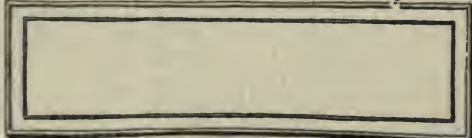
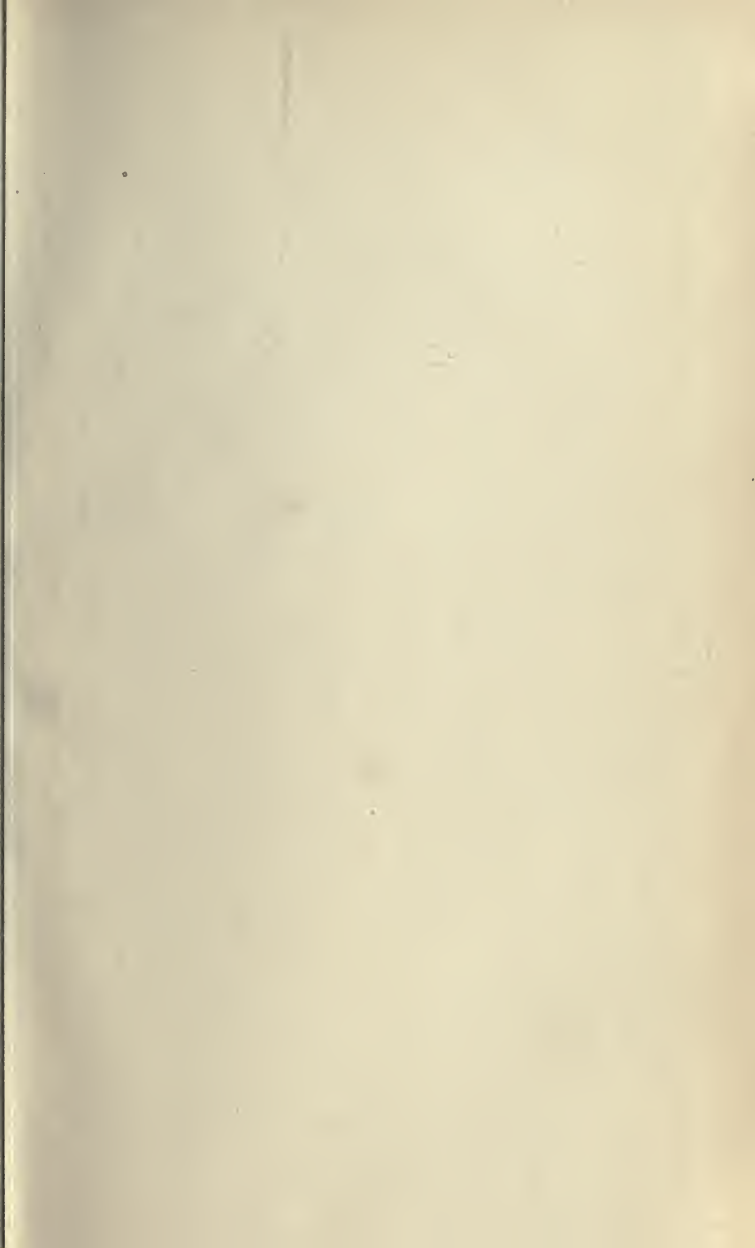


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I JOIN MY FIRST SHIP.

Frontispiece

THE SUB.

BEING THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID
MUNRO, SUB-LIEUTENANT, ROYAL NAVY

Boring

By "TAFFRAIL"

AUTHOR OF "PINCHER MARTIN, O.D.," ETC.

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PREFACE

THIS book was written in the brief spare time at my disposal, and subject to frequent interruption; while often, for weeks at a time, I have been unable to lay pen to paper due to my naval duties. Indeed, without the generous help of my wife, who has read through the narrative both in manuscript and proof, I could hardly have completed the book in time for publication this autumn. Her assistance and suggestions have been invaluable.

“The Sub” may be criticised in that it devotes too much space to pre-hostility days and too little to the present war; but it has been my principal aim to give some idea of the life and training of the boy who enters the Royal Navy as a cadet through the Colleges at Osborne and Dartmouth. Moreover, I hope in a future volume to give further war experiences of Sub-Lieutenant David Munro.

I was not at Osborne myself, and my thanks are due to various brother officers, and to the author of that excellent little book *From*

Dartmouth to the Dardanelles, for certain information concerning the life of a cadet at the R.N. Colleges.

It seems almost unnecessary to state that my characters are fictitious, and that incidents described, though generally true in themselves and unexaggerated, must not be taken too literally.

“TAFFRAIL.”

NORTH SEA

September 1917.

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CHAPTER I

PURELY PERSONAL

§ 1

THOUGH I have never regretted the happy fortune which caused my name to be entered on the list of prospective candidates for admission as cadets to the Royal Naval College at Osborne, it has always been somewhat of a mystery to me how my father first came to consider the Royal Navy as a profession for his second son. I daresay I was the proverbial fool of the family, but my parent himself was in the Army and my elder brother followed in his footsteps.

So far as I am aware, moreover, none of my relations have ever served in the fleet of His Majesty or his predecessors. We have no seafaring ancestors and no nautical traditions—only one uncle who has an interest in the welfare of a certain shipping company whose vessels he has never seen.

My own early recollections of the sea merely date back to the days of our annual summer visits to the seaside, where, attached to the extremity of a long line, the shore end

of which was firmly held by some responsible person on the beach, I was wont to disport myself in water up to my waist. I eventually learnt to swim, and was then permitted to go afloat fishing in a small boat with a long-shore mariner clad in a beard, a blue jersey, and immense sea-boots.

The fishing, which figured conspicuously in the list of attractions of the place, existed largely in the imagination of the local boatmen, who thereby reaped a rich harvest from those unsuspecting summer visitors who knew no better. From my point of view it was never really successful, though I remember, at the age of nine, earning an honest sixpence from my brother by swallowing whole one of the furry-looking worms which we used as bait. It was the last of my brother's pocket-money, and, thinking that I would never do it, he called me "a dirty little beast!" I quite agree. I certainly was a glutton in those days, but I still consider that the assimilation of that worm was worth more than a miserable sixpence!

On my eleventh birthday I went to sea for the first time under sail in a clinker-built, cutter-rigged vessel known as the *Skylark*. She spent most of her time hauled up on the beach, but when a loud-voiced, red-faced, perspiring gentleman in gold braid and a yachting cap had induced or bullied sufficient people to "Walk up, walk up,

ladies and gents! Come and 'ave a blow on the briny in the *Skylark*! Fine sailin' breeze! All round the bay for sixpence!" they launched the noble vessel into her rightful element, erected a precarious gang-plank from her bows to the water's edge, and started to rake in the money as adventurous passengers climbed gingerly on board.

I, having received a birthday present of five shillings from a kind aunt, was temporarily opulent, and even consented to pay for my elder brother's ticket if he came with me. He, seventeen years old and rather blasé, had been out in the *Skylark* before and saw nothing at all romantic in the enterprise. He was a bit of a sea-dog in his way, and, with him smoking a forbidden cigarette and me feeling like Christopher Columbus setting out to discover the New Continent, we embarked.

Presently we were reinforced by a battered, blue-chinned ruffian with a cornet; a woman with a large string-bag and a small baby; a seedy-looking man in a bowler hat with three scrubby children—two sucking oranges and one a stick of glutinous peppermint rock; a merry, middle-aged gentleman in a black cutaway coat, white waistcoat, ditto trousers, panama hat, and tennis shoes, and who, from his very nautical language, I imagined at the time to be a retired Admiral; and an unsuspecting curate and his wife.

The gold braided personage then stepped on board, eyed us contemptuously, remarked to his mate that we looked a "cheap lot," and gruffly gave orders to "Let 'er go, Bill! 'Oist the fore-s'l!" The gang-plank was drawn ashore, and amidst the stirring blasts of "A life on the ocean wave" from the cornet, we set forth on our voyage of discovery.

But before we had been ten minutes afloat I discovered that a home on the rolling deep, in the good ship *Skylark*, at any rate, did not suit me. It may have been that I had spent too much of that five shillings on unnecessary nourishment during the morning. It may have been the heat of the sun or the steady but disconcerting pitching of the *Skylark*. I don't really know what caused it, but I started yawning, while my face, so my brother tells me, rapidly assumed a ghastly, greenish tinge, so that presently I leant over the side and offered my first tribute to Father Neptune. The curate and his wife, overcome at the sight, followed suit. So did the nautical gentleman in the white waistcoat, and the woman with the baby and the string-bag. So did the seedy-looking man and the three scrubby children. We were all involved in it, and all through me.

The skipper glared at us with the deepest disgust, while my unsympathetic brother did his best to pretend that I did not belong

to him. But I was long past caring what he thought about it. I was as limp and as pallid as any pocket-handkerchief. It did not signify to me whether it was Christmas or Easter. I had to be carried ashore with my fellow-sufferers, and thus ended my first real nautical experience which I am never likely to forget.

It must have been soon after this distressing episode that my father, through mutual friends, met Captain Charles Playfair, D.S.O., R.N. I think they played golf together, but I well remember the Captain once coming to lunch with us during my holidays. It occurs to me now, moreover, that my mother was distinctly anxious that I should create a good impression, for she took me up to my room, stood over me while I scrubbed my hands, changed my collar, and brushed my hair, made quite certain that there was no line of demarcation round my neck, and told me again that I must be sure not to open my mouth unless I was first spoken to, and that on no account was I to rattle the fork against my teeth during the assimilation of food.

To tell the truth, I felt rather awed at all these preparations. It was the first time in my life that I had ever had the opportunity of seeing a real live Captain of the Royal Navy, much less of speaking to one. Through my father having been in the Army and our home being near a large garrison

town I had met quite a number of military officers—generals, colonels, majors, and captains, some of whom took notice of me and some of whom did not. But a naval officer I had never seen, and being thoroughly *au fait* with *Peter Simple* and *Mr. Midshipman Easy*, I regarded the commanding officers of His Majesty's men-of-war as something quite apart from the ordinary run of human beings. I think I imagined them as fierce ogres whom one approached on one's hands and knees like the gilded image of King Nebuchadnezzar.

But Captain Playfair wasn't a bit like that, and when the gong rang for lunch and I crept downstairs on tip-toe with my face shining with soap, halted for a space outside the dining-room door, and then summoned up courage to enter, I was very surprised. Captain Playfair seemed quite human. He didn't even wear his uniform, merely a grey suit of rough tweed with the baggiest of knickerbockers. His calves were very muscular, and as my own legs were like a chicken's, I very much admired them.

He was a strongly built, thickset man of average height. His hair was tinged with grey, and he had a short beard, a ruddy-brown, weatherbeaten face all covered in tiny wrinkles, and a pair of the kindest blue eyes I have ever seen. They seemed to twinkle and to laugh at one, and some years later, when he was the commanding officer

of my first seagoing ship, I discovered that he had the kindest heart as well. In those later days we "Snotties" all stood in the greatest awe of him; but he never got angry without good reason, and rarely with us. When he was angry, however, it was time to stand clear.

"Hullo!" said my father as I entered. "Here he is. Playfair, this is David, my second son."

"How d'you do, sir," said I, going forward.

"How d'you do, young man," nodded Captain Playfair, smiling and wrinkling up the corners of his eyes as he looked me keenly up and down and shook hands. "How old are you?"

"Eleven and three quarters, sir."

"And how would you like to go into the Navy when you're a little older?"

"I don't think he's really thought about it yet," my mother put in. "We haven't mentioned it."

The Captain laughed. "Won't do him any harm to start thinking about it," he answered. "We catch 'em young, you know. Bless my soul! I was at sea before I was fourteen. How's he getting on with his work at school?"

My father looked dubious. My last report had not been a very good one.

"I'm afraid he's rather backward," he explained. "However, he's improving,

and can do well if he really sets his mind to it."

"Ah well," the Captain said. "He's very young. I was never much of a shining light myself at his age. But look here, youngster," he went on kindly. "If you want to get into the Navy, you'll have to work hard, you know."

"I'll do my best, sir," I faltered, hardly knowing what to say.

"That's right. I'm sure you will," said Captain Playfair, patting me on the shoulder. "You can't go up for Osborne until you're a few months over thirteen, but remember to dig out and to get in. Then, if I have a ship when you go to sea, I'll apply for you as one of my midshipmen."

"Thank you, sir," said I.

It was the first time in my life that I had ever seriously thought of the Navy as a possible profession, and the idea, bursting in upon me suddenly, came as rather a bombshell. Not that I disliked the prospect, in spite of my unpleasant experience on board the *Skylark*. I had read all Marryat's novels and all the sea adventure stories I had been able to get hold of, while during the summer holidays I had made friends with a coast-guardsmen, whose tall yarns had filled my little heart with a love for the sea and a desire to see the world.

But my parents had never said anything about my joining the Navy. I had indulged

in the usual infantile wishes to become an engine-driver, a tram conductor, or a bicycle merchant, but at the back of my mind I had always taken it for granted that I should one day find myself in the Army, like my father, brother, and many of my relations. Of course I had sailed a boat on a pond, but ever since I could remember my toys and games had been almost entirely martial. I had innumerable boxes of leaden soldiers, with which I used to spend hours fighting imaginary battles. I built forts in the garden, and had possessed numerous toy swords and guns, a series of drums and trumpets, a brass helmet with a long flowing mane, and a shining cuirass. I sometimes spent hours in my warlike panoply marching up and down the garden path on sentry-go outside the hall door, and when the other small boys of the place used to come and help me to fight the Dervishes, the Red Indians, and the other warlike tribes which, in my fervid imagination, inhabited the pine woods round our house, my military equipment was always much admired and envied.

So it was a serious and rather sad-faced little boy who, after lunch that day, retired to the play-room and tumbled all his toys out on to the floor. It was a wrench to have to part with them, but I had made up my mind.

“Mother,” I asked, when we were alone at

tea that afternoon, "am I really going to be a sailor?"

"Yes, dear," she said. "Father and I hope you will get into the Navy some day. You would like it, wouldn't you?"

"Y-yes. But . . ." I hesitated.

"Well, dear, what is it?"

"Do you mind if I give away my soldiers and guns and things?" I queried, with a lump in my throat.

"Give them all away! Whatever put that idea into your head?"

"Only I thought that if I was to be a sailor I shouldn't want them any more," I stammered, on the verge of tears.

"You can do what you like with them, David dear," she said, smiling softly. "They are your own toys."

"Y-yes. And mother?"

"Well?"

"Will you give me a model steamboat with engines for my next birthday?"

"Yes, dear, if you like. But your birthday isn't for nearly four months."

"I know," said I wisely. "But I thought I'd let you know now. You see, Aunt Caroline generally gives me a box of soldiers or something potty like that, so I thought you might write and tell her that I'd rather have other things more fit for a sailor."

"I see," she nodded, laughing at me.

So that night when I went to my room I hung the brass helmet and my little array

of weapons on the rail at the foot of my bed. I said good-bye to them all in turn, thanked them for their trusty services, and laid my head on my pillow with a sigh of regret. It was a wrench parting with them, but my mind was made up, and the next morning before breakfast I carried them, and all my boxes of soldiers, off to the wood, where I concealed them in a disused gravel-pit which we used as a fort.

We had arranged a sanguinary battle with Afghans as a diversion for the morning, and at ten o'clock, when my valiant army of five other small boys turned up, I made them a little speech.

"You chaps can share all these things between you," I said, pointing to my pile of toys with a solemn face. "I shan't play at rotten soldiers any more."

"Not going to play soldiers any more!" echoed Tony Whittle, staring at me in undisguised amazement. "But we were going to be Afghans, and Bob was to be our prisoner, and we were going to tie him to a tree and cut his inside out!"

"No," said I stoutly. "That's all rot. I'm sick of soldiering. I'm going into the Navy!"

"Bags I the helmet!" shrieked the youth about to be sacrificed, making a dart for the brazen headgear.

"Bags I!" shrilled Tony, falling upon him. "I'm the eldest and have first pick!"

They both fell to the ground fighting furiously.

“Ow! Let go my hair, you beast!”

“Take your elbow out of my face, then!”

“Shan’t unless you promise not to bite!”

They writhed on the ground breathing heavily and rolling over and over in their efforts to get uppermost.

The other three joined in, and the battle that morning was quite the most realistic I had ever witnessed. They fought for my booty with hands, feet, and teeth, while I looked on and encouraged them to further efforts.

“Pax!” gasped Bob, prone on the ground with Tony sitting on his stomach. “You can have the beastly thing!”

“Jolly good thing for you!” spluttered the victor, releasing his antagonist. “Golly, I’ve split my breeches!”

So “pax” it was, and when my cherished belongings had been shared out, I conducted the scarred and bleeding heroes to the lavatory. I don’t know what their respective mothers said when they got home with their black eyes, their bleeding noses, and their torn garments.

§ 2

With the prospect of joining the Navy ever before me, I certainly did work harder at school than I had ever worked before,

so that in a year and nine months, by which time I was thirteen and a half and eligible for entry from the point of view of age, I was proficient enough in English, History, Geography, Arithmetic, Algebra, Geometry, French, and Latin to pass the qualifying examination for admission to Osborne. Moreover, I was the son of "natural-born British subjects," and, though rather thin, was "in good health, free from any physical defect of body, impediment of speech, defect of sight or hearing, and also from any predisposition to constitutional or hereditary disease or weakness of any kind." I also possessed "full normal vision as determined by Snellen's tests."

But it was neither the x and y part of the business nor the "medical" which caused me qualms. It was the dreaded interview in which prospective candidates were closeted alone in a room with half a dozen flag officers and public-school headmasters, so that, by a series of questions on any conceivable subject, their social qualifications and general suitability for the Navy were determined. I was aware that three hundred boys or so presented themselves for each qualifying test, and that only seventy-five or eighty of these were ever successful. Would I be one of the lucky 25 per cent.? My schoolmaster evidently thought so from what he told my father, but I was by no means so sanguine.

A month before the date of my interview, myself and the two other young gentlemen who were trying for the Navy from our particular school were visited by a tailor. It was a red letter day for us, for the tailor, he informed us, was a representative of the firm of Messrs. Slieve, Simons & Seawood, the naval outfitters, who, nothing if not enterprising, had managed in some mysterious fashion to procure a list of the intending candidates, and sent their representatives all over the kingdom to measure them one and all for their uniform. Seventy-five per cent. of the boys who were measured, and had their hopes raised by feasting their eyes on the picture of a sea-chest, and the coloured illustration of a naval cadet in most immaculate raiment—blue, double-breasted monkey-jacket, with its eight brass buttons and the most fascinating little buttons and strips of white twist on the collar, gold badged cap with patent-leather peak, and the sharpest of creases down the legs of the nether garments—never got into Osborne at all. But Mr. Slieve got the custom of most of those who did, and I think he deserved it.

Never, before or since, have I known a more enterprising firm. They have branches at nearly every naval port, and know the idiosyncrasies of naval officers almost better than they know them themselves. They have a telegraphic code, and if one is in China and cables home the single word "Giraffe,"

for example, one invariably receives the six lambswool undervests, the pair of shooting-boots, the safety razor, telescope, or sword, the bracelet or brooch for a young lady, or whatever else one happens to be in need of at the moment, by the earliest possible mail.

History relates that a dashing lieutenant in Malta once ordered a polo pony, and received the animal in due course. I won't vouch for the truth of the yarn, but I verily believe that Mr. Slieve could provide an elephant or a steam yacht if he thought there was any prospect of his customer being able to pay for them.

No matter what happens, the presiding genius of the firm is always very much on the top line. If one is appointed to a new ship, he knows all about it. If one is promoted, he telegraphs his "respectful congratulations," and sends his representative on board the next day to make the necessary arrangements for the sewing on of the extra gold stripe. I still treasure a recollection of a newly promoted commander being chased down the crowded thoroughfare of a certain east coast naval port by Mr. Slieve's local manager. It was a hot day, but the representative of the well-known firm was fleet of foot.

"Excuse me, sir," he said breathlessly, overtaking his quarry. "I saw you passing, and thought I would tell you that we have altered the lace on your best monkey-jacket,

and that we have a new cap which will fit you ! ”

So the officer turned back and entered the shop. He went in wearing the two and a half gold stripes and plain peaked cap of a lieutenant-commander, but was bowed out ten minutes later in the three stripes and “ brass hat ”¹ of a full-blown commander.

The manager himself saw him off the premises. “ Pardon me saying so, sir,” he observed, rubbing his hands, “ but I am of the opinion that the new cap is very becoming to your type of face. It gives you a presence, sir, if I may be permitted to say so. Yes, sir, the other monkey-jackets will be ready for wear the day after tomorrow without fail, and if there is anything else you may be requiring, we are always ready and anxious to serve you.”

“ Thanks very much,” said the officer, covered in blushes and confusion.

“ Thank you, sir,” said Mr. Slieve’s representative with a bow.

All of which, I may remark, took place at 5 o’clock in the afternoon of the day on which the officer’s promotion had appeared in the morning papers !

But all this is merely by the way. It has nothing whatever to do with my entrance examination for Osborne.

¹ “ Brass hat.” Officers of commander’s rank and above have gold laurel-leaf embroidery on the peaks of their caps.

It was on a cold and blustery morning in January, 1907, soon after the school had reassembled after the Christmas holidays, that the other two boys for the Navy and myself, arrayed in our best Eton suits, overcoats, and shiny top-hats, and accompanied by our "Head Beak," the Reverend Robert Hastings, M.A., took the train to London. It was a solemn and auspicious occasion, and we travelled first class. It was no time for unseemly levity, though we did manage to beguile the monotony of the forty-minute run to St. Pancras by sticking pins into the legs of Tommy Hargreaves while our learned preceptor was immersed in the *Times*. And the best of it was that Tommy daren't squeal or otherwise take exception to our proceedings. Then we derived some comfort from a box of eucalyptus and menthol lozenges which we discovered upon his person, and which he had been allowed to bring with him on account of the lingering remnants of a bad cold in the head.

But at last we arrived in what a journalist would call the "gay metropolis," and, bundling into a taxicab, we were first taken to a hairdresser, where we had our hair cut, shampooed, and plastered all over with pomatum to please our examiners, after which we proceeded to a dismal block of buildings not far from Westminster Abbey. Here old Hastings disappeared, leaving us to be conducted to a large room with desks,

where we found about a dozen more boys from other schools. We eyed each other shyly and suspiciously, longing to fight; but presently a solemn-looking chap with a bald head and a voice like a tin trumpet appeared on the scene, said, "Seat yourselves, young gentlemen," gave us pens, ink, and paper, and read out a short but very dull dictation. When this was finished, he told us to write an essay on King Henry VIII, of all subjects. I cannot remember exactly what I said, but I know I made the most of the matrimonial adventures of that redoubtable monarch.

One by one the participators in the great event, for, believe me, it was a great event in our lives, were summoned into the inner audience chamber, where the members of the interviewing board waited to devour us. One by one they returned, some with hopeful face and a devil-may-care sort of attitude, others moody, despondent, and obviously disappointed. Then the asthmatic-voiced custodian opened the door and glanced at a paper in his hand.

"Mister David Munro to step this way, please," he croaked automatically.

It was my turn at last. I was David Munro, "Mister" for the first time in my life, and with strange palpitations at my heart I left the room and followed the porter along endless, dreary-looking corridors, until we eventually came to a closed door, behind which I could hear the subdued hum of

voices. I steeled myself. The porter knocked at the door and was bidden to usher me in.

I entered, feeling like an early Christian martyr about to be thrown to a den of lions. I heard the door close softly behind me, and experienced a miserable feeling of utter loneliness.

I still remember that severely furnished room, and the varnishy smell it had. I can picture the neutral-tinted walls, bare, save for a couple of old-fashioned steel engravings of long-defunct celebrities in heavy black frames; the glass-fronted, mahogany book-case filled with learned-looking, leather-bound volumes; the blazing fire; brown linoleum-covered floor; and two windows displaying patches of dull wintry sky and an endless succession of gaunt chimney-tops and a few skeleton trees in the middle distance. I recollect the blank map of the world hung rakishly over an easel, and the table with its green cloth round which my examiners were seated, each with a blotting-pad, paper, pencils, and all the rest of the paraphernalia in front of him. There were seven of them. Three had bronzed faces, straight, determined mouths, and wrinkles round the corners of their eyes, which told me they belonged to the Royal Navy. Another was a bespectacled clergyman, while the other three were obviously schoolmasters.

It was almost with a feeling of relief that I saw that one of the naval officers, an elderly, clean-shaven man with merry grey eyes, occupied the post of honour at the head of the table. I felt somehow that he was inclined to be friendly, for he looked up smiling, noticed my nervousness, and waved a hand towards a vacant chair facing him at the foot of the table.

“Sit you down, youngster,” he said.

I did so.

“Well,” he went on. “Your father was in the Army, eh?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Have you any relations in the Navy?”

“Not so far as I know, sir.”

“Why would you like to join?”

“My father thought it was a good thing, sir.”

“Quite so, boy; but what do you think about it?” he asked, eyeing me critically.

“Oh, I should like it awfully, sir.”

“Why?”

“I’d like to go all over the world, sir, and have a chance of fighting,” said I. “And I’m very fond of the sea. I’d far sooner be in the Navy than the Army, sir.”

He grinned. “I daresay you’re right. Do you know anything about the Navy?”

“Oh yes, sir! I can tell you the names of all the latest Dreadnoughts, and I know how many guns they have and what speed they can go.”

He grunted. "I don't want to hear that. Tell me the date of the battle of 'er, let's see, yes, the Battle of Camperdown?"

"Seventeen ninety-seven, sir."

I don't really believe he knew whether I was right or wrong.

"Who was it fought against, and what was the name of the British Admiral?"

"It was fought against the Dutch, sir, and our Admiral's name was Duncan," I informed him.

"'Umph! Ever heard of Quiberon Bay?"

"Oh yes, sir. That was where Lord Hawke beat the French fleet under Admiral Conflans in seventeen fifty-nine. He sailed in and fought them on a lee shore."

My questioner seemed rather surprised. "And where did you learn that, boy?" he wanted to know.

"I think I read it in a book, sir."

"Right. Now you ask him some questions," he added, turning to one of the schoolmasters, and setting to work to draw little pictures of ships and things on his blotting-paper.

"Whereabouts is Ceylon?" I was asked. "Point it out on the map."

I got up and did so, correctly.

"What is the capital of Ceylon?"

"Col . . . no, sir. I mean Kandy."

"What does Ceylon export?"

"Spices, coconut oil, pearls, and tea, sir,"

I rattled off. "Sir Thomas Lipton gets all his tea from there."

The officer at the head of the table tittered, but the gentleman who asked the question glared at me as though I were a criminal. Evidently he thought I had intended to be funny; but I was much too nervous for that.

"Where is the isthmus of Panama?" he snapped, thinking to floor me.

"Here, sir," said I, pointing to the map.

"What is an isthmus?"

"A narrow strip of land joining two larger pieces."

"And what do you know about Panama?"

"The Americans are building a canal there," I answered, beginning to dislike the man.

"And when the canal is finished it will join . . . ?" he looked up interrogatively.

"The Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean."

"Thus making it unnecessary for a ship voyaging from, say, New York to Valparaiso . . . by the way, what is Valparaiso the capital of?"

"Chile, sir," I told him, bored at the stupidity of the question. I had not collected stamps for nothing.

"Quite right. And by having a canal through the isthmus of Panama a ship going from New York to Valparaiso will save many hundreds of miles by not having to . . . ?" he paused, and looked at me.

“Go through the Straits of Magellan,” I said.

“Not necessarily the Straits of Magellan,” he observed pedantically. “She might go round Tierra del Fuego and pass Cape . . . ?”

“Cape Horn,” said I.

“Is this ship of yours a steamer or a sailing ship?” queried the Admiral at the head of the table.

“Oh, ’er, a steamer, I think,” said the schoolmaster.

“Well she’d go through the Straits if I was in charge of her,” the naval man grunted.

The schoolmaster seemed rather annoyed.

They turned me inside out, asking me amongst other things to tell them what I knew of the War of the Spanish Succession; of William Wallace—I mixed him up with Robert Bruce, and brought in a long story about the industrious spider—and the names and professions of the Twelve Apostles, this latter question coming from the clergyman. Further, they wished to know what games I played, and why I preferred football to cricket; what books I had read and cared for most, while one of the naval officers—I think he was a post-captain—asked whether I knew “port” from “starboard” and a “granny” from a “reef-knot.” Finally I was told to name the three most important inventions of the age.

“Wireless telegraphy, aeroplanes, and—’er, submarines, sir,” said I.

The chief examiner nodded approvingly.

“And what would you do if you were stranded in London with no money to get home?” he asked.

I thought for a moment or two. “I think I should go to the shop where my father buys his cigars and tell the man what I wanted, sir,” I said.

“Oh, indeed. And supposing it was Sunday and the place was shut?”

“I should go to my uncle, sir,” I explained, innocently enough.

Somebody tittered.

“What, and pawn your watch?” asked the Admiral.

“Oh no, sir! I should ask him to lend me five shillings. The fare home is only two and ninepence third class.”

He smiled. “And suppose your uncle wasn’t in, what then?”

“I’d borrow it from the butler, sir,” I told him, not to be outdone.

“And who is this uncle of yours?”

“It’s my aunt really, sir,” I stammered. “She’s my mother’s sister and married my uncle. Her name is Conway, and she lives at 21, Worcester Square. It’s not far from Lancaster Gate station, sir.”

“Thank you, young gentleman, that will do,” said the Admiral, nodding at me with a smile. “Good morning, and do not omit to close the door behind you like the last youngster.”

I bowed and retired. The interview was over.

The medical examination, which came next, was a depressing ordeal enough, and on my arrival in the room with one of my schoolmates we were told by a dreary-looking gentleman with gold pince-nez to strip to the buff behind a screen in a small and very draughty alcove. Then we sallied forth, naked and very ashamed, while the gloomy person and an equally mouldy friend appraised us as if we were fowls or sheep. They pounded and thumped our bodies, tested our eyesight, sounded our hearts, made us climb up ropes attached to the ceiling and jump in the air, ordered us to cough and to say "ninety-nine," and asked us the most searching questions about ourselves and our parents.

I suppose really that the two examining doctors were kind and sympathetic enough, but how I hated them at the time. After all, one never feels at one's best when one has to appear before utter strangers without a vestige of a garment in which to hide one's nakedness. It reminds one, somehow, of those horrible, nightmarish dreams in which one imagines oneself arriving at Windsor Castle for a garden party, or walking down Bond Street, in nothing but a cholera-belt.

We were not informed at the time whether or not we had been found sound in wind and limb. However, I cared little for that. I

was merely very glad to get into my clothes again, for the room itself was like a hot-house and our dressing-cubicle like the inside of a refrigerator.

The third fellow who had been up from our school had apparently failed, for about a month or so later Tommy Hargreaves and myself were again summoned to London for the written exam. I had never been clever, but even I did not find it very difficult, and three weeks later both our names appeared in the newspapers among the successful candidates. I was glad that they were put down in alphabetical order, otherwise I might have figured near the bottom of the list.

Soon afterwards I received the official announcement from the Admiralty informing me that I must hold myself in readiness to join the Royal Naval College at Osborne, Isle of Wight, in May. Messrs. Slieve, Simons & Seawood rose to the occasion, and on Easter Sunday I went to church at home in my brand-new cadet's uniform. It was the first time I had worn it, except for a dress rehearsal in the drawing-room, and I am afraid I put on a considerable amount of "side." At any rate, I remember being rather diffident about talking to friends of my own age who, in their Eton suits, were still mere civilians. I imagined myself a bit of a "nut," if not the king of all the filberts.

But I was small for my age, and soon afterwards my pride was taken down a peg, and by the bookstall man at the station, of all people.

I had been up to London to visit the dentist, and had returned alone, and my brother came rather late to meet me.

“Have you seen any one in naval uniform?” he asked Mr. Sugg, the bookstall manager.

“No, sir,” said the old beast, “I have not. But there was a little boy dressed up as a sailor here about ten minutes ago.”

Dressed up as a sailor, forsooth! The cheek of the man!

CHAPTER II

THROUGH THE MILL

§ 1

IN due course, wearing my uniform, and accompanied by one small trunk, a regulation handbag in brown leather, a cricket bag, and a new, evil-smelling mackintosh, I arrived at Waterloo station to catch the special cadet's train to Portsmouth *en route* for Osborne. The greater portion of my kit, thanks to the indefatigable energy of Mr. Slieve, had been sent to the College in my new sea-chest a week or more beforehand.

We, the newly entered cadets, joined a day earlier than the others to give us a chance of becoming more or less acclimatised to our new surroundings before the old-timers arrived, but of the seventy and five sucking Jellicoes on the platform there was only one that I knew, and that was Tommy Hargreaves. We both felt shy and lonely in such a crowd of strange faces, and I think he was just as glad of my moral support as I was of his.

My term-mates came from different schools all over the United Kingdom. Some were

large and some were small. Some were tall and thin, others fat and stumpy. Some had rosy cheeks and were cheerful, others were pale faced and seemed on the verge of tears. Some were loud-voiced and aggressive, but most of us were very humble and meek. A few of those who knew no better had brought their fathers and mothers, their aunts, and their sisters to see them off. Half a dozen parents, indeed, as assorted in shape and size as their progeny, even accompanied us to Portsmouth in the train, and did not finally leave us until their tearful offspring were safely embarked on board the dockyard tug which ferried across the Solent to Osborne. But I, wise in my generation, and considering myself very much a man of the world, would have none of these things. I would not have dreamt of allowing my parents to accompany me even if they had expressed a desire to do so, which they had not.

After all, parents are all very well in their right place, at home. But on the platform of a railway station amongst a crowd of their son's future companions they are a positive nuisance, and little know what misery their young hopefuls afterwards have to suffer through their presence. The "mother's darlings" always started under a disadvantage, and until half-way through our first term one fellow called Smiley-Jones was always having his leg pulled because his

mother, father, and a rather pretty flapper sister came with him as far as Portsmouth. Moreover, the sister wept when Smiley-Jones departed. I suppose boys are little beasts to each other, but our remarks were always personal, sometimes brutal.

“Hullo, Smiler?” we used to ask him. “How’s your ugly sister? Give her my love next time you write, and ask her if she’s got a clean handkerchief yet,” or “I don’t think much of your mother’s taste in dress, old chap. I do hope she will have been able to get a new bonnet by the time you go on leave.”

But I have rather gone off at a tangent.

At Waterloo station there was also the lieutenant of our term and four cadet captains to look after us. Some of us saluted the lieutenant and some of us did not, but as neither he nor his myrmidons started to exert their authority until we arrived at Portsmouth, none of us quite realised at the time that he was to be our guide and mentor, and the ruler of our destinies for the next two years of our lives.

Each term at Osborne or at Dartmouth has its own officer in charge of it who arranges the games, enforces discipline, and is generally responsible for the well-being and behaviour of his cadets. Our lieutenant’s name was Massey-Johnson, Richard Massey-Johnson, and he had all but played for his county at cricket, and actually had

his cap for Rugby with the United Services. I believe he played for England afterwards. I shouldn't think he was much of an "a chaser," but was a rattling good seaman and dead keen on games and athletics generally, and woe betide any cadet who made a habit of spending his afternoons in the canteen instead of taking proper exercise. Moreover, Massey-Johnson's notions of discipline and of what was correct and proper deportment in future naval officers were also very strict. In short, if we misbehaved ourselves, he "chassed" ¹ us until our lives became a misery and a burden, and now, looking back at it, I must say that his régime did us a power of good.

We all loved him, and at the end of two years, when we left Osborne for Dartmouth, we each subscribed two shillings with the idea of presenting him with a small memento in the shape of a travelling-clock. Then we were informed that collective presents from juniors to seniors were not allowed by the regulations, so the project fell through. We had a photograph of the whole lot of us taken instead, a copy of which, in a frame with a small silver plate bearing an inscription, we gave him on the last day of our last term. He said he would treasure it all his life, and nearly wept when he said good-bye to us.

The "cadet captains" were selected from

¹ "Chassed," *i.e.* chased or harried.

among the senior terms, and acted as assistants to the lieutenant, being put in charge of their juniors in much the same way as prefects at a public school. They were distinguished by a little knot of gold lace worn on one sleeve, were allowed certain privileges, and received the sum of one shilling a week for their services. Their ideas of discipline were also strict, and if we were slack or idle, they either applied the toe of a boot to a certain portion of our anatomy, or reported us to the officer of the term.

But it was not until our arrival at Portsmouth that Massey-Johnson and his myrmidons took charge, and started to hustle us into shape. Mr. Slieve's representative, having chartered a couple of covered vans to convey our luggage to the dockyard, was also there waiting for us, and in the intervals of superintending the disembarkation of our belongings from the train, he did his best to answer the innumerable questions of a horde of cadets.

Never shall I forget one very small fellow called Johnny Harker, who marched up to him.

"I say," he demanded, in a shrill treble, "do you come from Slieve's?"

"I do, sir," said the man, mopping his heated brow.

"Well, my mother says that the six summer vests you've given me aren't thick enough. She wants to know if you'll

change them for thicker ones with long sleeves?"

"If you will give me your name, sir," said "Mr. Slieve," producing a notebook without a smile on his face, "the matter shall be rectified with all possible despatch."

It was, but poor Johnny was known as the "frowster" or "fuggy beast" for ever afterwards. Thick, long-sleeved vests in summer were quite beyond the pale at Osborne!

At last, after a certain amount of confusion and much shoving into places on the part of the cadet captains, we were marshalled in fours outside the station.

"Party . . . left turn!" ordered the lieutenant. "Quick . . . march!"

We stepped off bravely enough, some with the right foot and some with the left. We swelled out our chests and tried to walk with a nautical roll, so that the crowd of on-lookers might be gulled into believing that we were real sailors. But it was a miserable failure.

"Lor' love a duck!" I heard a woman remark in a strident whisper as we ambled down the Hard. "Look at the little dears! What are they, I wonder?"

"Them's a horphanage out for a hairin'," said her husband. "They 'ain't got no farthers nor mothers, pore little blokes, so they gives 'em a treat once a year by takin' 'em round the dockyard to see the ships."

I felt very small—very small indeed.

Immediately in rear of our phalanx came the two chariots filled with luggage. Astern of them, like a chief mourner, came Mr. Slieve's man, alternately sucking a pencil, scratching his head, and making hurried entries in a notebook. Behind him again came a party of parents and relations with those very self-conscious cadets to whom they belonged. It only wanted a band at our head and a few wreaths to transform our triumphal procession into a very fair representation of a naval funeral.

We marched along the Hard and in through the dockyard gates with the policemen grinning at us behind their moustaches. We tramped up a cobbled roadway, and then, turning to the left, passed under a couple of archways and arrived on the South Railway Jetty. There was a "Dreadnought" lying alongside, and we eyed her curiously. Some of us had never seen a battleship before, and the sight of her huge grey hull and long guns rather filled us with amazement.

But the tug, a sturdy yellow-funnelled, paddle craft, was waiting for us with steam flickering from her exhaust pipes and her skipper stumping impatiently up and down the bridge. On arriving abreast of her, all hands at once set about transferring our gear on board, with Mr. Slieve's representative buzzing round like a blue-bottle fly to see that nothing was left behind. Then we

went on board, and those youths who had been foolish enough to bring their people, said good-bye. One or two of them actually wept, and so did some of their female relations. It was a most affecting scene. One would almost have imagined that we were a party of explorers setting out to discover the South Pole, instead of merely travelling across the Solent to the Isle of Wight.

The skipper of the tug cut short the farewells by pulling the lanyard of his steam whistle. The homesick ones crept sheepishly on board, trying hard to look as if they didn't want to cry, the gangway was drawn in and the securing ropes let go, and the tug, with much splashing from her paddles and furious blasts from her syren, backed out into the stream. The little crowd of mothers, fathers, sisters, and aunts on the jetty waved their handkerchiefs to their respective belongings, and then, thank goodness, we went ahead and the stern of the battleship intervened between us and them.

"Pah! What silly rot!" grunted Tommy Hargreaves contemptuously. "Fancy blubbing in public like that! I said good-bye at home, but I didn't jolly well blub."

"Nor did I," I answered loftily. "But I expect these kids were all day boys at some rotten dame's school and don't know any better."

The tug churned her way down the harbour like a flustered fowl. We passed Nelson's

Victory, which was duly pointed out to us by the lieutenant, and then Fort Blockhouse with Haslar Creek and its submarines close beside it. Next, turning to port down the channel outside the harbour mouth, we went on till the leading marks were in line, and headed out across the Swashway toward the Solent.

I had been to Portsmouth before, and had been taken round the dockyard and on board various men-of-war, but never shall I forget my first impressions of Spithead as a small and very insignificant unit of His Majesty's Navy. It was one of those pleasant breezy days with a brilliant sun and masses of white rounded cloud scurrying across a hard azure sky. The water was ruffled enough by the wind to be intensely blue, and against the greeny-blue background of the Isle of Wight we could see the grey hulls of the men-of-war lying at Spithead. I remember taking some pride in pointing them out to my more ignorant companions and in being able to differentiate between the various classes.

There were half a dozen battleships anchored in two lines, a couple of them being "Dreadnoughts," and the others vessels of an earlier class. Then two low-lying, four-funnelled cruisers, and another smaller ship of the same type. Hurrying in through the channel past the black and white chequered Spit Fort came a division of four black

destroyers, long, wicked-looking craft with smoke pouring from their stumpy funnels and the white water piled up in their wakes.

I have always loved destroyers from that day to this, though the destroyers of to-day are very different to those of 1907. There is something fascinating about them which I cannot exactly describe. A battleship dawdles through the water like a perambulating fort. The huge mass of a battle-cruiser, so bulky that it seems impossible that men can have fashioned her, speeds along with hardly any visible signs of the immense power which drives her. But a destroyer, being small, always seems so intensely human. She is ever in a hurry; her slender hull fusses along in an agitated sort of way, with the water creaming at her bow and stern, and those touches of white always remind me of the flutter of a pretty girl's petticoat as she is running to catch a train.

But we were not given very much time for admiring the scenery, for no sooner were we past Gilkicker Fort than the cadet captains, dividing us into batches, took us in hand and taught us how to salute. They told us that we were to pay this mark of respect to all officers who wore gold stripes on their arms, and that if we didn't do it we should incur the most disagreeable penalties.

When we were tolerably proficient at saluting, they went on to explain various

other mysteries of naval discipline and Osborne etiquette. The first term cadets, we soon discovered, were mere blots or excrescences on the landscape, and as such it was our bounden duty to obey the orders of all the senior cadets of the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth terms. If we did not, then those young gentlemen would soon make things confoundedly unpleasant. The second term cadets might also try to bounce us into obeying their commands, but as they too were contemptible "dog's bodies" of no importance, we need pay no attention to them, could even fight them if we thought we had a chance of winning. Then we were given to understand that all orders must be obeyed at the run, and that walking or slouching about was not permitted.

Moreover, by long-established custom, dating back from the old *Britannia* days, cadets of the junior terms were forbidden to swing the keys worn on the lanyards round their necks, must not turn up the bottoms of their trousers, wear their caps crooked or on the back of their heads, nor be seen with their hands in their pockets. There were many other things which we were not permitted to do, all of which were considered as "cheek," and were duly punished on the spot by the senior cadets with the utmost rigour of their self-made law. Indeed, at 4.30 in the afternoon, by which time our tug had splashed her noisy way up

the Medina to East Cowes and we were preparing to disembark, my head was so crammed with things "verboten" that my sorely tried brain was in a whirl.

At the time of my leaving the scholastic establishment of the Reverend Robert Hastings, I had been one of the lesser luminaries of the school and a bit of a "bug," as we termed it. Here, at Osborne, I was to become an absolute nonentity, one of the lowest of the very low. I was to be subject to the orders of about forty officers and masters, not to mention some three hundred cadets all senior to myself! The prospect was appalling. I was quite thankful on the whole that there were only four and twenty hours in the day, out of which one spent the greater portion in the process of being instructed or in bed.

We were driven up to the College in wagonettes, and, having been provided with a high-tea in a huge barn of a mess-room which ordinarily provided seating accommodation for about 450 cadets, but now held us alone in all our glory, as the senior terms did not join until the morrow, we were allowed a certain amount of time to visit our dormitories. There were two dormitories for each term. They opened off a long corridor, and the term reading-room, where we amused ourselves in our spare time, stood across the way. One servant was allowed for every six or eight cadets,

and the man who looked after me, a dissolute-looking fellow of chastened appearance, was named Spruggs. He had grog-blossoms on his nose, which he said came from rheumatism in his legs, but though I never actually saw him the worse for liquor, I didn't believe him. However, he wasn't a bad servant, and condescended to unpack my belongings while I gloated over the newly acquired sea-chest, with my name on the brass plate on the lid, which stood at the foot of my bed.

I had barely time to ascertain the names and to exchange confidences with the fellows on either side of me, however, than we were ordered to fall in on "Nelson," a large open space with a chapel at one end and a gymnasium at the other. It was our quarterdeck, and was treated with all the reverence of this particular portion of one of His Majesty's ships, being saluted each time we emerged upon it. Moreover, it was the place where the chaplain read prayers in the morning, where we fell in for inspections twice a day, and to be harangued by the powers that be. It was also the spot where the defaulters were interviewed. I came to know it well!

Shepherded by the cadet captains, we were eventually formed up in some sort of order, whereupon we were mustered and reported correct to the lieutenant of the term. This officer then disappeared, presently to arrive with the captain and commander behind him.

“Cadets . . . ’shun !” ordered Lieutenant Massey-Johnson.

We “’shunned” as best we could, while Captain Seton, a sturdy little man with a chest covered in medal ribbons, a red face, and a merry, roving blue eye, cleared his throat, let his glance run up and down our ranks, and stepped to the front.

“Young gentlemen,” he said, “it is my duty to welcome you to a college which was established for the education of gentlemen entering His Majesty’s Navy as officers. You have left school and have now entered a very important period of your careers. You are young, but for the first time in your lives you are wearing the King’s uniform and are his servants.”

