

**BOWER JOHN
GRAHAM**

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Klaxon H.M.S. —

TO D. V. B

When Homer launched his epic on the literary sea,
The critics were as merciful as they can ever be:
"We take it that the author did the best that he can do,"
"And the book should be remembered for at least a year or two..."
But Homer let the critics go, and listened with a smile,
For he had heard a verdict that was better by a mile,
In a code that only Homer as a husband understood, —
"You *are* a funny clever thing — I'd no *idea* you could."

"1923."

[The following is the description by Professor J. Scott, F.R.S., of his recent Airship Journey across the old Bed of the North Sea. July 1, 1923.]

It is perhaps unnecessary for me to state the objects and purpose of my journey of last week, as it would be false modesty in me not to recognise the great interest taken by the geologic and antiquarian worlds in my proposed enterprise. For the benefit, however, of those for whose intelligence the so-called "Popular" geologic works are compiled, I will recapitulate some points which are ancient history to my instructed readers.

The winter of 1922 witnessed the greatest geologic change in the earth's surface since the last of the Glacial epochs. Into the causes and general results of this change I do not propose to enter, beyond mentioning my opinion that the theory propounded by Professor Middleton (a theory designed only for one purpose – that of attempting to throw doubt on the data and reasoning of my first monograph on the subject) is not only childish, but based on a fallacy.

I will confine myself to the results as they affected this country and the continent of Europe, of which it is now a prolongation or headland – not, as the Daily Press erroneously labels it, a peninsula.

The total change in elevation of the land is now calculated at 490 feet 7 inches, but more accurate measurements are still being taken. This great change brings us back to a geologic age when man and mammoth co-existed in the primeval forest of Cromer, and when the Dogger Bank was a great plain where wild beasts roamed and palæolithic man left the traces of his industry in the bones and shaped flints which we hope soon to collect in quantities from the mud and ooze with which thousands of years of sea-action has covered them.

I had little difficulty in obtaining Admiralty permission to accompany the Captain of a Naval Airship on one of his regular patrol trips across the great expanse of mud which was once the North Sea.

Of course in the six months since the departure of the Ocean from the new lands, the district has been regularly patrolled by the Navy, but the air is as yet the only safe route by which to cross it. It will be some time, perhaps years, before the surface becomes safe to walk on, although the Government is plentifully sprinkling grass and other seeds from all passing aircraft. In the large and powerful airship in which I was privileged to travel, we had every modern device for enabling a close inspection of the surface to be taken. A trail-rope was used when it was desired to drift slowly or to actually hover over some of the points of interest which we observed on our passage.

The day was fine and clear, and I could not have wished for better weather conditions when we rose over Dover and started the main engines on a north-easterly course. As no maps can yet be compiled of the New Lands (as popular clamour has most inaccurately labelled them) owing to their dangerous surface, we navigated by the old Admiralty charts, marked in depths of water, and I was amused at having the Varne and Goodwin "shoals" pointed out to me – the objects indicated being long ridges of sandy hills rising from the shining surface of the Channel bed. Off Deal and Dover a few of the wrecks are being worked on by enterprising local Salvage Companies – a road being laid out to each composed of gravel, sand, and brushwood. I fear, however, that the speculators will not profit greatly. The roads are good enough over the sand, but where they cross the mud-flats they swallow not only their traffic but the funds of their owners.

As we travelled up the valley with the drone of our engines echoing from the whale-backed ridges on either side, with our gondolas barely a hundred feet from the ground, I discussed our programme with the Captain, whose views and reminiscences I found most entertaining. On general subjects he was like most of his service, almost contemptibly uneducated (I might mention that he did not understand what Magdalenian culture was!), but he was evidently well read in his own

trade. He told me several stories which were no doubt excellent, but which were marred to a point of incomprehensibility by a foolish interlarding of technical terms. I gave him a short précis of what is known or deduced of prehistoric life on the New Lands, and spoke of the bones and fossils occasionally found in trawl-nets by the fishermen. His point of view was that the war overshadowed everything. He seemed to think that that event was one from which all others should date, although it had lasted such a short time. As very little of interest to me could yet be seen owing to the general coating of slime with which the land was covered, I amused myself by listening to his experiences on his weekly air patrols, his conversation being somewhat after this style: —

"Yes, it was a fair snorter while it lasted – that gale, – damn lucky we hadn't many ships out. Yes, most of 'em got in. They either ran down Channel (Lord! the Straits were like opening the caisson gates to a graving-dock!) and made New Queenstown, or else they got into harbour on the East Coast and stranded there. You see, what with mines and wrecks, the North Sea wasn't being used much, and as the navies were taking a rest there wasn't much of value at sea. Some ships got stuck though – fishing boats mostly. No, they were all right – it took a week to drain off, and it was calm weather when they grounded. Most of them have wireless now, and they yelped for help, and we took 'em off. Those that hadn't were a bit hungry when we found them, but I don't think we lost many. You see, all nations sent air fleets out. Have you read the U.S. Magazine? You ought to; there's a damn good argument going on as to whether it would have paid us or Germany most if it had happened during the war. I think us, myself. You see, there's only a narrow channel now running past the Norwegian coast, and we could have mined that. Look at that, Professor! How's that for mines? That's Zeebrugge with the houses showing over the sand-hills. Whose? Oh! both sides put 'em there – that hollow to the east is proper stiff with them, isn't it? Port fifteen – Quartermaster! steer east – What? No, just going to show you something. You said it seemed a wicked waste of material; well, look over there – two of them got it. One's a U.C. boat but the other's a big one. They picked them up coming back, and that big chap's nearly in two halves – Starboard twenty, Quartermaster! No, we needn't go closer, you'll see one every half mile between here and Heligoland – some of ours as well as theirs. Yes – that's a Dutchman – torpedoed by the look of him. See the hole in the stern? Oh, butter and bacon and that sort of thing! No, nobody in her. Why? Well, look at the davits – they left her before she sank – all the boats are gone.

"Like these glasses? That's the *Hinder* over there. Yes, they still live in her, and she's still useful. A fine big lightship, isn't she? She settled down at her moorings as peacefully as could be, and when we sent a line down to them on our first patrol trip after the show, they sent up a note asking for some 'baccy, and would we post some letters for them? Nothing ever did worry the *Hinder* in the war, and it won't now. You see, English and German used to fight under her tail every other night, and as she was an international light she just flashed away and looked on. I wonder none of their crew have written a book yet – 'Battles round the *Hinder*,' by an Eyewitness. It would be better than most of the truck that has been written in England about it. Yes, she lies in a bit of a hollow, but the light shows up all right, and that's all we want. Here you are; this is what you wanted."

We had reached the first object of interest in my journey. More trail-rope was paid out, and we swung with our engine stopped, downwind, lying twenty feet above a great pit torn in the earth by some tremendous explosion. All around the pit-mouth lay masses of earth and rock, and the face of the crater was thick with bone-breccia and fossils of every kind. The explosion had occurred over an old beach on the bank of what had once been the old Channel River. For thousands of years prehistoric men and beasts had lived and died there, and had left their skeletons to enlighten us. And more than bones had been left. Almost the first basket-load that our light electric "grab" produced for us contained among its numerous specimens of surpassing interest a rough "hand-axe" of dark flint, possibly of Pre-Chellean culture. However, the whole of my notes and specimens obtained on this visit are now being examined and classified, and I will postpone description of them until the meeting of the Society on the 18th.

