of the population of Great Britain is aware. Unless a striking success or a lamentable disaster brings them into the limelight the great British public never hear their names. Yet every one of that vast fleet of armed merchantmen was doing its duty as a unit of the greatest Navy the world has ever yet seen, nobly performing a service whereby the United Kingdom is spared the horror of the yoke-mate of war—the scourge of famine.

The "Strongbow" carried the same officers as in the days when she sailed under the Red Ensign, while in command was a full-fledged naval officer, Captain Hugh Ripponden.

Captain Ripponden was one of those men who welcomed the outbreak of hostilities as a godsend. July found him in a hopeless position as regards seniority on the list of commanders. The prospect of compulsory retirement at the age of fifty stared him in the face. By sheer merit and perseverance he had attained his present position, but unfortunately he lacked the necessary influence "up topsides" to gain an additional advance in rank.

The absorption into the Service of a fleet of armed merchantmen proved to be his salvation from a distasteful retirement, and thus he found himself in command of H.M.S. "Strongbow."

Like many another talented naval officer Captain Ripponden had not the gift of eloquence. He was a man of few words. A speech was beyond his powers.

While the crew of H.M.S. "Strongbow" first mustered for Divisions after commissioning the captain's address was short and to the point:—

"My lads, you look a smart crew. If you are as smart as you look, I'll be quite satisfied. Now dismiss."

He was quite right in saying the ship's company were a smart body of men. In spite of the fact that they were made up of Royal Naval Reserve men, Royal Fleet Reservists, and a sprinkling of Royal Naval Volunteers, they presented an appearance that would defy criticism even from the oldest martinet in the days when a smart lower-yard man was considered as a greater asset to a ship's company than a good gun-layer.

The officers of the "Strongbow," from Captain Ramshaw (who now assumed the rank of Commander, R.N.R.) downwards, quickly voted the new skipper "a right good sort," while it did not take the crew long to form the current opinion that "the owner" was a man who, not shirking

work himself, expected others to do their utmost. On board H.M.S. "Strongbow" there was no room for shirkers or grousers.

Before the vessel passed the Nab Lightship practically the whole of the Naval Volunteers—men of good position in civil life, whose previous acquaintance with King Neptune's domains was a view from the deck of the "President" lying off Temple Pier—were prostrate with sea-sickness.

Captain Ripponden received the report that ten of his crew were temporarily hors de combat with equanimity.

"Let the men lie in their hammocks," he replied considerately. "They'll be all the better for it when they recover their sea-legs."

Therein he was right, and before the "Strongbow" arrived at her cruising-station the Volunteers were as fit and as eager as the rest of their comrades for the arduous work on hand.

CHAPTER XI.

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK.

"LIGHT on the port bow, sir," sung out a hoarse voice in the darkness.

Sub-Lieutenant Aubyn rubbed his eyes with the back of his lamb-skin glove. The action was necessary, for his face was encrusted with frozen spray—icicles that, driven with terrific force by the howling wind, cut so deeply into his weather-beaten skin as to draw blood. Then, grasping his telescope with his benumbed fingers he steadied the instrument on the edge of a "storm-dodger" and brought it to bear upon the object indicated.

Two months of monotonous patrol-work had passed since the day on which the "Strongbow" left Portsmouth Harbour. The rigours of a winter in the North Atlantic had severely tried the physical and mental capabilities of the officers and crew. As the days shortened and the nights correspondingly increased, and the periods of weak sunshine became more and more rare, the stress upon the ship's company grew. Buffeted by wintry gales, swept by icy seas, the "Strongbow" kept doggedly to her station. For a week at a time no strange sail would be sighted. The armed liner seemed to be an atom of isolation in the midst of a deserted foam-flecked ocean; yet hers was a particular duty to be done for King and Country.

Coming from a regular route that for the most part lay in tropical and sub-tropical seas the original officers of the ship felt the climatic change acutely. Most of them, who hourly faced death in the shape of unseen mines, quailed at the thought of having to use a razor, and grew beards of wondrous trim.

Aubyn was one of the exceptions, yet his appearance was such that he resembled, to use Raeburn's expression, "a cross between a teddy-bear and a golliwog." In addition to double underclothing he sported three thick sweaters, a heavy great-coat and an enormous woollen muffler. Over this perambulating bundle of clothing he wore a large yellow oilskin and sea-boots. His naval peaked cap had given place to a woollen "helmet" surmounted by a "sou'-wester" kept in place, against the frantic efforts of the wind to dislodge it, by a black and white plaid "comforter" tied tightly under his chin. And in spite of this load of garments the cold chilled him to the bone.

Terence's appearance in the matter of dress was in keeping with the rest of the officers and crew. Gifts of woollen comforts from the womenfolk of the Empire had been showered upon the Royal Navy, and in spite of the apparent redundancy of garments every article was utilized and appreciated. Commander Ramshaw had been heard to remark that when the men were given an order they had to almost undress before they could carry it out. He was not far out, for although the amount of clothing worn was not superfluous it certainly hampered the men's movements.

The "Strongbow's" task was an arduous, necessary, and momentous one. Like scores of her consorts the joy of battle was denied her. The possibility of any of her crew smelling powder was a very remote one. She was never likely to join in the chase of a fleeing enemy warship. Her men would never, according to present circumstances, witness the last plunge of a hostile cruiser, sent to the bottom by the guns of a man-of-war. Honour and glory were not to be hers when the story of the Great War comes to be written in letters of gold upon the pages of the world's history.

No, she was only a patrol-ship; doomed to cruise within certain limits and examine all strange merchant-craft that passed within sight of the alert lookout. Yet by so doing she was driving a nail into the coffin of the vaunted German Empire. She was helping to tighten the bands of economic pressure that were slowly but surely crippling the resources of the Mailed Fist.

It was not until Aubyn had removed the thick deposit of frozen spray, which, in spite of the protective shade had encrusted the object glass of the telescope, that he was able to distinguish the outlines of the strange vessel. She was a three-masted topsail schooner, close-reefed and on

the starboard tack, showing her port light, which was burning brightly.

No vessel engaged in carrying contraband to Germany would be likely to show navigation lamps while attempting to steal through the cordon of British patrol-ships. The sub. knew that; yet it was his duty to report the presence of the stranger in order that the "Strongbow" could make a proper examination of her papers.

Upon receipt of the intelligence that the armed liner was heading for an unknown vessel, Captain Ripponden, aroused before he had "turned in" for less than an hour, hurried to the bridge. Orders were issued for the cutter's crew to stand by, while the "Strongbow" was manoeuvred to take up a position to windward of the schooner.

Promptly the stranger obeyed the order to heave-to. With her lean bow plunging into the angry seas like a chopper she lost way two cables' lengths from the British patrol-ship, a row of sou'-westered heads lined the lee-rail, as her crew watched the approach of "Strongbow's" boat.

Half an hour later the boarding officer returned.

"No luck, sir," he reported. "She's our old friend, the 'Sarmiento,' of Boston, U.S.A., bound for Bergen."

He was justified in calling the schooner an old friend. Three days previously the "Strongbow" had fallen in with and had boarded the self-same vessel. For three days the "Sarmiento" had tacked and tacked in the teeth of the strong nor'-easter, never gaining a mile, while the patrol-ship in keeping her to appointed limits had again fallen in with her.

"All in a night's work," remarked Captain Ripponden, as he prepared to return to his cabin. "Better luck next time. Mr. Bury, you brought the cutter alongside in excellent style."

The sub. who had gone to the schooner as boarding-officer saluted. The praise from his captain had amply recompensed him for the dangers he and his boat's crew had undergone in traversing the stretch of angry sea between the two vessels, only to find that he had departed upon a fruitless errand.

Philosophically he agreed with the skipper that it was all in a night's work, and made a hurried bolt below to shed his saturated garments, for in spite of oilskins and sea-boots he was drenched to the skin.

At eight bells noon on the following day another sail was reported, this time on the port quarter.

The "Strongbow's" helm was immediately put over and a course shaped to intercept the stranger.

"German, by all the powers!" ejaculated Commander Ramshaw. "She's got the confounded cheek to hoist her rascally colours."

The approaching vessel was a large steel barque. Her jibboomless "stump" bowsprit and the absence of chain-plates betokened her to be a modern craft and apparently a valuable prize.

The stranger made no attempt to alter course. A score or so of stolid, fair-haired Teutons were gathered on her short fo'c'sle, gazing with a faint degree of interest upon the grey-painted vessel approaching them, till a shot fired across the barque's bows, followed by a peremptory signal to heave-to roused them to unwonted activity.

Away aloft swarmed the astonished German seamen. Sail was quickly reduced, and curtseying to the short steep seas the barque was ready to receive her prize-masters.

Terence was in charge of the boat detailed to take possession of the barque. Armed with a revolver and accompanied by fifteen of the crew with rifles and bayonets, he took his place in the stern sheets of the boat. Deftly the patent disengaging gear of the falls was cast off, the men bent to their stout ash oars with a will, and five minutes later the boat was alongside the barque.

"Vot you vant?" demanded the skipper of the barque, which proved to be the "Freya" of Bremen. "Your vessel is a prize of his Britannic Majesty's Government," announced Terence.

"Prize?—I no onderstan'," expostulated the master vehemently. "Dis Zherman sheep. Zhermany not at war."

"I'm afraid you are greatly mistaken," said Aubyn, as he swung himself up the side by means of the rope ladder which the crew, unsuspecting the nature of the visit, although mystified by the display of arms, had meanwhile lowered. "Germany is at war with Great Britain, France, Russia, Japan, and Servia."

At the mention of each of these countries the skipper's eyes opened wider and wider.

"Mein Gott!" he exclaimed, and without another word turned on his heel and made for his cabin, only to be brought back by a peremptory order from the young sub.

From the ship's papers it was ascertained that the "Freya" had a most valuable cargo of nitrates and copper ore—a cargo that would be of immense service to the German army had the barque escaped the British patrol. She was a hundred and forty-three days out of Valparaiso, and during the whole of that time she had not spoken a single vessel; consequently her crew were in total ignorance of the European War. Gales and head winds had delayed her; water and provisions remained sufficient only for three more days. She had been blown so far out of her course that her master had decided to make a passage round Cape Wrath rather than beat up the English Channel, and when almost in sight of the North Sea she had been snapped by the "Strongbow."

Quickly the prize crew went about their work. The German seamen were ordered below; guards were posted at the hatchways and outside the officers' quarters. The red, white, and black ensign of the German Mercantile Marine was lowered and rehoisted under the British flag; canvas was stowed and preparations were made to take the "Freya" in tow.

After a considerable amount of skilful and dangerous manoeuvring a stout hempen hawser was passed from the prize to the "Strongbow," and wallowing heavily in the latter's wake the "Freya" was towed into Dingwall.

Almost the first thing that attracted Terence's attention on landing at Dingwall was a poster on which appeared the words "German Fleet attempts Bombardment of Yarmouth."

"Another rumour—I'm getting sick of them," ejaculated Aubyn; nevertheless, he bought a copy of the paper. He was wrong in his surmise. It was a fact, not a rumour. Several German heavy cruisers had suddenly appeared off the port in the grey dawn, and had opened a furious fire. Unaccountably, it seemed, all the projectiles fell short of their mark. A few, indeed, ploughed up the sand on the shore, but no damage was done. Everyone was asking, "Will the hostile cruisers get away safely?"

That same afternoon the news was received that the raiders had escaped. The chances were eagerly discussed on board the "Strongbow." It seemed incredible that, in spite of the cordon of British light cruisers and destroyers a dozen enemy ships should be able to retire unharmed after their brazen attempt.

"You fellows must remember we haven't official details," remarked Lieutenant Lymore. "Another thing: you know what the North Sea is like this time of the year, with the range of vision limited to perhaps a couple of miles."

"Think they'll try it on again?" asked Raeburn.

"No doubt. Encouraged by their being able to avoid getting into contact with our fleet they'll have another shot at it, but let's hope they'll burn their fingers."

Before the "Strongbow" left Dingwall, after coaling ship, a mail, mostly of belated letters, arrived. Amongst them was one for Aubyn from his chum Waynsford.

"I suppose you know all about our little excitement here at Yarmouth," he wrote. "We were rudely disturbed from our bunks by tremendous firing, and when we turned out we discovered shells dropping within five hundred yards of the shore. With the naked eye one could make out the enemy ships fairly distinctly, and with glasses quite plainly. The shells could be seen falling all around the little 'Halcyon,' and it was most marvellous how she escaped. Altering the position of those buoys the night you were here doubtless upset the German gunners' calculations.

"The Press report that none of the shells did damage is incorrect. Of course it may be advisable not to give the public full details, but in your case I think you ought to know."

"Almost the last shell fired struck your mater's house. Went right through the dining-room without exploding and buried itself five feet in the earth on the other side of the building. Lucky you made your parent clear out, wasn't it?

"I'm under orders to leave Yarmouth and report myself at Scarbro'. Goodness only knows what for, but 'orders is orders,' as Coastguardsman Smith is so fond of quoting. If ever you are within easy distance of Scarbro' and get short leave, look me up.

"Yours most sincerely,

"RICHARD WAYNSFORD."

CHAPTER XII.

MINED.

Twelve hours later H.M.S. "Strongbow" was on her appointed station. It was night. The wind had moderated considerably, yet there was quite a heavy sea running. The young moon peeped between dark masses of drifting scud, while to windward a bank of irregularly defined clouds fringed with ragged tails betokened a repetition of the unpleasant climatic conditions.

It was Sub-Lieutenant Aubyn's "watch below." Seated in the plainly furnished gun-room, the scuttles of which were carefully screened, were most of the junior officers who were off duty.

Some were playing cards, others were reading, in spite of the raucous ragtime melodies ground out by a gramaphone that had already suffered considerably from the effects of two months' buffeting. In the pauses while the junior midshipman rewound the instrument of mental torture, the slap of the waves against the vessel's side could be distinctly heard.

"In for another dirty night," remarked Raeburn inconsequently.

The announcement was received in chilly silence. "Dirty nights" were too frequent and too monotonous to form the subject of conversation.

The assistant engineer tried another tack.

"What do you make of the latest report from the Russian frontier?" he asked.

"Oh, dry up, old man!" expostulated O'Reilly feebly. "What with your cackle and young Jones grinding away at that blessed gramaphone—Jones, if you put on another record I'll throw this book at your head! There's no peace in the gun-room."

Aubyn smiled grimly. He realized that in the monotonous round of routine his comrades were almost bored to death by their own company. Even the versatile O'Reilly was becoming as surly as a bear with a sore head.

"Keep your wool on, old man!" exclaimed Raeburn. "Strikes me, we all want shaking up——"

Before he could complete the sentence the ship seemed to leap vertically out of the water. A deafening crash followed. The gun-room furniture was thrown in all directions, the occupants were either hurled against the bulkhead or pitched violently on top of the overturned gear, while the failure of the electric light left the place in utter darkness.

Terence found himself lying across the remains of the gramaphone, with someone's heel beating a tattoo on the small of his back.

For some seconds he remained where he was, his senses dulled by the sudden shock. Then it occurred to him that the ship was not so lively as usual. Her movements seemed decidedly sluggish. A confused roar, the sound of many feet hurrying, mingled with the hiss of escaping steam, recalled him to his senses. Either the "Strongbow" had struck a mine or had been torpedoed. Above the tumult came the sound of the bugle, the notes quavering to such an extent that the sub. hardly recognized their significance.

"That's 'General Quarters'," he exclaimed, and freeing himself from the persistent attentions of the unknown's heels, he sprang to his feet and struck a match.

By its feeble glimmer he could form some idea of the chaotic aspect of the gun-room. Many of his comrades had regained their feet, and in their eagerness to obey the bugle-call were groping blindly for the door. The concussion had jammed it badly. Two of the officers were still prone amid the débris—stunned by the shock.

The match flickered and died out, but before Aubyn could strike another, one of the midshipmen thrust a hastily rolled newspaper into the remains of the fire on the stove and held it like a torch.

A combined effort on the part of O'Reilly and two of the midshipmen burst the door from its hinges. Aubyn, assisted by Raeburn, lifted one of the unconscious men and bore him on deck. Others performed a like office for the second victim, while the rest filed up the companion.

By this time the short burst of uproar had entirely ceased. Officers and men were quietly falling in on the upper deck, awaiting the captain's orders.

Silhouetted against the fitful moonlight could be discerned the cool and resolute form of Captain Ripponden as he grasped the bridge-rails and looked down upon the orderly mass of humanity. In that moment of peril he was proud of his crew. They were worthy of upholding the traditions of gallant British seamen. To what extent the "Strongbow" was damaged he knew not. He was awaiting the carpenter's and the boatswain's report.

As he waited, with a true seaman's instinct, he glanced to windward. The approaching storm was not far off. Should it be necessary to take to the boats the chances of being saved were very remote. Nor did there seem any possibility of rescue from any other ship, for the explosion had dislocated the wireless apparatus. The only chances in that direction were that a passing vessel might detect the wail of the syren—as it sent forth its call for assistance in the long and short blasts that corresponded to the dot and dash of the Morse Code—or might sight the coloured star rockets that were being fired from the bridge.

Captain Ripponden deliberately delayed giving the order to take to the boats. Although the "Strongbow" was sorely hit she showed no immediate inclination to make her final plunge. The engine-room and stokeholds were clear, and the engine-room staff still remained at their posts

below the water-line; nevertheless, the ship was making water freely and was already considerably down by the head.

Suddenly a short thick-set figure ran aft between the double line of seamen drawn up as calmly and as steadily as if mustered for Divisions. Terence could hear the man's laboured breathing as he hurried. It was the ship's carpenter, on the strength of whose report Captain Ripponden's orders for immediate action would be delivered.

Up the bridge ladder the warrant officer made his way, then drawing himself erect saluted his superior—a courtesy that the captain punctiliously returned. Even in the presence of fearful and imminent peril the regulation regarding the paying of proper compliments in the matter of saluting were carried out to the letter.

The eyes of every man on deck were directed upon the silhouetted figures of the captain and the carpenter on the bridge. Captain Ripponden's head was observed to nod slightly several times as he listened to his subordinate's report; then he stepped to the after-bridge rails.

"My men," he shouted in stentorian tones that were clearly audible amid the moaning of the wind and the hiss of escaping steam, "we'll save the old ship yet. Twenty men to assist carpenter's crew. The rest remain aft and stand easy."

Away doubled the working party, their task being to build a temporary coffer-dam in the after side of the for'ard transverse bulkhead. The "Strongbow" had bumped upon a drifting mine, the explosion of which, occurring right under the bows and close to the water-line, had flooded the bow compartments. The watertight bulkhead was dangerously strained. Water was entering in small jets under the terrific pressure in the flooded compartments; but although the pumps were quite capable of keeping the leak under control, the bulkhead, unless shored up, was in momentary danger of giving way.

Feverishly the carpenter and his men tackled the hazardous task. Bolts of canvas, rolled hammocks and tarpaulins were piled against the bulging steel bulkhead, and held in position by baulks of timber, braced and chocked till the coffer-dam was as strong and firmly set as human ingenuity could devise.

Meanwhile, the rest of the crew were allowed to smoke—a concession that was eagerly welcomed, and the quarter-deck glowered with the dull glare of lighted cigarettes and pipes. Those men who had turned up without adequate clothing were ordered to find additional garments to protect them from the numbing cold, while the cooks were told off to the galleys to make hot cocoa. Even in the midst of peril Captain Ripponden's thoughts were for the comfort of his devoted men.

As soon as the carpenter reported that in his opinion the strained bulkhead was properly shored up, orders were given to the engine-room for half-speed astern and a course shaped for Aberdeen. To drive the ship ahead with her bows seriously damaged would be placing a tremendous strain upon the coffer-dam, while when making sternway the pressure would be considerably reduced.

"Let's hope we don't hit another of those infernal mines," remarked O'Reilly to Aubyn, as the two officers made their way below. "I don't think we are in a regular minefield. The one we struck was evidently a derelict."

"Evidently," agreed Terence. "Judging by the damage done it must have deteriorated, otherwise it would have sent us to the bottom like a stone. I suppose it will mean turning over to another ship?

"Six weeks, patching the old 'Saraband' up," declared O'Reilly, who almost invariably referred to the ship by her former name. "I wish to goodness they'd appoint us to a cruiser or a destroyer and give us a chance of seeing some fun."

"We have had a fair share."

"Yes, of hard work—which I don't mind—and getting bashed about without being able to strike a blow in self-defence. Of course, it's the call of duty——"

A muffled thud, coming from almost immediately below their feet and followed by the unmistakable sound of rushing water, interrupted the young officer's conversation.

They looked at each other for one brief instant, hardly able to comprehend the nature of the latest calamity.

"Bulkhead started," announced Aubyn laconically.

Snatching an oil lamp from its bracket Terence rushed below, followed by O'Reilly. Guided by the feeble illumination, for the electric lighting installation was hopelessly out of order, the two officers made their way down several short ladders. On the orlop-deck they almost collided with Raeburn.

"After magazine flooded," announced the assistant engineer breathlessly. "Huge rush of water. I was just off to get extra hands, but you'll do. Be quick, there's no time to lose. The water's pouring in like a sluice."

Knee deep in water the three officers made their way aft till their arrival at the door of the magazine. The sentry was fumbling with the lock, while two artificers, one holding a lantern, were impatiently urging him to make a job of it and open the door. The whole of the magazine was full of water, while the pressure had forced a part of the bulkhead containing the compartment.

When the "Strongbow" struck the mine the concussion had caused a hitherto undiscovered leak aft, the flow being concealed by the locked door of the magazine until the pressure had become sufficient to burst the thin steel walls. Being specially constructed for flooding in case of emergency, the floor of the magazine was some feet below the level of the orlop-deck.

"We'll have to tackle the leak inside," announced Terence. "Here, one of you," he added addressing the men waiting by the door. "Cut up and inform the carpenter. Look alive."

At length the marine sentry succeeded in shooting back the strained lock. The officers hurled themselves against the door. It opened inwards, at the same time releasing an additional flood of water, that surged violently along the orlop-deck.

At every heave of the ship frothing billows careered up and down the length of the confined space, wellnigh sweeping the little group of officers and men from their feet. Already, taking into account the state of the flooded fore compartments, the volume of water admitted into the ship was causing her to move sluggishly. The danger of foundering was still imminent.

Holding his breath and setting his jaw tightly, Aubyn literally leapt down to the floor of the magazine. The mean level of the water was up to his neck. Momentarily it would subside, then rise till it floated him off his feet, yet gamely he struggled onwards, partly swimming, partly wading.

The "Strongbow" was built on the "single-skin" principle. Only a thin steel shell, riveted to curved ribs of the same metal, formed her hull. The after magazine was on the port side, at approximately the spot where the "run aft" of her lines began. It was here, as Terence suspected, that one of the seams had gaped open.

Filling his lungs to their utmost capacity with the none too wholesome air, the sub. dived. His fingers, already numbed by the icy-cold water, came in contact with a gap through which a steady torrent was pressing. His surmise was correct: several of the rivets had been fractured, and between the lap of two adjoining plates a serious leak had developed.

Whipping off his scarf Aubyn attempted to thrust it into the gap. The rush of water swept it away. Off came his pilot coat. Thrice he essayed to hold it in position, but his body being practically water-borne he could exert little or no force. He felt still more the numbing effect of the sea. In the semi-darkness, for he had only the reflected light from the lanterns, the horror of the position gripped him.

"If she goes, I'm done for," he thought, for in his fevered imagination he fancied that the ship was already on the point of making a final plunge. He felt tempted to desist from his efforts and make a rush for safety. Then, as quickly as it had come, the wave of panic left him.

"Got a hand-spike there?" he asked.

"Ay, ay, sir," replied one of the carpenter's crew who had just arrived on the scene. "And some stoppers as well."

Two of the men plunged into the flooded magazine. The hand-spike was applied to the temporary plug until it was forced into the gap.

"That'll hold, sir," announced one of the men confidently.

"Let's hope so," replied the sub. Then to himself he muttered, "And my very best pilot coat."

For another ten minutes Aubyn stood and shivered, till one of the men felt the sub.'s numbed hand shaking as he assisted to hold the hand-spike.

"Leak's well under control, sir, I think," continued the seaman, a burly Devonshire man. "Might I make so bold, sir, as to suggest that you stand easy? We'll see to this all right."

The man spoke truly. All the available pumps working continuously were sufficient to keep the remaining inrush of water well under control. Already the orlop-deck was practically cleared. In the magazine the water was just above the sub.'s waist.

Aubyn did not reply. He was incapable of speech. In the semi-gloom the Devonshire man saw that something was amiss.

"Do'ee take hold of this a minute, Joe," he said to his comrade, as he relaxed his hold on the

hand-spike. "Now, sir, out you do come."

With that he literally carried the numbed form of his superior officer out of the partly flooded magazine, just as others of his mates were preparing to complete the task which Aubyn had successfully begun.

Of what happened during the next few hours Terence had but a hazy idea. He was dimly conscious of being placed into a hot bath, wrapped up in blankets, and being put into his bunk. There, as far as he personally was concerned, scarce troubling whether the ship went down or otherwise, he fell into the deep sleep of utter exhaustion till he was aroused by the officers' call followed by the shrill notes of the bo's'un's mates' whistles.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RAID ON SCARBOROUGH.

"My watch, by Jove!" ejaculated Aubyn. "What in the name of goodness am I doing in my bunk at this time of the morning?"

He sprang out of bed with his customary alacrity, only to find his knees give way under him. Then it gradually dawned upon him that his last fully conscious moments were whilst he was in the flooded magazine.

"Steady, old man!" he muttered reproachfully. "This won't do. Pull yourself together."

He began to dress, rummaging for his clothes in one of the characteristically awkwardly placed drawers under his bunk. The garments he had worn the previous day had been taken away to be dried. Then he remembered the fate of his great-coat and wondered what he should do without it when on the bridge.

He glanced through the scuttle. The sea was still running high. Flakes of snow, scudding before the wind, were falling rapidly. By the motion of the water as it slipped past the ship's side he knew that the "Strongbow" was still going sternforemost.

The door of his cabin opened noiselessly, and Raeburn entered.

"Here, this won't do, old fellow!" exclaimed the assistant engineer. "You toddle off back to your bunk again. Pills will be on your collar if you don't."

"What silly idiot made the doctor look me up?" asked Terence.

"Don't call yourself ugly names," protested Raeburn laughingly. "Since you chose to have a cold bath and stay there till your nose was as blue as a dungaree suit, and you looked liked a favourite for the Triple Pneumonia Stakes, it isn't to be wondered at that Pills had to have a chip in. But honestly, old man, you turn in, or it will be a case for the sick bay. By Jove, you did a rattling plucky thing!"

Terence abruptly silenced his chum.

"Rot!" he exclaimed. "I spoilt my only great-coat. If I'm to be crocked every time I do a little job like that, the sooner I chuck the Service the better. I'm off."

Ignoring Raeburn's threats to call the surgeon, Terence hurried from his cabin, and having borrowed a pilot coat, donned his oilskins over the borrowed garment and went on deck.

It was a weird sight which met his gaze.

The "Strongbow" was in the grip of a North Sea blizzard. Her tapering masts, funnels, ventilators, even shrouds and ropes, were outlined in glistening snow. Owing to the extreme danger of men being overthrown by the slippery state of the frozen snow underfoot, men were busily engaged in sweeping the decks—an apparently interminable task, as the flakes fell quickly and heavily.

Unnoticed Aubyn gained the foot of the bridge-ladder. The ascent caused him considerable effort. In spite of his natural activity the prospect of a "trick" on the exposed bridge in that awful weather damped his enthusiasm. Mr. Lymore was on duty. His back was turned towards the sub. Before Terence could report himself the door of the chart room was opened and Captain Ripponden appeared.

"Good morning, Mr. Aubyn," exclaimed the latter, returning the sub.'s salute. "I am rather surprised to find you here."

"It's my watch, sir."

"It would have been," corrected the captain. "Dr. Terry reported you unfit for duty, and I must

abide by his decision. So you will report yourself to him."

"Very good, sir," said Terence.

"And," continued Ripponden, "allow me to congratulate you on your plucky action. I will take the first opportunity of transmitting an account of it to My Lords for their information."

Aubyn grasped the captain's extended hand. Completely taken aback by his superior's congratulations he could not frame a reply.

Again saluting, Terence turned to leave the bridge. As he did so a roar of cheering burst from those on deck. Those of the crew who had witnessed the meeting between Captain Ripponden and the plucky sub. had rightly interpreted the "owner's" action. There are moments when spontaneous enthusiasm ignores the dictates of discipline, and this was one of them. The men of the "Strongbow" cheered their young officer to the echo.

Terence Aubyn met with a boisterous reception in the gun-room. His brother officers "chipped" him unmercifully on the subject of the tribute of the crew. The sub. took it all in good part. He realized that underneath the outward mask of levity was a substratum of genuine admiration for his courage and judgment in tackling the leak. Even the dangers through which they had so recently passed failed to subdue the exuberant spirits of the denizens of the gun-room, and entering into the fun, Terence soon felt so much better that Dr. Terry was obliged to confess that his fears for the sub.'s health was no longer justified.

Before dusk the same day two tugs put out from Aberdeen and took the "Strongbow" in tow. Three hours later she was safely docked, and for the first time for many a long day the "watch below" were able to turn in without being confronted by the possibility of sudden death in the mine-strewn waters of the North Sea.

Examination proved that the damage done to the ship was considerable. Practically the whole of the bow portion would have to be re-built, while in many places the hull-plating would have to be re-fastened and re-caulked. Internal damage caused by the concussion was also great. By dint of working day and night the shipbuilders might be able to effect repairs in a month's time.

The next day leave was given to the starboard watch. Officers and men were, by the special consent of the Admiralty, granted seven days' leave. Meanwhile, arrangements were being made to turn over the ship's company to another vessel until repairs to the "Strongbow" were carried out.

The temporary substitute—the armed merchant-man "Vindex"—was lying at Leith. Being of considerably lesser tonnage than the "Strongbow" there was no necessity for the whole of the latter's crew to man her. With mixed feelings Sub-Lieutenant Aubyn found that he was appointed to H.M.S. "Terrier" as supernumerary.

He was sorry to part company with his old messmates, even for a comparatively brief period. Having won praise from his captain, possessed of the friendship and esteem of his brother-officers, and well liked by the lower deck, he felt a mental wrench at having to say good-bye even for a few weeks.

On the other hand, his appointment to the "Terrier" was after his own heart, for the ship was a regular unit of the British Navy. She was, it is true, an obsolete craft—a torpedo-gunboat of only 800 tons and a speed of nineteen knots.

Built more than twenty years previously, the "Terrier's" original rôle had long since been usurped by the "destroyer" class. In later years she had been employed as a fishery-protection cruiser, until at the outbreak of war she had been hastily re-fitted and commissioned as a mine-sweeper patrol-boat.

The "Terrier," undergoing engine repairs, was still detained at Newcastle, whither Terence proceeded to join her.

"I hear you've been done out of your leave," was the remark of the "Terrier's" captain, a tall, slimly built man, who looked about Terence's age, although he must have been some years his senior in order to have attained the rank of lieutenant-commander. "We won't be out of dockyard hands for another week, so if you like you can go ashore and report yourself on Saturday."

"Can I be spared, sir?"

"A more favourable opportunity may not occur again for some time," replied Captain Holloway. "Lying alongside a dirty wharf with the coal-dust flying into the officers' cabins all day doesn't make life aboard very attractive. I'm in shore quarters myself until we're ready to proceed to sea; so under the circumstances you will be wise to take advantage of a few days' leave."

The sub. thanked his captain for his consideration, and having given orders for his gear to be placed in his cabin, proceeded to pack a small portmanteau with articles absolutely necessary for his well-earned holiday. While he was so doing he rapidly debated with himself as to where he intended to go. According to the King's Regulations he was bound to leave his address in the

event of being telegraphed to rejoin his ship. The limited time at his disposal, coupled with the idea of the expense of a first-class railway ticket to the South of England, did not permit a visit to his mother. He had no friends in Newcastle, and he was not at all desirous of putting up at an hotel in that city.

Then he remembered Waynsford's invitation to look him up if he happened to be within easy distance of Scarborough.

"Somewhat of the nature of a busman's holiday," he mused, as he wrote his proposed address in the leave-book: "R.M.B.R. 'Lonette,' Scarborough."

Dick Waynsford, apprised by telegraph, was on the station platform to greet him.

"Glad you're come, old man," he exclaimed. "Anything to buck a fellow up?"

"Why, what's wrong now?" asked Terence.

"Nothing in particular; only I'm getting thoroughly fed up in this place. Nothing much to do but to run errands to the mine-sweepers that occasionally put into the bay. A fisherman could do the job equally as well as I can. You've been having an exciting time, I hear?"

"Somewhat," replied Aubyn modestly. "Now, let's be making a move."

The two chums jumped into a waiting taxi, Waynsford giving the chauffeur directions to drive as straight as he jolly well knew how to Sandside, and not to take them half-way round the town to get there.

"'Sandside'—that sounds all right," thought Terence, but his expectations were unrealized as the taxi drew up in the rather dingy quarter of Scarborough adjoining the harbour.

"There she is," announced Waynsford, pointing to the grey hull of the "Lonette," which, barely water-borne, was reclining against the lofty wall of the harbour. "One of the best runs I ever had in her was when we brought her round from Yarmouth."

"Why, she's hard and fast aground."

"M'yes," agreed Waynsford unconcernedly. "She spends most of her time like that, It's all right sleeping on board, unless she happens to take a list the wrong way. Then you've got to sort yourselves out of a horrible muddle on the cabin floor."

"What if you're wanted?" enquired Aubyn.

"We have to jolly well wait till she floats," answered his chum, with a grin. "It's a quiet berth, and heaps better than rolling all night in the open bay. We had one taste of it—nearly upset the whole crowd of us. Mind that ladder: it's horribly slippery."

Waynsford indicated a perpendicular iron ladder, its lowermost end hidden in black mud, over which the rising tide was slowly advancing.

Throwing his portmanteau to one of the crew, who, as the result of long practice, deftly caught the heavy article, Terence descended the fifteen feet of ladder and stepped across the intervening space between the water and the motor-boat's quarter.

"Here's your bunk," announced Waynsford, pointing to a cot swung against the side of the bin. "Nalder, my opposite number, sleeps on the port bunk."

"How about you?" asked Terence.

"I'm going to turn in on the floor for the next few nights," replied Waynsford. "I'm used to it. You see, we've another boat for actual duty purposes in fine weather. She's smaller and handier. We use 'Lonette' mostly as a kind of parent ship. Now, I'll get the boy to bring the grub in. Fire away and let's have all the news."

During the rest of the day while daylight lasted Waynsford piloted his chum round the Queen of Watering Places, taking him up to the ruined castle and introducing him to some officers of Kitchener's Army whose acquaintance he had recently made.

"Jolly decent place in the summer, I should imagine," declared Waynsford, as the chums wended their way back to the harbour. "But deadly dull now. Not a light to be seen after dark. It makes one almost wish that the Germans would pay the place a visit, if only to make things a little more lively."

"Eh, what's that?" inquired Terence.

"Only wishing for the impossible, my dear fellow. Being an unfortified town Scarborough will not be favoured with the attentions of the Teutons. Apart from that they won't risk another raid. They're too wary of our fleet."

It was quite late in the night before the officers of the "Lonette" turned in. The crew detailed for the duty boat had departed, their "trick" commencing at midnight. Quietude settled upon the almost lifeless harbour. Most of the fishing fleet that still remained at its usual work were out. Five or six of the boats, locked up for the night, were moored in the inner harbour. Three more, preparing to leave at high water, were tied up to buoys at the entrance to the outer basin, their crews working silently as if infected by the solitude that overspread the once busy port.

Suddenly Terence was awakened by finding himself slipping from his bunk. In the darkness, for the moment, unable to recall his surroundings, he imagined himself back in the old "Strongbow," and that the vessel was rolling badly. But quickly he discovered that the movement was different; there was no recovery. He felt his bunk list more and more, until vainly endeavouring to hold himself in, he subsided upon the still soundly sleeping Waynsford.

"Confound it!" exclaimed that worthy. "She's heeled outwards. I thought we'd taken proper precautions. Sorry to disturb you, old man."

"It's a case of my disturbing you, I fancy," replied Terence, after he had extricated himself from the pile of blankets and cushions. "I don't mind, if you don't. There goes the crockery," he added, as a series of crashes came from the fo'c'sle.

Striking a match Waynsford lit the cabin lamp and glanced at the bulkhead clock.

"Seven, by Jove!" he exclaimed. "It's close on low water. In another two hours we'll be afloat again. No use attempting to turn in. Nalder, you lazy bounder, get up and join in a hand of dummy whist."

Sub-Lieutenant Nalder, who being in the port cot had been wedged between the bunk cushions and those on the side, was sleeping unconcernedly throughout the racket, as if such happenings were quite in the usual order of things. Aroused by Waynsford's voice and a hearty slap on the back, he sat up.

"Right-o," he agreed. "Jones!"

"Sir!" replied a muffled voice from the fo'c'sle.

"Bring me my pack of cards, will you?"

Terence heard the unmistakable sounds of someone trying to open a jammed door. Then, after a moment's delay the fo'c'sle sliding door was thrust open and the seaman thrust his dishevelled head into the cabin.

"Sorry, sir," he reported, "but the blessed condensed milk has gone and upset itself all over the pack."

"That's kippered our game," remarked Waynsford. "Let's turn out and see what it's like. A stretch before breakfast will do us good."