He paused for a moment to let his words sink in.

“I need hardly remind you,” he resumed, “that Osborne is in no sense a private school. It is a naval establishment, part and parcel of the Royal Navy, one of His Majesty’s ships, in fact, and as such it is run on Service lines. Naval discipline is carried on here. Discipline is necessarily strict, and at first you may find it rather irksome. But it is enforced so that when you go to sea as officers you in your turn will be able to take charge of your men and to win their confidence and respect. I do not wish to din into your ears the pains and the penalties that may be visited upon you if you mis-

behave—you will soon discover them for yourselves. What I do want you to realise is that you are sent here to become officers, and that the term 'officer' is synonymous with 'gentleman.' If you work hard and obey your officers and instructors you will get on. If you do not, the Navy has no use for you, and you will lose the opportunity of becoming members of the finest Service in the world. Work hard, play hard, and behave as gentlemen; that is all we ask. Remember that though those cadets who misbehave themselves may occasionally have to be corrected, we all have your welfare at heart. You will not find us unjust or unkind, for most of us have been cadets ourselves. But remember Nelson and his band of brothers; remember the glorious traditions of the Service whose uniform you have the honour to wear, and you will not go far wrong. That is all I have to say to you. Bear it in mind."

Some people might have thought that Captain Seton's little speech was rather highfalutin and over the heads of boys of thirteen, but it didn't give me that impression. He was not treating us as school-boys; more as responsible men, and I liked the tone of what he said and the pithy, abrupt sort of way he said it. He made it quite plain, too, that even though we were only junior cadets, we were still members of the Royal Navy, and the bit at the end

about Nelson and his band of brothers made most of us feel rather proud of ourselves. I know that I did.

After all, being a schoolboy was all very well in its way. It had been pleasant enough to be somewhere near the top and to be able to order the smaller kids about; but it was a very different pair of boots to being a cadet at Osborne and to wearing an uniform. There was some honour and glory attached to it. Moreover, I was one of the lucky seventy-five who had passed in, not one of the 225 who had been rejected.

The skipper's words were not the last we were to listen to that evening, for when he had finished he turned to the commander.

"I'll turn 'em over to you now, Commander," he said, leaving us. Commander Rupert Lawrence was the very opposite to the captain. He was tall and very slim, with a tanned, rather thin face, grey eyes which seemed to peer through one, and rather a severe expression unless he was actually smiling. I afterwards discovered that the severe expression meant nothing at all, for "Rupy," as we referred to him behind his back, always barked worse than he bit, and had a very warm corner in his heart for us "young fellas," as he called us. I have known him give cadets money to spend in the canteen when they were hard up, and when any of us ever went to the sick quarters, he always used to roll up in the

afternoons with his arms full of books and his pockets full of sweets. The latter were contraband, and a Sister once bowled him out giving a quarter of a pound of chocolate creams to a greedy little beast of a chap who was always having bilious attacks from overeating. There was a bit of a shindy about it.

But when we were ill we always looked forward to the commander coming to see us, not so much for what he brought, but for the amusing yarns he used to spin. And they were funny. How I wish I could remember some of them now that I have started this book.

“Rupy” had light curly hair which grew round his ears and over the band of his cap, and at our concerts he would sit down at a piano, ruffle his hair, and keep us in fits of laughter by pretending to be a society entertainer. There was nothing amateurish about it either, for he did conjuring tricks as well, and would have made a fortune on the music-hall stage. And the fact that he occasionally condescended to play the fool did not lessen our respect for him in the very least. He wasn't much of a hand at football or any winter games that I know of, but was an expert horseman and hunted whenever he got the chance, while he played cricket regularly in the summer and occasionally for the Free Foresters or the M.C.C. He had

plenty of private means to indulge in any hobby he cared for, but apart from his hunting you would never have guessed it.

His first speech to us was very fierce. Looking back at it now, I think it was deliberately intended to frighten us, though I cannot remember half the things he said. I recollect, though, that he said he was responsible for the cleanliness of the College, and woe betide us if we were seen leaning against the paintwork ("my paintwork," he called it), bringing mud into the dormitories or class-rooms, leaving things lying about, hurling food at each other's heads at meals, or daring to be in the possession of catapults or other lethal weapons. However, he tamed down a bit after a while, and finished off by telling us one of his funny yarns. I am afraid we did not appreciate it. We were much too petrified to laugh.

Then Lieutenant Massey-Johnson addressed us, telling us that we were to come to him through the term Chief Petty Officer if we wanted anything, that he would like to have the names of all those cadets who were keen on games, and giving us some sort of an idea of what we were expected to do. He didn't take very long, and when it was all over we were marched off and were permitted to occupy ourselves as we liked.

At about 8.30 came more food in the shape

of buns and glasses of milk, and half an hour afterwards we were chased off to our dormitories and turned in.

Thus ended my first day at Osborne. It was altogether an eventful day, but even the novelty and the excitement of it did not prevent my dropping off to sleep the moment my head touched the pillow.

§ 2

I have gone into the subject of my joining the Navy and my first day at Osborne because both events were red letter days in my life. I do not propose to enter into the same detail when describing my life at the Colleges at Osborne and Dartmouth. For one thing my career there was a very ordinary one; secondly, this book has to be within certain limits; while, thirdly, my memory often fails me as to what sometimes took place ten years ago. So many important events have happened since; and I have a theory that one's brain is like a sponge, and that the cleverer one happens to be, the larger that sponge is. Eventually one reaches a saturation point when one's brain or memory, call it what you like, can retain nothing further unless something else is squeezed out to make room for it. Some clever people who were naval cadets with me have not reached their saturation point yet, and may never do so. Mine came two

or three years ago. I am a very average person.

I have never quite agreed with people who are too elderly to remember their own boyhood and assert for the benefit of their young relations that one's schooldays are the happiest of one's life. I don't think they are, for, besides a constant atmosphere of monotony and petty restriction, the constant "don't do this" and "do that," the life is full of discomfort and inconveniences, particularly for a small boy. But I most certainly enjoyed my time as a naval cadet, though the life was more strenuous and the discipline far and away more severe than at any school. The best thing about it was that we were handled by officers who were used to handling seamen. We were brought up to a sense of responsibility, and felt, somehow, that we owed it to the Navy to maintain a certain standard.

In a term of about seventy-five there were boys of all types. There were the "x chasers," who were naturally brilliant, worked without apparent effort, and knew their own capacity; the plodders, who always toiled manfully with their noses to the grindstone and achieved a certain degree of success. Then the people of average intelligence, who were not beyond idling on occasions if a subject did not interest them, but generally did their fair share of work and could do well if they tried. Next came

the intensely dull, but well meaning and conscientious, who never got very far; and lastly the out and out slackers or rotters, who didn't care how little work they did and were rather proud of the fact.

An idler at school can sometimes linger on for terms until he is finally requested to go elsewhere. An habitual slacker at Osborne, however, was soon sized up, and if repeated warnings did not cause him to mend his ways, he generally got the Order of the Boot at the end of his third term and became a civilian again, much to the disgust of his parents. Four members of our term vanished like that. I met one of them some time afterwards. He was about to become a clerk in a London office, and did not relish the idea of licking stamps and addressing envelopes from nine till half-past six. He was rather down on his luck, and borrowed half a sovereign. It was the last I ever saw of it.

I might go on describing my term-mates for ever, for they were all different. But as this book is supposed to be about me and not about them, I had better desist. I was neither an "*x* chaser" nor a plodder. I was, I consider, a "person of average intelligence," and could do well if I really made up my mind to it. But I was by no means a model of all virtues, and at times was not altogether industrious.

On one occasion I remember deriving no

small satisfaction and amusement by placing sherbert in somebody else's ink-well during a science lecture, whereupon the owner of the ink, privy to the plot, gazed agitatedly at the blue, cauliflower-like mass rising from his desk, and summoned the short-sighted science master to his side in a voice of feigned alarm.

"Please, sir," he piped, "do come and look at my ink!" The master approached.

"Dear me!" he observed, with the deepest interest, looking at the frothy thing through his spectacles and putting out a tentative hand. "Whatever is it?"

"Don't touch it, sir!" squeaked its owner. "It's my ink, and it's going to burst in a minute!"

We stuffed our handkerchiefs into our mouths to stifle our mirth. "Dear me," mused the master. "I wonder what has made it go like that?"

"It must be the hot weather, sir," said several people at once.

"M'yes, quite so, the hot weather. But it mustn't occur again, boy."

"I hope it won't, sir."

We found it intensely amusing, but I was fool enough to try the same game about a week later. The result, utterly unexpected, was rather different.

Once more the balloon arose from some one's inkpot, and again a small voice observed

that his writing fluid had gone "rummy" on account of the heat. An intensely interesting phenomenon, observed the master, but would the cadets kindly refrain from laughing, and would the young gentleman who had placed a Seidlitz powder in Molyneux's inkpot oblige him by standing up. It was not a Seidlitz powder, but I rose guiltily, and was requested to leave the room and report myself to a certain person in authority. I did so, and spent the next few afternoons doing physical drill and walking with a sergeant of Royal Marines instead of amusing myself with the others. Moreover, I was not allowed to enter the canteen.

Trying to be funny at the expense of the authorities did not pay, and I soon gave it up. But one youth in his third term received what the gentleman who taught us drawing called "six knocks with the cane" for illicit manœuvres carried out on somebody else's anatomy with the business end of a pair of dividers. And at Osborne or Dartmouth, six with the cane, laid on by a lusty Chief Petty Officer upon that portion of one's body which one usually places on a chair, were excessively painful. There was also a certain amount of unpleasant ritual attached to the performance, and the only consolation afforded to the sufferer was that he might afterwards make a little extra pocket-money by exhibiting the bruises to his more select friends. But the fellow I

mean wasn't very popular, and made only fourpence, so it wasn't really worth it.

At the risk of being tedious it would be as well to give some idea of a typical day in the life of a naval cadet. Our routine at Osborne and at Dartmouth was very similar. At 6.30 in summer and 6.45 in winter (I think it was 6 o'clock at Dartmouth), we were roused out of our beds by the bugler sounding the *réveillé*. Well I remember that bugle call :



and the words we applied to it :

“Sandy, Sandy, don't be a water funk.
Sandy, Sandy, go through the bath !”

Why “Sandy” I never discovered. Perhaps he was a cadet of some former generation who abhorred cold water and tried to shirk the early morning cold plunge. It was never worth our while to try to escape it, bitter though it sometimes was. If we did, some cadet captain soon got wind of the omission and asked pointed questions as to whether or not we had been excused by the doctor's orders. If we had not been specially exempted, there was trouble.

So when the *réveillé* sounded we were out of our beds on the instant to seize a towel and a few minor garments to join in the wild stampede for the bathrooms. Having im-

mersed ourselves with chattering teeth, we then dashed back to our dormitories and scrambled into our clothes. Time for dressing was short, and within twenty minutes of turning out, with a satisfactory feeling of warmth coursing through our bodies through the contact with the cold water, we mustered in the mess-room for cocoa and ship's biscuit before starting work.

Then came an hour's study in our classrooms, after which, at about 7.45, we fell in in our respective terms and were doubled to the mess-room for breakfast by our cadet captains. Our progress was not the "steady double" of the drill book. It was a most undignified, wild, and helter-skelter stampede, followed by a bloodthirsty rough and tumble mêlée round the small door of the mess-room, in which, amidst the heavy breathing and frenzied squeals and imprecations of the combatants, small cadets subsided gently to the deck with larger cadets on top of them. People generally were trodden upon by any one, clothes were torn, and casualties were not infrequent. We behaved like the animals in the Zoo at meal times, eventually to arrive in our places at the long tables in a generally dishevelled condition, while some one rang a gong and a cadet captain said grace. Then we fell to. The food was good, and for breakfast there was always porridge, with plenty of sugar and milk, rolls and butter, tea or coffee,

sausages, kippers, eggs, bacon, or any of the usual breakfast dishes.

We could leave the table when we had finished, and were left to our own devices until 9 o'clock, when the bugle sounded off "Divisions," and we fell in in terms on the "quarter-deck" and were inspected by our lieutenants. Then followed an orgy of saluting. The lieutenant reported us "correct" to the commander, who, when he had received all the reports, informed the captain. Then the Padre, or "Holy Joe," as we called him, arrived upon the scene in his surplice, whereupon the commander gave the order "Off caps!" the chaplain gave out the number of a hymn, and we sang lustily. Then followed the usual prayers, after which we replaced our headgear and were marched off to the morning's work.

The cycle of work varied periodically, for some of the classes would start the day by going to theoretical instruction in science, navigation, and the usual school subjects. Others would do seamanship, which included signals, knotting and splicing, boxing the compass, boat pulling, and all the rest of it; while still more would go to the engineering workshops, where they did practical engineering under the supervision of an engineer-lieutenant. We were instructed practically how to construct and to fit together the various parts of steam engines, how to turn steel and brass, to make moulds and castings,

and many other things which I cannot enter into here. In the lecture-room, moreover, the engineer officer taught us the theory of the business, while occasionally, when we got more proficient, we were taken out in the steam-boats or torpedo-boat attached to the College, and took complete control of the engines and boilers, often with most peculiar results. At Dartmouth, when we got there, they had a destroyer and a turbine, oil-fired torpedo-boat in which we actually went to sea for instruction. We spent most of the time being seasick.

We had about four hours work during the morning, and at half time we changed round from practical work to theory, or vice versa. The break came at 11.15, when there was an interval of a quarter of an hour for milk and buns in the mess-room and to give us time to collect what books and instruments we required for the next instruction.

At one o'clock came lunch, a repetition of the breakfast stampede. This lasted half an hour, and after grace each term was doubled out in order of seniority, and we were free for half an hour. Instruction similar to that of the morning then took place till 4 o'clock, at which time came "Evening Quarters," the same, except for the prayers, as the morning "Divisions." Next more buns and more milk in the mess-room, after which we changed into flannels for recreation lasting till 6.30, by which hour

we all had to be inside the College. In the dark days of winter we played our games immediately after the midday meal and went to afternoon instruction at 4.30, while on Wednesdays and Saturdays throughout the year we did no afternoon school at all.

The consuming of the milk and buns after Quarters—the buns were sometimes ginger-nuts, while once there was nearly a mutiny because they served us out with rock-cakes—was often amusing. Everybody was naturally anxious to get away to the games as soon as possible, and to save time the food and glasses of milk were placed ready for us in our places in the mess-room. Eagle-eyed stewards kept a horny and unsympathetic gaze upon us to see that there was no petty pilfering, for both buns and ginger-nuts were conveniently portable.

But even the presence of the stewards did not prevent occasional forays. A cadet, carrying a mackintosh, would enter the mess-room rather early and as meekly as any lamb. A confederate then deliberately started a disturbance in a far corner, and, as the stewards gravitated in his direction to quell it, he of the mackintosh would dart down one side of a long table filching buns and biscuits from the plates and cramming them into the sleeve of his garment, the wrist of which was tied with string to form a convenient and capacious receptacle. When the lawful owners of the food eventually ap-

peared to find their plates empty, there was wailing and gnashing of teeth. Indeed, the lamentations occasionally developed into active strife. But we generally managed to right matters by purloining somebody else's bun while he wasn't looking, and so on, *ad infinitum*. The chief pilferer and his confederate, however, divided their ill-gotten booty, and spent the afternoon in a state of gorgeous and somnolent repletion.

The masterly scheme, excellent example of successful strategy though it usually proved itself, did not always work. I still treasure a vivid and joyful recollection of one young gentleman, who had omitted to tie the sleeve of his mackintosh, dashing from the mess-room with a trail of ginger-nuts dropping in his wake. After him, like a pack of hounds, pounded six heavy-footed stewards, grinding the biscuits into dust. Presently they started to fall headlong. It was a gladsome sight, and we, whooping with delight, joined in the chase and fell over the stewards.

But on the whole I think we were very well behaved. It was only during the strawberry season, when they sometimes gave us strawberries for tea, that we demanded successive helpings which we couldn't eat, and, with a view to subsequent gluttony, concealed the surplus in our caps placed conveniently on our knees underneath the table. Moreover, it was only very occasionally that

we flung pats of butter aloft in the hope that they might adhere to the ceiling. Sometimes they did, to detach themselves with amusing results when the place got really warm.

We were allowed to spend the afternoon much as we liked, but "loafing" was not countenanced, and at evening preparation every cadet had to state how he had occupied his afternoon, the information being entered in a book kept by the cadet captain. The volume, moreover, was shown to the lieutenant of the term weekly, and if our "logs," as they were called, were not satisfactory, we were compelled to play games.

There was always cricket and tennis in the summer, football of both varieties in the winter, hockey and the annual sports during the Easter term, and fives and racquets at all times. At Dartmouth, too, we had our own beagles, certain of the cadets being selected as "Whips" and wearing the garments suitable to this office. The beagles usually met on Saturdays during the season, and were very popular, particularly if the meet happened to be at some country house where refreshments were provided. At one place we were given sherry. The results were quite un contemplated, for certain of the young gentlemen, quite innocently, gulped it down like ginger-beer.

Provided we did not go into towns or private grounds we were free to roam about

the country as we pleased, while boating on the Solent and Dart was a favourite pastime in the summer. Besides cutters, which we were allowed to sail by ourselves, there were also five-oared gigs and skiffs for rowing. These latter were known as "blue boats," from their vivid ultramarine colour, but nobody was suffered to go afloat before he could swim. There were also two 10-ton yachts in which we went sailing at Osborne, and at Dartmouth the larger sailing craft *Syren* and *Arrow*, in which we occasionally went outside the harbour on half-holidays and were fearfully and wonderfully sea-sick.

The canteens at both Colleges were largely patronised, and did a thriving business in sweets, ices, pastry, buns, biscuits, boiled eggs, cream, jam, mineral waters, and all other sorts of "stodge." The trade was particularly brisk on Saturdays, when we received our weekly pocket-money of one shilling. But even in the canteen the etiquette was very strict, for no junior cadet was permitted to be seen at the sixth term end of the counter.

We were not permitted to trespass, naturally, though I am sorry to say the official prohibition did not altogether prevent our doing so. Both at Osborne and at Dartmouth there were woods, in the fastnesses of which the more senior cadets used to erect huts in which they spent their Sunday afternoons, eating, smoking forbidden pipes and cigar-

ettes, and holding up the junior fellows to ransom. If no satisfactory ransom was forthcoming, the junior cadet had either to recite, sing a song, or else suffer himself to be tied to a tree or be mildly beaten for having "a nasty face," a defiant manner, or something equally trivial. But it was never done ill-naturedly. We were never really bullied, and our treatment certainly inculcated the habit of obedience which is so very necessary in the Navy.

Sometimes we went in search of game. I recollect a pond at Osborne, in the centre of which was an island. I am perfectly well aware that a fowl is not "game," but marooned on the island we once saw a forlorn-looking chicken, and I, the smallest of our gang of desperadoes, was selected to procure that bird alive or dead. The pond was too deep for wading and too cold by far for swimming, so I ferried my way across to that island in an antiquated and very leaky wooden pig-trough. It was a perilous journey, but I carried it through successfully, and after some difficulty slaughtered the prey with a catapult and returned with the corpse. It was a Plymouth Rock, an elderly Plymouth Rock, and we concealed it in some one's mackintosh and carried it off in triumph to our lair in the woods. There we removed its feathers by singeing, and cooked it over a slow fire without even troubling to take out its interior. The result was not

appetising, for when we came to divide it the flesh was barely warm, so that even our hardened gorges rose in disgust. We procured a junior cadet, and ordered him to bury the grisly remains.

At Dartmouth I was the proud possessor of a Derringer pistol with which I once nearly shot a sitting pheasant in a strictly preserved covert. The sound of the report brought a keeper to the scene, so I took to my heels. I was nearly caught, but the keeper was stout and breathless, and, running like a redshank, I got clear away. There would have been wigs on the green if I hadn't.

By 6.30 in the evenings every one had to be inside the College buildings, and at 7 o'clock we had our high-tea of cold meat and as much bread, butter, and jam as we could conveniently stow. Once a week at Dartmouth we had Devonshire cream for this meal, and rumour had it that the cream, or the wherewithal to purchase it, had been bequeathed long ago by some philanthropic old lady who had a weakness for the "dear little cadets," bless her kind old heart! But she evidently didn't know cadets as I knew them. She cannot have possessed an orchard anywhere within five miles of the College. We never really meant to steal of course, but . . . enough said.

There was an hour's preparation from 7.30, and from half-past eight the band, composed of our servants, played on the quarter-

deck for half an hour while we danced. At 9 came evening prayers, after which we doubled to our dormitories and turned in. At 9.30 came the commander's rounds and the putting out of the lights, and thus ended our day.

CHAPTER III

I GO TO SEA

§ 1

DURING my second year at Osborne, in about September, 1908, they took to naming the terms after famous British admirals. We, in our fifth term, accordingly became known as the "Exmouths," while the sixth, first, second, third, and fourth, in the order named, became respectively the "St. Vincents," "Drakes," "Blakes," "Hawkes," and "Grenville's." We retained these names right through our time of training.

I cannot go into further details of our life at Dartmouth, beyond saying that it was the Osborne work over again, but on more advanced lines. In April, 1911, however, at the age of $17\frac{1}{2}$, I passed my final examinations, and proved myself to have a sufficient knowledge of mathematics, including navigation and geometrical drawing, physics and chemistry, mechanics and applied mechanics with laboratory work; engineering, with workshop practice and mechanical drawing; seamanship in its many branches; French; English grammar and

composition; English literature; History, naval and otherwise; geography; drill and physical training to make me a fit and proper person to be retained in His Majesty's Service and to learn still more. My knowledge was not really very profound, and looking back on the subjects I was supposed to have a working acquaintance with is rather perturbing, but spread out over four years they were not so formidable as they sound.

Then, with the remainder of the batch, I left Dartmouth for good and all, and in May joined the training cruiser *Somerset*, where, through unforeseen circumstances, I remained without a break until the following December.

During our time in the cruiser our school work still went on, but we had far more practical instruction than formerly, at the hands of the officers of the ship, in seamanship, navigation, pilotage, gunnery, torpedo work, electricity, and engineering. We also learnt something of the routine, management, and interior economy of a man-of-war, but, above all, it made us used to life afloat and afforded us a much-needed chance of finding our sea legs before we went to sea as midshipmen in the Fleet. Never shall I forget the awful rolling and pitching of the ship, or my own feelings, in our first really heavy weather. Most of us were in the last throes of misery, and lay about with pea-green faces, to stagger on deck at frequent

intervals for a certain mournful purpose. But after a month or so on board we were getting better, and by the end of our time had become tolerably good sailors.

Our cruise was not uneventful. We first spent some weeks in Norway and then, crossing the Atlantic, visited North America. It was here that we had the first real excitement of our lives, for while we were at Halifax we one day received information by wireless to the effect that the Canadian cruiser *Clytia* had run ashore in a bay some distance off. My memory is very hazy as to the exact circumstances, for I played a very minor part in the operations, but I well remember the thrill which pervaded our ship when the news became known, and we hastily raised steam to go to the stranded vessel's assistance.

The captain and commander, assisted by the navigator with his charts and tide-tables, held earnest consultations as to the means of salvage to be employed, while some of the lieutenants went ashore in charge of parties of men to beg, borrow, or steal what salvage plant and spare hawsers the dock-yard could provide. It was a motley collection of stuff when it did come on board, but some of it was serviceable.

The ship, meanwhile, hummed like a beehive. The men, supervised by the officers and assisted by us cadets, were put on to the job of unreeling the great 6½ and 5½-inch

wire hawsers and flaking them down on the quarter-deck in readiness for taking in tow. Messengers ran to and fro. The carpenter and his gang were busy providing shores, stoppers, and everything else they could think of, while our poor old boatswain, the dearest old soul imaginable and a great friend of mine, was in a state verging on dementia.

His alliteration was perfect.

“Them . . . burglars!” he confided to me, shrugging his shoulders with an air of great resignation. “Them perishin’ thieves! This’ll be the death o’ me!”

“I’m sorry to hear that, Mr. Deadeye,” I sympathised. “What’s been happening?”

“Happenin’!” he snorted. “Why, if the Commander wants anythin’—‘Go to that silly old fool of a bos’un,’ he says. So they comes, whole hordes of ’em, and surep’ously denodes my storeroom o’ rope, canvas, spare collision mats, taller, spun-yarn, an’ everythin’ I’ve got. Lord, sir! You’d think they wanted to put up a row o’ houses from the gear they’ve took!”

“Ah, yes,” he went on, seeing a party of us grinning at him. “It’s all very well for you young gennel’men to laugh like you do, but when I asks this gang o’ pirates what the ’ell they’re thinkin’ of, they says it’s Commander’s orders. Commander’s orders is all very well,” he continued, wagging his grizzled old head mournfully. “Com-mander’s orders won’t square my perishin’

store accounts. 'Stead o' takin' my pension next year as me an' my wife sincerely hoped, I shall be 'ung, drawn, and quartered. That's what they does to bos'uns, an' the Commander'll bust out laughin' when he hears of it same as you young gents is doin' now. Lord, Lord! The world is crool hard!"

Our guffaws were all the louder, and Mr. Deadeye, bereft of even our sympathy, went off grumbling under his beard like a semi-active volcano. He didn't want sympathy, really, for he was as efficient a boatswain as had ever become a warrant officer. Moreover, he loved the Commander, and the Commander swore by him.

We left harbour, and in due course arrived on the spot where the *Clytia* was ashore, but as we were manœuvring to close her and take her in tow, there came a thud deep down below the waterline, a series of crashes, and we too found ourselves hard and fast on an uncharted pinnacle rock.

I will not attempt to describe the scene, but several weary hours passed before we finally got off on the rising tide, a damaged ship.

But, damaged or not damaged, we had to help the *Clytia*, and passed our hawsers across to her and made them fast. Then we worked our engines and, after parting several wires, eventually plucked her free of her rocky bed and towed her slowly back to Halifax.

The *Clytia* practically required a new bottom, and our injuries necessitated a sojourn of thirteen weeks in the dockyard and a postponement of our cruise to the West Indies.

However, we cadets had no cause for complaint. We enjoyed our time at Halifax, and though our noses were kept assiduously to the grindstone, we had far more leave ashore than we should otherwise have got. The residents were very hospitable, and here it was that I embarked on my first love affair with a young lady of eighteen called Sarah, with whom I exchanged photographs and corresponded for six months after our departure. She was a very pretty girl, with blue eyes, corn-coloured hair, and an American accent. I loved her very dearly, and she said she loved me; but a year later she married a solicitor. After all, I could hardly blame her. One cannot do much on a cadet's pay of one shilling *per diem*, particularly in a place where they think in dollars worth four and twopence.

We eventually arrived in England again in December, and, having passed more exams, left the old *Somerset* for ever.

At last I was an officer in His Majesty's Fleet, or rather I should be on January 15th, from which our first appointments to sea-going ships would be dated. I was entitled to wear white patches on my collar and a short, brass-mounted dirk at my side. In

short, I was a "snotty," a full-blown midshipman! I might have been Sir John Jellicoe from the airs I gave myself.

I cast my cadet's uniform, and when I went home on leave just before Christmas I affected a nautical roll, talked airily about "my first shipwreck," and appeared before my astonished parents in all the glory of an immaculate plain clothes suiting supplied by Mr. Slieve.

"How you've grown, David dear," said my mother, looking me up and down with happy eyes when she had finished hugging me. "You're almost as tall as your father. I don't like your clothes, though."

"Not like 'em," I asked disappointedly, gazing down at the crease in my trousers, my lavender socks, and a pair of the sauciest brown brogues. "Lord, mother, what's up with 'em?"

"I like you so much better in your pretty uniform, darling."

"Uniform!" I snorted. "I can't possibly wear that now. I'm not a beastly cadet!"

"Stupid nonsense!" growled my father good-naturedly. "I suppose you'll come down on me for a brand-new outfit before you go to sea, what?"

"Bet your life, father," said I. "And, by the way, could you let me have ten bob to go on with? I'm devilish hard up!"

My mother opened her mouth to expostu-

late and my father spluttered. They both seemed rather astonished; but luckily father had no change, so I got a sovereign.

It was during that leave that I received payment for my first real literary effort. It never saw the light of day in actual print, and was merely a letter to my Aunt Caroline, in which I gave a lurid description of our adventures.

“MY DEAR DAVID,” came her reply. “I was much thrilled and interested to read your account of the terrible shipwreck, though of course I had heard of it from your mother. What a time you must have had, and how dangerous a sailor’s life can be. I have long been meaning to make you a little present as you have done so well in the Navy, so here it is. I hope you will find it useful. Mrs. Chuggins, my old cook, has given notice, as she is about to be married for the second time to the man who keeps the livery stables near the station. The vicar’s second daughter, Ruth, who often asks after you, has a bad cold in her head, poor girl. I have just had wire-netting put on the top of all the garden walls to keep the cats out, they make such a terrible noise at nights. Ask your mother to look out for a cook and to let me know if she hears of one.

“When shall I see you again?”

“Your affectionate aunt,

“CAROLINE.”

I didn't quite gather how Mrs. Chuggins could marry the same person twice, but the little present was a crackling, brand-new note for £5, a sum I had never handled before, let alone possessed.

"Put it in the bank, David dear," my mother advised.

"I'll be jiggered if I do," said I rebelliously.

Shipwrecks aren't always so bad as they are painted.

§ 2

Captain Playfair was as good as his word, for soon after Christmas I received my official appointment to his ship, the battleship *Pericles*, in the shape of a bluish sheet of thick, printed foolscap.

"C.W. By Command of the Commissioners for Executing the Office of Lord High Admiral of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, &c.

To Mr. David Munro.

The Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty hereby appoint you Midshipman

of His Majesty's Ship "Pericles"

and direct you to repair on board that Ship at Portland.

Your appointment is to take effect from the

15th January, 1912.

You are to acknowledge the receipt of this appointment *forthwith*, addressing your letter to the

Commanding Officer, H.M.S. "Pericles,"

taking care to furnish your address.

Admiralty, S.W.

By Command of their Lordships,
W. GRAHAM GREENE."

It was my first appointment to a ship. Its arrival punctuated another red-letter day in my life, and that sheet of bluish paper will be preserved in my archives. Who in the Navy has not been guilty of a similar conceit?

I received my instructions as to joining in due course, and half-past eight in the evening of January 15th found me, with my sea-chest, an uniform tin case, portmanteau, suit case, cricket bag, and golf clubs, standing on Weymouth pier waiting for a boat to take me off to the ship. I had travelled down from home in plain clothes, but had changed into uniform at an hotel.

It was a raw and blustery evening, with occasional showers of heavy rain. I was cold and rather miserable, and when, after waiting for twenty minutes, I at last saw the red, green, and white lights of a steamboat coming in through the narrow entrance of the harbour, I was very thankful. She came alongside with a swish and a roar from her propeller as it went full speed astern to check the way, and then, from her slender grey hull, fat bell-topped single funnel, engine-room casings, and little cabin aft, I could see she was a Service picquet-boat.

An oilskinned, sea-booted figure with the water running off him in streams left the wheel and clambered slowly up the steps.

“Are you the new snotty for the *Pericles*?” I was asked gruffly, as the new

arrival eyed me and my belongings in no very friendly manner in the dim light of a solitary gas lamp.

“Yes,” I said.

“Is your name Munro?”

“Yes.”

“Well, why the dooce can’t you join the ship at a reasonable hour instead of dragging us out at this time o’ night?” he demanded brusquely. “D’you think that we senior snotties have got nothing better to do than to go dancing attendance on warts who’ve never been to sea in their lives?”

“I’m awfully sorry,” I stammered nervously. “I was told to be down here at half past . . .”

“Of course you were. But I’ve been running my blessed boat ever since six o’clock this morning, and it wasn’t till a quarter past eight that they remembered about you and called us away in a hurry. I’ve been on the go the whole bloomin’ day, and the only stand easy I do get is spoilt because you choose to arrive at this ungodly hour. It’s about the limit! Lord! I don’t know what the dooce the Navy’s coming to!”

“I’m very sorry,” I apologised. “But it really wasn’t my fault. I was told . . .”

“Oh, shut up!” growled the other, with a sudden smile. “I know it’s not your fault. I wish it was, and then I’d . . . Lord!” he broke off. “I say, is this all your gear?”

"Yes," I meekly told him.

"You'll have the commander on your track if you don't watch it. Didn't you know you were only allowed one trunk besides your chest?"

"No."

"Well, you'll jolly soon find out," he replied, going to the side of the jetty and bellowing for some one called Coggins.

"Sir?" came a voice from the depths.

"Send a couple o' hands up here to take this officer's gear into the boat," he ordered. "Bear a hand about it."

Two seamen waddled up the steps, fastened on to my sea-chest, and with much grunting and blowing carried it down into the stern-sheets of the picquet-boat. This done, they returned for the other things.

"I'm awfully sorry to give every one all this trouble," I apologised once more.

"That's all right," he answered more graciously, removing and wringing out the sodden muffler round his neck. "I wasn't really angry with you; but it does make one a bit ratty about the temper, it's so beastly wet. I'm Thorp, and you'll be in the same division as me."

We went on talking, but before long our amicable conversation was interrupted by a splash, a howl of dismay, and a spluttering, gasping sound, accompanied by some profanity. Then a wild shriek of laughter.

“Charley’s Aunt!” exclaimed a voice, with every indication of enjoyment. “’Ere’s old Bill bin an’ fallen in th’ ditch!”¹

Thorp and I went to the edge of the pier and looked over. It was low water, and the last few steps were covered with thick seaweed, and “Bill,” the A.B. who was carrying my golf clubs and cricket bag, had apparently slipped badly and tobogganed down the slope. At any rate, he now sat on the bottom step with his legs in the sea, anathematising the world in general and midshipmen’s luggage in particular. My cricket bag nestled alongside him, half in and half out of the water. The golf clubs, being weighty, were nowhere visible.

“Carn’t you blokes stop larfin’?” demanded the disgruntled victim plaintively. “Carn’t you come an’ give a bloke an ’elpin’ ’and ’stead o’ bustin’ yerselves up top there? I’ve tore me oilskin breeches and lorst me sou’wester. Likewise I’ve ’urt me stern somethin’ crool, ’sides barkin’ me shins an’ nearly knockin’ me front teeth ’art. I reckons it’ll take a bottle o’ beer in th’ gunroom pantry to make me well agen!”

“That’s a hint for you, Munro,” observed my companion, trying hard to conceal his amusement. “You take my tip and tell the cox’n to take the whole lot of ’em down to the pantry when we get on board. It’ll make ’em love you for ever afterwards.”

¹ The “ditch” or “pond,” naval terms for the sea.

“Of course I will,” I agreed.

“Come on,” said the snotty, walking gingerly down the steps. “We’ll be getting back. Evans, if you’ve finished your bathe, you’d better get back to the boat.”

“I’m lookin’ for those there gawf sticks, sir,” answered the recumbent one, splashing aimlessly about in the water.

“Never mind them,” said I, knowing full well that they were at the bottom of the harbour and that I should never see them again.

“One thing less, at any rate,” said Thorp unperturbably. “Besides, golf’s a rotten game. You’d much better play hockey.”

Evans, groaning dismally, rose to his feet, flung my dripping cricket bag into the boat, and clambered on board. “I’m ’urt some-thin’ crool!” he reiterated for my benefit. “I reckons I shall ’ave to see the doctor when I gits aboard.”

“Tell the cox’n about the beer,” Thorp whispered in my ear.

I did so, in a loud voice.

“Thank you, sir. I don’t mind if we does,” said Coggins, drawing in his breath appreciatively.

Even Evans became a little more cheerful.

“Let go forward! Let go aft!” Thorp ordered, taking his place at the wheel. “Munro, you’d better get down aft in the cabin if you don’t want a wet shirt. It’s blowing a bit outside.”

I took his advice.

“All gone, sir!”

The engine-room gong clanged once, and the boat shook as the screw revolved with the helm hard over.

Thorp was right about the weather. Outside the harbour it certainly was “blowing a bit,” and to me it seemed more like a raging hurricane. The boat rolled and pitched drunkenly. Sheets of spray flew high over the funnel, and seas came washing along the deck, until even the cabin where I took shelter was nearly knee-deep in water. The men on deck must have been soaked, but they drove her at full speed in spite of it. But it did not last long, for a quarter of an hour later I was climbing the accommodation ladder of the *Pericles*.

“Midshipman Munro, come on board to join, sir,” said I to the officer of the watch, saluting the quarterdeck as I stepped over the gangway.

“Right. Wait half a minute and I’ll take you to the commander. Picquet-boat!”

“Sir?”

“Moor your boat up to the starboard boom and draw fires. Steam by six o’clock in the morning.”

“Aye aye, sir.”

“Come with me, Munro.”

I followed the officer across the broad quarterdeck, down a ladder, along a passage-

way shimmering with white enamel and lined with rifles in their racks, until we presently halted outside a curtained doorway at which the lieutenant knocked.

“Come in!”

“New midshipman come to join, sir,” he said, pushing me inside.

The commander, a cheery-looking little man with a fat red face and twinkling brown eyes, was writing at his desk. He glanced up as I entered.

“You’re Munro, I suppose?” he greeted me, swinging round in his chair and looking me up and down.

“Yes, sir.”

“All right, boy, don’t be frightened,” he went on, laughing at my nervousness. “I’m not going to eat you. What sort of a trip did you have in the picquet-boat?”

“Pretty wet, sir.”

“’Um,” he grunted, reaching for his pipe and striking a match. “The wind’s . . . (puff, puff) . . . been in the sou’west—blow this pipe—for nearly a week.”

“Yes, sir,” I agreed.

He started to empty the offending pipe with the butt end of his pen.

“Don’t wonder it won’t draw. The rotten thing’s choked up,” he observed, flinging it into the wastepaper basket. “Halliday?”

“Sir?”

“Send him down to the gun-room and turn him over to the senior midshipman.

You'll have to-morrow to sling your hammock¹ and to get used to the ship, youngster," he went on, turning to me. "You'll start in on your ordinary work the day after to-morrow. That's all. Good night."

I retired.

Thus, by paying my footing with one set of brand-new golf clubs and six bottles of gunroom beer did I join His Majesty's battleship *Pericles*.

¹ To "sling your hammock," *i.e.* to be given time to settle down in new surroundings.

CHAPTER IV

H.M.S. "PERICLES"

THE *Pericles*, or *Perickles*, as her ship's company called her, was one of the very last of the pre-Dreadnought type of battleships. She and her sister ship the *Lord Howe* were the only two vessels of their class in the British, or in any other, Navy, and they had a speed of about eighteen knots and carried the respectable armament of four 12-inch, ten 9·2's, and a number of smaller guns. The really strange thing about them, however, was their shape.

They looked unduly short and bulbous, even for battleships. They had tripod masts aft and ordinary pole masts forward, with, piled up between them, enormous flying-decks or superstructures reaching nearly to the heavens, with a couple of stumpy funnels sticking up out of the middle. Their masts, due to the sloping effect given by the after legs of the tripod, always looked from a distance to be falling in towards each other, and so strange was their *tout ensemble*, that it even excited the curiosity of Mr. Gainston

Kirkmount, the well-known First Lord of the Admiralty, for on one occasion, when he happened to be visiting in the Admiralty yacht the harbour in which we lay, he paid us a surprise visit at half-past ten in the morning and demanded to be shown all over the *Pericles*.

“Good morning, Captain Playfair,” he said, running up the accommodation ladder in his usual energetic manner. “I’ve come to have a look at your ship. She’s the most peculiar-looking ship I’ve ever seen!”

She was, but one could see from the look on the skipper’s face that he hardly took the remark as a compliment. He loved the *Pericles*, peculiar though she may have been. Moreover, he had arranged to play golf with a brother Captain that very morning at eleven o’clock, and had been forced to put it off.

“I shall be delighted to show you over the cleanest ship in the squadron, sir,” he grunted.

So Mr. Kirkmount, asking innumerable questions, was trotted round. He was told the size of our guns, the weight of their shell, and the thickness of our side armour. He enquired the make of our boilers and the manufacturer of our stockless anchors. He even stopped Mr. Bobbett, our Boatswain, and wrought that worthy old gentleman into a state of blushing confusion by subjecting him in public to a rapid cross-examination as

to whether or not he was married, how many children he possessed, and where he lived.

Mr. Bobbett confessed to one wife, five small Bobbetts, and a nice little house and garden at Stamshaw, near Portsmouth, whereupon the First Lord rather took the wind out of his sails by observing that the stories he had heard to the effect that warrant officers could barely live upon their naval pay were evidently false. A man with a wife, five children, and other luxuries could hardly be poverty-stricken, and Mr. Bobbett's burly figure and healthy red face certainly failed to give one the impression of semi-starvation.

"And what is this place?" Mr. Kirkmount wanted to know, halting before a door in the superstructure after having flattened out the Boatswain.

"That is the gymnastic store," the Captain told him, "where we keep the vaulting horse, the horizontal bar, and other gymnastic gear."

"And do the men do gymnastics every day?"

"Regularly," said Captain Playfair with a nod.

"And who is this?" demanded the inquisitive potentate, flinging open the door and pointing an accusing finger at a figure attired in nothing but a singlet slumbering peacefully on a pile of soft gymnastic mats.

The skipper, with rage in his heart and a frown on his face, glared at the drowsy one over the First Lord's shoulder as though to wake him by will power alone. But not a bit of it; the tired gentleman still snored peacefully on.

It was the Commander who came to the rescue.

"Oh! him, sir?" he said airily. "That's the Physical Training Instructor."

"And why is he not instructing someone?" enquired the Ruler of the King's Navee.

The Commander was quite equal to the occasion.

"He kept the middle watch last night," he answered glibly, on the spur of the moment, and without the flicker of an eyelid. "We have been rather short of responsible petty officers lately, so some . . ."

"Ah! I understand. You mean he is allowed to make up for his loss of sleep in the daytime?"

"Precisely, sir?"

"By the way, Captain Playfair," came the next question, "do any of the seamen ever wear pyjamas?"

"I'm sure I don't know!" exclaimed the owner, rather purple about the face. "They're not supplied by the Government, anyhow."

Mr. Kirkmount's companion, himself a naval officer, burst out into a hoarse chuckle of amusement, while at the same moment the

P.T.I.,¹ hearing the sound of voices, opened his eyes dreamily and saw the galaxy of gold lace and "brass hats" gazing in upon him.

I, the skipper's "doggie," or A.D.C., could just see the man's face from my place in the rear of the little crowd clustered round the doorway, and never shall I forget his first look of utter amazement, followed by one of absolute horror, as he realised the state of affairs. The First Lord's features had appeared too often in the illustrated newspapers for him to pass unrecognised. But the P.T.I. was determined to be polite, singlet or no singlet. He could hardly salute, so he merely sprang to his feet and stood strictly to attention.

Mr. Kirkmount fixed him with a piercing gaze, and opened his mouth to ask a question, when the Commander, realising that a cross-examination of the culprit himself might prove distinctly awkward, adroitly broke in and changed the subject.

"By the way, sir," he interrupted hastily, winking at the Captain who seemed on the verge of apoplexy, "we quite forgot to show you the bakery. I always think the bakery is the most interesting place in the ship. It has a steam oven, and an electric machine for mixing the dough, and . . ."

"Very interesting indeed," the skipper corroborated in a growl.

"Ah, yes, the bakery," nodded the First

¹ P.T.I.—Physical Training Instructor.

Lord. "Take me to it. I am always interested in the men's victualling arrangements. It's wonderful to think of the improvements which have been brought in within the last few years. Now five years ago the sailors never got fresh bread every day at sea, did they?"

So the procession moved on and the situation was saved, but it was a very long time before the P.T.I. heard the last of the rough side of the Commander's tongue. He had hardly kept a middle watch in his life, and at half-past ten in the forenoon he should have been taking the cooks' mates and officers' stewards at physical drill. Instead of that he had delegated this duty to his assistant, and was discovered, by the First Lord of the Admiralty of all people, asleep on his own gymnastic mats in much the same attire as that in which he had been born!

But I am digressing. I am endeavouring to relate my own nautical experiences, not those of a First Lord of the Admiralty. To return to our ship.

The *Pericles*, in spite of her ungainly appearance, was one of the most comfortable ships in which I have ever served. The accommodation for her officers was all that could be desired, and the gunroom, which naturally interested me the most, was a large airy place on the port side of the lower deck aft. It must have measured some

thirty feet by twenty, or thereabouts, and had four scuttles in the side of the ship a few feet above the waterline. Of course they had always to be closed at sea, even in the finest of weather, but we could open them in harbour. So we were far better off than in some super-Dreadnoughts, where the gun-rooms had only a small skylight overhead to let in fresh air and daylight, so that the electric lights burned day and night and most of the air was of the "potted" variety, or driven in through ventilating shafts by fans.

The walls and ceiling of our happy home were of the usual white enamel, rather grimy in parts, and to relieve the bare monotony the members of the mess had purchased pictures, most of them of beautiful ladies in rather *négligé* raiment. There was the usual furniture, two long tables flanked by cushioned lockers on one side and padded forms at the other; the inevitable lockers overhead near the roof in which we were supposed to keep books, but really concealed our pots of jam and pickles; a solid mahogany sideboard and bookcase; some cupboards; a letter rack, notice board, and rack for dirks; and a large stove. We also possessed cretonne curtains for the door and scuttles, a basket chair or two, a gramophone, a pianola and piano combined, some rugs, and a couple of woebegone-looking plants in brass pots to alleviate the bareness

of the long tables with their red and black Service tablecloths. Under the table reposed the beer barrel. It sometimes leaked.

The cretonne curtains were frequently in need of a visit to a laundry, while the pianola, purchased on what we called the "everlasting payment system," was long past its early youth. It had been obtained soon after the ship commissioned and became our property soon after I joined. Some time later, finding it to be suffering from chronic asthma, we tried to dispose of it. A dealer in such things was therefore summoned on board, but the instrument was in such a deplorable state that £10 was the most he would offer. Amongst other defects, he explained, the strings were ruined and its interior was full of "foreign matter."

