

CHAPTER IX.

To "No. 70 Berlin."

LEWIN RODWELL, as a powerful and well-informed secret agent, was no amateur.

After the old fisherman had left the close atmosphere of that little room, Rodwell seated himself on a rickety rush-bottomed chair before the sewing-machine stand, beside the bed, and by the bright light of the petrol table-lamp, carefully and with expert touch adjusted the tangle of wires and the polished brass instruments before him.

The manner in which he manipulated them showed him to be perfectly well acquainted with the due importance of their adjustment. With infinite care he examined the end of the cable, unscrewing it from its place, carefully scraping with his clasp-

knife the exposed copper wires protruding from the sheath of gutta percha and steel wire, and placing them each beneath the solid brass binding-screws upon the mahogany base.

"The silly old owl now knows that we won't stand any more nonsense from him," he muttered to himself, in German, as he did this. "It's an un-savoury thought that the old fool, in his silly patriotism, might blab to the police or the coastguard. Phew! If he did, things would become awkward—devilish awkward."

Then, settling himself before the instruments, he took from his inner pocket the long, bulky envelope, out of which he drew a sheet of closely-written paper which he spread out upon the little table before him. Afterwards, with methodical exactness, he took out a pencil and a memorandum-

block from his side-pocket, arranging them before him.

Again he examined the connections running into the big, heavy tapping-key, and then, grasping the ebonite knob of the latter, he ticked out dots and dashes in a manner which showed him to be an expert telegraphist.

"M. X. Q. Q." were the code-letters he sent. "M. X. Q. Q." he clicked out, once—twice—thrice. The call, in the German cable war-code, meant: "Are you ready to receive messages?"

He waited for a reply. But there was none. The cable that ran for three hundred miles, or so, beneath the black, storm-tossed waters of the North Sea, was silent.

"Curious!" he muttered to himself. "Stendel is generally on the alert. Why doesn't he answer?"

"M. X. Q. Q." he repeated with a quick, impatient touch. "M. X. Q. Q."

Then he waited, but in vain.

"Surely the cable, after the great cost to the Empire, has not broken down just at the very moment when we want it!" he exclaimed, speaking in German, as was his habit when excited.

Again he sent the urgent call beneath the waters by the only direct means of communication between Britain's soil and that of her bitter enemy.

But in Tom Small's stuffy little bedroom was a silence that seemed ominous. Outside could be heard the dull roar of the sea, the salt spray coming up almost to the door. But there was no answering click upon the instruments.

The electric current from the rows of batteries hidden in the cellar was sufficient, for he had tested it before he had touched the key.

"Tom," he shouted, summoning the old fisherman whom he had only a few moments before dismissed.

"Yes, sir," replied the old fellow, gruffly, as he stalked forward again, in his long, heavy sea-boots.

"The cable's broken down, I believe! What monkey-tricks have you been playing—eh?" he cried, angrily.

"None, sir. None, I assure you. Ted tested at five o'clock this evening, as usual, and got an acknowledgment. The line was quite all right then."

"Well, it isn't now," was Rodwell's rough answer, for he detected in the old man's face a secret gleaming satisfaction that no enemy message could be transmitted.

"I believe you're playing us false, Small!" cried Rodwell, his eyes flashing angrily. "By Gad! if you have dared to do so you'll pay dearly for it—I warn you both! Now confess!"

"I assure you, sir, that I haven't. I was in here when Ted tested, as he does each evening. All was working well then."

THE younger man, a tall, big-limbed, fair-haired toiler of the sea, in a fisherman's blouse of tanned canvas like his father, overhearing the conversation, entered the little room.

"It was all right at five, sir. I made a call, and got the answer."

"Are you sure it was answered—quite sure?" queried the man from London.