I would have liked to have descended into the pit by a ladder or other means, but was dissuaded, partly by the motion of the airship, which swayed to and fro in the light wind, and partly by the blunt negative with which my suggestion was greeted by the Captain. We took only three baskets of specimens from this spot, as we had others to visit, and our carrying capacity was limited. As we slowly hauled in the trail-rope and prepared to continue our journey, I asked the Captain whether this crater had been intentionally formed by the Government for purposes of research, or whether it had been produced accidentally in the late war.

"Accident?" he said. "Well, no, hardly that – but still, I expect he *thought* he might pull it off without doing himself in." He pointed to one of two big submarines which lay on opposite sides of the crater. The one indicated was the smaller of the two, and the least damaged. She lay upright with a slight tilt up by the bow (which was dented and torn rather badly). The other was in two halves, and lay on her side with a mound of earth, bones, and rock, making a sort of rough junction between the halves. The two submarines looked like great guardians of the pit, and I wondered at the madness of man that makes him revel in war and killing to no purpose. I mentioned something of this thought to the Captain, who was still gazing at the more intact of the two boats, and tapping a flint "Coup de poing" on the side of our gondola.

"Well, Professor," he said, "the man who made this tool didn't make it to clean his nails with, did he?" I observed that it was now generally agreed that most of prehistoric man's weapons were for use against his greatest foes – which were wild beasts, and not men. The Captain jerked the flint implement back into the basket.

"My oath! you've said it," he snapped. "We've been fighting wild beasts, and that chap in the smaller boat was a friend of mine. He took that Fritz fairly amidships with his stem, but he couldn't get free, and they went down locked. When Fritz hit bottom his mines went, and that blew them apart, and so there's your bone pit, Professor."

I looked back at the pit and the two hulks beside it, now dwindling astern. "How do you know all that?" I asked.

"Read his number on the conning-tower for one thing, and the chap who had that boat would be pretty sure to take a Hun with him when he had to go. The rest? Well, his bows are bashed in, you see, and his lid is still open, so he gave Fritz his bow first on the surface. You may have some relics of curious beasts in that basket, Professor, but I can show you a relic, or a hundred if you like, of a damn sight nastier beast. See the masts over that mudbank? That's a Dutch liner – two torpedoes and no warning. Full of women too. Like to go and look? I thought not. Yes, Professor, I can show you two hundred sunken ships in a few hours' run here, and they haven't all got their davits empty by a long chalk. Never mind – here's something more amusing."

Our engine slowed and almost stopped while we drifted across a flat, broad, muddy plateau which sloped away to a valley on each side.

"See those lines?" said my abrupt naval friend – "those long straight scores along the mud, I mean. Those are where the submarines – ours and theirs – have been taking bottom for a rest. Taking bottom? Oh! on winter nights, when it's too dark to see or when they're waiting for anything, or got defects or struck fog, you know. They used to take bottom a lot here, because it's good surface and they had twenty fathom of water, too. The marks haven't washed out yet. See this one? He bumped three times before he settled: he must have had a lot of headway on – his track's all of half a mile. That bed is where he settled for the night. It's soft there, and he worked in over his bilge keel. There's another, fifty yards off him. Of course it was probably made a year before or after he made his, but there must have been cases when our boats and Fritz's lay that much apart all night and didn't know it. Pretty queer idea, isn't it? Perhaps a banjo strumming in one boat and a gramophone going in the other. Oh yes, they used to have concerts on the bottom before turning in! One of our chaps gave me a programme once. There were twenty items in it, and it was headed 'C/o G.P.O. – 126 feet.' This was a regular submarine traffic lane for both sides. Some parts of the surface up north aren't marked

at all, – it was either too deep water or there were too many mines about. Funny thing is, that some of the areas which both sides seem to have studiously gone round and avoided have no mines at all in them. Just rumour, I suppose. They gave the place a bad name and damned it. Eh? No – that's all right – tip 'em out on the deck – we can scrub the place out when we get in."

He spoke to a sailor, who stepped forward and turned the nearest basket of specimens upside down. As he did so, something rolled from the heap to my feet, and with a thrill which could only be understood by my brother scientists I gazed on the greatest archæological discovery of the ages. I have already announced my discovery to the press, and the scientists of all nations are now gathering in London to inspect it, so I shall not enter now on a detailed description. I may say that my first thought was that I had in my hands a copy of my confrère Keith's reconstruction of the Piltown skull, and that my own reconstruction had been to a certain extent false; but on mature reflection I decided that this could not be so, and that I must classify my find as belonging to a hitherto unknown branch of the race of Homo Sapiens – akin to, but yet distinct from, Eoanthropus. This prehistoric man I have called Homo Scoticanthropus, and my full report and conclusions will be shortly before the Society.

The skull is intact and requires no reconstruction. The lower mandible is of the chimpanzee-like type found with Eoanthropus, and as it was picked up by the same basket, must undoubtedly belong to the skull.

As to the remainder of our voyage, I can only say that I spent the time on the floor of the gondola measuring and inspecting my find. I could not tear myself away from it, and we therefore omitted our visits to other spots where explosions were known to have occurred near the old sea-bed, confining ourselves to a hurried round of the Naval patrol route. Beyond a casual inspection and a remark that it looked like Hindenburg, the airship captain took no interest in this now famous skull, but confined himself to his duties of navigation and control.

It is unfortunate that the exact depth and geological strata of the skull's position cannot be given. The basket was drawn from the bottom of the pit, but the skull may have been either thrown up by the explosion or rolled down later by the action of the tides.

When the new lands have dried we hope to have a careful inspection of that and other pits, when more and perhaps equally valuable discoveries may be made.

I have perhaps made undue mention of my naval friend in this pamphlet, but to tell the truth his type was new to me. Though, like all his fellow-officers, his limited education had tended to make him narrow-minded, he nevertheless deserves mention here as having assisted, albeit in a humble way, in the most wonderful discovery in history.

PRIVILEGED

They called across to Peter at the changing of the Guard,
At the red-gold Doors that the Angels keep, —
"Lend us help to the Portal, for they press upon us hard,
They are straining at the Gate, many deep."

Then Peter rose and went to the wicket by the Wall,
Where the Starlight flashed upon the crowd;
And he saw a mighty wave from the Greatest Gale of all
Break beneath him with a roar, swelling loud —

*Let us in! Let us in! We have left a load of sin
On the battlefield that flashes far below.
From the trenches or the sea — there's a pass for such as we,
For we died with our faces to the foe.*

"We haven't any creed — for we never felt the need, —
And our morals are as ragged as can be;
But we finished in a way that has cleared us of the clay,
And we're coming to you clean, as you can see."

Then Peter looked below him with a smile upon his lips,
And he answered, "Ye are fighters, as I know
By your badges of the air, of the trenches, and the ships,
And the wounds that on your bodies glisten so."

And he looked upon the wounds, that were many and were grim,
And his glance was all-embracing — unafraid;
And he looked to meet the eyes that were smiling up to him,
All a-level as a new-forged blade.