Donning their great-coats, the three officers contrived, without mishap, to leap from the heeling side of the motor-boat to the rungs of the ladder.

"Beastly foggy morning," declared Nalder.

"Just getting light enough to see," added Waynsford, as, in contradiction to his statement, he stumbled and almost fell over a mooring rope.

Gradually the gaunt outlines of the ruined castle that towered high above the harbour began to grow distinct against the grey sky. The fog began to disperse, although the cliffs to the southern end of the town were still invisible.

"Let's stroll up to the castle," suggested Waynsford. "It will be something to do."

Acting upon this proposal the two ascended the stony path. As they approached the coastguard station they noticed that the signalman was peering seawards through a telescope. The man was so intent upon some objects out to sea that he paid no attention to the new-comers.

Presently the coastguardsman put down his telescope and seized the mouthpiece of a telephone in the signal hut. Terence could hear him speaking distinctly.

"Strange vessels approaching from the nor'ard, sir," he reported to the officer at the Naval Wireless Station behind the town. "I've signalled them, but they won't pay any attention."

The three subs. gazed seawards. Just visible through the haze were four cruisers, moving sufficiently fast through the leaden-coloured water to cause the foam to froth at their bows. Even as they looked the young officers were mildly surprised to see a spurt of dull red flame burst from the for'ard turret of the leading vessel.

Mild surprise gave place to complete astonishment as a heavy shell hurtled overhead, carrying away several of the telegraph wires, and plunged with a terrific detonation into the fortunately

unoccupied barracks on the Castle Hill.

Before the noise of the falling brickwork and masonry had subsided the devoted coastguardsman could be heard shouting on the telephone:—

"They're German cruisers: they're shelling us."

The man had done his duty. He could do no more good remaining where he was. At a quick double he tore for safety, shouting to the young officers to get under cover.

Aubyn, with his companions, quickly took this advice to heart. He had in the action between the "Saraband" and the "Osnabruck" stood up to the hostile fire, but then it was a fight on even terms. Now it was a one-sided affair, and by the noise of the exploding shell Terence knew that it was of much larger calibre than those that came from the German armed liner.

Scarcely had the fugitives covered a hundred yards when another appalling crash, followed by a distinct blast of acrid-smelling air, caused Terence to look back. A shell, better aimed than the first, had completely demolished the signal hut. This missile was followed by salvo after salvo, some forty shells of various calibre raining on the Castle Hill. Others, striking the sheer cliffs, brought tons of rock clattering down upon the Marine Parade, while what was far worse, many projectiles skimming the ruins of the castle, fell with disastrous results upon the congested buildings of the town.

The three subs. were now under the lee of the frowning rock. Here they were comparatively safe, except from stray fragments of splintered shell and flying masonry. The coastguardsman had gone in a different direction.

"The swine!" ejaculated Nalder. "They're shelling a defenceless town. And the 'Lonette' is high and dry too."

In spite of the serious situation his comrades gave vent to a hearty laugh. It seemed so incongruous that Nalder should have taken the plight of the little motor-boat into consideration. Yet had Nalder had his way it was quite possible that he would have blazed away with a rifle at the huge steel monsters with as much result as a small boy using a peashooter against an elephant.

"Not a bad idea getting down to the harbour," added Waynsford. "We'll be fairly sheltered, and we can see what's going on."

Terence thought otherwise. Massive stone walls afford no protection from monster guns. Nevertheless he raised no objection. For one thing—and here the professional sailor scored heavily over the two amateurs—it afforded a chance of making a note of the appearance of the hostile vessels: information that might prove of immense service to the Admiralty.

Shells were raining upon the undefended town as the three reached the harbour pier. In several parts of Scarborough fires, caused by the exploding projectiles, had broken out, and dense columns of smoke rose from the demolished buildings. Having, as they thought, completely demolished the supposed batteries on Castle Hill the German gunners were out to do as much damage to private property as they possibly could. It was but a phase in the terrorizing operations that these modern barbarians delight in calling "kultur."

The attacking craft had now passed in front of the Castle Hill and were clearly visible from the harbour, as they slowly steamed within a quarter of a mile of the shore, vomiting death and destruction upon the hapless town.

The leading craft Terence recognized as one of the Derfflinger Class—an inferior imitation of our Dreadnought cruisers. Astern of her came the "Bluecher," a vessel whose construction the German people hailed with acclamation as the most powerful craft afloat and one that would outclass anything that the British had or would be likely to have. Yet, ere the "Bluecher" took the water, she was hopelessly outmatched by the "Indomitable" class.

For once, however, these two ships were having things all their own way. With the exception of the fiasco at Yarmouth, over a hundred years had elapsed since the thunder of an enemy's guns had been heard by the dwellers of our sea-girt island. British pride in the impregnable position of our insular kingdom had received a nasty shock, for without let or hindrance German guns were pounding her shores in broad daylight.

Half a mile or so behind the battle cruisers were two light cruisers, which apparently took little part in the one-sided engagement. They were engaged in the pleasant occupation of mine-laying, in the hope that one of the British squadrons, summoned by wireless, would flounder blindly into the dangerous zone.

"Oh, for a couple of our submarines!" groaned Terence, as the hostile craft moved slowly along the bay. "They'd bag the whole crowd of them."

Twenty paces from the spot where the subs. stood was an old bronzed and bearded fisherman—a typical Yorkshire salt. Heedless of the risk he ran, he leapt upon the stone parapet, and shaking

his fist at the German ships rated them in the choicest language of the Shire of Broad Acres. Nor would he descend when Aubyn pointed out the risk he ran, and it was only when a shell tore a huge hole in the side of the lighthouse that the old fellow would deign to move.

For a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes the two cruisers maintained a hot fire with their starboard guns. Then came a pause in the hitherto ceaseless roar of the ordnance, as the ships circled to port. Retracing their course they reopened fire, till, gradually increasing speed, they shaped a course nor'nor'east and disappeared in the haze.

"Let's gie into town an see t' damage," suggested the old fisherman, who, like the rest of the hardy East Coast men, had little respect for rank and persons. "Sith'a, lads, there'll be work for us over yonder," and he pointed to the maze of houses, many of which showed signs of the effect of the high-explosive shells.

In the course of his sea-service Terence Aubyn had witnessed more than one horrible sight; but in all his previous experience he had never seen anything approaching the cold-blooded butchery of mere civilians—men, women, and children—by the murderous German shells.

With the energy and coolness that is characteristic of the born seaman he dashed into a practically gutted house, whence cries of pain had attracted his attention.

The house was in one of the poorer districts, substantially built of stone, as is frequently the case in the north of England. A projectile had struck the building just above the ground-floor window. The stonework had, for the most part, resisted the explosion, the force of which had resulted in floors and roofs being either demolished or reduced to a state of absolute insecurity. The ground floors were piled high with débris, under which, though partly visible, was the dead body of an old man.

The cries for aid, uttered in a childish voice, came from the upper storey. Here a part of the bedroom floor had collapsed, exposing to view a wooden bedstead, so insecurely perched that it threatened at every moment to topple over into the chaotic mass thirty feet below. The stairs had vanished, only the iron handrail and a few of its supports remaining.

"What's the move?" demanded Waynsford, as Aubyn threw off his great-coat and handed it to a boy who was watching the scene of desolation with marked curiosity. "Don't be a fool, man! Wait till they bring a ladder."

"It may be too late then," replied Terence; then turning to the old fisherman he bade him bring a coil of rope.

"Thank goodness, there's one man who knows what he is about," thought Aubyn, as the veteran salt hurried off. "No stopping to ask what size or what length."

The next instant the sub. was well on his hazardous climb. Grasping the handrail and making fairly certain that it would bear his weight, Terence hauled himself up, using the holes in the stonework, left by the dislodged stairs, as footholds. As sure-footed as a cat, as active as a panther, he swung himself up, hardly pausing till he gained the uppermost landing, where a few square inches of floorboards remained. Between that and the bedstead was a gap nearly ten feet in width. A professional long-jumper might have essayed the task with success, but in his case Terence realized that a leap would be out of the question.

Rapidly the sub. reviewed the situation. From where he stood he could see the children distinctly. One was a girl of about nine years of age, fair-haired and pale-faced. It was she who was screaming, more with fright than pain, although there was a dark moist patch upon her hair. Her companion was a child of about three, lying with his head over the side of the bed to all appearances either dead or else unconscious.

Already the joist nearest the gap in the shattered floor was bending ominously. Terence felt certain that even if he could get across the intervening space his weight would precipitate the bed and its occupants on to the mound of rubble and broken woodwork below.

He looked above him. The laths and plaster of the ceiling had vanished, the tiles had been blown into the street, leaving the gaunt rafters practically intact. Raising his hand he found that he could just grasp the sloping timber.

"If it carries away, I'm done," he thought. "But it's no use hanging on here, so here goes."

With a resolute leap the sub. seized the two adjoining rafters. The rough woodwork lacerated his hands, but he heeded it not. By sheer muscular effort he raised himself sufficiently to pass his arms over the timber, whence it was a comparatively simple matter to clamber on top of the outside wall.

Well it was that Aubyn had a good head for heights. Looking down from that precarious perch would make most landsmen giddy, but as coolly as if he were walking along a street, the sub. made his way round to the opposite side of the shattered house immediately over the still holding floor of the bedroom.

The elder child, on seeing Terence approach, had ceased her cries and was watching him with wide-open eyes. Then she raised herself, as if to make a spring into his arms.

"Don't move just yet," exclaimed the sub. as calmly as he could. "I'll help you both very soon."

He was desperately anxious lest the girl, by her action, would bring about the calamity he was trying to prevent. At the same time he was racking his brains to find out how he could get hold of the rope when the fisherman returned with it.

"Eh, little lass," he exclaimed, imitating to the best of his ability the East Riding dialect, "just you hand me up one of those sheets. Don't hurry."

The girl obeyed, wonderingly but unhesitatingly. Terence began to tear the cotton sheet into thin strips, binding them into one continuous length, until he judged that he had sufficient to reach the ground.

"'Don't move just yet,' said the Sub. 'I'll help you both very soon.'"

[Illustration: "'Don't move just yet,' said the Sub. 'I'll help you both very soon.'"]

Hardly were his preparations completed when the fisherman returned, puffing and blowing with his exertions.

"Eh, lad, a've got 'en," he announced. "An' a block as well. Th' knows it might come in handy.

"Good man!" thought Terence. "He's solved an awkward problem." Then addressing the old salt: "Stand by and bend the rope on to this," he shouted, as he allowed one end of the cotton strip to flutter to the ground.

Steadily the sub. began to haul in his flimsy line, while the fisherman dexterously paid out the coil of rope, the end of which he had made to Aubyn's means of communication. Then, as soon as he saw that Terence had secured one end of the rope, the old man hitched on the large pulley and continued to pay out more cordage until the block was within the sub.'s grasp.

Whipping out his knife Terence cut off about six or seven feet of rope, using the severed portion as a strop to make fast the block to a pair of rafters. Then passing the rest of the rope through the sheave his means of effecting the rescue of the children were ready for service.

"Stand by to lower away," he shouted, as he made a loop known as a "bowline on a bight."

"Ay, ay," replied the old salt, at the same time signing to Waynsford and Nalder to bear a hand.

Giving a final tug at the strop to make sure as far as possible that the rafter would hold, Terence slid into the loop and swung himself clear of the wall.

"Belay there," he hailed after being lowered a sufficient distance to bring himself level with the remains of the bedroom floor. "Now, little lass, I'll hold you. Don't be afraid."

The next moment the injured girl was safe in his arms. Although the bed shook as the rescued child moved, it still withstood the tendency to slip into the abyss. Twenty seconds later Terence handed his charge over to a doctor who formed one of the rapidly-gathering crowd in the street.

"There's another child—a baby," announced Aubyn. "Badly hurt, I fancy so haul me up smartly."

Spinning round and round like a joint on a meat-jack the sub. again ascended, till the smaller child's body was within reach of his arms. As he whipped off the covering he gave an ill-suppressed exclamation of horror. The left foot of the little victim had been torn away at the ankle.

"Good heavens, Waynsford!" exclaimed Terence, after the child-victims had been removed, and the justly-exasperated crowd began to disperse. "I'm not a vindictive fellow, but if I had that low-down German who gave orders for this butchery, it would give me the greatest pleasure in the world to punch his head."

"You may have the chance yet," replied Waynsford. He had been thinking deeply for the last few moments. "I'm afraid I'm on the wrong lay. Here I am, wearing His Majesty's uniform, fooling about in a rotten little motor-boat, when I ought to be taking a man's part out there," and he pointed towards the North Sea."

"You haven't done badly, when you come to think of it," remarked Terence. "At Yarmouth, for instance."

"A beastly fluke. You, my dear fellow, had most of the game then."

"Buck up!" exclaimed Aubyn cheerily. "You may have a good sniff-in yet. If you don't, remember there's some verse about people serving who only sit and wait. I'm not fond of poetry myself, but perhaps you may know the line I refer to. Let's make a move. There may be more work for us amongst the ruins."

"May I coom along wi' tha', maaster?" asked the fisherman, who was coiling away the rope that had been so instrumental. "Eh, lad, thou'rt real champion."

"By all means," replied the sub. heartily. In spite of his years the old fellow had his wits about him. If there should be any work of a similar nature his assistance would be most valuable.

Before they had gone fifty yards the attention of Aubyn and his party was attracted by the sudden appearance of an elderly corpulent man whose garments consisted of a pyjama suit, over which he wore a woman's jacket with the sleeves tied round his throat, an old pair of carpet slippers and a felt hat. He had just emerged from a cellar, into which he had bolted during the earlier stages of the bombardment. Blinking like an owl he asked plaintively if the danger was at an end.

"Eh, maaster," replied the fisherman. "They kind and humane Germans sheered off half an hour agone."

"It's disgraceful!" exclaimed the dishevelled man vehemently. "Didn't the First Lord of the

Admiralty tell us plainly, only a few months ago, that we could sleep quietly in our beds? Weren't those his exact words?"

"Ay," replied the old salt, with a grim twinkle in his eye. "Ay, that a' did. Th' knows the Huns gave us a look up at a time when most folks ought to be up an' about. Naw, get you gone, friend Thomas; thou'rt not fit to be seen in a respectable town like Scarbro'."

Terence looked inquiringly at his humble friend, as the pyjama-clad man waddled away.

"He'll be one o' those fools as oratates on t' parade on Sundays afternoons," explained the fisherman.

"I knows him well. Always was trying to make us believe that those Huns were our best friends, and that there weren't no use for a British Navy. Th' knows t' sort. For one reason, sith'a, I'm not sorry that those Germans came to Scarbro'."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE END OF THE "TERRIER"

H.M. torpedo-gunboat "Terrier" lay at anchor just within the limits of one of the numerous shallow estuaries of the Essex Coast. By the aid of the lead-line and an Admiralty chart on too small a scale to be of much assistance, Captain Holloway had taken his craft through the intricate approach channel with often less than three feet of water under her keel. Now she was lying head to wind, for it was high water and no tide running, in six fathoms, and within two hundred and eighty yards of the mud-fringed shore.

The "Terrier" had spent an uneventful week on her station, patrolling her appointed limits in the North Sea without a single incident to break the monotony. Swept fore and aft by huge seas that her high fo'c'sle failed to ward off; plugging away in a zig-zag course day after day, till her grey funnels were bleached white with salt spray; with her guns' crews standing by their guns through watch and watch day and night, she was "doing her little bit" as one small unit of the vast, tireless navy.

A few hours previous to the torpedo gunboat's anchoring in the creek, one of the crew had with great suddenness developed appendicitis. Although the "Terrier" carried a surgeon, the case was one for a shore hospital, and as one of the Admiralty "sick-quarters" was situated in the village at the head of the creek, Captain Holloway decided to land the patient with the utmost despatch.

It was blowing fairly fresh. Outside the bar the sea was foam-flecked. Rollers came tumbling in, breaking heavily on shore or else expending themselves harmlessly in the creek. At her anchorage the torpedo-gunboat was pitching slightly to the heave of the open sea.

"Do you see any sign of the boat, Mr. Aubyn?" asked Captain Holloway. "Those fellows ought to be on their way back by this time."

Terence, who was officer of the watch, brought his glass to bear upon the shore, where a cluster of red-tiled roofs, dominated by the grey tower of a church, marked the position of the village—a distance of about a mile and a half from where the "Terrier" lay.

"Boat's still at the hard, sir," he reported. "The boat-keeper is sitting in the stern sheets."

Lieutenant-Commander Holloway gave vent to a gesture of impatience. He knew from the fact that the seaman left in charge was taking it easy that the rest of the party were not on their way back to the hard.

On board the "Terrier" the crew were taking advantage of dry decks to air their saturated clothing and bedding. The watches had just been changed. Down on the ill-ventilated mess-deck grimy stokers, up from the confined stokehold, were scrubbing themselves and changing into clean rig. The fo'c'sle was packed with humanity. Amid the babel of voices Terence could detect the burr of Glorious Devon, the broad Scotch of the Highlands, the staccato voice of an excitable Welshman, the rich brogue of Connemara, and the last but not least, the unmistakable Cockney accent, but one and all stout-hearted British seamen. The most frequent topic of conversation that drifted to the sub.'s ears as he stood on the elevated bridge was football. Some of the men were discussing home affairs in the blunt open fashion that Jack Tar unconsciously adopts; others were debating the prospects of Christmas leave. As for the war, the subject was almost entirely ignored.

Once more the sub. brought his telescope to bear upon the shore. There were signs of activity on the part of the boat-keeper, so Terence came to the conclusion that the hospital party were on their way back.

Then, with a true seaman's almost unconscious instinct he gave a glance first to windward and then towards the open sea. As he did so he made a sudden dash to the engine-room telegraph,

signalling for full speed astern with the starboard engine and full speed ahead with the port, at the same time shouting in stentorian tones that electrified the whole of the crew within hearing: —

"Submarine on the port beam!"

A bugle blared. Ere the short notes of alarm had died away Captain Holloway was beside his subordinate on the bridge. The guns' crews of the two 4.7's sprang to their weapons. Clang went the breach-blocks.

"Eight hundred yards!" announced the gunner calmly, as the copper cylinders with their deadly steel heads were thrust home.

But a deadlier weapon was already on its way towards the doomed ship. A torpedo, set at its minimum depth in order to make sure that it would not pass under the keel of its intended prey, was tearing towards the "Terrier" with the speed of an express train.

From his position on the bridge Terence watched its rapid progress. He could do nothing beyond what he had already done. It was evident that before the ship could swing on her cable, under the adverse action of her twin propellers, until she was bows on to the deadly missile, the torpedo would hit her.

At times the gleaming steel cylinder was clear of the water between the crests of the waves, yet unswerving either to right or left, it headed with disconcerting accuracy towards the ship.

The two 4.7's clashed almost simultaneously. The shell from her bow gun, aimed at the now disappearing periscope of the hostile submarine, missed it by a bare yard, and ricochetting, threw up five distinct columns of spray ere it sunk for good and all.

The gun-layer at the after gun with admirable presence of mind launched a projectile at the torpedo in the hope of diverting its course. He made one mistake: he forgot to take into consideration the refractive properties of water, and consequently the missile struck the surface too far in the wake of the torpedo to affect its direction.

"Stand clear there!" shouted the captain, seeing even in that tense interval that several of the men were standing by the stanchions.

There was a general rush to the starboard side to avoid the direct effect of the explosion of the "tin-fish," then a strange silence fell upon the ship's company.

"Crash!"

A hundred feet or so in the air rose a column of spray, as the deadly torpedo exploded on the port side nearly abreast of the fo'c'sle gun. The ship literally jumped a yard or so out of the water, then with a sickening thud, followed by the unmistakable sound of water pouring into her hull, subsided heavily in the agitated foam.

With his senses practically numbed by the shock of the explosion, Terence stood stockstill, grasping the bridge rail with both hands, while unconscious of the fact he held his telescope under his arm. He was dimly aware of the débris flying all around him, as the slender pole-mast, ventilators, and other heavy objects went crashing over the side. Then, as the cloud of spray and acrid smoke dispersed he could discern the forms of the crew as with varying speeds the majority regained their feet. A few, stunned by the concussion, were lying inertly upon the deck.

For quite ninety seconds Aubyn remained in his dazed condition. Then he realized that the ship was done for, and that he was still alive. Further, as an officer it was his duty to exert himself for the sake of the men. He remembered that the captain had been on the bridge, and turning saw his superior officer standing at the head of the ladder.

The captain was capless. There was blood upon his forehead. A splinter had grazed his head, making a clean superficial wound. The two men exchanged reassuring glances, then in clear, steady tones Captain Holloway issued an order for all hands to fall in on the quarter-deck.

The men made their way aft at the double. There was no undue scrambling or frantic haste, although the "Terrier's" raised fo'c'sle was now almost flush with the water, and her after part, where the freeboard was nominally only five feet, was thrice that height in the air.

Up through the small awkward engine-room stokehold hatchways came the "black squad," not one man of whom had stirred from his post until ordered to do so. Knowing full well that a catastrophe had befallen the ship, but ignorant of the actual facts, or whether she was on the point of making a sudden plunge to the bottom, these men had to undergo the greatest ordeal of any of the ship's company. Yet, before making his dash for safety, the artificer-engineer had taken care to prevent an explosion of the boilers as the water poured into the stokehold.

Of the boats on the davits only one was fit for service. The others were badly strained by the explosion or damaged by the flying débris. The serviceable one was quickly lowered, and, although leaking freely, was manned and brought alongside.

"Pass all injured men over the side," ordered Captain Holloway. "The rest of you can make the best of your way ashore—and good luck to you."

The crew gave three rousing cheers and prepared for the coming ordeal, for although the distance to the shore was an easy swim the bitter coldness of the water had to be taken into consideration.

One by one the wounded were passed into the boat; after them as many men as she could safely hold. The boat was ordered to lie off and render assistance to any swimmers in difficulties.

"With your permission, sir," said Aubyn, "I'll have a look down on the mess-deck. There may be some of the hands left below."

"Do so, by all means, Mr. Aubyn," replied his superior. "The old boat shows no great hurry."

"I fancy she's aground for'ard, sir," said the sub. "I'll be as sharp as I can."

Descending the now almost perpendicular ladder Terence gained the shelving mess-deck. Already the water was surging over the forepart; kit-bags, tables and stools were floating in a confused mass, while those that were not yet reached by the rapidly rising flood had been thrown about in all directions by the explosion.

It was some time before the sub. grew accustomed to the semi-gloom. His senses were still affected by the concussion; he could see the water pouring in, but the noise it made was barely audible. The situation reminded him of a cinematograph show unaccompanied by a band.

"All clear as far as I can see," he thought. "It's about time I looked after number one. Heavens! What is that?"

Lying almost buried by a pile of gear in one corner of the stokers' mess was the body of a man. He was insensible, and, in the hurried rush, had been overlooked by his companions. Already the level of the water was up to the man's chin as he lay with his head and shoulders propped up against a broken ditty-box.

Knee-deep in water Terence hurried to the rescue. The man, a great brawny specimen of humanity, was stripped to the waist. Surprised in the act of washing, after coming off duty, he had been rendered senseless by the explosion. His right leg was bent under him. The limb, Terence knew at a glance, was broken. He was also bleeding profusely from an ugly scalp wound in the back of his head.

In spite of the unconscious stoker's weight—he turned the scale at sixteen stone—Aubyn dragged him along the deck to the foot of the ladder. Here he was temporarily baffled, for the metal "treads" were now sloping downwards at such an angle that it would be difficult for him to get a foothold unimpeded, much more when attempting to lift a heavy man.

It never occurred to the sub. to call upon Captain Holloway for assistance. The captain, the only person now on deck, was mechanically puffing at an unlighted cigarette, while his attention was fixed upon the crowd of swimmers, good, bad, and indifferent, as they struck out for the shore. Beyond removing his boots the captain had made no preparations for safety, resolving to remain on his quarter-deck until his ill-fated command disappeared beneath the waves.

Unseen by his superior officer and equally unconscious of his presence, Terence gained the upper deck, secured a rope, and again descended to the aid of the luckless stoker. Bending the rope round the man's chest and back the sub. clambered up the ladder and began to heave away. Under ordinary circumstances Aubyn would never have attempted such a feat, but sheer nerve gave him the strength of a giant. Unaided he succeeded in raising the senseless man and toppling him over the coaming on to the deck.

Just then Captain Holloway, having seen that the last of the swimmers had reached the mud-fringed shore, remembered that the sub. had gone below, and finding that he had not returned, hurried to the companion.

To his surprise he found Aubyn bending over the body of a badly wounded stoker.

"Found him below, sir," explained the sub. "Double fracture of the leg and a nasty gash on his head."

With his captain's assistance Terence proceeded to apply rough splints to the injured limb and to staunch the flow of blood from the man's head.

"We'll soon have him out of it," remarked Captain Holloway. "The gig's returning, and I see the whaler is coming up as hard as she can."

He pointed to the boat which had taken the invalid to the sick-quarters. Alarmed by the explosion and concluding that something had befallen the ship, the ship's crew had bent to their oars with a will, to find on drawing clear of the hard that the "Terrier" was on the point of sinking.

The sub. felt himself shivering. The keen wind blowing against his saturated nether garments reminded him that it was mid-winter. As he stooped to wring the water out of the bottoms of his trousers he realized that the unconscious stoker, who a few moments before had been toiling in the hot stokehold, was now lying stripped to the waist.

Removing his great-coat and muffler Terence slipped the garments over the unfortunate man, just as the gig and the whaler came alongside.

This time there were plenty of helpers. Carefully the stoker was lowered into the whaler and placed in the stern-sheets.

"Give way, my lads," ordered Captain Holloway. "Run this man up to the sick-quarters as hard as you know how."

Then turning to Aubyn he added,

"The old ship seems to be hanging on. We may as well have a look below and see if there's anything of value in our cabins."

Bidding the gig lie off at a boat's length from the ship, which was now tilted at such an angle that her propellers were clear of the water, Captain Holloway, followed by Terence, disappeared down the little companion just abaft the after 4.7-in. gun.

Although Aubyn had been on board the torpedo-gunboat only a week he was thoroughly familiar with the appearance of the little box-room dubbed by courtesy a cabin. It would be difficult to describe its shape, for being well aft she was cut into by the "run" of the ship's side as it approached the stern-post. It was lighted by two scuttles, or circular ports. Immediately beneath these lights was his bunk, extending from bulkhead to bulkhead, yet barely long enough for him to lie at full length.

Underneath the bunk were two mahogany drawers. In one of the two corners of the cabin, which were rectangular, stood a wash-basin, hidden from view by a green baize curtain. Against the opposite bulkhead was a very small stove, its brasswork polished to a high degree. Somewhere between the rest of the space was a chair which had to be moved whenever the occupant of the cabin crossed from one side of his personal and private domain to the other. Even the steel ceiling, coated with cork cement, in a feeble attempt to prevent "sweating" of the metal, was utilized for a secondary purpose; from here hung the sub.'s enamelled iron bath.

Being well aft Aubyn's cabin had escaped much of the force of the explosion, but most of the loose gear had been displaced and lodged in the angle formed by the sloping floor and bulkhead. Two photographs in silver frames, their glasses smashed to atoms, lay on the carpet in company with the sub.'s silver cigarette-case, his watch and chain and a toilet-case—the latter a present from his headmaster upon leaving school. That little heap represented practically the whole of his worldly belongings in the way of luxuries: he could have stowed the lot inside his sweater.

Yet he did nothing of the sort. Like a man in a trance he stood in the doorway. Unaccountably the dazed feeling that gripped him immediately after the ship had received her death-blow took possession of him again. There he remained, gazing at the scene of disorder, without stirring a finger to save his treasures, until he was aroused by Captain Holloway exclaiming:—

"Look alive, Mr. Aubyn. She's going."

Up the companion raced the two officers. The ship was trembling violently. Air bubbles, escaping through the submerged scuttles, agitated the water alongside. The whole of the fore-part of the "Terrier," as far as the base of the after funnel, was under the waves. It was even a difficult matter to cross the deck from the companion to the side.

The gig backed. Captain Holloway signed to the sub. to leap; then giving a last look round he followed Aubyn into the boat.

"Lay on your oars, man," he ordered, after the gig had gone a hundred yards from the sinking ship.

Standing in the stern-sheets, Captain Holloway waited for the end. It was not long in coming. With the White Ensign still fluttering proudly in the breeze, the "Terrier" dipped more and more till ten feet of the after-part of her keel was visible. For a brief instant the towering mass seemed to hang irresolute, then with hardly a splash the hull disappeared from sight, leaving only the after-mast from the truck to the hounds above the surface.

Raising his hand to the peak of his cap the captain gave his former command a last salute, then resuming his seat, bade the men "give way."

All the inhabitants of the village were on the shore ready to offer hospitality to the crew, many of whom had discarded most of their clothing before jumping from the ship. One petty officer, three able seamen, and a stoker were missing—doubtless killed outright by the explosion. Four men were seriously injured, while a score more were suffering from wounds and shock.

"Hanged if I can quite realize it," remarked Captain Holloway, as he walked with Aubyn towards the village. "I remember going down to my cabin and grabbing a spare cap. There were two drawers in my locker. In one was fifty half-sovereigns, and in the other over three hundred pounds in notes. The gold is in my trousers' pocket, but, although I recollect seeing the notes, I've let the whole lot go to Davy Jones. Strange, eh? Why, what's the matter with you, man?"

He turned and grasped Terence by the shoulders just in time to prevent him from falling to the ground in a dead faint.

CHAPTER XV.

VICE VERSÂ.

"TELEGRAM for you, mum."

Mrs. Aubyn put down her newspaper and took the orange-coloured envelope which her sister's maid had just brought in on a tray. Telegrams were rather unusual at "Anchor Cottage," and the freckled, red-haired girl, with eyes and mouth wide open, stood consumed with ill-concealed curiosity.

But she was disappointed. Deftly Mrs. Aubyn tore the envelope and scanned the contents.

"No answer, Jane," she announced, in a steady voice.

Not until the maid had closed the door did the old lady betray the anguish that the telegram had caused.

"God grant that he is not blinded or crippled for life," she exclaimed, in low, earnest tones; then she re-read the momentous words of the telegram in the vain hope that she had not rightly grasped its significance, and that on second reading the message might not appear so terribly grim:—

"Regret to have to inform you that Sub-Lieutenant Terence Aubyn, R.N.R., is lying here seriously wounded."

The telegram was dispatched from Shotley Naval Hospital and bore the signature of one of the medical officers.

"Seriously wounded," she repeated. "An accident, perhaps. I must go to my boy."

She had read all the important news in the morning paper. There had been no mention of a naval engagement, so there could be no other explanation of how Terence received his injuries. She was thankful indeed that she had not gone to Portsmouth for the day with her sister. Thankful, also, that the said relative was not in the house, for in contrast to the presence of mind displayed by Mrs. Aubyn, Miss Wilson possessed a highly-strung temperament that frequently expressed itself in hysterical outbursts.

Mrs. Aubyn consulted a time-table and then rang the bell.

"Jane," said the old lady in even tones, "I want you to run across to Smith's and order a taxi to take me to the station at once, to catch the 9.15 train."

Quickly Terence's mother made her simple preparations. After dressing for the journey she sat down and wrote a note to her sister, explaining the reason for her hasty departure, and stating that she would write the same evening and give full details. Upon second thoughts she did not enclose the telegram, but placed it in her handbag. Then, closing the envelope and sealing it with wax, she gave it to the maid to hand to her mistress on her return.

It was close on four in the afternoon when the train steamed into Harwich station. Making her way through crowds of bluejackets who formed the bulk of the passengers, Mrs. Aubyn called a cab and bade the man drive her to Shotley as quickly as possible.

The cabby looked curiously at her.

"Shotley?" he repeated. "'Tis a long way. It'll cost you a quid, mum—a sovereign. Couldn't do it for less."

"A sovereign!" repeated Mrs. Aubyn aghast.

"Not a penny less, mum," declared the man, stolidly. The old lady's hand tightened on her purse. Her means were strictly limited. A sovereign was to her a large sum. Yet, for her boy's sake——

"Excuse me, madam," exclaimed a deep, pleasant voice.

Mrs. Aubyn turned. The cabby gave vent to an exclamation that, although inaudible, clearly expressed his views upon "fussy toffs who interfered with an honest chap's living."

"Do I understand that you want to go to Shotley?" continued the stranger, a tall, bearded gentleman in the uniform of a naval captain.

"Yes, to the hospital. My son, Sub-Lieutenant Aubyn, is lying there seriously wounded."

She spoke bravely, laying emphasis upon her boy's rank. She felt certain she could enlist the entire sympathy and aid of a brother-officer, notwithstanding he was a post-captain.

"If you will allow me I will give you a passage in my gig," said the naval officer. "It is only a short distance by water, but quite twenty miles from here by land. I fancy that cabby knew you were a stranger here. My name is O'Rourke—Captain O'Rourke."

Outside the station boys were selling the early evening papers. Catching sight of the naval officer three or four of them made a rush towards him.

"Evening paper, sir. H.M.S. 'Terrier' torpedoed and sunk."

He bought a copy, and without attempting to read it thrust it into his coat pocket.

"When a ship is torpedoed, Captain O'Rourke, are the crew severely injured?" inquired Mrs. Aubyn.

"A strange question to ask," thought the naval man. He glanced swiftly at his companion, trying to read an unexpressed thought that might have prompted her query. Her face betrayed no sign whatever.

"Well, it depends," he answered guardedly. "Unless there are men below, close to the point of impact, there is generally very little damage to personnel. The men would undoubtedly feel the effect of the concussion. When the 'Hogue' and her consorts were torpedoed the loss of life due to the actual explosion was absurdly small in comparison to the number of men drowned. Of course, if the torpedo strikes the magazine and caused an internal explosion, that is quite another matter. But excuse me, what made you ask that question?"

"My son was on the 'Terrier,'" she replied simply.

"I hope——" he began; then he stopped and pulled out the newspaper.

"There are no details," he continued. "In fact, I know far more about the disaster and how it occurred than is stated in the Press. The number of casualties is given but no names."

Assisting Mrs. Aubyn into the waiting gig, Captain O'Rourke gave orders to the coxswain to make for Shotley Pier. Then, having acted the part of glorified ferryman, and handed the old lady into the charge of a petty-officer with instructions to escort her to the Sick-Quarters, Captain O'Rourke returned to his ship.

The short winter's afternoon had now given place to night. Well it was that Terence's mother had a stalwart seaman to show her the way, for, owing to possible air-raids, both sides of Harwich Harbour were shrouded in darkness.

"Officers' wing, ma'am," announced the petty-officer. "If you'll write particulars in the visitors' book you'll soon be attended to by that chap—he's one of the assistant ward-masters."

After a few moments' delay Mrs. Aubyn was ushered into a fairly large room in which were half a dozen occupied beds. Eagerly she scanned the faces of the patients. None of the five who on hearing the visitor turned in her direction bore the slightest resemblance to her son. The sixth bed—ominous sign—had a screen drawn round it.

A nursing sister walked silently up to the assistant ward-master and asked a question in an undertone, then turning to the visitor:—

"Mrs. Aubyn, I believe. You have come to see your son?"

"I have; is he dangerously hurt?" she asked.

The nurse inclined her head.

"I am afraid so," she replied gently. "The surgeons are holding another consultation tomorrow. It may mean amputation of the right leg, but I think he'll get over it."

"Amputation of the right leg ... he'll get over it."

Mrs. Aubyn mechanically repeated the words as she followed the nursing sister towards the screened bed. After all, it might have been worse. Throughout the tedious journey the idea that persistently occupied her mind was that her only son had been deprived of his sight. She felt almost inclined to weep with relief. Compared with a life-long existence deprived of the light of

day, the lot of a maimed hero—whose sacrifice had been for King and Country—was light indeed. And, besides, he would be invalided out of the Service. She, his devoted mother, would spend no more sleepless nights endeavouring to picture her son somewhere on the wild North Sea, beset by perils that had never, before the present war, threatened the gallant men who defended our shores.

She gave no sign of the emotions that surged within her. Outwardly she was calm and self-possessed—a pattern of a modern Spartan mother.

The nurse moved aside the screen.

On the bed, his forehead swathed in surgical bandages, and with a rest over his injured limb, was an unconscious man. His face was pallid, his closed eyes rimmed with red. His massive features, short turned-up nose, long upper lip and square jaw unmistakably stamped him as a son of the Emerald Isle.

"But this is not my son," said Mrs. Aubyn calmly.

"Not your son?" repeated the nurse. "Why, this is Sub-Lieutenant Terence Aubyn."

"He is some other poor mother's son," declared Mrs. Aubyn; then, with unwonted eagerness she asked, "Were any of the other officers missing?"

"I think not," replied the nursing sister. "If you will take a chair for a few minutes I will make inquiries. Perhaps you would like a cup of tea in my room," she added, noticing the visitor's langour.

"Thank you," was the grateful reply. "I would."

While Mrs. Aubyn was drinking her tea the nurse held a hurried consultation with the ward-master and one of the doctors.

"Now you mention it," remarked the latter, "I did notice that the patient looked a bit tough for a commissioned officer. A sub., even though he be a reserve man, does not as a rule decorate his chest with fanciful tattoo designs. Have you any of the 'Terrier's' ship's company who can identify the patient?"

The result of the consultation was that an able seaman, suffering from slight shock, was brought into the officer's ward.

The man's weather-beaten face relaxed into a broad grin when he saw the supposed sub-lieutenant.