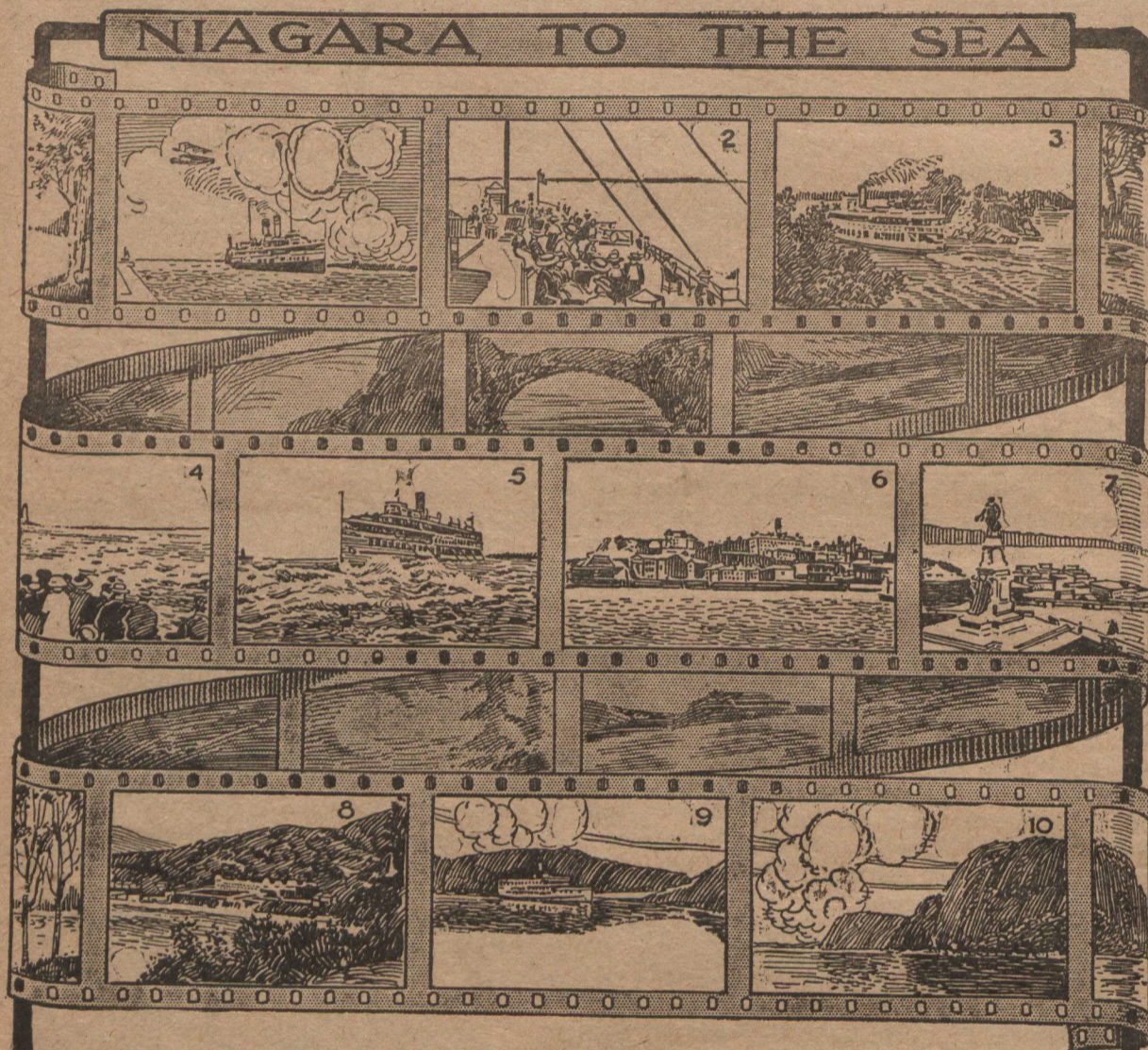
"Positive, sir."

"Then why in the name of your dear goddess Britannia, who thinks she rules the waves, can't I get a reply now?" demanded Rodwell, furiously.

"How can I tell, sir? I got signals—good strong signals."

"Very well. I'll try again. But remember that you and your father are bound up to us. And if you've played us false I shall see that you're both shot as spies. Remember you won't be the first. There's Shrimpton, up at Gateshead, Paulett at Glasgow, and half a dozen more in prison paying the penalty of all traitors to their country. The British public haven't yet heard of them. But they will before long—depend upon it. The thing was so simple. Germany, before the war, held out the bait for your good King-and-country English to swallow. That you English—or rather a section of you—will always swallow the money-bait we have known ever so long ago."

"Mr. Rodwell, you needn't tell us



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