

The Sea Monarch

A Thrilling Tale of Adventure Under the Most Unusual Circumstances

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CHAPTER XXIII

THE CRIPPLED SUBMARINE

"BETTER switch off the searchlight," said Gerald. "It's doing no good, and we must economize the air."

"There's enough oxygen to last for two hours," observed Palmer; "but we had better try the motors full speed ahead once more. It can't do much harm, and the longer we remain inactive the deeper the boat will sink in the ooze."

But beyond a slight pulsation of the hull the submarine remained in her hazardous position.

"Look here," exclaimed Gerald's companion, hopefully, "why not close the torpedo compensating tank and discharge all the torpedoes? That will get rid of some of our gear."

"What happens to the torpedoes when they have finished their run, provided they miss their mark?" asked Gerald.

"If they have practice-heads they rise to the surface; if provided with war-heads they sink."

"The same as our Whiteheads; the exhaustion of the compressed air actuating the propellers opens a valve that admits water into the air-chamber?"

"That is so."

"Then I'm afraid your plan is useless, for in expelling the torpedoes we are only getting rid of objects lighter than the weight of the water they displace."

"You're right," assented Palmer, ruefully.

"Beg pardon, sir," exclaimed one of the seamen, "but are we hitched up here for good?"

"It looks like it," replied Palmer, almost brutally.

"Then couldn't I go out by the air-lock—I am willing to risk it—and take a line up with me? We've nearly a hundred fathoms aboard."

"Impossible, man; you would be crushed to death."

"We ought to try something, sir; the oxygen seems to be giving out, and the mice are getting torpid."

"I thought we had two hours' supply?"

"So did I, sir, but something's wrong with the stuff."

"We will have to rely on the oxygen helmets, then. Serve them out; it may prolong our lives a few hours, though I know not to what purpose."

Slowly the minutes passed. Illuminated

only by the glimmer of a solitary incandescent lamp the interior of the submarine presented a picture of gloomy despair. The crew began to realize that they were imprisoned in a living tomb.

"We must make some attempt to communicate with the *Olive Branch*" exclaimed Gerald, shaking off the growing feeling of apathy and drowsiness by a great effort. "Why not write a report stating our condition, enclose it in one of the torpedoes, and fire it to the surface?"

"To what purpose?" asked Palmer. "They can't help us."

"It will show them that we've done our best."

"All right, then, though personally I think it a waste of time."

Somehow or other Gerald wrote out a brief account of the vicissitudes of the submarine. This both he and Palmer signed, and enclosed in a practice-head of one of the torpedoes.

The impulse charge was sufficiently strong to eject the cigar-shaped cylinder from the tube, though at the expense of another slight rush of water; then, as there was nothing more to be done, the crew prepared for the worst.

It was a peculiar sensation that came over the doomed men. Apparently paying scant heed to their peril they sat down, with their heads buried in their arms, awaiting the sleep that precedes death. The white mice—the surest means of indicating the presence of impure gases—had long since been lifeless; only the soft purr of the dynamo and the laboured breathing of the men broke the oppressive silence.

How long Gerald remained in a semi-unconscious state he knew not; time and place were alike forgotten; he hardly possessed the power of thinking, and, knowing his fate, he seemed absolutely indifferent to it.

Suddenly a sharp metallic clank caught his ear, but, beyond hearing the sound, Tregarthen paid no heed to it. Yet something was moving across the outside of the massive steel shell. Perhaps, he wondered dreamily, it was one of those enormous submarine animals that exist only under enormous pressure, and whose bodies have from time to time been cast ashore, to the wonder of scientific men.

Slowly the bow of the submarine began to rise. Gerald sat bolt upright; he could scarce believe the evidence of his senses. Higher and

higher it rose till his inert comrades rolled sideways upon the steel floor, and began to slide helplessly towards the dim recesses occupied by the motors.

Grasping the lowermost rung of the ladder leading to the conning-tower, Tregarthen tried to collect his scattered wits in order to find some explanation for the sudden tilting of the helpless boat. Perchance her afterpart had rested over a fissure, and the slimy bed had given way as the hull began to settle down.

Then the sensation of drowsiness began to reassert itself, and the lieutenant felt his grip relaxing, till, just as he was on the point of joining his companions who lay in a confused heap—dead perhaps, but at all events unconscious—a voice exclaimed peremptorily, "Empty your ballast tanks."

