

CHAPTER I

THE BIG GUNS GO OFF

THE Lord Paramount was able to give exactly fifty-three minutes of thought altogether to the threatened Canadian defection before he made a decision. There was one sustained stretch of rather under thirty minutes, before he got up on the morning after he had learnt of this breach on the imperial front; the other twenty-three-odd minutes were in scraps, two or three at a time. There were also some minutes of overlap with the kindred questions of Australia and South Africa. His decision was to take a spirited line both with Canada and the United States.

The truth is that in this matter and every matter with which he dealt he did not think things out in the least. Men of action do not think things out. They cannot. Events are too nimble for them. They may pause at times and seem to think, but all they do in fact is to register the effective sum of such ideas as they had accumulated before they became men of action. Like most Englishmen of his type and culture, the Lord Paramount had long allowed a certain resentment against American success to fester in his mind. He had long restrained a craving to behave with spirit towards

THE AUTOCRACY OF MR. PARHAM

America. Just to show America. In a crisis this was bound to find release.

He resolved to make an immense display of naval force and throw the battle fleet and indeed all the naval forces available across the Atlantic to Halifax, unannounced. It was to be like a queen's move in chess, a move right across the board, bold and dangerous, to create a new situation. Suddenly this awe-inspiring array, with unknown orders and unrevealed intentions, would loom up from nothingness upon the coast of Nova Scotia. This rendezvous was to be approached from a northeasterly direction so as to avoid the liner routes and create an effect of complete surprise. It was to be a blow at the nervous equilibrium of the American continent.

A powerful squadron would enter the Gulf of St. Lawrence and detach an array of small craft to steam up to Ottawa, while the main fleet, with its multitudinous swarming screen of destroyers, torpedo craft and aeroplanes was to spread out in a great curve eastward from Cape Sable, a mighty naval crescent within striking distance of New York. When these manœuvres were completed the outgoing and incoming liners to New York, Boston, and Halifax need never be out of sight of a British warship or so, cruising ready for action, for nearly a thousand miles. The battleships and battle cruisers were to be instructed to make themselves conspicuous and to hold up and impress shipping. The moral effect on both Canada and the United States could not fail to be immense. More than

THE BIG GUNS GO OFF

half the American fleet, the Lord Paramount understood, was in the Pacific based on San Francisco, vis-à-vis to Japan; many ships were reported in dock, and the preponderance of British strength therefore would be obvious to the crudest intelligence. Meanwhile the exchange of views with Washington was to be protracted in every possible way until the display of force could be made.

It took, he found, just forty-two minutes more of the Lord Paramount's time to launch the cardinal orders for this stupendous gesture. Once more the unthinking urgency with which the crowning decisions in history must be made impressed itself upon his mind. The acts of history, he realized, are but the abrupt and hazardous confirmation of the vague balance of preceding thought.

A multitude of other matters were pressing upon his attention. All the while he was full of unanswered criticisms of the thing he was doing. But there was no time at all to weigh the possibilities of failure in this attempt to browbeat the New World. It seemed the plain and only way of meeting and checking the development of the American threat and so bringing the ambiguous hesitations of the European Powers to an end. He dismissed some lurking doubts and transferred his attentions to the advantages and difficulties of accepting a loan of Japanese troops for service in India. That was the next most urgent thing before him. Bengal was manifestly rotten with non-co-operation and local insurrectionary movements;

THE AUTOCRACY OF MR. PARHAM

a systematic wrecking campaign was doing much to disorder railway communications, and the Russo-Afghan offensive was developing an unexpected strength. He realized that he had not been properly informed about the state of affairs in India.

It was impossible to carry out the orders of the Lord Paramount as swiftly as he had hoped. The Admiralty seemed to have had ideas of its own about the wisdom of entirely denuding the British coasts, and with many ships a certain unpreparedness necessitated delays. The Admiralty has long been a power within a power in the Empire, and the Lord Paramount realized this as a thing he had known and forgotten.