"Strike me pink!" he ejaculated in undisguised astonishment, and heedless of the fact that he was in the presence of a superior officer. "Mike O'Milligan will have the time of his life when he wakes up to find himself in with the officers."

"Mike O'Milligan?" repeated the surgeon.

"Ay; first-class stoker—that's what he is," declared the seaman, with the air of a man who is instrumental in denouncing an impostor. He seemed to imagine that it was a piece of audacity on the part of the luckless O'Milligan, in spite of the fact that he was unconscious when brought into the hospital.

"Did you see Sub-Lieutenant Aubyn after the explosion?" asked the nurse.

"Ay, ma'am. He was all right. Saw him with my own eyes on the quarter-deck when the hands mustered aft. Don't remember seeing him after that, though."

"I think there has been a mistake, Mrs. Aubyn," said the nurse on returning to her private sitting-room, where Terence's mother was striving to forget doubts and fears in a cup of tea. "A stoker was admitted to the ward under the inexplicable error that he was your son. Dr. Hardiman is making inquiries, and we hope to clear the matter up satisfactorily. You need not worry about finding a hotel; we can put you up for the night."

The nurse remained in conversation with the old lady for some minutes, then, excusing herself, returned to her duty.

Left to herself Mrs. Aubyn remembered that she promised to write to her sister. The news she was able to give was far from satisfactory; in fact, the position of affairs was very vague. Nevertheless, she sat down to write an account of what had occurred up to the present time, in the hope that before she had finished the letter Dr. Hardiman's investigations might produce definite and satisfactory results.

Suddenly the door opened. In the subdued gleam cast by the electric table-lamp Mrs. Aubyn saw the figure of a man dressed in a long, pale blue coat with broad red collar and cuffs. His face was darkened by the shade of the lamp.

Thinking the intruder was one of the hospital orderlies, the old lady turned to her work, only to feel a pair of hands grasping her shoulders.

"Hullo, mother! What brings you here?" asked Terence.

It was all because of the fact that Terence gave his great-coat to the unconscious man he had rescued from the mess-deck of the sinking "Terrier" that the sub. and the stoker had changed places.

Upon Aubyn losing consciousness Captain Holloway feared that the sub. had been wounded, and that he had kept the knowledge to himself. A hasty examination by the naval surgeon resulted in the satisfactory report that the young officer was not hurt beyond suffering from the shock of the explosion.

Captain Holloway, of course, could not stay with his subordinate. He had plenty of work to do, looking after the survivors of the ship's company, sending telegraphic reports to the Admiralty, and tackling fifty other problems to which the sudden catastrophe had contributed.

Owing to the limited room at the Sick-Quarters of the little village, orders were received to send the wounded members of the crew to Shotley. A fleet of motor-cars, lent by the well-to-do residents in the district, was quickly organized and the work of transporting the sufferers was put in hand.

A message had already been received at Shotley warning the medical authorities to prepare for the reception of one officer and so many lower-deck patients. The latter were to be distributed amongst the various wards.

A small crowd of sick-berth attendants were in waiting when the motor-cars arrived. The worst cases were taken into the building on stretchers. Amongst these were Sub-Lieutenant Aubyn, clad in cloth trousers and sweater, and Stoker O'Milligan decked in borrowed plumage—to wit, a naval officer's great-coat. Both men were still unconscious.

Consequently it was excusable that the sick-bay staff made a slight mistake. O'Milligan, after his leg was properly set in splints, was put to bed in the officer's ward, while Terence was dumped into the only vacant cot in one of the men's wards.

He was a puzzle to the sick-berth attendants. They knew that the one officer mentioned in the telegram had arrived. They could find no mark of identification on the clothing of the supposed seaman. Being particularly busy they let the matter of identification slide, thinking that on the patient's return to consciousness he would be able to give the necessary information as to his name and rating.

When the doctor went his rounds he gave directions for a sleeping draught to be administered to the patient as soon as he regained his senses.

Ten minutes after the medico's departure Terence opened his eyes. Instantly the alert attendant pounced down, and, without giving the patient a chance to speak, made him swallow the draught. Consequently it was not until six o'clock in the evening that the sub. awoke, feeling little the worse for his prolonged rest.

He sat up and looked round the room. His surroundings were strangely unfamiliar. The very bareness of the place had a lower-deck atmosphere.

He beckoned to the sick-bay attendant.

"What's up now, mate?" asked that worthy. "Feeling better?"

Somewhat taken aback by the familiarity of the man, Terence asked where he was, and was informed that he was in "B" block of Shotley Sick-Quarters.

"What's your name and rating, chum?" asked the man, producing a book and fingering a stump of indelible pencil.

Like a flash the situation became apparent to the sub. He remembered his great-coat—he seemed particularly unfortunate in the matter of great-coats, he thought. He had lent it to the stoker, and as a penalty he had been mistaken for the man he had rescued. The ludicrous side of the affair tickled him.

"A sub-lootenant?" queried the man incredulously. "Seems likely, eh? Either you're barmy, or else you're trying some little game on. Won't work, chum. Who's your raggie?"

"Raggie," in lower-deck parlance, is a term used to denote a man's particular pal. It was the sick-berth attendant's idea to get one of the ship's company whom the patient named to identify the fellow who was under the hallucination that he was one of the officers.

"Try Captain Holloway," suggested Terence. The man shook his head more in sorrow than in anger.

"It would go hard with you, chum, if I did," he remarked. "Your skipper wouldn't care to be bothered at this time o' night. 'Sides, he isn't here."

The patient in the next cot—of the crew of a destroyer that had been in some minor action—began to grow interested.

"Bill," he whispered in a stage aside, "'umour 'im. He's dotty. I knowed a chap once who looked just like 'im. He was as mad as a 'atter. He would 'ave it he was the Right 'Onerable Somebody. Got fair violent if you didn't believe 'im. So, 'umour 'im, says I."

Terence, overhearing these remarks, laughed.

"I don't claim to be anything so grand as a Right Honourable, my man," he said.

"Maybe, then, you're not so bad as the chap wot I was talking to the poultice-slapper about. 'E was sent to Yarmouth Loonatic Asylum, pore chap; maybe you won't need to be if you pulls yourself together," retorted the seaman, with brutal candour.

"Look here, my man," said Terence authoritatively, addressing the "poultice-slapper," otherwise the sick-berth attendant, "you'll please fetch the surgeon on duty—and be quick about it."

There was something in Aubyn's tone that caused the man to wonder whether, after all, there had been a mistake. He was one who was disinclined to take any risks in the matter. He hurried off, striving to recollect, as he went, what he had said to the unknown patient, and whether he had used indiscreet language to one who might really be a commissioned officer.

The doctor arrived, tardily. Although the circumstances had been explained to him, he, too, had his doubts. Patients suffering from shock were apt to be light-headed upon recovering consciousness.

He was a little, round-faced man, with a shiny pate surmounted by a tonsure-like ring of jet black hair. War had dealt kindly with him. Formerly a country medical practitioner in a poor district, having great difficulty in making both ends meet, he had taken advantage of the Admiralty regulations for the entry of Temporary Surgeons. With free quarters, a home billet, and a comfortable rate of pay, he was now "having the time of his life."

He lacked the general brusqueness of naval doctors when dealing with men. He was eminently a doctor; as a naval officer he made an indifferent show.

He was sympathetic as he questioned Aubyn, and although he observed him narrowly he saw no sign that would be bound to betray to a medical man any symptoms of lunacy.

"You are well enough to get up," he said at length. "Get your things on."

Somewhat disdainfully Terence clothed himself in the garments provided—rough underclothing and an ugly dressing-gown, arrangements that My Lords think fit to provide for the lower-deck patients.

"Fit as a fiddle," remarked the doctor.

"Fit for a good dinner, anyhow," added Terence, who was feeling desperately hungry—the craving for food accentuated by the fact that one of the patients had just been given some roast chicken.

"Ordinary seamen don't talk about having dinner in the evening," thought the surgeon. "Perhaps there's some truth in his assertion after all. I'll get him into the next ward; there are two of the 'Terrier' men there."

Nor was the doctor greatly astonished when, as the quaintly-garbed patient followed him into the ward, the men recognized their officer, stood up and smartly saluted.

"Well, Smith," said Terence, addressing a seaman-gunner by name, "how goes it?"

"Can't complain, sir. Got a proper whack in the ribs. 'Tain't much to grouse about. And how's yourself, sir, if I may make so bold as to ask? I seed the cap'n catch you as you pitched to starboard."

In a few minutes Terence was taken to the officers' ward. Here he was informed that his mother was waiting to see him. He wondered why. His condition was hardly serious enough for the medical authorities to send for her, so he settled the matter by going, just as he was, to the room where Mrs. Aubyn was waiting.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FLOORING OF MR. McNAB.

PROMPTLY discharged from hospital, Terence was given six days' leave—a period which he spent with his parent.

He thoroughly appreciated the brief spell of leisure. It was simply great to be able to turn in at night and sleep soundly till seven o'clock the next morning. There was no insistent voice of the messenger: "Please, sir, it's ten minutes to four, and your cocoa's ready;" no watch upon an exposed bridge in the cold dark hours of a winter's morning; no monotonous round of ship routine with the constant menace of being bumped upon a mine.

Yet, in a way, he was glad when his leave was up. The call of duty in Britain's time of peril was too urgent. He felt he must be doing something. Even his well-earned leave savoured of "slacking."

On the afternoon of the last day of his holiday Terence received his order from the Admiralty to proceed to Whale Island for a second gunnery course. Somewhat to his mother's and his aunt's consternation he executed a war-dance round the drawing-room, to the imminent peril of Miss Wilson's objects of art, with which the room was certainly overcrowded. "A short gunnery course." He took it that that meant another step to the height of his ambition. If he came through that with flying colours he concluded that he would be sent to either a battleship or a cruiser. There could be, he reasoned, no object in putting a Reserve officer through the mysteries of *heavy*-gun drill if he were to continue to serve in an armed merchantman, whose heaviest ordnance consisted of the comparatively small 4.7-in. gun or the 6-in. at the very outside.

On the other hand, in spite of his experience as officer of the watch on the "Strongbow" and "Terrier" he would be of little use as watch-keeping officer on a battleship or cruiser in company. He had no training in the delicate art of station-keeping, whereby lines of huge ships keep their respective distances with mathematical nicety, which can only be acquired by years of experience.

Yet that troubled him but little. So long as he had a chance of smelling powder under anything approaching equal conditions he would be content. Rather selfishly he hoped that the German fleet would skulk in Wilhelmshaven Harbour or in the Kiel Canal until the time that he found himself on board one of the battleships or big cruisers of the Grand Fleet.

So with a brand new kit—for he had lost practically all his gear when the "Terrier" made her plunge—Terence reported himself at Whale Island—the principal gunnery establishment of the British Empire, nay, of the whole world—an artificial island, constructed by means of earth excavated from the huge basin of Portsmouth Dockyard.

Officially Whale Island is a ship, appearing in all official naval documents as H.M.S. "Excellent." It boasts of a "Quarter-Deck;" ship routine is carried out almost as faithfully as if the several thousand men were really afloat instead of being quartered in barracks. There are spacious parade grounds, diving-tank for instructing embryo seaman-divers, workshops, and, in the adjoining Portsea Island, a rifle-range; but all these give precedence to the gun-batteries.

Almost the whole of the western side of the island is occupied by a long, low building designated the heavy-gun battery. Here types of guns, from the monstrous 15-in. downwards, are mounted under similar conditions to those on shipboard, and used solely for the instruction of officers and men. Even the "heave" of a ship in a seaway is allowed for, since some of the ordnance are mounted on "rolling platforms" designed to make a seaman gunner in training accustomed to the motion of a vessel under way.

Terence entered into his duties with the keenest zest. His ready mind quickly grasped the points raised by the instructor. Difficulties that proved well-nigh insurmountable to several of the class, he overcame with an ease which astonished both his mentor and himself, and at the end of the period of training he was the proud possessor of a first-class certificate signed by the captain of the ship.

Thus it came as a slight disappointment when Terence received orders to proceed to Rosyth to join H.M. torpedo-boat-destroyer, "Livingstone." Still, it was a step in the right direction, the sub. agreed, and that was something to be thankful for.

The "Livingstone" was a modern craft of 965 tons, carried three 4-in. guns, and was propelled by turbine machinery, steam being raised exclusively by oil fuel. It was one of the flotillas whose duty lay in patrolling the easternmost limits of the North Sea, so as to be in readiness to report the German High Sea Fleet should, in a rash moment, the Kaiser or his minion Tirpitz give the order for it to risk annihilation at the hands of Admiral Jellicoe's waiting seamen.

Every alternate fortnight the flotilla to which the "Livingstone" belonged proceeded to take its spell of arduous duty. The intervening period it spent in harbour, giving the crew a well-earned rest.

Terence joined his new ship on the second day of his return. The officers, all young men full of spirits and on excellent terms with each other, were busy planning how they were to spend the next few days of comparative leisure. As usual the subject of the war was hardly mentioned. After days of strenuous watching and waiting, with the waves constantly sweeping the battened down decks, they were only too glad to discuss matters other than "shop"—since the German fleet

showed no sign of leaving its lair.

"We're off to Tuilabrail to-morrow, Aubyn," announced the engineer-lieutenant. "You'll come too, I hope. McNab has issued a general invitation to the officers of the flotilla."

"Who's Mr. McNab?" asked Terence.

"Oh, don't you know? I've forgotten it's your first time at Rosyth. McNab is the laird of Tuilabrail—quite a swagger place, not far from St. Margeret's Hope. There's plenty of sport—shooting and fishing, and all that, you know."

"'Fraid I'm not much of a hand with a sporting gun," remarked Terence. "Last time I tried I made an awful ass of myself."

"Fire away and let's have the yarn, old fellow," said a sub., as cordially as if he had known Aubyn all his life.

"There's not much to tell," replied Terence. "It was while I was staying at a farm in Devonshire. The farmer asked me to go out rabbit-shooting. It was tame work bolting the poor little beasts with ferrets and bowling them over at twenty yards. Well, we were working a hedge, set in a bank literally honeycombed with rabbit-holes. The old farmer told me where to stand and cautioned me to let rip directly I saw the rabbit, as there was plenty of cover about.

"I waited for perhaps five minutes. Then something dashed out of the hedge like greased lightning. I pulled the trigger and——"

"Peppered the farmer?" hazarded the engineer-lieutenant.

"No, bowled over a fox. Shot the brute dead as a door-nail."

"You rotten sport!" exclaimed several of his listeners.

"Try your luck again," said the lieutenant. "Have you a gun? If not, I'll lend you one—it's a good one, I can assure you."

So it was arranged that half a dozen officers, including Aubyn, should go over to Tuilabrail on the following morning and have lunch with the hospitable Mr. McNab.

"Who is this Mr. McNab?" asked Terence.

No one seemed to know exactly. He had only recently rented Tuilabrail. Some one said that he had heard that McNab was a wealthy manufacturer from the Lowlands, who had been obliged to retire early on account of bad health, but amongst the officers there was a general opinion that he was a real good old sport.

The sub.'s first night on board a destroyer soon enabled him to realize that there is a great difference between cruising in an armed merchantman and serving with a flotilla.

He was officer of the Middle Watch. The "Livingstone" and her consorts, although supposed to be stationed at Rosyth during the fortnight, were anchored far up the Firth of Forth, ready at a moment's notice to steam out into the North Sea should there be a "wireless" announcing that the German fleet was at last about to risk The Day.

From where the "Livingstone" lay, save for the anchor lamps of the flotilla, not a light was visible. Culross and Kincardine on the north shore and Grangemouth and Boness on the south shore of the Forth might have been non-existent as far as sound and visibility were concerned.

It was a raw, misty night, with a keen easterly wind blowing in from the North Sea. With the wind against the strong ebb tide the sea was flecked with "white horses" that slapped viciously against the stern of the destroyer. Overhead the insulated stays of the wireless aerial moaned fitfully in the blast.

"Boat ahoy!" The hail came from a seaman stationed aft. He had been indulging in a surreptitious "few puffs" under the lee of the after 4-in. gun, and in a fateful moment had been trying to light his refractory pipe when a red, white, and green steaming light within twenty yards of the destroyer aroused him into super-activity.

"Guard-boat!" shouted a gruff voice, intensified by means of a megaphone.

"Guard-boat, sir!" repeated the lookout for the sub.'s information.

Accompanied by the quartermaster Terence hurried to the side, there to find a dark grey launch, her outlines barely visible against the leaden-coloured white-flecked sea.

From a diminutive cabin aft, the yellow flicker of a lantern feebly illuminated the bronzed features of an officer muffled in oilskins and sou'-wester.

"Night guard!" announced the officer, without any superfluity of speech. "All correct?"

"All correct, sir," replied the quartermaster.

"P'raps," rejoined the officer of the night guard sourly. Making a ten-mile round in a wet launch in the small hours of a winter's morning tended to make him short-tempered. "Where's the officer of the watch?"

"Here, sir," replied Terence.

"Very good. You might warn your lookout to lookout a little more smartly, and not wait until we were alongside your quarter. Where the dickens would you be now, do you suppose, if it had been a German torpedo-boat? It's not unlikely, you know. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir," replied Aubyn.

The officer of the night guard closed the door of the cabin on the unprotected light. In the engine-room a bell clanged, the artificer started the engines to half-speed ahead and in ten seconds the launch was lost in the darkness.

Aubyn remained peering out into the night. He could just distinguish the hail of the destroyer next ahead, followed by the reassuring "Guard-boat."

The luckless lookout man stood at attention awaiting the sub.'s pleasure, and trying to forecast the punishment he would receive on the following morning when his offence was entered in the captain's defaulters' list. He uttered silent maledictions on the damp "navy plug" that had distracted his attention for a few critical seconds. In addition he was to go "on leaf" on the following day: his little lapse would assuredly "knock the bottom out of that caboodle."

"Well, what have you to say?" asked the sub.

"Nothin', sir; I was properly caught napping," replied the seaman. He was not going to attempt to bluff his officer by a feeble excuse. He was too much of a man for that: he would "go through the mill" with a good grace.

"You were smoking?"

"Yes, sir. I turned to loo'ard to light my pipe, an' that done it."

"Listen, my man," said Aubyn. "I'll not place you in the captain's report this time. Let this be a warning to you—and be more careful in the future."

The man saluted and returned to his duty. He was agreeably surprised.

"He's a real jonnick," he muttered. "Sort of chap as 'as got some regard for a bloomin' matloe who gets a bit adrift. If ever I gets a chance to repay him I jolly well will, or my name's not Jim Stairs."

After morning Divisions Terence went ashore in company with the other officers who were to make up the party to visit McNab. Some were armed with fishing-rods, others with guns, and some with both. All were in excellent spirits, and evidently determined to "let themselves go."

A picquet boat took them to Culross, where their host's palatial car awaited them. After an all too short run Terence found himself at Tuilabrail Hall.

The house, standing high and surrounded by spacious, well-kept grounds, enjoyed an uninterrupted panoramic view of the Firth of Forth. The Forth Bridge, the Grand Fleet lying off Rosyth, and newly-constructed basins and workshops of the Scottish Portsmouth were within easy range of vision, while, by the aid of a telescope Grangemouth, Queensferry, Edinburgh, and Leith could be seen.

This much Terence noticed as he waited under the portico while the various members of the party were handing their sporting gear over to the charge of a grave and dignified manservant. Then, escorted by a liveried footman, the guests were shown into the McNab's morning-room.

"Our host has evidently overslept himself," remarked Gilroy, the lieutenant who had offered to lend Terence a sporting-gun and had faithfully kept his word. Gilroy was a young, pleasant-faced man of twenty-eight, with three thousand a year, and capable of obtaining any amount of influence. Yet, although he had more than once been offered a job on one of the Royal Yachts, he had voluntarily preferred to endure the obvious discomforts of a destroyer. "Look here, you fellows, I'll introduce Aubyn when the laird puts in an appearance. Don't be bashful, my boy; he's quite a free-and-easy chap. No bally stand on ceremony, you know."

"He's a lucky man to have a swagger show like this," declared the engineer-lieutenant, who, being without private means and newly married, found it a hard task to make both ends meet on his Service pay and allowances. "What a decent view. Look, there's a battle-cruiser arriving."

The officers crowded to the window. A long, three-funnelled battle-cruiser, mounting eight large guns and apparently brand new, for there were patches of red-lead showing on her lofty sides, had just picked up a mooring-buoy.

"Must be the 'Tiger,'" suggested Gilroy. "I heard she was expected round, but I didn't think she would put in an appearance so soon. By Jove, if the Germans pluck up courage to attempt another Scarborough business, they'll have something to reckon with."

"More than likely——" began another sub., but a hurried footstep in the corridor warned the guests that their host was about to enter.

The McNab came into the room with an impetuous rush. Being a long and somewhat narrow apartment, and the door being close to one angle, he had some distance to traverse to where the officers stood with their backs to the window. As he strode he seemed to be peering eagerly, as if to discern the faces of the guests as they stood silhouetted against the light.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he exclaimed in slow, measured tones that contrasted with his hurried arrival. "I'm sorry to have kept you waiting."

"Not at all," replied Gilroy easily. "Acting on your open invitation we've brought a brother-officer along: Mr. Aubyn—the McNab."

Terence made a step forward. His jaw was tightly set, his face pale in spite of his tanned complexion. He made no attempt to grasp the outstretched hand of the tenant of Tuilabrail, but kept his arms close to his side with his fists firmly clenched.

For a moment the McNab stood with a look of surprise upon his face. Then his smile of welcome changed into a venomous look. His hand flew to his pocket.

"*Crash!*"

With a swift and powerful left-hander Terence's fist shot forward, caught the man full in the centre of the chest and sent him reeling. The next instant Aubyn's brother-officers were astounded to see their host prostrate on his back with his arms and legs beating a tattoo on the carpet, while the sub. sat on his chest.

"Are you mad, man?" demanded Gilroy, laying his hand on the sub.'s shoulder. The apparently meaningless attack by the officer to whom he stood sponsor—an outrage upon a man in the sanctity of his home—could only be the outcome of the frenzy of a disordered mind.

"Far from it," replied Terence. "You fellows might bear a hand and secure Major von Eckenhardt."

"Von Eckenhardt!" echoed the engineer-commander. "Impossible."

For the name of von Eckenhardt, the master-spy, was only too well known in naval circles. It was generally acknowledged that more than one carefully-planned "scoop" had gone awry owing to warnings received by the German Admiralty from the elusive secret agent.

"Are you Major Karl von Eckenhardt?" demanded Gilroy, after the officers had set the man upon his feet again.

"Absolutely a mistake. I did not know until a few moments ago that I had a double whose misdoings would be to my detriment," replied the McNab, speaking with difficulty, for the effect of the blow he had received had wellnigh deprived him of breath.

Gilroy and his companions looked enquiringly at Aubyn. Perhaps, after all, the sub. had made a mistake?

"Under the circumstances, although Mr. Aubyn has shown mistaken zeal for the Service," continued the McNab, "I am willing to forgive the outrage, and no doubt Mr. Aubyn will tender an apology. There the matter will end as far as I am concerned. If you'll excuse me, gentlemen, I will go and remove the traces of your zealous friend's super-abundant energy."

Alarmed by the crash upon the floor three menservants had hurried into the room. There they stood like automatons, each man concealing under a wooden-like expression a burning curiosity to know what had happened to their master.

"Don't let him go: watch his hands!" exclaimed Terence. "I'll accept all responsibility."

The McNab's plausibility vanished.

"Enough of this horse-play," he said vehemently. "James and you two—throw this—er—gentleman out."

"Stand back—stand back, I say!" ordered Terence, as the three flunkeys showed signs of obeying their master.

The men paused irresolutely. There were a few seconds of tense silence. Then the servants revealed themselves in their true colours—accomplices of the spy, von Eckenhardt.

Drawing automatic pistols from their pockets they levelled them at the now more than

astounded British officers, while von Eckenhardt, of whose identity Terence had not the faintest doubt, wrestled furiously with his captors.

It was not compulsion that kept the Germans from using their firearms it was fear—a dread that their act would assuredly, in the event of capture, make them indictable on a capital charge.

"Shoot!" shouted von Eckenhardt in German. "Shoot, for the sake of the Fatherland."

It was Gilroy who saved the situation. Tall and powerfully built, and a prominent member of the "United Services," he was far away superior in physical strength to the denounced spy.

With lightning-like rapidity he flung his arms around the Teuton, and using him as a human buckler and a battering-ram combined, charged the still irresolute flunkeys.

Half a dozen pistol-shots rang out; not the result of a deliberate act but of the nervous pressure on the delicate trigger of one of the automatic weapons. The bullets, flying wide, chipped the oak panelling, and—omen of ill-luck to the tenant of Tuilabrail—shattered a mirror into fragments.

In ten seconds Gilroy with his living weapon had cleared the room of the enemy. The engineer-lieutenant locked the door, while Terence and the others quickly bound von Eckenhardt with their handkerchiefs.

"Stand clear of the door," cautioned Gilroy. "Now that those fellows have started to let off fireworks they might take it into their heads to put a few pieces of nickel through the woodwork. Nixon, cut off as hard as you can and bring up a file of Marines: be careful going through the grounds. The whole place is a nest of Germans—beastly cheek sheltering under good old Scots' names."

Gilroy's words, similar to those expressed by Chief Engineer McBride, showed how deeply he, a thorough Scot, resented the colossal impudence of the super-spy in assuming a respectable Highland cognomen.

It was, indeed, a daring piece of work on the part of Karl von Eckenhardt.

After his encounter with Terence on the cliffs at Yarmouth he had succeeded in eluding the patrols and had taken refuge in London. Here he lay low as a Russian subject. A fortnight later, by means of a forged passport, he embarked at Shields upon a Swedish vessel bound for Gottenberg. Thence he returned to his native country, where during a period of activity at the German Admiralty he grew a full beard. He was far too wily to adopt false hair as a disguise, although he did not hesitate to dye his beard a ruddy tint.

Without difficulty, this time making use of an American passport and registering as a citizen of New York, he returned to England by a different route. After a short stay in Liverpool he went on to Glasgow, whence he transmitted valuable information to Berlin as a result of a casual acquaintanceship with an overseer of one of the Clyde shipyards.

Gaining increased confidence his next move was to install himself in the neighbourhood of Rosyth, in order to keep a watchful eye upon the movements of the Grand Fleet. Plentifully supplied with money, he assumed the honoured name of McNab, and completely deceiving a firm of house agents, succeeded in getting the tenancy of Tuilabrail.

Then, having engaged servants who with few exceptions were German secret agents domiciled long enough in Great Britain to disarm any suspicion of their nationality, he proceeded to get in touch with certain of the junior officers of the Fleet and some of the civil officials of the new and important dockyard of Rosyth.

Fortune seemed to smile on his efforts. Acting as a friend in need to a naval officer whose car had met with a breakdown, he found the beginning of a chain of acquaintances. His hospitality became a by-word amongst certain parties of naval men. He never asked questions upon Service matters. He relied upon his sharp ears and those of his minions to pick up useful information from the casual conversations of his guests. Young officers were at times, he reasoned, apt to forget the necessity for "official reticence and reserve."

One of his duties was to send a report to Berlin of all changes in the personnel of officers of the Fleet. This was a comparatively easy matter, since most appointments were published in the Press.

Another was to notify movements of individual ships, both naval and mercantile. This he did by means of a simple re-arrangement of the International Code, the news being sent by a comparatively low-powered wireless apparatus to a disguised trawler that was cruising regularly off the tail of the Dogger.

Unfortunately for him, Sub-Lieutenant Aubyn's appointment to the "Livingstone" did not appear in the papers; had it done so he would have been put upon his guard. Cool and calculating as he generally was, the suddenness with which he found himself confronted by Terence momentarily took him off his guard. In spite of his disguise the sub. recognized von Eckenhardt immediately.

It was an hour or more before Lieutenant Nixon returned, accompanied by a party of Marine Light Infantry and a number of Metropolitan police, who, amongst other duties, are entrusted with the guarding of his Majesty's Naval and Military establishments.

Seeing that the game was up, von Eckenhardt gave in with a good grace, boasting, however, that having done a great deal of work for the Fatherland he was ready to pay the price, although it was a misfortune that he had not been able to do all that he had hoped to accomplish.

His assistants had already fled—one, out of perhaps half a dozen, was arrested twenty-four hours later in a sailor's home at Leith; the others got clear away. So hurried had been their departure that the house was left untouched. A systematic search revealed the presence of a secret wireless apparatus cunningly concealed in a bricked-up chimney corner; while, amid the mass of documents impounded by the police, experts discovered the system whereby von Eckenhardt was able to communicate with the utmost freedom with the German Admiralty.

"A smart move, that of yours, Aubyn," commented Gilroy, as the officers made their way back to the flotilla. "I really thought you had gone off your head."

"It wouldn't be the first time people thought that," rejoined Terence. "But I don't think we've done anything to brag about."

"What? Not laying that dangerous spy by the heels?" asked the engineer-lieutenant in surprise.

"Perhaps," replied Gilroy, with a grim smile. "But the point is, we've all been taken in by the rotter. Suppose at the court-martial they inquired the reason why we went to Tuilabrail? We'll have to admit that we were very nicely taken in, in more senses than one. Then they'll make us sit up."

The "sitting up" part of the business began immediately upon their return to their respective destroyers, for a signal was made by the admiral cancelling all shore leave.

At four that same afternoon—being Saturday 23 January, 1915—orders were received for the flotillas to weigh and proceed to a rendezvous off the Isle of May.

Speculation was rife amongst officers and crew as to the significance of this move. No one guessed what was taking place at Tuilabrail House: that the secret wireless was being made use of to send grossly misleading information to Berlin; and that the authorities had great hopes that the German swift armoured cruisers would be lured into making another raid on the supposedly defenceless East Coast.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE END OF THE "BLUECHER."

THE "Livingstone," second destroyer in the port-column of the flotilla, was speeding through the long undulations of the North Sea at a modest twenty knots. It was barely a quarter past seven on Sunday morning. Dawn had not begun to show in the eastern sky, and although a dozen or so of the destroyers were in company, only the partly-screened stern lights of the one ahead and the phosphorescent swirl of the one next astern betrayed the presence of others of the flotilla.

Something was in the air. Officers and crew knew that, but vaguely. Orders, significant in their brevity, had been issued overnight for the ship's company to bathe and change into clean clothes. That in itself meant the possibility of an action, while the sudden call to the flotilla to proceed to sea instead of completing the fortnight's "stand-by" in the Forth indicated that no minor operations were contemplated.

The "Livingstone" was cleared for action. Ammunition had been served up, fire hoses rigged, deck fittings removed, and every other possible precaution taken to safeguard the frail craft in the impending action.

The crew were on the tip-toe of expectation: eager to get in touch with the enemy and fearful lest they should find themselves out on a wild-goose chase.

The action, should it materialize, would not be of a minor character, for broad on the starboard beam of the flotilla, though invisible in the darkness, were the giant battle-cruisers "Lion," "Tiger," "Princess Royal," "New Zealand," and "Indomitable."

Flung out, fanwise, were the handy and hard-hitting light-cruisers, supported by other destroyer flotillas, and serving as a screen to the battle-cruisers should any hostile torpedo-craft attempt their vaunted "lancer-thrust" against them.

"Something doin' this time, Aubyn," remarked Gilroy, who was responsible for keeping the "Livingstone" in station. "Wireless from the 'Arethusa' just through, reporting strong enemy squadron. There—look."

The sub. turned his head just in time to catch the flash of a distant gun, quickly followed by another and another. Half a minute later came the dull rumble of the first report. The light-cruisers were in touch with the enemy away to sou'-sou'-east.

A signal lamp flickered from the flagship:—

"All destroyer flotillas proceed to support the light-cruisers. Engage enemy destroyers."

Like hounds released from leash the long, lean, black-hulled craft dashed forward. No need to give a compass course: the now rapidly-recurring flashes told them where their work lay.

Under copious supplies of oil fuel, the "Livingstone's" engines quickly developed more horse-power than they had ever done before. Trailing lurid flames issued from her four squat funnels, and threw their ruddy glare upon the determined faces of the guns'-crews.

Ahead, and on the starboard hand, and astern the position of the rest of the flotilla was likewise indicated by the spurts of flames from their furnaces. Noxious oil-fumed smoke belched in dense columns, glowing like fanned charcoal as it eddied clear of the funnels. The scene resembled a section of the Black Country transferred bodily to the North Sea on a pitch-dark night.

"By Jove, we're in luck!" shouted Gilroy, in order to make himself heard above the hiss of the wind as the destroyer tore at thirty-six knots towards the scene of action. "We've just picked up a wireless to the Flag. We're up against the 'Moltke,' 'Seydlitz,' and 'Derfflinger,' three of Germany's best battle-cruisers, with that old crock the 'Bluecher' chucked in, to say nothing of a swarm of light-cruisers and destroyers. Beatty's got his chance this time: he'll bag the lot with the force he has at his disposal."

And the lieutenant pointed in the direction of the British battle-cruisers, whose position could now be faintly distinguished, well on the port beam, by the splash of flame from their funnels.

"We'll give them something in return for Scarborough, Whitby, and Hartlepool," continued Gilroy. "Ten to one the beggars were off to try the same game again. By Jove! I pity any German submarine that gets foul of that crowd," and he indicated the far spread-out line of destroyers speeding towards their foes.

Just then the lieutenant-commander of the "Livingstone" ascended the bridge.

"Rotten luck, Gilroy," he announced. "The Germans are funking it. They've turned tail."

"The battle-cruisers will head them off yet, sir," suggested Gilroy confidently.

"I hope so—ha! what's this?"

A signalman had just hurried up.

"Destroyers to take up position on battle-cruiser's port quarter," said the skipper. "Confound it! That's put the pot on it, Gilroy."

"It's our smoke, sir, that's troubling the 'Lion,'" replied the lieutenant.

Dawn had now broken sufficiently to discern the lofty hulls, triple funnels, and masts of the five battle-cruisers, as they raced at their maximum speed on a south-easterly course. The four guns of the two foremost superimposed turrets of the "Lion" were already trained to their greatest elevation, awaiting the report of the fire-control platform that their quarry was within hitting distance.

Gilroy was right. The smoke from the destroyers was drifting across the line of fire of the giant ships.

"It's a case of get out and get under—their lee," commented the lieutenant-commander, as a signal was sent up from the parent ship of the flotilla ordering the destroyers to fall back out of the way of the hard-hitters of the fleet.

As the day dawned the thick haze of smoke that marked the position of the runaway raiders could be seen, although from the bridge of the destroyer the hostile ships were invisible. The cannonading away to the sou'-east had now ceased; apparently the enemy torpedo-boats had attained a temporary security under the wing of their larger craft. Suddenly Terence remembered that he had not had his breakfast. Although it was not his watch, excitement had kept him on deck, and now in the lull the workings of the inner man demanded attention. It was a quarter to nine when he entered the mess. Three minutes later, before the steward had time to bring in the coffee, a terrific detonation caused the "Livingstone" to shake like an aspen leaf.

Breakfast completely forgotten, the sub. dashed on deck. He knew what had happened: the "Lion" had fired the opening shot of the engagement with one of her monster 13.5-in. guns.

She was not yet within range. Terence realized that by the fact that she did not follow the single shot by salvo after salvo, that the projectile—weighing nearly a ton—had shrieked ineffectually towards the rearmost of the German ships.

To the sub. it seemed as if the fifty odd feet of steel cylinder that projected from the "Lion's" B turret was rising slowly on its complicated mountings. Obedient to the master-hand in the fire-control platform the giant weapon was being "laid" upon an invisible target 20,000 yards away.

Then—*flash! crash!*

Flames of cordite enveloped the whole of the fore-part of the "Lion." Above the bank of haze from the so-called smokeless powder, the gunnery-lieutenant in the fire-control platform was coolly watching the result of his second trial shot.

There was no doubt about it. The British battle-cruisers, pelting along at 28 1/2 knots, were slowly but surely overtaking their prey. Already the "Bluecher," credited with but a fraction over 25 knots, was falling astern of her consorts. In their frantic dash for the safety of their own mine-fields the three swifter vessels paid no heed to the fact that one of their own ships was sooner or later to bear the brunt of the Englishmen's guns.

Naval chivalry which caused the gallant "Monmouth" to share the fate of the luckless "Good Hope" in the action off Coronel was found wanting amongst the disciples of "kultur." Instead of attempting to cover the "Bluecher's" retreat, the "Derfflinger" and her fellow-raiders ran, abandoning her to her fate.

Terence glanced at his watch as the first salvo burst from the avenging "Lion." It was nearly ten minutes past nine. Truly, he thought, it was a magnificent sight to see Beatty's flagship wreaking vengeance upon the cowardly bombarders of Scarborough; yet in the light of a general action it seemed a one-sided affair, as shell after shell sped on its way towards the still invisible German ships and none came in reply.

Gilroy, perched upon the bridge weather-rail, was coolly taking snapshots of the "Flag" with a pocket kodak. The men of the destroyer were so impressed by the sight of the "Lion" in action that it was with the greatest difficulty that they could be brought to realize their position: to watch for any lurking submarine that might seize an opportunity of loosing a torpedo against the swiftly-moving mass of 26,000 tons displacement.

A column of spray flung high in the air at fifty feet from the "Lion's" starboard beam announced the fact that the German battle-cruisers had been overhauled sufficiently for them to get the range of their pursuers. Then shell after shell began to fall around the flagship. Occasionally a projectile would strike a glancing blow against the armoured sides of the British vessel, but unswervingly she held on, if anything increasing her rapidity of fire.