"Ye are savage men and rough — from the fo'c'sle and the tent;
Ye have put High Heaven to alarm;
But I see it written clear by the road ye went,
That ye held by the Fifteenth Psalm."

And they shouted in return, "*'Tis a thing we've never read,
But you passed our friends inside
That won to the end of the road we tread
Long ago when the Mons Men died.*"

"*Let us in! Let us in! We have fallen for the Right,
And the Crown that we listed to win,
That we earned by the Somme or the waters of the Bight;
You're a fighting man yourself — Let us in!*"

Then Peter gave a sign and the Gates flung wide
To the sound of a bugle-call:
"Pass the fighting men to the ranks inside,
Who came from the earth or the cold grey tide,
With their heads held high and a soldier's stride,
To a Friend in the Judgment Hall."

ACCORDING TO THEIR LIGHTS

The world was a streak of green and white bubbles, and there was a great roaring noise which disturbed his thoughts. "Boots – boots – I must get them off." He remembered the only occasion on which he had experienced an anæsthetic, the mental struggle to retain his ego, and the loss of will-power he had known at every breath. He was going down now, the roaring was less terrible and he felt very tired. A check in his descent and a little voice at the back of his brain: "There was a big sea running." Then a blur of white foam and a long gasping breath. Something rasped his forehead and a rough serge sleeve was across his throat. He fought feebly to keep the choking arm away, but as they rose on the crest of a long blue-green swell, he was jerked from the water by the neck and the belt of his overcoat. His first clear sensation was one of intense chill. Although there was little wind, it was cold in the air. He raised his head and moved to avoid the uncomfortable pressure of something on his chest. As he saw his situation he dropped his head again quickly and lay still. He was across the keel of a broad grey boat which pitched and heaved at terrifying angles as the seas passed. He crawled cautiously round, pivoting on his stomach till his legs straddled the keel and he had a grip on it with his hands under his chin. Facing him in a similar attitude was a seaman he knew, a tall brawny torpedoman whom he had noticed rigging the lights in the Wardroom flat on occasions when Evening Service had been held there. What was his name – Davies? Denny? No, Dunn! of course – the ship's boxer, and the funny man at the concerts. Were they two all that was left? He opened his mouth and gasped a little before speaking.

"All right, sir – take it easy – I've been off this billet twice, and it's no joke getting back to it. Good thing you're a light weight, sir, or you'd've pulled me in just now."

"Are there – are there any more, Dunn?"

"God knows, sir – beggin' your pardon, that is – the mine got us forr'd and the magazine went. This is the pinnace we're on, and it's the biggest bit of the ship I've seen floating yet."

"Good God! Where were you?"

"On the bridge, sir, just sent for by the Officer of the Watch about the telephones; but I'm – I don't know 'ow I got away, sir – flew, I reckon. Where were you, sir?"

"Coming up the Wardroom ladder, and as I got on deck I was washed away. Dunn! do you think we'll be picked up?"

The seaman raised his head and shoulders cautiously and took a rapid glance around as they topped a sea, then resumed his attitude along the keel, his chin on his crossed wrists. "You're a parson, sir," he said, "and you're ready for it, so I'll tell you. We were on detached duty, and there mayn't be another ship here for a week yet."

"A week! But, man, a merchant ship or fisherman might pass any time."

"A fisherman might, sir; but I never saw a merchantman since we came on this trip, and I don't see anything now."

There was a pause, and the padre shivered in his thin wet clothes. "The sea was going down this morning; how long do you think we could stay alive on this?"

"That's the trouble, sir. This is the pinnace, and she's stove in a bit."

"Do you mean she'll sink? But they float when they are waterlogged, don't they?"

"Not this one, she won't, and she's got the launch's slings in her too – half an hour I give her; but you're right, sir; the sea's going down, and I'm keeping a watch out for more wreckage if it goes by, sir."

The shivering-fit passed and he tried to collect his thoughts. Yes, the pinnace *had* settled a bit since he had been dragged aboard. She did not lift so easily to the sea, and had lost the tendency to broach-to which had made him grip the keel so tightly at first. He was quite calm now, and everything seemed much more simple. Half an hour! He lowered his forehead to his hands and his thoughts

raced. What had he left undone? Yes, the ship was gone, so he had nothing to think of in connection with her. As Dunn would say, his affairs in her were all "clewed up" by her loss. But ashore, now – ah! For a full minute he fought with his panic. He felt a rage against a fate that was blindly killing him when he had so much more of life to enjoy. He wanted to scream like a trapped rabbit. He felt his eyes wet with tears of self-pity, and at the feeling his sense of humour returned. He thought of himself as a child about to be smacked, and when he raised his head he was smiling into Dunn's eyes. "Half an hour is not long, Dunn," he said, "but it is longer than our friends had."

Dunn took another swift glance to right and left, then, reaching a hand cautiously into his jumper, pulled out a wet and shiny briar pipe, and began to reflectively chew the mouthpiece.

He was a young *padre*, but he had been in the Service most of the war. He knew enough to choose his words with care as he spoke again.

"Dunn," he said, "we haven't got long. I am going to pray."

"Yessir," said the bony, red face before him.

He tried again. "Dunn, you're Church of England, aren't you?"

"Yessir. On the books I am, sir."

"You mean you have no religion?"

Dunn blew hard into the bowl of his pipe and replaced the mouthpiece between his jagged teeth. "Not that sort quite, sir – but I'm all right, sir."

The *padre* moved a little bit nearer along the keel. The pinnacle was certainly deep in the water now, but his mind was at ease and he did not feel the cold. "Listen, Dunn," he said; "I am going to pray – I want you to repeat what I say after me."

Dunn moved his hands from under his chin and took his pipe from his mouth. "Yessir," he said.

The *padre* paused a moment and looked at the long blue slope of a sea rising above his eyes. He wondered vaguely why he was not feeling sea-sick. "O God, Who made the sea and all that therein is, have mercy on us Thy servants called to-day to Thy judgment-seat. Pardon us the manifold sins we have committed, and lead us to a true repentance; and to us, who have in the past neglected Thee in our hearts, send light and strength that we may come without fear before Thy throne. Have pity, O Lord, upon those who are made widows and orphans this day. Grant to our country final victory and Thy peace. Amen."

The sun was behind clouds now, and the seas were washing occasionally along the sinking boat.

"You did not join me in the prayer, Dunn," he said. "Was it not within the scheme of your religion?"

Dunn put his pipe carefully back in his jumper and took a firmer grip of the keel. "Yes, sir," he said, "it was – but I don't whine when I'm down."

"Do you mean I was whining, Dunn?"

"No, sir, I don't. You've always prayed and you're not going back on anything. I don't go much on Church, and God wouldn't think nothing of me if I piped down now."

The *padre* was, as has been said, a young man, and being young he did the right thing and waited for more. It came with a rush.

