

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOW WE PLUGGED UP ZEEBRUGGE HARBOUR.—II.

NOW let us follow the adventures of the block-ships. *Thetis* came first, steaming into a tornado of shell from the great batteries ashore. All her crew, save the handful who remained to steer her in, had by this time been taken off by motor launches. The remnant not only worked the ship, but managed to keep her four guns going. *Thetis* was to show the way to *Intrepid* and *Iphigenia*, which followed. She cleared the string of armed barges which lay at the tip of the Mole for the purpose of defending the channel, but had the hard luck to foul her propeller in a submarine net, and became practically unmanageable.

The shore batteries now began pounding her with an unceasing fire of shells. Finally, she bumped into a sandbank, edged off, and found the channel again; but she was still some hundreds of yards from the mouth of the canal, though in a sinking condition. She immediately signalled to the two following block-ships, and informed them on which side to pass her so as to reach the canal entrance. Then charges below the water line were blown off, and swift motor launches raced up to her and carried off her crew. Her losses were five killed and five wounded. The manner in which the three block-ships worked together was beyond all praise.

Intrepid, smoking like a volcano, and with all her guns blazing, steered straight into the canal. Behind her came *Iphigenia*, so blinded by *Intrepid's* smoke that she went a little wide, and rammed a dredge and barge that lay at the western arm of the canal. She managed to get clear, however, and entered the canal, pushing the barge before her. It was then that a shell hit the steam connections of her whistle, and the