

A SUB AND A SUBMARINE

By Percy F.
Westerman



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**[Frontispiece: ANOTHER AND ANOTHER SHELL
SPED
FROM THE SUBMARINE'S GUNS [Page 53](#)]**

A SUB AND A SUBMARINE

**The Story of H.M. Submarine R19
in the Great War**

BY

PERCY F. WESTERMAN

Author of "A Lively Bit of the Front"
"Under the White Ensign"
"Rounding Up the Raider"
&c. &c.

Illustrated by E. S. Hodgson

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BY PERCY F. WESTERMAN

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ANOTHER AND ANOTHER SHELL SPED FROM THE
SUBMARINE'S GUNS - - - Coloured frontispiece

THE TOO FAITHFUL FLIRT

AHEAD, ASTERN, ABOVE, AND BELOW, THE SHELLS
BURST

IT WAS MINDIGGLE

"PASS UNDER MY LEE!"

A SUB AND A SUBMARINE

CHAPTER I

Flirt's Indiscretion

"Come here, Flirt! Heel at once!"

Noel Fordyce had good cause to be anxious concerning his pet. It was the dog's first run with him for over five months, and, left during that period to well-meaning yet lax guardians, the animal had been reported out of hand; while, in her great joy and excitement, Flirt had apparently forgotten the discipline imparted during puppyhood.

Noel Fordyce, Sub-Lieutenant, R.N.R., was spending a fortnight's hard-earned leave at his parents' home on the outskirts of the naval town of Otherport. For five months he had been on submarine patrol work in the North Sea, including brief periods spent in a certain East Coast port while R19 was replenishing stores and fuel.

The Sub was a tall, broad-shouldered youth barely out of his teens. His complexion was dark; his eyes a deep grey that betokened resolution and determination. His lips were full, and firmly set in repose; but when he smiled he revealed an even set of white teeth that glinted in contrast to the mahogany tan of his weather-beaten face.

He was in mufti. For one thing, it was a change to slip out of uniform; for another, his uniform badly needed renewal. A strenuous period on board one of H.M. submarines is not conducive to longevity on the part of gold lace and blue cloth.

Flirt was an Irish terrier, now in her second year. Fordyce was deeply fond of the dog, and she was devotedly attached to him; but, unfortunately, Flirt had already had her "first bite", and was developing a tendency to fly at persons to whom she took a dislike.

Flirt obeyed the order to come to heel, but that merely aroused her suspicions. Coming towards the Sub was a tall, loosely-built man, whose chief peculiarities were his abnormally sloping shoulders and a shuffling gait. Fordyce knew him by name, although he had never spoken to him.

He was Councillor Mindiggle, a retired "something in the City", who had taken a house at Otherport a few months before the outbreak of war. Of a most plausible manner, and having strong Socialistic views, he soon gained a seat on the Town Council as a representative for a working-class district of Otherport. Always carelessly and almost meanly dressed, he nevertheless seemed well-provided with this world's goods, although he was reported to be a "near" man as far as spending was concerned.

It was the sight of Councillor Mindiggle's shuffling feet that upset Flirt. The dog never could tolerate a slovenly gait. Before Fordyce could stop her, she had flown at the man's

legs, and was tearing down the street with a piece of cloth between her teeth.

"I'm awfully sorry," began the Sub. "I hope my dog hasn't bitten you?"

"Being sorry won't mend my trousers, Mr. Fordyce," replied the aggrieved man. "As for being bitten, I distinctly felt the brute's teeth. And it's not the first time she has flown at me. What have you to say to that?"

"Of course what is done cannot be undone in this case," continued Fordyce, "but if I can make any reparation——"

"The only reparation you can make is to have that dog destroyed," interrupted Councillor Mindiggle. "What's more, I mean to take out a summons against you for not keeping a dangerous dog under proper control. Good morning!"

The irate Mindiggle shuffled away, while Fordyce turned and walked back to his home, whither Flirt had preceded him and, with the trophy still in her mouth, was awaiting her master.

"What, back already?" enquired Mr. Fordyce. "Anything wrong?"

"Yes, Pater," replied his son. "Flirt has flown at that Mindiggle fellow. He must have hacked her some time ago or she wouldn't have gone for him like that," he added in defence of his pet.

"That animal will get you into trouble," declared Mr. Fordyce; "or, rather, I get the worry of her, since you are away most of the time. It's a pity you can't take Flirt with you."

The Sub had not thought of that possibility. A dog would lead a dog's life indeed on board a submarine. But a more urgent problem offered itself.

"Mindiggle swears he's going to take out a summons, Dad," he continued.

"Then it's your funeral—or Flirt's," added his parent grimly. "From Mindiggle's point of view he's justified in taking steps, to remove a public danger. I don't want our name to figure in the local police-court report, and you don't want to lose Flirt. So the best thing you can do is to allow Mindiggle to cool down a bit, and then call and see him. He may relent."

Noel Fordyce took his father's advice. Already he had sufficient experience of human nature to know that a man is in his best humour after a good meal; so that evening he called at the councillor's house, prepared to eat humble pie for the sake of his canine chum.

He was shown into the councillor's study, a large, well-furnished room, the window curtains of which were closely drawn. Over the roll-top desk was the only electric light that was switched on. The glare shone directly upon a small packet, tied with cord, and sealed with red wax. The Sub

could not help noticing the address. The writing was in Russian characters, and was as follows:—

RUSSIA,
PETROGRAD,
BOBBINSKY PROSPEKT, 19,
M. VLADIMIR KLOSTIVITCH.

Noel Fordyce could both read and write the Russian language. In pre-war days he was in the Royal Seal Line, the vessels of which plied between Newcastle and St. Petersburg, and, since the study of Russian was regarded as a valuable adjunct to promotion, the lad had studiously applied himself to master the manifold intricacies of the language.

After keeping his visitor waiting a considerable time—Mindiggle rightly guessed that it was a supplicatory call—the victim of Flirt's animosity entered.

"Quite enough mischief done," replied Mindiggle guardedly in answer to Fordyce's enquiry. "But I may change my mind about that summons. You mentioned the word 'reparation'. Well, you can do me a service; sort of wheel within wheels, don't you know."

"In what way?" asked the Sub.

"You are leaving for the Baltic in submarine R19 in about fifteen days' time," asserted Mindiggle bluntly.

For some seconds Fordyce was completely taken aback. Submarine R19 was certainly under orders for Cronstadt, but

the secret was supposed to be known only to the Admiralty and the officers immediately concerned.

"What makes you say that?" he asked.

The man shrugged his shoulders and looked the Sub fixedly in the face. There was something uncanny in the look. Fordyce felt as if those steely eyes were focused on a point in the back of his brain.

"What I have said is so," replied Mindiggle. "Now, to continue. Knowing you are bound for Russian waters, I want you to take this small packet," he indicated the sealed parcel on the desk, "and hand it personally to the addressee. To be open with you, I may mention that the contents of the packet consist of small diamonds, not of great intrinsic value in this country, but considerably so in Russia. If you will agree to do this, I for my part promise to take no further steps concerning your dog's unprovoked attack upon me this morning."

"Why can't you send the diamonds in the ordinary way?" asked Noel. "There would be less risk, and they could be fully insured. I presume that you have no wish to evade the customs duties?"

"You are very fond of that dog, I take it?" asked Mindiggle, evading the direct question.

"I am, tremendously so," admitted the Sub.

"Then this is my ultimatum. Either give me your word of honour to execute my commission or your dog will be destroyed by order of the court."

"You want me to transgress against the Defence of the Realm Act," rejoined Fordyce with rising temper. "I'll see you to blazes first. More than that, it will be my duty to report this conversation to the proper authorities."

"Do so, by all means," said Mindiggle suavely. "Do you think anyone would take your word against mine—a prominent municipal officer of this town? Remember, we have no witnesses. I would also point out that you have shown grave indiscretion (an unpardonable fault in a military or naval officer) by informing me of the date of departure of Submarine R19 and also her destination."

"It's my belief that you are tin-hatted," exclaimed Fordyce. "You mentioned those particulars: I did not."

"Until you told me, Mr. Fordyce, I was quite unaware of the number of your submarine or of your date of departure," reiterated Mindiggle. "I am afraid that in your agitation over the danger that threatens your pet you have lost control of your tongue."

"I've a good mind to lose control of my fist and to decorate your figurehead," thought Fordyce. "The fellow's tactics savour of blackmail or something suspiciously like it; but if I lay him out there'll be a most infernal row. Appearances will be against me."

"Don't be a fool," continued Mindiggle. "It's quite a simple matter. No risk about it, and nothing to prejudice the safety of the realm and all that sort of thing, don't you know. Now, then."

"I'll report the matter to the police," declared the Sub.

"Do so," was the calm reply. "Would the police believe such an accusation against a prominent member of the Watch Committee? Supposing—even supposing, mind—that they did take action and search my house. What would they find—nothing. Can't you realize that I hold the whip hand?"

"You can jolly well do what you like," answered the Sub.

"Very good. To-morrow I take out a summons. If between the present time and the date of the hearing you decide to accept my terms I will immediately withdraw the summons and your dog's life will be saved. Good evening!"

CHAPTER II

An Ultimatum

Confronted with the mysterious problem Sub-Lieutenant Fordyce made his way to a secluded part of the sea-front. With a true sailor's instinct he paced up and down, debating with himself as to the course of action he should pursue.

If only he had a witness to the conversation. He racked his brains to formulate a scheme whereby he could discuss the matter again with Councillor Mindiggle, this time with a third person unseen but within earshot. Failing that there was

little use in reporting the matter. As the fellow said, it was one man's word against another's, and the charge would appear so preposterous that it would stand no possible chance of being substantiated.

For similar reasons he dismissed the idea that he should report the case to his skipper, the Hon. Derek Stockdale, Lieutenant-Commander of R19. Mindiggle's statement that the Sub had informed him of the vessel's date of departure and destination would be an awkward factor in the matter.

So, rightly or wrongly, Noel Fordyce resolved to keep secret the interview with Councillor Mindiggle, at least for a time. Meanwhile he would fight to the bitter end to save Flirt from the lethal chamber.

Having shut the front door on his caller, Councillor Mindiggle returned to his study. As far as the rest of his household was concerned he was free from interruption. He had no wife; his housekeeper was stone deaf; the servant who had shown Fordyce into the room was going out for the evening.

It would have been a great surprise to Fordyce if he had known that there had been a third person within earshot, but such was a fact. Unlocking a door leading into an inner room Mindiggle released a man who, although he looked an Englishman, spoke in Russian.

"Don't you think, comrade, that you were much too rash?" he asked anxiously.

"Not at all, Boris Platoff," replied Mindiggle coolly. "On the contrary, I have hopes that we shall be relieved of a considerable amount of bother and danger. The diamonds will be in Petrograd before the great day. That young man will consent to my terms. It's wonderful what a hold one has over an Englishman who owns a favourite dog. Inform the police—bah! He would not dare risk the ridicule his action would bring upon him. Those diamonds will go in the submarine, you mark my words."

"Let us hope so," rejoined Platoff. "Then, either they will reach Comrade Klostivitch or else it will be an end to R19. It depends largely on the temperature in the Baltic, eh?"

Both men laughed softly.

"Supposing," continued the Russian—"Supposing—and we must consider possibilities—this English officer takes the diamonds and then hands them over to the authorities?"

"I'll have to take the risk of being convicted as a smuggler, comrade," replied Mindiggle.

"But if they are subjected to a test?"

"They will discover nothing. I defy the efforts of the world's laboratories to analyse the stuff," declared Mindiggle. "Acid, heat—nothing will avail."

"Except cold," added Boris Platoff. "Then it will be what the ancient Egyptians call Nirvana," said the other grimly.

Boris Platoff was a Leninist, a member of the ultra-extremist party in Russia. Having, under German influence, taken a prominent part in wrecking the Russian Empire as a fighting-machine, he was doing his best to supplant the Kerensky regime by one of red-hot anarchy. While on a mission to the Russian Anarchist colony in London he had been given an introduction to a member of the World's Workers—a revolutionary society the object of which was the social democracy of every nation under the sun. This member's name was simply given as Comrade Ivan, known outside the brotherhood as Mr. John Mindiggle.

While posing both as an Englishman and a Russian, John Mindiggle was neither. He was a German—a Secret Service agent—whose work was entirely for the furtherance of Kaiserism. During twenty years of practically continuous residence in Great Britain Ernst von Verbrennungsraum had been working unostentatiously, yet deliberately, for the Fatherland, for the day when Germany would become the mistress of the World and when freedom would be denied to all other nations large or small.

Von Verbrennungsraum's chance came when Russia took the suicidal step of exchanging the yoke of Czardom for that of unbridled "liberty". The first revolution that resulted in the abdication of the Czar Nicholas was a step in the right direction so far as Germany was concerned, but it was not far enough. The new republic still maintained an army on its Austro-German frontier—an army in which bravery and cowardice existed cheek by jowl. Utter internal chaos was what was desired in order to remove a menace to Germany's

eastern frontier and thus enable her to throw thousands of troops into other sectors of battle.

To compass the downfall of the Kerensky regime the anarchists were to resort to a favourite device—explosives. In a secret laboratory was manipulated a new and extremely powerful chemical, which, in its final state, resembled, and could hardly be distinguished from, cut diamonds. It was a sample of this diabolical stuff that Mindiggle was in hopes of sending to Petrograd through the agency of Noel Fordyce.

Impossible to detonate by combustion, friction, or the application of heat, the explosive was perfectly safe to handle until the temperature fell below -5° C. The moment the mercury dropped to that point the explosive would simultaneously and spontaneously act.

In his attempt to induce Fordyce to convey the "diamonds" to Russia the German agent was employing a double-barrelled weapon. If the stuff did get to Petrograd well and good. If, on the other hand, the temperature on board the submarine should fall below -5° C. while running awash towards the port of Cronstadt, it meant utter annihilation to R19 and terrific damage to everything within a mile of the source of the explosion.

And, confident in his ability to make use of Flirt as the deciding factor, von Verbrennungsraum duly applied for and obtained a summons against Noel Fordyce.

CHAPTER III

The Sub's Stratagem

Ernst von Verbrennungsraum had not taken into account one of Noel Fordyce's characteristics—that of grim, almost obstinate determination. Under the mistaken impression that, for the sake of his pet, the Sub would agree to his terms, the Secret Service agent applied for and obtained a summons.

"I'll fight him while I have a penny left to call my own," declared Fordyce, and with this laudable intention he engaged the best solicitor in Otherport.

The German could not now back out without loss of dignity as a respected member of the Otherport Town Council. He had to proceed with the case, unless Fordyce capitulated.

The morning of the day fixed for the hearing came round. Noel Fordyce, in uniform, made his way towards the Town Hall. Flirt was safely under lock and key. An hour would decide whether she was to live or die.

The young officer had not reached the end of the road when an Irish terrier bounded up to him. It was Nell, Colonel Richardson's animal and Flirt's mother, a quiet, affectionate and absolutely inoffensive little beast. Flirt did not inherit her one bad trait from her mother.

"Go back, Nell," ordered Noel. "Home! I can't take you for a stroll this morning."

The dog, for once in a way, took no notice of the command. After several vain attempts to send her back, Fordyce gave it up as a bad job, and with Nell close at his heels he entered the Town Hall.

The police on duty at the door of the court made no attempt to turn the animal off. They naturally but erroneously thought that this was the canine delinquent.

While Fordyce was chatting with his solicitor the dog began exploring. Round the well of the court she trotted, wagging her stumpy tail; then, receiving a friendly caress from the bewigged clerk, she proceeded, with scant regard to judicial authority, to the bench itself, where the Great Unpaid gave her a cordial welcome.

Just then Councillor Mindiggle appeared. Catching sight of the dog, the spy let himself go with a display of excitability that almost betrayed his Hunnish nationality.

"That's the dog!" he exclaimed. "The dangerous brute! Take care, gentlemen; she's vicious!"

The magistrates evidently thought otherwise. A ripple of laughter ran through the court.

"By Jove!" thought Fordyce, an inspiration flitting across his mind. "I'll risk it for Flirt's sake. Mr. Clinton," he said in a low tone to his solicitor. "We decided that I was not to be put

into the witness-box. I've changed my mind. Call me as the first witness for the defence, if you please."

The solicitor shrugged his shoulders.

"I wouldn't if I were you," he remarked. "But as you like."

The court opened, Fordyce's case was the first to be called. The clerk read the indictment, the defendant pleaded not guilty, and John Mindiggle was asked to give evidence.

He did so, stating most emphatically on oath that the dog present in court was the animal that had bitten him.

Sub-Lieutenant Noel Fordyce, called and sworn, was equally emphatic in his statement that the dog was not with him on the day in question, and consequently could not have bitten the complainant. If he, Fordyce, had apologized, he had done so on behalf of another dog.

"And you can see for yourselves, gentlemen," he concluded, "that this animal is quite a harmless, well-conducted dog. I can affirm that to the best of my knowledge and belief she has never bitten or even attempted to bite anyone."

The magistrates consulted, and soon gave a unanimous verdict for the defendant.

"Costs, I presume, against the prosecution?" asked Fordyce's solicitor.

"Certainly; the prosecution is to pay costs," was the mandate.

Calling to the dog, the Sub left the court. Not until he was several streets away did he give vent to his pent-up feelings of delight.

"Well, old girl," he exclaimed, "you've saved my Flirt. By Jove, it was a rotten trick, though! I wouldn't have done it if that skunk hadn't tried to make me do an underhand job. He forced my hand. It was for Flirt's sake."

Had Fordyce known the true facts his qualms of conscience would not have troubled him in the least. As it was, the knowledge that he had won by means of a piece of sharp practice was not in accord with his instincts as an officer and a gentleman.

"Well?" enquired his father laconically.

"Verdict against Mindiggle, with costs," replied Noel.

"Dash it all!" exclaimed Mr. Fordyce when his son had told him of what had occurred. "You young scoundrel, I've half a mind to write to Mindiggle and explain. In any case, I'm not going to be saddled with Flirt while you're away. You'll have to find another home for her."

"Very well, Dad," replied Noel quietly, knowing that in such matters his parent's word was law.

It was Mr. Fordyce's decision that prevented Noel confiding in him concerning the interview with Mindiggle. In

spite of his sense of independence the young officer was anxious to obtain advice on the matter, but now another possible chance was denied him.

"Hang it all!" he soliloquized. "I suppose it will keep a bit longer. The main point is that I didn't agree to the sweep's proposals, and I've scored heavily off my own bat. I'll spin the yarn to the Honourable Derek when we are making our passage to the Baltic. Let me see; what is that address? I have it: 'Klostivitch, 19, Bobbinsky Prospekt'. I'll jot it down in case I forget. It may come in handy. And now there's Flirt to consider. It won't do to send her to a place in Otherport; she'll be nipping somebody—Mindiggle again for a dead cert—and I'll find that she's been poisoned when I return. I'll run her over to Billy's show this afternoon. He'll look after her, I know."

Billy was Noel's cousin, a captain of the Loamshire Light Infantry, who, after being thrice wounded slightly, had been buried by a shell at Messines. He was now given home service, and was unlikely to be again sent abroad.

Billy Fordyce was stationed at Upper Todbury—a small village about twenty miles from Otherport—around which a large training-camp had sprung into existence. Since Flirt was very partial to khaki it was reasonable to suppose that the animal would take kindly to her new surroundings.

The Sub lost no time in putting his plan into execution. It was late in the afternoon when he brought his cycle-car round. At eight the following morning he had to report for duty.

"I believe Flirt knows there's something in the air, Pater," he remarked, as the dog obeyed the order to jump in with marked reluctance. Usually the prospect of a motor run made the terrier frantic with delight.

Noel took a roundabout route. It was a beautiful afternoon, the roads were in perfect order, and the car ran faultlessly. In just over the hour the Sub arrived at his cousin's quarters.

"I'll take care of her with pleasure," replied Billy in answer to his cousin's request. "But do you think she'll stop?"

"I think so," replied Noel. "If I tell her she'll obey. In any case she'd make her way back to Otherport, so you needn't be anxious. I pity the man who tries to steal her."

"To be on the safe side, I'll lock her up until to-morrow morning," said Billy. "That'll give you time to get clear. Sorry you can't stop to dinner, old man."

Noel took an affectionate farewell of his pet. Flirt looked very downhearted as, with her tail between her legs, she followed the Captain to her new quarters, while the Sub, having bidden his cousin *au revoir*, hurried back to Otherport.

CHAPTER IV

Bound for the Baltic

At seven the following morning a taxi-cab deposited Sub-Lieutenant Fordyce and his scanty baggage on the jetty at Otherport Dockyard. Here a steam pinnacle was awaiting to convey him to H.M.S. *Barnacle*, an obsolete cruiser employed as a parent ship to the submarine flotilla of the Otherport Division.

Alongside the *Barnacle* lay R19, one of the most recent type of submarine craft. She was nearly three hundred feet in length, with a maximum beam of twenty-five feet. Over her bulging hull was a steel platform that afforded almost as much deck-space as that of a light cruiser. Amidships was the conning-tower, oval-shaped, with truncated walls. From the top of the conning-tower projected three tubes, each of about six inches in diameter. Of these two were periscopes—one for the use of the Lieutenant-Commander, the other to enable the helmsman to steer the vessel whilst submerged. The third had a double use. While running awash in a heavy sea it afforded means of ventilation; while diving it acted as a sound-conductor whereby the skipper of the submarine could tell with almost absolute certainty whether there were other vessels in the vicinity and in which direction they bore.

Surrounding the conning-tower, and extending twenty feet in its wake, was a steel platform facing the "bridge" of the vessel. Here was a binnacle containing a compass specially designed to withstand a tremendous pressure of water. Close at hand was a telegraph indicator communicating with the motor-room.

Around the deck were stanchion-rails, so arranged that they could be automatically lowered to lie flush with the deck when the vessel was trimmed for diving, thus offering no resistance to any obstacle that might be met with.

Two open hatchways, one for'ard the other aft, completed the visible fittings of the deck. The four 12-pounder guns, capable of being used as anti-aircraft weapons, were "housed" below, water-tight steel slabs fitting over the hermetically-sealed recesses in which the guns lay until required for action. In the wake of the conning-tower, and just clear of the raised platform, was another closed recess—longer than those for the quick-firers. This was to accommodate a "twenty-foot" whaler, which, with a couple of collapsible canvas Berthons, formed the complement of boats belonging to R19.

Down below, the accommodation was vastly superior to the earlier types of submarines at the outbreak of war. Transverse water-tight bulkheads divided the hull into five separate compartments, any one of which could be "holed" without completely destroying the buoyancy of the vessel. The foremost compartment contained the twin bow torpedo-tubes with their store of deadly 21-inch torpedoes. The latter, propelled by super-heated compressed air, had an extreme range of five miles, and could be relied upon to run with unerring aim under the influence of gyroscopically-actuated vertical and horizontal rudders. Beneath the torpedo-room was a roomy space for stores as well as the "cable-manger".

The second compartment was given over almost entirely to crew-space, providing sleeping and living accommodation

for eighty men.

Next came the 'midship compartment, over which was the conning-tower. Here the officers "messed", each officer having a small separate cabin, while a large "wardroom" afforded comfortable quarters for meals and recreation. Here, too, was the wireless-room.

A steel ladder communicated with the conning-tower, which, when necessary, could be hermetically cut off from the rest of the interior by means of sliding panels working in indiarubber-shod grooves.

Underneath the officers' quarters was the 'midships torpedo-room. This was an innovation in the "R" Class. It enabled a torpedo to be discharged broadside, this obviating the necessity of keeping the submarine "bows-on" to her prey. Fore and aft were two tubes—mounted on "racers" or quadrants of a circle consisting of toothed gun-metal rails. The combined length of this torpedo and its tube was too great to allow the weapon to be "launched in" when the latter was trained athwartships. Consequently the tubes were loaded in a fore-and-aft position and swung round until the mouths engaged with a corresponding pair of flanged, water-tight tubes through either side of the hull. From the broadside tubes torpedoes could be trained through an arc of 30 degrees.

Compartment 4 was devoted almost entirely to machinery—propelling, pumping, and steering—while the aftermost subdivision contained the oil-fuel tanks and electrical storage batteries.

In each compartment were water-ballast, trimming-tanks, and air-locks for life-saving purposes in the event of the vessel being sunk in comparatively shallow water.

R19 had refilled and replenished stores and provisions. She was ready to "sail" at a moment's notice, directly the Lieutenant-Commander received orders from the Commander-in-Chief's office and had obtained the latest charts of the Baltic from the dockyard chart-room.

In the absence of the Hon. Derek Stockdale, the Sub reported himself to Donald Macquare, the senior lieutenant, who specialized in torpedo-gunnery, a tall, big-boned Scot whose abruptness of manner was apt to form a temporary disguise to a large-hearted nature. Macquare was still a young man—the submarine service had no need for middle-aged officers—and, without professing any claim to being a "Popularity Jack", was well liked by his brother officers and fearlessly respected by the crew.

"Good time?" he asked laconically.

"Rather!" replied the Sub. "And now I'm ready for anything—even another hand at bridge. I won the princely sum of one and eightpence from you last time, do you remember?"

The Lieutenant smiled. He remembered the incident when R19, lying in twenty-five fathoms on the bed of the North Sea, was being sought by a dozen hostile destroyers with "distance charges". At any moment the deadly explosive grapnels might have engaged and blown the strongly-built

hull to pieces, yet the while the officers played cards, and the men listened to the muffled notes of a gramophone placed in a glass case to obviate any possibility of the Huns detecting the sounds of revelry.

"We're in for a busy time, laddie," remarked the Lieutenant. "This German offensive against Riga looks a serious matter, and I hear the Hun fleet is off to co-operate in the Gulf of Riga. For the life of me I can't imagine what these Russians are doing. It's proper dry rot. 'The glorious and bloodless revolution—the birth of a new Russia', as some of our statesmen expressed themselves. I'm afraid Russia's knocked out."

"Let's hope not," said Fordyce. "In any case, she did jolly well in the beginning of the war."

"Admitted," rejoined Macquare. "Which proves that the old regime, with its acknowledged defects, was infinitely preferable to the equality-for-all policy of the present day. Freedom! They'll find themselves in a pretty mess before they go very far with their chimerical search, you mark my words. Hallo, here's the skipper coming off."

The Hon. Derek came alongside in one of the steamboats belonging to the parent ship. Smartly returning the salutes of his colleagues, he stepped on board, followed by his coxswain, who bore under his arm a bundle of charts and a large blue envelope bound with red tape.

Lieutenant-Commander Stockdale was in his early thirties, a slimly-built man of medium height and of engaging

manners. He had gained his present rank through sheer merit and whole-hearted devotion to the branch of the service in which he specialized. He had unlimited influence behind him; he could easily have secured a "warm billet" on one of the royal yachts, but he had steadfastly set his face against favouritism. Notwithstanding his exalted birth, he was in every sense of the word an officer and a gentleman. A firm disciplinarian, he was ever ready to consider a grievance on the part of his crew. Provided a man was keen and reliable, he could rely upon the skipper's impartiality, but woe betide the luckless individual who attempted to "get to windward" of the Hon. Derek.