"You see, sir, it's God this, and God that, and no one knows what God is like, but I'm a Navy man and I think of Him my way. If I'm not afraid to die I'm all right, I think, sir. It wasn't my fault the ship sank, sir. I've always kept my job done, and I've got 'Exceptional' on my parchment. When I joined up I took the chance of this, and I ain't kicking now it's come. I reckon if a man plays the game by his messmates, and fights clean in the ring, and takes a pride, like, in his job – well, it ain't for me to say, but I don't think God'll do much to me. He'll say, 'Jack,' He'll say, 'you've got a lot of things against you here, but you ain't shirked your work and you aren't afraid of Me – so pass in with a caution,' He'll say. You're all right, sir, and it may be because you're a good Christian; but I reckon, sir, it's because you know you've done your job and not skrimshanked it that you ain't afraid, just the same as me... Hold tight, sir, – she'll not be long now."

The *padre* ducked his head as a swell passed, but the sea had no crest now, the weather was certainly improving. "I don't say you're right," he said, "but I haven't time to bring you to my way of thinking now."

The pinnace began to stand on end with a gurgling and bubbling of air from her bow. The two men slipped off on opposite sides, still holding the rough splintery keel between them.

"Listen, Dunn – repeat this after me: 'Please God, I have done my best, and I'm not afraid to come to You.'"

"Please God, I've done my best, and I'm not afraid to come to You,' sir. Good-bye, sir."

"Thank you, Dunn – good-bye."

The sunset lit up the slope of a sea that looked majestically down on them, and flashed on something behind it. As they looked the wet grey conning-tower of a submarine showed barely fifty yards away. The startled sea pounded at her hull as she rose and grew, and a rush of spray shook out the folds of a limp and draggled White Ensign that hung from the after-stanchion of her bridge.

A NAVAL DISCUSSION

The air was thick with smoke, and a half-circle of officers sat clustered round the stove in the smoking-room. True – there was no fire in the stove, but that did not count. A stove was a place you sat around and jerked cigarette ash at, or, if you were long enough, rested your heels on. The party consisted of six ship's officers and a guest. A few feet away a Bridge-party was in progress. It was the usual Naval party, and was composed of one man who could play, two who thought they could, and one who had come in in response to urgent demands to "make up a four," and who held no illusions about his own play or his partner's. However, he argued well, which was a help. The game appeared to go in spasms – a few minutes' peace punctuated only by subdued oaths, and then a cross-fire of abuse and recriminations – usually opened by the fourth player, who had somewhere learnt the wonderful feminine art of getting in first accusation, and then dodging his opponents' salvoes behind a smoke-screen of side-issues.

The group by the stove were not in the least disturbed by the game behind them. They had heard Naval Bridge played before, and knew that it was only when the players became polite that trouble was in the offing. The talk, as always, was of the War, and swung with startling suddenness from one queer aspect to another. The Senior Engineer was leaning back in his chair, his pipe between his teeth, listening to the mixture of views and voices from either side of him.

"What do they want this saluting order at all for? They're making everybody salute everybody in London now, and they say it isn't safe to walk down the Haymarket to the Admiralty, because the traffic stands to attention for you."

"All damn nonsense. There's too much saluting – that sort, I mean – and there's too little of the other sort. Let's have an order that every civilian must salute a wounded man, or a man with a wound stripe, and then I'll take Provost-Marshal and see it done."

"They'd chuck their hands in. They're all talking of Democracy now, and a wounded man would count as a gilded autocrat."

"Democracy, my foot! I know their sort of Democracy. It's like Russia's special brand – do as you please, and make all you can for yourself. A civilian's no good till he's a conscript or done his time in the Territorials. If they want democracy they can come here. This is the most democratic Service in the world."

"But you can't run down civilians over this war; why – the whole Army's civilian now. They haven't done so badly, though they had to wait for war before they moved."

"Whose fault was it they didn't help before? It wasn't ours. But that's just what I'm saying. They're all right once they've been drilled, but no damn good till they have been. We ought to put the whole lot through a short course of drill and a week of trench work, and let them go again."

The guest's voice broke in – "You mean, I take it, that the people who are going to make the peace are the people who have not yet learnt discipline?"

"Yes, sir – that's about it. They haven't learnt to think for their side instead of their own private ends."

"Call 'em politicians and have done with it, Pongo!"

"Well, they are – aren't they? They get the politicians they like, and they appoint men of their own sort, so they are all politicians really."

"Well, I think that's being rather hard on them. They have to take the men the party whips gave them. I think they're a poor lot, but I wouldn't call them politicians."

The guest moved uneasily. "I don't quite see your point," he said. "Is the term 'politician' one of reproach or praise? I once stood for my local constituency and –"

The young officer with his heels on the stove gave a sudden snort. "Don't you believe him, he's pulling your legs – so don't apologise. He's no politician, anyway."

The guest laughed. "Well, I'm not in politics now," he said. "What is your definition of this strange animal?"

There was a pause, and then a cautious reply, "Well, he's an M.P."

"But I know some very charming M.P.'s – are they all politicians?"

"Oh no, sir. They're different. It's a question of standards, really."

"Ah, but what are the standards?"

"Well, you see – we have one – and civilians have another, business people and so on, and then there's the politicians."

"You ought to write a dictionary, Pongo – you snub-nosed old shell-back. No, I ain't scrapping, and if you get up I'll take your chair."

"Whose got a cigarette? No, not one of your stinkers – gimme one of yours, Guns."

The officer addressed politely passed a cigarette across in his fingers, and turning in his chair beckoned to a marine servant who was just returning with an empty tray from the Bridge table.

"A cigarette, please, waiter – and debit it to the account of my honourable friend Mr Maugham, here. I'll stop your cadging, Pongo – if I have to take on the tobacco accounts to do it."

"Lucky there's no shortage of 'baccy, or all the armies would strike."

"Well, that'd be one way to stop the war. You can't fight without it. Wish we had some tobacco shares. Some people must be making a lot."

"Not so much as the food people."

"I don't believe the food people do make so much. It's the world shortage that causes the trouble, not the prices – or rather one involves the other."

"It isn't so much that. It's a rise of prices all round. Things get expensive, so the country strikes for higher wages and gets them – then prices go up because the sovereign has depreciated, and they strike again. It goes on in a vicious circle."

"Can't be a circle – because that's progression. You've got to get to a smash in time."

"Yes, it means there'll be just as much cash in the world, but every one will be poor. Cash isn't wealth – work is wealth, and all work nowadays is wasted. We're chucking it into the air in Flanders."

"Well, we'll last out this war, and then have to lash out."

"Oh yes – there'll be room to lash out in, too. We'll be back in Elizabeth's days – lots of room for every one, but no capital."

"So long as there are no Huns we'll be happy, so what's the odds? Give us a match."

"Well, I want a few Huns left to compare notes with after this. It would be dull to hear our own side only. One couldn't meet their Army, of course, but their Navy's not so bad. They've tried to fight clean, at any rate, and they fight good and 'earty. Yes, I know about Fritz, but if you had orders to torpedo liners, wouldn't you do it? 'Course you would, if you were told they were carrying munitions and you were saving your country by it. There are Fritzes who *like* it, certainly, but we have to give the others the benefit of the doubt."

"Well, I'd like to read their logs and so on after the war, though we'll be so damn sick of all the truck they'll publish here when the Censor pays off that we won't want to read much of anything."

"It isn't the stuff just after the war one would like to read. I'd like to be alive in a hundred years to read the truth."

"Well, you won't be if you knock my drink over with your hairy hoofs – sit still!"