I really don't wonder at his verdict, for we had frequently pulled the whole contraption to bits to see why it wouldn't work, while more often than once I saw it used as a convenient receptacle for coffee dregs and the contents of ash trays. Once, in a hilarious mood on his birthday, Rawson, our Sub-Lieutenant, emptied half a bottle of stuffed olives into it to "ginger the old gal up." So on the whole I don't really marvel at the dealer turning up his nose. The wonder was that the pianola could be induced to produce music of any kind. It was a long-suffering instrument.

The brass pots on the table were bent and battered, as they were frequently used as helmets by the "crabs," or junior midshipmen, when those young gentlemen were forced to indulge in gladiatorial combats on guest nights for the delectation of their seniors and betters.

But we were a very well-conducted mess on the whole, and Rawson, the president, ruled us, the junior members, with a rod of iron. Sometimes the "warts," as we were called, were forced to kneel on the form and to smell a certain spot on the tablecloth, while the Sub, a husky fellow, operated with a pliable cane on the then most prominent portion of our anatomy. At the time we thought Rawson was a bit of a beast, but now that I have passed the exalted rank of Sub-Lieutenant myself, I understand what little perishers snotties really are, and have come to realise that he was very just.

Of course, beating in any shape or form, since it might degenerate into bullying in wrong hands, was strictly forbidden by the regulations. But Rawson never punished us without reason, and looking back on it I know that the painful "half-dozens" I sometimes received did me all the good in the world. At any rate, I am tolerably certain that I deserved a good deal more than I ever got.

Besides Rawson we had two other "one stripers" in the gunroom, Nichols, the

Engineer-Sub-Lieutenant, and Driver, the Assistant Paymaster.

Nichols was a very quiet, studiously inclined fellow, short and very muscular, with black hair generally worn rather long, a brown roving eye, and a pale complexion. When he wasn't on watch in the engine-room he was generally to be found in his cabin writing long letters to his fiancée and reading books on ornithology. He rarely went ashore, and then only to play golf or football, but, like most quiet people, his lively moments were very lively. Sometimes, when we had a Rugby scrum in the gunroom after dinner, one would see old Nichols flat on the deck, shrieking with laughter and minus half his clothes, with a pile of about a dozen snotties on top of him. We all loved him, for he was always so sympathetic when we got into trouble, and always so ready to help us.

Driver I never really cared for, and I was no exception to the general rule, for he got on everybody's nerves, including those of the Fleet Paymaster. He had once been a Secretary to the Captain (D) commanding a destroyer flotilla, and never tired of trying to assert his superiority and referring in our presence to the days "when I was a Secretary, don't you know."

Moreover, he took care to inform us that accountant work in a big ship was utterly derogatory to his dignity and capability

He intended to become a Secretary to a Flag Officer, "the only job in our branch worth going in for," and it did not please us a little bit to hear a fellow running down his own branch of the Service.

No, Percival Driver was a callow youth and what we referred to as "a nasty bit of work." He was tall, fair-haired, and slim, and his huge languishing blue eyes earned for him the nickname of "Goo-goo." He never played games, always went ashore in patent leather boots, oiled hair, immaculate clothes, and the very last word in collars and ties, and fancied himself very much as a ladies' man. He attended more tea parties and dances than were really wholesome for one so young, imagined that he had only to look at a girl to captivate her, and had a horrible trick of referring to women as "the dear things."

Rawson, his very antithesis, detested him cordially, chiefly because he wore silk socks, used scent, and was such an inveterate "poodle-faker."

But, thank goodness, our other officers of the accountant branch were not like Goo-goo. The old Fleet Paymaster, John Tanner, was the kindest old soul imaginable, and when the time came for us snotties to go on long leave we never had a penny in our pockets and always went to him for an advance of pay for our travelling expenses.

"Money," he used to say, looking at us

over his glasses. "What do you young limbs of Satan want money for?"

We told him.

"'Um," he grunted, turning over the sheets of the enormous pay-book or ledger, or whatever else it was he kept, and looking at the entries. "Look at this? Look at it! You come to me for money. How can you have money? By the time your mess bills are taken out of what's due to you, you'll all be in red ink!"¹

One certainly cannot do much on pay of one and ninepence per diem, plus an allowance of £50 a year from one's people, however economical one may be. In fact, by the time we had paid our mess bills, servants, washing, and other necessary expenses there was rarely anything much left for riotous living. So we were very glum.

But John Tanner was soft-hearted, and after growling at us for our extravagance and assuring us that our expensive habits must inevitably land us in the workhouse, he sighed deeply, polished his glasses with a silk handkerchief, and opened the safe.

"You shall have thirty shillings apiece and not a penny more," he observed, glaring at us through his bushy eyebrows. "Not another stiver shall you get out of me! It's meself that's responsible for it, mind you,

¹ When a man is in debt to the Crown a notation is always made in red ink against his name in the ledger.

and if you don't pay me back inside a month there'll be the deuce to pay all round."

So we departed, highly jubilant, and the same little comedy took place every time we were granted long leave. We were always an impecunious lot.

There were fifteen of us midshipmen. Taking us all round I think we were a pretty average lot. I cannot describe the whole bunch, but Turley, the senior, was a tall thin fellow who took life very seriously. He was a thorough "æ chaser," and anything he did he did well, but was so busy mugging up for his exams that he didn't worry much about us crabs, provided we were out of the bathroom in the mornings by the time he appeared.

Johnny Hungerford came next. He was fat, red-faced, and rather a comic character, with a decided bent for smashing up the bows of his picquet-boat by ramming flag-ships, accommodation ladders, and jetties. He was usually under stoppage of leave for these crimes, until at last the Commander became so tired of him that he was dismissed from the picquet-boat and put in charge of one of the sailing cutters.

But the very first time he went away in her he sailed the boat under our lower boom and brought the mainmast down with a crash, while the Commander, purple with rage, danced upon the quarterdeck.

"Is there anything you can do without

smashing things up?" he enquired frigidly, when Hungerford eventually came on board.

The snotty thought for a minute. "I don't know, sir," he stammered at last.

"Nor do I," snorted the Commander, swinging his telescope. "The carpenters of this ship are always busy repairing your damage. Do you go on like this at home?"

"Oh no, sir. They don't mind what I do there!"

"All the more fools them," grunted the Bloke.¹ "The sooner you pull yourself together and try to learn, the better it will be. Meanwhile, you will keep watch and watch² until the carpenters have made a new mast for the second cutter."

Poor old Hungerford! He was always in trouble, but was an excellent fellow in charge of men and such a rattling good mess-mate. His comic songs set us all roaring with laughter during our gunroom sing-songs, and his impersonation of George Robey—rather a corpulent George Robey—were the absolute limit. We all loved him.

But poor Johnny is dead now. He was the Sub of a destroyer at Jutland, and when his ship was sunk during the night attacks on the German fleet and her people took to the water with life-saving rafts, lifebelts, and pieces of wreckage, Johnny, though

¹ The Commander of a ship is always known on the lower deck as "the Bloke."

² "Watch and watch," *i.e.* watch on and watch off.

wounded, went with them. I heard afterwards that it was he who kept up the survivors' spirits through the long, awful night in the water. He assured them that help would come in the morning, and help did come. But when the rescuing destroyer appeared John Hungerford was not there. Instead, a badly wounded, unconscious A.B. was found lashed to the float in the place where the Sub had last been seen.

Thorp, my friend of the picquet-boat, came next in order of seniority, and then the immaculate George Carstairs, a very tired member of society who was even too tired to write letters. He had more money than was really good for him, and conducted his correspondence by telegram, until at last things reached such a pitch that he was receiving as many as ten telegrams a day.

"Private telegram for Carstairs," would come signal after signal from the depot ship which, linked up to the telegraph office ashore, acted as the fleet post office. "Private telegram for Carstairs," and every time a boat had to be sent away to fetch it. The snotties and boat's crews naturally got rather sick of it, for George's interminable correspondence meant extra work for everyone.

But the Commander was never slow in inventing a punishment to fit every crime, and one day during lunch there came a rap

on the gunroom door followed by the entry of a signal boy.

“Private telegram for Mister Carstairs,” he announced. “An’ the orficer of the watch wants to see ’im at once, please.”

So George, leaving his meal, went on deck, and presently, to our huge delight, we saw him pulling over alone in the dinghy to fetch his telegram. It was a distance of three-quarters of a mile either way, and that same afternoon he rowed backwards and forwards no less than thrice. The next day he repeated the evolution no less than four times, and during the evening complained bitterly of blisters on his hands and a great stiffness in his arms and legs. The treatment had a salutary effect, however, for the day afterwards his telegrams dwindled to one, while the next day there were none at all.

Thereafter George continued his correspondence like any ordinary mortal by means of the penny post, but for a very long time he was known as the “Dinghyman.” Moreover, all the other snotties in the squadron had heard of the episode and made facetious remarks whenever they met him ashore.

I have no space to describe the other senior midshipmen, but the six “warts” were Purdey, MacTavish, Meryon, Sandilands, Prescott, and myself. The two latter had been in my term at Osborne and Dartmouth, but the others were about six months our seniors.

They were all good fellows, and as we were all "dog's bodies" we rather hung together. They certainly put us up to all the tricks of the trade, and told us among other things that if we ever had any request to make of the Commander it was as well to beard him after dinner in the evening when he was always in a good humour. They also informed us that the morning watch at sea was well worth keeping, because the Captain invariably invited the "young gentlemen" who kept that watch to have breakfast with him. And breakfast with the skipper was better than breakfast in the gunroom. There were no tinned salmon fishcakes and watery porridge in the "cuddy."¹

Also, Captain Playfair seemed to take it as an insult if we didn't seem hungry.

"Come on, boy!" he used to growl. "Pull yourself together. Do you mean to tell me you can't stow another egg?"

"I don't think so, sir," we would answer, rather short of breath, while the steward looked on in astonished admiration.

"Well, try some marmalade or jam, then. When I was a midshipman . . ."

We learned, too, where one could retire to smoke a clandestine cigarette during the forenoon, and the individual idiosyncrasies of the wardroom officers, particularly the watchkeeping Lieutenants.

¹ Cuddy, *i.e.* the Captain's cabin.

Mr. Halliday, for example, always had cocoa during the middle watch at sea and expected his snotty to brew it. And woe betide the young officer who put in the sugar last of all. The cocoa, sugar, and a little milk had first to be stirred into a stiff paste at the bottom of the cup and the boiling water poured in on top of it, thus producing the creamy froth which delighted Mr. Halliday's soul.

Another of the watchkeepers, not content with cocoa and ship's biscuit, celebrated every middle watch with a good square meal. He always took an electric chafing-dish with him to the charthouse underneath the bridge, and while he kept the watch on the "monkey's island,"¹ the snotty cooked his eggs, bacon, sausages, and devilled chicken legs.

Never shall I forget the time when, whilst removing a fried egg from the dish with the navigator's compasses, I inadvertently allowed it to drop on the open chart of the English Channel. It burst like a lyddite shell in an ever-widening circle of hot grease. I first contemplated removing all traces of my guilt by burning the chart. Then I thought better of it and tried to wipe up the mess with my handkerchief. The process was not good for the chart.

And presently, in the midst of this operation, I heard a step behind me and turned

¹ "Monkey's island," *i.e.* the upper bridge.

round to see the Lieutenant (N),¹ Mr. Hodder, gazing at me open-mouthed in indignant astonishment.

“I’m awfully sorry, sir,” I blurted out, going hot and cold in turns. “I was cooking an egg for Mr. Trueman, sir, and I’m afraid I must have dropped it.”

His mouth worked as he tried to speak. Then he took off his cap, hurled it to the deck, and tried to dance upon it, glaring at me all the while like a maniac. Then he suddenly found his tongue.

“You miserable little worm!” he shouted, gibbering with rage. “You come into my charthouse and cook your beastly eggs all over my chart. You stuff yourself with food morning, noon, and night until you can hardly see! Oh, you little fiend! Singe my whiskers! Look at that disgusting mess! Look at it!! Look at it!!!”

“I’m really fearfully sorry, sir,” I managed to get out, trembling in my shoes. “Mr. Trueman . . .”

“To hell with Mr. Trueman!” he belated, flying out of the charthouse and dashing up the ladder to the upper bridge like one demented, there to continue the conversation with Mr. Trueman himself.

For quite five minutes the battle raged furiously, while I listened in trepidation to the angry voices. Then I heard Mr. True-

¹ Lieutenant (N), *i.e.* Lieutenant for navigating duties.

man laugh, and presently he called me by name.

“Sir?” said I, my knees knocking together.

“Munro. You will kindly cook another egg and present it to the navigating officer with my compliments. When you’ve done that you can do one for yourself.”

“You’re not such a bad cook, youngster,” Mr. Hodder said graciously, when he had come below to the charthouse and had demolished my handiwork. “As a punishment for ruining my chart you shall cook me an egg every time you have the middle watch. But remember,” he added, wagging an admonitory finger at me. “Never dare to use the chafing-dish unless you’ve put the chart in the drawer. It’s only by sheer luck that I happen to have a duplicate.”

So all was peace. Mr. Hodder’s bark was always worse than his bite, and he was one of the most popular officers in the ship.

Then there was Mr. Carley, another watch-keeper, who was always so sleepy that he had to be called half an hour before his watch, and every five minutes thereafter, if he was to turn out of his bunk in time to appear at the hour. When remonstrated with for relieving late he invariably said that the snotty hadn’t called him, whereupon the snotty got into trouble with the officer relieved. If, on the other hand, we dared to turn on the electric light in Mr. Carley’s

cabin to wake him up, we got bitten by him, so whatever happened we generally got it in the neck.

But we managed to survive it, and it was always some consolation to us to think that, junior as we were, there was always someone in the gunroom who was junior to us. That was Tilley, the Assistant Clerk, a small, rather nice little chap with a squeaky voice and sandy hair. He was the wart of all the warts, and at times, when he dared to become obstreperous, we took jolly good care to let him know it.

CHAPTER V

THE DAY'S WORK

It is a dull and an uninteresting business for a person who has been a midshipman himself to sit down and write of what he did and how he was trained; but I cannot very well omit all reference to that very crucial period of my life. I have a theory, and I believe it to be a correct one, that the success or otherwise of a naval officer's career depends in no small measure on his upbringing in his first sea-going ship.

A snotty, like anyone else of a susceptible age, is very malleable, and absorbs outside impressions like a piece of blotting paper. If his first sea-going ship is a smart ship, therefore; if the Commander, among his many other duties, can find time to keep a horny but not unsympathetic eye upon the "young gentlemen"; if the Sub-Lieutenant of the gunroom and the senior snotties themselves exert their authority and enforce discipline in the way they should, their newly joined shipmate will see that it is the fashion to be smart, and, in seventy-five

per cent. of cases, will turn out a good officer. If, on the other hand, he is allowed to do as he pleases without let or hindrance, he has every excuse for being a failure when he grows up.

These are platitudes—merely another way of saying “Spare the rod and spoil the child”—but the truth of them is more than borne out by the histories of some of those who have the misfortune to figure in the quarterly Court Martial returns of His Majesty's Fleet.

We had no excuse for going to the dogs in the *Pericles*. We were very well looked after indeed, firstly by Commander Transom, who took a great personal interest in us and encouraged us to play games rather than to loaf aimlessly about when we went ashore. He also hunted us mercilessly when he thought we were getting slack at our job on board, and though we groaned loudly at the time, I have no doubt that it did us a lot of good.

Next came Lieutenant Hinkson, the senior “salt horse,”¹ two and a half striped Lieutenant,² who was in charge of our sea-

¹ “Salt horse,” *i.e.* an officer who has not specialised in any particular branch such as gunnery, torpedo, navigation, etc. “Salt horse” was the name given by old-time seamen to their salt beef in casks, and a “salt horse” officer is sometimes supposed to know more of old-fashioned sailing than the more scientific specialist.

² “Two and a half striped Lieutenant,” *i.e.* a Lieutenant of over eight years' seniority who wears the thin ring of gold

manship instruction, and generally regulated our programme of work. He was a destroyer officer who was doing a couple of years service in a battleship to keep him in touch with the affairs of the big-ship navy, and whatever other ideas he may have had he certainly believed in keeping our noses to the grindstone.

Then, in the gunroom itself, there were Rawson and all the senior snotties. The Sub was a great stickler for Service etiquette and personal cleanliness, and exercised a rigid supervision over our behaviour and dress. It was from him that I learnt by bitter experience that it is the Service custom for the junior officer to get into a boat first, and to leave it last, while he would never allow a midshipman into the mess for meals with a dirty collar, grimy hands, or unbrushed hair. One unfortunate wart was even made to mess upon his chest outside in the gunroom flat for three days because he habitually omitted to use a nail-brush.

Moreover, because Rawson once saw some snotty who knew no better going ashore in a hideous scarlet tie, he started a routine of inspecting us and our attire before we went on leave in the afternoons.

“Sandilands,” he would say, “you’re not going ashore with that walking-stick of yours. It’s the most vulgar and beastly

lace on his sleeve between the two thicker ones. The title “Lieutenant-Commander” was not introduced until 1914.

thing I've ever seen. If you can't get a better one, for heaven's sake spend a shilling and buy a decent ash plant!"

So the offending article, a cheap and nasty whangee cane with chased silver mountings, was impounded and destroyed.

Tilley was also prohibited from landing in a striped yellow and green waistcoat knitted and presented to him by an aunt whom I should think must have been colour-blind, while silk or violently coloured socks and flaring ties brought forth a torrent of abuse.

Habitual offenders were sometimes haled before a gunroom Court Martial to answer for their delinquencies in this respect, and with the Sub as president and the senior snotties as members of the Court the sentences were more just than merciful.

The charge generally read something as follows :

"For that he, Donald MacTavish, on the 17th day of March, 1912, after having been cautioned, did attempt to leave the ship in attire unbecoming to an officer and a gentleman, to wit, purple socks and an emerald green tie."

Accused admitted his guilt, though, in a statement in mitigation of his offence, pleaded extenuating circumstances. The purple socks were the only ones he possessed without holes in them, while he had purchased the green tie by gaslight and did not notice its vivid hue until afterwards.

That excuse wouldn't wash, said the president drily, and accused having no further evidence to offer on his own behalf, Mr. President consulted with his learned colleagues, assumed his cocked hat, and pronounced sentence. Three strokes with "Little Benjamin, our ruler"—otherwise the Sub's cane—for the charge of disobedience, and accused to wear a black tie and black socks in civilian attire for a period of one month. The first part of the sentence to be carried into execution then and there.

Another crab, Prescott, was tried on the charge of being in love with an unsuitable person, to wit, a pretty young woman who kept the cigarette kiosk on the pier at a certain watering-place we once visited. It was alleged that accused had addressed the young lady as "Gertie," and that he had been seen in her company at the local roller-skating rink on an early-closing day.

Accused proved conclusively that he had never addressed the lady by her Christian name, and that, moreover, her name was "Rose," not "Gertie." He further assured his judges that he had made her acquaintance at the skating rink solely by having the misfortune to "barge" into her. Whereupon, being a model of gentility, he bowed and apologised, and she, the sly puss, remarked that it was a very nice afternoon, and would the young gentleman care for somebody to help him along, as he seemed rather unused to

roller skates. He, of course, didn't quite like the idea, but couldn't very well refuse, and . . ."

That was quite enough, interrupted the president. Did the accused think they had the whole blooming day to waste listening to his yarn? Certainly not! The intentions of accused were evidently strictly honourable, but for having the impudence to visit a skating rink on a perfectly fine afternoon when he should have been taking exercise for the good of his health, and for wasting the time of the "Honourable Court here assembled" in listening to his rotten yarn, accused was sentenced to "half a dozen of the best," and was warned to be more careful in future. Cheers in court, but heart-rending lamentations on the part of the accused, who loudly protested his innocence as he was dragged off to sacrifice.

But really we had little time to indulge our natural bent for wickedness, for our days were very full. Every morning except on Sundays, when we were allowed to lie in until 7 o'clock, we were turned out of our hammocks at 6.15. Then, arraying ourselves in flannels, we fell in on deck for physical drill, which was varied occasionally by boat pulling or rifle drill. At 6.50 we rushed below and scrambled through our ablutions in the tiled bathroom in the flat beside the gunroom. We each had our own private hot-water can, and it was

supposed to be the duty of our bandsmen servants to take down one of the shallow, saucer-like baths, and to place therein his master's filled can, together with his soap, sponge, and nail-brush. But all these things were regarded more or less as public property, in addition to which there were not enough baths to go round, so it was always a case of first come first served, in which the crabs, due to the Hunnish instincts of the senior snotties, frequently went to the wall.

Our baths finished we proceeded to dress at our chests, and at 7.30 went to the signal bridge for twenty minutes instruction in signals, and half an hour later, by which time we were ravenous, there came breakfast.

Our gunroom messman, Mr. Marshall, did us very well on the whole, wonderfully well when one considers that we all had healthy appetites and paid no more than one shilling a day for our food. But besides that, of course, the messman drew the tenpence a day ration money for each one of us, this sum being allowed by the Government to every officer and man¹ in the Navy. He could also buy fresh bread, meat, vegetables, and practically everything else except pure luxuries, at contract rates from the stores kept on board, and that saved him a good bit, for one can't buy the best beef or

¹ Men over twenty who draw their rum ration receive 9½d. a day only. Officers, except warrant officers, are not allowed a spirit ration.

mutton for sixpence a pound at any butcher's shop ashore, and other things were cheap in proportion. We had our bakery on board, while meat was embarked by the boat-load about once a month, being kept in a refrigerating chamber until required for use.

I think Mr. Marshall must have made most of his profit over our "extra bills" for such things as cake at tea, biscuits, pots of jam, potted meat, fruit at dinner, and tins of cocoa to while away the monotony of the night watches, but even then his prices were fairly reasonable.

Of course, like other gunrooms, we sometimes suffered from a surfeit of tinned salmon cutlets, rissoles, canteen sardines on toast, and Russian kromeskijs. (I fail to find the word "kromesky" in any dictionary, but in our time the delicacy consisted of a small pastry affair filled with hot air and any old thing in the shape of réchauffé, minced-up meat.) But we wolfed everything he gave us, and if there were any complaints about the food from the senior members—it was as much as a wart's life was worth to be heard making a grievance—Mr. Marshall's face would appear in the trap-hatch between the gunroom and the pantry outside.

"It's like this here, gentlemen," he used to say, beaming benignly, "I'm sorry the dinner is not up to our usual standard, but my chef, being a married man, must have a run ashore occasionally. Our dinner to-

night has been done by the wardroom cook!"

Observe that he referred to our old villain as the "chef," and the wardroom culinary expert as the "cook."

But whatever he did, provided he refrained from starving us, we could forgive him. He was a very useful friend, and I don't know how many times he paid my washing bill to enable me to get my shirts and collars from the laundry, or how often he obliged me with a loan of five shillings. Laundries who undertake midshipmen's washing generally demand their money before they deliver up the goods, and neither I nor my messmates had half-a-crown to our names by the twelfth of the month.

We finished breakfast at 8.20, when there was just time to smoke a pipe on deck before both watches fell in to clear up decks for divisions. We all puffed pipes, for as we were over the age of eighteen before we came to sea we were allowed by the regulations to smoke.

On Monday, which was usually a "general drill day," when the whole squadron did evolutions together by signal from the flagship, we attended divisions and prayers at 9.10 with our men, on the conclusion of which the lower deck was cleared and practically every soul on board fell in on deck.

At 9.30, by which time all the telescopes on our bridge would be levelled on the flag-

ship, a couple of signal flags would climb to her masthead.

“Out sheet anchor, sir!” the Chief Yeoman of Signals would howl to the Commander.

“Out sheet anchor!” bellowed the boatswain’s mates, twittering on their pipes.

The lines of white clad men would dissolve with a scurry of feet as they rushed to their stations, some to hoist out the heavy launch and pinnace which lay on the booms abaft the after funnel and had to be swung out with the main derrick; others to unreel the huge 5½-inch steel wire hawser ready for coiling down into the sailing pinnace; and still more to lower the six-ton anchor from the forecastle to the water’s edge ready to be taken away in the launch.

I was the Captain’s “doggie,” and, with him, stood on the upper bridge and watched the proceedings, and at first the confusion appeared to me to be absolutely chaotic. Men seemed to scamper to and fro in an aimless sort of way doing nothing in particular but get in each other’s way, so that it was a marvel that anything was done at all. There was a great deal of noise, too, for one heard the constant twittering of the pipes and frantic objurgations from the 1st Lieutenant on the forecastle to “Surge¹ handsomely!² Handsomely!! Catch hold of the

¹ To “surge” a rope is to allow it to slide round the drum of a capstan or bollard.

² “Handsomely,” *i.e.* slowly and with care.

thing, you devils, it won't bite you!" as a line of blue-jackets allowed a wire hawser to slide slowly through their hands and to travel round the drum of the capstan as the anchor took the weight and was lowered into the water. From aft, too, came a strident voice—"Away with the starboard after guy! Ease away roundly¹ the port foremost and port after guys! Handsomely the starboard foremost guy! Vast hauling the starboard after guy!" in such rapid succession that one wondered what it all meant. It was merely the bulky 42-foot sailing launch, hanging from the end of the main derrick like one of those flying boats at Earl's Court, being lifted from her resting-place, whirled into the air, and swung out through space until she was deposited neatly into the water alongside the ship. And the crew, if you please, were in the boat the whole time!

It took me some considerable time to perceive that there was a method in all this madness, but eventually I came to realise that our Commander's reputation for being one of the best organisers in the Service was by no means an empty one. His stations for every conceivable evolution were absolutely cut and dried, and as the ship had been in commission for some time, every man knew exactly what to do and when and how to do it. Being a Chatham crew, with no small proportion of Cockneys among

¹ "Roundly," *i.e.* quickly, smartly.

them, they sometimes chattered rather loudly, but there was no doubt that they were one of the best-drilled ship's companies in the squadron, if not in the whole Navy.

Commander Transom had a wonderful memory, too. He knew the name of every seaman rating in the ship, and several times I saw him step to the fore side of the bridge, cap slightly askew and a megaphone to his lips, and say something—he never seemed to raise his voice—to a man on the fore-castle.

“Ordinary Seaman Whitlock! Don't stand there looking about you, my boy! This isn't a Sunday-school treat. You ought to be backing up that five and a half inch wire with the second sub of fore-castle men port watch!”

And Henry Whitlock, O.S., looking like a startled rabbit at being singled out by name in the midst of such a scurrying multitude, went off to his place firmly convinced that the Commander was in league with the Noseless One. How else should he know his name, him, a humble O.D.¹ who had joined the ship only ten days before?

The Commander's memory was positively uncanny. It was never a case of “Hi! You there!” with him. It was “Able Seaman Robinson!” or “Petty Officer Higgins!” So the men, knowing this,

¹ “O.D.” A Service term for “Ordinary Seaman.” The correct abbreviations are “O.S.” or “Ord.,” “O.D.” probably being derived from the latter.

always worked their hardest with the Bloke's eagle eye upon them. There was very little that escaped his notice.

But there were many other evolutions that we did on Monday mornings besides "Out Sheet Anchor." It might be "Out Net Defence," when the great, steel-meshed torpedo nets encircling the ship were swung out on their booms to hang round the ship like a great curtain to ward off hostile torpedoes, or "Fire Stations," a sloppy business in which the decks were littered with hoses while every steam and hand pump throughout the ship was brought into play to subdue an imaginary conflagration. Then we practised "Collision Stations," when the watertight doors were closed and the marines staggered along with a huge collision mat, an affair of substantial canvas thickly thrummed with spunyarn until it looked like some huge, long-haired carpet, which was presently hauled into position over a mythical hole below the waterline by means of its bottom line, lowering line, and fore-and-afters.

Sometimes we pretended to "Abandon ship," when all the boats were lowered, were provided with water and biscuit, and every soul on board was packed into them. Then "Clear ship for action," preparing to be towed, or to take a disabled ship in tow, and anything else that the Admiral's ingenuity could suggest. We were always hard at it

for about an hour and a half on general drill mornings, ship working against ship to be the first to complete the evolution ordered, and to break the red, white, and blue "Number One" pendant at the yardarm to show that she had finished.

The morning's entertainment invariably concluded with that favourite diversion of all Admirals, "Away all boats' crews, pull round the fleet!" Every pulling boat was lowered with a rush, the crews tumbled into them, and then ensued a race round the division of four battleships, each ship's boats starting and finishing at their own ship. Soon the water would be covered with a never-ending procession of 42-foot launches, pinnaces, cutters, jolly boats, gigs, galleys, and whalers, the light galleys and gigs skimming through the water with their long oars, and the heavier launches and pinnaces splashing and lumbering along behind like fussy old ladies trying to catch a train. It was a sort of ship to ship race, for every boat in the squadron had exactly the same distance to travel, and as the first boat round got back to her ship the vessel hoisted the "One Pendant" at the dip, or half-way up, and close up to the yardarm when the last boat returned and was hoisted out of the water. So the straining, sweating crews, minus their jumpers, could see how things were progressing and nerved every effort to get home first.

Some ships, knowing the Admiral's habit of pulling round the fleet after the other drills, and anxious to appear smarter than they really were, "warmed the bell"¹ by manning their boats beforehand and keeping them out of sight until the signal went up. In other words, they cheated. The *Amphibious* was a noted offender in this respect, but one day, when she had several of her boats waiting alongside with the men already in them, she happened to swing the wrong way, so that the flagship saw what was being done. A few moments later the signal went up. "Away all boats' crews, pull round the fleet. *Amphibious*' boats to be manned by stokers, marines, and ordinary seamen."

We got away in good time, while the poor old *Amphibious* was still struggling to get her proper boats' crews out of the boats, and the stokers, marines, and ordinary seamen in.

On Friday forenoons we usually went to "General Quarters," when the guns were cleared away and officers and men went to their action stations, while on Thursdays the seamen were sometimes rigged out with their rifles, bayonets, and gaiters, and were sent ashore to play at being soldiers. And how they hated it! The number of men who

¹ "Warming the bell," i.e. calling a relief for a watch before the proper time. A Service expression which can be taken to signify any illegitimate method of saving time.

professed to have been "excused boots" by the P.M.O. on these occasions was truly wonderful. One could almost believe that they were the same as those old tarrybreeks who, while the Naval Brigade was employed ashore during the Sudan campaign in the 'eighties, removed their footgear and marched barefooted over the desert, greatly to the envy of the soldiers. A sailor never loves his boots, though the habit of going about barefooted on board ship is rapidly dying out. Perhaps it is due to the number of ring-bolts and other fittings in the decks of modern men-of-war against which one can stub one's toes.

Saturday forenoon was always given over to an orgy of cleaning ship and holystoning decks, while the afternoon was set aside as a "Make and mend." In the days when seamen made all their own garments one afternoon a week, generally Thursday, was given for this purpose, and now that the men buy most of their clothes ready-made the *raison d'être* of the "Make and mend" has really vanished. But the custom was too old not to survive, though the half-holiday is now given on Saturday.

Sunday was supposed to be a day of rest and recuperation after the toil of the week, but even so there was plenty to be done. The men turned out at 5.15 instead of 5 o'clock and cleaned the ship as usual. Then they shifted into their "Number One's," or

best clothes, and at 9.30, by which time the officers were all on deck in their frock coats, swords, and white gloves—we snotties wore our round jackets and dirks—the bugles sounded “Divisions.”

The men, when assembled, were first inspected by their officers, particular attention being paid to those who, unless they were checked, fancied themselves with long hair or unshaven faces, in trousers too loose to be strictly uniform, with the V of their jumpers cut too low in front, or the three rows of tape on their collars too close together or too far apart. This preliminary inspection over the Captain went round followed by the Commander, the Fleet Surgeon, Fleet Paymaster, myself (in my official capacity as the Captain's “Doggie”), and a whole string of lesser luminaries in the shape of the Master at Arms, the Captain's Coxswain, the Petty Officer of the upper deck, with quite a number of messengers, buglers, and other small fry bringing up the rear. It was quite a goodly procession.

As we drew near each division the officer in charge brought his men to attention and gave the order “Off caps!” after which the Captain walked up and down the ranks and inspected them. Sometimes he made no remarks at all, but occasionally pointed out a man with a quiff or “foretopman's lock,” or another with a beard not trimmed in accordance with the regulations. And how

precise the rules as to beards in the Navy really are I only discovered by looking up the K.R. and A.I.¹

“The Captain is to permit all the officers and men of the ship, including the Royal Marines, to wear beards and moustaches if they so desire.

“When the permission is taken advantage of, the use of the razor is to be entirely discontinued, as moustaches are not to be worn without the beard, nor the beard without moustaches, except in the case of officers’ stewards and cooks, and marines, who whether afloat or ashore may wear their beards and moustaches, or moustaches only, as each may elect.

“The hair of the beard and moustaches or whiskers is to be kept well cut and trimmed. The Captain is to give such directions as may seem to him desirable on these points, and is to establish, so far as practicable, uniformity as to the length of the hair, beards, moustaches, and whiskers of the men.”

Those regulations are so happily worded that any Captain of any of His Majesty’s ships could well take exception to any beard of any length worn by any member of his ship’s company. Few of them worry much about it, thank goodness, but beards like unto that worn by Abraham in a picture in an illustrated Bible I once possessed are not encouraged. Neither are the “young

¹ *i.e. King’s Regulations and Admiralty Instructions.*

gentlemen" encouraged to grow their face fungus. I knew of one aged midshipman who tried it, and his face, at the end of three weeks, looked like a hairy gooseberry. He was ordered to have, regulations or no regulations.

Sometimes there were amusing incidents on these Sunday rounds. My friend Nichols, for instance, the Engineer Sub, who was the officer of one of the Stoker's divisions, had a man who was the dirtiest, most disreputable lout of a fellow imaginable. His habits were such that his messmates made an official complaint about it. Persuasion, bullying, and punishment were each tried in turn, but without success. Human agency alone could never make Joseph Mulready clean. Personally, I believe he was half-witted.

But one Sunday he turned up at divisions even dirtier than usual. His hair was long and unkempt; his face, streaked with grime, had not seen soap or a razor for a week; his clothes were greasy, and the less said about the state of his hands the better.

"What do you mean by coming to divisions in that condition?" asked Nichols, surveying the unsavoury object with the deepest disgust. "Haven't I cautioned you again and again not to do it?"

Mulready opened his mouth, but said nothing.

"Haven't you any explanation to offer?" Nick persisted.

"I tried to wash meself, sir," Mulready

stammered at last. "But someone 'ad pinched me soap and towel, sir."

"And is that your best suit?"

"It's the only one I got, sir."

"Where are the others?"

"I've lost 'em, sir."

Suppressed titters from the rear rank and a heartfelt sigh from Nichols. But what on earth was he to do? If the Captain saw Mulready there would be ructions, and the divisional officer would inevitably be the burnt offering. Nichols wasn't going to be sacrificed on any account, and as the time was short the only way out of the difficulty was to conceal Mulready *pro tem*.

As luck would have it the *Pericles* was fitted with small electric lifts giving communication between the upper deck and stokehold, and one of these happened to be quite close to where the Stoker's division fell in. So they took the insanitary Joseph, and, much against his will, propelled him gently towards the opening, placed him inside the cage, and closed the door, though not before the occupant, unperceived by anyone, left the impression of a black and grimy palm on the spotless grey paint.

Presently the Captain arrived and walked up and down the ranks. "A very clean-looking lot of men, Mr. Nichols," he said approvingly, turning to go forward.

Then his eye caught sight of the awful imprint on the door.

"Hullo! D'you see that, Transom?" he said, pointing at it.

"Who the dooce did that?" queried the Commander, scratching his head. "It wasn't there a quarter of an hour ago, that I'll swear."

The skipper walked up to it and examined it attentively, when all of a sudden the door opened about an inch and nearly knocked his cap off.

"'Ere?" came a sepulchral voice from inside. "'Ere? 'As 'e gorn yet? Cin I come out?"

"What the—who the—who's that inside there?" demanded the skipper, seizing hold of the handle. "Come out at once, whoever you are!"

The door opened slowly to disclose Stoker Mulready, as black as the pots, framed in the narrow opening.

"Does this man belong to you, Mr. Nichols?"

"Y—yes, sir. He b—belongs to my division," stammered Nick, blushing a rosy red and wishing that the deck might open and swallow him up.

"And you put him in there so that I shouldn't see him, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

The skipper transferred his gaze to Mulready.

"You are the dirtiest man I have ever seen. You're a disgrace to your division and the ship!"



"DOES THIS MAN BELONG TO YOU, MR. NICHOLS?"

No answer from the culprit.

"He's always been the same, sir," the Commander chimed in. "Mr. Nichols has brought this man before me time after time for being slovenly and losing his kit, and punishment has no effect. I think he's slightly wanting, sir," in a whisper.

"Well, turn him over to the Fleet Surgeon and have him medically examined," said the skipper. "As for you, Mr. Nichols . . ."

Poor old Nick stood strictly to attention.

"As for you, Mr. Nichols," the owner went on with a twinkle in his eye. "Blow me! If I had a man like that in my division I'd have done the same myself!"

So the procession moved on with people stuffing handkerchiefs into their mouths, leaving poor old Nichols in a state of hopeless bewilderment.

Oh yes. Captain Playfair had a very pronounced sense of humour, and it didn't much matter how wicked one was provided one was really funny.

Our mess-decks were quite the cleanest and best kept in the squadron, but it was our 1st Lieutenant who invented the game of what he called "Spotting the Spud." No. 1 had a theory that a Captain must find fault with something or other on the mess-decks during Sunday rounds, otherwise he would not be doing his job. Rather than let him go empty away, therefore, he determined to give him a legitimate excuse for

finding fault, which also had the advantage of distracting his attention from things which really might matter.

The rules of the game were simple. You first caused the mess-deck sweepers to scrub the deck, the stools, the tables, the bread-barges, and anything else that could be scrubbed to a state of snowy whiteness. Next, you chivvied the paintwork cleaners to wipe down the spotless white enamel, and hunted the cooks of messes until their tin utensils shone like burnished silver and their brasswork like gold.

Then, at 9.15 on Sunday morning, when the men had been cleared off the mess-deck, you went round followed by one of the Ship's Corporals with a large bag. In this you placed all stray boots, clothing, musical instruments, vegetables, and other articles beloved of the bluejacket which you found "sculling" about. Incidentally, also, you charged the respective owners one inch of soap on Monday afternoon for each article impounded.

Having ascertained that the mess-deck was spotless and perfect, you then produced one small potato from the tail pocket of your frock coat, which, with much strategy, you placed in a fairly conspicuous position where it was practically certain to catch the owner's eye when he came round.

If he failed to see it you lost the game; but if he remarked, "Ha! Is that a potato

I see there?" you won, and treated yourself to a second glass of port after cold supper on Sunday evening.

But Captain Playfair must have heard of this innocent amusement, for one Sunday morning he turned to the 1st Lieutenant.

"How is it I don't see your potato this morning, First Lieutenant?"

"Potato, sir?" echoed No. 1, blushing all over his face and pretending to be very mystified.

"Yes, potato," chuckled the skipper. "I'm sorry you won't get your extra glass of port to-night, but if you will dine ashore with my wife and myself we'll see what can be done!"

Complete collapse of No. 1.

The 1st Lieutenant's mind seemed rather to run on vegetables, for, as a gunnery expert, he had once been attached to a British Naval Mission lent to the Ottoman navy. According to him many of the Osmanli seamen, recruited from the interior of Asia Minor, had never seen the sea before, much less a man-of-war. Consequently they knew nothing of naval terms.

So it was no use saying, "Haul away the purchase!" "Ease the topping lift!" or "Walk away with the fore guy!" They evinced no emotion at all, and merely stared about them in the blankest astonishment.

But, being agriculturists, they did know the names of vegetables. So what had to

be done was to attach a different specimen to each particular rope, and they always knew which rope to pull upon when one gave the order, "Haul away the onion!" "Ease the water-melon!" or "Walk away with the tomato!" Things were exquisitely simple.

I won't vouch for the truth of No. 1's yarns as to his Turkish experiences, for he was a born raconteur, and I somehow remember having seen this story in print long before I ever met him.

But I can believe anything of the Ottoman navy in its palmy days. A Turkish cruiser once arrived at Spithead by special invitation to attend a certain naval review. She was moored with due care in her exact place in the line, but during the night the wind rose to a gentle breeze. The tide, moreover, was rather strong, and the next morning the Turk dragged her anchors and was foul of her neighbour, a Brazilian.

Much gesticulation and objurgation from both ships, the officers and men of which, I presume, could not understand each other's language. Much tearing of hair and frantic signalling on the part of the King's Harbour Master who had so carefully anchored the Turk.

So the authorities provided themselves with sextants and other instruments and reanchored the Sultan's vessel in her correct position, but again she dragged her anchors. This time the truth came out.

“ I am desolated that you should have had all this trouble about my ship,” explained the Turkish captain, shrugging his shoulders. “ But it is inevitable.”

“ Inevitable ! ” snapped the King’s Harbour Master. “ Why ? ”

“ The fact of the matter is I have only three shackles of cable in the ship,” the Turk answered. “ I was forced to part with the rest in payment for coal at Gibraltar ! ”

Now three shackles of cable is $37\frac{1}{2}$ fathoms, or 225 feet. An ordinary British man-of-war has fifteen shackles of cable on each of her two bower anchors, and on the occasion in question they, our own vessels, were moored with four shackles on each anchor.

The Turk, apparently, had one on one, and two on the other. No wonder he dragged !

History does not relate what happened. I believe they lent him some more from Portsmouth dockyard.

I hope he returned it !

CHAPTER VI

UPS AND DOWNS

§ 1

DURING our first year at sea we were officially known as "junior midshipmen." In other words, we were still learning our job as officers, and acquiring habits of responsibility, while the instruction we had had at Dartmouth and in the training cruiser was still carried on.

The six of us crabs formed a class or section by ourselves, and one forenoon a week the Naval Instructor—who was also the Chaplain—took us in the purely theoretical work of navigation, nautical astronomy, mechanics, and so forth. We were supposed to be pretty well up in these subjects before we joined the *Pericles*, but there was "voluntary" instruction in the same subjects on two evenings a week between 8.30 and 9.30 for all who cared to avail themselves of it. The Padre, too, excellent man that he was, was always ready to help us in our work at any time; but, if we were at all backward, he took very good care that all those

crabs who did not volunteer to attend his evening classes were compelled to do so.

Our work went on in a regular six-monthly cycle, two months being devoted to what was known as "Seamanship, Navigation, and Deck duties"; one month at gunnery; one month at torpedo and electrical work, and two at engineering.

Our actual working hours were ordinarily from 9 till 11.40 in the forenoon, and from 1.15 till 3.10 in the afternoon, and we were never taken away from our instruction for work on deck unless there was something particularly interesting or instructive going on which it was considered advisable that we should witness.

After working hours we had our regular watch to keep up till 10 o'clock at night in harbour, and day and night at sea, while, with the ship in harbour, we were also available for going away in charge of boats, with the proviso that no junior snotty was to go away in a steamboat until the Commander informed him that he was considered competent. Every midshipman had to attend the signal instruction before breakfast, moreover, and, each week, had to take in three morse flashing exercises made with a lamp after dark. This number was reduced to one a week when we had reached a certain standard.

During the seamanship period we were in charge of Mr. Hinkson. He gave us two or

three lectures a week on the purely theoretical part of the business, the rule of the road at sea, organisation, internal economy, anchor work, and any other matters which could conveniently be explained by word of mouth. But by far the greater portion of the time was spent in practical instruction, such as going away in a boat under sail, splicing hemp and wire rope, rigging a pair of sheer-legs on the fore-castle to lift the capstan drum, and being taken round the ship and having every fitting and its use explained to us. Mr. Hinkson was nothing if not thorough, and believed that the best way of teaching us how to do things was by making us do them ourselves, in which he was quite right. Moreover, there was little in the seamanship line that he did not tell us, and if he wasn't explaining steam tactics on the upper deck with us representing the ships, we were in the chains learning to heave the lead.

Sometimes we were sent to old Chivers, the sailmaker, to learn the art of sailmaking, or sewing canvas as it really is nowadays, since sails are not used in the Service except in boats.

Chivers was the oldest man in the ship and a relic of a bygone age. He was a bit of a character, too, though he had a nasty habit of chewing tobacco and suffered from a firm conviction that the Service had gone, or was rapidly going, to the dogs.

“Fifteen year ago, young gennel'men,” he used to wheeze, “th' Service wasn't like wot it is now. When I wus along o' Commodore Martin in th' ole *Raleigh*—she wus wot we calls a corvette, an' wus Commodore's ship in wot we calls th' Trainin' Squadron—I wus one o' the most important members o' the 'ole ship's company. You see, we wus sailin' ships mostly, 'cept we 'ad henges an' bilers to 'elp us along when there wasn't no wind.”

He would pause for a moment to shift the quid of tobacco from his right cheek to the left.

“Yus,” he went on, nodding away to himself while his needle flew through the canvas. “Fifteen year ago th' navy wus orl right, an' we wus orl proper sailors. They isn't sailors now, not 'arf of 'em ain't. Why,” with an expression of the bitterest contempt, “there ain't a petty orficer in th' ship wot as shifted top'sls in a gale o' wind same as we used ter do. 'Arf on 'em can't walk abart on deck without their boots. I tells yer, young gennel'men, the Service ain't 'arf wot it was, an' . . .”

“But surely you've been in the navy more than fifteen years, Chivers?” said one of us, looking at the old man's badges. “I thought you remembered Nelson?”

“Na,” answered the sailmaker, wrinkling his brow in his effort to remember dates. “I served along o' Lord Charles Beresford,

but Nelson 'e went a bit before my time. What yer larfin' at?" he demanded suddenly, looking up.

Our faces became very solemn.

"Makin' fun o' me, are yer?" he growled. "Orl rite. I knows wot to do, Mister Purdey. I goes an' tells Mister 'Inkson as 'ow you've been idlin', see if I don't!"