A hoist of flags fluttered up to the signal yard arm of the "Lion" and stood out as stiff as if made of sheet iron in the strong breeze.

From the leader of the flotilla came the answering pendant, each of the destroyers acknowledging the signal in turn. Enemy torpedo-boats were threatening an attack, and the British destroyers were to beat off the hornets that had the audacity to attempt to hurl themselves within torpedo-range of the battle-cruisers.

"Now for it," thought Aubyn, as he left the bridge and took up his station at the after 4-in. gun.

Swift as was the "Lion" the speed of the destroyers was greater. Forging ahead they left the battle-cruisers well on the starboard quarter. Heavy projectiles, passing handsomely over the short masts of the "Livingstone" and her consorts "straddled" the "Lion," some falling short, others ricochetting from the water two hundred yards in her wake.

The contest between the rival destroyer flotillas was of short duration. Apparently the German boats had no intention of joining action. It was merely a manoeuvre on their part to screen their already severely damaged battle-cruisers by means of dense columns of smoke.

In a sense they were successful, for under cover of the pall of black vapour the larger German ships altered course and steered in a northerly direction, but as the torpedo-boats drew off Terence discerned for the first time one of the enemy battle-cruisers.

She was listing heavily to port. Flames were bursting from her amidships, her funnels had disappeared and two legs of her tripod mast. Yet in spite of her damaged condition she was endeavouring to crawl out of line, slowly shaping a course to the nor'-nor'-west. Still firing as she wallowed in her death-agony, she was being marked for special attention by the "Indomitable," which, under the admiral's orders, had hauled to port to complete the work of destruction.

"Hurrah! The 'Bluecher's' done for!" shouted the torpedo-gunner of the "Livingstone."

Terence could hardly believe his eyes. Was that battered wreck the same vessel that a few weeks before he had seen pouring death and destruction into the peaceful town of Scarborough?

He brought his glasses to bear upon the ill-fated raider. In spite of her enormously thick armour huge rents were plainly visible in her sides. One of her heavy gun-turrets had been blown clean away. 'Tween decks the greater part of her was a glowing furnace. It seemed a marvel how the crew could maintain even the feeblest fire, yet, under the influence of morphia supplied by

their officers, half-dazed men still worked the remaining effective guns with the ferocity of madmen.

Then the "Tiger," showing scars of honourable wounds, but still vitally intact, came up, hurling shell after shell into the doomed vessel.

Cat-like in her death-agonies the "Bluecher" sought to deal her antagonist a *coup de grâce* by letting loose a torpedo.

Keenly alert to such a possibility, the cool and collected captain of the British battle-cruiser detected the ripples that marked the approach of the deadly "tin-fish." Ordering the "Tiger's" helm to be put hard over, he had the satisfaction of seeing the torpedo miss its mark by a bare twenty feet.

As the "Bluecher" showed no sign of surrendering it was necessary to hasten her end. Looming up through the black and yellow smoke that drifted in huge volumes to lee'ard came the saucy "Arethusa." Fearless in the midst of a rain of light projectiles her torpedo-men gathered round two of her above-water tubes. At any moment a fragment of a shell might strike the warheads of the two missiles ere they took the water, and send the light-cruiser to her doom.

Like a trick swimmer making a clean dive, the first of the gleaming cylinders left the tube and disappeared amidst the feathery spray. Five seconds later the second torpedo sped on its way to destruction.

The first alone would have been sufficient. Striking the "Bluecher" fairly amidships the powerful weapon blew a gaping hole in the hull of the already foundering vessel. More and more she heeled, till the whole length of her bilge keel became visible.

With the characteristic consideration to a beaten foe the British vessels ceased firing. Instinctively the German sailors knew that they were free to leave the doubtful shelter of the armoured portions of the ship and to save themselves, if possible.

Aft poured the scorched and dazed survivors of the ship's company, forming up upon the steeply shelving deck. Some, with a devotion to their Fatherland, broke into song with "The Watch on the Rhine," while the officers, linking arms, stood awaiting the final plunge—if plunge it might be called.

"Jump, you silly blighters!" shouted an excitable bluejacket from the "Arethusa," and the invitation was taken up by others, while the crews of the light-cruisers and the nearmost destroyers hastened to lower boats to assist in the errand of mercy.

"She's going!" ejaculated Gilroy, as the huge hull turned completely over on its side, and with hardly any agitation of the sea slid gently under the waves, throwing those of her crew who had not already jumped into the water.

The "Livingstone" by this time had come to a standstill at about a cable's length from the spot where the "Bluecher" had disappeared. The only boat she had fit for service was lowered, and into it clambered Terence and four seamen.

Before they had gone fifty yards Aubyn noticed that the boat was leaking badly. Already the water was above the floor boards. One of the men was obliged to use the baler vigorously, while the others kept to their oars, the sub. holding the boat on her course by means of considerable lee helm.

"Lay on your oars, men," exclaimed Terence, and leaning over the side he was just in time to grasp the hair of a scorched and blackened German bluejacket as he was sinking for the last time. Two more men were rescued, one stark naked, save for an inflated swimming collar; the other wounded in half a dozen places by pieces of flying metal.

So intent were the crews of the numerous boats upon their work of saving life that they failed to notice a new peril. Only a warning shout from the quarter-deck of the "Arethusa" recalled them to the fact that they were not fighting civilized foes but enemies whose methods of waging war were on a par with those of the old Red Indians, the ferocious Boxers, or the fanatical tribes of Somaliland.

Overhead was a Zeppelin, accompanied by a couple of German waterplanes. Although it must have been perfectly obvious to the observers that the British tars were rescuing their beaten foes, the aircraft began a rapid bombardment with bombs.

One missile, fortunately without exploding, dropped an oar's length from the "Livingstone's" boat. Others, detonating with a sharp crack, assisted in sending a score or so of the "Bluecher's" crew to their death.

Filled with fury, that during the engagement had been foreign to them, the British tars were compelled to relinquish their task of saving life. Back to their respective ships they rowed, and a hail of projectiles was launched against the treacherous Zeppelin and her consorts.

This was more than the unwieldy gas-bag could stand. Circling and ascending higher and higher she flew out of the danger zone and made off back to Heligoland.

But the engagement was not yet over.

From the flagship of the admiral commanding the destroyer flotillas came a signal:—

"Proceed to N.E. and engage enemy-destroyers and submarines."

CHAPTER XVIII.

DERELICTS.

THE reason for this order was obvious to the officers of the "Livingstone." The "Lion" had been disabled: whether by torpedo (for several of the enemy submarines had been sighted) or by shell-fire they knew not. But she was sufficiently mauled for it to be necessary for Admiral Beatty to shift his Flag, first to the torpedo-boat-destroyer "Attack" and afterwards to the "Tiger" as she was returning from the sinking of the "Bluecher."

With her engines out of order, and very much down by the head the crippled "Lion" shaped a course to the north-west, making for the Firth of Forth. Finding that the damage to the machinery grew worse, the badly hit battle-cruiser had to appeal for assistance, and was taken in tow by the "Indomitable." Speed was now out of the question, while there was great risk of both battle-cruisers falling victims to the lurking German submarines. Accordingly one flotilla of destroyers was detailed to escort the "Indomitable" and her tow, another was ordered to reconnoitre to the north-east and check any attempt on the part of hostile light-cruisers and torpedo-boats from menacing the crippled "Lion."

The "Livingstone" was one of the flotilla told off for the latter service. Hers was a hazardous undertaking, for ahead lay the almost impregnable island of Heligoland, on her starboard hand was the German torpedo-boat station of Borkum, while it was known that an ill-defined mine-field was somewhere in this part of the North Sea. Presumably the "Derfflinger" and her consorts, when they made a somewhat abrupt change of course while screened by the smoke of the destroyers, had put the mine-field between them and the British. The supposition was mainly responsible for the breaking off of the action and for the escape of the German battle-cruisers.

In line abreast the various units of the British destroyer flotilla pursued their course, an interval of nearly a mile separating each boat. At two p.m. they were within sight of the rocky plateau of Heligoland, yet no hostile craft hove in sight. The Zeppelin which had frustrated the humane intentions of the British tars when the "Bluecher" sank, was just visible as it made for its lair. Away to the eastward, where a mist was lying over the Frisian Islands, the thick clouds of smoke from the fugitive battle-cruisers was rapidly merging into the bank of fog.

"May as well get something to eat, Aubyn," remarked Lieutenant Gilroy. "Nothing like taking advantage of a lull in the performance."

Terence willingly acquiesced. Now that the excitement of the engagement was past he was beginning to feel peckish so the two officers went below.

"Not a bad day's work," remarked the sub., as he attacked a tin of biscuits and a cup of chocolate.

"H'm, no," replied Gilroy. "We ought to have bagged the lot, and we should had it not been for the 'Lion' being crocked."

"I expect the Press will make a song about our not having done so," remarked Aubyn. "It's easy for the arm-chair critics to expound theories of what ought to be done."

"Let 'em," declared Gilroy grimly. "If I had my will I'd ship a few of these professional advisers—people who are ever ready to tell their mother's mother how to extract the contents of a bird in embryo—and let them see what's going on. I'll bet they'd change their tune and not ask what the Navy is doing. It's impossible to ram into their thick heads that sometimes it pays to sacrifice a small craft in order to enable a battle-cruiser to get a sniff in. That's what we are doing now."

Aubyn looked at his companion in surprise.

"Fact," continued Gilroy. "We have information that a German flotilla of light-cruisers and destroyers is out: independently of the crowd we sent home as fast as their engines could take them. What we have to do is to get in touch with them, lure them on, and let our light-cruisers come up and bag the lot. If the German boats won't come out—and they are vastly superior in number to our lot—there are two conclusions. Either they fear a trap, or else they cannot negotiate their own mine-field. If they do pluck up courage and come for us, we've got to make a running fight for it, and at the same time watch these fellows' course."

"So, apart from screening the 'Lion' we have to discover the passage through the enemy's mine-

field?"

"Exactly," answered Gilroy. "The information is most necessary, although I cannot at present say to what use it will be put. Hullo! there's the 'Action.'"

Both officers tore up the narrow companion to find that the periscope of a submarine had been sighted on the port-bow. Evidently the skipper of the "unterseeboot" had a great respect for the ramming powers of British destroyers; for, without attempting to discharge a torpedo, he promptly dived to such a depth that on the "Livingstone" passing just ahead of the swirl that marked the submarine's disappearance no tell-tale oil rose to the surface.

By this time the mist had increased; the nearmost British destroyer was just visible. The rest were swallowed up in the bank of haze. The flotilla had changed course and was now running S.S.W. or practically parallel with the chain of islands extending from the mouth of the Weser to the Dollart.

Suddenly out of the mist loomed the outlines of four grey torpedo-boats: the forerunners of the Borkum flotilla. On they came at a good twenty-six knots, the smoke pouring from their funnels and obscuring any hostile craft that might be following in their wake.

Boat for boat the "Livingstone" and her consorts were vastly superior to the German craft. An action would result in annihilation of the enemy unless the element of luck favoured the weaker side. But it was not a time for fight. The first mission of the British destroyers was to lure their foes, especially the supporting light-cruisers, well away from the sand-banks and shallow mined channels protected by the heavy guns of Borkum.

Round swung the "Livingstone," heeling outwards till her rail was almost awash: then steadying herself on her course, steamed due west. Although the after 4-in. gun was trained on the leading German boat, no order was given to fire. Shells began to hurtle past, as the foremost enemy vessel attempted to wing her foe. It was tantalizing for the "Livingstone" to be under fire with the knowledge that her armament could dominate that of her enemy, but forbearance was desirable: it was a part of the grim game.

Suddenly a terrific glare flashed before Terence's eyes, followed by an ear-splitting report. He was dimly conscious of clapping his left hand over his eyes and feeling blindly with his right for some support that was not forthcoming. His feet gave way under him, and he fell—not upon the slippery deck of the destroyer but into the sea.

It was in a sense fortunate that he fell in a huddled posture; had his body been rigid the shock on striking the surface from a craft travelling at close on thirty knots might have broken his back. Winded by the blow and the sudden immersion he sank, swallowing mouthfuls of salt water as he vainly gasped for breath.

After a seemingly interminable time he knew by the light filtering through the water that he was rising to the surface. Up he came, spluttering and gasping. His thick clothing still retained air and afforded a certain amount of buoyancy, enough to counteract the weight of his sea-boots.

He looked in the direction of the "Livingstone." She was by this time several hundred yards off and still running at a high speed. Even had his fall been noticed he knew that it would have been impossible for the destroyer to stop and pick him up. It was one of the grim realities of warfare. In the piping times of peace there would be a cry of "Man overboard," a rapid working of the engine-room telegraph, and a prompt backing and going easy astern of the engines, while the boat was being hastily lowered to effect a rescue. But now, although the loss of a man overboard was to be deplored it was the fortune of war. Under the circumstances no captain would hazard his ship in the presence of the enemy to save life.

Terence also knew that there was no chance of rescue by the German boats. For one thing it was an established fact that the disciples of "kultur" had never been credited since the declaration of hostilities with having saved a single British sailor, be he officer or man. Again, it was not to be expected that the German destroyers would cease in their efforts to overhaul a supposedly fugitive craft to pull one of the hated English out of the sea.

At a distance of about ten yards from the swimmer the leading German torpedo-boat passed. The "wash" wellnigh overwhelmed him, for by this time his clothes were becoming saturated and his limbs numbed by the cold. He was seen by several of the crew, most of whom regarded him with stolid indifference, while one or two openly jeered at him.

The desire for life was strong within the young sub. He realized that his case was hazardous in the extreme. More than likely cramp—the dreaded foe of the swimmer—would seize him; if not there would be a struggle for life until, numbed by the cold, he would sink through sheer inability to move his limbs. Yet he meant to fight strongly for his life.

"I must first get rid of my boots," he thought, at the same time ruefully reflecting that they were practically new, and had cost him a couple of guineas only a few days ago.

Turning on his back Terence began to fumble with his footgear. His fingers had little or no sense of feeling.

"All right, sir; hold up—I'm coming. You're saved," shouted a voice.

Swimming towards him and pushing a lifebuoy was Stairs, the bluejacket whose gratitude he had gained by letting him off with a caution instead of putting him in the captain's defaulter's book. The devoted man, seeing Terence blown over the side by the explosion of a hostile shell, had without hesitation seized a lifebuoy and had plunged into the sea with the laudable intention of either saving his officer or sharing his fate. Swift though he was in making up his mind, the "Livingstone" had put a hundred yards or so between her and Terence ere the man took the fateful leap.

Swimming strongly, and pushing the buoy before him he took nearly five minutes in getting within easy hailing distance of his superior officer. Even in that moment of peril, when he realized that the chances of the pair of them were most remote, Stairs was governed by the regulations.

"'... approach the drowning person, assure him with a loud and firm voice that he is safe,'" he repeated to himself. "It's a blessed lie, but regulations is regulations, so 'ere goes. All right, sir; I'm coming. You're saved."

Had Stairs continued to act strictly in the spirit of the before-mentioned regulations, he would have proceeded to "take fast hold of the hair of his head, turn him, as quickly as possible on his back, give him a sudden pull and this will cause him to float." But fortunately the seaman, having committed one absurdity, wisely refrained from doing another. Seeing that Terence was afloat, he contented himself with pushing the lifebuoy into his grasp.

"What on earth possessed you to jump overboard?" asked Aubyn.

"Never you mind, sir, beggin' your pardon," replied Stairs. "Keep your precious breath, sir you'll be wanting it afore long."

The advice was sound, for by this time two more destroyers had passed, one on either side of the submerged men, and the turmoil of the water as they tore past had the effect of stopping any attempt at conversation. Well it was that Aubyn had hold of the lifebuoy, otherwise the buffeting of the waves would have sent him under—perhaps for the last time.

Just then a large object shot up from under the water about fifty feet from the two men. It was part of a British whaler, possibly abandoned previous to going into action, or it may have floated from one of the torpedo-cruisers during the earlier stages of the war.

The third German destroyer had cut through and had passed completely over it. The greater part of the stern sheets had been torn off, but there was a considerable amount of buoyancy by reason of the copper air-tanks, some of which were yet intact.

"Good business, sir!" exclaimed Stairs. "See yon wreckage? Strike out, sir; I'll give you a hand. We'll fetch it yet."

Before Terence had covered half the distance "striking out" was beyond him. All he could do was to support himself by allowing his arms to hang inertly on the curve of the buoy. For propulsion he had to rely upon the powerful and seemingly tireless efforts of his brawny companion.

Awaiting his opportunity Stairs scrambled through the jagged gap in the wrecked boat, then, bringing himself against the after thwart he hauled Terence into a position of comparative safety.

Even with the weight of the two men the buoyancy of the airtight tanks was sufficient to keep the gunwale a foot above water. Within the wrecked boat the water was about up to the thwarts, while the sea dashed continuously over the frail planking and surged violently up and down the bottom boards.

Holding Terence by the arm, for the sub. was now incapable of stirring a finger to save himself, Stairs cautiously raised himself and looked around. The destroyers, both British and German, were now lost in the mists. Everywhere was an unbroken stretch of water. The waves, although not violent, were short and steep.

He realized that there were two great perils. The waterlogged craft might be capsized in the trough of the waves, in which case the two men would either be stunned by the heavy woodwork or else have to choose between drowning or suffocation under the upturned boat. Nor was the danger of perishing from cold and exposure to be lost sight of. Drenched to the skin, without food and water, and drifting about in a waterlogged craft on the North Sea in mid-winter, their condition was an unenviable one.

"Sit up, sir, and swing your arms," said Stairs, with pardonable sternness.

Terence tried to obey, but the nerveless condition of his arms, additionally handicapped by his wet clothing, resulted in a feeble effort; but that was by no means satisfactory to his devoted companion.

Grasping the sub. by the elbows Stairs began to work his arms in an energetic manner. Before long Aubyn began to feel the blood circulating, while the exercise also served to warm the chilled body of his rescuer.

"Avast there!" exclaimed the seaman, after five minutes' steady performance. "I'll take a spell a bit and then carry on. It's our one chance."

Terence agreed. He, too, realized that only by exercise could they hope to retain warmth in their bodies. Dimly he found himself wondering was it worth while to prolong their acute physical distress, with no apparent chance of rescue.

For nearly an hour Stairs repeated his operations at frequent intervals, but it was evident that, robust and strongly built as he was, even his bodily strength could not hold out much longer.

Neither man spoke during that fearful hour. More than once Terence wanted to ask the seaman why he had deliberately risked almost certain death on his behalf. He was not conversant with the circumstances under which Stairs had leapt from the "Livingstone's" deck, but from the fact that he arrived on the scene with a lifebuoy, the sub. concluded that it was not by accident but by design. Yet, in spite of his desire to question the man and to thank him for his gallantry and devotion, Terence was unable to frame a sentence, so utterly acute was his distress.

From time to time Stairs would stand upright, at the imminent risk of losing his balance and being thrown out of the water-logged boat, and scan the horizon—or rather the ill-defined blending of sea and sky. In the vain hope that the British destroyers had vanquished their foes and would put back to look for the missing officer, the seaman kept a sharp lookout at regular intervals, but nothing save an unbroken waste of water met his gaze.

He knew also that in a water-logged craft and without means of propulsion, the rate of drift would be extremely slight. Hours, perhaps days, would elapse ere the wrecked boat grounded on the sand-banks fringing the German and Dutch chain of islands on the east coast of the North Sea.

So intent was Stairs in looking for a distant sail that he failed to notice a pole-like object appearing above the surface at less than eighty yards from the boat. Terence noticed it; more, he remarked a slight "wash," showing that the object had a forward as well as a vertical movement.

"A periscope! he exclaimed, finding his voice in the excitement of the discovery.

"Where, sir?" asked Stairs, with incredulity in his tones, for he imagined that the sub. had become lightheaded in his distress. Then following the direction indicated by Aubyn's limp fingers, he added, "You're right, sir; it's a blessed submarine. I'll bet my last tanner the brutes will poke charley at us, and sheer off. If I'd my rifle, by smoke! I'd pepper that blessed periscope."

In his indignation the seaman began to search the bottom of the boat for a likely missile with which to vent his rage upon the modern pirates; but finding none he folded his arms and awaited events.

Like the wary water-rat that cautiously reconnoitres before it leaves its hole, the submarine surveyed the seascope. For a brief instant the eyepiece of the periscope was turned in the direction of the waterlogged boat, then, having slowly and deliberately swept it all round the compass, it again scrutinized the two unfortunate men.

"'She's one of ours!' exclaimed Stairs. 'Hurrah! we're saved.'"

[Illustration: "'She's one of ours!' exclaimed Stairs. 'Hurrah! we're saved.'"]

The submarine was in no great hurry to rise to the surface. Her commander had heard of decoys being employed to lure an inquisitive craft within range of a distant quick-firer, so he used discretion. Finally, having come to the conclusion that it was safe to ascend, the submarine resumed her diagonally upward motion, and with the green water pouring from off the fore side of her conning-tower and surging from her narrow deck she emerged to the light of day.

"She's one of ours!" exclaimed Stairs. "Hurrah! sir, We're saved."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SUBMARINE SCORES.

THE seaman was right. It was a British submarine, one of the E class. Terence could hardly believe his eyes to see the craft emerge from beneath the waves almost within sight of the

German coast and certainly within the limits of the hostile mine-field. He had yet a lot to learn concerning the bravery and resource of the commanders and crews of these marvellous craft, operating, without support from the destroyer flotillas, at the very gates of Germany's naval strongholds.

The watertight hatch in the conning-tower opened and the head and shoulders of a young officer appeared. He bent to give an order, then leapt out and gained the navigating platform, where he was joined by three of the crew, clad in "fearnought" suits and seaboots.

"Come alongside as sharp as you can!" he shouted.

"Can't sir," replied Stairs. "We've no oars, and we're pretty well done up."

The officer gave the order for "easy astern"; then judging that there was sufficient room for the intended manoeuvre he ordered "easy ahead," at the same time steering the submarine to pass about ten feet to windward of the remains of the boat.

Meanwhile, those of the crew on deck had detached two boathooks from the handrail to which they had been secured by "beckets," and standing by, awaited for their craft to pass within reach of the object of their attentions.

Simultaneously the two boathooks engaged, and the boat was drawn alongside. While thus firmly held, one of the crew leapt into her, and raising Terence, passed him on to the willing arms of his companions. Without loss of time Stairs was likewise rescued, and both men, practically "done up," were taken below. Then, the officer and his men having returned to the shelter of the hermetically-sealed steel hull, the submarine prepared to dive.

While kindly helpers were assisting to strip the clothing from the almost unconscious sub., massaging his body and limbs with more energy than skill, and were pouring hot drinks down his throat, Terence could hear as in a dream the order given by the captain of the submarine.

"Diving stations. Flood main ballast.... Flood auxiliary ballast tanks!"

Dimly Aubyn began to realize that he was actually in a steel prison, several feet beneath the surface of a sea sown with deadly mines.

"Easy ahead. Elevate horizontal rudders!"

The submarine, now weighing nearly the same as the amount of water she displaced, was ready for diving. That part of the operation was performed by means of the horizontal planes or rudders, trimming them to give the required angle of descent.

"Down to seventy feet, sir!" reported a voice, sounding hollow in the ribbed, vaulted space.

"Stand by—let go!"

With a subdued rattle the anchor, hitherto bedded underneath the fore-part of the hull, dropped to the bed of the North Sea, additional water ballast being admitted into the tanks of the vessel to compensate the loss of weight of the ground-tackle. Save for a faint pendulum-like motion as the submarine swayed to the tension on the bight of her cable, the craft lay calmly in twelve fathoms, for the time being safe from the perils of naval warfare.

Warm both externally and internally, Terence dropped to sleep in a comfortable bunk in the officers' part of the vessel. Three hours later he awoke, feeling much his former self, for the beneficial effects of the oxygen-charged atmosphere were as invigorating as the air on the summit of a lofty mountain.

The instant he awoke the circumstances which led to his being on board the submarine flashed across Aubyn's mind with vivid clearness. He contrasted his experiences with his regaining consciousness in Shotley Sick Quarters. There his brain worked slowly—it took considerable time for him to recall the events subsequent to the torpedoing of the ill-fated "Terrier." Here, owing possibly to the chemically charged atmosphere, his mind was as fresh as if he had awakened from a normal sleep.

The submarine was still at anchor. Beyond the purring of the dynamos for supplying the electric light there was no noise of machinery. Men were laughing and talking freely: he could hear Stairs' voice, holding forth with a vivacity that betokened no ill-effects from his voluntary immersion.

Terence sprang out of his bunk and began to dress. His own clothing, dried in the motor-room, was ready for him to put on. Just as he had completed his toilet a man of about thirty, dressed in the uniform of a lieutenant-commander, entered and introduced himself as Paul Maynebrace, captain of Submarine "E Something."

"Sorry we can't land you for a day or two," he remarked, after inquiring after Aubyn's state of health. "We're on observation duty, and are not due back at Harwich until noon on Thursday. However, we'll do our level best to make you comfortable. Of course, I suppose I am right in assuming that you haven't been on a submarine before? It will be something of a novelty to you,

but we are getting used to it. Rather boring, in fact."

"Boring?" repeated Terence.

"Well, rather. We are stationed to observe the approach through the mine-field to Wilhelmshaven. It means that every few hours we have to pop to the surface and have a look round; and except for the departure of some of the raiding German cruisers late on Saturday night (which we duly reported to the Admiralty, by the by) it's usually a case of a lot of work for nothing—for the beggars won't come out."

"Supposing a German warship did make a dash while you are down below?" asked Terence.

"We could tell by the noise of the propellors," replied the lieutenant-commander. "She is bound to keep almost immediately above us, owing to the narrowness of the passage through the mine-field."

"Then what would happen?" queried Aubyn, keenly interested in the information.

"If she were unsupported we would try the effect of a torpedo," replied Maynebrace, with a smile. "Ten to one the disaster to one of von Tirpitz's pets would be put down to the accidental displacement of one of the mines. In the case of the 'Derfflinger' and her consorts we let the whole crowd go. It would be impossible to torpedo the lot, and even if we hit one the remainder might scoot back to Wilhelmshaven. On the other hand, by not giving them a scare we help to keep their spirits up, so to speak, and let our battle-cruisers do the smashing-up part of the business. By the by, the seaman who was with you on the derelict boat told us of the result of the dust-up: how the 'Bluecher' went under."

"It was a pity we didn't get the rest," remarked Terence.

"Fortune of war," declared the lieutenant-commander. "And, as luck would have it, the three German battle-cruisers did not return to Wilhelmshaven by the same channel, otherwise I might have had a try for one or two of them. No, they made for Heligoland, I fancy, and thence either to Kiel or Wilhelmshaven by a passage inside the mine-field. Well, I must leave you for a while. I'll send young Warborough—he's my sub.—to have a yarn with you. And as soon as I get the chance I'll get off a wireless announcing that you are safe and sound on board."

It was not long before Sub-lieutenant Warborough arrived upon the scene. He was a young, easy-going officer, wholeheartedly devoted to his career; yet, when on leave he was a worry to the police in the vicinity of each of the great naval ports. His brother-officers in the submarine flotilla were apt to remark that Dick Warborough was a "bit of a scorcher" in more ways than one. On one occasion a lively scene in a Portsmouth theatre, in which Warborough played a leading though unrehearsed part, almost ended in a police-court. Perhaps it was lucky for the sub. that his father was a man of position and influence. Warborough freely confessed to half a dozen endorsements on his motor-driver's licence. The fines he had been ordered to pay in his twelve-month amounted to almost as much as his pay and allowance as a sub-lieutenant in the submarine service, so once again he thanked his lucky stars that his parent was rich and, what was more, generous. Yet, with all his foolish pranks ashore, he was keen and a capable officer from the moment he passed through the dockyard gates to return to duty till the time when he was again able to proceed on leave.

"Skipper says I'm to hold a pow-wow with you, Aubyn," began Warborough, not with any suspicion of condescension but in a frank, easy-going manner. "Glad to have someone to spin a yarn with. Do you motor?"

Terence had to confess that, except for trips in hired cars during his brief visits to his home, his experiences in that direction were few and far between; then, by way of altering the topic of conversation, he asked what the young officer thought of the submarine service.

"Top-hole—absolutely ripping!" declared Warborough. "This lying in wait is apt to be a bit tedious, but there are moments when you feel downright happy at being in the submarine service."

"Pretty dangerous?" hazarded Aubyn, who had not entirely got over the feeling that he was imprisoned at the bottom, or nearly at the bottom of the sea.

"That's what gives a spice to the business," said Warborough. "If we do bump a mine there's precious little chance for us. The worst part of the job is when we are getting fairly close to Harwich, and running awash. The helmsman of one of your destroyers might get a trifle jumpy, you know—mistakes have been made in that direction, especially at night."

"That I can quite understand," rejoined Terence, recalling the many anxious hours he had passed on the "Strongbow" as officer of the watch, and straining his eyes in the darkness till he fancied he saw the periscope and conning-tower of more than one submarine.

"And the rotten part of the business is, the man in the street grumbles," continued Warborough. "It's all very fine saying that the Silent Navy is above public opinion and all that—it isn't, and it's a bit rough. Our men come back from leave with the yarn that they are continually

being asked, 'What is the Navy doing?' And if people find out that they belong to the submarine service they ask still more pointed questions. Civilians forget that the German ships rarely put to sea, except when they think they can do a sneaking bit of damage. And after this recent scrap they'll be still more chary about coming out. Now, if there's nothing or hardly anything afloat for us to go for, it's not much use running a great risk of being rammed by our own destroyers. Submarines can't fight submarines, and the fact that a few German 'unterseeboots' have started playing the fool with our merchant craft complicates the situation. However, there are four of our submarines keeping an eye on the approach to the German North Sea ports, so perhaps, after the war is over and people are let into the know, we may be vindicated in the minds of the Great British Public. Why, man, what's wrong now? Your nose has started to bleed."

Terence brought out his handkerchief and applied it to his nasal organ. It was a very rare thing for it to bleed, and he wondered whether it was the result of the concussion when he was blown from the deck of the "Livingstone."

"I don't fancy so," remarked Warborough. "It's the excess of oxygen. We are frequently affected that way. Shove your head in that basin and let me pour cold water on your neck: that will stop it pretty quickly."

Aubyn's companion was quite right. In less than two minutes the flow had entirely ceased.

"How about the water?" asked Terence. "I suppose this is the pump?"

"Yes. You'll have to exert a fair amount of strength to get rid of the water, you know."

Aubyn seized the pump lever, but in spite of his efforts he could not force the water out of the basin. "Back pressure too much," commented Warborough. "We're more than fifty feet below the surface. We'll have to get rid of this water pretty quickly, so I'll ask the skipper to bring the boat twenty feet or so nearer the surface."

"Sorry to give you so much trouble," said Terence apologetically.

"Not at all, my dear fellow. It will give the men something to do to relieve the monotony. Come with me, if you're fit to move, and you can see the operation."

Terence followed the junior officer to the base of the conning-tower, and upon Warborough explaining matters to the lieutenant-commander, the latter concurred in the desirability of ascending.

"While we are about it we may as well go up and look round," he added.

Word was then passed for the crew to stand at their stations. Inside a water-filled compartment, separated from the rest of the vessel by strong watertight bulkheads, the electrically-worked winch could be dimly heard as it hauled in the cable, till the stockless anchor was safely housed flush with the outer plating of the submarine.

The reserve tanks were "blown," the electric motors for propelling purposes were set in motion, and the horizontal fins trimmed for the ascent. Steadily the pointer of the depth indicator began to fall till it registered ten feet. At that distance below the surface it is quite possible to make use of the periscope.

The lieutenant-commander watched the seemingly monotonous changing panorama depicted upon the bowl at the base of the periscope, as the eyepiece swept the horizon.

Suddenly he checked the training handle. A small and rather indistinct object had appeared in view.

"What do you make of that, Warborough?" asked the skipper calmly.

"Light-cruiser, sir!" replied that officer, after a brief glance at the reflected picture. "And a German, by all the powers!"

"May as well have a look, Mr. Aubyn," said the lieutenant-commander considerately. "She seems in no hurry, and unless she takes it into her head to change her course, she'll pass within eight hundred yards of us."

Terence inspected the periscope representation of the German vessel. Although she flew no ensign, her characteristic masts, funnel, and derricks, as well as her protruding bows—a combination of both clipper and ram—proclaimed her as one of the "Freya" class cruisers, averaging 5600 tons. Her guns were trained abeam, but from their direction it was evident that the Germans had no idea of the peril that menaced them.

The sub. felt his blood tingling. It was the "Terrier" incident over again, only the boot was on the other foot this time.

"Down to thirty feet—charge firing-tank—flood both torpedo-tubes—stand by!" ordered the lieutenant-commander.

He would not run the risk of allowing the tip of the periscope to remain on the surface while the crew were thrusting the two steel cylinders into their respective tubes.

"All correct, sir!" reported the leading torpedo-hand.

"To fifteen feet, then," was the order.

Once again daylight filtered through the periscope. On the bowl stood the image of the doomed cruiser, now showing with remarkable vividness. A slight touch on the steering gear and "E Something" swung a point or so to starboard to enable her tubes to be trained a few feet in advance of the cruiser's bows—a sufficient allowance for the vessel to be fairly in the path of the deadly weapon by the time the torpedo travelled the intervening distance.

A faint detonation, caused by the release of the propelling charge of compressed air was followed by the rush of the water admitted into the now empty tube to compensate the loss of weight of the torpedo. The missile was on its way.

A few seconds of tense silence followed, then came the muffled sound of a terrific detonation, as the warhead exploded fifteen feet below the surface and fairly amidships of the doomed cruiser. No need to let loose a second missile.

"Got her!" exclaimed the skipper laconically, as the submarine dived to fifty feet to avoid detection and its natural sequence—a hail of quick-firer projectiles from the already sinking vessel.

A quarter of an hour later the "E Something" again showed her periscope. The lieutenant-commander's surmise was correct. The German cruiser had plunged to the bottom, while half a dozen boats, crammed to their utmost capacity, were laboriously rowing towards the invisible island of Borkum.

"Thank you, Mr. Aubyn!" exclaimed the lieutenant-commander, extending his hand towards the sub.

"What for, sir, might I ask?"

"For letting your nose bleed at a most opportune moment," was the cool rejoinder.

CHAPTER XX.

A DUEL WITH A ZEPPELIN.

An hour after sunset "E Something" rose to the surface. Her hatches were opened and the crew allowed on deck, five men at a time, to enjoy the cold, fresh air. Owing to the possibility of the sudden approach of a swift hostile cruiser or destroyer it was not advisable to let more men out at once, in order that there would be no delay in battening down and diving.

It was a clear starlit night. Away to the east the sky was illuminated by the steely rays of the searchlights on the German batteries, where the garrisons, kept on thorns by the dread of a visit from the British Fleet, maintained ceaseless watch.

"I shouldn't wonder if we weren't honoured by the attentions of a few German torpedo-boats," remarked Warborough to Aubyn, as the two officers, sheltering from the wind under the lee of the conning-tower, were enjoying their cigarettes. "By this time the boats of the torpedoed cruiser ought to have reached land, and the report of the disaster—cooked by the authorities for serving up to the gullible Teutonic public—will have been issued."

"It will probably be reported that she struck a drifting mine," said Terence.

"More than likely," agreed Warborough. "Drifting mines are a godsend to the harassed German press agencies. But, all the same, those fellows on the cruiser must have seen the wake of our torpedo, and that's what makes me think that they'll be sending some of their small craft to give us a shaking up—if they can."

Meanwhile, the wireless mast, which during the period of submergence had been housed on deck, had been set up, and a report of the torpedoing of an unknown German cruiser of the "Freya" class had been sent off to the Admiralty. A second message, reporting the rescue of Sub-Lieutenant Terence Aubyn, R.N.R., and Seaman Stairs, was also despatched.

Twenty minutes later came the reply:—

"Admiralty express great satisfaction at prowess of submarine 'E Something,'" while the news concerning the rescued officer and man was acknowledged in stereotyped form.

"Another 'buck-up' for the British Public," remarked Terence, "although our little piece of work—excuse me saying 'our,' but it sounds natural—will pale into comparative insignificance after

the 'Bluecher' business."

"Perhaps My Lords will not make the news public—at least, not for a long while," rejoined Warborough. "They'll keep it in reserve until there is a lull in the papers. Of course not a quarter of the work, that would gladden the nation like anything, gets into the Press. It isn't well to let the enemy know too much of their losses. By the by, did you hear anything about a hostile submarine attempting to slip past the Needles and into the Solent?"

"No," replied Terence. "Is it a fact?"

"Can't say, old man. Accounts differ. All I know is, that I was staying at a house close to Lymington just before Christmas. It was the first leave I had had since the outbreak of the war. Anyway, the gunners on the Isle of Wight forts spotted something suspicious, and promptly let rip for about twenty minutes."

"Did they hit anything?"

"They did," answered Warborough, with a grin. "They nearly plugged me with a ricochet. Several shells fell inland, one of them demolishing the chimney of a country pub. Next day I heard on good authority——"

"Something moving up aloft, sir!" reported one of the submarine's crew. "Listen, sir. There's a distinct purr."

"A Zeppelin, by Jove!" exclaimed Warborough. "Pass the word to the captain."

The lieutenant-commander, termed by courtesy the captain, was resting in his bunk. He was quickly on deck, for he had "turned in all standing," with the exception of his boots.

He looked aloft. Like a lead-pencil the Zeppelin could now be distinguished as she rapidly advanced at an altitude of about a thousand feet. Judging by her position she would, unless she changed her direction, pass half a mile to windward of the submarine.