It was noon before the signal was received for R19 to proceed. Meanwhile a dozen odd jobs had kept Fordyce busily engaged, and almost before he was aware of the fact the submarine, running awash at ten knots, had passed the "gate" in the boom thrown across the harbour's mouth. Then, increasing speed to eighteen, R19 shaped a course N.N.E., across the mine-infested North Sea.

At eight bells (midnight) the Sub, relieved of duty, went below and prepared to turn in. Switching on an electric light in his diminutive cabin, he gave an exclamation of surprise, for, perched at the foot of his bunk, with a wistful look in her brown eyes, was his Irish terrier—the too faithful Flirt.

CHAPTER V

The Stowaway

Lieutenant-Commander the Hon. Derek Stockdale stooped and patted the dog's head. Flirt, instinctively realizing that she was being caressed by a friend, wagged a stumpy tail and licked the skipper's tanned hand.

It was on the morning following R19's departure and Noel Fordyce's discovery. The submarine was still running awash. North, south, east, and west the horizon was unbroken. Sea and sky met in a sharp, well-defined line. Save for R19, the broad expanse of the North Sea appeared to be deserted, although none could tell what dangers lurked beneath the surface of the dull-green water.

[Illustration: THE TOO-FAITHFUL FLIRT]

The skipper was taking a stroll on deck when Noel appeared with the four-footed stowaway. Lieutenant Macquare was on duty on the navigating-platform. For'ard of the conning-tower half a dozen bluejackets, clad in fearnought suits, evinced a lively interest in the proceedings.

"So this is the animal that didn't bite Councillor What's-his-name?" remarked the Lieutenant-Commander, for the report of the police-court proceedings at the Otherport Town Hall was common knowledge.

"I'm afraid, sir," replied the Sub, "that Flirt was guilty of the offence."

"Eh, what's that?" asked the Hon. Derek sharply.

Briefly Noel outlined what had occurred, for the present confining himself to the case as decided by the magistrates. The story of the previous interview with Councillor Mindiggle could be deferred to a more convenient season.

"She doesn't look like a snappy cur," remarked the skipper.

"Nor is she, sir," Fordyce hastened to assert. "Something must have irritated her."

"So you smuggled her abroad?"

The Sub denied the impeachment.

"For the life of me I cannot imagine how she came aboard, sir," he declared. "It was a great surprise to me to find her below. I was quite under the impression that she was twenty miles from Otherport."

"She is—and more," remarked Stockdale, with a laugh. "Very well, Fordyce; such devotion ought to be appreciated. Look after her, and keep her out of mischief: the mascot of submarine R19."

The interview ended, the Sub took his pet for'ard to be "adopted" by the ship's company. Evidently safe in the knowledge that her master could not now desert her, Flirt went willingly with half a dozen blue-jackets to be fed, groomed, and to make the acquaintance of her new messmates.

"She seems to take to you, Cassidy," remarked the Sub, addressing a bull-necked able-seaman.

"Yes, sir," replied the man, saluting. "We've met afore, ain't us, doggie?"

"In what circumstances?" asked Fordyce.

"Well, sir," replied the man, "seein' an 'ow Cap'n Stockdale don't object, I'll make a clean breast of it. It was yesterday mornin', when we were drawin' stores in the dockyard, that I spots the dog sniffin' round the steps. Comes up to me friendly-like, as if she knowed I belonged to this 'ere craft. Then I looks at 'er collar and sees your name. 'Bless me, Smiler,' I says to my raggie, 'if this ain't Mr. Fordyce's dog, same as took a chunk outer that cove's leg t'other day.' 'Mr. Fordyce, he's aboard,' said Smiler. "Ow about it? Let's give the dog a passage.' She nips into the boat and under the stern-sheets in a brace o' shakes. When we got alongside, out she 'ops and goes straight below, while you an' Mr. Macquare was spinnin' a yarn."

"Then why didn't you report to me?" asked Fordyce.

"Seein' as 'ow the dog didn't want to report 'erself, we thought as 'ow we'd let you have a little surprise, sir," explained Cassidy. "You see, she might a' been sent ashore."

Steadily R19 forged ahead, her course regularly checked by frequent observations on the sextant, and "picked out" on the chart. A deviation of a few miles would bring the submarine into the British mine-fields. Provided she kept to

the trackless path, as announced by the Admiralty, she had nothing to fear from these; it was the sinister drifting mines sown by the Huns with a reckless disregard of the rights of neutrals and the vaunted "Freedom of the Seas" wherein lay the danger. In addition, it was always possible that a lurking U-boat might be within striking distance, for the old theory that "dog will not eat dog", i.e. one submarine is unable to attack another, had long since exploded. Overhead, too, a hostile seaplane, soaring at an immense height, might swoop down and attempt to destroy the craft by means of powerful bombs; and the danger, although remote in this part of the North Sea, could not be lost sight of.

Nevertheless R19 still ran awash. Until she was within easy distance of hostile territorial waters it was policy to do so, since a British seaplane would find it difficult to distinguish friend from foe should she spot the ill-defined shape of a submerged craft creeping blindly through the water at a depth of from fifty to a hundred feet.

"Submarine on the port bow, sir," reported the look-out.

The order for "General Quarters" rang out. Telescopes and binoculars were brought to bear upon the triangular-shaped grey object, cleaving the waves at a distance of nearly three miles, while the four quick-firers were promptly raised from their places of concealment and manned to open fire at the first word of command.

The old couplet:

"Twice armed is he who has his quarrel just,
Thrice armed is he who gets his blow home fust",

is essentially applicable in modern naval warfare when single-ship actions take place at comparatively short range. The days of courteous exchange of compliments between doughty antagonists before opening fire are past. The first shot may decide, and frequently has decided, the contest.

Therein, especially during night encounters between destroyers in the Straits of Dover and off the Belgian coast, the Huns held an important advantage. Every vessel afloat was to them an enemy craft, while the British had to withhold their fire until they made certain that they were not attacking a friendly or neutral ship.

"She's flying the White Ensign!" exclaimed Macquare.
"By Jove, she's been at it!"

The approaching submarine turned out to be one of the E Class returning from observation patrol. She was showing a considerable amount of freeboard. Most of her water-ballast had been started. Just abaft her conning-tower, on the port side, a tarpaulin and a "thrum mat" had been lashed over a rent extending from just above her water-line to half-way across her curved deck. Pumps were steadily ejecting water—a circumstance that told of strained plates and shattered rivets. Of her twin periscopes, one had been shorn off close to the top of the conning-tower; the other, bent at an acute angle, trailed drunkenly over the side.

Dive she could not, unless once and for all time. Only by running on the surface and keeping the leaks under control could she hope to make port. With her ensign proudly displayed, and most of her officers and crew drawn up on her narrow deck, she held on her course, the passing submarines saluting each other according to the honourable and long-standing custom of the seas.

The Hon. Derek Stockdale raised a megaphone to his lips.

"Been strafed?" he enquired laconically.

"Aye, aye," was the reply, shouted in clear, decisive tones. "Scrapped with a Zepp., crocked her, and then took on a U-boat. She won't trouble you, but keep your weather eye lifting for Zepps. S'long and good luck!"

Ten minutes later the E Something was out of sight. Her cruise had been honourably accomplished. She was bound for home and a well-earned rest. R19's had just begun, and already the prospect of imminent excitement was in store. Dark, rugged clouds, scudding rapidly in the upper air, betokened a gale as surely as did the steadily-falling mercury of the barometer. With luck R19 ought to overhaul the crippled Zepp. as she strove to battle her way against the rising storm.

CHAPTER VI

The Zeppelin Hunt

Before long the wind rose, blowing strongly from the nor'west. In less than an hour it had increased to half a gale and had veered due east. Vicious, white-crested waves were slapping against R19's snub bows and surging in green cascades as far as the base of the conning-tower.

With the exception of the quick-firers everything on deck was battened down. The for'ard gun's crew was ordered aft until their services would be required; even then, duffel suits and oilskins notwithstanding, they stood, hanging on to the stanchion rails, shivering in the icy, salt-laden blast.

The sky, too, was now overcast, while the horizon was frequently obscured by patches of mirk as the rain-clouds scudded rapidly with the wind.

"There she is, sir," shouted one of the seamen.

Although his words were unintelligible in the roar of the elements, his outstretched hand gave an indication that the quarry was in sight. At an altitude of 3000 feet, and battling ineffectually with the gale, was a large Zeppelin—one of the "L" type. She was considerably down by the stern and manoeuvring badly. Two of her five propellers were motionless, while the action of her twin vertical rudders failed to keep her steady against the side-thrust of the remaining propellers. Steadily and surely she was being blown farther and farther away from her base.

Lieutenant-Commander Stockdale had already laid his plans. In calm weather diving would be almost useless as a means of concealment; but in the choppy seas now running the submarine could with advantage submerge until the crucial moment.

No alteration of the vessel's course was necessary. The Zeppelin was drifting almost straight towards her. Any slight deviation could be easily corrected by means of observation through the periscopes, for unless the air-ship turned and fled "down-wind"—an unlikely contingency—she could not help passing within effective range of the submarine's guns.

"Trim for diving."

The order was carried out with the utmost dispatch. With hardly a tremor the four guns, with their bulky mountings, sank into their "houses", the water-tight lids sliding automatically over the lowered weapons. The stanchions and rails fell as flat as did the walls of Jericho, but with far less noise and certainly no dust, although there was plenty of spray to atone for the deficiency. Ankle-deep in water, the men on deck waited until the submarine's platform was clear of the swirling foam, then they too bolted below. Clang went the water-tight hatches and R19 was little more than a hermetically-sealed cylinder packed with machinery, eighty odd human beings, and Flirt.

Alone in the conning-tower, the manhole of which, communicating with the interior of the hull, was left open, the Hon. Derek stood, his eyes fixed to the object-bowl of the periscope, on which the surrounding surface of the water was

reproduced with absolute fidelity, marred only by a vertical and a horizontal line marked in degrees. In the middle part of the image, corresponding with the centre of the field of vision, a specially-constructed lens enlarged the view, enabling the observer to gauge the distance and the direction of the target with the greatest exactitude. Although there were voice-tubes and indicators at hand, the Lieutenant-Commander's attention was directed mainly upon the object-bowl. Consequently he shouted his orders to a petty officer, whose head, as he stood on the short steel ladder, was level with the floor of the conning-tower.

"Down to eighteen feet."

With an almost imperceptible movement, as the horizontal diving-planes were actuated, R19 slid beneath the waves, the while "pumping" or rising and falling vertically under the constant alteration of the pressure of the water above her. Momentarily the vision in the object-bowl dimmed and again recovered its normal clearness, as clouds of spray enveloped the tips of the exposed periscopes, almost immediately to vanish from the surface of the anti-moisture-treated glass.

In the confined space the noise of the well-running electric motors was deafening. The torpedo-men were in the present instance able to "stand easy", but the engine-room artificers and stokers, their moist faces glistening in the glare of the electric lights, were far from idle. The gun-crews, clustered round the hatchway ladders, ready to rush to their posts, were grimly silent, awaiting the order that would give them the chance to "strafe" a Hun gas-bag. Opportunities for "strafing" were few and far between in the British submarine

service, not from inclination but from the absence of a suitable target; when a chance did occur the eager men were "all over it".

Standing immediately behind the petty officer stationed at the sound-receiving apparatus in a glass-encased compartment Sub-Lieutenant Fordyce noticed the man was listening intently, first at the right-hand disk then at the left. Then, turning his head, he regarded his officer with a puzzled air.

Opening the door, Fordyce entered the sound-proof cabinet.

"What's wrong now, Chalmers?" he asked.

"Something fishy, sir," replied the man, stepping aside. "Will you stand here a minute, sir?"

The Sub took up a position between the two concave disks. He could distinctly hear the bass hum of the Zeppelin's aerial propellers, while faintly through the right-hand disk came the thud of a marine "screw".

That meant that on the starboard hand, abeam if anything, a vessel was under way.

"Very good; carry on, Chalmers," said the Sub as he relinquished the apparatus to the man's charge. "I'll report to the Captain."

"What's that?" enquired the Hon. Derek, without turning his face from the vision of his expected victim. "Vessel to

starboard? Nothing in sight up-topsides, by Jove. All right, carry on. We'll tackle our Zeppelin friend first of all, and then see what it is that's worrying you."

Fordyce could not but admire his skipper's coolness. Somewhere within audible distance of R19 was another under-water craft, hostile, no doubt, and intent upon the British submarine's destruction, unless—jealous thought!—it were another of the E Class stalking the crippled airship. Whichever it might be, the Hon. Derek was resolved to leave her severely alone, risking a torpedo or being rammed until he had had a smack at the huge gas-bag.

"Up with her!" ordered the Lieutenant-Commander.

There was no necessity to blow the ballast-tanks. R19 had been kept to 19 feet solely by the action of the deflected horizontal diving rudders. Like an ungainly porpoise the submarine "broke surface", and the guns' crews raced up the ladders and through the now open hatchways.

At an angle of 30 degrees from the perpendicular, and at a bare 2000-feet altitude, was the Zeppelin, presenting a splendid target. Proceeding in the same direction as the submarine, she was evidently unaware of the latter's presence, for not a shot came from the quick-firers mounted in her nacelles, nor did an aerial torpedo hurtle downwards towards the British craft.

No. 3 quick-firer—the one immediately in the wake of the conning-tower—was the first to open fire. Ere the haze of the burning cordite had drifted aft, the smoke from the bursting

shell mushroomed close to the huge envelope. It seemed impossible that the fragile fabric could hope to escape the terrific impact. Another and another shell sped from the submarine's guns. Still the Zeppelin held on.

Then a cloud of black smoke hid the target from the gunlayers' eyes. The men raised a rousing cheer.

"Got her, by the bosun's cat!" shouted a bluejacket, unmindful of everything in his excitement and delirious joy.

But the cat of the afore-mentioned warrant officer must have been a bad mouser, for when the smoke drifted away the Zeppelin was 12,000 or 14,000 feet in the air. Under cover of the camouflage—for it was smoke purposely emitted in order to screen her movements—the air-ship had thrown out a large quantity of ballast, and had shot vertically upwards out of effective range.

Even as they watched, the bluejackets were aware that R19 was porting helm. Circling eight points to starboard, she headed straight for a pole-like object forging ahead through the crested waves—the periscope of a U-boat that was either about to "break surface" or else to let fly a torpedo at the British submarine.

CHAPTER VII

A Double Bag

A double, converging streak of foam marked the path of an approaching torpedo. For a few seconds the men on deck watched and waited with bated breath, knowing that 50 yards ahead of the tell-tale track was a powerful weapon capable of shattering R19's massively-built hull and sending her to the bottom like a stone.

It was the gun-layer of No. 2 quick-firer who saved the situation. Thrusting a projectile into the breech of the weapon he slammed the complicated breech-block, bent over the sights, and pulled the trigger of the firing-pistol.

Heavily depressed, the gun barked, sending the shell obliquely towards the surface of the water. Fifty feet in the air flew a column of spray, while the torpedo, deflected by the impact of the missile, tore harmlessly past R19's hull.

The U-boat, having shot her bolt, was preparing to dive once more, although her conning-tower had not appeared above the surface.

With a dull crash and a scarcely-perceptible shudder R19's snub-nosed stem grated against the rounded side of her foe. So great was her momentum that her bows were lifted clear of the waves.

"Got her, by smoke!" ejaculated the Hon. Derek, who, having emerged from the conning-tower, was standing by the side of Fordyce on the navigation-platform.

Both officers turned and faced aft. They were just in time to see the bows of the U-boat fling themselves clear of the agitated waves—sufficiently to enable them to note the number, U129—then, with a sobbing, gurgling sound, the doomed craft slithered beneath the surface, to the accompaniment of a volume of iridescent oil and a crowd of huge air-bubbles.

"Have a look down below, Mr. Fordyce," continued the Lieutenant-Commander. "Let's hope we haven't started a plate or two. It would be rough luck at this stage to have to put back for repairs."

The Sub hastened to carry out his instructions. Eager faces mutely questioned him as he entered the electrically-lighted compartment where the "hands" not told off for duty on deck were still in ignorance of what had occurred, although the unexpected shock had been sufficient to capsize several of the crew.

"It's all right, men!" exclaimed the Sub cheerily. "We've strafed another U-boat. The Zepp., I'm sorry to say, has sheered off."

In answer to his enquiries, Fordyce learnt that immediately after the impact steps had been taken to ascertain if any damage had been done to the hull. Not a leak was to be found. The for'ard diving-planes or horizontal rudders were intact and in perfect working order; while, on testing the twin bow torpedo-tubes, both were found to be undamaged. Evidently R19 had not struck her opponent an end-on blow, otherwise the covers of the tubes would have been buckled

or burst from their hinges. At the moment of impact U129 had submerged sufficiently to allow her opponent to strike a glancing blow with her forefoot—enough to crack the deck-plates of the ill-starred unterseeboot.

Eager to convey this gratifying report to his skipper, Fordyce went on deck. As he emerged through the circular man-hole a burst of cheering greeted his ears. He was just in time to see a long trailing cloud of fire-tipped smoke plunging towards the water at a distance of less than a couple of miles to leeward.

It was the Zeppelin. Whether by the submarine's gun-fire or by an accident it would never be known—but in any case the result was the same—the air-ship had caught fire in mid-air. For some seconds she blazed furiously—the whole of the after part of the envelope being hidden in fire and smoke—without showing any appreciable signs of falling. Then, with appalling suddenness, she buckled in two, and commenced her headlong flight to destruction.

Too far off to hear the loud hiss of the burning fabric as it came in contact with the water, R19 nevertheless turned and proceeded to the spot where the wreckage had disappeared. It was a fruitless quest. Beyond a few charred fragments of wood, there were no traces of what was, a few minutes previously, one of the vaunted mammoths of the Kaiser's air fleet.

Joyfully the Hon. Derek repaired to his cabin to draft his report for dispatch by wireless. Brevity and modesty were

some of his characteristics. He was not one to take credit for the acts of others:

"I have the honour to report that the hostile air-ship L67, previously crippled by H.M. Submarine E Something, has been destroyed. During the operations U129 was rammed by R19, and also destroyed. Derek U. E. Stockdale, Lieutenant-Commander R19."

This dispatch sent off in code, the Hon. Derek "turned in", acting on the principle that it is well to sleep when one can. The most strenuous part of the outward voyage was yet to come, the passage through the mine-infested Sound at the entrance to the Baltic.

From a strictly personal point of view, R19's mission was not an enviable one. For two months—longer if the exigencies of the service so required—she was to be tacitly lent to the Russian Government. During that period the crew would be lucky if they had as much as one mail-bag from home. Ravages by hostile underwater craft, operating off the North Cape, and the uncertain state of internal communication between Archangel and Petrograd, made it a difficult matter for letters and parcels to be sent to the crews of British submarines operating in Russian waters. They would soon be short of food, too; when their own stores were exhausted they would have to rely upon what provisions the Russian authorities could spare out of their already depleted

stocks. Both going and returning from her station, R19 would have to thread the narrow, dangerous waters of the Sound, and run the gauntlet of the numerous motor patrol boats which the Huns maintained almost without let or hindrance in the landlocked waters of the southern and western Baltic.

Yet with the same cheerfulness that the British bluejacket will voluntarily choose a two years' exile in the desolate Arctic, or risk the perils of the miasmatic, mosquito-infested swamps of tropical Africa, did R19's officers and men set forth on their hazardous adventure. In the common cause of the Allies it mattered little whither they went, so long as they could strike a blow for king and country.

CHAPTER VIII

"Accidents will Happen"

Grey dawn was breaking when submarine R19 approached the waters of the Skagerrack. Well on their port bow could be faintly discerned the rugged cliffs of Norway, but it was yet too hazy to sight the low-lying shores of Jutland. The strong wind had blown itself out, and although the waves still ran high, they had lost their angry look. It was possible to stand on deck without having to hang on like grim death, as the water surged waist-high over the comparatively low-lying structure.

Scorning to take advantage of the doubtful security afforded by the "three-mile limit", R19 kept a mid-channel course, prepared to dive the instant a suspicious craft was sighted. She was to keep awash as far as practicable, in order to economize her electrical propulsive powers. As yet not a single craft had been sighted. The once-crowded waterway, from whence vessels laden with timber and iron-ore for Great Britain issued in the piping times of peace, was deserted. The hardy mariners of Norway still kept the sea, their fearful losses in shipping notwithstanding, but they took a different route; while the mercantile flag of Sweden had practically disappeared from the North Sea and its approaches.

Clad in oilskins, Donald Macquare and Noel Fordyce stood on the navigation-platform. At the Sub's feet crouched Flirt. The dog, having completely recovered her "sea-legs", was sniffing eagerly at the off-shore breeze, as if sighing for the land that was denied her. From the electric stove in the galley wafted the appetizing odours of frying bacon, to mingle with the salt-laden air.

"It looks like a dirty sky to windward," observed the Lieutenant, as he lowered his binoculars and rubbed his eyes. It was nearing the end of his "trick", and he was longing for his watch below. "It will be a jolly good thing for us, if it doesn't get too thick. Bless my soul, these neutrals may be quite all right as a whole, but goodness only knows when there isn't a pro-Hun ashore armed with a powerful telescope."

"In which case the news will be telegraphed to Kiel," added Fordyce. "Hang it all, I never could understand how these fellows get the hang of things!"

He was on the point of confiding to the Lieutenant the information of R19's date of departure and destination, as told by Councillor Mindiggle, when the look-out reported a sail dead ahead.

The craft was a tramp, deep in ballast. At a distance of four miles she stood out distinctly against the approaching cloud of misty rain, until the pall of vapour swept down and hid her from sight.

"It will be as thick as pea-soup directly," declared Macquare. "No need to call the skipper. I'll alter helm and give yonder vessel a chance to slip clear of us."

Accordingly R19's course was altered a few points to port, which, allowing for the relative speed of the two vessels, ought to allow ample margin for the submarine to pass at least two miles from the tramp.

Presently Flirt began to bark violently at some invisible object on the starboard hand. Macquare made a gesture of reproof, and the Sub, placing his hand on the dog's muzzle, lifted him into the conning-tower.

"It's that tramp's screw she heard," he remarked, as he rejoined the Lieutenant. "Sounds quite close."

"By Jove, yes!" exclaimed Macquare. "We'd best get under."

Even as he spoke, a rift in the mist revealed the tramp at less than a cable's length away. She had changed her course as a matter of precaution, zigzagging in order to baffle any U-boats that might be lurking in the vicinity. By so doing she was now passing through the wake of R19.

"British, by Jove!" exclaimed Fordyce, catching sight of a dirty smoke-begrimed red ensign floating proudly from the tramp's ensign staff, while, as she slid past, he could read the words *Talisman*—*Goole* on her stumpy stern.

Even as he spoke, the mist was stabbed by a lurid flash, and a shell, screeching through the air, passed so close to the Sub's head that he distinctly felt the windage.

It was not a time to offer protests and explanations. Before the tramp could let fly a second time, Fordyce had gained the conning-tower. The water-tight lid was promptly shut and secured, and, with more haste than grace, R19 dived for safety with the muffled reverberations of a second report to cheer her on her way.

Through the trap-door in the floor of the conning-tower appeared the Hon. Derek, just awakened out of sleep yet perfectly cool and collected.

"A pretty kettle of fish, sir," reported Mr. Macquare in answer to his superior officer's question. "A British tramp, the *Talisman*, did her level best to blow us to blazes. Let rip at point-blank range."

"And missed," added the Lieutenant-Commander cheerfully. "Bless her dear skipper's heart, although his gun-layer's a rotten bad shot he's a tough old British heart of oak. Accidents will happen, Macquare, in the best-regulated families."

"Rough luck if we'd been sent to Davy Jones by one of our own people, sir," said the Lieutenant doggedly.

"A miss is as good as a mile," rejoined the Hon. Derek soothingly. "I suppose the old man is dancing about on the bridge, wild with delight at having sent a strafed U-boat to the bottom. When we return, Macquare, we must look out for the name of the skipper of the *Talisman* on the Honours List of the Mercantile Marine, though not for worlds would I disillusion the gallant old boy. By smoke! He's pottering around to pick up the pieces."

The thud of the tramp's propeller clearly indicated that such was the intention of the *Talisman's* skipper. It was an audacious, almost foolhardy piece of work. The tramp, unescorted and of comparatively slow speed, had eased down and was circling over the spot where the supposed U-boat was last seen.

"I'll humour the old chap," resumed the Lieutenant-Commander. "Mr. Fordyce, pass the word for the oil in the sump to be pumped out. That'll please him when he finds the oil floating on the surface—but not a word, mind, to the men. It's our little joke."

It was not until the beating of the tramp's propellers had long faded into inaudibility that R19 poked her periscope above the surface. The fog had cleared considerably, although the air was still misty. As far as the field of vision showed all was quiet. Up came the submarine, the electric motors were switched off and the petrol engines clutched into the propeller shafts. Hatches were opened and steps taken to "con" the vessel from the navigation-platform.

A swirl in the water on the starboard hand attracted the Sub's notice as he gained the open air. Something was converging upon the vessel's side. Instinctively he glanced towards the bows. His supposition was correct. In rising, the submarine had fouled the wire span connecting a pair of drifting mines. On either hand a deadly metal cylinder was being swung in towards the vessel's hull.

There was no time for official decorum. With a bound Noel threw himself upon the engine-room telegraph indicator and signalled full speed astern.

Thank Heaven, the order was obeyed promptly, even at the risk of snapping the blades, wrecking the stuffing-box, or smashing the clutches. With the water hissing and foaming past her sides under the reverse action of her powerful propeller, the submarine quickly lost way and began to gather sternway.

"Stop! Easy astern!"

Both orders were as quickly carried out as before. By this time the two mines were bearing on the bows at a distance of

less than fifty yards away, and were gradually being drawn towards each other. So exactly midway had R19 struck the span that, unless steps were taken to prevent them, the metal cylinders would collide with each other and explode within a few seconds of the fragile horns being snapped under the impact. And at fifty yards the detonation of that double quantity of T.N.T. would be sufficient to severely damage, if not destroy, the submarine.

Again Fordyce signalled "Stop", then called for volunteers to clear the fouled wire. There was no need to ask twice. From below poured hands armed with hack-saws, cold chisels, and axes.

The rope—a 2-inch flexible-steel-wire one—was badly rusted, nevertheless it took the bluejackets the best part of five minutes to sever it and disentangle the newly-cut ends.

"All clear, sir," sang out a petty officer.

With feelings of thankfulness Fordyce put the indicator to half speed astern. Gathering way, R19 slowly backed from the floating cylinders until she was safely out of that danger zone.

"Well done, Mr. Fordyce!"

The Sub turned, flushed with pleasure, and smartly saluted. It was the Hon. Derek who had spoken. Throughout the hazardous operation he had stood quietly behind his young subordinate, ready to take charge if necessity should

arise. But there had been no need, and Stockdale was too shrewd a man to "barge in" and flabbergast his youthful Sub.

"Mine right astern, sir!" shouted a seaman.

"And to starboard, sir!" announced another.

R19, in backing from one danger, found herself beset by floating perils on all sides.