"It'd do you good if I did knock it over – your hoary-headed old rip. Guns, do you think they'll have raised our pay in a hundred years' time?"

"I doubt it. They'll pay off the Navy and economise as soon as peace is signed –"

"– And we'll have another war on our hands inside six months – we always do; we've always retrenched after a war, and then had to give bonuses to get the men back inside a year."

"Well, they'll pay off the battleships, anyway – and only keep the fast cruisers and the submarines."

"You and your submarines! Have you heard from your brother lately?"

"Yes, he tells me if I'm going to join I've got to remember it's the greatest honour to be – half a sec., I've got the letter here – to be alive and able to get into the greatest and most efficient Service of the Greatest Navy the world has ever seen, in the Greatest event in History since the Moon broke off."

There was a two seconds' silence (which is long for a Naval discussion), then —

"Well, cutting out the swollen-headed tosh about the Greatest Service, which I take it he means to refer to submarines, I don't know that he's far wrong."

"Well, I suppose we shall have our pasts and presents all looked up, and that people at the U.S. Institution will argue about us like they did a few years ago about Trafalgar."

"No fear. They'll all be peaceful then, and we'll be barbarians, and not to be spoken of."

"Barbarian, my foot! We're the cleanest lot in England, and the English are cleaner than most races."

"Do you think there'll be another battle?"

"Oh, help! If that cag's going to start, I'm off. Good-night, sir."

"I must go too, Jim," said the guest, with a startled glance at the clock. "Where did I leave my coat?"

The Senior Engineer rose and followed them out, hearing as he passed through the door an unwearying voice by the stove – "I know a chap on Beatty's staff, and he says they'll fight next spring or summer."

THE GUNLAYER

"*Hit first – hit hard – and keep on hitting*, is a good rule, but what I want to impress on you is that in this war the last part of that rule is the most important. The enemy shoots remarkably well – at a target – but he does not appear to stand punishment well himself. It is remarkable how the German shooting falls off once he gets a few big shells aboard him, and up to date it has been noticeable that our own practice is, up to a certain point, improved by our being hit. It is just a matter of sticking power..."

The Gunnery Lieutenant paused in his lecture and sighed. "Would these pasty-faced beggars stick it?" He had had a week to train the crew – most of them raw hands – of the latest and fastest light cruiser, into a semblance of war efficiency, and the effort was tiring him. They were so very new and unintelligent, and he had had to go over the A B C of gunnery with them as if they had never been through their course before joining. Seven bells struck, and he dismissed the class and sent them shuffling and elbowing out of the flat.

They had been stationed at the guns three hours and had seen nothing. This was their second day out, and the first nervousness and feeling of shyness at being in enemy waters was wearing off. The mist that had been with them since dawn was clearing away too, and the gunlayer of No. Five straightened his back and stretched himself against the shield. This was a silly game, he decided. Two cables astern the knife-edge stem of a sister ship was parting their wake into two creamy undulating waves which seemed to spoil the mirror-like surface of what the German wireless has with inimitable humour termed "The fringe of the English barred zone," or as their Lordships more drily put it, "The mouth of the Bight."

The gunlayer spat carefully over the side and felt in his cap-rim for a cigarette. He calculated that he would make the "fag," with care, last till breakfast. Fourteen days in commission had at any rate taught him that the art of shortening up the frequent spells of boredom consisted in a judicious mixture of tobacco and thinking, and as smoking was barred under heavy penalties during the dark hours, his brain had been somewhat overworked since four. As he fumbled for his matches he froze suddenly still as a bugle blared "Action stations!" from the bridge above him. He heard the beginnings of the clatter of men closing up and the hum of activity along the deck, but till the cold shiver had passed from him he could not move. His one idea was that this was *real*, and he would give anything to be out of it. Then in a flash he was at his sights, his hands on the focussing-ring and his head close up to the telescope, in fear that others might see something in his face that he did not want them to see. For exactly the same reasons some hundred other men on the upper deck were becoming feverishly busy, but before the last note of the bugle had died the guns' crews were over their stage fright, and were, with perhaps a little more care and intelligence than they had shown at drill, closing up to their guns.

The gunlayer of No. Five stepped to one side and looked out on the beam. The mists had cleared, and far to the east he could see a line of little smoke puffs that could only mean one thing – ships in station and burning high-speed fuel. The cruiser heeled a little, and the smoke dots swung from abeam to nearly ahead as she turned, and he lost sight of them behind the shield of the next gun. He wanted to go forward and watch them. It seemed worse to have it hanging over him like this. He did not know if he would be quite ready if the ship turned suddenly to bring his gun to bear and he should see the enemy at close range, and no longer as little brown smoke blurs.

The sight-setter, a boy of seventeen, spoke to him and he looked round. The boy's face was rather white, and his lips trembled a little. The gunlayer woke up at the sight, and broke into a pleased grin.

"Only little beggars," he said, "hardly enough to make a mouthful. Don't you make no blinkin' errors this morning, my lad, or I'll land you one you'll be proud of!"

The speech cheered him up, and he began to believe he *might* come out of it alive – with luck. The ship was travelling now. The white water raced past at a dizzy speed, and a great sloping V of bubbling foam followed them fifty yards astern. Every few seconds a quivering vibration started from forward and travelled through the hull – reminding him of a terrier waiting at a rat-hole. He wanted to smoke – there would be just time for a cigarette – but although he was afraid of death, he was afraid of the Gunnery Lieutenant more. He snuggled down to the shoulder-piece and began working his elevating wheel slowly. There was little roll on the ship, and he realised thankfully that there was going to be no difficulty about keeping his sights on. The oblong port in the shield through which his telescope passed worried him: it seemed so unnecessarily big. That was just like the Admiralty designers, he thought – so long as they didn't have to stand behind the hole they didn't care how big it was. Why, it would let a six-inch shell through! He felt quite a grievance about it. Then, with a heel and an increase of vibration the ship turned. Lord! there they were – one – two – three – four – five of them – going like smoke, too. He pressed close to his telescope, and the enemy sprang into view – many times magnified. The boy sight-setter in a cracked voice repeated an order, and he heard the quick shuffle of feet and the word "Ready" come like a whip-crack from behind him. The leading enemy danced in the heat-haze as his telescope swayed up and down her foremast. It all depended on him and a few others now. The responsibility worried him. The gun's crew behind him were invisible, but he felt that their eyes were glued to his back, and that they were wondering if he was going to make good.

Boom – Br-r-room – Boom! That was the next ahead. It sounded a rotten salvo. Was she ranging – or would they all start now? He saw no splashes by the ship in his sights. Was it a complete miss, or was it fired at another enemy?

Boom – B-r-room! That was a better one. Weren't *they* going to do anything? As he wondered, the enemy cruiser flashed like a red helio, and he gasped in admiration at the simultaneous firing of her battery. A great sheet of white shut out the view in his telescope, and a deafening crack announced the bursting of a short salvo. *Wow-ooo!* Something whined overhead, and his own gun spoke – rocking the shield, and making him flinch from the sights. *Gawd!* had he fired with the sights on, or were his eyes shut? Anyhow, the men behind him did not seem to notice anything wrong. The breech slammed viciously, and the word "Ready" came on the instant. "*Clang*" – something hit the shield and glanced upwards as his gun spoke again. He knew he hadn't had the sights on then – he hadn't been ready, – how the hell could a man keep the sights on with this going on? Behind him a man began a scream, a scream which was cut short suddenly with the crack of a bursting H.E. shell and the whistle and wail of splinters. *Gawd!* this was chronic – the ship must be getting it thick. The enemy swung into his telescope field again, and he saw the throbbing flame jerk out and vanish from her upper deck.