"Mr. Warborough," exclaimed the lieutenant-commander, "I don't propose to dive."

"Very good, sir," replied the sub. of "E Something," as coolly as if the Zeppelin were anything but a war-machine.

With very little noise the guns'-crews mustered on deck. The two anti-aerial guns were raised on their disappearing mountings, ammunition was served out, and the submarine was prepared to risk an encounter with the vaunted terror of the air.

Although the petrol engines, used for running on the surface, were in motion, the clutches of both shafts were disconnected and the exhaust completely muffled. Thus the submarine was ready to forge ahead at a moment's notice; but, until she was discovered by the giant gas-bag, her captain preferred to lie low until the Zeppelin somewhat incautiously would descend to investigate the scene of the catastrophe to the torpedoed cruiser.

At each of the 3-pounder quick-firers the gun-layers "stood easy." To keep bending over the sights of the high angle firing-gun would be putting an unnecessary strain upon the men. They waited alertly for report of the range-finding officer and the order to open fire.

"The brute is in no hurry to descend," grumbled Warborough. "She's a good two thousand feet up now, and a pretty bad target, especially at night. One thing, she doesn't stand much chance of dropping a bomb within a couple of hundred yards of us, unless it's by a pure fluke."

"She's descending," exclaimed Terence, as the long, aluminium cylinder, under the influence of the compensating weights, began to dip her nose.

As he spoke a searchlight flashed from the foremost nacelle. The rays, almost perpendicular in direction to the surface of the water, played upon the sea at some three hundred yards from the quiescent submarine. The Zeppelin had its suspicions, but as yet had not located its intended prey.

"Don't look up, men," cautioned the lieutenant-commander, knowing that should the searchlight play upon the faces of the crew detection would be certain. He, as well as Warborough, had taken the precaution of wrapping a dark muffler over the lower part of his face, while his forehead was shaded by his peaked cap.

It was a hard thing to obey the order, but the men, subduing their natural desire to see what menaced them from above, kept their faces averted.

"A thousand feet up," announced Warborough at length, speaking softly, lest the sound, borne upwards with remarkable clearness, should give the Zeppelin the alarm. "Actual distance, one thousand five hundred yards."

As he spoke the deck of "E Something" was bathed in a flood of brilliant light. A sweep of the searchlight had caused the beam to "pick up" the submarine. So dazzling were the rays that it

would have been impossible to sight either of the guns in the direction of the airship.

With admirable presence of mind the lieutenant-commander forbore to open fire. Rigidly the men stood at attention, not one of them risking the temporary blindness that would ensue if he raised his eyes to the powerful glare.

"Thank heavens," ejaculated the captain fervently, as the sweeping rays swung round, "they haven't spotted us!"

"Eight hundred feet—twelve hundred yards," reported Warborough.

The Zeppelin was still descending; more, she had slowed down considerably, since during the last four minutes she had travelled three hundred yards. Heading dead into the eye of the wind her rate over the sea was now roughly two and a half miles an hour.

The Zeppelin now presented an easy target, as, moving slowly, she stood out clearly against the starry sky.

The lieutenant-commander raised his hand, the gun-layer of the for'ard weapon sprang to the night-sights; in another second the missile would have been hurtling on its way towards the bulky target, when round swept the blinding searchlight, full on the submarine.

This time there was no swaying round the rays were kept focussed on the "E Something." The Zeppelin had spotted her foe.

"Confound that light!" muttered the skipper, as he telegraphed for full speed ahead.

Quickly the vessel gained steerage way, the helmsman thrusting his helm hard over, alternately to port and starboard at frequent intervals in order to pursue a zig-zag course and thus baffle the aim of the bomb-trainers.

The first bomb was not long in making its presence known. From the invisible and now noisy airship, for her engines were making a terrific din, a powerful missile dropped fifty yards abeam of the submarine, and burst with a loud report.

Fragments of the shell flew in all directions, some glancing harmless from the rounded side of the submarine, and others flying overhead. Not a man was touched.

The second bomb fell much further off and dead ahead. The Zeppelin had overrun her quarry.

With a sharp turn of the steering gear the helmsman brought "E Something" smartly round in a semicircle till her bows pointed in the opposite direction to which they had been heading a few seconds before. So quickly was the manoeuvre executed that the submarine swept out of the irritating rays of the searchlight.

Both quick-firers barked simultaneously. One shell burst well beyond the frail gas-bag; the other appeared to explode almost under the foremost suspended car. Whether by accident or design the searchlight was immediately switched off, while the Zeppelin, elevating her horizontal rudders and frantically throwing out ballast, began to rise in order to be out of range of the British shells.

"Crash!" went the after anti-aircraft gun. This time the range was obtained to a nicety, and the projectile, bursting almost in front of the bows of the Zeppelin, gave her a mortal blow.

To the watchers on the submarine the whole fabric of the airship appeared to jump, then, with the slightest perceptible interval following the explosion of the missile, a second detonation occurred in the fore-part of the Zeppelin. There was a blinding triple flash, followed by a deafening report. The aluminium envelope seemed to disperse amidst a cloud of fire-tinged smoke, while the heavier portions of the airship fell with ever-increasing rapidity.

Amidst a series of heavy splashes, the wreckage plunged into the sea at less than half a mile from the submarine. A quantity of heavy oil, taking fire as it streamed downwards, remained burning upon the surface of the water for quite a considerable time, then with a number of spasmodic flashes the flames died out, leaving only a slowly drifting cloud of smoke to mark the spot where the wreckage fell.

During the final catastrophe the men of the British submarine remained almost spellbound. They had gained the victory, but all thoughts of elation were subdued by the awfulness of the fate of the vaunted terror of the air.

The "E Something" was then run to the spot where the ill-starred Zeppelin had disappeared, in the vain hope of rescuing any survivors. For a radius of several hundred yards the sea was covered with oil which had escaped combustion, but of actual relics of the airship nothing was visible. Her twisted and bent aluminium framework lay a hundred and twenty feet down at the bottom of the North Sea.

Just before dawn the submarine descended and lay hidden, save for a brief interval of reconnaissance, during the whole of the day. At night she came up in order to give the crew a

"breather." Nothing of incident occurred, neither on the two following days, so Terence had a good idea of the monotony of life in a British submarine on observation duty.

At daybreak on the following Thursday the "E Something" prepared for her homeward run. She travelled awash, without sighting any enemy cruiser or destroyer. At a rendezvous she fell in with her relief, and having exchanged greetings the two submarines parted, one to enjoy a welcome rest in Harwich harbour, the other to play her part in sweeping the North Sea of the enemy's flag.

"We're giving that fellow a rare funk, Aubyn," remarked Warborough, as the two officers were standing on the navigation platform.

"An example of the far-reaching effect of Teutonic kultur, I suppose," replied Terence. "By Jove, I reckon her old man is shaking a bit!"

The subject of their conversation was a Dutch tramp steamer of about 1500 tons. Anticipating the execution of von Tirpitz's cowardly threat to sink British merchantmen, she had lost no time in stating her nationality in an unmistakable manner. Her wall sides were painted in horizontal bands in the national colours, in addition to her name and country in letters a yard or more in length. From her ensign staff she flew a Dutch ensign far out of proportion to those usually sported by vessels of that size, while, to make additionally certain that no mistake on the part of a German submarine was possible, she flew another Dutch ensign at her main-masthead.

Directly they spotted the "E Something" running awash and with the White Ensign prominently displayed, the tramp altered her course. Dense columns of black smoke poured from her funnel; every available man of her engine-room staff gave a hand in shovelling the "black diamonds" into the furnaces.

At the very best she could make only eleven knots; had the "E Something" been a German vessel the Dutchman would have stood no chance of escape.

Even as the two officers were watching the panic-stricken tramp, a column of spray shot up fifty feet in the air, about half a cable's length astern of the submarine.

To the accompaniment of a peculiar screeching sound another and yet another column of foam leapt skywards. Both men knew at once from experience what was the meaning of those pillars of spray; they were caused by the series of ricochets of a "common shell."

"Hard a-starboard!" ordered Warborough. The submarine awash presented too big a target broadside on. End-on the area exposed to the distant gun-layer was comparatively small.

"Diving quarters!" shouted the junior officer of the submarine.

In fifteen seconds the hatches were closed and the boat trimmed for diving. At an unusually steep angle she disappeared beneath the surface.

"Just our confounded luck," declared the lieutenant-commander. "One of our own cruisers trying her level best to smash us. That tramp altering her course gave her the tip. But the fellow who laid that quick-firer ought to have his cross-guns taken away for a bad miss," he added grimly, referring to the "gun-layer's badge" worn on the right arm.

A careful survey by means of the periscope revealed no sign of the cruiser or destroyer that had been so inconsiderate as to fire upon one of her submarines; but the modern "Flying Dutchman" was well within view, and about a couple of miles on the submarine's port bow.

The lieutenant-commander knitted his brows in perplexity. His craft was in an awkward predicament. She had been fired on at sight, owing possibly to the tramp signalling to the British warship that she was being chased by a German submarine. If "E Something" had remained awash a second or third shot would in all probability have sent her to the bottom for good and all, since it was impossible to convince the cruiser or destroyer of her error in time to stop the over-zealous guns'-crews.

By diving, the submarine was safe from the effect of gun-fire so long as she kept submerged; but directly she reappeared she might be instantly fired upon or else rammed by the now alert cruiser, which would certainly follow the supposed course of the unseen craft.

Suddenly an idea flashed through the brain of the skipper of "E Something." The Dutch tramp had been the cause of the somewhat disconcerting incident: he would make her the means of getting out of an awkward, not to say hazardous, position.

Terence held his breath when he heard the order to ascend to the surface. The operation savoured of suicide, for it seemed evident to him that the mere showing of the top of the conning-tower would result in a salvo from the guns of the cruiser, which must by this time have greatly decreased the distance between the position from which she fired the first shot and the spot where the submarine had vanished.

Up rose the "E Something," but no shell burst with devastating effect within her vitals. Almost

before she regained her normal position the order was given to open hatches.

"Now, Aubyn, up with you!" exclaimed Warborough.

Terence needed no second invitation. Nimbly he ascended the iron rings of the vertical ladder and gained the deck. To his surprise he found that the submarine was close alongside the Dutchman's starboard quarter and moving at practically the same speed and in the same direction as she was.

The submarine's White Ensign, which, owing to the hasty descent had not been lowered and untoggled from the halliards, was hanging limply from the staff, resembling an umbrella. For the purposes of recognition it was useless. Even had it been otherwise, the minds of the crew of the tramp were so completely obsessed with the idea that the craft was a German submarine that they would have regarded the ensign as false colours.

Imagining that the game was up, the stolid Dutch skipper leant over the bridge rail, while a dozen of the crew peered anxiously over the side.

"This is a Dutch ship," announced the skipper vehemently in German. "Why are you stopping me?"

"We are not stopping you, my friend," replied Warborough, in English. "Can you understand?"

"Yes, ver' well," was the reply; then pointing to the distant British cruiser, which was now recognisable as one of the "Astraea" class, he continued: "If you English, why dat sheep fire?"

"Just what we don't want her to do," replied Warborough. "So we've taken the liberty of ranging up alongside you. They can't very well fire at us now, and they'll soon discover their mistake."

Meanwhile, the signalman had hoisted the submarine's code number, but owing to the confusing background afforded by the tramp's tricoloured sides, the hoist was not readily "picked up" by the cruiser, which was now approaching to ascertain the mystery of a supposedly hostile craft that had the audacity to hold up a merchantman under the very guns of a British man-of-war.

"There's the answering pendant, sir—at the dip," announced the signalman, pointing to a red and white strip of bunting hoisted half-way up the cruiser's yard-arm. "Now it's hoisted close up, sir!" he added after a brief pause.

The cruiser had seen and had read the submarine's signal. Closing, she ramped up at a cable's length from the little craft that she had done her level best to sink.

A facetious exchange of compliments by means of hand-flags was indulged in, and with a mutual farewell the British vessels parted, while the skipper of the Dutch tramp, devoutly grateful that things were not so bad as he had imagined, resumed his course towards Ymuiden.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LAST OF THE "SYNTAX."

"You're a troublesome card, Mr. Aubyn; delaying the march of justice by taking French leave."

This was the greeting of Lieutenant Gilroy, after Terence had reported himself on board the "Livingstone."

The sub. looked inquiringly at the speaker.

"Fact," continued Gilroy. "You are under notice to appear as principal witness at the trial of Major von Eckenhardt. The business was to have come off to-day, but in consequence of your tumbling overboard (we had the wireless report of your rescue) the trial is postponed till to-morrow. Congrats, old man, on your escape. Apparently you've had a lively time on board 'E Something'?"

"Fairly," admitted Aubyn, modestly. "But I wish to goodness I could cut this trial business. Why couldn't they push on with the show without me?"

"Ask me another," replied the lieutenant, shrugging his broad shoulders. "So buck up and make the best of a bad job. You'll be in good company, my lad, for I'm warned as a witness."

But the trial, which was to be held behind closed doors under the summary authority of the Defence of the Realm Act, never came off.

Von Eckenhardt succeeded in escaping from Edinburgh Castle during a dark, tempestuous night. Although searched when received into custody, he had contrived to secrete a small bottle filled with corrosive acid. This liquid applied to the bars of his cell made short work of those

barriers. His knowledge of his environments must have been remarkably accurate, for after dropping a height of twenty-five feet from the window to the floor of the dry moat without sustaining any injury sufficient to impede his movements, he found his way down the precipitous sides of the Castle rock and got clean away.

The authorities left no stone unturned to attempt the recapture of the dangerous and daring spy, but their efforts were in vain. The disquieting thought remained that von Eckenhardt was still within the limits of Great Britain. His activity, amounting almost to recklessness, made it pretty certain that he would not return to the Continent while there was scope for work amongst his enemies; and, although it was unlikely that he would carry on his secret service work either in the vicinity of Rosyth or Great Yarmouth, it was surmisable that he would recommence operations in the neighbourhood of another important naval or military centre.

Shortly after the escape of von Eckenhardt the various units of the torpedo-boat-destroyer flotilla to which the "Livingstone" belonged were sent out on detached service. Since the repetition of the luckless German raid seemed unlikely, at least until the extensive repairs to the "Derfflinger" and "Moltke" were carried out, the necessity for keeping the full complement of flotillas ceased to exist. Hence the "Livingstone" was ordered to proceed to a certain rendezvous off the Lizard, in the vicinity of which one of von Tirpitz's pirate submarines was making itself a considerable nuisance to British merchantmen bound up and down Channel.

Twenty-four hours after leaving the Firth of Forth the destroyer arrived at her appointed station, where she had the mortification of hearing that a large tramp steamer, the "Quickstep," had been held up and sunk only two hours previously.

All the destroyer could do was to tow the ship's boats with the survivors within an easy distance of Falmouth; then back the "Livingstone" doubled, her officers and crew filled with the utmost keenness to meet and destroy the skulking terror of the deep.

About three bells in the First Dog Watch the lookout reported a sail in sight, which quickly proved to be a large two-masted cargo vessel bound down Channel.

As she came within signalling distance she made her number, announcing that she was the SS. "Syntax" of London, and inquired if the destroyer had seen any of the enemy's submarines.

"Tell them 'yes'," ordered Gilroy, who was the officer of the watch. "And inform them that we will escort her as far as the Wolf Rock. Beyond that she ought to be fairly safe."

"Tough old skipper of that packet," remarked Terence, pointing to the "Syntax." "He doesn't deign to sail under false colours—there's the good old 'red' flying as proudly as any merchant skipper could wish. And I wouldn't mind betting that there isn't a firearm on board, except the signal gun and perhaps the old man's revolver."

"We'll mother him all right," declared Gilroy optimistically. "It would go hard with any German submarine that dared to show her periscope now," and he indicated the man standing by the for'ard 4-in. gun, ready at the first alarm to shoot and shoot straight—for the No. 1 was one of the best gunlayers of the flotilla.

With her speed reduced to a modest twelve knots, in order to keep station with her convoy, the destroyer turned and followed the "Syntax" at a distance of one seamile astern and slightly on her port quarter.

Just as the sun was setting, the lofty needle-like pinnacle of the Wolf Lighthouse was observed, rising above the horizon and backed by the vivid crimson of the disappearing orb of day.

There was little or no wind. The surface of the sea was as placid as a mill-pond, broken only by the bow-wave of the two vessels. So calm was the air that the savoury smell from the galley of the merchant vessel was wafted to the nostrils of the officers on the bridge of the destroyer. On the lofty fore-deck a seaman was about to hoist the steaming-lamp. His figure silhouetted against the ruddy light was, when viewed from the destroyer, just clear of one end of the bridge.

For no apparent reason Terence kept his glasses focussed on the man, who, awaiting the order to send the light aloft, was taking a farewell view of the rapidly-receding coast-line of Old England, for the Cornish hills were just visible abaft on the starboard quarter.

Suddenly the fellow put the lamp on deck and shouted. Although Aubyn heard no sound, he could distinctly see the seaman's mouth working as he pointed to something on the starboard hand. Then heeling heavily to port the "Syntax" circled in the direction indicated.

"A submarine, by Jove!" ejaculated Terence. "On the tramp's starboard bow—and the old man's trying to ram her."

Gilroy, too, levelled his glass, but owing to the glare on the water he could pick up no sign of the submarine. But Terence was right in his surmise. A periscope had emerged from beneath the surface at less than a cable's length from the "Syntax." The courageous old skipper had put his helm hard a-port, with the laudable intention of ramming and sending the submarine to the bottom.

He missed; more, the hull of the cargo steamer screened the submarine from the destroyer's bow-gun.

"That's done it!" ejaculated Gilroy, as a column of water tore skywards on the far side of the luckless vessel. The merchantman heeled violently, recovered herself with a corresponding roll, as her main-mast buckled, burst its shrouds and toppled across the deck.

"Full speed ahead!"

The engine-room telegraph gong had scarce ceased vibrating ere the "Livingstone" leapt ahead like a greyhound released from its leash. With the oil-fired engines running at their utmost capacity the destroyer quickly circled round the doomed vessel, but not a sign of the modern pirate was to be seen. Having shot the cowardly bolt, the submarine had quickly dived, and perhaps was lying *en perdu* eighty feet beneath the surface.

Even in the midst of peril the heart of the stout old merchant skipper never failed him. Immediately his ship had been torpedoed, he steered towards the distant shore, hoping against hope to beach his vessel on the iron-bound Cornish coast.

In less than ten minutes it was obvious that the attempt was in vain. The "Syntax" was settling rapidly by the bows. Already the stern was so high out of the water that the boss of the swiftly-revolving propeller was visible amidst the cascades of spray churned up by the blades.

Presently the propeller ceased to revolve. Not until the water was over the level of the engine-bed did the skipper give orders for the engine-room staff to save themselves. Up on deck they poured, hurriedly yet without undue confusion. The boats were already swung out and made ready to lower.

So sluggish was the partly-flooded vessel that she lost way rapidly. One by one the boats were lowered, and the disengaging gear of the falls cast off without a hitch. The old skipper was the last to leave. With the ship's papers thrust inside his buttoned, weather-beaten coat, he waved a salute to the destroyer that had attended the "Syntax" in vain, then slid down into one of the boats.

Before the boat had rowed a dozen lengths from the ship, the "Syntax" all but disappeared from view, boisterously, amid a series of veiled explosions as the compressed air burst from her seams. Amidst a miniature maelstrom the stern hung irresolute for a brief instant, with the red ensign still fluttering in the calm air. Then, with a quick dive, the emblem of the Mercantile Marine vanished from view.

"Shall I take you in tow?" shouted the lieutenant-commander of the "Livingstone."

"Better not, sir," replied the "old man." "That skulking submarine may be showing her snout again. Another couple of yards and I would have given her a bump. No, sir, we're all right. Sea's calm. All being well we'll land at Sennen Cove before another couple of hours.

"There's pluck," commented Gilroy. "I always had a certain respect for the Mercantile Marine, and after this, by Jove——"

Terence made no reply. He was thinking regretfully of that magnificent specimen of British construction lying fathoms deep, a victim to the brutal violation of all conventions and compacts of modern civilization.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TABLES TURNED.

"THE swine!" ejaculated Gilroy furiously. "They know we play the game, but if I had my will, I really believe I'd ship a couple of captured German officers on board every merchantman clearing our ports."

"That wouldn't stop them, Gilroy," remarked the captain. "Not even if you had old Tirpitz's son as a figure-head. Instead of which he's living in luxury at our expense, while our officers and men are being housed like cattle. No, we must do our work with clean hands."

"Not even employ a ruse, sir?" queried Gilroy.

"That doesn't enter into the question," replied his superior officer. "As a matter of fact, I mean to have a little try on. It's hardly in accordance with Admiralty procedure, but I'll explain, and if any of you gentlemen have any objections, don't hesitate to say so."

"I am willing to take the risk, sir," declared Gilroy, after the captain had outlined his plans. "And if we succeed I don't think My Lords will give us a rap on the knuckles."

"And you, Mr. Aubyn?"

"I am of the same opinion as Mr. Gilroy, sir."

"Very good: we'll carry on," concluded the skipper of the "Livingstone."

Accordingly the destroyer returned to the rendezvous off The Start. From there she sent a wireless announcing certain engine-room defects, that might well have stood over to a more convenient time, and requested permission to put into Brixham, where the work could be carried out.

Back came the reply: "Concur. Make good defects on relief by 'Radimus'."

At ten p.m. the destroyer "Radimus" came up, and exchanged signals with the "Livingstone," which at once steamed for Brixham.

There was just enough water for the destroyer to enter the outer harbour and tie up alongside the wall. An hour later she was aground; a little later she was high and dry in the tidal harbour.

Both the captain of the "Livingstone" and Lieutenant Gilroy had ample private means, and they did not hesitate to spend money for the good of the country and the Navy in particular. So within forty minutes of the destroyer entering Brixham Harbour, the two officers, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, had concluded a bargain with a local owner for the hire of three of the weatherly trawlers for which that Devonshire port is so greatly celebrated.

At two in the morning, when Brixham slept, the crew of the "Livingstone" were hard at work, transporting stores and munitions to the three hired trawlers. By dint of great exertion one four-inch gun with its mountings was transferred to each of the trawlers and set in position just abaft the mainmast.

Directly the tide rose sufficiently, the trawlers, each containing a third of the "Livingstone's" crew, in addition to the regular hands, warped out into the Roads, hoisted sail, and with a fresh easterly breeze "reached off" towards The Start.

Thus Terence Aubyn found himself, for the first time in his career, senior executive officer of an armed vessel—the ketch "Asphodel," with a sturdy Brixham fisherman as his sailing master, and twenty bluejackets lying upon the deck.

The three trawlers maintained a "line ahead" formation, the captain of the "Livingstone" leading in the "Myrtle," Lieutenant Gilroy second in the "Cinema," and Terence as the rear-guard. To all outward appearance the unofficial flotilla was off to the fishing-grounds.

Five miles S.S.E. of the Devon promontory known as The Start, the destroyer "Radimus" crossed the bows of the trawlers, bound for Portland Bill, the eastern limit of her patrolling ground. Unsuspecting, her officer of the watch brought his glasses to bear upon the three peaceful ketches, and proceeded on his way.

Half an hour later a large auxiliary barque came ploughing her way up Channel. Although absolutely unarmed she showed no fear of the threatened submarine blockade, her red ensign proudly and unmistakably announcing the fact that she belonged to the greatest mercantile navy the world has ever yet seen.

"That rascally submarine, sir!" announced the master of the "Asphodel" to Terence, pointing to a peculiar swirl in the placid water about a mile astern of the barque, followed by the sinister-looking conning-tower and twin periscopes of the German pirate.

Doffing his regulation cap, Aubyn raised his head just above the low bulwarks and kept the submarine under observation with his telescope. Owing to the "line-ahead" formation of the trawlers, the "Asphodel" was nearest the enemy craft, which bore well on that trawler's port quarter.

The barque was helpless. Being under a full press of canvas she could not even attempt to ram her antagonist, while the wind being light, and her auxiliary engines of comparatively low horse-power, flight was out of the question.

The German submarine approached quickly and fearlessly. A survey of the horizon revealed to her captain nothing formidable in sight, only three harmless trawlers off to the fishing-ground. When he had finished with the barque, he decided, he would send two of the trawlers to the bottom, in order to let the English know that even fish was to become a scarce article of food, and let the third craft go with the crews of their sunken consorts.

It did not take the submarine long to range up on the starboard quarter of the barque. A brief argument took place between the German captain and the British merchant skipper, with the result that the latter, finding resistance useless, had the vessel hove-to.

On the deck of the submarine, just in front of the after quick-firing gun that had been raised from below and was trained on the barque, stood a steel boat lashed down and secured in chocks. In the boat's garboards were four large apertures, each capable of being closed watertight by the manipulation of a single interrupted thread screw. When open these holes allowed the boat to be

emptied or flooded with great rapidity as the submarine rose or dived.

Yet for some reason the pirates made no attempt to use their own boat; they ordered the barque to lower two of hers, and with three men in each to row alongside the submarine.

It was the intention of the Germans to rifle the prize before they placed explosives on board. They were evidently short of provisions, oil, and petrol, and these were to be found in abundance upon the luckless barque. The ship's boats could be more conveniently employed upon this business, as in the case of a surprise there would be delay in hauling the steel tender on to the submarine's deck and securing it, before she could dive.

Terence watched this part of the operation with extreme annoyance. If the pirate meant to keep some of the British crew on the deck of the submarine, her destruction could not be accomplished without great risk and peril to the men of the mercantile marine. However, he decided the capture or destruction of the unknown submarine—for she had no number painted on her grey sides or conning-tower—was imperative, and acting in accordance with a prearranged plan, he gave the master of the "Asphodel" instructions to steer towards the now motionless barque, approaching on the starboard hand, while the other trawlers held steadily on their course.

It was sound strategy. The captain of the submarine evidently imagined that the trawler was approaching out of sheer curiosity, or that, seeing the barque hove-to, her master thought that the skipper of the British craft wished to communicate with the shore. Lying snugly under the port quarter of the barque, the submarine was now invisible from the trawler's deck, while the crew of the captured vessel were ordered not to give the alarm under penalty of death.

Meanwhile, the "Myrtle" and "Cinema," having crossed the barque's track, were able from a convenient distance to see what was going on.

The pirates made their captives work with the utmost dispatch, and in a very short time almost all of the barque's cargo and stores that they were in need of was transported to the submarine and stowed below.

This done, the captain was ordered to surrender his papers, but the stubborn old salt declared that he had heaved them overboard before capture. As a matter of fact they were slipped into the lining at the back of his coat. This act of non-compliance aroused the German captain's anger. Ordering the boats back to the barque, he told the skipper and crew that they had five minutes to clear out. At the expiration of that time limit, he would sink the vessel by gun-fire.

Directly the British officers on the "Myrtle" and "Cinema" saw that there were no longer any of the crew of the barque on or alongside the submarine a signal was sent to the "Asphodel." Instantly the ketch luffed up, ran under the barque's stern and came in sight, and within eighty or a hundred yards of the submarine, the crew of which were standing by their quick-firers, ready to hull and sink the prize.

"Heave-to, 'Asphodel'!" shouted the German captain in good English, as he read the name of the apparently unsuspecting trawler that had blundered right into his clutches. "Heave-to, or we'll sink you without mercy."

"Let them have it!" shouted Terence. He had no scruples now. It was a fair fight between a modern submarine, with her guns ready for action, and a trawler manned by a trained Navy crew.

Like a sheet of tissue paper caught in a furious wind the tarpaulin concealing the gun was whipped off; cool and collected the highly-trained gun-layer lingered a fraction of a second over the sights, then—*crash!*

Almost before the recoil of the weapon had been taken up by the hydraulic mountings the breech-block flew open with a clang and a fresh cartridge was inserted.

One round was enough.

The shell, fired at almost point-blank range, had penetrated the conning-tower, killing the captain and ripping the steel plating like cardboard. More, the fragments of the exploded missile had put out of action all the crew of the fore quick-firer.

Terrified by the appalling concussion the engine-room ratings of the submarine abandoned their posts at the motor and ran on deck, while the after-gun's-crew, realizing that they were trapped, made no attempt to use their piece, especially as they were covered by the formidable 4-inch on the "Asphodel's" deck.

With their hands held high above their heads the pirates raised a monotonous shout of "Mercy, Englishmen!"

The submarine was done for. With the conning-tower shattered she could not dive; apart from the abandonment of the motors, she could not seek safety in flight, for even if running on the surface she would quickly be swamped by the seas pouring over her low freeboard.

"Mercy, Englishmen! Mercy!"

The cry was repeated over and over again. The recreant Teutons, taken red-handed, were firmly convinced that their captors intended putting them to death—the extreme penalty for their guilt.

Terence glanced in the direction of the two trawlers. They were approaching slowly, for the wind was still light. Before the arrival of his superior officer the sub. realized that the mischief he anticipated might be consummated.

"Where is your captain?" he shouted.

The babel ceased. One German, a petty officer, knew how to speak English after a fashion.

"He kapitan Schluk he dead," he replied.

"The senior officer, then?"

There was a movement on deck. Some of the men bawled down the hatchway. After some delay a fat, fair-haired sub-lieutenant appeared. Being unable to speak or understand English the new arrival made use of the petty officer as an interpreter.

"Do I understand that you surrender?" demanded Terence.

"Yes; if our lives are spared," answered the German officer through the medium of the interpreter.

"Very good; I accept your surrender on conditions," agreed Terence, speaking deliberately, and with a stern, menacing tone in his voice. "Your craft must be given up exactly in its present condition. If any attempt be made to open the valves no quarter will be given."

It went against his sense of honour to speak in this strain. He knew perfectly well that, happen what may, quarter would not be denied these modern pirates. But experience taught him that on more than one occasion a German submarine had surrendered to a British vessel, and as soon as the crew was safe, the ballast tanks would be deliberately flooded to let the boat sink for good and all, so that the secret of their construction should not be revealed to the hated English.

Consequently he was not surprised when the German officer, on hearing the conditions, made a gesture of defiance and disappeared below. Before many seconds had passed the crippled submarine began to sink deeper and deeper in the water. The survivors of her crew, now animated by the example of their young officer, lined up, bare-headed, and joining hands burst into the words of "Deutschland uber alles." One brawny, yellow-haired man produced a German ensign lashed to a boat-hook stave, and held it defiantly aloft. It was perhaps fortunate that they did not attempt to use the still intact quick-firer, otherwise Terence might have been compelled to put his empty threat into execution.

The end was not long in coming. The slight reserve of buoyancy of the submarine was quickly destroyed by the inrush of water, both through the valves and through the huge rent in the base of the conning-tower.

The water mounted to the knees of the double line of men. Still singing they looked death in the face. Then with a sudden lurch that threw the ranks into complete disorder, the submarine plunged. "Deutschland uber alles" trailed away into a grim silence, broken by the rush of water and the hiss of escaping air.

The next instant the submarine was lost to sight, taking with her the resolute sub-lieutenant, whose devotion to the Kaiser had out-weighed his conscience in the matter of the utter disregard of international law.

There was still life to be saved. More than a score of the German crew were swimming strongly.

"Out with the boats!" shouted the master of the "Asphodel."

A dozen willing hands helped to launch the hefty boat which was stowed bottom upwards on the trawler's deck. With a loud splash she was thrust overboard and volunteers hastily tumbled into her. Already the boats of the barque were heading towards the spot marked by bobbing heads of the swimmers. The seamen knew that, but for a fortunate change of circumstances they might be swimming for dear life and jeered at by the crew of the submarine into the bargain but petty spite and recriminations are not to be found in the creed of true British seamen.

Long before the "Myrtle" and "Cinema" came up, every one of the swimmers had been rescued, and since the crew of the barque dumped their living cargoes into the "Asphodel," the latter's decks were packed with humanity. Round every half-drowned German a dozen British tars, all more or less sympathetic, were gathered, doing their utmost to assist their foes.

"Smart shot, Mr. Aubyn," sang out the captain of the "Livingstone," as his temporary command shot up into the wind within easy hailing distance. "Your gun-layer took good care not to let us

have a finger in the pie."

"We acted under your orders, sir," replied Terence.

"You did," admitted the captain, with a hearty laugh. "You did, but you might have given the others a chip in. They hardly—why, what's that?"

He broke off suddenly at the sound of a terrific cheer. The barque had now gathered way. Her sails had been sheeted home. The weather shrouds were black with men who were cheering the three trawlers with all the force of their lungs, while aft stood the old skipper, waving his cap with the vivacity of a schoolboy.

Considering the unusual means whereby the German submarine had been destroyed, the necessity of keeping the incident a secret, until the Press Bureau thought fit to dole out another morsel of information, was most desirable. There was also another reason. The enemy must not know of the actual circumstances, otherwise the submarines still at large would take steps to prevent a similar surprise.

So the crews, both temporary and permanent, of the three trawlers were mustered and sworn to secrecy, their respective naval officers impressing upon the Brixham men the fact that, being an Admiralty chartered vessel (this was a piece of pure bluff) they were liable to the pains and penalties of the Naval Discipline Act, the Official Secrets Act, and a dozen other statutes passed for the safety, honour, and welfare of the King's dominions.

The next question was how to dispose of the prisoners. Gilroy proposed delaying the arrival of the trawlers till after dusk and then setting the Germans ashore under an armed guard at a remote and unfrequented cove in the vicinity of Dartmouth; but the captain overruled.

While the council of war was in progress the destroyer "Radimus," returning on her patrol work, came in sight. In answer to a signal hoisted on the "Myrtle" the destroyer altered helm and ran down to investigate.

Her officers and crew were good sportsmen all. Although chagrined to find that the German submarine had been sunk almost under their noses, and by three sailing trawlers, a type that the Admiralty persistently deprecated as being of no service in the war, they tendered their congratulations, in the spontaneous British way, by giving three rousing cheers.

To the "Radimus" the prisoners were transferred, while the captain of the "Livingstone," having drafted a report, requested the officer commanding the destroyer to forward it with all dispatch, and at the same time to send a wireless to the Admiralty announcing the bald fact that another modern pirate had been sent to its last account.

Gilroy and Terence then boarded the trawler under the command of the "Livingstone's" skipper. The latter, in spite of the success of his ruse, looked somewhat anxious. He was not quite certain what My Lords would think of the unofficial commissioning of the trawlers, and he expressed his fears to his subordinates.

"Never fear, sir," remarked the lieutenant. "We'll stand by you."

"That you will not," replied the captain. "It's my pigeon. I take the responsibility; you are under my orders."

"I don't suppose there'll be any fuss up topsides, sir," reiterated Gilroy.

"H'm! Don't know so much about that. We've attacked a hostile craft without displaying our colours: that's against the King's regulations——"

"But we've sent a far worse transgressor to the bottom, sir," interrupted Gilroy. "After all, that's the main thing."

"I suppose so," admitted his superior. "And we've done all we can to impress upon the men the urgency of official reticence and reserve."

So it happened that just before four in the afternoon the three trawlers entered Brixham Harbour, and, amidst the wild and erroneous conjectures of the inhabitants of that little Devonshire town, the naval men landed and went aboard the "Livingstone," whose engine-room staff had kept steam raised during the absence of their comrades.

Half an hour later the destroyer put to sea to resume her interrupted patrol duties.

But, somewhat unfortunately, the carefully laid plans of the skipper of the "Livingstone" went awry. The third hand of the "Myrtle" had a wife. The wife was an excellent cook and studied her man's weakness for the fleshpots of Glorious Devon. Moreover, she had a small cask of prime cider in her cottage, and Dick Ottery, the third hand, was very partial to the juice of the apple. Mrs. Ottery had a knack of extracting information from her spouse, and curiosity prompted her to question him as he fed and drank. Before the delayed meal was over, Mrs. Ottery knew as much as her husband.

At Brixham, like many other British towns, men had gone either to the Front or else to adventure themselves on the High Seas; and a committee of well-meaning ladies had volunteered to do this, that, and the other for the wives of the absent warriors.

That same evening one of the committee paid a visit to Ottery's cottage, where his sister-in-law lived since the day when her husband shouldered his kit-bag and went to report himself at Devonport as a Naval Reservist.

Mrs. Ottery, unable to keep the startling news of the sinking of the German submarine, told full details and embellished them with highly imaginative extras to the lady visitor. "Of course," she added, "it be quite a secret, my man du say."

Half an hour later the committee heard the news, also in strict confidence, with the result that when the "Livingstone" put into Portland to replenish her stock of oil-fuel the news of the exploit preceded her.

Magnified out of all proportion by the little additions it had gained in being passed from mouth to mouth, the latest version was to the effect that "the crew of H.M.T.B.D. 'Livingstone,' having been compelled to take to their boats owing to their vessel being torpedoed, were rescued by a Brixham trawler. They thereupon rammed three German submarines, sinking them with all hands."

"Absolutely without foundation," was the Press Bureau's comment, but people in the know winked solemnly. It was significant that the captain of the "Livingstone" was appointed to the command of a light-cruiser; that Lieutenant Gilroy was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-commander, and that Sub-Lieutenant Terence Aubyn, N.R., blossomed out into a lieutenant.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE STRUGGLE IN THE CUTTING.

POSSIBLY no one was more astonished than Terence to find himself a full-blown lieutenant. Yet it was a fact and a pleasant surprise, especially when he had misgivings as to the unorthodox method of destroying the hostile submarine.