CHAPTER IX

Drifting Mines

It was a situation in which skilful handling and consummate coolness alone would extricate R19 from the perils that encircled her. To attempt to back astern or forge ahead in the hope of escaping the floating mines would be courting disaster. Fortunately there was little to fear from partly-submerged anchored mines, for the depth of the Skager-rack was here not far short of four hundred fathoms. On the other hand, the drifting mines were either in pairs or in multiples of two, connected by lengths of wire of sufficient length to cause the explosive cylinders to hit amidships the hull of any vessel unfortunate enough to pick up the middle part of the bight of rope.

Promptly the whaler and one of the Berthons were brought on deck. The former was launched over the side and a couple of coils of rope tossed into her. The canvas boat was unfolded, the stretchers put in position, and also put afloat.

The Berthon, in which were three blue-jackets, acted as scout, rowing on ahead, while one of the hands kept a sharp look-out for any obstructions. The whaler followed, towing a buoy to which was attached a grapnel by means of a 30-foot length of rope.

Provided the grapnel fouled none of the spans connecting the mines it was reasonable to conclude that the submarine could likewise follow without risk, since the depth at which the grapnel was suspended was greater than the draft of R19 when awash.

A cable's length astern of the whaler the submarine cautiously crept through the water, ready at the first alarm to back from the danger.

"Heavens! What is that lubber doing?" exclaimed the Hon. Derek, as the bowman of the Berthon laid aside his oar, seized a boat-hook, and prepared to fend off a circular mine.

"Avast there!" roared the Lieutenant-Commander through his megaphone; but he was too late. Already the foolhardy man was thrusting the metal head of the boat-hook hard against the slippery surface of the mine. Even in calm water the act would have been that of a madman. As it was, the choppy waves rendered the result of the attempt a foregone

conclusion. Metal grated on metal, and the next instant one of the fragile horns of the mine snapped off close to its base.

Through his binoculars Fordyce could see the horrified looks on the faces of the men in the Berthon as they attempted to back from the scene of the bowman's ill-judged activity. In four or five seconds the chemical action of the salt water upon the contents of the fractured tube would cause the charge to explode, with annihilating results to the three blue-jackets.

Four seconds passed in long-drawn suspense. Five, six, seven—but the expected disaster did not take place.

Not until the Berthon was beyond the danger zone did the Hon. Derek give vent to his feelings.

"Thank Heaven, it's a dud!" he exclaimed fervently.

Then, ordering the Berthon alongside, he addressed the bowman with a few very forcible remarks upon his lubberly action, and, as a precaution, made the men leave their boat-hooks on the submarine's deck.

For nearly an hour the nerve-racking ordeal continued as R19 slowly threaded her way through the mine-field. By a skilful use of the helm the submarine, under the guidance of the whaler, contrived to avoid most of the dangers. Those mines that lay athwart her course, and could not be otherwise avoided, were tackled by the whaler, their spans grappled for and secured, and thus towed out of the way.

"By Jove, if we had time I'd like to explode the whole crowd of them!" remarked the Lieutenant-Commander, referring to the mines, now happily astern. The whaler, now a mile ahead, was returning, after having made sure, as far as human agency could provide, that the limit of the field had been passed, and R19, having hoisted the recall, was only waiting for the boats to be safely stowed before proceeding.

"Destroyer on the starboard bow."

The disconcerting announcement could hardly have been made at a worse time. The chances were that the approaching craft was a Hun, since both Heligoland and Kiel were within easy steaming distance of the Skaw, and German light cruisers and torpedo-boats could manoeuvre with slight risk of being brought into action. If surprised by a British flotilla, it was a simple matter to make for Danish territorial waters. On the other hand, should no hostile craft put in an appearance, the presence of Hun warships off the shores of Jutland served to impress the Danes with the fact that Germany held supreme command of the North Sea.

By the fact that the destroyer had altered helm and was bearing down upon the submarine, it was certain that she had spotted the latter. R19 was at a decided disadvantage. Without abandoning her boats she could not dive and attack by means of torpedoes. If she remained awash, her comparatively low speed and inferior gun-power would be no match for the swift and well-armed destroyer.

The master-mind of the Lieutenant-Commander instantly gripped the solution to the problem.

"Action stations! Prepare for diving!" he ordered. "I'll fight her, and the victors can pick up the boats' crews."

CHAPTER X

The "Havornen's" Warning

Down to fifteen fathoms R19 plunged under the influence of her diving-rudders and water-ballast admitted to her buoyancy-tanks. Then, turning eight points to starboard, she shaped a course that would bring her on a diverging track to that of the destroyer.

Already torpedoes had been "launched in" in both bow and broadside tubes, ready for instant liberation the moment R19 picked up her target. Overhead could be distinctly heard the thrash of the vessel's propellers.

"The silly josser!" muttered the Hon. Derek. "She's slowing down. To capture the boats most likely. Well, that's her funeral, so here goes."

Having deemed that the submarine was within striking distance, her Lieutenant-Commander brought her carefully towards the surface, slowly, lest a perceptible disturbance of the water should betray her presence.

Suddenly the object-bowl of the conning-tower periscope was flooded with light. Right in the centre of the field of vision appeared the destroyer at a distance of 800 yards. Without having to "con" the submarine either to port or starboard, Stockdale was in a position to let loose a couple of 21-inch torpedoes with almost certain chance of success.

With their senses keenly on the alert, the L.T.O.'s awaited the order that would send the deadly missiles on their way—but the order did not come.

Close alongside the destroyer lay R19's whaler. A short distance from the latter was the Berthon, making her way towards her. Both were in the direct line of fire. It was one of those perplexing problems that the naval officer has frequently to solve. Ought he, in the certain chance of sending an important unit of the enemy's fleet to the bottom, to sacrifice deliberately the lives of a dozen of his own men? In an above-water engagement between two destroyers a skipper would, perhaps, have to accept the risk of having half his ship's company put out of action before he could claim the fruits of victory. From a purely professional point of view it would be a sacrifice well made, although deplorable; but in the present instance it looked like a cold-blooded butchery of his compatriots.

Even as he looked, Stockdale noticed that the destroyer's quick-firers, instead of being trained abeam, were fore and aft, and not manned for action. Most of the crew were clustered along the side watching the submarine's boats, but making no hostile demonstrations. Just then a waft of air bore down. The stranger's ensign fluttered in the faint breeze.

It was a white cross on a red, swallow-tailed field: the naval ensign of Denmark.

Even then the Hon. Derek had his doubts. The new-comer might be a Hun under false colours, and might open fire without troubling to substitute the dishonoured Black Cross Ensign of Germany for the flag she was displaying. The fact that the guns were not manned rather knocked that theory on the head. Nevertheless R19, with the tips of her periscopes showing, forged ahead until her Lieutenant-Commander was able to read the name on the destroyer's stern—*Havornen*.

Giving the order to the torpedo-men to "stand fast", Stockdale brought the submarine awash at a distance of 200 yards dead astern of the *Havornen*. Then, emerging from the conning-tower, and followed by Macquare and the Sub, he punctiliously exchanged salutes with the officer commanding the destroyer.

None of the submarine's officers could speak Danish. Fordyce knew a few words, picked up during his service with the Royal Seal Line, but not sufficient to carry on a conversation. Still in a quandary, they were agreeably surprised when the Danish officer addressed them in English.

"I am glad to see you!" he exclaimed, when the two craft drew within hailing distance. "I thought, until I spoke to your men in the boats, that you were Germans."

By his tone the Dane clearly indicated that his pleasure would not have been anything so cordial if the submarine flew the Black Cross Ensign.

"Thanks!" replied the Hon. Derek; "and we reciprocate your expressions of greeting." He did not think it advisable to congratulate the Danes upon their narrow escape of being blown out of the water. "Might I call your attention to the fact that you are within a couple of miles of a German mine-field?"

"Is that so?" asked the Danish officer. "It must have been the work of a submarine mine-layer—the one that is now hard and fast aground off Laeso. We will proceed, and set to work to destroy the Germans' vile handiwork. Thank you for the information. In return, let me warn you: the Germans have recently laid a new mine-field at the south entrance of the Sound; so if your Government has given you instructions, the information will most likely be misleading. More than that I dare not say, but you have our best wishes."

With another exchange of courtesies the British and Danish vessels separated, the *Havornen* making towards the region of the floating mines, where, presently, musketry reports and, anon, the heavy roars of a powerful explosive being liberated were evidences that the work of clearing the deadly menace to neutral shipping was in active process.

R19, having picked up her boats, gathered way and an hour later was rounding the Skaw. Here a course S. $\frac{3}{4}$ E. was set through the Kattegat. Beyond lay the Sound, where one of the greatest ordeals in modern naval warfare was awaiting the dauntless submarine—the threading of the intricate, uncharted mine-field guarding the principal entrance to the Baltic Sea.

"Jolly decent of that Dane," remarked Fordyce as he stood with Lieutenant Macquare upon the navigation-platform. "There's not much doubt as to which way his sympathies incline."

"It was," agreed Macquare. "I feel sorry for Denmark, one of the most decent neutral countries, looking on at the great stunt. She'd come in like a shot—she still remembers being robbed of Schleswig-Holstein—but it would be the case of Roumania all over again. With the German fleet having pretty nearly its own way in the Baltic it would be suicidal policy for Denmark to chip in. Well, I suppose another twenty-four hours will either see us in the Baltic or else at the bottom of it."

"This new mine-field has upset our calculations," said the Sub. "Yet I suppose we'll manage it somehow—we usually do," he added optimistically.

In defiance of all international treaties the Huns had mined the territorial waters of the Sound, a strait averaging five miles in width between Sweden and the Danish island of Zeeland. The mines were "contact" ones, anchored by means of sinkers and so arranged that the cylinders containing the explosive charges were at varying depths. A submarine stood an equally poor chance whether she kept just below the surface or crept along the bottom of the channel. The original "field" consisted of three parallel rows, the first 12 feet from the surface, the second about the same distance from the bed of the sea, the third midway betwixt the bottom and the surface. Through the danger zone was a narrow channel, guarded by patrol boats and destroyers. The British

Admiralty had obtained information of this opening and had used the knowledge to good advantage, when, early in the war, British submarines had paralysed Germany's trade with Sweden and the harbours of Stralsund, Danzig, and Memel were chock-a-block with merchantmen afraid to venture across the comparatively narrow stretch of water to obtain badly-wanted cargoes of Swedish iron-ore and foodstuffs.

Now, more than likely, the mine-field was increased in width. There were also reports that the Huns were employing steel nets as an additional safeguard, and had augmented the number of patrol boats. Zeppelins and sea-planes, too, had been constantly sighted south of the Danish islands, so that R19 was "up against" a particularly tough proposition.

"Yes; it's easier for a mosquito to find its way through the curtains of an old West Coaster's bed than for a submarine to nose herself into the Baltic," declared Macquare. "But we'll do it, laddie, you mark my words."

Whenever the Lieutenant's grim determination showed itself he involuntarily rolled his "R's". He did so on this occasion, and Fordyce knew that Macquare was revelling in the prospect.

It was night. Although land was within ten miles on the port hand not a light was visible. The island of Anholt had been left astern. Another hour's run ought to bring the submarine within sight of Elsinore at the starboard side of the Sound.

At the Lieutenant-Commander's request Flirt had been sent below, much to her disgust, as she appreciated the night watches crouching on deck at her master's feet. But now absolute silence was imperative. By the sense of hearing as much as that of sight were the crew to guard against the dangers of the unlighted channel.

Just before midnight two topsail schooners were observed, bearing northwards. Without attempting to submerge, R19 held on, knowing that her low-lying shape would be indistinguishable except from a distance of a few yards. Then came a tug, displaying navigation lights and three masthead lamps, showing that she was towing a vessel over six hundred feet in length. These were indications that the submarine was approaching Denmark's principal seaport, and, although the vessels were neutrals, there was the possibility of their skippers reporting the presence of a submarine if the latter were spotted. And, then, where the information would eventually be sent was a matter of speculation, with the odds that it would reach the ears of the German patrol commanders.

Proceeding at a bare five knots, R19 was within a few miles of the mine-field when dawn broke. It was a case of "hasten slowly". To attempt the forcing of the blockade during the hours of daylight would be courting failure and disaster, so she promptly "sounded", resting on the bottom in twelve fathoms.

Never did a day pass more slowly. In spite of various attempts to provide the men with amusement the enforced watch below for all hands was a long-drawn period of

suspense and irritation. The period of inaction before undertaking a task of infinite danger is always such, whether in the case of infantry waiting to "go over the top" or the ship's company awaiting the order to "open fire". Once in the thick of things danger is forgotten in the enthusiasm of the encounter, but until then the minds of even the bravest are filled with morbid forebodings.

It was not until an hour after sunset that the welcome order came to blow auxiliary tanks. Without making use of her propelling machinery the submarine rose steadily towards the surface. Everything seemed quiet. The periscopes, useless except for the purpose of picking up a solitary light, revealed nothing, for the night was already as black as pitch.

With their night-glasses the officers swept the waste of waters. Ahead a faint "loom" indicated the position of Copenhagen. On the Swedish side a faint light flickered for a few seconds and then disappeared.

A quarter of an hour passed, but Stockdale gave no orders to proceed. Not that he hesitated to face the danger; he was merely waiting an opportunity.

Suddenly the horizon away to the south'ard was swept by the rays of a search-light. Another and yet another beam followed suit, until the sky in that direction was a blaze of light. Then the rays vanished and a mast-head signalling-lamp began its flickering tale.

"QKG—TOXZ—PJ"—code, thought so," muttered the Lieutenant-Commander, as he read the unintelligible

message.

"Mast-head signal astern, sir," reported Fordyce.

The Hon. Derek swung round in an instant and levelled his binoculars at a pin-prick of yellow light.

"Good!" he ejaculated. "That's what I was waiting for."

CHAPTER XI

Caught in the Net

Presently the powerful night-glasses revealed the misty outlines of a large two-funnelled craft slowly making her way in a southerly direction, the while signalling steadily, pausing only to receive an answering message from one of the German patrols.

Then, with all lights screened, came a pair of lean destroyers, zigzagging their way through the mine-field. After a while they steadied on their respective helms. Unless they altered course, they would pass at a distance not less than five cable-lengths from the lurking submarine.

"One of their strafed raiders coming here to roost for a dead cert," quoth the Hon. Derek. "Hands to action-stations, Mr. Macquare. I mean to let that chap pilot me through the

mine-field, and, with luck, I'll return evil for good by putting a torpedo into him."

The two destroyers passed without sighting the British submarine. They were emitting dense columns of smoke that wafted over R19's deck as they steamed by. Two deductions were to be drawn from that circumstance. The boats were short of steam coal, which was a most cheerful bit of information. Also, from the fact that they were burning coal and not oil fuel, they were not by any means of the latest type of German torpedo craft.

Presently the nearest destroyer put her helm hard over and circled away from the submarine. Not until she was pointing in exactly the opposite direction to the one she had been following did she steady and slow down. Her consort still carried on until she had passed the approaching armed merchantman. Then she, too, flung about.

Preceded and followed by her escort, the returning raider (for Stockdale's surmise was correct) steamed past at a rate of about five knots. It would have been a splendid opportunity for R19 to get home three torpedoes with mathematical precision, but reluctantly the Lieutenant-Commander stayed his hand. It was tantalizing, but the greater issue was not to be lost sight of.

Under electrical motive power, for it was too risky to make use of even the well-muffled internal-combustion engines, R19 fell in at the tail of the procession, keeping at a distance of four cable-lengths astern of the rearmost destroyer.

Luck was in her favour, for not only was the night very dark, but the eddying clouds of smoke from the German vessels' funnels were frequently sweeping over the submarine, thus making a most effectual screen to her movements, while with her slow speed R19 did not show the "bone in her mouth"—the phosphorescent bow wave that at any high rate of speed would inevitably betray her position.

Both periscopes were "housed", and the boat prepared to dive at an instant's notice.

For a full quarter of a mile the course was due south, until, at a flashing-signal from the leading torpedo-boat, the big German starboarded her helm, and steered almost at right angles to her former direction. R19's officers noticed that the rearmost destroyer made no attempt to alter helm until she gained the position where the armed merchantman had turned. Evidently the "gateway" through the mine-field was narrow, and permitted no liberties.

As the following destroyer turned she flashed out a signal, to which a distant vessel replied. The next instant the concentrated rays of a dozen search-lights swept the surface of the water.

Down dropped R19 to 20 feet. Her periscopes were raised until they projected but 18 inches above the surface. Until the crucial moment, Stockdale chose to keep the escort under observation.

Again the Hun vessels turned, this time to port, and were heading straight for the centre of the far-flung line of patrol

boats and destroyers.

"We're through, I fancy!" exclaimed the Hon. Derek.
Then: "Down to forty feet."

At that depth the submarine was immune from the danger of being stove in, even by the keel of the heaviest battleship afloat. For the rest of the distance, until the last of the patrolling craft was left astern, the submarine had to depend upon direction by listening to the thrash of the Hun torpedo-boats' propellers.

The raider and her escorts were now increasing speed, another indication that the danger of the mine-field was a thing of the past. Before long R19, in her efforts to keep up with her hostile guides, was pushing ahead at fourteen knots—a rate sufficient to raise an ominous swirl upon the placid surface.

The while Macquare and the Sub were working out the course for future reference, noting the varying compass bearings and the distance run between alterations of helm. Knowing the exact spot where the second channel began, it would be a relatively simple matter to "plot out" the secret channel on the chart for use on the return run—if R19 were fortunate enough to leave the Baltic. In order to check each other's calculations the Lieutenant made his readings on a magnetic compass, while the Sub used the gyro-compass, which, unaffected by deviation and variation, enabled the navigator to obtain his knowledge of direction without having to take into consideration half a dozen intricate but

important influences to which the magnetic instrument is subjected.

Presently, finding the pace too hot, the Hon. Derek gave orders for speed to be reduced to five knots. The returning raider had played her part as far as R19 was concerned, and, as a reward—although Stockdale would have willed it otherwise—she was rapidly drawing out of torpedo range. Even if the submarine dared to risk letting fly a couple of torpedoes, the possibility of hitting a vessel stern-on was rather remote, while the presence of a hostile craft inside their mine-field would at once be revealed to the German patrol-boats.

A faint rasping metallic sound caused both officers to look up from their respective tasks. It was the unmistakable noise of meshed wire grating along the submarine's side. Then, with a decided jerk, the vessel's way was checked. Under the impulse of her propellers she tilted nose downwards, the while the disconcerting sound of the flexible wire grinding against her was growing more and more in volume.

The artificer in charge of the motors acted promptly on the order to declutch and then reverse. Before her propellers had made a dozen revolutions the port-hand one, entangled in a remorselessly-tightening obstacle, slowed down, and then stopped dead.

R19 was firmly held in the meshes of an anti-submarine net.

CHAPTER XII

"Away Diving-party!"

Lieutenant-Commander Stockdale descended the ladder from the conning-tower and gained the 'midship compartment of the submarine. Outwardly he appeared cool and collected. If the intense gravity of the situation assailed him, he kept his emotions to himself.

"A nice old jamboree, Macquare!" he exclaimed. "It's the port propeller getting fouled that's the trouble."

"It is, sir," agreed the Lieutenant.

"The consequences of halloing before we're out of the wood," added Stockdale. "I'm going to blow the ballast-tanks. We must risk it, although it's pretty well a dead cert that the Huns have calcium-light alarms in connection with this infernal net. We'll be in a fine old mess if we do break surface in the full glare of a dozen search-lights and hampered with a ton of wire netting over everything."

R19 had been too premature. When the raider and her attendants had increased speed they were clear of the mine-field, but not of the maze of steel netting, which, supported so that the upper edge was at a sufficient depth below the

surface to enable them to pass without hindrance, was a dangerous trap to submarine craft.

"Why not fill all ballast-tanks, and see if we can sink clear?" suggested Macquare.

The Lieutenant-Commander shook his head.

"We would only get in a worse mess," he objected, "and as likely as not foul the starboard propeller into the bargain."

"It's not much use standing by and waiting for the Huns to strafe us with distance charges," remarked Macquare doggedly. He was beginning to roll his R's again. "If you have no objection, sir, I'll call for volunteers, and see what it's like outside."

"That's my job, I think," said Fordyce quietly.

The Lieutenant demurred at the assertion, while the Sub was equally emphatic.

"Don't argue about it!" exclaimed the Hon. Derek. "The best way you can settle the matter is to toss for it."

A florin glittered as it spun in the rays of the electric light.

"Heads!" declared Macquare. "It's your go, laddie, and good luck!"

In common with other submarines of the "R" Class, Stockdale's command was provided with a means of enabling divers to leave the interior of the vessel while submerged.

One of the sub-compartments was fitted with two water-tight doors, one of which communicated with the interior; the other, in the vessel's side, gave access to the outside.

Without loss of time the Sub called for two volunteers. Of the submarine's complement twelve men had "proficiency pay" as seamen-divers, and every one of the twelve volunteered for the hazardous task.

"I'll take Cassidy and Payne," decided Fordyce. "They are most reliable men, and both unmarried. If we are not back in an hour, sir, don't wait if you have a chance. We'll do our best."

"And good luck!" exclaimed the Lieutenant-Commander. It was the naval way of bidding farewell to a comrade about to undertake a risky enterprise—a pithy expression conveying a wealth of possibilities of thought.

Assisted by willing helpers, the Sub and the two seamen donned their diving-dresses. These were of the "self-contained" type, in which the cumbersome life-line and air-tube are dispensed with. The dresses were of "armoured" rubber and canvas, specially contrived to withstand high pressures. The copper helmet was fitted with three large scuttles, so that the wearer could see what was going on on either side by merely turning his head, and thus doing away with the necessity of having to keep the desired object in view directly in front. At the back of the helmet was a flexible metal tube supplying chemically-treated air from a reservoir to the wearer. The reservoir was strapped to the small of the back, if such an expression can be applied to an

inflated diving-dress. Immediately above the breathing-apparatus container was another contrivance of strong elastic material, capable of being expanded to double the size of a football. Normally it lay flat and compact against the diver's shoulders. Strapped across the chest, immediately below the leaden weight attached to the collar of the helmet, was a strong copper receptacle connected with the deflated bag on the diver's back, and fitted with a stopcock and a small but powerful suction-pump. This contrivance took the place of the life-line in the older type of dress; for, should a man wish to rise from the bottom of the sea, all he had to do was to release the compressed air from the copper container into the expanding bag, until the buoyancy of the latter overcame the weight of the diver's equipment.

Each of the three men was equipped with a knife, hacksaw, crowbar, a small slate and pencil for communication purposes, and an electric lamp. Their bare hands were protected from the numbing cold by a thick coating of tallow.

Their helmets having been placed over their heads, and secured by "butterfly nuts" to their rubber-lined metal collars, Fordyce and his assistants entered the diving-chamber, the inner door of which was secured by clamp locks capable of being operated either from within or without.

The Sub's next task, after securing the door, was to flood the diving-chamber. This was done by means of a stopcock communicating with the water outside, while the weight of the intruding fluid was compensated by expelling a similar

quantity from one of the auxiliary ballast-tanks, in order not to disturb the trim of the submarine.

The diving-compartment filled, Fordyce threw open the door in the submarine's side; then, groping until he found the lowermost of a series of rungs, he made his way to the deck, where he awaited his companions.

Thence the three went towards the bows, flashing their lamps in order to discover the nature of the entanglement. Although each light was of 500 candle-power, the rays were effective only for a distance of five or six yards, but they were sufficient to enable Fordyce to see that a huge large-meshed steel net enclosed R19 on both sides, while towards the bows it contracted, thus preventing further progress in that direction.

Cautiously the Sub lowered himself upon the bow diving-rudder on the starboard side. Examination showed that no part of the net was holding it; but the one to port was stubbornly enmeshed.

By dint of careful tackling by means of crowbars, the three men succeeded in freeing the projecting plate from the net. As far as could be seen, there was now nothing for'ard to prevent the submarine gathering sternway. Obviously the principal difficulty lay in the fact that one of the propellers had fouled.

"By Jove, what's that?" mentally enquired the Sub, as the light of his electric lamp fell upon a huge, ill-defined object less than six feet from R19's bows. It was a part of the upper

works of a large tramp vessel, lying slightly on one bilge, and almost hidden by a lavish growth of barnacles and seaweed.

It was the wreck of a tramp steamer, possibly a German one sent to the bottom by a British submarine during the early stages of the war. Providentially the steel net had done R19 a good turn, for, had it not stopped her progress, the chances were that the submarine would have collided with the wreck, with disastrous results to herself.

Clearly there was no escape for R19 in that direction. The only possible way seemed to lie in the ability of the submarine to back out of the toils, and until the propeller was cleared this could not be attempted.

Signing to the two seamen, the Sub led the way aft. Here, by means of a length of signal halyard, Fordyce lowered himself upon the exterior shaft of the seized-up propeller. It was a risky job, for should he relax his hold he would sink to the bottom of the sea, a distance of 90 or 100 feet; and, more than likely, if he made use of his self-raising apparatus he would find his upward progress intercepted by the intricate meshes of the net. Examination showed that the blades of the propeller had cut through a part of the flexible steel entanglement and the stranded ends of the wire had wound themselves firmly round the boss. The only thing to be done was to sever the wire still attached to the rest of the net and unwind it.

Fordyce pointed to the work to be attacked. The two men instinctively knew what was required and set to work with

their hacksaws while the Sub kept the light fixed upon the object of their labours.

Presently he listened intently. Above the faint hiss of the air escaping through the release-valve of his helmet he could detect the rapid thrashing of a vessel's propellers. Louder and louder grew the sound. Submarine undulations almost swept the three men from their precarious perch as a swiftly-moving craft passed 60 feet overhead. The suspended net swayed to and fro like a flimsy curtain in a strong draught, while into and beyond the faint halo of light swept the bight of a metallic rope.

The Sub's first inclination—that of self-preservation—was to release his stock of compressed air and rise blindly to the surface. It took all his presence of mind to subdue the temptation. He knew the danger. At the end of that trailing cable was a powerful charge of high-explosive. A hostile destroyer was doing her level best to blow the trapped submarine to smithereens.

CHAPTER XIII

Kapitan-Leutnant von Hoppner's Prowess

"There are worse tasks than this," mentally observed Kapitan-Leutnant Ludwig von Hoppner of H.I.M. torpedo-boat V201, as he went below to his cabin. "Himmel! There

is but little chance of destruction in these waters, unless we have our orders to attack the Russians, but it is infinitely to be preferred to service in our unterseebooten. Thanks to our elaborate defences against those accursed Englanders one can enjoy a good night's rest afloat. It was indeed thoughtful of my friend, von Rutter, to get me transferred from the Cuxhaven division to the Baltic."

Unfortunately for von Hoppner's good intentions his idea of having an undisturbed slumber was rudely shattered by the appearance of a messenger.

"What is it, numskull?" thundered the Kapitan-Leutnant.

"A signal from the flagship, Herr Kapitan," replied the man. "The armed liner *Komorán* has arrived from the South Atlantic with numerous prisoners. We are to pass her through without delay."

Grumblingly von Hoppner resumed his recently-discarded greatcoat and muffler, thrust his cap over his eyes, and made his way on deck and thence to the bridge.