It was three days before the Grand Fleet was fairly under way across the Atlantic. It included the *Rodney*, the *Royal Sovereign*, and three other ships of that class, the *Barham*, *Warspite*, *Malaya*, and two other battleships, the *Hood* and *Renown* and another battle cruiser and the aircraft carriers, *Heroic*, *Courageous*, and *Glorious*. A screen of destroyers and scouting light cruisers had preceded it and covered its left wing.

The first division of the minor flotilla coming up from Plymouth had started twelve hours ahead of the capital ships. These latter converged from north and south of the British Isles to a chosen rendezvous south of Cape Farewell.

The American navy, he learnt in the course of another day, was already in movement; it was unexpectedly prompt and in unexpected strength.

THE BIG GUNS GO OFF

The Lord Paramount was presently informed that a force of unknown composition, but which was stated to include the *Colorado*, the *West Virginia*, and at least ten other battleships, was assembling between the Azores and the Gulf of Mexico and steaming northward as if to intercept the British fleet before it reached the Canadian coast. This was a much more powerful assembly of ships than he had supposed possible when first he decided on his queen's move. But that move was now past recall.

Something of the chess-board quality hung over the North Atlantic for the next three days. The hostile fleets were in wireless communication within thirty-six hours of the Lord Paramount's decision, and on a chart of the Atlantic in an outer room flagged pins and memoranda kept him substantially aware of the state of the game.

Neither government was anxious to excite public feeling by too explicit information of these portentous manœuvres. Neither, as a matter of fact, admitted any official cognizance of these naval movements for three days. Nothing was communicated to the Press, and all inquiries were stifled. The American President seemed to have been engaged in preparing some sort of declaration or manifesto that would be almost but not quite an ultimatum. Steadily these great forces approached each other, and still the two governments assumed that some eleventh-hour miracle would avert a collision.

A little after midnight on May 9th the fringes

THE AUTOCRACY OF MR. PARHAM

of the fleets were within sight of each other's flares and searchlights. Both forces were steaming slowly and using searchlights freely. Movement had to be discreet. There was an unusual quantity of ice coming south this year and a growing tendency to fog as Newfoundland was approached. Small banks of fog caused perplexing disappearances and reappearances. The night was still and a little overcast, the sea almost calm, and the flickering reflections on the clouds to the south were the first visible intimation the British had of the closeness of the Americans. Wireless communication was going on between the admirals, but there were no other exchanges between the two fleets, though the air was full of the cipher reports and orders of each side.

Each fleet was showing lights; peace conditions were still assumed, and survivors from the battle describe that night scene as curiously and impressively unwarlike. One heard the throbbing of engines, the swish and swirl of the waters about the ships, and the rhythmic fluctuations in the whir of the aeroplanes above, but little else. There was hardly any talk, the witnesses agree. A sort of awe, a sense of the close company of Fate upon that westward course kept men silent. They stood still on the decks and watched the pallid searchlights wander to and fro, to pick out and question this or that destroyer or cruiser, or to scrutinize some quietly drifting streak of fog. Some illuminated ship would stand out under a searchlight beam, white and distinct, and then, save for a light

THE BIG GUNS GO OFF

or so, drop back into the darkness. Then eyes would go southward to the distant flickerings of the American fleet, still out of sight below the horizon.

Like all naval encounters, the history of these fatal hours before the Battle of the North Atlantic remains inextricably confused. Here again the time factor is so short that it is almost impossible to establish a correct sequence of events. What did such and such commander know when he gave this or that order? Was this or that message ever received? It is clear that the American fleet was still assembling and coming round in a great curve as it did so to the south of the British forces. These latter were now steaming south-westward towards Halifax. The American Admiral, Semple, was coming into parallelism with the British course. He agreed by wireless not to cross a definite line before sunrise; the two fleets would steam side by side until daylight with at least five miles of water between them. Then he took upon himself to inform Sir Hector Greig, the British commander-in-chief, of the general nature of his instructions.

"My instructions," said his message, "are to patrol the North Atlantic and to take whatever steps are necessary to prevent any possibility of hostile action against Canada or the United States of America in North American waters."

