

18 THE BATTLE OF JUTLAND BANK

running on their parallel northerly courses. Ahead of them were the main British Battle Fleet, five miles distant, and Arbuthnot's armoured cruisers on its port bow. Nearer at hand, Hood was approaching Beatty ahead of Jellicoe, 'bringing his Squadron into action in a most inspiring manner, worthy of his great naval ancestors.' It was a moment for rapid decision. The enemy, receiving severe punishment at the head of his line, and facing the immediate onslaught of Jellicoe's heavy ships, was hauling off to eastward with an eye to his mined waters. In the gathering mists and darkness it was possible after all that he might elude an engagement. In this situation Beatty once more showed his 'fine qualities of gallant leadership and correct strategic insight' Altering his course due east, he threw himself at highest speed across the front of the German van. The effect of the movement was instant and determining. The head of the German line, driven first eastward and then south-westward, was 'crumpled up', leaving the enemy's battleships as targets for the majority of the British battle-cruisers and Fifth Battle Squadron, their outline being temporarily distinct against the western horizon on the new course upon which Beatty had driven them. Still more important was the fact that the new bearing of the British line compelled the enemy to haul off to the open sea, away from his mined waters, if he insisted on avoiding action.

Such was the situation when Sir John Jellicoe came on the scene at 6 p.m. On receipt of Beatty's report (6.14 p.m.) of his position and that of the enemy Battle Fleet, Jellicoe, like Beatty, turned his course eastward and deployed in battle order. Being in the position of a 'chasing' or 'following' fleet, he could not rely on speed to force Scheer to an engagement before nightfall.