It was through the receiver of the loud-speaking wireless telephone that the voice came. It meant that the submarine had been raised several fathoms, sufficiently for the telephone to be used once more.

Staggering up the sloping deck, Gerald grasped the pump lever of the 'midship tank. Thank goodness the pressure had been reduced sufficiently for the powerful pump to act.

With his last remaining strength Tregarthen plied the lever, till at length a ruddy sunset glare streamed in through the thick glass apertures in the conning-tower. The submarine was awash.

Climbing the ladder into the conning-tower Gerald threw back the double-action lock securing the hatchway, but the task of opening the massive steel plate was beyond him. The next moment he was drinking in the pure air, supported by a burly petty-officer who had slid down from the cruiser to the deck of the submarine.

"Hurry up and pass these men out," he heard Captain Brookes exclaim. "Perhaps some of them may be still alive."

Half conscious, Gerald was lifted over the side of the *Olive Branch*, Jack Stockton supporting him with the utmost solicitude.

"A pretty fine pass," he heard Captain Brookes remark. "I did not think that Palmer would disobey orders. And nothing gained, after all."

Gerald stopped, just as he was about to be assisted down the companion ladder, and with a sudden impulse that surprised his chum, he wrenched himself clear and staggered across to where the captain stood.

"No, sir; something is gained after all. The missing wireless gear is strung underneath the submarine."

Then everything seemed to swim around him in a white mist, and but for Lieutenant Sinclair's prompt action he would have fallen headlong to the deck.

"We thought you were all done for when you did not return at the end of the hour," said Stockton next morning.

"So did I," replied Gerald. "But how did they manage to raise the boat?"

"Mainly by a slice of luck, and also through Captain Brookes perseverance and energy, old chap. Directly we felt certain that something was amiss the captain ordered a couple of hands to the cable-cutting room. The

dynamometer detected the presence of a very weak current—"

"That must have been after we shut off the searchlight and stopped the motors."

"Well, at any rate, it was sufficient to enable us to fix your position. Three times the grab was lowered without result. During these operations a torpedo came to the surface."

"Yes, we discharged it without allowing the propellers to actuate, so that it would come nearly straight to the surface."

"By jove, it did! I should never have believed it had I not seen the thing jump. It shot nearly twenty feet in the air, missing the cutter by a bare boat's length. Then someone suggested unfixing the head, and within we found your message."

"With that we knew you were still alive, and that the submarine had not collapsed under the pressure of the water, as Captain Brookes had feared. Shortly afterwards the grab engaged, and we found that under a strain of half a ton it was beginning to come home. It was an anxious time, as the cable was only tested to twelve hundredweights, but it held, after all, as you know."

"How is Palmer?"

"Bad. The strain coming on top of the narcotic has played havoc with him. The other men are progressing favorably; but Gerald, old man, where's your shaving-mirror? Then hold it so that you can see the back of your head."

Tregarthen did so, and to his surprise he found that on his dark brown hair was a patch as white as snow, almost the size of a man's hand.

"That's strange, Jack. I remember putting my hand to my head when the boat began to tilt. It's a case of utter funk, I suppose."

"You've something to remember the eighty-fathom dive by for the rest of your natural life."

"I don't want that to remind me," replied Gerald, with a shudder.

"Well, it's all over now, and little harm done; but do you know there was something very remarkable about that message you sent up? You gave an account of everything that happened save one thing—the object of your trip. You never mentioned the missing wireless gear."

CHAPTER XXIV

A FRUSTRATED PLOT

THE recovered reciprocators were none the worse for their prolonged submersion, thanks to the protection afforded by the steel cylinders in which they were encased.

A diver having removed them from the body of the ill-fated airman, the wrecked monoplane was released and allowed to sink once more to the bottom of the sea.

The aviator's body was brought on board the *Olive Branch* in order that it might be given a decent burial, and then it was that an astonishing discovery was made.

The man was not an American. Papers found on him, carefully concealed in the double thickness of his india rubber coat, revealed the

fact that he was the agent of a certain European power, and that it was his intention to find out as much about the *Olive Branch* as he was able to do. The flight across the Straits of Messina was part of a prearranged plan, and, though his fall into the sea under the influence of the Z-rays was not strictly in accordance with his programme, it materially helped to mature the plot that had all but succeeded.