Sir Hector replied: "My instructions are to patrol the seas between Great Britain and Canada, to base myself upon Halifax and send light craft up the St. Lawrence River."

THE AUTOCRACY OF MR. PARHAM

Each referred the situation back to his own government. The Lord Paramount was awakened at dawn and sat in his white silk pyjamas, drinking a cup of tea and contemplating the situation.

"Nothing must actually happen," he said. "Greig must not fire a shot unless he is fired at. He had better keep on his present course. . . . The Americans seem to be hesitating. . . ."

It was still night at Washington, and the American President had never gone to bed.

"Are the British in great force?" he asked.

Nobody knew the strength of the British.

"This cheap Mussolini at Westminster is putting us up some! I don't see why we should climb down. How the devil is *either* party to climb down? Is there no way out?"

"Is there no way out?" asked the Lord Paramount, neglecting his tea.

"Battleships are made for battles, I suppose," said someone at Washington.

"Aw—don't talk that stuff!" said the President. His intonation strangely enough was exactly what a scholarly imperialist would expect it to be. "We made 'em because we had the Goddamned experts on our hands. Wish to hell we hadn't come in on this."

An ingenious person at Washington was suggesting that if the American fleet wheeled about to the south and turned eastward towards Great Britain, Greig would either have to follow with all his forces, split his fleet, or leave England exposed.

"That will just repeat the situation off

THE BIG GUNS GO OFF

Ireland," said the President.

Until it was too late some hitch in his mind prevented him from realizing that every hour of delay opened a score of chances for peace. A sleepless night had left him fagged and unendurably impatient. "We can't have the two fleets steaming to and from across the Atlantic and not firing a gun. Ludicrous. No. When we built a fleet we meant it to be a fleet. And here it is being a fleet—and a fleet it's got to be—and behave accordingly. We've got to have the situation settled out here now. We've got to end this agony. Semple must keep on. How long can they keep on parallel before anything happens?"

A brisk young secretary went to inquire.

Meanwhile the Lord Paramount had got into a warm dressing gown and was sketching out the first draft of a brilliant memorandum to the President. It was to be conciliatory in tone, but it was to be firm in substance. It was to take up the whole unsettled question of the freedom of the seas in a fresh and masterful manner. The room was flooded with sunlight, and in a patch of that clear gay brightness on his table were some fresh lilies of the valley, put there by the forethought of Mrs. Pinchot. She had been sent for to put the memorandum in order as soon as his pencil notes were ready.

Almost simultaneously messengers of disaster came to both these men.

The brisk young secretary returned to the President.

THE AUTOCRACY OF MR. PARHAM

"Well," said the President, "how long can we carry on before we see 'em?"

"Sir," said the brisk young secretary, with such emotion in his voice that the President looked up and stared at him.

"Ugh!" said the President and clutched his hands as if he prayed, for he guessed what that white-faced young man had to tell.

"The *Colorado*," said the young man. "Blown out of the water. We've sunk a great battleship. . . ."

It was Hereward Jackson broke the news to the Lord Paramount.

His face, too, lit with a sort of funereal excitement, told its message.

"Battle!" he gasped. "We've lost the *Rodney*. . . ."

For some moments the consciousness of the Lord Paramount struggled against this realization. "I am dreaming," he said.

But if so the dream would not break, and the tale of the disaster began to unfold before him, irreversibly and mercilessly, as if it were history already written. News continued to come from the fleet, but there was no further sign that the direction and inquiries he continued to send out were ever received and decoded.

