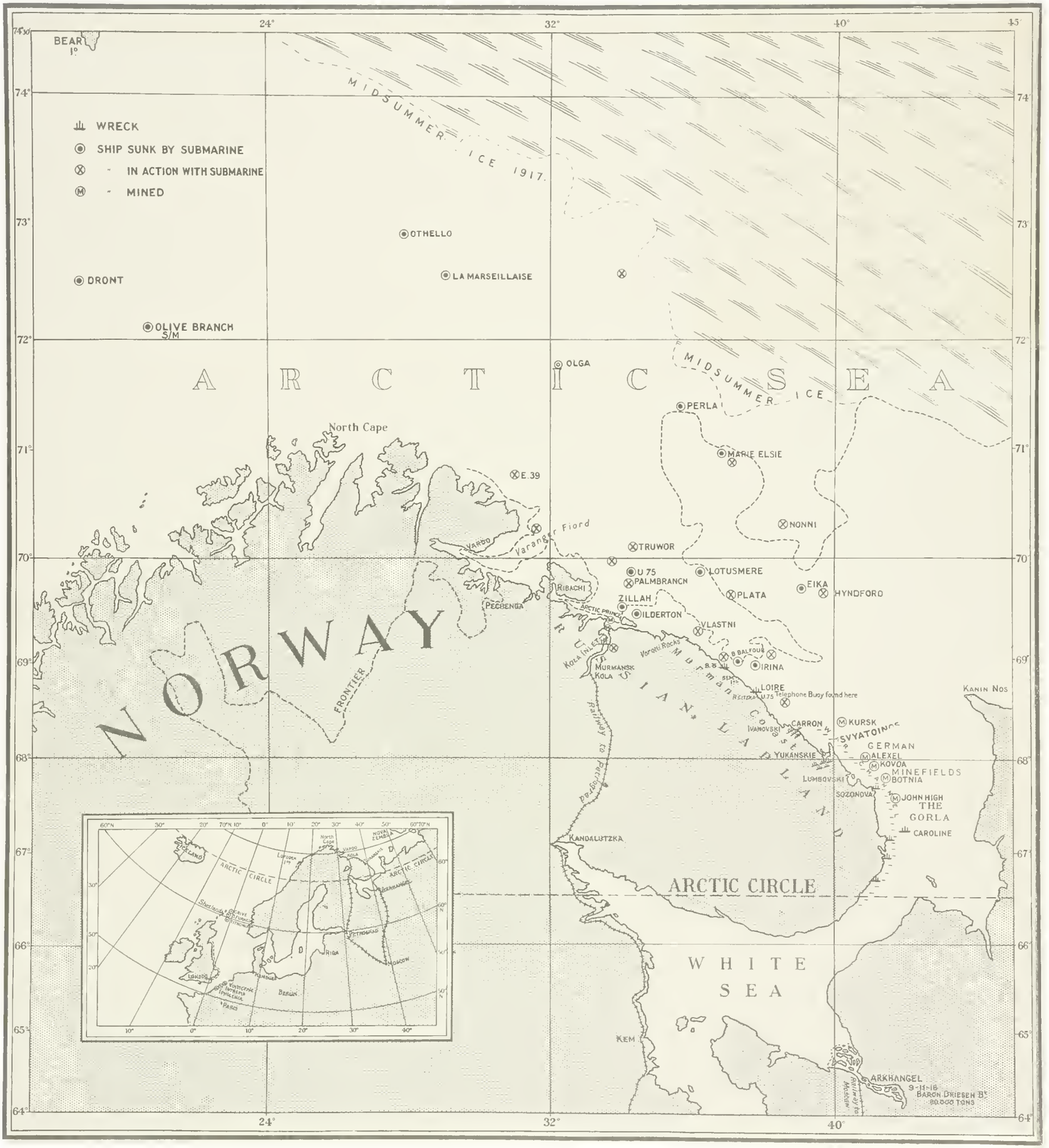
UNDER THE BLACK ENSIGN



MAP. Shewing Principal Naval Actions and Casualities Murman Coast, 1916-1917.

Under the Black Ensign

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WITH MAP AND EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS.

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PREFACE

WHO seeks the roar and smoke of battle, the clash of mighty fleets, let him turn elsewhere—of such he will find nought herein. These records are but the memoirs of a " Dug-Out," of one who, although he spent four years in their fulness at sea in the war zone, yet heard no shot fired in anger save once. But he who would know the world of the sea as the author saw it, and learn of subjects so far apart and so apparently incongruous as tape-worms and torpedoes, let him turn these pages. Recorded in them he will find both the marvellous and the merely ridiculous, yet is each incident set forth a historical and unimpeachable truth. Lest the unwitty should marvel at the title of this work, let it be known to such that " Under the Black Ensign " is a phrase intended to embrace in one heading all those little ships of the late war Navy—destroyers, tugs, trawlers, boarding steamers, and the like. These, though officially exalted to the status of ships entitled to wear a WHITE Ensign, yet in actual practice rarely did so, but flung to the breeze a banner as BLACK and tattered as their own grubby and insignificant piratic selves.

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CHAPTER I.

FOOLS AND THEIR FOLLIES—BEING THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF THE " BLACK ENSIGN " IN THE OLD NORTH CHANNEL.

IT was August, '14—only eight years ago, yet already the happenings of those days appear like a dream in the night that is past, and their vivid realities are fading into a dim ghost whose dead bones form history. I was then a man of thirty-nine years of age, twenty-five of which I had spent in the Royal Navy, whence, having retired, I was eating the bread of idleness in a foreign land, where I was endeavouring to find work.

It was two days after the outbreak of war that I reached England, and at once hurried to the Admiralty to tender my services as a volunteer for immediate active employment. My reception was not encouraging. Having penetrated the august portals wherein Admiralty sits enthroned at Whitehall, I presently found myself in the presence of an urbane and smiling civilian official, who, having washed his hands repeatedly with invisible soap, and ascertained the purport of my visit, proceeded to disillusion my mind of the hopes that I had entertained that my services could be of use to my country. " The war," he informed me, " was going very well. He did not consider it probable that *any* extra ships would have to be commissioned, consequently the prospects of a ' Dug-Out ' such as myself of getting immediate employment were, of course, absolutely nil. However," he added, noticing the way in which my countenance

had fallen, " if I liked, he would make a note of my name and address and add it to the list of other ' Die-Hards ' who had already tendered their services. It was just possible they might be able to make use of me later on."

Here the matter ended so far as I was concerned, for, piloted to the door, I found myself once more in the passage, my last despairing request to be allowed to order uniform having been met with a peremptory " No." Thoroughly disgusted, I went off to my home at Portsmouth.

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Within twenty-four hours of this interview a great change had come o'er the scene. Hardly had I arrived at Portsmouth when, in rapid succession, three Admiralty telegrams arrived ordering me to take up an immediate war appointment. I was to be Naval Commander in Command of the little railway steamer *Hibernia*, well known to passengers between Dublin and Holyhead, and at the moment lying at the latter port. Once more I lived. Like some inebriated comet, I dashed from outfitter to trunk and boot-maker, from house to railway station, bearing in my tail an ever-increasing dust of parcels and impedimenta. But, in spite of my best efforts, I could not get through to Holyhead the same night, but spent it walking the streets of London, fearful lest by over-sleeping I should miss my early morning train.

Some ten days in all I spent at Holyhead, while my little ship was being got ready for sea as a Fleet Messenger, in company with her three sisters, *Anglia*, *Cambria*, and *Scotia*. After much discussion their Lordships decided that all four ships were to fly the White Ensign, instead of the Red as originally intended, and my own ship was renamed H.M.S. *Tara*, for there was already a battleship named *Hibernia* figuring on the Navy List, and it was not desirable to muddle her up with our insignificant selves.

Thus the *Tara* and her crew became part of the Royal Navy, but there was little else that in reality was Navy about them. Guns were hard to come by in those early days of the war, and we found ourselves saddled with three very ancient 6-pdr. Hotchkiss—guns which had once formed part armament of the long-deceased battleship *Howe*. They were more than thirty years old, and the rifling of their bores was worn almost smooth from their years of service. Neither, by any stretch of the imagination, could the crew of the *Tara* be called fighting men. Both officers and men were the railway company's old *employés*, brought up to double strength by raking in whatever human elements were available. The old crew were decent, staid individuals, long in the service of the company; but the fifty per cent. of novices added to them were, for the most part, scallywags and corner-boys, dragged up anyhow from anywhere, the riff-raff of Liverpool's slums. All alike were equally ignorant of firearms, and, if the truth must be confessed, were as frightened of guns as a monkey of snakes. However, they had for the most part been born and bred to the sea, were consequently not over-prone to sea-sickness, and could be sent aloft to the crow's-nest on look-out duty without falling down and hurting themselves. Moreover, we had a small addition of real "pukka" Navy in the persons of a few Fleet Reservists—a master-at-arms, a signalman, and two seamen gunners—men who had for some years been in civil employment, and had been rather badly bitten with the Trades Union bacillus; nevertheless, they were a sheet-anchor for me to hold by in all matters of discipline and preparedness for war. Later on to these were added a sprinkling of Scotch fishermen hastily trained as Royal Naval Reserve.

It was a proud day for me when I first took command, although, like everyone else, I had as yet no uniform. The dignity of my rank I asserted as well as I could by donning over my mufti a sea-service cutlass, but all the time unpleasantly conscious that it blended ill with my

unwarlike civilian bowler hat. My own status was, in any case, sufficiently invidious, for I was in reality only a kind of go-between connecting the Admiralty and the railway company. I had nothing to do with the handling or the discipline of the ship, a matter left entirely in the hands of the master. The latter, however, was instructed to carry out my orders.

Thus somewhere towards the end of August, 1914, the *Tara* lumbered off to sea on her first voyage as a man-of-war, with her heterogeneous collection of a hundred officers and men. Her sides had been painted a chaste but warlike grey; her holds were loaded with six times their normal stowage of coal, and her speed reduced—thanks to this same overloading—from twenty-one to seventeen knots. It was a great day for Holyhead, that which saw our departure, for the majority of the crew were local men. All the town turned out to see us go—all the little Joneses and Evanses, dressed in their holiday attire. Your Welshman is nothing if not gallant, and there appeared to be wives and sweethearts by the hundred score.

At the time of sailing our destination was unknown to us, but once well out to sea, and the white lines of waving handkerchiefs receding from sight, the master and myself were at liberty to open the packet of sealed orders which were to determine our fate. I hardly know what we hoped for or expected. Whatever it was, our actual orders came to us as a great disappointment, and, such as they were, they were painfully short and explicit—the ship was to proceed forthwith to the North Channel, that strip of water separating Scotland from North-East Ireland, and there to patrol until further orders. When we required coal we were to proceed to Larne to replenish our bunkers.

Somehow, we had persuaded ourselves that we were destined for a more dramatic career than this—that, as a Fleet Messenger, the *Tara* would at least have employment with the Grand Fleet, and that, following a few

"FAIR HEAD" (N.E. IRELAND).
("Submarine Corner.")

short weeks of glorious excitement, we should return, laden with honour and glory, to Holyhead, rainbow-hued with bunting, to an accompaniment of brass bands and the acclamations of the multitude. But now, having read, the scales fell from our eyes; we felt ourselves to be what we really were, and not as the wives and sweethearts had thought us to be. We were a poor, contemptible little railway steamer, guyed out in the trappings of a man-of-war—a negligible unit in the great world conflagration. Good-bye, Westminster Abbey; adieu, our hopes of early glory. We could imagine no place further from the war than the North Channel, a place which in actual mileage was as distant from Germany as Cape Finisterre. With heavy hearts we turned the ship's head to the northward and lumbered off.

Arrived in the North Channel, we found our duties, if at first not as warlike as we could have wished, at least sufficiently onerous. We were the *only* ship on that beat; in fact, for some time we were the only ship off the west side of England with guns in her. Consequently we had no relief. We simply stopped at sea for as long as we could, and then, having come to our last ton of coal, we headed for Larne, replenished our bunkers, and then rushed off to sea again. It was thus that during the first few months of war we actually did thirteen days at sea for one day in harbour, and that during the first year we steamed seventy-five thousand miles in those narrow waters—a record, I believe, not beaten by any other warship in the Navy.

Our bi-monthly day in harbour at Larne was always an event, both for ourselves and for the hospitable inhabitants of that place. Larne, at that time, was principally known to fame from the advertisement it derived from the recent gun-running exploit of its Orange inhabitants. All posed as the fighting man's friend, and the "bloody hand" of Ulster seemed to ever extend an opened bottle of whisky. Upon the pier every fisher girl, maidservant, and factory lass would

be awaiting the *Tara's* arrival, and, as the ship came alongside, an Amazon avalanche would overwhelm her and carry off as prisoners the major portion of the ship's company, despite sentries and every other obstacle which we could devise. Truth to tell, the " shell-backs " displayed little zeal in repelling this invasion, and appeared nothing loth to being carried off captive; but it was no light labour to extract them from the various public-houses on the following morning in time to put to sea; but 8 a.m. the following day always *did* find the old *Tara* at sea—a very creditable record, for the reader must recollect that ninety-five per cent. of her company were merchant seamen pure and simple, with no training, no tradition even, of naval discipline. The word was, in fact, to them meaningless, and they appeared to suffer from the delusion that as soon as the ship had been secured and her hawsers made fast, all further calls upon them had ceased. With one accord they made for the shore, and returned at their own sweet will. It took both time and patience to dissuade them from this course, and to make them understand that, although the ship was in harbour, much was still required of them; in that undefended port gun-watches and look-out duties had still to be performed, and a sufficient number of officers and men must remain available who, in an emergency, could raise steam and even take the ship to sea.

In some ways the officers were even more difficult to deal with than the men, for they were quite unaccustomed to any form of autocratic control such as is necessary in a fighting service. They were loth to award punishments to wrongdoers among the crew, to whom they were in many instances related by blood or marriage, and with whom, in the community ashore, they were accustomed to mix freely. The results were often perplexing, as one of these officers was at some trouble to explain to me as follows: " If I, Officer A, punish Seaman B, by stopping his leave or ordering him

cells, then the wife of B, on hearing of it, will render the life of Mrs. A unendurable, for they are next-door neighbours." If someone *had* to be punished, in accordance with the law of the Navy, then, as A put it, he would rather do the punishment himself.

Time and experience, however, work great changes. The officers could not help but note the salutary effects of such punishments as had reluctantly been given, and became enthusiastic converts to a system which they had at first condemned. It was not long before I had to interfere to prevent the pendulum oscillating with undue violence in the opposite direction. Often, without the semblance of an inquiry, often without affording the accused an opportunity to state his case, and, if possible, without even seeing him, the officer would find him guilty and pass sentence.

In this autumn of 1914 the *Tara* was, I believe, the only ship armed with guns on the west side of England between the Bristol Channel and the Pentland Firth—all the real British sea forces being, of course, concentrated in the Channel and North Sea. It was therefore, I suppose, not unnatural that both we and the inhabitants of Larne suffered from somewhat swollen-headed views of the importance of the *Tara*. One of the foibles which at that time became prevalent among her officers was an obsession to have their pictorial merits recorded for the benefit of posterity. But photography is at best a " lying jade "—no " feet of the young men " linger to carry out Ananias with a camera. The remembrance of those photographs still causes me to smile, for the alleged likenesses of the mild-mannered and peaceful gentlemen who posed for the occasion invariably depicted them clad in borrowed war paint. This, for the most part, consisted of a huge sea-service cutlass, a pair of immaculate kid gloves, and a fierce and bloodthirsty scowl. What purpose these " likenesses " were intended to serve I am at a loss to explain. Possibly they were to impress the sitters' even gentler appanages of the fair sex with

the belief that their lords had become bold, truculent, dare-devil warriors—for is it not a fact that the daughters of Eve love to imagine their Adams as hard, ungovernable, untamable, to all save themselves?

One of the officers of the ship, a man not a sailor by profession, had, until the outbreak of the war, been employed at cinema work, and the *grande passion* still waxed hot within him. There was much boarding work to be done at the time, and, although this had nothing whatever to do with his own special department, no boat was ever seen to leave the ship without his accompanying her. On the blackest and stormiest of nights, in every possible and impossible kind of weather, one could always rely on witnessing the entertaining spectacle of this individual, strangely and weirdly clad, swinging himself by a rope up the wallowing side of some suspect steamer. Between his teeth he carried, like the pirates of old, the bare blade of his trusty cutlass, and in his pockets, ready to hand, a brace of "barkers." It was truly dramatic.

The days and months rapidly slid by, and first enthusiasms began to wane. The war seemed to be a far-away affair, and it became difficult to keep alive that spirit of alertness so vitally essential if patrol work is to be of any use at all. In fact, we were beginning to feel distinctly bored, when our mental horizon was unexpectedly livened up by the *Audacious* striking the mine which eventually sank her in our near neighbourhood. The information itself came to our ken through some ship, who was attempting to assist, wirelessing the whole story of the mishap in plain language at the time. The information was, therefore, public property, and not confined to the men-of-war on the spot, and it must have been intercepted by scores of other ships, both neutral and allied, within a radius of hundreds of miles. In fact, within twenty-four hours, it was the talk of every public-house bar in the north of Ireland, and photographs of the sinking ship appeared in the American newspapers.

The policy of the British Admiralty in trying to hush up this incident months, nay years, after all the world knew about it was then, and has ever since remained, a puzzle to me. Not only did their Lordships try to hoodwink the public, but, apparently, they hoped to do the same with the Navy itself. More than a year later the secret and confidential lists giving the ships and squadrons in commission and the names of ships lost in action still showed the *Audacious* as in full commission. These secret confidential lists were for " The Information of Commanding Officers Only." Could foolish, fatuous lying have gone further? Its fruits were reaped later, when, on the publication of the official accounts of the Battle of Jutland, a wave of pessimism spread through the country. Scepticism was universal, and the public displayed an undoubted tendency to accept the German accounts at their face value, and to discount the British ones. After the *Audacious*, it was felt that Admiralty reports could no longer be relied upon, and for years the nation lost the great moral asset of confidence in the dictum of its rulers.

For us in the North Channel, however, things began to liven up considerably. No longer did we feel that we were entirely out of the war, and drifting mines, which became fairly numerous, added a new zest to life. A few trawlers were sent to assist the *Tara* in her patrol work, their crews formed of hardy but entirely untrained fishermen. They were blissfully ignorant and, what was worse, entirely contemptuous of the properties of German mines. A German mine of that period was an extraordinarily efficient weapon, a weapon worthy at all seasons of the greatest respect, and most certainly *not* meriting contemptuous indifference. It therein differed greatly from its British contemporary, which, partly owing to parsimoniousness, and partly to the humanitarian edicts of the Hague Convention, displayed an amiable harmlessness towards the enemy, and was only dangerous towards its friends. In fact, when being laid

out, it had a reprehensible habit of blowing off the sterns of the ships so engaged.

But to return to our trawlers. Their contempt for mines raised my hair on more than one occasion, and threw a strange light on the psychology of those doughty descendants of the old sea rovers, the trawler skippers themselves. One incident will serve to illustrate the kind of thing which used to happen. A mine had been reported as floating close inshore off Fair Head, and a trawler was accordingly despatched with instructions to sink it. The correct way to do this was for the vessel to lie at a safe distance, and fire at the mine with a rifle or small gun until it became waterlogged and sank. Having despatched the trawler, I went to bed and thought no more about the matter. It was, however, brought to my notice once more, in a novel and disturbing way, at an early hour the following morning. Dawn was breaking, when I was aroused from my slumbers by an unearthly rattling and banging almost alongside my cabin. Thrusting a sleepy head through my scuttle, I was at once petrified by what I saw. It was the trawler, who had returned, and was even at that moment trying to come alongside the *Tara*. But what particularly riveted my attention, and froze my blood, was the fact that all the racket was being caused by a *mine*. Hoisted at the trawler's stern was a mine, and with every roll it crashed into her, bending and twisting the horns. As every school-miss knows nowadays, the quickest and surest route to Heaven is to bend the horn of a German mine. But in those days trawlermen did *not* know it. This mine already had *all* its horns bent, but there appears to be some particular dispensation, some peculiar ordering of that thing which men term indifferently Providence, Luck, or Fate which watches over trawlermen, for, for some inexplicable reason, the mine had not gone up. The trawler *should* have been blown to matchwood, but for once the usually deadly efficient German mine had failed to function.

Filled with undignified fury—a condition not lessened by the knowledge that my features were rapidly assuming a green and pallid hue—I sped on deck, and issued peremptory commands for the instant attendance upon me of the trawler skipper. That individual, I could not help but observe, having secured alongside the *Tara*, was congenially occupied in vaingloriously showing off his trophy to all and sundry. I have seen a fox terrier go through just the same antics when he has brought in his first rat.

"Why the blank blank blazes didn't you sink the blankety mine as you were ordered to?" I roared at him as he arrived in my presence. My fury and scorn were, however, quite wasted on the vain and stolid fellow. Touching his forelock in salute, and shifting from one foot to the other in a perplexed manner, he, with a self-commendatory grin, commenced: "If ye please, sirre, I *did* carry out them orders what you gi'me. I *did* sink the moine." "Then, if you sank the mine," I replied incredulously, "what the blank blazes is that object I see hanging from your stern?" "Oo, thaat?" he replied, turning to regard his trophy with a cunning and ever-widening smirk, "that *is* the moine I sank, sirre. I sunk it by rifle-fire in haccordance with your horders, but afore I sunk it, I says to myself, 'That's just the very thing my old 'oman at Grimsby 'ud like as a hornament to 'er front rockery.' So, afore we sunk the moine it were a easy thing to tie a wee bit o' line to it. And, after we sunk it, thinking no harm, it were a easy matter to haul it to the top again."

It has been said, "Whom the gods would slay they first cause to become mad"; but it struck me forcibly at that time that they often appear to take a long time over the job, and to derive an impish pleasure in extricating drunks, lunies, and trawlermen from quite impossible situations. Further anger or argument from my side was obviously futile. Having cut the electric circuit and carefully disembowelled the mine, we returned

it to the rejoicing trawler skipper. He, in the due course of nature and in pursuance of his vow, finally planted it in his " old 'oman's " front rockery at Grimsby, where it may be seen even unto the present day.

One other mine stunt the *Tara* did, which is perhaps worthy of mention here, though in pride of actual place I am under the impression that the incident occurred prior to that already narrated. Mines were suspected to have been laid in Liverpool Bay, and the *Tara* was despatched hot-foot by the Admiralty to search for them. How the poor old ship was supposed to discover the presence of a supposedly submerged invisible mine by any other means than that of exploding it accidentally under her bottom their Lordships omitted to explain. It would almost appear that ignorance of the properties of mines was not confined *solely* to poor uneducated trawler skippers.

However that may be, the *Tara* duly arrived in Liverpool Bay, and, " in accordance with plan," proceeded carefully to quarter the ground, her rigging studded with anxious gazers, her bulwarks ornamented with a long line of outstretched necks and starting eyes. Slowly and cautiously the ship moved upon her appointed courses, but nothing of the rumoured mine-field could at first be seen. Interest began to flag. Then, just at the right psychological moment, a loud hail reverberated from aloft: " Red globular object below the surface, right under the port bow, sir." British mines, in those days, *were* " red globular objects," and, for all we knew to the contrary, German mines probably answered the same description. Excitement was at fever heat. The officer on the bridge tore at the engine-room telegraphs, the steersman spun his wheel, and the ship's rail once more assumed its resemblance to an animated hen-coop, with its rows and rows of peeking eyes and outstretched necks. A pause, then the engines began to revolve at full speed astern, and the white wavelets from the back-turning propellers surged round the bows, as, with

quickly diminished speed, we drifted towards the sphere of fate. At last, from the deck, we were for the first time able to see it clearly—a *jellyfish*. A fine, scarlet fellow he was, fully a yard in diameter, one of the largest I have ever set eyes on. Four rings he had, too, placed just where the horns should have been, if only he could have been really a mine. Slowly he drifted past, his cherry-tinted moonface seeming to smile and nod at the ship in a manner that was both mocking and provocative. He had certainly some cause for self-congratulation, for, after all, it is not given to every jellyfish to be able to claim that he has stopped a man-of-war. A hoarse cry of anger broke from some three score throats, but the sailors were too mortified and taken by surprise to act quickly. Before one of them could find a lump of coal and retaliate by dropping it on to that sneering countenance, the medusa had dropped astern and drifted out of sight.

As time passed reports, not only of mines, but of German submarines themselves in Irish waters, became increasingly prevalent. At first frankly disbelieved by both officers and men of the mercantile crew, the accounts became daily more circumstantial. U boat hunts became the order of the day, and the lochs surrounding the Firth of Clyde, the islands, bays and creeks of the adjacent coasts became the scene of a never-ending quest. Full many a whale and limpet-crusted rock had cause to regret the skill of the *Tara's* gunners, and their own superficial resemblance, under certain conditions of light and tide, to the hated "Untersee" boats. Never, at any time, were we ever rewarded with an actual glimpse of the Kaiser's elusive submarines; yet were they ever at hand, and more than once were we able to observe their track of murder and destruction.

There came a day when the U boats appeared in Liverpool Bay itself, and, after sinking several incoming liners, departed. In hot haste the *Tara*, the only ship with guns within a radius of a hundred miles, was sent

for. Disguised as a peaceful merchantman—the first in point of time of all the Q boats—she wandered aimlessly, but unsuccessfully, about the locality. "Fritz" had probably already departed, or, if he had not, he, in any case, could not be induced to attack.

On another occasion three submarines were reported to be taking in oil from a parent ship off Bardsey Island on the Welsh coast, the said parent ship being credibly reported to have cleared from Liverpool the previous day. Once more the *Tara* flew to obey the Admiralty's behest—to put the parent ship and three submarines out of action. It was well for us that we never discovered them, though it is doubtful if they ever had existence save as a figment of the imagination. But the three submarines alone would have had half a dozen long-range 4-inch guns as opposed to the *Tara's* three worn-out 6-prs., and, had we met, it is unlikely that this story would ever have been written.

Gradually the fear of the submarine began to spread among the coastwise shipping, and the latter's methods of coping with the danger were many and varied. Some owners purchased ancient field pieces, antique weapons long ago consigned to limbo, many of them dating from the days of the Crimean War. These they mounted as best they could in their vessels' sterns. Others again, and these from the Irish side, sought safety by flying a green ensign—a then unrecognised symbol, but one which they appeared to hope would confer immunity upon them.

The constant reiteration of the cry of " wolf," a wolf which we by no chance ever saw, began once more to lull the *Tara's* crew into a false sense of security. Some went so far as to openly aver their disbelief in the fact that the U boats had ever visited the west side of England. Daily it became more difficult to keep all hands fully up to the mark and constantly on the alert. But there came a day when an incident occurred which thoroughly aroused us all, and finally convinced every doubter. Following a

particularly black and piercingly cold night, there dawned one of those sweet and tranquil mornings when the whole world is bathed in sunshine. It was one of those blest days which occasionally come to break for a few hours the black monotony of a British winter. The *Tara* was making for Stranraer, at which place the Admiralty were considering establishing a temporary base for a few destroyers, and of which small craft the *Tara* was to become the parent ship. As we approached the entrance we observed a small coasting steamer with her engines stopped and blowing off steam. This in itself was a very suspicious circumstance, for, up till then, submarines had not as a general rule sunk ships at sight, but stopped them and gave the crew a chance to abandon ship. This, we felt certain, was at the moment taking place in the steamer we had under observation. At full speed we zigzagged towards her, with the men at the guns, and, as we got closer, our suspicions were yet further confirmed by observing that she had got her boats out. A moment later and we could make out through our glasses objects which we decided were rafts, spars, and smashed and overturned boats. Then suddenly we found ourselves traversing what I can only describe as a veritable forest of dead bodies—grim, stark, bearded men, each floating upright in his life-collar, yet all dead, the water washing in and out of their mouths as the commotion caused by our bow-wave reached them. No need now to call on the men for alertness; it was a lesson which the veriest dullard could understand. Quickly our own boats were in the water in order to help the small coasting steamer in the work of rescue, a work in which she had been already engaged before the *Tara's* arrival. Some twenty exhausted and half-frozen beings were in all picked up still alive. They were all that remained alive of the crew of the armed merchant cruiser *Bayano*, who had cleared from Liverpool the previous night with a company of some four hundred officers and men. She had been torpedoed during that

darkest hour of the night which precedes the dawn by a submarine which remained unseen. She sank so quickly that the men were literally washed out of their hammocks into the icy element, and, though there were numbers of boats and rafts floating about, the darkness was such that the men could not see to grapple with the help which lay so close at hand. Some few, however, succeeded in finding the rafts, and the strongest of them were able to survive the night until rescued in the morning.

Instructed by this, I caused everything that would float on board the *Tara* to have Holmes' lights affixed. These lights readily burst into flame as soon as they come into contact with the water, and would insure that floating rafts, etc., would be visible in the dark. My ideas on the subject I transmitted to the Admiralty through my senior officer. They were never acknowledged, but the affixing of these lights became a standard custom in the Navy, one which was the cause of the saving of many lives after the Battle of Jutland.

In those early days of the war scenes such as I have just recorded greatly impressed one, but, later on, all seafarers became hardened to them. Corpses, floating and derelict, were strewn about the ocean highways from Land's End to the North Cape. In the North Sea their number was legion, and they spread down the coasts of Spain and Portugal, along the whole length of the Mediterranean. The crews of the mine-sweeping trawlers had, in fact, a nodding acquaintance with many of these human derelicts, whom they regarded with friendly indifference. Meeting them often, the features of many of them became familiar, and, in fact, they went so far as to christen some of them with pet names. The following rather grim story which recurs to me is typical of many such, and may give the reader an insight of what passed for humour during the war.

There was a certain trawler, mine-sweeping from the Tyne, I believe, who was continually encountering the same poor corpse, so much so, that he was affectionately

known to the crew by the sobriquet of "Moike." "Moike" himself, in the life, must have been an individual with a striking resemblance in feature to "Ole Bill," and was ornamented with a long, trailing moustache. His frequent appearances upon the scene began, however, in the course of time to tell upon the nerves of a certain old retired chief petty officer, who formed one of the crew of this particular trawler. The latter's shipmates were not long in noting the fact, and, whenever "Moike" was seen coming bobbing down upon the bow, there was an insistent cry for Jenkins—a name by which I will call the petty officer in question. "Hi! Jenkins! 'Ere's Moike a 'arstin' for yer!" Whereupon poor Jenkins, palpably pale and ill at ease, was forced to come up on deck and gaze, while "Moike," with glassy eyes rolling, his long moustache washing in the seas, bobbed and curvetted himself past. Humour in those days was indeed apt to be of the grimmest, but, such as it was, it served its purpose nevertheless. Men suffering from nerves, like Jenkins, had no business to be in mine-sweepers. Not long afterwards he managed to get himself transferred to a shore billet.

But to resume. Shortly after the loss of the *Bayano*, the fighting forces in the North Channel were augmented by a small division of four rather antiquated destroyers based on Stranraer. This augmentation, however, seemed in no way to diminish the sauciness of the submarines, and quite soon afterwards there was a fine kettle of fish when it was discovered that they had actually landed two officers at the entrance of the harbour to prospect. It was during the night that they had landed in a small collapsible boat dressed in their German naval uniform. They had closely interrogated the guardian of the local oyster-beds as to whether it were a fact that destroyers were really now based on the place, and, having found out what they wanted to know, left as they had come. The keeper, though he easily recognised his interrogators as Germans, and although he was

on the telephone, did not report the matter at once, for the reason that he had apparently cried "wolf" more than once before, anent other suspicious happenings, and was determined not to be fooled again.

It was a pity, for only a mile away two destroyers were lying idle alongside the pier, and the wrath of their commander—an individual not noted for the parliamentary phrasing of his language—was great when he learned too late of the visit, for by then the scent had grown cold.

The commander's ruffled feelings were certainly not mollified when, a few nights later, while nestling for shelter under the lee of the Mull of Cantyre, the unmistakable white tracks caused by three torpedoes passed like lightning under his keel. It was "Fritz's" playful little way of showing that he was still there, that he felt no ill-feeling, and wanted to leave a calling card in person. But the ravings of that destroyer commander were such that it is well for the good of humanity that wireless telephony was not then in general use.

CHAPTER II.

THE ARTS OF PAINTING AND LETTER WRITING, AS "UNDERSTANDED" BY SEAMEN. ALSO SOME COMMENTS ON GOATS AND GHOSTS, CATS AND COURTSHIP.

IT was during the first year of the war that the fashion of painting bow-waves came into vogue. In itself the idea was excellent, for, properly carried out by a skilled painter, these imitation waves gave to an onlooker the impression that a ship so painted, even when stationary, was proceeding at a high rate of speed. Consequently the chances of such a ship being missed by torpedoes, or even by gun-fire, were very greatly increased. But, alas for human inventions and the cunning of man! Ideas, in practice, are often hemmed in by limitations, and this one of the bow-waves proved no exception to the rule. The trouble was that, in most seaports, scene-painters, unlike limpets, do not grow on every rock. Like so many other things of the Navy of that period, they had to be improvised.

In the case of the *Tara*, the dockyard painter at Holyhead was the first to essay his maiden effort upon the ship's forefoot. He was apparently a student of the Chinese school, and the rolling white billows which he limned were a masterpiece of decorative art, both massive and impressive. The whole ship's company lined up upon the quay to watch his progress—wide-eyed, open-mouthed, profuse in their loud-spoken admiration. As decorative and classic art, there could be no question that it was superb. But as a representation of a real, live, watery wave it was somewhat weak. It depended

altogether too much on the imagination, and could not, by any possibility, have deceived a child.

After this, our virgin effort at realism in art, several successive other attempts were made by the ship's own local talent. All alike, however, failed decisively in their object of being convincing, though, if luridness of effect had been the desideratum, Turner himself would have acknowledged we were his masters. Despairing of obtaining the effect I desired in any other way, I at length took the matter in hand myself, and, having retired to a suitable distance, I directed the pictorial labours of Johnny Jones, A.B., through a megaphone. The trouble in guiding a Welshman, however, was the fact that, to all practical intents and purposes, I was addressing him in a foreign language. Jones's knowledge of English, being extremely limited, proved unequal to the occasion, and rarely did he guess correctly whether I meant right or left, up or down. However, in the end, the result far exceeded my most sanguine hopes. The ship appeared to be fairly throwing herself out of the water in an attempt to run away with herself. The optical illusion was, in fact, so good that, on our first reappearance off Tor Point, the coastguard were completely taken in by it. They are even alleged to have telegraphed up and down the coast, warning the other stations that the *Tara* had gone mad; that she, in fact, was running "amok" and could not be stopped.

Imitation, it is said, is the sincerest form of flattery, and it was not long before the *Tara* found herself the centre of a circle of servile copyists. Fired to emulation by the appearance of the *Tara's* bow-wave, the two destroyers remaining to us were not long in following in their "parent's" footsteps. The smaller of the two was the more modest in her ambitions, for her commander was content to smear on either bow a small, white, triangular patch, which, to the uninitiated, might excusably have been mistaken for the mark left by an accidentally overturned tin of condensed milk. Not so,

however, his companion in the other destroyer, a being altogether more ambitious and vitriolic of temperament, and apparently dominated by " futurist " leanings in art. There was nothing of the modest violet about him—far otherwise. Like the " green bay-tree " of the wicked, his ship's cutwater soon shone resplendent with an immense emerald expanse, which would have gladdened the heart of any hungry goat. The design was pyramidal in shape, and was strangely reminiscent of a meadow in June. Tradition asserts, but I know not with what truth, that some unsanctified Philistine took advantage of the darkness of the night, and of the superficial resemblance of this verdant patch to the grass of the field. For lo! in the morning, when that " futurist " commander arose to consider his so beautiful handicraft, he found that it had been desecrated by an allusion to a much-advertised meat extract. Some soulless individual had painted an ox engaged in the act of grazing on his emerald pyramid, and to it had appended the legend, " Alas! my poor brother."

This, by the way, was also a covert allusion to another event which had occurred a few days previously. The destroyer in question was engaged in scouring the locality for floating mines, of which there were reported to be several in the vicinity. Whilst so occupied, an object was sighted on the surface. Whereupon the destroyer had hoisted a signal, " Enemy mine in sight " —this, by the way, before confirming the matter by closer inspection. A second signal followed swiftly on the first, giving the further information that the mine was " with horns." Unfortunately, however, the alleged mine turned out to be no mine at all, but a black bullock, well distended and many days dead, which happened to be floating belly up along the tideway. It was, however, " with horns."

A somewhat onerous duty of mine in those days was the censoring of letters, and here, as in other matters, the language difficulty often became acute. This was

due to the fact that some ninety per cent. of the *Tara's* crew were "Taffies" born and bred, and Welsh was the ordinary medium, both for conversation and commands, current on board the ship. Official Admiralty orders, however, laid it down plainly that *all* letters for censoring were to be written in plain English. How could they carry this out was the somewhat natural question of many, when, as one old "shell-back" put it, their wives could understand no word of any other language but their native Welsh?

Censoring, though as a rule dull and monotonous work, certainly taught me many things that I had not hitherto suspected. For example, it was news to me that the *Tara* had been engaged in the Battle of Heligoland Bight and many other famous actions, in which she covered herself with glory. There were other things also which caused me "furiously to think." At one time, it appeared that we must have a terrible bigamist among our number, for by the same post I detected a number of letters, all unmistakably in the same handwriting, all couched in the same endearing terms, but all addressed to married ladies of different names. Such a shocking state of affairs, of course, required immediate investigation; but, instead of a Mormon, we only discovered a mare's nest. The individual responsible for this multitude of amatory epistles proved to be of most respectable habits and above suspicion. He was but the tool of his less-gifted messmates—too indolent or illiterate to write letters themselves—who, in consideration of a small retaining fee, had undertaken to write their letters home for them.

There was yet another ardent young correspondent, from whose letters I used to derive much entertainment. His real name and status I never learned, for his identity was hidden under the "nom de plume" of "Loving Tommy Sailor Boy." At the period when I first encountered these gems from the pen of our sea-going Cupid, he was apparently engaged in amatory dalliance with the

cook-general of a resident of Larne. Each letter in turn doted feelingly and in detail upon the excellences of the various dishes which she had set before him upon the occasion of his last visit to her domicile. But, alas, there came a day upon which a volunteer regiment in war-training came to be billeted upon the town. Its attractions were evidently too much for Venus of the Frying Pan, and she deserted Neptune in favour of Mars. I gathered as much from "L.T.S.B.'s" next letter, which was a sad one, and noticeable for the marked coolness of its tone. In it he complained that, although he had whistled and waited for two hours outside her portal, she had given no sign. He also commented upon the fact that there seemed to be a great many "sodgers" about in the same locality, and that one of their caps was hanging up on the latch of the kitchen window. A final cutting epistle shortly followed this, in which "L.T.S.B." made it abundantly clear that their young loves had been sundered for ever. He was, however, already evidently beginning to benefit by his naval training, which inculcates the principle of always having spare numbers trained in readiness to fill up all casualties, for by the same post he had already entered into correspondence with two other young ladies.

By the close of 1914 Larne had developed into quite a considerable naval base. No longer was the *Tara* the only "pebble on the beach," for an admiral had installed himself with his staff, and there were a number of yachts, trawlers, and drifters using it as their headquarters. Many of these yachts were commanded by old retired admirals and the like, some of whom were half blind and deaf, but sportsmen all. They had, one and all, volunteered for active service in any capacity, and, though some of them were well advanced in the sixties and even seventies, were now at sea once more, camouflaged as lieutenants and commanders in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. As such, they did yeoman service, for, in spite of their physical disabilities and infirmities,

they were, by reason of their experience, of immense value during the first year of the war whilst the new Navy was in training. Their practical knowledge of discipline, service customs and working conditions, of guns, torpedoes, and the handling of ships in close order was an invaluable asset. It was by their example of loyal service that those dear old admirals did so much to inspire the new Navy. More than one of them had been my captain at sea twenty years before, when I, an irresponsible young officer, had trembled at their slightest frown. But there, in the North Channel, our relative positions were reversed. It was they who waited on my nod, and received their orders from me, and "had the honour" to "submit" their views and reports for my "favourable consideration." In some measure I could enter into the feelings of King Canute (I think it was he, but my history is rather weak) when he found himself being rowed on the River Dee by a crew of attendant subject kings.

The new Navy, which came to birth with the war, was formed from the toughest, but at the same time entirely undisciplined material. The men who formed it had no fighting instinct, and such of those who had been bred in the merchant service had had instilled into them the principle of safety first—safety for the crew, safety for the ship, and, above all, safety for their own and their owners' pockets. It did not come easy to them to deliberately seek danger and court destruction, and their natural instincts at the beginning of the war were the grandmotherly ones inculcated by the Board of Trade. A concrete example may, perhaps, better illustrate this tendency:

Working from Larne were some sixty or seventy drifters, whose business it was to shoot the steel-wire nets spread across the North Channel for the trapping of submarines. Only a very small percentage of these drifters were blessed with a weapon of any kind, and, even among the fortunate ones, it was often a gun of

only one inch calibre. To the majority this made no difference whatever, for they feared neither man nor devil. But there remained a minority who were apparently incapable of shaking off the " safety first " incubus upon which they had been weaned. One day there came an urgent message that, at that very moment, a submarine was lying off the entrance to Larne Harbour. Whereupon the senior officer at once signalled to the drifters—the only craft available—to proceed to sea and tackle her. Out they went promptly—all except one. Her skipper had other views. Turning his ship's nose *away* from the harbour mouth, he headed inland in the opposite direction, and did not feel safe until he had run his vessel up, high and dry, on a mud bank—a position in which she remained for several days subsequently.

Compare this with the action of a yacht, commanded by an old navy man " dug out " for the war. She was cruising off the Western Isles of Scotland. Depth-charges had not then been invented and she had no guns, but she managed to grapple with a submarine who happened to come to the surface near her. Unable to get at the Huns inside, the chief engineer was lowered over the side in a bowline and commenced to chop off the U boat's periscope with an axe; but, unfortunately, before the operation was completed, the submarine managed to break away and, submerging once more, escaped.

The influx of so many vessels to Larne eventually had the effect of crowding out the *Tara*. She had to go elsewhere for her coal, and thereafter Campbeltown, situated on the eastern side of Cantyre, became her base. At Campbeltown we found the inhabitants no less friendly-disposed than they had been at Larne, and, in accordance with the time-honoured traditions of the senior service, the ship's company quickly adapted themselves to their changed " locale " by acquiring a completely new assortment of sweethearts. It is, apparently, the custom of shore-dwelling folk to assume that, because

a sailor loves quickly and loves often, he is, therefore, of a fickle and irresponsible nature. I do not think that this is really so. Such critics should remember that a sailor's opportunities of courting are limited and his time short. Nature abhors a vacuum, and, on board ship, the mariner is situated in what, I suppose, a meteorologist would describe as a "system of low pressure"—free from feminine influence. Therefore, when a sailor goes on shore and encounters the full force of feminine guiles, atmospheric disturbances are bound to follow. Hence the hurricane courtships occasionally observed—for sailors are not misogynists—and she who sows the wind must expect to reap the whirlwind. Blow high, blow low, the sailor takes the variabilities of feminine caprice much as he does those of the weather, and makes the best passage he can under the circumstances.

At Campbeltown some of the inhabitants appeared to be horrified at the rapid way in which some of these *affaires de cœur* seemed to be progressing. One lady informed me that she had questioned her maid (a damsel of shy and erstwhile retiring disposition) as to *how* it was that she had so rapidly made the acquaintance of so many of the *Tara's* crew. The maid looked at her in stupefaction: "Och, mum," she replied, "it's simple! Ye could do it yersel'! I jist gang doon tae the pier and gie un the glad eye."

It was during the time that we were based on Campbeltown (that is, in the latter part of the summer of 1915) that a rather curious mystery came to light.