Promotion, he knew, meant an appointment to another ship. That was the fly in the ointment, for in spite of certain discomforts that life on a destroyer brings in its train, he had become thoroughly attached to the "Livingstone."

He had hopes that his old skipper, Captain Holloway, late of the "Terrier," might use his influence in getting him appointed to the "Bombard"—a modern light-cruiser which Captain Holloway had recently commissioned, and which, according to well-founded rumours, was to proceed to the Mediterranean to take part in the operations against the Dardanelles.

It was therefore with mixed feelings that Terence found himself appointed to his old ship, the armed merchantman "Strongbow," which, having completed her extensive repairs and refit at Aberdeen, was to be recommissioned, as far as practicable, with her former officers and crew.

The newly-appointed lieutenant was sorry, since it meant being relegated to the somewhat monotonous, although necessary task of patrolling, instead of having a chance to smell powder on one of the fighting ships. Unless an unforeseen incident occurred, the possibilities of quitting the patrol service seemed very remote. The number of hostile mines in the North Sea had been steadily reduced by systematic sweeping while the German pirate submarines seemed to give the northern area of the North Sea a wide berth—possibly owing to the fact that there was more scope for the despicable energies in the Channel and in the vicinity of the great mercantile ports. Thus the element of risk that prevailed in the earlier stages of the war had been considerably diminished; henceforth, according to Aubyn's opinion, patrol work would be one long round of cruising, examining neutral vessels, and, perhaps, making a few isolated captures of ships carrying suspected contraband.

Yet it was his duty, and he accepted it in the spirit of a true British seaman: he had to obey orders even if they entailed work of a cheerless and uneventful character.

On the other hand, Terence was pleased at the thought of having to meet his former comrades. Nor would the severe climatic conditions be so intense. The days were longer and the nights correspondingly shorter, and although the temperature was low and the Equinoctial gales about due, the fact that spring was rapidly approaching was in itself sufficient compensation for the passing rigours of patrol work in the North Sea.

The lieutenant had two clear days before rejoining the "Strongbow," which had left Aberdeen and put into Leith to replenish magazines and bunkers. Owing to the dislocation of the train service through the moving of large numbers of troops from the North to Salisbury Plain, Terence knew that it would be unwise to delay his journey. He therefore decided to proceed straight to Edinburgh, put up for the night, and go on to Leith on the following morning.

Arriving in London he seized the chance of visiting a theatre in company with some friends, knowing that it might be months before a similar opportunity occurred again; then, having had supper, he caught the night mail train to the north.

There were comparatively few passengers. The lieutenant, finding that he had a first-class carriage to himself, thought it best to spend the tedious journey by snatching a few hours' sleep.

Accustomed to slumber under awkward conditions he was soon lost in oblivion. How long he slept he had no idea. Suddenly he was awakened by the hurried application of the brakes. The train slowed down so quickly that the alteration of momentum wellnigh threw him off the seat. He glanced at his watch. It was ten minutes past two. Under ordinary circumstances the journey was a non-stop one, the mails being dropped or taken up by means of nets while the train was in motion.

Curiosity prompted Terence to open the window and look out. It was a pitch dark night. Rain was falling in a steady drizzle. The lamps in the carriages had been screened by drawing the blinds, as a precaution against hostile air-raids, but in many cases the passengers had rushed to the windows. Thus the glare of the lamps showed the lieutenant that the train had come to a standstill in a rocky cutting.

"Rotten night," commented Aubyn to himself.

He looked along the line. The signals were not set at danger, for a hundred yards ahead of the engine a bright green light gleamed through the mirk.

"What's up, guard?" asked Terence, as that official, followed by two or three passengers, walked briskly along the permanent way. Already he had gone to the front part of the train to confer with the driver, and was now on his way back.

"Man killed or something," replied the guard vaguely. "A soldier stopped the train—one of them chaps guarding the tunnel. You're not a doctor, by any chance, sir? We had half a dozen ships' doctors in the train last night."

"I am not," replied Terence. "But I'll go with you, in case I can be of any use."

Buttoning his great-coat up to his chin and pulling the peak of his cap well over his eyes, the lieutenant descended and joined the little band of volunteer helpers.

The rear end of the train was only just clear of the tunnel, so promptly had the driver brought the engine to a standstill. Lying by the side of the rail was a motionless figure in khaki, while standing by him and still grasping his rifle and bayonet was another soldier.

"No doctor, my man," declared the guard. "I've inquired of every carriage. How did it happen? We didn't run over your mate, did we?"

"No," replied the Tommy, an elderly National Reservist. He was shaking like a leaf. "No, it was that goods train. Cut his foot off as clean as a bloomin' whistle. But that ain't the point. Poor old Bill was put across the metals, only the bloke didn't do the job properly."

"What?" exclaimed the guard incredulously.

"Truth—honest truth—an' my eyesight ain't at fault, even though it's a beastly dark night. Bill was standin' easy over there. I was about here. S'elp me, as true as I'm a-standin' here, I saw a bloke spring upon my chum and push him across the line. Afore I could up with my rifle the train comes tearing along. When it had gone it was too late. The bloke had done a bunk. And," he added reminiscently, "Bill was a right good sort. Never had a grudge against nobody, so it licks me why the fellow wanted to out him."

Meanwhile, Terence had been paying attention to the unfortunate sentry. The man was dead. His left foot had been severed at the ankle. That in itself would hardly be sufficient to cause death.

"Turn your light this way, guard," said Aubyn, as he began to unbuckle the man's ammunition pouches and to unbutton his coat. A thin streak of blood upon the victim's shirt told its own tale. He had been shot—evidently by a small yet powerful pistol at close range, for the great-coat and buff straps were pitted with the grains of powder.

"Did you hear a shot fired?" demanded Terence.

"No, sir," replied the Tommy. The suggestion of a shot being fired aroused a new train of ideas in his mind. "No, sir; see, his rifle hasn't been discharged."

"I mean, did you hear a shot being fired at him?"

The sentry shook his head.

"The man's been murdered by a pistol shot, right enough," declared Terence. "Either the noise of the train deadened the report, or else the murderer muffled the weapon in a cloth. The best

thing you can do, guard, is to take the poor fellow's body on to the next station."

"An my relief ain't due for another hour and a quarter!" gasped the remaining sentry. He had been completely unnerved at the sight of his chum being foully done to death.

"All right, my man," said Terence, "I'll stop with you. I suppose I can get to Edinburgh by another train, guard?"

"Yes, sir," replied that official. "Next station's only a matter of three or four miles. But you won't be lonely. There's half a dozen troop trains on the up-line within the next three hours. I'll take the corpse, sir, if these gents'll bear a hand. 'Tain't the first poor chap that's been done in like this: not by a long way. Good-night, sir, and good luck."

Presently the mail train resumed its journey. The sentry, nervously fingering his rifle, seemed grateful to the young officer, but at the same time he regarded him with a certain amount of suspicion. Perhaps his naval uniform was a disguise. He might be an accomplice of the man who had murdered his chum. Troop trains? That started a fresh chain of surmises. This dastardly act might be that of a spy, intent upon damaging the tunnel and wrecking the crowded trains.

"Look here, my man," said the lieutenant, "are you game to going and standing where your chum was posted?"

"What for, sir?" asked the soldier, with obvious reluctance at the suggestion.

"Oh, never mind. I'll go. You remain here. If you see or hear anything suspicious, don't hesitate —shoot. You're a fairly good shot, I hope?"

"Don't know about that, sir; I feel all of a tremble."

"Then fire anywhere, as long as you don't wing me. I want you to prop yourself between these two rocks and keep as quiet as you possibly can. Don't let yourself be seen. I'll take your chum's rifle. If you hear me fire, hop across the line as sharp as you can, with your bayonet at the charge. Buck up, man, and keep your nerves."

Having seen the sentry take up the position indicated—in a niche formed by two large boulders in the side of the cutting—Terence secured the rifle and bayonet of the dead man. The rifle was a magazineless '303, with Martini action, similar to those issued to troops engaged in home defence.

Donning the pouches of the unfortunate sentry, the lieutenant took out a cartridge, inserted it into the breech and closed the breech-block. Then, having ascertained by touch that the back-sight was down, he crossed the line and commenced to walk the murdered sentry's beat.

In the darkness his naval cap and great-coat were not to be distinguished from those of the man he was impersonating. He felt certain that should the crime have been committed by a German agent, the reason was the destruction of the tunnel. When the mail train stopped, the miscreant would certainly betake himself to a safe distance; but with his work uncompleted, he would almost certainly return. He had marked the time when the two sentries were posted he knew when their reliefs were expected. Before that time he must render the second sentry incapable of raising an alarm and then proceed with the blocking of the line.

In his operations the spy had made one serious blunder. He had shot the sentry, as had been surmised, and had thrown his body on the line in front of the goods train, so that it would be taken for granted that the luckless man had been knocked down while incautiously walking his beat. But instead of the train mangling the victim's body and thus destroying all traces of the fatal shot, the wheels had only severed one of the unfortunate man's feet.

For half an hour Terence maintained his sentry-go. The rain was now falling heavily. His great-coat felt as weighty as lead. The moisture dropped from the peak of his cap and filled the palm of his left hand as he held the butt of his rifle.

The sub.'s nerves were in splendid condition. The hand that held the rifle was as steady as a rock. With eyes and ears strained he paced to and fro, prepared at the least sound to face about, bring his rifle to the ready and fire.

From a strategic point of view his position was an unsound one. By the remaining sentry's description the miscreant must have retired from the scene of action not by running into the tunnel but by scaling the fairly accessible wall of rock. Consequently the anticipated attack would be from that direction, and Terence was liable to be fired at from a height of from ten to fifty feet above his head.

Presently a dull but increasing rumble greeted his ears. It was a local down-train, which had just entered the far end of the tunnel. Instead of grounding the butt of his rifle and facing the line, as he had seen other sentries do, the lieutenant marched to the mouth of the tunnel; then, leaning his shoulder hard against the massive stone buttress, waited for the train to pass.

A vivid flame spurted from the opposite side of the cutting, followed practically simultaneously

by a sharp report that outvoiced the roar of the train. The sentry, without waiting to challenge, had "let rip."

Bringing his rifle to the ready, Terence waited. He had not long to wait. Silhouetted against the gloomy rain-laden sky—for by this time Terence's eyes were used to the darkness—appeared the head, arms and shoulders of a man. In his right hand he held an automatic pistol, and was now blazing away indiscriminately, judging by the splash of flame that stabbed the night in varying directions. He seemed to be leaning over a rock in the side of the cutting with the intention, now that he had been fired upon, to get at close quarters with the sentry.

Bringing his rifle to his shoulder Terence aimed low and pressed the trigger. The fellow gave no convulsive spring; he merely toppled over and fell on the permanent way just as the train emerged, with a rush and a roar and a dense cloud of steam, from the tunnel.

Jerking the lever of his breech-block, the lieutenant inserted a fresh cartridge. He still kept close to the buttress, even after the train had passed. Experience had taught him the necessity for caution in dealing with a wily foe. Not that he feared anything from the man who had been shot. His headlong tumble down the almost precipitous side of the cutting was too realistic for a person shamming death.

The soldier, emerging from his shelter, began to cross the line. Before he was half-way across, another shot rang out from the top of the cutting. The Tommy collapsed in a heap.

Terence let him lie. His whole attention was centred upon the spot from whence the last bullet had sped. With his rifle ready to be lifted to his shoulder, Aubyn waited like a hunter stalking his prey.

He knew that he would not have to wait long. A desperate attempt was being made to destroy the tunnel—an attempt in which the lives of two or more men mattered but little provided success attended the miscreants' efforts. The firer of the last shot, he reasoned, imagined that with the murder of the first sentry, he had only one man to deal with, and now he was lying motionless on the ballast. Thinking that "the coast was clear" the desperado would presently show himself.

A hunched-up shape appeared at the top of the embankment. Some one was descending with his face towards the rock. He was progressing slowly and cautiously, making certain that he had obtained a firm foothold before he groped for a lower one. Every now and then he would turn his head and look towards the doubled-up body of the sentry, till, satisfied that there was no danger in that direction, he gave his whole attention to his descent.

Levelling his rifle, Terence took deliberate aim. He had no qualms in so doing. The fellow was a murderer and train-wrecker, and undoubtedly an agent of the German Government. The lieutenant was alone and unsupported. If he should be "done in" there would be no further obstacle between the miscreant and the success of his diabolical scheme. Besides, there might be more than two men engaged in the enterprise, which, if it matured, might mean the death of perhaps hundreds of human beings.

Terence aimed fairly in the centre of the climber's back. It afforded the best target in the darkness.

With no more compunction than if he were shooting a rat, the lieutenant pressed the trigger.

The report of the rifle was outvoiced by a loud detonation, accompanied by a vivid flash. For one moment Terence stood stock still, his eyes temporarily blinded by the sudden glare. Then he realized that his cap had gone. His face was wet, not with the chilly rain but with a warm moisture. Something had struck him on the cheek, inflicting a small cut from which the blood flowed freely.

"A pretty rumpus!" he soliloquized. "The rotter has plugged me—no, it can't be that. It's only a slight gash. I wonder if he hurled a bomb."

"Blowed to atoms, sir; that's what's happened to him—the blighter!" exclaimed a voice that seemed to come from the ground.

"I thought you were a dead man, by Jove!" exclaimed Terence bluntly, as he recognized the sentry by his voice.

"Not yet, sir," replied the man. "He put a bullet through my leg—just above the knee. It don't hurt much, but it kippered me, so I thought I'd lie low and see what happened. I'd a cartridge ready, though, in case of an accident."

"We ought to stop the next train," said Terence, as he stooped to recover his cap. "The rail might be damaged. I think that fellow had a few detonators on him, and my shot did the trick. How did you stop the train I was in?"

"Had a lantern, sir. It's somewhere along the line. But our chaps must have heard the racket, an the sergeant'll be coming along in half a tick."

"Wind the wrong way," declared Terence laconically. "I'll bandage that leg of yours and then I'll get the lantern."

The miscreant's bullet—from a small calibre high velocity pistol—had passed completely through the soldier's leg, fortunately without severing any arteries. Having attended to the wound and bidden the man sit down by the side of the bank, Aubyn set out on his search.

It was a fruitless quest. Other means had to be found to bring the troop train to a standstill.

"There's a signal a couple of hundred yards down the line, sir," announced the sentry. "It's worked from a box a long way off. Maybe, sir, you can climb up and tie this red handkerchief of mine over the green light."

Terence took the handkerchief. He knew that the plan was a useless one, since the result would be a semi-opaque gleam, as the red would neutralize the green. But the red cloth might come in handy. The matter was urgent, for the train was about due.

As he passed along the up-line his progress was checked by an enormous boulder that, dislodged by the explosion, had fallen on the permanent way and across one of the metals. Its weight was far beyond his strength to move.

Skirting the obstruction the lieutenant broke into a run, keeping up a hot pace till he reached the foot of the signal post. Already the red disc had changed to green, showing that, to the signalman's belief, the line was clear.

Terence knew that if the operating rod could be severed the signal arm would, by reason of a weighted lever, rise to the "stop" position. He tugged savagely at it, but without success. A spanner might have saved the situation, but he was without such an article.

Suddenly an idea flashed through his mind. Ascending the swaying ladder, he gained the platform just below the arm. Here he could reach the discs with comparative ease.

"Wind's right direction," he muttered. "Can't blow the light out very well, so here goes."

Unlacing and pulling off his boot, Terence made a determined onslaught upon the thick green glass. It stoutly resisted several blows, cracking at the sixth and shivering out of its frame at the two next. As the lieutenant had foreseen the now open space was away from the wind, and beyond a slight unsteadiness the lamp burned well.

Knotting the red handkerchief across the open disc, Terence descended to take a more remote view of his handiwork. The red light shone sufficiently bright to be observed at a considerable distance, but as a matter of precaution he held his rifle ready to fire into the air to attract the attention of the driver of the on-coming troop train.

"Here she comes," exclaimed Terence, as a dull rumble could be heard in the distance. Presently a cloud of flame-tinged smoke announced that the engine had rounded the curve.

Terence raised his rifle, but there was no need to fire. With a loud grinding of brakes, accompanied by showers of sparks, the train drew up, the engine coming to a standstill within eighty yards of the signal post.

"What's up now, mate?" demanded the engine-driver, as, leaning over the side of the "cab" he saw what he imagined to be one of the soldiers whom he knew to be stationed on either side of the tunnel.

"Line blocked," replied Terence. "And what's more, two men killed and another injured."

Leaving the driver to act for himself, Terence passed along the row of stationary carriages, filled with troops, who, for the most part, were singing uproariously. A few were looking out of the windows, but the pulling up of the train had aroused but little curiosity. They were already too used to being held up on sidings, even in the course of a comparatively short journey.

At the first first-class carriage he came to, Terence clambered on to the foot-board and opened the door. Within were a couple of majors, a captain and a lieutenant enjoying a hand of cards. Briefly Aubyn told them of what had occurred, and suggested that an investigation should be made of the victims while the line was being cleared.

"Good idea, by Jove!" exclaimed the senior field-officer.

Alighting, he blew a whistle. The uproar ceased as if by magic, and the men began to descend from the train. For the most part they imagined that a Zeppelin had been sighted. They treated the possibility almost with indifference, but their interest was quickly excited when they learned that an attempt had been made to derail or blow up the train.

Accompanied by several of the officers, and escorted by the driver and the guard of the train and a score of soldiers, Terence led the way. The obstruction had, fortunately, not fractured either the rail or the chairs. By the aid of plenty of willing helpers, the rock was levered back into a shallow ditch at the foot of the cutting. Then there was just room for the train to pass, for the

stone was nearly ten feet in circumference.

"Here's the sentry," announced Terence, indicating the wounded soldier.

A number of men carried the luckless Tommy into one of the carriages, where he was promptly attended to by a captain of the R.A.M.C., while it was decided to detail two of the men from the troop train to mount guard until the proper reliefs arrived. Meanwhile, the wounded man could be taken to the nearest station, close to which was a hospital where he could be well looked after.

By this time there was light in plenty. Terence had no idea that a train carried so many lamps.

The next task was to look for the bodies of the two miscreants. That of the first was discovered in a ditch. He had been shot through the forehead and through the body, either wound being sufficient to cause death.

The explanation was simple: one of the wounds had been caused by the bullet from the sentry's rifle. The victim in his death agonies had convulsively gripped the trigger of his automatic pistol, and thus had caused the fusillade Terence had seen and heard. When he fired, the lieutenant's bullet had also struck the fellow, but by that time he was already a corpse.

A further search revealed a considerable cavity blown into the side of the embankment. The rocks around were scorched by the heat of the explosion, which had horribly mangled the corpse of the second conspirator, although strangely enough his features were hardly injured.

A light was flashed upon his face. Terence recognized it instantly. It was that of Major von Eckenhardt, master-spy and desperate plotter.

The rascal had met with his deserts. After his escape from Edinburgh Castle he had, according to his usual practice, laid low for a time. Then, owing to the adroit manner in which the authorities had made use of his secret wireless installation, the German Admiralty found itself landed into a very awkward situation on more than one occasion. It was not until von Eckenhardt contrived to send a secret message to his employers, explaining the reason for his failure, that the German authorities realized that they had been tricked. In reply came a message savouring of a reprimand. Von Eckenhardt ought, it said, to have taken greater precautions to prevent such eventualities. Finally the message hinted pretty broadly that an act of signal service to the Fatherland would alone atone for the blunders that the spy had made.

Von Eckenhardt was desperate. He knew that the German Secret Service had no mercy for its servants who had failed. Indeed, he wondered why he had been given another chance. By the implied tone of the communication he realized that he had to undertake a "forlorn hope." If successful, then, perhaps, he might be reinstated into favour; otherwise it would be preferable to die rather than face the penalty for failure.

Hitherto, he had been more or less a director of the spy system. With the exception, perhaps, of the part he played in attempting to wreck the "Saraband," he had kept aloof from the actual espionage work. Now, he decided he must employ his energies in a direct attack upon the resources of the British Empire.

The news of forthcoming movements on a large scale of troops from the North of England and Salisbury Plain suggested the great possibility of a striking example of German "frightfulness." He knew that the bridges and tunnels would be slenderly guarded, for the precautions adopted by the British Government at the commencement of hostilities had slackened.

Accordingly, accompanied by an accomplice who had acted the part of servant at Tuilabrail Hall, he motored to a town within a few miles of the tunnel he had selected for his nefarious designs. It was a simple matter to bluff the proprietor of their hotel, while to excuse their late hours, von Eckenhardt resolved to send a wire from a place twenty miles distant, announcing the breakdown of the car. Then, returning to within half a mile of the tunnel, the two miscreants left the car in a field and walked stealthily towards the scene of their proposed operations.

"Time I was out of this," thought Terence. He had no desire to be dragged into a long-winded coroner's inquest and the subsequent official inquiries. His evidence would not alter matters in the faintest degree. Von Eckenhardt would be identified without his help, and publicity he shrank from.

No one attempted to question the lieutenant as to his name. In the excitement such a procedure never entered the heads of the military authorities. So, without attracting the least attention, Terence walked quietly away, scaled the embankment, crossed a couple of ploughed fields and struck a roadway.

It was growing light as he entered the town. At a drinking fountain he washed the dried blood from his face, and having brushed the mud from his uniform, made his way to the railway station.

Here, exciting little attention, he obtained a ticket to York; had breakfast at the station, and boarded the next express to Edinburgh. For the time being, at least, he had evaded the consequences of having performed another duty for King and country.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE "STRONGBOW'S" PRIZE.

BEFORE eight on the following morning Terence rejoined the "Strongbow." The heartiness of his welcome almost banished the sense of disappointment he felt at having to serve on patrol duty instead of in a sphere of belligerent activity.

Captain Ripponden honoured him by requesting his company at breakfast; Commander Ramshaw was enthusiastic at seeing his former fourth officer again; even the somewhat taciturn Lymore smiled grimly as he shook Aubyn's hand; while Chief-Engineer McBride delivered such a welcome in the broadest Scotch that he was seized with a fit of violent coughing that did not subside till he rushed to his cabin and drained a stiff glass of "Hie'land Dew."

Kenneth Raeburn, who happened to be on watch in the engine-room on Terence's arrival, quickly sought out his chum as soon as he was off duty.

"I hear you've been having a high old time," he exclaimed boisterously. "You always were a lucky chap, old man. Let's hear all about it."

"I'll begin stern-foremost," began Terence, and to Raeburn's astonishment he related the circumstances that culminated in the death of Karl von Eckenhardt.

"By Jove, old man, you'll be lionized over this business!—saving a troop train and settling that bounder."

"I think not," rejoined Terence. "Fact is, I slipped away while they were all busy with the investigations. Didn't want to be detained over a rotten inquest. Don't believe in them myself."

"Neither do I," asserted Raeburn. "I had to attend one once, and the whole thing struck me as an utter farce, beginning with the false evidence of the village bobby and finishing up with the doctor's report. I know for a fact that when he examined the body he was as drunk as a fiddler. But is there anything in the papers?"

"Can't tell," replied Terence. "The bumboat hasn't come alongside yet. Anyway, I don't want you to say a word to anybody about the business; I want to be afloat. Any idea of the programme?"

"Same old game," said Kenneth, with a grin. "Between the south of Iceland and the Faroe Islands. Hullo, here's the bumboat! Now for a paper."

The "Strongbow" was lying about a mile from the West Pier of the port of Leith in company with half a dozen Admiralty craft of various sizes. Communication with the shore was maintained by means of frequent picquet boats, while tradesmen were allowed to supply luxuries to the ships by means of sailing craft known from time immemorial as bumboats.

Terence showed no hurry in securing his copy of the paper, but his interest was none the less acute. Having received one he retired to the seclusion of the deserted smoking-room and opened the damp sheets.

Quickly he scanned the news columns. Nothing escaped him, but there was no mention of the attempted outrage on the troop train. For good reasons, mainly to avoid creating any alarm on the part of the public and partly to conceal the fact from the German authorities that their master-spy had paid the penalty for his activities, the news had been completely suppressed by the Censor, although already eight-hundred soldiers were spreading the report amongst their comrades on Salisbury Plain.

Terence gave vent to a chuckle of satisfaction. Nevertheless, he kept an anxious eye on the boats putting off to the ship, in case one of them contained a messenger bearing a demand for the lieutenant to report himself to the civil authorities. Nor did his uneasiness subside until the "Strongbow" weighed and proceeded towards her station.

For weeks she cruised, save for the short visits she was compelled to pay when requiring coal and provisions. Yet nothing occurred to mar the uneventfulness of that lone patrol.

The principal topic on board was now the question of the Dardanelles operations, of which reports were received by wireless.

Amongst the officers there were two distinct parties in the matter of opinion. One, headed by Commander Ramshaw, expressed the belief in the success of the attempt to force the supposedly impregnable waterway. The other, though smaller, was represented by Lieutenant Lymore, who pessimistically regarded the operations as hopeless.

"It's not the Turkish guns," he declared. "It's that rotten current setting down from the Marmora. I've been there, and I know what it's like. The Turks will be chucking cartloads of

mines overboard, and there'll be no end of a mess up."

The very next morning came the news of the totally unexpected appearance of the Super-Dreadnought "Queen Elizabeth." Ramshaw was so elated that he upset a cup of coffee over the ward-room tablecloth, and cheerfully paid up the sixpence demanded by McQuid, the assistant paymaster, who in his capacity of member of the Mess Committee was as sharp as needles in mulcting a delinquent.

"That's the way," declared the commander. "Taking those forts in the rear. They'll be through within a week."

A week passed, and still no news of the successful forcing of the Dardanelles. Then came the disquieting tidings of the sinking of the "Ocean," "Irresistible," and "Bouvet" and the disablement of the "Gaulois."

"Just what I said!" declared Lymore. "It's those beastly mines. Now, if I had a prominent voice ——"

"You have, old man!" exclaimed the assistant paymaster.

Lymore glared at the interrupter.

"I'd chuck the idea of pushing up through the Narrows."

"A pretty figure you'd cut," remarked McBride. "There's nae true Briton wha'd back down once he's taken on the wurrk."

"I didn't mean that, my dear sir," continued the lieutenant. "I'd devote my energies in another direction. There's the Peninsula of Saros, about five miles in width and about eighty feet in height."

"Well?" inquired the assistant paymaster.

"I'd land a strong force under cover of the warship guns, whip together a regular army of navvies and all the steam navvies I could lay my hands on. In six weeks, and at a cost of less than that of the battleships we've already lost, there would be a canal twelve feet in depth from the Gulf of Saros to the Sea of Marmora. And, remember, both seas are practically tideless."

"Sounds feasible, laddie," remarked McBride.

"And then it would be a simple matter to send out the monitors. With their draught of seven feet they could easily pass through, as well as our earlier type of destroyers. Without paying the faintest attention to the Dardanelles forts the monitors could strike hard at Constantinople."

"Lymore, you ought to be on the Board of Admiralty," said Commander Ramshaw gravely.

"Instead of which I'm only a Reserve officer on the armed merchantman 'Strongbow'," added Lymore, with a grim smile.

At that moment came a knock at the wardroom door, and a messenger announced that an accident had occurred in the engine-room.

McBride was on his feet in an instant. The thought of anything happening to his beloved engines acted like a red rag to a bull.

All the executive officers not actually on duty gathered round the engine-room hatchway, from which clouds of steam were issuing. It was as far as they dared go towards setting foot in McBride's domain.

After ten minutes' wait, two stokers were sent on deck, both suffering from severe scalds. These were followed by Kenneth Raeburn, whose right arm was swathed in cotton waste soaked with oil.

"Rotten luck, old man!" he exclaimed, with forced cheerfulness, as he caught sight of his chum, Terence. "It's not much as far as I am concerned; merely a slight burn."

Aubyn could see by the expression upon the assistant engineer's features that he was suffering acutely. He did not know at the time that in addition to being severely scalded by the bursting of a steam pipe, Raeburn's wrist had been broken in a gallant attempt to rescue the two stokers as they lay, overcome by the hot steam, upon the floor of the stokehold.

Terence accompanied his chum to the sick-bay, where the surgeon quickly made the discovery that the plucky officer had sustained injuries that would probably necessitate his being invalided out of the Service.

Kenneth read the doctor's fears as clearly as if he had been bluntly told the truth.

"Hard lines," he exclaimed. "Looks as if I'm to be chucked out of the old 'Strongbow'."

"Only for a time, I hope," rejoined the surgeon. "Now, keep as steady as you can. I may hurt you a bit."

Aubyn watched his chum's face as he proceeded to dress the doubly injured limb. Beads of perspiration stood out on the young assistant engineer's face, but not a sound escaped from his lips, but before the dressing was completed Kenneth fainted.

"He's real pluck," declared the surgeon. "I dare not give him an anaesthetic, and the fracture of the wrist, complicated by the burns, made it a fearfully painful business for him. It's as well he's unconscious."

"Will he be invalided?" asked Aubyn.

"I'm afraid so," replied the medico. "The effect of the burn upon the tendons will probably result in a permanent weakening of the muscular action of the hand. I may be wrong—I hope so; but time alone will tell."

For the next week Raeburn was confined to the sick-bay. At the end of that time he was able to get on deck, with his bandaged arm in a sling. The doctor suggested to Captain Ripponden the desirability of landing the patient at the first opportunity, and the captain concurred.

Two days later a sail was reported. Of late the "Strongbow" had not fallen in with any craft, either British or neutral, and the news was hailed with mild excitement. Anything to relieve the monotony of the daily routine was welcome.

As soon as the stranger sighted the British merchant-cruiser he turned tail and steamed as hard as he could. A thrill of expectancy took possession of the "Strongbow's" crew. They were out to chase something, and the mere fact that the unknown vessel had shown her heels went to prove that she was a of suspicious character.

Calling every ounce of steam, Captain Ripponden stood in pursuit. It was the first time in her existence as an armed merchant-cruiser that the "Strongbow" was called upon to engage in a chase. Hitherto every craft she had subjected to examination had submitted passively. Now she was having a run for her money. Her hull quivered under the rapid pulsations of her powerful engines. The grey paint on her funnel casings blistered and peeled in large flakes, while for miles astern the thick cloud of smoke gave some indication of the activities of the "black squad" as they piled shovelful after shovelful of coal into the furnaces.

Half an hour's chase showed that the "Strongbow" was overhauling her quarry. Twenty minutes later the merchant-cruiser dropped a plugged shell a hundred yards abeam of the fugitive. Even this was not sufficient to impress upon the stranger that the game was up, and it was not until the "Strongbow" planted another shot within fifty feet of the unknown vessel that she slowed down and hoisted Norwegian colours.

The craft proved to be the "Roldal," a passenger and cargo steamer, of Bergen; but the fact that she had attempted to escape was in itself significant.

"Boarding-party away."

Into the boat tumbled fifteen bluejackets. In command was Lieutenant Terence Aubyn.

"I protest against the outrage," exclaimed the Norwegian captain in good English, as the boat ran alongside the "Roldal," which was now hove-to within two cables' lengths of her successful pursuer. "This is a neutral ship."

"And carries twenty passengers—citizens of the Republic of the United States of America, sonny," added a man standing by the gangway, whose "twang" would in itself be a sufficient indication of his nationality.

"Sorry, captain," replied Terence, "but my duty compels me to board you."

"Then a curse upon your duty!" retorted the captain. "Your Government will regret this outrage."

"If you will kindly allow me to come on board," remarked the lieutenant courteously, according to his instructions, although he felt he would have given a month's pay to have spoken his mind, "I'll go through the formality of examining your papers, and if they are in order you will not be detained more than a few minutes."

After intentional delay a tarry rope-ladder was lowered. Terence could have insisted upon having the accommodation-ladder let down, but instead he swarmed up the swaying perpendicular means of access, and followed by six of his men gained the "Roldal's" deck.

Ignoring the studied rudeness of the passengers, one of whom loudly protested against the "darned interference of cocksure Britishers!" Terence requested the captain to produce the ship's papers.

Grudgingly these documents were handed over. The "Roldal" was a Norwegian-owned vessel,

bound from Boston, U.S.A., to Bergen. Her passenger list showed that there were nineteen American subjects and four Norwegian. Her cargo consisted of wheat and iron ware.

Glancing down the passenger list Terence saw the name "Octavius P. Rand, of Norfolk, Virginia." Going to the door of the cabin he requested the owner of the name to step forward.

There were looks of blank astonishment on the faces of eighteen of the American citizens. The nineteenth, the fellow who had protested so emphatically, began nudging a round-faced man in the group.

"You are Octavius P. Rand?" inquired the lieutenant, and receiving an affirmative reply, conveyed by means of a decided inclination of the head, he asked the man a few questions of various places in Norfolk—a town with which Terence happened to be fairly well acquainted. It was quickly apparent that the so-called Octavius had never set foot in that part of Virginia. By his Teutonic accent he was either a German or a German-American.

Of the others not one could speak English properly. They were eighteen Germans, domiciled in the United States, but on the way to the Fatherland to join the reserves. The nineteenth was a Yankee agent for a munition business in Hamburg.

A peculiar buzzing from the wireless-room of the "Roldal" told Terence that the operators were at work. Ordering two armed seamen to follow him, the lieutenant peremptorily told the wireless men to cease operations, and having placed sentries outside the door, he returned to his work of examination.

The Bills of Lading, Manifest, and Charter Party were palpable forgeries, while a survey of the hold showed that a quantity of the "iron ware" was copper ingots.

"You must consider your ship under arrest," declared Terence to the still aggressive skipper.

Without a word the captain flung himself into his cabin. He did not mind the ship being taken as a prize. His liberty would not be affected, since he was a Norwegian subject, while a substantial sum of money had already been paid to him by his employers, and the money had been sent by mailboat to his home. He had no interests at stake, but he was determined not to render his captors the slightest assistance in navigating the ship.

Leaving a strong armed party on board the prize, Terence returned to the "Strongbow" and made his report. On the strength of this Captain Ripponden had no hesitation in taking possession of the ship. A wireless was sent to the Admiral of the Armed Merchant Fleet announcing the capture, and proposing that the "Strongbow" should escort the "Roldal" into Cromarty Firth.

Promptly came the reply: "'Strongbow' not to escort prize. Send 'Roldal' into Cromarty Firth with a prize crew."

"Very good," commented Captain Ripponden when the message was delivered. "Mr. Aubyn, you will please take command of the prize, and upon arrival at Dingwall hand her over to the authorities for disposal. Then bring your men on to Leith. We will be putting in there for coal on the 26th, and you can rejoin the ship on that date."

The lieutenant saluted, and turned to go to his cabin and make brief but urgent preparations for his independent command.

"One moment, Mr. Aubyn."

Terence saluted and awaited the captain's pleasure.

"You may as well take Mr. Raeburn with you," continued Captain Ripponden. "Dr. Hardiman seems to think that the sooner he is ashore and able to obtain hospital treatment the better. Now, carry on, and good luck to you."

Ten minutes later Terence and Kenneth were ready to proceed to the prize. The assistant engineer, in spite of the fact that his right arm was still crippled and showed no immediate prospects of healing, was in the best of spirits and, unassisted, gained the stern-sheets of the boat amid a fire of farewell greetings from his brother-officers.

"Give way!" ordered Terence.

The men bent to their supple ash oars with a will, while the lieutenant steered towards the prize.

"What's up, old man?" he asked, suddenly noticing a perplexed look on Raeburn's face.

"Left my best pipe behind," was the dejected reply. "No, don't put back—'tis beastly unlucky."

He faced aft, then using his sound hand as a speaking trumpet he shouted to another assistant engineer.

"I say, Smithers, I've left a presentation pipe in my cabin. You might look to it, old man."

"Right-o!" was the reply. "I'll send it off as soon as we arrive at Leith. You can rely upon getting it by Monday morning. So don't get into a tear."

"If I don't, look out for squalls," retorted Kenneth.

Smithers shouted something in reply that was evidently intended to be facetious, but by this time the distance between the "Strongbow" and the receding boat was too great for the words to be understood.

"I'll never forgive old Hardiman for having me sent ashore," declared Raeburn. "It isn't as if I were properly crocked. I could do a trick in the engine-room even with a damaged hand. It's hard lines on Smithers and the others: they'll have to put in extra time."

Terence did not reply. He knew that it would be a long time—perhaps never—before Kenneth Raeburn would be on duty in the engine-room of a British warship, or even on a merchantman.

By the time the boat came alongside the "Roldal" those of the "Strongbow's" crew who had been left on board the prize had cleared away and lowered the accommodation-ladder. The Norwegians had stood sullenly aside, not a man stirring a finger to help. The skipper had made up his mind to adopt an attitude of passive resistance, and his crew took their cue from him.

As soon as the rest of the prize crew boarded the ship and their scanty gear and provisions hoisted up, the boat returned to the "Strongbow."

From the yard-arm of the latter a string of bunting fluttered in the breeze. It was the signal to part company. Then gathering way the armed merchantman circled to port, and steamed in a westerly direction.

Left to himself Terence proceeded to take the necessary steps for the safeguarding of his charge. The Norwegian crew were ordered to keep for'ard; the officers were allowed the run of the deck aft, while the passengers, with the exception of the American, were placed under arrest as German subjects capable of bearing arms.

Since the ship's officers bluntly refused to take any part in navigating the ship, Terence had a bed prepared in the chart-room. He knew that it meant forty-eight hours' duty.

He was short-handed. With sentries posted at the wireless-room, the fo'c'sle, and over the prisoners, the number of men at his disposal was far too small. He could not compel the engine-room staff to work; so some of his own men were sent to the stokehold and engine-room under the charge of an experienced engine-room artificer. Yet in spite of the willingness of the volunteer stokers, it was impossible to keep a full head of steam. Eleven knots was the maximum speed that could, under these circumstances, be screwed out of the captured "Roldal."