B-r-r-oom! That was a better salvo. He must have been on the spot that time – another one – no, he was aiming high then. Still, it didn't matter. They'd all be dead soon and nobody would know who'd fired well or badly. Right abreast the enemy's bridge a great spout of water shot up, and behind it he saw the yellow sheet of flame that told of half a broadside going home. "He *must* keep his sights on" – "*Must* keep his sights on." His gun rocked as it fired, and he swore under his breath at the delay before the crew reloaded. Were they all wounded? They might be – as he estimated at least three full salvos had been aboard since the first shot. The enemy swung out of his field of view again, and he took his eye from the telescope a moment. What the hell was the ship turning for? The flagship must be crazy – just when we were hitting, too. He froze to his eye-piece again, and saw the familiar bridge and curved stem of his target as before. A haze of purplish-grey smoke was over her forecastle, and as he fired again he saw the flash of another salvo along her side. What was it "Guns" had said? *The one that sticks it out.* Why couldn't they load quicker behind him? They seemed so slow. The target vanished suddenly in a pall of brown smoke, and he lost her for a moment, his sights swinging down with the gentle motion of the ship. He saw splashes rise from the sea, but heard no whine and hum of splinters following. There she was again! And there was another salvo in the same place. A voice

from behind him said something, and he barked a profane response, – a demand for quicker loading. The voice replied with, "Stick it, Jerry – you're givin' 'er bloody 'ell!" And he realised suddenly that the hitting now seemed to be all one way, and that his target was on fire from the bow to the forward funnel. His sights swung off again, and a moment later his gun brought up against the forward stops with a bump. He raised his head and looked round. Their next astern was on the quarter now, and they must have all turned together towards the enemy. The bow gun still banged away, sending blasts of hot air back along the deck, but no reply seemed to be coming. The gunlayer scrambled up on the shield and looked ahead to the east. A blur of smoke hid the enemy – a great brown greasy cloud – and he dropped on his knee to the heel that announced another change of helm. Round they came – sixteen points – and he had a view of the Flagship, with a long signal hoist at her masthead, tearing past in her own wake.

"What the hell – ain't we going to finish it? What's the game?" a chorus of voices spoke from the deck below him, and then came the "still" of a bugle and the pipe, "Sponge out and clean guns – clear up upper deck. Enemy is under the guns of Heligoland."

"Well, who cares for Heligoland?" said the gunlayer – and on the words he came down from his perch on the gunshield with a run. A roar like a twelve-inch salvo and a huge column of tumbling water a hundred yards on the beam had answered him. The next shell pitched in their wake – then another well astern, and they were out of range. He suddenly realised that he was thirstier than he had ever been before, and started forward to the water-tank. As he moved, a hand clutched his arm and he found the boy sight-setter at his side, a fountain of words, dancing with excitement.

"My Christ! that was fine. *Gawd*– what a show, hey? An' you that cool, too. I didn't 'alf shake, till I looked at you, an' saw you was laughin'. We didn't 'alf brown 'em off, did we? an' they – "

"Aw, go chase yerself," said the gunlayer. "That weren't nothing. Wait till you sees a battle, my son – and you won't think nothing o' to-day."

As he turned to lift the drinking-cup he glanced at the clock and saw with amazement that it was seven-fifteen. With a vague memory of having done so before, he fumbled in his cap-lining for a cigarette.

A WAGE SLAVE

The Coxswain nodded to the boy messenger and reached for his cap.

"All right, my lad – 'ook me down that lammy. What's the panic, d'ye know?"

"No, I dunno. Sez 'e, 'Tell 'im to come up. I want 'im at the wheel,' 'e sez. An' I come along an' – "

"All right – 'ook it, and don't stand there blowin' down my neck."

The Coxswain jerked his "lammy" coat on, and clumped heavily out of the mess, chewing a section of ship's biscuit (carefully and cunningly – for the shortage of teeth among torpedo coxswains amounts almost to a badge of office) as he went.

"What's up, Jim – steam tattics?" asked the Torpedo Gunner's Mate – another Lower Deck Olympian – looking up from a three-day-old 'Telegraph.'

The Coxswain grunted in response. It is not the custom of the Service to answer silly questions. The reason the question was asked at all may be put down to the fact of the 'Telegraph' being not only old but empty of interest.

As he reached the upper deck he buttoned his coat and felt in his pockets for his mittens. It was very cold – a cold accentuated by the wind of the Destroyer's passage. There was no sea, but it was pitch-dark, with a glint of phosphorus from water broken by the wakes of six "war-built" T.B.D.'s running in line ahead at an easy twenty-four knots. The Coxswain could never, in all probability, have explained his reasoning, though the fact that the speed had been increased was noticeable; but he knew, as he swung up the ladders to the unseen fore-bridge, that he had not been sent for a mere alteration of course. His brain must have received some telepathic wave from the ship's hull which told him that the enemy had had something to do with the break in his watch below.

His sea-boots ceased their noisy clumping as he reached the bridge, and he was standing by the helmsman with a hand on the wheel before the man had noticed his arrival. With an interrogative grunt he stepped to the steering pedestal as the man moved aside, and he stood peering at the dimly lit compass card, and moving the wheel a spoke or two each way as he "felt" her.

"North Seventy East – carryin' a little starboard," said the dark figure beside him, and he accepted the "Turn-over" with another characteristic growl —

"That you, Pember? Follow the next ahead and steer small." The Commander had spoken, the white gleam from his scarf showing for a moment in the reflected compass light.

"Next ahead and steer small, sir." He leaned forward and watched the blue-white fan of phosphorus that meant the stern-wave of the next ship. Low voices spoke beside him, and the telegraphs whirred round and reply-gongs tinkled. Half, or perhaps a quarter, of his brain noticed these things, but they were instantly pigeon-holed and forgotten. He was at his job, and his job was to hold his course on the next ahead. Without an order, nothing but death would cause him to let his attention wander from his business. He heard the sub-lieutenant a few feet distant crooning in a mournful voice —

"How many miles to Babylon?"

"Three score and ten."

The back of his brain seized the words and turned them over and over. Babylon was in the Bible – he wasn't sure where it was on the map though. How much was three score and ten? Three twenties were sixty, and – "*Action Stations*" – Babylon slid into a pigeon-hole, and he relaxed for a second from his rigid concentration on the next ahead. He straightened up, stretching his long gaunt body, and a suspicion of a smile lit his face. Then he resumed his peering, puckered attitude, oblivious to everything but that phosphorescent glow ahead. The glow broadened and brightened, and he felt the quiver beneath his feet that told of a speed that contractors of three years ago would have gaped at.