On the western side of the North Channel is situated Rathlin Island, and just to the south of the latter is Fair Head, the north-east point of Ireland. Since the early dawn of history Rathlin has been a kind of stepping-stone for the old freebooting Irish in their invasions of Scotland. Upon it still stands the ruins of the castle of Robert the Bruce, and at the base of the shore-cliffs hard by is the historic cave in which he hid from his would-be slayers, and was saved by a spider spinning

her web across the mouth. It was from Bruce's castle that his beautiful lady-love, during her lord's absence, hurled herself from the parapet into the sea to escape the amorous advances of a traitorous guest. Her dead body was washed up on the Irish coast opposite, and the headland whereon it was found has been named Fair Head ever since, in memory of that fair and beautiful woman. During the war, however, Fair Head gained an unenviable notoriety as a centre of U boat activity, and was better known to sailors as " Submarine Corner." A vast tonnage of homeward shipping for Glasgow, Liverpool, and that circle of English, Irish, Scotch and Welsh ports which border the Irish Sea swept daily past it. The great troop convoys from the United States and Canada, and ships with food and munitions from the New World, wheeled by in endless procession ere shaping their course to the southward. To enter or leave the Irish Sea from the northward all must pass the narrow portals of the North Channel, and rarely was it, during the latter years of the war, that some submarine was not lying in wait to sink and to destroy. Well was it therefore named " Submarine Corner," and there did many a homeward-bound sailor obtain his first, and often his last, glimpse of his native land.

But the mystery of which I now wish to speak has nothing to do with Robert the Bruce nor his lady-love, save so far as the latter gave name to the headland on which her corpse was discovered. Fair Head itself is, to my mind, one of the most impressive sights in the world. Its giant basalt columns rise sheer from the sea to a height of over six hundred feet. Its base, formed of huge fallen boulders—many as big as cottages—is indescribably wild, and overgrown with a tangle of whin and thorn bushes. All day long the great breakers come roaring past from the Atlantic. Only in exceptional weather is landing possible there, and the white clouds blowing low along the base of the black cliff add the last touch of desolate ferocity.

Alas that the heart of the sailor-man is generally dead to so much beauty! It was not the scenery of Fair Head that first drew his attention—it was the inhabitants. Two destroyers were constantly patrolling in the North Channel, and they noticed, in the course of their duties, that there were a large number of supposedly wild goats clambering about the boulder-strewn base of the Head. The billies of these alleged wild goats were remarkable for their magnificent horns, and the destroyer officers were at once bitten with a desire to slay one, and have the trophy mounted for the ward-room mess. Needless to say I was not informed at the time of this design, for they, being my juniors, naturally did not desire me, their senior, to know that they proposed taking an unofficial holiday.

Times were quiet, no submarines were reported in the vicinity, and the weather was favourable. Just as dusk was falling one of the destroyers accordingly lowered a boat and landed an armed party on the head.

The very first shot was successful, and a billy with a fine pair of horns was seen to tumble. Excitedly the sailors rushed forward, scrambling over rock and bush, heedless of torn clothing, anxious only to view their quarry. At length they reached an overhanging shelf, whence, looking down, they expected to see the carcass of the goat. Body there certainly was, and the air struck foul and acrid on their distended nostrils. But it was not the body of a goat—a human skeleton grinned back at them from empty eye sockets. Round about were scattered human bones and tattered clothing, and two skeleton legs lay with knees drawn up, the feet still encased in rubber-soled shoes.

Night was fast falling. Whitely gleamed the bones, and the organ-pipe columns of the head played eerie tunes between the fitful rain-squalls. It was too much for the sailors' already overwrought nerves. Like one man they turned tail and fled helter-skelter for their boat.

Not until they were once more on board the destroyer, amid lights and warmth, did they feel safe.

On the destroyer's return to harbour the matter was subsequently reported to the police, who, on more than one occasion, searched the locality. But so wild, isolated and overgrown is Fair Head, to search for anything there is like looking for the proverbial needle in a bundle of hay. The terrified sailors had not noted the spot exactly, and the skeleton was never refound. Tossed by the storms, drenched by the rains, it still remains a mystery. One ray of light, however, has come to me, and that purely by accident. I happened to mention the matter at a public lecture, and one of my audience gave me a clue and showed me a Press cutting. Many years before the war a certain Professor Simcox, known as the "absent-minded professor," was summering in the north of Ireland, and expressed an intention of visiting Fair Head. From that day to this he has never been seen again by any of his friends. It appears probable that the skeleton of Fair Head is that of the absent-minded professor, but the manner in which he met his fate—whether by falling over the cliff impelled by an infuriated billy goat or by being crippled by breaking a leg on that rough terrain—will, I suppose, now never be known. One curious fact alone emerges. From that date onward the wild goats deserted their haunts around Fair Head and were seen no more of naval sportsmen.

The *Tara* had now been employed for over a year in patrolling the waters of the North Channel, and all on board had quite come to regard both themselves and their ship as a part of its permanent scenery. A ship at times seems to be almost as much a part of Nature as the trees and water, the cattle and the birds. She bends to the fierce blasts, dances to the sunshine with the wavelets underfoot, changes her colour with the passing clouds. But though we liked the fine weather well enough, our hearts were hardly in it when it came to passing a second winter in those gusty waters.

It was, therefore, with delighted surprise that during a short refit at Holyhead we heard that the ship was to proceed to the Mediterranean. Our anticipated departure at once led to a notable furbishing up of ancient sextants and the resurrection of tattered works on navigation. No more were we to cruise continuously in pilotage waters with land always in sight. We were to roam the high seas—" Heaven's light our guide "—and the fixing of the ship's position would depend upon our observations of the sun, moon, and stars. That meant the solving of all sorts of problems in navigation and spherical trigonometry which we had well-nigh forgotten the working of. It was a science in which we had, in fact, all grown rusty, and it would never do to lose our way between Holyhead and Alexandria.

Thus in the late autumn of 1915 we set forth for the blue skies and sunny seas of the Mediterranean, to waters which we believed to be free of mines and submarines, and a life which we anticipated would be in the nature of a yachting cruise. And yet, within a month the old *Tara* was lying at the bottom fully fifty fathoms deep, twelve of our number were dead, and the rest were enduring the most terrible of captivities.

No warning, no premonition had we, of what was in store for us; yet, if we had heeded them, the superstitious had something to go on. The changing of a ship's name is regarded as unlucky by sailors, and ours had been changed from the day that the Admiralty took her over. But just before the ship's loss an omen of much feller import had transpired.

On leaving home waters, the *Tara's* crew had taken with them, for the purpose of ensuring " good, luck," a black cat. Where the black cat came from I cannot say. It was probably " acquired " by one of the men on the eve of our departure, for, like fruits, stolen cats are sweetest—or, at least, they so appear to that warped one-sidedness which passes for conscience among sailormen. However as that may be, and whatever may have

been his origin, the *Tara's* cat was certainly a most remarkable animal. Nowhere else, even in dreams, have I seen a Grimalkin who even remotely resembled him. The reader is doubtless familiar with that type of cat, yclept " lucky," at one time common in china shops, but nowadays perhaps more familiar in black velvet trappings and adorning the bonnet of an automobile. What the special attributes may be which determine " luckiness " in these mascots it is difficult to state concisely. All alike, however, possess certain features in common. Among these may be mentioned huge saucer-like eyes, a demoniacal grin, an arched back, and a bushy tail curved like a note of interrogation.

The *Tara's* cat, besides greatly excelling all his china and velvet contemporaries in these essential " lucky " qualities, possessed also a coat of Nubian blackness, in which could be found not one single white hair. Big and heavy as an Airedale terrier (my veracity on this point has been questioned, but I adhere to the statement), he was extremely gaunt and long of limb; moreover, his countenance was both sinister and forbidding. This baleful embodiment of sin, the cat, was, in fact, so striking in appearance that he was a thing you were not likely readily to forget; yet, despite his malign appearance, he was, in his public conduct, a model of good behaviour. His only bad habit, so far as I am aware, was a trick he had of springing on to your bed unexpectedly at dead of night; at such times his great weight and diabolical aspect were apt to have a terrifying effect on his somnolent victim.

However, the cat appeared to be very happy on board in his own bored, weary way, and it was not until after the ship's arrival at Malta that he developed as a seer and filled us with uncanny forebodings as to the future. The ship was just about to resume her voyage when, without any apparent reason, the cat sprang overboard and attempted to swim ashore.

For a moment consternation reigned among the

onlookers, but a sailor and his luck are not so easily parted. A boat was at once lowered and sent after the errant "Tom," and, before he could reach the liberty of the shore, he was seized and dragged back wet and dripping. For safe custody he was thereafter confined in a hen-coop in disgrace, and not released until the ship was well out to sea.

The matter was soon forgotten, and, in the pleasurable excitement of our arrival at Alexandria, for a time completely faded from all minds. It was only the sequel that brought it to our memories, for on a Friday, a few days later, the ship was torpedoed and sank in eight minutes.

With her went the *black cat*.

Since those far-off days of 1915, many people who ought to know better have told me they feel *quite* sure that that cat *knew*—that he had a premonition that disaster was about to overtake the ship and compass his own doom, and that he tried to avoid it. I wish I could believe that such psychic powers belonged to the feline race, for then might I easily attain to wealth without the painful necessity to work. On every sea-going ship I would install a black cat, and, when my trusty agent on board informed me that my omen-giver had jumped overboard, I would insure that ship up to the hilt, and thereby reap a rich harvest when her loss was posted at Lloyd's.

But, I fear me, so facile a road to wealth is not open to me, and statistics point all the other way. A casual survey of my neighbour's roof, indeed, convinces me that there *may be* another explanation of the cat's strange conduct other than the psychical one. Discordant howls are sometimes borne to my ear at the witching hour of midnight, and, in fact, I am sure that there *is* another explanation.

My readers may have observed that, unlike the "young man," the "thoughts of love" of the felidæ are not confined solely to "the spring-time." The race

U 35 at Cartagena. The submarine which sank H.M.S. "Tara."
(From an Admiralty photograph.)

of "Thomas Cat" has also very sharp hearing. Can it be that the *Tara's* Grimalkin, like Shakespeare's Romeo, heard his Juliet calling to him across the vasty deep, or rather (to get the technique of local conditions correct) through those layers of garlic and oil which form the lower strata of the atmosphere of Malta? It is probable, and he, poor fellow, probably thought that swimming ashore was the easiest way of making his fair one's acquaintance.

The story of the captivity of the *Tara's* crew among the Senussi of Libya I have already told in another book (*Prisoners of the Red Desert*), and it was not until St. Patrick's Day, the 17th of March, 1916, that they were again set at liberty by the gallant dash of the armoured cars led by the Duke of Westminster. Could any fitter day of the year be found for our liberation than that of the patron saint of Ireland? *Hibernia* was the ship's baptismal name, and *Tara* is probably the most sacred place in Ireland, for the hill of that name marks the supposed resting-place of the Ark of the Covenant. It was but one more link in the strange chain of coincidences which I have observed as I pass along life's highway.

CHAPTER III.

AN ASYLUM STAFFED BY LUNATICS, FOLLOWED BY A VOYAGE TO THE ARCTIC; SEA SERPENTS, AND THE ONUS OF BEING NOBODY'S DOG.

FOLLOWING our release, it was in the merry month of May that I once more saw the white cliffs and green valleys of Old England, after a quite uneventful passage home in the hospital ship *Valdivia*. The reader may guess my feelings of joyful anticipation of home and full liberty after those five terrible months of nakedness, starvation, and captivity in a red and sterile desert—an existence which had reduced me to a living skeleton, weighing only nine and a half stone instead of my normal fourteen. But some weeks spent happily "feeding up" in the luxurious hospitals of Alexandria had already worked wonders, and I was rapidly putting on weight.

But, whatever I had anticipated lay in store for me, I had certainly not reckoned on the swathes of red tape which then bound Admiralty hospital administration. Instead of freedom, I found myself incarcerated between the four walls of X.—a naval hospital so-called, but in reality a dreary prison, round whose walls Marine sentries patrolled day and night with loaded rifles and fixed bayonets, lest any of the unhappy patients should attempt to escape. The walls themselves, it would have been thought, were sufficiently tall and forbidding, not to mention its police-guarded portals, above which, in

letters of fire, seemed to be written: " Abandon hope all ye who enter here."

The establishment of X. itself was ruled over by an ancient naval pedagogue and disciple of Æsculapius, dignified with the rank of Rear-Admiral, but irreverently referred to by his patients and victims as " Old Mouldy " or " Frosty Face." On all medical subjects this austere deity appeared to be hazily timid and ignorant, but on the subject of saluting he was unquestionably an authority. No matter how ill a patient might be, when " Mouldy's " shadow passed that way it was necessary for the patient to arise and make humble obeisance. He who would be this Nero's " white-haired boy " trained himself to see him afar off, to salute, and to keep on saluting. By such means only could any hope to reach the veteran's crabbed old heart and ossified brain.

This arbiter of our fates at X. appeared to run the establishment on the same lines as the " Old lady who lived in a shoe," and I promptly found myself deprived of all liberty, my clothes taken away, and myself tucked into bed. In vain did I protest that there was nothing the matter with me except malnutrition—that I had already been for five months a prisoner, and that I wished, above all, to see my home. As well might I have appealed to the winds and waves, for in an evil day, and just prior to landing, some well-intentioned person had affixed the fatal label " Neurasthenia " in my coat lapel. As I was soon to discover, the stigma of alleged neurasthenia relegated me to a status only comparable with that of the witch and heretic of the Middle Ages. I was an outcast, without human rights, and one to whom no one dared give sanctuary or shelter—indeed, little better than an unregistered lunatic. Of all at X. I alone knew that neurasthenia was, in my case, merely a convenient label to express starvation and weakness where no other symptoms were present. Into bed I was thrust, and, lest I should become too proud and haughty, my feeding was reduced to half-diet. Outside the snow

fell heavily, in spite of the calendar pointing to May; it was bitterly cold, but no fires were allowed, for, by the laws of the Medes and Persians as decreed at X., all artificial heating ceased on the 1st of May, no matter what the temperature.

Fortunately, however, for my mental sanity, the novelty and humour of my position began to thrust itself into my consciousness, or I might have committed I know not what wild act. Apparently I was imprisoned in what to all intents and purposes was a lunatic asylum, but an asylum in which it was the staff themselves who were the lunatics, and the patients the only sane persons. Prior to these calmer reflections I had seriously meditated stripping my clothes from me, climbing into a tree, and assuming the arboreal habits and customs of our simian ancestors by pretending to eat nuts. For, I reasoned, once I could be certified as insane I should at least have the rights and privileges given by the laws of my country to the mentally weak. I would, at stated intervals, have the right to interview a magistrate, whereas, as I then was, I was merely a prisoner without any right of protest.

But quiet reflection showed me a better method, and one altogether more likely to succeed in obtaining the liberty I so much desired. There were among the victims at X. many patients who were themselves naval surgeons, and, as such, presumably having a knowledge of what the symptoms of neurasthenia were likely to be, and also what tests it would be requisite to pass to prove my innocence of the fell malady. From them I learned that the more angry I got, the more certain I was to be convicted; instead of anger I studied the tests—how to walk straight with the eyes shut and my fingers extended in an irreverent attitude from my nose, and how, when shaking hands, I should give my inquisitor a hearty grip divorced from mental feebleness, and one which would make him regret the personal greeting.

Four days I languished thus at X. before my oppor-

tunity came—dreary days spent in watching the ghosts of dispirited patients of an inhuman system drifting sadly up and down. The patients' conversation was not inspiring: they had, for the most part, lost count of the time that they had been there themselves, and seemed to take a melancholy pleasure in impressing me with the belief that my own chances of freedom were hopeless, and that no one else had ever yet been known to get out in less than a month. But I heeded them not, and possessed my soul in patience.

X. certainly was the most dreary prison ever designed for the torture of sailors: there were no amusements more exciting than bowls, no books except the most musty and ancient of tomes, no piano, no gramophone, and visitors were most sternly discountenanced. On the rare occasions on which they *were* admitted at tea-time they were charged for at prices which would nowadays rapidly bring them into the meshes of the anti-profiteering committee. Food was indifferent in quality, and bordered on the starvation line as to quantity. I will not readily forget my first unwary request for a second helping—or a second portion of bloater, in fact—and its ignominious " turning down " by the bloated-looking mess-man. That the days of Oliver Twist in the poor-house were by no means dead was a fact to which I speedily tumbled on observing the shocked and scandalised expression on the faces of the smug attendants, and my request for more met with a prompt and uncompromising refusal. And I had rashly believed that, as a full captain in the Royal Navy, my wishes were not without weight! But it was all a part of the accursed soulless hospital system, bound and edged with red tape, wherein the Surgeon-General acted as Grand Inquisitor, and the patients were the heretics whom it was necessary to mould into shape and make conform to the system.

But at length the great day dawned for me—the day upon which the great civilian nerve expert was due to

return from his holiday, and upon which I should have my first chance of a fair trial, by one who presumably knew something about his job; for "Mouldy" himself, though nominally in charge of the hospital, dared move neither hand nor foot without the authority of this *deus ex machina*. Needless to say, I passed my examination (for which I had most carefully schooled myself) with flying colours; an hour later I was speeding forth in a taxi, barely controlling my joyful impulse to kiss the now saluting policeman at the gate as I departed.

* * * * *

I had been given a month's sick leave in which to recover my health and strength, but ere that period had elapsed I had, by my importunity, succeeded in "wangling" a new sea-going appointment out of the Admiralty, and by the 10th of June, 1916, I was on my way to join my new command, H.M.S. *Intrepid*, one of the Arctic or White Sea Squadron.

The *Princess Maud*, the vessel in which I took my northward passage, was a short, dumpy, and very slow steamer, which at one time had been employed in taking excursionists around the coastwise beauty spots of Scotland, but was then employed by the Admiralty to carry and lay out the various anti-submarine booms in distant parts of the world. Nine knots was her best speed, and she rolled and wallowed intolerably; it was thus not until a fortnight later that I got to my destination of Yukanskie, on the Murman Coast of Russia, the place at which I expected to find the *Intrepid*.

Our voyage had taken us up the East Coast of England along the War Channel, a buoyed passage-way three hundred miles in length, and daily swept clear of enemy mines. It extended from the Thames right up to St. Abb's Head in Scotland, following the windings of the coast. But, in spite of every care to the contrary, it could by no means be considered safe, for the submarines had developed an annoying habit of waiting for

the mine-sweepers to pass, and then, having seen them well on the way, of following after and depositing their explosive eggs in their wake.

To one who, like myself, had not been on the East Coast for years, it was interesting to note the changes which war had brought to it. From Felixstowe, the port of our departure, the sea was literally one great ocean graveyard until past Yarmouth. In that space we must have passed a hundred wrecks, some of them huge vessels, many lying upon their sides on sandbanks, others just showing the tips of their masts above water. Yet, in spite of all this shipping mortality, the War Channel itself in the day-time was as crowded with moving shipping as is Piccadilly Circus with wheeled traffic. At night, however, the War Channel was deserted, for, the buoys marking it not being lit, vessels had perforce to anchor or, if possible, crawl into the nearest port, lest in the darkness they should wander from the comparative safety of the passage into those areas where, by reason of their not having been swept up, the mines lay thick. It was at night that much of the damage by submarines was then being done, they pouncing upon, and sinking, the helpless steamers which had not been fortunate enough to get into port and had been obliged to anchor.

The *Princess Maud* herself anchored for the first night inside the entrance to the Humber, and on a subsequent night at Lerwick. It was at the latter place, then a bustling minor naval base, that I heard many stories of the Battle of Jutland. I cannot guarantee the truthfulness of these, but the battle was then a very recent event, and fresh in all men's minds; and at Lerwick we were in close and daily contact with the Grand Fleet. Among many, one version given of the reason why the German Fleet was caught at sea was that a convoy of seventy Allied merchantmen were, at the time, on their way home from Arkhangel. The Germans deemed that if they could succeed in capturing or destroying these it

would be a great haul. Another story of Jutland was that when the German Fleet retired they formed their destroyer divisions astern of the battle squadron. The destroyers having then made a dense smoke screen, the battleships were able to escape unmolested. But it was a close thing, for the British destroyers, pressing on the heels of their antagonists, one of them suddenly found himself through the smoke screen and close to the main German Fleet. It was a great chance, but one which was never taken advantage of, for the destroyer in question, not knowing that his leader in the *Tipperary* was sunk, left it to the latter to report the matter, and this vital error was not discovered until too late.

Another incident I also heard of—not, this time, relative to Jutland, but to the earlier action of the Heligoland Bight. The British were at the time engaged in picking up the drowning crews of sundry sunken German destroyers, and a Hun officer just rescued was on board a British destroyer. The latter's commander compassionately offered the shivering German a cigarette, and the result was typical of a certain school of Prussians: not only did he not accept the cigarette, but he dashed it violently away with his hand, and followed the action by spitting in his British saviour's face. Close at hand, and witness to the deed, stood a British petty officer, and the sight was too much for his insular phlegm. In a flash, and before anyone else could interpose or in any way interfere, he had seized the Hun in his arms and dumped him overboard—a place from which history does not relate that he was subsequently re-salved.

But to resume our voyage in the *Princess Maud*. After leaving Lerwick we proceeded on our northerly course in perfect, cloudless weather, entering the Arctic Circle at 1 p.m. on the 21st of June, and this lovely weather we carried with us right around the North Cape. The transparent clearness of the atmosphere up there was wonderful: far away to the westward towards Ice-

land one could faintly make out the distant sheen and glimmer of ice. The sea was as blue, or bluer, than the Mediterranean, glassily calm, and dotted everywhere with the black glass floats and other impedimenta which had broken adrift from the submarine nets employed in home waters, borne thither on the warm bosom of the Gulf Stream. One branch of the Gulf Stream sets past England right towards the north of Norway, taking the flotsam of the English coasts with it. Drifting mines were accordingly common objects off the North Cape; wreckage and bodies from Jutland occurred there for many months afterwards, having drifted more than a thousand miles. Marine life was also numerous, and we passed many schools of whales and porpoises, of which the dorsal fin, just showing above water, gave one at times an unpleasant shock by their uncanny resemblance to the periscope of a submarine—an effect accentuated by the white feather of spray by which they were accompanied. His majesty the sea serpent did not personally come our way, but, from what I saw of the habits of the northern seals, the frequent reports of the sighting of the monster in Norwegian waters are capable of explanation. An old dog seal, open mouthed, white fanged, fierce eyed, with long, sinuous neck and serpentine head stretched high out of the water, is, as it moves along, sufficiently like to the legendary sea monster, even without the aid of an excited seaman's imagination and the clouds of vapoury breath which the animal ejects into the cold air. But when, in addition, as is usually the case, the old dog seal is accompanied by the black, writhing coils of his attendant harem, the latter diving and reappearing in a long string close behind him, the illusion is so perfect as to be absolutely terrifying.

It was on the 22nd of June, 1916, that we reached our furthest point north, some thirteen hundred miles nearer the Pole than London and three hundred and thirty miles north of the Arctic Circle. The midnight sun was by

then beginning to become somewhat of a nuisance, for we all found difficulty in sleeping with the day god blazing brilliantly through cabin scuttles; it made one feel like a naughty child put to bed in the daytime for punishment! The temperature itself remained moderate, ranging somewhere round about forty-four degrees throughout the twenty-four hours. In pursuance of the usual plan for eluding submarines, the ship was kept far out, out of sight of land, giving it a berth of two hundred miles. It was thus that we passed right round Norway without sighting it, and, after thus rounding the North Cape, we spent twenty-four hours in one of those dense blankets of fog so prevalent in high latitudes: there being also a strong east-running current of unknown and variable strength, navigation became very difficult and a matter for the most part of guess work. Eventually, the fog lifting, we managed to find our destination, Yukanskie, and arrived there safely without further incident at 5 p.m. on the 24th of June. At Yukanskie I found my ship, the *Intrepid*, awaiting me, as also her sister, the *Iphigenia*, together with a yacht, some armed boarding steamers, trawlers and colliers—in fact, the greater part of that heterogeneous force known as the British Arctic Squadron.

Yukanskie, at that time the main British base in North Russia, is a rock-strewn anchorage enclosed between three small islands and the mainland, the whole nestling under the lee of Svyatoi Nos (pronounced " sweaty nose "), a prominent headland of the Murman Coast marked on most atlases. Inhabitants of that barren land there were none, except for small migrating bands of Laps who came up to the coast for the fishing in the summer, and retreated once more into the interior during the winter; the bare, sterile, rolling, low granite hills stretch from there for nearly ten thousand miles eastward along the whole northern breadth of Siberia, and are known as " tundras " or " bad lands."

In spite of its unprepossessing appearance, however,

Yukanskie, thanks to the war, had become a place of some considerable strategical importance, for it is close to the Gorla or gullet which leads to the Gulf of Arkhangel. Since the outbreak of war the Germans had constantly sown the Gorla with mines, and it was the business of the Arctic Squadron, and of the British mine-sweeping trawlers in particular, to keep a passage constantly swept free for shipping.

To Yukanskie, during the period each year that Arkhangel was free from ice (generally from July to the end of November), the whole sea-borne trade of Russia converged fanwise. It was there that ships received their orders, and were swept or convoyed to Arkhangel and the other White Sea ports. Day and night the shipping came and went during those short golden summer months, and was boarded, searched, questioned and instructed. Many hundreds of ships passed through each season, laden for the most part with coal, guns, munitions and every species of warlike stores; many whose single cargoes were valued even so far back as 1916 as being worth £2,000,000 each. It was only the old *Intrepid* and the other units of the British Arctic Squadron who made this traffic possible, for, by keeping open the mouth of Arkhangel by which Russia received her war food, they enabled her still to keep going as a combatant.

Through damage caused by stranding and collision, through fog and faulty navigation, through stress of tempest, ice, mine, submarine and treachery, not to mention the ordinary defects to hull and machinery inseparable from the navigation of a ship at sea, this vast allied merchant fleet was continually in need of the most urgent repairs. Neither at Arkhangel nor anywhere else within a thousand miles could such repairs be made good on that desolate coast line—it was only due to the presence there of the *Intrepid*, *Iphigenia* and other vessels of the British Arctic Squadron that these ships were able to be patched up sufficiently to face the return journey home.

Besides these duties to merchant ships, the *Intrepid* and her sister acted also as floating batteries in places like Yukanskie, where there were no shore defences, and had to keep prepared also to put to sea at short notice to tackle possible hostile raiders. They moreover kept in repair the rest of the Arctic Squadron, which included four armed boarding steamers (henceforth the reader will recognise this class of vessel by its service designation, A.B.S.), two yachts, sixteen trawlers, not to mention colliers and various small fry. The A.B.S. in those waters were of great value for patrol work, to meet and convoy incoming ships, to rescue them from submarine attack, and to succour the crews of those which had been torpedoed. The trawlers' work was to keep the War Channel, a channel a hundred miles long in the shallow waters of the Gorla, swept clear of mines at all times and at all seasons; later on, they were also employed escorting and sweeping through convoys, the round journey each time, from the Norwegian Fiords to Arkhangel and back, being roughly a thousand miles.

It was truly a herculean task, but never for one moment did that little British Arctic Squadron fail—through the nightless, mosquito-haunted summer of five weeks, through the long darkness, storms, and fearful cold of the endless winter this little squadron ever kept the sea. It was the fable of old Æsop exemplified yet once again, the fable in which the mouse, by gnawing the meshes, freed the lion (in this case a bear) from the net that held him. It was this little weak off-shoot of the British Navy that, by its persistence and its ability to " keep on keeping on," gave to the Russian bear the freedom of the seas, and kept open his northern ports to the whole world when every land frontier was barred. It was the British Arctic Squadron which kept Russia in the war for at least twelve months longer than she could possibly otherwise have done, and thus had a very vital effect on the whole world's history. Yet who in England has ever heard of

the late Arctic Squadron?—not one man in a thousand, I imagine—and now it is at the bottom of the sea.

In far away England Their Lordships of the Admiralty had certainly but the vaguest notions of the Squadron's needs and conditions—I suppose the units of which it was formed were too insignificant to merit close attention; for I have actually received official communications from them addressed to Yukanskie, *Japan*. It was even not unknown for reliefs for the North American Station to be sent to us by mistake. It was also a case apparently of " out of sight, out of mind," and anything in the way of officers and men was considered good enough for us in those far northern waters: we became the dumping ground of all the drunks and ne'er-do-wells whom nobody wanted at home. I do not blame Their Lordships in this matter, for they truly had an uphill fight to keep the Grand Fleet and other important squadrons fully manned and efficient with first-rate personnel. Poor little waifs and strays such as ourselves, being nobody's children, had to be grateful for anything that was left over, and we were apt to have our most insistent demands disregarded. But the fact remained—from first to last, the Arctic Squadron was consistently starved and overlooked in many essential things; however, I will add (lest the reader come to regard us as bad workmen who abused our tools) that we *always* kept our tails up and Russia in the war.

At the distance at which we were living from England at Yukanskie, every little need had to be thought out and provided for months ahead; for, though nominally we were in telegraphic communication with home, in practice telegrams generally took nearly a week on the way, and, on receipt, were found to have become so distorted in transit (almost certainly by enemy agents) as to be wholly, or in great part, undecodable. This would entail a further delay while a repetition was being obtained, and this, again, would be followed by a month or more of waiting whilst a suitable ship was being

selected and loaded with the stores required. On her way to the Murman Coast perhaps one out of every three of such ships would be sunk; this, of course, entailed the whole process being gone through again, and was often greatly complicated by our not having heard of the loss of the original vessel. In several instances the second ship with such urgently needed stores was also torpedoed and sunk, and on one occasion it occurred for the third time.

Such delays were harassing; we were, in fact, living again in the Nelsonic era, thanks to the inefficient telegraphic service maintained by the Russians, many of whom were unquestionably in German pay. Again and again mails, urgent stores, and the latest secret cyphers were, through submarine activity, sunk and lost *en route* for us; the crews of sunken ships were often thrown on our hands, and had to be clothed, fed, and housed by us. These and similar other unexpected causes more than once reduced the Arctic Squadron to the direst straits for provisions, so that we had little more than a week's supply in sight, and no other food that we could rely upon obtaining closer than England. But this Nelsonic era had its good points as well as its bad ones: the individual upon the spot came to rely more and more upon his own judgment, and to wait less and less upon that dim and distant authority of the Admiralty—an authority which with many in the Navy has come to usurp the functions of the Deity.

It must be remembered that the British Navy were aliens in a none too friendly Russia. During the first year of the war they had tried to work in conformity with Russian ideas and methods, but, long ere this, hard and bitter experience had taught them the futility of the effort. The Russians themselves, though brave, kind-hearted, romantic, and always hospitable, were about as practical in the administration of their sea affairs as a girls' Sunday-school class might reasonably have been expected to be. The Russian senior officers were super-

sensitive, steeped in pride and prejudice, mostly incompetent, and prone to hard drinking. Lower down in the scale, all Russians alike appeared to have an ingrained distaste for the sea, and the common seamen, though vastly patient, displayed all the slowness and lack of *savoir faire* characteristic of oxen. For countless generations Russia had been accustomed to regard the winter months as a time for festivity, and not for work; their idea was to wage war for a few months in the summer only—a notion which clashed, inevitably, with the more active and strenuous British temperament. Moreover, no one could be trusted; the most patriotic and capable Russians often had German names, while those with Russian patronymics were often nothing but German spies and paid agents. As for the country we were in, the Murman Coast was practically unsurveyed, and our charts were little better than caricatures of the real conformation of the coastline; the men who did the surveying must have done the greater part of it in their homes, inspired by imagination and liberal potions of vodki. Waste and inefficiency were chronic. I will give but one typical instance. For the landing of railway materials it became necessary to construct a pier at Murmansk. The necessary timber for this was not, however, for the moment available, but there was in the river lying a steamer waiting to discharge a cargo of motor-cars. She was made to discharge her motor-cars *overboard* to make the foundation of the pier!

Another of our difficulties in 1916 was that a great many neutral ships were also plying to North Russia, and the masters of some of these, especially such as brought munitions from the United States, were anything but free from the suspicion of being in German pay. One notable instance was that of the *C*——, which in June was proceeding with a cargo of motor-cars for Arkhangel. Her master was already reputed to have lost four ships during the war, and, having arrived on the Murman Coast, he continued to act up to his

reputation. His first two attempts to smash the *C*—— in the ice were, however, unsuccessful, for they were frustrated by the vigilance of the British trawlers, who headed her off. The third time he had better luck, and managed to get his ship firmly ashore; this accomplished, he and his crew landed in their boats, amply provided with tents and provisions, and waited to be rescued. It was at least strange, if this were really an accident, how well he and his men came prepared for it.

The way in which all Russian news was being tapped at that time and forwarded to Germany was also illuminating. The British Commodore happening to arrive one day in his yacht, I asked him, in the course of conversation, whether a certain steamer, which I knew had grounded at Kem, had been floated off. The Commodore appeared surprised at my question, and asked how I had heard of the casualty, which he had been trying to keep secret. His astonishment was even greater at my reply, which was to the effect that I had read it in the official German war news made by wireless on the preceding day.

From the foregoing the reader will realise that in 1916 the British were in a very delicate situation in North Russia, a situation which required the greatest tact and most careful handling. The Russians were intensely jealous and suspicious of us, yet, at the same time, the country required every ounce of help which England could render, for their own sea administration in the Arctic was totally inefficient—smothered by red tape and prejudice, honeycombed by intrigue, undermined by German money. Of themselves the Russians just then were not capable of doing anything, and if anything was to be done at all it had to be done by the British, and in the British way, for the two administrations could no more coalesce than oil and water.

Gradually the more patriotic and far-seeing of the Russians began to see this themselves, and during the course of the war England took over the whole manage-

ment of the shipping at Arkhangel—a matter which, during the first year of the war and before this arrangement had been come to, was chaos twice confounded. In that first winter of the war more than a hundred British vessels were icebound there from November to the following July, and the discharge of all cargoes was a slow and painful process.

Besides Arkhangel the British also established their base at Yukanskie, at the entrance to the White Sea, and from it plied the British trawlers, who, by their mine-sweeping, alone made traffic practicable. True, the Russians also had mine-sweepers, but in practice they proved so inefficient that they were only allowed to play at looking for mines in waters in which it was thought improbable that mines would be found.

Thus it was that Russian authority waned and that of Britain extended in those waters north of the Arctic Circle; and such, more or less, was the state of affairs when I arrived on the scene at Yukanskie in the *Princess Maud* on the evening of the 25th of June, 1916. Needless to say, I did not then know these facts which I have just set forth; it was a matter of many months and of painful incidents before I found them out.

CHAPTER IV.

ICE AND THE FLOWERS THAT BLOOM IN THE SPRING SET IN AN ARCTIC EDEN, WHEREIN DWELT WINGED DRAGONS, CHRISTIAN COMMODORES AND SOME HEATHEN LAPS.

I TRUST the reader will not have been carried away by anything that I have said, or which may follow, with the belief that, because I speak little of Murmansk or Arkhangel, that therefore those places had little to do with the scheme of things, and that the whole British Arctic Squadron existed solely under my command at Yukanskie—for this would be exactly opposite to the truth. The actual facts were far otherwise, for not only was there a Commodore acting as senior naval officer in North Russia and living for the most part on shore in Arkhangel, but there was also an officer senior to myself at Murmansk. The latter commanded the old British battleship stationed there and such cruisers and smaller craft as from time to time came within his jurisdiction. He had duties at least equally as onerous as my own, and ones, moreover, far more harassing to carry out, for at Murmansk he was daily in contact and combat with Russian officialdom, the pains of which I was to a great degree spared in my rôle of Senior Naval Officer at Yukanskie—or S.N.O.Y., the letters by which my office was most generally known.

As S.N.O.Y. I was in fact but the third senior in the Arctic Squadron, a squadron which, owing to the difficulties of communication, had little coherence. This entailed that the senior officer on the spot had to a great

extent to work independently of the others. Hence in this book I speak not of the squadron as a whole, but merely of that major portion of it which came directly under my own personal control.

At the time of my arrival at Yukanskie there was not then a great deal of snow remaining there. Yet, as I learned, only some three weeks previously the whole harbour had been a solid frozen expanse of grinding, driving ice-floes—the ships of the squadron, with steam up and all their anchors out, had been dragged helplessly hither and thither by the ice pressure, and had been in great danger of being driven ashore or of having their bottoms torn out on the numerous and uncharted submerged rocks.

Yukanskie, my home to be for many months, certainly was not an inviting looking place. Low bare granite hills stretched their rounded, featureless forms to the far horizon in all directions; not a tree was visible, not a house, and vegetation was confined to a few grey and rusted lichens peeping through the snow, with, in the more sheltered hollows, a few dwarf and depressed-looking yews and birches: these had been crushed flat by the weight of winter ice, and were now trying to recover themselves.

But though vegetation was so scant, bird life was already a prominent feature of the landscape. Overhead long V-shaped flights of geese were wending their way northward, and the little brown and white snow buntings flitted and chirped on every boulder. Along the shore the brown goose-like eider-duck, accompanied by her handsome black and white drake, was everywhere numerous. There also the pretty little black guillemots made merry, while from every hand a myriad skuas, herring, and other gulls descended on us and fought for the offal which was thrown overboard. The eggs of these birds, I was informed, had already served to make excellent omelettes for the sailors in this land where no poultry farms are. Landing, I found in the pools where

the snow had melted that caddis and dragon-fly larvæ were already moving about, not to mention numerous small shining water-beetles.

Nature was already awaking from her ten months' winter sleep.

On board the *Intrepid* herself I found I had a contented and well-disciplined ship's company of some two hundred souls—men who for the most part had volunteered for the Arctic Squadron. To the regular Navy man the Arctic was a change from the putrefaction of Scapa Flow, the deadly inactivity, dull monotony, and yet insistent preparedness of the Grand Fleet. Occupation with us never needed to be looked for, for work was over-abundant, and, with their homes so far away, it was easier to settle down and make the best of things. With the delights of town life so distant, there were no heart burnings, no contentious strivings for shore leave, such as were inevitable with our fleets in home waters—where civilisation and its attractions were ever present to sight, yet rarely attainable owing to the exigencies of service.

Here on the Murman Coast were neither women nor public-houses, and, with the disappearance of these twin temptations of sea-faring youth, the punishment list had also dwindled to near vanishing point. The trawler crews did not even have a rum ration, and year in, year out, through periods of the most ferocious cold and exposure, remained perforce teetotallers. Day and night the great proportion of the Squadron's crews were laboriously working in shifts—coaling, watering ship from the boats, hoisting out and transferring cargoes, together with the drills, boat work, small arm exercise, painting, general cleaning and spit and polish which form the ordinary life of a man-of-warsman. It is a life, indeed, of which it can be even more truly said than that of woman that the " work is never done."

On board the ship I found installed an abnormal number of pets, the most numerous of which were

several parti-coloured specimens of the local Lap dog, a mongrel and much mixed breed.

But she who undoubtedly took first place in the sailors' affections was the ship's cat. Your sailor is ever a sportsman, and to those with sporting instincts the cat introduced just that element of chance to his life which meant so much. And the reason? It was that pussy was of the feminine sex, capricious and uncertain in all her ways, and much addicted to the procreation of kittens. Need I add that no better subject for the running of a sweepstake was ever devised by man than the date, hour, and locality of the next feline " happy event," nor than the number, sex, and markings of the kittens.

The pros and cons of this abstruse subject were studied eagerly by all on board; and, in fact, nearly every one of the lower-deck messes had rigged up a sumptuous nesting box for Madame Chat, and prodigally squandered canteen kippers in an effort to secure her favour, for there were none but would have considered it an honour and of good omen had Tabitha selected their own special sanctum in which to fulfil her destiny.

It was somewhat later on, in the last few days of summer, that we were enabled to add yet another form of pet to our menagerie: the newcomers were the little Arctic lemmings, or " lemons," as the sailors invariably styled them.

A lemming is a bright, fat, cheerful little rodent, not far removed from the guinea-pig in appearance, if not by descent, only it is much smaller, with a short, shrew-like tail and adorned with the prettiest of black-and-tan coats with a cream-coloured underside.

None of us had ever seen a lemming previous to the late summer of 1916, and then somebody found one hanging on to a fender which had been put over the side preparatory to coaling ship. The next day three or four more were found in the same way, and this was followed by a report from an individual who happened to go on shore that the little animals were simply

swarming there. The report proved to be correct; there were literally millions and millions of them, and they were obviously migrating. A strange sight it was, for these small animals, only slightly larger than a dormouse, appeared to be impelled by some instinct which caused them to heed no obstacle. Boldly they swam wide rivers, and countless thousands of them put out to sea and perished; it was such as these that we had found clinging to the fenders we had put over the ship's side, and the ship was half a mile from the shore. At Yukanskie itself, the river which lay to the east of us was a hundred yards wide, yet in places it was nearly choked by their dead bodies.

As I was also in the Arctic during the following summer of 1917, I looked forward to learning more of these lemmings and their strange ways; but, to my surprise, and in spite of the most careful search, I could not come across a single one of them. The only traces of their presence which I could discover were in the immense number of pellets of fur and bones ejected by the owls which had eaten them. This suddenness with which the lemming appears from apparently nowhere, and then again as suddenly disappears, was well known to the ancients, and was the cause of a great deal of superstition being attached to them. While the snow still lies anywhere its surface is fairly riddled by holes and burrows, these, as we soon discovered, having been made by Master Lemming in his efforts to get at the roots and berries underneath, upon which he feeds. At such time as there is snow the lemming, with his bright coloured markings, is very conspicuous, for, unlike his North American cousin, he does not turn white in winter. When surprised on the surface he becomes more guinea-pig-like than ever, for, instead of escaping quietly, he rushes around in circles, squeaking excitedly, so that it is almost impossible to overlook him. Once caught, the lemming in a very few hours becomes tame, and makes the prettiest of pets imaginable, sitting up

on his haunches and eating after the manner of a squirrel. Unfortunately, however, he is an inveterate fighter, and if two are put into the same cage their companionship is quickly ended by a fierce duel, which results in the death of one or both of them. For some reason the lemming is very difficult to keep in captivity. I possessed two which lived for longer than any of the others on board; in fact, I succeeded in getting them back to England with me and in keeping them there a further three months, then, although apparently in the best of health and spirits, they in turn died suddenly without any visible preliminary illness.

As for the strange migrating habits of the lemming, I inquired of the British Museum as to whether there were any accepted explanation of it. Apparently there was none. But one official, less cautious than the others, suggested that it may possibly be a relic of that dim and distant past when Europe was still joined to North America by a bridge of land passing through Iceland. In those distant epochs of the world's history the lemming may have acquired a habit of migrating westward at certain seasons of the year, and this habit, having become an instinct, still continues, although for ages this land bridge has disappeared. Some instinct certainly does compel them to commit suicide in millions by swimming out to sea, although nowadays this instinct is apparently of no more use than the human appendix, that other inconvenient relic of long-vanished ages. Whatever the explanation, the fact remains that the lemming now only inhabits the extreme north-west corner of Europe, although there is no visible reason why it should not flourish equally elsewhere, and its fossil remains are common in Britain.

With the end of June the Arctic spring commenced suddenly to blaze forth; in those granite fastnesses where previously there had been visible nothing but snow, with an outcrop of lichen-covered boulders, there magically appeared a wealth of flowers. The islands in a few nights

became pink with flowering mountain azaleas, dwarf shrubs only an inch or two in height, while bilberry, cloudberry, and wild raspberry blossomed in profusion. The yellow pansy, the blue of the dog and also of the bog-violet spangled the grass which had sprung up, and many varieties of scarlet and purple vetches made sterile patches to glow with colour. In the damper parts large and delicate pale green ferns thrust themselves forth from beneath sheltering boulders, and the watercourses shone golden with king-cups and the spherical flowers of ranunculus as large as small tulips.