Before night the wind freshened. By six bells in the middle watch it was blowing a gale from the east'ard. The "Roldal" made bad weather of it. Broadside on to the direction of the wind she rolled like a barrel, shipping green seas amidships.

Clad in oilskins Terence remained on the bridge throughout the terrible night. He mentally condemned the fate that put him in charge of a cranky tramp-steamer, when he might be sleeping soundly on board the weatherly "Strongbow." Hour after hour he stood gripping the rail of the erratically swaying bridge and peering through the welter of broken water and pitch-dark sky. For the first time in his nautical existence he realized the responsibility of being in sole charge of a ship and of the lives of men.

Before it was dawn a hideous clamour, distinctly audible above the howling of the gale, came from somewhere for'ard. Terence strained his ears to try to detect by the nature of the sound what had gone adrift. It was the clanging of metal against metal.

Watching their opportunity during the slight interval when the broken water receded from amidships, two of the prize crew dashed aft from the fo'c'sle and sprang up the bridge-ladder.

"Starboard anchor broken adrift, sir," reported one. "It's hammering against the bows for all it's worth."

Aubyn considered the problem for a few moments. To send some of the scanty crew to work upon the exposed fo'c'sle to secure and re-cat the recalcitrant anchor would be a difficult task even with sufficient hands and in a moderate sea. Better by far unshackle the cable and allow the anchor to go.

He gave the order. Between the pounding of the heavy mass of forged steel, for the anchor weighed more than a ton, could be heard the blows of the mauls as the two seamen knocked out the pin of the shackle. Then, after the whirr of the chain through the hawse-pipe, the noise ceased. Terence knew that the anchor had plunged to the bottom of the Atlantic.

A babel of shouting came from the forepeak. The Norwegian seamen were clambering to be let out. There was no need for Terence to ask why: the damage was already done, for the "bills" of

the anchor had penetrated the hull below the water-line.

The sense of danger had overcome their resolution to remain passive. They had attempted to plug the hole with hammocks, but the inrush of water was too great. Already the forepeak was flooded to a depth of three feet.

Shouting orders to the engine-room for the bilge and condenser pumps to be brought into action, Terence bade the quartermaster turn the ship head to wind. Even as the "Roldal" swung round, a terrific sea slapped her quarter and wrenched away the rudder brackets. The strain upon the insufficiently supported rudder resulted in the carrying away of the sole means of steering, for being a single screw vessel it was not possible to control her by means of the propeller.

Her only chance lay in forging ahead and trusting to luck that she did not fall off and wallow in the trough of the mountainous seas.

Mechanically the quartermaster stood by the steam steering-gear. Years of implicit trusting to a vessel to answer to her helm had left such an impression upon the seaman that he could not realize that the sole means of keeping the vessel on her course was denied him.

The "Roldal" was slowly turning to starboard. At one moment her stern would be deep in the waves, at another it would be high in the air, accompanied by a nerve-racking jar as the propeller, lifted from its natural element, raced wildly. Then, *swish!* A cascade of surging green water would sweep across the deck and pour in a smother of white foam to leeward.

Another appalling crash aft caused Terence to turn his head. To his dismay he saw that one of the fore mainmast derricks, which had been triced up and housed in a perpendicular position, had broken adrift. Like a gigantic flail it swept from side to side, clearing rails and deck-fittings as easily as if they were made of matchwood.

For a few seconds the heavy spars would bring up against the foremast iron wire shrouds supporting the mainmast, then, with the roll of the vessel, it would fly against the corresponding one on the other side, making the stay sing like a gigantic harp-string. A few minutes of that sort of game, Terence knew, would result in the carrying away of the shrouds and the loss of the mainmast.

The lieutenant motioned to some of the men: his own crew and a few of the Norwegians were sheltering under the lee of one of the intact deck-houses. At all costs the erratic derrick must be secured.

The men obeyed the unspoken order, for it would be useless even to shout in the midst of the tumult. Rigging a tackle they awaited an opportunity to slip a stout strip over the end of the terrible flail. Over came the spar, missing a man's head by a hair's-breadth. Two of the Norwegians sought to secure the derrick during its temporary inactivity, but an extra roll to leeward caused the spar to give an irresistible lurch. The next instant the men were hurled into the mountainous sea.

Nothing could be done to save them. To lower a boat would be a worse than useless act. It would be simply throwing away human life in an impossible attempt to save two already doomed men.

One of the unfortunate wretches was apparently stunned by the blow, for he was never seen again; the other could be discerned for a brief instant as he raised his arms in a mute despairing appeal for aid that was not humanly possible; then he was lost to sight in the chaos of the dark turmoil of broken water.

Dawn was just breaking as a sudden rush of steam through the engine-room fidley, followed by the slowing down of the engines, announced the disconcerting fact that the water had put out the stokehold fires. Quickly losing way the "Roldal" rolled excessively, helpless in the trough of the raging sea.

Hanging on to the rail like grim death the now thoroughly chastened Norwegian skipper mounted the bridge. Terence offered no objection. In the hour of danger little unpleasantnesses were lost sight of. They were now human beings fighting against a common foe.

"Can you set canvas on her?" shouted Aubyn.

The Norwegian understood.

"Ay," he roared in reply. "I will see to that."

Calling half a dozen of the men the skipper, accompanied by the first and second mates, made their way for'ard, not without imminent danger of being washed overboard. From the partly flooded sail-locker a storm staysail was produced. It had been rolled up for months, perhaps for years. Its hanks were stiff with rust. It took ten minutes' hard work to bend the canvas to the forestay; then slowly it was sent up and sheeted home. Gradually the vessel's head began to pay off. Under the pressure of the sail she would run before the wind. It was her one chance.

Scudding before the mountainous seas the "Roldal" might keep afloat some hours longer, in which time she might be sighted by another ship and her crew given a fighting chance of being rescued.

Without warning came a sharp, whip-like crack. The clew cringle of the sail had burst. With a series of terrific reports, like the bark of a quick-firer, the rotten canvas flogged itself to ribbons. In two minutes hardly a vestige of the staysail was to be seen.

Once again, helpless and in imminent danger of foundering, now that the steam-pumps were useless, the ship rolled broadside on in the trough of the waves. The motion was now decidedly sluggish, her recovery slow. Another hour, or two at the very most, would see the end unless something totally unforeseen occurred to baulk the sea of its prey.

"Land ahead!"

Five miles to leeward appeared a chain of rugged cliffs, topped with treeless ground that culminated in a gaunt peak. Here and there were gaps of varying sizes, but whether these were inlets, or merely patches of low-lying ground, invisible owing to the curvature of the ocean, the lieutenant could not for the time being decide.

All this while, from the moment the Norwegian operator thought it advisable to relinquish his attitude of passive resistance, the wireless had been sending out calls for aid; but, although Terence swept the horizon with his glasses, no smoke announced the approach of a succouring steamer.

Presently a line of surf, as the tremendous seas hurled themselves against the rock-bound coast, became visible. The "Roldal" was evidently doomed either to founder or else be driven upon the bleak and frowning cliffs.

Suddenly the quartermaster, forgetting disparity in rank in his excitement, grasped Terence by the arm.

"Look, sir!" he exclaimed. "A submarine!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE WRECK.

THE Norwegian skipper saw the twin periscopes almost at the same time, as, owing to the "jump" of the submarine, they bobbed up and down in the raging sea. At one moment they would be completely submerged; at another the top of the conning-tower would appear above the surface.

"German, eh?" asked the skipper, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Them everywhere; but I think they will not hurt us—we Norwegian ship. They go to read name on our stern."

Terence did not reply. He gripped the rail and looked stedfastly in the direction of the latest menace. It reminded him of that awful period of suspense when the torpedo came speeding towards the ill-fated "Terrier."

Perhaps, seeing the desperate plight of the "Roldal" the German commander would not waste a precious torpedo. If he did, Terence reasoned it would only hasten the seemingly inevitable end.

"By Jove, what a chance if we had a quick-firer!" exclaimed a voice in his ear, and turning the lieutenant saw that Raeburn had emerged from the chart-room, where he had been during all those hours of danger.

"And if we had use of the helm we would settle her," added Aubyn. "As it is——"

A glistening object cleaving through the waves caused him to break off suddenly. The submarine, with a fiendish disregard of humanity's laws, had let loose a torpedo.

It came straight towards the luckless "Roldal," at times jumping clear of the terrific seas, at others cutting through the great waves with a hiss of escaping air and a smother of foam from its double propellers.

Fully expecting the missile to strike fairly amidships and immediately under the bridge the three officers scurried to the starboard side, Kenneth being assisted by his chum as he lurched across the steeply shelving planks.

"Missed!" he shouted, as the wake of the receding torpedo caught his eye. The weapon had, owing to an erratic roll of the ship, passed a few inches beneath her keel and was now expending its store of compressed air in a useless run.

"The lubbers! The lubbers!" exclaimed the Norwegian skipper, using a term which he

considered to be the last word of nautical malediction. Whatever sympathies he had for the Teuton had now flown to the winds. The torpedo from the recreant submarine had converted one more biassed neutral into a staunch moral foe of kultur.

Chagrined by the failure, the German submarine did not discharge another torpedo. Her periscopes disappeared, and although Aubyn kept a vigilant lookout, he saw no more signs of her.

By this time the "Roldal" was badly down by the head. At intervals it seemed as if she would not shake herself free of the tons of water that poured over her decks. Her very sluggishness suggested to the experienced seamen that there was very little life left in the vessel.

"Release the prisoners, Saunders," ordered Terence, leaning over the bridge rails and addressing a petty officer. "See that they are served out with lifebelts."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the man, as he hurried below, where eighteen frenzied Germans were clamouring to be let out.

There was nothing more to be done to safeguard the lives of the crew. The men, British and Norwegian, were steady and under perfect control. All wore either life-belts or inflated swimming-collars, although the possibility of gaining the shore seemed very remote in view of the mountainous seas breaking against the sheer wall of iron-bound cliff.

"Let me give you a hand, old man," said Terence, offering a life-belt to Raeburn.

The assistant engineer shook his head.

"Thanks, I'm not having any," he replied. "I never was fond of icy cold water, so the sooner it's over the better. Wonder what old Smithers will do with my pipe? I wish I had it now."

"Try a cigarette," suggested Aubyn.

Kenneth took one from the proffered case, and, awaiting his opportunity, made a dash for the lee side of the chart-house. In a few seconds he was back again, with the cigarette between his teeth. A shower of ice spray extinguished it, but seemingly unconscious of the fact he puffed away at the unlighted cigarette.

One of the "Strongbow's" men ascended a few rungs of the ladder and saluted. Terence beckoned him to come close.

"Beg pardon, sir," announced the seaman, "I know the coast. We're drifting on to a bad part of the Shetlands. Yon island's Unst; t'other is Fetlar, and beyond it, though it looks all one island, is Yell. D'ye happen to know what time o' tide it is, sir?"

"High water at about seven o'clock at Lerwick," replied Terence.

"Then, sir, if we hit to the south'ard of Fetlar, God help us. It's sure death; but if so be we get swept to the nor'ard of it, there's a 'swilkie'—that's what they call a race in these parts—that'll take us into Dalsetter—unless we founder first," he added, as an after-thought.

Anxiously Aubyn kept his telescope levelled on the north end of Fetlar. By taking a bearing he was able to realize that the ship had a perceptible northerly drift. If this movement were maintained it might be possible to escape being cast upon the perpendicular cliffs, otherwise all hopes of rescue must be abandoned.

In breathless suspense the crew watched their vessel bear down upon the forbidding shore, till caught by the "swilkie" she was swept clear of the dreaded cape. Yet so close had she shaved the land that in fine weather it would have been possible to "toss a biscuit" ashore.

Although the sea still ran high the force of the wind was lessened by the slight shelter afforded by the island. Ahead lay the large island of Yell, wherein could be distinguished the comparatively safe haven that terminates at the village of Dalsetter.

"Look, sir," exclaimed the seaman, who at Terence's request had remained on the bridge. "There are people ashore. They're signalling to us to edge to starboard."

"Would if we could," muttered the lieutenant grimly. "By Jove, they're sending out a couple of boats."

Such was the case. In spite of the mountainous seas, some of the hardy Shetlanders had put off in two of the typically seaworthy craft for which Lerwick and the fishing harbours of these islands are justly celebrated.

Tack after tack they made. At times only the peaks of the closely reefed dipping lugsails were visible. The rest of the boats were lost to sight between the crests of the waves.

It was soon evident to the Shetland fishermen that they could do nothing in the way of salvage, and having been able to ascertain that the distressed vessel was not under control and incapable of answering to her helm, they contented themselves by tacking to and fro to wind'ard, waiting

for the "Roldal" to make her final plunge.

Yet the Norwegian vessel showed no undue haste. She had reached a certain stage when she retained just sufficient buoyancy to keep her afloat. After all, it seemed as if she would ground rather than founder.

"We can't fetch the creek, sir," declared the seaman. "We're setting too much to the nor'ard. It's only a question of time, sir."

Almost as he spoke the "Roldal's" hull shuddered under a terrific blow. Heeling to port, she swung almost broadside on to the waves; with a crash her masts went by the board, the foremast buckling close to the deck, and about ten feet of the main-mast remaining.

Two more heavy bumps she gave, then, settling on hard rock, merely quivered as the seas broke over her.

"Hold on, men, for your lives!" shouted Terence. "The tide's ebbing. We may be all right even yet."

The crew needed no caution in this respect. Hanging on desperately to whatever came to hand they resisted the efforts of the breakers to sweep them overboard and into the chaos of broken water between them and the low cliffs.

The fishing-boats had gone. Brave as were their crews the hardy Shetlanders knew that to venture anywhere in the vicinity of the stranded vessel meant almost certain death without the slightest chance to render any assistance.

Then, with surprising suddenness, the summit of the hitherto deserted cliffs was teeming with people—men, women, and children. The inhabitants of the little village had been waiting by the side of the sheltered firth, fully expecting to see the disabled vessel crawl into safety. But with the news that she had failed to weather the headland they rushed to the cliffs, and, what was more, they brought a rocket apparatus with them.

The first rocket, deflected by the wind, fell fifty feet from the wreck. The second was fired immediately on the deck of the "Roldal." Several of the seaman, at imminent risk of being swept overboard, secured the light line and began to haul away.

In ten minutes a means of communication with the shore was established. Beginning with the prisoners, the shipwrecked party were hauled to land, one by one till only Raeburn and Terence were left, for in spite of Aubyn's representations that the partly disabled officer should be sent early in the course of the operations, Kenneth stoutly refused to budge until all the passengers and crew were saved.

"Now, then, old man," exclaimed Terence. Gently he assisted his chum into the breeches-buoy, and, since the assistant engineer was incapable of raising his right hand and arm, the lieutenant made him additionally secure by lashing a rope round his shoulders and to the slings of the buoy.

"'Fraid I'll get a ducking after all," remarked Kenneth, with mock ruefulness. "Never mind, I'll get my pipe again."

Terence gave the signal. The strain on the hauling rope increased, and Kenneth started on his semi-aerial, semi-submarine journey to the cliffs of Yell.

Anxiously the lieutenant followed his chum's progress. He knew how hard the tail of a wave can hit, and that Kenneth was in serious danger of having his still unhealed arm broken again by even a fairly light blow. White-crested waves were breaking right over the occupant of the breeches-buoy, for he was now nearly half-way to the shore and at the lowermost limit of the sagging rope. At times lifted by the seas, he would be swung into an almost horizontal position. At others he would be suspended in the air, with the water pouring from him like a miniature cascade.

"He's making slow progress," thought Terence. Then he looked at the endless travelling line. It was not running through the block. Something had jammed and the men on the cliff were unable to haul the breeches-buoy another foot.

Frantically Terence signalled for them to slack away. Putting every ounce of strength into his effort he tugged at the line in the hope of freeing it from the jammed block, but without avail.

"He'll be drowned, or he'll die of exposure," thought Terence, as he desperately taxed his powers of resourcefulness to devise some means of extricating his comrade from his dangerous position.

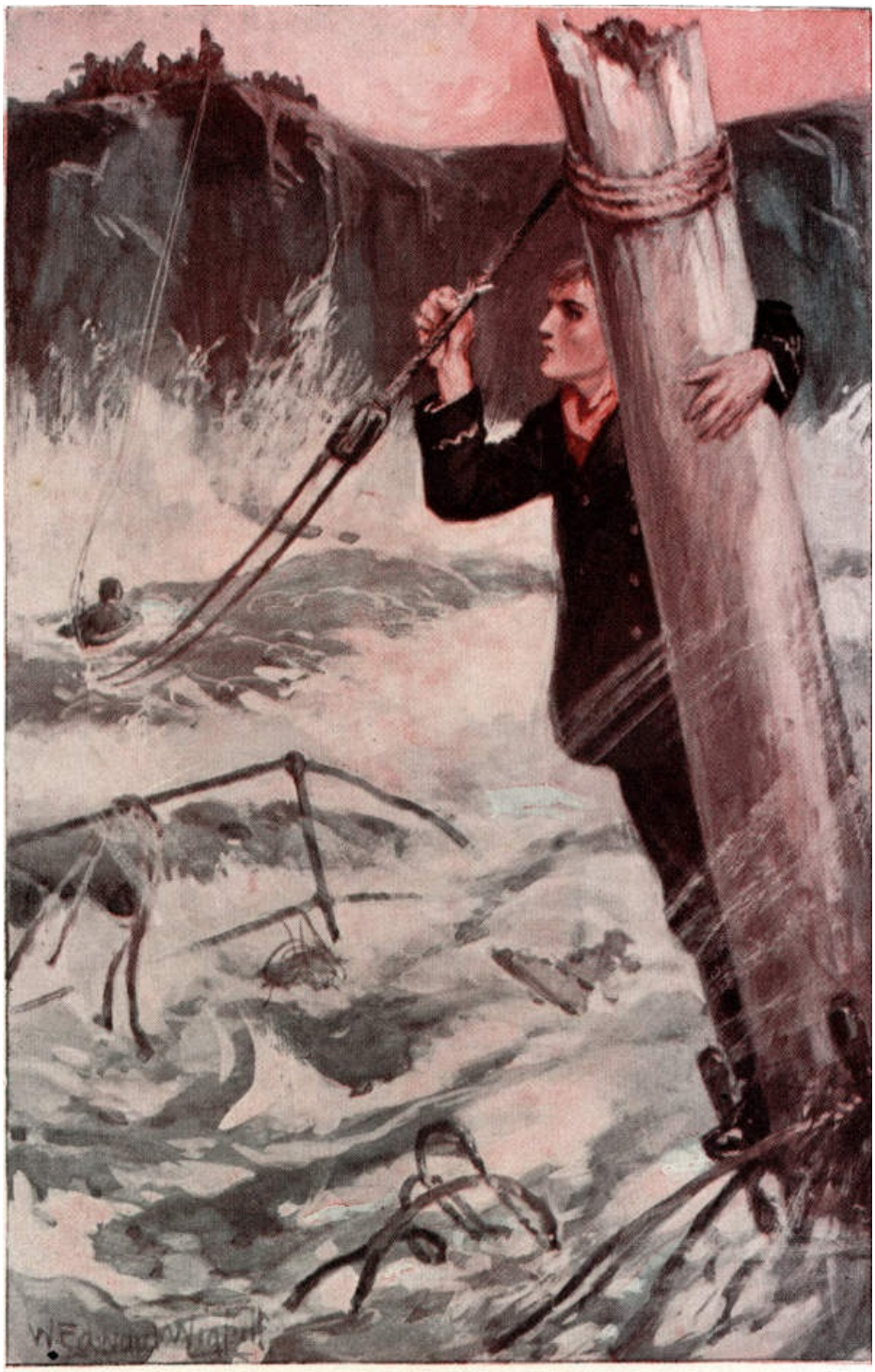
"There's only one thing to be done," he continued. "It's kill or cure, so here goes."

Pulling out his pocket-knife, Terence made his way to the stump of the mainmast, to which, ten feet above the deck, was bent the "tail jigger," or rope through which the endless line was rove and the stout hawser from which the breeches-buoy was suspended.

Securing a foothold on the spider-band Aubyn found that he could now easily reach the object

of his attack. The blade of his knife, though small, was sharp. The strain on the hemp aided his efforts, and in a very short time both means of communication with the shore were severed.

His own retreat was cut off, but the helpers on the cliff were now able to haul Kenneth through the breakers. They understood the act of self-sacrifice of the solitary figure on the wreck and acted promptly.



"The strain on the hemp aided his efforts."

[Illustration: "The strain on the hemp aided his efforts."]

Anxiously he followed the progress of that small black object that was being towed rapidly towards the base of the cliffs. He knew the risk. Even in the case of a man in full possession of the use of his limbs the danger of being hurled against that almost perpendicular wall of rock was appalling.

He held his breath. Kenneth was clear of the waves—no, almost, for a smother of white foam

had hidden him temporarily from the lieutenant's sight. The next moment the surf had subsided, revealing the breeches-buoy and its occupant like a spider at the end of its thread.

The rope was swinging violently, but owing to the fact that here the cliffs overhung the sea Raeburn was not being continually bumped against the rocks. Instead he seemed to be clear of that danger, and the higher he was pulled up, the shorter became the swing of that exaggerated pendulum.

Men were lying flat upon the brink, waiting to receive the rescued officer. Others, still hauling, but with less speed, awaited the order to belay. The last ten feet of the ascent were the most difficult of all, for here Kenneth's body and maimed limb were in actual contact with the rugged granite. Yet, from where he stood, Terence could see no sign of life in the saturated burden of the breeches-buoy.

Now the rescuers had the object of their attention within arms' reach. Grasped by the muscular hands of the hardy Shetlanders, Kenneth was lifted clear of the jagged edge of the cliff. Willing helpers released him from the buoy, and still without showing signs of movement Raeburn was carried out of his chum's sight.

Leaning against the lee side of the chart-house, for the bridge was now at an alarming angle, Terence quietly reviewed the position. The "Roldal" was breaking up fast. Already the bow portion had vanished, and the 'midship portion seemed in a great hurry to disintegrate itself under the sledge-hammer like blows of the waves.

His first idea was to throw himself into the sea and trust to fate. He might perhaps escape being dashed against the cliff and contrive to seize a bowline lowered from above; but the possibility of getting safely through that turmoil seemed wellnigh hopeless.

The tide was still falling. Every few minutes meant the uncovering of the reef on which the vessel struck, and a compensating diminution of the force of the waves. On the other hand, delay resulted in the increase of the numbness of his body and limbs, which were already feeling the effects of the cold and wet.

Hundreds of eyes were fixed upon him. In addition to the inhabitants of the village and the surrounding district, his own men and the Norwegian crew were standing on the cliffs in apparent helplessness, waiting for the final act of the tragedy.

Presently a hand-cart drawn by half a dozen fishermen appeared upon the scene. It was another life-saving apparatus, for the first had been rendered useless owing to the accident.

With a hiss the light-line fell handsomely across the wreck, the rope almost falling into Terence's hand. To it was attached the hawser, but the lieutenant knew that it was beyond his strength to attach the stout rope to the stump of the mast. Since Raeburn had been hauled through the breaking seas, he argued, why could he not follow his example?

Securing the running rope round his waist, and making sure that no part of the gear was likely to foul any part of the wreckage, Terence made his way down the shelving bridge. The lee side was now only six or seven feet above the water. The whole structure was quivering violently. At the most it could not hold together for many minutes longer.

Using his arms as a semaphore the lieutenant signalled to those on shore that he was ready to be hauled through the surf. A reply to the effect that he was understood came from the "Strongbow's" men. Then, making a leap clear of the bridge, Terence plunged into the sea. Even as he did so, the chart-house and the weather part of the bridge were swept bodily away.

Upon rising to the surface Aubyn found himself being dragged through the water at a rapid rate. Ten yards or so behind him was an enormous mass of woodwork—a part of the bridge-planking—bearing down on the crest of a billow. Swift as was his progress, the floating timber threatened to overtake and overwhelm him.

The rescuers, too, saw the danger, and redoubled their efforts to haul the lieutenant clear of the pursuing mass. Buffeted by the waves, his limbs completely numbed by the action of the icy-cold water, Terence was hardly conscious of what was happening, till he found himself being lifted clear of the chaos of broken water.

Before he was out of danger an exceptionally heavy sea completely buried him as he swung with irresistible force towards the base of the cliff. The "backlash" of the foam alone saved him from being dashed to death against the solid mass of granite. As it was he received such a severe blow that he lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"THE PRICE OF ADMIRALTY."

WHEN Terence recovered his senses he was lying in a crofter's cottage. A white-haired venerable dame was busying herself with a large iron pot over a peat fire, while an old fisherman, her husband, was spreading the lieutenant's clothes to dry. The reek of the peat and the vapour of the steaming garments seemed to fill the confined space.

Through the diamond panes of the small window Aubyn could see the heads and shoulders of several of his men. The devoted tars, having been provided with dry clothes of weird fit by their poor but hospitable hosts, were mounting an impromptu guard outside the cottage in order to hear the news of their popular young officer's return to consciousness.

Terence sat up. As he did so he became aware of a throbbing pain in his left hip and leg, while he noticed that his left arm was roughly bandaged. Fearful lest his leg should be broken, he raised his knee. Although it caused him agony he realized to his intense satisfaction that he was capable of moving it.

Hearing him move the old fisherman spoke to him, and although Terence could not understand one word of the broad Shetland dialect the lieutenant guessed rightly that the man wanted to know whether the patient would like to see those of his crew who were disconsolately lingering outside in spite of the howling wind.

In trooped the seamen; seven burly and extremely diffident specimens of the Royal Naval Reserve, who, slow of speech except when amongst themselves, could hardly find means to express their thoughts. They did not know whether to congratulate their temporary skipper on his escape or to commiserate with him on his injuries.

"How is Mr. Raeburn, Griffiths?" asked Terence.

The Welsh petty-officer fidgeted with his hands, attempted to reply, but at last turned with mild entreaty to his comrades.

"Fairish, sir, only fairish," vaguely declared another. "But how's yourself, sir, if we may make so bold as to ask?"

"Stiff, bruised, but otherwise all right, I think," replied Terence. "And awfully peckish. Have you men been fed?"

"Yes, sir, we were victualled down at the village," announced the man. "They did us right well. They say as how we'll have to hang about on this island till the gale moderates; but they've communicated with the authorities at Lerwick, sir, and the senior officer is going to send a vessel to pick us up."

Dismissing his men Terence contrived to borrow some clothes from his humble yet kindly hosts, and making his way with considerable difficulty to an upstairs room, proceeded to dress.

Considering the terrific buffeting he had received Aubyn had come off pretty lightly. He was black and blue from his shoulders to his knees, his forehead was grazed through coming in contact with the rock, and there was a clean cut across his cheek. Rigged out in rough ill-fitting Shetland tweeds, his chin and cheeks black with a stubble of forty-eight hours' growth, he looked anything but a spruce officer of his Majesty's Service.

His efforts to borrow a razor were fruitless. His host had never shaved in the whole course of his existence, and he was now over eighty years of age. Nor did he know of any of his neighbours who would be in a position to oblige his guest.

Having found out where Kenneth had been taken, Terence went to see him. He had to traverse nearly half a mile of bleak moorland, over which the wind blew with great force. Shelter there was not, except a few stunted thorns and patches of gorse.

Looking seawards the vista was a turmoil of broken water, divided by the Island of Fetlar. Close under its lee the sea was comparatively calm, but owing to the tidal race, the "Sound" or intervening channel seemed too violent for any craft to navigate in safety.

Cautiously the lieutenant approached the brink of the cliff and looked down to the cauldron of foam beneath. The tide had ebbed considerably. Fang-like rocks showed their jagged heads above the breakers for nearly a quarter of a mile off shore. It seemed marvellous how the almost waterlogged "Roldal" had contrived to be swept over those dangerous rocks. In vain he looked for traces of his first independent command: the ship had literally gone to pieces.

After considerable difficulty Terence succeeded in finding the little cottage to which his chum had been taken. A big-boned, gaunt-featured man answered his knock, and without betraying the faintest surprise at his visitor's garb, invited him into the room. The Shetlander asked no questions; he seemed to know Aubyn's business. Like the rest of the islanders, most of whom had played a prominent part in the rescue of the survivors of the "Roldal," he already know the officers and most of the men by sight.

Impressed by the gravity of the man's manner, Terence fully expected to find his chum in a desperate plight, but to his surprise he was greeted by an outburst of laughter.

"Excuse me, old man," exclaimed Kenneth, "but you do look a sketch! Who's your tailor? And are you about to cultivate a torpedo beard?"

"How's that arm of yours?" asked Aubyn.

"Feels a bit rotten," admitted Kenneth, "or rather, I can't feel it at all. It seems a bit numb. But it will be all right in a day or so, I guess. It was a real plucky thing of yours, old man. Looked like a case of attempted suicide, when you cut that rope.

"I should have felt like your murderer if I hadn't," retorted Aubyn. "But it's over and done with. We're lucky to get ashore. By the by, I suppose you know that they're sending a steamer from Lerwick as soon as the weather moderates?"

Terence could not talk rationally. He touched upon half a dozen subjects in as many minutes. His mind was full of sorrow for his chum's misfortune. He knew what Raeburn was yet to learn: that the lack of sensitiveness in Kenneth's arm meant that never again would his chum be able to use the limb.

Raeburn's sanguineness was most pathetic. He had fully made up his mind to get to Leith and await the "Strongbow's" return. He rehearsed the little scene he would have when Smithers restored to him his cherished pipe.

Two days later the sea moderated sufficiently for the shipwrecked men to be taken to Lerwick. Here they were split up. The German reservists were sent into detention quarters to await the decision of the War Office as to their disposal; the Norwegians, whose indignation towards the apostles of kultur showed no signs of abatement, were forwarded to Aberdeen, whence they were permitted to return to their native land, while the detachment of the 'Strongbow' were given a passage as far as Dingwall, whence they were told to proceed by train to Leith.

Kenneth Raeburn did not go with them. Upon arrival at Lerwick he was promptly taken to hospital. A preliminary examination resulted in the doctors' seriously considering the advisability of amputating his wounded arm, but upon a further consultation it was found that there was a possibility of saving the limb, although it would be practically useless for the rest of his life.

Raeburn was not told of this. In spite of his disappointment at not being allowed to go with the rest of the prize crew his optimism was remarkable.

"Can't understand why those doctors insist upon keeping me here, old man," he remarked to Terence, when the lieutenant came to bid him good-bye. "I feel as fit as a fiddle, except for the long-winded business over my arm, you know. And it's rotten not being able to see the 'Strongbow' come into port. You'll take good care to remind Smithers to send along that pipe of mine, won't you?"

"I won't forget," asserted Terence.

"And another thing," continued Kenneth. "If you get a chance to go to Edinburgh you might look up my tailor—you know, the fellow in the Hogmarket—and get him to knock me up another No. 5 rig. I can't possibly present myself in this shabby uniform when I have to report myself for duty. Explain to him that my arm is crocked and I can't write at the present moment."

The lieutenant could not commit himself to reply. Gripping Raeburn's left hand he bade him "buck up," and made an undignified retreat from the man who was never again to wear the uniform of the R.N.R.

Throughout the tedious journey to Leith, Aubyn was on tenterhooks, for he was a day and a half overdue. During that time the "Strongbow" might have arrived, coaled, and put to sea again, without waiting for the men who had formed the prize crew of the "Roldal."

As the train swept across the Forth Bridge, Terence anxiously scanned the shipping below, on the off-chance of "spotting" his ship should she by any possibility leave the open roadstead and ascend the Firth.

At Leith he ordered his men to fall in and marched them down to the harbour. Inquiries of various naval officers elicited no information of the "Strongbow's" presence. Almost all of the people he questioned were convinced that the armed merchant-cruiser had not put in an appearance.

Allowing the men to "stand easy," Terence made his way to the office of the admiral commanding the Forth division of the auxiliary cruisers. On sending in his card he was received by the admiral in person.

"We've had no news of the 'Strongbow' for the last three days," said the admiral. "She is now forty-eight hours' overdue."

"Has anything happened to her, sir?" asked Terence.

"There is no saying. On Tuesday we received a wireless from her, reporting all well and giving her position. From that hour till now there has been a complete blank. Of course, she may have

had to stand by a prize, and if her wireless has broken down her silence is explicable. However, I wish you to say nothing about the matter. Send your men to the 'Sailors' Home' and report yourself here at noon. Remember to leave your telephone number at the office as soon as you have completed your hotel arrangements, so that, if necessary, we can send for you."

Terence carried out these instructions and resigned himself for a disquieting wait. Something serious, he argued, must have befallen the armed merchant-man. He was somewhat reassured when, on giving his men orders to proceed to temporary shore quarters, the prize crew expressed astonishment neither by word nor gesture. His peace of mind would have been greatly disturbed, however, could he but have heard the men discussing the "Strongbow's" non-appearance amongst themselves.

Upon making his third call at the office Terence was again received by the admiral. The sturdy old officer's face was grave.

"I'm afraid it's a case, Mr. Aubyn," he said. "The 'Strongbow's' hopelessly overdue. I have just reported her to the Admiralty as regarded as lost. You had better proceed on leave, and I will notify Whitehall accordingly."

Terence almost reeled out into the street. The blow had temporarily unnerved him. Not one thought did he give at the time to the fact that Raeburn and he had been almost miraculously preserved from sharing the fate of their gallant comrades: his whole mind was centred on the appalling disaster.

He mentally pictured the old ship ploughing along in that terrific gale. A staunch vessel such as she was would have made light of the climatic conditions. It was fairly safe to conclude that she had been sunk either by a mine or a torpedo—and sunk so suddenly that there had been no time to send out a wireless call for aid. The state of the sea, he knew, would render it impossible to lower the boats even had there been time. Out in the wild North Sea, miles from land, and with no means of recording her end in the course of duty, the "Strongbow" had vanished utterly.

He thought of his comrades. The cool and collected Captain Ripponden; Commander Ramshaw, one of the very best; Lymore, taciturn, yet a man who set duty on a high pedestal; slow and deliberate McBride, and more than a dozen others. All of them, tried comrades in stress and storm, had given up their lives for their country. Only Raeburn and he were left—and Raeburn incapacitated for further service afloat.

Verily, the "price of Admiralty" is a huge one, but men will ever be found ready to comply with its demands.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"MEPHISTO" AND THE SUBMARINE.

"Good business! Now there's a chance of seeing life!" exclaimed Lieutenant Aubyn.

"I should have thought you have been seeing plenty of life already, Terence," remarked his mother, with a faint tinge of reproachfulness, "and death also," she added.

"Ay, and death," agreed Terence. "Unfortunately, yes; but it's part of the work. It was the future to which I was referring. Fancy, mother, a real cruiser at last—not an armed merchantman, nor a destroyer, although I'll admit I had a real good time in the 'Terrier'—but a modern cruiser."

Terence's appointment had arrived in the form of an Admiralty telegram, ordering him to join H.M.S. "Sunderland" as soon as possible.

H.M.S. "Sunderland" was a light cruiser of the "Town" Class, a vessel of a little over 5000 tons displacement, and armed with eight 6-in. guns, four 3-pounders, and two submerged 21-in. torpedo tubes. Her speed was nominally 25 knots, but this rate had been considerably exceeded when conditions called for her to do her level best.

Accordingly, within four hours of receiving his appointment, Terence bade his parent farewell and proceeded by rail to Devonport, where the "Sunderland" was lying. It was nearly dark when he alighted at Millbay station. Here he called a taxi and was whirled off to the Dockyard, whence a picquet boat conveyed him to the cruiser, which was lying at a buoy in the Hamoaze.

"We're off under sealed orders at six o'clock tomorrow morning," announced one of his new shipmates, a junior lieutenant, Teddy Barracombe by name. "Of course, we are quite in the dark, but there's a strong idea floating around that the ship's off to the Near East. Just my mark! According to all accounts we'll be pretty busy in the Dardanelles."

"That's all very fine for you," commented Oswestry, the torpedo lieutenant, "but where do I come in? We can't use torpedoes against fortifications, you know, and there's precious little floating about for us to go for."

"Don't take on, Torps," said Barracombe cheerfully. "You never know your luck. Wait and see."

"I'd rather t'were the other way about," corrected Torps. "Seeing your torpedo leave the tube and waiting for the enemy ship to be blown up. No Dardanelles for me. So I hope to goodness it's the North Sea. By Jove, I do!"

As soon as the "Sunderland" was clear of the breakwater the momentous orders were opened. It was not to the Near East; the cruiser had to proceed to Dover and await further instructions.

All the way up Channel a rigorous watch was maintained, for hostile submarines had made their presence unpleasantly felt off Prawle Point, the Bill of Portland, and south of the Royal Sovereign Lightship. The cruiser pelted under forced draught, steering a zig-zag course in order to baffle the carefully-planned calculations of the lurking tigers of the deep, while the guns were manned and trained abeam ready to be laid upon the first suspicious object resembling a periscope.

Being the first day of the month the ship's company was to be paid, and soon after six bells final preparations for the solemn rite were in progress.

At a quarter to one two "G's"—the officers' call—sounded, and the first hundred men, mustering by open list, assembled in the Port Battery. On the quarter-deck tables were placed in position, on each of which were teak trays divided into small compartments by brass strips. In each of these divisions a man's monthly pay and allowance money had already been placed and checked by the paymaster and his staff.