The grey dawn over the dark Atlantic waters had discovered the two fleets within full view of each other and with a lane of vacant water perhaps three miles broad between them. The intention of the two admirals had been to have a five-mile





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THE BIG GUNS GO OFF

lane, but either there had been some error in reckoning on one side or the other, or else there had been encroachment by the minor craft. Ahead, under the skirts of the flying night were strata of fog which veiled the sea to the west. Each admiral, though still hopeful of peace, had spent every moment since the fleets became aware of one another in urgent preparation for action. The battleships on either side were steaming line ahead with rather more than sufficient space to manoeuvre between them. The *Colorado* was heading the American line followed by the *Maryland* and *West Virginia*; then, a little nearer the British, the *Idaho*, *Mississippi*, and *New Mexico* followed, and after them the *California* and at least seven other battleships. These three groups were all prepared to wheel round into a battle formation of three columns. In each case the battle cruisers were following the battleships; the *Hood* was the tail ship of the British, and the aircraft ships were steaming under cover of the battleships on the outer side. Beyond them were light-cruiser squadrons. The two main lines of warships were perhaps a little more than five miles apart. Nearer in were the flotillas of destroyers and special torpedo craft held like hounds on a leash and ready at an instant's signal to swing round, rush across the intervening space, and destroy or perish. Submarines were present on the outer verge of the fleets awaiting instructions. The British seem also to have had special mine layers in reserve for their contemplated operations on the American coast.

THE AUTOCRACY OF MR. PARHAM

The aeroplane carriers were tensely ready to launch their air squadrons and made a second line behind the screen of battleships and battle cruisers.

As the light increased, the opaque bank of fog ahead began to break up into fluffy masses and reveal something blue and huge beyond. Shapes appeared hunched like the backs of monstrous beasts, at first dark blue, and then with shining streaks that presently began to glitter. A line of icebergs, tailing one after the other in receding symmetry, lay athwart the course of the British fleet and not four miles from the head of that great column. They emerged from the fog garment like a third Armada, crossing the British path and hostile to the British. It was as if the spirit of the Arctic had intervened on the American side. They made the advancing leviathans look like little ships. To the British battle fleet they were suddenly as plain and menacing as a line of cliffs, but it is doubtful whether Admiral Semple ever knew of their existence.

Perhaps Greig should have informed Semple of this unexpected obstacle. Perhaps there should have been a discussion. It is so easy to sit in a study and weigh possibilities and probabilities and emerge with the clearest demonstration of the right thing he ought to have done. What he actually did was to issue a general order to the fleet to change direction two points to the south. He probably never realized that these huge ice masses were almost invisible to the American fleet and that his change of direction was certain to be

THE BIG GUNS GO OFF

misunderstood. It must have seemed perfectly reasonable to him that the Americans should make a corresponding swerve. So far it had been for him to choose the direction. To the American admiral, on the other hand, quite unaware of the ice ahead, this manœuvre could have borne only one interpretation. The British, he thought, were swinging round to fight.

Perhaps he too should have attempted a further parley. What he did was to fire a shot from one of his six-pounders across the bows of the *Rodney*. Then he paused as if interrogatively.

Just one small intense flash of light, pricking through the cold tones of the dawn, the little hesitating puff of dense whirling smoke just beginning to unfold, the thud of the gun—and then that pause. It was as if a little thing had occurred and nothing else had altered.

Each admiral must have been torn most abominably between the desire to arrest a conflict and the urgent necessity of issuing final orders for attack. It is good to have the best of arguments, but if battle is to ensue it is of supreme importance to strike the first blow. No one now will ever know if at this stage there was any further attempt on the part of either admiral to say anything, one to the other.

All the survivors speak of that pause, but no one seems able to say whether it lasted for seconds or minutes. For some appreciable length of time, at any rate, these two arrays of gigantic war machines converged upon each other without another shot.

THE AUTOCRACY OF MR. PARHAM

For the most part the doomed thousands of their crews must have been in a mood of grim horror at the stupendous thing they were doing.

Who knows? There may have been an exaltation. The very guns seemed to sniff the situation incredulously with their lifted snouts. With a whir the first aeroplanes took the air and rose to swoop. Then the *Maryland* let fly at the two most advanced of the British destroyers with all her available smaller guns and simultaneously in a rippling fringe of flashes both lines exploded in such an outbreak of thudding and crashing gunfire as this planet had never witnessed before.