But the most conspicuous of all the plants at first were sundry clusters of asparagus-like shoots, which, to our unbotanically instructed eyes, appeared to be lilies-of-the-valley. Eagerly the men dug them up, and, having duly replanted them in boxes on board, awaited a rich floral bouquet. Never before were there such giant lilies-of-the-valley; they grew at the rate of a foot a week for five weeks, and then, having reached maturity, flowered. But the flowers were not lilies, but small green " conthaptions," as verdant as the leaves of the plant itself and rather less interesting and conspicuous looking than those of the common dock weed. Truly had the mountain laboured and brought forth a mouse: the disgusted sailors promptly consigned them to " the ditch," or, in other words, dropped them overboard.

With the flowers came also flies and spiders, which, before the snow was fully melted, could be seen in their myriads nimbly skating over its surface; these were also shortly followed by magnificent-looking bumble-bees of three or four species, and later on by dragon-flies.

In general, during the short Arctic summer, the weather was calm and cool, broken by lengthy periods of fog and Scotch mist. But on the 1st of July the sun shone forth in a clear sky and it got considerably warmer, and the first butterflies appeared. By the 6th of July the thermometer had risen as high as 84 degrees in the shade, and, though the temperature of the sea was not as yet

much above freezing point, all the officers who could get away indulged in a bathing picnic.

Such as it was, however, this picnic was the last for many weeks, for a new and unexpected enemy had appeared on the scene—an enemy more ruthless and rest-destroying than ever the Kaiser's U boats. It was the Arctic mosquito.

A few days previously to this we had noticed a few mosquitoes sitting aimlessly about on the rocks, but as they had not attempted to molest us in any way we had taken little heed. The reason for this forbearance on their part was that these were the harmless males who hatch out several days in advance of the females, and, unlike the latter, are content with the honey of flowers and do not bite human beings.

But during the first week of July the female mosquitoes also commenced to put in an appearance, and in countless myriads swarmed everywhere. Having personally spent many years in tropical climates, I was inclined to regard with contempt insect pests which might occur elsewhere, but I soon found I had cause to alter such views. Compared with the Arctic mosquito, his tropical cousin is as a harmless, unenterprising lamb to a hungry devouring lion, and, whereas the timid tropic insect confines his malarious ministrations mainly to the hours of darkness, the Arctic fiend holds high orgy throughout the twenty-four hours, for he is a daylight mosquito, and in the Arctic summer the sun sets neither day nor night.

We were at that time wearing white cap-covers, and it is no exaggeration to say that, within a few minutes of going on shore, such cap-covers were a crawling treacly-brown mass of mosquitoes, with no white visible. There was indeed no malaria attached to their bites—the one and only good point in their favour—but in an incredibly short time they had invaded every corner of the ship and made of the life of all on board one long-drawn-out curse. An epidemic of small-pox could not have marked us all more effectually. Many men were put on the sick-list

by their stings, and on more than one occasion they entirely stopped all work in the squadron; with the greatest ease they bit through many suits of clothing, and the only person who was immune and could afford to laugh at their persecutions was the diver cased in his rubber and armour-plated suit. The very dogs on board went half mad and threw fits, the birds were driven from their nests, small rodents in the open and even the butterflies could get no rest. Never was there plague like the Arctic mosquito, an insect who made a hell of that transient Garden of Eden, these short five weeks of what would have otherwise been a delightful season—the Arctic summer.

Thanks to this experience I was, in the following summer, enabled in a measure to prepare for this onslaught—the whole ship, fore and aft, was cased in with mosquito-netting, every man had his own sleeping net and a veil to protect his face in the daytime; some also brought deterrent lotions, which they smeared over their faces and hands. But in that, our first, summer of 1916 the mosquitoes caught us unprepared, and were wholly contemptuous of tobacco or any other kind of smoke; it was only during the colder spells and periods of rain, wind and fog that they in any way abated their attacks. At other times we were literally so blinded and maddened by the pain of their stings that it was difficult to find one's way about, or even to see through the brown haze of their myriad bodies.

Mosquitoes were our main obsession for a while, but by no means the only one. On the 3rd of July one of the trawlers swept up and exploded a mine off Cape Danilov. This mine was almost certainly a relic of the first year of the war, during which Germany had laid several large mine-fields in that neighbourhood. This was one of the few survivors of that period. It was one of the blessings of the Arctic that by far the greater proportion of enemy mines laid during one summer were automatically destroyed by the following season, for during the winter,

as soon as the ice reached a thickness of ten feet or more, its lower surface pressing down on the horns of the submerged mines would cause them to become bent, and thus touch off the mine without danger to anyone. The consequent explosions and the vast upheaval of ice caused by them were more than once witnessed by the keepers of the shore lighthouses. Other mines, which had been set too deep for the ice to reach them, were for the selfsame reason of very little danger to shipping, for they were as a rule too low down to come into contact with the ships' bottoms. Thus each spring we were able, so far as mines were concerned, to start with what to all intents and purposes was a clean sheet.

By the middle of July large numbers of huge jelly-fish began to float past the ship, and we were able, by observing them, to gauge something of the strange tidal currents by which we were beset at Yukanskie—currents which were responsible for more than one heavy bump of ship against ship and for others getting ashore. On the surface a current would perhaps be running at two knots to the eastward, while ten feet down, as we could see by the jelly-fish, another current would often be running at an equal speed across it, or in the opposite direction.

Those officers who were fishermen and also sufficiently pachydermatous to withstand the onslaught of the mosquitoes, after exploratory visits to the river and smaller local streams, now began to come back with very fair bags of salmon and also of brown and white sea-trout. I myself took the opportunity to run up and visit the Lap summer settlement, a small village in the Russian style of timbered houses, situated some three or four miles up the river. I found it to be incredibly filthy, and from every roof hung the semi-decayed carcasses of reindeer, placed there to be out of the reach of dogs. These Lap inhabitants had a priest and were nominally Christians, but I was told that heathen images could generally be found hidden away somewhere or other in their boats.

These, however, had been degraded from the proud position of family gods to the status of mere objects for abuse and ill-treatment when the affairs of their owner did not turn out as he desired—a form of religion which I believe is not conclusively confined to the heathen Lap.

The Christian counterblast to this heathendom was to be observed elsewhere in the large number of votive crosses erected by the fishermen in conspicuous places around the coast—the fulfilment of vows made while in dire peril of the sea. At first I had mistaken these for graves. The fact that the ground is solid granite and that it is frozen for fully nine months every year makes it difficult to find a spot anywhere with soil sufficiently deep to effect an interment.

By the 17th of July the *Princess Maud* had finished laying the anti-submarine boom which she had brought with her for the defence of Yukanskie. The boom certainly gave us an increased feeling of confidence, for, by its mere appearance, it helped to scare the underwater gentlemen, much after the manner in which extended cotton threads placed over seeds, by presenting the appearance of a trap, serve to deter inquisitive and marauding birds. The submarine could tell no more than the bird what the real potentialities of the device might be, and consequently feared the worst.

But since the truth may now be told, the wide meshed wire net, such as formed our boom at Yukanskie and that of many other outlying places, was not of sufficiently strong design to stop a submarine, and it was not even intended to stop torpedoes. There was, in fact, nothing to stop a submarine lying off the place and browning the assembled shipping at long range with his torpedoes; sometimes there was a trawler on patrol duty at the entrance, but as a rule the trawlers were far too precious as mine sweepers for us to be able to spare one for such work. Yet throughout the whole war I believe there was no single case on record, except at the very beginning, of a submarine having attempted to force such

defences; they therefore, in spite of their shortcomings, served as a most useful deterrent.

The local coasting schooners were, however, a thorn in our side, for, until they became aware of the nets' existence, they were constantly running over them in the dark and getting tangled up as a result—an experience which appeared to cause their crews very great terror, they not knowing what new and deadly warlike contrivance they were foul of. This was a state of mind which we did all in our power to encourage, and strove to impress upon all Russians the belief that the boom was heavily mined, a fiction which the numerous buoys employed to float the nets served to confirm in their imaginations. Like all other news, true or fabulous, in Russia, I have no doubt that it soon afterwards found its way to Germany, and was, I trust, believed there.

During the summer and autumn, the period of the year in which the White Sea remained free of ice, the British Commodore-in-Charge, North Russia, used to make frequent trips from Arkhangel in his yacht to Yukanskie, Murmansk, and other places along the coast. It was during such visits that we were able to learn something of the internal state of Russia and discuss the limited news of events in the outside world which came our way. A white-haired, rugged personality was this representative of Britain's far-flung sea power, and quite one of the toughest specimens of humanity it has ever been my good fortune to meet. In spite of his more than three-score years of bachelor existence, he held in contempt both the climate and the mosquitoes. In the winter months in North Russia the thermometer often registered 60 degrees of frost, yet he considered it almost effeminate to wear extra clothing; so much was this so that it became a proverb among the Russians at Arkhangel that " It must indeed be a cold day when the British Admiral puts on an overcoat." Of the most generous nature imaginable, he posed as a lady-hater; but I fancy this attitude was mere camouflage on his part, and but

a manœuvre to cover his own excessive timidity with regard to the sex. At dinner parties I fear we soon fell into a reprehensible habit of bating him on this matter, and of discussing such subjects as " Votes for women." This and kindred political topics never failed as a sure draw, for the Commodore, having torn out several handfuls of his own plentiful white hair, would spring to his feet and, with flashing eyes, roar forth his contempt for woman and all her ways. We, in the absence of the fair sex, enacted the *rôle* of her defenders, no matter how foolish the subject of discussion might be; and thus the battle waged until the small hours of the morning, whereupon the Commodore (who, in spite of all his heat, had been thoroughly enjoying himself) would take his departure. This officer spoke Russian well, but his salient characteristic was like that of Don Quixote—a predisposition to tilt at windmills. In his case, however, the windmills took the form of the acts and ordinances of their Lordships of the Admiralty—an institution which he, like a goodly number of other naval officers, appeared to regard as only one place removed from hell-fire, a locality into which he hoped that it might fall speedily. It was alleged of him (I know not with what truth) that so great was his dislike of naval officialdom that during the many years that he was in North Russia he had never sent in one single written report, but contented himself with the vagaries of the telegraph. If that were indeed the case, it helps to explain in some measure the Admiralty's gross ignorance as a whole of the conditions under which the Arctic Squadron existed.

The arrival of the Commodore's yacht at Yukanskie was usually the signal for a mild outburst of festivities—such, at any rate, as we were able to indulge in under the exigencies of active service, and with the very limited resources at our disposal. In the food line we were circumscribed by the narrow circle of Navy rations and the slender stocks of a nearly empty canteen. Fresh meat

The Officers, H.M.S. "INTREPID," 1916.

often did not come our way for weeks, and fresh vegetables, with the exception of occasional much-sprouted potatoes, rarely or never. Ingenuity, therefore, in the devising of dishes made from unsuspected articles was of value, and, thanks to my five months' training as a prisoner in the desert, my mind was perhaps more open to the inception of new gastronomic ideas than those of my fellows, limited by custom in their views of what was good to eat.

As the result of a few hours spent on shore I, by diligent search, had quickly unearthed many unsuspected dainties in a land which we had thought held little but snow and granite; by means of my discoveries I was able to provide my guests with both salad, meat, and floral adornment. The islands I found to be literally clothed with wild onions, of a tough and wiry sort, no doubt, but which, nevertheless, when secured at a sufficiently tender age, resembled, at least in odour, the spring onion of our own happy land. Add to this the fact that at a more mature age these onions developed magnificent mauve blooms, set on stems a yard and more in length, eminently suitable for table adornment, and you will see what a first-rate find I had already made. Besides these onions, I found also sorrel growing abundantly, not to mention a few dandelions and a species of wild celery—in fact, all the makings of a first-rate salad. Upon the sea-shore itself were numbers of a small kind of mussel, and very often under the seaweed a hideous black rock-fish with a sucker under its chin—a monstrosity known to the men as a " Jerusalem haddock." Many useful dishes could be made from the mussels, and as for the " haddock," it was full of roe, which the Russian epicures opined was similar to that used in caviare. Sea-birds were also numerous, and we very soon found that all of them without exception—skuas, divers, gulls, and guillemots—were most excellent eating, for once their skin had been removed they had no fishy taste. As for the black guillemots, which

up here in the breeding season are not black, but very elegant black-and-white birds with coral-coloured feet, they were as tender, plump, and savoury as the best of partridges. Man will do much to obtain variety in his food, and some of the sailors actually boiled down and ate an ancient dog-fox, which had rashly strayed on to our island and got shot.

Here is a menu typical of all the many dinners which it was my wont to give in those days to the Commodore and to the various Russian and British captains—a menu at which my guests, in their blissful ignorance of its true wherewithal, smacked their lips, and one which, to this day, still brings a smile to my own:—

HORS D'ŒUVRES—Caviare (made from the roe of "Jerusalem haddock").
SOUP—Mariniere (made from fish-heads and condensed milk)
GAME PIE (made from sea-gulls and "Fanny Adams," alias tinned beef).
SALAD (made from wild onions, sorrel, dandelions, and a celery-like herb).
ROAST PARTRIDGE (camouflaged guillemot).
ICE PUDDING—Bombe glacée à la Yukanskie (snow, condensed milk, and tinned pineapples).

Needless to say, that part of the menu which I have inserted between parentheses for the reader's information was not revealed to my guests. Occasionally some of them complained subsequently of certain pains and qualms, but I had only to point out to them my own perfect health (I think I could eat concrete and india-rubber mixed without suffering inconvenience) to convince them that such internal inharmony as they felt could not possibly be due to *my* dinner. There can be no question, however, that these dinners were much appreciated and, whatever their subsequent effects, did much to assure international harmony between us and our then Russian allies.

Sometimes, of course, there were red-letter days when I really had genuine articles to offer, and when "game" was not simply skinned sea-gulls. On one memorable

occasion my steward, worthy fellow that he was, put up a brace of ptarmigan with their family covey of young birds. As the latter, besides being young, were also innocent and not yet able to fly overwell, and as moreover there was plenty of ammunition in the nature of stones available, he, by the simple Davidian method, succeeded in " downing " and bringing off two plump young ptarmigan.

If any man ever possessed such a thing, this steward of mine most certainly bore a charmed life—and there was nothing which he was not prepared to eat. When a specially poisonous-looking fish came along, it was always first given to him to sample; then, if within twenty-four hours he was still alive, and was not suffering from obvious and acute pain, it was considered safe to offer to my guests.

In the giving of dinner-parties I was not alone, for the Ward Room officers also indulged in festivities of a like nature. Their menu was often but little less *ersatz* than my own: they had also an added attraction with which I could not vie—it was that amongst their number was the ship's surgeon, a noted naturalist, whose special hobby it was to collect parasites. Hence it arose that, before any guest was taken in to dinner, and in place of an *apéritif*, he was given something else with which to whet his appetite, namely, a private view of the doctor's bottled horrors. These parasitic horrors ranged from the six-foot-long tape-worm which inhabits the Russian salmon down to such comparatively innocuous creatures as thread-worms and microscopic lice from birds and small animals; for, whatever was slain under the name of " game," it was always recognised that the doctor had the priority of right of scientific search. Their appetites having thus been suitably stimulated by the aid of vision, the guests were then taken down and fed; but the crux of the whole joke was that, having well eaten, they were then told exactly which of the animals previously seen in bottles had inhabited their dinner when in the life.

Another pastime in which the Ward Room engaged was that of horticulture. In fact, their passion for it grew to such lengths that the paymaster eventually had to prohibit the sale of Admiralty flannel to officers, for, owing to its suitability as a medium for the cultivation of mustard and cress, he found himself faced with the fact of the near approach of winter and greatly depleted stocks of that most useful article. Thwarted in this direction, the officers then had recourse to other uses for their little cabin allotment patches—a new form of intensive culture was soon brought to birth. It was found that the potatoes in the ship's store had, for some unknown reason, developed a tremendous growth of " whiskers "—whiskers being the term by which we designated the long pendulous roots which they had sprouted. Each officer having selected his own potato, labelled it with a pet name, ornamented it with red tape, and entered it for the competition. On Sunday mornings the potatoes were duly and in order displayed upon a shelf in the Ward Room, and, having been judged by some impartial person, the prize was awarded to the happy owner of that tuber which possessed the most luxurious crop of " whiskers " and was of the most grotesque appearance.

CHAPTER V.

OF MINES AND MUTTON AND AUTUMNAL FRUITS, OF CLEO'S VICTIMS LOSING SUITS, OF NAVAL CAPTAINS TEARING HAIR, AND, LAST OF ALL—A RUSSIAN BEAR.

BY the time that mid-July had arrived I began to feel that I was at length beginning to grasp something of the peculiar local conditions; my mind no longer felt so completely in a whirl, and my brain, in place of being a mere sponge engrossed in the absorption of information, began to recover something of its normal functions as a reasoning and creative medium. One of our greatest difficulties in the Arctic was that there were no dry docks within reach; yet the trawlers, upon whose efficiency as mine-sweepers the main utility of the Arctic Squadron most chiefly depended, were constantly running ashore and damaging their propellers. By some expedient or other these damaged propellors had to be taken off and replaced by the spare ones carried on board the collier; beaching the trawlers was the only method then known to us by which this could be done with no dry-docks available, and it was not until the following season that we discovered and developed a new method for doing it under water by the aid of divers alone. The difficulty on that rocky, iron-bound coast of finding a suitably sheltered strip of sand on which such beaching could safely take place, and at which moreover the spring tides fell sufficiently to expose the propeller-boss at low water to allow of a fire being built under it, were very great. The nearest we knew of was at Trekh Island, more than

a hundred miles away. And even at Trekh Island beached trawlers were very exposed to any heavy weather which might come on from seaward; it was always on the cards that the trawler herself might be pounded to pieces by the seas before the work could be completed. With the end in view of trying to find a safer beaching place, I took the first opportunity of a lull in the pressure of work to take my ship to sea and also to visit Ivanovski, a small sheltered harbour near at hand, hard by Cape Cherni; Ivanovski also proved to be a rock-strewn spot, but we at length found there a suitable strip of sand.

On the 19th of July another mine was exploded off Svyatoi Nos, and, although this was seventeen miles distant from Yukanskie, we in harbour there all felt the concussion, which seemed to lift the ship. This mine had not been swept up in the ordinary way by the trawlers, but suddenly rose to the surface close to one, it having been broken from its moorings by age and the force of the tide.

This mine we hoped and believed to belong to one of the old German mine-fields, but, as the Roumanian s.s. *Bristrita* reported shortly afterwards having sighted a submarine heading our way, and some one hundred and twenty miles distant from the North Cape—and this first report having been corroborated by two others—it became evident that the U boats' spring campaign was about to commence, and that thereafter we must prepare for all eventualities.

Meanwhile the material comfort of the squadron was steadily increasing; a ship had arrived with a supply of frozen beef, and for a time, at any rate, we were not compelled to resort to the flesh of sea-gulls as a substitute for fresh meat. The work of the squadron went busily along, and much was done to sound the harbour and to mark down and buoy such of the uncharted rocks as were not already sufficiently advertised by the presence on them of wrecked Russian vessels. It was at this time also that we succeeded in finding and recover-

ing the *Arlanza's* anchors and cables. These heavy chains at the bottom of the harbour had already caused several other vessels to lose their anchors, they having accidentally hooked them. The enormous weight of this cable made its salvage very difficult and heavy work, each single link being more than any two men could lift. The *Arlanza* herself was a large armed merchant cruiser engaged in conveying a military mission to Russia, and, her voyage, like Lord Kitchener's subsequent one in the *Hampshire*, had ended by her striking a mine. More fortunate than the *Hampshire*, she, instead of foundering, had only had her bows blown in, and had succeeded in making Yukanskie. At Yukanskie she had spent the previous winter, in great anxiety and peril due to ice pressure, but, having weathered this successfully, had been able to proceed for home under escort in the spring. Her windlasses and capstans having all been destroyed, she had had to let her cables run overboard on departure, and thus they had remained, a pyramidal heap of metal and a danger to all other ships, until we had found and removed them.

On shore, those who were able to face the mosquitoes, the plague of which had by no means abated, found the floral landscape rapidly changing; a profusion of harebells and large chamomile daisies having taken the place of the ranunculus, vetches, onion, and other blooms. With the end of July a Russian surveying ship arrived on the scene, carrying as part of her complement a lady surveyor—a businesslike-looking individual garbed in breeches and long boots. Rocks were whitewashed and beacons erected in the orthodox manner, a sight which inspired us with hopes that by the following spring we might have a somewhat more reliable chart of our surroundings at Yukanskie.

On the 1st of August we had our first warning of the approach of winter, for with it a chill gale of rain and sleet set in, bringing with them the first few flakes of snow. A passing vessel reported having sighted off the North

Cape many floating bodies in naval uniform, but whether these were merely relics of Jutland or evidence of more recent submarine activities I found myself unable to decide.

The arrival of a flock of sheep, a hundred in number, sent out by the Admiralty to Yukanskie, was in some ways perhaps the event of the year; it will certainly remain green in the memories of many in the *Intrepid* long after other events of the Great War have faded from their minds. This was an entirely new responsibility to us as seamen, and we were adding to our already multitudinous duties a further one—the care and nurture of sheep—a duty which we at first took light-heartedly, not dreaming that therein we were storing up tribulation for the future.

Ever since my arrival, more than a month previously, these sheep had been an apple of discord. The men for many weeks had been living mainly upon salt and tinned provisions, and the doctor was getting somewhat nervous as to a possible outbreak of scurvy. In reply to many urgent requests for fresh meat, the Admiralty had demanded by telegram a reply to what must have seemed to them a simple question. It was as to whether, yes or no, there was suitable accommodation for pasturing live stock at Yukanskie, and, in the event of this being feasible, whether sheep or cattle were the more suitable. They also asked how many were required and whether hay was procurable locally.

After heated all-night discussions with all and sundry whom it was hoped might have some faint knowledge of cattle rearing, I had in desperation telegraphed a reply to the effect that a hundred sheep *accustomed to a mountainous country* were required, and added that there was ample pasturage, but that a small stock of hay was also advisable.

To the uninitiated, this must seem a very simple problem to have caused us so much worry, but the reader should try to realise *how* we were circumstanced. To

begin with, the country itself was one vast howling wilderness of snow, totally unenclosed. Even in June little was visible above the snow save a few lichen-covered boulders, and the only grazing animals known locally were reindeer—and they, as we knew, lived on moss. In fact, we had no idea at all whether later on grass or other edible herbs would appear to sustain the sheep. As for pasturing them out, the mainland was, where all was desert, undoubtedly more fertile than the islands; but, the country being entirely unenclosed, as someone pointed out, *if* the sheep were loosed on the mainland, in a very short time they would have " spread all over Russia." It was therefore decided to maroon the unfortunate sheep on the island nearest to the ship, a rocky expanse two miles in length and a prison from which they could not escape. There, we hoped, they would be sufficiently circumscribed, and that we should be able to keep in touch with them. Owing, however, to the rocky and precipitous nature of their future home, and also in view of the severity of the climate, I thought it best to compromise, and asked that sheep of an active mountain breed should be sent. It was those final words which were our undoing!

It was on a Friday, the 4th of August, that the sheep duly arrived, accompanied with mountains of hay and of oil-cake. They appeared to be weak and docile after their three weeks' sea voyage, and we landed them without much difficulty, despite the afore-mentioned mountains of fodder accompanying them; this we floated on shore on rafts made from drifting timber. The animals were obviously pleased at their change of *locale* from their confined quarters on board ship, and were also very tame; once ashore they commenced to graze quietly, the lichens and mosquitoes which the island provided being apparently much to their taste. We began to congratulate ourselves on having emerged so successfully from a difficult situation. In fact, so quiet were the sheep, it never occurred to us that later on there might

possibly be any difficulty in rounding them up when mutton was required.

The advent of the sheep at Yukanskie was soon noised abroad—I received urgent telegrams for mutton from Murmansk, and yet others from Arkhangel. The sheep having been rested for a fortnight, and apparently having put on weight from their strange dietary, it seemed good that some of them should be converted into mutton. The paymaster, the butcher, and some half-dozen satellites were accordingly landed on sheep-murder intent. The dinner hour passed, tea-time came, and anxious telescopes scanned the rocky slopes of the island, but still there were no signs of the hunters' return. It was not until late evening that a dejected, weary, and mosquito-bitten group was seen dragging its way down to the shore, and they had with them—*one* sheep. It was a sad disillusionment; the Admiralty had taken us at our word, and for once given us *exactly* what we had asked for—an active, mountain-climbing breed of sheep! And now that we had them, they were hardly what our hearts desired; more fleet than greyhounds, more active than chamois, they defied our every effort at capture.

For the first six or seven days there was no lack of volunteers for sheep-capturing expeditions; everybody thought that *they* could catch sheep—until they tried! Each succeeding evening saw the same recurring spectacle of a disgruntled returning crowd of swearing, sweating, tattered seamen—and never, by any chance, did they bring back with them more than two, or, at the outside, three sheep. Such numbers were useless in a squadron numbering over a thousand souls.

Telegrams for mutton continued to pour in, each hinting subtly that I personally was keeping the sheep for my own private table and selfish personal ends, when, as a matter of fact, the mere mention of the word mutton was by then sufficient to give me an acute feeling of nausea. Yet another telegram came, and this time it was from the Commodore himself; it announced his

proposed arrival at Yukanskie in his yacht on the morrow, and stated that he would require *six sheep*—a hitherto unheard-of number.

Goaded to madness, it was then that in desperation I had recourse to a project which for some time had been floating through my mind. Without further ado, I made a general signal to land the small-arm men, taking with them every available rifle and fifty rounds of ball cartridge apiece. An hour later some hundred and fifty stalwarts in blue were assembling ashore for the fray, taking also, the result of bitter experience, their dinners with them. The plan was to extend the sailors in skirmishing order right across the island, and by this means to drive the flock into one corner. From the ship we could see little, and all day long I listened anxiously to the bursts of furious rifle fire. For all concerned it was a hot and bloody day. The fight waxed fast and furious, and the sheep outwitted and outmanœuvred the seamen at every point. One poor old ram, indeed, got himself bayoneted in a gallant attempt to break through the line of angry sailors, but in the end a comparative success was achieved. Nearly thirty victims, riddled with shot, were the result of the affray. The stretcher-men, having shouldered the carcasses, the heated and exhausted landing party returned in triumph. On his advent upon the morrow the Commodore was able to get his mutton.

These sheep, it might be thought, were already a sufficient annoyance to ordinary human beings on active service; but the Admiralty, in their wisdom, had thought it necessary to inflict yet another pin-prick. The year 1916 was a year of wool shortage; wherefore with the sheep had come an imperative order that *on no account* were any of them to be killed until they had first been shorn of their fleeces. In the Arctic Squadron we had many skilled ratings, but, with all their talents, not one could be found who numbered sheep-shearing among his accomplishments. Another small matter was the fact

that the whole of North Russia and the combined resources of the Allied Squadrons between them were unable to produce a single pair of shears or other instrument of any kind suitable for the clipping of wool. Even had such been forthcoming, the Admiralty memorandum had failed to suggest *how* one was first to shear an animal which could never be approached within a hundred yards, and whose death was only to be achieved after a long stalk and a lucky shot from a ·303 rifle. An attempt was indeed made to cut the wool from some of the animals' skins with a pair of scissors; but this proved so laborious and ineffective that in the end it was abandoned. The pelts had to be sent home with the wool still on them, and a request that they might be sheared at the other end—a matter to which their Lordships vouchsafed no reply.

But more pressing matters even than mutton now began to absorb my attention, for on the 5th of August the ss. *Hector*, homeward bound from Arkhangel, reported having passed within a few feet of a floating mine in the Gorla. Trawlers were sent at once to examine the spot, though at first we consoled ourselves with the thought that it was probably only another relic of the old minefield. Such hopes were, however, soon shattered, for by the following day the mine-sweepers had reported that they had discovered moored mines of the submarine type. These mines laid by submarines differ from others in having no central horn, and thus, once sighted, are easily distinguishable. With fresh mines definitely known to exist in the war-channel, it became necessary to at once hold up traffic to and from Arkhangel, and to endeavour to stop ships already on their way. The whole of our little trawler force of sixteen vessels at once put to sea, and they, being faster than Russian telegrams (they could steam ten miles an hour), managed to intercept much of the shipping before it got to the dangerous area. They could not intercept it all, however, for the Russian s.s. *Kovda*, striking a

mine, was sunk, and at the same time a small coasting schooner, the *Alexei*, encountering another in the dark, was blown clean in half, losing three out of her crew of six. She, however, being timber laden, did not sink, and I was able to have her stern half towed into Yukanskie—a noteworthy object-lesson in the explosive force of mines, for had she been severed by a giant pair of shears, such cutting could not have been done more cleanly and neatly. But the loss of these two vessels was not all, for one of the mine-sweeping trawlers also met her doom. This was the *John High*, commanded by her skipper of the same name, who, sweeping with a group of other trawlers over the new minefield, was suddenly blown to matchwood by a mine which rose under her bottom. There was a raging sea at the time, and out of her crew of sixteen there was only one survivor, the mate, who happened to be right in the bow with his lifebelt on. When the mine exploded he was blown overboard, and suffered no injury beyond shock caused by immersion in that icy, turbulent sea; his companions were never seen again.

For a week from the 6th of August the sweepers had an anxious time; but they accounted for practically the whole of the submarine's cargo, for they destroyed twenty-nine mines out of a possible thirty-six. In such mine-sweeping, while the tide was running at its greatest strength, the mines would be dragged down by its force to a depth of perhaps fifty feet; the trawlers, who themselves drew sixteen feet of water, could consequently pass safely over them. But when the tide slackened, and this it generally did suddenly, the mines would rise close to the surface, and if a ship happened to be over the spot it meant " Good-by-e-e," that being what had actually happened in the case of the *John High*. Such a happening was a continuous imminent peril, and Captain Hurt, the senior officer of the mine-sweepers, found himself on more than one occasion with half-a-dozen mines which had risen, and were breaking the surface all around him.

But the courage of all those in mine-sweepers was of tempered steel, their energy and resourcefulness without measure; in spite of a heavy gale from the north, the interruptions caused by periods of dense fog, and the increasing length of the nights, they had in four days cleared one side of the war-channel, and traffic was once more able to proceed to and fro from Arkhangel. This latter was always the most urgent of all matters, for not only was it extremely important to get the umost quantity of coal and munitions into Russia before Arkhangel froze up for the winter, but it was necessary also to clear the harbour of Yukanskie of shipping, for, due to the delay caused by the " hold up," it had become dangerously congested, and some fifty ships were crowded into that small port.

On the 17th of August a submarine mine-layer was sighted off the Norwegian coast, homeward bound for Germany, it most probably being the one who had laid the mine-field and had been sighted outward bound on the 25th of May. At that time German submarines did not hesitate to use the Norwegian Fiords, the Norwegians themselves, though probably much disliking such guests (which preyed unmercifully upon their own commerce), being quite impotent to prevent them.

Alarums we had in plenty during the following weeks, and the Russian imagination having now been thoroughly aroused, reports of submarines, mostly fictitious, were showered upon us from every direction. We had an unpleasant shock also when, without any warning, one afternoon a submarine steamed into Yukanskie. The visitor proved to be a Russian, though neither the Russian authorities nor myself had had any warning of her expected advent; had we sunk her off-hand the blame would have been entirely on the shoulders of those who had thus sent her. She was on her way to Murmansk, and not long afterwards accidentally sank at her moorings during the night, and remained thus on the bottom until the end of the war.

The Germans having by this time rendered the passage of British submarines round Denmark to the Baltic impracticable, a new method was devised to get them into German home waters. In pursuance of this, four British C Class submarines, lightened by the removal of their heavy storage batteries, etc., arrived at Yukanskie on the 18th of August, whence, proceeding to Arkhangel, they were transported across Russia by river and canal in a sort of floating dock from the White Sea to the Baltic. This remarkably well-organised and successful operation gave us high hopes that we should hear much of their work in the following spring—hopes, however, which, like many others, were dashed by the supineness and jealousy of Russian officialdom, which prevented their ever being usefully employed. Later, when the Bolsheviki took charge, their fate was sealed.

Towards the end of August a fourth armed boarding steamer, the *Tithonus*, arrived on the station, and she, being armed with six-inch guns, was a most useful addition to our small fighting forces, for the *Intrepid* and *Iphigenia* were armed with nothing heavier than four point sevens. Moreover, she carried what to us was of at least equal importance—a cold-storage room, filled to the brim with frozen beef; no longer were we dependent upon our agility and sureness of aim for our daily meat!

On shore the autumn fruits were now ripening, and of the low-growing cloud-berries there was quite a considerable crop. As a fruit, the cloud-berry is insipid and uninteresting, it being composed of little beside large-sized pips enclosed by a watery bag; but the men gathered the berries eagerly, and from them made jam and jellies which were not to be despised.

With the last ten days of August autumn commenced, and then merged into winter with a rush. For two or three days after the first frosts the whole landscape glowed with the most vivid and beautiful red it is possible to imagine; then, as though some evil spirit had passed

through the land, we awoke one morning to find everything a dead and sombre black, with nought to relieve it save the flickering wings of seagulls and the white foam of the waves lashing the base of the granite cliffs. In sheltered crevices for a few days longer the willow herb showed its rose-coloured blossoms, and the sturdy tufted balls of the cotton grass stood erect in the marshes; then they, like all else, faded—their dried and withered stems were uprooted, tossed aside, and scattered by the chill gusts of the oft-recurring gales. It was a dreary outlook, yet our relief at the simultaneous disappearance of the mosquitoes was so great that we breathed the cold fresh air with unfeigned satisfaction. Not all at once, however, did the intense cold of winter come upon us. The weather, as at home, had its ups and downs, and not until the 3rd of September did we have a really heavy fall of snow. It was just after that that we captured the first two of the lemmings whom I mentioned in an earlier chapter—the advance guard of many who followed their example in a half-mile swim out to the ship.

Ashore the Russians were at length making a belated attempt to build some sort of a settlement at Yukanskie. A shipload of pine-trunks having arrived, all on shore were busily engaged in erecting log-houses and in blasting the rocks with dynamite. But the Russians were having much trouble with their workmen, most of whom were old naval reservists who had been called out to join up at a moment's notice; these were still entirely destitute of winter clothing and very short of food. The Russian officers themselves for this shore base at Yukanskie were at the time billeted on board a British steamer, the *Lady Gwendolen;* they consisted of the Commandant and his wife—the latter the *only* lady for two hundred miles—and some three or four officers. This lady, whom I will call Madame C——, was stout, good-natured, and vivacious, but by no means young. Such as she was, however, and in contact with the susceptible Russian temperament, she wielded a power in that isolated

uncompetitive spot which I can only compare with that of Cleopatra in her prime; daily she desolated the hearts of the whole Muscovite colony, and kept it perpetually in a state of frenzied turmoil. Her morals were unquestionably above reproach, but, like other saints, she had a habit of conversing occasionally upon somewhat *risqué* subjects. Her Russian admirers unfortunately equally often misconstruing her meaning, replied in what they believed to be a similar vein—giving Madame an opportunity, which she never failed to take, of lashing them mercilessly with her tongue. This, to the average super-sensitive nervy Russian, was an affront more poignant than the scorpion's sting, and one which he was quite unable to bear. It ended in his escaping by the first steamer to Arkhangel, more often than not leaving his kit behind him in the *Lady Gwendolen* rather than face the possibility of meeting his tormentress once more. To us more restrained Englishmen, a race I trust not less gallant than the Russians, such affairs caused intense amusement, and I have related the incident, not because it is of much interest as a story, but because I think it throws a sidelight on Russian character and helps to show how it is that in Russia women hold so dominant a position. Russians are governed by emotions and excitements in a way which an Englishman cannot conceive of. Card playing, for example, was absolutely forbidden (and necessarily so) by the law of their navy, both for officers and men alike. For a Russian is naturally so confirmed a gambler that there was no knowing to what extremes indulgence might lead him. Even the possession of a pack of cards incurred a very heavy penalty.

With the Commandant and his wife I soon became on terms of friendship, and there quickly ensued a constant interchange of hospitality, such as the means at our disposal and the contents of our respective larders permitted. Russia was in those days, at least officially, a "dry" country; but, from passing steamers, and also from the British men-of-war, Commandant C. had

managed to collect quite a respectable stock of the cup which " maketh glad the heart of man "—not to mention his own potent native vodka, a spirit which had by that time almost disappeared from Russia.

These Russian dinners consisted for the most part of hors d'œuvres and soup, combined with a great variety of drinks and punctuated by the smoking of some scores of tobacco-tipped cardboard tubes. The tobacco in these cigarettes is always excellent, but in quantity it is so minute as to be comparable with the ham in the proverbial railway buffet sandwich. But the *pièce de résistance* in these dinners was always the local and freshly caught salmon, served raw, and cut in thin slices lightly dusted with salt; of this each guest would eat a pound weight or more, and, in my opinion, this Russian method is by far the best way of serving the king of fresh-water fish. From my host I heard many stories of the War as viewed from the Russian angle, but the only tale which still sticks in my mind is the affair of the *Zemchug*. The reader may perhaps remember that this was one of the Russian vessels sunk by the German cruiser *Emden* during her surprise visit to Penang in the early days of the War. My Russian informants told me that when the disguised *Emden* made her appearance, the captain of the *Zemchug* could not be located, for the very good reason that he was miles away living up-country with his wife. Not only this, but the ship was utterly unprepared in every way, and the keys of the magazine could not be found until after the ship had been torpedoed. For this and other like offences, her captain was disrated to ordinary seaman, and sentenced to three years' imprisonment with hard labour—a penalty which all my Russian friends seemed to think he richly deserved, although his offence, from what little I could see, was typical of the rest of Russia.

Commandant C. himself had left the Navy many years before the War, and for the best part of his life had been a banker; at the moment when war broke out

he was in Bulgaria—and there he had spent three months as a prisoner. Needless to say, he and Madame dined with me on board the *Intrepid* on numerous occasions, and it was after one of the earlier of these functions that C. drew me aside and confidentially informed me that Madame had told him that I was " a beautiful." At another of these dinners a little comedy was enacted which is perhaps worthy of mention. Among my guests was the captain of one of the British armed boarding steamers, a fresh, breezy individual whom I will call X. Now X. could speak a little Russian, so it was not long before he was in animated conversation with Madame C., in the course of which he imparted to her the information that he hoped shortly to be taking his ship back to England with a view to returning again in the following spring. Madame evidently regarded this as a heaven-sent opportunity, and promptly asked X. if he would execute a commission for her, she being cut off from all shops and means of making purchases of her own. All unsuspectingly X. consented, and it was not until Madame (whose plainness of language was *quite* Elizabethan) began to divulge her heart's desires—a large assortment of the most intimate feminine lingerie—that X. began to grasp what he had let himself in for. At the time I had no idea what was transpiring—all I could see was that X. was getting redder and redder. But the next morning X. came to me, with tears literally standing in his eyes, and explained the tragedy. " What shall I do? " he groaned. " You see, sir, I've only *just* got married to a young wife. I can't go into a shop and order those things myself—and I can't ask the wife to do it, for, if I did, it would want such a lot of explaining—in fact, it couldn't be done! She's never met any of these Russian Jezebels yet, and it would be quite impossible to make her understand that there was no harm in it." I found it difficult to comfort poor X. in his predicament, one in which I fear he could see no humour at all; but, in the end, I persuaded him that the

matter could be arranged by writing to the stores and having the incriminating articles of feminine attire sent direct to his ship—a solution of the problem which I believe he eventually followed. But it's a funny old world, and I often wonder what the packing department of the stores thought at receiving such an unusual order from the captain of a British man-of-war. It shows, too, how easily one might be deceived by circumstantial evidence.

One other Russian lady I will mention, and one only, and then I hope I will be finished with the subject. It is a lady whom I have never met, but one who loomed large on the mental horizon of many at Yukanskie—I speak of the lady " tooth-carpenter " at Arkhangel. In Russia it would appear that the art of dentistry is more especially one of the feminine professions, and, whether it was due to the chill winds of the Arctic I know not, but when this fact became generally known, it was really quite extraordinary the number of my officers who became afflicted with toothache. In turn they visited Arkhangel, and, after duly interviewing Pavlova-of-the-Forceps, their molars duly yielded to treatment; but in place of a pain in their gums they had but transferred it to the regions of the heart, the most successful antidote for which was the one they invariably got—the most merciless of chaffings from their messmates.

During September we had an addition to the ship's company in the person of a small brown bear. I think that originally this animal had been purchased for a few roubles from the Russians, who had doubtless kept her in a cage and were fattening her up as a table delicacy—for smoked bear-hams are still a much-esteemed dish; and, in Russia, bruin is considered as but a superior sort of pig. With us, however, this lady bear made herself very much at home and became a universal pet. In appearance she was exactly like a " Teddy " bear, only much fatter, and of greater breadth than length; her coat was of the finest and only equalled in length by her

claws, which, being innocent of manicure, extended for at least six inches. When first she joined the Royal Navy, she was of about the size and weight of a hundred-weight bag of coal; but daily she "swelled wisibly," until soon nothing lighter than a tank would have had a sporting chance to stand up against her impetuous charge. Quickly she made friends with all the ship's dogs, and was wont to tease and torment them much after the manner of a mischievous and very adipose monkey. Yet, by nature, she was gentle in a heavy-handed sort of way, and her agility was such that she could shin up the rigging faster than any of our sea-booted seamen, and her tricks were legion. Her greatest delight was to sit with her squat stern on the hose while decks were being scrubbed, thus stopping the flow of water; then, as some unlucky victim passed, she would as suddenly remove herself and deluge him with a stream of water from the suddenly-increased pressure at the nozzle. This little game of hers with the hose was not, as might have been imagined, a mere accident; it was, on the contrary, a deliberately-planned and executed practical joke, the child of her own impish nature, and one which she was never tired of repeating. Her food, when she could get it, was sweets—in the form of condensed milk and jam; but at times, when such were not forthcoming, she showed a partiality for old boots and other unconsidered trifles. Neither was she above a tot of Navy rum. This weakness of hers for rum was, in the end, one of the causes which brought about her disgraceful downfall—a downfall which the reader will find set out in a subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

AURORA AND THE WINTER'S GRIP; THE U BOATS AND THE MINES THEY SLIP. A SWEDE AND RUSSIAN—NERVES AND FIGHT. A MERRY CONCERT IN THE NIGHT.

IT was not until the 25th of September that I had my first glimpse of the Northern Lights; but from thence on, the Aurora Borealis was an event of frequent occurrence, and one very unpopular with those who, in those days, had to "go down to the sea in ships." Its illumination, although insufficient to be of any use in ordinary affairs, was bright enough to show up the silhouettes of shipping against the sky-line, and was, therefore, of material assistance to the commanders of the German submarines in helping them to find their prey after dark. As a spectacle, I found the aurora disappointing, and not to be compared for scenic effect with the seach-lights playing on the clouds in London on a "Zep." night. Perhaps this was only the effect of prejudice on my part, or of my instinctive dislike of anything which in any way could help U boats. It was an analogous sentiment to that of the master of hounds who spoke of the "stinking violets" which spoilt the "scent" of the fox.

But to return to my chronicle of daily events—a matter which I have recently neglected, and a lapse which may have caused my readers to wonder whether we, in the Arctic, did not sometimes forget that there was a war on. As a matter of fact, we were at that time

wrestling with work of the most pressing and exacting nature, and rendered none the less easy from the fact (first learned from the German wireless of the 29th of August) that Roumania had come into the war. This was an event for which we were not altogether unprepared, for several Roumanian munition ships had recently arrived at Arkhangel, and, from thence forward, Roumania, as well as Russia, was dependent on the little British Arctic Squadron for the safe transit of her supplies. I have narrated here many of our little local scandals, jokes, and foibles, and not kept myself strictly to serious matters; for, after all, such trivial incidents form the major part of life, and without them it is impossible to get a true perspective of events fresh in all minds at the time, but the memory of which rapidly passes away and is forgotten. It always appears to me that humour, especially as it is understood by Britons, has done more to help us in winning our wars and in enabling us to " muddle through " than all the " hate " that was ever manufactured in Germany.