Owing to the conditions of war-time the captain was not present, his duty of superintending the payment being taken by the commander. At the tables stood the staff-paymaster, the R.N.R. assistant-paymaster, and the chief writer.

The staff-paymaster glanced at the commander, indicating that all was in readiness. The commander gave the word to carry on, and the disbursing of coin began.

The assistant-paymaster called the men's names from a book. Each seaman stepped briskly forward to the chalk line, removed his cap, and, according to instructions, looked the accountant officer squarely in the face and gave his name and rating. Then, receiving his money in the crown of his cap, the recipient saluted and moved away to make room for the next man.

All was proceeding smoothly and with the regularity of clockwork when suddenly a diversion occurred.

The ship's company had a mascot in the shape of a young African monkey, that had been presented to the "Sunderland" by a French cruiser during a visit to an Algerian port. Although usually good-tempered "Mephisto" could and did exhibit fits of sulkiness and outbursts of insubordination that would have earned a lower deck man ninety days' "confined to detention quarters." But the monkey being a sort of chartered libertine, was idolized by the ship's company and mildly tolerated by the officers.

Mephisto was lazily sunning himself under the lee of the quarter-deck 6-in gun shield when his eye caught sight of the chief writer's silver watch, which that petty officer had occasion to consult.

Probably the monkey imagined that it was one of the tins of condensed milk for which he had great partiality.

Getting on his four feet Mephisto ambled across the quarter-deck, past the line of men drawn up at attention. Before he could cross the chalk line, a symbol for which he had no respect, the chief writer had replaced his timepiece.

Foiled in that direction the monkey made a grab at a pile of brand new copper coins, and before any of the officers and men could prevent, had made a rush for the weather-shrouds.

"Stop him!" yelled the commander.

A dozen men hastened to comply, jolting against each other in their alacrity to pursue the animal, which with marvellous agility had gained the extremity of the signal yard-arm.

Here he perched, hanging on with his hind paws while he tasted each coin with his teeth—at first with an expression of hopefulness upon his features that rapidly changed into one of profound disgust.

Holding the rest of the coins against his chest Mephisto hurled one on to the sacred precincts of the quarter-deck. It landed in one of the compartments of the pay-table, displacing a sovereign, that rolled between the staff-paymaster and the assistant-paymaster.

Both officers simultaneously stooped to recover the errant piece of gold. The result was that their heads met with a thud in spite of the protection afforded by their peaked caps.

Several of the men could not conceal a grin. One broke into a laugh, and meeting the stern

glance of the commander tried to side-track into a painful cough.

Fortunately for the culprit the commander was inwardly affected by a similar complaint, for he, too, saw the humour of the business.

"Confound you!" shouted the staff-paymaster, removing his cap and rubbing his bald head. "Confound you, you brute! Throwing away the money from the public chest!"

The only reply from Mephisto was another penny that, thrown with splendid aim, rebounded from the staff-paymaster's shiny pate.

"The ship's company will have to make up the loss," he muttered. "They're responsible for their confounded pet."

"But you're responsible for the money, Staggles," remarked the commander drily. "At any rate, Mephisto is paying you back by instalments."

It wanted all the self-control at their command to keep the lookout men's attention from the comic scene to a duty of a serious nature, while the gun's crews temporarily forgot their duties to watch the encounter between the mascot and the staff-paymaster.

"Catch it—oh, you rotten butterfingers!" groaned the accountant officer to the assistant-paymaster, who, missing a coin thrown by the animal, allowed the sum of one penny to be committed to the deep. "Here, ship's steward, nip below and open a tin of condensed. That may tempt the brute below."

"You're condoning an offence, Staggles," said the commander in an undertone, with a humorous gleam in his eye.

Another coin tinkled on the deck. The commander promptly placed his foot on it to check its career towards the side.

"Where did that go?" asked the staff-paymaster, who, curiously enough, had a miserly regard for any money except his own, which he spent liberally.

The commander shifted his foot and pointed to the retrieved coin; as he did so, another penny, hurtling through the air, hit him smartly on his bent neck and promptly slithered inside his collar and down his back.

Unfortunately the commander was a man of a most ticklish temperament. The contact of the metal disc with his back caused him to writhe like a lost soul in torment. He had recently unflinchingly faced death in a hotly-contested engagement in the North Sea, but this rear attack completely unnerved him. His grotesque efforts to capture the elusive coin was too much for the rest of the officers and men. They were unable to conceal their amusement. Finally the commander dived down below and divested himself of his uniform.

Just then the ship's steward appeared with the tin of condensed milk, and handed the unopened can to a seaman. Away aloft the man made his way till he gained the cross-trees. Owing to the "Sunderland" altering her course she was swinging considerably to starboard, and the motion made the man advance cautiously, his feet sliding along the foot-ropes while he held on grimly with his free hand to the spar.

Mephisto eyed the approaching delicacy with marked approval. Letting the remaining coins drop, some of which tinkled on deck although most of them fell overboard, he whisked along the yard-arm, and before the seaman realized the brute's intention, snatched the can from his grasp.

A snarl warned the bluejacket that if he advanced it would be at his peril, and unwilling to risk an encounter with an agile monkey on the swaying yard, he followed the precept of discretion being the better part of valour, and regained the deck, leaving the spoils in the hands of the elated ape.

Presently the monkey had another disappointment. The intact tin baffled him. He tried his teeth upon it—but unavailingly, so he began to batter it upon the metal eye of a band encircling the spar.

"There'll be an unholy mess, by Jove!" ejaculated the commander, who had now reappeared upon the scene, for the tin showed signs of capitulating to the strenuous frontal attacks on the part of Mephisto.

"Bring up another tin—and take care to open it this time," ordered the staff-paymaster recklessly, who had now taken the precaution of covering the pay-tables with a green baize cloth.

"Bang, bang, bang!" went the tin under the muscular efforts of Mephisto. Already large drops of the viscous fluid were descending upon the hallowed quarter-deck, bespattering officers and men indiscriminately, for owing to the ship's speed a strong current of air was drifting aft and spraying the stuff far and wide.

"Clear the quarter-deck," ordered the commander. "Up aloft a couple of hands and collar the

brute. By Jove! if it gives much more trouble, I'll have it shot."

Suddenly, above the scuffling of feet as the men doubled for'ard, came the shout: "Submarine on the port quarter."

Sharply the bugle sounded "Action," and as the "Sunderland" began to circle to starboard in answer to a quick movement of her helm, the quick-firers began to bark at a pole-like object four hundred yards off.

The unexpected detonation, as a gun was discharged fifty feet under his nose, completed Mephisto's brief spell of unalloyed liberty. Temporarily stunned by the terrific concussion the monkey relaxed his grip and fell.

Just at that moment the staff-paymaster, who was scurrying below with one of the pay-trays, happened to be passing in the direct line of Mephisto's descent. The next instant the portly officer was rolling on the deck in a puddle of condensed milk with the monkey's paws clutching at his scanty crop of hair, while to complete the staff-paymaster's discomfiture most of the money he was carrying rolled overboard.

Regaining his feet Staff-paymaster Staggles contrived to reach the companion, and with Mephisto still firmly attached to him, disappeared below.

But the men's attention was now directed towards more serious matters. An ever-diverging line that rippled the placid water denoted the approach of a deadly torpedo. Now it was heading as if about to hit the bows of the "Sunderland," a second later and the arrow-like ripples seemed to be approaching directly abeam; then, as the cruiser swung almost on her heel the wake of the formidable missile was merged into the churning froth astern. It had missed by a bare yard.

From the fire-control platform telephone bells were clanging and men shouting through the voice-tubes. From their elevated position the watchers could discern a long, dark shadow that marked the position of the submarine.

Completely circling the "Sunderland" was steadied on her helm and steered straight for the spot. In vain the submerged craft attempted to dive to a depth greater than that of her enemy's draught.

Terence, who was stationed on the after-bridge, felt a faint shock as the five thousand tons vessel literally cut the luckless submarine in twain. For a brief instant the lieutenant caught sight of the after-portion of the "U" boat, as, rendered buoyant by the trapped air, it drifted past. Then amidst a smother of foam and oil the wreckage vanished.

"The eleventh to my certain knowledge," remarked the commander, as coolly as if he were reckoning up the score at an athletic meeting.

"Any damage for'ard, Mr. Black?"

"No, sir; all as tight as a bottle as far as I can see," replied the carpenter, who immediately after the impact had hurried below to see if any plates had been "started."

A little later in the afternoon several of the ward-room officers were enjoying their cups of tea and biscuits, when the staff-paymaster entered.

"Well, Staggles, what's the shortage?" asked the commander facetiously.

The accountant officer eyed his tormentor reproachfully, as if that officer were responsible for his former discomfiture.

"One pound three shillings and threepence—and two tins of condensed milk," he announced stiffly. "According to paragraph 445 of the Admiralty Instructions there will have to be two separate reports on the shortage."

The staff-paymaster spoke seriously. The man was heart and soul in his work, and his mental horizon was bounded by official forms and other red-tapeism connected with the accountant branch of H.M. Service.

"By the by," interposed Oswestry, "Staggles ought to be recommended for the V.C."

"What's that, Torps?" asked Barracombe. "Our staff-paymaster the V.C.?"

"What for?" inquired the staff-paymaster innocently.

The commander entrenched himself behind a double number of an illustrated periodical.

"For bringing Mephisto in out of action," he replied with a chuckle.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FOILED AIR RAID.

LATE that evening the "Sunderland" brought up in the Admiralty Harbour at Dover, in company with three other light cruisers, two monitors, and a flotilla of destroyers. All night long the men slept at their guns, while the cruiser's searchlights aided those of the forts both ashore and on the breakwater in sweeping the approach to the sheltered harbour.

"Nothing to report," announced Barracombe, as Aubyn relieved him as officer of the watch. "A jolly fine night. I shouldn't wonder if we were favoured by a visit from a Zeppelin or two."

"A pretty jamb in the harbour," said Terence, giving a quick glance at the maze of vessels. "Fortunately, I hear, we've several seaplanes at our disposal."

Barracombe wished his relief good-night and descended the ladder to retire to the seclusion of his cabin and sleep the sleep of exhaustion, for he had had a strenuous time before the cruiser left Devonport.

During the first hour nothing unusual occurred. The midshipman of the watch reported "Rounds all correct, sir," to which Aubyn replied with the stereotyped "Very good." Across the harbour came the faint hail of the Night Guard as the picquet boat studiously visited every vessel within the limits of the breakwater.

The masthead light of the flagship began to blink. A signalman on the "Sunderland's" bridge snatched up a slate.

"General call, sir," he announced.

Deftly the man took down the message, then hurried to the chart-room to decipher the code.

"Submarine E27 reports three hostile aeroplanes passing S.W. by W. Position eleven miles N.N.E. of North Goodwin."

The warning was a brief one, for hardly had the ship's company been called to their action stations when a faint buzzing, immediately becoming louder and louder, announced that the raiders were approaching the town and harbour of Dover.

Searchlights flashed skywards, while from beneath the old castle on the lofty chalk cliffs half a dozen intrepid British airmen ascended to meet the foe. Already the anti-aerial guns were stabbing the darkness with lurid spurts of flame, while their shells, bursting perilously close to the hostile aeroplanes, caused the calculating Teutons to think better of the attempt.

It was an easy matter to steal over an unfortified town or village and drop explosives; but for once the Germans were to learn the wisdom of discrimination. Higher and higher they banked, until catching a glimpse of the British seaplanes as they passed through the path of one of the searchlights they precipitately turned tail.

"'Sunderland' and destroyer flotilla to proceed in support of seaplanes," came the signal.

Hastily the pins of the mooring shackle were knocked out. Steam was already raised, and in a very few minutes the light cruiser and her attendant destroyers were slipping between the heads of the detached breakwater and the Admiralty Pier.

But swift as were the light cruisers the seaplanes were quicker. Already they were five or six miles out to sea, their position being revealed by the flashes of the light guns as they exchanged shots with the fugitive Taubes.

Suddenly with a dazzling flash a bomb exploded hardly twenty feet from the "Sunderland's" starboard quarter. Five seconds later another struck the water almost under the cruiser's bows, and a waft of evil-smelling gas drifted across the navigation bridge, causing officers and men to cough and gasp for breath.

The captain tried to give an order, but was unable to utter a sound. Mutely he signed for the helm to be put hard over.

Terence understood. Literally groping his way through the thick vapour, that even in the darkness showed an unmistakable greenish hue, he found the quartermaster, who was clutching his throat and struggling for breath.

Pushing the man aside Aubyn rapidly revolved the steam steering-gear. Obediently the cruiser swung round, narrowly escaping a high explosive missile that, had she maintained her course, would have played havoc with her fo'c'sle.

All around the "Sunderland" the destroyers were dodging hither and thither in order to attempt to avoid the hail of bombs that rained from the sky. It was little short of a miracle that collisions did not take place, for owing to the darkness, the suffocating fumes from the missiles, and to the fact that most of the helmsmen were temporarily blinded and choked, all attempt at formation was out of the question.

From the after-bridge of the cruiser a searchlight flashed skywards. For a few seconds even its powerful rays failed to penetrate the pall of smoke, till an eddying gust freed the "Sunderland" from the noxious fumes.

Then the source of the mysterious missiles was revealed. At a height of over two thousand feet were a couple of Zeppelins. Taking advantage of the fact that the attention of the British seaplanes and destroyers was centred on the fugitive Taubes, these giant airships, by reason of their altitude, were able to manoeuvre immediately above the flotilla.

It was an opportunity too good to be missed, for although the objective of the Zeppelins was a raid on London—they having decided upon a circuitous course over Kent and Sussex borders in order to avoid the air-stations at the Isle of Grain—the chance of raining a shower of bombs upon the British cruiser and her attendant destroyers was too tempting.

For once, at least, the German Admiralty had not been kept well posted as to the details of armament of the cruisers of the "Town Class," for the "Sunderland" and her consorts had recently been equipped with a couple of 12-pounder anti-aircraft guns. These weapons fired a shell of unique character. Somewhat resembling a shrapnel, the missile was packed with short lengths of chain and charged with a high explosive.

Almost as soon as the Zeppelins were discovered both guns barked venomously. From the point of view of the observers on the "Sunderland's" bridge the shells appeared to burst close to the frail targets. Both airships were observed to pitch violently, while one, with her nose tilted downwards, began to descend.

"She's done for!" exclaimed Terence.

A round of cheering burst from the throats of the crew. It seemed as if nothing could arrest the seaward plunge of one of the Kaiser's gas-bags. Not only had her bow compartments been holed but the nacelle containing the propelling machinery was completely wrecked.

Both Zeppelins began to throw out ballast with frantic haste. They also released the whole of their remaining supply of bombs, which fell with a rapid series of deafening detonations more than half a mile from the nearest destroyer.

With the release of the ballast the undamaged Zeppelin shot skywards until her altitude was not less than ten thousand feet. Comparatively safe for the time being from the effect of the anti-aircraft shells, she floated, a mere speck in the concentrated yet diminished glare of a dozen searchlights, and awaited events.

Meanwhile, the damaged Zeppelin had checked her plunge, and, in spite of a hot fire, was slowly rising. By dint of strenuous efforts her crew succeeded in shifting aft the travelling weight that served to trim the unwieldy craft. Even then her longitudinal axis was sharply inclined to the horizontal.

Everything that could be jettisoned was thrown overboard. Guns, ammunition, stores, and the metal framework of the wrecked car were sacrificed, till without being hit by the British guns, she rose to a terrific height.

"We've lost her!" exclaimed Oswestry savagely.

"One thing, she won't trouble us again," added the commander. "And I'm not so certain that she will get clear. We've wirelessed the seaplanes, and they'll have a chip in. Hullo! What's the game now?"

A searchlight flashed from the undamaged Zeppelin and played in ever-widening circles until it picked up her damaged consort. The latter was consequently more plainly discernible to the crew of the "Sunderland" than it had hitherto been, since the distance between the two airships was less than a thousand yards and was visibly decreasing.

"They're going to take her in tow, by Jove!" ejaculated Aubyn, who had brought his binoculars to play upon the scene.

Oswestry gave a snort that implied disbelief in his brother-officer's assertion, but presently he exclaimed:—

"Well, blest if you aren't right, old man. And a deuced smart move," he added, with a true sailor's admiration for a smart manoeuvre, whether executed by friend or foe.

"What a chance for our seaplanes!" said the torpedo lieutenant. "They ought to have been on the spot before this."

"They're on the way all right, Torps," declared the commander. "I wouldn't mind betting a month's pay that they've spotted their quarry. By Jove, they've established communication!"

The undamaged Zeppelin had circled round her consort and was now forging gently ahead. An upward jerk of the other's bows announced that the strain on the towing hawser was beginning to be felt. Gradually the hitherto uncontrollable airship began to gather way, both vessels rolling

sluggishly in the light air-currents.

The aerial searchlight had now been switched off, but by means of the rays directed from the British ships the progress of the two Zeppelins could be followed as their huge shapes, showing ghost-like in the silvery light, moved slowly in a north-easterly direction.

Having resumed their respective stations the cruiser and the destroyer flotilla followed. Owing to the greatly reduced speed of the hostile aircraft it was an easy matter to maintain a fixed relative distance between them and the British vessels, whose attention was divided between the prospect of an aerial meeting with seaplanes and the risk of being intercepted by the torpedo of a German submarine, to say nothing of floating mines.

"She's cast off!" shouted a dozen voices.

Such was the case. The two Zeppelins had parted company, one flying off at a terrific speed, rising rapidly as she did so, while the other, being without means of propulsion, drifted at the mercy of the winds.

It was now dawn. The grey light of morning was already overcoming the strength of the searchlights and it was already possible to discern the outlines of the abandoned Zeppelin by the natural light of day.

Pelting up from the eastward came the air squadron of seaplanes. Half a dozen circled and started off in pursuit of the fugitive airship, which, travelling at high speed, was now but a faint speck against the ruddy sky.

The rest advanced boldly upon the disabled Zeppelin, although ignorant of the fact that she had jettisoned her guns, and, save for a few rifles, was without means of defence.

The seaplanes' automatic guns spat viciously, and as the range decreased almost every shot began to tell. The huge fabric once more began to drop, as the small projectile ripped through the flimsy aluminium envelope.

Presently the seaplanes ceased firing and circled triumphantly over their vanquished foe. They knew that the Zeppelin was doomed, and instincts of humanity forbade them to take undue advantage of the plight of her crew.

"Away, boats!" ordered the "Sunderland's" captain.

Instantly there was a rush to man the boats and to stand by the falls. With an alacrity that was part of his nature, Jack Tar prepared to rescue his enemy, in spite of the fact that that enemy had sallied forth with the deliberate intention of hurling bombs with the utmost indiscrimination upon combatants and non-combatants alike, not excepting helpless women and children.

Before the boats could be lowered a lurid blaze of light rolled out, rivalling the rays of the rising sun. Where the Zeppelin had been only a cloud of flame-tinged smoke remained, while from the mushroomed pall of vapour that marked a funereal pyre of yet another unit of the Kaiser's air-fleet, scorched and twisted girders and other débris streamed seawards.

Whether by accident or design the only remaining petrol tank had exploded, and the flames instantly igniting the huge volume of hydrogen had in the twinkling of an eye completed the work of destruction.

For ten minutes the destroyers cruised over the spot where the débris had disappeared, but there were no signs of survivors, not even of wreckage. The remains of the Zeppelin had been swallowed up by the insatiable sea, and no visible trophy remained in the hands of the men who had baulked an attempted raid on the largest city of the world.

Before the flotilla regained Dover Harbour the remaining seaplanes came in sight. Unfortunately their efforts at pursuit were futile. The Zeppelin developing a turn of speed far in excess of which she had been credited by her detractors, had shaken off the British aircraft, and when last seen she was high over the Belgian coast.

Nevertheless, her wings had been clipped, although she survived to tell the tale that the hated English were still able vigorously and successfully to dispute the mastery of the air.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"LIEUTENANT AUBYN, R.N., D.S.O."

On the evening following the return of the "Sunderland" to Dover, Terence obtained leave to go ashore in order to visit a brother-officer who, owing to his ship being under repairs, was temporarily installed in the Lord Warden Hotel.

Aubyn was proceeding along the Admiralty Pier when his progress was barred by a tall,

bronzed young fellow in the uniform of a flight-lieutenant of the Naval Air Service.

"Hullo, Aubyn, old man!" exclaimed the latter cordially, as he extended his hand. "Forgotten me already?"

"Waynsford, by Jove!" ejaculated Terence. "Bless you, Dick, I never expected to see you here and in this rig. What has happened?"

"Oh, I chucked the Motor Boat Reserve," declared Waynsford. "It was a bit too dull. They sent me to Southampton, and that was the limit. A superannuated postman could have done my job, which was delivering letters to transports. So I applied for the Naval Air Service. It's more in my line."

"Been across yet?" asked Terence, indicating the twenty odd mile strip of water that separated Great Britain from the scene of land hostilities.

"Dunkirk twice," replied Waynsford. "Was there when the Germans started shelling the place. But we're off again early to-morrow morning."

"Yes, I heard," said Aubyn. "Big operations. We are to engage the Zeebrugge and Ostend batteries while the Allied airmen play with the German lines of communication. So I may see something of you."

"I hope so—after the fun is over," replied the young airman. "Well, I must be moving. Early hours and a good night's rest are essential to this sort of work."

The two friends parted, Terence making for the hotel, while Waynsford walked off in the direction of the castle, in which the airmen detailed for the great raid were temporarily quartered.

Precisely at one hour before sunrise the first British waterplane rose from the surface of Dover Harbour. Almost simultaneously an Army aeroplane "kicked off" from the sloping ground beyond the chalk cliffs. Each was followed at regular intervals, until a double row of swift air-craft flying with methodical precision headed towards the Flanders shore.

Already the "Sunderland" and three other light cruisers, accompanied by a torpedo-boat destroyer flotilla, were shaping a course for the Belgian coast.

Off the East Goodwins they were joined by two monitors and three pre-Dreadnought battleships, and the battle line was formed. Away steamed the destroyers to act as screens to the heavier vessels, and to guard them from submarine attack. The monitors led the main division, the cruisers acting as links between them and the battleships, which, owing to their greater draught, could not approach the coast nearer than a distance of from four to seven miles.

From Aubyn's point of view the forthcoming operations were entirely new. For the first time in his experience he was to take part in an action between ships and shore batteries, the latter being both fixed and mobile. It was a comparatively easy matter to plant shells into forts the position of which were known, but the Germans had brought up heavy guns mounted on travelling platforms, which could be moved with considerable celerity behind the long, low-lying sand dunes between Nieuport and Zeebrugge.

It was partly to locate the latter that the airmen had preceded the bombarding ships, and also to harass the enemy's lines of communication. Moreover, hostile submarines were reported to have been brought in sections to Zeebrugge, where they were being bolted together ready to take the offensive against the British vessels operating off the Belgian coast.

The "Sunderland," like her consorts, was already cleared for action. All the crew were behind the protected portions of the ship, but the captain and seven of the officers elected to fight the ship not from the armoured conning-tower but from the fore-bridge.

"By Jove! They're at it already," exclaimed Oswestry, as a series of rapid detonations came from across the dunes.

By the aid of their glasses the officers could discern the fleecy mushrooms of smoke caused by the bursting of the anti-aerial guns directed against the British airmen. Viewed from a distance it seemed impossible that a frail aeroplane could exist amid that tornado of shell.

"Wireless reports mobile battery three hundred yards sou'-sou'-east of Clemskercke church, sir," reported a signalman.

Promptly the news was transmitted to the fire-control platform. In his lofty perch a gunnery-lieutenant was busy with a complication of instruments, assisted by a midshipman and three seamen.

"Fire-control to for'ard 6-inch gun: stand by!" came the telephonic order. "Fire-control to port battery stand by."

Round swung the guns, "laid" by the master hand of the gunnery-lieutenant on the fire-control

platform. Docilely obedient to the delicate mechanism they reared their muzzles high in the air.

Then, with a crash that shook the ship, five of the 6-inch guns spoke simultaneously. To the accompaniment of a long-drawn shriek the 100-pound missiles hurtled through space.

"Eighty yards short," came the wireless report of the observing seaplane that, hovering a bare five hundred feet above the German mobile battery, had marked the point of impact of the shells.

Again a salvo was let loose. This time came the encouraging statement that the hostile guns were knocked clean out of action, and that swarms of artillerymen and infantry were scurrying across the dunes.

The next discharge practically annihilated the fugitives. In one minute and twenty-five seconds the "Sunderland's" particular task was accomplished. It was but the beginning, for acting upon orders from the flagship she was ordered to engage a battery at close range.

Meanwhile, the rest of the battleships and cruisers had not been idle. A perfect tornado of shell was being directed upon the Belgian shore.

"Hard aport!" shouted the captain of the "Sunderland."

Round swung the cruiser, only just avoiding the tell-tale line of bubbles that marked the track of a torpedo. With consummate daring a German submarine had dived under a part of the torpedo-boat destroyer flotilla, and had discharged a weapon at the British cruiser. The torpedo, having missed the "Sunderland," was tearing straight for one of the monitors, which, having to go full speed astern to avoid a collision with a couple of damaged destroyers, was now practically stationary.

Owing to the light draught the weapon passed six feet beneath her keel, and finishing its run rose to the surface three hundred yards beyond; for, instead of the torpedo sinking at the end of its course, the Germans, in direct contravention of the laws of naval warfare, had closed the sinking valve so that the torpedo virtually became a floating mine.

In this instance the trick did not avail, for a well-directed shot from one of the monitor's quick-firers exploded the war-head and sent the missile into a thousand fragments.

"A feeble reply," observed Oswestry to Terence. "These fellows seem afraid to stand to their guns."

Even as he spoke the air was torn by a terrific salvo of shells from powerful batteries hitherto well concealed in the dunes. The "Sunderland," being fairly close, seemed the special mark, for in six seconds she received as many direct hits. One of her funnels showed a jagged gash ten feet in length and was only prevented from toppling overboard by the steel-wire guys. A three-pounder gun, that fortunately was not manned, was blown completely from its mountings, while the rest of the shells passed clean through the unprotected parts of the ship, totally wrecking the ward-room and the stokers' mess-deck.

Terence felt a strong desire to make a hasty rush for the shelter of the conning-tower, for splinters were flying and wafts of pungent smoke from the hostile shells were drifting over the bridge, but the sight of his captain standing cool and collected and without a vestige of protection tended to restore his confidence.

With unabated fury her guns replied to the German fire. The "Sunderland" proved that she could receive as well as give hard knocks.

It was time to give the almost overheated starboard guns a chance to cool, so orders were given for the helm to be starboarded. Seeing the cruiser in the act of turning, a destroyer tore across her bows, purposely throwing out huge volumes of black smoke from her four funnels in order to mask the "Sunderland" as she circled.

Terence recognized the destroyer as his old ship the "Livingstone," as she darted swiftly round the turning cruiser, then, leaving a thick pall of smoke in her wake, hastened off to assist another destroyer that was evidently in difficulties.

The "Livingstone's" manoeuvre undoubtedly saved the "Sunderland" from destruction, for a fifty-two centimetre shell, aimed to hit the exact position where the cruiser would have been had she not altered course, struck the water with a tremendous splash not fifty yards on her beam.

Before the "Sunderland" had drawn clear of the friendly cloud of smoke she had increased her distance from shore by nearly five cables' lengths; while, until the German gunners had found the range anew, she was able to enjoy a brief respite.

"Seaplanes returning," announced the gunnery-lieutenant on the fire-control platform, who from his elevated post could command a wide and almost uninterrupted view.

Their task done, the seaplanes, which had been engaged in dropping bombs on the railway stations in the rear of the German batteries, were on their homeward way. Anxiously Terence counted them. Thank heaven! Not one was missing.

Apparently the last but one of the aerial procession was in difficulties, for the seaplane was rocking violently, and in spite of a dangerous tilt of the elevating planes was appreciably descending.

Suddenly the frail craft plunged, literally on end, towards the sea, the force of gravity, acting with the pull of the propeller, greatly increasing its velocity.

When within two hundred feet of the surface the seaplane made a complete loop, then after climbing a hundred feet or so, began to side-slip.

"By Jove! He'll be drowned for a dead cert," exclaimed Terence, for he knew for a fact that the aviator had not been thrown from the chassis when the seaplane "looped the loop," and in consequence must be strapped to his seat.

"Away sea-boat," ordered the captain, at the same time giving directions for both engines to be reversed.

The "Sunderland" was considerably the nearest warship to the descending airman. Already the "Livingstone" and her two sister-ship destroyers were a mile or so away, and wearing at full speed to investigate a suspicious swirl in the water.

Shells were again dropping unpleasantly near to the cruiser as Aubyn hurried towards the boat which was, owing to being cleared for action, secured inboard, abreast the after funnel.

Before he reached this spot the seaplane had struck the surface of the water. Falling obliquely and at a sharp angle, the impact had shattered one of the floats. When the cascade of spray had subsided the wrecked craft could be seen still afloat but listing acutely. The aviator had survived the shock and was hurriedly unbuckling the strap that held him to his seat.

"Boat's done for, sir," announced one of the would-be crew. Such was the case. The explosion of a shell had wrenched her keel and garboards out of her.

"Then overboard with that!" ordered Terence, indicating a Carley life-buoy, which, though scorched by the blast of the shells, was still practically intact.

The Carley life-buoy is a "new departure" in life-saving appliances on board ships of the Royal Navy. It is a glorified edition of an ordinary buoy, but elongated in shape and provided with gratings, and capable of being propelled by oars.

Half a dozen bluejackets seized the huge buoy and slung it overboard. Held by means of a line it floated alongside the cruiser until Terence and three men clambered into it.

Although the rate of propulsion was not by any means so rapid as that of a boat the progress of the rescuers was far from slow. More than once they were splashed by the spray thrown up by a ricochetting projectile, as the German gunlayers were gradually correcting their aim, yet unscathed the rescue party came alongside the gradually sinking seaplane.

"Hullo, Aubyn!" shouted a well-known voice.

The airman was Waynsford. In his pneumatic helmet and huge goggles he was unrecognizable, but his voice proclaimed his identity.

"Hurt, old man?" asked Terence.

"Not a bit," replied Waynsford coolly. "They clipped a couple of stays just as I was getting out of range. But we did the trick, by Jove! Blew the railway station to Jericho."

"Hurry up," interposed Terence. "She's going."

The young airman methodically gathered together several important instruments, and giving a final look round at the aircraft that had served him so faithfully, stepped into the waiting "Carley."

Before the men had pulled five yards the wrecked machine gave a lurch and capsized completely. Supported by trapped air in the partially intact float the seaplane sank slowly, and with hardly a ripple disappeared from view.

With the least possible delay rescuers and rescued were taken on board the cruiser. Gathering way the "Sunderland" steamed in a westerly direction in order to baffle the range of the shore batteries, using her after guns with terrific speed.

Somewhat unceremoniously leaving his friend Terence hastened towards the bridge. Just as he was abreast of the wreckage of the shattered funnel a deafening detonation, that completely surpassed the roar of the cruiser's guns, seemed to burst over his head. Staggering under the blast of the explosion and temporarily blinded by the pungent smoke, the lieutenant groped his way until his progress was checked by a jagged mass of plating rendered almost red-hot by the impact of a huge shell.

Recoiling, he stood stock still for quite thirty seconds, his senses numbed by the nerve-racking concussion. Then, as the smoke drifted away, he could discern the débris of the bridge. Charthouse, stanchions, semaphore, signal-lockers—all had vanished, and with them the captain and those of the officers and men who had dared fate by rejecting the shelter afforded by the conning-tower, which, stripped of its surroundings, stood out a gaunt, fire-pitted steel box.

The shell, a 42-centimetre, had literally cleared the forepart of the ship, from the for'ard 6-inch gun to the second funnel. Everything in its path had been literally pulverized, with the exception of the conning-tower. Had the projectile burst on or below the main deck the fate of the "Sunderland" would have been sealed; as it was, she was still intact under the waterline.

Instinctively Aubyn realized that the ship was not under control. Steaming rapidly she was heading towards the "Bradford"—her sister ship—which was steering in a north-easterly direction at about five cables' distance on her port bow.

With a tremendous effort of will-power Terence cleared at a bound the formidable glowing plate of metal that obstructed his path. Making his way across the scorched and splintered planks, some of which gave under his weight, he reached the entrance to the conning-tower.

The steel citadel was full of acrid-smelling smoke that eddied in the air-currents which drifted in through the observation slits.

Bending, and holding his left hand over his mouth and nostrils, Terence entered. As he did so he stumbled over the body of the quartermaster.

Propped against the circular walls were the first lieutenant and two seamen. All the occupants of the conning-tower had been overcome by the noxious fumes from the highly-charged projectile.

Gasping for fresh air Terence flung himself upon the steam-steering gear and put the helm hard over. A glimpse through one of the slits revealed the fact that the cruiser was answering to her helm. Yet so narrowly had a collision been averted that the "Sunderland's" starboard side was within twenty feet of the "Bradford's" port quarter as the two vessels swung apart.

The guns were now silent, for with the destruction of the foremast the fire-control platform and its occupants had been swept out of existence. The cruiser was temporarily out of action.

Terence was beginning to feel dizzy and faint. Why, he knew not. Perhaps it was the pungent fumes. Leaning over the mouthpiece of the speaking tube he ordered a couple of quartermasters to be sent to the conning-tower. He could hardly recognize the sound of his own voice. It seemed miles away.

Again he looked ahead. The cruiser was still drawing further and further out of range. Having satisfied himself on that score and that there was no fresh danger of colliding with any of the rest of the fleet, he staggered into the open air and leaned heavily against the outer wall of the conning-tower, He was barely conscious that the metal was still hot.

Up came the quartermasters. At their heels was a sub-lieutenant, his face grimed with smoke and his uniform torn.

"Take over, Garboard," ordered the lieutenant brokenly. "Report to the flagship and ask instructions. I'm feeling deucedly queer."

"Why, you're wounded!" exclaimed the sub-lieutenant, noticing a dark and increasing patch upon Aubyn's coat.

"Am I?" asked Terence incredulously.

Turning his head to ascertain the nature of his injury, of which hitherto he was unconscious, his shoulder slipped along the curved steel wall. Garboard was only just in time to save him from collapsing inertly upon the deck of the ship he had brought safely out of action.

"Congratulations, old man. You'll have to get your tailor to make some alteration in your uniform."

"What do you mean?" asked Terence.

Two months had elapsed since the day on which Lieutenant Aubyn had received a dangerous wound in his right side in the fight off Ostend.

He was sitting in the grounds of the Royal Naval Hospital at Chatham, having made a fairly rapid recovery.

The officer who offered his congratulations was Oswestry, the torpedo-lieutenant of the "Sunderland," who was also a convalescent, having managed to intercept a flying fragment of metal during the momentous engagement.

"Torps" flourished a newspaper with his left hand, for his right arm was in a sling.

"Stop press—Latest news and appointments," he read. "The Admiralty has approved of the following transfer. From R.N.R. to R.N.: Lieutenant Terence Aubyn, to date 3rd of June, 1915."

For a moment Terence looked incredulously at the torpedo-lieutenant. "Torps," he knew, was fond of a practical joke, but if he were playing a prank it was carrying the game a little too far.

"Here you are," continued Oswestry, noting the expression on Terence's face. "Read it for yourself."

"It's worth getting this," said Aubyn, indicating the position of his wound. "All I want now is to be afloat again."

"Young fire-eater!" exclaimed "Torps" facetiously. "Don't you worry—you'll have a look-in before The Day comes. By Jove, Aubyn, you'll have to ask the surgeon if he'll allow you to hold a fête——"

The crunching of boots upon the gravel path caused both officers to turn. Standing at attention was a Marine orderly; behind him a telegraph boy.

"Congratulations pouring in already," remarked "Torps."

Terence took the buff envelope and opened it.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed brokenly, and without another word he handed the telegram to his companion.

"It never rains but it pours," quoted "Torps." "You'll attain Flag-rank in another fifteen years, mark my words. Lieutenant Aubyn, D.S.O."

The "wire" was a private tip from a personal friend at the Admiralty, informing Terence that His Majesty had been graciously pleased to bestow upon him the Distinguished Service Order for gallantry in bringing H.M.S. "Sunderland" out of action during operations off the Belgian coast.

"Torps" was not far short of the mark, for a D.S.O. almost invariably means a rapid promotion to the fortunate and heroic recipient.

"Flag-rank," echoed Terence. "There's plenty of time for that. Meanwhile, that's where duty calls," and with a wave of his hand he indicated the distant North Sea, on which the supreme contest for the supremacy of the waves will prove that the heritage of Nelson is still worthily upheld by Britannia's sons.

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Transcriber's Notes:

This book contains a number of misprints.
The following misprints have been corrected:

[the prisoner nonchalently.] —> [the prisoner nonchalantly.]
[to commuicate with wireless] —> [to communicate with wireless]
[was calculated to be from] —> [was calculated to be seen from]
[of what had occured,] —> [of what had occurred,]
[hostilites as a godsend] —> [hostilities as a godsend]
[a courtesey that the captain] —> [a courtesy that the captain]
[its horribly slippery] —> [it's horribly slippery]
[the concusion had caused] —> [the concussion had caused]
[with the laudible intention] —> [with the laudable intention]
[he crosssd the line] —> [he crossed the line]
[a stragetic point of view] —> [a strategic point of view]

[the faintest attenion to] —> [the faintest attention to]

A few cases of punctuation errors were corrected, but are not mentioned here.

A list of illustrations has been added.

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