The inevitable had arrived. America and Britain had prepared for this event for ten long years; had declared it could never happen and had prepared for it incessantly. The sporting and competitive instincts of the race had been inflamed in every possible way to develop a perverted and shuddering impulse to this conflict. Yet there may have been an element of amazement still, even in the last moments of Greig and Semple. Imagination fails before those last moments, whether it was rending, cutting, or crushing metal, jetting steam or swirling water that seized and smashed and stamped or scalded the life out of their final astonishment.

The *Colorado* had caught the convergent force of the *Rodney* and *Royal Sovereign*; she was hit by their simultaneous salvoes; her armour must have been penetrated at some vital spot, and she vanished in a sheet of flame that roared up to

THE BIG GUNS GO OFF

heaven and changed into a vast pillar of smoke. The *Rodney*, her chief antagonist, shared her ill luck. The sixteen-inch guns of the *Colorado* and *Maryland* had ripped her behind, something had happened to her steering gear; without any loss of speed she swept round in a curve, and the *Royal Sovereign*, plastered and apparently blinded by the second salvos of the *Maryland*, struck her amidships with a stupendous crash. An air torpedo, some witnesses declare, completed her disaster. But that is doubtful. The American aircraft certainly got into action very smartly, but not so quickly as all that. The *Rodney*, say eye-witnesses, seemed to sit down into the water and then to tilt up, stern down, her futile gun turrets towering high over the *Royal Sovereign*, and her men falling from her decks in a shower as she turned over and plunged into the deeps just clear of the latter ship.

A huge upheaval of steaming water lifted the *Royal Sovereign* by the bows and thrust her aside as though she were a child's toy. Her upreared bows revealed the injuries she had received in the collision. As she pitched and roiled over the ebullitions of the lost *Rodney*, the *Maryland* pounded her for the second time. Her bruised and battered gunners were undaunted. Almost immediately she replied with all her eight big guns, and continued to fight until suddenly she rolled over to follow the flagship to the abyss. Down the British line the *Warspite* was also in flames and the *Hood*, very badly ripped and torn by a concentration from the *Arizona*, *Oklahoma*, and *Nevada*, had had a

series of explosions. The *Idaho* also was already on fire.

So this monstrous battle began. After the first contact all appearance of an orderly control disappeared. To get into battle formation the main squadrons had to swing round so as to penetrate the enemy force, and so even this primary movement was never completed. Further combined tactical operations there were none. The rapid cessation of command is a necessary feature of modern marine fighting. The most ingenious facilities for adjusted movement become useless after the first impact. Controls are shot away, signalling becomes an absurdity, and the fight enters upon its main, its scrimmage phase, in which weight tells and anything may happen. The two lines of battleships, already broken into three main bunches, were now clashing into each other and using every gun, each ship seeking such targets as offered and doing its best by timely zigzagging to evade the torpedo attacks that came dashing out of the smoke and confusion. The minor craft fought their individual fights amidst the battleships, seeking opportunities to launch their torpedoes, and soon a swarm of aeroplanes released from the carriers were whirring headlong through the smoke and flames. The temperament and tradition of both navies disposed them for attack and in-fighting, and no record of shirking or surrender clouds the insane magnificence of that tragic opening.

Never before had the frightful power of modern guns been released at such close quarters. These

THE BIG GUNS GO OFF

big ships were fighting now at distances of two miles or less; some were in actual contact. Every shell told. For the first time in the twentieth century battleships were rammed. The *Royal Oak* ran down the *Tennessee*, the two ships meeting almost head on but with the advantage for the *Royal Oak*, and the *Valiant* was caught amidships by the *New Mexico*, which herself, as she prepared to back out of her victim, was rammed broadside on by the *Malaya*. All these three latter ships remained interlocked and rotating, fighting with their smaller armaments until they sank, and a desperate attempt to board the *New Mexico* was made from both British battleships. "Fire your guns as often as possible at the nearest enemy" had become the only effective order. "Let go your torpedo at the biggest enemy target."