The damage done to the Z-rays apparatus was considerable, necessitating the removal of the diagram hoard and the wires between the dynamo and the conning-tower. While this was being done the ZZ-rays were consequently out of action, hence Captain Brookes' anxiety to have the work put in hand without a moment's delay.

In this partially crippled state advantage was taken of the proximity of the Santorin Islands to clear the cruiser's under-body of the marine deposit that was already beginning to have an appreciable effect on her speed.

Practically the whole of these islands are of volcanic origin, sulphur springs being strongly in evidence around the shores of Port Megalos, while the water possesses the property of killing and removing in less than thirty-six hours the weeds and barnacles that adhere to a ship.

"What do you say to a run ashore, gentlemen?" asked Captain Brookes of several of the officers on the afternoon of their arrival. "I'm told the crater is very interesting."

"I, for one, will be very glad of the opportunity, provided I can be spared," replied Sinclair.

"And I," exclaimed Gerald, Stockton, Temple, and Slade in chorus.

"Very well, only be careful not to go too close to the sulphur springs, and beware of loose stones rolling down the mountain. You will be practically in sight of the ship the whole time, so keep a good look-out in case I have to make a signal for recall."

Two hours later, by dint of much exertion and considerable agility, the party of officers gained the edge of the crater. For some time they remained looking at the scene of desolation.

"What's that, by jove!" exclaimed Jack Stockton, pointing to an elongated yellow object swaying in a deep hollow a few hundred yards away. The others looked in the direction indicated.

"It's an airship — one of the Zeppelin type," said Gerald. "What on earth is it doing in this part of the globe?"

"I wish I'd brought my marine glasses," remarked Sinclair. "This looks like an interesting discovery. She's anchored, I think."

"Ay, and there are some men coming this way; they've just descended by a rope ladder. I wonder if they have spotted us?"

"I don't think so. Look here, you fellows, they mean mischief! Suppose we take cover and watch their little game?"

The only shelter worthy of the name was afforded by a clump of withered thorns. Foliage there was none, but by lying flat on the ground and keeping behind the thick uncovered roots, the officers could follow the

movements of the men of the mysterious airship.

Evidently the clump was the objective of the strangers, since from it they could command a view of the *Olive Branch* without appearing on the skyline. The newcomers were three tall, bearded men dressed in a brown uniform. One carried a revolver in a pouch, the others were apparently unarmed; all had field-glasses sung over their shoulders.

Unsuspectingly they stopped at the clump of thorns, only a few tangled branches separating them from Gerald and his comrades. Out came their glasses, and with them glued to their eyes the chance of detecting the concealed officers was materially lessened.

"Yes, there she is," exclaimed one of the strangers, speaking in a guttural tongue that both Gerald and Sinclair were conversant with. "Adolphe was right this time."

"Looking at her from here, sir, one would not imagine her to be such a formidable ship."

"Appearances are deceptive, Captain Dorge. However, there she is, and now is our opportunity. Once we settle with her our chances against England are wonderfully improved."

"Will forty kilos of the explosive be sufficient?"

"It will wipe her out of existence. We must be sharp, for the moon rises at two."

"If we blunder?"

"There will be no blunder. I'll bring the 'Voertwards' immediately above her, and drop to within thirty metres of her deck. They will never expect an attack in this harbor, especially from the sky."

Gerald's grasp tightened on Sinclair's shoulder. That officer nudged Temple in a manner that required no verbal explanation; while Stockton, who had observed the signal, was not slow to comprehend.

"Now!" shouted Sinclair.

Simultaneously the four men sprang to their feet, burst through the intervening bushes, and threw themselves on the astonished foreigners.

The man addressed as Captain Dorge made as if to draw his revolver, but Gerald had already seized him round the waist, while Jack Stockton deftly took possession of his weapon. In an instant he was capsized, Stockton sitting on his chest so that he could only writhe helplessly in the dust.

Temple, a strapping great Scot, had little difficulty in overpowering his antagonist, but Sinclair found all his work cut out in tackling his man. Fiercely they struggled, the stranger striving to grip his adversary by the throat. Failing that, he inserted his fingers in the lieutenant's hair and tried to gouge his eyes out with his thumbs—a continental trick that Sinclair was conversant with.