"Well?" he enquired laconically, addressing a tall, cadaverous-featured unter-leutnant.

"The *Komorán* is sighted, sir," replied the junior officer. "S19 has just signalled that she is escorting her direct to Stettin. This time, I trust, there will be no mistake."

Unter-Leutnant Schwam was referring to the case of a German commerce-destroyer that, having successfully evaded the British patrols in the North Sea, was fired upon

and sunk by Hun cruisers in the Baltic under the misapprehension that she was an enemy vessel attempting to run the gauntlet. Since then elaborate precautions had been taken to prevent a similar occurrence, one of which was that commanding officers of patrolling craft were to be on the bridge whenever a German war vessel was passing through the cordon.

Having carried out his duties as far as the returning raider was concerned, von Hoppner was about to seek his bunk once more when a vivid light flared from the surface of the water at a distance of less than two miles from the patrolling torpedo-boat.

"Donnerwetter!" ejaculated the now furious Kapitän-Leutnant. "Am I to get no sleep to-night? How does that light bear, Herr Schwam?"

The Unter-Leutnant took a compass bearing and reported the result of his investigations to his superior.

"Then that is at Position 24," declared von Hoppner. "Our section of the defence, confound it!"

He rang for half speed ahead, giving instructions to the Quarter-Master to steer towards the burning calcium light that indicated a violent disturbance of the steel net 40 or 50 feet beneath the waves.

The "tell-tale" was an ingenious device consisting of a calcium-light buoy made of glass, so as to be practically invisible during daylight. On the under side of the buoy was

a "friction-tube" of sufficient strength to resist the power of the winds and currents, but at the impact of a submerged vessel with the net the buoy-rope connecting the latter with the buoy would put a strain on the friction-tube enough to ignite the dazzling light.

As V201 proceeded towards the object of her investigations the watch on deck prepared the deadly "distance-charge" grapnel. Over the stern was tossed a length of flexible wire rope, terminating in a cylinder of high-explosive and a barbed contrivance to engage in the net adhering to the trapped vessel. At first only 100 metres were paid out; the rest of the circuit, roughly twice that length, was wound round a drum.

"All ready aft?" shouted the Kapitan-Leutnant.

Receiving an affirmative reply, von Hoppner ordered speed to be reduced to that corresponding to five knots, and, since the more slowly the grapnel was moving through the water the deeper it sank, the explosive charge was now in a position to engage the obstruction.

Suddenly there was a jerk on the wire rope. The petty officer operating the hand-brake of the winding-drum allowed another hundred metres to reel off before checking the revolving cylinder. Not until the third hundred metres was on the point of being reached did he jam the brake hard on.

"Now!" he exclaimed tersely.

At the word a seaman pressed the key of the firing-battery. With a deafening roar a column of water leapt high in the air, accompanied by a dense cloud of smoke. Then came the hiss of falling foam and the heavy splash of solid objects striking the surface as they dropped from great and varying heights. Then all was silent.

"Farewell, Englander!" exclaimed von Hoppner gleefully.

"Not much doubt about that, Herr Kapitan-Leutnant," added Schwam obsequiously.

"Let us hope we did the trick properly," rejoined von Hoppner; then, leaning over the guard-rail, he gave orders for the search-light to be unscreened.

Although the calcium light had vanished in the terrific upheaval, there was no mistaking the locality of the explosion. Already within a radius of a hundred yards the surface of the water was covered with oil that gave a weird kaleidoscopic effect under the slanting beams of the search-lights.

"Himmel, she carried an enormous quantity of oil!" remarked Unter-Leutnant Schwam, as V201 steamed slowly round the steadily-increasing circle of iridescent liquid. "It will be interesting, when we send down the divers, to find out what type of craft she was."

Satisfied with the result of the preliminary investigations, V201 switched off her search-lights. Before returning to his cabin von Hoppner drafted a dispatch for transmission by

wireless to the officer commanding the patrol flotilla. Then, his mind occupied with contented visions of honours that were to be bestowed upon him for his signal services, the Kapitan-Leutnant went below.

Soon after daybreak, lighters with diving-parties and spare nets proceeded to the spot. The divers reported the wreckage of a large vessel, evidently one of a new class of submersible cruisers of at least 4000 tons displacement. Had the Hun authorities employed experts for the examination, instead of taking the word of a seaman-diver, they would have modified their extravagant claim. As it was, Berlin claimed the destruction of an enormous British submarine-cruiser, while von Hoppner had the *Ordre pour le Mérite* bestowed upon him by his wildly delighted Emperor, who also liberally showered Iron Crosses upon the torpedo-boat's crew.

CHAPTER XIV

The Way Out

Sub-Lieutenant Fordyce and his two companions clung desperately to the motionless blades of the crippled propeller as they awaited what they were firmly convinced was the end.

Although it seemed an interminable period before the expected explosion took place, only a few seconds actually

elapsed before the detonation occurred.

Through the lens of his helmet the Sub saw nothing of the nature of a flash. He heard the roar; it smote upon his temples like the blow of a club, as a rush of violently agitated water all but swept him from his precarious position. His head-dress came in contact with a hard substance. It seemed as if the metal helmet was collapsing under the shock.

Still he held on, wondering dully why he had not been pulverized by the explosion, or at least his diving-dress torn asunder. Nothing of this nature happening, he sought his companions. Cassidy was still there, literally hugging the outboard part of the propeller shafting, but of Payne there was no sign. All the tools had vanished, with the exception of one hack-saw. The rest were lying on the bottom of the sea, ninety feet or more below, doubtless with the unfortunate Payne. The Sub still retained his electric lamp. Cassidy also had his, but the light had failed.

The hull of the submarine was still oscillating gently under the influence of the disturbed water. It was a good sign. Had the plating been shattered by the explosion, the vessel would have sunk like a stone. As it was, she still retained a reserve of buoyancy, but was prevented from rising only by the retaining influence of portions of the steel net. Subsequent events proved that this was a blessing in disguise, for R19 would have risen to the surface in the full glare of the German torpedo-boat's search-lights.

Signing to Cassidy, the Sub indicated that the task of freeing the propeller should proceed. It was a slow job with

only one hack-saw at their disposal, but one by one the tough strands were severed.

Fordyce was on the point of giving his companion a spell, when a scratching, rasping noise against his helmet rudely attracted his attention. He was just in time to avoid a kick on the plate-glass front of his headdress from a leaden-soled boot, as Payne, making his way down the tapering stern of the submarine, was gamely returning to his interrupted task. The explosion, the effect of which was greatly mitigated by the buffer of water, had wrenched him from his perch, and had lifted him 20 or 30 feet vertically upwards, depositing him upon the rounded afterpart of the submarine.

The churning sounds of the Hun torpedo-boat's propellers had now ceased. It was indeed fortunate, Fordyce decided, that the vessel made no further attempt to use explosive charges. The Sub had no idea of what time had elapsed since he and his companions left the submarine. It was certainly not far short of an hour. To let the rest of the crew know that they were still alive and, what was almost as important, active, they hammered upon the steel plating.

The task was nearing completion. With the blood running from a dozen cuts in their benumbed hands, as the strands of the tough wire rasped the flesh, they deftly unwound the severed layers from the boss of the propeller, until the gun-metal, polished with the friction of the wire, was revealed, free from anything that was likely to impede the propulsive action of the blades.

Unexpectedly, R19 gave a jerk as the remaining strands of the retaining net parted. Almost before they were aware of it, the Sub and his companions found themselves a few feet beneath the surface, still clinging to the propeller blades.

"If they start up the motors it's all U P with us," thought Fordyce, until he remembered that close at hand there had been a trailing length of signal halyard.

Thank Heaven, it was still there! Signing to the two men, the Sub pointed to the rope. Up they swarmed—easily until their helmets cleared the surface of the water. Beyond that they could not rise another foot without assistance. Held down by their leaden weights, the effect of which was almost negligible when submerged, they were helpless to gain the submarine's deck.

A seaman can almost invariably be relied upon to extricate himself from a tight corner. Drawing his sheath-knife, Cassidy quickly severed the cords that attached the leaden weights to the Sub's chest, and, with a reckless disregard of His Majesty's stores, cut away his metal-shod boots.

Assisted by the petty officer, Fordyce hauled himself to the deck, while Cassidy set about to perform a similar office for the A.B. But help was forthcoming from another direction. Through the conning-tower hatchway came Lieutenant-Commander Stockdale and a dozen of the crew. The various members of the diving-party were relieved of their head-gear and dresses with the utmost dispatch.

"Propeller cleared? Excellent!" exclaimed the Hon. Derek. "We thought that you were all knocked out. I cannot account for the fact that the old boat's hull withstood the explosion."

"There was a wreck lying almost athwart our bows, sir," replied Fordyce. "The grapnel must have engaged in her topsides, and, when the charge was detonated, the hull and the water between must have borne the brunt."

"Fortunately for us," rejoined the Lieutenant-Commander. "We'll have to be making a move before another Hun barges in to attempt to strafe us. What's that, Wilkins?"

"We're still hung up, sir," reported the petty officer addressed. "A few strands of wire across the deck just abaft No. 2 quick-firer. I've told off some hands to hack it through."

"Very good; carry on," said the Hon. Derek. "Report when the job's done. Pass that gear below, men."

The diving-dresses were returned to their proper place. The Lieutenant-Commander made his way for'ard to superintend the last of the task of freeing the submarine from the toils of the net, while Fordyce and the two divers went below to change into dry clothing and partake of food and hot drinks.

For the present all was quiet. The patrol vessels were out of sight and hearing. Their search-lights had been switched off, and there were no indications that signals were being exchanged. It was safe to conclude that, under the impression

that the intruding submarine had been effectively accounted for, the Huns did not anticipate further trouble in that direction.

At length the welcome order came for half-speed ahead. Rhythmically both propellers began to churn the water. It spoke volumes for the thoroughness of the shipwrights who had built the vessel that, notwithstanding the severe strain when the propeller "seized up", there were no defects from strained shafting, stripped gears, or leaky stuffing-boxes.

"We've had enough of submarine nets for the present," remarked the Lieutenant-Commander to Lieutenant Macquare. "I won't risk submerging until we are well clear of this area, unless, of course, a Hun destroyer butts in. By Jove! Young Fordyce is a brick! I didn't envy him his job, but he carried it out splendidly."

"Now it's all over," confided Macquare. "I'm jolly glad I didn't have to tackle the business. The thought of it gave me cold feet."

"Tut, tut, Macquare!" exclaimed the Hon. Derek. "You suggested and volunteered for the task."

"Aye," agreed the Lieutenant. "And I would have done my best to see it through; but all the same I didn't relish it, and it's no use saying I did. Yes, Fordyce deserves special recommendation. Cassidy and Payne too—splendid fellows both."

"And they'll get it," added the Hon. Derek. "That is if we are alive to tell the tale."

Just before dawn R19 was fairly in the Baltic. The peril of the mine-field was a thing of the past. Nevertheless, owing to the possible presence of enemy air-craft and to the fact that several vessels were sighted, Stockdale decided to submerge and lie on the bed of the sea until dusk. While the submarine was in the western Baltic it was a case of hasten slowly, hiding by day and travelling awash during the hours of darkness.

As the Hon. Derek passed through the ward-room on his way to his cabin he found Noel Fordyce sitting on a settee and fondling the faithful Flirt. Chalmers had told the Sub how the dog knew that her master was out of the vessel. Instinctively the animal had realized that he was in danger, and her efforts to break loose to find the Sub were only stopped when the petty officer, at the risk of forfeiting all future affection from the submarine's mascot, locked Flirt in one of the store compartments.

"Come and have a snack with me, Fordyce," said the Lieutenant-Commander. "Bring Flirt too."

It was a pleasant meal. The Hon. Derek was a genial host. He possessed a strong vein of humour and had the happy knack of putting a guest entirely at his ease. Not once did he touch upon the subject of the Sub's heroic act. He purposely avoided talking "shop", and quite naturally kept the conversation confined to matters of general interest.

Presently the subject of Flirt's indiscretion and Fordyce's appearance at the Otherport Police Court came up, and the Hon. Derek, hearing the story at full length—Noel had but briefly outlined the account when Flirt smuggled herself on board—laughed heartily at Nell's impersonation of her daughter.

"There is another yarn in connection with the affair," continued Fordyce, encouraged by his superior officer's interest. "This Mindiggle blighter is a queer fish. I went to see him before he took out the summons and tried to put him off. He seemed to know all about my being on R19, when she was leaving Otherport, and also her destination. Then he tried to, well, not exactly blackmail me, but something preciously close to the wind. The rotter offered to overlook Flirt's lapse of manners if I consented to do a bit of smuggling—to take a small parcel of diamonds to some pal of his in Petrograd."

The Hon. Derek had listened in silence to the Sub's narrative. At this point he sat bolt upright.

"Fordyce," he exclaimed, "why on earth didn't you spin this yarn to me before? Diamonds to Petrograd! I suppose you didn't bring any of the infernal stuff on board?"

CHAPTER XV

Picking up the Pilot

"Sorry, sir," said Fordyce. "I didn't attach any particular importance to the fellow's request at the time. I boomed him off, absolutely. Refused point-blank to touch his blessed diamonds."

"I am glad to hear that," said the Hon. Derek. "At the same time, it is a regrettable matter that you did not report the affair to a competent naval or military authority. I'll briefly outline the facts concerning these so-called diamonds. The stuff is actually a super-powerful explosive, a secret compound of which one ingredient is known to be obtainable only in a few isolated districts in Cornwall. Our Munitions Department has been attending to the matter for months past. The analysts have discovered that the stuff—they call it nitro-talcite—is capable of being detonated only at a temperature below -5° C. And the strange part of it is that nobody in the department has yet been able to compound the explosive. All the data has been based upon the examination of a small quantity that was seized on a vessel bound for Archangel—so Sir Josiah Sticklewood, the Admiralty explosive expert, tells me. Who the makers of the stuff are and how they get it out of the country has been a mystery."

"It's fortunate that in England the temperature rarely falls to much below freezing-point," remarked Fordyce.

"Yes, and that accounts principally for the fact that the explosive has not been used against us at home," continued the Lieutenant-Commander. "Russia, on the other hand, offers plenty of opportunities in that direction. The disaster at

Archangel and the terrific explosion at Petrograd can be well attributed to the work of Extremists or German Secret Service agents—practically the same thing. What does surprise me is that Mindiggle went so far as to attempt to coerce you; only, of course, he hadn't the faintest idea that we know as much concerning nitro-talcite as we do."

"Is it too late to lay him by the heels?" asked the Sub.

"I am doubtful whether it would be advisable until we make sure of our ground," replied the Hon. Derek. "Do you happen to remember the address on the packet?"

"Rather!" said Fordyce emphatically. "And I jotted it down in my pocket-book."

"Good man! Now this is what I propose doing: to make up a dummy packet of broken glass—from all accounts broken glass is a common object in Petrograd just at present—and deliver it at Vladimir Klostivitch's house in the Bobbinsky Prospekt. We'll have to do the business entirely off our own bat. It's not the faintest use taking the Russian Government officials into our confidence at the present juncture, for the simple reason that they don't know where they are and we don't either. If Klostivitch is merely an agent, we don't get much forrarder, unless he is injudiciously communicative. If he is a principal, then we'll do our level best to lay him by the heels. It's not the first time I've done police duty ashore."

And the Hon. Derek smiled reminiscently as he recalled a certain incident in his naval career, when, with a mere

handful of blue-jackets, he had nipped in the bud a revolution in an obscure little republic.

Then he rose from his chair and patted the Sub on the back.

"Fordyce," he exclaimed, "I have it! You'll have to assume the character of a red-hot revolutionist, and to introduce me to this rascal Klostivitch as Comrade So-and-so, a sympathetic Englishman, who, although unable to speak a word of Russian, has made his way to Petrograd for the express purpose of congratulating Klostivitch and his friends upon their arduous work in the interests of liberty and equality."

"Isn't it a bit risky, sir?" asked Fordyce.

The Lieutenant-Commander raised his eyebrows in mild surprise.

"From a diplomatic point of view," continued the Sub.

"Not if we go to work in the right way," replied the Hon. Derek. "After we've settled with Comrade Klostivitch, I'll report the circumstances to the British Embassy—but not before. For the present we'll let the matter drop. It is yet too early to go into details."

In due course R19 arrived off the Gulf of Riga. During the run across the Baltic she had studiously avoided craft of every description, although she had several chances of successfully attacking small German vessels. Stockdale let them "carry on", not from choice but of necessity. A

tremendous lot depended upon the secret arrival of a British submarine to help the Russian navy against that of the Huns. He acted upon the principle that a hunter stalking a lion will not waste a shot upon a jackal, and thus prematurely alarm the main object of his efforts.

Just before midnight R19 rose to the surface and lay motionless upon the tranquil water. She was now within sight and sound of the guns, for the German land force had thrown the Russians out of the important town of Riga, while their auxiliary vessels were busily engaged in sweeping the minefield across the mouth of the gulf, to enable the High Seas Fleet to find a secure anchorage before attempting to discover and overwhelm the New Republic's Baltic Fleet.

Away to the south-eastward, and faintly discernible against the continuous flashes of the guns, could be seen the German minesweepers and their covering vessels—light cruisers and torpedo-boats. As yet the battleships and armoured cruisers had not left Kiel.

For an hour R19 remained motionless; then the order was given to dive and rest on the sea bed. The reason no one on board knew except the Hon. Derek and Lieutenant Macquare. The men could not form any satisfactory opinion of the submarine's apparent inactivity. They could not understand why they did not go for everything afloat that was German, instead of "sounding" time after time.

For three successive nights R19 popped up for the space of sixty minutes. Each time the officers carefully fixed the

submarine's position by means of cross bearings and the use of position-finders.

At midnight on the fourth consecutive night of inaction Fordyce and the Lieutenant-Commander were on deck when they heard the subdued hum of an aerial propeller. It lacked the well-known sound of a British machine, nor did it make a noise like a Gotha. The two men exchanged glances.

"That's it!" exclaimed the Hon. Derek. "Pass the word for the Very's light."

It seemed a risky thing to do—to send up a couple of rockets from a British craft that was lying four or five miles only from the line of German patrol-boats—but there was no option.

A red and a green rocket blazed overhead. From the hovering sea-plane came an answering flash. Her motors were then switched off, and, with a swift volplane, she alighted upon the surface at less than fifty yards from the submarine.

Then "taxi-ing" cautiously, the sea-plane approached the lee'ard side of R19, until one of the occupants dexterously caught a rope hurled from the submarine's deck.

A greatcoated, muffled figure made its way along one of the projecting floats of the sea-plane and clambered up the bulging side of R19.

"Welcome, gentlemen!" he exclaimed in Russian.

The officer deputed by the Russian Government to pilot the British submarine through the mine-fields guarding the approaches to Cronstadt had arrived at a most opportune moment.

CHAPTER XVI

The Battle of Moon Sound

With the least possible delay the Hon. Derek escorted the Russian below. As the sea-plane again rose in the air the submarine dived; not a moment too soon, for already half a dozen German patrol-boats were making towards the spot in an attempt to solve the mystery of the nocturnal signals.

Deputing Lieutenant Macquare to con the submerged vessel, the Lieutenant-Commander, accompanied by Fordyce, entertained the pilot in the little ward-room. Although the Sub could speak Russian, the conversation was maintained in French, since the Hon. Derek and the pilot could exchange ideas without the somewhat cumbrous medium of an interpreter.

The Russian was Naval Lieutenant Rodsky, a tall, full-faced man with pronounced Tartar features. He was obviously ill at ease when Stockdale asked him concerning affairs in the Russian navy. He was in rather a difficult position, as were most of the officers who had sworn

allegiance to the Tsar of all the Russias. Under the new regime of equality and ultra-democracy the Russian seamen were seething with unrest. Discipline was lax; the men, partly held by the traditions of the Imperial navy and partly dominated by the highly-unstable Revolutionary Government, were literally "at sixes and sevens". Torn by internal dissensions and threatened from the outside by an onslaught of the German High Seas Fleet, the Russian navy was little better than a collection of disorganized ships awaiting destruction—unless the men responded to the trumpet-call of true patriotism.

It was ill news that Lieutenant Rodsky brought. On land the Huns were sweeping nearer towards Petrograd, meeting with little opposition from the disorganized Russians. At sea the Russian fleet was in danger of being cornered and annihilated in the intricate channel known as Moon Sound.

Internally things were in a deplorable condition. The Revolutionists were divided amongst themselves. There was street fighting and rioting in Petrograd and other large cities and towns. Deserters from the front were arriving in thousands to swell the ranks of the Extremists; others, under the impression that there was to be a general partitioning of land, were hurrying back to their villages to share in the promised distribution. Munition factories were idle; the stock of shells had fallen almost to nothing. Labour demanded and obtained fabulous rates of payment that availed the men but little, since there was little or no food to be bought.

"By Jove, I feel sorry for that fellow, sir!" remarked Fordyce, after Rodsky had been shown to the cabin

temporarily given up to him. "He's like a toad under a harrow. You noticed how guarded he was in everything he said; yet I believe he's simply longing to speak his mind."

"And I feel sorry for Russia," replied the Hon. Derek. "There's not the faintest possible shadow of doubt that she's out of it. She'll have to stew in her own hash, and by the time the Huns have finished with her she'll heartily wish for the old order of things. But the fact remains that an additional burden is thrown upon our shoulders—the Allies', I mean. There's one thing I hope for, and that is, that we'll be able to get a smack at the Huns before we clear out. Unless I'm much mistaken, we'll find ourselves in a pretty kettle of fish if this threatened armistice does come off."

At eight bells (midday) Fordyce turned out to "take his trick". Throughout the night R19 had been under way, running awash when she had put a reasonable distance between herself and the Riga patrol vessels.

Going on deck, the Sub found that there was a considerable "chop"—short, steep-crested waves slapping the submarine's hull, and occasionally breaking over the entire fore part of the vessel. Overhead the sky was heavy with rain-clouds moving slowly, yet betokening plenty of wind before many hours had passed.

"Can you hear gun-fire?" asked Macquare, after he had given his relief the course.

Fordyce listened. Above the splash of the waves he could hear a faint, continual rumble.

"Yes," he replied. "Too hot for ordinary practice."

"Rather!" agreed the Lieutenant. "We're in luck, Fordyce. The Huns are hammering the Russians, and we've got their battleships between us and our allies. Keep her as she is, and report to the skipper the moment you see anything."

An hour later the main body of the hostile fleet was sighted away to the nor-east. The battleships in two divisions were engaged in long-range firing, although from the submarine's deck nothing could be seen of the nature of their objective. On either flank of the double line were light cruisers and torpedo-boats; overhead a couple of Zeppelins and a swarm of sea-planes were engaged in scouting and observation-work.

Just as Lieutenant-Commander Stockdale was about to give the order to submerge, the enemy formation underwent a change. One division headed towards the comparatively narrow entrance to Moon Sound, firing heavily as it went; the other bore up in a north-westerly direction, with the evident plan of steaming half-way round the islands of Ossel and Dago, and taking the retreating Russians in the rear.

Stockdale acted with praiseworthy caution. The presence of a numerous torpedo-boat flotilla in the rear of the battleship division, and the scouting planes overheard, made it a matter of extreme risk for R19 to draw within effective torpedo range. In the comparatively shallow and clear water her submerged hull would be clearly visible from a height. Directly the long-drawn northern twilight set in, the submarine's opportunity would arrive.

The Russian ships were resisting fiercely. Occasionally a German battleship would fall out of line, more or less damaged. The destroyers of the Republic, too, were far from inactive. On four separate occasions groups of them made desperate "hussar strokes" upon their powerful foes. In each case the plucky boats were sent to the bottom under a heavy concentrated fire, but not before their torpedoes had "got home" against the enormous hulls of their opponents.

Suddenly a rain-squall swept the sea, blotting out the light-grey hulls of the German ships. It was Stockdale's chance, and he took it.

"Action stations! Launch home all tubes!"

Under the hail-swept waves R19 plunged, submerged to 18 feet, and headed straight for the centre of the enemy division.

CHAPTER XVII

Hit

With the tips of her periscopes just showing above the surface, R19 stealthily approached her prey. Every watertight door was closed, even the hatch between the conning-tower and the centre compartment. Within the confined space of the conning-tower stood the Hon. Derek, Fordyce, and

Petty Officer Chalmers, whose duty it was to transmit the Lieutenant-Commander's orders by means of voice-tubes, and telegraph to the torpedo-hands, engine-room artificers, and men stationed at the auxiliary ballast-tanks.

The hail and spray beating upon the glass lenses of the periscopes blurred and distorted the images in the object-bowls. There was no time for the globules of moisture to fall clear of the prepared glass before others took their place. Fumes of so-called smokeless powder, too, were drifting sluggishly to lee-ward, beaten down by the heavy fall of rain. In the circumstances, it made the chances of the slender periscopes being seen very remote, while, on the other hand, although not to the same extent, the submarine's intended victims were obscured by the misty conditions.

Twice R19 dived deeply as groups of torpedo-boats tore athwart her track, ignorant of the presence of the formidable British submarine.

Then, cautiously and deliberately rising towards the surface, R19 again exposed her periscopes.

"Thanks be!" ejaculated the Hon. Derek, as, a couple of points on the starboard bow, loomed up the towering outlines of one of Germany's most recent battleships.

A slight touch of the helm and the submarine turned until her bow-tubes pointed dead on the stem of her prey. At the rate the battleship was moving she would be struck amidships by the time the two torpedoes covered the intervening space.

"Fire!"

Down in the bow compartment the alert L.T.O.'s depressed the firing-levers of the two 21-inch tubes. A faint hiss as the compressed-air propulsive charges expelled the steel cylinders, and the gurgling sound of inrushing water, to compensate the weight of the missiles, alone announced to the cool and determined men that their part of the immediate business was completed. Whether it was to be "hit or miss" they were not to know at present. It depended upon the skill of their daring skipper.

Stockdale took his chance with fate. The moment he made certain, by the air-bubbles in the wake of the locomotive weapons, that the torpedoes were speeding towards their mark he dived. So far so good; but sheer curiosity prompted him to bring the submarine towards the surface until her periscopes were exposed. True, he ran several hundred yards under water before he did so.

In the midst of a terrific cannonade the roar of the double explosion was indistinguishable to the crew of R19. All they could hear was a constant rumble. They were attacking under novel conditions as far as they were concerned. It was not a case of lying in wait for a passing hostile craft. Shells were flying in all directions, torpedo-boats, on the look-out for submarines, were in attendance upon the larger vessels. Whether some of the shells were being fired with the intention of "doing in" the daring British craft none of her crew would know until the submarine received a hit.

As the light grew brighter on the object-bowl of the conning-tower periscope, both officers gave vent to a satisfied grunt. Eight hundred yards away the German battleship was settling by the stern with a terrific list to starboard. Smoke and steam were pouring from her three funnels, her decks were thick with humanity, while already many of the crew were scrambling down the sloping sides of the listing hull. Destroyers were making for the sinking ship to pick up the survivors, while others were maintaining a hot fire upon a totally imaginary periscope a full half mile from those of R19.