The battle resolved itself slowly into a series of interlocked and yet separate adventures. Smoke, the smoke of the burning ships and of various smoke screens that had been released by hard-pressed units, darkened the sky and blocked out regions of black fog. A continuous roar of crashing explosions, wild eruptions of steam and water, flashes of incandescence and rushes of livid flame made a deafening obscurity through which the lesser craft felt their way blindly to destroy or be destroyed. As the sun rose in the heavens and a golden day shot its shafts into the smoke and flames the long line of the first battle was torn to huge warring fragments from which smoke and steam poured up to the zenith. The battleships

THE AUTOCRACY OF MR. PARHAM

and battle cruisers still in action had separated into groups; the *Queen Elizabeth*, the *Barham*, and the *Warspite*, which had got its fires under control, fought, for example, an isolated action with the *Pennsylvania* and the *Mississippi* round the still burning and sinking *Idaho*. The three British ships had pushed right through the American line, taking their antagonists with them as they did so, and this circling conflict drifted far to the south of the original encounter before its gunfire died away and the battered and broken combatants followed each other to the depths. The huge American aircraft carrier, the *Saratoga*, was involved in this solemn and monstrous dance of death; her decks were swept by a hurricane of fire, and she could no longer give any aid to her aeroplanes, but she made such remarkably good use of her eight-inch guns that she alone survived this conflict. She was one of the few big ships still afloat in the afternoon, and she had then nearly a thousand rescued men aboard of her. Most of the airmen, after discharging their torpedoes, circled high above the battle until their fuel gave out, and then they came down and were drowned. One or two got on to the icebergs. The *West Virginia*, thrusting to the west of the *Royal Sovereign* group, struck one of these icebergs and sank later. The *Revenge* and *Resolution*, frightfully damaged but still keeping afloat, found themselves towards midday cut off from the main fight by ice and were unable to re-engage.

After the first shock of the encounter between

THE BIG GUNS GO OFF

the giant ships the rôle of the destroyer flotillas became more and more important. They fought often in a black and suffocating fog and had to come to the closest quarters to tell friends from enemies. They carried on fierce battles among themselves and lost no chance of putting in a torpedo at any larger ship that came their way.

The torpedoes of the aircraft showed themselves particularly effective against the light cruisers. They were able to get above the darknesses of the battle and locate and identify the upper works of their quarries. They would swoop down out of the daylight unexpectedly, and no anti-aircraft guns were able to do anything against them. The *Nevada*, it is said, was sunk by a British submarine, but there is no other evidence of submarine successes in the fight. It is equally probable that she was destroyed by a floating mine—for, incredible as it seems, some floating mines were released by a British mine carrier.

No one watched that vast fight as a whole; no one noted how the simultaneous crashes of the first clash, that continuing fury of sound, weakened to a more spasmodic uproar. Here and there would be some stupendous welling up of smoke or steam, some blaze of flame, and then the fog would grow thin and drift aside. Imperceptibly the energy of the conflict ebbed. Guns were still firing, but now like the afterthoughts of a quarrel and like belated repartees. The reddish yellow veils of smoke thinned out and were torn apart. Wide spaces of slowly heaving sea littered with

THE AUTOCRACY OF MR. PARHAM

rocking débris were revealed. Ever and again some dark distorted bulk would vanish and leave a dirty eddy dotted with struggling sailors, that flattened out to a rotating oily smudge upon the water.

By three in the afternoon the battle was generally over. By half-past three a sort of truce had established itself, a truce of exhaustion. The American flag was still flying over a handful of battered shipping to the south-west, and the British remnant was in two groups, separated by that fatal line of icebergs. These great frozen masses drifted slowly across the area of the battle, glassy and iridescent in the brilliant daylight, with streams of water pouring down their flanks. On one of them were two grounded aeroplanes and at the water line they had for fenders a fringe of dead or dying men in life-belts, fragments of boats and such like battle flotsam.

This huge cold intervention was indubitably welcome to the now exhausted combatants. Neither side felt justified in renewing the conflict once it had broken off. There is no record who fired the last shot nor when it was fired.