To add to my own personal difficulties at that period, I found myself laid by the heels for some weeks by " famine " ulcers, the result of starvation and privations as a prisoner of war. I had to conduct the squadron affairs at Yukanskie from my bed, a long-faced, anxious doctor as my constant visitor, who, by sundry threats of amputation of my leg, attempted to keep me quiet. The old battleship *Albemarle*, at Murmansk, had just been relieved by another equally ancient, the *Glory*, her new captain being, of course, a fresh complication. Although so close, owing to the presence of high land in between it was but rarely that we could communicate direct by wireless, and land telegrams took an indefinite number of days in transit. The vagaries of wireless were, indeed, infinite; it was a common matter to receive urgent S.O.S. signals from ships which were being attacked by submarines, and which the wireless operator receiving them adjudged, by the strength of the signals,

to be close at hand, yet which, when they were plotted out on the chart, proved to be in the Mediterranean or other distant locality. Though we never at that time ever received direct signals from England, yet we were constantly getting them from Paris and Madrid, and, on one occasion, from Mexico.

On the 2nd of September a stranded mine was found and destroyed, and this, we hoped, was the last of the mine-field laid by our late submarine visitor. It may have been so, but within a fortnight our trawlers had found two fresh mines in the Gorla; once more the traffic with Arkangel had to be suspended and the ships began to crowd into Yukanskie. This was a very serious matter, occurring so late in the season; we did not wish for a repetition of the previous winter's fiasco, when so many vessels had been lost in the ice, including several Russian trawlers and a submarine, and the British steamer *Sappho*. There is a drift to the northward of the ice from the Murman Coast; vessels caught by the ice there are set towards the pole and rarely seen again. The *Sappho* was one of these unfortunate vessels, and, having drifted for many days and being hopelessly crushed, she was abandoned by her crew, who attempted to reach the land down to the southward by walking across the ice. The ice, however, was full of cracks and channels, and the land much more distant than it appeared to be. One by one they dropped from exhaustion and died, there being but three survivors who got through to tell the tale. These three, at the point of death, reached the coast, and there were fortunate enough to be found by some migrating Laps before they perished. The Laps tended and cared for them, and eventually enabled them to return to civilisation.

On the 18th of September, after strenuous exertions and hampered by gales and the increasing length of the nights, the sweepers reported the war-channel clear of mines, traffic with Arkhangel was once more resumed, and we breathed again. Two days later, the British

s.s. *Etton*, who had wandered a little from the prescribed route in the dark, struck a mine and foundered half an hour later. It was a most unfortunate accident, for though she lost but one man, the rest of her crew being rescued by the British trawlers, she had as part cargo all the storage batteries and other fittings of the British submarines which had just been got overland from Arkhangel to the Baltic. Until these could be replaced the submarines themselves would be useless, and it was a question whether the loss could be remedied before the White Sea froze up for the eight winter months.

Another problem which was causing us " furiously to think " was whether the German mines had not got some " delay action " device in connection with them. They had developed a most unpleasant habit of cropping up in places which had only just been swept and had been reported clear. There was something very suspicious about it all. If the Germans had invented a *practical* delay-action arrangement—such, for example, as one by which mines were laid in threes, but only one became active at a time (floating up by the usual automatic arrangement to its appointed depth), while the other two remained quiescent on the bottom—it would have been an extraordinarily difficult matter to cope with. For the first mine in exploding would have automatically released the second, which would then have floated up and taken its place, and in like manner the third. There could never be any certainty that any channel, even one which had just been swept, was free of mines.

Heavy gales with snow were becoming increasingly frequent, greatly hampering the trawlers in their work; but as a temporary measure against the possibility of such delay-action mines the shipping was organised into convoys, each convoy being conducted through the more dangerous waters in the wake of a group of trawler-sweepers. The weather was often such that the trawlers were unable to keep their sweeps out in the mountainous seas, and more than once had them swept back on board

by a heavy following wave. Another impediment also to the entirely satisfactory working of this method was the ineradicable contempt with which so many masters of merchant ships still regarded mines; it was almost impossible to make them keep their vessels exactly in the wake of the sweeping trawlers, and they thus rendered the efforts of the latter for their safety null and void. One object-lesson received by some of the shipping had, however, for a time, a most excellent effect. It happened that one of these loosely-formed, scattered convoys was proceeding for Arkhangel, the steamers careless to a degree as to their steering. Down from the opposite direction came another group of trawlers, mine-sweeping, and by good luck it happened that just as the convoy was passing them three mines were swept up and exploded. The effect was electrical—no need any longer then for disregarded signals and the hooting of sirens—for the convoy at once closed up and remained glued in station for the rest of the voyage. Moreover, on their safe arrival at their destination, instead of the usual surly dispersal, the masters of the ships concerned signalled to the senior officer of the mine-sweepers their thanks and appreciation for their safe conduct.

A fresh danger was now, however, beginning to loom somewhat big on our horizon. Up till then the Germans had been content in Arctic waters with the mere mining of the approaches to Arkhangel, and had left it at that; the U boats themselves had not materially harassed shipping. But now active fighting submarines, as well as the more passive mine-layers, began to trouble us, and this many months before the German declaration of the " barred zone," which did not come into operation until the following spring.

Our first intimation of this new state of affairs was brought by the armed trawler *T 20*, a vessel sold by the British to the Russians, who had just arrived at Yukanskie. She reported having sighted a submarine between

Murmansk and Yukanskie, but that the U-boat (having doubtless sighted her gun) had declined action and dived. At first we deluded ourselves with the belief that this submarine was only another mine-layer, but two days later we were undeceived by the arrival in port of the Swedish s.s. *Dana*, who stated that she had three times been stopped by a submarine, and each time ordered to abandon ship, but each time something had occurred which had enabled her to escape. There is no question that throughout the war the Swedes were treated more tenderly by Germany than was the case with any other nation, and, as such, the Swedes were the most suspect of all the neutrals with whom we had to deal. Contrariwise, the known pro-German leanings of so many of his countrymen was probably the reason why the master of the *Dana* was able to successfully extricate his ship from the jaws of the submarine. On each occasion of her being stopped he had pointed out the roughness of the sea, which would have made the lowering of his boats a matter of extreme danger; he had also delayed lowering the boats for as long as possible. On the first two occasions the submarine had made off in pursuit of another vessel, and the *Dana* had taken the opportunity to slip away under cover of a friendly snow squall. Her captain had seen three other ships sunk during his short voyage, and when he was caught for the third time had quite made up his mind that it was all up with the ship; he, in fact, started to lower his boats, one being instantly smashed to matchwood, and then luck once more befriended him for the third time, for out of the driving snow suddenly emerged a Russian destroyer, and the submarine promptly made herself scarce. But the *Dana* was by no means out of the wood yet, for the Russian destroyer captain, seeing the latter in apparently friendly communication with a U-boat, came to the not unnatural conclusion that the *Dana* was in collaboration with her, and the weather being far too bad to permit of boarding, it was just a toss-up whether he should save further

trouble by torpedoing her off-hand. However, he did not; the *Dana* was evidently sailing under a lucky star that day.

From that date on, reports of active submarines were a matter of daily occurrence, and, by one of those strange coincidences so common in spy-ridden Russia, this submarine campaign synchronised with the burning down of the telegraph station at Alexandrovsk, the terminus of our only direct cable home—an accident, if such it were, of which no explanation was forthcoming. For some weeks, our only cable communications with England were via Bombay.

On the evening of the 2nd of October the French s.s. *Plata*, heavily loaded with munitions, arrived in safety, having twice been in action with a submarine, which had fired over fifty shells at her; but she, being a fast boat of fifteen knots and well armed, had had no great difficulty in escaping, and was brought safely into port by the British armed boarding steamer which had gone to her assistance.

These armed boarding steamers did yeoman service in the Arctic, for, not only did they often succeed in saving vessels attacked by driving the U-boats to seek cover under water, but, without them, the toll of life in the Arctic would have been infinitely heavier and more ghastly, for they were constantly rescuing the crews of ships not so fortunate, who, their vessels sunk, were attempting to make land in their boats. It was thus on the 3rd of October that the A.B.S. *Stephen Furness* brought in the crew of the *Lotusmere*, sunk a few days previously. The poor fellows had been fired on, and, as soon as they had stopped their engines, the U-boat promptly torpedoed the ship. When the *Stephen Furness* came across the boats, the men in them were already so numbed by the fearful cold that not one of them could any longer use his limbs; all had to be hoisted out by means of ropes. Failing her arrival, they would undoubtedly have perished miserably, as did so many

hundreds of other seamen in those days on the high seas. This care of the crews of ships was a difficult problem for us at Yukanskie, for we had no clothes with which to provide them, except those off our own backs, and there was no shore accommodation to which they could be sent; they had also to be medically attended to and fed. We had to distribute them among the ships of the Squadron and send them home as opportunity offered.

These fighting submarines which were then preying on us were apparently accompanied by a larger U-boat of the commercial type, from which, no doubt, they renewed their supplies of oil. They also appeared to be well acquainted with the numerous little inlets along this desolate coast, and to have a number of friends amongst the sparsely-scattered population, many of whom were Norwegians or Swedes. In Scandinavia at that time, apparently, the further north one proceeded, the more Germanophile were the inhabitants. We were constantly receiving reports of the visits of U-boats to these outlying places, and of their having remained at anchor there for considerable periods; everything seemed to point to the probability that some of these places were regular ports of call and, possibly, even supply bases; but, if such were indeed a fact, it was a matter which could never be proven, and the real or feigned simplicity of the coast fishermen was so great that interrogation of them was a mere waste of breath.

On the 5th of October S.O.S. signals again filled the ether; this time it was the British s.s. *Hyndford* who was in trouble. She was loaded with a cargo, full to bursting, of munitions and high explosives, valued at one and a quarter million pounds; therefore, when she found shells dropping all around her, fired from a submarine which she had not previously perceived, things began to get exciting. Her only gun was a twelve-pounder, a small and inadequate weapon which, at first, could not even be got to go off. This, accompanied by

bursting shells and a knowledge of the dangerous nature of her cargo, started a panic among her crew, who rushed to the boats and began to lower them. At that moment one of the U-boat's four-inch shells struck the vessel and burst, but, fortunately, in a coal bunker and not among her cargo. Any but a very brave and determined man might well have given up hope of saving the ship and have abandoned her. But the master of the *Hyndford* happened to be just the sort of man needed for such occasions, and was one of a type that came to the fore a thousand times in our merchant navy during the war, though mostly without official recognition. Springing down from the bridge, he told his crew in a few choice adjectives just exactly what he thought about them, and lashed them with seaman-like scorn for "Dagos" and "Dutchmen." The effect of his words was electrical—not only did the panic instantly cease, but the crew went down to the boiler-rooms and worked with such good effect at double-banking the boilers that they knocked twelve knots out of that old tramp steamer, while others on deck at last got the gun to work and returned the submarine fire. It was a long chase and a stern one, enduring more than five hours from the time —7.45 a.m.—when firing had first commenced. The submarine fired in all over a hundred and forty rounds of her four-inch shell, and the *Hyndford* expended seventy-two of her own lesser ones; but not another shell among all those fell aboard her, except that one which, by a merciful Providence, had struck her coal-bunker. Presently her supply of ammunition began to run low—it looked as though she would be vanquished after all, when, just before 1 p.m., the submarine turned away—she had gone in pursuit of another vessel who had come into sight from the southward, and who, having no gun, promised to be an easier victim. The *Hyndford* herself was saved, but before the submarine was quite lost to sight she saw the new-comer struck by three shells and columns of smoke ascending.

H.M.S. "INTREPID" at YUKANSKIE, June, 1916. (In distance, IPHIGENIA and TRAWLERS.)

The fate of this last unfortunate vessel, left to the tender mercies of an angry submarine commander, I did not learn until some days later, when the survivors were brought into Yukanskie by another vessel, who, fortunately, came across them after they had spent twenty-six hours in their boats. She brought in ten men, all that survived of a total crew of twenty-seven of the Russian s.s. *Erika*, a defenceless vessel which had offered no resistance; the remaining seventeen officers and men had all died from wounds and exposure. The captain of the U-boat was evidently in a furious rage at the escape of the *Hyndford*, and gave the unfortunate *Erika* no chance either to stop or to surrender, but kept her under a continuous shrapnel fire at close range. The first result of this was that the men lowering the boat were all killed, and the boat itself, crowded with men, came down with a run and crashed into the water. The ship was then torpedoed, and the crew left without food in open, damaged boats a hundred miles from land, with an Arctic gale commencing to blow, accompanied by snow and seventeen degrees of frost. Even had they succeeded in making the land, the chances were ten to one against their finding it inhabited—it would, in all probability, have been but an exchange of death by the fury of the open sea for a slower one due to hunger and exposure. Only by the merest accident had a passing British tramp steamer sighted and rescued them.

One of our chief annoyances on the Arctic Station was that, with our small forces on the spot, we could do little or nothing effective to cope with these sea-murderers. We had no destroyers, depth-charges had not yet come into general use, and our total force for dealing with submarines consisted of but sixteen trawlers of nine knots speed—already reduced by one since the *John High* had been destroyed by a mine—and four boarding steamers. With these we had to protect a coastline over five hundred miles in length, keep the

War Channel and coast generally swept clear of mines, and safeguard a huge volume of allied shipping, whose cargoes were valued annually at many hundreds of millions of pounds sterling. True, on paper, there were also Russian forces, which included a couple of destroyers; but, in practice, so uncertain was their assistance that it had always to be " written off " as negligible. After nearly thirty years of experience at sea, I have come to the conclusion that no other nation on earth save the British and, perhaps, the Japanese can be relied upon to always *keep* the sea. Your Frenchman, Italian, Russian, and the like are gallant and enthusiastic fighters; but it is the Briton alone, with his dogged tenacity of character, who can stick it out indefinitely, and can " keep on keeping on" at all times and in all weathers, even when there is little hope or prospect of a fight. The majority of the world's races are too mercurial for this deadly dull, but vitally necessary, work—their enthusiasm soon cools, and, under one pretext or another, they presently contrive a breakdown or other excuse for putting back to harbour.

Submarines, like rain, have a faculty of falling alike both upon the just and upon the unjust—the man who spends his life seeking them may oft do so in vain, while, to the indolent, they often present themselves. Which of these categories the Russian destroyer *Vlastni* came under in her encounter with a submarine is a matter which I must leave to the reader's own judgment. It was an encounter of which a lurid and strictly untruthful account from Russian sources appeared in the London *Times* shortly afterwards, and one for which the Russian officers concerned were profusely decorated. It appears that one of the saucy U-boats had been whiling away a tedious hour by bombarding one of the small wireless stations then used in lieu of telegraphs for coast communications; this so annoyed the Russians that the *Vlastni* put to sea. Still hovering near the scene of the bombardment, she came upon a large submarine,

who, with sails hoisted, was simulating the appearance of one of the local coasting schooners. The submarine showed no disposition to move off, and when the *Vlastni* opened fire on her, reciprocated the compliment by answering gun for gun, one of her shells striking the destroyer and wounding several men. One of the U-boat's sails, however, happening to catch fire, the latter eventually thought better of the matter and dived "all standing."

During the month of October the gales became more and more frequent and of increased force, and the cold gradually strengthened as the days shortened. At Yukanskie the ships lay with both anchors down, hanging on as best they could, constantly dragging, and often with steam up. The barometer in the Arctic plays strange tricks—generally its sharpest fall was the prelude of fine weather, while its first slight rise was more often than not the precursor of a fierce gale. The Russian coast stations were by then suffering badly from "submarine nerves," and their reports of the appearance of U-boats were as innumerable as they were fantastic. Some of them reported that a submarine had been seen to dive in places where we knew that there were only a few feet of water; another had it that one had "blown itself up" in the Gorla; in fact, every rock, log, seal, whale and porpoise had suddenly become endued in Russian eyes with deadly and diabolical qualities. But, in spite of it all, our convoys from Yukanskie to Arkhangel, escorted and swept by trawlers, ploughed their way unchallenged and unharmed through the storm and gloom of the gathering winter night.

On the 14th of October the *Vindictive*, later to win fame at Zeebrugge, arrived on the station; with her armament of six-inch guns she was a great addition to our forces. Nearly the last of our Admiralty sheep had by then been killed and eaten, but I find it recorded in my diary that my steward celebrated the occasion by making me an excellent pie, yclept "Acting Rabbit"—

a savoury compound of salt pork and "Fanny Adams"—a dish much esteemed by the sailors.

On the 17th of October we were again troubled by submarine mines, and a Norwegian steamer, the *Botnia*, was badly holed by one forward. Being timber-laden, she did not, however, immediately sink; the A.B.S. *Stephen Furness* succeeded in getting hold of her and in towing her thirty miles—we had great hopes that we would be able to salve her. But at that point an unusually heavy gale sprang up, the tow parted, and she was driven ashore to be pounded mercilessly by the breakers against the granite cliffs. Next morning at daylight not a sign of her remained; but for many a month to follow the sea and surrounding coastline were encumbered by the floating logs which had formed her cargo.

For some days, owing to the heavy weather, sweeping was impossible, and the convoys were, therefore, delayed in their sailing. The merchant captains, always incredulous and contemptuous of the danger from mines, were impatient at the delay; but on the 19th of October, when the convoy was at last enabled to put to sea, no fewer than five mines were swept up directly in advance of it—an occurrence which effectually silenced the grousers.

The Admiralty were by then beginning to recognise that some assistance must be given to us in the Arctic to enable us to cope with submarines. As no destroyers could, at that time, be spared from home waters, five British G Class submarines were despatched, and worked for a short time from Murmansk. They, as a matter of fact, never accomplished anything; but it was thought that, at any rate, they might have a sporting chance of getting into touch with Fritz—which, in fact, they very nearly did. It was on the 24th of October that the Russian *Kolguev*, steaming close in shore, had a torpedo pass under her bottom, which exploded against the rocks immediately afterwards. One of the British submarines

happened to be cruising submerged in the near neighbourhood at the time, but knew nothing of what had happened, and, as Fritz also kept himself out of sight, an introduction between the two remained uneffected. On the 4th of November the Q-ship (decoy) *Carrigan Head* arrived at Yukanskie, she also having hopes of an early rencontre with the "Tin Pirates." Her efforts were, however, no more successful than those of the submarines had been, although she had the dubious satisfaction of an exciting half-hour, during which she manœuvred with every nerve ajangle in a frantic, but futile, effort to stimulate one of the War Channel buoys to attack her! This was a quite excusable mistake on her part, for she had no knowledge of the buoy's existence, nor, for that matter, of that of the War Channel itself. Having, therefore, received no warning, the appearance of a large buoy, with the seas washing past it, gave to all on board the *Carrigan Head* a first-rate impression of what seemed to be the conning-tower of a submarine. The buoy, however, having refused to further humour the Q-ship by following her—a course which a genuine U-boat might reasonably have been expected to pursue—the mistake was presently discovered. As, however, the *Carrigan Head* had on board a large stock of butter, margarine and whisky for disposal, articles which had for some time ere this disappeared from our menu, she was, as may be imagined, a very welcome visitor to the station.

Gale succeeded gale with increasing frequency, ship after ship dragged ashore, and Yukanskie began to overflow with the damaged merchantmen who had put in there to be repaired by the *Intrepid* and her sister *Iphigenia*. Of these, some had broken steering-gear, others their fore-peaks full of water, but the main part had disabled engines or bottoms dented and leaking from contact with the rocks—and to all and every we gave such assistance as lay within our power. It was a strenuous time for the boarding officer, tossing about in

his little shell of a worn-out motor-boat—a boat which broke down many times a day and drifted helplessly at the mercy of the wind and tide. The divers, too, found it none too warm replacing rivets under water on a damaged ship's bottom, and the engineer for ever had his hands full, his skilled artificers working continuously in shifts on the repairs of distant steamers. But the very difficulties seemed to stimulate everyone to do their best, and the almost hourly reports of submarines in the near vicinity girded the men to fresh efforts. We all felt the satisfaction of a craftsman turning out work well done; it was a happy time, and, in that dark and isolated spot, we never had leisure for a moment's dullness. The submarines also, for the time being, had been outwitted, for, though they continued to cruise in the neighbourhood until November, they sank no more ships—a consummation mainly due to the fact that we were deflecting all allied shipping from the coastline, and ordering it to steer from one to two hundred miles due north before making any westerly courses. Further north than this our ships could not then go, for the presence of many icebergs and of an ice-barrier precluded it.

October blew itself out with a week of gales which, at times, approached hurricane force, and during which three ships were blown ashore, another got into collision, and many dragged their anchors; but for the 1st of November the tempests suddenly abated, and, to our great surprise, a thaw set in.

Although we lost no more ships that season due to submarine action, we had by no means yet heard the last of those slippery gentlemen. On the 1st of November the *Huntspill*, a big transport full of troops for Arkhangel, reported an attempt to torpedo her, although she had gone as far north as latitude seventy-two thirty-two. Earlier on the same day, thirty-three miles still further north, the *Daybreak*, bound for Yukanskie, was also attacked. On this occasion the U-boat was ornamented by two tall masts and a funnel belching smoke,

a disguise which nearly proved successful, for the *Daybreak* was expecting to encounter a patrol boat and was readily taken in, until a shot across her bows undeceived her. To this salute the *Daybreak* at once replied by getting her own gun into action, and a short fight ensued—until the submarine, finding matters getting unpleasantly warm, dived—masts, funnel and all. An hour later she once more reappeared and followed until 3 p.m., at which hour the *Daybreak* finally lost sight of her.

The closing incident of the season happened on the following day, the 2nd of November, and the occasion was the conducting of a large floating crane from Vardo—the nearest neutral port in the north of Norway—to Murmansk. To ensure its safety in transit, this crane was escorted by a Russian force consisting of a destroyer and a large boarding steamer; also a British trawler, the *Vale of Fruin*. Suddenly a large submarine, going fifteen knots and armed with two guns, appeared from the south-west, and both sides were apparently at first too surprised to do anything. After mature deliberation, however, the destroyer plucked up sufficient courage to fire half a dozen rounds at the U-boat, none of which, by the way, fell within half a mile of her. The Russian armed steamer then also fired one round, which struck the water about a hundred yards from her own bow, whereupon the submarine, which must have been of an excessively timid nature, dived out of sight. The unfortunate *Vale of Fruin* had, meanwhile, done her best to close the target, but found herself consistently thwarted by the Russians, who got in the way and blanked the range, her speed also, being only nine knots, was a great handicap. But this was not the end of the matter, for the Russians, evidently thinking that they had achieved a good day's work, promptly proceeded into harbour in order to be first to claim having sunk a submarine—and left the unfortunate crane to its fate.

As the submarines had now departed until the following spring, we of the Arctic Squadron prepared to settle down for the winter. At Yukanskie there was still much to be done, for besides the ordinary repair work there were the War Channel buoys and the anti-submarine boom to be got in. This severe task was greatly helped by the unexpectedly mild weather, for, with the exception of one day, upon which we had twenty degrees of frost, the thaw continued until the 13th of November. In fact, during the whole of that month the weather was little colder than might reasonably have been expected at that season of the year in the north of England; this also, of course, helped materially in the getting away of the last of the allied merchant ships from Arkhangel.

Of snow, however, we had more than enough, and the long, early winter nights of twenty-two hours each, punctuated by the howling gales, were already becoming extremely depressing. It was impossible to get on shore for exercise, the motor-boats having all finally broken down, and the force of the wind was such that rowing boats were generally out of the question. But even so, we were not entirely without relaxations, for the *Intrepid's* crew were extremely vocal, and gave more than one variety entertainment. At one of these the ship's bear, an animal ever of an inquiring turn of mind, somehow got her nose mixed up with an electric ventilating fan—with the result that, for ten devastating minutes, she ran amok among the audience until someone at last disentangled her. Amongst the performers, our sick berth attendant, a worthy known to his fellows as "Toby"—an individual to whom his physiognomy bore a striking resemblance—was specially noted for the fervour of his recitations. Among his favourite efforts was "Lars Porsena of Clusium," a classic which he always delivered in his best histrionic style, but which—I suppose owing to his facial contortions—the men always took to be a poem of a humorous nature, and not the heroic tragedy which "Toby" wished to portray.

On such occasions the ship fairly rocked with the mirth which his actions and gestures aroused. There were, of course, dancers and songsters without end, and a conjuror who produced that thing of wonder—a genuine top-hat, the which, I imagine, to be the first of its kind ever seen at Yukanskie. But whoever the performers were, they, at least, seemed always to be able to thoroughly enjoy themselves; as to the feelings of the audience, that apparently was a matter of indifference to them. Once on the stage, one and all did their best to remain there, and, when the howls of the onlookers failed to remove them, brute force had, on more than one occasion, to be resorted to. But some of the turns were universal favourites with all, and among many that genuine Arctic playlet known as *Hickney Hockney* ranked high. Perhaps the reader would not consider this play to be a refined one, the scenery also was no doubt a little crude. But where else in the Arctic could one come across a real, bad old Tory squire, with an ancestral domain—represented by two flags—and a beauteous daughter whose cheeks—well shaved for the occasion—were not innocent of flour and cherry toothpaste cosmetics. Moreover, she was one whose lovely flaxen hair, floating to her waist, helped to account for a recently-discovered deficit in the amount of tow so jealously guarded in the gunner's storeroom! Add to all this that the hero was a French doctor resplendent in the conjuror's tall hat, that he wore a stu'n'sail tie and toothpick pointed boots, and that, at the crucial moment, he cured the heroine of a fell disease, announcing, after having timed her pulse, that he found her only "three minutes fast." Add to this, I say, a final lurid scene in the bar of the "Pig and Whistle," wherein were seated beauteous ladies and three no-less beauteous barmaids—and that these between them contrived the unmasking of the villain. Add all this, I say, and the reader will begin to realise that life at Yukanskie was not entirely without its compensations. Only the yeoman of signals

mourned silently the disappearance of much of his bunting, and a glance at the " ladies' " dresses helped me to understand *why* the ship's flags were always so badly in need of repair.

Such relaxations as this, however, were few and far between—work and the weather were the factors which daily loomed increasingly in our outlook.

CHAPTER VII.

'TIS GUY FAWKES' SEASON, ERE IT FLIES, ARKHANGEL'S THUNDERING TO THE SKIES; AND SHIPS ARE MINED, AND NIGHT IS DAY; BUT WE GO HOME—AND LOSE THE WAY.

ON the 6th of November the s.s. *Waltham* arrived at Yukanskie in a sinking condition, with fourteen feet of water in her fore-peak and all her pumps in a broken-down condition. She was at the moment the third merchant ship requiring extensive repairs by us at Yukanskie, and typical of many dozens of others which should never have been allowed to leave England in the state they were then in—a state which had at that time become chronic with much of our merchant navy, owing to the congestion in the home repairing yards.

Owing to the continued mild weather, Arkhangel still remained open, and as yet showed no sign of being frozen up; but, as this state of things could not be expected to continue indefinitely, it was decided to reduce the British forces on the station from a definite date—this with a view to sending them home in turn during the winter months while work was slackest, to give leave and refit, returning again in good time for the reopening of the season in the spring. In accordance with this scheme, the *Iphigenia* and six trawlers duly sailed on the 7th of November—their parting being speeded by the usual ceremony of "cheering ship" carried out by us who remained behind. But hardly had the last of them disappeared round the corner of the island when the *Niffie*

Jane (the irreverent name by which the *Iphigenia* was invariably referred to by the less polite among our number) was seen to be returning—she had developed a hot bearing. However, she managed to struggle out quietly again at an early hour on the following morning. On the second occasion, however, her passing was *sans* ceremony and *sans* "cheer ship." A lingering glance indeed we gave her as she steamed past, then settled down once more to our struggle for existence with the inclemency of the climate, conscious of certain vague rumours, borne to us from Arkhangel, that Russia was on the verge of a revolution.

Wind, frost, fog, gale, snow, and rain followed each other in an unending series through the days which had now become almost completely nights. The darkness which now spread over twenty hours out of each twenty-four gave us a surfeit of opportunity to study the starry heavens. It is, I suppose, a thing known to every schoolboy, but nevertheless a fact which I myself had never previously realised, that in the Arctic the moon acts in the same way every month as does the sun every year. Even at Yukanskie, a place but a few hundred miles inside the Arctic Circle, there were periods every month during which for five days the moon never set, but skimmed along above the northern horizon after the manner of the summer midnight sun. And again, there were periods of five days or more during which the moon never rose. The Arctic winter is thus divided every month into periods of continuous moonlight and into others of intense darkness—the latter only relieved by the faint twilight given out at noon by the sun still remaining invisible below the horizon. The snow, however, by its reflecting power, assists in making the most of what light there is, consequently it is never entirely dark except when storm clouds cover the sky; at such times the depth of the blackness is almost unimaginable. Time itself we had long before this realised in practice to be a misnomer and a fraud. It required but a very

few hours' hard steaming in those high latitudes, either to the east or west, before it became necessary to alter the clock an hour or more. It was possible, in fact, to go to bed and rest for a considerable period, and then to arise and find that, owing to the alteration of the clock, you had lost no time at all; or, contrariwise, to discover that your watch below had been converted into a minus quantity.

On such subjects, however, we had not leisure to ruminate for long, for on the 9th of November an urgent telegram arrived stating that there had been serious explosions at Arkhangel, and that a warship was to be sent there immediately and "with despatch." Fortunately the *Vindictive* had just arrived in port from Murmansk, and had still got steam at command—she was able to proceed the same evening at full speed, taking with her all the carpenter and artisan ratings who could still be spared. On her arrival, she found that there were still forty-nine ships who had not yet been able to clear from Arkhangel, and these had been discharging their cargoes, mostly of munitions, on to the crowded timber wharves. Upon the same wharves, stacked in readiness for return cargoes, were immense piles of timber. Among all this crowded shipping, inflammable timber, and high explosive was a Russian ship, the *Baron Driesen* also discharging munitions. A load of some forty tons of dynamite had but left her side some twenty minutes before, when, without any warning, the ship blew up—the explosion instantly killing everyone on board and in the vicinity. All the other ships in the neighbourhood were, of course, wrecked and destroyed also, and many had their decks blown off. The burning fragments were scattered around for a radius of four miles, falling in and among the heaped-up timber, and, to make matters worse, the fire-station had been blown down at the first explosion. The timber was therefore free to ignite without interference, and, in its turn, it set off the dumps of ammunition—the conflagrations and

explosions thus originated continuing for many days. It was this scene which greeted the *Vindictive* on her arrival.

Never before probably has there been such an explosion as this one at Arkhangel. The death roll must have numbered several thousands, although, for official purposes, the Russian authorities gave out the number to be only one hundred and thirty. Whatever it was, approximately *thirty thousand tons* of munitions had gone up into the air!

If my readers can recollect the outcry that arose in England over the few puny tons of high explosive which went up at Silvertown on the 19th of January, 1917, it will help them to realise in some minor degree what affairs were then like at Arkhangel after the explosion of thirty thousand tons. The presence of the *Vindictive* there on the spot so soon after the catastrophe, and at a period while the fires were still raging, was invaluable. The sight of her helped greatly to restore confidence; she compelled discipline, assisted in fighting the fire, rescued the injured; above all she repaired the battered shipping still afloat—for she had with her a number of skilled artificers from Yukanskie as well as her own ship's company; together they wrought marvels and were of inestimable service.

It must be confessed that, at first, this loss of thirty thousand tons of munitions was a cause of great depression among us of the Arctic Squadron. It made us wonder whether our whole season's efforts had not been wasted, until further reflection showed us that, after all, this huge quantity was but a flea bite as compared with the enormous mass of explosives already safely got into the country. During the season of 1916, the British Navy had been responsible for the unloading of seven hundred and fifty thousand tons of munitions into Russia, so that the thirty thousand tons lost was, after all, but a beggarly four per cent.

As was but natural in Russia at the time, rumours of

treachery at Arkhangel were, of course, rife for a considerable period after the explosions; but whether these were well founded in fact or not will, I suppose, now never be known. One circumstantial story anent the ship first to blow up was that her captain, chief officer, and engineer had all left her but a few hours previous to her destruction, and had thus escaped the fate which overtook the crew. But such an incident in itself, even if true, could give no just grounds for an accusation of treachery; it was but a curious and somewhat significant fact, easily explained by ordinary causes, but one which nevertheless added fresh fuel to the furnace of suspicion and mistrust already glowing in so many minds.

Less than a week later, on the 15th of November, fresh events at Yukanskie thrust for a time all thoughts of the Arkhangel disaster out of our minds. It was blowing a heavy gale, with fifteen degrees of frost, when a big Russian steamer, the *Kursk*, loaded with munitions, was heard making frantic S.O.S. signals only seventeen miles away—she had struck a mine. Captain Hurt, with the only four trawlers available, at once dashed out to her assistance, and, having quickly found her, succeeded in getting her in tow. A very dangerous and harassing time it was for him and his little cockle-shells of trawlers, for the gale had by then increased to almost hurricane force, and, to add to his difficulties, he found the *Kursk's* crew in a state of disorganisation and panic. They had already started to lower their boats, and were firing their gun recklessly in every direction—a stray shell only missing one of the rescuing trawlers by inches. But somehow the mine-sweepers got alongside her, in spite of the tremendous scend of the sea, which caused their stems to cut deep gashes in the steel plates of the *Kursk's* counter. Once aboard, they took complete charge of the demoralised ship and caused the boats to be again re-hoisted. The *Kursk* having been got in tow, the trawlers steering her, a course was set for Yukanskie; but, almost immediately,

the towing wires parted. Again and again lines were thrown to her, but her crew were once more in a state of panic—they seemed incapable of making a rope fast, and instead let its end run overboard again. All night long the trawlers stood by the ship as she lay wallowing dangerously off a lee shore. The mine had exploded under the *Kursk's* bow, and, as a consequence, her foremost portion was almost level with the water, her stern and rudder high in the air. The rudder being thus rendered useless, she could, of course, not steer; but fortunately, with the tips of her propeller blades, she could still just touch the water—with these backing astern all night, she was able to keep herself steady and her stern up to the wind.

At Yukanskie, the weather was such at the time that the ships were dragging their anchors in all directions—in fact, no less than four ships lost an anchor each within two days. Out in the open, with a westerly gale blowing into Svyatoi Nos Bay, the weather was terrific; but the stout trawlers never abandoned the helpless *Kursk* for an instant, and, during the night, once more succeeded in passing the tow lines. Then, at earliest dawn, at about 10 a.m., they commenced to bring her into harbour. It was a brave spectacle! First of all came the two tiny trawlers who were towing her, tossed hither and thither by the giant waves, their bows dashed from side to side, but always hanging on and always struggling back to the course. Astern of them trailed a quarter of a mile of mine-sweeping wire, frail gossamer to hold so huge a vessel; but they had fortified it by hanging from the bight lengths of chain cable, which, by their weight, kept it from tightening too suddenly and snapping. A very long way after them came the great ship, rolling heavily, and, as each roller passed underfoot, plunging her waterlogged fo'c'sle right under, the while her impotent screws churned noisily and impatiently in the unresisting air. Again she would right herself, then plunged deeply once more, each dive she made bottomwards seeming as

though it would be her last. Far astern of her again were the other two trawlers, each hanging to her also by a further quarter-mile length of mine-sweeping wire. Their purpose was not to tow her as did the trawlers in advance, but to steer her and to act as rudders in place of the *Kursk's* own useless one swinging idly high above the water. The duties of these last two were probably the most difficult of all; they were but minnows trying to control a triton, and one which yawed perilously from side to side with each sea that roared past under her counter. Tugging and straining first on one side, then on the other, the minnows at length achieved their task; missing the rock at the entrance by a few feet only, the *Kursk* was finally coaxed and pulled into calmer water within the harbour, where she was able to anchor. For the moment the trawlers' work was done.

The trawlers having now accomplished their part, it devolved upon the bigger ships at Yukanskie to keep the ball rolling, and to render the ship fit for sea again. In this the first point was obviously to get the ship on an even keel once more, so that her stern should no longer point foolishly up to heaven, but, by being immersed, should allow of her rudder and screw propellers being once more brought into use. As, owing to the huge rents in her bottom, the pumping out of her flooded fore-hold was out of the question, the only method by which we could bring her stern down was by letting more water in aft, and by transferring as much cargo as possible from the forward to the hinder part of the ship. This method of letting more water into an already half-flooded ship may seem a strange one to the uninitiated, but it is a very common expedient in salvage operations. The amount so admitted can be kept exactly under control, as it only enters compartments know as tanks or double-bottoms —these being themselves watertight and of exactly known dimensions. For the purpose of transferring the *Kursk's* cargo, the armed boarding steamers were in turn got alongside her; part of her cargo they dumped

in her stern, and, when that would hold no more, stowed the rest about their own decks. Working day and night, and by these simple means alone, in three days we had raised the *Kursk's* bow from its original depth of thirty-one feet until it only drew twenty-six feet; and her stern we had brought down in the water, from seventeen feet to twenty-six feet and a half. Once more the ship was on an even keel, her rudder and propellers submerged and capable of doing their duty—in fact, she could steam and manœuvre, and was very nearly in her normal sea-going trim. To actually repair the hole in her bottom with the resources at our disposal at Yukanskie was an impossibility—we could do little more beyond shoring up her bulkheads, but we had rendered her sufficiently seaworthy to be able to steam to another port where such repairs could be taken in hand.

Such as we had accomplished, however, was not without its alarums and the loss of valuable time. When the *Kursk* first arrived it was a dubious point as to whether she had really struck a mine or whether she was suffering from the effects of some internal explosion in her cargo, and presumably caused by some infernal machine. The only way to settle the matter was by sending down a diver to examine her bottom under water. If the damage had been caused by a mine, then obviously her plates would be dented inwards; but if, on the contrary, she had been damaged by an internal explosion, then of necessity would her bottom have been driven outwards. At the moment there happened to be no British divers available, and I was forced to rashly invite Russian co-operation by asking for the loan of one of theirs—a request very willingly complied with. The Russian diver duly descended, and in a very short time reappeared. As soon as we had got his helmet open he informed us through the interpreter that the *Kursk's* plates had been blown *outwards*—proof positive of an internal explosion! This was a serious matter, and, with the sinister rumours of Arkhangel, and of another

similar Russian ship there which had blown up, I at once caused all work on board to be discontinued, withdrew my working parties, and waited to see her go up. For where there had been one bomb on board there was no reason why there should not have been a dozen others.

For hours we watched, but nothing happened, so the next morning I made a very careful inspection of her holds so far as these were accessible, and still nothing suspicious could be found. The British diver had by then come off the sick list, and he, concurrently with myself, made a fresh examination of her bottom. Upon his return to the surface he reversed the Russian's verdict, for he stated that, without a shadow of doubt, the *Kursk* had been mined. On hearing this the Russians acknowledged that they had made a mistake. Work was once more resumed after a loss of eighteen hours.

Delayed for a further two days by the weather, the *Kursk* was finally safely convoyed to Arkhangel by British trawlers on the 23rd of November, just eight days after the date of striking the mine, and her cargo was discharged without the loss of a single ton. Once more had the poor old Arctic Squadron been justified, for, without their presence on the spot, not only would the *Kursk* herself have been lost, but almost certainly the whole of her crew.

For days the mine-sweepers scoured the vicinity of the spot where the *Kursk* had struck the mine, but in spite of most careful sweeping, only one more was discovered, and the mystery of their origin remained unsolved. A mine is undoubtedly one of the most potent of weapons in a war of attrition, and probably inflicts on the enemy a greater percentage of loss for the same initial outlay than does any other weapon. No dramatic coup is ever likely to be brought off by mines, but they are always there as a menace, always ready to instantly destroy the ship which blunders across them, never sleeping, and, though their chance may not come

for weeks, months, or even many years after being laid, they still remain there, deadly waiting things, until swept up and destroyed; moreover, the wound which a mine inflicts is likely to come at the most unexpected of moments.

That no more mines could be found was, however, a great relief to us, for the shortness of the daylight hours restricted the sweepers' labours to a very short period every day, and the cold and continuous gales caused their work to become increasingly arduous. The spray and frozen fog, congealing on the rigging and upper works of such small vessels as trawlers, quickly made them top-heavy. Until this ice can be removed in smoother water there is imminent danger of their capsizing in the heavy seas and foundering. The last of the War Channel buoys had now been weighed and removed, and the anti-submarine boom at Yukanskie unrigged and stowed in the *Princess Maud's* holds; we were ripe for our winter flit westward. Yukanskie was not a place at which any ship could safely spend the winter, but only twelve hours' steam to the west lay the ice-free waters of the Kola Inlet. Although this is geographically further north than Yukanskie, and much further so than Arkhangel, yet, thanks to the Gulf Stream sweeping round the north of Norway, its climate is infinitely milder, and the ice which forms there is never of sufficient thickness to prevent steamers pushing their way through. As soon as the last of the merchant fleet had cleared from Arkhangel Yukanskie could be abandoned, and the Arctic Squadron take up its winter quarters at Murmansk, at the head of the Kola Inlet, there to await as best they could, in the blank dreariness on an Arctic winter night, the advent of spring.

November, 1916, on the Murman Coast proved to be an abnormally mild month; rarely were there more than 20 degrees of frost, and even these cold periods were broken by short intervals during which it thawed and rain took the place of the incessant snowstorms. Gales

Poop of H.M.S. "INTREPID."

of great power, but of short duration, averaged as many as seven and eight in number each week, and kept us in a state of constant irritation and anxiety. The rock-bound harbour of Yukanskie is extremely narrow, the holding bad, and in the long, long nights the furious snow-laden gusts blew the ships hither and thither, dragging their anchors after them. Perhaps only a sailor can realise the anxiety and nerve strain which such a state of things causes—the restless worry which it entails, due to the fear that his ship will be blown ashore. Boat work had become impossible, and shore exercise was, of course, out of the question. For those imprisoned in their ships, the only communication possible between themselves and other vessels was by means of signals, or by the rare opportunity offered by some already overworked trawler as a passenger conveyance. All reading and writing had perforce to be done by artificial light, which after a time affected the eye-sight. Those doomed to spend the whole winter on the station had to look forward to the probability of spending months without mails or news, without relaxations, with no possibility of exercise, and the lack of fresh vegetables. In the result it could hardly be surprising if many became terribly depressed and irritable, and that among them were many cases of insanity as well of impaired vision.

We in the *Intrepid*, however, were among the fortunate ones not so doomed to spend the winter, for, on the 1st of December we received orders to proceed home, and on the same day we bid for a season an unregretful adieu to Yukanskie—that windiest spot on earth. With us at the same time departed three out of the four boarding steamers, together with five trawlers, leaving behind to guard North Russia for the remainder of the winter the old battleship *Glory*, the cruiser *Vindictive*, the A.B.S. *Tithonus*, and four trawlers.

From Murmansk, the port at which this small squadron wintered, the war-born railway to Petrograd had not been completed. But, during the winter months, rails

were laid over the snow, so that whilst the frost held, a considerable amount of traffic could be carried across it. It was this railway which gave to Murmansk its chief importance, for during the months that Arkhangel was frozen up it remained open, allowing of a limited amount of warlike stores still filtering into Russia. In other ways also Murmansk was suitable as a war port, for, owing to the deep water running up to the entrance, the approaches to the Kola Inlet were practically unminable.

The *Intrepid's* start for home on the 1st of December was made under auspicious circumstances, with the sea a flat and oily calm. Submarines were reported to be still working off Tromso, in Norway, but none had actually appeared off the Murman Coast for nearly a month. Taking with us the *Stephen Furness*, the fastest of the armed boarding steamers, we set off.