A vivid flash of yellow light lit up the next ahead and showed her bridge and funnels with startling clearness against the sky. By the same flash he saw another big destroyer on the bow crossing the line from starboard to port. His own bow gun fired at the instant the detonations of the first shots reached him, and in the midst of the tearing reports of a round dozen of high-velocity guns, by some miracle of concentration, he heard a helm order from the white scarf six feet away. The little fifteen-inch wheel whirled under his hand, and with a complaining quiver and roll the destroyer swung after her leader to port. In the light of a continually increasing number of gun-flashes he saw the next ahead running "Yard-arm to Yard-arm" with a long German destroyer, each slamming shell into the other at furious speed. He gave a side-glance to starboard to look for his opposite number on the enemy line – and then came one of those incidents which show that the Navy trains men into the same mental groove, whether officers or coxswains.

The enemy destroyer was just turning up to show her port broadside. She was carrying "Hard-over" helm, and her wheel could hardly reverse in the time that would be necessary if – . The coxswain anticipated the order he knew would come – anticipated it to the extent of a mere fraction of port-helm and a savage grip of the wheel. The order came in a voice that no amount of gun-fire could prevent the coxswain from hearing just then. "*Hard-a-port! Ram her, coxswain!*" The enemy saw and tried to meet the charge bow-on. There was no room between them for that, and he knew it. His guns did his best for him, but a man intent on his job takes a lot of killing at short range. Two shells hit and burst below the bridge, and the third – the coxswain swung round the binnacle, gripping the rim with his left hand. His right hand still held the wheel, and spun it through a full turn of starboard helm. The stiffened razor-edge bow took the enemy at the break of the poop, and went clean through before crushing back to the fore bulkhead. At the impact the shattered coxswain slipped forward on the deck and died with a smashing, splintering noise in his ears – the tribute of war to an artist whose work was done.

AN "ANNUAL."

A grey drizzly morning, with yellow fog to seaward and every prospect of a really wet day. At each side of the black basin gates stood a little group of men, the majority "Dockyard mateys" of the rigger's party. A few wore the insignia of higher rank – bowler hats and watch-chains. The bowler hats conferred together in low voices, while the rank and file conferred not at all, but stared solemnly out at the wall of mist that cut the visibility in the harbour down to a bare four hundred yards.

Round the corner of the rigger's store two uniformed figures appeared walking briskly towards the basin entrance. Both wore overcoats. The shorter man was grey where the hair showed beneath his gold-peaked cap, while the pale face and "washed-out" look of the younger man indicated that the hospital ship which took him away from Gallipoli had done so none too soon.

As they approached, one of the bowler-wearers detached himself from the group and spoke to the senior of the two. There was a three-cornered comparison of watches and then a move to the wall, over the edge of which they gazed down at the slowly moving yellow water.

"We'll give her another quarter of an hour, Mr Johnson, and then pack up," said the officer. "I think it has cleared a little since six, and I know they'll bring her up if they possibly can."

Through the medley of horns, syrens, and whistles that had been sounding through the fog, four short blasts caught the ear of a rigger who leaned against the outward capstan bollard. He lounged forward a couple of paces, and the men nearest looked round at him with a symptom of interest. The blasts sounded again, and he turned and looked at the foreman rigger behind him. The foreman nodded and spoke and the group separated a little, some of the men picking up long flexible "heaving-lines" coiled in neat rings on the cobble-stones.

"She's coming, sir," said the foreman, turning to the King's Harbourmaster; "she'll just do it nicely. That was the new tug's whistle."

A couple of capstan bollards began to clatter round as steam was turned on and a heavy wooden fender swung with a crash over the rounded edge of each entrance wall. The mist was clearing now, and the traffic in the harbour could be dimly seen. A foreman pointed to seaward, and the younger officer followed his arm with his tired eyes. Over the fog a slender dark line showed with a blurred foretop below. The unmistakable tripod mast of a big ship showed gradually through, and as he watched he was reminded of a magic-lantern picture out of focus being gradually brought into definition by the operator. The mist cleared faster than she approached, and at a quarter of a mile he could see the great looming bow surmounted by tier on tier of bridges, which mounted almost to the high overhanging top. She crawled slowly on, using her own engines, the hawsers leading to the furiously agitated paddle tugs on bow and quarter sweeping slack along the stream. On the tall "monkey's island" a group of figures clustered together, and the gleam of gold-peaked caps showed among the blue overcoats. At half a cable's length the voices of the leadsmen, inarticulate and faint before, could be clearly heard. "And a *ha-a-a-f* nine" – "and a *ha-a-a-f* nine." The bow tugs sheered off to each side, and whistles blew shrilly. The heavy bow hawsers fell splashing in the water, and the jingle of engine-room telegraph bells echoed up the walls of the entrance. A couple of dingy black "rigger" boats, propelled "Maltee fashion," with the rowers standing facing forward, appeared between the dockyard wall and the great curved stem. Heaving-lines sailed through the air, uncoiling as they flew, and the boats rowed furiously back to the entrance. From somewhere aft by the turret a great bull voice spoke through a megaphone. The riggers at the entrance leapt into sudden activity, and for five minutes the din and clatter of capstans, shrilling of whistles, and splash of hawsers in the water broke the spell of silence. The noise died suddenly, and the note of telegraph bells came ringing again from the high grey monster. Slowly she gathered way, and to the clatter of the dockyard capstans as the slack of the hawsers was taken in, her forty-foot curved stem passed the black caisson gates. The two officers, the young and the old, stepped to the edge of the wall and looked across. Her

stem had hit off the exact centre of the entrance, but there was a good two hundred yards of her to come yet. In dead silence, with groups of men fallen in at attention along her side, she flowed on, her speed a bare two knots, but a speed in keeping with her enormous bulk and majesty. As she entered, and the finer lines of her bow passed, she seemed to swell, till she almost filled the entrance, and it looked as if one could step aboard her from the lock-side. The eyes travelled from the mighty turret guns that glistened in the rain, and were attracted up and up till heads were tilted back to look at the highest bridge of all. A quiet incisive voice could be clearly heard: "Port ten" – "Midships" – "Stop both." Again the "kling-kling" of bells and then silence. The grey-haired officer on the wall raised his hand in salute, and a tall grave captain, looking down from above, saluted in return, showing a flash of white teeth in a smile of recognition.

As she passed the hawsers came with her, transferred from bollard to bollard by gangs of staggering men. The passage of her stern past the outer entrance seemed to break a spell, as if the hypnotism of hundreds of staring eyes had passed away. The caisson gates ground to with almost indecent haste behind her, as some castle portcullis might do as the last prisoner was dragged through. Whistles blew, answering each other across the oily, rain-pitted water of the basin, and to the *weeep we-ooo* of pipes and the roar of the boatswains mates' voices, the lines of rigid men on the great ship's side broke up and fell back. She had left the open sea and had become "Number 955 – for refit – in Dockyard hands."

"How long is she for, sir? Ten days?"

The grey-haired officer turned: "No, only eight. They want her back as soon as possible. Four days' leave to each watch and she'll be off again. You're looking cold, boy – come up to breakfast. That malaria hasn't left you yet."

"I wish it would, sir. I want to get to sea again."

"I know. It's not so bad to watch them come in, but it makes me feel old when I see them leaving again. But you needn't worry, the War's going on a long time yet."

"OUR ANNUAL."

