

drowned all other sound up there in the mist.

In a few minutes the cable was wound up on the drum. Jacobs picked up the last foot or two of cable. The end was torn and broken; soaking wet. That might be mist. He put it to his lips, and tasted brine.

They flew in broad circles until dawn, and then sank down very carefully through the mist, and came to rest upon the calm sea. Porter stopped his engines. It took time to get accustomed to the silence, but presently they realized that the gun fire had ceased. Porter was exhausted and overwrought. He laid his head down upon the steering wheel, and Jacobs, with clumsy tenderness, threw an extra coat over him, then donning another himself, set about making some sort of tea-brew with a petrol lamp and a tin can. They had done it on Milford Haven, so why not in the Channel, with nothing between them and eternity but half an inch of teak and the momentary complaisance of Providence?

Before midday the sun made an end of the mist, but there was nothing to be seen from sea-level; therefore, determining to make for the coast of France, the two launched themselves into the air about noon. Before they had reached any great height, however, they made out a mass of floating wreckage, upon which appeared to be a group of men. They descended as a matter of course, hardly knowing whether to ask aid or to offer it, but on approaching the mass, which turned out to be half a dozen ship's rafts lashed together, with spars, a couple of boats, and a vast quantity of wooden cases, they found themselves covered by the rifles of a dozen German seamen. Even when he realized this, Porter did not think of trying to escape, for the situation seemed little less desperate for one party than for the other. He therefore signed to them for a rope, which was brought out to him in a canvas boat by a pair of men whose placid nonchalance conveyed the impression that if there was anything more ordinary than picking up an aeroplane in the Channel, it was to navigate the high seas on a mass of broken packing-cases.

Porter experienced his first qualm when, on going aboard the raft, he was greeted by a German officer who remarked in excellent English:

"I suppose you realize that you are my prisoner, and that your aeroplane is a prize of war? You must make no attempt to escape, for you will be shot if you do."

"Don't you think you are labouring the farce a little?" asked Porter. The German shrugged his shoulders.

"The Captain will see you in a minute; meanwhile, you may be seated."

Porter endeavoured to conceal his resentment by examining the raft more minutely. As his gaze fell upon a thing he had taken to be a jurr mast, his heart sank within him. He turned to Jacobs, who sat beside him on a spar.

"Jacobs, you are without exception the biggest fool I have ever met, and you can safely say the same of me. We ought to be gasfitters, Jacobs, or very small ironmongers, near Seven-oaks. I thought it was a mast, Jacobs."

Jacobs looked intently at the object in question.

"Good God! It's a periscope!"

"PRECISELY that. This platform—until the next storm carries it away, acts as deck to some cursed submarine, whose back and conning-tower are concealed by that mountain of packing-cases. Why didn't we see through it?"

"You don't look for periscopes on a wreck-raft."

"Exactly; we were just gulled, taken right in. And the gentleman with the keen moustache says he will shoot us if we try to escape. Jacobs, we ought to be shot; we

"Mr. Porter! Of all persons!"

ejaculated a gruff genial voice at his elbow.

"Herr Muller! Well, I'm . . ." The brother inventors were shaking hands before they knew it. They stared with interest at each other.

"I wish I had not captured you, Porter: I wish it was not war just now. I do not want to fight mit you already. You are a goot friend, und a good mechanic, but now, of course, I cannot let you go."

"It was a very easy capture; we came down to rescue you. Your disguise took us in completely." Porter spoke with a little suggestion of contempt in his voice.

"I feel what you say," replied the German. "I do not like deceptions no better as yourself; what you see here is what those naturalists call 'protective colouring.' I would be sunk twice a day otherwise. If a Cherman ship come along it would be goot, but none have I seen for three days already. There was a great schlacht mit big ships last night, but where I do not know. That was not my schlacht. I am left over from three days before. We were seven submarines and two small merchantmen, armed, trying to intercept your ships making for Channel ports, but we ourselves got intercepted. There was a great schlacht. A shell hit my propellers, and that or some other explosion strain my outer plates so bad that my submerger tanks start a leak, und fill so quick that not one of them can I empty, and so I sink to the bottom. There I remained till night."

"Well, when night came on, I cast off my emergency weight—a heavy, false keel of lead and iron, made to detach from within for such a case as this—and I come up shust like a bobble in spite of my tanks was full of water. That speaks good for the design as for the construction, eh, Herr Porter? You will appreciate that, eh?"