The propitious start which we had made did not, however, ensure fair weather for the rest of the voyage; within twenty-four hours, and before we had rounded the North Cape, we encountered a most ferocious gale, which quickly sheathed the ship in ice from stem to stern and from truck to water-line. Our whole passage home was a nightmare, and gale succeeded gale, blowing from every direction. The heavens themselves, being obscured by snow-clouds throughout the voyage, effectively prevented our taking observations of the stars to determine our position. The guns were all frozen into a solid block of ice, half the boats were stove in, and the bridge ladder, situated nearly forty feet above the water-level, was washed away by the battering seas; in consequence of this I was for many hours unable to reach the chart-house. But the *Intrepid*, in spite of the fact that she lay low in the water, was a beautiful little sea-boat—her movements were like those of a thoroughbred horse, and she made little trouble of any weather, slithering easily through the rollers. Far different was the *Stephen Furness*, lighter but more clumsily built,

whose propeller for half the time was racing high out of the water. This, of course, greatly reduced her speed, and, in order to keep company with her, the *Intrepid* had also to ease down to, at times, so slow a rate of progress as six knots. Thus we plugged along for some days, thrusting our fo'c'sles deep into the on-racing seas, until presently we began to grow somewhat anxious as to our coal supply holding out. We had been at sea nearly a week without being able to fix our position, and the one given by dead reckoning, after so much heavy weather, was but little better than guess-work. However, on the 6th of December, believing that we were nearing the Shetlands, the *Intrepid* went on ahead to try to make a landfall. Taking the risk of submarines being about, we presently stopped the ship and took an up-and-down cast with the lead, and at length found bottom at a depth of 204 fathoms (1,224 feet). This first sounding having been confirmed by other casts of the lead, we came to the conclusion, after a study of the chart, that we were considerably to the westward of our calculations. I accordingly altered the ship's head to south-east, and a few hours later we were rewarded by the sight of land right ahead. As we neared this we recognised it for the western side of the Shetlands, and found that we had been more than fifty miles out of our course. Having wirelessed to the *Stephen Furness* and given her her position, we coasted down the western side at eighteen knots, and finally anchored off Lerwick at seven-thirty in the evening.

At Lerwick, where we remained for four days, our fate hung in the balance while the "powers that be" were making up their minds what should be done with us; it was in doubt whether we should be snapped up by the Grand Fleet or allowed to go to our home port of Chatham. Having coaled, the opportunity was taken to give shore-leave to the men, and, although hardly one of them had so much as seen a public-house for the best part of a year, out of two hundred of them there was only

one who was in any way the worse for liquor. On the 10th of December, authority having decided for Chatham —as we had all along hoped it would do—we resumed our southward voyage, escorted by two destroyers. The vicinity of Lerwick was in those days a very popular haunt for enemy submarines, and one was reported off the entrance just as we were leaving; but, preferring to risk meeting one whose position was approximately known to deferring our sailing and chance meeting him unexpectedly later on, we held our course. Proceeding thus down the east coast of Scotland, while in the darkness abreast the Firth of Forth we found ourselves to be moving at right angles across the track of a portion of the Grand Fleet putting to sea on one of its periodical cruises. It is a somewhat unpleasant sensation to have a great fleet bearing down upon you, especially when they are first sighted and before you have been recognised for a friend and the secret signals exchanged; one is apt to experience a feeling of impotence similar to that felt in dreams, when one is only conscious of inability to avert by a hair's breadth whatever is about to happen. The phantom soundless fleet bore on across us in the gloom, passing east into the North Sea; first came the widespread fan of ghostly destroyers, then a formation of the larger but similar-looking light cruisers; these followed, after a short interval, by the grim grey bulk of the silent battleships themselves, moving in fixed formation and exact station, with no flicker of light. It was as though we had seen some ill-lit shadow panorama, and, as we rubbed our eyes and looked again, they were gone—swallowed up in the mists and the dim moonlight.

Having passed across the mouth of the Firth of Forth, we presently struck the first buoys of the War Channel off St. Abb's Head, only finding them with great difficulty in the moonlight. Thence we continued along it at our best speed of from seventeen to eighteen knots until we ran into a dense yellow fog off the entrance to the Tyne. Floating thus in a sea of mist, nothing was

visible; but the loud hooting of sirens on every hand convinced us that we were no planet apart, but aboard a very mortal ship in imminent danger of collision. A fresh enemy mine-field had just been laid in the vicinity, but, the fates being propitious, we avoided accident, and the fog lifting, we were able to put into the Humber for a few hours, where we exchanged our escort of destroyers. On again until we passed through Yarmouth and Lowestoft roads, leaving behind the red glow of the blast furnaces which mark the shore-line further north, and which seemed to render nugatory the war-time extinction of the coast lighthouses. The War Channel followed every tortuous winding of the coast, and, as the buoys marking it were unlighted, it was almost impossible to follow them at night—at times unquestionably we strayed and wandered through what were presumably mine-infested waters. The number of wrecks of stricken merchantmen had visibly increased since my previous visit in June; but from every little coast town darted seaplanes and the small silvery, sausage-shaped dirigibles, while fast patrol craft towed captive balloons in every direction—all widely awake and aggressive, sharply on the look-out for mine and submarine. Every few miles also the dark sturdy forms of trawlers or paddlers would be encountered, busy about their daily work of sweeping up the mines laid by submarines during the night. From every point of the compass also, as though oblivious of the war, the great steamers ploughed their way, bringing to our shores food and the sinews of war.

As we approached the maze of sand-banks which mark the estuary of the Thames, the congestion of shipping became still more prodigious; in the Black Deep alone, when we passed through about 4 p.m., there must have been some two or three hundred large vessels at anchor. Having successfully negotiated another minefield (the third across which we had blundered since leaving Lerwick), we were off the Nore by five o'clock on the evening

of the 12th of December, just as the last twilight faded into a dark and foggy night. A friendly patrol-boat gave us a lead part of the way towards the mouth of the Medway, but, on her departure, our good luck deserted us—in the gloom we grounded on some unknown mud-bank and remained helplessly stuck, surrounded by impenetrable fog. It was a mortifying finale to our successful homecoming; fortunately it was near low water, and three hours later, the tide having risen, the ship was got off undamaged and anchored safely in deeper water for the night. Glad indeed was I of some rest, for for three nights and days I had not lain down; neither had I taken off my clothes nor washed.

At daylight the next morning we passed Sheerness on our way up the Medway, seeing many of those strange sea monsters which the war had brought into being, not the least strange among many being a huge aeroplane ship, looking for all the world like a coral island with palm trees. At Blackstakes, just above Queenborough, an ash-hoist poking above water and the swirl of the tide showed where the blown-up *Bulwark* lay at the bottom of the river, still holding many an entombed corpse. The same evening of the 13th of December, 1916, we reached Chatham, and, having faced the ordeal of a court of inquiry as to our grounding, the old ship was paid off a week later. I found myself a gentleman at large, with three weeks' leave and nothing to do, conscious more than anything else of the abominableness of the English climate. In the Arctic I had never felt the cold, but here, in smoky, grimy England, with wet, fog and mud, accentuated by the gloom of the war-darkened streets, I found myself chilled to the bone. I hungered for the spring, with whose advent I hoped to sail north once more, and to breathe those winds which blow so fresh and pure in the lands that border the Arctic. At home in England I felt that I was suffocating.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PLAYFUL BRUIN IN THE NIGHT, THE TERRORS OF A "NEVER" FIGHT. AN ARCTIC PANTOMIME AND ZOO, AND WHAT A TRAWLERMAN WILL DO.

IT was in December, 1916, whilst the *Intrepid* was paying off at Chatham, that the ship's bear, who had by then grown into an animal approximating in size, but greatly exceeding in weight, a Shetland pony, got both herself and us into serious trouble.

Owing to the quarantine so sternly enforced for the prevention of rabies, we had already taken the precaution of disposing of our motley assortment of dogs, most of them having been turned over to other ships before we came into port. But the bear proved to be altogether "another brand of hair-pin," and at her advent there was much scratching of heads amongst the Customs officers and local big-wigs. It appeared from their regulations that a bear could be assessed neither as a canary nor as a rabbit; nor was she either a dog, a horse or cattle. There was, however, a new regulation which appeared to apply to her—one which forbade the importation of wild animals during the war. Add to this the fact that Madame Bruin was also a receptacle for so much neat Navy rum, that it must have raised a doubt as to whether she should not have been put in a bonded warehouse with other spirituous liquors which had not paid Excise duty, and the difficulties which encompassed her landing will be understood.

For days the decision as to the bear's disposal hung in the balance; local bumbledom could not make up its mind. We, for our part, endeavoured to keep Madame Bruin modestly in the background, hoping that in the throes of a world war her existence might be forgotten. But fate and the bear herself decided otherwise. One evening, just as the gloom of a December night was closing down, the bear got tired of this " wait and see " policy, and, skilfully upsetting the sentry on the gangway by diving between his legs, dashed across the prow into the darkness of a war-time dockyard and disappeared. A search party was immediately sent in pursuit with a warrant to arrest the deserter; but a brown bear in a brown dockyard on a brown foggy night is more difficult of discovery than the traditional needle in a haystack. The search proved fruitless; wherefore we held our peace and anxiously awaited further developments.

We were not kept long in suspense. It may have been half an hour later when, in the darkness, there arose a tremendous uproar. There was a clanging of fire-bells and the shrill toot-tooting of a ship's siren, accompanied by cries and yells and the rushing of many feet. Only a few weeks before there had been a sanguinary air-raid on the dockyard, and when we first heard these sounds of terror we concluded that we were in for a second raid. But a frantic dockyard " matie," flying to the ship for shelter, was in a position to enlighten us as to the real cause of the tumult. He stated that there was a huge grizzly bear loose in the dockyard which was killing and devouring everybody. Guided infallibly to the spot whence the greatest clamour arose, the search party was this time successful; the truant was secured and brought back on board and, from the evidence then secured, we were able to reconstruct the history of what was probably one of the most notable debacles which has occurred in the history of Chatham Dockyard.

After her escape from the ship the bear had at first

apparently wandered about aimlessly in an imbecile and entirely innocent kind of way; this we could trace by her deep paw-marks in the mud. Eventually, however, she had come upon a group of "maties" engaged in the necessary, and to them eminently satisfactory, rite of assimilating an evening meal. They being "maties," this meal inevitably consisted of bread and jam, and it was the sight and odour of this latter article which finally overcame the bear's moral rectitude, and in a moment wiped out the virtue accumulated by many months' sojourn on board ship. With a shrill snarl of delight the bear dashed forward from the shadows where she had been lurking into the centre of the lighted circle around which were grouped the horny-handed sons of toil—duffle coated and all unsuspicious, cramming the food down their throats. For the reader's information, I may state that it was only *jam* that the bear's soul sighed for. But to the excited Royal Dockyardmen's imagination this sudden apparition of extended claws and a huge hairy monster not unnaturally aroused the fear that it was upon their own red blood that the bear wished to sup. With a yell the "maties" scattered in all directions, and, although not generally noted for the celerity of their movements, there can be no question that, on that occasion at any rate, the majority of them would have done honour to their country as its representatives in an international Marathon race.

The race, however, is not always to the swift, and one of the runners bore with him the seeds of disaster, for in his hand he carried, as he fled, the fatal tin of jam. Dashing meteor-like into the void of darkness, he yet nevertheless scattered the sweet and viscous fluid as he went, blazing a trail which the bear could not fail to follow. Hot in his track came Madame Bruin; nearer and nearer she got to the coveted jam, until the terrified duffle-coated Mercury could feel her panting breath at his back, and, glancing round, see her dripping red tongue and the glitter of her small beady eyes. This was too

much for him; with a last despairing effort he flung himself through a half-opened door, but failed to close it in time. The bear pushed through after him, bearing the " matie " and the pot of jam to the ground in her impetuous progress.

The bear now found that she was in a lighted room furnished with many chairs and tables, upon each of which was perched a young lady screaming frantically, for it was the Admiral's office. Disregarding, however, such non-essentials as lady clerks, the bear turned to the initial object of her mission—the prostrate dockyard " matie "—by then in a state of vertigo. Him she proceeded to lick all over with great care, and, having removed all traces of jam from one side, turned him over, and proceeded with equal care to lick the other side. Then, having recovered the pot of jam itself, and there apparently being " nothing doing " in the way of other sweets, she quietly made her departure. It was at that moment that the *Intrepid's* search party had come up and dragged her unrepentant self back to the ship.

For bruin this was but the " end of a perfect day," but for us on board things were not quite so pleasant; our relations with the dockyard officials were seriously strained, and we received orders that the bear was at once to be " disposed of." The exact meaning of this sentence was not quite clear to us, but we interpreted it in our own way. Nailed up in a piano-case, the bear was safely smuggled on shore, and then taken by train to the home of one of the quartermasters, a man who had always looked upon himself as the bear's foster-" mother." Its arrival at his little cottage in the country, and its reception by his wife and family, I will leave to the reader's imagination. Suffice it to say that, having unroofed his house, plundered his larder, and generally behaved after the manner of a Bolshevist and a Hun, the animal finally found asylum in the local zoo. And there, peacefully and usefully engaged in eating proffered buns for the amusement of rustic children, she

remains, for all I know to the contrary, down to the present day. R.I.P.

From January, 1917, until the end of March I was fortunate enough to get temporary employment at the Admiralty, there to await such time as the *Intrepid* should be recommissioned again for Arctic service. My appointment was to the Submarine Branch of the Intelligence Division—an exceedingly strenuous but intensely interesting job, coming at a time when submarine ruthlessness was at its height, and when Germany had declared her policy of the "Barred Zone." Allied shipping was then being sunk at an average rate of some twenty steamers a day, to say nothing of innumerable fishing craft, added to which an enemy raider was creating much havoc in the Atlantic. Outside the Admiralty portals one heard much of the alleged sinkings of enemy submarines: indeed, a dinner party was popularly credited to have been given to commemorate the destruction of the hundredth U-boat. Inside the Admiralty, however, it was a different matter, and one was mainly conscious of our own fearful and daily increasing losses. All reported sinkings of enemy submarines were most carefully sifted, and, more often than not, the supposedly destroyed U-boat was found to be still continuing its nefarious activities in the locality of its alleged *coup de grace*. In fact, not one claim in a dozen was generally allowed, after a careful investigation had been made. The precision with which Admiralty records followed the career of a submarine were little short of marvellous: its movements, from the day the U-boat left port until the day upon which it returned, were exactly known and chronicled. But the trouble with all these details was that they were wisdom *after* the fact, and *not* prognostications of future events. They did not serve to give much real help or hope for the future; in fact, knowledge of the real circumstances made great calls on one's faith in the might of England, and was apt to raise doubts as to whether her star was

still in the ascendant. In Room X we strove night and day, dealing with mountains of telegraphic reports and dockets—recording, marking, and posting up on the great war map the positions of all enemy vessels, as well as the routes and positions of our own.

On the 16th of March, 1917, the outbreak of the Russian Revolution was announced in the Press, and on the 2nd of April the *Intrepid* recommissioned once more for service in North Russia. I was glad to find myself once more northward bound. With me went the great majority of my ship's company who had served with me the previous year on the Murman Coast as willing volunteers.

On this occasion, and as the result of experience, the ship was splendidly fitted up with extra machinery and all that forethought could provide for her special work in the Arctic; but as for her external appearance, she was a mass of dirt, shavings, and straw, giving more the impression of a farmyard than of a man-of-war. It looked almost as though our friends, the dockyard "maties," had been having a *revanche* for the scare our bear had given them at Christmas-time.

As to the effect which the Russian Revolution might have on our work in the Arctic we could not even guess; but we took heart that America had at last come into the war, an event which occurred while the *Intrepid* was commissioning. Cheerfully optimistic to a man, all glad to see the last of British dirt, mud, and officialdom, we on the 9th of April slipped down the River Medway to Sheerness. Having coaled, swung for adjustment of compasses, and completed our gunnery and steam trials, we finally put to sea on Friday, the 13th of April—a date which gave me the liveliest satisfaction, for thirteen had proved itself to be my lucky number right through the war.

The weather was at its worst during the first half of April, 1917, and the week previous to our sailing had seen a continuous succession of snowstorms. But

Friday, the 13th of April, was a lovely day, and, as we sped north with our pair of guardian destroyers, I was again impressed by the great fleets of merchantmen rolling unconcernedly on their way. As each steamer passed we could see its trained crew standing to the gun mounted in the stern, fully alert and in readiness for instant action. Our first night we spent, as usual, inside the mouth of the Humber, and, sailing at dawn, had the good fortune to intercept a wireless signal made by a trawler to the effect that she had just exploded three mines. These were in a position which we had been due to pass over an hour later; wherefore, hastily altering course away from the dangerous area, we arrived safely at the end of the War Channel at dusk—the Cheviots covered in snow as we passed. Off the Firth of Forth a great convoy, outward bound, was forming up in the darkness; skirting round it, we arrived off Peterhead just as dawn was breaking. Peterhead is not a port which any sailor would willingly choose for a ship of the *Intrepid's* size, for it is very exposed to easterly winds. At that stage of the submarine campaign, however, it was not considered advisable for ships to be under way by daylight off the east coast of Scotland. We accordingly had to spend the day in these uncongenial surroundings, and gazed aghast at the granite rocks, granite houses, and granite-faced inhabitants who together form the *tout ensemble* of Peterhead. At dusk, with a feeling of relief, we crept stealthily out to sea, to an accompaniment of snow and beastly weather.

While at Peterhead we had received orders to call in at Scapa Flow and pick up two E Class submarines (the E 39 and E 44), whom we were required to escort to the Arctic. The scene at the time of our arrival there at 4 a.m. on the 16th of April was magnificent and beautiful. Before us rose the snow-topped uplands, glowing pink in the first light of the mounting dawn. Closer at hand lay the vast silent masses of more than a score of Dreadnoughts, ranged line upon line, together with all the hosts of

attendant vessels which then formed the Grand Fleet. For the first time I realised by comparison how small a thing was a vessel such as the *Intrepid*, with her puny five thousand tons displacement. Any one of those great battleships might have hoisted her inboard without its affecting their appearance sufficiently for a casual passer-by to notice any difference. It was the first time that I had seen the Grand Fleet as a whole, and there was much to interest me and many old friends to greet. But I think the object which most greatly impressed me was the Theatre Ship, a vessel which went alongside each battleship in turn and gave two performances daily. This useful vessel also carried out the duties of water-tank, and, on an emergency arising, she could promptly get herself out of the way, leaving the battleships free to put to sea, unencumbered by any inflammable impedimenta such as theatrical properties.

Having embarked the spare torpedoes and stores for our submarines, we put to sea again the same evening, arriving at Swarbacks Minn, our last British port of call, the following morning. This place was then a base of some importance, the headquarters of a cruiser squadron, and protected by a double boom; it is situated on the opposite side of the Shetlands to Lerwick. There I found many of my armed boarding steamers, trawlers, and other units of the Arctic Squadron, and it was from thence that we sailed on Friday, the 20th of April, at seven in the evening, with a mixed convoy of two submarines and two trawlers. In moderate weather we shaped a course true north for the Arctic Circle, but, owing to the slowness of our consorts, our speed was limited to eight knots.

It was on the following night that the wireless operator reported that he could hear German *Telefunken* signalling going on close at hand. In consequence of this it was with some anxiety that I scanned the horizon at dawn, for, should we meet a raider or other German warship, it was almost certain that our obsolete four-point-

seven guns would be outranged—in fact, we should not have had a ghost of a chance in an action. It was with feelings therefore not unlike those of the patriarch Job that at 7 a.m. I observed two tall columns of smoke on the southern horizon. Like him, I meditated on the transitory nature of human affairs, and opined that, "that which I greatly feared had come to pass." Our respite was short—in a very few moments the two columns of smoke had materialised their lower portions into a great cruiser bristling with guns, followed by a smaller vessel also heavily armed, and both obviously in hot pursuit of us. With the warning of the previous night's *Telefunken* in mind, I no longer felt much doubt about their being enemy vessels; I accordingly got the hands to "Action" stations, determined to make as good a fight of it as possible. There was just a chance that we might be able to slip away during one of the numerous snow squalls that kept blowing past. But such a chance was a very remote one, and I remember distinctly gazing at the paint-work and wondering what it might feel like to be what in a very few moments I might reasonably expect to become—a mere smear of blood across its white surface, a few shreds of flesh and scattered hairs.

I am not built in a heroic mould, and I confess the suggestion conveyed to me by that piece of paint-work and its future appearance *after* the enemy had finished with us gave me several unpleasant moments. Meanwhile the great ships bore down upon us, looming every moment nearer and more formidable. At the utmost range of our ancient searchlight I flashed the secret signal. A flickering succession of sparks answered in reply, at which the signalman gazed tensely through his telescope. Then he relaxed himself, and reported, "Challenge correctly answered, sir." They were English and not German after all—and at that knowledge I think all our hearts gave a thankful rebound. The great cruiser and her companion turned away, and left us to pursue our voyage in peace.

Later, on the same day, I was grieved to learn by the German wireless news that an old acquaintance, Admiral Sir Dudley de Chair, had died. Had I known, however, I need not have grieved, for at that moment the Admiral happened to be in the best of health. The reasons for such an apparently meaningless official lie I am, however, at a loss to explain, unless it was an attempt to revive the Black Magic of the Middle Ages and to murder by suggestion—a not altogether improbable solution. The Admiral, being in charge of the blockade, was especially unpopular in Germany, and I am told that a medal was actually struck to commemorate his demise.

We entered the Arctic Circle on the 23rd with a fresh south-west gale astern of us, and very heavy snow-squalls; as, however, this weather was helping on the sluggish trawlers, so that they could make good a speed of nine and a half knots, we did not complain. In order to save their oil fuel, the *Intrepid* had been towing by turns each of the two submarines; but, owing to the tow having parted in the gale, further attempts at this had to be abandoned. The next day, the 24th, it was blowing with hurricane force from the westward, with mountainous seas; the ships had to turn east and run before it for some hours, during which interval both the submarines and the trawlers made surprisingly good weather of it. The temperature at first was, fortunately, not very cold—only some 10 degrees of frost—but by the 26th it had got decidedly chillier. From my diary I note that the ink was all frozen, and that there were three inches of solid ice on my cabin floor. However, with the red canvas of an old target wound round me, and with all my clothes on, I never slept better in my life.

During this weather the submarines themselves appeared as a solid sheet of ice, without shape or form, and their guns as a glittering quadrangular block of frozen sea-water. But my chief grief, as recorded in

my faithful diary, was that some two dozen of the new-laid and much prized eggs which I had brought with me from home had all got frozen also, and had burst after the manner of a water-pipe.

On the afternoon of the 26th we sighted the first ice-fields, and very soon we were cutting our way through the half-melted sludge, which was only some three or four inches in thickness, and gave way readily with a resounding " Crur-r-umph ! " After we had passed, the submarines and trawlers followed through the gap we had made as best they could, being many times turned aside.

The ice in its then soft, half-melted state was not a very formidable obstacle, the fields being only four or five hundred yards wide, with beautiful calm lagoons of pellucid water in between. In consequence the ship easily cut her way through, her speed was only slightly checked, and only very occasionally was she turned round. Overhead the sun glowed from a cloudless sky, while below fields of glittering ice and turquoise sea stretched as far as the eye could see in every direction, reflecting back the vaulted heavens. In every clear patch of water animal life was abundant; grampus, porpoise, and whales spouted and dived, while guillemots and gulls sat around and squabbled on the edge of the ice, and fat black seals basked on its surface. The latter were so indolent that they barely condescended to slide leisurely into the water, even when the ship was right upon them; in fact, they put off this necessary but unwelcome exertion until the last possible instant, and then had to scuttle hurriedly to avert a painful death. The whole scene was, in fact, a combination of zoo and fairy pantomime—one which tickled mightily our sense both of the artistic and of the ludicrous.

Whilst passing through these ice-fields the temperature remained rather low, with about 20 degrees of frost. Having reached our highest northern latitude in 72½ degrees, we turned south-easterly to make the

entrance of the Kola Inlet. This was by no means an easy problem, for we were rather uncertain as to our exact position, as also of the rate of the current which generally ran at some speed to the eastward, but of which the force could never be relied upon. Having run south-easterly a little while, we presently cleared the ice and found ourselves enveloped once more in a series of blinding snowstorms. This was awkward, for we had just learned by wireless from the British senior officer at Murmansk that the German submarines were before us in their spring outing, and had already laid one or two cargoes of their explosive eggs. It was imperative, therefore, to approach the Kola Inlet from a fixed direction, that being the only way in which we could keep the ship in deep water of a hundred fathoms or more, and so be safe from mines.

It was at noon on the 27th of April, 1917, that we at length sighted the glittering pinnacles and wedge-shaped masses of Kildin Island and the Ribachi Peninsula, which dominate the entrance of the Kola Inlet. When first seen these were still forty miles away. At the entrance of the Inlet itself we were met by some of the British mine-sweeping trawlers, and by them piloted through a series of snowstorms to Murmansk, Kola, Semenova—all names of the same place, the terminus of the then uncompleted railway to Petrograd. We were glad of this escort of trawlers to guide us into these, to us, new waters of the Kola Inlet, for, owing to the enormous quantities of iron ore in places on the Murman Coast, the compass needle is greatly affected when near the shore or in shallow waters; it is consequently sometimes totally unreliable. There is one specially awkward place some distance up the Kola Inlet at which ships have to make a double right-angled turn. And it is there, of all spots, that the compass plays its strangest tricks, for the needle swings round suddenly to an angle of nearly 90 degrees from the magnetic north. Should a snowstorm come on at the moment

a ship is passing this critical corner (a very common occurrence) and blot out the land, navigation becomes, indeed, a precarious and difficult art. The water is too deep for anchoring, and the ship must needs stop and drift blindly until the atmosphere clears once more. Thanks to our guiding trawlers we were spared this anxiety, but one of the convoy which I had brought out with me from home, the trawler *James Hunniford,* gave me cause for concern. Some hours before we reached the entrance of the Inlet she had been lost sight of during a snow-burst, and, as several hours after our arrival she had failed to put in an appearance, I began to have doubts as to whether she had lighted on a mine or in some other way had "done herself in." My fears, however, proved to be groundless, for the *James Hunniford* turned up smiling at a late hour the same night. We were enabled, after a short examination, to understand the simple explanation of all her wanderings and vagaries, many of which we had observed on the way out—there was no magnetic needle in her compass. They say that there is a little cherub which sits up aloft and looks out for the life of poor Jack. However this may be in the case of ordinary sailors, I feel convinced that there is a little imp, who lives in climes a good bit sultrier, who safeguards trawlermen. That a ship should steam thirteen hundred miles without a needle in her compass (this, of course, making the compass absolutely useless, and on a par with the wheel of a roulette table for navigational purposes) may seem strange; but what rendered it really extraordinary was the fact that the skipper of the *James Hunniford* apparently never suspected what was wrong; he doubtless noted that his compass seemed a bit uncertain of itself, but was in no way put out by the fact. Given a piece of string, a postage stamp, and a copy of the *Daily Mail,* any trawler skipper would expect to find his way readily to Heaven, Hell, or the uttermost parts of the earth. Whilst the *Intrepid* was in sight the *James*

Hunniford could, and did, steer by her, and ignore his compass. But when the *Intrepid* was lost to sight the trawler skipper doubtless had recourse to those black arts by whose means alone he could hope to get his ship safely into port, for I doubt if, at the moment he lost sight of us, he really knew within five hundred miles his ship's position. The voyagings of trawlers are as those of the beasts and fishes: they are mainly directed by instinct, and not, like those of other seamen, the products of thought and science.

CHAPTER IX.

RED TAPE, A SLEDGE, AND SABOTAGE, WHILE TRAWLERS HUNT THE HUN. A "DOC" WHO DOTES ON PARASITES—AND SNOWBALLS FOR A GUN.

HAVING delivered the squadron mails and despatches to the Senior Naval Officer, Murmansk, we all found ourselves busy giving information as to home affairs and in receiving and discussing the local news. Everyone seemed to anticipate that we should, during the coming season, have a lively time with submarines. The *Iphigenia*, who had preceded us by a few weeks, had already encountered a U-boat off the entrance, and the *Arctic Prince*, one of the British mine-sweeping trawlers, had, a fortnight before, struck a mine near the same spot, losing six men and seriously damaging her bows. But she was one of those sturdily-built pre-war trawlers, fitted with a watertight bulkhead forward, and, in spite of most extensive injuries, she remained afloat. In fact, at a later date, having had her jagged bows cut off, she was successfully towed back to England stern first.

The Russian Revolution was at that time, of course, an accomplished fact, though the Bolsheviki had not then made their appearance: in fact, in North Russia all news was very confused and contradictory, no one seeming to have any very clear idea of what was happening. With the captain of the *Glory* as cicerone, I went to pay my first official visit to the Russian Senior Naval Officer in his quarters ashore, this entailing my initiation into the dubious joys of a sledge drive. Perhaps it was a bad

time of the year for such a painful method of transit, for there was very little snow left on the main track. The agile, sure-footed little pony took us at full speed over railway lines, banks, and ditches, with never a slip—a process which we, seated as we were on the hard unyielding box honoured with the name of sleigh, found both productive of bruises and derogatory to the dignity of our office. On arrival at our destination we were cordially received by the Russian, who seemed to find his position somewhat painful, he being one of the old school and possessed of a courteous, well-bred demeanour. With Kerensky haranguing up and down the country, discipline had already become greatly relaxed; things were in a very touchy state, and most of the old-time officers had already been sent as prisoners to Petrograd. Of the sailors, the majority still saluted their officers. But with the soldiers this was a rare occurrence; we could see those on duty lolling stolidly about, smoking their cigarettes.

At Murmansk both the harbour and railway were under Russian control, as opposed to the British authority in force at Arkhangel and Yukanskie. The railway, with its lines laid on the bare snow, had run intermittently during the winter, but the greatest quantity of goods got through in one day had never exceeded nine hundred tons. At the time of our arrival this amount, owing to the rapid melting of the snow, was already greatly reduced, and in the near future might be expected to cease altogether. Red tape and officialdom were, of course, supreme—even the British Senior Officer was not allowed to land at the pier, and could obtain no pass to do so. Owing to the fact that ammunition was being disembarked there, the danger of fire was the reason officially given for this. Need I add that the workmen employed at this labour could generally be seen smoking vigorously, and that the very sentries placed there to prevent any danger of fire were also congenially occupied in the same manner.

This Russian Senior Officer was a very charming man, who spoke English fluently, and he greatly deplored our treatment in having to scramble over half a dozen steamers before we could get ashore. A pass which would have enabled us to land at the other pier was a matter not within his control; it had to be referred elsewhere—I fancy to Petrograd. I found him to be very pessimistic as to the outcome of the war, and especially as to the part his own country would play in it. Already, he told me, the Russian peasantry had quite made up their minds that the war was a personal affair between the Czar and the Kaiser, and no concern of theirs. Moreover, they maintained that that part of Russia then occupied by the Germans was not *really* Russian, but Polish and German. The peasantry, in fact, wanted peace at any price; he doubted whether his country would keep her word, and strongly suspected that she would make a separate peace. All which information, though it has subsequently proved to be correct, I did not find very cheering at the time.

The Kola Inlet is really a continuation of the Norwegian Fiords, and very different country to the monotonous rolling " tundras " to which we were accustomed at Yukanskie—barren lands which stretch for so many thousand miles to the eastward. At the time of our arrival the ice on the Kola River was commencing to break up, and the river itself was in violent flood. All day long great blocks of ice, bearing with them thousands of pine trunks, rocks and parts of houses, came crashing and grinding along our sides, borne by the rapid current. Overhead the sun blazed in a cloudless firmament, while ashore, among the feathery branches of the birch trees, the blue-white surface of the snow was broken by the outlines of innumerable black rocks which had pushed their way through. It was very beautiful, but it reminded one most absurdly of a white-topped, well-sugared plum-pudding, garnished with dark raisins and sultanas.

Our stay at Murmansk was pleasant in its way. Both we ourselves and the other ships based on Yukanskie during the previous season spent altogether five and a half weeks there. It was indeed not until the 6th of June that Yukanskie was reported clear of ice, and we found ourselves free to proceed there to inaugurate the opening of the Arkhangel season, the first ships of the year to enter the White Sea having done so on the 21st of May. These latter were a convoy of ten ships, and they experienced considerable difficulty before they got through to Arkhangel, one of them losing her propeller in the ice. The ice to the eastward of Yukanskie was then still solid and formidable, and had at any time a northerly wind set in it would probably have packed badly and, by its pressure, have been very dangerous to shipping.

But to return to Murmansk, where we were lying. The temperature gradually rose, there being never more than twenty degrees of frost, and after the middle of May it often thawed in the daytime. Snowstorms were indeed frequent, but the greater part of the time there was brilliant sunshine, and in that land-locked anchorage we experienced but two gales of any force.

For the season of 1917 in North Russia the British mine-sweeping forces on the station had been increased by the addition of eight trawlers. This brought the total number of those craft available to twenty-four—less the *Arctic Prince*, already hors de combat, thanks to her butting against an unmannerly mine. There was also an additional yacht, the *Sagitta*, for the use of the Senior Officer of Mine Sweepers; otherwise our squadron was the same as in 1916.

This small increment of force was very necessary, for besides the anticipated increase in virulence of the submarine campaign the Admiralty were also meditating a change of policy with regard to shipping for Arkhangel. Hitherto traffic for that port had skirted round Norway as far north as the ice permitted. But now it was

proposed that, in imitation of the German plan, merchant ships should make their way up inside the territorial waters of the Norwegian Fiords. Having thus gone on their way as far as possible in safety (so far as submarines were concerned), they were then, on reaching Vardo (the extreme north-eastern port of Norway), to be convoyed the remaining five hundred miles to Arkhangel. It will be seen that under this new scheme Yukanskie, being in the middle instead of at one end of the route, would lose much of its strategical importance. The question arose, therefore, as to whether there was no more suitable base available from which the convoys could be organised. In order to determine this, and after much discussion, I, on the 13th of May, visited Pechenga, lying to the westward of the Kola Inlet on the extreme western edge of North Russia. I was much impressed by its possibilities. Pechenga is, to all intents and purposes, a Norwegian fiord, but territorially it lay just inside the Russian frontier, Norway being only four miles distant. Opposite to it is Vardo. Only an hour's steam separated the two places, and Vardo was the place from which our convoys would have to sail. Close at hand to the west lay Kirkenaes, an important Norwegian port much frequented by German steamers, they visiting it to obtain the special iron-ores mined in the locality—ores of great importance for war purposes. Pechenga, moreover, is approached in deep water, and, like Murmansk, is for that reason practically unmineable. Its narrow entrance could also easily be defended against submarines by a single drifter armed with depth charges. This entrance opens into a magnificent land-locked harbour, with water not too deep for safe anchorage.

Our British trawlers at that time were very fond of prowling round in this likely neighbourhood, drawn as if by a lodestone by the proximity of the fat Hun merchant ships visiting Kirkenaes. Other German steamers were also in the habit of visiting the small neighbouring Norwegian coast towns for the purpose of collecting

food. This, in great part, was the flesh of seals, which were netted in great numbers around the coast, and whose drowned carcasses were reputed to be an important article of diet for British prisoners of war. Needless to say, these Hun merchantmen generally took the greatest care to remain inside territorial waters. But the sight of them annoyed and fascinated us greatly, and we were for ever devising schemes to lure them into some trap. The problem was greatly complicated by Norway claiming extra territorial waters outside the three-mile limit—a claim, however, not allowed by Britain. In the course of time it was found that near Kirkenaes there lay a strip of water outside the three-mile limit. It was a strip, moreover, which the Hun steamers were in the habit of passing across, for it was a short cut, saving them many miles of steaming. Needless to say, our trawlers were very fond of lying in wait there, totally indifferent to international squabbles as to territorial waters, and with rosy visions of prize money ever before their eyes. Alas that trawlers are such slow steamers, for one of them actually *did* intercept a German steamer near this spot. The joy of her crew was great as they listened to the soul-satisfying outburst of Teutonic curses as the Hun crew commenced to abandon their vessel. Unfortunately, however, before the deed could be completed, the German steamer drifted just inside the three-mile limit. A Norwegian gunboat, the *Raven*, happening at that moment to put in an unexpected and unwelcome appearance, the British trawler had to abandon her prey. Her undignified exit from the scene was made at her best speed, and, like some law-breaking motorist, without disclosing her identity. Such little incidents were a joy to us all, but the Norwegian Government having then and there taken the matter up diplomatically, a curt telegram from the British Admiralty promptly warned us to abate somewhat our misplaced zeal, a rebuff which I fear for the most part the trawler skippers received with their tongues in their cheeks.

Not having a great deal to do for the moment (there being an officer senior to myself in charge at Murmansk), I, with others, took the opportunity of our stay at that place, to land from time to time, and try and bag a little game. The snow just then was generally not more than three or four feet deep, much of it having been evaporated by the sun. In the drifts, however, it was very soft, and its depth was an unknown number of fathoms. Progress on foot was therefore both slow and exhausting, while the heat engendered by the direct rays of the sun caused all of us to stream with perspiration. The country was mountainous, covered with birch and larch woods, and we very soon noted that the surface of the snow was patterned with the broad-arrow foot-prints left by ptarmigan. Personally, I had no sporting gun with me, but armed with a somewhat defective miniature rifle, I spent many pleasant afternoons ashore in company with the ship's surgeon, tracking for all we were worth these foot-prints in the snow, after the best manner of Fenimore Cooper's Red Indians. Such chases proved to be both hot and arduous, but our first day's outing being successful, it stimulated our further efforts. We had tramped all the afternoon in a blazing sun up to our waists in snow, and had nearly given up hope, when I thought that I observed a slight movement twenty yards distant. There was, however, nothing visible, and we were just about to resume our tramp when I was again conscious of something moving. This time I looked very carefully, and at length realised that I was gazing into the black eyes of a hen ptarmigan, her white plumage being all but invisible against the snow. A lucky shot with my miniature rifle, and I had winged her as she squatted motionless; I was just about to spring forward to seize her, when I became conscious of yet further movements. There were two other birds, a cock and a hen, squatting motionless alongside the first. A second lucky shot, and I had hit the cock bird as well. Our excitement was great, for at that

moment my rifle jammed, and before I could fire a third shot. The doctor also had been unable to induce his rifle to go off and was commencing to dance and exercise his vocabulary—a safety valve to his pent up feelings, in which I, with my seaman's training, quickly surpassed him. Meanwhile the ptarmigan, having evidently abandoned further hopes of being able to pass themselves off as snow-balls, commenced to scuttle lightfootedly down the snowy hillside. We heavy-footed mortals blundered heavily after them, damning the high heavens as we went and hurling sticks, stones, and snow-balls, for lack of better ammunition. It was a long chase and a profane one, and for the most part breast deep in the snow. Sometimes we were on our feet, but more often we were struggling tortoisewise on our backs in the treacherous drifts. But, in the end, we had our reward; for we returned on board exhausted, perhaps, but triumphant—and with us a fine brace of ptarmigan to prove our hunting prowess and also to grace the festal board.

My companion, the ship's surgeon, was blest or cursed with an insatiable thirst for scientific knowledge, a thirst which found nothing too trivial or disgusting. From my point of view, the ptarmigan were beautiful objects, an interesting study in protective coloration, and most excellent eating. But the doctor desired above all things to burrow in their interiors, and, on receiving his promise not to spoil them for the table, I allowed him to open up their crops and entrails. The former of these organs we found to be full to bursting with birch buds, which, to judge by the plumpness of the birds themselves, must have been a nourishing diet. The entrails he searched for parasites, and, after exhaustive explorations with his knife, unearthed two disgusting looking tape-worms—a find which gave him as much joy as if he had discovered a gold mine. Their presence in my dinner-to-be did not fill me with pleasant reflections. And yet, in spite of my repugnance, the doctor

soon succeeded in interesting me in what would have been the life history of these horrors, had we not, by killing the ptarmigan, interfered with the plans of Nature. In the ordinary course, these tape-worms would have laid their eggs inside the birds, to pass out in due time still as eggs with the excreta. The excreta, in its turn, would have been devoured by a beetle, and the eggs it contained, hatching out inside this new host, would not have been tape-worms at all, but microscopic thread-worms who would have inhabited the insect's muscles. In these they would have laid their eggs and, the beetle having been eaten by a ptarmigan, the chain of Nature would have been complete—for this time the eggs would have hatched out in the likeness of their grand parents as tape-worms, and so on for endless cycles.

Chief among our sports and pastimes whilst waiting at Murmansk was rowing. In a vain-glorious and rash moment, the officers of the *Intrepid* had challenged their rivals in the *Iphigenia* to race them in six-oared galleys over a pre-arranged course. In a still weaker moment, I had promised to stroke the *Intrepid's* officers' crew, The galley proved to be an extremely heavy boat, far more suitable for contending with rough seas than with rival racing boats. However, having sown the wind, we now had to reap the whirlwind, and make the best show we could—intensive training, as understood in the Navy, was forthwith commenced. This training, besides curtailing grievously the allowance of drinks and cigarettes which we had hitherto thought good for ourselves, was strenuous in many other ways. I hardly think I am what would be considered a "feather bed" sailor, and, if anything, I pride myself on being somewhat more hardy than my fellows; but, to be turned out of my snug bed at six o'clock of an Arctic morning, to embark, clad only in shorts and the scantiest of underclothing, with a bitter wind, snow falling, and from ten to fifteen degrees of frost; and then, for half an hour,

to row a Noah's Ark among the ice floes—that was an experience which I will not readily forget so long as I have finger-tips. The pain from cold in one's digital extremities was exquisite, and many a time did I thank my stars that I had not been born a centipede.

The much-discussed race eventually came off on the 23rd of May, and we found ourselves soundly, but not ingloriously, beaten. The hated *Niffie Janes* had got away more speedily than ourselves at the start, owing to the greater lightness of their boat, but we came up steadily with them throughout the whole race. At the finish, to us who were rowing it looked like a dead-heat. The course pulled was only a half-mile, for both crews were under the false impression that they would thereby spare their untrained winds and muscles; whereas, as a matter of fact, there are no distances so exhausting as these short ones, which necessitate a continuous spurt the whole time, and give the crews no chance of getting their second wind. The victors having entertained the vanquished to drinks, we challenged them to a return race at the end of June, a proposal which they scornfully "turned down."

The *Vindictive*, however, having witnessed our defeat, evidently thought that they could go one better, and accepted the challenge of a race to be pulled in five-oared whalers. Ten days later, in mild weather, with no ice-floes to obstruct the course, we most soundly trounced them, beating them by three lengths. That was the last of our Arctic boat-races, for the summer was at hand, and with it the attentions of submarines and the necessities of shipping fully engrossed all our energies.

If, however, we no longer found ourselves free to indulge in boat-racing, the *Intrepid's* concert party, now known as the "Yukanskie Canaries," was still going strong. They had provided themselves with much new talent, also some theatrical wigs and other properties, and a remarkable piano which I had bought. Its owner

YUKANSKIE, principal base of BRITISH ARCTIC SQUADRON,
showing mine-sweeping trawlers, armed boarding steamer, &c.

had parted with it unregretfully for the sum of ten pounds before leaving Chatham. On every occasion before it was played the instrument required complete re-tuning, but the Chief Engineer made it his own foster-child, and surprised me by the melodies which he could rattle out of such a wheezy assortment of wires and bones. As was the case in the previous season, these concerts were never damned by the stigma of being "highbrow" or super-refined, but they eminently fulfilled a real purpose by the gaiety which their constant repetition spread throughout the squadron. Among the many new "star" performers who made their *début* this season one was a trawler skipper popularly known as the "North Sea Siren." He had lungs of leather, a throat of brass, and a wind pressure which would have put to shame many so-called high-pressure steam engines. It was not for the melodiousness of his voice that he was famed, but for its volume and penetration, for it was said (and I have no reason to doubt the truth of the story) that, when he chose to do so, he could easily make himself heard from one end of Yarmouth to the other end of Lowestoft. Another turn, equally popular in his way, was an officer belonging to the *Intrepid*, whose asset was in being bountifully provided by Nature with that anatomical protuberance known to the vulgar as a "bow window" or "Little Mary"; but, contrary to the ordinary course of Nature, this protuberance, in his case, instead of being soft and flaccid, proved to be a mass of indiarubber-like muscles. At our concerts this happy freak was wont to mount the stage, and therefrom invite all and sundry to "try their strength"—this by striking him with their bare clenched fists on his "Little Mary"—an invitation which most were very glad to avail themselves of. But all efforts to disturb the serenity of his smile proved fruitless. As well might they have punched a whale or an elephant—it was they themselves who rebounded from the force of the impact, while the individual himself remained

unmoved, and with the far-away smile of a Buddha. Even the ship's blacksmith, a black and hairy Hercules with a fist like a piston-rod, made not the least impression.

