

The Brood of the Saxon

A Tale of the War of Empire in the Year 1918

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Illustrated by Arthur Lismer

THE Admiral tossed his cigar into the early morning, and fastening his keen, blue eyes to his glass, searched the broad Atlantic. Not a sign of the enemy, though any moment their steel masts might appear above the far horizon. He turned and gazed on the six grey monsters in his wake, and his heart throbbed. The sun, like a great golden coin, balanced on the rim of the sea, shone on the silken folds of the White Ensign, which lazily fluttered in the languorous West Indies breeze. He dropped the glass into its case and looked aloft at his own top, where, in company with the Empire's emblem, the beautiful ensign of Canada kept proud consort.

A young man hardly more than a boy came from the end of the bridge with hurried step. "Nothing doing, dad!" he said, in disappointed tones. "The operator just got him from the Bermudas. No sign of the enemy." He handed the aerogram to his father and watched the large, homely face, so like his own, as the blue eyes read the message.

"It's a gathering of the clans, dad," he cried, jubilantly, not waiting for the other's answer—"a flocking of the whelps to the mother's need, and they wondered if we'd help!

"Why, dad, they're fighters! Every one of them!" he cried, as he grasped his father's arm and pointed to the stalwart, husky men below them on the decks. "They've fought all their lives. In the woods—on the spring drives—the cruel wind and wave of the Labrador coast—and—and—if there wasn't the Empire's existence to fight for, they'd fight for you, dad."

A proud exultation filled the lad's breast. Pride of Empire—love of home—the Canadian land back there that breasted the Atlantic and the Pacific, and pride and love for the big, quiet-faced man who commanded the fine array of battle-ships in their wake.

"Tut, tut, my boy; you talk like a veritable fire-eater," chided the Admiral, though in his heart he lauded the lad's enthusiasm.

"Yes," he said. "They thought we wouldn't stand by the homeland, but they reckoned without the blood, without the predominant element! And Germany, Austria, they imagined five years ago we were too engrossed in reaping wheat and building railways to care what became of the Empire on that tight little island that saw the birth of our grandsires," broke in the son, proudly. "They have drunk to the day, father," he cried. "May it be now!"

He turned and dashed off, half ashamed of his own vehemence, leaving the father standing gazing after his lithe form with his eyes filled with love and pride.

This boy, but out of school—had he done right in bringing him into this dangerous game of war, which might terminate in—death—for both?

HE thought of the sweet-faced little mother back there in St. John, and her tearful but brave good-bye. At any moment a division of the Austro-German fleet might heave in sight, and he knew too well that the meeting would be one of death and carnage, and, as he thought of his son's words, and his eyes surveyed again the long line of grey monsters ploughing the opalescent sea, guarding the trade route to Bermuda and the West Indies, he growled a malediction on these little Canadians who had begrudged a fleet unit to the Empire, the fools! But he would not dampen his son's ardour or his belief in the patriotism of all Canadians, though he knew only too well the bitter wrangling that had taken place before they had been made to see their duty. They would have basked forever in the fancied security of their national safety,

with the selfish knowledge that the British taxpayer was building Dreadnoughts for their protection, while Europe had looked on in sneering ribaldry at Britain's boast of Empire.

He remembered Conan Doyle's words placed in the mouth of the old roundhead soldier: "If ever it should be that England should be struck upon her knees, if those who fight her battles should have deserted her, and she should find herself unarmed in the presence of an enemy, let her take heart and remember that every village in the realm is a barracks, and that her real standing army is the hardy courage and simple virtue which stand ever in the breast of the humblest of her peasants."

He lifted his grey head proudly. "Thank God, while the heads of the Government had wrangled, public opinion—in the river-driver, the woodsman, the farmer—the real backbone of the country, had, as often before, moved the nation with a burst of

patriotism and forced the vacillating heads to a definite and honourable course."

And now in this year of 1918, the blow had fallen. Germany and Austria had decided that the day had come to break the power of empire that linked Britain with her colonies, and to reduce the motherland to serfdom.

Little did they know the breed that has been the champion of justice since Alfred the Great. Scarcely had the combined fleets started on their pilgrimage of conquest than the mighty forces in England began to work. Canada—Australia—New Zealand were fired as with religious zeal. As his son had said—it was a gathering of the clans, a flocking of the whelps to the mother's need. Even in India, where disaffection had been rampant, the result of seed sown by the agents of military Europe, there was heard the rolling of drums from morn till dark as the native princes summoned and drilled their wild hordes to do battle for their Emperor. From the land of the Pharaohs came the ebony men who, but a few years before, had fought so fiercely the advent of Anglo-Saxon progress. The Boer-Briton took his trusty mauser from above the fireplace and leaving his peaceful home on the veldt sought the towns and enlisted under the once-hated ensign of England. Thus they came, with jingle of harness and blowing of trumpets, from every nook and cranny of the old and the new world, stern of eye, unalterable of purpose. The enemies of Britain would find that the Empire was not merely a boast, but a reality, built upon firmer foundation than Caesar's or Alexander's, or the bloody dream of the great Napoleon.

Should the Empire fall, should the proud armies of Austro-Germany pollute the soil of that England which, for a thousand years, has not felt the conqueror's foot, should Britain's day wane, this gathering of the sons to the Empire's need would go down in history as the most sublime effort since the world began.

Suddenly, even while his eyes travelled over his own decks, cleared for action, over the long, black muzzles of the British guns, over the stalwart, busy men below him spoiling for the fray, his quick eyes caught the unmistakable sound of a shot from the southward, then another and yet another, and he knew them for the grim dogs of war.

As he stepped into the small steel house at the farther end of the bridge, the bell clanged furiously, and his son's voice, joyous, fraught with restrained excitement from the wireless room, heralded the message from the Bermudas—only the words—"the enemy."