Realizing that it was decidedly "unhealthy" to prolong the satisfactory observation, the Hon. Derek gave orders to dive to 90 feet. In the turmoil of agitated water the submarine would be safe from the inquisitive attentions of Zeppelins and other German air-craft.

Before the raised periscopes could dip beneath the waves a dull crash sounded almost immediately above the head of the Lieutenant-Commander and the Duty Sub in the conning-tower. Simultaneously the vision in the object-bowl vanished and the electric lamps were shattered into fragments.

"They've bagged us this time," thought Fordyce, but, restraining an inclination to shout a cry of alarm, he compressed his lips firmly and awaited the end. In the pitch-dark blackness, momentarily expecting to be overwhelmed by the inrush of water, he stood rigidly prepared to face the Unknown like a true British seaman.

"Ask them how the manometer stands, Chalmers," ordered the Hon. Derek. There was not the faintest tremor in his clear, modulated words.

"Ninety feet and still descending, sir," reported the petty officer.

"Good enough; keep her at that, Mr. Fordyce, if you can."

It was easier said than done. To control the diving-planes solely by the sense of touch was a difficult task to carry out in the Cimmerian darkness of the conning-tower.

"The sooner we get a light on the scene the better," continued the Lieutenant-Commander. "Get each compartment to report, Chalmers. Ask if any damage has been sustained."

Again the reply was satisfactory. Beyond a slight leak in the 'midship compartment—it was right over Fordyce's bunk he afterwards discovered—the hull of the submarine was as tight as the proverbial bottle.

Stockdale hesitated no longer. The cover-plate in the floor of the conning-tower was thrown open, and once more the confined space was flooded with light as the upcast rays from the centre compartment were thrown through the circular opening.

"Keep her as she is, Mr. Fordyce," he ordered. "We can carry on a bit without barging into anything other than a foundering Hun. Wonder where they strafed us?"

Quickly an electrician fitted new lamps to the holders in the conning-tower. The leads were intact. It was merely the sudden concussion that had shattered the glass bulbs. A steady trickle through the glands of the revolving periscope-shaft at the spot where it passes through the dome of the conning-tower gave definite evidence that R19 was no longer capable of vision. The hostile shell that had all but cracked the massive steel plating had knocked both periscopes out of action.

For twenty minutes the submarine ran at an average depth of 90 feet, until, for fear of getting into shoal water, her Lieutenant-Commander allowed her to rest upon the bottom. Judging by the manner in which she grounded, the submarine was resting on soft mud, and, since there was a fairly strong current setting past, the sediment made an efficient camouflage against the prying eyes of the Huns' aerial scouts.

The water-tight doors were opened and the Hon. Derek made a tour of his ship. Already the news of the destruction of one of the German battleships had spread. Steel bulkheads were not proof against the transmission of the glad tidings.

In the torpedo-room the men were singing. The Lieutenant-Commander paused and listened to the refrain. A smile played over his face as he caught the words, sung to an old music-hall favourite air:

"I don't care what becomes of me,
S' long as a Hun's at the bottom of the sea".

The interior of Fordyce's cabin presented a scene of desolation. Overhead, the leak had been plugged by means of a steel disk faced with india-rubber. Until it could be secured by means of bolts and washers—a job only capable of being undertaken when the submarine was running on the surface—the plug was shored up by a couple of stout spars, held by an elaborate contraption of wedges and wire "racking". While the submarine was deep down, and before the temporary repairs had been effected, the water had gushed through with considerable force notwithstanding the smallness of the jet. It had made a clean sweep of the Sub's *lares* and *penates*—those little nicknacks and photographs with which his otherwise Spartan cabin was adorned. Bedding, spare clothing, and nautical instruments were lying in sodden confusion upon the floor; for, although the water had been expelled by means of force-pumps, the damage had been done before any steps could be taken to prevent it.

"Looks like Christmas Eve ashore, and the water-pipes burst, sir," remarked Fordyce, as his skipper offered his condolences. "It might be worse, and I can sleep on the ward-room settee."

"And don't hesitate to use any of my gear," added the practically sympathetic Lieutenant-Commander. "Hallo! What's the latest racket?"

He might well ask, for with a dull thud something landed heavily upon the submarine's deck with a force sufficient to make the vessel roll sluggishly in her muddy berth.

CHAPTER XVIII

Pinned Down

"Something heavy athwart us, sir," remarked Lieutenant Macquare, stating what was an obvious fact to all on board. "But she's standing it all right."

"I wonder what it can be?" asked the Lieutenant-Commander.

"Just as likely as not a sinking torpedo-boat has inconsiderately dropped on top of us," surmised the Lieutenant. "If so, the question is how are we to come to the surface? It will take a lot of our reserve of buoyancy to overcome the suction of the mud, and with that lump of metal pinning us down——! Must look facts fairly in the face, sir."

The Lieutenant-Commander was on the horns of a dilemma. In order to prevent R19 sinking deeper and deeper into the ooze under the abnormal pressure of the unknown mass athwart her deck the submarine ought to be either brought to the surface or, failing that, kept "lively".

Any attempt in either direction would have the result of stirring up the already muddy water, and to such an extent

that the presence of the lurking submarine would be made known to the hostile patrol-boats.

"We'll stand fast for a few hours," decided the Hon. Derek. "If the worst comes to the worst we'll have to shed our ballast keel, although, goodness only knows, then we'll be properly in the soup."

Amongst other mechanical devices R19 was provided with a heavy metal keel that in case of emergency could be released from within. Deprived of this anti-buoyant contrivance she would rise rapidly to the surface. It was a step to be taken only as a desperate resort, for before the compensating water-ballast tanks could be filled several precious minutes must necessarily elapse, during which time the submarine would be a target for every quick-firer within range.

"Very good, sir," replied Macquare.

He was quite content to accept his chief's decision without question. Not having been asked his opinion on the matter, he offered none. He was one of those men who knew how to give orders and receive them. Even if he were convinced in his own mind of an error of judgment on the part of his skipper, his strict adherence to the principles of discipline would have kept him silent.

For another six long-drawn hours the blinded submarine lay motionless. Fortunately there were no signs of the hull plating collapsing under the weight of the obstruction. Apart from the slight, almost imperceptible, leak in the roof of

Fordyce's cabin—for the artificers had tackled the job promptly and effectually—the hull of R19 was as tight as a bottle.

"We'll risk it now, I think," declared the Hon. Derek as he consulted his wristlet watch. "Start the auxiliary ballast-tanks first and see how she likes it."

The powerful, double-action pumps quickly ejected the water-ballast. In ordinary circumstances the submarine should have risen to the surface. She showed no tendency in that direction. Without any exhibition of liveliness she lay obstinately on the bed of the sea.

"Nothin' doin'!" commented the Hon. Derek. "Give her half speed ahead."

The dynamos purred. The hull trembled under the action of the twin propellers. Whether the submarine was forging ahead was a matter for speculation. Certain it was that she was failing to respond to the deflection of the horizontal diving-rudders.

"Stop! Half speed astern."

Beyond an increased reverberation of the hull nothing resulted. Even when the Lieutenant-Commander took the somewhat desperate step of ordering full speed astern R19 failed to respond.

"Blow main ballast-tanks," was the next order.

The submarine now showed a certain liveliness, although in her present trim she ought to be floating with nearly six feet of freeboard.

"She's trying to lift herself aft, sir," reported Fordyce.

"Is she, by Jove!" exclaimed the Lieutenant-Commander. "Send all available hands for'ard, and see if that makes any difference."

Quickly the men made their way to the first and second compartments, and, taking their time from the Lieutenant, ran from side to side as far as the congested state of the vessel permitted. At the same time the motors were running full speed astern.

For full five minutes the manoeuvre was maintained without tangible result; then, with dramatic suddenness, R19 shot obliquely towards the open air.

The first intimation that the submarine had "broken surface" was the terrific and disconcerting racing of the engines as the twin propellers revolved at high speed in the air.

Promptly the artificers switched off the current, and R19, well down by the bows, floated motionless.

Momentarily expecting a fusillade from one, if not more, German destroyers, the Hon. Derek rushed up the ladder to the conning-tower and strove to open the hatch. The locking-bolts refused to budge. The blow that the submarine had

received before her latest dive had jammed the closely-fitting metal plate.

The after hatch gave better results. Followed by Fordyce, the Hon. Derek gained the open air.

With feelings of relief, both officers realized that all immediate danger was past. Not an enemy vessel was in sight. A couple of miles to the south-east'ard lay the stranded and partly-submerged hull of a large Russian battleship.

Her upper-works were rent and shattered by gun-fire. Military masts and funnels had gone by the board. From the sole remaining turret a pair of 12-inch guns projected at a grotesque angle to each other. Dense clouds of smoke were pouring from the battery.

Fordyce glanced at the lowering bank of clouds overhead and listened intently. He could faintly discern the bass hum of an aerial propeller. Somewhere in that great vault of vapour a sea-plane was cleaving the air, invisible from the submarine's deck, but liable at any moment to swoop within view.

The risk of being bombed had to be taken. The first important task was to discover what it was that was pinning down the submarine's bows, and to take steps to rectify matters.

R19's stern was almost clear of the water. As she dipped to the long sullen swell, the tips of her propellers just touched the waves. Amidships, the base of the conning-tower was just

awash, but the rise of the navigation-platform prevented further investigation from the spot where the Lieutenant-Commander and the Sub stood.

"Pass the word for all hands on deck," ordered Stockdale. "Fall in aft."

Silently the men trooped from below. Their combined weight had the effect of restoring the vessel to a slightly better trim, and it was now possible for an investigation to be made of the for'ard part of the deck.

Examination showed that a shell had exploded close to the conning-tower, for the massive steel-work bore visible signs of the impact of the flying slivers of metal. One of the principal tubes had vanished, being shorn off close to the top of the conning-tower; the other, buckled by a fragment of shell, trailed drunkenly over the side, rasping and grinding with every roll of the vessel.

Springing upon the raised platform, Fordyce made his way for'ard and past the rise of the conning-tower until further progress was stopped by a huge cylindro-conical mass of metal lying athwart the deck. It was an unexploded 15-inch shell, weighing more than a ton. Missing its objective, the ponderous missile had sunk until it had alighted fairly upon R19's deck.

Before the Sub could return and make his report, the roar of the aerial motors grew deafening, and out of the clouds swept a large, double-fuselaged biplane, bearing the distinctive Black Cross of Germany.

CHAPTER XIX

Forced to Ascend

There were no signs of confusion on the deck of R19. Only the two after quick-firers were available, and these were promptly manned. Those of the crew who, in normal circumstances, were stationed below, threw themselves flat on the deck.

The submarine could not dive without great risk of again courting the peril from which she had so recently emerged. It was even a hazardous business to keep under way, as the forward motion, combined by the fact that she was down by the head, made it a difficult matter to forge either ahead or astern. To all intents and purposes she was a motionless target for the huge battle-seaplane that manoeuvred overhead, seeking an opportunity to strafe her opponent by means of her powerful bombs.

"Hoist the ensign! Let her have it, lads!"

Both quick-firers were speedily in action. So rapidly were they fired that there was a constant clatter as the ejected metal cases were thrown from the breech.

With his head thrown back, and a pair of binoculars to his eyes, Fordyce watched the effect of the bursting shells.

Viewed from below, the sea-plane seemed in the very midst of a hollow globe of mushroom-like clouds of smoke from bursting projectiles. Ahead, astern, above and below, the shells burst. It seemed as if the hostile air-craft could not escape the inferno of flying fragments; yet, seemingly possessing a charmed existence, she swooped onwards to take up a favourable position for releasing her bombs.

[Illustration: AHEAD, ASTERN, ABOVE, AND BELOW, THE SHELLS BURST]

A heavy object, hurtling with ever-increasing velocity through the air, struck the surface of the water at less than half a cable's length on R19's port side. With a terrible din the bomb burst, churning up cascades of spray and hurling minute particles of metal in all directions. A second later another "egg" fell, fortunately without exploding, although several of the submarine's crew were well doused by the volume of foam that was flung all around.

Back swept the biplane, manoeuvring for the position she had lost by her momentum. As she did so, she lurched violently and began a dizzy tail-dive. Twisting and turning in erratic spirals she dropped seawards. Loud cheers from R19's crew greeted her descent, but their jubilation was premature.

The tail-spin was a "blind" to enable the Hun to avoid a particularly unhealthy "air-patch". When within five hundred feet of the surface of the sea, the air-craft described a semi-loop in a vertical plane, and, flattening out, sped rapidly

away until lost in the faint mist that was banking from the nor'west.

"She's bitten off more than she can chew," declared Macquare. "Now, lads, overboard with that lumber for'ard."

Half a dozen hands, led by the Lieutenant and Fordyce, plunged knee-deep in the water that surged over the forepart of the submarine. It was bitterly cold. Even at that time of the year the temperature of the Baltic was far below the average.

With handspikes and crowbars the men strove to lever the huge projectile over the side, "sword-mats" being placed in its path to protect the exposed edge of the deck plating. All went well until the shell was rolled to within a few inches of the edge. Then came a check. Something, unnoticed owing to its being under water, prevented further progress.

"Slue her round and let her roll for'ard a bit, sir," suggested a petty officer. "Plenty of beef out to do the trick."

Lieutenant Macquare considered the suggestion. It was one thing for an object weighing a ton to fall through several fathoms of water and alight upon the submarine's deck without starting the steel plates, another to roll the same object when its weight in air was enormously greater than when immersed in water.

"Round with her, then!" he exclaimed.

"Destroyer broad on the starboard beam, sir," reported a signalman.

The Hon. Derek, standing on the platform in the wake of the conning-tower, was quick to take in the situation. With a thirty-knot destroyer bearing down at top speed delay would be fatal.

"Diving-stations!" he roared. "Look alive, men!"

Down the sole available hatchway the crew poured, the Lieutenant-Commander, Macquare, Fordyce, and the Russian officer standing by until the last of the "lower-deck ratings" had left the deck. To dive was R19's only chance if she were to escape the attentions of the destroyer. Badly trimmed, it was a difficult matter to speculate as to how the submarine would behave—whether she would dive too steeply and ram the mud or roll completely over.

The destroyer had evidently sighted the submarine, for she had altered course and was bearing straight down towards her. As the Hon. Derek leapt below and closed the water-tight lid of the hatchway the approaching craft was less than two miles off.

With the water pouring into her ballast-tanks, and her motors running full speed ahead, R19 plunged rather than glided beneath the waves. Never before had the indicator pointed to such an excessive dip. The lighting dynamo short-circuited, plunging the interior of the vessel into profound darkness, while various articles of gear, breaking loose, careered noisily across the confined space.

Clutching the hand-rail of one of the ladders, Fordyce felt his feet slip from under him. There he hung, his weight

supported solely by his hands, awaiting what fate had in store for him.

He was surprised at his own calmness. He found himself reasoning that, after all, one cannot expect to have things all one's own way. Whatever happened, R19 had had more than an ordinary run of good luck, and, should she be "knocked out", there was some satisfaction in the knowledge that she had already acquitted herself in a manner worthy of the traditions of the Royal Navy.

Above the turmoil of inanimate objects on board—for amongst the crew strict silence and discipline were maintained—could be heard the rapid threshing of the destroyer's propellers as the long, lean craft passed almost directly above the diving submarine. Had the destroyer made use of depth charges, nothing could have saved R19 from swift destruction. Why she did not was a mystery to every man of the submarine's complement.

Suddenly, to the accompaniment of a disconcerting, rasping clamour, R19 jerked violently until she hung on an even keel. For some seconds she remained thus; then, rolling excessively from side to side, she bobbed up to the surface in spite of the weight of water in the ballast-tanks and the action of the depressed diving-rudders.

Groping in the pitch darkness, the Lieutenant-Commander found the lever actuating the hydroplanes. These he brought to a neutral position, since they were useless for the purpose of submersion. R19, unable to dive, was forging ahead

blindly and erratically upon the surface, an easy prey to the vigilant destroyer.

"Up, every mother's son of you!" roared the Hon. Derek. "We'll fight her while there's a gun left fit for action or a man jack of us remaining to face a Hun."

With a cheer the undaunted seamen followed their gallant captain, ready to face death with the grim determination that is ever the enviable possession of every true Briton when up against desperate odds.

CHAPTER XX

Under Russian Escort

Hard on the heels of the Russian officer, Naval Lieutenant Rodsky, the Sub made his way through the narrow hatchway. The sudden transition from the darkness of the interior of the hull to the brightness of the open air left him blinking in the watery sunlight.

Already the two after guns, which in the haste had been left "unhoused", were being manned by the crews. Other guns' crews were rushing for'ard to serve the bow quick-firers, for by this time R19 was floating on a perfectly even keel and showing an abnormal amount of freeboard. The Hon. Derek and Lieutenant Macquare were standing by the

Quartermaster on the navigation-platform, since, owing to the jamming of the conning-tower hatch, it was impossible to steer the vessel except by means of the hand-wheel on the exposed raised platform.

The destroyer was now less than a mile away. She had ported helm, and was circling, with the evident intention of closing with the submarine. Up to the present she made no attempt to use her guns. If the destruction of RIQ was her object, she apparently meant to use her knife-like stem as the weapon of annihilation.

In strict silence the gun-layers trained the weapons, while the captains of the guns awaited orders to open fire.

The stillness was broken by Lieutenant Rodsky suddenly leaping in the air and waving his cap over his head, alighting heavily upon the toes of the astonished Fordyce.

"Good!" shouted the Russian in his own language, forgetting to make use of French in his excitement. "All is well. It is a Russian destroyer, the *Zabiyaka*. I am certain on that point."

The Sub hastened to his commanding officer and translated the Russian's words.

"Let's hope Ivan won't make a mistake then," remarked the Hon. Derek. He glanced upwards at the White Ensign. In spite of the fact that it was saturated with moisture, the bunting was streaming proudly on the breeze.

Almost at the same time the destroyer's colours fluttered athwart her course. There was no mistaking the blue St. Andrew's Cross on a white field—the naval ensign of Russia. Notwithstanding changes ashore, where a Republican flag had superseded that of the Emperor of all the Russias, the fleet still retained the blue diagonal cross.

Even then the thought that the oncoming vessel might be displaying false colours flashed through the Hon. Derek's mind. Russian-built she might be, but there was no telling what changes had recently taken place. She might have been captured by the Huns during the operations in the Gulf of Riga or in the subsequent battle of Moon Sound, and, as a prize, used against her former masters and their allies. So the order was given for the guns' crews to stand fast and await further orders.

Slowing down, the *Zabiyaka* drew within hailing distance. She was cleared for action, while a couple of jagged holes through her foremost funnel and a dismantled quick-firer flung across her deck were evidences that she had participated in a recent "scrap".

Her officers still wore the uniform of the Imperial Russian Navy; her crew, alert, blonde-featured men, were quick to obey the orders given by their superiors. It was pleasing to find that in this destroyer the blighting canker of red revolution had not done its ruinous work.

A lively exchange of greetings passed between Rodsky and the Captain-Lieutenant of the Russian vessel, from which the British officers gathered that the destroyer had

engaged and brought down the Hun sea-plane that had vainly endeavoured to strafe the partly-crippled R19. They also learnt that the Russian battleships and cruisers had contrived to escape the trap in Moon Sound, sustaining comparatively trivial losses; while the German High Seas Fleet, shaken by submarine attack, had not ventured in pursuit, but had drawn off, making, it was supposed, for Kiel.

The *Zabiyaka's* commanding officer, hearing of the plight of the British submarine, offered to escort her to within the limits of the port of Cronstadt, where, it was to be hoped, sufficient repairs could be effected to enable R19 to resume her aggressive role.

Examination showed that the submarine had sustained considerable damage. In diving she had shaken off the enormous projectile that lay across her deck, but as the missile rolled over the side it had bent one of the diving-rudders hard over against the hull. At the same time a considerable portion of the false keel had become detached, although what caused the automatic fastenings to release themselves remained a mystery. It was the sudden release of both the keel and deadweight of the projectile that had caused R19 to shoot up to the surface. Combined with the fact that both periscopes were out of action, and that the submarine could only dive erratically under the influence of the remaining hydroplane, it was plain to all on board that the sooner she made Cronstadt the better.

During the following morning the Captain-Lieutenant of the *Zabiyaka* paid a visit to the Lieutenant-Commander of R19, and in the course of the conversation the British officers

became better acquainted with the chaotic state of affairs in and around Petrograd. A section of the Russian fleet had mutinied, murdering several of their officers and subjecting them to unnameable indignities. Rioting was taking place in the capital, while the soaring increase in wages was met with more than a corresponding rise in the prices of the necessaries of life. Countless revolutionary and Extremist "committees" were being formed, to increase still further the difficulties of the unhappy country. Already the deluded peasantry found that there were stupendous defects in the clap-trap theory of social democratic equality. It was doubtless an easy matter to seize and distribute the possessions of the rich landowners; but it was quite another matter to manage with any degree of efficiency their newly-acquired land. Reports, too, of increasing cases of fraternization between the German and the Russian troops in the trenches showed that the wily Hun, a typical wolf in sheep's clothing, was content to play a waiting game so far as the Eastern Front was concerned, knowing that the anarchy-torn country could be left to itself until the masses of German troops, released for sterner work elsewhere, could return to complete the destruction of the vast but already-tottering new republic.

The Russian officer had barely taken his departure when R19's yeoman of signals reported the receipt of a wireless message sent from the British Embassy at Petrograd. It was in cipher, but when decoded its meaning was bluntly emphatic:

"The state of affairs here renders it necessary for H.M. Submarine R19 to return to her base. Co-operation on the

part of the Russian Government can no longer be guaranteed. Admiralty orders to this effect have been communicated to all British forces engaged in operations in the Baltic and on the Eastern Front."

The Hon. Derek read the decoded message and glanced enquiringly at his brother officer.

"By Jove," he exclaimed, "we're in a pretty fix! Now what would you suggest, Macquare?"

The Lieutenant solemnly closed one eye.

"Since you ask me, sir," he replied, "I'd carry on to execute repairs. In our present condition we could no more get out of the Baltic than fly. Refitted we could have a fair chance of having another slap at the Huns."

"But in the face of these orders?" asked the Lieutenant-Commander.

"Take Nelson's example at Copenhagen as a precedent, sir," rejoined the Lieutenant.

CHAPTER XXI

The House in Bobbinsky Prospekt

"I'll risk it, Macquare," decided the Hon. Derek. "The responsibility's mine. If we are able to effect repairs and get away before the Baltic is closed by the ice we'll be able to do a little strafing on our own account. In that case I don't suppose I'll be rapped over the knuckles if we get home. If we don't, well—we shan't be alive, and official reprimand won't worry us then."

"I agree, sir," said the Lieutenant. "Obeying orders is all very well in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred. In the present instance the Admiralty hasn't taken into consideration our defects. The instructions were issued, I presume, on the assumption that we are in working trim."

"Yes," concurred the Hon. Derek. "And, knocked about as we are, it wouldn't be fair on the men to attempt to run the gauntlet of the Sound. They'd go like a shot, I'm absolutely convinced, but I'm hanged if I'll sacrifice them needlessly. So, all being well, Cronstadt is our next port of call."

Dawn was breaking when R19, piloted by the Russian destroyer *Zabiyaka*, came within sight of the supposedly-impregnable island fortress. Everywhere the numerous fort-batteries were displaying the flag of the Republic, while to show that watch and ward were still being kept a couple of shots were fired wide of the destroyer.

Presently an armed launch put out and a brisk exchange of words took place between the port officials and the Captain-Lieutenant of the *Zabiyaka*, which ended in the latter rather reluctantly ordering the Blue Cross Ensign to be struck and replaced by the emblem of Red Republicanism.

This done, the destroyer was ordered to proceed to a certain anchorage, while R19, under the charge of a Russian pilot, entered the naval arsenal.

Here lay the bulk of the Russian Baltic Fleet, many of the ships bearing evidences of German gun-fire. A large proportion of the crews had gone to Petrograd to take part in a demonstration; others had deserted in order to return to their homes and join in the general policy of grab; while those who remained were promenading the streets and quays, singing revolutionary songs and drinking deeply of vodka.

"See what liberty, equality, and fraternity do for a nation, Fordyce," remarked the Hon. Derek, indicating a group of roysterers gathered round a barrel on the quarter-deck of a large battleship. Utterly indifferent to the presence of their officers, the seamen were already in advanced stages of intoxication. Any attempt to enforce discipline would doubtless result in ghastly butchery, for already the crews of certain ships had risen and murdered their officers.

"A good object-lesson for British pacifists, sir," rejoined Fordyce. "And these fellows don't seem particularly favourably-disposed towards us."

"No, indeed," said the Lieutenant-Commander. "However, we must find out how the land lies. The main point is to get material; we can then execute the work ourselves, for it is a moral cert. that there isn't a Russian workman available."

The Hon. Derek's surmise proved to be correct, for when an appeal for assistance was made to the newly-appointed

commandant of the arsenal the request was met with scant consideration. German gold and Hun propaganda had done their work effectively, and already there was a strong anti-British feeling amongst the soldiers, sailors, and workmen.

Enquiries resulted in the information that already the other British submarines had left, while the armoured-car detachments operating on the Eastern Front were under orders for Archangel and home. Until Russia found her feet and her reason the assistance of her allies would be utterly wasted.

Undeterred, R19's crew set to work to make good defects. Since no dry dock was available, the task of removing the bent hydroplane had to be carried out by her own divers. Ashore, a small workshop had been placed at their disposal, and a limited quantity of material was forthcoming. Provided no hitch occurred, the Hon. Derek hoped to have his command ready for sea within a fortnight.

"Look here, Fordyce," he remarked one morning, "I want you to take this dispatch to the Embassy. There's no immediate hurry, so if you care to spend a few days in Petrograd you may. If you do, keep your eyes and ears open."

"Thank you, sir!" replied the Sub. "I may have the chance of calling on Vladimir Klostivitch."

"By Jove, yes!" exclaimed the Lieutenant-Commander. "I'd forgotten all about that consignment of 'diamonds'. It's a dangerous business, I fancy. It was not at all unusual for a man to disappear in Russia during the Imperial regime.

Under the republic the opportunities for removing a person would be far greater. What do you propose to do?"

"Carry out the original suggestion, sir," replied Fordyce. "Hand Klostivitch a dummy packet, and then try to bluff him into giving details of the Russian Anarchist Society in London. The chief thing is, I take it, to find out where this nitro-talcite is secretly manufactured. Obviously it is somewhere in England, or there wouldn't be such a fuss made to smuggle the stuff into Russia."

"Quite right," agreed the Hon. Derek. "For my part I wouldn't trouble if they blew themselves to bits. It would be one solution of the difficulty. Of far more importance is the discovery of the place of manufacture, since the explosive would be of considerable use against friend Fritz. But, look here, I don't like the idea of your tackling the business single-handed. If I weren't compelled to remain here, as skipper of this craft, I'd go with you like a shot. How about Macquare?"

"He'd jump at it, sir; only a similar objection holds. As an executive officer he cannot well be spared. Might I take Chalmers?"

"By all means, providing he is willing," agreed the Lieutenant-Commander. "You'd have to introduce him, I take it, as a British sympathizer and delegate. All right; speak to him, and make your own arrangements."