The first lieutenant's left arm shot out straight from the shoulder, and, taking his antagonist fairly in the chin, sent him reeling a dozen paces ere he fell like a log.

"Now what's to be done?" asked Gerald breathlessly, as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"Done? Why, drag the bounders back to the ship," replied Sinclair. "We've three im-

portant hostages for the airship's good behavior."

"Easier said than done."

"Not when you know the way, but we must look alive, for I see yonder gentleman is recovering from the effects of my knockout blow. I wonder if the other fellows belonging to the airship have spotted us?"

So saying, Sinclair relieved the two prisoners of their belts, and, ordering the men to stand side by side, he fastened the left arm of one to the right arm of the other by means of the leather straps, tying their thumbs together by means of a piece of thin cord as an additional safeguard.

Meanwhile Gerald and Stockton had raised the semi-dazed officer, while Temple brought up the rear with the captured revolver well in evidence.

It had taken nearly two hours to climb the crater, but the descent occupied barely twenty minutes.

Smothered in clouds of pumice dust, continually dodging enormous boulders that rolled down the mountain side, the officers of the *Olive Branch* and their captives pursued their headlong descent, and on gaining the beach they found that a boat had already been despatched to bring them off to the ship.

"What has happened, gentlemen?" asked Captain Brookes as the party gained the quarter-deck. "I was watching you through my glasses, and could see that you were having an encounter of some sort."

Briefly the "first luff" made his report.

The captain's brows clouded.

"This is bad news," he remarked. "Whatever design these people have against Great Britain is evidently a secret. I've been in communication by wireless with our Swanage agent, and he assures us that there is no sign of international complications. However, it's lucky you nipped this little plot in the bud, for I have no doubt that that airship would deliberately violate all the etiquettes of neutrality. I'll ask our prisoners a few questions."

"I am Hans von Rippach," replied the man who was evidently the senior officer of the airship.

"Herr Hans von Rippach, I salute you," rejoined Captain Brookes, without betraying the fact that he understood the nature of the foreigner's reply, though he shrewdly suspected that his prisoner was a member of the Royal House of a powerful European State. "Might I inquire the reason why you proposed to attack my vessel treacherously in neutral waters?"

"I refuse to offer explanations to a pirate," replied the prisoner, rudely.

Finding that it was useless to attempt to gain further information, Captain Brookes ordered the captives to be removed and confined in a cabin under an armed guard.

"Couldn't we have a smack at the airship, sir?" asked Lieutenant Sinclair. "A six-pounder could be taken ashore and dragged up to yonder ridge without much trouble."

"We might harm some of the inhabitants of the island," replied Captain Brookes.

"There's bound to be a crowd gathered around to see the sight."

"I venture to suggest that the crew have kept them at a respectful distance, sir."

"I'll not take the risk. If the airship ascends I'll wing her sure enough, not otherwise. But I mean to get under way at once and head at top speed for English waters. There's mischief brewing; of that I feel certain."

Ere nightfall the *Olive Branch* had cleared Santorin Harbor and was tearing towards the Straits of Gibraltar. The English agent at Swanage was kept constantly in touch by means of wireless, greatly to that individual's annoyance, since he saw no reason for Captain Brookes' continuous messages. But, four hours after clearing the Straits, a wireless was received that caused the blood of every member of the crew of the *Olive Branch* to surge madly through his veins. It was brief and yet to the point: "Triple Alliance has commenced hostilities against Great Britain."

CHAPTER XXV

THE EMPIRE'S ORDEAL

IN the course of a few hours the officers and crew of the *Olive Branch* were in possession of the state of affairs so far as it was possible for their English agent to impart information. Great things were taking place, events of momentous importance, yet with few exceptions the country was kept in ignorance of the initial disasters of the war.

A secret treaty had been contracted between three great European Powers, and so well were the terms of the understanding guarded that the British Foreign Office was absolutely unaware of the existence of any agreement between the countries concerned. Simultaneous "autumn manœuvres" had been the means of the foregathering of a powerful combined fleet in the Atlantic, where, though away from the recognized trade routes, it was within twelve hours' steaming distance of the south coast of England.