During the early summer of 1917 the discipline of the Russian Navy was daily becoming more undermined, and showed signs of breaking down altogether. Owing to the confusion of affairs at headquarters caused by the Revolution, neither the officers nor the men had received any pay for some time, and discontent was rife. Without the prior consent of her crew no Russian man-of-war could put to sea, and any officer against whom any member of the crew had a grievance, either real or imaginary, was at once superseded and sent as a prisoner to Arkhangel. Add to the difficulty which we had always experienced of persuading a Russian ship to go to sea the fact that sabotage and deliberate damage to machinery became increasingly prevalent, and it will be realised that the British artificers whom we sent to repair Russian vessels had an uninspiring task. Their annoyance was greatly aggravated by observing the attitude of the Russian crews, who, whilst they themselves were straining every nerve and sinew to complete the repairs, sat around smoking and spitting, without so much as lifting a finger to assist. But, to the credit of the British be it said, they never actively showed their annoyance, and, in spite of the Russians themselves, they kept the Russian ships going to the end of the season. This, too, despite the fact that, as soon as the ice broke up, the Russian trawlers with one accord attempted to bolt for Arkhangel, fully intending to remain there until they were frozen in once more for the winter.

Necessity, ever the mother of invention, had by this time caused us to try many experiments which at other times we would have regarded doubtfully. Some of these experiments proved of very real value, chief among which was a new method which we had devised

for shifting the damaged propellers of trawlers. At Murmansk there was of course, no dry dock, and, one of the Russian trawlers having bent all her propeller blades, we tried beaching her in the approved manner, with a view to heating the boss at low water. This, by expanding it, would allow of its being more easily removed. But the sand upon which the trawler rested proved to be too soft, and, as the tide fell, so did the trawler sink into it; by no means could we induce the boss to remain above water. Some new method had to be found, and it was the *Intrepid's* chief engineer and gunner who between them devised it. The trawler was once more floated off and got alongside the ship, and a stage rigged under her keel upon which a diver could work. The diver then drilled under water a series of holes in the propeller boss, and into these wedges were hammered and the boss thus split open. This accomplished, the propeller shaft was easily withdrawn into the trawler by means of folding wedges, leaving the damaged propeller behind. The new propeller was then put into its place, and the process reversed—the shaft being wedged out once more and the boss pushed home on to it by means of hydraulic jacks. The reader must not imagine that on the first occasion this was accomplished as easily as it reads, for our maiden effort lasted for twenty working days; but, with a little practice and experience, we found to a nicety just where to drill the holes and the minimum number necessary, and the transfer of propellers was effected within forty-eight hours. Henceforward we were independent of tides and weather for such work.

Perhaps the reader will wonder how it was that the diver was able to endure the intense cold under water in the Arctic, with the sea below the freezing point of fresh water. This was only possible owing to another invention of Mr. Warnes, the gunner of the *Intrepid*, who devised a special pair of under-water gloves. Before the invention of these gloves half an hour under water was

as much as most divers could stand. But after the gloves came into use the diver was generally bathed in perspiration and the only warm person in the party, for those engaged in the boat pumping air to him suffered bitterly from the cold.

But our stay at Murmansk was now rapidly drawing to a close. The spring was advancing by leaps and bounds, the rivers were all in violent flood, and the coast-line was rapidly clearing of ice to the eastward. On the 6th of June we commenced our summer flit to Yukanskie, but before I transport the reader with me I will first narrate some of the submarine incidents which had already occurred in our immediate vicinity at Murmansk.

CHAPTER X.

GUNS AND TORPEDOES STEAMERS HIT, YET SOMETIMES IS THE BITER BIT; AND THOUGH LAND DOGS DON'T EAT THEIR KIND, THE UNDERWATER DO—YOU'LL FIND.

THE first ship of the season 1917 to fall a victim to the spring campaign of the Kaiser's U-boats in the Arctic was the Russian s.s. *Olga*. She, on the 28th of April, was in latitude 71.40 N., longitude 32.9 E., and heading along happily to the south-south-east at nine knots. It was a glorious spring morning, with that wonderful weather, calm sea, and brilliant sunshine so common in those high latitudes at that season of the year. Like most of the other Russian merchantmen then plying to the Murman Coast, the *Olga* carried, besides her own seamen, a British gun's crew of two men to work the defensive armament of a 12-pounder gun mounted in her stern.

There appeared to be nothing in sight when, at 8.30 a.m., the *Olga's* crew were startled by the sound of an exploding shell, which splashed into the water close alongside them. Looking more attentively, they at length made out on their port quarter, and some five miles distant, a submarine just awash on the surface. The latter's large conning-tower had in reality been in sight for some little time, but, mistaking it for the upper sails of some square-rigged ship, hull down below the horizon, no one had heeded it.

The *Olga's* British gun's crew at once manned their gun and returned the U-boat's fire, but their gun was

only sighted for an extreme range of 8,100 yards. All their projectiles fell short, while those from the submarine began to fall around and over them. In vain did the *Olga's* master, by attempting to steer in the direction of the land, then eighty miles distant, endeavour to obtain shelter. Of the two vessels the submarine was much the speedier, and she, while carefully keeping herself out of range of the *Olga's* gun, constantly headed the latter away from her objective. The *Olga* found herself steering due north, with both the submarine and the desired land right astern. The *Olga's* smoke apparatus was then brought into use, but without success. In climes warmer than the Arctic this smoke apparatus was, I believe, of material use on many occasions in foiling the deadly attacks of submarines. But in the Arctic, on every occasion of which I have a record, it failed dismally. This apparatus, known as Type E., consists of boxes of chemicals which, having been thrown overboard by the pursued vessel, float on the surface and give off dense clouds of smoke. Under cover of this movement-concealing cloud of smoke the vessel then attempts to make her escape. At the same time the smoke also assists by preventing the submarine seeing where her projectiles are falling. In the case of the unfortunate *Olga*, however, the smoke entirely failed to rise more than four or five feet above the surface, and left her masts and the upper part of her hull fully exposed to view. In a very short time the submarine's shells began to find their target; six in rapid succession struck the doomed ship, one piercing her water-line forward and killing the cook. Thereupon the *Olga's* crew, with the exception of the master, chief engineer, and British gun-layers, fell into a state of panic. *En masse* they implored the master to surrender, and refused either to go below to double bank the boilers or to assist the British gun's crew. At 10.30 a.m., being hopelessly outranged and having fired twenty-nine futile rounds from his gun, Captain Stesser, the master, reluctantly ordered

the ship to be abandoned, and took to the boats. The ship had been in action for just two hours, and was badly down by the head owing to the shell-hole on her water-line forward. The boats having left, the submarine fired yet eight other rounds, which fell between them and the ship, and then closed. Her commander, a man of about forty, then asked for the *Olga's* orders, papers, et cetera, but in this matter Captain Stesser had been beforehand and had already destroyed them. He had, however, unfortunately left his chart, marked with the ship's track, on board, and this was taken by the U-boat's captain. This find doubtless proved of use to him in assisting him to hunt down other Allied vessels, for it would give a good clue as to which routes ships were at that time taking and as to where they might be looked for with most advantage.

Having laid their boat alongside the *Olga*, the submarine crew, who looked half starved, looted her most thoroughly, taking back with them food, clothes, chronometers and everything of the least value. Having done this, they placed two bombs in her hold and exploded them, whereupon she began to settle down slowly, although, when last seen about 1 p.m., she was still afloat.

Whilst his crew were thus congenially engaged, the submarine commander, a man who spoke both English and Lettish fluently, occupied himself in conversation with Captain Stesser. The latter asked him the reason as to why his submarine was so far out from the land, a query to which the German replied, "Because we know your track." The German then asked for the British gun's crew, but refrained from making them prisoners on Captain Stesser representing that all they had done was by his orders, and that, if they were to be made prisoners, then the same fate must be his also. Subsequently, the German commander expressed much amusement at the inefficacy of the British gun, and also much curiosity as to the purpose of the smoke-boxes, a "gadget" which was evidently new to him. He

stated that he would take both home and put them in a museum—an event which, according to a German wireless intercepted a few weeks later, actually took place.

This submarine, which had two guns and was apparently on her maiden voyage, was two hundred and sixty feet long. One of her commander's last queries of Captain Stesser was "How long he thought the war was going to last?" To this, the latter replied—"As long as you have anything to eat." The German then commented, "It can't last very long now. Any way, we have plenty of ammunition." This eliciting the instantaneous and somewhat obvious retort, "You can't eat that!"

This Hun undoubtedly behaved well according to his lights, and towed the boats (which had been badly damaged by bumping the submarine) for some twenty minutes. He then, however, suddenly dropped them in a great hurry, and went off at full speed towards the north, doubtless in pursuit of another victim. For, though nothing could be seen of the latter from the boats, their occupants could distinctly hear the sound of distant firing.

The *Olga's* crew, thus abandoned in leaky boats a hundred miles from land, spent twenty-six hours tossing on the open sea, suffering greatly from cold and wet. Then, however, they were providentially picked up by a Norwegian motor-drifter, who landed them at Berlevaag, in Norway, whence they made their way to Murmansk, at which place I interviewed them a fortnight later.

The next victim of "frightfulness" in the Arctic which came to my ears was also a Russian, the s.s. *Truwor*. She was sunk by a U-boat five days after the *Olga*—that is to say, on the 3rd of May. In her case the vessel was fortunate enough to be close to the entrance of the Kola Inlet. After comparing the descriptions which I have received, I have no doubt that the *Truwor's* fate was brought about by a different

submarine to that which administered the *Olga's coup de grâce*.

The time was just a quarter after midnight, and it was of course broad daylight, with a calm sea and land in sight to the southward. During the voyage, the two men of the British gun's crew on board the *Truwor* had taken it in turns to do watch and watch about at their weapon. Watch had just been relieved, and one man had just gone down to his cabin, but, feeling uneasy, was peering through the scuttle: He could, however, see nothing. The other man on duty at the gun was also looking round with his binoculars, but neither could he see anything suspicious. Suddenly, without any warning, a torpedo struck the ship under number two hold, and within seven minutes the ship had foundered. However, all the crew, with the exception of the chief engineer (he was never seen again after the torpedo exploded), managed to get safely away in the boats before the ship sank under them.

Up till then, nothing had been seen of the submarine, nor had even the track of the torpedo been observed. But as soon as the crew had got away in the boats a periscope appeared, and, after regarding them for a short space with its cold eye, the U-boat herself rose to the surface and approached them. The Commander of the pirate was a fat red-faced fellow, and his crew appeared to be decidedly better nourished than those of the *Olga's* submarine—doubtless they had had more extended opportunities of looting and obtaining food from stricken ships. In number they exceeded fifty. The German in command, speaking English, inquired of the *Truwor's* master where his British gun's crew were; but the latter, with more patriotism than veracity, answered that they had "gone down with the ship." Apparently satisfied by this reply, the U-boat then made off, and four hours later the *Truwor's* boats were picked up by the British patrol, who took them to Murmansk.

Up till this time, as will have been seen, the U-boats had been having things pretty much their own way. On this Arctic Coast of Russia were no fast destroyers, no air craft, neither were there submarine mines nor nets. There was, in fact, nothing that could hunt them, nothing that would make of the lives of their crews a haunting terror, such as at times they often became in home waters. But the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, and, as I will presently show, even up there, in the bare and frozen Arctic, the bones of the U-boat seaman and those of his hapless victims lie not far apart. On those deep coral bottoms, the hulls, both of the destroyer and the destroyed, rest close together.

The British s.s. *Palmbranch* was the first of those who turned the tables on the destroyer that lurks at noonday. She was commanded by Captain Malling, than whom no finer officer existed in our merchant navy—one, in fact, whose courage and skill have been recognised by the bestowal of a D.S.O. with bar. His ship had among her cargo a large quantity of high explosives and poison-gas, and mounted an American 13-pounder gun aft. This gun was a concession to the insistent demands of the master, he having previously been chased and shelled in a gunless ship by a submarine. But, purely by his own skill, seamanship, and resolution, he had escaped destruction, and brought his ship safely into port—the scars of battle still showing in the *Palmbranch* when she arrived in the Arctic. Captain Malling had organised his crew as efficiently as those of a man-of-war; everything had been thought out beforehand. Apparatus was in readiness to deal with fire, gas-masks had been served out, and various officers and men were detailed to assist with the gun, to spot the fall of the shot, to take notes, and even to make sketches. In fact, nothing which could be foreseen had been left to chance.

It was under these circumstances that, at a quarter

to four on the afternoon of the 4th of May, 1917 (the day following the *Truwor* incident, and not far from the same spot), the *Palmbranch* was zigzagging her way towards the entrance of the Kola Inlet. The weather was calm and clear, the land already in sight, and no special warnings had been received as to the presence of submarines in the vicinity. Most people would have thought, under the circumstances, that the dangers of the voyage were practically ended, and would have relaxed their vigilance. Not so in the *Palmbranch;* every man was at his station, and the gun ready, loaded with a projectile and cartridge.

Suddenly one of the gun's crew saw a stationary periscope only sixty yards distant on the vessel's port beam. At the same instant, and before any action could be taken, a white track of bubbles, marking the course of a torpedo, was seen racing towards the ship. The track passed two or three feet from her stern, and there can be no doubt that the torpedo itself passed under her, but too deep to strike her.

Instantly the men at the *Palmbranch's* gun slammed-to the breech and laid their sights to zero. As they did this the conning-tower of a submarine rose on the port quarter, barely forty yards away; then the deck itself emerged from the water.

Such a target at point blank range comes not often to naval gunners, and it was one which was not likely to endure for many happy golden seconds. A flash, a roar, and the *Palmbranch's* first shell struck the U-boat at the base of her conning-tower, just at the point where it joined the deck; and where it struck it tore great gaps and rents. Five seconds later and a second shell had burst on the submarine's water-line forward. Only two rounds with a small gun, but they were enough. The submarine, which appeared to be stopped, rolled slightly, then took a list, and sank vertically out of sight—never to rise again.

But though she had sunk her antagonist, the *Palm-*

branch was not yet out of the wood; for the U-boat had a mate close at hand intent on revenging her companion. Within a minute of having "put under" the first submarine those on board the *Palmbranch* sighted a periscope moving to the eastward, 4,500 yards distant on their starboard quarter. Once more they opened fire, and the periscope dipped; nothing more was seen of it for twenty minutes. And then, at ten minutes past four o'clock, a submarine rose to the surface three and a half miles away. With her two guns the new antagonist opened fire at 7,000 yards range, the first shot falling half a mile short. But gradually the projectiles crept up nearer and nearer, until one flopped into the water only fifty feet from the *Palmbranch's* stern, and directly in line with it. Fortunately, from there it ricochetted high overhead and passed above the ship, doing her no damage.

It is hardly necessary to add that during this interval the *Palmbranch* herself was not idle, but was replying vigorously to the enemy fire. In fact, during forty-five minutes she loosed off no less than eighty rounds. But the steamer was a big target, and it looked as though in the end she must succumb to the longer range weapon and heavier projectiles of her antagonist. However, at the critical moment, at a time when it seemed almost certain that the next German shell must be a hit, one of the *Palmbranch's* own projectiles took effect. It struck the submarine abreast her after gun and knocked it out, and from whose vicinity dense clouds commenced to issue. Almost immediately the submarine broke off the action and headed away to the northward on the surface. She had swallowed a bigger pill than she was able to digest when she had challenged the *Palmbranch*.

To this affair of the *Palmbranch* there was an interesting aftermath. It was observed that when the first submarine sank at 3.45, a conical object floated away from her. The general opinion at Murmansk at the time was that this submarine was a mine-layer

and that the object seen to float away was a mine which had become detached. I personally was of another opinion and, in sending my report to the Admiralty, stated that I believed it to be something entirely different, namely, a telephone buoy. All German submarines at that date carried in the structure of their hulls a large buoy; this buoy, in the event of the vessel sinking accidentally, could be released from the inside and would float up to the surface. Each buoy was fitted with a watertight telephone, and it enabled a rescuing party on the surface to converse with those imprisoned in the sunken submarine.

Subsequent events seemed to prove that my theory was the correct one, for, exactly four weeks later, on the 1st of June, I learnt from Russian sources that a buoy answering to this description had been found. It was in the possession of some Lap fishermen residing at a small village on the coast more than a hundred miles distant to the eastward, the place being called Litzki. Another month passed by before I could get further information on the subject, and then it was Captain Hurt, in the yacht *Sagetta*, who succeeded in obtaining it. With gifts of tea and sugar he had bribed the natives to give up its possession, and he had then brought it back with him. Through an interpreter, whom I also sent to the spot, I at the same time learnt something of its history.

It appears that Dvoravaya Bay, the spot where the buoy was actually found, was an uninhabited spot. But it was a place constantly visited by the fishermen-trapper coast-dwellers of the surrounding districts for the purpose of collecting drift-wood for fuel, for great quantities of that commodity normally drift into the bay. It was about the 22nd of May that one of these visiting parties found the buoy resting on *the outer edge of the fixed winter ice*, this fact proving that it was no relic of the previous season, as might otherwise have been the case. For, had that been so, the buoy would have been

inside the winter ice instead of on the outside edge of it. At first the fishermen, taking the buoy to be a mine, had fired their rifles at it. But, nothing happening as a result of this rash treatment, they presently gained courage and took it into their boat, and thus conveyed it to their homes at the Litzka River, sixteen miles distant. There the natives dismantled it of all its chains, wires and anything else which could possibly be of use to them; but they left *in situ* the record of most interest to us, namely, the big brass plate let into the head of the buoy. Upon this was inscribed:—*Nicht offnen. Telefonbote liegen lessen! Telegraphieren sofort liegestelle an U-bootswen, Kiel. Unterseeboot 75 hier gesunken.* (Translation: "Do not open. Leave telephone buoy lying! Telegraph immediately position to U-boats' base, Kiel. Submarine 75 sunk here.")

From the evidence which I have now given, I think no other conclusion is feasible than that this telephone buoy was the object seen to detach itself from the submarine "put under" by the *Palmbranch* on the 4th of May. It was the final proof, if any were still needed, that she had really sunk her antagonist. The buoy was, indeed, found one hundred and twenty miles from the scene of the action, but the known set of the current, and also the prevailing direction of the wind in the interval, would have tended to drift it that way. To account for the buoy being at the position in which it was found would have necessitated only a daily average movement easterly of eleven or twelve miles—a most ordinary rate. Add to this the fact that no other ship claimed to have sunk a submarine east of the North Cape that season, and probability merges into certainty. The U 75 class were large mine-layers, then the latest of their kind, and carrying a load of thirty-six mines. They were designed for work in distant waters, but were not a great success, and many of them came to grief during the war.

It remained until the closing months of 1921 for the full significance of this sinking of the U 75 to become

apparent. It only became so when the Germans published the full official reports of the doings of their submarines. From these it was discovered that almost exactly a year previously to the events here narrated—that is to say, in the spring of 1916—the U 75 had laid thirteen mines off Scapa Flow. Of these, twelve were destroyed by the British sweepers, but the thirteenth, which remained undiscovered, sank H.M.S. *Hampshire* with Lord Kitchener on board. Thus by the instrumentality of the s.s. *Palmbranch*, which totally destroyed the U 75 with all her crew, was Lord Kitchener avenged in Arctic waters twelve months after his death.

The bad luck of the U 75 herself was probably due to the *Palmbranch's* zealous zigzagging. The latter had just altered course on one of these zigzags, when the submarine, who had doubtless marked her from afar, had put up her periscope to deliver the final blow with a torpedo. Owing to the steamer's sudden alteration of course the submarine found herself unexpectedly right on top of her proposed victim, and in imminent danger of destruction by collision or from the explosion of her own torpedo. Stopping her engines, and also putting over her helm to avert this, at once brought the submarine to the surface, with the satisfactory results, from the British point of view, which I have just narrated.

This was, however, by no means the only success scored by British merchantmen, *en route* for the Arctic, against the Kaiser's "unterseeboots," for the s.s. *Cotovia* carried out a most successful action, and also destroyed her opponent. It was at ten-thirty of the morning of the "glorious 1st of June" that she was zigzagging along on a north-easterly course, her speed being ten knots and the weather in conformity with the title of the date. She was in a position in latitude 68.49 north, and longitude 5.20 east, when the look-out reported a sail on the port bow; whereupon Captain Bryant, the master of the *Cotovia*, despatched an officer

aloft with glasses to investigate. The officer's report corroborated that of the look-out man, and stated that the ship in sight appeared to be a barque, hull down, with square sail and a fore-and-aft mizen showing above the horizon. Captain Bryant, however, still remained somewhat uneasy in his mind and dissatisfied about the matter, and altered his ship's head to the south-eastward so as to bring the strange sail astern. Heading thus, he soon ran it out of sight; this accomplished, he resumed his old course and his zagzagging. Judge of his surprise, therefore, when, half an hour later, the suspicious sail once more reappeared, and this time half a point further forward. Such a happening was more than suspicious. Without further ado the *Cotovia* was headed almost due south, and steam worked up for full speed. Twelve knots was quickly attained, but, in spite of this, the stranger still continued to gain and to rapidly overhaul the *Cotovia* from astern. As she got closer still there could no longer be any possible room for doubt—it was a submarine which they were looking at, and one whose large conning tower had, in the distance, looked like the square upper sails of a ship.

Half an hour after noon, the submarine being then about five miles distant, the ball commenced by the U-boat firing a shot which fell into the water nearly a mile short. At 9,000 yards range the *Cotovia* replied with her 10-pdr. Russian gun, and shortly afterwards she also brought her smoke apparatus into use. But this, as in the case of the *Olga*, proved to be quite ineffective, the smoke not rising sufficiently high above the water. The submarine's attack then became most determined, and, unlike most of her confrères, she did not trouble to keep outside the range of the *Cotovia's* weapon, but kept doggedly closing. Thus the action raged, with at first *apparently* no hits to register on either side.

By 3 p.m. the *Cotovia* had fired sixty-one rounds and was beginning to run short of ammunition. Thinking

there was little or no hope of saving his ship, the master then burnt all his secret orders and wireless codes, and provisioned his boats preparatory to the worst. At ten minutes past three, however, the submarine unexpectedly ceased fire, and, to economise ammunition, the *Cotovia* did the same, hoping that later on the U-boat might present a more favourable target. It was then noticed for the first time that the submarine was listing considerably to port, and had commenced to swing round in the same direction. A moment later and the submarine was lying broadside on to them with her engines stopped. In this position the German fired two final spiteful rounds at the *Cotovia* from her after gun, and those two rounds it was which sealed her own fate. The shells passed within a few feet of the *Cotovia*, but did her no harm, and to them she replied with half a dozen rounds from her own miniature cannon. Of these two at least got home—one striking the submarine's waterline below the base of the conning tower, the other landing on her deck just before it. This was the last shot of the action. As the Britishers gazed they saw the submarine heel over more and still more, then gradually sink out of sight horizontally, her engines stopped, and her crew all on deck. It was the last that was ever seen of them, for it was a long way to Germany, and I don't fancy any of them ever got there. Doubtless they have gone to join their companions of the U 75 in that place wherein " there is no more sea."

In explanation of the fact that it was the submarine who first broke off the action, it is probable that, in the heat of action, the *Cotovia*, unknown to herself, had damaged the submarine's foremost gun. The fact only became evident by the submarine turning away. Once more had the bull-dog tenacity of a British merchant seaman defeated Hun " frightfulness."

These four actions which I have just related took place while the Yukanskie division were still awaiting at Murmansk the breaking up of the ice. There were

many other minor incidents, but the only one I consider worthy of setting forth here is a little episode which befell the British submarine E 39—she being one of the two whom the *Intrepid* had escorted to the Arctic. This British submarine, E 39, was, on the 26th of May, cruising on the surface in latitude 70.50 north, longitude 31.15 east, sharply on the *qui vive* for enemy underwater craft. It was just ten p.m. when, on her port bow and some 600 yards distant, the air-splash caused by the discharge of a torpedo was both seen and distinctly heard. Almost at the same moment the conning tower of a U-boat momentarily broke the surface and then disappeared. Like lightning, the E 39 starboarded her helm, in order to get end on to the enemy, and thus to present to her the smallest target possible. She was barely in time, for, as she turned, a " Mouldy " (torpedo) whizzed past within a few inches of her stem.

Making a pretence of not having noticed anything, the E 39 continued upon her course on the surface, while the U-boat, for her part, remained submerged and invisible. Thus they continued until eleven p.m. (it of course being broad daylight in those latitudes), at which hour the Britisher, in her turn, dived, and returned underwater to look for her late antagonist. All night she cruised thus, only showing the tip of her periscope above water, and remaining in the vicinity of the previous day's incident. Nothing however was seen, so, at ten thirty a.m., she rose to the surface once more to recharge her batteries. She had been thus engaged for about half-an-hour, when, on the port bow, she sighted a periscope distant four hundred yards. Once more the E 39 " acted innocent "—and continued her course on the surface—to subsequently dive and return as before. But the enemy boat was not seen again; she had probably thought better of the matter, and moved to some " healthier " spot.

It was a blind game, this submarine hunt submarine, and one in which luck was undoubtedly the predominant

factor. Such as it was, however, a few, if not a great number of successes were scored by it during the war. The recharging of batteries was a matter which always had to be done from time to time, and for this it was necessary to rise to the surface. In dark weather at night this was a fairly safe operation; but in the continuous daylight of the Arctic summer it was a matter fraught with considerable peril, and therein was the factor of luck greatly magnified. It might happen that when your own boat rose to the surface to recharge, an enemy submerged lay close at hand—in which case you were fully exposed to the enemy torpedoes, while the enemy himself remained safe, unguessed at, and invisible. And a torpedo, striking a submarine, entailed almost certainly the instantaneous annihilation of her whole crew. But the luck might equally well be the other way round; in which case it was the enemy who was annihilated, without being given a chance to strike back. However, our submarines in the Arctic, though they never had the good fortune to destroy any of those of the enemy, by their presence undoubtedly gave him a fit of nerves, and caused him to remain under as much as possible. They thus greatly hampered his baleful activities in the pursuit of merchantmen, for the range of vision from a low-lying periscope is very limited.

But our stay at Murmansk was now drawing to a close. I will now take the reader with me to Yukanskie, for which anchorage we sailed at seven p.m. on the 6th of June, 1917.

CHAPTER XI.

BACK AT YUKANSKIE THE RIVALS TRY TO WIPE EACH ONE THE OTHER'S EYE; WHILE "FRITZ" IS HOT ALONG THE ICE, AND SWANK IS PROVED A PEARL OF PRICE.

ON reaching open water outside the Kola Inlet at about nine p.m. on the 6th of June, we discovered that we were in for a boisterous night. There was a fierce north-west wind blowing, accompanied by a big sea and exceedingly heavy snow, the latter completely shutting out the land for the greater part of our voyage. Zigzagging continually, we made the best speed we could, this, however, being limited to fourteen knots, owing to the presence of our slower companion, the *Iphigenia*. By six o'clock the following morning we were in sight of Cape Cherni, two hours' steam to the westward of Yukanskie, and shortly afterwards we entered the small harbour of Ivanoski, which nestles under its lee. At Ivanovski we found our two colliers and two out of the three armed boarding steamers, the third being on patrol duty not far away. Hitherto we had been in deep water, and, therefore, in no great danger from mines; but to the eastward of Cherni the water shoals rapidly, and the probabilities were that the U-boats had been before us and mined the approaches to Yukanskie. For this reason the squadron had first assembled at Ivanovski, the slower ships being sent in advance, and thence, the mine-sweeping trawlers having arrived, we sailed in company at one p.m. on the 7th of June.

As we once more proceeded east at nine knots the trawlers, with their mine-sweeps out, headed our long and somewhat straggling procession, we, of course, being very careful to keep in their wake and follow directly astern of them. Somewhat to our surprise, no mines were encountered, and we eventually anchored at Yukanskie at 8.30 p.m. without further incident. It was with a sense of relief that I heard the chain-cables rattle out of our hawse-pipes after my twenty-four hour vigil. As they did so there came a rift in the black snow-clouds, and the all-night sun burst forth in his glory; his rays, reflected pinkly from the shimmering fields of snow, gave us a dazzling welcome, and Yukanskie itself, perhaps one of the loneliest and most barren places on earth, was for a moment beautiful. Thanks, I suppose, to our associations of the previous year, it imparted for the nonce a restful and homelike feeling, and yet, like all things of beauty, it brought back a restless longing for our own homes in smoky England, at that moment more than thirteen hundred miles distant.

This restful feeling was not long to endure, however. I scarcely seemed to have got to sleep (though, as a matter of fact, it was not until five o'clock the following morning) when I was aroused by the decoding officer. He reported that the A.B.S. *Grive*, whom I had left on patrol duty off Cape Cherni, was in action with an enemy submarine.

The encounter which was then taking place was in a position fifteen miles north-west of Cherni, where the *Grive* was on the look-out to meet and direct incoming merchant vessels at the spot at which they converged fan-wise from the north on Yukanskie. It was at 4.45 a.m. when one of these vessels, the valuable and heavily-loaded *Manchester Engineer*, zigzagging her cumbrous way eastward for Yukanskie, suddenly found herself the focus of a hail of projectiles, these being her first intimation of the presence of a hitherto unobserved submarine. The *Manchester Engineer*, taken by surprise

though she was, did her best to reply to this fusilade with her own little twelve-pounder. But from the first things went badly for her; she was greatly outranged and, almost at the start, her side was ripped open by a German shell. She would have undoubtedly been " done in " had not the *Grive*, who happened to be in sight and to have observed what was toward, at that moment come up. The submarine, preoccupied with her prey, did not at first notice the *Grive's* approach, or, if she did, she probably took her for another merchantman. It thus happened that the *Grive* managed to get in nearly ten minutes' firing before the U-boat tumbled to the altered circumstances of the case and made a rapid exit in the direction of the sea bottom. Unfortunately, submarines are a somewhat small target, and the range was long—8,000 yards. Visibility was also very bad at the time, owing to the distortion caused by the refraction of the atmosphere, and also to the difficulty of picking out a grey submarine against the similar coloured background of the Sem Islands. Had this not been so, the end of this story would probably have been different. As it was, the *Grive* could but follow up along the track left by the diving submarine, and drop a depth-charge or two by way of final benediction at the spot near which it was hoped the submerged and invisible submarine was cruising.

Probably neither the *Grive's* projectiles nor her depth-charges did the U-boat any physical damage. But the moral effect of depth-charges was likely to be considerable, for at that time submarine crews were known to be in abject terror of them and greatly to over-estimate their explosive force. For terror of depth-charges many an underwater boat commander had been known to bring his craft to the surface and to surrender when, in actual fact, his boat was little, if at all, injured, and quite capable of remaining submerged. In consequence of this known fact British commanders never lost any opportunity, however remote, of dropping these useful deterrents.

For the latter could be relied upon to shake up the morale, and possibly the physical efficiency, of this, the most slippery of all their enemies.

Yukanskie itself we did not find to be changed much since the previous year. The Russians, however, had erected during the winter a considerable number of huts to form a settlement, as well as a wireless station and a building to receive the end of the submarine cable being brought from England. The latter was to communicate with Murmansk and Arkhangel, and had a loop passing through Yukanskie. We had brought with us from home a new large-scale chart of the harbour, based upon the Russian survey of the previous autumn. It was one upon which the Russians themselves gazed with envy, for their own hydrographical department had failed to give birth to a corresponding production. Such as it was, this plan of Yukanskie was far better than any we had hitherto possessed; but even so it was still painfully inaccurate, the very leading marks into the harbour itself having been marked on a wrong bearing. This in reality did not matter much, for, during the winter, the Russians had succeeded in wrecking so many vessels on the various rocks that the latter had, by reason of the wrecks upon them, become so well advertised as to render a chart almost superfluous.

Needless to say, I took an early opportunity of calling on my Russian friends, Commandant C—— and his wife. The latter, I ascertained, had not moved outside her front door since the previous November, on the date upon which the *Intrepid* had sailed for home.

There were by this time dwelling at the log-village which had arisen at Yukanskie some three or four hundred Russians—workmen, soldiers, sailors and a few of their wives. But of far greater interest than these, especially to my younger officers, was an ancient Russian whaler which had arrived, and was now occupying the best anchoring billet in the harbour. The reason for this interest was not far to seek, for this ancient whaler

was posing as a hospital ship, though there was nothing in her fittings, either internal or external, to support the fact, save an ill-painted red cross on her side. But it was not her potentialities to relieve sick and suffering humanity which interested the gay and gallant youth of the *Intrepid*. Far from it; it was the flutter of a feminine skirt on board the old whaler which had caught the eye of one of them. Further investigation through a telescope proved that there were no less than three real live red cross nurses on board the vessel—all of them flaxen haired and of the most comely type.

The ship having been christened the *Intrepid*, it was but natural that her officers should wish to live up to the name under which they sailed. A deputation was accordingly deputed to visit the ancient whaler, having for its avowed object the proposed entertainment of the three red cross nurses at a sylvan picnic ashore by the aforementioned young officers. The invitation was graciously accepted, and arrangements were made that, on the following day, the motor-boat should call for the ladies and take them with their hosts to a pleasant and secluded waterfall. We regarded the matter as being as good as settled; but therein we had reckoned without our Jacob—the officers of the supplanting *Niffie Jane*. At the appointed hour our motor-boat called alongside the whaler's gangway, just in time to observe the *Iphigenia's* boat leaving by the opposite one, and taking in her *our* three red cross nurses. These guileless maidens, to whom all sailors and all ships' boats looked alike, had been shamelessly abducted by the *Niffie Janes*. For the latter had represented that they were the *Intrepid's* officers and that their boat was the *Intrepid's* boat.

Needless to say, an incident such as this did not tend to improve the but lightly veiled hostility already existing between the two rival sister ships—a rivalry greatly increased by our defeat in the boat race. The *Niffies* had once more scored heavily over us; but within a month

we had our revenge. We succeeded in raising a laugh at their expense which entertained the whole squadron and whose echoes reverberated for many months afterwards. It came about thuswise:—

Upon the squadron's arrival at Yukanskie the two rivals set about their own special jobs, both of them for the time being as busy and ambitious as bumble-bees. The *Intrepid's* special line was the erection of a war signal station on the highest point of Vitte Island. From thence a view of the sea for thirty miles in every direction could be obtained, and the ships in harbour could be informed by signal of everything which came in sight. Within a week of its inception was this, our first labour, concluded. We were able to gaze with the pride of a property owner upon a brand-new signal station, with platform, signal-mast, semaphore, and sentry-box complete; also a well-appointed domicile, which had been rendered mosquito-proof, in which the crew could sling their hammocks. Its crowning triumph was the oven, designed and made on board from steel plates, in which the crew could roast their meat. We found ourselves with a breathing space, during which we could look around and watch the progress of our rivals.

The *Niffie Jane*, however, was not lightly to be beaten. Less elegant perhaps than our own work, theirs was certainly not less ambitious. The *Iphigenia* was in particular the parent ship of the British trawlers, in contradistinction to the *rôle* of the *Intrepid*, whose duties lay with the armed boarding steamers and Russian trawlers. The former's ambition, therefore, was to construct safe housing on shore for the multitudinous stores which she carried for her trawlers—stores with which her own limited hold space was overflowing. It was with this object in view that she had collected an enormous number of the drifting pine-logs which were floating about the harbour, and, after infinite labour, had hauled them up on shore and commenced the erection of a vast log store-house in the supposed Russian style.

It was the sight of this massive mausoleum, sprawling its clumsy wooden length over the landscape, which aroused our mirth and mischief-loving instincts. It presented to us the opportunity for which we had long sighed, of getting our own back from the hated *Niffie Jane*. Day after day we watched the titanic labour, and, as we watched, brooded on our wrongs re the matter of the Red Cross nurses. A month elapsed, and at length the edifice was complete, presenting to our inappreciative eyes the forlorn and deserted aspect of a sea-bathing establishment in the " off " season. Into just such an establishment we determined to convert it, and at the same time considerably to brighten up its appearance.

That night, at about 11 p.m., an hour by which the sun's shadows were long drawn out and it was hoped that all good sailormen would be in bed and asleep, a group of strange-looking individuals, attired as harmless Laps, might have been seen landing in a ship's dinghy and clambering up the rocks towards the *Niffie's* mausoleum. With them they carried sundry pots, boards and carpenter's tools, and having arrived abreast this St. Paul's-by-the-Sea, they began to act in a very un-Laplike manner. One party rapidly painted the whole fabric from end to end with gorgeous scarlet and white stripes. A second, armed with nails, hammers and saws, quickly altered the surrounding scenery after the manner of stage carpenters, and, having done this, affixed a number of ready-prepared notice-boards which they had brought with them. A third party with busy fingers greased the whole landing slip from end to end. These operations completed, the whole group, after having taken a series of photographs of the result of their labours, retreated to their boat and sought safety on board their own ship.

It was Revenge, sweet and beautiful as the heart of man could desire. A Cockney excursionist, could he but had been brought thither in an aeroplane and dropped in front of the *Iphigenia's* log-hut, must inevitably have believed himself at Margate. The crimson and white

stripes with which the edifice was decorated were but a small part of the scheme, for, painted on a board which ran the whole length of the building, was inscribed in twelve-inch letters: "*Niffie Jane's* select bathing establishment." Following this were other notices, which stated: "Pay here before bathing"; "Tea and shrimps, 6d."; and "Very mixed bathing" (this a cut at the hospital nurses). To further add to the holiday touch, various other legends ran: "Photos taken while you wait," and "Coco shies, three balls a penny." The massive log door having defied all efforts to force it, the matter was compromised by painting across it "Bank of England," and, lest the war should be entirely forgotten, a notice was put above the flat roof: "Landing-place for aeroplanes." The final touch before departure was the complete greasing of the landing-slip from end to end; nothing less surefooted than a spider or a fly could by any means traverse it. To it was then affixed a notice: "C——'s water-chute," C—— being the Engineer officer of the *Iphigenia*, the architect and author of the abomination.

At an early hour the next morning the delinquents were called, and their joy was made complete by observing through their telescopes the approach of the creator to his creation. Hastily he stepped ashore, anxious to observe what fungus growth had, during the night, disfigured his handiwork. Oblivious of the notice-board, he sprang on to the jetty, and the resulting double somersault with which he realighted in his boat assured the watchers that the "chute" was functioning properly and that their night's labour had not been in vain.

Once aroused, a blood feud such as this between two rivals such as the *Intrepid* and *Iphigenia* could, of course, not end there; moreover, the memory of it was constantly being kept green by the fact that each ship, on her way in or out of harbour, made a point of signalling to the *Niffie*, complimenting her on the improved appearance of her hut, and asking for particulars as to

the "mixed bathing," et cetera. With varying success, the combat between the two rivals swayed backwards and forwards until the end of the season.

At that time the trawlers were bringing in large quantities of fish, trawled in the intervals of mine-sweeping, for the use of the squadron. This fish often amounted to several tons a day, and was more than could be eaten, although we gave vast quantities to the Russians on shore. To prevent the surplus being wasted, the *Intrepid* made a small wooden hut in which the fish could be smoked, and this hut it was which the *Niffies* decorated, in their turn, after a feeble fashion. But it was not long before the *Intrepid* retaliated and again wiped their rival's eye.

It happened that two trawlers had both damaged their propellers and required to have them shifted at the same time; wherefore the work was divided between the two cruisers, each undertaking to put one trawler to rights. The *Iphigenia*, who had at various times expressed great contempt for the *Intrepid's* method of doing this under water by means of divers—stigmatising the latter as slow, uncertain, and dangerous—proceeded to take her charge to Ivanovski for the purpose of beaching her. This, of course, necessitated her stopping all repair work on other trawlers, and the employment of her whole ship's company of two hundred men on the work in hand. Not until she had left did the *Intrepid* commence work with her own two divers and half a dozen men, and within twenty-four hours she had completed it. Two days later, after many bombastic wireless signals reporting progress, the *Niffie* reappeared on the scene accompanied by her trawler, expecting to find the *Intrepid* not yet half-way through her job. To her intense chagrin, not only did she find the job completed, but the trawler herself, with steam up, awaiting to challenge her arrival at the entrance. Thus did the rivalry continue with unflagging zeal, with plot and counter-plot, jibe, jeer, and repartee, until finally the gales and

icy grip of winter rendered further communication between the ships impossible. To the rest of the squadron, as well as to our own two selves, these little bouts were a never failing source of amusement.

But the reader must not imagine that in such light comedy only was passed the life of the Arctic Squadron. Tragedy lurked in every mile of ocean highway, and the Kaiser's U-boats were becoming more and ever yet more pressing in their attentions.

The 7th of June was the day on which we had arrived at Yukanskie, and the reader will remember that it was early on the following day that the *Manchester Engineer* had been attacked off Cherni. The same afternoon the lighthouse-keeper on Svyatoi Nos raised an alarm by signalling that he had sighted a periscope in the bay. As invariably proved the case with Russian reports, this was a mistake, for what he had taken to be a periscope turned out to be nothing more than the staff of one of the dan-buoys which we had laid down to mark the swept-channel into Yukanskie. Such alarms were, however, very harassing, for they entailed that every small ship in the harbour was at once rushed to sea to deal with the supposed enemy at our door.

The next day, the 9th of June, frantic wireless S.O.S. signals began to come in from the Russian s.s. *Nonni* about 9.30 p.m., stating that she was being chased by a submarine a hundred and forty miles to the north of us. The chase continued all night, and for me, sitting in my cabin sending out wireless orders in all directions, it was as good as a game of chess. The *Nonni* wailed that she was being fired on, and I told her to keep up heart, for help had been sent to her. At 10.40 p.m. she reported in despair that she had sighted ice ahead. At this I ordered her to throw herself and force her way through, for the submarine was unlikely to follow her. This she did, and my surmise proved to be correct, for the U-boat, having fired a vain torpedo, finally gave up the chase and turned away, being out of sight by

2.30 a.m. The *Nonni*, for her part, continued to bleat her wireless distress signals into the ether until, by nine o'clock in the morning, the increasing distance prevented them being longer audible to us at Yukanskie.

Whilst this chase of the *Nonni* was in progress, I had directed the *Stephen Furness*—then on patrol and on her way to assist—to search along the edge of the ice and endeavour to see if she could not locate the submarine. This she was proceeding to do, when, at four forty-five a.m., other S.O.S. signals commenced to come in. These were from the British s.s. *Perla, en route* from Genoa to the Murman Coast, and then in a position in latitude 71.27 north, longitude 35.28 east. They stated that she was being chased by a submarine along the edge of the ice. Half-an-hour later the *Perla* repeated her S.O.S. signal; then there was silence, and, for the time being, I knew no more of her fate.

The *Stephen Furness* was by then searching along the edge of the ice, and, at two fifty p.m., she boarded a suspected Norwegian schooner similar to one which had been reported by the *Nonni* as being in company with the submarine. There was not, however, sufficient evidence to convict the schooner, and the *Stephen Furness* had reluctantly to let her go. The fact of the schooner having been seen in such suspicious company, though compromising, was probably entirely involuntary on her part, and other matters were pressing. Within half-an-hour, the *Stephen Furness* had sighted a steamer apparently coming towards her, and which she at first took to be the much harassed *Nonni*. On closer approach, however, she noticed that this steamer was very low in the water, and, a moment later, at three p.m., she observed that there was a submarine on the surface on the other side of the ice-spit. Fire was at once opened by the *Stephen Furness;* but the range was over four miles, and atmospherics were very bad owing to mirage and the refraction caused by the proximity of ice. She had time to fire but four rounds when the submarine

H.M.S. "VINDICTIVE." ARCTIC SQUADRON, 1917.
(Later, with Intrepid, Iphigenia, &c., of Zeebrugge fame.)

dived, and, at the same moment, the steamer, which had been getting lower and lower in the water, sank. A few moments passed, and then an object which appeared to be the conning-tower of a submarine became visible in the vicinity of the sunken steamer. Once more the *Stephen Furness* opened fire, but at once checked it on discovering that the suspicious object was no conning-tower, but a ship's boat with a sail hoisted. At that moment dense fog intervened; but at three-forty, this having lifted, the boat was once more sighted and its crew rescued and taken on board. They proved to be the survivors of the British s.s. *Marie Elsie*, torpedoed at nine o'clock that morning, of whose crew three had been killed by the explosion, but of the remainder, twenty-five had got away in the boat before the ship sank.