"But I'm not idling!" Purdey protested, trying to conceal his smiles. "I'm listening hard to what you're telling us."

"Are yer? But orl th' same, young gennel'men, as I was sayin', when I was along o' Commodore Martin I was one o' th' most important men in th' ship, 'cos I was th' smartest 'and wi' a palm an' needle in th' 'ole squadron. An' th' Commodore 'e knew a good man when 'e see'd one. 'E knowed that if they 'ad th' foretops'l split from clew to earring in a 'nurrricane that they 'ad only to bring 'im along to me to get 'im repaired proper. Time an' time agen the Commodore sez to me, 'Ben Chivers,' 'e sez, 'you're a hartist, that's wot you are. You're a credit to the Service an' th' ship. If I 'ad my way I'd make yer a warrant orficer tomorrow.' But lor' bless me, I didn't want to be no warrant orficer, struttin' abart in a fore an' aft suit wi' a sword, an' givin' orders to them wot's old enough to be me farther. But I could 'a bin, orl th' same. But now," he concluded, mournfully, "wot 'appens now, young gennel'men?"

“What?” we demanded in chorus.

“They calls me Grandpa Monkeyface 'cos o' me whiskers, an' sez I'm a ruddy ole fool . . .”

“Surely not!” we cried in mock amazement.

“Yus they does, an' well you knows it. They sez I'm time expired an' outa date, an' orl I'm fit for is to be put on to sewin' deckclothes an' ter be made fun of by th' midshipmen an' O.D.'s!”

Which was rather ungrateful of the “hartist,” for really we never went out of our way to amuse ourselves at his expense, and many a bottle of beer he assimilated in the gunroom pantry at our expense.

But he was a wonderful workman, and the Commander, though Chivers himself thought fit to pretend otherwise, held a very high opinion of him. The neatness and rapidity of his sewing always excited our admiration, and it is one thing to sew a button on a pair of trousers without making a botch of it, but quite another to make even stitches in a piece of thick canvas with a large needle threaded with sailmaker's twine. One has to propel it through the material with a steel disc, honeycombed like the surface of a thimble, embedded in the strap, or “palm,” worn across the palm of one's hand.

“You first takes a length o' twine an' threads 'im, so,” said the old man, going

through the motions in slow time. "You rubs yer twine wi' yer bit o' beeswax, so, an' 'avin' shoved your pointed 'ook through the canvas you're sewin' to get 'im nice an' taut, you shoves your needle through, so, an' so, an' so, an' makes yer stitches, see?"

He drove the needle through the tough stuff with such rapidity and so evenly that the stitches looked as if they had been made with a machine. We tried to follow his example, but a pretty fearsome job we made of it. As I said before, it is one thing sewing on a button. I could do that quite well, and even went so far as to make a pretty decent job of a tear in the seat of my second-best trousers with the assistance of the hussif which my mother gave me as a parting present when I came to sea. But sail-making, like painting or music, must be an art which is born in one, for a pretty rotten job I made of it, however hard I tried.

While in the seamanship section we also spent a certain portion of the time working at navigation and pilotage under the orders of the Lieutenant (N), Mr. Hodder. One of us was always detailed as his personal assistant, or "Tanky," as we called it, and whilst with him we were taught to put into practice all the mass of theory which we had learnt before. We took sights of the sun and stars with our sextants and worked them out to find the latitude and longitude. The moon we left severely alone, for, as Mr. Hodder

explained, she moved through space with such "explosive violence" that the slightest error in taking the observation put the ship many miles out in her reckoning. We were taught what effect magnetism had on a compass and how to allow for it; to find the deviation of the compass by taking bearings of distant objects, the sun, and "heavenly bodies." (I love that term "heavenly bodies." It is so essentially mediæval, and reminds one of the days when seafaring gentlemen in armour took their sights with the astrolabe.)

We were told the uses of the Flinders bar and the soft iron spheres in compass correction; how to wind and look after chronometers, and to ascertain their error on Greenwich Mean Time by observations of the sun or the daily time signal from the Eiffel Tower in Paris. We also discovered that it was part of the duty of the Sergeant Major of Marines, of all people, to report "Chronometers wound, sir!" daily to the Captain at 9 a.m. He invariably reported it as "Chronometers wounded!"

We learnt how to correct charts; to use sounding machines; to keep the ship's reckoning at sea, and to fix the position on the chart by means of cross-bearings. We were instructed in the system of buoyage; the difference between occulting, flashing, revolving, alternating, and fixed lights—in fact there was very little that we were

not taught, and if I set forth all we were supposed to have learnt I should write a very comprehensive treatise in seventeen volumes on Practical Navigation and Pilotage. Some of it has stuck, thank goodness!

Whilst at gunnery, too, we were handed over to the tender mercies of the 1st Lieutenant, Mr. Tompion, who was also our gunnery officer. For the first week or so with him we were passed on to a Gunner's Mate and initiated into the mysteries of the rifle and field exercise, when, arrayed in flannel trousers and seaman's brown canvas gaiters, without which, I am told, it is quite impossible to learn gunnery, we spent many mornings and afternoons shouldering, sloping, trailing, securing, and presenting arms. Presenting arms with the bayonet fixed was always the most exciting evolution of the lot, for, with any luck, one might push the point of the bayonet through the quarter-deck awning overhead—until the Commander happened to notice our innocent diversion.

Having done this we drilled with the 12-pounder, 9·2, and 12-inch guns; learnt, or were told, how the guns were worked, loaded, and fired; and took parts of them to bits and put them together again. We crawled round the hydraulic machinery of the heavy gun turrets to cover ourselves with oil and to make ourselves acquainted with valves and pipes. We learnt about cordite, powder,

shell of all sorts, fuses, and cartridges. We examined the rockets, blue-lights, and other fireworks with which the ship was supplied, and incidentally succeeded in purloining and concealing on our persons certain of their dangerous contents. We held a highly successful firework display in the gunroom flat the same evening before turning in—or it would have been successful if we hadn't filled the whole place with evil-smelling smoke and set Prescott's pyjamas alight. It was the smoke and our howls of delight which brought Rawson out of his cabin to see what was happening, and, as we were all more or less implicated, we all received condign punishment then and there with "Little Benjamin." Lord! How he hurt in pyjamas!

In torpedo work and electricity we followed the same thorough routine, being taught to take the "mouldies"¹ to bits and to put them together again, to adjust them for running, and to fire them. We played with gyroscopes, dynamos, motors, and electric circuits, and generally had the time of our lives in giving ourselves and each other electric shocks. It was hopelessly impossible to learn all the ins and outs of the complicated business in a month's instruction, and I cannot remember exactly how much I

¹ "Mouldies," *i.e.* torpedoes. A nickname of fairly recent birth, but the exact origin of which I am unable to discover.

assimilated during the period. But it was an interesting subject, and our natural curiosity for finding out the why and wherefore of everything certainly stood us in good stead.

For the last two months of the cycle we were handed over to the Engineer-Commander, who, in his turn, passed us on to the Senior Engineer. He put us in charge of Nichols, who first gave us a few lectures on theory to refresh our failing memories, and then we went below and spent the rest of the period in practical work in the engine-room and stokeholds. We were regarded as part and parcel of the engineering branch, taking part in the engineering work of the ship so far as we were capable of doing so, keeping our regular four hours on watch and eight off with the ship at sea, and being kept with our noses to the grindstone throughout the working day whilst in harbour. I think on the whole it was the most strenuous portion of our training, but the chief joy of it was that our routine was more or less cut and dried, and we knew exactly what was expected of us.

When the two months' engineering were over the cycle started afresh and we reverted to seamanship again, until, at the end of one year's time at sea, we became "Senior midshipmen." Instruction was then reduced to a bare minimum, and we took a more responsible part as officers in the general work of the ship.

§ 2

It does not follow, because we were generally busy on board, that we had no recreation. On the contrary. Except for some of the engineering snotties, and those keeping watch and running boats, Saturday and Sunday were holidays, save that on Sunday mornings we wrote up our journals ready for the Captain's signature.

On these two days, having placed our names in the "leave book," which had to be signed by the Commander, 1st Lieutenant, Senior Engineer Lieutenant, Padre, and the Lieutenants (G), (T), and (N), all of whom were empowered to stop our leave if we had been idle, but very rarely did, we could go ashore at 1.15 in the afternoon and remain till 7. On the other days of the week, provided we had no duty on board, we could "take the beach" from 3.30 till 7. On a rough weekly average, therefore, we could, if we wanted to, get ashore on either Saturday or Sunday for the whole afternoon, with about two half afternoons if the ship was in harbour.

Late leave had to be asked for specially, and even then was rarely granted unless we had been asked to dine with friends, or something of the kind. The Commander was very strict on this point. He said he wasn't going to have his snotties "beer swilling and bar loafing," and even an innocent visit to

a theatre or a music-hall was regarded with some suspicion unless we were going with one or other of the senior officers.

But we had some very amusing afternoons, nevertheless, and the most entertaining one of all, which will always stick in my memory, was when a party of us midshipmen, with old Nichols, landed on a streaming wet day in a certain naval port in the West Country.

Have you ever attended one of those auctions where plausible Israelites dispose of so-called bankrupt stocks, unredeemed pledges, and goods left in railway carriages and cloak-rooms to more gullible, common-or-garden Gentiles ?

Far be it for me to scoff at a Jew, but these particular auctions savour of the miraculous. You can buy anything, from a watch or an umbrella to a hand-painted vase or an "Old Master."

I may be a fool; but I am not a ruddy fool, as somebody wiser than myself once remarked. I am aware, from bitter experience, that folk do sometimes leave their umbrellas in railway carriages; but I have yet to learn that one hundred and forty-four umbrellas of precisely similar appearance can be left in one hundred and forty-four different railway carriages by one hundred and forty-four different people. No, I cannot believe it. It seems almost as if one man made a habit of it.

I do not blame a man for pawning his

watch, though he is never likely to leave it in a cloak-room—or at least, I shouldn't. I might leave a grandfather clock or an ormolu timepiece if I had happened to purchase one on the spur of the moment; never a watch. But even supposing two hundred and eighty-eight men bought and pawned two hundred and eighty-eight watches, all rolled gold, split second, jewelled in twenty-six places watches, do you think for one instant that they would be precisely alike? I don't.

The same with hand-painted vases and "Old Masters." People don't leave such things sculling about in cloak-rooms or railway trains. I mean, if you had attended a genuine sale and had bought a genuine "Old Master" which you had had your eye upon for years, carrying it off with you in triumph, you might be tempted to remark, or your wife might, "Dear, dear! Where is the Old Master?" on arriving at home without it. Moreover, all old vases and hand-painted masters . . . I am getting mixed.

What I do mean is that a party of us once beguiled the tedium of a wet and boring afternoon by visiting one of these "auctions." It was better than any music-hall, far and away better. I came out of it with a black eye and a swollen lip. Old Nichols had his collar torn and the coat stripped off his back. Not one of us got away without damage of some kind. Whoever heard of a well-fought battle in which the victors came off scathless?

NO BIDS REFUSED!

£25,000

UNIQUE CHANCES.

£25,000.

HAVING PURCHASED UNREDEEMED PLEDGES, BANKRUPT STOCK, AND UNCLAIMED GOODS TO THE VALUE OF £26,000. WE HAVE LEASED THESE PREMISES FOR ONE WEEK ONLY TO DISPOSE OF THE SAME TO THE PUBLIC AT ROCK BOTTOM PRICES.

STOCK POSITIVELY MUST BE CLEARED.

SALES DAILY AT 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 p.m. prompt.

If you require a MANGLE, PERAMBULATOR, CLOCK, or a set of KITCHEN UTENSILS, we will provide them. WE PROVIDE EVERYTHING.

EASY PAYMENTS ARRANGED ON APPLICATION.

PATRONISED BY THE NOBILITY AND GENTRY.

TO PEOPLE ABOUT TO MARRY.
TO THOSE ALREADY MARRIED.
DO YOU WANT TO FURNISH A
HOUSE?
IF SO, STEP INSIDE.

SALE THIS DAY.

SALE THIS DAY.

WE HAVE NO CONNECTION WITH ANY OTHER FIRM.

JEWELLERY, WATCHES, CUTLERY, UMBRELLAS,
PICTURES, HARDWARE, ARTICLES OF VERTU
ASTONISHING PRICES!

NO REASONABLE OFFERS REFUSED.

TO-DAY.

WALK IN!
YOU WILL NOT BE PRESSED
TO BUY.

So if somebody you are not particularly keen upon comes to tea, or a maiden aunt pays you an unexpected visit and you don't know how to entertain her, take my tip, take them to an "auction," and do as we did.

I'll guarantee you will have the time of your lives. Your guests will never, never forget it, nor, though she may possibly cut you out of her will, will the maiden aunt ever forget you.

It was a pestilential day, not the usual drizzle, but a regular downpour which soaked one through to the very marrow. We had gone ashore at 3.30 with no fixed intention of doing anything in particular, and, having disposed of a satisfactory tea at a restaurant, it was Nichols who suggested that he would like to buy an umbrella. So the five of us snotties volunteered to go and help him, and, sallying forth, we marched off down the main street.

"Here's the very place!" said Nick, halting in front of a building which had once been a shop, but now had its plate glass windows plastered all over with advertisements in brilliant blue and red lettering.

So, as the picture houses were not open, and it was a case of any port in a storm, we marched in. It was dry inside, at any rate, and we had a full two hours to waste before we could catch the 7 o'clock boat back to the ship.

The floor space of the room in which we

found ourselves had been cleared of its shop furniture, and along the far end of it ran a long wooden counter laden with a choice assortment of glittering cruets, electro-plated teapots, ditto fish-knives and forks, together with many watches in cases, vases of highly decorative design, shaving sets, hair-brushes, and other articles to tempt the eye of the unwary purchaser. Behind the barrier rose a small pulpit-like contrivance occupied by the auctioneer, a seedy, oleaginous person of distinct Hebraic appearance with long, dank hair, dirty collar and hands, rather an aggressive manner, and a Cockney twang.

The side walls were well supplied with shelves on which reposed the "articles of vertu" in the shape of a further assortment of glass and china vases of lurid colouring, certain of them labelled in gold "A present from Margate." These were evidently the bankrupt stock. Then there were whole battalions of noisily ticking clocks of rococo appearance in wood, metal, and china; numbers of small bronze busts of Queen Victoria, King Edward, Queen Alexandra, Lord Roberts, and other royal and titled notabilities; several statuettes of prancing horses in imitation bronze; some accordions and other musical instruments, and a heterogeneous collection of china, glass, crockery, plate, cutlery, and roller skates.

Ranged on the floor underneath the shelves were three perambulators, two obviously

second-hand; rolls of oilcloth; a carpet or two; a mowing machine long past its early youth; one armchair covered in faded cretonne; a selection of rickety bedroom chairs in white enamel; a rocking chair rather the worse for wear; one lady's bicycle; three "scooters"; some carpet sweepers; two small vacuum cleaners in post-office red; a couple of mangles; dozens of umbrellas and walking-sticks; dust-pans and brushes, brooms, mops, jugs and basins, tin buckets, saucepans, pots and pans . . . I cannot remember what else.

Hanging from hooks on the walls were many mirrors and pictures. Some were framed in plush, and many of the looking-glasses had their faces ornamented with sprigs of green bulrushes and bunches of hectic roses in oil paint, obviously the work of an amateur. The pictures were scarcely more exciting. Half a dozen of them gave a life-like view of a portion of a dining table, with a scarlet lobster on a blue dish in the immediate foreground, a half-emptied glass of wine on the right front, and a tall fruit dish containing a bunch of purple grapes, three bananas, an orange, and a bunch of what I took to be radishes, lurking in the background. They, too, were hand-painted, and the mind of the "old master" responsible for the series evidently ran upon food.

Some of the other works of art showed

sorely tried lighthouses on dangerous-looking clusters of rocks with waves breaking all over them; sheep grazing in an expanse of snow with the moon shining through spidery trees in the background; and three "antique" oleographs of Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort reviewing the volunteers in Hyde Park in eighteen-fifty something.

The people present can hardly have been satisfactory from the point of view of the auctioneer. An elderly, red-faced farmer and his wife, obviously out for the day, were abusing the weather. Four raucous-voiced youths, caps askew, cigarettes pendant from their lower lips, and attended by the same number of gaudily attired young women who partook of occasional nourishment from paper bags, spent their time in twitting the auctioneer and his assistants. They had obeyed the injunction to "Walk in!" and were clearly taking shelter from the rain.

Three stokers from the Royal Naval Barracks were discussing the merits of the lawn-mower as being something in the mechanical line, while two middle-aged ladies of rather chastened appearance in bonnets, notebooks in hand, were solemnly appraising a set of fire-irons and the bedroom suite in white enamel. There must have been thirty people present altogether, but besides the bonneted females the only really genuine purchasers were a lance-

corporal of the Royal Marines and his fiancée, who, arm in arm, had already bought a brass fern pot and a paraffin lamp, and were now gazing longingly at one of the electro-plated cruets. They were evidently furnishing their future home.

The sale must have been hanging fire, for the auctioneer's face brightened visibly as we appeared.

"The next lot we 'ave to dispose of, ladies and gents," he said cheerfully, selecting an imitation leather case and flashing the contents before our eyes, "is a set of gents' studs and cuff-links. These harticles would make a nice little keepsake from any wife to 'er 'usband, or from a sweet'art to 'er intended . . ."

Loud giggles from the four young women.

"'Ere we 'ave the genuine harticle, reel rolled gold, 'all marked throughout, and guaranteed to wear for twenty years without tarnishin'. Naow don't get runnin' away with the idea that I'm tryin' to sell you rubbish. Fair play and fair prices is my motter, and these harticles 'ave stood the test of time. They're made by hexperts, and the workmanship and chasin' is the 'ighest form of the jooler's hart. Naow, ladies and gents, what am I hofferred for this most hexquisite addition to any gent's dressin' table?"

"Give yer a tanner, guv'nor," sniggered one of the youths.

“Come, sir. Be serious!” chided the auctioneer. “Sixpence for these ’ighly hornamented . . . Dear, dear! George?”

One of the oily-faced assistants stepped forward.

“George! Display to the distinguished company ’ere assembled. this magnificent set of harticles, the like of which could be worn by the ’ighest in the land and could not be purchased at any shop in the town under the price of ’arf a guinea!”

“Naow, ladies and gents!” when “George” had displayed the shoddy things. “What am I hofferred?”

“Eightpence!” said the lance-corporal of Marines.

“Tenpence!” from one of the youths.

“Make it a bob!” from the marine, eyeing his rival while his own fiancée looked at him with perturbed admiration.

“One and a tanner,” said one of the youths.

“One and eight,” said I.

“Two bob,” from Nichols, who had just drawn his month’s pay.

“Two and a penny,” from myself.

There was a dead silence in which everybody looked at me. I blushed a rosy red.

“Two and a penny is what I’m hofferred,” said the auctioneer blithely, raising his hammer. “Any advance on two and a penny? Going for two and a penny! Going! Going! . . . Gorn!”

And so, for the modest sum of five-and-

twenty pence I found myself the proud possessor of the most shoddy and atrocious set of studs and cuff-links which it has ever been my lot to purchase. They were possibly worth one shilling, and I did not want them in the very least. I had only made my bid for the pure fun of the thing, and if the others hadn't left me in the lurch in that rotten way . . . No. I was had for a juggins.

I subsequently gave the horrible things to my servant as a token of my regard on his birthday. He thought them very beautiful and was deeply grateful.

The sale went on and more and more people arrived. The lance-corporal of Marines, who evidently had more money than sense, bought a bronze statuette, a hearthrug, two tin pails, and a pie-dish—and would have bought a great deal more if his young woman, who obviously had her head screwed on the right way, had not entered a firm protest against further reckless expenditure. The two bonneted ladies, sisters or cousins, I should think, made their purchases jointly, and besides the bedroom suite and the fire-irons, obtained a second-hand carpet sweeper, a vacuum cleaner, and a collection of three brooms, two mops, with three or four scrubbing-brushes thrown in as a make-weight. Evidently cleanliness came next to godliness in their creed, though I thought it my bounden duty to point out

to them that the circular brush of the carpet sweeper was very bald. They thanked me gratefully for my perspicuity in noting the defect and insisted on an exchange, to which the auctioneer, glaring at me as if I was a wild beast, reluctantly consented.

I hugged myself with joy.

Then old Nichols, who thought he was bidding for an umbrella, found he had bought a mirror in a plush frame for five and sixpence.

He didn't want the beastly thing, he said. He required an umbrella. Then why on earth couldn't he be a little more careful, the Hebrew in the pulpit wanted to know. A sale was a sale, everybody knew that. Nick would be "jiggered in heaps" before he'd pay a penny for the beastly looking-glass. The auctioneer had distinctly said he was selling the umbrella, and how in the name of heaven could anybody understand what was going on if he was fool enough to hold up a mirror in one hand and an umbrella in the other. He'd go and fetch a policeman and ask him what he thought about it. Loud cries of corroboration and approbation from all of us. Evil glances from the auctioneer, who, with the majority against him, could do nothing but declare the transaction null and void.

We became intensely unpopular.

A slight diversion and some inconvenience was caused at this juncture by the purloin-

ing of the auctioneer's hammer by one of the youths, who held a mock auction of his own in one corner of the room and disposed of six pictures and a carpet to one of the bonneted ladies for one and sevenpence. Lengthy explanations and much annoyance on the part of the salesman and his assistants before the purchaser could be induced to believe that the sale of these articles was not strictly genuine. Would the gentleman responsible for the fracas "be'ave 'imself or git out"?

No. He would not.

Would George and h'Albert, the assistants, kindly show the gentleman to the door and cause himself to remove his obnoxious presence immediately? But the two mercenaries, puny and undersized, summed up their burlier opponent and observed sapiently that they did not believe in "vi'lence."

Just as well they didn't, said the opponent, 'cos they'd get a thick ear else. He'd blinkin' well teach 'em to try to stop a feller from having his bit o' fun.

All right, the auctioneer agreed, the gentleman might stay, but he must be'ave 'imself.

He'd jolly soon see about that, the youth replied warmly, adding in a strident afterthought that he strongly disapproved of the personal appearance of the auctioneer and his hired assassins, and that, strictly speak-

ing, their methods of business ought to be enquired into by the police.

The master of the ceremonies affected not to hear these personal imputations. Suppressed titters from everybody. Atmosphere very electric. Nervous glances at the door on the part of the bonneted ladies and the Royal Marine's fiancée.

The last straw which broke the camel's back and occasioned the disturbance was a rolled-gold, fully guaranteed, half-hunter watch sold to another of the youths for some sum which I cannot remember. He paid the money and received the article in exchange, only to raise his voice in loud exposition a moment later when, in the process of winding the watch, something snapped with an ominous click.

"'Ere, mister!" he shouted, holding it aloft. "This bloomin' thing's bust! I wants me money back!"

"Pardon me, sir," said the auctioneer with a suave and oily smirk. "You broke it yerself. You can't expect no decent watch to stand being wound up like that."

"Wound up like wot, you ugly Sheeny! I tells you I wound 'im quite ord'nary like, and the spring goes click at once. I wants . . ."

"Look 'ere, mister," began the auctioneer, descending from his perch, but remaining discreetly behind the counter. "Look 'ere. I don't stand no hinsults. You jest keep

a civil tongue in your 'ead! I've 'ad enough trouble from you and your party already. You come 'ere and kicks up a shindy . . ."

"Oh, shut your 'ead, you ugly reptile!" retorted the complainant. "I wants a noo watch or me money back. That's flat, ain't it?"

"Them watches is guaranteed for five years," put in George, the assistant, who was standing among the audience. "Wif' careful treatment they'll last an ord'nary lifetime, but if you goes . . ."

"And 'oo asked you a question, Mister Nastyface?" demanded the youth in a shrill crescendo, and getting redder and redder about the face. "Look 'ere! I comes 'ere to buy a watch an' I've been swindled, that's wot it is. Now look 'ere, either you give me a noo watch or else I'll 'ave me money back, if . . ."

"You won't get neither," interrupted the auctioneer, "and the sooner you gets outa my shop the better. George, do your dooty! Put 'im outside!"

"You try it on, Nastyface, and see wot you gets!" spluttered the youth, hitching up his coat sleeves.

"You catch 'im one on the conk if 'e tries to touch yer, Bert," advised one of his friends.

"I'll do the dirty on 'im some'ow, the pimple-faced lil' Sheeny," growled Bert the belligerent, advancing threateningly.

George promptly scuttled behind the counter like a frightened rabbit and joined his master, while h'Albert, the other assistant, hemmed in on all sides and unable to retreat, affected an overwhelming interest in the rocking-chair.

The young women hugged their respective swains by the arm and giggled nervously. The farmer and his wife, scenting a row, departed in a hurry, while the Royal Marine was towed reluctantly from the room by his frightened fiancée. The two bonneted ladies, also, explaining that they would call again for their bulkier purchases, darted forth like a couple of flustered chickens. They all reminded me of the rats deserting a sinking ship. I held my breath and waited.

"Now look 'ere," Bert exclaimed. "I don't care 'oo you are or wot you are. Either I gets a noo watch or else . . ."

"You won't get neither, I tells you," the auctioneer hurled back with some heat. "Carn't you . . ."

"I'll 'ave my money's worth, any'ow!" bellowed Bert, seizing a small but heavy plaster bust of Lord Charles Beresford from the shelf beside him and hurling it full at the auctioneer.

That wily Israelite promptly ducked behind the counter, while the missile sailed over his head, burst against a shelf behind him like a lyddite shell, and, amidst a chorus of screams from the ladies, brought several

rows of china vases and teapots crashing to the floor in a thousand pieces.

"H'Albert!" came a muffled shriek from behind the counter. "H'Albert! Run quick an' fetch the perlice!"

Albert looked at the door and tried to edge away.

"No you don't," said another of Bert's friends, seizing him round the middle as he attempted to fly. "You'll stay 'ere with your pals, my son," and with that he carried his shrilly protesting victim across the room, and deposited him flat on the counter among the cruets and cases of fish-knives.

"Stay quiet, carn't you!" came a growl, as the recumbent one lashed out with his feet.

Albert's only reply was to kick his assailant in the stomach, whereupon the latter slid him slowly across the counter and allowed him to fall, together with a shower of electro-plated goods, on to the heads of his two friends taking cover below.

"I'll 'ave the perlice on you for this, see if I don't!" shrieked the auctioneer, putting his head up like a jack-in-the-box.

"Will yer give me a noo watch or me money back?" howled the redoubtable Bert, waiting with an alarm-clock poised ready in his hand.

"No!" from the auctioneer. "You'll go to prison for this, see if you . . ."

The rest of the sentence was inaudible in

the crash of riven crockery as the fresh projectile, narrowly missing his head, ricocheted off the counter, shot into a laden shelf, and brought a pile of plates hurtling to the floor.

“Look here,” said Nichols to the thrower. “Hadn’t you better stop this? It’s getting beyond a joke!”

“And ’oo are you talkin’ to, mister?” demanded Bert, too heated and annoyed to care what he said or how he said it, and holding a china vase in his hand ready for another shot. “What’s this ’ere gotter do with you?”

“Simply that you’re making a confounded nuisance of yourself,” said Nick. “You’ll get yourself into trouble if you don’t watch it!”

“But wot’s it gotter do with you?”

“Nothing, but you’d better put that vase down at once! If you don’t, I’ll make you!”

The next moment the ornament in question caught him in the vicinity of the third waistcoat button, and Nick didn’t wait for any more. He seized the unfortunate Bert by the waist, swung him off his feet, deposited him with a crash on the floor, and then sat calmly on his chest.

“Ow, ow!” piped one of the girls, rushing in to the rescue of her champion. “’E’s killin’ my sweet’art! Pull ’im orf quick!”

She, not to be behindhand, kicked and

tugged at Nichols from behind. The fat was now properly in the fire.

In the excitement of the moment the auctioneer and his assistants were quite forgotten, for in another instant Nick and us five shotties were fighting tooth and nail against the four youths and their female belongings. They were lusty girls too, regular Amazons, and the worst of it was we couldn't hit them, whatever they did to us.

It was a stiff tussle, but it was all so confused that I hardly know what happened, except that we eventually got the best of it. One of the ladies, a heavy young woman, hit me in the mouth with her fist and made it bleed, whereupon I, unwilling to take sterner measures, seized her hands and held them fast. Whilst doing this somebody else considerably clouted me on the ear and kicked me hard from behind, so I had to let go. Next I saw Sandilands attacked by a fellow about twice his size, so I ran at his opponent with my head down, butted him heavily in the stomach, and we all three tumbled headlong to the floor. All this time old Nick was fighting valiantly, and at times I caught a glimpse of him with one fellow in each hand knocking their heads together.

The crockery crashed. The articles of vertu, the looking-glasses, teapots, pictures, vases, and roller skates came hurtling and tumbling to the floor as the bodies of the

fighters impinged heavily against the shelves. The ladies screamed wild imprecations and their young men reviled us with every undesirable epithet they could lay their tongues to. We were far too breathless to think of retaliating by word of mouth, we merely fought, and fought, and fought.

The auctioneer and his assistants, too terrified to join in lest they should be set upon by both parties, kept their heads above the counter and regarded us in horror-stricken amazement. It must have been a terrible scene: a regular Waterloo.

But at last the gentleman called Bert, the originator of the whole business, dabbed a gory handkerchief to his nose and held up a hand in token of surrender.

"Cheese it, gov'nor," he gasped to Nichols, who was about to make another assault. "We've 'ad enough!"

"Call your people off, then," ordered Nick, very red in the face and breathing like a steam-engine.

"'Ere, chuck it, boys," the ringleader commanded. "Liz, leave that young genel'man alone, carn't yer!" This last to the stalwart young fairy who was busy kicking my shins while I held her hands to prevent my eyes being scratched out.

So an armistice was declared, and we drew off to count our casualties. Nick had his coat stripped off his back in two pieces, his collar torn, and a scratch down his right

cheek. I had a bleeding and swollen lip and a jolly good imitation of a black eye, while Meryon's nose was spouting gore all down the front of his waistcoat. Not one of us was untouched.

But our opponents were much worse, while two of their Amazons, flushed, vituperant, and breathless, had their hair down and were sobbing on each other's shoulders. A third, the one who had smitten me in the mouth, had had her hat torn from her head in the struggle and was regarding the battered remains of her headgear which she had retrieved from the broken glass and crockery littering the floor. It, the hat, had been well trampled upon during the fight. I only hope that Bert was made to pay for a new one.

"And 'oo, may I be so bold as to hask, is goin' to pay for the damage to my stock?" wailed the auctioneer, rising from behind his counter like Venus from the waves and gazing ruefully at the debris-strewn battle-field. "There's five 'undred pounds' worth of goods been ruined, and 'oo is goin' to pay for it?"

"Five hundred fiddlesticks!" grunted Nick, trying to make himself presentable. "The contents of your whole bally establishment aren't worth twenty pounds all told!"

"But 'oo is goin' to pay?"

"I'm not, at any rate. You'd better ask

these gentlemen," said Nick, pointing to Bert and his party.

"Come on, you fellows," he added to us. "We'll go."

So we shook the dust of the establishment from off our feet with the uncomplimentary remarks of the auctioneer still ringing in our ears. We left belligerent Bert and his friends to square their own yardarms, and what the outcome of the business was I don't pretend to know. But three days later, when Nichols next went ashore (I, unfortunately, was not permitted to land on account of a black eye and a cut on the lip sustained by falling down a hatchway after dark), the Cockney-Hebrew and his compatriots had departed on a pilgrimage and their erstwhile auction-room was in the process of being refitted as a sixpenny bazaar.

So this was the end of that adventure, an episode which I am never likely to forget, for it is the first and the last time that I have ever been knocked about by a lady. I don't say, mark you, that it is fit and proper for an officer of His Majesty's Navy to take part in brawls in a public auction-room. In fact, it is downright undignified, and I am not certain that in so doing one does not render oneself liable to trial by Court Martial for conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman.

But we were in plain clothes, and the fight,

such as it was, was forced upon us. Nick had been doing his best to quell the riot when the fellow flung the vase at him. Would you, gentle reader, turn the other cheek if some rascal of a fellow hurled a china vase at you which smote you in the blouse, shirt-waist, waistcoat, chest-protector, or whatever else it is you happen to wear over that particular portion of your anatomy?

No, no! Of course you would not. Flesh and blood could not stand it. Neither could we.

Our conduct may have been undignified and unofficerlike, but it was a gorgeous afternoon to look back upon, nevertheless.

CHAPTER VII

PROMOTION

§ 1

I NEED hardly describe in detail the whole of my two and a half years' service as a midshipman. I spent the entire period in the *Pericles*, and in course of time when the old lot of senior snotties became Acting Sub-Lieutenants and left the ship, we then became the seniors, and a new lot of crabs, fresh from the training cruisers, joined in our stead and took our former burden of juniority on their shoulders. It was then, I think, when we were no longer the meanest creatures in the gunroom, that we started really to enjoy life.

There was not much variety in the itinerary of the *Pericles*. Throughout the thirty odd months I served in her we visited the same old places and carried out the same old routine and the same old programme. Our headquarters were really at Portland, where, in Weymouth Bay, to be exact, we spent many days in steaming past our targets and carrying out our firing exercises.

Gunnery was the great god who ruled us. We made daily obeisance unto him; lived for him day and night, and everything, even the outward cleanliness of the ship, was sacrificed for his worship. And quite right too, for however clean a ship may look from the outside, however smart her officers and men may pride themselves on being, she is a mere whited sepulchre if she cannot shoot. And hitting a dull smudge on the horizon at a range of fourteen sea miles or more is not a thing which is taught in a day or two.

Berehaven, in Bantry Bay, was another favourite rendezvous for gunnery practices, and Lamlash, Arran, another. But we had our diversions. At the first place we climbed Hungry Hill on Sunday afternoons, indulged in most exciting paper-chases on rawboned Irish ponies, played golf, and sampled the milk and illicit pot-still whisky retailed by barefooted ladies in the little whitewashed cabins dotted all over the hillsides, habitations in which chickens, ducks, and a pig or two generally lived in the house cheek by jowl with their human friends. Indeed, a fowl usually had to be "shooed" off the solitary chair before the guest could sit down. We also bought bog-oak ornaments and Irish crochet lace from the black shawled ladies who came on board with their bundles, and suit-lengths of so-called Irish frieze from the local merchants who insisted, by St. Patrick and all the other Saints in their

calendar, that the shoddy material was woven by the poor peasants during the long days of winter. As a matter of fact, I believe much of it came from British looms in the Midlands, subsequently to be sent to Bantry to be well impregnated with peat smoke before being disposed of to credulous naval officers, generally midshipmen. Mr. Slieve, to whom we sometimes sent the frieze to be made up into golf jackets and knickerbockers, rather looked askance at it, as I imagine any decent tailor would. As an alternative, however, one could have the suit made up by a local tailor. One can always tell a Bantry suit. It fits where it touches.

During the spring we sometimes went south across the Bay of Biscay to Arosa Bay and Vigo, while, about June, came the summer naval manœuvres, when the crews of all the "nucloids"¹ were brought up to full strength and the whole fleet, divided into Red and Blue forces, fought with itself in a mimic war lasting for ten days or a fortnight. After the manœuvres we settled down to a further programme of gunnery and torpedo practices which lasted well into the autumn.

So, taking things all round, we spent no small portion of our time at sea; and even in harbour, what with coaling ship and a hundred and one other things, we were never

¹ "Nucloids," *i.e.* those ships manned by two-thirds of their proper complements.

idle. I know that the Commander, probably the busiest officer on board, rarely went ashore at all except for occasional week-ends. I think it is safe to say, moreover, that not a single moment, either at sea or in harbour, was ever wasted. There was always something or other going on, generally something to do with gunnery.

Once a year we went to our home port, Chatham in our particular case, for the annual refit. This lasted between a month and five weeks, and officers and men were given leave for as long as they could be spared, generally for ten days or a fortnight. But in addition to this we also got on an average ten days' leave at Christmas, seven days at Easter, and four after the manoeuvres. The regulations lay down that leave for officers is not to exceed six weeks per annum except in very special circumstances, but few of us ever reached this amount. The elder married officers, whose wives sometimes followed the ship from port to port, and always made their homes at Weymouth when we were there for the winter, did not do so badly. They got their Saturday to Monday "week-ends" fairly frequently, besides ordinary night leave during the week from 1.30 or so in the afternoon till 8.30 the next morning if the ship was in harbour and their services could be spared.

In spite of our strenuous life, however, we had plenty of time for games. Golf we

played everywhere, and hockey and football if we could get a ground. Ship versus ship matches were constantly in the air, and if we were hard up for opponents for, say, a football match for the men, the Forecastle-men were always ready to challenge the Quarterdeckmen, the Maintopmen the Marines, and so on.

Among the officers, too, we could generally raise two teams for football, hockey, or golf, and then we used to divide up into Married and Single, Bearded and Clean-shaven, and the S.O.B.'s and D.Y.F.'s. The S.O.B.'s, I should explain, were the "Silly Old Blighters," or those officers over the mystic age of thirty-five; while the D.Y.F.'s were the "Dashed Young Fools" under that age. No insult was meant, I assure you, for everybody, even including the Padre, was automatically one thing or the other. I am a D.Y.F. at the present moment; presently, in less years than I care to reckon, I shall become an S.O.B. But our S.O.B.'s in the *Pericles*, in spite of the fact that they were popularly supposed to have one foot in the grave, generally managed to beat us at games. For one thing, they had more avoirdupois.

Once a year came the squadron regatta and sports, while at frequent intervals our "Funny Party," or pierrot troupe, gave an entertainment on board to which we asked all our friends from other ships in the hope

that they would return the compliment. They generally did.

Our entertainments were very much the same as anyone else's. We had the same "screaming farces," generally home-made, with the funny man as a bucolic butler, and burly, tattooed seamen dressed up as society ladies.

We had our own expert dramatist in the shape of a ship's steward's assistant, who, having been a scene-shifter or call-boy in his early youth, was popularly supposed to have a profound knowledge of things theatrical. At any rate, he always wrote the plays performed by our men's Amateur Dramatic Society. From his productions I should imagine that he enjoyed a nodding acquaintance with the flower of the British aristocracy, for his villains were generally dukes or baronets, and the female characters, unless they were farmer's daughters, invariably lived in Park Lane. Moreover, our playwright's mind ran in the Picture Palace or "Deadwood Dick" groove. Lethal weapons played a prominent part in his productions, and his dramas always included bombs and blood. I once counted no less than five "corpses" in a row upon the stage.

Once we had a wicked squire in borrowed riding breeches who, in the intervals of smacking his gaiters with a hunting crop, and despite the fact that he had one wife

already living, took a violent fancy to the beautiful daughter of one of his tenants, a farmer. Because she would not fly with him to some place unknown he induced the local policeman, the low comedian who for ever made jokes anent mothers-in-law, seaside lodgings, and kippers, to evict the entire family from the farm they had occupied for the past five-and-twenty years.

Poignant lamentations on the part of the family, and much "Cur-r-rse you, Sir 'Arry Fox!" from the aged grandfather, a decrepit old gentleman of any age between eighty and ninety-seven. Incidentally, grandpapa succeeded in winning much whole-hearted applause from a sympathetic audience by the trite remark, "Fox by naime and fox by nature!"

Next, in the dead of night, the squire attempted to abduct the beautiful daughter in a motor-car.

(A darkened stage for this, since the motor-car, a rickety concern of painted canvas, would not bear close inspection.)

Loud screams from the daughter. Louder curses from the squire, for the grandfather, having discovered the squire's amiable intentions, had frustrated his scheme by slashing the tyres of the motor to ribbons with his trusty pocket-knife.

"Dastard!" screamed the aged one, appearing from behind a convenient tree at the critical moment. "Sir 'Arry Fox! You

are foiled! Thy sins 'ave found thee out!"

"Cur-r-rse you!" retaliated the squire. "You shall di-hi for this!" and without further ado he drew a pistol and shot the poor old dear through the heart.

(Loud cheers from the audience. Things were getting exciting.)

The lovely daughter, meanwhile, had fainted, and the squire (he was also a "baronite," by the way) was still wondering what to do to avoid being brought to trial for murder, when the band, very softly, started to play "The British Grenadiers." After a lengthy pause, for he was late on his cue, in marched the hero, the girl's true "lovah." He, clad in a marine's tunic and spurs, was supposed to represent a gallant sergeant just home from the Indian frontier, where he had lately won the Victoria Cross and several other decorations. His arrival, apparently, was quite unexpected.

"Hum!" he remarked, eyeing poor grandpapa's corpse with the unruffled, detective demeanour of a Sherlock Holmes. "Ha! There 'as bin foul play 'ere!"

Then his eye happened to light upon Sir 'Arry with the girl in his arms.

"At larst!" he shouted, springing straight at him. "At larst I 'ave you in me power!" Why "At larst!" I don't quite know. Evidently, without our knowledge, Sir 'Arry and the sergeant had been introduced before

and had taken a mutual dislike to each other.

The substantial lady dropped to the ground with a hollow thud, and a desperate struggle ensued.

(More cheers, and howls of "Go it, Bertie!" from the enraptured onlookers.)

Sir 'Arry got the worst of the encounter, and after some hammering was securely lashed to a tree. Having done this the sergeant next proceeded to comfort the daughter, and the scene ended with the happy couple billing and cooing, while the unfortunate squire, amidst the wild hissing of the audience, was dragged off to gaol by the witty policeman.

But the story was not finished, for when the curtain next rose the soldier and his lady-love, surrounded by the entire family of the latter, were discovered sitting in the same chair reading the same morning paper.

"'Ullo!" the sergeant observed, when the occupants of the back rows had regained their equanimity. "Wot 'ave we 'ere?"

"Yesterday mornin' at eight h'o'clock," he reads, "the notorious Sir 'Arry Fox, 'oo was convicted of the wilful murder of the much respected, late lamented Samuel Westgarth . . ."

(Loud sobbing and much display of handkerchiefs on the part of the family, while the sergeant, to keep them company, drew his hand before his mouth in a manner strangely

reminiscent of a habit which obtains in public houses.)

“ . . . suffered the hextreme penalty of the lor at Pentonville gaol. Large crowds assembled to see the black flag ’oisted. Death was instantaneous. Billington was the ’angman, and the condemned man preserved ’is composure to the larst and partook of a ’earty breakfast of fried ’am and heggs before settin’ out for the fatal scaffold ! ”

(Loud and prolonged cheering from the audience.)

But by some peculiar stroke of fortune the same newspaper contained another piece of news, for by some process unknown to me, but perhaps through the agony column, the gallant sergeant suddenly discovered that he was the murderer’s missing nephew and the heir to his title and millions. The ramifications of the family tree are still beyond my comprehension, but when the curtain finally went down the soldier was being addressed as “ Sir Halfred ” and the farmer’s daughter as “ Laidy Rose,” from which it would seem that the couple had been married between the acts without the knowledge of the audience or the consent of the girl’s parents.

So, except for the poor wicked baronet-squire and grandpapa—who, after all, had had his fair innings and couldn’t very well complain—everything ended quite happily, and “ The Murderer’s Millions ” or “ Grand-

father's Revenge" was quite the most popular drama ever produced by the *Pericles* Amateur Dramatic Society. At any rate, the performers were hugely pleased with themselves, and we, though not exactly moved to tears, enjoyed it immensely. There was something very unconventional about the "Laidy Rose," who, off the stage, was Able Seaman Dan Mason, the proud owner of the largest pair of feet in the ship.

§ 2

There is a considerable difference in the status of a midshipman and an Acting Sub-Lieutenant, though the Acting Sub of tomorrow may have been the snotty of the day before yesterday. His pay, moreover, or rather his income, is not so very different, for while the midshipman gets his one and ninepence a day from the Government and £50 per annum from his people, the Acting Sub draws a daily honorarium of three and six together with a yearly allowance of about £25. This works out at £81 18s. 9d. a year in the case of the snotty, and £88 17s. 6d. for the Acting Sub.

But the fact remains that the latter is an acting commissioned officer and wears a sword and the single gold stripe and curl on his coat sleeves. In fact, since he wears exactly the same uniform, one cannot tell him from a pukka Sub, while the possession

of the stripe is supposed to endow him with experience, knowledge, and a dignity which he sometimes doesn't possess. A midshipman, who still wears the white patches on his collar, and a dirk, can be forgiven a certain amount of ignorance, for he is still in the "young gentleman" or embryo stage, and can behave with a levity which would not be becoming in the wearer of a gold stripe.

Examinations are often supposed to be the principal curse of the Navy, and it by no means follows that the fellow who is good at passing exams. will make the best practical officer. But even so I don't quite see how one could discover what people know without them. A man is not even allowed to ply for hire with a taxi in the streets of London until he has passed stringent tests, and can tell you, off-hand, the shortest and most expeditious route between Victoria Station, and say, 6, Lawn Road, Haverstock Hill, London, N.W.3.

The Sub-Lieutenant, similarly, may, or probably will, one day find himself on the bridge of a destroyer in the Channel with other ships all round him, and he is a distinct danger to himself and his shipmates if he puts the helm the wrong way at the critical moment, neglects to call his commanding officer, crashes into something, and retires from the conflict with the bows of his ship crumpled as far as the bridge. Destroyers' bows do crumple in the most extraordinary

way, and though collisions are not always brought about by Sub-Lieutenants—I know of several officers of far more seniority and experience who make a hobby of them—the Sub who is unfortunate enough to be the cause of one will find himself earmarked for life.

“Oh, of course,” someone will say in a wardroom in 1921. “Let’s see, wasn’t he the fellow who rammed that collier in the Channel in 1907?”

So it behoves the Sub to be careful and competent, and though lack of experience may be responsible for most of his difficulties, even experience loses its value unless he has a certain fundamental knowledge to which to apply it. A collision between two taxicabs is an unfortunate incident. A collision at sea may be a national calamity.