At the same time most of the British warships under the supreme command of Sir Protheroe Hobbes, Admiral of the Fleet, were cruising off the west coasts of Scotland and Ireland, while, through unforeseen defects, an unprecedented number were under refit at the home ports.

Several events, to which no one at the time attached the real importance, took place during the week preceding the outbreak of war.

A large British-owned vessel entering Portsmouth Harbor with a cargo of Norwegian granite for use on some of the dockyard works, ran aground opposite the Round Tower—the narrowest part of the mouth of the harbor. As she swung round broadside on to the strong flood tide there was an explosion amidships and the vessel sank in ten minutes, completely blocking up the fairway, and, consequently, "bottling up" six useful units of the British Navy.

On the same day a mysterious outrage took place in Scotland, the center spans of the Forth Bridge being destroyed by some powerful explosive. This act was wrongly attributed to Anarchists, who had been extremely active

of late. Though, fortunately, there was no loss of life entailed, the consequences were disastrous, since, until the debris was removed, the naval base of Rosyth was completely isolated.

The following afternoon the ambassador of the Triple Alliance left London, and hostilities, without a formal declaration of war, immediately broke out.

Under cover of darkness simultaneous attempts were made by airships upon the principal naval ordnance magazines of Great Britain. The attack upon Priddy's Hard Magazine failed, mainly through the initiative taken by a young lieutenant in charge of B Y aeroplane at Fort Blockhouse; but the enemy succeeded in destroying the magazines of Bedenham, Chattenden, and Bull Point, though in the last instance the airship dealing the blow was so crippled by the effect of the explosion that she was compelled to come to earth at Saltash, where her crew were immediately taken prisoners.

A small coasting steamer entering Plymouth Sound struck a submarine mine a few cables from the Mewstone, and sank with all hands. It was subsequently discovered that the channel on either side of the breakwater had been strewn with mines, so that ere a battleship or cruiser dare leave the Hamoaze the Sound had to be "swept" as far seaward as a line joining Rame Head and Wembury Point.

Meanwhile the fleet of the Triple Alliance—outnumbering Admiral Hobbes's command by no less than seven Dreadnoughts and super-Dreadnoughts, eleven armored cruisers, and more than twenty ocean-going destroyers—sought to cut off the British fleet and compel it to give battle. Once the British fleet were destroyed the position of the Empire would be hopeless. Without landing a single hostile regiment her downfall would be only a matter of a few weeks; with her sea-borne commerce captured or destroyed England would be starved into submission; the partition of the Empire would follow in due course.

The minute Admiral Hobbes heard by wireless of the outbreak of war, he issued orders for the fleet to steam at its greatest speed straight for the English Channel. A man of undoubted courage and skill, he never hesitated to count the cost; disregarding the disparity of force, he resolved to take the initiative and do his best to win a decisive action.

At daybreak on the day following the departure of the British fleet from Bantry Bay, two of the swift coastal destroyers signalled that the enemy's ships were standing north-west in quarter line.

Unfortunately, this information, though correct, was not complete, as a strong division, in line ahead, was steaming parallel to that of the main fleet, though some fifteen miles to the southwest. Thus, should the British admiral of the fleet attempt to break the enemy's line—as he decided to do—he would have to run the risk of being raked by the guns of the powerful division lying hull down on his starboard side.

Admiral Bloch, in supreme command of the combined hostile fleets, had laid his plans carefully, but he had not reckoned with Captain

Brookes, of the *Olive Branch*. Bloch it was who had planned the annihilation of the dreaded cruiser by means of a surprise night attack by one of the latest type of airships.

The crew of the airship had cabled news of the failure of the enterprise, but, unfortunately for the enemy, owing to an error on the part of a Greek telegraph operator, the code word for "destroyed" was substituted for that signifying "escaped."

Consequently, Admiral Bloch, imagining that all danger from that source was at an end, did not hesitate to meet the British fleet, well knowing that the latter, though powerful, was vastly inferior in numbers to his own.

Meanwhile the *Olive Branch* was tearing across the Bay. Two hundred miles from Finisterre she overhauled a British transport homeward bound. This vessel she promptly warned of the danger ahead, and as the transport turned and made towards Gibraltar her sides were crowded with troops who cheered the formidable cruiser to the echo.