Up the well-remembered fairway, past the buoys and forts we drifted
—

Saw the houses, roads, and churches, as they were a year ago.
Far astern were wars and battles, all the dreary clouds were lifted,
As we turned the Elbow Ledges – felt the engines ease to "Slow."

Rusty side and dingy paintwork, stripped for war and cleared for battle
—

Saw the harbour-tugs around us – smelt the English fields again, —
English fields and English hedges – sheep and horses, English cattle,
Like a screen unrolled before us, through the mist of English rain.

Slowly through the basin entrance – twenty thousand tons a-crawling
With a thousand men aboard her, all a-weary of the War —
Warped her round and laid alongside with the cobble-stones a-calling
—

"There's a special train awaiting, just for you to come ashore."

Out again as fell the evening, down the harbour in the gloaming
With the sailors on the fo'c'sle looking wistfully a-lee —
Just another year of waiting – just another year of roaming
For the Majesty of England – for the Freedom of the Sea.

MASCOTS

When the galleys of Phoenicia, through the gates of Hercules,
Steered South and West along the coast to seek the Tropic Seas,
When they rounded Cape Agulhas, putting out from Table Bay,
They started trading North again, as steamers do to-day.
They dealt in gold and ivory and ostrich feathers too,
With a little private trading by the officers and crew,
Till rounding Guardafui, steering up for Aden town,
The tall Phoenician Captain called the First Lieutenant down.
"By all the Tyrian purple robes that you will never wear,
By the Temples of Zimbabwe, by King Solomon I swear,
The ship is like a stable, like a Carthaginian sty.
I am Captain here – confound you! – or I'll know the reason why.
Every sailor in the galley has a monkey or a goat;
There are parrots in the eyes of her and serpents in the boat.
By the roaring fire of Baal, I'll not have it any more:
Heave them over by the sunset, or I'll hang you at the fore!"
"What is that, sir? *Not* as cargo? *Not* a bit of private trade?
Well, of all the dumbest idiots you're the dumbest ever made,
Standing there and looking silly: *leave the animals alone.*"
(Sailors with a tropic liver always have a brutal tone.)
"By the crescent of Astarte, I am not religious – yet —
I would sooner spill the table salt than kill a sailor's pet."

THE SPARROW

A perfectly calm blue sea, a blazing June sun, and absolutely nothing to break the monotony of a blank horizon. The sparrow was deadbeat, and was travelling slowly to the north and west on a zigzag course, about two hundred feet high. The sparrow had no right to be there at all. He hailed from a Yorkshire hedgerow, and nothing but a real three-day fog and westerly winds could have brought him over such a waste of waters. He had been flying in a circle all night, swerving at intervals down to the water in the vain hope of finding rest for his aching muscles. Now he was heading roughly towards his home with but slight hopes of ever reaching it.

A faint droning noise to the north made him turn, and low over the straight-ruled horizon he saw a silvery-white line that every moment grew larger. He headed towards it, but at a mile range swerved away to pass astern of it. It was not an inviting object for even a lost sparrow to rest on. With engines running slow – so slowly that the blades of the great propellers could be easily seen – with a broad white-and-black ensign flapping lazily below and astern, the Zeppelin droned on to the south'ard, a thing of massive grace and beauty on such a perfect summer's day.

With a vague idea that the monster might lead him home, the sparrow turned and followed. The Zeppelin slowly drew ahead and rose higher, while far to the south another monster rose over the skyline, black against the sun. The great craft passed each other and turned away, the first one heading back to the north whence he had come, and the second disappearing to the east, climbing slowly as he went.

The sparrow turned also and fluttered and dipped in pathetic confidence after his first visitor. The fact of having seen *something*, however unpleasant and strange-looking, had given him a new access of strength, and he was able to keep the great silver thing in easy view. Suddenly the Zeppelin tilted like a hunter at a high fence, and the note of his engines rose to a dull roar. He climbed like – well, like a sparrow coming up to a house-top – and at three thousand feet he circled at full power, levelling off his angle, and showing a turn of speed which left the frightened bird gaping.

The sparrow fluttered on vaguely, passing at 100 feet above the water, below the Zeppelin. He had decided that a pilot who played tricks like that was no sort of use to him, and that he had better stick to his original idea of working to the north and west, however lonely a course it might be. He swerved a little at a rushing, whistling noise that came from above him, and which grew to a terrifying note. A big dark object whipped past him, and a moment later splashed heavily into the mirror-like surface below. The rings made by its impact had hardly started to widen, when there was a great convulsion, and a column of smoky-white water leapt up behind him, followed by the roar of an explosion. The sparrow started to climb – to climb as he had never done in his life. Twice more – his weariness forgotten – he was urged to further efforts to gain height, by the shock of the great detonations from the water below. The Zeppelin was down to a thousand feet now, swinging round on a wider circle. Five hundred feet below, the sparrow saw a faint streak on the water which faded at one end into blue sea, and at the other narrowed to a little feather of spray round a dark point that was travelling like the fin of some slowly moving fish to the north-westward. The Zeppelin saw it too, and came hunting back along the line. Bang – bang – bang! Great columns shot up again ahead and astern of the strange fish, and away went the sparrow to the south once more. Any course was bad in this place, and it was better to die alone in the waters than to be pursued by such a monster of the air. As he went he heard more and more detonations behind him, until the noise of the droning engine had died, when he was again alone over the sparkling unfriendly sea. The exertions and alarm of the last hour had taken the last of his reserve forces, and in uneven flutterings his flight tended lower and lower, till he was a bare twenty feet from what he knew must be his grave. Then came a miracle of war. A bare quarter-mile ahead a thing like a tapering lance began to rise and grow from the water. It was followed by a grey black-lettered tower which also grew and showed a rounded grey

hull, moving slowly south with a white band of froth spinning away astern. A lid on the tower clanged open, and two figures appeared. One raised something to his eye, and faced south. The other stood on the rail and pivoted slowly round, staring at sky and sea.

"I wonder what the deuce he was bombing – bit of wreckage, I suppose," said the man on the rail.

"Well, it wasn't us anyway. The blind old baby-killer." The man with the sextant lowered it and fiddled with the shades. "We've got no boats near, have we, sir?"

"Not for donkeys' miles. I hope it was a Fritz, anyway. I say, look at that spadger!"

"Where? I don't see it. Stand by. Stop, sir."

"All right, I got you. Here, catch this watch. That spadger's gone down into the casing, and he'll drown if we dip with him there. Look out for those Zepps. coming back."

The Captain swung quickly down the foreside of the conning-tower, ran forward and peered into the casing in the eyes of the boat.

"Zepp. coming, sir, – north of us, just gone behind a bit of cloud."

"Zepp. be damned. Ah! got you, you little beggar." He reached his arm into a coil of wet rope and rose triumphantly to his feet. The sparrow cheeped pitifully as he ran aft again and took the ladder in two jumps. He gave a glance astern and another all round the horizon before following his sextant-clutching subordinate below. The lid clanged, and with a sigh, a gurgle, and a flirt of her screws the submarine slid under, the blank and expressionless eye of her periscope staring fixedly at an unconscious but triumphant Zeppelin that was gliding out from a fleecy patch of cloud astern.

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