To the “*x* chaser” the examinations which have to be passed at the end of his midshipman’s time present no very great terrors, but to the plodder, or to the young gentleman who has been habitually slothful, they are apt to be a very substantial nightmare. They certainly were in my case, for though the anticipation of the one and only exam. I did was far and away worse than the actual realisation, the prosperity of one’s future career depended so largely upon one’s success.

In my time there were five subjects, Seamanship, Navigation, Gunnery, Torpedo, and

Engineering, and in each one of these it was possible to obtain first, second, or third-class certificates, or else to fail altogether. Failure generally meant a loss of two or three months' time.

One was awarded so many points for each, "one" or "two," and none at all for a "three,"¹ and upon the number of points one obtained depended the date on which one became a full-blown Lieutenant. It was worked on a sliding scale, and the "five oner" was promoted thirteen months after becoming an Acting Sub, and so on down to those who got five "threes" and had to do about two years before getting their second stripe.

The seamanship exam., which was almost entirely oral, took place after about two and a half years' service afloat as a midshipman. It was final, and after passing it and the preliminary navigation test one was duly rated an Acting Sub-Lieutenant. Then, after a further three months at sea, one went up for preliminary examinations in gunnery and torpedo, and the final in engineering, after which one went to the Navigation School at Portsmouth for further short courses in navigation, gunnery, and torpedo. At the end of these one underwent the final exams. in these subjects. A proportion of the marks for the "preliminaries" counted in the final result, so one had to do no less

¹ i.e. 1st, 2nd, or 3rd-class certificates.

than seven different exams. in five different subjects in less than six months.

Personally I passed in nothing but seamanship and preliminary navigation, for before I had time to do the others the Kaiser created his disturbance in Europe and the Country and the Navy went to war, when the authorities naturally had no time to worry their heads about such trivialities on the seascape as snotties and Acting Subs. I shall always be grateful to the Kaiser for his intervention on my behalf, though I have several bones to pick with him on other subjects if ever we meet.

So after two and a half years at sea, then, in June, 1914, by which time I had absorbed a certain amount of worldly wisdom and was supposed to know far more than I actually did, I was haled with bated breath and trembling limbs before a board of examiners in another ship to be tested touching my knowledge of the gentle art of seamanship. There were several of us up at the same time, and never shall I forget that awful feeling in the pit of my stomach when my immediate predecessor emerged from the torture chamber with a face like a sea-boot.

“How did you get on?” I asked him, collecting my journal and certificates.

“Pretty mouldy,” said he. “They tore me absolutely to bits. Buck up, they’re waiting for you!”



"WHERE HAD I SEEN THAT EYE-GLASS BEFORE?"

I approached the door of the Captain's cabin with some trepidation. I felt rather like a blancmange, or an early, very early, Christian martyr about to be cast to the wild beasts. I knocked on the door and was bidden to enter. I entered, and found one Captain and two Commanders sitting round the long table. They all seemed to glare at me as I went in, one of them through a single eye-glass which made my blood run cold.

Where had I seen that eye-glass before? Of course, I suddenly remembered. Only a fortnight before, whilst playing golf, I had inadvertently driven off the tee before the party ahead of me had played their second strokes and were out of range. My drive, by some strange fluke, for I was never an expert at the game, was a low, straight "daisy-cutter" rising sweetly towards the end of its flight, and the ball skimmed past between one of the players and his caddie, to fall some distance beyond. The player, about to address his ball, threw down his club, turned round, inserted a monocle in his eye, and glared at me. I could feel him glaring, even though he was fully a hundred yards away.

"Dash it, sir!" he bellowed in a quarter-deck voice, shaking his fist in my direction. "Don't you know the etiquette of the game?"

I can't remember what feeble excuse I

made in reply. There was no excuse; but the irate gentleman with the eye-glass was now one of my examiners! He didn't seem to recognise me, thank heaven!

"Sit you down, boy," said the Captain, waving with a pencil at the vacant chair opposite him. "What's your name?"

"Munro, sir. David Munro."

"Ship?"

"The *Pericles*, sir," I told him.

"Have you been in her the whole of your midshipman's time?"

"Yes, sir."

"Humph," said the skipper, turning to my friend of the monocle. "Carew, ask him some questions in riggin'. That's the first thing on the list. I only hope he knows more than the last fella'."

Commander Carew fixed me with a horny eye, an eye magnified out of all proportion by that terrible eye-glass.

It would be tedious to give details of all the questions I was asked and the answers I gave. Indeed, I cannot remember one tenth of them, but if any reader wishes to know the various branches of seamanship with which I was supposed to be thoroughly conversant, I would gently refer him to Section (a), Paragraph 13, Part II, Appendix X of that massive and voluminous compilation, the *King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions*.

It must suffice when I say that the two

Commanders succeeded pretty well in turning me inside out, while the Captain, throwing in a question every now and then, spent most of my five and forty minutes' torture in drawing pencil sketches of battleships and pretty ladies on sheet after sheet of foolscap, each of which he tore up in turn and added to the little pile in front of him.

I did not do exactly brilliantly, and I don't think I made an abject ass of myself. For instance, in reply to the question, "What do you do as officer of the watch if a man falls overboard?" I did not answer, as a snotty once did, "Please, sir, I should call the Captain!"

No, I wasn't such a fool as that, for, to my intense surprise, I was informed that I had just succeeded in getting a "one," which meant that I had made over 85 per cent. of marks.

There was some jubilation in the gunroom that night, jubilation at my expense. My parents, also, were wholly delighted, though it is true that my unexpected performance made my father the poorer by the sum of £10, for he had offered me this as a reward for every first class I should obtain in my examinations.

And a week later, having passed the preliminary navigation test, I shipped the stripe of an Acting Sub, and towards the end of July, by which time the *Pericles* had gone to her home port, I was granted ten days' leave

with the prospect of undergoing further gunnery, torpedo, and engineering exams. in the middle of September.

Fate and the Kaiser did the rest, for, except for a few hours to collect my goods and chattels, I never served on board the *Pericles* again.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WAR CLOUD

§ 1

TUESDAY, July 28th, 1914, was a typical summer day. I had gone home on leave the previous Saturday, and after three days of the free-and-easy existence ashore I was gradually becoming accustomed to the joyful luxury of turning out at eight o'clock, breakfasting at nine, and doing exactly as I liked throughout the day. And to people who are used to living on board a man-of-war a little freedom does sometimes come as a blessed relief. I felt almost like the old bos'un, who, when he retired, hired a small boy for the sum of 6*d.* a week to call him at 5.30 every morning.

"Please, sir, the Commander wants you," the urchin was instructed to pipe.

"Tell the Commander to go to Hades!" the bos'un was reputed to remark, turning over and going off to sleep again.

The mutinous satisfaction of consigning an imaginary executive officer to the nether regions was worth £1 6*s.* a year to that

bo'sun. Possibly the money would have been better spent if he had sent it to the Fresh Air Fund for poor children; but I can quite understand his feelings.

And at home I was no longer treated as a child. For instance, I helped myself to a second glass of my father's "good old fruity" after dinner with no further protest than a slight lifting of my mother's eyebrows. I wasn't used to two glasses of port, it is true, more especially after claret. I had rarely indulged in port at all on board the *Pericles*. My wine bill simply wouldn't stand it. But I thought it best to give the impression that I was a veteran sea-dog who knew a glass of good wine when he tasted it. So I rolled it round my tongue in a lordly way and ventured the opinion that it was a sound and aged wine. Whereat my father laughed, for he knew that I knew that I should have made precisely the same remark if it had been the grocer's "Special Spanish ferruginous" brand at 1s. 6d. the bottle. How on earth was I to know the difference?

I had a jolly good time. My father, whose handicap at golf was + 4, even cast aside his other arrangements and took me off in the car after breakfast to play eighteen holes and to have lunch at Worplesdon. Which was very self-sacrificing of him, for I, with a handicap of a doubtful eighteen—my golf in those days was almost as erratic

as my knowledge of port wine—completely spoilt his game. And in the afternoons I played tennis at home, where I met decent girls, wholesome, clean-looking girls, some of them pretty, who weren't perambulating Navy Lists. They could not for the life of them tell you what pay Lieutenant-Commander Reece of H.M.S. *Mantelpiece* received from a beneficent Admiralty for his labours, nor what prospects he had of supporting a wife. Some of the girls I had met in the naval ports were very well up in these matters. I expect they had an eye to business, for I always noticed that they usually congregated in the spot where the gold lace was thickest. They weren't all like this, of course. Only some of them.

I didn't take much interest in the newspapers while I was on leave, though I knew from sundry remarks of my father's at breakfast on Sunday and Saturday that the disagreement between Austria and Serbia was becoming acute.

"I hope it is not very serious," my mother had said.

"Oh no," my father replied calmly. "It'll all fizzle out. It's merely a try on."

So we rested content with that, and even on the Tuesday, July 28th, we felt quite confident that nothing untoward was about to happen. But at about 6 o'clock the same evening, when I was in the middle of tennis, I saw the telegraph boy come up the garden

path and go to the front door, and a few minutes later my father came out with an orange envelope in his hand.

"David!" he called across to me, just as I was serving. "You're recalled."

"Recalled!" I exclaimed, dropping my racquet in disgust and going across to him. "Whatever . . ."

He thrust the telegram into my hand. There was no mistaking it. It was addressed to me, and was brief, laconic, and very much to the point. "LEAVE CANCELLED. REJOIN IMMEDIATELY. COMMANDING OFFICER. 'PERICLES.'"

I read it aloud.

"What does it mean?" my mother asked rather anxiously.

"Seems as if things were getting serious," I told her. "Perhaps it's war!"

"War!" said everybody at once.

"Poof!" laughed my father, shaking his head. "It can't be that. They're merely taking reasonable precautions."

"It's put the stopper on my leave, anyhow," said I indignantly. "And when the excitement's all over I'll bet my bottom dollar I shan't get any more. What rotten luck!"

It really was rather galling being dragged back at the end of three days when I had expected a full fortnight.

"You can just catch the 6.39 if you go in and pack at once," my father broke in,

examining his little time-table. "You haven't much time, so hurry up! I'll order the car now."

So I said good-bye to everyone and the tennis party broke up, and less than forty minutes later I was in the London train.

Both my parents came to the station to see me off, and when the guard waved his flag and I leant out of the carriage, my mother put her arms round my neck and kissed me. Her eyes, I noticed, were very misty.

"Buck up, mother," said I cheerily, patting her on the shoulder. "I expect I shall be back in a day or two."

She shook her head sadly. "Take care of yourself, my son, and God bless you," she murmured softly. "Don't forget to write, and let me know if there is anything you want."

The train jolted and moved forward. She released me.

"Good-bye, David. Good luck!" said my father.

"Good-bye, my son. Take care of yourself," from my mother.

"Good-bye, good-bye!" from me.

I leant out of the window and waved till a curve in the line took them out of sight, and then sat down and tried to analyse my feelings. They were peculiar, for though I was distinctly annoyed at the curtailment of my leave, even the remote prospect of war

had rather an exhilarating effect. I felt somehow as if I wanted to wave my hat and to sing "God Save the King." A silly sort of idea, perhaps, but that is how it took me.

So thus, with my parents' blessing, a £5 note in my pocket from my father, and a packet of chicken sandwiches from my friend the cook to sustain me on the journey, I set forth, without really being aware of it, to take part in the greatest war the world has ever known.

§ 2

Waterloo station when I arrived there was a seething mob of bluejackets who had been recalled from leave to rejoin ships at Portsmouth, Weymouth, and Devonport. Many of them had brought their female belongings with them to see them off, also sundry musical instruments, and what with the strident salutations of the ladies, the frenzied efforts of concertinas and penny whistles, and the singing and shouting of the men themselves, a few of whom had been celebrating not wisely but too well, the place was an absolute babel in which station-master, inspectors, ticket-collectors, and porters alike were powerless to keep order. But they were a very good-tempered crowd, nevertheless.

I had some time to spare, and stood there awhile watching the scene. Never before or

since have I seen such a spectacle. I saw a ticket-collector standing at the gate giving access to the Portsmouth platform and vainly endeavouring to regulate the crowd surging through.

“'Ave your tickets ready, please!” he was bellowing at the pitch of his voice. “One at a time, please! Can't you stop shovin' behind there!”

He might as well have been talking to the man in the moon for all the notice they took of him, when suddenly, unobserved by the official, a sailor clambered over the gate, opened it from the inside, and the next instant a throng of bluejackets and women poured through in a human avalanche, carrying the ticket-collector with them. He didn't punch many tickets that evening, for when next I saw him he was half-way down the platform minus his cap.

First, second, and third-class carriages, guards' vans and luggage vans, of the trains bound to the naval ports were besieged by a noisy mob and were gradually packed to repletion. Train after train steamed out with musical honours, and a chorus of cheers, howls, and screeches from those left behind and those on board.

Fat sailors, thin sailors, tall sailors, short sailors, all sorts and conditions of sailors, all belonging to His Majesty's Navy, pushed, shoved, and jostled each other. Sailors wearing feminine headgear, ladies wearing

sailors' caps, couples arm in arm, all shouting and singing at the top of their lusty voices. Never in my life have I seen such a pandemonium.

In front of the bookstall a jovial gentleman with a very red face, and without efficient control of his legs, was solemnly endeavouring to dance the Highland fling with a young lady from Whitechapel amidst the loud applause of the onlookers. An obliging shipmate with an accordion provided the music. The girl, her skirts well lifted, footed it right lustily, until her partner, endeavouring to imitate her, subsided to the ground with a thud and remained firmly seated. His friends hastened to help him; but he waved them aside. Dancing was so dangerous, he explained, that he thought it wise to assume an attitude whence he could fall no further.

I saw an enormously fat A.B. tearing along a platform to catch his train with an equally fat woman, probably his wife, in tow astern of him. She clutched two bottles of beer and a paper bag containing sustenance for her lord and master's journey, and the pair were well cheered by an appreciative audience with howls of "Go it, Ginger! Get a move on, Skinny Lizzie!"

They reached the last carriage of an already moving train. The sailor made a flying leap, and, with legs waving in the air, was unceremoniously hauled in through the

window by his friends, while his wife, standing on the footboard, passed his provender in after him. Then a purple face appeared from the window and kissed the lady on both cheeks, after which she dropped neatly to the platform, produced a handkerchief, and alternately waved it and mopped her streaming face until the train was out of sight.

There was no "Tipperary" in those days—no "We are the boys of the bulldog breed," or anything of that kind. Merely a good-tempered, hilarious crowd singing comic songs such as one might have seen at a popular Cup Tie at the Crystal Palace.

I noticed many men wearing "Royal Fleet Reserve" cap-ribbons. They were the members of the "Immediate reserve," men who had served their time in the Navy, had retired to civil life, but were available for immediate recall in the event of any emergency on receipt of a telegram and without the formality of the general Royal Proclamation calling out all the naval reserves. They had received their orders that very afternoon, and now, throwing their civil employment to the winds, leaving their wives and families behind them, they were pouring in from all parts of the country to report themselves at the different naval depots before being drafted to ships. Without realising it, they, like myself, were embarking on the greatest adventure they had ever known.

Many of the men I saw that night can

never have seen their homes and relations again. Some must have lost their lives in the North Sea, the Dardanelles, and various unmentioned little naval encounters in the uttermost parts of the world, others by mine, torpedo, and other perils of war; but as I stood there and watched them I think I was prouder of belonging to the Navy than I had ever been before. Like me, the men had all been recalled from leave, but judging from the scraps of conversation I overheard nobody grumbled. Moreover, considering the circumstances, one could have forgiven a certain amount of drunkenness, but there were very few signs of it. There was far more wild enthusiasm, and, as anybody who knows him will tell you, an enthusiastic bluejacket with his friends is the noisiest creature on this earth. The one aim and object of every man in that huge mob seemed to be to get back to his ship as soon as possible, and for this, perhaps, the rather disquieting news in the evening papers may have been indirectly responsible.

At Victoria, when I arrived there with my luggage, the scene was much the same, except that there were fewer men. Even so, though I arrived early, I had the greatest difficulty in obtaining a seat in a first-class carriage in the Chatham train, and then only by the courtesy of several other officers who squashed up and made room for me.

And when I arrived at my destination

there was no conveyance of any kind. Chatham, the last place that the Almighty ever made, is always like that, and I had to wait the best part of an hour before getting an ancient "growler," an incoherent Jehu rather the worse for wear, and a horse whose ribs seemed to be wearing rapidly through his skin, to take me to the dockyard. So it was not until past 10.30 that I finally arrived on board the *Pericles* and made my way to the Commander's cabin. My reception was not exactly cordial.

"Who the deuce's that?" came his voice as I knocked. "Sentry! Sentry!!" in a bellow, "I thought I told you I wasn't to be disturbed!"

The sentry evinced no emotion. He was out of earshot.

"It's me, sir. Munro," I said.

"Well, come in! Come in! Don't stand there howling at me from outside!"

There was little doubt as to who had done the howling, so I entered in some trepidation, to find the Commander seated at his writing-table with the Lieutenant-Commander (G). "Guns"¹ looked at me with a grin as I went in, and evidently they were busy reorganising the men's stations, for the Commander was rumbling away *sotto-voce* and running his fingers through his hair. "Guns" himself seemed rather heated about

¹ "Guns," a wardroom nickname for the gunnery officer.

the face, and the table was littered with watch bills, station bills, typewritten orders, and scribbled-over sheets of paper. The air, moreover, was blue with tobacco smoke, ash was scattered all over the carpet, while the waste-paper basket was full of the Commander's pipes.

"The Bloke"¹ was an inveterate smoker. I never remember seeing him off duty without a "gum-bucket," as he called it, in his mouth, and when in his cabin he never by any chance smoked the same pipe twice running. He possessed about thirty of them all told, and to save himself the trouble of knocking them out when finished, invariably hurled them into the waste-paper basket or on to the floor, whence they were eventually retrieved by his long-suffering marine servant. I now saw that there were about ten of them in their usual receptacle, so realised that the Commander and his companion had been hard at it for some time.

"Blow this fellow!" the Commander growled, glaring at the gunnery officer, who merely smiled. "I don't know why you're so anxious to change all these men round at the last moment. I seem to have the nine point two guns' crews at the twelve pounders and vice versa. And why the devil the surname of Smith was ever invented I'm sure I don't know! This ship's simply plastered with

¹ "The Bloke," a lower-deck nickname for the Commander.

Smiths; they pursue me morning, noon, and night. . . . Oh Lor!

"Well," he added, leaning back in his chair, stretching himself, and looking at me with his usual whimsical expression. "Don't you ever go in for gunnery. Gunnery officers are the bane of any decent-minded Commander's existence, aren't they, Guns?"

"Weren't you one yourself, sir?" queried our expert, gazing innocently at the ceiling.

The Commander snorted. "Of course I was," he muttered: "But thank the Lord I wasn't one of your new-fangled products. So you've come back, eh?" he snapped at me.

"Yes, sir," said I with a sweet smile, for I knew a jolly sight better than to take the Commander seriously.

"And you're leaving the ship to-morrow morning at seven o'clock, d'you know that?"

"Leaving, sir!" I said, utterly flabbergasted. "Whatever for?"

"They're sending you to a destroyer. Wire came from the Admiralty this afternoon telling us to nominate one acting Sub with some sense in his head to relieve the Sub of a destroyer who's been fool enough to go sick. We've told you off. D'you like the idea?"

"Well, sir," said I, blushing, for I knew the gruffness of his tone meant nothing, and

I couldn't help feeling rather pleased that he considered I had some sense in my head. "I hardly know. Of course . . ."

"More fool you!" said the Commander, twinkling his eyes at me. "I'd give my soul to go to a destroyer if I knew anything about the job, and there's going to be a war. You ought to be jolly grateful to me for giving you such a good character, you young ruffian."

"I am, sir."

"Humph! Don't believe it! Let's see," searching for something among the papers on his table. "Yes, here it is. You're going to the *Lictor*, one of the new 'L' boats. You'll have to be on board her sharp at seven o'clock to-morrow morning. She's lying in the basin near the entrance locks, and sails for her base at noon. Savvy?"

"Yes, sir. But can't I . . ."

"No. You can't!" he said brusquely, waving a pencil as if to brush me aside. "I'm in a beastly bad temper and far too busy to argue, so clear out! If I'm approachable in the morning—which I very much doubt if the gunnery officer goes on bullying me—if I'm in a decent temper then, you can come and say good-bye to me. Meanwhile get out of my cabin, and tell that idiot of a sentry that if he allows anyone else in here I'll have him flayed alive and fricasseed in burning oil. Good night!" He turned again to his work.

I retired to the gunroom, where I found several of my messmates.

"You're a fine fellow," were Nick's first words. "What the deuce d'you mean by being appointed away?"

"Ask me another, old boy," said I. "I knew nothing of it until the Commander told me five minutes ago."

"Lucky dog!" growled Meryon. "It's that one you got in seamanship that's done it. That, and being the Commander's blue-eyed boy."¹

"For goodness' sake tell me what's been going on," I said, smiting Meryon on the head. "What's all the panic about?"

"You may well ask," Nichols answered. "This morning everything was perfectly peaceful and I went off to play golf with Shortie. Just as we were having lunch we were recalled by telephone, and when we got back the flap had started. I've been in an overall suit in the engine and boiler rooms ever since. Look at me if you don't believe it!"

I did look at him and did believe it, for his brown overalls were covered in oil, while his face and hands were streaked with grime and perspiration.

"I've spent the whole blessed afternoon and evening crawling round the guts of the ship on my stomach," he continued, waving his hands with a comical gesture of despair.

¹ "Blue-eyed boy," *i.e.* favourite.

"Nobody loves me at all. Everybody's in a hell of a temper and everything's in a hell of a mess, and the dockyard are doing their level best to have us ready for sea the day after to-morrow. They'll do it, too, judging from the speed they're slapping things together. Outside!"

"Sir," came the sleepy voice of the steward from the pantry.

"Bring beer! One, two, three . . . eight glasses of beer, and a bottle of ginger ale for the assistant clerk!"

"Why can't I have beer too, please, Nichols?" queried the youthful accountant officer.

"Beer's not good for little boys, and I'm not going to give you a chance of writing home to your mother and telling her that I'm responsible for your downfall. Beer's been the ruination of many a sweet che-ild like you."

"But I've often drunk . . ."

"Oh, sit on the little blighter's head, someone," said Nick, puffing at his pipe.

Meryon did so, and there was peace.

"So things have been humming, what?" I asked.

"Lord, yes! All leave's been cancelled, and there's a buzz that the reserves have been called out. Lord! I only hope we're ready for sea in time!"

The drinks arrived.

"Well, here's luck to you, David," said

Nick, looking at me over the edge of his tumbler. "May your shadow never grow less."

"Here's luck to the What's-her-name," chimed in Meryon and the others, holding their glasses towards me. "What about old David making a farewell speech?"

Nichols grunted and went across to the piano, and before I could stop him was playing "Auld Lang Syne."

"Speech! Silence, gentlemen!" they all roared, having bellowed twice through the chorus with much stamping on the deck. "Brother David will now oblige with a speech!"

I was hoisted on to a settee, where I stood like a fool with a full tumbler in my hand.

"I don't in the least know what to say, you fellows," I began awkwardly. "I'm jolly sorry to leave you, and all that sort of thing, and I only hope . . ."

"Eleven o'clock, gennel'men, please, and the Commander says there's too much noise goin' on in the gunroom," interrupted ship's corporal Stiggers, thrusting his head through the curtained doorway. "It's time to lock up, sir, please!"

"Have a glass of beer, corporal?" shouted Nick, anxious to delay the evil moment.

"Can't be done, sir. These lights oughter 'ave been out by ten o'clock, and the Commander's been tellin' me off¹ somethin'

¹ Telling me off, *i.e.* scolding.

crool. Can't give you another minute, general'men. I'll be 'ung, drawed, and quartered else!"

We did not wish to see the worthy Stiggers so basely mutilated, so the farewell speech, to my great relief, was indefinitely postponed, but when I left the *Pericles* the next morning I honestly believe there were tears in my eyes.

I knew I was very lucky to be going to a destroyer, particularly as it was practically an unheard-of thing for an Acting Sub to be appointed to one. I revelled in the idea of being in a more or less responsible position in a small ship instead of a very junior officer in a large one, but still I could not help feeling a pang of regret at leaving the dear old *Pericles*.

I had served in her for over two and a half years and had come to love her as a home. Her officers, too, were the whitest set of fellows who ever stepped, and so were the men. I had many friends among them.

Indeed, while I was packing up in the morning two A.B.'s of my division sought me out in the gunroom flat.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir," said the spokesman awkwardly. "But we heard 'as 'ow you was goin' to a deestroyer?"

"Yes," I said.

"Well, sir. We thought 'as 'ow you might take me and my chum along o' you. We've got on all right together since we've

been in this ship, sir, and seein' 'as 'ow we're both badgemen with good records we thought you might arrange it. I'm a seaman gunner, sir, and Jevons 'ere is an L.T.O."¹

They were both good men, but it was not in my power to grant their request, much as I should have liked to. And when I told them as much they both seemed rather disconsolate.

"I expect you'll go to destroyers soon enough," I said to them.

"We wants to go now, sir," said Jevons. "You see, sir," he added in a throaty and confidential whisper, "we'd like to serve along o' an officer we knows, but we gets an extry tanner a day 'ard-lyers' in a deestroyer. And a tanner a day means a lot to married men with fam'blies, sir."

So the extra sixpence a day was the real reason, was it? Though even then I could not help feeling rather complimented that they should want to come with me to my new ship.

But it was impossible for me to arrange it, so I merely wrung their horny hands and wished them good-bye and good luck. It was all I could do.

¹ "L.T.O.," *i.e.* heading torpedoman.

² "Hard-lyers," *i.e.* hard-lying money, extra money paid to men in torpedo craft for the increased discomfort and wear and tear of clothing.

CHAPTER IX

H.M.S. "LICTOR"

§ 1

SHORTLY before 7 o'clock the next morning, with my belongings on the jetty in a small hand-cart propelled by two bluejackets, I was reporting myself on board my new ship. She was a fine-looking craft, one of the very latest destroyers, slim and narrow for her length, with two funnels and a high upstanding bow which promised to make her a good sea-boat in bad weather. Her speed, I had already discovered, was somewhere in the neighbourhood of 30 knots, and her displacement about 1,000 tons. She was well armed, too, for she carried three 4-inch guns and two pairs of torpedo tubes, and, painted black all over, seemed to my inexperienced eyes to be everything that a destroyer should be.

"I'm Sub-Lieutenant Munro, sir, come to join the ship," said I with a salute, going up to a Lieutenant, who, in a monkey jacket with the lace dropping off it, a white muffler, and a pair of gigantic sea-boots, was superintending some work on deck.

He turned round and took stock of me for a moment, wrinkling up his eyes and pushing his cap on the back of his head, and then smiled and extended a hand.

“I’m Turley, the First Lieutenant of this junk,” he introduced himself. “I’m glad you’ve turned up, for since Horton went to hospital I’ve had to do every blessed thing.”

“And is Horton coming back?” I asked.

He shook his head. “Shouldn’t think so. He’s having his appendix cut out, poor devil. Rather hard luck just as a war’s coming on. You’re probably here for a full due¹ if you hit it off with the skipper. Ever met him, by the way?”

“I don’t think so. What’s his name?”

“Lennon,” he answered. “Lieutenant-Commander Lennon.”

“Is he a good fellow?” I asked.

“Good fellow!” Turley snorted. “I should think he jolly well was! One of the very best provided you do your job. But come along and see him. He’ll be in bed or in his bath, I expect, but that won’t matter. Quartermaster!”

“Sir?”

“Have Mr. Munro’s gear taken down to his cabin, and tell my servant I want my bath now. Come on, Sub!”

I followed him aft until we came to a small circular opening in the deck under a canvas canopy, through which orifice I

¹ For a full due, *i.e.* permanently.

heard someone below singing at the pitch of his voice. The noise was so unmusical that I could barely recognise the tune, but various indications led me to believe it was the hymn which starts "O happy band of pilgrims."

"You needn't be alarmed," whispered No. 1 with a grin, noticing my surprise. "It's not a revival meeting. It's merely the skipper in his bath. He usually sings when he's feeling bobbish."

He clattered noisily down a narrow steel ladder and knocked at a door.

"Where such a light affliction,
Shall win so great a prize,"

chanted the voice with great feeling.

"Hullo! Who's there?"

"Sorry to interrupt, sir," said Turley. "The new Sub's just joined."

"Good egg! What's he look like?"

"Oh, all right, sir," came the guarded reply, for I was in earshot.

"Right. Send him down and let's have a look at him. Give us a chance to get a towel on, though, I'm in my bath. I say, Number One?"

"Sir?"

"Got any sticking plaster? I've cut myself."

"No, sir, I'm afraid I haven't."

"Blow! I'll have to do without it, then." Turley came up grinning, and I went

down, and entering the cabin found myself in the presence of a short, thick-set little man standing in a shallow bath of soapy water with nothing on but a towel. He had curly hair, a merry blue eye, and a humorous expression, while his face was covered in lather and streaming with blood from a bad scrape with a razor.

"Come in!" he said affably. "Don't be bashful, and excuse my rig. I've only just turned out. D'you ever use one of these beastly mowing machines, by the way?" shaking hands and proceeding to dab the gash on his cheek with a sponge. "They're inventions of the devil! You've come from the *Pericles*, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"'Um," he muttered, putting his left hand on my shoulder and turning me to the light to examine my face. "Transom's an old ship of mine, and told me about you. I'm glad you haven't got a pasty face," he added inconsequently. "Pasty faces are the devil. People who have 'em are always so beastly seasick, what?"

"I don't know, sir," said I, noticing that his own face, or what I could see of it for blood and shaving soap, was tanned by sun and wind to a healthy mahogany.

He laughed and relinquished his scrutiny. "Well, there isn't much I can tell you now, but I daresay you'll soon get into the swing of things. You'll keep watch at sea, of

course, and look out you keep the charts corrected up to date. It's easy enough when you get into the way of it. So long, I must get dressed. See you at breakfast."

I retired, and the instant I left the cabin he burst into another hymn, inventing most of the words as he went on. He couldn't sing for toffee. He shouted, and his bass notes literally shook the ship.

My cabin in the next flat was only separated from his by a thin steel bulkhead, and before I had been a week on board I discovered that it was a habit of his to sing in his bath and while he dressed, though why he always selected hymns whose words he didn't know I never understood. Occasionally, also, he played on the penny whistle in his spare time, and later on, when the war came and we spent most of our days and nights at sea, I often found him sitting cross-legged on the settee in the charthouse like a fat little Buddha trying to coax "The Bluebells of Scotland" out of his refractory instrument.

"Perish the thing!" he used to growl, getting redder and redder about the face. "I never seem to get any forrader, somehow. How does this bit go, Sub?" twittering away like a demented canary.

"Sounds all right, sir," I said with my tongue in my cheek, for really his penny whistling was as ghastly as his singing.

"Don't believe it! However, I've prac-

tised enough for to-day, so I'll just play through 'God save the King' and the 'Marseillaise' and then pack up!"

Which he proceeded to do, while I, out of sheer politeness, had to stand there and listen.

My cabin was quite a snug little cubby-hole, far and away larger than any cabin I should ever have had in a battleship or a cruiser, and having a place to call my own and somewhere to stow my gear was absolute bliss after living in a chest. The little place was painted in white enamel and had two scuttles in the ship's side, beneath which came the bunk with shallow sliding trays under it for clothes. The furniture was completed by a small mahogany chest of drawers; a tip-up washstand with a nickel basin; a looking-glass screwed to the bulkhead; a bookshelf; a rack for water-bottle, tooth tumbler, and other odds and ends; a wooden flap to serve as a writing-table; a folding chair; and a shallow bath hung to the ceiling overhead except when I happened to be using it.

The Engineer-Lieutenant-Commander, Cornelius Prettyman, the 1st Lieutenant, and the Gunner (T), Mr. Samuel Cotter, lived in other cabins opening off the small flat outside. They soon received me to their respective bosoms, and before long we were always dodging in and out of each other's domiciles to borrow stamps, matches, shav-

ing soap, and other necessaries of life. Promiscuous borrowing reached such a pitch, in fact, that I soon learnt to lock up my cigarettes.

But there were several flies in the ointment, and the first of them was Robert Wilkes, Able Seaman, who acted as my *valet-de-chambre*. He was an uncouth fellow who had volunteered for the job of officer's servant, not through any knowledge of his duties, but because the ten shillings per month he received for "doing for" his unfortunate master might come in handy for beer, or to buy Mrs. Robert Wilkes a new Sunday bonnet. He "did" for me in more senses than one. It really was rather trying when, in an excess of zeal, I found him cleaning my sextant with bath-brick and emery paper, and more annoying still when he carefully removed the save-all from the bottom of my washstand and substituted my uniform boots, whereupon I, tipping the basin, filled my boots and my cabin at the same time. Wilkes was so painfully zealous, however, that one couldn't bear him any lasting grudge, and when, for instance, he burnt a hole in my best superfine cloth monkey jacket by leaving it to dry in close proximity to the red-hot galley stove, he instantly volunteered to provide me with a new one. He knew very well I could never accept his offer.

The next disadvantage was that, at sea,

our cabins, since the side scuttles could never be opened, were distinctly frowsty. The atmosphere, in fact, could generally be carved with a knife. Of course we kept the hatch open, which admitted a small quantity of fresh air, but a large volume of water as well in anything approaching heavy weather. Sometimes I came down from the bridge to find a couple of feet of dirty slush swishing dismally to and fro across the flat and slopping into our cabins with the heavy rolling of the ship; but even so a little air plus a great deal of water was better than no air at all.

It certainly took me some time to get accustomed to sleeping in a state of partial asphyxiation, and I used to wake up with every symptom of what is generally known as a "fat head." It doesn't worry me now, though. I suppose I must be thoroughly kippered inside by this time.

The *Lictor*, like all destroyers, had not the solidity of a big ship. She was the frailest sort of vessel imaginable, and, as all superfluous weight was rigidly cut down, her sides and decks were no thicker than ordinary fairly stout cardboard. When the engines were stopped, therefore, and in harbour at night the infernal orchestra of dynamo, pumps, and other what-nots in the engine-room had ceased their humming, buzzing, groaning, roaring, growling, screeching, chattering, hissing, grunting, barking, lowing,

and any other farmyard or zoological-garden sounds you can imagine, outside noises became magnified out of all proportion by the dead silence. Often and often with my head on the pillow in my bunk I could plainly hear the footsteps of somebody walking up and down the deck a hundred and fifty feet further forward. The coming and going of heavy footfalls immediately overhead sounded like the passing of an elephant battery.

So when I say that Mr. Cotter snored, and snored not like an ordinary human being, but with a series of grunts and blasts midway between the sounds caused by a tramp steamer bellowing on her steam whistle for a pilot, and the breathing of an asthmatic carthorse, you can perhaps imagine our feelings. His doleful trumpeting, like the skipper's singing, caused the ship to vibrate and tremble, and the worst of it was that sometimes he would remain quiet for nights on end, then suddenly to break out into a perfect pæan of triumph in the stilly hours of the morning when we were least expecting it. Naturally it woke us all up.

"Mister Cotter!" would come a muffled remark from the Chief's¹ cabin.

"Mister Cotter!!" from No. 1.

"Mister Cotter!!!" from me.

"MISTER COTTER!" from all three of us together.

¹ "The Chief," i.e. the senior engineer officer.

“Haw! Honk! POOUF! HURRUMP!!”
from the culprit.

“MISTER COTTER!!”

“Hullo! What’s up now?” demanded
the gunner, waking up at last.

“For the Lord’s sake stop snoring!”
in an irritable voice from the 1st Lieu-
tenant.

“Snoring, sir!” in a voice of the most
righteous indignation. “No, sir. Not me.
It’s the Sub-Lootenant, sir. I’ve been lying
awake listening to him!”

Me? Shades of Ananias and Sapphira!

Tut tut, Mr. Cotter! I am still ashamed
of you.

So after he had gone to sleep we always
made a practice of creeping out of our
cabins and gently closing his door. We
could still hear his mournful brayings and
explosions going on inside, but the sound
was more or less deadened.

We were a very happy little party, and in
the wardroom, too, we were always cheery.
It was the skipper himself who was the bright
particular spirit of the mess, for if he wasn’t
showing the Chief how to crawl round the
back of a chair without touching the deck
with his feet, he was inventing a contrivance
whereby all our gramophone discs could be
played backwards.

“Just think of what it’ll save us!” he
observed at breakfast one morning, when
smitten by this brilliant brain-wave. “We’ll

get four tunes out of every double-sided record ! ”

I have no doubt that “ Stop your tickling, Jock ! ” or “ Alexander’s Ragtime Band ” played backwards would have delighted his musical soul, but before he had completed the invention he was busy thinking out a scheme whereby the engine of our motor-boat might be utilised for supplying the necessary current to run the electric lights of the ship when the dynamo wasn’t working. He was a perfect genius for thinking of things.

Some time later he developed a passion for a new game, or rather an old game, called “ Pitch penny.” The rules were quite simple. You moved the wardroom table to one side to leave an open space, at the far end of which you placed a cork on end. Then, when you and your messmates had provided yourselves with all the pennies you possessed, you stood at the other end of the mess and pitched your coins at the cork with a peculiar back spin to make them fall flat. You pitched in turn, and at the end of each series the player whose penny was nearest the cork became the possessor of all the others.

The skipper soon developed an unholy aptitude for the game. He won eight and ninepence in coppers the first night, and fifteen and fourpence the next. Then, as we had no more pennies left, he asked people on

board from other destroyers and rooked them, until at last he had a good-sized bag full of coppers in his cabin. If he had gone on I believe there would soon have been a copper famine in the flotilla, but one evening I met him coming off in the boat with the empty bag.

"Have you changed 'em all for silver, sir?" I asked.

He grinned. "No. I went ashore with the idea of shoving 'em all in the lifeboat box, but to-day was the Belgian flag day, and I met a most prepossessing flapper..."

"And gave them all to her?" I gasped.

"Only a hundred and seventy-two of them. The poor little dear could hardly carry her box by the time I'd finished, and I was nearly run in for creating a disturbance. But she was jolly grateful. Pretty gal, too!"

"And what did you do with the rest, sir?"

"Let's see," he said, wrinkling up his forehead. "I put another hundred and seventeen in the collecting box outside the railings of the Red Cross hospital, and a hundred and thirty-eight, I believe, in the Mayor's box for local war orphans. Quite a large crowd collected. They thought I was trying to burgle the bally thing!" He laughed at the recollection.

"Any more, sir?"

"Yes. I spent a penny on a box of

matches to light my pipe with, and sent three and a penny in halfpenny stamps to the Chancellor of the Exchequer!"

"Whatever for, sir?" I queried feebly.

"Income tax, fathead! Income tax at one and nine in the pound as near as I could work it out. Won't the old man be pleased when he gets it?"

"How did you send it?"

"Quite simple. I just shoved the stamps into an envelope with a chit of paper labelled 'Conscience Money,' and addressed it to the old bloke, care of G.P.O., London. You see," he added with a twinkle in his eye, "if he acknowledges it in the papers, as he ought to if he's a proper gent, it'll cost him at least five bob! By George! I haven't had such an amusing afternoon for years!"

§ 2

It was no great surprise to us when, on the night of August 4th, we received a signal from the senior officer of our flotilla telling us that war had been declared against Germany. We had expected it, and when the momentous news of the outbreak reached us we were already at sea as a precautionary measure against certain eventualities.

For some days beforehand we had been preparing the ship for war, so now, with the warheads on the torpedoes, ammunition at the guns, and all our superfluous stores and

peace-time fittings ruthlessly cast ashore, we were ready for anything which might turn up. And not we alone, but every other fighting unit in the Navy.

In those early days we had no idea that the war was going to be anything but short and sharp. Most of us expected a big fleet action in the North Sea at the very outset of hostilities, and that the whole thing would be over by the following spring. So some destroyers, to be quite ready for going into action, even went so far as to land their boats, the chest of drawers from the officers' cabins, and the chairs, cupboards, and stove from the wardroom. I remember going on board one vessel, moreover, where they had even removed the wooden ladder leading from the wardroom to the deck, so that one had to make a precarious ascent or descent by means of a rickety pile of wooden biscuit cases placed on end.

Even in harbour with no movement on the ship getting up or coming down required no mean acrobatic agility, but the perpetrators of the Eiffel tower-like arrangement seemed to have forgotten altogether that their food from the galley under the fore-castle had to come along the upper deck and down that hatchway. However, they soon found out, for the first time the ship went to sea in moderate weather and started rolling a little, the steward slithered gracefully below with the nauseous remains of two

beefsteak puddings, not to speak of vegetables, broken crockery, an entrée dish or two, and the biscuit cases themselves, on top of him.

The wardroom got no hot lunch that day. They made their meal off cold bully beef out of a tin; but it taught them a lesson, and the next time they returned into harbour they took good care to retrieve the ladder. I noticed, too, that in most cases the chests of drawers, the chairs, and the stoves—particularly the stoves—all came drifting back in time. One cannot exist for very long on board a ship, even in war, without something to sit upon or to keep one's clothes in, and as for undergoing a North Sea winter without artificial warmth of some kind, well, the idea is absurd. We were young and foolish in those days. We know better now.

What our feelings were when war actually came I cannot very well remember. I know we were all desperately anxious to have a slap at something German, but for some days we had regarded hostilities as inevitable and were more or less accustomed to the idea, so that when the announcement came there were few signs of spontaneous enthusiasm. It was only by the extra keenness and willingness on the part of officers and men that one could see what they really felt, though it was noticeable that they were much cheerier than usual, and that, on the infre-

quent occasions on which we had a spell in harbour, little groups used to collect on deck with a newspaper anxiously discussing the news, and giving their opinion of the Kaiser and "Ole Tirps" in no very measured terms. Tirpitz, of course, was responsible for the movements of the High Sea Fleet, and the great question which was ever in our hearts was whether or not that much talked about collection of vessels would come to sea and have it out.

The skipper, whose nerves seemed to be made of cast steel, was affability itself, and went about with a broad smile on his face and a cheery word for everyone. I shall never forget his remark when war was declared.

"Thank heaven!" he said fervently. "Now I shall be able to wear out all my old clothes!"

He also started to grow a beard, which did nothing to improve his personal appearance, but his one reiterated regret was that he had no time in which to learn the Serbian National Anthem. Not that it really mattered, for nobody on board knew what the Serbian National Anthem was, and not one of us could have read the music even if we had had the score. But the "Marseillaise" he knew, and the Russian hymn he knew, or said he knew, so he thought it rather hard luck on the Serbs that he could not pay them the same compliment. He seemed

rather put out about it. It did not worry us in the least. 'Tis an ill wind . . .

The *Lictor* did not have the happy fortune to be present at the first naval engagement of the war on August 5th, when the German minelayer *Königin Luise* was overhauled and sunk by the *Amphion* and some of our destroyers whilst in the very act of laying her mines. We had our first real taste of war the next day, when, at 6.30 in the morning, the *Amphion* was blown up and sunk by one of the very mines laid by her victim of the day before.

I was keeping the morning watch at the time, and the skipper was on the bridge with me, giving me some hints as to how to keep station in close formation. The *Amphion*, the light-cruiser which carried our Captain (D),¹ was some little distance ahead, and we were all steaming along quite peacefully, expecting to get back to our base in a few hours. Then, without the least warning, the awful thing happened.

Suddenly a great spurt of greyish-white water leapt into the air by the *Amphion's* bows. She seemed to stop in her stride, and an awful sheet of bright greenish-golden flame danced and flickered over her fore part, almost obscuring it from view. Next the thudding, booming roar of a heavy explosion, the shock of which, reverberating

¹ Captain (D), i.e. the Captain in command of a destroyer flotilla.

through and across the water, seemed literally to compress the air and caused our ship to tremble as if we had struck something heavy far below the waterline.

For a moment we both gazed at the spectacle spellbound, for I, at any rate, had no idea what it meant.

“Great Scott!” muttered the Captain at last, leaping at the engine-room telegraph to reduce the speed. “She’s up on a mine! Starboard! Hard-a-starboard, quartermaster!”

Every soul in the ship came bundling on deck to see what had happened, and when the *Lictor* had slowed slightly to port we could see that the *Amphion* was in a bad way. Her fore part, due no doubt to the ignition and explosion of some of the contents of one of the foremost magazines, was blazing furiously, and as she was still moving slowly ahead the flames, fanned by the breeze, were licking all round the bridge and foremost funnel. But the fire was now an ominous orange-red, which showed that the woodwork was burning. She was also settling down by the head, and the bow portion of the ship, which seemed to be detached from the rest of the hull, sloped down at an unnatural angle into the water.

“Her back’s broken!” murmured the skipper. “Poor chaps! I wonder what men they’ve lost?”

We could see men in the after portion of

the ship turning out the boats under the orders of their officers, but forward there were no signs of life at all. Indeed, it seemed impossible that anyone in that part of the ship could possibly have survived that first stunning explosion and the raging inferno of flame which followed it.

We destroyers, meanwhile, turning out our boats with all possible speed, approached the scene to give what help we could. Some of us, the *Lictor* included, lowered our whalers and sent them across, while one destroyer, approaching the stricken vessel's stern, made preparations for taking her in tow.

It must have been about now that we noticed some of the *Amphion's* survivors entering the still blazing fore-castle and returning with shipmates who had been injured by the explosion.

"Good work!" said the skipper, watching a pathetic line of injured and mutilated men hobbling slowly aft to a place of comparative safety with their arms round the necks of their friends. Some, too sorely stricken even to hobble, had to be carried.

It is possible that these gallant fellows who went to the rescue of their shipmates were merely obeying orders. Perhaps they did not understand what frightful risks they were running. But we did, and I held my breath as I watched them, for at any moment a fresh explosion might have hurled them to

eternity. It was a heartrending business, for though we were so close we could do so little to help.

Then orders were apparently given for the boats to be lowered and the wounded to be placed in them. This was done without the least signs of undue haste or confusion, the uninjured passing the injured down, and then falling in on deck and waiting for further orders. They went about their work exactly as if they were carrying out a practice evolution, and it made me proud to watch them.