The defects to the *Olive Branch's* electrical gear had been made good ere she passed Gibraltar; the 6-in. shells were charged with their powerful explosive; magazines were opened and water-tight doors closed. As far as was humanly possible the vessel under Captain Brookes' command was fit and ready for action.

At six bells the dull rumble of a terrific cannonade was heard away to the north-west. The van of Admiral Hobbes' fleet was in touch with the enemy.

It was a prolonged, yet terrible encounter. The British fleet, advancing in line ahead in double columns, suffered severely as they received the concentrated fire of the hostile ships. It was a running fight at this stage, for Admiral Bloch's main division, relying on its superior numbers, was slowly retiring so as to subject its pursuers to a heavy cannonade at long range ere the second division, fresh for action, converged upon the flank of the British fleet.

In twenty minutes the British *Orion* and *Thunderer* were sunk, while the *Princess Royal*, *Vanguard*, *Inflexible*, and *Foudroyant* had fallen out of line. In spite of their complicated system of water-tight doors they were leaking badly, their powerful centrifugal pumps being barely sufficient to cope with the inrush of water. The *Foudroyant*, in particular, was in a deplorable condition, being battered entirely out of recognition.

The "lame ducks" must go. Admiral Hobbes could not hazard the rest of his fleet by standing by. The cripples were ordered to make their way as best they might for Haulbowline, trusting to luck to avoid the detached armored cruisers of the hostile fleet.

In this running light the enemy possessed a decided advantage in the fact that both torpedoes and mines could be employed, whereas the pursuing vessels were unable to use either.

Nor had they suffered lightly. The huge 20,000-ton battleship *Kronprinz Gustave*, her armored sides shattered by the 13-in projectiles of the *King George V.*, was slowly settling down by the head. The *Askoldin* and *Trodet*—both regarded as formidable vessels—

had already disappeared, while the *Styx*, *Vonderflack*, and *Gelion* had dropped astern hopelessly crippled. These three vessels, finding themselves overhauled by the British fleet, surrendered at discretion. But Admiral Hobbes was not in a position to take possession of the disabled ships; all he could hope was that his own "lame ducks" would be able to complete the surrender.

Then with a terrific roar a small cruiser steaming about two cables' length on the quarter of the *Donetz*—Bloch's flagship—burst into a thousand fragments. Admiral Hobbes hailed this success with as much delight as if it had been the sinking of one of the enemy's super-Dreadnoughts, for the vessel had been recognized as the *Hekla*, a mine-layer of the most aggressive type.

Thus the losses on the side of the Triple Alliance outnumbered those of the British by one. This, Admiral Hobbes knew, was good, but not good enough. Should the action be continued with the same proportion of losses the allies would come out with a balance of eleven ships to the good—and that without taking into consideration the as yet invisible division of Vice-Admiral Neboff.

By noon the rival fleets, covering a front of eleven miles, were in the vicinity of the Lizard. The British commander hoped that some of the units left at Devonport might make a flank attack on the enemy. His wireless gear had been swept away, and, consequently, he was cut off from communication with the shore.

Then, instead of the expected reinforcement, one of the scouts came within signalling distance with the grave news that another hostile division was closing in on the British starboard quarter.

Half an hour later Admiral Neboff's division opened fire.

Admiral Hobbes realized that his position was hazardous in the extreme. Cornered between two powerful fleets he had either to beat an undignified retreat or to fight to the death. Quickly he made up his mind; he would hammer and be hammered as long as a single ship remained afloat.

At this juncture a grey cruiser, cutting through the water an inconceivable speed, was seen approaching from the southeast. Eagerly, though hardly daring to hope, Admiral Hobbes watched her approach through his glass. As she passed within a mile of the partially disabled *Hertzog* the foreigner imprudently let fly an 11-in. shell. The mysterious cruiser returned shot for shot, but one only was sufficient. Like a cardboard box the *Hertzog* appeared to crumple up, and amid a thick cloud of steam and smoke she disappeared beneath the waters.

"Thank heaven!" exclaimed the British admiral, fervently. "'Tis the *Olive Branch*."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE VINDICATION OF THE "OLIVE BRANCH"

FOR three nights preceding the arrival of the *Olive Branch* on the scene of action Captain Brookes rarely left the deck. Content with two hours' rest a day he seemed had

to be independent of a desire to sleep. Yet the enormous physical and mental strain was beginning to tell.