Soon the whole fleet was belching huge clouds of smoke as, in one long line they raced the fifteen knots to the scene of conflict, which grew greater with every moment.

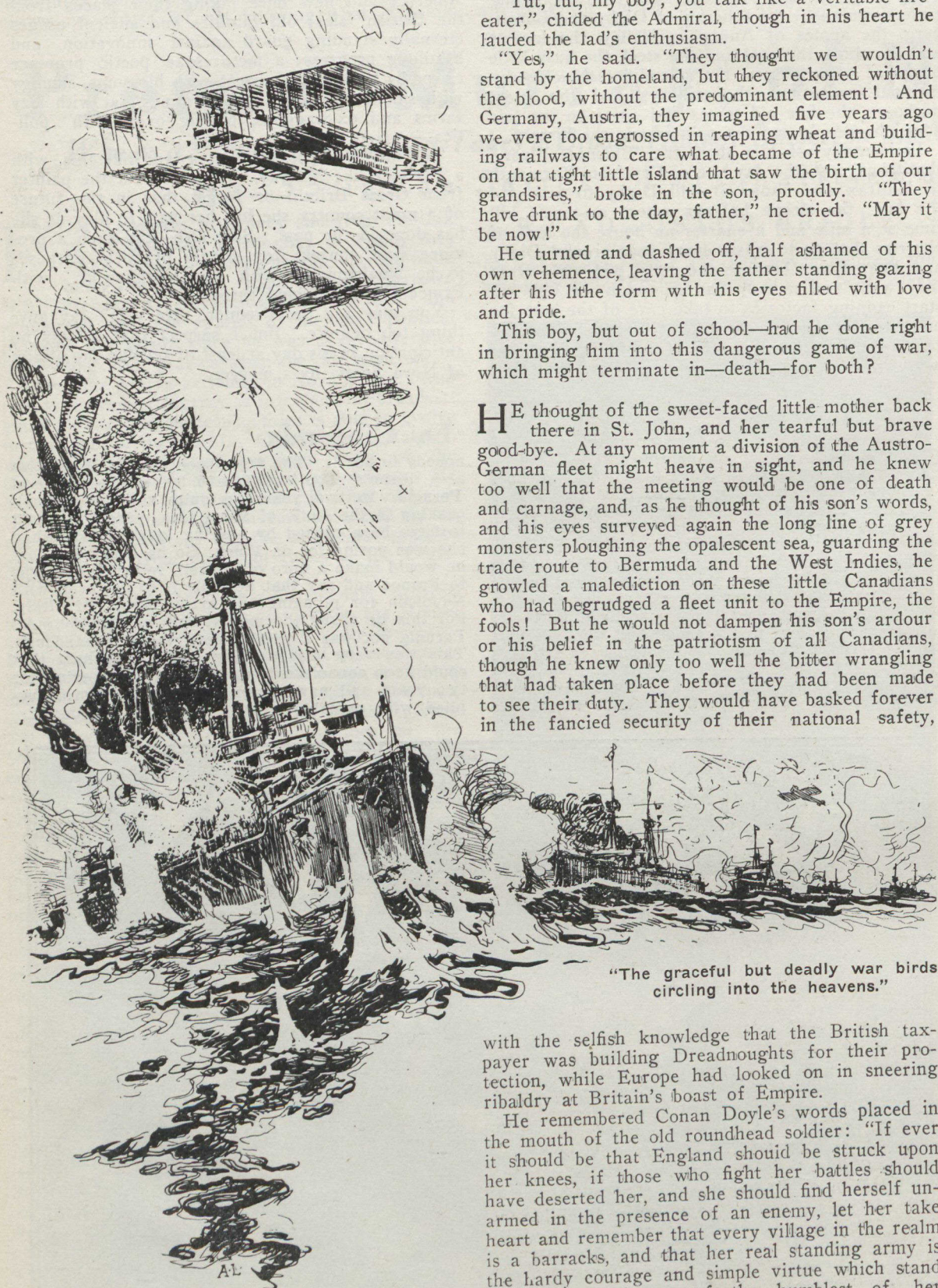
Like grey, ugly monsters of a dream, they heaved their way over the opalescent sea, throbbing with a mighty, irresistible power, while down in their vitals big coal-blackened, brawny giants from the Nova Scotia mines fed the huge, insatiable furnaces so that they roared like mammoth hurricanes, and the great engines throbbed and throbbed with a never-ending, mighty rhythm.

In the magazines men toiled with long, evil-looking shells, with which to serve the monster guns, beside which, throughout all the fleet, each gun crew stood awaiting the command from the bridge.

It was a little less than an hour later that the fleet, stripped like athletes for the fray, sighted the enemy, who, standing off a good six miles from the coast of Bermuda, were hammering away at the old town of St. George, and the fort which topped the hill. There was no sign of consternation there, for the great shore guns bellowed with stern and automatic regularity.

THE Admiral of the Canada sent a message to his wireless operator, and the message in turn leaped over the sea. "Leave them to us," it ran, "Canada."

The men of the old world were to test the courage of the new, and the bonds of Empire. The Austro-German ships swung round, presenting a beautiful sight as they formed in a long crescent to meet the new foe which had sprung unheralded out of the seas. The townspeople of old St. George flocked the hill, eyes strained to watch the battle. Never in all its ancient, turbulent history was it to see such a sight, and the bones of brave old Admiral Somers in little St. Peter's churchyard must have



"The graceful but deadly war birds circling into the heavens."

"Any chance of the Australian unit intercepting them, dad?" he asked.

The older man smiled at the fear in his offspring's voice—fear that the enemy might meet with other sons of the Empire and get the drubbing which he confidently felt would be their lot, thus robbing him of a share in the glory.