The *Amphion* was sinking fast. Within about twelve minutes of the first explosion the bows were nearly under water, while the stern, due to the flooding of the compartments forward, was slowly lifting in the air. Still her commanding officer would not give up all hope of saving his ship, and still men remained fallen in on deck waiting for orders.

But it was hopeless. In another five minutes the ship was settling rapidly, and then it was that final orders were given for her to be abandoned. The men clambered down into the boats, their officers followed, the Captain, who had been hurled from the bridge and momentarily stunned by the explosion, being the last to go.

I saw him, a solitary figure, hatless and with his coat torn to ribbons, standing on deck waiting to leave. He lingered for a moment, turning half round as if to say

good-bye to the ship he loved so well, and then, with a shrug of his shoulders, climbed slowly down the ship's side into the waiting boat. I could imagine his feelings.

The ship was just abandoned in time, for within a few minutes of the last boat leaving her side there came the dull crash of another explosion. Whether or not it was caused by a mine, or by the fire reaching a magazine, I cannot say, but once more there came a sheet of livid flame, followed this time by a billowing cloud of greasy, dun-coloured smoke, while masses of riven debris hurtled skywards to come raining down in the sea all round us.

The cloud of vapour hung there for some time, dense and impalpable, and when at last it drifted away on the gentle breeze the bows of the ill-fated ship were no longer visible. Gradually, very gradually, the stern, rearing itself in the air until we could see the propellers and rudder, sank lower and lower, until at last, within five and thirty minutes of striking the first mine, the *Amphion* disappeared for ever.

She went down quietly. There was no great vortex or swirling of the waters, merely a few big air bubbles breaking on the surface, a discoloured, oil-strewn area of sea covered with scattered flotsam, and a thin haze of steam and smoke hanging in the air over the spot where she had vanished.

“Poor old *Amphion*!” murmured the

skipper huskily. The sight of the vessel sinking had damped even his buoyant spirits.

One officer and over 100 men had gone to their last long rest with their ship. Sixteen officers and 135 men were rescued, but many of these were badly burnt and others were suffering from shock.

We returned to our base with the survivors, sadder but wiser men. We had seen over a hundred of our flotilla-mates, ordinary human beings like ourselves, blasted to death in the twinkling of an eye. It gave us furiously to think. It taught us to realise that war, our legitimate trade, was no light-hearted picnic.

CHAPTER X

A CERTAIN LIVELINESS

§ 1

IT was about a fortnight after the loss of the *Amphion* that we were mixed up in what the Admiralty official communiqué was pleased to refer to as "a certain liveliness" in the southern portion of the North Sea. The phrase rather tickled our fancy when we read it in the newspapers the day afterwards. We rather wished that the gentleman who wrote the announcement for the press had been with us while his "liveliness" was yet in progress, for to me personally it was far too ticklish a business to be really amusing, and I don't in the least mind admitting it. After all, nobody likes being shot at, and it was the first time in my life I had ever been under fire.

It so happened that our flotilla was patrolling a certain section of sea in which it was expected that the enemy might appear. It does not matter exactly whereabouts it was, but we—the destroyers, that is—

were employed on what somebody in authority called an "observation patrol," and were spread out in a long line abreast the better to cover the area. We were steaming to and fro at 15 knots, and our instructions were very simple. We were there primarily to keep a look-out, though if we sighted hostile destroyers, or anything weaker than ourselves, we were at liberty to concentrate and to attack. If, on the other hand, we tumbled across a light cruiser or anything larger, we were to cut and run for it, while reporting the enemy's movements by wireless.

It was one of those rare North Sea days with a grilling sun, a hard blue sky, and a flat, oily calm sea. What little breeze there was came in fitful puffs from the south-eastward, and since the early morning the heat had caused a slight mist or haze which hung over the horizon and narrowed our range of vision to about five miles.

I had kept the forenoon watch on the bridge, and except for our next-door neighbours three miles to port and starboard, respectively, and a Dutch trawler or two, nothing had hove in sight to relieve the monotony of our vigil. We had, of course, been intercepting the usual undecipherable Telefunken wireless messages made by the enemy's ships and shore stations, but as this was of daily occurrence, and the signals did not seem unduly strong, thereby telling

us of the close proximity of the sender, we attached no particular importance to them.

It was a wearisome business altogether, and the skipper and I had spent the greater part of the morning in trying to keep cool, and in sending rude messages to the cook on account of the ghastly whiffs of boiling cabbage emanating from the galley underneath the charthouse. We strafed the cabbage odour pretty successfully, but as it was almost immediately succeeded by the capsizing of a frying pan and the consequent abominable effluvia of burning fat, we were very little better off.

At half-past twelve I was relieved and went below to lunch, after which I retired to my cabin, clambered into my bunk, and promptly went off to sleep with a book in my hand and a pipe in my mouth. The day was so piping hot, moreover, and the sea so calm that I had foolishly opened both the scuttles over my bunk.

It was soon after two o'clock, as I lay peacefully slumbering in my shirt sleeves, that I was rudely awakened by a deluge of water pouring in upon me, due to the helm being suddenly put hard over to starboard and the ship heeling over. I slammed the scuttles to at once and screwed them home, though not before I and my bedding were both well soaked. I was still contemplating the mournful necessity of changing every stitch of clothing, however,

when I noticed from the throbbing of the propellers that the ship had increased speed. I sat there for a moment with my feet dangling over the edge of my bunk wondering vaguely what had happened, when suddenly there came the trampling of feet overhead as some men rushed aft. I pricked my up ears, for they seemed to be in an unusual hurry, when there came a howl from Mr. Cotter, who had relieved me on watch, from the top of the hatch leading to our flat.

“Down below there!” he bellowed throatily. “Enemy in sight! Action stations!”

I jumped out of my bunk on the instant, crammed my feet into a pair of bedroom slippers, flung on my monkey-jacket and a pair of glasses round my neck, and was out of my cabin and up the ladder in about five seconds. Even as I reached the deck I heard overhead a shrill, piercing “Whe-e-w! . . . Whe-e-e-w! . . . WH-E-E-E-W!” like an express train tearing through a station. Almost immediately afterwards came several sounds which I can only describe as liquid thuds, and simultaneously, to my intense surprise, four or five dazzling white plumes of spray leapt out of the sea barely two hundred yards in front of my very eyes.

Next the “Boom . . . boomp! . . . Boomp, Boomp, Boomp!” of guns fired in an

irregular salvo, and I must confess that at that moment I suddenly felt as if my inside were made of jelly.

I summoned up the courage to look round to starboard, where, about 9,000 yards distant, and silhouetted against the mist on the horizon beyond, I saw a lean-looking light cruiser with black smoke rolling from her four funnels and a great white bow wave piled up round her stem. She was travelling at full speed, and there was not much doubt as to her nationality. Her light grey colouring and build told me at once she was German, and even as I watched I saw the orange sparkle of five or six gun flashes break out from her side as she fired another salvo.

Once more that terrifying, whining shriek as the projectiles drove towards us, and then another cluster of spray fountains followed at once by the muffled, metallic-sounding crash of explosions in the water, and an infernal humming, buzzing, and droning as splinters came hurtling through the air. Then again the more distant rumble of the reports.

Nobody on board was hit, but this time the shell, instead of passing overhead, had exploded in the sea about a hundred yards short. The next salvo would probably hit unless we altered course to avoid it.

How long I stood there before rushing along the upper deck to get to my station

on the bridge I haven't a notion. Very likely it was no more than six or seven seconds, but as I made my way forward the noise was positively deafening. It was an ear-splitting medley in which the roaring of our stokehold fans as we increased speed, and the humming of our turbines, predominated, but above these sounds came the intermittent rumble and thunder of the hostile guns, that awe-inspiring crescendo as the shell came driving towards us, and the shattering roar of their explosion as they burst.

My impressions of what happened are very confused, though I fully expected the ship to be hit before I had even time to get forward. But we were turning and twisting as we went, and out of the corner of my eye I caught a fleeting glimpse of the third salvo falling into the sea. It was still short, thank heaven!

I eventually arrived on the bridge perfectly breathless, to find the skipper smoking a pipe, giving an occasional order to the coxswain at the wheel, and gazing now and then through his binoculars at our formidable antagonist. He told me afterwards that he also had felt like a blancmange at this time, and that the pipe in his mouth was "mere eyewash" to steady his nerves; but he certainly looked quite cool, and his example made me feel much better.

"Port fifteen!" he ordered, as the cruiser

fired again. "Port, man! Port!" as the coxswain, not hearing what he said, looked up enquiringly. "For goodness' sake don't get the scatters, Bewles! I'm trying to dodge her salvoes!"

The coxswain, with perspiration oozing from every pore, wiped his face with a grimy hand and nodded.

And dodge the salvoes we did, for the next bouquet of shell fell into the sea in the very spot where we should have been if we had not altered course.

Before very long we were stern on to the cruiser, who, turning after us, came pounding along in our wake. We obviously had the legs of her, for she was still at a distance of about 8,000 yards. But four sea miles is not a very long range for a naval gun, even a German 4.1, and flash after flash darted out from her forecastle as she fired those of her weapons which would bear.

The *Lictor*, steaming at nearly 30 knots to her 25 or so, must have presented a very difficult target, and as luck would have it not one of her projectiles actually hit us. Nevertheless the shooting was quite accurate enough to be extremely unpleasant, for shell after shell pitched to the right, to the left, or astern, and so close that time after time the spray they flung up actually fell on to our decks and drenched some of our men to the skin.

"Shall we open fire with the after gun,

sir?" I asked the Captain, who, with his mouth to a voice-pipe, was busy dictating a message to the wireless office below.

"Eh, what's that?" he enquired.

I repeated my query.

"She's nearly out of range," he said rather doubtfully, measuring the distance by eye. "However, tell 'em they can fire a round or two if they like. It'll steady the men. They're not to waste ammunition, though!"

I joyfully passed the necessary orders through, and a moment later the ship gave a little shiver as the after 4 inch, with her muzzle cocked well up in the air, went off with a crash and a sheet of flame. It was the first shot we had ever fired in anger, but whereabouts the projectile went I never saw.

The range now began to lengthen out as our superior speed told, but still the enemy continued to fire an occasional round or two in our direction, though her shooting became more and more erratic as time went on. Two of our other destroyers, meanwhile, one on our starboard quarter and the other on our port beam, and both steaming at full speed on much the same course as ourselves, were also in action at very long range, for I could see the flashes of their guns as they fired, and the splashes of their projectiles falling some distance short of the German. The latter, also, was firing at them, though her shell, too, were pitching wide of their mark.

From our movements and the wireless signal I judged that the skipper was trying to lead the enemy to the westward in the hope of bringing her into action with one of our light-cruisers which lay in that direction, and presently, when the firing at us had ceased and he eased the revolutions a little to keep our pursuer well in view, I quite understood what was happening.

"You needn't be alarmed," he grinned, guessing my thoughts. "We've got the legs of her, and the perishin' old rattle-trap doesn't seem to be able to hit us, anyhow. If only we can get her to go on chasing us we may run into the *Dauntless*. She'll give her toko! Keep a good look-out for her ahead, signalman!"

But he spoke too soon, for a minute or two later I saw him glancing dubiously astern and then at the water alongside.

"Singe my wig and whiskers!" he suddenly burst out. "What revolutions¹ have you got on that telegraph, Munro?"

"Five-seventy, sir," I told him. "About 26 knots."

"Quite sure?"

¹ The speed of a man-of-war is adjusted by the number of revolutions per minute of the engines or turbines. A table on the bridge gives the revolutions for each knot of speed, the requisite number being transmitted to the engine-room by means of a telegraph in which a pointer is made to travel round a graduated dial. Speed for speed, the shaft of a turbine revolves far faster than that of an ordinary reciprocating engine.

“Positive, sir.”

“I’ll be jiggered if we’re going that!” he exclaimed. “Messenger! Go down to the engine-room and ask ’em if there’s anything the matter. Tell ’em we’re not going anything like the proper speed! Hurry!”

The man left on his errand, while the skipper, casting an occasional anxious look astern, started to walk up and down the narrow bridge. I could see from his manner that he was rather perturbed.

“Well?” he asked impatiently, when the man came back.

“I saw the engineer orficer, sir, and ’e says ’as ’ow one of the oil-fuel feedin’ pipes in number two stoke-’old ’as got choked. ’E can’t go no more’n twenty-two or twenty-three knots until . . .”

“Christians awake!” ejaculated the Captain. “Can’t go more than twenty-three?”

“No, sir. But ’e’s dishin’ it up as quick as ’e can, sir, but don’t know how long it’ll take!”

The skipper whistled uneasily and looked astern again, where I saw that our pursuer, from about 10,000 yards, had now closed in to 9,000 and still seemed to be overhauling us hand over fist.

“Go down and tell Mr. Prettyman that I am quite confident he’ll do all he can,” he said to the messenger. “But tell him there’s a fat beast of a German astern of us who’ll catch us if we don’t watch it!”

The bluejacket ran down the ladder with rather a scared expression.

"If that doesn't make 'em hurry up I don't know what will!" he added to me with a short laugh. "Lord love a duck! If that fellow there gets within 6,000 yards he'll hammer us to blazes!"

"She's already started, sir," said I, and I once more saw the tell-tale orange flashes as she fired in our direction.

"Boom . . . Burrp . . . Boomp!" went her guns. "Burrp . . . Boomp . . . BOOM!"

They were shooting fast, and again there came that nerve-racking screeching in the air as shell came flying towards us. Column after column of water spouted out of the sea astern. They seemed alarmingly close.

"Oh, Christmas! This'll never do!" Lennon muttered. "Hard-a-port, Bewles! Steady her on north fifteen west. Sub, pass down a range and deflection to the guns, and open fire as soon as you can! She's coming up fast, and if we have the luck to hit her we may shake her off. I'm going to dodge her salvoes as best I can."

We steadied on a new course roughly at right angles to the first, and the ship trembled and shook as our guns opened fire. But those ominous splashes from the cruiser's shell seemed to follow our every movement. They came nearer and nearer, until I once more heard the jagged splinters whirr-

ing and humming overhead. I felt rather sick.

Then, with a sound like a thunder-clap, a shell hurtled close over the bridge and plumped into the water about 50 feet the other side of our bows. Another, passing over us amidships, fell close alongside the first, while three or four more landed between 10 and 70 yards short. They burst, but had been descending at such a steep angle on account of the long range, that their splinters, instead of continuing their forward flight, expended their energy in flying almost vertically into the air. Consequently, when they came down again they fell with the force of gravity only, and I heard some of them clanging, rattling, and thudding on our steel deck and against the funnels. Had the range been a little shorter and the trajectory flatter, that salvo would have made a shambles of the men on deck.

We were being straddled. The enemy had our exact range, and but for that merciful gap of about 30 yards we should have been hit.

“Starboard fifteen! Steer due west!” I heard the skipper say coolly.

He was avoiding the next salvo, and sure enough, when it came, it spouted into the sea astern and slightly beyond us.

Our guns ceased firing for the moment as the ship swung round on her heel. The

alteration of course brought the enemy on to our port quarter, but she seemed terribly close, barely more than 6,000 yards. And her guns were very busy.

Another consignment of nastiness flew overhead as she started to find the range again, but all the time our two after guns were blazing away at her. I was watching their splashes drawing nearer and nearer to their target, when, quite suddenly, there came a deep red gout of flame and a cloud of black smoke on her forecastle. One of our shells had gone home on her, at any rate. I could almost have shouted for joy.

But she still came on. From 6,000 yards she drew in to 5,500, and then to 5,000, a short $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles. Her forecastle gun had evidently been knocked out, for it was firing no longer, but yawing slightly off her course every now and then to bring her broadside guns to bear she let fly an occasional salvo. Her shooting was slower than before and not quite so accurate, so that it seemed that those on board her, confident that we were permanently crippled and could never escape, were saving their ammunition to polish us off at close quarters.

Unless the Chief got the ship travelling at her proper speed again, our destruction seemed nothing but a matter of time.

Our guns were firing as fast as they could, and several times between the rifts of smoke I saw the unmistakable ruby flash and the

cloud of yellow or black smoke caused by a shell driving home and exploding. We were hitting her, and that was always something, for she had not hit us up to the present.

Then, annoyed at her punishment, she yawed again and opened up another heavy burst at no more than 4,500 yards. Our helm went over as soon as we saw the flashes, but it was by far the most accurate and galling fire we had yet endured, for the projectiles, missing us literally by feet, seemed to be rushing through the air and pitching in the sea all round us at the same moment, so that there was no dodging them.

But the skipper had yet another card to play, for I saw him put his hand on an electric push communicating with the engine-room and press it up and down. He then gazed aft, nonchalantly sucking his thumb, and I saw that our smoke was becoming momentarily thicker and thicker.

I did not grasp what was happening, until, thirty seconds later, the funnels were vomiting forth a rolling, billowing cloud of inky blackness, so thick and so solid-looking that it seemed as if one could almost walk upon it.

By using the helm very cleverly he then manœuvred to keep this impenetrable pall between us and the enemy, and presently the whining of the hostile shell ceased. Their gunlayers could see nothing to fire at. We

were saved for the present. I wiped my streaming face and breathed again.

Then, a few minutes later, the Chief, his face, hands, and brown overalls streaked and saturated with grime and oil-fuel, appeared on the bridge.

"I've cleared that confusticated pipe!" he exclaimed breathlessly, wiping his face with a filthy handkerchief. "I'm whacking her up all I know. Lord!" in an undertone, "I could do with a drink!"

I could have fallen on his neck and kissed him, so great was my relief.

"Good on you, old boy!" the skipper laughed light-heartedly, patting him affectionately on the arm. "You shall have a bucket of bubbly wine at my expense. You only did it just in time, though. Another minute or two and . . ." He shrugged his shoulders suggestively and pointed at the sea.

"Was it as bad as all that?" asked Prettyman with a yawn.

"Bad! I should jolly well think it was, old bird. You should have seen the bricks flying about. If I hadn't remembered to ask you to put up that nice little drop of smoke we'd have been doing a V.C. act by now. Sinking with our colours nailed to the mast, and all the rest of it!"

"War's a dirty business!" grumbled the engineer officer. "And me with a wife and three children. Anybody got a gasper?"

I handed him his cigarette and helped him to light it. "Thanks," he said, puffing out the smoke with a contented sigh. "And now I'd better be going below again in case anything else goes fut. By the way, though," he added. "Next time you want me to put up smoke you might make the proper signal, sir."

"Proper signal!" said the skipper. "What d'you mean, Chief?"

"Only that you kept on pressing that push of yours three times instead of four. Three, if you remember, is the signal for 'You are making too much smoke.'"

"I'm sorry, old boy," apologised the Captain, laughing. "I clean forgot. But how did you know what we wanted?"

"I didn't know," said Prettyman, disappearing down the ladder. "I guessed!"

We had not suffered one direct hit, and though splinters had rained upon us the only damage was a dent or two in the funnels and three minute holes in the canvas bridge screens. Moreover, our sole casualties were one black eye and a swollen nose, due to two sailors taking a fancy to the same shell splinter which had dropped on deck at their feet. They both wanted it as a memento, and there was a difference of opinion as to which of them it rightly belonged.

And when next we saw our enemy she was a small blur on the horizon streaking back to Germany as fast as she could.

The other destroyers and ourselves went after her, but we never got near her, as the fog shut down and concealed her from view.

“Liveliness!” grunted the skipper, reading the newspaper the next day. “Lord, if that’s what they call it, let’s try something else!”

He passed the whole affair off as a huge joke, but I am tolerably certain that every officer and man in the *Lictor* realised that only a merciful Providence, aided and abetted by the Captain himself, had saved us. And Providence rarely helps those who don’t help themselves.

CHAPTER XI

HELIGOLAND

§ 1

“**HERE,**” said our Lieutenant-Commander, airily waving a pair of closed dividers over a chart of the North Sea before finally depositing their business ends on a small speck of an island tucked well in under the German coast.

“Here’s Heligoland, which, as you’ll all know, is heavily fortified and is used as a destroyer base. This,” as the pointer travelled eastward, “is Brunsbüttel, the North Sea entrance to the Kiel Canal. Here is Cuxhaven, another destroyer base, and this is Wilhelmshaven, where they probably keep some of their High Sea Fleet. At the present moment we are somewhere about here.”

He indicated a spot about half-way across the chart and to the west-south-westward of the roughly equilateral triangle whose points are formed by the island of Sylt, to the north; Borkum, to the south; and the entrance to the River Elbe, to the eastward.

“At daylight to-morrow we shall arrive about here,” and the pointer stopped within a few miles of Heligoland.

The speaker looked round at his audience with that peculiar half smile of his and the characteristic wrinkles round the corners of his eyes. His cap, as usual, was slightly askew, and he wore his invariable sea-going war-time garments, consisting of a pair of disreputable grey flannel trousers, a light blue flannel shirt, an absolutely villainous monkey jacket, with a pair of glasses slung round his neck.

It was a homely little gathering. The skipper had come off the bridge for a few minutes to hold one of his “mother’s meetings,” during which, when any particular operation was about to take place, it was his habit to explain to the ship’s company what was going to happen.

“Tell ’em what’s going on,” he used to say, “and they’ll all be as keen as mustard. Tell ’em nothing, and you can’t expect ’em to take much interest. It’s not human nature.”

He was perfectly right, but I doubt if even he quite realised how well his little war lectures went down, or how much his hearers appreciated being taken into his confidence. I did, for I sometimes heard the remarks which were passed after he left.

And now, as he paused and looked at the chart, the men remained silent in rapt at-

tention, eager to drink in every word. There were quite fifty or sixty of them present, nearly all the crew, in fact, crowded in the little space between the galley and the fore-castle mess-deck. And a very representative collection they were: engine-room artificers in their working overalls, petty officers, seamen in their leather sea-boots and lammy coats,¹ stokers in grimy flannel shirts and oily fearnought trousers, officers' stewards, and even "cookie" in his white jacket and apron. Some sat tailor-fashion on the deck or knelt. Others stood, with those behind craning over their shoulders and breathing heavily into their ears so as not to miss a single word. They were all interested.

"Our submarines are going nosing round about here on the surface at daylight tomorrow," the skipper continued, wagging the compass points round about Heligoland. "They're the bait, and we hope that the enemy's destroyers will chase 'em out to sea. Our little bunch—the two light-cruisers and the destroyers, that is—go in astern of the submarines to mop up anything the Germans send out. The battle-cruisers with a light-cruiser squadron, and another lot of older cruisers, are further out to sea to support us in case we get it in the neck."

¹ Lammy coats. The name given to the thick fearnought watch coats with hoods provided by the Government for use at sea.

“It is known that the Germans have patrols out,” he went on, “so we’re out for blood, and are practically certain to have fun of some kind. It is our job to drive in their patrols and to sink and destroy what we can, and though it looks quite a simple little business on the chart, its success or otherwise naturally depends on what we tumble up against.”

The audience stiffened themselves and looked at each other with doubtful grins on their faces.

“We may be able to walk straight through them, but if we barge into anything big, like a cruiser, it is quite possible that we may have to cut and run for it. At any rate, at daylight to-morrow the chances are a hundred to one that we shall find ourselves going into action, so you must all be on the top line. Has anyone any questions to ask?”

They shook their heads in silence.

“Well, I don’t think I’ve very much more to tell you, except to say that I know you’ll all do your best to—er—keep up the good name of the ship. You’ve been under fire before, and I have no doubt that you’ll do well this time, but I hope there won’t be any more choked pipes in the boiler rooms, and that you will not”—he laid some emphasis on the word—“forget to take the caps off the lyddite shell before you put them into the guns. . . .”

The men tittered, for it was common knowledge that on the occasion when the German light-cruiser had chased us, at least four lyddite shell had been fired in the excitement of the moment with their caps still in place, in which condition it was extremely improbable that they could have burst.

“Look out it doesn’t happen again,” he went on to say, “because it’s rather important. Another thing. You’ll be piped to breakfast rather earlier than usual, probably half-past four or thereabouts, as it’s a good plan to go into action with something inside you. I think that’s all . . . no, I forgot. I advise you all to wear clean underclothes.”

Somebody was evidently amused.

“You may laugh,” the Captain said, smiling himself. “But clean clothes are very important. If you get wounded and a bit of dirty rag gets carried in to your wound the results are very unpleasant. They found that in the Russo-Japanese war, so bear it in mind. That’s all, and good luck to everybody.”

“And the same to you, sir,” in an appreciative chorus.

“You take us alongside them Germans and see what we gives ’em, sir,” came an enthusiastic voice from behind. “We’ve bin waitin’ for this ’ere!”

“And I’m very glad to hear it,” returned

the Captain, his eyes twinkling. "I've no doubt you'll give 'em the time of their lives!"

There was a general laugh and the gathering broke up in a buzz of excited talk.

I am not likely to forget that particular "mother's meeting." It took place on the evening of August 27th, and within four and twenty hours we had been amply blooded.

§ 2

Long before daylight the next morning our men had eaten their first meal and had mustered at their action stations. The weather was fine, with hardly a breath of wind or a ripple on the water, and when at last the first signs of dawn came out of the east every soul in the ship who happened to be on deck was straining his eyes in the dim half-light in a vain endeavour to probe the thin mist which overlay the surface of the sea. It was an exciting and anxious time, for Heligoland was not very far away, and at any moment we might see a dark blurred patch betokening the presence of a hostile cruiser or destroyer.

Daylight came, and still there was nothing in sight, though as we gradually drew in towards the land the haze thickened, until at last we could see no further than about three miles. Still we steamed on, getting nearer

and nearer to our objective. The suspense of waiting for we knew not what became well-nigh intolerable.

I was on the bridge. An hour passed, and just before seven o'clock I found myself gazing idly at a number of those little black-and-white dipper duck, parrot-beaked puffins, as I believe they are really called. They were evidently married puffins, for they swam about in pairs, each little man with his wife, and as we came up to them they regarded us with frightened eyes, and, not liking our looks, reared their little pointed sterns in the air and disappeared with a series of "plops" to the quiet depths below. Poor wee birds! I fear we disturbed their happy idyll, but I gazed at them with some interest. There was some romance attached to them, for we were now so close to the enemy's coast that they must be German puffins, not the ordinary common-or-garden British ones we were so familiar with.

But my reverie was interrupted by a sudden exclamation from the Captain, and looking ahead I saw the long shape of a hostile destroyer half veiled in the mist to the eastward. She was two and a half or three miles away, and the *Arethusa*, our leader, sighted her at much the same time, for the next moment a string of flags went up to her masthead.

"Fourth division's been ordered to chase to the eastward, sir," said our signalman

unconcernedly, reading the flags through his telescope.

The four destroyers, of whom we were not one, dashed off at full speed with a suddenly-increasing cloud of smoke and the white water piled up astern of them. They looked for all the world like a pack of thoroughbred terriers after a rat, and the German, quite rightly, turned tail and made off. We watched, breathless with excitement.

Then, one by one, within a minute or so of our sighting the first, the shapes of more and more hostile torpedo-craft loomed up through the haze. Another signal from the *Arethusa*, followed by a slight alteration of course to cut them off from their base, and the orange flash and a cloud of brown smoke as her foremost six-inch gun gave tongue. The deep roar of the report came to our ears. It was the first shot of the battle, and before we saw the distant splash of the shell and heard the dull rumble of its explosion, we were going hell-for-leather after them. The Germans, considerably outnumbered, did the only possible thing—they sought safety in flight.

“This,” exclaimed the skipper, his eyes glistening, “is going to be a little bit of all right!”

It is quite useless for me to attempt to describe the battle as a whole from my own personal observation. It was no set and ordered engagement in which squadrons and

flotillas fought each other in regular formation, but developed into more or less of a mêlée, a series of scattered, rather confused ship-to-ship encounters fought over a large area and in which we had little idea of what went on beyond our immediate range of vision. And the visibility, to add to the uncertainty, was no more than six thousand yards at any time of the day.

For nearly an hour we chased numerous destroyers and torpedo-boats which were making off as hard as they could go in the direction of Heligoland. We fired heavily upon them as we went, but though our shell could be seen pitching in the water and exploding all round them, it was impossible to see the result of the shooting on account of the mist and the long range. Still, I don't think they got off scathless.

It was at about eight o'clock, however, that we suddenly saw the blurred outlines of two heavier vessels on the port bow of the *Arethusa*. One of them had four funnels and the other two, and the next minute, when the gun flashes started to sparkle up and down their sides, we knew them for German light-cruisers. The *Arethusa*, concentrating most of her fire on the nearest, promptly engaged them both, and for fully a quarter of an hour there ensued an unequal fight in which the British ship, a brand-new vessel, by the way, which had only left the dockyard a short forty-eight hours before,

was pitted against two enemies of her own size, not to mention several destroyers which presently joined them. We British destroyers, though rather scattered, did what we could to equalise the business, though the range was rather too long for our 4-inch guns to be really effective.

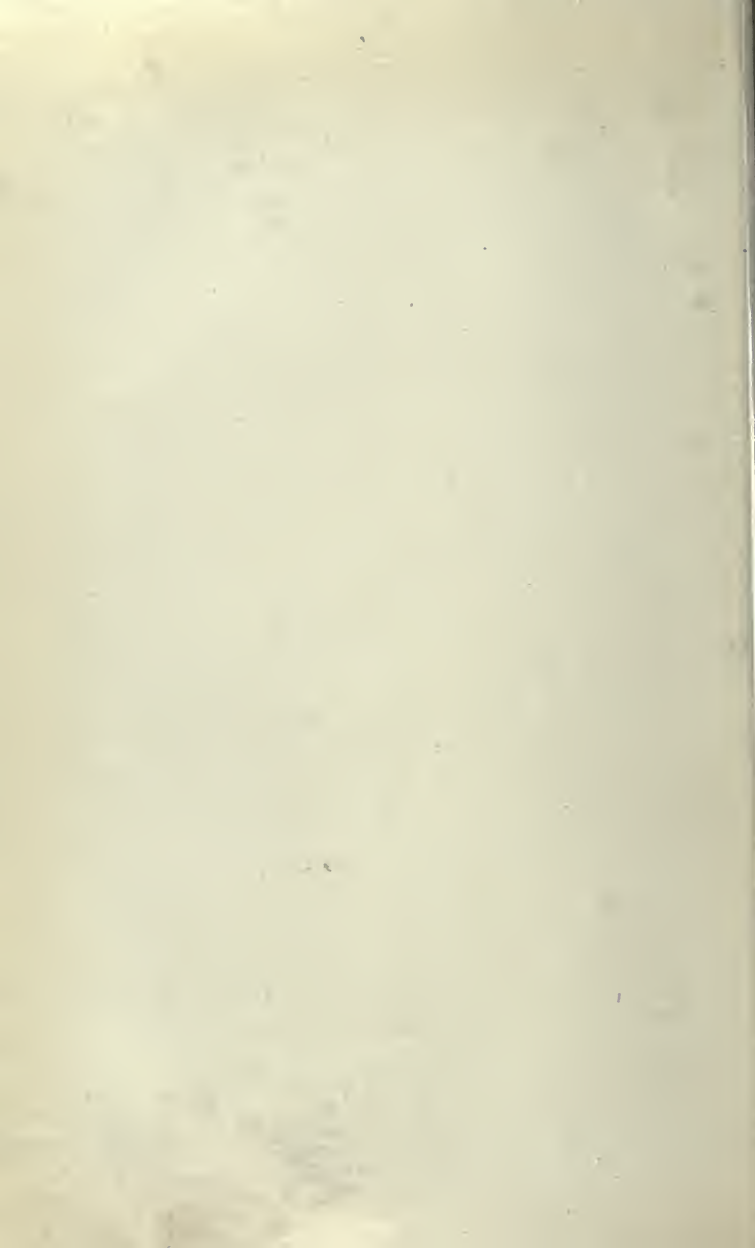
I shall never forget the magnificent spectacle of the *Arctusa* in her first action. At times her entire grey shape was literally blotted out by the shell spouting into the sea all round her, but then she would emerge from the turmoil of spray for an instant with her guns still blazing merrily away. She was hit again and again, and now and then through the yellow cordite smoke and the columns of water we saw the ruby-red flashes and clouds of black smoke as projectiles struck her and exploded. How she could endure such a volume of fire without being sunk seemed nothing short of a miracle, but she hung on to her immediate antagonist, the two-funneller, with a grip which never relaxed, until at last they were mutually hammering each other at a range of barely more than 3,000 yards, or $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles. It was too hot to last.

The German, though she fought gallantly, was also having a bad time, for on several occasions through the rifts in the smoke we saw the British shell driving home and bursting on board her. Then at last there came a bright greenish-golden flash as a six-inch



JSH

"I SHALL NEVER FORGET THE ARETHUSA IN HER FIRST ACTION."



projectile exploded underneath her bridge and demolished it. The blow evidently disabled her, for when next we caught sight of her she had discontinued the engagement and was making off to the eastward.

Just before this our other light-cruiser, the *Fearless*, which had been detached with some of her destroyers to chase in another direction, came up at full speed and poured a furious fire on the four-funnelled German which was still engaging the *Arethusa*. The four-funneller at once transferred her attention to the *Fearless*, and for some time the two ships were at it hammer and tongs.

I was still watching them, when the skipper took me by the arm and pointed out on the starboard bow. I looked, and there, at a bare three and a half miles, was a clump of red cliffs glimmering through the haze. They could be only one thing—Heligoland!

I held my breath and waited, expecting at any instant to see flashes as the heavy guns on the island opened fire. But they never did. They did not fire a single shot, and the next thing that happened was a general signal for all ships and destroyers to retire to the westward and to reform on the *Arethusa*. We did so with some thankfulness. A nearer approach to those red cliffs would have been distinctly unhealthy.

For some time we steamed to the westward, while the *Arethusa*, which had suffered a severe gruelling at the hands of her two

opponents, did what she could to repair her damage. It was not until afterwards, when we heard the full story, that we realised what a terrible hammering she had sustained, for, hit repeatedly, she had had many casualties and incurred damage to the machinery and boilers so that her speed was considerably reduced. But not only this: every gun and torpedo-tube in the ship, with the exception of one 6 inch, had been disabled, while a bursting shell, setting alight to some ammunition on deck, had started a fire which set the woodwork in a blaze before it was finally extinguished.

But her commanding officer, our leader, was not the type of man to throw up the sponge and to retire from the scene of action because his ship was temporarily *hors de combat*. On the contrary, he promptly set to work to replenish his deck supply of ammunition, to get his guns into working order, and to strike his wounded below, confident that before very long he would meet another enemy. And he did.

At ten o'clock or thereabouts we received a wireless signal to tell us that the two destroyers working with the submarines inshore of us were being chased by light-cruisers, whereupon the *Arethusa*, *Fearless*, and all available destroyers present swung round to go to their assistance. But nothing came of it, for after proceeding in their direction for about half an hour we were

once more dangerously close to Heligoland and had received no further news. So there was nothing for it but again to alter course to seaward.

But we were by no means out of the mill yet. At about eleven o'clock, by which time the *Arethusa* had luckily been able to repair most of her guns and fill up her shell racks, a hostile four-funneller suddenly hove up out of the mist and opened a very heavy fire, concentrating on the *Arethusa*. The situation, on account of the latter vessel's damage, was rather critical, but both she and the *Fearless* returned the fire, while some destroyers were ordered to close in on the enemy and to attack with torpedoes. They dashed off at top speed with shell splashing all round them, and the German, not liking the look of affairs, sheered off to avoid them and disappeared in the mist.

We were not free of our unwelcome friend yet, for in less than ten minutes she reappeared from another direction and again opened fire. Our two cruisers answered as before, hitting her frequently and doing her great damage, while another bunch of destroyers sped off to attack with torpedoes.

How the *Arethusa* escaped being sunk at this time was nothing short of a miracle. She seemed literally smothered in splashes and bursting shell, though, in the words of the official report, "salvo after salvo fell

between ten and thirty yards short, but not a single shell struck."

Providence was on our side that day, for after a brief action the German, badly damaged, made off in the direction of Heligoland.

About five minutes later another enemy appeared, and this time it was the *Mainz*, one of the crack shooting ships of the German Navy. She opened fire at once, to which the *Arethusa* and *Fearless* replied. We also blazed away at her, but what the result was I never knew, for just then a signal went up.

"Division's been ordered to attack with torpedoes, sir!" the signalman suddenly shouted.

"Thank you, Giles," said the Captain, perfectly coolly. "Sub, whistle down to the tubes and tell them to stand by!"

At the moment he made this remark I was feeling sick, desperately sick, for a salvo of shell had just whizzed close overhead with their devilish howling and screeching, whereat I, unable to restrain myself, ducked. But the skipper, as usual, never turned a hair. He paid no other attention to those beastly projectiles than to wave them aside as if they had been a cloud of gnats. "Confound the fellow!" he said casually. "Why can't he choose something his own size!" I looked at him and marvelled. One would have imagined that he had been at this sort of thing all his life.

There wasn't much time for thinking, for the next moment the leader of our division clapped on full speed and swung round almost at right-angles to the original course. The rest of us, strung out in her wake, followed, and with the old ship throbbing and shaking like a jelly we charged full tilt at the enemy, who instantly concentrated her fire upon us.

Her shooting was excellent, for the splashes were simply vomiting from the sea all round our divisional leader, while every now and then we saw the unmistakable flash of an explosion as she was hit. But still she sped on, until, in the midst of a perfect hail of projectiles, she suddenly altered course and fired a torpedo.

The sea a short distance ahead of us was spouting white water like a fringe of rocky coast in a gale of wind. The enemy was concentrating every gun that would bear on our turning-point, the area through which we must pass before we could bring our torpedo tubes into line to fire. It was an exciting moment.

Another destroyer in the line turned, and I saw the silvery flash of her torpedo as it left the tube. . . . We were steaming nearly thirty knots. That spouting area of sea came rapidly closer.

"Fire when your sights come on!" nodded the skipper, looking at me over his shoulder as I stood at the voice-pipe.

“Starboard fifteen, Bewles!”

I just managed to pass the order through before we entered the terrible zone. The air suddenly became full of howling, screeching, and whining, louder, far louder, than anything we had ever heard before. For no apparent reason, but due, no doubt, to a shell falling short, I suddenly felt myself drenched to the skin. Then the ship shuddered, there came a terrific detonation, and a gout of flame sprang up before my eyes, followed by the sickening stench of explosives. A crash and another roaring detonation from somewhere aft, and all the time the whizzing and humming of splinters and the booming reports of the guns.

The *Mainz* was certainly a good shooting ship, but even now I really don't know all that took place while she paid us her unwelcome attention. It was a ghastly experience. It lasted, perhaps, for a minute or a minute and a half. It seemed more like an interminable nightmare, for seconds passed like hours.

Then the clatter of the guns and the horrible din of the shell grew fainter as we drew out of range and our follower passed through the same ordeal as ourselves. We were no longer being fired at, and to me it felt like coming out of a stuffy, overheated room into the cool outside air. It was a relief!

I had expected the ship to be sunk, or at any rate to be so damaged as to be unable to

steam, but to my intense surprise and joy we still seemed to be travelling at much the same speed as before, and every second took us further and further from those terrible guns and nearer to our own friends.

Then, in the midst of the noise, I heard a dull, rending boom which sounded for all the world like the slamming of a steel, velvet-covered door in a lightly built house, if such a thing can be imagined.

I looked at the Captain enquiringly, and he looked at me.

“Torpedo,” he said abruptly, turning aside and giving another order to the coxswain. “Someone’s got her!”

When I had time to look about me I could see that the *Mainz* was practically done for. She had stopped, and was very much down by the bows, while splashes were darting out of the water all round her. She was blazing furiously amidships, but still the pitiless shell sought her out, for time and time again I saw the sheets and gouts of flame as they struck and exploded.

Next the roar of guns from closer at hand, and our light-cruiser squadron, headed by the *Southampton*, appeared on the scene at full speed to finish her off. In less than five minutes their concentrated fire had reduced the unhappy *Mainz* to little more than a blazing, sinking wreck. One mast and two funnels were knocked overboard, while her port side was riddled like a nutmeg grater

through the holes in which we could see the glare of the inferno inside. Her guns were demolished or flung off their mountings and her deck a chaotic shambles of twisted, riven steel and the bodies of the dead and wounded. The fire amidships was still burning furiously, so that smoke and flame poured from her as from an erupting volcano.

Then, as she faded away into the mist, the firing ceased, and when last I saw her she was sinking by the head and a cruiser and destroyer, both British, were standing by to pick up her survivors. The time was about fifteen minutes past noon.

A bare seven minutes later the *Arethusa* and ourselves were again in action at long range with a fresh antagonist, the four-funnelled light-cruiser *Köln*, when, looming up through the haze, we saw the huge grey shapes of four of our battle-cruisers coming to our assistance at full speed. They were the *Lion*, *Queen Mary*, *Invincible*, and *New Zealand*, and as they came on, grim, menacing, and silent, their huge bulks seemed to fill the whole horizon. Our latest enemy was pointed out to them, whereupon they altered course to get in between her and Heligoland, and presently, when they had vanished in the mist to the eastward, we heard the rolling thunder of their heavy guns. Then silence.

We steamed on to the westward at the *Arethusa's* best speed, and again at one

o'clock in the afternoon and half an hour later the deep rumble of guns came travelling across the water from the eastward as the battle-cruisers sank the *Ariadne* and *Köln*. Then silence again, followed by a general signal from Sir David Beatty—" *Lion* to all ships and destroyers—RETIRE."

The Battle of the Bight was over.

§ 3

Providence had been very kind, for when, at about two o'clock, the Captain sent me down to find what damage and casualties we had sustained, I was able to return with a very satisfactory report. There were no killed, only Mr. Cotter and four men slightly wounded by splinters, and Barter and Higgins, able seamen, and a stoker called Goff, rather worse.

"What!" the skipper ejaculated, staring at me in amazement. "Nobody killed?"

"No, sir. Not one."

"Thank God!" he exclaimed thankfully.

"Lord, what luck! I thought at least half of 'em would be wiped out. How about the ship?"

"Nothing really serious, sir," I told him.

"One shell got us right aft in the stern and burst on deck. The splinters just missed the steering gear, but otherwise it's only torn up the deck and blown some of the side-plating about. Nobody was hurt, and if

this weather holds there's no danger, as all the damage is above the waterline."

"Humph!" he muttered indistinctly, cramming the remains of a corned beef sandwich into his mouth. "And what about this hit forward here? I see old Fanny's got it in the neck, thank heaven!"

"Fanny," I may observe, was our motor-boat, a horrible, one-cylindrical craft which was the bane of our existence, for she gave us an infinite amount of trouble and never by any chance ran when we most particularly wanted her. And even when she did consent to heave round she had a habit of breaking down in a strong tideway miles away from anywhere, and, with her crew exhausting their profane vocabulary, had to be towed ignominiously back to the ship by some good Samaritan of a steamboat. We had tried to get rid of her by fair means and foul. Time and time again, having been damaged, she was sent to the dockyard for survey in the hope that they would supply us with a new and more reliable boat, but as often she had been patched up and returned to us as still serviceable.

The job had been done pretty successfully this time, however. No dockyard on earth could do anything for her, for Fanny, at the hands of a bursting shell, had undergone an operation from which she could never recover. The whole of her midship portion, including the diabolical engine itself, had

been shredded in bits and hurled overboard, and nothing remained but a few splintered, blackened planks hanging mournfully from each davit. She was not a pretty sight.

“Thank goodness!” laughed the skipper. “They’ll jolly well have to give us a new boat this journey!”

So we cast her mangled remains into the North Sea and went on our way rejoicing.

The same shell had torn up the deck and had perforated the foremost funnel with holes of all sizes until it looked like a huge colander. The galley, too, had been knocked endways, and the cooking range, the pots and pans, the men’s dinner, together with much soot and various of the cook’s garments which had been hanging up to dry, were scattered by the four winds of heaven and littered all over the landscape. One of the ammunition supply party, indeed, a stoker, even tried to make out he was wounded because he had been hit a resounding crack on the side of the head by a red-hot, half-baked potato.

It was the splinters from this same projectile which had caused most of our casualties, for the slivers of steel had flown here, there, and everywhere. Moreover, it was only by the sheerest good fortune that the foremost boiler was not put out of action. As it was, our speed was only lessened by a knot or two due to the loss of draught on account of the perforations in the funnel.

So these items, and several small punctures in the starboard side-plating caused by fragments from shell bursting short, were the sum-total of our injuries. We were extremely lucky.

Presently, when the First Lieutenant came on the bridge, and the skipper and myself went below to visit the wounded, we found them all as merry as crickets. They were sitting up in their hammocks smoking cigarettes and arguing loudly with each other as to how much sick leave their respective wounds were worth. We carried no Surgeon-Probationer in those days, and their hurts had all been bandaged by No. 1 and the coxswain, both of whom were supposed to be qualified in First Aid, though the coxswain, at any rate, had very hazy ideas on the subject.

The babel ceased abruptly as the Captain entered the fore-castle.

“Well, Barter,” he said in his best bedside manner, “I’m sorry you’ve been hit. How goes it?”

“Fair to middlin’, thank you, sir,” said the patient, concealing his cigarette and doing his best to look ill. “My legs hurts me a bit when I moves, sir, but I’m all right otherwise.”

“I’m glad of that. We’ll pack you off to hospital as soon as we get in. They’ll soon put you right there.”

“But look here, sir,” Barter went on in

an undertone, looking anxiously round to see that nobody was listening. "The cox'n's starvin' me, sir. He says I'm to have nothin' but bread and milk t'eat till we gets back! I told him it wasn't fair, 'cos my hunger was somethin' crool, and then he given me one o' them there pills of his!"

"A pill!"

"Yessir!"

"But you were hit in the leg, weren't you?"

"Yessir, splinter through the leg above the knee, sir."

"A pill!" the Captain repeated with a frown.

"Yessir. The cox'n says it would take down the inflammation and burnin' feelin's wot he says I've got!"

"Have you got a burning feeling, then?" the skipper inquired.