"I shall have rest in plenty after this business is done; my lifelong task will soon be accomplished," he replied in answer to Gerald's remonstrances. "But now I must see the prisoners personally. Will you please accompany me?"

Outside the cabin in which the officers of the airship were confined stood two armed seamen. On the captain's approach they unlocked the door, and followed their superior into the apartment; but with a gesture they were dismissed, and Captain Brookes and Gerald were alone with the three prisoners.

"Good morning, Herr Hans von Rippach," exclaimed Captain Brookes. "I regret to have to inform you that owing to possible events I must ask you to take up your quarters in a cabin on the main deck."

"Beneath the armored deck, I presume?" replied the individual who concealed his identity under the Continental equivalent of Mr. Nobody of Nowhere. The man spoke in fluent English, with hardly a trace of a foreign pronunciation. "That means you are going into action?"

The captain assented.

"Might I take this opportunity of expressing my regret for the rude manner in which I spoke to you on my arrival on board?" continued the officer.

"I accept your apologies, sir."

"And to answer your original questions I beg to announce myself as—"

"Prince E. von Bulow von Hatalewis, second son of—"

"Thank you, Lord Stanningborough," rejoined the prince with an air of a practiced duelist who has effected a successful counter. "Need I recall our most pleasureable meeting in Vienna in '09?"

"You heard what the prince said?" said the captain, abruptly, as he and Gerald left the cabin after the expiration of ten minutes' conversation. "Please keep this matter to yourself, as I particularly wish to preserve my incognito."

Gerald bowed; he was on the point of replying "Yes, my lord," but, checking himself, he merely answered "Yes, sir." The revelation had momentarily staggered him, for he clearly remembered the case of the mysterious disappearance of Lord Stanningborough early in the second decade of the present century. For the first time he was able to recognize the peer's features in spite of the addition of the torpedo-beard.

Lord Stanningborough had been a prominent member of a committee of Imperial Defence, and had been submitted to a severe criticism for his outspoken utterances at the time of the three-power standard controversy. Even his personal friends treated him as a harmless fanatic, while the Government of the day ignored his well-meant warnings. At last, in utter disgust, Lord Stanningborough announced his intention of undertaking a big-game expedition to Uganda, and within a month of landing in Africa all traces of him vanished. But Gerald Tregarthen under-

stood; Captain Brookes was to remain Captain Brookes till his life's work was completed.

A bugle sounded "General quarters." From his position in the conning-tower Gerald could see the ungainly lattice-work masts of Admiral Neboff's division showing just above the horizon.

"Independent firing, foremost turret," ordered Captain Brookes, as an 11-in. shell from a partly disabled ship ricocheted harmlessly a hundred yards across the *Olive Branch's* bows.

"That's done it," he exclaimed as the hostile vessel disappeared from view. "Now for the enemy's flanking ships."

Neboff had witnessed the arrival of the redoubtable cruiser. He had been duped; the *Olive Branch* had not been annihilated but had arrived at a critical moment.

A signal fluttered from the flagship of the vice-admiral's division. Every available 11-in. and 14-in. gun was to be trained and fired simultaneously at the *Olive Branch* in the hope of sending her to the bottom.

For the space of twelve seconds over fifty heavy shells were hurtling through the air at a velocity of considerably more than a thousand yards a second. But the gun-layers had forgotten one important consideration; they had omitted to make due allowance for the cruiser's abnormal speed, and, with one exception, the projectiles fell harmlessly astern, thrashing the sunlit water into a cauldron of foam.

The shell that struck home—a 14-in. missile—simply swept the whole of the afterpart of the *Olive Branch* out of existence. Everything above the armored deck and abaft the rear-most gun-turret was blown away, the concussion shaking the cruiser from stem to stern.

"The bos'un to sound and report state of hull," ordered Captain Brookes; "then take necessary steps to keep the leak under."

"The range?" he continued, as he bent over the ZZ-rays indicator.

"Fourteen thousand yards, sir," replied Gerald.

The next instant the horizon in the direction of Admiral Neboff's division seemed to be one blaze of dull red fire, a thick pall of smoke rose in the air, and presently the dull revibration of a series of detonations was faintly borne to the ear of the young lieutenant in the conning-tower.