"All the ships were gone, but there was plenty of this stuff about." He indicated the shattered timber and cargo boxes. "So next morning I collected enough to make this covering. Several warships have passed me since then, but not close enough to torpedo at. Yesterday a big merchantman come too close as was goot for him, and I dorped him in the bow—a bad shot, but, you see, I cannot steer quick. He crawled so far as the English horizon, launched his boats, und sunk."

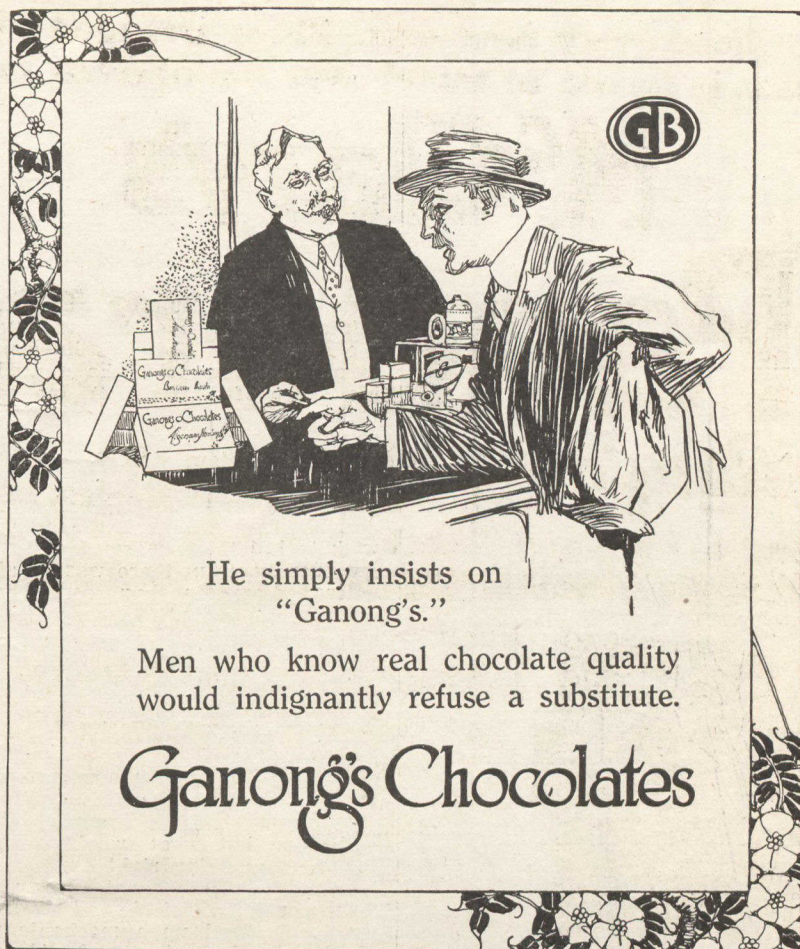
"THAT seems rather poor sport, doesn't it? She was coming probably to see if there were any poor beggars adrift."

"War is not sport, Herr Porter," replied Muller, unemotionally. "That is the mistake you English make. It is no more sport than is any other murderings, but when I must fight a murderer, will I not fight him mit murder; how else? If I put off my cloak of wreckage, I am helpless, for my propellers are broke und my water tanks are filled. If I permit the merchantman to examine me too close, he will see through my disguise and report me to the first armed vessel he meets. Also," he added, doggedly, "I was sent to destroy British merchantmen."

Again the two former comrades regarded each other.

"War is very like Nature, Herr Porter," went on Muller, "and she is not at all a 'sporting' person. The depths of the sea are full of just such creatures as my little Haifisch, who disguise themselves as stones, and food, and seaweed, to lure the victim. But no doubt my own turn will come. I cannot say I much wish to live after these killings. Und yet I invented this most devilish machine of all . . . to do it . . . I do not understand!" And now, tell me your own adventures."

"I went up from my ship about one o'clock this morning to see if I could distinguish anything above the mist. My engines drown all other noises; I heard nothing, but my 'phone wire ran out, very rapidly, then broke at the lower end, and came up wet with sea-water. So I take it that my ship



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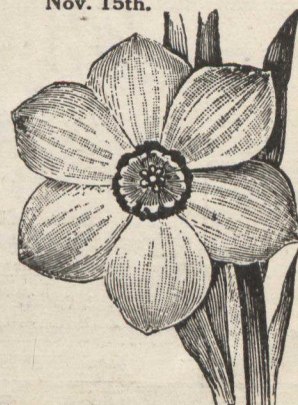
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