"No, sir. Only I'm that hungry I could swallow a goat!"

"But did you swallow the pill, Barter?"

"Oh no, sir!" in a voice of deepest indignation. "I dropped it on the deck when the cox'n wasn't lookin'!"

"What is the grievance, then?" the Captain asked, smiling.

"I haven't got no grievance, sir," the patient explained sheepishly, "but I doesn't want to be starved, sir."

Lennon burst out laughing.

"You want a square meal, what?"

“ Yessir.”

“ And what would you call a square meal ? ”

“ Depends, sir.”

“ How d’you mean ? ”

“ Depends on what there is to eat, sir. I could do with three or four kippers, or maybe half a dozen eggs and a slice or two of bacon and some bread and jam, sir. You see, sir,” he added in a whisper, “ it isn’t fair to give me nothin’ t’eat. I had me breakfast at five o’clock this mornin’, and I gets wounded about eleven and my scran ¹ stops automatic. Leastways, that’s what Petty Officer Bewles says, anyhow ! ”

“ All right, Barter, I’ll see what can be done,” said the skipper, chuckling with amusement. “ Perhaps I can find something for you in the wardroom pantry.”

“ I don’t fancy no slops, sir.”

“ I quite understand. Something solid, eh ? ”

“ Yessir,” very gratefully. “ Thank you, sir ! ” and Barter, having achieved his purpose, lay back on his pillow with a satisfied sigh, winked solemnly at a shipmate behind the Captain’s back, and produced another cigarette.

They were all as happy as children at the pantomime, and even Mr. Cotter, who was sometimes inclined to be a bit of a pessimist, was all over smiles when we visited him in

¹ Scran, i.e. food.

his cabin. He had a splinter through the palm of his left hand and a nasty gash in his left forearm. His wounds must have been rather painful, but with the injured members well swathed in bandages, and arrayed in a suit of puce-coloured pyjamas, he was sitting up in his bunk sucking the stub end of a pencil as he composed a letter to his wife.

“Well, sir,” he said proudly, as we left his cabin after asking him how he felt and all the rest of it, “there’s one thing that I do know, and that is that it was OUR torpedo that did for that cruiser!”

Very possibly it was, but at least six other destroyers claimed the same distinction, and for some time afterwards nearly all the gunners (T) in the flotilla went about calling each other names.

Our damage did not necessitate a very long sojourn in the dockyard, and, to our inexpressible relief, we presently acquired a new twin-cylinder motor-boat in place of the defunct *Fanny*. We also got about five days leave, which did not come at all amiss.

I don’t think I need talk of all the various incidents in connection with the “Battle of the Bight,” and which filtered through afterwards. The details of the sinking of the German destroyer *V 187*; the rescuing by Submarine *E 4* of the occupants of a destroyer’s boat which had been lowered to pick up the enemy’s survivors, and then had to be abandoned because a hostile cruiser

appeared on the scene and opened fire at the critical moment ; how one destroyer captain, badly wounded in both legs, fought his ship till the end of the engagement and then remained sitting on a camp-stool on his bridge until six o'clock in the evening before he could be persuaded to go below ; and the case of the destroyer who, badly damaged in her machinery and boilers, and unable to move, was gallantly towed out of action by her mate—these, and other similar happenings, have all been mentioned in the newspapers and the official despatches which came out afterwards.

I do not intend to convey the impression that the engagement was a second Trafalgar, or anything of that kind. It was nothing more nor less than a reconnaissance in force ; but that, in the words of the Admiralty, it was both “fortunate and fruitful,” there is no denying. It was attended by great risk, for the battle was fought in the enemy’s own water and within about twenty-five miles of two powerful naval bases, but yet a kind Providence favoured us, for we lost no ships at all and escaped with the insignificant casualty list of sixty-nine killed and wounded all told. The enemy, on the other hand, lost three light-cruisers, the *Mainz*, *Köln*, and *Ariadne*, while two destroyers were actually seen to sink and many more must have been damaged. The complements of these five vessels must have aggregated at

least 1,200 officers and men, all of whom, with the exception of 330 picked up by our ships, perished.

It was Heligoland, too, which earned for our leader his lower-deck nickname, and for a senior officer to have a pet-name among his men is a sure sign that he is regarded with the greatest affection and confidence. And the name he was unofficially and irreverently christened was "Blood Red Bill. 'Im 'oo looks for trouble!"

CHAPTER XII

ON BUMPS AND OTHER THINGS

§ 1

BEFORE I had been in the *Lictor* for very long, I quite endorsed the skipper's opinion that most "bumps" and "crashes," as he gaily called them, were mere bad joss directly attributable to the evil designs of the Noseless One, and that they could not have been avoided even if the Archangel Gabriel himself had temporarily assumed a naval uniform and had taken charge of the operations. Collisions and groundings in destroyers, if we are to believe the victims thereof, are always brought about by a concatenation of circumstances over which they have no control. They are never anybody's fault, of course not, though not infrequently the members of the resulting Court of Enquiry hold a contrary opinion.

There were very few regrettable incidents, and to my inexperienced mind it was an amazing thing that we did not have more. The southern area of the North Sea in which

we worked was a shallow, desolate region of gales, fogs, and mist, with snow and sleet in the winter, while, as it was war-time, many of the offshore lightships and buoys had been removed and the coast lights were rarely exhibited at night. So, though we never admitted it, we sometimes lost ourselves, and finally made the low-lying coast dangerously close and at some place many miles from where we intended to be. In thick weather we always used the lead, but even so it gave little indication of our whereabouts, for the soundings were much of a muchness all over our domain. So after being at sea for forty-eight hours or more, with never a glimpse of the sun or land, our navigation was often largely a matter of conjecture.

And in bad weather, too, things were even worse. How could it be otherwise when spray and rain together had so soaked the chart that it resembled blotting-paper through the pulpy surface of which the softest B.B.B. pencil drove its way like a ploughshare?

It is one thing to keep an accurate reckoning in a big ship where there is comparatively little movement even in a gale of wind, and the chart can be kept dry. But I soon discovered that it was a totally different job to know your exact whereabouts in foul weather in a destroyer if you were by yourself and were returning to harbour

after doubling and redoubling on your tracks for a couple of days on patrol in the North Sea. The position from which you laid off your course was never too accurate, to start with, and with a heavy sea and half a gale of wind in your teeth you never quite knew what speed you were making good. Moreover, you lived in a perpetual shower-bath of icy spray, and, wet through to the skin, numb with cold, and possibly seasick as well, with the water streaming off your oilskins and percolating through your inner garments until it finally came to rest in your sea-boots, you strove to manipulate your pencil, dividers, and parallel rulers with one hand, while with the other you hung on like grim death to prevent yourself from being hurled headlong by the violent motion. And at night the chances were four to one that the spray got at the electric-light leads, short circuited them, and left you at the critical moment without a glimmer of light in the chart-table. It is therefore not to be wondered at that, on comparing notes afterwards, we sometimes discovered that we had staggered home to our base across a particularly virulent minefield!

When "Mother," our light-cruiser, was with us, things were rather better. She carried a fully qualified navigating officer who could be depended upon to keep an accurate reckoning, even if it snowed saucepans, and

so long as we stuck to her everything in the garden was lovely. But sometimes, just before dark, "Mother" might send us off over the rim of the horizon to examine a feather of smoke or a suspicious sail, and then, if the weather became foggy or darkness came down, we sometimes lost ourselves as successfully as the babes in the wood.

And I, if you please, was the *Lictor's* navigating officer. I almost blush to think of it. I was no Christopher Columbus, and looking back at sundry of our escapades I wonder we ever got home at all. The credit was mostly due to the skipper, I must admit, though he, shaking his head sadly, was sometimes wont to remark that I should bring his bald head in sorrow to the grave.

So singly, in pairs or fours, or with the whole flotilla together in close formation, we careered about the ocean at high speed until we knew, or thought we knew, its every fog-bank and shoal. We never used lights, not even on the darkest nights, and for every collision that actually took place,—and they were few—there were fully twenty narrow squeaks which went unrecorded.

"I say, old chap," somebody would say a day or two later, "weren't you a bit close to us during that alteration of course in the middle watch the night before last?"

"Close!" murmured the other. "My dear fellow, we missed you by a good thirty

feet! Besides, how were we to know you had eased to ten knots, you silly juggins? You never told us."

Often and often at night when I saw the dark mass of another destroyer coming closer and closer I felt my heart rising into my mouth, and hung on to the bridge rails waiting for the crash. Nevertheless, I was pleasantly disappointed, for somehow the skipper always had a premonition when things were going wrong, and invariably appeared on the bridge before these close shaves occurred. And as he had the happy knack of doing the right thing at the right moment we generally succeeded in steering clear without mishap. The captain was a lucky man, and was evidently on excellent terms with the little cherub who sat up aloft.

Bumps, like gout and other ailments, sometimes run in families. Certain destroyer officers are born with golden spoons in their mouths and "brass hats" upon their heads, while others—alas!—the unlucky ones, seem to have spent their infancy with a summons to attend a Court of Enquiry pinned to their swaddling clothes. Indeed, I know of one T.B.D.—wild monkeys will not compel me to divulge her name—who had five collisions, groundings, or accidents, not to mention four Courts of Enquiry, all in six weeks. The commanding officer of that ship finished up by running amok in a fog and removing most of the pavilion from the

end of the promenade pier at a certain well-known watering place. I believe the Mayor and Corporation sued him for damages.

It is as well that such folk should leave the destroyer service and seek the security of larger vessels where others will be responsible for the navigation, though it must have afforded some slight satisfaction to the victim of the pier-pavilion-removing C. of E. (Court of Enquiry, not "Church of England"), when his senior inquisitor was himself haled before another similar tribunal a week or two later for an investigation into the circumstances attending the loss of one of his screw propellers due to striking "sunken wreckage." "Sunken wreckage" covers a multitude of sins. Occasionally it is not sunken wreckage at all, merely rocks, sand, or shingle!

Sometimes, for no apparent reason at all, a destroyer flotilla may be afflicted with an epidemic of bumps like the outbreaks of measles, chicken-pox, and whooping cough we used to have at school. For a year or more all may have been peace, and then, in ten days or a fortnight, there may be a succession of collisions, runnings-ashore, and damaged propellers which no earthly Court of Enquiry can satisfactorily explain, and no "severe displeasure" addressed to the responsible parties by the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty can wholly eradicate.

These epidemics, let me add, sometimes occur during the third month of the year, from which it would seem that hares are not the only animals smitten by March madness.

But it is consoling to know that even the best people sometimes come to grief. It was a very shining light in the destroyer world who, in entering a certain naval port in his first command—one of the old 30-knot destroyers which we will call the *Emu*—took a short cut over a ledge of rocks at low water which the barest inspection of his blue-backed Tide Tables would have told him was altogether inadvisable. He wished to accelerate his arrival in harbour to catch a train, but, as usual, it was a case of more haste less speed, for there came a jar, a bump, and a succession of grinding crashes as he left his twin screws and rudder on the rocks behind him.

“Submitted,” was the irreverent signal he made to the Commander-in-Chief as his ship passed ignominiously up the harbour in tow of a dockyard tug. “Submitted. Have had the misfortune to leave my tail feathers on the Greystone Ledge!”

History says nothing of what the Admiral remarked on receiving this distressing information, but the episode happened in the very early days of destroyers, and there was not even a Court of Enquiry, which was lucky for that very promising destroyer

officer. Perhaps it was luckier, still, however—tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon—that the C. in C. happened to be his connection by marriage. Otherwise . . . well, there is no knowing what might not have happened.

That officer is now a very senior potentate with a “brass hat” and a string of letters after his name. He is an ornament to the Navy and one of its trusted men, so it is well that his one and only indiscretion did not weigh heavily against him.

From which it would seem that there is a chance for all of us, even including myself.

§ 2

I cannot remember how many times during the first few months of the war we, in conjunction with the greater portion of the Grand Fleet, swept and scoured the North Sea in the expectation of finding something hostile. We were constantly at sea, fair weather or foul, rain, hail, or snow, but we seldom had much luck.

Fritz, the German submarine, was constantly with us. He enlivened the monotony by laying mines on the coastal trade routes off the east coast in the hope of bagging merchant ships, and by firing occasional torpedoes at us, the nasty fellow! We, in our turn, hunted Fritz assiduously, but as he had the power of making himself

invisible at any moment, the chances were always in his favour, and the game resolved itself into a sort of blind-man's buff with us as the blind man. He was up to no end of dodges. Sometimes, when he wanted a breather, he hoisted a sail and disguised himself as a fishing vessel, so that he should not be recognised at a distance. Sometimes he appeared dressed up as a tramp steamer, with a dummy funnel and upperworks. Occasionally, too, we sighted him on the surface at dawn in his proper guise, and made full tilt at him in the hope of sinking him by ramming or by dropping explosives on his head, but he generally dipped under the surface before we got there. And then, when once he had disappeared, looking for him was rather like searching for a three-penny piece in the proverbial haystack. Fritz was no fool, not by a very long chalk.

As for the enemy's big ships, those mastodons of the High Sea Fleet into which it was our fervent desire to slip our torpedoes, we hardly ever saw them at all. Brother Bosche, playing his usual game, kept his battleships safe in harbour, while indulging every now and then in one of those sporadic and rather senseless raids with his battle-cruisers against some "heavily fortified" town on the east coast of England. The bombardments of Yarmouth and Hartlepool were legitimate enough, but nobody in his

wildest moments could have called Scarborough or Whitby anything but innocent watering places.

What was the Navy thinking of to allow such goings on? This was the question hurled angrily at my head by a portly, rather apoplectic gentleman who flourished an evening paper in my face in a crowded, first-class railway carriage during a brief period of leave.

“I’ll tell you what the Navy is doing, sir!” chimed in my next-door neighbour rather unexpectedly. He was a ruddy-complexioned, clean-shaven little man in mufti whose face seemed familiar to me.

“I should be very glad if you would, sir!” snorted my attacker contemptuously.

“It’s keeping that fat paunch of yours taut, sir!” observed my champion in a very audible whisper and without moving a muscle of his face. “You ought to thank your lucky stars, sir, that you’ve still the wherewithal to fill it!”

There was a titter of amusement throughout the carriage, while the abundant one rapidly assumed the colour of a beetroot.

“I’m not here to be insulted by you, sir!” he spluttered at last, glaring like a wild beast. “I’ll have you know that I’m . . .”

“Softly, sir. Softly!” chided the little man quietly. “I have no wish to insult you, provided you in your turn do not

insult the Service to which this young gentleman and myself both have the honour to belong. Permit me to give you my card, sir, and let me add that the discussion of naval and military topics in railway carriages is to be discouraged. In fact, I believe the Defence of the Realm Act says it is a punishable offence ! ”

The portly gentleman collapsed like a punctured bicycle tyre and hid his blazing face behind a newspaper, for the card he was handed bore the name of one of our most distinguished Admirals, a man whose history even he must have known, and whose outspokenness was a matter of common knowledge. Moreover, most of our other fellow passengers were military officers who, to judge from their grins, sympathised with us.

And when at last the train slowed up at the next stopping place the disgruntled one, eyeing me viciously as if I were the cause of his discomfiture, made preparations for relieving us of his presence.

“ I wish you a good morning, sir, ” said the quiet little Admiral very sweetly, as the train came to a standstill and the civilian opened the carriage door.

“ Good morning be jiggered, sir ! ” retorted the well-fed gentleman snappishly, hopping out and slamming the door behind him.

“ Tut, tut ! ” murmured the Admiral, his eyes twinkling.

§ 3

One afternoon in January, 1915, we had finished tea and were all in the wardroom amusing ourselves in our usual manner. Outside, it was blowing a howling gale of wind from the north-eastward with frequent blinding flurries of snow and sleet, and even in the harbour in which we lay the sea was so heavy that the ship tugged and strained at her moorings, and we could hold no communication with the shore by boat.

“Thank the Lord we aren’t at sea!” said No. 1 piously, laying down his book for a moment to poke the blazing anthracite stove.

I quite agreed with him.

The Chief, puffing clouds of evil-smelling ship’s tobacco from his inevitable pipe and muttering fiercely to himself, was busy with a jigsaw puzzle amongst the litter of tea-things on the table. No. 1 and myself were trying to read, while the “Doctor”—an ex-medical student who had joined us about a month ago as a Surgeon-Probationer R.N.V.R.—was playing “Demon” patience.

But as luck would have it the skipper, a day or two before, had received a large parcel of books, games, and musical instruments for the “dear sailors” from one of his many female admirers. And amongst the consignment, much to our grief, had been a set of toy bagpipes. I knew what would

happen the moment I clapped eyes on them. The skipper promptly impounded them for his own use, and, forsaking his penny-whistle, spent many dismal hours practising in his cabin with his new toy. And now, sitting cross-legged in an arm-chair, he was giving us a spirited rendering of what he said was "The Bluebells of Scotland." It sounded more like ragtime to me, and the noise was atrocious. I could hardly hear the howling of the wind.

"What does it sound like?" the player suddenly asked the Chief, pausing a moment with his head cocked on one side.

"Sound like!" snorted the engineer officer, who had been stopping each of his ears alternately. "Sounds to me like a pig being slaughtered!" The Chief never minced matters. He always said exactly what he thought.

"You ought to get hold of a Scotsman to play the beastly things!" he added.

The skipper laughed. "Come, come, Chief! My grandmother was half Scotch and quite a lot of my relations. . . . Hullo!" he broke off, as we heard the sound of hasty footsteps on the thin deck overhead. "Someone's in a deuce of a hurry!"

The ladder clattered as a man descended, and the door was flung open to admit an icy blast and a red-faced, sou'westered signalman.

"Signal just come through, sir," he said

hastily, with the melting snow running in streams off his oilskins. "Raise steam with the utmost despatch and report when ready to proceed."

The skipper sighed. "I thought as much. How long will you be, Chief?"

"Forty minutes at the outside. Half an hour if we're lucky," said Prettyman, seizing his cap and making for the door.

The Captain yawned, uncoiled himself from his chair, and walked to the scuttle to look at the weather. "Lord!" he observed dismally. "There's no peace for the wicked, and I did so hope for a quiet night. We're going to have the time of our lives outside, my bonny boys!" he added. "You'll all be as sick as hades, and look out you have everything on the upper deck well lashed, Number One. You'd better be ready for slipping in half an hour from now."

He evinced no particular excitement, for ever since the outbreak of war we had always had steam ready at short notice when we were lying in harbour. Moreover, we had long since become accustomed to sudden excursions to sea at all hours of the day and night, so this was nothing out of the ordinary.

"D'you think anything special's in the wind, sir?" the 1st Lieutenant wanted to know, hunting for his cap.

"Same old stunt, I expect," answered the skipper. "Forty-eight hours at sea in stink-

ing weather, and then back to harbour with the bridge knocked flat. Come on, young fellows, you'd better get a move on and get into your sea suitings."

Three-quarters of an hour later, in company with several light-cruisers and many destroyers, we were groping our way out of harbour. The short winter afternoon had drawn to a close and the night had come down pitch-dark with no moon. The sky overhead was obliterated in dense masses of dark cloud scurrying down from the northward on the wings of the gale, and the wind howled and shrieked across the water, bringing in its train occasional blinding flurries of snow and showers of sleet and rain, while on deck, too, except in the places where the heat of the engine and boiler-rooms had melted it, there was a thin layer of ice. It was bitterly cold, and wrapped up though I was in a thick lammy coat, many woollen mufflers, thick fisherman's stockings reaching to my thighs, leather sea-boots, and oilskins on top of everything, the piercing blast sought out the chinks in my armour and chilled me through to the very marrow. It was a perfectly beastly night.

Before long we had passed the bobbing buoys at the harbour entrance and were forming up into our divisions outside.

"Signal for twenty knots, sir!" shouted the signalman, as some ship far ahead in

the darkness started to talk on a dimmed flashing lamp and we slid in astern of our leader.

“ Show no lights at all, sir ! ” a little later. “ Signal for twenty-three knots, sir ! Course north fifty-two east.”

The movement gradually became more and more pronounced as we left the lee of the friendly sandbanks and found the full force of the gale. The ship started to bob and curtsy, and the first whiff of spray came flying over the bows to rattle against the canvas bridge-screens like a shower of pebbles. Then, as we got further afield, the bows began to rise and fall dizzily, and with a crash and a thump the first sea came thundering over the bows, swished knee-deep across the forecastle, and erupted against the charthouse with a jar which shook the whole bridge.

“ Now she feels it ! ” muttered the Captain, wiping the spray from his eyes and readjusting the collar of his oilskin. “ Who wouldn't sell a farm and join the Royal Navy ! ”

Who would not, indeed ? Being at sea on a night like this was certainly an over-rated amusement. The North Sea was far more crimson an ocean than any atlas would have us believe.

I was due to keep the morning watch the next day, and at eight o'clock, on being relieved by No. 1, I left the bridge, made a perilous journey aft along the sea-swept

deck, and dived down to the wardroom flat with the intention of getting some food before I turned in. But the sickening corkscrew motion and the nauseating aroma down below completely overcame me.

I looked into the pantry where one of our stewards, gasping like a fish out of water, lay mournfully on the lockers. His mate reclined on the deck amidst a litter of broken china and glass, some spoons, knives, and forks, and an unsavoury mess in which I noticed a ham, half a cheese, several loaves of bread and pats of butter, a broken bottle of piccalilli, and a pair of boots cavorting gaily to and fro in a pool of dirty sea water every time the ship rolled. Each time the stern lifted to the sea and shook itself like a dog something fresh was added to the noisome collection. First a jar of blacking, which fell with a crash and exploded like a shrapnel. Then a shower of plate powder from some out-of-the-way corner, closely followed by an avalanche of plates and half an entrée dish. The poor wretch on the floor paid no heed whatsoever to his merciless bombardment from aloft. He was long past caring. . . . I tottered into the wardroom.

And there, except for the absence of the food, things were very little better. A considerable quantity of sea water was slopping about the floor, and chairs, books, the coal scuttle, the doctor's instruments,

jigsaw puzzles, and the skipper's bagpipes were playing a furious game of touch-last. The doctor, very white about the gills and hanging on like grim death, lay stretched out on one settee breathing stertorously. He opened one eye as I entered, regarded me mournfully, groaned, and then closed it again. He also did not care whether it was Christmas or Easter, and I, too, was rapidly approaching the same condition. The very thought of food was repugnant; but perhaps you have experienced the pangs of *mal de mer*, so I will spare your feelings.

I left the wardroom hastily, clambered painfully on deck, paused a moment, and then, accompanied by the fag end of a sea, fell down my hatch to my cabin.

Here, too, was a scene of utter desolation. The heavy rolling had flung open all my drawers, so that my uniform, shirts, underclothes, socks, boots, and most of my other belongings were swishing to and fro across the floor in a puddle of water. But I was long past caring for little things like that. I merely wished to die as painlessly as possible, so flung myself into my bunk, wedged myself as best I could, and lay there listening to the seas as they crashed and pounded overhead and against the side of the ship within a foot of my head. But at last, by some merciful dispensation of Providence, I managed to get off to sleep.

At four o'clock the next morning, when

I went forward to relieve Mr. Cotter for the morning watch, it still blew moderately hard and was bitterly cold. The ship was frisking about like a skittish pony, but the sea had gone down, the glass was rising, and my agonised feelings of the night before had quite left me. And on my way to the bridge I looked into the charthouse for a moment to see our whereabouts on the chart, and there I found the skipper, muffled up to the eyes, sitting on the settee munching stolidly at a huge ship's biscuit and drinking cocoa from a vacuum flask.

I sometimes wondered how the Captain ever succeeded in getting enough sleep. It was all very well for the rest of us, for No. 1, Mr. Cotter, and myself kept a regular three watches, four hours on and eight off, and in our spells below, even though we could not take off our clothes and get into pyjamas, we could retire to our bunks without much likelihood of being disturbed.

But with the skipper it was different. He was at everybody's beck and call, and what with the signals coming through, the actual navigation of the ship, the changes in formation which were constantly taking place when we were working as a flotilla, not to mention the hundred and one unexpected things which always happened when we least expected them, he rarely got more than an hour's consecutive sleep at sea, and then only on the settee in the chart-

house. Moreover, and as I said before, he slept with one eye open, and always appeared on the bridge without being called when things were starting to go wrong. This, perhaps, may have been due to the fact that both the helm and the revolution telegraph shafting passed through the chart-house, and the moment the wheel started to move agitatedly to starboard or to port, or the telegraph reply-gong began to clang incessantly as the people in the engine-room acknowledged frequent alterations in speed, the noise woke him up and brought him to the bridge in the twinkling of an eye to find out what was going on. He realised as well as we officers of watches did that frequent movements of the helm and continual alterations in the revolutions meant that something was going wrong, or that the ship was out of station.

The skipper rarely went below except to snatch an occasional meal in the wardroom or a hasty wash in his cabin. At one time, in the earlier days of the war, he used to disappear below every morning to bath and shave himself, but ever since the day when No. 1 had suddenly sighted a Zeppelin emerging from the clouds, and the Captain had appeared on the bridge in a bright green dressing gown with half his face shaved and the other half lathered, he had taken up savings¹ for immaculate cleanliness.

¹ "Savings" are the money allowances payable in lieu

And now, at four o'clock in the morning, he was affability itself. "Mornin'," he said, smiling at me with his red face appearing over his many mufflers like a full moon rising from the sea. "Have some of this and a biscuit, Sub? I'll bet you had no dinner last night!" He held out his flask.

"I didn't, sir," I agreed, thanking him and looking round for a cup.

"Drink it out of the spout, man," he yawned, lighting his pipe. "Don't be bashful. Surely you don't mean you were sea-sick?"

I nodded at him as I gulped the hot cocoa.

"Poor fellow! Thank the Lord I'm not smitten that way. By George!" he added, rubbing his eyes. "I haven't had a wink o' sleep all night, and was pitched off the settee twice. Then all your beastly books came tumbling down on my head!"

He pointed to the litter of Sailing Directions and other navigational tomes which rightly belonged to the bookshelf overhead, but now lay strewn on the deck with their coloured linen covers gradually becoming detached by the sea water which invaded the charthouse in bad weather.

"Well," he continued, "I think I'll try of certain items in the daily ration supplied by the Government. To "take up savings" means drawing this money, and, as a naval colloquialism, to go without, or not to do, a thing. For instance, one may hear the expression, "I will take up savings for going ashore to-day," meaning "I will not go ashore."

for a caulk now. Look out you call me at crack o' dawn." He composed himself to slumber with the pipe still between his teeth, while I went on to the bridge and took over from Mr. Cotter.

My vigil passed slowly, and at about 6.15 the first grey streaks of dawn started to come out of the east. The old North Sea still looked the same as ever, a pitiless grey-green expanse of heaving, wind-ridden water with a dull, cloudy grey sky lightening towards the horizon to a peculiar misty yellow covered with innumerable rounded greyish-white masses of watery-looking vapour. But the weather, for the time of year, was comparatively clear, while the wind was lulling appreciably and the sea was going down, and as I inhaled the clean, salty tang of the morning breeze I felt glad to be alive. There is always something rather heartening and fascinating about the advent of another day at sea, even though it may be the North Sea in mid-winter. One's spirits seem to rise automatically with the coming of the dawn; the cares and troubles of the night to disappear with the arrival of daylight.

The ship woke up. Those of the men who had been asleep on their stuffy mess-decks underneath the forecastle came out into the fresh air, stretched themselves, gazed round about, and lit their pipes and cigarettes. "Tibby," our sedate black cat,

emerged from her nocturnal lair and stalked majestically along the deck with her tail erect in the air like an ensign staff, while a tousled-looking gentleman in a lammy coat, one of our funny men, informed us all in a raucous bellow that he had "plaiiced a wreath upon 'er graive as a token of esteem." Who his defunct lady friend was I did not trouble to enquire.

Next the atmosphere became redolent with the usual morning aroma of canteen kippers cooking for somebody's breakfast. Our men, bless their simple souls, were always hearty eaters. They seemed to live upon kippers for breakfast, onions for their midday dinner, and fried eggs and bacon for their tea. In fact, were one to be blindfolded, one could almost tell the time of day by the pungent odours arising from the galley.

And so the day had come.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DOGGER BANK

SUNDAY, January 24th, 1915, was destined to be a red-letter day in our calendar, for a few minutes past seven, when the sea was yet veiled in the grey half-light which comes between dawn and full daylight, the *Aurora*, one of our light-cruisers, suddenly fired a gun. Then another, and another . . . a whole salvo.

“Christians awake!” exclaimed the skipper, quoting from one of his favourite hymns. “What the deuce is she firing at?”

We hadn't very long to wait, for almost at once a number of shell splashes broke out of the water close alongside the *Aurora*, and a minute or so afterwards, when she steamed ahead and permitted us to see a certain section of the horizon, we saw, about 8,000 yards off, the slim grey shape of a two-masted, three-funnelled cruiser steaming on a northerly course under the lee of her own smoke. Several destroyers were with her.

At first I could have staked my bottom dollar that, with her three perpendicular funnels, the stranger was one of our "County class" cruisers. Indeed, I said as much to the Captain.

"Rot!" he replied, looking through his glasses. "She's a Hun!"

And so, indeed, she was, the *Kolberg*.

Our men, hearing the sounds of gunfire, came swarming up to their action stations like bees from a hive, and for some time the two ships continued to fire at each other. We saw one or two shells burst as they hit the enemy, but the *Aurora*, though she was frequently straddled, did not seem to be struck at all. At any rate, she showed no signs of any damage. The German was evidently getting more than he had bargained for, for at about 7.20 he suddenly turned off to the south-eastward and made off at high speed. And almost at once, looming up over the horizon in the same direction, we made out the dull outlines of four heavy ships together with a number of light-cruisers and a flotilla of destroyers.

"Those are their battle-cruisers!" the skipper exclaimed, rubbing his hands. "Now we're going to have some fun!"

It certainly did seem like it, for all through the night, though we knew nothing for certain, we had an inkling that we were steaming to the northward to rendezvous

with our own battle-cruisers at dawn. And when, soon after seven, the *Aurora* fired the first gun and our telegraphist told us she was reporting "Enemy in sight" by wireless, and that her signals were being acknowledged from somewhere near at hand, we were practically certain that Sir David Beatty and his squadron were not very far away.

And the Germans, steaming hard to the north-westward, were advancing into the very jaws of our battle-cruisers coming down at full speed towards them. Sir David Beatty's squadron was invisible to us at this time, but, as subsequent events proved, it cannot have been more than ten or fifteen miles away.

It was an exciting moment for us. None of us had ever seen an action between big ships, indeed, nobody had, and now, if our luck held, there was every prospect of the most thrilling drama we had ever witnessed being enacted before our very eyes. We had one of the best seats in the house for seeing what went on, and it felt rather like sitting in the stalls of a theatre waiting for the curtain to rise. We held our breath and waited.

Then, to our intense mortification, the leading enemy ship, scenting trouble, turned away in the opposite direction to that in which she had been steaming. A chorus of groans came from the little crowd of

men clustered on the upper deck, for they, too, seemed to understand what was happening.

“Oh, singe my wig and whiskers!” muttered the Captain disgustedly, stamping his foot in his annoyance. “Suffering Susan! I’m shot if the blighters aren’t off!”

They were, for the second vessel followed round in the wake of her leader, then the third, and the fourth, until at last the whole bunch of them, with their cruisers and destroyers, had turned away to the south-east. But it was not a dignified retreat, for all that people may say. They were going hell-for-leather with great clouds and volumes of smoke staining the grey sky all round them. They were still in formation, but otherwise it looked suspiciously like a case of *sauve qui peut*.

Then, to the northward, we saw first some more British light-cruisers, and finally our battle-cruisers—the *Lion*, *Tiger*, *Princess Royal*, *New Zealand*, and *Indomitable*—coming towards us and literally obliterating the horizon with their huge grey hulls.

“Ah!” we thought to ourselves as we grinned at each other. “This begins to look good!”

It did, and personally I felt so exhilarated at the sight of our big fellows that I wanted to shout and fling my cap into the air.

We destroyers, meanwhile, with our attendant light-cruisers, had swung round after the retreating enemy and were going full pelt after them to shadow their progress and report their movements. By this time they had dwindled to a dull, smoky smudge on the grey horizon, and now most of our interest became concentrated on our heavy squadron, the ships of which, steaming hard, seemed literally to be flying through the water. It was a magnificent sight to see these grey monsters crashing through the seas with the smoke billowing behind them, and the long, lean guns in their turrets cocked up to full elevation ready to open fire as soon as they came within range. They looked so grim and so powerful, so utterly huge and unwieldy, that it was difficult to realise that they were controlled by mere human beings like ourselves.

But we were all feeling anxious lest they should not be able to get within effective range of the flying foe. Ship for ship the British superiority in speed was not so very marked, and the opposing squadrons were fully 28,000 yards, or fourteen sea miles, apart when the chase started.

The skipper, No. 1, and myself were all on the bridge watching. We were all thinking the same thing, and hardly dared to speak to each other, for the suspense was well-nigh intolerable.

“Buck up, you big chaps!” I heard the

skipper muttering impatiently to himself. "For mercy's sake buck up and let 'em have it!"

But I don't think the "big chaps" required much encouragement. They were nerving every effort, and were every bit as anxious for the ball to open as we were.

"I believe they're overhauling them, sir!" said No. 1 after a bit, biting his nails in his excitement. "Yes, I'll swear they are!"

"Overhauling my foot!" snapped the skipper disgustedly.

"But they are, sir!" the First Lieutenant persisted. "We're exactly the same distance from the *Lion* as we were a quarter of an hour ago, but I can see their rear ship's upper deck showing over the horizon. I couldn't a few minutes ago!"

He pointed to the south-east, where the hulls of the hostile heavy ships certainly seemed to be rising slowly over the line of demarcation betwixt sea and sky, becoming gradually, very gradually, more distinct.

And even the skipper had grudgingly to admit that we were gaining.

"It's going to be a long job, at any rate," he growled at last. "A stern chase, and you know the rest. You can fall the hands out, No. 1, and let 'em finish their breakfast. You and the Sub had better go below and have yours. You might tell the steward to send mine to the charthouse when you've

finished, and tell the blighter that if he sends me any more of his hard-boiled eggs I'll have him incinerated!"

So breakfast was piped, though I doubt if more than five or six of the men made a regular sit-down meal. They were much too interested in what was going on, and the greater number ate their kippers and demolished their slabs of bread and margarine on deck where they could see everything. No. 1 and myself, too, though we were both hungry, were far too excited to think really seriously of food, and in less than ten minutes we were back on the bridge.

And now I saw that even in the short time we had been below we had undoubtedly overhauled them slightly, for half the hull of their rearmost ship could be seen over the horizon. It seemed too good to be true. Once more I could have shouted for joy.

The battle-cruisers, with our light-cruisers and flotillas on their quarter, settled down to their long stern chase. The speed gradually increased until eventually we were steaming at $28\frac{1}{2}$ knots, with the *Lion*, *Tiger*, and *Princess Royal* in the van, and the more elderly *New Zealand* and *Indomitable* pounding along in their wake.

Sir David Beatty, in his official despatch, commended the engine-room personnel of these two latter ships, and certainly they deserved his praise, for both vessels exceeded

their contract speed. But never yet have I known an occasion when the officers and men below did not look upon it as a point of honour to bring their ships into action in record time. Time and time again during this war ships which were regarded as slow and more or less out of date have surpassed themselves in steaming and have actually bettered their trial speeds in action, and whatever happens we people on deck know that our friends down below in the engine and boiler-rooms will never fail. Indeed, when they are aware that there is a prospect of meeting an enemy they work wonders; but when the enemy appears and the first gun goes off they generally achieve the impossible, splendid fellows that they are.

We were overhauling the Germans slowly but surely. The range diminished from 28,000 yards to 20,000, and shortly before nine o'clock we noticed the *Tiger* and *Princess Royal* hauling out on a line of bearing from the flagship to bring their foremost turret guns to bear. This was necessary as the enemy were slightly on their bow, and, if our ships had remained in single line ahead, the fire of each vessel would have been blanketed by her leader.

The German heavy ships were steaming in single line with their light-cruisers ahead and the destroyers to starboard, and at this time, 8.52 to be precise, we saw a flash and a cloud of dun-coloured smoke burst out

from the *Lion's* fore turret as one of her 13·5's gave tongue. The deep boom of the report came reverberating across the sea, and we waited for what seemed ages to see the shell pitch. Then at last a gigantic white pillar of water sailed gracefully into the air some distance short of the enemy. It was merely a trial shot, but it acted as a tonic on us, for we knew that our long period of suspense was nearly over.

Another flash and burst of smoke from the *Lion*, and this time the projectile went closer to its mark. Another shot, closer again. The flagship was firing slowly and deliberately to find the exact range, and then at last, at about ten minutes past nine, a gun fired and there was no splash at all; but in its stead a flicker of deep red flame and a small cloud of black smoke from the last ship in the hostile line, the ill-fated *Blücher*.

"Hit!" howled our skipper, nearly dancing with excitement.

It was a hit, but the spectacular effect of a 13·5-inch shell striking at long range was distinctly disappointing. I quite expected to see a bright crimson flash and belching clouds of smoke and debris, but all we noticed was that insignificant little spurt of brick-red flame and a scarcely distinguishable puff of smoke which soon vanished. But even so I could well picture the awful havoc caused by that projectile. Imagine

nearly a ton of metal filled with high-explosive dropping almost perpendicularly on a ship's deck. It tears its way through the steel plating as if it were brown paper, and, penetrating far below, bursts and spreads death and destruction everywhere. The effect is well-nigh indescribable, and at sea a plunging, long-range fire searches out the very heart of a vessel and must always be far more deadly than that at a shorter distance where the trajectory is flatter and the projectiles have more of a sweeping effect.

The range was gradually closing as our superiority in speed made itself manifest, and very soon afterwards all three of our leading battle-cruisers chimed in. And at much the same moment the enemy also opened fire.

It was a wonderful and an awe-inspiring spectacle to see our huge ships speeding along with their heavy guns flashing and their ponderous hulls occasionally shrouded and indistinct in their own black funnel smoke and the rapidly dissolving brown cordite haze of their gun discharges. All the while the tall white plumes of spray played and leapt round about them as the German guns fell to work, though, from what I could see of their shooting, it was nothing very wonderful. Indeed, I don't recollect seeing one of our ships hit during this period of the fight.

By half-past nine the last two vessels

in the enemy's line were having, or had had, a very bad time. The *Lion*, which had started by firing at the *Blücher*, had transferred her unwelcome attention to the third ship, the battle-cruiser *Seydlitz*, and had hit her with several salvos, while No. 4, the *Blücher*, was under the concentrated fire of the *Tiger*, *Princess Royal*, and *New Zealand*, which had now come up.

It is unnecessary for me to describe how the ships of our squadron shifted their targets as the range gradually lessened and ship after ship of the enemy was engaged, but by 9.45 the action had become more or less general and each heavy unit of the German squadron was under fire. The *Blücher*, too, was obviously in a bad way, for now and then her hull was all but obscured in a cloud of reddish-brown smoke, while through our glasses we could see occasional tongues of flame playing about her upperworks. Her speed, also, seemed to have decreased, for she lagged rather behind the others.

It was now that the Captain, the First Lieutenant, and myself, who were all on the bridge, suddenly noticed a great mushroom-shaped cloud of blackish smoke leap into the air at the far side of the enemy's line. It hung there for quite an appreciable time, dense and impalpable, and was evidently caused by a very heavy explosion, though at the time the distance was so

great that we could see nothing to account for it. It was not until some time later that we heard a story to the effect that the light-cruiser *Kolberg* had literally been blown in two by some of our shell falling over, but even now I don't know whether or not the yarn is true.

The enemy were now getting very much the worst of it. The *Moltke*, the second ship in their line, had been badly pounded, and from now on, the sole idea of the German Admiral—Von Hipper—seemed to be to make good his escape. Just before ten o'clock, moreover, the hostile destroyers, in a vain endeavour to save their heavy ships from further punishment, came down from ahead at full speed, making a heavy cloud of dense black funnel smoke, under cover of which the German main body steamed for a short time to the northward. Having done this, their destroyers then came on towards us with the evident intention of delivering a torpedo attack, whereupon we, the British T.B.D.'s, were ordered to take station ahead of our battle-cruisers to drive them off. But we never had the chance we all hoped and prayed for, for long before we got anywhere near them they had been compelled to retire by a burst of heavy fire from the *Lion* and *Tiger*.

The engagement went on, and at 10.45 the *Blücher*, who had borne the brunt of the action and had dropped farther and

farther astern of her consorts, suddenly swerved abruptly to port and struggled off to the northwards.

It was one of the most dramatic incidents of an eventful day, but none of us felt inclined to show our elation. It is always a sad sight to see a stricken ship at her last gasp, even though she may be an enemy, and the Captain, I know, felt exactly as I did. I was desperately sorry for the poor wretches on board her, for she had undergone a ghastly fire which had converted the interior of her hull into a blazing inferno and a hideous charnel house of mangled dead and dying and riven steel. It is impossible to imagine what it must have been like, let alone to describe it.

When first the British guns started firing, the *Blücher's* crew, said one of her survivors, watched the deadly waterspouts creeping closer and closer with an awful fascination. The shell dropped ahead and over, astern and short as the range was found, until one pitched so close alongside the ship that its vast watery pillar fell on deck. Almost immediately projectiles started to arrive thick and fast. The ship's dynamos were destroyed at once, and the ship was plunged into darkness. Shell, falling from the sky, tore their way through the decks and penetrated even to the stokeholds before bursting, while the coal in the bunkers was hurled about and set alight. In the engine-

room bursting projectiles scattered blazing oil in flames of blue and green. Men were burnt to death; men were blinded, scalded, and mutilated, while others huddled together in dark compartments for safety. But even here the flying projectiles sought them out and tore them limb from limb, and lucky indeed were the poor wretches who perished outright. It was a holocaust.

The air pressure caused by the heavy explosions in confined spaces flung loose and insecure fittings to and fro and converted them into fresh and dangerous projectiles. Heavy steel watertight doors were wrenched off their hinges and bent, and through the inferno the bodies of the living and the dead were hurled from side to side like leaves in an autumn gale. Some were battered to death against steel bulkheads, others were flung to a more ghastly fate amidst the whirling machinery. . . . But the *Blücher* still fought gallantly on, until at last the very stokers had to be told off to supply the ammunition to her guns.

She was not a battle-cruiser like the rest of her squadron. She was merely a slower and less powerful armoured-cruiser of an older type, a ship which was temporarily taking the place of the *Von der Tann*, which had been damaged during a British air raid on Cuxhaven. And now, battered out of recognition, with a heavy list, and the smoke and flame pouring from her, she was

reeling helplessly about like a blind man, while her friends had gone on and left her to her fate. No. It was not a glorious or inspiring spectacle. To me it was intensely pathetic—but war is ever pathetic.

Ship after ship fired on the unhappy German. Even some of the destroyers peppered her with their little 4-inch guns as they came within range. And this time the spectacle certainly was more thrilling, for we were closer and could see the shell driving home and bursting in splashes of vivid orange and scarlet flame and clouds of yellow and black smoke. The unfortunate ship rocked like a cradle as the broadsides struck her. She blazed furiously, and a layer of dense smoke, glowing on its under side from the glare of many fires, hung over her like a funeral pall. But, beaten and battered though she was, she would never surrender, and through the haze which enveloped her we could see the flashes of some of her guns as they still fired intermittently. And they went on firing to the bitter end. Her steering gear was demolished and her engines were damaged, but she still struggled slowly on. One funnel had disappeared, and the other two were riddled through and through and tottering. The fore turret, hit fair and square by a heavy shell, had been whirled bodily overboard like a sheet of paper. Part of her mainmast was still standing upright, but

the tripod foremast, brought down by an explosion at its base, leaned drunkenly over on its side.

The ship was sinking on an even keel, but one of her guns still fired an occasional shell. Indeed, it was not until five minutes past noon that her last weapon was discharged at the British destroyer *Meteor*, which had approached to finish her off with a torpedo at close range. The 8·2-inch shell, striking the destroyer in one of her boiler-rooms, killed four men and wounded another, besides doing great damage.

Two minutes later, however, the *Meteor* fired her torpedo. It struck the *Blücher* nearly amidships and burst with a thundering shock and a great upheaval of smoke and whity-grey water. It brought the stricken ship to a standstill, and then, very slowly, she heeled over to port and lay wearily down to die. We were barely 300 yards off when it happened, and I shall never forget the awful sight.

Orders had evidently been given for her men to save themselves, for the deck on our side was black with human beings, and as she went over there came that horrible, pitiable drawn-out cry which so often seems to break out from the survivors before a ship takes her final plunge. It was the blending of many voices into one awful moaning in a rising crescendo; a terrible, eerie sound like the wailing of a banshee,

which I can only write as "Aaah . . . o . . .
o . . . O . . . O! Ah . . . o . . . o . . . o . . .
O . . . OOH!"

The *Arethusa*, and several other destroyers, had come up, and we were all lowering boats to save life, and presently, when the *Blücher* heeled over and over, numbers of her men could be seen walking on her starboard side as it gradually became horizontal. Others, casting themselves into the icy sea, were swimming towards us and the rescuing boats, while still more slid down the curve of the bottom and walked on the bilge-keel before trusting themselves to the water. I witnessed many horrible sights. One poor wretch, trying to jump clear, landed with his head on the bilge-keel with a crash which must have fractured his skull. Others, swimming towards the boats, were crying "Save, Englishman! Save!" while more, dazed and badly wounded, flung up their hands and sank the moment they jumped into the sea. A few reached the side of our ship, whereupon we flung them lifebelts and lowered rope ends to help them to clamber on board, but many, overcome and exhausted by their wounds and the bitterly cold water, slipped away and perished.