"Hurrah! That's settled their hash," he shouted, carried away by the excitement of the moment. "The—"

The sentence remained unfinished, for, happening to turn his head, he saw the figure of his commanding officer huddled over the indicator-board.

"Hit, sir?" he exclaimed, anxiously.

There was no reply. Gently Gerald lifted the body of the captain and laid him carefully down upon the floor of the conning-tower. Then, in answer to a hurried order, two seamen entered the citadel by means of the armored spiral staircase, and Captain Brookes was carried below to be placed in the hands of Dr. White.

There was no time to be lost in bewailing the latest catastrophe.

"Pass the word for Mr. Sinclair to take command," ordered Gerald, then, without waiting for the first lieutenant's appearance, he directed the quartermaster to head towards the left flank of the main division of the enemy's fleet.

A hurried glance at the ZZ-rays apparatus showed that this potent means of offence was no longer available. The pointers had been kept in position for such a length of time during the captain's collapse that every unit of electricity had escaped. Tregarthen realized that at their utmost capacity the dynamos would have to be working for six hours ere sufficient power was restored to bring the ZZ-rays up to their normal power.

It was to be by gunfire alone that the *Olive Branch* must complete her work of retrieving the fortunes of the day.

"Independent action!" roared the lieutenant through the speaking-tube, for the electrical indicators communicating with the turrets had been disorganized by the concussion of the shell that had burst inboard.

In the space of a quarter of an hour the supreme conflict was decided. The enemy's feint had been changed into a disorderly retreat; many were sunk by gunfire, while the remainder, overhauled by the superior speed of the British fleet, hoisted the white flag.

The naval Armageddon had been fought and won.

"Where's Sinclair?" asked Tregarthen, as the wearied, yet triumphant, crew came on deck to witness the British warships taking possession of their surrendered foes.

"Down, sir; fatally wounded, I fear."

"And the captain?"

"Dead, sir, answered Dr. White, who was unable to conceal his emotion.

For some moments Gerald could say nothing, so grieved was he at the news. Then he asked, simply:—

"Where was he hit?"

"He is untouched by the enemy's shot; it is a case of heart failure caused by the strain of the last few days, culminating in the excitement of the action," replied the surgeon.

"Pass the word for the officers to come aft," said Lieutenant Tregarthen.

In a few broken words Gerald formally conveyed the news of their great loss, then, producing a document with which Captain Brookes had entrusted him, he read the instructions that were to be carried out in the event of the death or disablement of the captain of the *Olive Branch*.

This done, Tregarthen with his own hands lowered the green ensign and hoisted the blue ensign half-mast in its place, as the British naval regulations forbid the use of the white ensign. Then, gathering the struck colors under his arm, the lieutenant went below to where the body of the gallant captain lay.

All that was mortal of Captain Brookes had been placed on one of the junior officer's bunks, for the senior officers' cabins had been swept away by the 14-in. shell. Reverently Gerald covered the body with the green ensign,

the most fitting homage he could pay to the memory of his temporary chief.

"Admiral coming off, sir."

Tregarthen hastened on deck to find that a pinnacle—one of the few that was still seaworthy, so fierce had been the enemy's fire—was approaching the *Olive Branch*, a Union Jack denoting the rank of admiral of the fleet flying from a jack-staff in her bows.

With the customary honors, Admiral Hobbes came over the side, regarding the shattered quarter-deck of the mysterious cruiser with ill-concealed interest.

Gerald, in his uniform of lieutenant in His Majesty's fleet, stepped forward to receive the distinguished officer, and informed him of the death of Captain Brookes and of his written

instructions to hand over the *Olive Branch* formally to the British Government.

"I am not ashamed to confess," remarked Admiral Hobbes to Gerald as they stood in the presence of the great captain, "that but for the assistance of the *Olive Branch* our position would have been hopeless. Now, thanks to Captain Brookes, all danger is at an end, and England still remains Mistress of the Seas. More than that, she will be incontestably supreme for all time. It's a sharp lesson, but an effectual one. All honor to the man who fulfilled his mission, and by one great action made further war impossible."

And standing rigidly at the salute, the veteran admiral paid his homage to the Sea Monarch.

[THE END]

The Baseball Magazine will continue its fiction department in the future, devoting its energies toward securing short, crisp, startling stories of a type designed to appeal to its large and growing army of men readers.