And so the Battle of the North Atlantic came to its impotent conclusion. It had not been a battle in any decisive sense, but a collision, a stupendous and stupendously destructive cannonade. Fifty-two thousand men, selected and highly trained human beings in the prime of life, had been drowned, boiled to death, blown to pieces, crushed, smashed like flies under a hammer, or otherwise

THE BIG GUNS GO OFF

killed, and metallurgical and engineering products to the value of perhaps five hundred million pounds sterling and representing the toil and effort of millions of workers had been sent to the bottom of the sea. Two British battleships and three American were all in the way of capital ships that emerged afloat, and the losses of light cruisers and minor craft had been in equal or greater proportion. But, at any rate, they had done what they were made to do. The utmost human ingenuity had been devoted to making them the most perfect instruments conceivable for smashing and destroying, and they had achieved their destiny.

At last the wireless signals from home could penetrate to the minds of the weary and sickened combatants. They found themselves under orders to cease fire and make for the nearest base.

That was in fact what they were doing. The *Revenge* and the *Resolution* accompanied by the cruisers *Emerald* and *Enterprise* and a miscellaneous flotilla, all greatly damaged and in some cases sinking, were limping on their way to Halifax. The airplane carrier *Courageous*, with a retinue of seaplanes and an escort of seven destroyers had turned about to the Clyde. To the south the American survivors, in unknown force, were also obeying urgent wireless instructions to withdraw. Acting under directions from their respective admiralties, a number of the still fairly seaworthy craft, including the *Saratoga*, the *Effingham*, the *Frobisher*, the *Pensacola*, and the *Memphis*, all flying white flags above their colours,

THE AUTOCRACY OF MR. PARHAM

were engaged in salvage work among the flotsam of the battle. There was no cooperation in this work between the British and Americans. And no conflict. They went about their business almost sluggishly, in a mood of melancholy fatigue. Emotion was drained out of them. For a time chivalry and patriotism were equally extinct. There are tales of men weeping miserably and mechanically, but no other records of feeling. There were many small craft in a sinking condition to be assisted, and a certain number of boats and disabled seaplanes. There were men clinging to the abundant wreckage, and numbers of exhausted men and corpses still afloat.

The surviving admirals, captains, and commanders, as message after message was decoded, realized more and more plainly that there had been a great mistake. The battle had been fought in error, and they were to lose no time in breaking off and offering, as the British instructions had it, "every assistance possible to enemy craft in distress." It was a confusing change from the desperate gallantry of the morning.

There was some doubt as to the treatment of enemy men and materials thus salvaged, but ultimately they were dealt with as captures and prisoners of war. This led later to much bitter recrimination.

The comments of these various surviving admirals, captains, and commanders, all now fatigued and overwrought men, and many of them experiencing the smart and distress of new

THE BIG GUNS GO OFF

wounds, as they set their battered, crippled, and bloodstained ships to these concluding tasks, make no part of this narrative; nor need we dwell upon their possible reflections upon the purpose of life and the ways of destiny as they had been manifested that day. Many of them were simple men, and it is said that battle under modern conditions, when it does not altogether destroy or madden, produces in the survivors a sort of orgiastic cleansing of the nerves. What did they think? Perhaps they did not think, but just went on with their job in its new aspect.

It is to be noted, perhaps, that before nightfall some of the ships' crews on both sides were already beginning what was to prove an endless discussion, no doubt of supreme importance to mankind, which side could be said to have "won" the Battle of the North Atlantic. They had already begun to arrange and to collaborate in editing their overcharged and staggering memories. . . .

Amazement was going round the earth. Not only in London and New York, but wherever men were assembled in cities the news produced a monstrous perturbation. As night followed daylight round the planet an intense excitement kept the streets crowded and ablaze. Newspapers continued to print almost without intermission as fresh news came to hand, and the wireless organizations flooded the listening world with information and rumour. The British and Americans, it became clearer and clearer, had practically destroyed each other's fleets; they had wiped each

THE AUTOCRACY OF MR. PARHAM

other off the high seas. What would happen next, now that these two dominating sea powers were withdrawn from the international balance? The event was dreadful enough in itself, but the consequences that became apparent beyond it, consequences extraordinarily neglected hitherto, were out of all proportion more stupendous and menacing for mankind.