In pursuance of my orders, the *Stephen Furness* remained in the vicinity for some hours to search for the submarine; but at midnight, nothing further having been seen of her, she shaped a course for Cape Cherni. It was just before ten o'clock the following morning, the 11th of June, that, making her way south, she sighted yet another ship's boat. This turned out to be one of those belonging to the ill-fated *Perla*, and her finding gave the first definite information that that ship had been sunk. From this boat's crew it was also learned that there were still four other of the *Perla's* boats adrift among the ice, and they two-hundred miles from land. Turning back on her course, during the succeeding four hours the armed boarding steamer succeeded in finding three out of these four boats, and in rescuing, all told, sixty-two souls. But the fourth boat, having in it two officers and thirteen men, was for a long time unaccounted for: fortunately, as I learned later, their crew were found by a Norwegian motor-boat and subsequently transferred by the latter to a British patrol trawler.

For three-and-a-half hours the unhappy *Perla* had

carried out a gallant but unequal contest with the U-boat, and then, all her ammunition having been expended, and the ship herself badly smashed up and three men killed by the German's shrapnel, her captain had abandoned her in the boats. On their leaving her, the submarine had sunk the ship in the usual way, both by exploding bombs in her hold and also by torpedoing. The U-boat had then departed, leaving the crew in open boats two-hundred miles from land, and with two of their number very seriously injured. These both died in the boats, and were buried at sea before the *Stephen Furness* appeared on the scene.

Submarines thus working among the ice were a new factor in Arctic warfare, and a far from pleasant one. Up till then allied merchantmen had been in the habit of making a detour as far north as possible, in order to avoid the more ordinary submarine haunts which were nearer the coast. But now, hidden among the ice, the submarines could remain safely on the surface and await their prey; in a very short time they would become covered with icicles, and thus rendered practically invisible against their surroundings.

Along the ice also, at that season of the year, were large numbers of Norwegian sealers, who greatly complicated matters. The British Admiralty had, from information in its possession, issued special warnings *re* these boats. Many of them, it was strongly suspected, would be used by Germany as look-out and stalking horses for steamers by submarines. They might even be expected to carry concealed guns and torpedoes.

As a result of these suspicions, British men-of-war had strict orders to bring into port for examination all Norwegian sealers not found in possession of an agreement to sell their catch to a British purchasing agency. In the Arctic, however, this order proved to be quite unworkable, and it lapsed without ever having been brought into force. The first reason for this was that these sealers, when discovered, were generally wedged

far into the ice, and could not be got at. Secondly, so far as I could ascertain, not a single one of these sealers when boarded was ever found to be in possession of the required papers, and the majority had never even heard of them. Add to this the language difficulty, and the fact that if they were taken into port it would necessitate towing them several hundred miles—through submarine infested waters, a highly dangerous undertaking—and some of the difficulties of enforcement will be understood.

Looked at in another way, such conduct would also have been bad policy. It would have alienated Norwegian sentiment, which, among seamen at any rate, was eminently pro-British. The *bonâ fide* sealers hated the German U-boats, which had badly treated them. On the 10th of June there were just outside territorial waters off Vardo, Norway, two German submarines, who had recently sunk three of these Norwegian boats and robbed the crews of a great many others of practically everything they possessed. Yet at that very moment there was at Vardo a German steamer who had the impertinence to remain, discharging her cargo of paraffin, coal, and salt, and to embark also a return cargo of fish and meat. She all the time was strongly suspected of acting as supply ship to these very submarines. Poor little Norway was in a very difficult position between the Devil and the deep sea, a position which required of our trawler officers in the Arctic that they should proceed with the greatest circumspection and tact, as well as firmness.

But to return to our *moutons*, or, rather, to Yukanskie, where affairs were at their busiest, and where the Russians, having overcome the first disorganising flood of revolution, were at length beginning to show some sign of spirit. Two heavy six-inch guns on twin mountings had already been disembarked for the defence of the place. A salvage ship having also arrived, attempts were being made to float off the ice-breaker

Canada, which had blown ashore during the winter—an operation which, in the end, proved completely successful. Marvellous to relate, two Japanese twelve-pounder quick-firers had actually been mounted on one of the islands as a protection against submarines. Having heard much from my Russian friends of the instant preparedness of these guns, I took an early opportunity of visiting them, and found the sentry on submarine look-out rolled up in his blanket fast asleep and no one else in sight. Him I photographed, also the guns, and then departed, as unobserved as I had come.

The *Princess Maud*, carrying the anti-submarine boom defence, had arrived on the 12th of June with her two attendant trawlers, and was now busy getting it into position. Both she and many other incoming steamers had intercepted my warning wireless messages as to the position of submarines hiding among the ice, and had consequently been able to alter course out of the danger area.

The pressure of service work at the commencement of the season was great; but it was rare indeed for it to be so continuous as to entirely prohibit those mild forms of hospitality embraced by the giving of inter-ship dinner parties. My confrères at Yukanskie were, for the most part, men called from every corner of the globe and from every kind of avocation, to return once more in war-time to the seafaring life of their youth. Their tales, both of civil life and of the war itself, were both many and varied, though perhaps not always as veracious as they were interesting. One specially distinguished liar was a versatile Irishman employed on the boom defence, whose career, among other things, had embraced the professions both of gold-miner and diamond digger. He related to me one incident which he stated he had himself witnessed—the arrival at Portsmouth of a destroyer which had just rammed a submarine. This remarkable vessel (so my informant asseverated) had on her arrival still hanging from her bows the conning tower of the

destroyed U-boat; but, what was still more remarkable, two live Hun officers were still in it. I cannot doubt that this officer believed that he had actually seen this strange and incredible spectacle, but its *tout ensemble* reminded me altogether too much of canaries in a cage. When I asked him if they had not also fed the Hun officers through a port-hole with bird seed, he became unduly hot, and seemed to think that I was doubting his veracity.

Another of my officers had been an engineer in a Q-ship, a vessel eminently successful in the decoying of submarines; during the period that he was in her she was responsible for the destruction of three U-boats. Of these he told me many interesting stories, but his story which specially interested me was one of hearsay only, and was not a matter of which he could give me a first-hand account, but I believe it to be true, nevertheless.

This story was concerning the legendary (?) *Mary Rose*, a name which of late has been much before the public, and a vessel reputed to be a privately owned Q-ship, having no official authority whatever for her existence, and the very first of her kind. This *Mary Rose*, I was informed, was a small barquentine, fitted with sail power only, the hobby of whose owner-master it was to cruise off the Isle of Wight in the early years of the war in a neighbourhood then very popular with submarines. To the outward eye she was unarmed; but her master, sitting in his cabin in the stern, had under his hand two small torpedo tubes and a twelve-pounder gun. With these weapons he was popularly believed to have sunk no less than seven submarines, but this is a quite incredible number. However, one day the *Mary Rose* disappeared from her old cruising ground and was seen no more, and no information was ever forthcoming as to how she met her fate. Probably one of her torpedoes missed its quarry, and, this having happened, she could expect no mercy. Between Q-boats and U-boats there was little or no quarter ever given on either side, but

both sides liked, if possible, to bring back one live antagonist, as evidence and proof positive of the destruction of an enemy.

Readers may remember that at that time there was a perfect epidemic of ships blowing up mysteriously in harbour. One officer informed me in explanation of this that, to his own knowledge in the case of the battleship *Russell*, the electric light circuits had been found joined up to detonators in her magazine. It required but for someone to enter the magazine and switch on the light for her to have blown up also like so many others. Fortunately the danger was discovered in time.

Another of my guests was at the battle of the Falkland Islands, and he amused me by describing how his old ship, the *Canopus*, was covered in with trees, so as to be invisible, and lay at the entrance to the harbour, her bottom resting on the mud. It was thus that when Von Spee's squadron arrived on the scene she was able to get in four rounds with her heavy guns before ever the enemy perceived her presence. The above yarns I give for what they are worth, but I am not prepared to vouch for the authenticity of any one of them. They are typical of many thousands of others which were flying round the service at that time, and were generally believed in.

Up till midsummer 1917, for all the large number of Russian mine-sweeping trawlers working on the Murman Coast, I cannot call to mind a single occasion on which they had ever dredged up a mine; whereas their British confrères had destroyed many scores of them. Food, money, and clothing were, however, all beginning to run short in the Russian service, and it was in a measure due to this scarcity that we were able in 1917 to induce a part of the Russian Navy to render useful service. In great part, the British clothed, fed, and paid the Russian crews; it was in hopes of a continuance of such favours that the Russian seamen were at length induced to drop some of their deep-rooted prejudices and

antipathies, and, in fact, to actually put to sea and learn from the British something of the practical work of mine-sweeping.

We had among our number a British officer, Herrival by name, and a lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, who specialised in this intricate art of getting work out of a Russian—an art analogous to that of "flogging a dead horse," and, in spite of the animal's apparent demise, in making it to go.

The Russian trawlers themselves were of much the same size as the British ones, but, to work them, they carried a crew nearly double as numerous as our own. Yet, in spite of this numerical superiority in complement, and of the Russian vessels being both the newer and faster, never by any chance did they succeed in keeping a sufficient head of steam, but lagged behind.

This being the case, it gave a golden opportunity for the display of our highest national attribute—swank. To the laggard Russian trawler would be sent *one* solitary British stoker to assist in raising steam. He, having turned all the Russians out of the boiler-room, would then, single-handed and in a very short time, raise a tremendous head of steam. So much was this so, that all her safety-valves would be lifted, and, blowing off, would advertise the fact with a noise that the rest of the flotilla could not fail to hear. To the fatalistic Russian mind, a practical demonstration of fact such as this was invaluable. Moreover, to show how easily it was all done, the British representative during these demonstrations was wont to make a show of coming on deck, and, reclining luxuriously upon the Russian's hatch-way as though he had nothing to do, ostentatiously smoke a cigarette. At this, the Russian onlookers marvelled and spat much, after the manner of the Slavonic races; then, for very shame, they set to work in real earnest to see whether they in their turn could not keep up this head of steam which the wonderful Britisher had raised.

It was in ways such as these that the yachtsman,

Herrival, triumphed over Russian lethargy; and, when his trawler, the *Daniel Henley*, put to sea, it was rare indeed not to see with her her full quota of eight Russian trawlers.

What was more, the Russian crews, who had the power of appointing their own officers, in many instances showed their good sense by turning out a number of useless slackers, and by appointing in their place keener and more efficient officers.

For a time indeed, to such a pitch did their national pride rise, that some Russians were actually to be found who criticised the perfection of their own administration, and queried the necessity of the British having to do all the repair work to their vessels, when they themselves had admittedly the best-fitted-out repair ship on the station. This was a vessel which swung round her anchor at Alexandrovsk (near Murmansk) and did nothing. For a time at least, and until the utter rot of Bolshevism set in, the Russian trawlers did some quite useful service.

The weather all this time was gradually getting warmer, but, even as late as the 12th of June, there were severe frosts; it was on the same date that I duly noted the appearance of the first mosquito of the season. Warned by the painful experiences of the previous year, we at once made every preparation for the onslaught we knew to be imminent, and commenced to house in the ship fore and aft with mosquito-netting. Three days later, the War Signal Station being completed, I installed in it the crew, amongst whom was a special taxidermist and trapper, late of the British Museum, but on the ship's books officially entered as a leading torpedoman. At the skinning of animals he was certainly most proficient, but at their trapping and slaughter he was unfortunately not so adept. After a short trial he had to be relegated to the equally scientific, but perhaps less thrilling, duties of cook of the mess.

CHAPTER XII.

AN ARCTIC SUMMER, HOT AND COLD. SOME FUNNY FISHES AND SOME GOLD. AT THRICE-REPEATED FATE WE PEEP, AND SEE HOW GOATS ARE TURNED TO SHEEP.

THE season of 1917 had opened in the Arctic with a great display of submarine activity; it was not unnatural for us therefore to anticipate an even more strenuous time to follow. But, strange to relate, after the first active phase, which fizzled out in the middle of June, we had absolute peace so far as U-boats were concerned until the very end of August. This is a fact which I find it very difficult to account for—the easing-up of submarine activity just at the very height of the Arkhangel season, and at a period when it might naturally have been expected to be most effective. I can only imagine it was due to the known loss of two submarines in Arctic waters, which perhaps caused "Fritz" (not knowing what weak forces we had at our disposal) to pause for a moment and wonder whether the game was worth the candle. The plain fact however remains that, for a month and a half at a most critical time, the trawler-escorted convoys passed every other day, east and west along the Murman Coast, totally unmolested, and with the regularity of a train service. These convoys were carefully swept through supposedly dangerous areas, but only one mine was discovered in advance of a convoy. The senior officer of mine-sweepers had kept a careful record of the registered numbers stamped on each mine, and, from this record, he was able to deduce the fact that

this mine was undoubtedly a relic of the great German mine-field laid in 1915.

The summer of 1917 alternated from cold to warm. On the 18th of June we had snow and frost; but, by the 24th, the thermometer had risen high above the seventies and so remained for a week; on one day it registered as high as eighty-four degrees in the shade. The heat was almost invariably followed by dense fog, and, on such occasions, it was usual for one or more vessels who were attempting to make the coast to get ashore. Such eventualities entailed difficult salvage operations by the British squadron in face of probable enemy submarine attack.

With the heat came also mosquitoes in their myriads, who, in the middle of July, for two or three days practically put a stop to all attempts to work in the open—this, in spite of veils, unguents, deterrent lotions, and everything else we could think of. After the heat, there followed also in July spells of comparative cold, accompanied by heavy rains and the thermometer dropping into the thirties. These spells of cool weather we welcomed, however, for, for the time being, they quietened the mosquitoes.

But in spite of peace from mines and submarines, there was ample work of other natures—we were all kept fully occupied. Not content with a signal station and fish-curing establishment, the *Intrepids* were now building a pier. The Yukanga River itself, which runs into the harbour, was also carefully sounded and buoyed. This enabled the trawlers to go safely up it, and to draw their fresh water direct from overboard—such water supply having up till then been one of our most difficult problems. There was also the anti-submarine boom to be got into place, and, in addition, a smaller boom was laid at Ivanovski, then much used as a harbour of refuge. There were as usual many trawlers' propellers to be shifted, the damage to them in great part being caused by the immense number of derelict logs floating every-

where on the surface, as well as by the vessels running on to uncharted rocks. Finally, there was always the boarding of all in-coming ships, and the organising, ordering, protecting, and sweeping of all the tri-weekly convoys.

Thus passed peacefully, but usefully, the greater part of the summer of 1917. Prepared for every emergency, we watched the changing panorama of Arctic life—birds, flowers, butterflies and other insects. These, brought to life by the warmth of the sun, grew to maturity in the shortest possible time, and, having accomplished this, disappeared again almost at once.

Thanks to this peaceful spell, we were, for a time, able to employ the patrol-trawler on duty at the entrance of the harbour at her peace avocation of trawling for fish. The Arctic fish, mostly plaice, haddock, halibut and cod, are incomparably fatter and better flavoured than anything I have tasted at home. Dragging her trawl along the coral bottoms close to Yukanskie, our patrol vessel would often, in a very few hours, bring up several tons of these wonderful fish. With the catch would sometimes come a Greenland shark, a huge but harmless animal, often measuring as much as sixteen feet in length. The other usual contents of the trawl were: clams a few, immense numbers of hermit and spider crabs, sea-eggs, many species of starfish, and marine worms innumerable. For us this fresh fish was a very great treat: it was a change from the salt and tinned meat on which we had for the most part lived. I heard no more of the eating of seabirds, nor of the old dog-fox which had been killed and eaten by the crew of the signal station.

These trawler fishermen themselves I found to have many unsuspected uses for the ten and twelve-rayed star-fishes from deep water. These animals, they told me, are a deadly poison; but, at the same time, are very attractive to both cats and rats. The fishermen are, therefore, in the habit of manuring their lands with these

delicacies, for besides fertilising the soil, they get rid, at one fell swoop, of those two twin pests of the small cultivator: cats and rats. These die, poisoned by the food which they cannot resist eating.

The trawlerman has also a universal remedy for all hurts, especially for poisoned fingers. He merely immerses the injured part in handy lamp oil, the beneficial effects of the paraffin being, I was assured, infallible.

Of all our annoyances in those days, the faulty mail arrangements made at home were, I think, the most aggravating, more especially so as they could have been, but never were, easily remedied. Every day numbers of steamers arrived from England, yet we often went for a period of a month without receiving any letters. The Admiralty had an obsession for putting many weeks' mails on board one specially-favoured boat; which, as often as not, was sunk, or damaged and obliged to return. In vain I pleaded by telegraph that all our eggs should not thus be put in one basket, and that a few bags only of letters should be sent in each steamer. Like Gallio, the official responsible "cared for none of these things," and continued to blunder to the end.

On the 18th of July the Russians celebrated the opening of their wireless station at Yukanskie—a station which they optimistically prophesied would be able to communicate direct with England, but which, as a matter of history, never covered a quarter of that distance, and was seriously damaged by fire four days later. There were no spare instruments upon the spot with which to replace those damaged. The station consequently remained in a more or less broken-down condition during the remainder of the season. However, we had by this time discovered that an armed boarding steamer a hundred miles out to sea formed an effective wireless connecting link with the *Glory* at Murmansk; when such was available, we were, for the most part, independent of the chaotic Russian coast communications.

During the course of the summer the British cable-

ship *Faraday* arrived. She had run a submarine cable direct from England to the Kola Inlet, and thence to Arkhangel, making a loop in it so as to include Yukanskie. Delay there was whilst the Russians built a hut to accommodate the end of the cable; and further delay before operators could be found capable of working it. But before the end of the season this direct cable route was actually in operation, and as it did not run through neutral countries, nor through other parts of Russia, we hoped that for the future messages would not be tapped *en route* or distorted.

The *Faraday* herself is a wonderful old ship, even then more than forty years old, and her officers and crew seemed all to form part of one happy family. In spite of her immense size, tending to increase her vulnerability, her state of immobile helplessness, and the fact that she was continually being employed in submarine-infested waters, she passed unscathed through all the perils of war, rock and tempest. It was a year later that I saw her for the last time, in mid-Atlantic and a thousand miles from anywhere, hard at her perilous work of repairing some damaged submarine cable. How it was that the U-boats overlooked her I cannot imagine.

During the summer of 1917 the internal affairs of Russia became worse and worse, and a *débâcle* set in on their western front. It was not easy at all times for us to keep up heart, when it seemed that all our labour would be useless, and that the country might at any moment declare for a treacherous peace. The Russian Navy had no heart in their work, but at times we prevailed on them to work with us in a more or less satisfactory manner. Many of their trawlers they allowed us to fit up with British mine-sweeps, and these did useful work; but at all times it was a very ticklish job to humour them and keep them going. A shipload of Russian Jews had recently arrived at Arkhangel from England, mostly the sweepings of the East End of London. These had been deported as undesirables, and

also with a view to their being employed on military service in their own country. This scum of Whitechapel were to be the future tools and instigators of Bolshevist horrors—a name which, by the way, we had not then yet heard of. Their influence, however, was soon to become apparent in the Fleet, as throughout the rest of Russia. At Yukanskie the Russian seamen insisted on their senior officer, a competent man, being relieved. This was for purely personal reasons—years before, in the course of his duty, he had sentenced one of them to six months' imprisonment.

This was a summer of fogs; from the 20th of July until the 2nd of August we found ourselves enveloped in an almost continuous fog blanket. As a result, more than one in-coming ship struck the rocks; but they were one and all got off and successfully patched up. It was probably due to this dark, damp weather that by the 8th of August enormous quantities of mushrooms, toadstools and other fungi had begun to show up on shore, a phenomenon which we had not noticed during the previous season. From our Russian friends we learnt that none of these fungi were poisonous, and, in fact, that all were edible—only some more so than others. A few minutes' walk and anyone could gather many sackfuls of them, they proving to be delicious eating. From the Russians also we learned to thread them on strings and dry them. Dried in this way they become as hard as wood, but will keep for months, after which period they, having been soaked for an hour in water, regain once more all the qualities of the fresh-gathered article, and are once more fit for eating.

During 1917 we had no bear on board the *Intrepid* to enliven the ship; but we possessed a good substitute in Nigger, the ship's dog, a black, curly-haired retriever. The cutest of canine pets, of tricks he had many; but his special accomplishment was the stealing of handkerchiefs. Let him see but one corner of a white handkerchief protruding from a breast pocket and, in a flash,

Nigger had leapt up and annexed it. Unfortunately Nigger was no respecter of persons, and, like the bear, his little jokes were apt to get us into trouble. The Commodore, coming to inspect the ship with all the pomp and panoply due to his exalted rank, was visibly startled when Nigger sprang upon him, and as quickly disappeared with his " wipe "—this to an accompaniment of but half-suppressed titters from the assembled ship's company.

On one occasion, whilst the men were engaged in blasting rocks to build a pier, a whole family of white ermines, as tame and cheeky as possible, was brought to light. Unfortunately I did not discover this until the last two or three were making a rapid exit earthwards once more, but I asked the men why they had not secured them. They replied that they had taken them for " white rats," and thus, owing to an unfortunate lack of knowledge of natural history, the animals escaped, still clothed in their own valuable pelts.

It was at the same time that we had another excitement, owing to the supposed discovery of gold. Gold there undoubtedly is on the Murman coast, but none, I believe, in paying quantities—a remark which applies equally to copper, zinc, and lead, samples of all of which minerals we found. The original discovery of the supposed gold was made by myself. Happening to fracture a block of quartz, I found therein several nuggets of a metallic substance, gold in colour. These I took on board and submitted to the examination of the chief engineer, who considered himself something of a metallurgist. He, having duly tested my samples with acid, pronounced them to be genuine gold, a verdict which was also corroborated by one of the men who professed at one time to have been a gold-digger. Dreams of another Klondyke began to float before my eyes and those of others. All who could scrambled ashore, and, armed with coal-hammers and shovels, commenced to dismantle the island. Disillusionment, however, was not

long in following, adding a fresh sting to our already cut and blistered fingers. There happened to be in the squadron an officer who genuinely had been for many years a *bonâ fide* digger. He, seizing one of my precious samples, struck it a violent blow with a hammer, whereupon it shattered to fragments as though made of glass. My gold was but iron pyrites; had it been true metal, instead of splintering it would have flattened out under the blow. Once more we returned to " the trivial round, the common task " of squadron routine—an occupation less exciting, but certainly less laborious, than that of gold-seeking.

With the declining summer the fogs daily became yet more dense and frequent in their occurrence. It was during one of these, at seven-thirty a.m. on the 9th of August, that the A.B.S. *Carron* got ashore. This was bad enough, but within ten minutes of this happening I was also getting wireless reports from the big British munition-carrier *Baron Balfour* that she also was on the rocks in some unknown position. The thick, damp fog was at the moment absolutely impenetrable, and what greatly aggravated the situation was the fact that neither of the two ships themselves really knew within fifty miles the true locality of their stranding—for had they known this they most certainly would have taken every precaution never to have got there.

Nowadays, with directional wireless, it would be a comparatively easy matter to locate the vessels. A wireless bearing could be taken which would give the direction, and the strength of the signals themselves would give an indication as to the distance. But in 1917 these useful scientific developments were quite unknown in Arctic waters, and there was nothing for it but to search for the vessels as best we could.

As usual, it was the good old British trawlers who went first to the rescue. Throughout the war, whenever there was any particularly difficult and dangerous work to be done which nobody else cared about, it was the trawlers

who were generally sent to do it. All available were at once rushed off to sea to search the coastline east and west in that blanket of fog. Ere long they had found the *Baron Balfour*, which was discovered badly ashore in a very exposed position at a place called " Oleni Russki." Already one of her holds was full of water, and she was held in position by a rock which had pierced her bottom. The *Carron*, for her part, had stranded at a place called Fadyev Point, a well-known spot, for she was the fourth steamer who had already run ashore there that season.

This matter of navigation on the Murman coast was, I think, responsible for the loss of more ships during 1917 than all the efforts of enemy submarines put together. Vessels had to round Norway as far north as possible, out of sight of land, and for days they often had no opportunity of fixing their position. Underfoot ran a current of unknown strength, fogs were almost continuous, the coastline when sighted was featureless and but half surveyed, and close in shore, owing to the presence of iron ore, the compass was totally unreliable. Add to this the innumerable snowstorms, which blanketed all lights and shut out everything as effectually as the fogs, combine with this the zigzagging and erratic courses rendered necessary by the presence of enemy submarines, and the wonder is *not* that so many ships were stranded and lost, but that the great majority of ships got safely into port as they did.

The *Carron* some two hours after stranding fortunately managed to get off, and proceeded to Yukanskie under her own steam. There was a hole torn in her bottom two and a half feet long, and more than fifty rivets had been sheared from under number two hold, but fortunately they had been able to keep the water under with their pumps. Once alongside the *Intrepid* our three divers were put to work on her, and within a fortnight her bottom had been patched, the missing rivets replaced, and the ship thoroughly reinforced with concrete and rendered once more watertight. This work

was all done by the *Intrepid's* divers, working under water, and generally in the most confined of spaces. However, owing to the distortion of her frames caused by stranding, it was not considered advisable to keep her on the station during the winter months. She was sent home, and in that she was fortunate, for thereby she escaped the fate of her three companion boarding-steamers, all of whom were sunk by submarines.

The *Baron Balfour* was, however, a much more difficult problem than the *Carron*, she being further away and unable to move. Accordingly the A.B.S. *Grive*, with the *Iphigenia* and four or five trawlers, were despatched to see what they could do. Arrived, they at once commenced the ticklish job of salving her; lying as she was in her then exposed position on the edge of a reef, it required but the faintest puff of wind from seaward, and in all probability she would at once have gone to pieces. On that exposed coast the work was almost equally dangerous to the vessels employed on the salvage, and the locality itself was also notorious as a former centre of submarine activity.

But the *Baron Balfour* was a most valuable vessel, packed to her full capacity with munitions of war, and worth, with her cargo, £2,000,000. Consequently her salvage was a risk well worth the taking, and, in the result, fully justified, for success crowned the effort. Not only did the submarines not get wind of the matter in time to interfere, but the weather itself held up and remained supernaturally calm. The divers were soon got down to examine the rock which had penetrated her bottom, but found themselves greatly hampered by the dense growth of seaweed, which prevented them seeing anything. Her cargo was also an awkward article to deal with, for among it was a consignment of poison gas, and this, leaking badly, reduced many of the salvors to insensibility. Six days later, however, the ship was successfully floated off from her exposed position, and then once more beached in a sheltered cove which

fortunately lay near at hand. This had hardly been accomplished when the weather, which until then had been so fine, suddenly changed, and it came on to blow fresh from the north-west. But the work could now proceed unhindered by weather, and under altogether easier conditions. Within two and a half weeks of her first stranding the *Baron Balfour* was safely convoyed to Arkhangel.

But there is a fatality in the affairs of men, a thing " that is written " and cannot be gainsaid or overcome. Lest my readers should think me unduly superstitious, I will look ahead with my story and narrate the *Baron Balfour's* subsequent fate.

The *Baron Balfour* got safely to Arkhangel, and there she duly discharged her cargo of munitions and started on her homeward voyage. It was eleven weeks since she had stranded, and the time was six forty-five a.m. on the 28th of October, as, in company with a convoy, she approached the scene of her late mishap. Her officers were interestedly looking out to observe the place where the ship had stranded, and, in fact, had just sighted it, when the vessel was struck by a torpedo—and sank almost instantly. But the fatality which dogged the ship and her crew did not end there. Her survivors were brought to Yukanskie, and, arrived there, were divided between two other vessels for passage home. Hardly were these ships clear of the harbour when they were in collision with each other and had to return. " It was written." The reader may judge with what feelings of unmixed relief we finally saw these modern Jonahs, and all the bad luck which they seemed to carry with them, clear of the station.

It has rightly been said that " cleanliness comes next to Godliness." Their Lordships of the Admiralty, possibly fearing that the vulgar might believe that they attached more importance to the former rather than to the latter desideratum, have, in their regulations, made it abundantly clear that " divine worship according to the liturgy of the Church of England is to be duly and

reverently performed," also, that all those on board H.M. ships are expected to attend such services.

Fifty years ago this was a regulation which probably evoked little or no opposition. But during the Great War, where all sorts and conditions of men were thrown in together and subjected to discipline for the first time, and where each had his own strongly developed beliefs, doubts, and lethargies, it was no easy matter to collect a sufficient number of worshippers who would *voluntarily* attend such services. Every officer and man on board is required to subscribe himself as belonging to some religious denomination or other, and, such being the case, can be compelled by the regulations to attend the worship of his own particular sect. Personally, however, I am a believer in what is known as "moral suasion," or what perhaps our German friends have styled "peaceful penetration." I had no desire to use compulsion in such a matter, but, as such a state of affairs could obviously not continue, I devised other means for due compliance with the regulations.

Accordingly, I had the officers and ships' company divided into two classes; they were composed of those who voluntarily attended the services and those who did not. The former were known as the "sheep," and the residue were the "goats." This arrangement having been duly made known to all concerned, upon the bell tolling for church, the "sheep" were mustered in a warm, snug corner under cover. Thence they, having lustily sung some half-a-dozen hymns and recited a portion of the church service, were, after about half an hour, dismissed. Not so the "goats"—with them it was far otherwise. They were fallen in in the starboard gangway, a nice airy spot, and for an hour their officers read to them choice extracts from the Articles of War, or, alternately, the doctor lectured to them on such subjects as the penalties attached to evil living. Bare-headed they listened in silence, and so good was the effect of these eloquent discourses that long before the

thermometer had touched the zero point with the advancing winter, practically the whole of them had reviewed their religious opinions, and announced their desire to become "sheep." Thereafter, there were no malingerers from our church service.

On the 24th of August there arrived at Yukanskie the season's first consignment of Admiralty sheep. These were duly landed on Vitte Island, as was the case the previous year; but this time we had little or no trouble with them. Warned by our sorrows of the previous season, we had been at pains to point out that an active mountain-climbing breed was *not* desired; but that, on the contrary, a fat and sedentary variety, more easily converted into mutton, would be acceptable.

Cloud-berries were, in the autumn of 1917, growing in enormous numbers on some of the islands which enclosed the harbour of Yukanskie; these the men collected, and from them made a pink and pippy form of jam. Our diet was now no longer confined to the salted and tinned provisions which had been our mainstay for the first year in the Arctic. We had in season wild vegetables, mushrooms, sea birds, and game, both deep water and shell-fish, and finally the mutton from our island sheep ranch. It was an easement of the food problem which our wildest hopes had never pictured. But, best of all, on the more distant of the three islands, some explorer had unexpectedly discovered an excellent site for a football ground. Everywhere else there was nought but solid rock and granite; but there, perched on the summit, was a splendid smooth expanse measuring six hundred by eight hundred yards. It was without a stone, composed of dry peat two feet in thickness, and carpeted with lichen. No safer spot for games could possible have existed, for so springy was the peat foundation that it resembled rubber. The men, fighting out once more their ships' rivalries at football, rebounded from its surface with all the agility of chamois.

CHAPTER XIII.

OF COURTLY UNDERWATER KNIGHT, OF BLAZING WRECK AND HORRID FRIGHT; OF LANDS WHEREIN THE COWS EAT FISH, OF SPY AND BEAR HUNTS FEVERISH.

BEFORE the month of August had fully run its course a change had come over the peaceful scene which I depicted in the last chapter, and in this Eden of the Arctic the Kaiser's tin serpents had once more put in an appearance.

It was at 5.30 p.m. on the 28th of August that frantic S.O.S. signals began to come in. They were from the Russian s.s. *La Marseillaise*, who was being attacked by a submarine in latitude seventy-two and a half north, longitude twenty-nine degrees east, a position three hundred and forty miles distant from Yukanskie. I did not succeed in getting the whole of her story until three days later, when the survivors of the ship were brought into harbour; but it may interest the reader to unravel it bit by bit, as I myself had to do at the time. Here are the wireless signals:

5.30 p.m.—S.O.S. Allo. 72.40 N. 28.30 E. *La Marseillaise.* (S.O.S., of course, means that a ship is in peril and in need of immediate assistance. Allo means that there is a suspicious vessel in sight, but that she has not yet committed any definitely hostile act. The numbers refer to the ship's position in latitude and longitude, and are followed by the ship's name.)

5.40 p.m.—Intrepid asked "*en clair*": "What is your course and speed?"

5.55 p.m.—*L. M.* replied: "Seven miles south-east we fired the submarine. We fired the submarine all the time. She is emerged and follows us." (The *La Marseillaise* intended to convey that she was going at seven knots on a south-easterly course, that a submarine had come to the surface, and that she was firing at it.)

6.0 p.m.—*Intrepid* asked: "Did the submarine fire on you?" (This was in view of the probability that the submarine was not hostile, but one of the British ones then working from Murmansk.)

6.10 p.m.—*L. M.* replied: "No, she did not, but she is turning around us and we are firing her all the time."

6.30 p.m.—*L. M.* made: "Submarine is firing us. S.O.S. S.S.S. 72.38 N. 29.00 E. *La Marseillaise.*" (S.S.S. following S.O.S. means that the vessel making it is in danger from submarine attack, and that the submarine has already commenced definitely hostile action. The ship's position and name are then repeated.)

6.40 p.m.—*Intrepid* replied: "Help is being sent. Darkness will help you." (The *Stephen Furness*, who was patrolling on the fortieth meridian on the look out for some expected troopships, had already been ordered in cypher to go to the assistance of *La Marseillaise*. But I obviously could not tell the latter the nature of the assistance being sent or where it was coming from, for, she having no cypher, it would have had to be made in plain language, and would have been taken in by the submarine as well.)

After this came silence, and no replies came in answer to any of the *Intrepid's* signals. I feared that the worst had happened, and attached a tragic significance to a solitary wireless signal intercepted at 9 p.m. This signal *may* have been sent by anyone, but wireless signalling has a personal touch in it, in the same way as handwriting or typing, and can be recognised by a skilled operator. Those who took in the message on board the *Intrepid* were of the opinion that it had been made by the operator on board the *La Marseillaise*. It read:

" Merci beaucoup, monsieur, adieu. . . ." and then broke off short.

The whole of the next day, the 29th of August, I was still without news concerning the fate of *La Marseillaise*, although the *Stephen Furness* had arrived at the position of her last cry for help, and had thoroughly searched the neighbourhood. It was, in fact, not until the morning of the 31st, upon which date the British s.s. *Cameron* arrived at Yukanskie with the survivors, that I was able to piece the story together.

It was briefly as follows: At 5.30 p.m. on the 28th of August *La Marseillaise* was zigzagging her way to Yukanskie at her best speed of seven and a half knots when, right astern of her, a periscope was sighted, distant only two hundred yards. At this two shots were fired, whereupon the periscope dipped; but, twenty minutes later, the submarine herself appeared on the surface four miles astern. The *La Marseillaise* at once reopened fire, but her projectiles fell a long way short of the target, and, after this had continued for ten minutes, the submarine replied by firing shrapnel. These, however, did not actually hull the ship, but fell among the steamer's rigging. The steamer's cargo consisting of munitions, the fears of her crew soon became too much for them, especially as they could make no effective reply. Having endured the perils of the bombardment until 7 p.m., they then abandoned the ship in their boats, whereupon the submarine at once closed them.

All are agreed that this U-boat commander behaved with courtesy, and, at 7.40 p.m., he ordered the boats to proceed to the southward, where, he said, they would meet a British cruiser. The boats accordingly proceeded under sail, while the submarine herself made off, taking the *La Marseillaise* with her as her prize. Before taking her, however, the Germans most thoroughly looted her of all provisions, wines, clothes, and brass-work.

In order to assist them in the work of navigating *La Marseillaise*, the Germans took with them five of the

latter's Russian crew; these they employed at stoking in the boiler-rooms. Presently the prize arrived in the vicinity of a timber-laden ship—believed to be the *Othello*, homeward bound from Arkhangel—of whose crew they could see no signs. The Germans had evidently captured her at an earlier stage of their proceedings, and had tried to sink her. But the *Othello*, being timber-laden, had foiled their best efforts. They now used the *La Marseillaise* to ram the *Othello* in a further attempt to sink the latter, but again effected nothing beyond twisting round the former's bows. As a last resource the Germans then lashed the two ships together with wire hawsers, after which they exploded bombs in the *La Marseillaise's* hold, hoping, no doubt, that as the latter sank she would drag the *Othello* to the bottom with her. This final effort was, however, apparently no more successful than the previous ones, for, when last seen, both ships were still afloat. In fact, a water-logged vessel answering to the description of the *Othello* was sighted more than once subsequently off the coast.

After leaving the two ships, the submarine then towed the five Russian firemen in their boat to the southward until one a.m. on the morning of the 29th of August, at which hour she left them. Altogether this Russian stoking-party had a strange experience, and were treated unusually well by the Germans. Together the two nationalities ransacked the provisions, champagne, and whisky on board the *La Marseillaise*—a consequence following this being that one of the Russians got very drunk. At the moment when the submarine was about to part company with the boat, this individual sprang back on board the submarine, brandishing a revolver in either hand, and shouted in English that he would " kill the whole —— German crew single-handed." The Germans received this threat with the utmost good nature, and, a few minutes later, the drunken man having subsided hopelessly intoxicated on the deck, they tenderly lifted him up and put him back in his own boat.

This submarine commander, in the course of conversation, mentioned that he had sunk seven ships within the last two days, and, indeed, there was much floating wreckage about corroborative of his statement. Assuming his statement to be correct, the victims were probably sunk a great deal further to the westward, for no information on the matter came my way at Yukanskie.

With reference to that last doubtful wireless signal ending "adieu . . ." If the signal were indeed made by the *La Marseillaise*, it must have been made by the Germans themselves, for, by comparing the times, it was known that they were then in possession of her.

September brought no abatement in the number of the fogs, whilst the gales blew with even more frequency and greater violence. It was on the 2nd of September that, during one of these dense fogs, the French s.s. *Loire* ran on shore at Litzki Island, ninety-five miles west of Yukanskie, the hour being eleven o'clock at night. Once more the indomitable boarding-steamers and trawlers were despatched to search for her in that pea-soup atmosphere, and, by six o'clock the following morning, the trawler *Bombadier* had found her. But, alas! the towing wires, pumps, diving apparatus, and cement which I had despatched to assist in the work of salvage were on this occasion useless to effect anything. With the falling tide the vessel had broken her back, and, an untended lamp having accidentally become overturned, the timber-laden ship had caught fire. By the time the trawlers arrived on the scene she was blazing fiercely fore and aft. The work of rescue of her crew of thirty-one men and a stewardess by these same trawlers was both arduous and dangerous, for the heat of the flames set off the ship's gun ammunition, and, as it exploded, shells whizzed in every direction.

But the trawlermen did something more than rescue the crew, for they found on board four live sheep which had been left to perish, and these they annexed by right

of capture. The senior officer of the trawlers present having adorned the tails of the animals with rosettes of red tape, they were put on shore to graze with the rest of the Admiralty flock at Yukanskie. This done, a general signal was made to all the ships present, stating that the red tape was a mark denoting private ownership, and that the animals so distinguished were not to be killed and eaten with the ordinary herd.

The incident of the *La Marseillaise* had once more put us very much on the alert for U-boats, but nevertheless we again had peace, although reports of submarine activity continued to come in from more distant waters. One vessel called the *Novington* had a strange experience. She was in a north bound convoy from Lerwick when, on the 29th of August, she was startled to see a torpedo coming straight at her, which, a few seconds later, struck her on the port side abreast the engine room. But, for some unknown reason, the torpedo did not explode. In place of exploding, it rebounded from her side, then, gathering speed, it once more rushed at her. This condition of things continued for some minutes, during which the torpedo contined to butt at the ship, rebound, then hurl itself forward once more. Naturally the *Novington's* crew were in a great state of alarm, expecting each minute that the torpedo would detonate. However, the captain, presently collecting his wits, eventually put his engine-room telegraphs to full speed astern. A few minutes later, to everyone's intense relief, the unpleasant visitor passed round the ship's bows and disappeared on the other side.

On the 7th of September we had a great disappointment. An overdue steamer, the *Polladern*, arrived with a long-expected consignment of sheep. But it was found on boarding her that she had a bad outbreak of smallpox on board, and that six of her coloured crew were already down with it. The doctors of the squadron had a busy time vaccinating the remainder; and, alas! our mutton had to go on to Arkhangel untasted by us.

In view of the activity of German submarines, the Admiralty, after much deliberation, had at length decided to carry out the policy which they had been meditating since the beginning of the season. Allied shipping bound for Arctic Russia was to proceed by way of neutral waters through the Norwegian fiords as far as Vardo in the extreme north, and thence we were to convoy it to Arkhangel. The time had come for us to have a temporary flit from our home at Yukanskie to Pechenga in the extreme west. Pechenga was opposite Vardo, and only eleven miles from Norwegian waters—a more ideal situation whence to organise and start off the convoys it would be difficult to imagine. The problem was one which we had been studying since the early spring, and to solve which we had prepared elaborate plans. On the evening of the 8th of September the *Intrepid*, taking with her the main body of the trawlers, left for this new base, leaving a boarding-steamer to deal with affairs at Yukanskie. The *Iphigenia*, for her part, went in the opposite direction—eastwards to Arkhangel. This was with a view to her overhauling and getting into some state of repair the large number of Russian ice-breakers which were lying there. Had this matter been left to the Russians themselves, when the ice came (a thing which generally happened very suddenly, and without any warning, in November or December) the probabilities were that hardly one of them would be immediately available, with the consequence that the merchant fleet would be frozen in until the following summer.

Zigzagging at fourteen and a half knots, the *Intrepid* arrived at Murmansk at dawn on the 9th of September, and, having sheltered there all day, left after dark the same evening. The following morning at six a.m. she arrived off the entrance of the Pechenga Fiord; having anchored outside for a short time, while a boat went ahead, sounded the entrance, and buoyed the submerged rock which partly blocks it, the ship entered. The

scenery outside this fiord is the most wild and rugged imaginable. The entrance lies between black, beetling precipices, down which dash many beautiful cascades, the blackness of the rocks themselves being relieved by sparkling twisted sheets of mica and the vivid hues of many iron ores, of which they are in part formed. But once the narrow entrance is passed a beautiful lagoon opens out, at whose head is the Trifona River. The mountains, well timbered, slope smilingly down to the waters of the harbour, around whose edge are built a number of houses constructed in the Norwegian style. Around the houses are patches of cultivation and fields—things which we had almost forgotten the appearance of among the bare granite tundras of storm-swept Yukanskie. Pechenga, though so far to the north of Yukanskie, is also some hundreds of miles to the west of it. It consequently benefits from the warmth of the Gulf Stream sweeping round the North Cape, and has an altogether milder and more equable climate than the latter place.

For our then purposes Pechenga appeared to be an ideal base. Deep water comes so close to its entrance that it is practically unmineable. Owing also to its narrow entrance, with a right-angled turn and a rock in it, it can easily be defended against the ingress of U-boats by a single drifter armed with depth charges. In extent the harbour is large enough to hold a hundred ships—a far larger number than we were ever likely to be required to squeeze into it. Moreover, its gently shelving bottom gives excellent holding ground for ships' anchors, and the harbour itself, being enclosed by high mountains, is completely land-locked, sheltered from gales, and contains no hidden dangers. Having laid out a large light-buoy at the entrance, we felt that we were firmly established, and commenced to organise the Vardo-Arkhangel convoys, the round trip for whose escorting trawlers was about a thousand miles, and in ordinary weather took from six to seven days.