The petty officer accepted the invitation with alacrity, even before Fordyce explained what was required of him.

"It's quite all jonnick, sir," he declared when the Sub outlined his plan. "If needs be I'd trot along rigged up as a chimpanzee or a Hottentot. And if there's a chance of a scrap, I'm on it."

"I don't think there will be, Chalmers," replied the Sub. "Tact and discretion are what is required."

So it was arranged that Fordyce should go as the mouthpiece of the supposed delegate. On the supposition that Klostivitch knew nothing of the English language, there would then be very little chance of the redoubtable petty officer "giving himself away".

The two adventurers journeyed to Petrograd in a Russian steamer that ran regularly between Cronstadt and the capital. With them went Naval-Lieutenant Rodsky, who, his present task completed, was on his way to report at the Flying School.

The Russian was openly despondent at the state of affairs in his country. Like thousands, perhaps millions, of his countrymen, he deeply regretted the revolution, and longed for the return of the Little Father from his exile in far-off Tobolsk. While admitting that there were grave defects in the administration of his country under the rule of the Tsar, he realized that then Russia was a nation. Now it was but a heterogeneous collection of undeveloped races, loosely held by a corrupt, quarrelsome, and incapable body of self-constituted rulers, and fast slipping into the gulf of utter ruin.

Having delivered his dispatch, Fordyce was able to obtain quarters for himself and Chalmers at the home of a British resident. In a sense it was fortunate that the hitherto elaborate police system of espionage had been swept away, and consequently the two men had no difficulty in obtaining civilian clothes. Fordyce would have liked to have brought his faithful dog, but in this matter he had been overruled by his sense of caution. A visitor from England would not go to the trouble and expense of bringing a dog with him. So Flirt was left on board under the care of the ship's company in general, and Able Seaman Cassidy in particular.

No. 19 Bobbinsky Prospekt was a three-storied stone house in the Vassili Ostroff quarter of the capital. Adjoining it on the left was a slightly lower building. On the right a frozen stream separated it from a shop, the shuttered windows of which were riddled with bullet-holes. Electric trams were running along the Prospekt, each car carrying a machine-gun and a crew of Red Republican guards. At either end of the roadway were evidences of recent street fighting, for the hastily-constructed barricades were still partly in existence.

"Now for it, Chalmers!" exclaimed Fordyce, as he knocked boldly with the rusty iron knocker.

CHAPTER XXII

When the Light Failed

After considerable delay the door was opened ajar by a diminutive, white-haired old man, who demanded in a quavering voice the names and business of the callers.

"We wish to see M. Vladimir Klostivitch on private affairs," replied the Sub. "It is useless to give one's names, for we are unknown to your master. You can inform him that we are comrades from England."

"I am Vladimir Klostivitch," announced the old man. "Be pleased to enter."

"I am sorry to have made a mistake," said Fordyce apologetically.

"It is nothing," rejoined Klostivitch. "Can I offer you tea? Excuse the fact that I am alone in the house. Please be seated."

The room into which Fordyce and his companion were shown was a large low-ceilinged place, devoid of a fireplace. It was well heated, warmth being obtained by means of a large closed-in stove in the centre of the room, over which was a bed-box, similar to those extensively used by the muzhiks in the smaller towns and villages of central Russia. The furniture consisted of a massive table, two arm-chairs and a few smaller ones, a plain sideboard, and a tall press. The floor was composed of stone flags on which rushes were strewn.

"By Jove," cogitated Fordyce, while his host set about to prepare tea in the Russian style—strongly-brewed beverage with lemon juice instead of milk, "I didn't picture Klostivitch to be such a shrimp of a fellow! If his cunning only equals his bodily size, then we ought to have an easy job. Hanged if I can imagine a white-haired, soft-spoken fellow like that as a dangerous Anarchist or Extremist. After all, there's little to choose between the two names."

Presently the tea was handed round to the accompaniment of an exchange of small talk. Apparently the Russian was seeking to "draw" his visitors, while Fordyce, in the joint role of interpreter and delegate, carefully sounded his ground.

"I understand that you are interested in the cigarette industry," remarked Klostivitch. "Do you bear letters of introduction from the head of our London house?"

"Cigarette industry?" repeated the Sub. "I never said so. We called at the request of a Mr. Mindiggle, of the town of Otherport."

The Russian shook his head.

"I know nothing of a person of that name," he remarked bluntly. "Perhaps you can give further particulars?"

He fixed his visitor with a piercing glance from his deep-set eyes and awaited his reply.

Fordyce made no attempt to answer until he had thought out a new plan of action, occasioned by Klostivitch's

disclaimer.

"If you do not know Mr. Mindiggle there is nothing further to be said," he remarked. "We must have made a mistake."

"Quite possibly," rejoined the other dryly.

"However, I might add," continued Fordyce, rising and holding up a small leather bag, "that the gentleman whose identity you disclaim entrusted me with a small parcel—of diamonds, I understand—to be given to you personally."

Without allowing the dummy packet out of his hands, the Sub allowed Klostivitch to read the address.

"Certainly it is for me," admitted the Russian. "But surely, Monsieur, you have handled this precious parcel very carelessly? Are you not aware that diamonds greatly deteriorate if exposed to low temperatures?"

"Hanged if I am," declared Fordyce. "I was certainly not warned to that effect. But, look here——"

Klostivitch held up a warning finger.

"No harm has apparently been done," he remarked. "In any case, a brief examination of the diamonds will confirm my belief. If you will come with me to my testing laboratory we will make a joint investigation."

Again Fordyce hesitated. He was doubtful whether to tackle the man straight away or to wait until the Russian himself made the discovery that the packet contained nothing

but broken glass. The mere fact that the Extremist had finally accepted the statement that the "diamonds" were for him was sufficient proof that he was in league with a dangerous secret society in Great Britain. Cornered and threatened, he would be pretty certain to give the names of his accomplices and the formula of the ingredients from which the deadly nitro-talcite was compounded.

The fellow might raise a terrific commotion afterwards, Fordyce reflected, but the Sub was prepared to risk that. Once he and the petty officer were clear they would discard their disguise and appear in their true characters as members of Submarine R19's complement. In any case, they could take efficient steps to prevent Vladimir Klostivitch raising an alarm until several hours had elapsed.

"All right; lead the way, monsieur," he exclaimed.

The old man opened the door of the stove and thrust a strip of wood into the glowing furnace. With this he lighted a cast-iron oil lamp.

"My laboratory is below the ground," he explained, "and owing to the scarcity of candles, and the failure of the authorities to maintain the supply of electric light, I am compelled to fall back upon this lamp. It will be quite enough for the brief examination I propose to make. Follow me, if you please."

Crossing the stone floor, Klostivitch threw back a thick, faded curtain that hitherto concealed a doorway under the broad staircase. A rush of warm air swept from the gloomy

opening. In spite of the otherwise cheerless conditions, the house in Bobbinsky Prospekt was well heated, even the cellars.

"Be careful," cautioned the guide as he preceded his guests and held the lamp low in order that its feeble rays might illuminate the worn stone steps. "It is not often that visitors honour my laboratory with their presence, otherwise I might have devoted a more accessible place to my researches."

"It is quite all right," rejoined Fordyce. "At any rate," he soliloquized, "you are in front of me, so it will go hard with you if you try any low-down tricks."

Full fifteen steps were descended before the three men gained a level passage. Placing his hand on one of the walls the Sub made the discovery that the stonework was warm. On the other side of the wall was, apparently, the large stove used for heating the whole house.

Suddenly the lamp went out.

"A thousand apologies!" exclaimed Klostivitch. "It was the draught. Have you a box of matches by any chance?"

"Yes, I have," replied the Sub, secretly rejoicing that the extinguishing of the lamp was by accident, not design, and that the Russian seemed as anxious as the others to rectify matters.

He unbuttoned his heavy greatcoat, and, removing his gloves, fumbled for his silver match-box.

"Here it is, monsieur," he exclaimed, extending his hand.

He waited a few seconds, under the impression that the Russian was groping for the proffered article. Then he repeated the announcement, adding, in a tone of involuntary impatience: "Where are you?"

"Here," replied a mocking voice above his head, "blundering busybodies that you are! You are securely trapped this time, and you will have good cause to repent of your unwarrantable and interfering curiosity."

Then came the dull thud of a heavy stone slab falling into position, and Fordyce and the petty officer found themselves prisoners in the cellar of the mysterious house.

CHAPTER XXIII

Trapped

"Tain't quite all ship-shape, is it, sir?" enquired Petty Officer Chalmers, who, ignorant of the Russian language, could only base his surmise upon the fact that Klostivitch had suspiciously made himself scarce.

"I'm afraid not, Chalmers," replied Fordyce. "We took too much for granted, and pal Vladimir has sold us a dog. Don't move till I strike a match; there may be booby-traps about."

The glimmer of the lighted match revealed the lamp. Either by accident or design Klostivitch had left it on the floor.

"Proper Tower o' London sort of show," commented Chalmers, examining his surroundings by the feeble glare. "Look, sir, that's where the old rascal shinned up."

He indicated a number of iron rungs clamped into the wall, while immediately above was a square opening in the stone ceiling, over which had been lowered a huge block of granite.

"Come along, sir," continued the petty officer. "Let's get back to the steps. Maybe the slippery reptile hasn't had time to shut the door."

Quickly the two men ascended the flight of steps, only to find their exit barred by a securely bolted door. Vainly the burly petty officer thrust with his shoulder against the firmly-held barrier.

"Hist!" exclaimed Fordyce.

From the other side of the door came the Russian's mirthless laugh. Then, finding that his captives had at least temporarily desisted from their efforts he shouted:

"Don't forget to keep the stove burning, you English imbeciles—that is, *if the diamonds are what you think they are.*"

Fordyce did not deign to reply, but, followed by his companion, descended the steps and gained the level passage. There was little here that called for examination beyond the iron clamps set in the wall; but at the farthest end was a low, metal-bound door. It was ajar. There were bolts on both sides, but these had apparently not been used for a considerable time, since they were thickly encrusted with rust.

Entering the cellar, the Sub found that it was a spacious place, measuring, roughly, 50 feet by 20, the vaulted roof being supported by a row of four stone columns. In one corner was a large stove, the one to which Klostovitch had recently referred. A large portion of the floor was occupied by bundles of faggots and logs hewn into short lengths, so that there was no lack of fuel.

Seven feet from the ground was a heavily-barred window through which a cold current of air was pouring. Obviously communicating with the open air, the aperture itself admitted no light.

"Let me give you a leg-up, sir," suggested Chalmers. "There doesn't seem much chance of being able to shin through that window, but there's no harm done in finding out what's outside."

Agilely Fordyce scrambled upon the broad back of the resourceful petty officer, steadying himself by grasping the iron bars, and allowed the lamplight to shine upon the scene without.

The opening communicated with an arched tunnel through which flowed a small stream but at present the water was frozen hard. If it were possible to remove the retaining bars and crawl through the aperture, the ice would form a safe way of escape, since the stream was bound to emerge into the open air in one or both directions.

"Well, sir, what's to be done now?" enquired Chalmers, when the Sub had made his report on his investigations. "It's no use sitting here and doing a blessed stoker's job with that there fire. We can't expect our chums to help us, or else old Klosytally, or whatever he calls hisself, would bring up a crowd of his revolutionary pals."

"The Captain might appeal to the British Embassy," suggested Fordyce.

"I don't think that would be much good, sir," replied Chalmers. "From what I've seen of this blessed country, British interest don't seem to count for much. No, sir; it's no use trusting to others; we'll have to work for ourselves."

"Quite so, Chalmers," agreed the Sub; "but I'm sorry I got you into this mess."

"Don't you worry about me, sir," protested the imperturbable sailor. "I'm quite content to follow my senior officer's movements without asking questions. I'll just try my knife on that window."

"One moment," interposed Fordyce. "This lamp won't burn so very much longer. Keep the door of the stove open,

and throw on some more wood; we'll have to work by fire-light."

This done, and the lamp blown out, Chalmers set to work to loosen the mortar in which were set the iron bars of the window.

For nearly an hour he toiled diligently, until the sweat poured down his face in spite of the cold blast of air through the opening. But the effort was in vain. It was the blade of his knife that was diminishing, not the cement, which was as hard as cast iron.

"I'll knock off, sir," he said, scratching his head in his disappointment. "Might go on for a whole month of Sundays, and yet get no forrader."

"We'll try to get those bars red-hot," declared Fordyce. "We've plenty of wood. Once we get the iron soft we can knock them out by using a log as a maul."

"Might be done, sir," admitted Chalmers. "No harm in trying; it'll keep us out of mischief, in a manner of speaking."

Acting upon the Sub's suggestion, a quantity of wood was stacked between the bars and set on fire. Fanned by the strong air-current, the combustibles burned fiercely, but the result was far from satisfactory. In less than five minutes the cellar was filled with choking fumes, and had not the experimenters torn away the burning wood they would have been suffocated.

[Illustration: IT WAS MINDIGGLE]

The hours passed slowly. Hunger and want of sleep were beginning to assail the prisoners. For their personal comfort they kept the big heating-stove well supplied, as they had not the slightest fear that a fall in temperature would affect the contents of the dummy packet which Fordyce still retained.

The two men were almost on the point of falling into a fitful slumber when Klostivitch's voice hailed them. Lighting the lamp, Fordyce made his way to the passage. A sense of dignity forbade him to hurry, but curiosity prompted him to ascertain the cause of the interruption.

The place was deserted. The Russian had removed the stone covering to the trap, for on the floor was a basket containing food and a jar of water.

"He evidently doesn't mean to starve us," commented the Sub as he carried the basket to the cellar. "I wonder if the stuff's drugged."

"I'll risk it, anyway," declared Chalmers. "I'm fair famished, sir. How goes the enemy, sir?"

Fordyce consulted his watch.

"A quarter-past nine," he replied. "You turn in, Chalmers. I'll take first trick."

The petty officer, having eaten his share of the scanty repast, was soon sound asleep. Fordyce, having made up the fire, prepared to keep watch, not knowing what move his captor might make.

It was close on midnight when he heard his name called. Hardly able to credit his senses, the Sub started to his feet. The voice seemed familiar, yet he could not fix the speaker's identity.

Relighting the lamp, and without disturbing his sleeping companion, the Sub hastened along the passage. Suddenly he halted. The trap-door above his head was opened, and through the aperture could be seen the head and shoulders of a man. His features were muffled in a turned-up fur collar, while an astrakhan cap was drawn well down over his forehead; but, in spite of this, Fordyce was now able to recognize the man.

It was Mindiggle.

CHAPTER XXIV

Fordyce's Two Visitors

A seemingly very slight incident will frequently alter the course of a man's career, and throw his time-table completely out of gear.

It was thus in the case of Ernzt von Verbrennungsraum, otherwise the trusted and respected Town Councillor Mindiggle of Otherport.

When he vainly attempted to trade upon Noel Fordyce's affection for his dog, Mindiggle had no intention of proceeding to Russia. It was only after his conversation with his fellow-conspirator, Boris Platoff, that he decided to go to Petrograd and hand over in person a small but immensely-powerful stock of nitro-talcite to the Extremist leader, Vladimir Klostivitch.

The haunting fear that perhaps he had made a grievous error in his dealings with Sub-lieutenant Fordyce, whose resolution and intelligence he had completely underrated, prompted him to make the journey without undue delay.

It was in his case an easy matter to leave the country. Through influence he was made a member of the Red Cross organization for the relief of wounded Russians, and, armed with credentials, he departed via the North Sea and Scandinavian railways to the Finnish town of Tornea, whence, by devious and uncertain travelling, he had made his way to Petrograd, arriving just twelve hours before Fordyce made his audacious yet ill-advised call at the house in the Bobbinsky Prospekt.

Mindiggle's suspicions were well founded, and, before the Sub had paid his visit, Vladimir Klostivitch had been warned of the possibility of being questioned by British naval officers.

Klostivitch immediately began to make enquiries. He soon learned that two Englishmen from a submarine lying at Cronstadt had recently landed from a Government steamer; that they had proceeded to the British Embassy, and thence to a house in which lived a compatriot.

The German agent wanted to be present at the anticipated interview, but this Klostivitch would not permit, avowing that he was quite capable of trapping the interfering Englishmen without assistance, and when this was done Mindiggle would be at liberty to converse with the captives.

"Hallo, Fordyce!" exclaimed the Hun from his place of safety. "I suppose you did not expect to find me here? How's that ferocious dog of yours? 'Costs against the plaintiff,' eh? Well, it will be a jolly dear bite for you before I've done with you."

"You think so?" enquired Fordyce coolly.

"I don't think—I know it!" replied Mindiggle. "Might I enquire why you've come here and tried to foist a spurious packet of diamonds upon my friend Klostivitch?"

"For motives best known to myself—and others," said the Sub stiffly.

"What motives?" enquired the spy, unable to restrain his curiosity.

"I decline to tell you; nor do I wish to hold further conversation with you," said Fordyce with asperity.

Mindiggle laughed loudly.

"You'll change your tune, my boy," he exclaimed. "Long before I'm done with you you'll be ready to answer my questions. You are a prisoner—a state prisoner—on a charge of conspiracy against the Russian Government. There is no prospect of rescue. With other pressure heavy upon them the Russian officials dare not listen to the protests of the British Embassy, even if it were known to your friends that you are here. Let me tell you that German rule will be all-powerful here. The followers of Kerensky, of Lenin, of Trotsky, of Korniloff—all will be completely subordinated to their rightful masters—the military force of the German Empire. Already negotiations are in progress for peace between Germany and Russia—and the terms will be those of a victorious Germany, let me tell you. What do you think of that?"

Fordyce made no reply. He knew that his tormentor told hard facts, but he saw no reason why he should agree with him. He was on the point of returning to the cellar when Mindiggle continued.

"You may just as well know what is in store for you," resumed the spy. "You and your companion will be kept here until such time as is convenient for you to be taken into German territory. Really, I don't know why I shouldn't give orders for you to be executed, unless I consider that alive you will be more useful to the German Government. You will be fed during your imprisonment here, so you need have no fears of death by starvation; but, remember, any attempt at

escape on your part will be visited by the severest punishment."

Unostentatiously the Sub measured the distance between the floor of the passage and the opening through which the spy was speaking. There were six iron rungs, by which Klostivitch had climbed when he tricked the two men into their prison—and Mindiggle's leering face was tantalizingly close.

With a sudden bound Fordyce scrambled agilely and rapidly up the rough-and-ready ladder. So astonished was the spy at the sudden onslaught, and taken at a disadvantage by the fact that he was lying at full length on the floor, that the Sub's attempt was within an ace of success.

But the ironwork that had supported Klostivitch's spare frame was unequal to the task of bearing Fordyce's weight. One of the bars was wrenched bodily from its setting, throwing the Sub to the ground, at the same time capsizing the lamp.

When he recovered his feet the young officer found that Mindiggle had gone and that the stone slab had been replaced over the aperture.

Fordyce returned to the cellar to resume his interrupted watch and to ponder over the recent conversation. It was beginning to dawn upon him that he was "up against a big thing". The affair was not merely an internal plot on the part of one of the many sections of Russian revolutionists, but an

international intrigue that, if successful, might seriously jeopardize the Allies' triumph.

Presently Chalmers stirred in his sleep, pulling an imaginary blanket over his head after the manner of seamen accustomed to sleeping in hammocks on a draughty maindeck. Then he sat up and gazed at the ruddy glow of the burning wood.

"It's my trick, sir, isn't it?" he asked.

Fordyce glanced at his watch.

"Yes," he replied, not deeming it necessary to inform the petty officer that twenty minutes had elapsed beyond the specified time. "I've had a most interesting conversation, Chalmers."

"It strikes me, sir," remarked the petty officer, when Fordyce had related the details of his talk with Mindiggle, "that we are properly in the soup. Talking of soup, sir, I could just do with a plateful of 'bubbly'. Wonder if they'll grub us on rat soup, sir? I think I hear rats about, and they say food's scarce in these parts."

A distinct, rasping sound came through the barred window. Both men listened intently. The noise could be likened to that of a rodent's teeth tackling a hard substance. Then came the pitter-patter of claws upon the smooth surface of the ice.

"A whacking great rat," remarked Fordyce incredulously, as he threw fresh fuel upon the fire and stirred the embers

into a blaze. Then he turned towards the window.

An animate object was frantically pawing the iron bars, and a succession of short, shrill yaps of delight pierced the air.

With a bound Fordyce gained the window.

"Good old Flirt!" he exclaimed. "How on earth did you find us out?"

The faithful terrier was almost mad with delight as she licked the Sub's hands and strove to force her way through the bars. Evidently she had been having a scrap with one of the canine residents of Petrograd, for there was a raw wound on one of her haunches.

For full five minutes Fordyce fondled the still-excited terrier. Although overjoyed at seeing his pet, and at the sagacity of the animal, he was ill at ease. Flirt could not get into the cellar, and it was quite certain that if Mindiggle found that she was outside he would not allow her to rejoin her master except upon utterly unacceptable terms. He might, most likely, order the dog to be destroyed.

"She must have smuggled herself upon the steamboat, same as 'ow she did when she first came off, sir," suggested Chalmers.

"Yes, and now's the trouble to send her back," said the Sub. "I can't keep her here, and, goodness only knows, I wouldn't like to know that she was adrift in Petrograd."

"Think she'll find her way back, sir?" asked the petty officer eagerly.

"There's a chance," replied Fordyce dubiously. "The first boat leaves for Cronstadt at eight in the morning."

"Then, sir," exclaimed Chalmers, excitedly, "that's the bloomin' ticket! Lash a note to her collar and let the skipper know where we are."

CHAPTER XXV

"Flirt, you're a Brick!"

"What do you make of it, Mr. Macquare?" enquired the Hon. Derek. "It looks as if winter has stolen a march on us."

"It has, sir," agreed the Lieutenant, as he rubbed his hands to restore the circulation. Even in the electric radiator-heated cabin the temperature was only a few degrees above freezing-point.

Mr. Macquare had just returned from a "spell ashore". It was close on sunset, by which time the British officers and crew had to be on board. During the hours of daylight they were allowed to wander freely over a considerable part of the great Russian arsenal, provided they conformed to the regulations laid down by the very democratic commandant.

The work of repairing R19 was proceeding apace. Already the diving-rudder had been straightened, and would be replaced the following day unless unforeseen circumstances arose to delay the operation. New tubes for the periscopes had been obtained, and only the fitting of the lenses and minor adjustments had to be made before the submarine was again ready for sea.

"The ice is forming rapidly on the Neva," continued the Lieutenant. "It's thick enough to bear a man's weight almost everywhere, except in the Morskoi Canal. They've got the ice-breakers hard at work already."

The Morskoi Canal is an artificial channel cut in the comparatively shallow Gulf of Finland, and affords deep-water communication below Cronstadt and the capital.

"Let's hope that the Baltic won't be completely frozen over during the next few days," remarked the Lieutenant-Commander. "We're running things pretty fine, but I see no alternative."

"Any news of Fordyce, sir?" asked the Lieutenant.

"Not yet," was the reply. "In fact I hardly expect to hear until he puts in an appearance. The youngster's not a sort of hare-brained fellow who would look for trouble. Just before he left——"

A discreet tap upon the cabin door interrupted the Hon. Derek's remarks.

"Come in!" he called out.

The door was opened, and the heavy curtain pushed aside, revealing the anxious features of Able-Seaman Cassidy.

"Well, Cassidy?" asked the skipper encouragingly.

"It's about that dawg, sir," began the sailor. "Mr. Fordyce's dawg."

"Has she bitten anyone?"

"Sure, no, sir; leastwise not as I knows of. But she's absent without leave, sir."

"For how long?"

"Can't say, sir. Cook's mate says as 'ow Flirt was in the galley just afore dinner. Me and my mates have looked everywhere."

"Have you tried Mr. Fordyce's cabin?"

"Sure that Oi have, sir."

"Well, she's not here, Cassidy," said the Hon. Derek, giving a perfunctory glance under the settee. "Have another hunt round and then report to me. The dog may have taken it into her head to go ashore for a prowl round."

Cassidy saluted and backed out of the cabin to confer with his equally anxious mates on the next course to adopt. The men were grievously concerned about Flirt's disappearance. Never before had the mascot been "absent without leave".

Some of the crew went on deck and began a pantomime conversation with a Russian seaman on sentry duty on the quay side. By dint of signs and the promise of a "plug o' ship's 'bacca", the Muscovite was made to understand that R19's mascot was missing, and that her recovery would result in a substantial reward.

All that evening there was a constant stream of Russian bluejackets and marines, bringing with them curs of all sizes and descriptions, until the harassed officer of the watch was reduced to the borders of unparliamentary language, while the crew were partly solaced by the sight of the impromptu dog show.

Morning came, but with it no signs of Flirt. A sympathetic Russian petty officer, who could speak English, volunteered to make enquiries at all the landing-places, although he expressed his opinion that the dog must be roaming about somewhere on the island.

With the resumption of work Flirt's disappearance was temporarily forgotten. The Hon. Derek and Mr. Macquare were anxiously dividing their attention between the progress of the repairs and the steady formation of the ice. Already the water alongside was covered with two inches of clear ice, while, in order to enable the divers to labour at their task of refixing the hydroplane, men had to be told off to keep the floes away from the submarine's bows.

Suddenly Cassidy, who was engaged in red-leading the newly-fixed periscopes, gave a shout of surprise.

"Sw'elp me!" he exclaimed, pointing at a small brown object showing clearly on the glistening field of ice. "There's Mr. Fordyce's dawg."

The animal had made her way across the expanse of frozen water until she gained the edge of the still-open channel, on which slabs of ice of varying sizes and thickness were drifting.

Informed of Flirt's return by the A.B.'s shout, the Lieutenant-Commander whipped out his binoculars.

"By Jove," he exclaimed, "the little beast's about to swim for it! She'll be done in, Macquare."

Even if the dog managed to withstand the low temperature of the water, she would be in considerable danger from the drifting floes. Quickly the Hon. Derek rose to the occasion and ordered the Berthon to be launched.

The collapsible boat was unfolded in record time and dropped over the side on the ice. Three men, one of whom was Cassidy, followed, and, grasping the gunwale, urged the Berthon forward like a sleigh across the 300 yards of frozen water that separated the submarine from the canal.

"Avast there, Flirt!" shouted Cassidy when the boat drew within hailing distance, for the terrier was dipping one paw into the water as a preliminary to jumping in.

At the sound of the A.B.'s voice Flirt cocked one ear, gave a yelp of welcome, and leapt from the fixed ice to a detached piece that had drifted within reach.

"Silly little josser!" exclaimed another of the Berthon's crew as the floe tilted under the dog's weight. It looked as if the animal would slide backwards in spite of her frantic efforts to find a firm foothold. Not until her body was half immersed did the sheet of ice recover itself, only to tilt in the opposite direction and precipitate Flirt into the bitterly cold water.

Slipping and floundering, the three men pushed the boat to the edge of the canal, then, heedless of the danger of the sharp edge ripping the canvas hull, they launched her and leapt in.

"Give way for all you're worth!" shouted Cassidy, who, in the absence of a rudder, gave the rowers directions by pointing with his hand.