One hundred and twenty-three men were saved altogether, and there is no doubt that many more would have been picked up had not a Zeppelin and an aeroplane appeared

on the scene. The latter dropped bombs, whereupon we had no alternative but to hoist our boats and retire. The Taube, no doubt, imagined the *Blücher* to be one of our ships, which naturally made us all the more unwilling to risk our ships and lives in saving the compatriots of men who imagined they were killing drowning British seamen. I would willingly have shot the pilot of that Taube in cold blood, and it was probably his report which gave rise to the statement in the official German communiqué that the *Lion* had been sunk.

And so, forced to leave many poor wretches in the water to their fate, we steamed away, and the last time I saw the *Blücher* the curve of her bottom was just disappearing beneath the surface, and a thin cloud of black smoke and white steam hung in the air over the spot where she had turned over. But even we, her enemies, were forced to admit that she had made a gallant fight.

To hark back to the doings of our battle-cruisers, which were still in action with the flying *Derfflinger*, *Moltke*, and *Seydlitz*.

I did not see the end of the engagement, for we had been detailed to close and pick up the survivors from the *Blücher*, but at 10.54 the periscope of a submarine was sighted on the starboard bow of the *Lion*. She promptly altered course to avoid a possible torpedo, and shortly afterwards, at 11.3, was hit by the shell which was so to

influence the final result of the battle. It struck her on the waterline the port side, disabled one of her feed-tanks, and forced her to haul out of the line, leaving the *Tiger*, *Princess Royal*, and *New Zealand* to continue the pursuit.

The flagship seemed in a very dangerous predicament, while, as she had a heavy list to port with numbers of men on deck, many people who saw her at the time imagined she was about to sink and that her crew were making preparations for abandoning ship. But things were not quite so bad as that. The signal "Engage the enemy more closely" still fluttered at her mast-head, while the men had mustered on deck to cheer Sir David Beatty over the side as he boarded the destroyer *Attack* and steamed off in her to overtake the remainder of his squadron. He met them at noon steaming to the north-north-west, and hoisted his flag in the *Princess Royal*. It was too late. The engagement was over, and that unlucky hit in the *Lion* altered in no small measure the result of the engagement.

When last they were seen vanishing over the eastern horizon all the three German heavy ships had been badly damaged by gunfire, while the *Derfflinger* and *Seydlitz* were on fire. Their injuries, as I was afterwards told by a German prisoner whom we picked up from an armed trawler, were very severe and their losses in men very heavy.

He told me, moreover, that a great fire had broken out in the after magazine of the *Seydlitz*, and that the conflagration, which threatened every instant to destroy the ship, could only be extinguished by flooding the compartments in question. There was no time even to remove the men, over 150 of whom, sealed up below under watertight doors and unable to escape, perished miserably by drowning.

The *Lion*, however, was in an unenviable position. Her injury prevented her at first from steaming at more than about twelve knots, at which speed she was a comparatively easy target for the hostile submarines known to be in the vicinity. Every available destroyer was at once sent to screen her against this danger, but during the afternoon further complications in the engine-room necessitated her being taken in tow by the *Indomitable*.

And for thirty-four hours the helpless leviathan, surrounded on all sides by destroyers like a mother hen by her brood of chicks, was towed slowly home. It was a dismal and anxious progress. We were only sixty miles from the hostile bases when we started, and all through the hours of daylight we expected a submarine attack. During the night, too, we made quite certain that every destroyer in the German navy would be out to look for us; but they missed their opportunity, for nothing came.

And so the wounded *Lion* came home, while Germany, with the *Blücher*, and possibly one light-cruiser, sunk, and three valuable battle-cruisers severely injured, licked her wounds and for a time denied herself the doubtful pleasure of raiding the British coast. The game was not worth the candle. Sir David Beatty had taught her a lesson which it took her a very long while to forget.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BITTER END

§ 1

BETWEEN four and five o'clock one merry April morning I was roused from my slumbers by a frenzied hammering on my cabin door and the throaty, penetrating voice of my faithful but misguided servitor, Robert Wilkes, Able Seaman.

Wilkes, when he was not putting many parallel creases down the legs of my best uniform trousers with a hot iron, sewing buttons on my pyjama jackets with sail-maker's twine, or polishing the corticene on my cabin floor until I could scarcely stand upright, ruled me with a rod of steel. He was the most ancient A.B. in the ship, a man who had been in the Service for many years and should by rights have been a petty officer if only he had behaved himself. He regarded a mere "Sub-Lootenant" with undisguised contempt, and, though never really disrespectful, took charge of me absolutely and constituted himself my unofficial "sea-daddy."

Sometimes he was a most unsympathetic person, and his behaviour, unless I bullied him first, positively tyrannical. And even when I did succeed in getting in the first word he merely stood there grinning like a gargoyle, so that slanging him for his misdeeds and misdirected efforts on my behalf gave one about as much satisfaction as pouring water on the proverbial duck's back.

"Seasick, are we?" he used to grunt, when, in a gale of wind and before I got really accustomed to the ship prancing and leaping like a circus horse, he sometimes found me in a comatose condition on my bunk.

"Seasick! Lawd 'elp us! Wot's the Navy comin' to when Sub-Lootenants carn't stow their vittles? But look 'ere, sir, spose I goes to the wardroom pantry and 'as a bit of a forage round like? It ain't good to 'ave nothink inside yer when yer feels like a vomit!" He was always inclined to be rather coarse.

I merely groaned. The very thought of food was utterly repulsive; but as sure as fate ten minutes later Wilkes reappeared with a cup of bovril and a piece of dry toast.

"There!" he would say triumphantly. "Put that little lot inside yer!"

I took his advice, and must confess that the food did me good. But even over the matter of my handkerchiefs he behaved like a miser, and would never allow me my usual

clean one per diem until I made a row about it.

“Now look ’ere, sir,” he grumbled. “I uses one clean ’ankercher a week, and seein’ as ’ow you’re an orficer I allows yer two. More’n that’s wastin’ money, and you knows as well as I does that we ’aven’t paid larst month’s washin’ bill yet!”

Nor had we, and it took me a considerable time to get my own way in the matter.

But for all his sins the old demon was as honest as the day is long, and I was very fond of him, while he, I think, in his own peculiar way, was fond of me. On Christmas Day, indeed, he entered my cabin with much mystery at some unearthly hour of the morning and presented me with a flamboyant card as a *gage d’amour* from himself and his wife. I have it still, a gorgeous thing of celluloid with clasped hands, sprays of forget-me-nots, and the words “True friendship never wanes” on the outside. I forget what I had given him to evoke this return. I think it was a pipe.

And now, on this particular morning, he indulged in his usual tactics to get me out of my bunk.

“Sub-Lootenant, sir!” he wheezed, hammering away at my cabin door. “It’s ’igh time we turned out. We’ll be all adrift else!”

“Oh, go to blazes!” I murmured testily, turning over with every intention of going

to sleep again. I had, you see, been on the bridge until midnight, and now, after four and a half hours' sleep in my clothes in an atmosphere solid enough to asphyxiate a mule, I was uncommonly fat-headed.

"Sub-Lootenant, sir!"

No reply.

So the old ogre did what he always did. He entered my cabin noisily, switched on every electric light, and then shook me by the elbow until I sat up.

"Oh, go to . . ." I began.

"Wake up and drink this nice little drop o' 'ot cocoa I brought yer," he interrupted, without paying the least attention to what I was saying. "You'll be adrift in another minit. The 'ands 'as bin piped to action stations already!"

I glared at him, speechless with indignation.

"And a lot you cares for me 'oo wears 'isself to skin and bone bringin' you 'ot cocoa at this time o' the mornin'!" he snorted. "There isn't many men in this ship as 'ud do it for ten bob a month paid irregular the same as I does, and wot gratitooode does I git? Not a bloomin' bit, only why the blazes this, and wot the dickens that, and me old enuf to be yer farther. Now, Mister Munro, sar, are we goin' to turn out or are we not?"

And I, taking the line of least resistance, did clamber out of my bunk. Moreover, I

was grateful for the cocoa, and told him so.

“Ah,” said Wilkes. “That’s the way. Now we’re be’avin’ like a proper little gent.”

With which cryptic utterance he left me.

On this April morning we—the *Lictor*, that is—with anything up to a score of destroyers, some light-cruisers, and a couple of seaplane carriers, were within measurable distance of the German coast. We were there, of course, not exactly for a change of air or scenery, but to annoy Brother Bosche, and the fact that we had arrived within ten or twelve miles of one of his pet particular islands, a place he was popularly supposed to have studded with every imaginable kind of a gun from a 12 inch downwards, was no great novelty.

It was not the sixth time we had visited the neighbourhood, nor yet the sixteenth. Sometimes, like an impudent street Arab with a booby trap round the corner making a long nose at a stout policeman in the hope of being chased, we were sent in to entice the enemy out to sea, an invitation he never by any chance accepted. On occasions, too, we went in to have a general look round and to strafe anything in the shape of outlying patrols he might have off his coast, but we rarely saw anything except a bloated Zeppelin or an aeroplane or two.

This particular “stunt,” an air-raid on a certain place I need not mention, had been

attempted four or five times before, but always without success. We invariably started off from our base with everything in our favour—a calm sea, rising barometer, excellent weather forecast, and all the rest of it. But no sooner had we steamed our 250 or 300 miles and arrived somewhere near our destination, than the fates turned against us, and the wind raged furiously and the sea rose, or the fog came down as thick as any blanket, in either of which circumstances our seaplanes could not do their business.

Gales, and that horrible, short, steep sea which wetted us through and through and made our little ships as comfortable as half-tide rocks, we could endure with a certain amount of equanimity. We could also put up with the northerly gales and their huge, yeasty-topped combers coming straight down from the Arctic. We were accustomed to ice, snow, and sleet, so that sometimes we came into harbour with plugs of ice frozen into the bores of the guns and our masts and bridges outlined in snow; but fogs we cordially detested, and what man who goes down to the sea in a ship does not?

In calm weather in the southern area of the North Sea, as anyone who knows that neighbourhood will tell you, thick weather sometimes shuts down at a few minutes' notice. It seems to descend from above, for at one moment the horizon may be perfectly clear, while the next the ship ahead will be

blotted out in a murk of cotton-wool-like consistency and the moisture will be dripping off your eyebrows.

The ordinary mariner who navigates his solitary vessel sometimes has a certain amount of sea-room when fog comes down. In our case, however, the sudden advent of thick weather might catch us "with our boots off," otherwise steaming at fairly high speed with anything up to thirty ships in close formation. In a few moments no one vessel might be visible to any other before they arrived within mutual spitting distance. Manœuvring signals and alterations of course had to be transmitted to each unit by wireless telegraphy or by sound signals made on the syren, either of which methods, if we happened to be off the enemy's coast, advertised our presence far more than was desirable.

All we could do, and did, was to grope our way gingerly astern of our immediate leader, trusting to luck that she was still in touch with her next ahead. Sometimes she was and sometimes she wasn't, for misadventures take place even in the best-drilled squadrons and flotillas, so that at times ships lost themselves and, with their syrens wailing like lost souls, were forced to alter course this way and that to avoid collision.

I know it is easy enough to be wise after the event—to say that this mishap or that would never have occurred if "I had been there" and t'other fellow hadn't been quite

such a purple fool as to do what he actually did. But it is as well to recollect that "t'other fellow" is probably just as good at his job as you are, possibly much better, while we may quite safely bet our last farthing that he didn't punch a large hole in the ward-room of the ship commanded by his best friend merely to show his undying affection and respect.

It is impossible to frame rules and regulations to meet every conceivable emergency, and in a fog, more so than at any other time, the unexpected always happens. Moreover, difficult though the circumstances may have been, blame may be attributable to someone if a collision occurs, and he who escapes a Court Martial for losing or hazarding his ship and merely suffers the lesser penalty of incurring "their Lordships' severe displeasure" on a sheet of typewritten foolscap is no very popular person for the time being.

He may even find himself a marked man for life, for the Navy is essentially a lurid example of the survival of the fittest. Many fall by the wayside, and out of a term of, say, sixty cadets who entered at the ages of thirteen and fourteen, only about twenty-five will ever become Commanders, fifteen Captains, while seven or eight at the outside will reach the exalted position of Rear-Admiral on the active list. The verdicts of the Service are seldom unjust or undeserved, but the success of a naval officer's career

hangs on the proverbial thread from the very moment he reaches manhood. A single indiscretion, a solitary error in judgment, a slight divergence from the straight and rugged path, may possibly mean the ruin of an otherwise unblemished career and the fading away into the hazy distance of the coveted "brass hat."¹ I don't say it always does, for some people have such force of character that they can live down anything.

However, to the marked and disappointed man there is nothing for it but a sorrowful retreat to shore billets followed by eventual retirement on a small pension to a white-washed cottage in the country. The cottage may be all that a cottage should be. It may have a bathroom, h. and c., a pretty flower garden, clusters of Crimson Rambler and Dorothy Perkins trailing round the porch, a potato patch, a chicken run, and a couple of happy pigs grunting in their sty. But a ducal mansion, let alone a cottage, can never atone for the fact that a few years hence the victim of misfortune will still be a Lieutenant-Commander (Retired), with a possibility of being promoted to Commander (Retired) at the age of forty or forty-five, while some of

¹ "Brass hat," *i.e.* the uniform cap with gold embroidery on the peak worn by Commanders and officers senior to them. Promotions to Commander are made entirely by selection, and the attainment of this rank is popularly supposed to be the turning-point of an officer's career.

his contemporaries yet in the Service are shipping their fourth stripes as Captains.

In the career of every N.O. that white-washed cottage sometimes looms perilously close. We live cheek by jowl with it. We regard it from every possible aspect, and sometimes, when particularly depressed and mouldy at seeing others promoted over our heads, we even decide in our minds that, if there is room for them and the wherewithal is forthcoming, there shall be a grandfather clock in the hall and a dark oak dresser laden with blue china in the living-room.

But personally I would far rather command a battleship than be the occupier of the prettiest cottage in existence, for there are few battleships, but many cottages.

The survival of the fittest. It is the invariable law of nature.

§ 2

When I arrived on the bridge the dawn was just breaking and the weather, though bitterly cold, was fine and clear. We were steaming on an easterly course in three parallel columns, the cruisers and seaplane-carriers sandwiched in the centre between a line of destroyers on either side.

The skipper, muffled up to the chin and in great good humour, was sucking away at his inevitable pipe.

“Morning, Sub!” he hailed me cheerily.

"I really do believe we're going to pull off this bally old stunt at last, thank the Lord!"

I agreed with him, for our enterprise was timed to start at 6 o'clock precisely, and now, just before 5, the weather seemed perfect for getting the machines off the water and for actual flight, there being hardly a ripple on the sea or a cloud overhead.

The horizon to the eastward gradually became overshoot with the mysterious, prismatic colouring of the sunrise, and then at last the red-hot disc of the great orb itself, looming huge and tremendous like some overgrown football, sailed off into space over a bank of low-lying purplish cloud. Next the sky and sea together became suffused with a gentle rosy flush.

"Evening grey and the morning red," quoted the skipper dubiously. "I don't quite like the look of it."

I said nothing. I had yet a lot to learn about successful weather prophecy in the North Sea.

"No," he went on. "I don't like it. Look at that greeny-yellow streak between those clouds, and the ragged edge to the cloud itself. That means wind, or I'm a Dutchman."

"But if the weather remains decent till 9 o'clock it'll give the flying fellows time to do their job and to get back again, sir," I said. "After all, it doesn't matter much if

we do have bad weather on the way home so long as we've pulled it off."

The Captain sniffed.

And certainly, as the time wore on, the wind did not seem to increase nor the sea to rise, so that at 5.50 our senior officer's ship hoisted the blue and white striped "Preparative" flag, the hauling down of which five minutes later would give the seaplane-carriers the signal to haul out of the line to hoist out their machines and to start them off on their journey.

It really seemed as if everything was going well, but once more our plans were upset by the unaccountable perversity of the North Sea weather, for a few minutes later the horizon was becoming indistinct and nebulous in a thin haze. We looked at it, hardly able to believe our eyes and hoping against hope that it would dissolve as the sun rose and gathered strength, but not a bit of it. Patches of mist came drifting slowly across the surface of the sea until the shapes of ships a mile away were blurred out of all recognition, and presently the wreathing eddies seemed mysteriously to unite into a single curtain, until at last we could only just discern the dull outline of our next ahead. Then, with an inexplicable suddenness like the dropping of a window-blind, we were plunged into thick fog in which we could see nothing at all except the grey impalpable murk all round us. We might have been

alone on the sea for all the signs there were of the others, and in the space of about three minutes we had run out of perfectly clear weather into a solid wall of the thickest fog I think I have ever seen.

“That’s torn it!” muttered the Captain, nearly weeping with vexation. “Blow my whiskers if this perishin’ North Sea isn’t the absolute limit!”

It was.

We were steaming at 18 knots to the eastward, straight for the German coast in fact, which lay some fifteen or twenty miles ahead. Our ships, as I said before, were disposed in three columns, and the squadron, unless we wished presently to find ourselves hard and fast ashore on a hostile coast, had somehow to be turned 16 points, or 180 degrees, to get their bows pointing out to sea again.

The flagship’s syren started wailing in the longs and shorts of the Morse code.

“Signal for ten knots, sir!” said our signalman, as the dismal hooting was taken up by ship after ship.

“Executive,¹ sir!” a moment later, and the skipper stepped to the revolution tele-

¹ The “Executive,” *i.e.* the long blast on a syren, or a long dash on the wireless, which, in fog, orders the purport of the preceding signal to be carried out. In clear weather at night the “executive” is made by a long flash with a signalling lamp, while flag signals, except in a few specially important cases where they are obeyed as soon as seen, are acted upon when the flags are hauled down.

graph and rapidly twirled the handle until the pointer stood at 180 revolutions.

For a space there was silence, only disturbed by the rippling sound of the water as our bows clove their way through it, while we gazed out over the bridge screens at the flattened, swirling water in the wake of our next ahead, all the signs we could see of her.

Then again the flagship's syren started yelping and howling, while the signalman, a hand to his ear, listened intently.

"Signal to alter course leaders together the rest in succession eight points to starboard, sir," he said at last.

Now consider for a moment what this alteration of course means. Place three parallel lines of matches on the table with their business ends, representing the bows of the ships, pointing directly away from you. (Three matches in each line will do to illustrate, though we had six ships in the centre line and eight destroyers on either side.)

The direction of advance has to be altered 90 degrees to starboard, that is, to your right, and to preserve the formation of the squadron the movement must be in the nature of a wheel. In other words, your centre line of matches must maintain their speed and alter gradually to the new course, while the line on your right hand, the ships on the side towards which the turn is being made, alter at once to the new course and have to mark time, so to speak. Conversely,

the matches on your left, the vessels on the outer wing, must increase speed and alter very gradually to avoid fouling the others. The *Lictor* was the third ship in this line.

The manœuvre looks easy enough on paper, and is simple enough when the weather is clear and one can see what is going on, but we were doing it blindfold in a fog in which one could not see more than a hundred yards.

Another prolonged howl from the murk ahead warned us that the leaders were about to alter course.

“WHOOW!” in an agonised hoot, as another ship informed the world in general that she was altering course to starboard.

“Be careful you steer a steady course, quartermaster!” the Captain cautioned, keeping his eye glued on the wake of the next ahead. “Sub, keep an eye on the compass!”

“Aye, aye, sir.”

“WHEW! WHEEW!” suddenly sounded two yelps as some ship to starboard and fairly close signified her intention of altering course to PORT.

“Oh Suffering Susan!” from the skipper, tapping his foot on the bridge. “That bally idiot’s gone and put her helm the wrong way, confound her! Keep a good look-out to star-board!”

I could share his anxiety. For some reason unknown to us at the time, but, as we discovered afterwards, to avoid colliding with

a neighbour, one of the cruisers had been forced to starboard her helm and alter course to port, or in the wrong direction. This meant she was crossing our bows and cutting through our line.

“There’s going to be a pretty pot-mess in a minute!” growled our boss. “They’re all over. . . .” Just as he spoke a shrill “WHIP! WHOOP! WHOOP!” from our invisible next ahead told us that she was going full speed astern to avoid running into something we couldn’t see.

“Stop both! Slow astern both!” came the next orders in quick succession, and even as our syren roared out its warning to the ships astern something vague and shadowy loomed up out of the fog right under our bows.

“Hard-a-starboard! Full astern port!” ordered the skipper.

I held my breath instinctively and waited for the crash, for a collision seemed inevitable. But my fears were groundless. The Captain had acted in time, and we just shaved past the quarter of the *Locksley*, our next ahead, by a distance which I am prepared to swear was no more than fifteen feet.

“’Ullo, ’ullo, ’ullo!” bellowed a muffled up, enormously fat seaman on her quarter-deck to someone on our forecastle as we slid by. “’Ullo, Nosy Parker! ’Oo arsked you to breakfast?”

“Shut yer ’ead, you silly old ’ipp-o-pot-

a-mus!" shouted back our man. "You don't want no breakfuss, any'ow!"

The remark was apt, and the "hippopotamus," being rather slow in the uptake, scratched his head to think of a suitable retort.

"*Lictor!*" came a hail from someone on the *Locksley's* shadowy bridge.

"Hullo!"

"Sorry to have to go astern, old boy. Couldn't bloomin' well help it. Some craft with no manners has just steamed across my bows between me and old Snatcher. I jolly nearly bagged her!"

"Right you are, sonny! Don't worry yourself! Are you still in touch with old Snatch, by the way?"

The voice in the fog laughed. "No," it said. "The old blighter's disappeared, but I'm going on now to find him. So long, old bird!"

"Snatcher," I may say, was the Commander of our division, in the *Locksley's* next ahead, and Snatcher, though he strafed us heartily if we made fools of ourselves, was regarded with the greatest affection. But we never used the nickname to his face.

The fact that the *Locksley* had been forced to go astern transmitted the retrograde movement down our line, for shrill yelps had been sounding from the syrens astern of us as ship after ship reversed her engines. The inevitable result was that the column became

telescoped, with the vessels piled up on top of each other, so that straightening out the tangle was a matter of some difficulty.

But we succeeded in clearing the muddle somehow, and started off again to find the others, gradually altering course to starboard as we followed the *Locksley* round to the new course.

Suddenly there came a frantic hail from the look-out man on our fore-castle.

"Ship crossing our bows from starboard, sir!" he yelled at the top of his voice, and even as he shouted both the skipper and myself saw the white wash of a bow-wave looming up through the wall of fog and heard the swishing sounds of a vessel's passage through the water.

She was perilously close, barely more than a hundred yards away, and if we continued on our present course we must certainly be rammed.

But the Captain never hesitated for an instant. He summed up the situation at a glance, and saw at once that the newcomer was one of the cruisers. Being rammed by her meant extinction, whereas she, being a heavier ship, could more readily afford to be collided with by us.

I think I admired his coolness at that moment more than I had ever done before. If he had hesitated for an instant it would have been all up with us, but he instinctively chose the lesser of the two evils, and jump-

ing to the starboard engine-room telegraph whirled it round to full speed astern, and shouted to the quartermaster to "Hard-a-port!" and to me to stop the port engine.

It was the only thing to be done, the quickest method of turning the ship on her heel, and to our inexpressible relief she answered her helm. But by now the cruiser was barely thirty yards off, steaming right across our bows, and to avoid her altogether was absolutely out of the question, for our way had not been checked. It was merely a case of delivering as light a blow as possible.

I caught a fleeting glimpse of an officer on her bridge waving his arms like a semaphore, while someone else shouted something unintelligible through a megaphone. The two look-outs on our forecastle dashed madly aft to a place of safety, and before one could draw another breath we were into her.

I don't know if you have ever been in a collision at sea. The shock of the impact between two vessels almost baffles description, and in our case can only be described as a horrible, crunching thud which nearly threw us headlong and all but brought our mast down with a run. Then came the shrill tearing, screeching sound of twisting steel as our bows were wrenched sideways. We had struck her a glancing blow on the port side almost amidships, and our bow plating and stem seemed to have been forced

bodily over to starboard and crumpled up like a concertina. The blow completely stopped our way and slewed the cruiser round through nearly a right angle, until, as the ships drew apart, we could see the ghastly V-shaped gash in her grey side. Most of her damage seemed to be above the water-line, but before we had time to enquire if she was making much water she drew ahead out of sight into the fog with boatswain's pipes twittering as her ship's company were summoned to collision stations.

Every soul in our ship, meanwhile, some in the scantiest of raiment, had arrived on deck and were already carrying the collision mat forward to place it over the great wound in our bows.

"Here's a pretty finale!" the skipper muttered, shrugging his shoulders mournfully and thinking, no doubt, of his white-washed cottage. "Munro, jump down and see what the damage is. Come, come, boy!" he added, noticing my glum expression. "Don't ship a mug like a sea-boot just because we've had a bump. You look like an undertaker's mute at a funeral!" And he actually laughed.

I didn't. I wasn't used to such goings on. It was the first time I had ever been in a destroyer with a crumpled, open-work bow in a thick fog. Also, to make matters worse, I knew from the chart that we were roughly fifteen miles from the German coast and

fully two hundred and fifty from home. And the other ships might leave us in the fog without realising that we were absent, which meant we should have to recall them by wireless telegraphy, thus telling the ever-listening Boche that we were prowling about in his domain.

Moreover, as the Captain had pointed out at sunrise, there was a windy look about the sky, and as the weather had been unsettled for some time we might quite reasonably expect a hard blow before long. I was prepared to bet that the gale, if it did come, would come as a regular snorter from the south-westward, or right in our teeth for the homeward journey. And suppose we found that the damage was such that we couldn't steam against it? All sorts of unpleasant things which might happen flashed through my brain. The prospect was anything but rosy.

But yet the skipper had laughed.

§ 3

"Well?" asked the Captain with some anxiety as the Chief and myself arrived together on the bridge.

Prettyman, who had been crawling about in the battered bows to inspect the damage, wiped his face, already streaked with oil-fuel, with an unspeakable handkerchief.

"Bad business," he said tersely.

“Cæsar’s aunt!” sighed the skipper very troubled. “How bad?”

“Collision bulkhead’s¹ leaking like a sieve and the chain locker’s flooded. The second bulkhead’s very dicky, badly buckled in fact, and the foremost oil-fuel tank under the stoker’s mess-deck is leaking into the sea. The ship’s down by the bows and we’re making water fast!”

The Captain groaned. “Any chance of getting her home?”

“Of course!” smiled the Chief, lugging his cigarette case out of the pocket of his overalls.

“Well, what the dickens d’you want to frighten me for?”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to say we shouldn’t float, or anything of that kind. I merely meant it would be a pretty long job in the dockyard when we did get home.”

The Lieutenant-Commander seemed greatly relieved.

“We’d better shore² up the bulkhead with all the spars we can spare,” the engineer officer went on, selecting a cigarette with great care. “No. 1’s doing it now, as a matter of fact. We’ll also shore down the top of the oil-tank in case it bursts with the pressure, but if you agree I propose to leave

¹ Bulkhead, *i.e.* an upright partition dividing a ship transversely into compartments.

² Shore, *i.e.* a prop set obliquely or otherwise against a bulkhead as a support.

the oil in it to act as a sort of buffer. Got a match, Sub ? ”

I handed him a box.

“ Then we’d better shift all the weights we can as far aft as possible to get her bows well up in the water, and when that’s been done we might work gradually up to eight knots or so and see what happens. ”

“ And what will happen ? ” the skipper enquired.

“ Oh ! ” grunted Prettyman, lighting his cigarette. “ I think she’ll stick it all right provided the weather remains decent. ”

“ And suppose it blows hard and we start pitching our bows under ? ”

“ It’ll be beastly unpleasant. If we put too much pressure on that second bulkhead and it collapses, well . . . ” He shrugged his shoulders expressively and went through the motions of swimming with his arms.

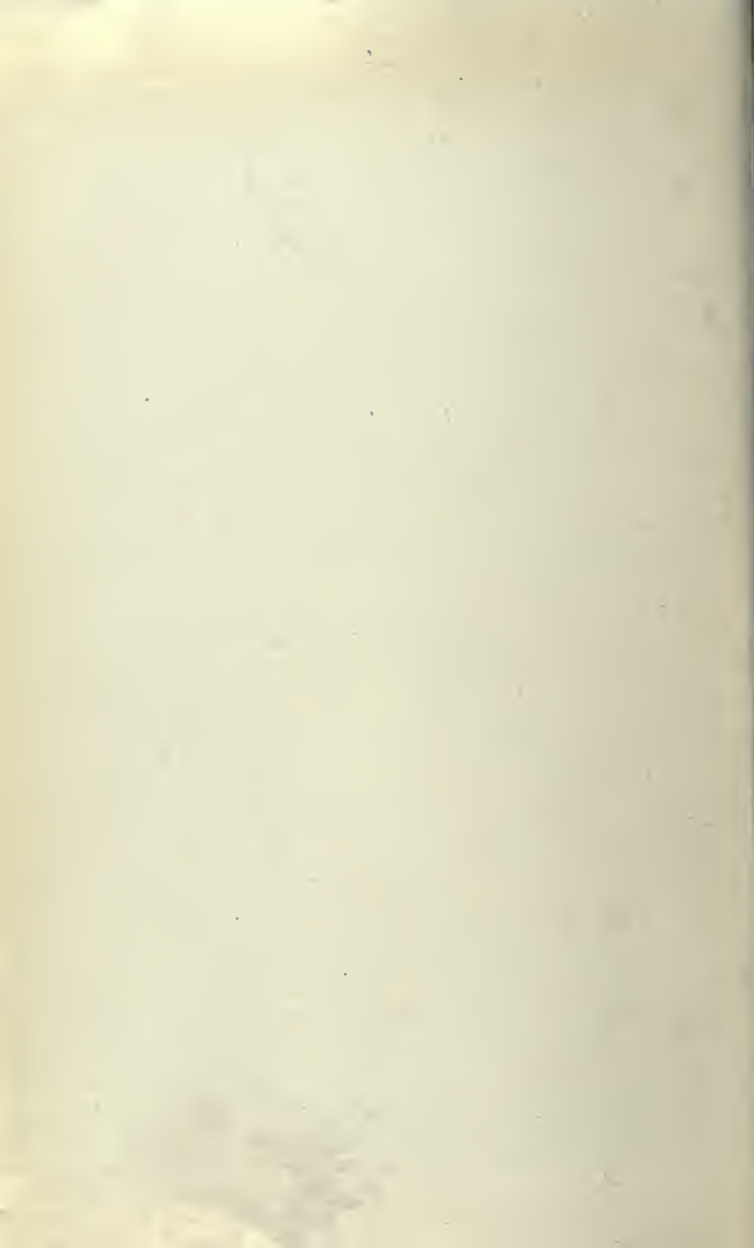
The skipper looked rather despondent. “ I’ll bet my bottom dollar it does blow. It always does when these shows happen ! ”

“ I wouldn’t worry if I were you, sir, ” the Chief consoled him. “ I’ve never known us come a proper mucker yet, and I don’t quite see why we should now. We shan’t if I can help it, anyhow ! ”

For two hours we laboured away doing what we could to make the ship seaworthy. The collision bulkhead was damaged beyond all repair, but we wedged spars, planks, mess-tables, and stools against the second bulk-



WE ARE TOWED HOME.



head to help it to withstand the pressure of the water, and did the same with the top of the large oil-tank in the bottom of the ship which showed signs of bulging upwards. This finished we next transported most of the shell from the foremost shell-room, together with a certain amount of the cable from the chain locker, to the after part of the ship to bring the bows higher out of the water. By the time we had completed the work it was eight o'clock, and the fog was still as thick as ever, while a gentle breeze which hardly rippled the water was blowing fitfully from the westward. It was the wrong direction for us, but up to the present there was no malice in it.

The skipper left the bridge to inspect the arrangements, and when he returned soon afterwards he looked rather more like his old self.

“They’ve converted the mess-decks into a bally forest!” he laughed. “You can hardly walk for shores. We’ll go ahead now and see what happens.”

He went to the engine-room telegraph and put them to “slow ahead” whilst ordering the quartermaster to steady on a westerly course.

The ship began to move slowly through the water, and to me the sound of the ripples breaking away from our bows was by far the sweetest music I think I have ever heard.

“She sticks it!” the Captain exclaimed

hopefully, when, after ten minutes, word came up from down below to say that everything was satisfactory and that we could go on faster.

We worked gradually up from 6 knots to 7, from 7 to 8, and eventually to 10, at which speed Prettyman and No. 1 came up to report that the bulkhead on which we had to pin our faith showed no signs of weakening, but that a further increase was inadvisable without running a risk of loosening the shores.

But 10 knots is 10 knots. We were moving in the right direction, and if the weather only held fine another four-and-twenty hours or so would see us in safety.

"Beg your pardon, sir," said the steward, suddenly appearing and addressing the Captain. "Will you have your breakfast up here or in the charthouse?"

"Breakfast! Great Scott! I clean forgot. What have you got?"

"Porridge, sir, and kippers," the man told him.

"Bring it up here, please. A large plate of porridge, none of your canary's helpings, mind, and two kippers."

"An' the usual toast and marmalade, sir?"

"Yes, please."

And I too made quite a respectable meal when I went below to the wardroom. There is never anything very much the matter with

people provided their appetites are still healthy.

§ 4

By 9 o'clock, to judge from the chits and voice-pipe messages emanating from our telegraphist in his cubby-hole beneath the bridge, the air was rapidly becoming blue with wireless.

"Have been in collision with unknown destroyer," the cruiser we had rammed reported to the Commodore. "Damage serious, but can proceed under my own steam. Two destroyers in company. Do not require assistance."

"Proceed to most convenient dockyard port," went back the reply.

"Have been in collision with *Clytia*," said we. "Damage serious. No ships in company. Escort advisable. My position at 8 a.m. latitude —, longitude —. Course W.S.W. Speed ten knots."

"Am returning to search for you," said our Commodore. "Use syren."

Now nobody in his senses will dream of using wireless telegraphy in close proximity to a hostile coast unless he could help it. Wireless can be heard by anyone and is essentially erratic, and however much one may damp it down it may still be heard at long distances. In this case, of course, its use was absolutely imperative, though when,

soon afterwards, our telegraphist whistled up to tell us that he heard the shrill, unmistakable sounds of Telefunken we were in no way surprised. On the contrary, it was only what we expected.

Brother Boche, safe in one of his lairs, now knew for a certainty that we were in the neighbourhood, and to judge from the frantic signals he was making he was evidently beginning to take some interest in us.

"Are the signals strong?" the Captain asked, putting his lips to the voice-pipe.

"Not very strong, sir, but they're screeching something 'orrid, and has been this last quarter of an hour. I can't make head nor tail of what they're sayin', sir."

"No, of course not," he grinned, replacing the whistle in its tube and turning to me. "Perhaps old Fritz is coming to sea to have a look for us." He eyed me and wrinkled up his face in his peculiar half-smile.

"I hope not, sir," I answered, for the last thing I wished for was to be hunted in our present condition.

"Lord, don't get rattled about THEM! They won't find us in this fog. Besides, think of what an honour it would be if we dragged the High Sea Fleet to sea? How jolly grateful they'd be for a breath of fresh air again!

"We might even slip a mouldy into one of them before we went down in a blaze of glory," he went on, seemingly rather in love

with the idea. "Then you'd see your photo in the papers, my boy. Heroic Sub-Lieutenant who fought his ship to the last with his captain killed, and went down with his colours flying, et cetera!"

"I shouldn't see it, sir," I felt bound to point out.

"Your friends and relations would, which is much the same thing. However, don't get the wind up. The boss is coming back to look for us, and I feel as safe as houses so long as he's anywhere knocking about."

There certainly was some consolation in the knowledge that our Commodore was returning. We all had the fullest confidence in him, the "band of brothers" sort of feeling, and we knew he would never leave us in the lurch. But even so, and for all the skipper's jokes about it, I should far prefer to be a live crossing-sweeper than a defunct hero with his photo in the newspapers.

Soon after 10 o'clock, however, we heard faint trumpetings in the mist ahead. Some ship was calling us up by making our number on her syren, and we replied. We used the terse, official phraseology of the signal book, of course, but it was exactly like two invisible people talking to each other in the dark.

"*Lictor! Lictor!*" the stranger kept on asking. "Where are you? Why the dickens don't you answer?"

"All right, old girl! Don't get excited!"

we hooted in our turn. "Here we are! All alive oh! Jolly glad to see you!"

"Right! Glad I've found you at last. I am the Commodore's ship. What course are you steering and what is your speed?"

We imparted the necessary information.

"Right! Burn¹ your searchlight to show me whereabouts you are, and I will get into touch with you. Do you want help, by the way?"

"Not at present, thanks. We can steam ten knots in this weather."

"Very well. I will escort you. Sing out if you require assistance."

"Thanks, we most certainly will," we howled gratefully.

And sure enough about five minutes later the lean shape of a three-funnelled light-cruiser hove up out of the fog on our port beam. She was barely 100 yards off, and was steering a parallel course to ourselves.

"Is that you, *Lictor*?" she asked, with a winking searchlight.

"Yes."

"Right! I'll edge in ahead of you. Keep touch with me. Speed ten knots."

And within five minutes we were paddling gently along astern of our big friend. Her hull, 300 yards away, was out of sight in the fog, but one of her searchlights, trained astern for our benefit, glimmered hazily

¹ The glare of a searchlight can be seen in fog at a greater distance than the actual shape of a ship.

through the murk ahead. It was so thick that the actual rays of the light were obliterated. All we could see was a shining, silvery disc suspended in mid-air like some huge star. It was our guiding star, and the sight of it gave us a feeling of security and a sense of comradeship which mere words can never describe.

Our troubles seemed to be at an end. We went on our way rejoicing.

§ 5

Shortly after noon the fog rolled away as suddenly as it had come to leave us with a perfectly clear horizon to the westward.

But it was not the fair weather horizon for which we had hoped. The glass had gone down and the aspect was distinctly threatening, and the sun had hidden itself in a hard grey, overcast sky blotted all over with masses of ugly-looking dark cloud driving down from the westward. The gentle breeze had strengthened into a regular wind from the west-south-west, right in our teeth for the homeward journey. It freshened fast, while the rapid movement of the upper cloud masses, those teased-out inky harbingers of heavy weather, warned us that it would blow harder before long.

The sea, too, was rising fast, so that by two o'clock we were pitching slightly against the crisp little waves and occasional whiffs of

spray came rattling against the canvas screens of the bridge.

I noticed the skipper gazing anxiously out across the sea and looking at the compass every now and then to note the direction of the wind. He said nothing, but I could see from his expression that he didn't like it. Neither did I. The prospect of having to punch our way home through a typical sou'-wester was anything but joyful. We seemed to have hopped out of the frying-pan into the fire, and I must confess that that weak, shored-up bulkhead which alone stood between us and the deep sea was very prominent in my thoughts.

And presently, as if to emphasise it, a report came up from below to say that the bulkhead showed signs of bulging and that some of the shores were working loose with the motion of the ship. We accordingly eased to 8 knots, and informed the Commodore by signal.

"I anticipate bad weather," he said in reply. "Do not risk your ship unnecessarily. Are you sufficiently seaworthy to steam at slow speed against a heavy sea?"

We answered in the negative.

"Prepare to be taken in tow by the stern," came back at once. "Turn stern to sea and stop engines. I will send hawser."

Within an hour, with our engines jogging slowly astern to keep the ship more or less straight, and a 4½-inch steel wire hawser

attached to our towing slip right aft, we were being ignominiously tugged along at $6\frac{1}{2}$ knots. Stern first, if you please; a method of procedure which would have been amusing if it hadn't been so intensely pathetic. I prefer not to remember too much about it, and do not propose to give a long and detailed description of our ghastly trip home. A destroyer can stand almost any weather bows on, but it is not designed for being dragged backwards into a sea, while our stern seemed to act as a sort of scoop to every wave that came along.

And that same night it came on to blow great guns from the south-westward. Our speed dropped from $6\frac{1}{2}$ knots to 5, from 5 to 3, and from 3 until we were only just moving against it. Even so, the huge, yeasty-topped combers, crashing against our blunt after part and erupting on board ten and fifteen feet deep, removed every movable fitting from the stern of the ship and rendered the after portion quite uninhabitable. The worst of it was that the store-rooms containing all our food were right aft, so after salvaging enough provender to last us the journey, we battened down as best we could and picnicked forward for the rest of the trip.

But the stoutest watertight hatches, let alone our light ones, would never have withstood the battering, and try as we could we could not prevent water finding its way below. Moreover, every ounce of water in

the after compartments decreased the buoyancy of the ship and made things worse.

At daylight the next morning it was blowing the father and mother of a gale and the sea was as bad as ever, while the ship, jerking to the pull of the towing wire, crashed, thudded, and shook so that I thought she would break in halves. Destroyers, proceeding ahead, poured oil on the water to calm the sea, but though by so doing they prevented the waves actually from breaking, nothing could flatten the steep rollers which threatened to overwhelm us. And at 10 o'clock that morning, to add to our misery, the towing wire snapped, and for two mortal hours we rolled in the trough of the sea, while a destroyer took us in tow with her chain cable. The dreary progress was resumed at about noon, but half an hour later the cable itself, jerking clean out of the water, parted like a banjo string, so that we fell off broadside on again, rolling fifty degrees either way.

Then it was that I thought we should have to abandon the ship, for the after compartments, though we kept the pumps going all the time, were flooded, while the bulkhead forward sagged like a piece of cardboard and a party of men were constantly at work replacing and wedging up the shores.

But the Commodore was the last man to think of abandoning a ship while there was the least chance of salving her, and steaming his vessel quite close he lowered a boat and

passed us another hawser. The hawser was followed by the end of his large chain cable, which, after nearly three hours' back-breaking work, with every soul in the ship sliding and tumbling about on our sea-swept deck, we eventually succeeded in dragging on board and securing to our stern. Then the cruiser went slowly ahead, and once more our stern was pointing for home. This time the cable held.

It was seventy-one hours after the collision, seventy-one hours of unmitigated agony, that daylight came and we saw the thin blue streak of the English coast spread out across the western horizon. Exhausted, unshaven, hungry, and wet through we gazed at it. Our hearts were full of joy, and we could have fallen on our knees and prayed for sheer thankfulness.

And then a few hours later when we got in under the lee of the land tugs came out to meet us and we cast off the tow.

"Congratulate you on keeping your ship afloat," said the Commodore.

"We are very grateful to you for getting us home," said we, and so we jolly well were.

§ 6

And that same afternoon, when we were safely berthed alongside the jetty and temporary repairs were being effected to enable us to proceed to a dockyard, the skipper,

whose cabin had been flooded to a depth of six feet, arrayed himself in a borrowed monkey-jacket and went to report to the Commodore. He went away with a face like a sea-boot, but came back beaming.

“What’s the news, sir?” somebody ventured to ask.

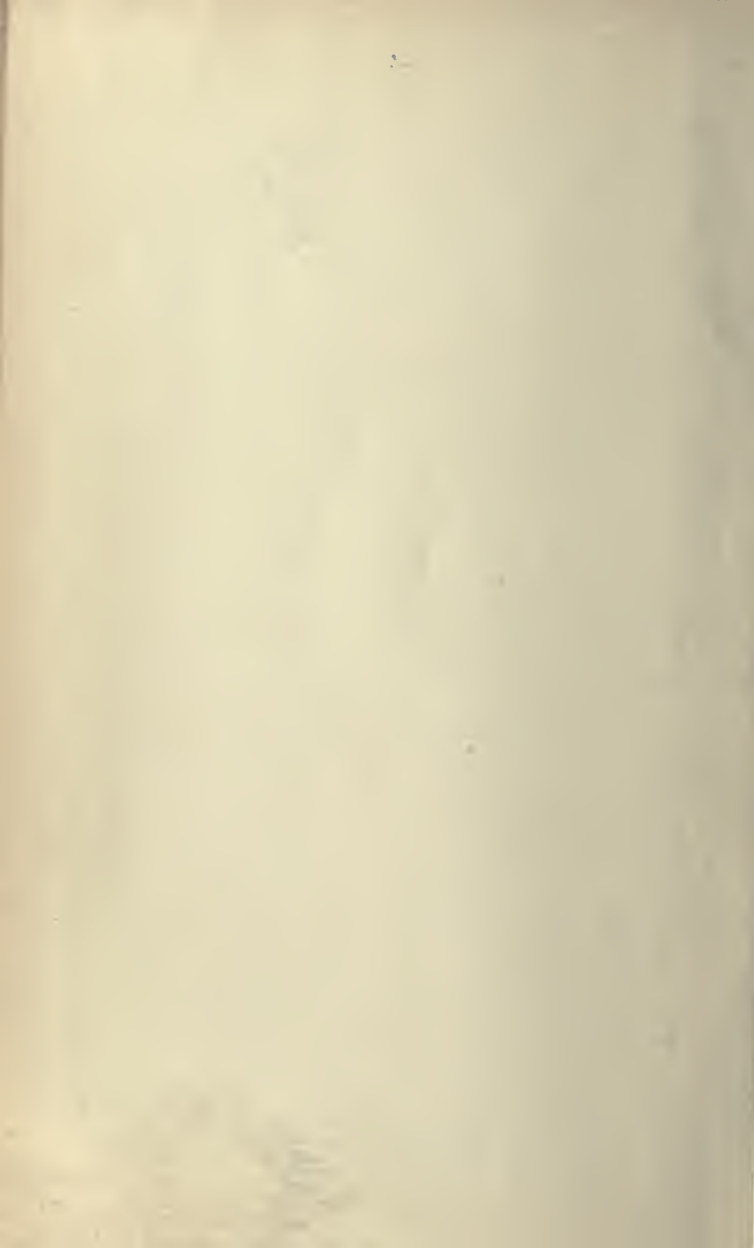
“Everything is peace,” he said joyfully. “The old man is all smiles. He says these things must happen sometimes, and that, though there’ll be a Court of Enquiry, he doesn’t think I shall get scrubbed.”

When the Court of Enquiry did come off the skipper was exonerated from all blame. In addition he received an expression of their Lordships’ appreciation for saving his ship in very difficult circumstances.

And the *Lictor*, though we all left her a year ago to turn over to a newer destroyer, has steamed many thousands of miles since that adventure.

THE END





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