Lying in that blessed, peaceful fiord of Pechenga we spent six and a half happy weeks, from the 10th of September to the 27th of October. After the wind-swept sterility of Yukanskie this land-locked harbour, with its fields of potatoes, its rivers, and its birch-clad mountains, was indeed rest to our war-wearied souls. The hundred or two of inhabitants were Finns, a kindly and, by comparison with the Russians, a very cleanly race. We were very soon on the best of terms with them, and each morning some scores of them would present themselves on board to consult the ship's surgeon, they having no doctor of their own within a distance of many versts. Honest they were, too, for they wished to pay for this medical attention; but on our doctor refusing to accept money, they pressed on us many little gifts, such as soured cream—than which, eaten with sugar, there is no pleasanter dish. Of cattle there appeared to be quite a number locally, but I fear our British kine would hardly appreciate the diet upon which these animals were forced to subsist—and also flourished. Hay they sometimes got, but this, I fancy, was a rare delicacy, if one may judge by the infinite pains which were taken to dry and preserve it. Fences of saplings some ten feet high were built, and upon the narrow summits of these fences a few hundredweights of hay were airily perched. In the winter months the fodder for cattle is, in the main, soup made from fish heads; these latter were hanging up in bundles to dry from every roof beam. The log dwellings of the inhabitants themselves were all fitted with windows, and in the latter I could see many a geranium and other cultivated plant. A quite usual form of house was one made by roofing it with the severed half of one of the large local fishing boats, and this formed a picturesque, if not very spacious, dwelling. Each house had also its bath-shed attached, these being of the usual Russian type, I believe. As I had not seen one of them before, I was much interested in its working arrangements, these being very primitive, but apparently

effective. The heating arrangements are simple. In one corner is erected a kind of altar of rough stones, and about this a large fire is built, and kept going all day, until the stones become very hot. The fire is then drawn off, and every chink in the room closed. When the bathers are ready, cold water is thrown on the heated stones, whereupon dense clouds of steam arise from them, and it is this hot steam which constitutes the bath.

Sixteen versts inland from Pechenga lies the ancient monastery of Trifona, founded by Saint Trifon many centuries back. Originally this monastery was close to the sea, but, it having been repeatedly sacked and burnt by sea-rovers and pirates, it was eventually re-erected at a safer spot inland. It is still considered one of the most sacred places in North Russia, and in years of peace is much visited by pilgrims. I had no opportunity to go so far afield myself, but many of my officers went there, and were much interested in the work of the monks, though in 1917 the greater part of the latter had been impressed for military service. Those who remained were fine bearded men, and, although in general I am not a great admirer of " face moss," one of the monks whom I encountered greatly impressed me with the beauty of his silken beard. It was a beard which had never known either razor or scissors, and fell in great soft, shining coils—as attractive in their way as a woman's tresses. Nowadays the monastery puts much of its energy into brick-making, in which useful industry it carries on quite a flourishing export trade. During the war, as in the rest of Russia, Chinese were being employed to do most of the work.

During our stay at Pechenga, many stories of bears which had been seen in the vicinity came to us, and a party of the ship's officers determined to organise a hunt. Having procured a local guide, they tramped all day along the chain of lakes and birch-clad mountains to the scene of the supposed bear's depredations. Arrived there, they were all very much exhausted, and, the bear

not having put in an immediate appearance as they had hoped, they sat down to lunch. And here the history of this epic ends, for, having lunched, they all with one accord fell asleep; by the time they awoke, the sun was low in the heavens, and they had to tramp back to the ship at the best speed they could make. Unkind critics of this venture hinted darkly that it was just as well for the huntsmen that they did not encounter the bear, for they asserted that the ammunition taken with the party was mostly of a liquid nature, and that, had bruin really turned up, he would have encountered the fire of no lethal weapon more dangerous than the popping of soda-water corks.

The first snow at Pechenga came towards the end of September, and I took the first available opportunity to land with my gun to see if I could not pick up some of the smaller feathered or ground game in the vicinity of the ship. In this, however, I was disappointed, although I saw both ptarmigan, capercailzie, and hare. The reason for this was that at that stage of the autumn, all these Arctic animals were very wild, and could not be approached as they can be in the spring. In September the wild animals were mostly piebald in colour, half in their winter and half in their summer coats, and were consequently extremely conspicuous—a fact of which they seemed to be fully aware, and entirely disinclined to take any risks. I never succeeded in getting within many hundred yards of any of them, and returned on board empty-handed. The very fine mussels and cockles with which the sandy shores of the fiord were covered proved to be a more facile prey, and one in which the sailors of the squadron rejoiced greatly. In spite of the fact that the collection of these shell-fish entailed wading for many hours in the ice-cold water, there was never any lack of enthusiastic hunters.

Though there had been many snowfalls, it was not until the 28th of September that the snow began to lie without melting. Each day it came lower down from

the hill-tops, until within a week it had reached the water's edge, and, by the 6th of October, it was waist-deep everywhere. Occasional partial thaws there were, but October was a month of much snow and of heavy gales, and, as the daylight became shorter and shorter, the Aurora began to make a more or less nightly appearance. On the 7th of October ice began to form inshore, and by the next day the surface of the harbour (the water of which was nearly fresh, owing to the number of rivers flowing into it) was covered by a thin crust. This surface ice greatly impeded boat work, and we began to wonder whether we should not soon have to leave our pleasant anchorage, or risk being frozen in for the winter. However, a heavy thaw set in in the middle of the month, the ice disappeared, and the heavy rains which followed washed away most of the snow.

Besides my ordinary work as Senior Naval Officer at Pechenga, I at that time began to find myself becoming engrossed in duties quite out of the ordinary line of my naval experience. One of these partook of the nature of spy hunting. This matter commenced upon the day upon which we had first arrived at Pechenga. On visiting the local telegraph office, the ship's postman had been handed, with a bundle of service cypher telegrams, another telegram written in English, and addressed to "Robinson, Pechenga." Thinking that this telegram might be intended for one of the officers or men of the squadron, the postman brought the telegram back with him; but, strange to relate, there was no Robinson among the allied ships. The telegram was then opened, and it read as follows:

Robinson, Pechenga.—Received Gk. 2,000 rubles from firebrace and transferred to Miss Harriott He will pay the remainder next week in marks regards.—SHAME HALT.

To say the least of it, this telegram struck me as very suspicious. The mention of a German coin, such as a mark, I regarded doubtfully. Miss Harriott I could not believe to be a real name, and the signature "Shame

Halt " seemed to sniff of Sinn Fein or some such rebel organisation. We had but just arrived at an isolated spot on the extreme edge of Russia, a spot visited by no English ships for years, and one which, so far as we knew, had no English-speaking inhabitants. On our arrival, we had been handed this very fishy telegram—a telegram which, being in English, would convey no more information to the local authorities than if it had been in cypher. We were only a few hours' walk from the frontier of Norway, and close at hand in that country lay Kirkenaes, a spot at which I knew there were a German agent and several German ships. In addition, there were no frontier guards nor customs barrier between the two countries, and everyone who wished could pass from one territory to the other without a passport, question, or hindrance. In fact, I had already ascertained that at that time great numbers of ex-German prisoners were escaping by this route from North Russia. They, still clad in their old tattered army uniforms and provided with maps, had, for the most part, tramped hundreds of miles overland by unfrequented routes. Descending in swarms on isolated houses in this sparsely populated country, they had terrorised the inhabitants into giving them food which they dared not refuse. Thus provided for, these prisoners (whom in my heart I could not help sympathising with) passed daily almost in sight of the British Squadron at Pechenga on their way to Kirkenaes. Arrived there, they were fitted out by the German agent and repatriated.

Pechenga had for the moment become the headquarters of the principal British naval forces in North Russia, and it was a place at which arrived daily enormously valuable ships and war cargoes, and whence convoys sailed tri-weekly. It was in the power of a German agent on the spot to do immense damage by reporting the arrival and departure of shipping. To impart such information to the German U-boats constantly cruising in the neighbourhood would also have

been a very easy matter, especially as these submarines were constantly violating the neutrality of Norwegian territorial waters.

From the above, the reader will realise that matters were ripe for an attack of spy mania, and, to tell the truth, ever since I was a boy, more than thirty years ago, and discovered my first bird's nest, the mystery of hidden things has always had a fascination for me. I accordingly determined at once that the matter should be inquired into, but, though at first the affair promised well and the scent was hot, in the end it fizzled out into nothing. To this day I am in doubt whether Robinson was a spy or an ordinarily harmless individual.

My first inquiries through the British Senior Naval Officer in the *Glory* at Murmansk were encouraging. At my request he ascertained from the Russian authorities that Robinson was an English Jew, and was also believed to be a German spy. From local inquiries, I ascertained that Robinson had recently left Pechenga, and that he was associated with several individuals, mostly students, wanted by the Russian police—one of these having only a short time before made his escape from custody. All these individuals were nominally prospecting for minerals along the coast, and several further telegrams for Robinson, which we intercepted, seemed to corroborate the *bona fides* of this supposition —that he was a mining expert. The crux of the whole matter, however, was that Mr Robinson and his companions, whatever in actual fact they may or may not have been, were all safely across the Norwegian frontier. We never had on opportunity of satisfying our justifiable curiosity concerning them.

In connection with this matter and others, a British R.N.R. officer, Lieutenant X., of whose coming I had been notified, shortly afterwards arrived from Murmansk. He was employed by the secret service, and was one of the most interesting individuals whom it has been my good fortune to meet. If only he had had but the ability

to relate in writing some of his life's adventures, they would have formed a volume which would have placed the writings of most fiction mongers entirely in the shade. He had been a prisoner of war in Bulgaria, and there saw all his companions shot as spies, he alone escaping and traversing the country disguised as a Turk. He had been across Siberia on a sledge, and, as a ship-wrecked mariner, had traversed Patagonia on foot. He spoke fluently innumerable languages, and had all his life been engaged on the most dangerous kinds of work. At the moment when I first met him at Pechenga he was even then on a most risky mission, so that, literally, from day to day, his life hung but upon a thread. Having fitted him out as well as we could for his journey, we watched him start off with his Russian companions, and wished them God speed in their new quest.

News from the front in Russia at that time was far from cheering and generally conflicting. The Russian railwaymen were on strike, Riga had fallen, and the Russian troops were threatening to leave their trenches. An incident of the fall of Riga, which I have not seen mentioned in the English papers, I give here; my information was from Russian sources, but I believe it to be true. It appears that the Russian troops had surrendered practically without a struggle, but, before doing so, had seized and bound their own officers. These officers they turned over thus bound to the German commander-in-chief, doubtless expecting to be duly rewarded for their treachery. Such an example to his own troops, however, did not suit the Kaiser, who happened to be present. He forthwith caused the Russian officers to be released and honourably treated, whilst the men of the mutinous regiments he ordered themselves to be bound. This done, he had one out of every fifty publicly hanged, while, of the remainder, he caused a large percentage to be flogged. On hearing this story, and knowing the then state of Russia, I fear we, with one accord, exclaimed, "Good old Bill!"

It was at about this time that we heard of the raid by three German cruisers on the Norway-bound convoy from Lerwick. In that raid they had sunk nine neutral merchant ships and two British destroyers, and left their crews to perish in the open sea. As it was thought that these cruisers might come north, for some days we kept steam at short notice, ready for all emergencies. The news of the German naval mutinies at Kiel came to cheer us, however, a rare gleam of sunshine breaking through the storm-clouds of war, and the first tangible result of British propaganda.

But the Arkhangel season was now drawing to a close, and the day fast approaching when the waters of the White Sea might be expected to freeze over. The last allied merchant ship for the far north had already sailed from home, and, consequently, Pechenga itself was about to lose its *raison d'être* as a centre for the organising of convoys. During the remainder of the winter such commerce as came to North Russia would pass through Murmansk. For this reason Pechanga was abandoned on the 27th of October, and the *Intrepid* returned for a season to Yukanskie to guard and overlook the homeward bound shipping from Arkhangel.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BITER BIT NO HUMOUR SEES, AND SHIPPING LEAVES THE FROZEN SEAS; SOUTHWARD ALL KEELS TO FAIR LERWICK, LEAVING BEHIND THE BOLSHEVIK.

OUR stay at Pechenga had indeed been a peaceful and successful one, but, though we ourselves lay in such a quiet backwater of the war, there came to my notice at the time many submarine incidents which may be of interest to the reader.

During the first week of September, 1917, U-boats in general were very busy round the north of Norway, and while about a hundred miles from the North Cape one of them succeeded in torpedoing the Russian s.s. *Dront* and killing fourteen of her crew, including two women.

But the very next day retribution befel a submarine—a submarine which, in all probability, was the same one that had sunk the *Dront*. The reader may remember how in the early spring the British s.s. *Palmbranch* had sunk the mine-laying U 75 off the entrance to the Kola Inlet. The incident I am now about to relate centres in the s.s. *Olive Branch*, another vessel of the same line, who sank her cruel antagonist under circumstances equally dramatic and even more incredible. It was a case which, I imagine, a court of law would have defined as an " act of God."

It was on the 2nd of September, 1917, that the British s.s. *Olive Branch* was peacefully pursuing her way to Murmansk, she being then in latitude 72.27 north and one hundred and fifty miles from the North Cape. She

was quite unconscious of any danger when she was grimly made aware that things were not what they seemed by being struck in the engine-room by a torpedo. The ship did not immediately sink, and time permitted of the crew getting clear of her in their boats, which they at once lowered. Barely had they done this, however, when the submarine came to the surface and closed on the sinking vessel. The German in command of the U-boat was evidently of an impatient nature, and, becoming restless at his victim's slow rate of sinking, closed to within two hundred and fifty yards of her to despatch her with his gun, quite indifferent to the question as to whether any of the *Olive Branch's* crew still remained on board their ship or not. At such point-blank range the Hun could not possibly miss his target, and one round sufficed—both for the submarine and for the ship. The *Olive Branch* happened to be one of the many ships loaded with munitions and high explosive, and as the first and only shell struck home she blew up with a deafening roar. Such an explosion at close quarters would in any case probably have severely shaken the submarine, but a much more dramatic and unexpected fate was in store for her. It happened that stowed on the fore-deck of the *Olive Branch* there was a heavy motor-lorry, and this, lifted by the explosion, came hurtling through the air and fell with a crash on to the submarine. Under the impact the U-boat instantly sank, leaving her crew, who were mostly on deck enjoying the spectacle, struggling in the water. A number of these swimmers, many of them armed, struck out in the direction of the *Olive Branch's* boats and begged to be taken in. The boats were already packed to a dangerous extent with their human freight; they were also short of food and water, more than a hundred miles from land, and the Arctic winter was at hand. Even had the danger of adding to their number a large party of armed Germans been disregarded, it was still humanly impossible to pack them into the boats. The Germans were accordingly

left to their fate, to deal, as well as they could, with the trap which they themselves had digged. In the result, none of them ever returned to tell the tale. The boats, however, after great peril and privation, eventually reached Norway many days later.

But the strangest part of the tale is yet to follow, for it seems to plumb to the depths the German lack of humour, and to prove yet again that race's inherent inability to see the world through anything but Teutonic spectacles. For some weeks the German Press was silent on the loss of this submarine, after which it blazed forth in hot denunciation. Evidently some information had been forthcoming from neutrals, this probably having filtered through from Norway, where the *Olive Branch's* crew had landed. Wollf's Wireless Bureau wailed the pitiful story to the world—in English—and we happened to intercept it at Murmansk, where my ship was then lying. I kept a copy of the wireless message for some months, but have since then unfortunately mislaid it. It ran practically as follows, if my memory serves me right:

"One of our humane U-boats, having torpedoed a British steamer, came to the surface to see what assistance she could render to the crew (NOTE.—The "assistance" rendered was the shelling of an apparently helpless ship at point-blank range), not knowing the dangerous nature of her cargo. At that moment, unfortunately, the vessel, which was loaded with munitions, blew up, and so damaged our submarine that she sank, leaving her crew struggling in the water. The latter, with *their revolvers in their mouths* (NOTE.—*Italics* are my own), swam to the steamer's boats and implored to be taken in. But the brutal Englishmen, fit compatriots of their countrymen of the *Baralong*, refused to do this, and our gallant seamen perished to a man."

The Kola Inlet had also a little incident of its own. It was on the night of the 7th of September, with heavy snow falling and everything blotted out from sight by

the inkiness of the night, that the Russian battery at Toros Island, near the entrance, reported that a submarine had come in close under them. In fact, so close did the U-boat approach that the battery guns could not be depressed sufficiently to fire at her. In the end, the garrison sallied forth and loosed their rifles at the three men who were visible on the alleged U-boat's deck, whereupon the visitor at once made off. Knowing, however, the unreliability of Russian reports, it is at least equally likely that this supposed submarine was in reality some unfortunate fishing boat which had put in there for shelter.

From September until March the fogs and snowstorms of the Murman coast are chronic, rendering the difficulties of navigation almost insurmountable to those unacquainted with the locality. A British cruiser (which shall be nameless) had, indeed, spent a whole week off the Kola Inlet the previous Christmas, vainly trying to find the entrance. She had then returned home without succeeding.

But to return to our submarines. These, after being fairly quiet in September, became in October once more very pressing in their attentions. On the 7th of October the British s.s. *British Transport* arrived and reported having sunk a submarine off the west coast of Ireland. She, more fortunate than most other merchant steamers, was provided with two up-to-date modern guns. Wherefore, when a submarine commenced shelling her, she easily compelled it to keep out of range during daylight, and to submerge. However, when darkness fell, the U-boat evidently thought that her own turn had come. Under cover of the night, and proceeding on the surface at full speed, she got ahead of the steamer without the latter being aware of what had happened. The first intimation that the *British Transport* had of her danger was by observing the white streaks of two torpedoes, which missed her by inches as she sped on her zigzag course. Almost at the same moment she saw the

submarine close under her starboard bow, and, porting her helm, she rammed the latter not far from its stern. The U-boat was, of course, now helpless, and clanged noisily along the *British Transport's* side, as the latter, surging forward, trod her adversary under foot. The German crew on deck yelled loudly for help as their doomed vessel drifted out of sight. But the only help they got was a salvo from the steamer's guns, at a range at which the latter could not miss. When last seen, the U-boat was still afloat, with her stern under and her bows high in the air. She had obviously only a few minutes to live.

However mercifully inclined our seamen may have felt towards the crews of U-boats, in practice it was quite impossible to help the latter without the gravest danger to themselves. It was as though with bare hands a man were to attempt to assist a hornet or poisonous snake. Few U-boat commanders seemed to understand the meaning of the words mercy or gratitude, and the sting of the submarine, her guns and torpedoes, continued to be deadly for just as long as any of the crew remained alive. As was on more than one occasion shown, this sting was relentlessly used by Germans against a benefactor whenever a chance occurred to reverse their relative positions. Besides this, U-boats often worked in pairs. The only reasonably safe course was to clear out as quickly as possible from an unhealthy neighbourhood.

On the 24th of October the submarines were very close at hand. Two steamers, the *Zillah* and *Ilderton*, were torpedoed off the old spot near Kildin Island, just eastward of the Kola Inlet. Of these two, the former, being timber laden, remained afloat for some days; but, owing to the heavy weather, we were unable to salve her. Indeed, every vessel available was occupied looking for the crews of the two ships, adrift in their boats in those pitiless waters. The majority of these were, I think, found; but one boat, with sixteen hands in it, was, I believe, never accounted for.

It was on the evening of the 27th of October, the moon being at the full, that we finally abandoned Pechenga. Fortunately, the danger caused by this undesirable illumination was partly discounted by clouds and a heavy sea as we zigzagged our way eastward at nearly sixteen knots. The U-boat we knew must be lying somewhere near our track; but *how* near she had been we did not know until our arrival at Yukanskie the following day. There we learned from our collier, the *Chelford*, the extent of our danger. The latter had been steaming considerably inshore of us, and could see us clearly silhouetted against the moon; and, as we passed her about midnight, she could see plainly astern of us a submarine following at her best speed. The *Intrepid's* own speed, and the heavy head sea, had, however, evidently been too much for " Fritz," and he had had to abandon the chase.

Had further proof of this been wanting, we soon received it; for, hardly had we anchored at Yukanskie, when we had news that the west-bound convoy was being attacked by a submarine in another favourite locality by the Sem Islands. It was the unfortunate *Baron Balfour*, whose fate I have previously narrated, who was on that occasion " done in." Every small ship available at once put to sea to assist in a submarine hunt, even the Russians present lending a helping hand. There were at that time four good Russian destroyers present on the station, they having recently arrived after a half-year's journey from Vladivostock. The senior officer of this unit had to a great extent succeeded in keeping his crews from mixing with the other Russian naval units. Their discipline was therefore much better, for they were uninfected with the bacillus of Bolshevism which elsewhere daily gathered force.

Despite a carefully organised hunt, nothing further was seen of " Fritz," neither did we hear any more of submarines until a week later. Then, on the 4th of November, the Russian s.s. *Irina* was torpedoed and

sunk within a few miles of the spot which had been the scene of the *Baron Balfour's* stranding and subsequent torpedoing.

The unfortunate *Irina* had got separated from her convoy, and, despite all orders to the contrary, was proceeding on a course which took her close inshore. During the latter stages of the war many mercantile captains seemed to have become incapable of resisting the allurement and false sense of security which the sight of land gave them. In reality, of course, their ships would have been much safer if they had remained several hundred miles out at sea for as long as possible; for the chances of their then being sighted by submarines would have been very much lessened. But, human nature being what it is, I suppose it was only natural that the fears of sea captains should constantly be pleading against reason. For if, when several hundred miles from land, their ship were torpedoed, they knew that their chances of winning through would be very much smaller than they would have been had their vessel been close to the shore. Wherefore, many masters chose the more ignoble part of seeking first their own personal safety, and forgot that their chief aim should have been the safety of the ship.

Whatever may have been the reason for the *Irina's* captain disobeying his orders, I do not know. He was himself one of the first to suffer by his disobedience, for he was killed by the explosion of the torpedo, which blew off the stern of his ship. Besides him, a stewardess and four others were killed instantly. One of the four was a British naval officer taking passage from Arkhangel to joint the *Glory* at Murmansk. The *Irina* was timber-laden, but, in spite of that fact, she sank within a few minutes, the rest of the crew, however, managing to get safely away in the boats.

The submarine shortly afterwards came to the surface and, closing the boats, commenced to interrogate their crews. Finding, however, that the master had himself

been killed, the German commander, after making a few little jokes on the matter, presently departed. The boats succeeded in reaching the coast the same afternoon; there they were given temporary shelter by the inhabitants until found by a searching trawler the next morning.

For a month after this we lingered on at Yukanskie, seeing the last of the ships from Arkhangel safely started on their homeward voyages. In addition, there was the anti-submarine boom to be got in and stored, and the huge buoys of the War Channel to be weighed and embarked. It was on the 8th of November, 1917, that we first heard of the Bolsheviki successes, and learned at the same time that, in all probability, there would be no going home for us that winter. It was a grievous disappointment to us as well as to the *Iphigenia*, who received like orders, hers having, however, an additional proviso—that she was to winter at Arkhangel for the purpose of protecting life and property.

Meanwhile the political horizon in Russia became daily blacker and blacker, and added greatly to the depression which, on board ship, we found inseparable from the rayless winter night then finally closing in around us. Gale followed gale in endless succession, and the thermometer dropped lower and lower, until the mercury entirely disappeared into the bulb of the glass.

It would, indeed, have been remarkable had we not all felt depressed, for it seemed that after all those strenuous years spent by the British Navy in North Russia their labour had been wasted and was in vain. The only war news which we obtained was generally gleaned from the German wireless, and this, naturally, was not made to sound encouraging from the British point of view. With Russia fallen away, Roumania in fragments, Italy having a *débâcle* on the Isonzo, it looked to us as if the entente must finally bend and break before the united forces of German militarism. It was a black hour for us, and we had no idea what to expect; we felt it

to be quite on the cards that our late Russian allies might turn on us and, off-hand, treacherously torpedo us. With steam ready at short notice, our bunkers filled, and our guns loaded, we for some days awaited events. The telegraphs were in Russian hands, and had they wished they could, of course, at any time have stopped our communicating with England. But nothing happened, and, so far as our particular little corner of Russia was concerned, for the time being the assumption of power by the Bolsheviki made no visible atom of difference.

On the 13th of November, under the influence of a north-easterly gale, the temperature began to drop very rapidly. Frost and snow became continuous, and it looked as if the long-deferred cold season were about to set in in real earnest. By the 17th ice had begun to form on the bar at Arkhangel, but, thanks to the enemy submarines having all, apparently, returned to Germany, we were left with only the inclemency of the climate to contend with. In fact, the *Vindictive* and eight out of our twenty-three trawlers were allowed to sail for home.

It was under these circumstances that, on the 19th of November, I made a start on a long-promised visit to Arkhangel. Taking passage in the Commodore's yacht *Salvator*, I left Yukanskie at six in the morning, the weather having by then become exceedingly cold; in fact, during the whole of the six days I was absent, the thermometer registered continuously from forty to sixty degrees of frost.

As always during cold spells in the Arctic, the icy air striking the warmer water caused a dense mist to arise. In a very short time this mist, coming into contact with the rigging, froze into solid masses. Within an hour the yacht was sheathed from stem to stern in an icy shroud, and carried a quantity of congealed fluid which, in the rigging alone, must have weighed over fifty tons. We passed the first ice forming in the waters of the White Sea; it took the circular form of water-lily leaves,

H.M.S. "INTREPID" at Yukanskie, June, 1916.

and these knocked together with a musical clink as the ship slid through them. Having somehow groped our way through the mists, we arrived off Arkhangel bar at 4 a.m. the following morning. The lightship was then in process of being removed for the winter, but we were fortunate enough to obtain a pilot, and started up river. The frail yacht was, however, not built for work in the ice. Having reached Economia, only half way up to Arkhangel, and the ice by that time being three inches thick, she had to give up the unequal struggle. It was with difficulty that she got alongside the bank, where she tied up with the assistance of a tug. Continuing my voyage in the tug herself, we forced our way through an ever-thickening crust of ice the remaining twelve miles to Arkhangel, arriving there at five in the evening.

The river approaches to Arkhangel are through low-lying, marshy country. This, at the time when I arrived, being covered with snow and ice, it was almost impossible to decide from their appearance which of the two was the land and which the frozen surface of the river. There was really no guide by which we could keep the tug in the channel, except the tracks of broken ice left by other vessels which had preceded us. Had it not been for these, we should probably have made many attempts to take the ship overland.

Arkhangel itself is much further south than Yukanskie. In fact, it is just outside the rim of the Arctic Circle, and consequently gets a little of the sun right through the winter. The prolonged twilight also gives it several hours each day which are free from darkness. On arrival there I received a very hearty welcome from the Commodore, who, in spite of the sixty degrees of frost registered by the thermometer, did not yet consider it sufficiently cool to wear an overcoat. I found him, however, in a decidedly worried state of mind over the sudden advent of hard weather, for there still remained in the port some thirty allied merchantmen—all in various stages of loading or unloading. It was

necessary to get them all out with the utmost expedition, for failing this, they would, in all probability, remain frozen there for the next seven or eight months—and at home there was already a sufficient shortage of shipping without a waste such as that. The Commodore's staff were even then scouring the river in all directions trying to get a move on the lethargic Russians who, like the guests bidden to the feast, as recorded in Holy Writ, "with one accord all began to make excuse." Of the forty ice-breakers then at Arkhangel not one was ready for this expected emergency, and this in spite of all the repair work done to them by the *Iphigenia*. Some there were who stated that they were out of coal; others, that their crews were on strike; and yet others, again, that they had developed new and unsuspected defects to their machinery. Unashamedly the British officers offered large bribes or tips to the captains of the recalcitrant ice-breakers. It was the only way to persuade them to get their ships ready for sea, and, if the ice-breakers did not succeed in breaking a passage through the ice in the course of the next few days, it would have become too thick to handle—and thirty priceless merchant ships would be frozen in. At that time bribery was the only means by which anything could be accomplished in Russia. It was by bribery alone, backed by British perseverance, zeal and energy, that the situation was saved, and *all* the ships were eventually got to sea.

The sudden advent of frost unfortunately entailed the cutting short of my own visit. Hardly had I landed than I had to set about making preparations for my return, lest I also should be imprisoned there for the winter. It was the most awkward season of the year for getting about. Boats and ordinary vessels could not move on the river, the ice being too thick for them. But the ice was not yet thick enough to bear the railway, which ordinarily runs along the river surface during the winter months, and forms the highway by which the collected cargoes of many steamers are despatched into the interior. For the moment I found any means of transit

were hard to come by, and the getting of myself away no easy matter. In fact, it took me four days to cover the twelve miles down river from Arkhangel to Economia—four days of solid ice-smashing, during which I was transferred from one ship to another, from tug to ice-breaker, no less than a dozen times.

Ice-breaking, like horse riding, may be a good occupation for those with sluggish livers, but I did not find it one which appealed to me personally. Ice-breakers are vessels of all sizes, built with sloping bows. An ice-breaker breaking ice charges the latter at full speed, runs her bows up on to it, and trusts to her weight to break her through. She thus makes a channel of only her own width, but one from which cracks and fissures open and radiate in all directions, thus greatly weakening the ice around. After her butt at the ice, the ice-breaker first backs astern, then charges forward once more, and so on *ad nauseam*. As a passenger, I found the sensations engendered by the process most unpleasant. The crunching, smashing, grinding noise is deafening, and the vessel advances, bumps, tilts, backs, slithers, and sways unceasingly. By no possibility could I keep my feet or myself anchored in the same spot without gripping desperately with my hands whatever lay closest. Nothing was for one moment at rest, nor could the next movement be foretold for even one second in advance. I was soon tired out, and, to my mind, it was more like a nightmare ride on a scenic railway than anything else with which my experience enables me to compare it.

At Arkhangel, with sixty degrees of frost, the water froze practically instantly as soon as the vessel had passed, and men were crossing the fresh ice in her wake within a few seconds of it. But wherever a patch of clear water showed for an instant, there arose a dense watery mist above it. Under the ice the water itself was half frozen, and its density comparable with that of clotted cream; this as the vessel's screws revolved flew aside in viscous masses and exposed the dark depths of

the river. One wondered sometimes whether it were not frozen solid to the very bottom, and in fancy caught a fleeting vision of the latter. So solid and so deeply frozen had the river become in a few days that at one place the ice-breaker in which I had the misfortune to be, spent over eight hours forcing her way through a small stretch of ribbed ice less than four hundred yards wide.

It was therefore with feelings of the greatest relief that on the evening of the 24th of November I at length reached the comparatively clear water off Arkhangel bar. Even there it was congealing rapidly, and floes of field ice stretched in all directions outside; but by dodging and forcing our way through these we at length reached Yukanskie at midnight on the 25th of November. Once more in those familiar surroundings, dreary though they were, I experienced that feeling of satisfaction which a horse knows on returning to its stable. Once more I was back in my temporary home—a comfortable ship, where I could get a bath and speak the same language as my companions.

During my flying visit to Arkhangel I had, of course, little opportunity to see the sights of the place itself. It gave me the impression of being a somewhat uninteresting town of wooden houses built in the usual Russian style, and sprinkled with churches, whose green domes and gilded minarets looked beautiful in the rose-coloured rays of the low-lying sun. However, between the intervals of trying to get started on my return passage, I did what I could to see something of the place.

Being a sailor, of course one of the first things which I noted was that there appeared to be a large number of pretty girls about. Their trim ankles, however, rising out of large black snow-boots, give to the ladies a strange appearance of being hoofed animals. So swathed also were both men and women alike in long fur coats and fur hats that it was by no means easy to distinguish the sexes. One evening, after a visit to some tenth-rate cinemas, I was taken by a naval friend to a

place called the Club Theatre. This was in reality a social club with a theatre attached to it. In the theatre on certain evenings dancing was indulged in. It was a democratic assembly—soldiers, sailors, officers, and men all mixed indiscriminately together, with a host of their women-folk, mothers, sisters, wives, and *demi-monde*. The dances were such as were customary at a servants' ball at home before the war, and included D'Alberts, Mazurkas, and the like. Returning to the Commodore's house at about two a.m. after this function, I was amazed by finding stretched across the doorstep what at first I took to be an inebriated bear. Further investigation, however, proved it to be no bear, but the *concierge*, wrapped in his skin rugs and fast asleep in the snow—the temperature then being thirty degrees below zero. This, I subsequently ascertained, was the good man's usual sleeping-place, and one habitually used by Russians whose avocation it was to guard houses during the night.

When I left the *Iphigenia* was still lying off Arkhangel, loaded to the gunwale with stores and solidly frozen in to the ice. In those troublous and revolutionary days her presence had an undoubtedly calming effect on the populace, although her actual gun-power—four ancient four-point-seven guns—was negligible, and the ship herself was helpless, wedged as she was in the ice. At Arkhangel at the time there were hundreds of heavy howitzers and other guns which in a very few moments could have shelled her out of existence had the Russians been so minded. But the prestige of the British name was very great, and the sight of Britain's flag was sufficient. No such unpleasant eventuality occurred.

The chief danger lay in the fact that near at hand lay huge stores of spirits, used in the manufacture of high explosives. Had the working men raided these, anything might have happened, and a general massacre of the more well-to-do inhabitants would have been likely to follow. It was for this reason that the more law-abiding citizens looked with approval at the British flag,

and were glad to see the *Iphigenia*, which, lying close in to their town, looked much more formidable than she really was.

At Yukanskie, in the meantime, we had bidden goodbye to the sun until the following spring. Barring the lugubrious twilight, which still continued to show up for a few hours round about noon, we had no light worth speaking about, save only those periods, lasting about five or six days every month, during which the moon never set. At times, when snow or storm clouds obscured the sky, the darkness was more intense than anything I can remember. But, when the sky and atmosphere were clear, the snow reflected back the starlight and gave a certain measure of light.

Rather sadly we watched ship after ship of the British merchant fleet sail for home, followed in due course by the boarding-steamers *Grive* and *Stephen Furness*, the two yachts, and the trawlers. We found ourselves at length at Yukanskie with nought else save the *Tithonus* and two solitary trawlers. On the 30th of November, the futility of any further hope of Russian help in the war became manifest, for we received news of the Bolshevik treaty of peace with Germany.

With the close of November the cold spell became a little less pronounced, and the thermometer rarely registered more than from ten to twenty degrees of frost. By that time, however, the ice had extended over a great part of the Gorla, and our trawlers were no longer able to reach Arkhangel bar. One lot of trawlers were, in fact, caught by the ice, and, drifting helplessly hither and thither, were by it carried unwillingly across shoal patches off Cape Orlov. One of these vessels actually grounded twice, but fortunately sustained no injury. In the end they all succeeded in extricating themselves.

The last of the merchant ships having departed, the *Intrepid* in her turn, and last of all, left Yukanskie on the 1st of December, and, in a gale of snow from the northwest, proceeded for Kola Inlet. Our guns were soon

frozen into a solid block of ice one foot thick; but with constant chipping, and thanks to the special electric radiators which we had fitted to each, they still remained serviceable.

The inner half of the Kola Inlet we found on arrival to be covered with ice some three inches in thickness. This generally happens at intervals during the winter, but the ice never endures there as it does at Arkhangel. After a few days it breaks up, and drifts out to sea. In the present instance we found this ice to be a great comfort, for during the blind impenetrable darkness of fog and snowstorm—when, owing to the proximity of land, we had to stop the engines until the weather cleared—this ice held the ship in one position, and kept her from drifting into dangerous waters. Every now and then there would come clear intervals, during which we were able to fix our position and drive the ship ahead once more through the thin ice. In this manner we arrived at Murmansk at two p.m. on the 2nd of December, and I found myself under the orders of my senior officer in the old battleship *Glory*.

At Murmansk we found everyone even more depressed than we had been at Yukanskie. This was due, not only to the political situation, but perhaps even more to the four months of winter gloom and darkness which they saw before them. Months during which they would have neither recreation, exercise, mails, nor news, and would have to do all reading and work by artificial light. This was a state of things which we already knew to be harmful to the eyesight, and a fruitful cause of insomnia and mental derangement.

There were present at Kola a Russian battleship, a cruiser, and a few smaller craft. When the fog temporarily lifted on the 7th of December, we were able to see for the first time that the old Russian naval ensign had been hauled down. In its place was flying the blood-red flag of the Soviet.

The four Russian destroyers which had come from

Vladivostock, and had been well disciplined and pro-ally, had since we last saw them been re-officered with Bolsheviki nominees. A week after our arrival these put to sea on some unknown mission. As the Soviet was at peace with Germany, and it seemed quite possible that pro-German counsels might prevail, we never knew from day to day whether these destroyers might not return at any moment as our enemies, and sink us by a treacherous torpedo. Of the other Russian vessels, the battleship was believed to be pro-ally in sentiment, while the cruiser *Askold* was known to be virulently Bolshevik. Anything might be expected to happen. For days I held the ship in readiness to slip her cables and ram the cruiser should she show any signs of hostility. It would have been our only chance, for, in gun power, we could not have stood up to her for a moment. Nothing, however, did happen. The menace of Britain's sea power made treachery, had it been intended, too risky. Having done their worst to the pygmy forces on the spot, the Russian ships would have had nowhere to escape to, save as refugees to neutral Norwegian waters. Moreover, in this far north of Russia, the whole population was still dependent upon the sea for supplies of food, clothing, and almost every necessary of life.

Work was evidently no part of the *régime* of Soviet ships. One of the few signs of life on board them was the spectacle, recurrent twice daily, of a tug arriving alongside to discharge or embark a cargo of fair but frail femininity. There was a great stir one morning, for the ice was too thick for the tug to be able to get alongside the battleship; whereupon, some of its occupants attempted to walk to her on the ice. One of the women happened to fall through a crack into the water, and, after much excitement and many thrills and chills, was gallantly rescued by a sailor. This to an accompaniment of loud " huzzahs " from the onlookers.

Consequent on the Bolshevik peace with Germany, all

Allied merchant shipping was ordered to leave Russian waters forthwith without discharging cargoes. The *Iphigenia* was also broken out of the ice at Arkhangel, and arrived to reinforce us at Murmansk, whilst the battleship *Glory* once more had her crew brought up to full strength by reliefs from England. Prepared for every emergency, we awaited events, sparing no effort to get off the scene as soon as possible the merchant ships still at Murmansk.

As may be imagined, life with us at that time was not exactly a round of gaiety; therefore, with a view to cheering things and people up, I resolved to essay the publication of a ship's paper. This was no easy matter, owing to the shortage of all materials generally considered essential for the production of a periodical. Neither paper nor printing-press did we possess, but where there is a will there is a way. By the use of typewriters, hectographic ink, and some gelatine reproducing apparatus, we brought to birth a really remarkable first number, it being profusely illustrated by lithographs in red- and violet-tinted inks. The official title of this ship's magazine—a magazine which contained eighteen pages of foolscap size—was *The White Sea Whisperer and Arctic Advertiser;* a footnote adding that with it was incorporated the *Poetical Pink'un.*

The idea of a ship's paper caught on from the first, and contributions—of a sort—fairly rained in. As the reader may have guessed from the title, the paper was not of a specially refined nature, and was apt to indulge in personalities of the most searching nature. But, such as it was, no copy of *Punch* in the Arctic ever caused half so much joy as did this low rag. It gave a chance to everyone to poke fun at his messmates—an opportunity which was taken every advantage of. The edition—owing to shortage of paper and gelatine—was limited to thirty copies; these were sold at half a crown apiece, and ten times that number could easily have been disposed of. With the proceeds quite a respectable sum

was available, which was forwarded to Lady Jellicoe's Fund.

Alas that the first number of such a successful paper should also be its last! We had in it discovered a means for the alleviation of our winter tedium and depression, and were busily prospecting round for further supplies of paper when the *Intrepid* received unexpected orders to proceed home forthwith.

On the 21st of December, 1917, we put to sea in the darkness at nine o'clock in the morning. Outside there was a roaring gale, and this we carried with us the whole thirteen hundred miles of our homeward voyage. The gale, however, was behind us and helped us to make a record passage, for we arrived at Lerwick at dawn on Christmas morning. Although she was then more than twenty years old the *Intrepid* was a wonderful steamer, and as sound as a bell. Nothing in the way of weather seemed to stop her, although my cabin under the fore-bridge was smashed to matchwood, and the staunchions supporting the deck were bent nearly double under the fo'c'sle by the weight of the descending seas.

Sheathed in ice, the *Intrepid* coasted down the western side of the Shetlands in a blinding snowstorm, and but by the thickness of her paintwork did a torpid patrol trawler, whom she encountered, avoid destruction. At midnight the latter suddenly emerged out of the whirling whiteness of falling snowflakes, and was right under our bows before we could see her. We missed her by inches.

It was with a sigh of thankfulness and relief, following on much anxiety, that I heard the splash of our anchor as it dropped to the bottom of Lerwick Harbour just as the clocks chimed eight that snowy Christmas dawn. Presently the sun came out and, as in the Arctic, shone over uplands of shining white.

At Lerwick we heard the sad news of the loss of the two armed boarding steamers, *Grive* and *Stephen Furness*. For two years they had been our tried and trusted

companions in the Arctic. Daily and hourly had they risked destruction from submarines in those waters and emerged unscathed. And now at Lerwick, within touch of their homes, they had fallen victims to lurking U-boats; the *Stephen Furness* losing her captain, five officers, and eighty-five men—nearly half of her small company.

On the following day we sailed for Chatham, our good luck following us all the way; for, though ships were being sunk all around us, we saw nothing of enemy submarines or their works. A British submarine we did, indeed, come in contact with, though we saw her not—only a light, presumably on her periscope, which, from the surface of the water, flashed a challenge to us as we sped past.

We had come home actually faster than the telegrams announcing our departure. This was responsible for some little delay *en route*, and it prevented our arriving at Chatham before New Year's Eve. A week later the ship paid off. Her paint work not being as spotless as was customary in home waters, the fact evoked some caustic remarks from the little tin god who presided at that function. Dressed as he was in his immaculate gold lace, aiguillettes and tailor-pressed uniform, I would have given much to have taken him and dumped him for a few months at Yukanskie. There he would have learned that in war time, in waters where work, frost and gales are continuous, and life and death themselves are trivial matters, it is not *always* possible to have paintwork up to that standard considered so essential in Chatham dockyard.

Of the larger ships which worked with me in the Arctic, only the battleship *Glory* and the damaged *Carron* now survive. As the reader already knows, the *Grive* and *Stephen Furness* had already been sunk off Lerwick, and the *Tithonus*, following after at a later date, met with the same fate at the hands of a submarine. A few months later the *Vindictive*, *Intrepid* and *Iphigenia* were

to be the makers of that immortal page of history which was written when they, with others, successfully blocked the exit of U-boats from Zeebrugge and Ostend. Very few of their old crews were then on board them, but some were. I have been told that one of my old petty officers in the *Intrepid*, a man always conspicuous for his keenness and courage, was the last man to leave the Mole. It was a gallant ending for the old ships; may their bones rest in peace and not be given over to the shipbreakers.

Although in the dark days at the close of 1917 it seemed to many of us that our three years' effort in Arctic Russia had been wasted, yet now, looking back, I know that things were far otherwise. Without our contemptible little Navy in those waters, without the zeal and effort which we put into our work, Russia would, for all practical purposes, have been cut off from her allies from the very commencement of the war. Her long, long line of railway across Siberia would have been the only mouth by which, during her three war years, she could have been fed on the indispensable requirements of war. Without Arkhangel, and latterly Murmansk, through which to obtain her supplies, she must have succumbed within twelve months, instead of enduring for three years as she actually did do. And without those three years of Russian assistance could the other allies have held out?

I cannot answer. But that there would have been a far greater expenditure of blood and treasure is a matter of which there can be no reasonable doubt.

THE END.

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