Already Flirt was showing signs of exhaustion. Her fore-paws were threshing the water, instead of moving strongly and noiselessly beneath the surface. Her hind-quarters were sinking lower, while her head was thrown well back—sure signs that the task she had undertaken was beyond her power.

"Way 'nough!" ordered Cassidy. "Grab her, Bill!"

The seaman addressed boated his oar and leant over the gunwale, but, caught by the stiff breeze, the lightly-built craft drifted to leeward, just beyond arm's length of the now-benumbed animal. Before the man could grasp his oar, Flirt disappeared beneath the surface.

Without hesitation Cassidy took a header over the pointed stern of the Berthon, to reappear ten seconds later with Flirt firmly held by the scruff of her neck. Willing hands relieved the brave sailor of his burden and helped him into the boat.

"Crikey! Ain't it 'orribly parky!" he exclaimed. "'Ere, Bill, give me an oar before I'm frozen stiff."

"'Ow about it?" enquired Bill, who, having taken Cassidy's place in the stern-sheets, was devoting his attention to the now torpid dog. "Do the 'Instructions for the Treatment of the Apparently Drowned' hold good for a bloomin' animile? Lumme, what's she got lashed round 'er neck—'er kit in a brown-paper parcel, I believe."

"Don't heave it overboard," protested Cassidy, as Bill cut the lashings. "Strike me pink! There's writing on it—'Prisoners in a cellar in this house.—Fordyce'. Hallo! This is news for our skipper. Flirt, old girl, you're a brick!"

Flirt, beginning to take a renewed interest in life, feebly wagged her stumpy tail. Perhaps she was rather glad she wasn't one in the literal sense of the word, as a brick would have made a poor show in the waters of the Neva.

CHAPTER XXVI

A Friend in Need

"Well done, Cassidy!" exclaimed Lieutenant-Commander Stockdale when the A.B., with his clothes already stiff with ice, came on board. "Go below—don't waste time—and shift into a dry kit; and tell Jones to serve out a stiff tot to you three men."

"Beg pardon, sir," said Cassidy, "but we found this gadget lashed round Flirt's neck—something written on it by Mr. Fordyce."

The Hon. Derek took the paper parcel. He recognized it as the dummy package that he had assisted to make up in order to tackle Vladimir Klostivitch.

"All right, carry on," he replied, dismissing the now shivering A.B.

"Mr. Macquare," he continued, turning to the Lieutenant, "come below with me if you please."

The two officers repaired to the Hon. Derek's cabin.

"Young Fordyce has got into hot water, judging by this message," remarked the Lieutenant-Commander, holding up the sodden parcel for his subordinate's inspection. "It's lucky the address is given, for I believe I forgot it. Now what's to be done?"

"Call for volunteers for a rescue-party, sir," suggested Mr. Macquare promptly.

The Hon. Derek shook his head.

"Won't do, Mr. Macquare. We aren't lying on an uncivilized coast, where we can act off our own bat. We've got to tread warily. All the same, there's no time to be lost. If we work through diplomatic channels there'll be weeks, perhaps months, of exasperating delay. We must be under way within the next twenty-four hours unless we are to be frozen in here for the winter. And I don't want to leave my Sub behind. Hallo, what is it? I'm busy."

The entry of a bluejacket holding a piece of pasteboard in his hand interrupted the discussion.

The card was that of Naval-Lieutenant Rodsky.

"Show him down below," ordered the Hon Derek. "Dash it all, Macquare, Rodsky's a sound fellow; he might help us."

The Russian officer had recently returned to Cronstadt and had taken an early opportunity of paying a formal call upon the Hon. Derek. When informed of what had befallen Sub-Lieutenant Fordyce he became genuinely sympathetic.

"I quite see your point," he remarked, speaking in French, since, in the absence of the Sub, Stockdale was without the services of an interpreter. "I would suggest that you consult my friend, Captain-Lieutenant Orloff, of the destroyer *Zabiyaka*. She is lying in No. 3 Basin."

Acting upon this advice the three officers went on board the destroyer, and Rodsky briefly outlined the case to his confrère.

"Vladimir Klostivitch—do I know anything of him?" exclaimed Captain Orloff. "One of the most dangerous men in Russia at the present time. M. Kerensky would have had him arrested, but there,"—the Captain shrugged his shoulders expressively—"Trotsky is more powerful than M. Kerensky, and Klostivitch is in Trotsky's pay."

"And Germany's too, I fancy," added Stockdale.

"I can suggest a plan," continued Orloff. "One that will remove all responsibility from your shoulders, Monsieur le Capitan. In the interests of my country I will arrest this villain, Klostivitch. Fortunately my crew are loyal to me and anti-German to a man. Now leave everything to me, and if your officer is not liberated within twelve hours my name is not Boris Orloff."

"You will not expose yourself to the risk of the Extremists' fury?" asked the Hon. Derek, loath to accept any favour that might be detrimental to the generous Russian's interests.

"My friend," replied Orloff, "what has England done for us? We Russians are extremely indebted to her. Strange, then, if I should hesitate to run a slight risk in return for far greater sacrifice that your navy has made for ours. There is one other point. I understand that you are leaving as soon as possible?"

"Directly repairs are effected," replied the Lieutenant-Commander of R19.

"Have any difficulties been placed in your way by the present naval authorities of Cronstadt?" asked Orloff

pointedly.

"None whatever," declared Stockdale emphatically. "In fact an ice-breaker has been told off to keep a channel open for us."

"I am glad to hear it," remarked the Russian. "Later on it may be different, especially as I hear that the Huns, in their infamous peace proposals, demand the surrender of all Russian and Allied warships in the Baltic. For my part I would sooner blow up the *Zabiyaka*, and there are, I am proud to say, many other commanding officers equally determined on that point. When will you be ready to proceed to sea, do you think?"

"By daybreak on Thursday," replied the Hon. Derek. "Stores and provisions are already on board."

"It is possible that the *Zabiyaka* will escort you through the mine-field in the Gulf of Finland," remarked Captain Orloff. "If so, be prepared to receive a present from me," he added grimly. "Something, perhaps, that you may not appreciate, but we Russians will be only too pleased to get rid of. Au revoir, Monsieur le Capitan."

"What is he hinting at, sir?" enquired Mr. Macquare as the two British officers made their way back to the submarine.

"Goodness knows!" replied the Hon. Derek. "We can but wait and see."

CHAPTER XXVII

The Fate of Klostivitch

Red dawn was breaking when a Russian naval pulling-cutter ran alongside the Probenjsky Quay. Already the ice, that a few hours previously had been broken by gangs of men impressed under the Revolutionary Government's decree for that task, was again forming, rendering it a matter of difficulty for the boat to force her way through the last twenty yards of water.

The quay was deserted. Heavy showers of sleet had dispersed the crowds of demonstrators who had "run wild" the previous evening. In that respect nature had found a far more efficacious method of dealing with the disorderly mob than had the Red Guards and their ever-ready machine-guns. Many broken windows and walls splayed with bullet-marks were the remaining evidences of the orgy that had ended in bloodshed and rain, and now a fall of snow was obliterating sinister patches on the roadway and pavements in a mantle of dazzling whiteness.

At the head of the flight of stone steps stood a sentry-box, the diagonal stripes of the Imperial regime still discernible under a hastily-applied coat of yellow paint. Within, and reclining against the woodwork, was a sleeping sentry.

Upon the approach of half a dozen or more bluejackets he bestirred himself sufficiently to push aside an empty vodka

glass and grasp his rifle.

"It is all right, comrade!" exclaimed the foremost of the party reassuringly. "We've just had private information as to where we can obtain some sides of beef. We haven't tasted fresh beef for nearly a month. We belong to the *Kuptchino*, and have just come in from Helsingfors."

"Have you your permit, comrade?" enquired the sentry.

The bluejacket solemnly closed one eye and slipped a sheaf of rouble notes into the man's hand.

"Ts—sh!" he whispered. "These are better than permits, Comrade Ivan. We will not be long, and when we return there will be a bottle of vodka for you."

"So long as you do not get me into trouble I am content," remarked the befuddled soldier. "A whole bottle, mind, and none of the stuff from the Winter Palace."

He laughed at his own jest, and his listeners laughed too, for the story of the pillaged wine-cellars of the Imperial Palace was now common property—how the Red Guards had looted thousands of bottles, drunk their contents, and refilled them with coloured water. The inhabitants of Petrograd, eager to purchase wine from the ex-Tsar's stock, bought the proffered bottles with avidity, only to find that they had been "sold". There was no redress, for the deluded purchaser realized that arguing with an inebriated Red Guard was likely to end in a bayonet-thrust.

Having paved the way for their retreat, the landing-party—Captain Orloff and seven of his men, all in bluejackets' uniform—hastened along the deserted street until they arrived at the Bobbinsky Prospekt.

Here Orloff halted his men under an archway, and, taking one of the party, stole softly down the passage until he came to a gap between the two houses—a space fenced off by a tall iron railing.

In a very short space of time Orloff's companions filed through two of the bars, and, by means of a powerful tug, wrenched them sufficiently apart to admit a man's body. It was then a simple matter for the two Russians to lower themselves upon the slippery ice on the surface of the stream.

Flashing an electric torch, the captain of the *Zabiyaka* plunged into the arched passage, through which the now frozen water usually flowed. For nearly a hundred yards he went, until he stopped at a small barred grating barely a foot above the ice.

"Are you there, Monsieur Fordyce?" he whispered in his own language, knowing that the captive Sub-Lieutenant spoke Russian fluently.

"I am. Who is it?" asked Fordyce.

"A friend," replied Orloff. "Take courage again," Fordyce, by the by, had never lost it; "help is at hand. I am Boris Orloff, Captain-Lieutenant of the *Zabiyaka*, the destroyer that piloted your craft into Cronstadt."

"I am pleased to meet you, sir," said the Sub.

"And still more so under better auspices," rejoined Orloff. "Now listen: Here are a brace of revolvers. We are going to tackle Comrade Klostivitch. If he beats a retreat to this cellar, corner him. He is a desperate man, and doubtless armed. Cornered, he will not hesitate to shoot, unless you act promptly."

"He has someone with him," announced Fordyce. "A fellow from England. Whether he is an Englishman or a German I hardly know, although his sympathies are certainly Teutonic."

"We'll collar him too!" exclaimed the skipper of the *Zabiyaka*. "Now, make ready. In five minutes we'll be with you."

"One question, sir!" exclaimed the Sub. "Might I ask how you knew we were here? Did a dog——?"

"Yes," replied Orloff, "it was a dog that brought the news."

"Then Flirt—my dog—is safe?"

"I have every reason to believe so."

"That's good!" ejaculated the overjoyed Fordyce. A great weight had been lifted off his mind. The harassing thought that harm had befallen his devoted pet had troubled him more than his own difficult position. And now, thanks to Flirt, deliverance was at hand.

Retracing his steps, the Russian rejoined his companion, and, having bent the railings to their original position, the pair hurried back to the rest of the party.

"No unnecessary noise, my children," continued Orloff, speaking in the pre-Revolutionary manner with which an officer addressed his men. "Two of you will remain here; two more at the other side of the street; the rest will come with me."

The dwellers in the Bobbinsky Prospekt were still deep in slumber. Undisturbed, the Russian bluejackets effected a forcible entry into No. 19 by the drastic expedient of cutting away the door-post into which the bolts securing the door were fitted.

Entering the room—there was no lobby—the intruders reclosed the door and proceeded in their search for Vladimir Klostivitch. The first room they entered was that in which Fordyce had interviewed the Extremist official. They found someone asleep on the bed over the stove.

"Seize him, men!" ordered Orloff.

Strong hands dragged the sleeper from his bed. It was Mindiggle, or, to give him his true name, von Verbrennungsraum.

Before he could be effectually silenced the German gave a yell of terror.

"Gag him!" ordered the captain of the *Zabiyaka*.

It was too late. A shuffling sound announced that another inmate of the mysterious house was awake.

Revolver in hand, Orloff dashed up the creaking stairs, just in time to catch sight of a grotesquely-garbed figure disappearing up the next flight.

"Surrender!" shouted the naval officer, loath to fire lest the report should arouse the neighbourhood.

In spite of his years, Klostivitch possessed plenty of activity. Rushing into an attic, he slammed and bolted the door, piling articles of furniture against it as an additional safeguard.

Throwing caution to the winds, Orloff placed the muzzle of his revolver to the lock and pressed the trigger. Then, with a tremendous heave, he burst the door open.

The room was empty. An open dormer window showed the track of the fugitive. His pursuer, leaping upon a box, thrust his head through the opening.

Brave as he was, Orloff hesitated to follow his quarry. Klostivitch had gained the parapet and was contemplating a leap to the roof of the adjoining house.

Before the naval officer could thrust his hand through the narrow opening of the window, and level his pistol, the rascal, desperate in his courage, leapt from his precarious foothold.

It was not a great distance for a man to jump—six or seven feet at the outside; but the fugitive had not taken into consideration the ice-rimmed stonework.

Even as he leapt, Klostivitch's feet slipped from under him. With a shriek of horror he grasped vainly at the thin air, then, turning a complete somersault, crashed upon the paving-stones sixty feet below.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Rescued

"There's someone coming, sir!" whispered Chalmers, raising his revolver. "Stand by, sir!"

Both men waited in eager silence as the sound of bolts being withdrawn was borne to their ears.

A voice hailed in Russian. Fordyce lowered his pistol.

"It's all right, Chalmers," he said quietly, as Captain-Lieutenant Orloff entered the cellar.

"We have made a clean sweep of this little nest, Monsieur Fordyce!" declared the Russian. "Klostivitch will not trouble you or anyone else in the future, as far as this world is concerned. The other man you mentioned is a prisoner. We

also found a third—Platoff by name. Do you know anything of him?"

No, Fordyce did not. He would have been considerably surprised if he had known that Platoff was in Mindiggle's house at Otherport on that momentous day when the Sub strove to placate the irate victim of Flirt's attack.

"It does not matter overmuch," continued Orloff. "The fellow asked for trouble—and received it. He had to be knocked over the head, otherwise he would have strangled one of my men. Sovensky struck a little too hard, and——"

The big Russian shrugged his shoulders. Fordyce understood.

"You are hungry?" asked Orloff. "Fortunately Comrade Klostivitch was well provided against possible famine. One of my men will get you both a meal, for it is a long, cold journey to Cronstadt. Meanwhile, if you will excuse me, I will make a search for incriminating documents."

Fordyce and the petty officer made their way to the room in which Mindiggle had been arrested. The spy was no longer there, having been removed to another part of the house for safe custody. The Sub was glad of that. Much as he had cause to detest the villain, he was not at all anxious to crow over his discomfiture.

Presently Orloff hurried into the room with a bundle of papers in his hands.

"Will you kindly read these, Monsieur Fordyce?" he asked. "They are in English, and, as you know, I am ignorant of the language of our brave allies. Glance through them hurriedly, please, for time is a consideration."

The Sub took the documents. The first was seemingly of no importance, but the second gave a formula for the manufacture of nitro-talcite, a recipe for which the leading scientists of Great Britain had sought in vain.

Other papers gave details of the extremist movement in London and elsewhere, including the names of several Russian residents within the limits of the British Isles.

"Take charge of these documents," continued Orloff. "They will be safer on a British submarine than in my possession, or even if they were left at your embassy. Now, are you ready, Monsieur? It is time to evacuate our position."

Through the still-silent streets the rescuing-party made their way, two of the seamen labouring under the weight of what appeared to be a well-filled sack carried between two poles. At the quay the tolerant sentry was rewarded according to previous agreement, and, shouting a tipsy farewell, he permitted his "comrades of the navy" to embark with their burden of "fresh beef".

It was now beginning to snow heavily. The bizarre towers of the Kazan Cathedral and the battlements of the fortress of Peter and Paul were invisible in the drifting flakes. Even the opposite bank of the Neva was fast being blotted into a state of unrecognizability.

"Do you think that we can manage it, my children?" asked Orloof, as the men took to their oars.

"Certainly, Excellency," was the chorused reply that evidenced no doubt as to the ability of the hardy Russian seamen to find their way across the bleak expanse of water.

Steering the boat on a compass course, Orloff devoted his whole attention to his task. The men relapsed into silence, pulling with steady strokes. Fordyce, glad of the comfort of a boat-cloak, was too elated at his release and the prospect of finding himself once more on board R19 to feel the biting cold. Occasionally the sack-enclosed bundle lying in the stern-sheet grating writhed and kicked, but little attention was paid to the unhappy captive.

Suddenly the falling snow was tinted a vivid orange hue, while the sky in the direction of the city was rent with lurid light. Then came an ear-splitting roar, while the ice-encumbered waters rose and fell under the influence of a powerful displacement of air. Green seas poured over both gunwales of the boat, and only the resourcefulness of the helmsman kept the frail craft from foundering.

"We are indeed fortunate," exclaimed Orloff, when the angry tumult of water had subsided and the men set to work to bale out the cutter. "All is not well with Petrograd, I fear."

The seamen hazarded various opinions as to the locality of the explosion, but it was not until the following day that they heard the facts of the case.

When Orloff pursued the luckless Klostivitch it must be remembered that he left the attic window open. In the room was stored a small quantity of the powerful nitro-talcite, the temperature of the house being kept up by means of the central heating-stove. Upon the house being abandoned the neglected fires soon dwindled, while the temperature of the attic fell so steadily that within half an hour of the time of leaving the house the nitro-talcite automatically exploded. Most of the buildings in the Bobbinsky Prospekt were blown to atoms and considerable damage done to the adjoining property; but, as "it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good", the Extremist leaders came to the conclusion that their energetic assistant, Vladimir Klostivitch, had perished by means of the explosive he had meant to employ against others.

For two more hours the cutter's crew pulled steadily. At intervals the braying of fog-horns and the shrill blast of sirens told them that other water-borne traffic was under way; yet, without sighting any other craft, they held steadily on, following the edge of the ice in the still-free Morskoi Canal.

Presently Captain-Lieutenant Orloff jerked the port-hand yoke-line. His keen eyes had discerned the outlines of the lighthouse on the eastern extremity of the island fortress.

It was now an easy matter for the cutter to pick her way past the line of anchored destroyers. Hailed she was repeatedly; but there was no cause for alarm, since boats of the flotilla were constantly passing.

Almost before Fordyce was aware of the fact the cutter was rubbing sides with R19, while leaning over the guard-rail of the submarine were the Hon. Derek and Mr. Macquare.

"No, I will not stay, Monsieur le Capitan," replied Orloff in reply to Stockdale's invitation. "Later on, perhaps—who knows? Meanwhile, pray accept this gift. It is not the same as I intended to hand you, nevertheless it may be acceptable."

And he indicated the enshrouded figure of the spy, Mindiggle.

"Come aboard, sir," reported Fordyce as he made his way up the side.

"Quite about time, Mr. Fordyce," replied the Hon. Derek, grasping his subordinate's hand. "Another hour and we should have left you behind. Confound it, what's that?"

"That" was Flirt. The delighted animal, hearing her master's voice, had escaped from below, and, nearly capsizing the astonished Lieutenant-Commander, had literally bounded into the Sub's arms.

CHAPTER XXIX

The Captured Convoy

"What do you propose to do with this, sir?" enquired Mr. Macquare, indicating the sack-enclosed form of the spy.

"Goodness knows!" replied the Hon. Derek. "What is it?"

"Only Mindiggle, sir," announced the Sub.

"Explain yourself, Mr. Fordyce," ordered the Lieutenant-Commander.

"I can explain but very little, sir," said Fordyce. "It was an absolute surprise to find him at the house in Bobbinsky Prospekt. I hadn't the faintest idea he was in Russia. Klostivitch is dead, and another of the gang. I have a number of documents for your perusal, sir. Captain Orloff handed them to me. I think you will find them interesting."

"His Majesty's submarines were never intended as receptacles for spies," grumbled Stockdale. "Pass the fellow below. Hallo! the weather's clearing. That's good. Directly the *Zabiyaka* signals us inform me, Mr. Macquare."

Already the ice-breakers had cleared a path through the frozen water. In the outer roadstead the *Zabiyaka* was lying at moorings with steam raised ready to slip and proceed. Apparently she was awaiting the return of the cutter with her disguised skipper.

Soon after Captain-Lieutenant Orloff boarded his vessel he reappeared on deck rigged out in correct uniform. A hoist of bunting fluttered from the destroyer's signal yard-arm. It was an intimation, in International Code, that R19's escort was ready to proceed.

Amidst the cheers of a crowd of Russian bluejackets and marines the British submarine cast off. Under the action of her petrol-driven engines she slipped away from the quay-side and felt her way cautiously down the narrow waterway. Then, taking station a cable-length astern of the now-moving destroyer, R19 began her long and hazardous voyage to Old England's shores.

Once clear of the Gulf of Finland minefields the *Zabiyaka* flung about and bade the submarine *bon voyage*. From that moment Stockdale's command was alone in an inland sea where German warships held almost undisputed sway and German mines closed every exit. More than likely the departure of R19 had been communicated to Berlin, and the Huns would be keeping special watch for the returning British craft.

Yet, with one exception, not a man on board was the least dismayed. Confident in the skill and daring of their gallant skipper, and with the knowledge that every revolution of the propellers was taking the submarine nearer home, the men were in high spirits. The exception was the spy Mindiggle. Not only was he viewing with the deepest apprehension the prospect of being handed over to justice, but the dread of being imprisoned in the hull of a submarine, in the midst of countless dangers, reduced him almost to the verge of panic.

[Illustration: "PASS UNDER MY LEE!"]

At the first possible opportunity the Hon. Derek ordered the crew to diving stations. With the exception of the lost portion of false keel, R19 was restored to her normal state, but it was highly desirable that the vessel's capabilities after refit should be severely tested. In order to compensate for the loss of several tons of outside dead weight a corresponding amount of pig-iron ballast had been taken on board and securely wedged to prevent shifting under diving conditions.

The test gave admirable results. The intricate mechanism worked without a hitch, the submarine descending without difficulty to a depth of 20 fathoms. The only disconcerting part of the evolution was the behaviour of the prisoner. The moment the vessel slid beneath the waves he began shouting and screaming hysterically, keeping up the performance during the whole period of submergence.

Almost without incident R19 came within sight of the Swedish coast. It was the Hon. Derek's intention to make a landfall in the vicinity of Braviken Bay, and thence, keeping just within Swedish territorial water, skirt the long chain of small islands as far as Oland.

Just before sunset on the second day after leaving Cronstadt, R19 sighted seven small merchantmen steering due south at a distance of about eleven miles from the coast. They were German vessels laden with iron-ore. Deeming the Baltic to be now free from the attentions of Russian destroyers, the hitherto idle shipping of Memel and Dantzic had put to sea. They were without escort, and steaming in single line at varying intervals behind one another.

"We'll have that lot, Mr. Macquare," decided the Lieutenant-Commander. "Fortunately the moon is almost full. We'll show Fritz our version of *spurlos versenkt*."

Altering helm, R19 steered athwart the course of the oncoming merchantmen. With her guns manned and trained, and the White Ensign floating proudly in the rays of the setting sun, she made no secret of her intentions.

Stockdale had them entirely at his mercy. Between the merchantmen and the shore he could have easily headed them off and destroyed them by gun-fire or torpedo. Had he been a German, and these vessels unarmed British ships, the latter would have been sent to the bottom, and their crews fired upon with machine-guns; but as the Hon. Derek was a member of a time-honoured and unsullied profession, and not a pirate, he acted otherwise.

At the peremptory signal: "Heave-to or I will fire into you!" the leading German ship reversed engines. Others followed her example, until the seven were bunched together within a radius of two cables'-lengths.

"They are taking matters for granted," observed Mr. Macquare as the crews began to lower away the boats. So anxious were they to leave that in their haste two of the boats capsized before the falls could be disengaged.

"I'll give you fifteen minutes!" shouted the Hon. Derek through his megaphone in German. "Pass under my lee. Each master will hand over his papers, and you can then make for the shore."

These orders were promptly executed, and, having seen the flotilla of boats well on its way, R19's crew set to work to destroy the prizes.

The whaler, under the charge of Sub-Lieutenant Fordyce, went from vessel to vessel, the work of destruction being silently and expeditiously performed by opening the sea-cocks.

Just as the Sub boarded the seventh ship the first flung her stern high in the air and disappeared from view. Others were on the point of making their last plunge. It was not a pleasant sight nor a congenial duty, but stern necessity demanded the sacrifice of those seven ships to the exigencies of war; and Fordyce, remembering the fate of many a helpless British merchantman, torpedoed without mercy in the midst of an angry sea and far from land, steeled his heart.

Suddenly the coxswain of the whaler gave a warning shout and pointed in the direction of a trail of flame-tinged smoke showing faintly against the warm afterglow.

There could be very little doubt concerning the approaching vessel. A German destroyer, too late to save the convoy, was doing her best to avenge its loss.

CHAPTER XXX

A Duel to the Death

Rushing upon the bridge of the foundering vessel, Fordyce looked around for signs of R19. The submarine, giving the sinking craft a wide berth, was slowly forging ahead to stand by to pick up her boat. At the present moment the intercepting hull of the largest tramp hid her from view.

"Ahoy!" shouted the Sub the moment R19's bows drew clear. "Enemy destroyer bearing east by south, distance two miles."

"Aye, aye," roared Mr. Macquare in reply. "Stand by; we'll pick you up later."

Keenly Fordyce watched the visible evolutions of the submarine as, cleared away for diving, she sped through the waves without attempting to submerge. To do otherwise would be running the risk of fouling some of the wreckage from the sunken merchantmen. Stockdale was making sure of his "ground" before seeking cover.

Up pelted the German torpedo-craft, the spray flying from her bows and sizzling in clouds of steam against her red-hot funnels. Sighting the submarine just as the latter was gliding beneath the waves, the hostile vessel altered helm and bore down upon the spot where R19 had disappeared, firing ineffectually with every gun that could be brought to bear ahead.

To Fordyce it seemed as if the destroyer shuddered under a terrific impact. He was more than half afraid that her sharp

stem had sent R19 to her doom. Then came the splash of the mark-buoy being hurled overboard to indicate the supposed position of the submarine, followed by the detonation of a "depth-charge".

"Best hook it, sir," suggested Chalmers. "This old tub won't keep afloat much longer."

So engrossed was the Sub in the spectacle of the German destroyer searching for her prey that he had entirely overlooked his own peril. Already the tramp's taffrail was level with the water, while her deck betwixt the poop and the rise amidships was flooded.

Alongside the entry-port the whaler's crew were "fending off" to prevent the boat being pinned against the side by the inrush of water.

"Give way, lads!" ordered Fordyce as he sprang into the waiting boat.

Before the whaler had been rowed a distance of fifty yards a portion of the tramp's deck blew up under the irresistible pressure of compressed air. A rush of steam and smoke followed, and the doomed vessel, her last reserve of buoyancy gone, sank like a stone.

It was now moonlight. A mile or so to the east'ard could be discerned the misty shape of the grey-painted destroyer. She was turning to starboard, with the intention of retracing her course in order to observe traces of her presumably shattered foe.

"Keep down, all hands," cautioned Fordyce.

The men, boating their oars, crouched on the bottom boards. There was just a chance that the Huns would overlook an apparently empty boat adrift in the midst of a medley of flotsam, for the sea all around was covered with woodwork of various shapes and sizes.

A minute passed in long-drawn suspense. There were audible indications that the German destroyer was bearing down. Then the tension was broken by a terrific roar, the rush of water being hurled violently into the air and falling again.

Raising his head above the gunwale, Fordyce gave vent to a shout of surprised gratification. A slowly-dispersing cloud of smoke marked the spot where the enemy craft had been. Broken asunder by the explosion of a torpedo, she was now lying on the bed of the Baltic.

"One more feather in the Old Man's cap," exclaimed a bluejacket, his enthusiasm outweighing his sense of respect in thus referring to his skipper.

"Give way!" ordered the Sub, as he grasped the yoke-lines. "There's someone in the ditch."

The men bent to their oars with a will. At the prospect of saving life their resentment for the Hun and all his works vanished.

They had not far to row before they entered the zone of acrid fumes, for at the moment of the torpedo's impact the

destroyer had lessened the distance to about a quarter of a mile of the then motionless whaler.

The moonbeams, penetrating the thinning veil of vapour, were scintillating upon the still-agitated waves, while silhouetted against the pale-yellow light were the outlines of the head and shoulders of a swimmer.

"In bow!"

The bowman boated his oar, and, grasping the gunwale, leant overboard with his right hand outstretched.

With the assistance of a comrade the bow-man hiked the rescued German into the boat. He was capless, his face was black with burnt powder. He seemed dazed and incapable of speech.

"There's another 'Un!" shouted the bow-man. "On your port bow, sir; a-hangin' on to that bit o' wreckage."

The second swimmer was in a desperate state. He was almost destitute of clothing, while his flesh was badly charred by the blast of the explosion. As he was being lifted into the boat it was noticed that his left leg was hanging limply, being all but severed above the knee by a sliver of metal.

Skilfully the British tars proceeded to place a rough-and-ready tourniquet round the injured limb, while, fortunately for himself, the wounded man lost consciousness directly he was hauled into the boat.

"There she is, sir," announced Chalmers, as the twin periscopes of R19, throwing up feathers of spray, emerged from beneath the surface. Followed the conning-tower, the bow portion of the deck, and then, like a huge porpoise, the rest of the hull until the submarine was awash.

"Look alive, Mr. Fordyce!" shouted the Lieutenant-Commander, as he emerged through the conning-tower hatchway. "There may be some other Hun craft knocking around. What's that—survivors?"

"Two, sir; one badly wounded."

The rescued men were lifted on board and passed below. Then, after cruising round and making sure that there were no more of the destroyer's men alive, the humane Stockdale gave orders for the submarine to submerge once more.

"You bagged her all right, sir," remarked the Sub.

"Yes, the silly ass played into our hands, absolutely," replied the Hon. Derek. "It was the result of taking too much for granted, I suppose. Have you found out the number of the boat?"

"No, sir; but I will ascertain."

Fordyce made his way to the place where the survivors were being tended by their late antagonists. The German with the broken limb looked on the point of death, while the other, who had lost consciousness upon being carried below, was found to be suffering from several contusions to the back and ribs.

"E's an officer, sir," reported one of the men, pointing to the discarded uniform of the Imperial German Navy.

Fordyce examined the sleeve of the coat. By the distinctive rings he knew that the prisoner was the skipper of the torpedoed destroyer—a kapitan-leutnant, whose rank corresponded with that of lieutenant-commander of the British navy.

"Wonder what he's done to get this?" mused the Sub, holding up the decoration known as the "Ordre pour le Mérite". "Rum-looking josses, too," he continued, studying the coarse features of the man; "brutal even while unconscious. Hallo! Now what's wrong?"

From for'ard came a succession of violent crashes, mingled with blood-curdling shrieks and unmistakably strong British epithets. Quick to act, Fordyce rushed from the compartment and hurried towards the scene of disorder.

CHAPTER XXXI

Von Hoppner's Boast

"It's that spy bloke, sir," reported one of the petty officers. "Cassidy and Jones are tackling him all right."

By the time Fordyce arrived upon the scene the worst of the tumult had passed. Mindiggle, foaming at the mouth, was lying on his back, with Cassidy planted firmly on his chest, and the other A.B. pinning his arms to the floor. Other would-be quellers of the disturbance were awaiting an opportunity to secure the spy's legs. He was kicking right and left, almost capsizing the bulky form of his captor, the while yelling and shouting in a blood-curdling manner.

At length Mindiggle was handcuffed and gagged, and the Sub was then told of what had occurred. It appeared that one of the seamen, going into the spy's temporary cell, had been suddenly and violently attacked by the demented man. There could be no doubt about it; Mindiggle's brain had turned under the mental strain. He was nothing less than a homicidal maniac.

About five minutes later Fordyce was called to the cabin occupied by the two survivors of the torpedoed German destroyer. The Lieutenant-Commander had recovered consciousness, and almost his first act was to demand the reason why he, an officer of the Imperial German Navy, should be sharing the same cabin with a common sailor?

"I will convey your request to my commanding officer," replied the Sub, although he was inwardly raging at the attitude taken up by the arrogant Hun, who, but for Fordyce's promptitude, might have been lying fathoms deep in the Baltic. "Not knowing your name (the Sub was too truthful to deny all knowledge of the prisoner's rank) we were naturally at a loss."

"My name, Herr Unter-leutnant, is Ludwig von Hoppner," replied the Hun pompously. "My rank, Kapitän-Leutnant of H.I.M. torpedo-boat V201, as you English have already learnt to your cost."

"Indeed!" remarked Fordyce. "Then apparently we are quits, since V201 has been destroyed. Might I enquire particulars of the circumstances, to which you refer? Surely this Ordre pour le Mérite must have had something to do with it?"

The Sub hardly expected that von Hoppner would give the information, but the Hun, unable to refrain from boasting, swallowed the bait.

"It has," replied von Hoppner. "If you wish to know, Englishman, it was for destroying one of your submarine-cruisers at the southern entrance to the Sound."

"Then, I suppose," resumed Fordyce, "that the incident occurred about two years ago, when one of our submarines went aground in neutral waters, and your destroyers shelled the stranded vessel until a Danish cruiser intervened. To the best of my recollection, the officer directing the German operations received the Iron Cross only, and not l'Ordre pour le Mérite."

"You are mistaken," said von Hoppner petulantly. "It was not that occasion to which I refer. It was on the 9th of —— of the present year."

"Thank you!" replied the Sub quietly. "That is all I wish to know for the present. I will convey your request to Lieutenant-Commander the Hon. Derek Stockdale."

Chuckling to himself, Fordyce returned to the skipper's cabin to make the report. He found the Hon. Derek conferring with Mr. Macquare as to what was to be done with the lunatic, for Mindiggle's case was hopeless.

"He's cheated a firing-party, Macquare," remarked the Lieutenant-Commander. "The sooner we get him off this craft the better. And the wounded German bluejacket too. At daybreak I'll speak the first merchantman or fishing-boat we sight and put them both on board. Well, Mr. Fordyce? You look mighty pleased with yourself."

"I have found out the name and rank of the prisoner, sir. He is Kapitan-Leutnant Ludwig von Hoppner, late of V201, and the possessor of l'Ordre pour le Mérite, bestowed, I have good reason to believe, for assisting us in our passage through the German minefield at the southern entrance to the Sound."

"Eh, what's that?" enquired the Hon. Derek. "Explain yourself, please."

"Might I have the log-book, sir?" asked Fordyce.

Receiving the manuscript volume, the Sub turned over the pages until he came to the entry under the date given by the German officer.

"There you are, sir!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "That was the night when we were held up by the nets, and a Hun torpedo-craft opened a way for us by destroying that sunken merchantman by means of depth charges."

"By Jove, yes!" ejaculated the Lieutenant-Commander. "Carry on, Mr. Fordyce."

"So there's hardly a doubt that this von Hoppner was the officer commanding the torpedo-boat. When he blew up the submerged vessel he was under the impression that he had strafed us, and so his Emperor gave him that potty decoration."

"What sort of fellow is he?" asked the Hon. Derek.

"A regular cad, sir, I should imagine," replied Fordyce. "His first words to me were of the nature of a complaint that we had shoved him into the same cabin as the bluejacket with the broken leg."

"Oh, is he?" rejoined the Lieutenant-Commander grimly. "In that case I won't spare his feelings over his tin-pot decoration. Had he been a decent sort of man I would have left him in blissful ignorance on that point. Well, I think it is about time we got a move on, Mr. Macquare."

R19, after a fairly long interval of submergence, was cautiously brought to the surface. An examination of the moon-lit sea gave no signs of the presence of hostile or other craft. Overhead nothing in the nature of an air-craft could be discerned.

Running awash, yet ready to dive at a few seconds' notice, the submarine held on her way, reeling off mile after mile, until the first blush of dawn revealed the presence of a Zeppelin bearing down wind at a great speed.

The Lieutenant-Commander promptly gave orders to dive, and once again R19 sank and rested upon the sea bed. Whether the German air-ship had "spotted" her was a matter for speculation. The crew would have preferred to take their chances in an encounter with the giant gas-bag, but their skipper thought otherwise. Until the Baltic was left astern, cautious tactics were to be the order of the day. Sounding meant long and tedious delays, but, as the Hon. Derek remarked, "None but a fool would cut capers in the open jaw of a man-trap."

It was approaching midday when R19 left her enforced resting-place. The Zeppelin had vanished from sight, having failed in her quest to locate the task she had been called upon to perform; but less than a mile away on the port bow was a fishing-boat of about forty tons, moving slowly through the water with fathoms of nets towing astern.

"That's what we've been wanting to fall in with," observed the Hon. Derek. "Starboard a little, Quartermaster. Lay me alongside that vessel."

CHAPTER XXXII

"Taken down a Peg"

The fishing-boat, according to the name painted on her stern, was the *Stor Afan*, of Carlsrona. The only member of her crew visible was a fair-haired youth of about fourteen, who was listlessly standing by the wheel. She was making a bare two knots under scandalized mainsail and jib. The rest of her canvas was stowed.

The youthful helmsman, happening to glance astern, caught sight of the approaching submarine. His lethargy vanished, and at his shout of alarm the rest of the crew came hurriedly on deck—a weather-beaten old man and a tall stripling of about twenty years of age.

With her pair of for'ard guns manned and trained, for even the most harmless-looking smack might prove to be a potential enemy, R19, taking care to avoid the line of nets, ran within hailing distance of the Swede.

"*Stor Afan* ahoy! I want you to take two men aboard you," hailed the Hon. Derek in German.

The skipper of the boat shouted something unintelligible in reply, and shook his head in a way that suggested helpless ignorance.

Stockdale repeated his request with a like result. The second hand, however, held up a basket of fish.

"Evidently a bribe," remarked Mr. Macquare. "They don't understand Hun lingo, sir."

"So much the better for us, then," rejoined the Hon. Derek. "It's a good thing we are not displaying our ensign; they'll take us for a strafed U-boat, and when they make harbour they'll report to that effect. It will help to throw the Huns off the scent."

Greatly to the consternation of the Swedes, R19 was adroitly manoeuvred alongside the *Stor Afan*, the crew of the latter making fast the ropes thrown them with the utmost alacrity. It was not until they saw the still-unconscious form of the German bluejacket being hoisted through the torpedo hatchway that anxiety gave place to sympathetic attention.

As carefully as possible the Hun was transhipped to the deck of the fishing-boat and taken thence to the little cabin. The spy, Mindiggle, was next handed over. His appearance was greeted with renewed apprehension on the part of the Swedes, which was not to be wondered at, for he presented a gruesome spectacle, notwithstanding the Hon. Derek's precaution of keeping him under the influence of morphia.

Gibbering and foaming at the mouth, Mindiggle was led to the forepeak, and, with the battening down of the hatchway, the spy passed from Fordyce's view for the last time.

"I don't know whether we are acting up to the principles of the cultured Hun," remarked the Hon. Derek as he gave the old skipper a handful of silver roubles.

The Swede took them with obvious hesitation, and pointed towards the invisible German shore.

"No, no!" exclaimed the Lieutenant-Commander, shaking his head. "Not Deutschland—Sverige. That's one result of being a philatelist, Macquare," he added parenthetically.

"The old boy evidently understands you, sir," remarked the Lieutenant. "He didn't seem at all chirpy at the prospect of being ordered to Germany."

Casting off, the submarine passed across the bows of the *Stor Afan*, and, steadying on her helm, resumed her former course, while the fishing-boat, when last seen, was observed to be hauling in her nets and standing towards the Swedish shore.

Lieutenant-Commander Stockdale had barely finished his belated lunch when it was reported to him that Kapitan-Leutnant von Hoppner urgently desired an interview.

"Does he, by Jove!" exclaimed the Hon. Derek. "'Urgently desires'—I like that. I'll send for him when I'm ready."

It was the Sub's trick with Mr. Macquare, but the Lieutenant-Commander sent a message requesting Fordyce to come to his cabin. Then, having set the log-book within hand's reach, and slipped a marker between the pages relating to R19's passage through the Sound, the Hon. Derek signified that he was agreeable to receive Kapitan-Leutnant von Hoppner in his cabin.

The prisoner appeared under the charge of two petty officers. He was in uniform, his saturated clothes having been dried; he had carefully upturned the ends of his bristling

moustache and brushed back his yellow hair from his beetling forehead.

The Hon. Derek rose to meet his involuntary guest, taking no notice of the fact that von Hoppner bore himself more like victor than vanquished.

"Well, Kapitan-Leutnant, for what do you wish to see me?" asked Stockdale, courteously offering the Hun the best chair in the sparely-furnished cabin.

"I wish to know," replied von Hoppner, "what you have done with the man who was brought on board this vessel with me?"

"Quite a thoughtful request," commented the Hon. Derek. "Naturally any officer worthy of the name would be anxious concerning the welfare of his subordinates. (And you kicked up a shindy because the poor blighter was told off in your precious company," mentally added Stockdale.)

The German inclined his head. He was too thick-skinned and puffed up with arrogance to detect the faint tinge of caustic wit in the British officer's words.

"As a matter of fact," continued the Lieutenant-Commander, "the man was seriously wounded, as you are doubtless aware. Without proper medical attention his life would be threatened by remaining in the closed compartment of a submarine, so I took what I consider to be the most humane course possible and set him on board a Swedish craft."

"You set him on board a Swedish craft!" repeated von Hoppner. "I do not understand."

"I made a plain statement," said the Hon. Derek. "If I can elucidate matters——"

"I thought you were bound either for Stockholm or Carlsrona," interrupted the German.

It was the Hon. Derek's turn to express astonishment.

"What made you think so?" he asked.

"Because," replied von Hoppner insolently, "you have shot your bolt, Englishman. You are trapped. All the entrances to the Baltic are closely guarded. Escape that way is impossible. Nor can you hope to find shelter in Russian ports, for Russia is now under the heel of Germany. Therefore, no other course remains for you but to be interned in a Swedish port until Germany wins the war and decides what is to be done with you."

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed the Hon Derek, his brows clouding ominously. Fordyce had seen his superior officer look like that once before. Von Hoppner, too, noticed the change. He felt sorry he had spoken. "Oh, indeed; *you* are mistaken, Herr Kapitan-Leutnant. This vessel came through your mine-fields and she'll make her way out—or bust. Do you understand that?"

"Then I demand to be set on shore on parole in a neutral country," protested the Hun vehemently.

"You may demand," retorted Stockdale composedly. "That is as far as it gets. What will happen is that you will be taken through your precious mine-field—recollect, Germany mined Danish territorial waters in flagrant defiance of international law—in His Majesty's Submarine R19. Have I made myself perfectly clear?"

Von Hoppner's arrogance dropped from him like a cloak. He implored, raved, whined, and attempted to browbeat his captor, finally cowering with his face hidden in his hands. Fordyce felt almost certain that the fellow was sobbing in an agony of terror.

"This display of feelings will not help matters," continued the Hon. Derek sternly. "I can admire a brave man even if he be an enemy. Your anxiety on the part of your wounded seaman is, I know, merely a subterfuge, else for what reason did you object to his presence? One other point, Herr von Hoppner. I see that you are the possessor of l'Ordre pour le Mérite. Was that for services rendered whilst you were acting commandant of the prison-camp at Neu Strelitz?"

"What do you know of Neu Strelitz?" enquired the Hun falteringly.

"Enough," replied the Hon. Derek briefly. "Under your orders British bluejackets, prisoners of war, were vilely treated. However, you have not answered my question concerning your decoration. You refuse to answer? Perhaps, as you have already told my Sub-Lieutenant here, you object to tedious repetition. Let me inform you, sir, that you took too much for granted when you claimed the destruction of a

British submersible cruiser on the night of the 9th of ——. Be pleased to listen while I read you an extract from the log. I will afterwards let you inspect the writing in case you have any suspicion that the log has been 'cooked'. That's not done in the British navy, you know."

Slowly and distinctly Stockdale translated the passages relating to R19's escape from the toil of nets. The Hun's face grew grey from horrified amazement. The thought of the ridicule that the revelation would produce should the true facts become known in Germany appalled him.

"You will not destroy my reputation, Herr Kapitan Stockdale?" he asked brokenly.

The Hon. Derek shut his log-book with a snap. "The British navy is based upon long and honourable traditions. One of them, by no means the least, is that its officers are *both officers and gentlemen!*"

CHAPTER XXXIII

Good-bye to the Baltic!

Four days later R19 drew within sight of the heavily-mined Sound. Judging by the demeanour of the ship's company, the possibility of facing immediate danger left them remarkably apathetic.

"Reminds me of a pack of youngsters robbing an orchard, knowing that the farmer and his bull-dog are somewhere on the lookout," observed Mr. Macquare. "They've had a rousing time while it lasted, and now they've made up their minds to take what comes, only they'd rather not meet the farmer if it could be avoided."

"How's von Hoppner taking it?" enquired the Hon. Derek.

"Badly," replied the Lieutenant. "If ever a man had the 'jumps' 'tis he. Should we make a home port, sir, we'll have a lunatic with us, despite your efforts to get rid of one. He even offered to impart information concerning the mine-field."

"And what did you say to that?" asked the Lieutenant-Commander.

"I couldn't choke him off on my own responsibility," answered Mr. Macquare.

The Hon. Derek pondered for a few moments. In the interests of all on board the recreant's information might be of enormous value. Then he shook his head.

"I'll turn it down, Macquare. If we are to win through it will be off our own bat. Unless the steamer track has been altered recently we stand a fighting chance. Tonight's the night, Mr. Macquare."

Taking elaborate cross-bearings while daylight lasted, R19 sounded, remaining at the bottom until midnight. On reappearing on the surface the submarine, ready for diving at ten seconds' notice, forged softly ahead, conned by the

Lieutenant-Commander and Fordyce from the platform without the conning-tower.

It was hardly an ideal night for the undertaking. A thick haze enveloped everything beyond a radius of fifty yards. Even the bows of the vessel were indistinguishable from the mingling blur of the sea and fog. A slightly longer range of visibility would have been better, as the submarine would have been able to spot and avoid the more conspicuous outlines of a patrol-boat or destroyer before the latter could sight the low-lying hull of her foe.

It was an intricate piece of navigation by dead reckoning and of the "hit or miss" order. From the after-end of the navigation platform trailed a log-line, the movements of the luminous hand on the dial being carefully watched by Petty Officer Chalmers. As an additional precaution, the striking-gong of the recording mechanism had been silenced.

The log gave the "distance run", the reading being checked by independent calculations based upon the revolutions of the propellers. For directing, R19 had to depend solely upon a compass course, since the mist made it impossible to pick up shore bearings, even if these were visible at night.

After an hour of high-tensioned suspense the Sub made his way aft to the Petty Officer at the log indicator.

"How goes it?" he whispered.

"Close on, sir," was the equally cautious reply.

"I thought so," agreed Fordyce. "Good enough."

"We're over Position A, sir," he reported.

"Or thereabouts," added the Hon. Derek under his breath. "Starboard eight, Quartermaster."

Round swung the deeply-submersed hull of the submarine to settle on her new course—the awkward turn in the channel through the mine-field. Already the netted area that had all but finished R19's career on her outward voyage was left astern.

After a comparatively short run the order was given to port helm. R19 had negotiated the awkward bend in the cleared channel, and a straight run northwards would see her beyond the limits of the mine-field.

Suddenly, at a distance of about forty fathoms astern, and slightly on the starboard quarter, a column of water leapt two hundred feet or more into the misty air, accompanied by a roar like the concentrated peals of a dozen thunderclaps. The next instant Fordyce, almost capsized by the rush of displaced air, was knee-deep in water.

Rolling sluggishly, R19 shook herself clear of the turbulent swirl while the Quarter-master promptly steadied her on her helm.

The Lieutenant-Commander glanced at his subordinate officer.

"Narrow squeak that, Fordyce," he remarked. "What's Chalmers doing? By Jove, we cut that corner pretty closely!"

The Sub made his way to the after-end of the raised platform, where the petty officer was standing as rigidly as a statue.

"All right there, Chalmers?"

"All right, sir," replied the imperturbable petty officer. "Only that blessed log's gone to blazes."

He held up a coiled length of log-line as a visible corroboration to his statement. The cause of the explosion was now revealed. In turning, R19 had passed perilously close to an anchored mine, while the log, towing astern, described a wider arc than that of the submarine, and also caused a reduction of speed of the revolving metal cylinder. The depth to which the log sinks varies inversely with the speed of the towing vessel. So in "cutting the corner" the trailing log descended sufficiently to come in contact with one of the horns of the submerged mine.

It was a blessing in disguise, for the explosion gave the Hon. Derek a clue as to his position, and a slight alteration of helm was sufficient to bring R19 approximately in the centre of the channel. Owing to the fog, none of the hostile patrol-boats risked making a dash between the mines, although away to the south'ard there were audible evidences of activity.

Another hour passed; then, with a partial lifting of the fog, the loom of the land could be discerned on either hand.

"White and red group flashes on the starboard beam, sir," reported the look-out, then: "Red and green occulting flashes on port bow, sir."

Raising his night-glasses, the Hon. Derek focused them first to starboard and then to port. Then he turned to the Sub.

"We're through, Mr. Fordyce," he remarked. "Those are the Malmo lights to starboard. Telegraph for full speed ahead, if you please. Good-bye to the Baltic!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

Home Again

It was fifteen miles to the nor'ard of the Skaw in broad daylight. R19 was running awash in a perfectly calm sea. Sub-Lieutenant Fordyce, keeping a tramp under observation, turned to the Quartermaster.

"Starboard a couple of points, Quarter-master," he ordered. "I want to have a closer look at that ship. Dash it all," he soliloquized, "the old tub seems strangely familiar!"

Evidently the vessel in question did not evince any desire to accept the submarine's advances, for she, too, altered helm.

"What is it?" enquired the Lieutenant-Commander, who at that moment emerged from the conning-tower.

"A tramp under Swedish colours, sir," reported the Sub. "Strange thing, she has a gun mounted for'ard. Unless I'm much mistaken we've met her before to-day."

An order from the Lieutenant-Commander brought the guns' crews on deck. The for'ard quick-firers were raised from their "houses" and manned, while, increasing speed, R19 was soon within hailing distance.

"What ship is that?" enquired the Hon. Derek in English.

"*Ryan-Berg*, of Malmo," was the reply. "You our colour painted on side see."

"I'm not blind—only sceptical," retorted the Lieutenant-Commander. "Heave-to; I'll send a boat."

While the tramp was losing way the submarine flung about, taking up a position on the vessel's starboard quarter, and on a parallel course.

On the bluff counter of the tramp appeared the words: "*Ryan-Berg—Malmo*", but at a short distance it was quite evident that the name was painted on a strip of canvas.

"That's good enough, Mr. Fordyce," remarked the Hon. Derek grimly.

"And what's more, sir," added the Sub, "she's an old friend, the *Talisman*, of Goole. She missed us at point-blank

range on one occasion."

"I recollect," agreed the Lieutenant-Commander, "and we pumped out a gallon of lubricating-oil just to encourage her misguided but praiseworthy skipper. Carry on, Mr. Fordyce."

Quickly the boarding-party tumbled into the boat and rowed off to the tramp. Revolver in hand, Fordyce gained her deck, to be greeted by half a dozen Teutons in very motley garb.

"The game's up," exclaimed Fordyce. "We are not bluffed by fresh paint and a canvas name-board."

The prize crew were ordered below, while the former master and a dozen hands were released from captivity.

"You never know your luck," exclaimed the rightful skipper of the *Talisman*, a bluff, grey-haired salt of the burly, breezy type. "I expected to find myself in a German prison-camp within the next thirty-six hours. A light cruiser nabbed us four miles outside Christiansand harbour. They clapped us under hatches and put a prize crew on board, and a rascally set they are."

"They treated you decently?"

"Not so bad," replied the "old man", "until they found I had an Admiralty certificate for sinking a U-boat. Blew her to bits at fifty yards. Not a doubt about it; there was oil enough to spread over a couple of hundred yards."

"And when did that occur?" asked Fordyce.

The master of the *Talisman* gave the date.

"The swine tore up my certificate," he added bitterly. "I suppose the Admiralty will give me a duplicate?"

"I should imagine so," replied Fordyce. "Excuse me, but time is precious. I must ask instructions from my commanding officer."

The Hon. Derek, upon being informed of the state of affairs, ordered Fordyce and four seaman to remain on board the prize.

"We'll stand by you," he added. "I suppose there's enough coal left in her bunkers to carry her home?"

"I'll enquire, sir. By the by, her master has or had a certificate presented him by the Admiralty for having fired at us. Luckily he missed."

"You didn't enlighten him, I hope?" asked the Hon. Derek anxiously.

"Oh no, sir!"

"That's good. Carry on—yes, certainly, take Flirt with you. And good luck!"

* * * * *

"So that dog's turned up again," observed Mr. Fordyce, senior, when a taxi deposited Noel, Flirt, and a portmanteau

outside the Sub's paternal home, and informal but warm greetings had been exchanged. "I thought she was lost."

"I took her for a cruise for the benefit of her health, Pater," said his irrepressible offspring.

"Benefit of her health indeed," re-echoed Mr. Fordyce. "And, pray, is she better for the change? I was under the impression that she was far too high spirited before. I hope to goodness, Noel, that there will be no repetition of the Councillor Mindiggle business."

"I'll answer for that, Pater," replied the Sub. "She won't nip him again."

"You seem jolly sure of it," rejoined Mr. Fordyce. "If she does she'll have to be des——"

A dinner gong sounded, and Noel linked arms with his somewhat biased parent and led him into the dining-room.

"I'm awfully peckish, Pater," he remarked.

"Then set to," suggested Mr. Fordyce. "Well, what have you been doing with yourself?"

When at length Noel finished his yarn on this occasion he was more communicative as to his adventures than on former occasions—Mr. Fordyce called to Flirt, who was contentedly coiled up on the hearth-rug.

"Come here, little girl!" he exclaimed. "By Jove, you're a brick! I'll take back all I said of you. Dash it all, I'd give you

a biscuit but for my Lord Rhondda!"

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