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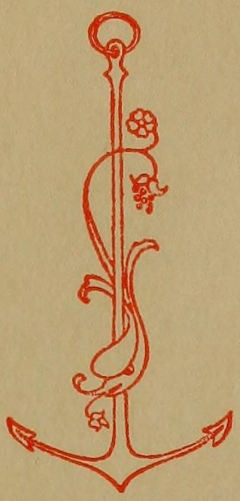
NO._____

A SIX-HOUR SHIFT

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BY

WILLIAM McFEE



GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1920

PR6025
.A2255
1920

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DEC -3 1920

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no 1

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I

I LIE still, with eyes closed, for a few moments before rising, listening to the drumming of the rain on the deck overhead, and the gurgle of the scupper-pipes outside in the alleyway. I sort out drowsily the familiar vibrations: the faint, delicate rhythm of the dynamo, the hammer of a pump, the leisurely rumble and hiss of the refrigerator. Suddenly a hideous jar close at hand: the Fourth Engineer is making tea in the galley, and has dropped the poker. I look sideways at my watch. It is now five minutes to two. I decide to get up and dress.

I reflect on the fact that to-day is

the anniversary of our departure from a home port. For a year, with but one or two days of rest, we have been dressing at five minutes to two. For a year the Armée d'Orient has been fed with frozen meat from our insulated holds. I recall a sentence in a recent letter from an officer on the Western front. It seems to put the matter succinctly. "War," he says, "is like trade; only indirectly interesting." And again, lower down, he remarks, "It isn't the horror of war that makes a man tired, or even the danger and bloodshed; it is the infernal monotony of it."

So I suppose we have no corner in monotony! I finish dressing (it is now five minutes past two, but no matter), and go into the mess-room for a cup of tea. The Fourth Engineer is there, also my colleague whom I am relieving, and the Third Officer

in pajamas. This last person is suffering from insomnia, which is not surprising, since he drinks strong tea at 10:30 P. M. He is now drinking strong tea at 2 A. M., on the principle of poison counteracting poison, I suppose. Anyhow, he does nothing all day, so it doesn't matter.

The Fourth Engineer is a hospitable soul and makes me toast. He is on duty all night in the main engine-room. He is a lanky, immature, good-tempered youth, with nice eyes. He knows I like toast. In return, I am looking the other way when the cook gives him a pocketful of eggs out of the cold-storage rooms. I like him. He laughs easily and bears no malice. Like most East Anglians, he has a subtle refinement of mind that will stand him in good stead through life. Among the dour north countrymen

who throng the ship, he is almost feminine.

While I eat my toast, I listen to their conversation. It does not amount to much. How could it? We have been together a year. We are, occasionally, rather tired of each other. We are each painfully conscious of the other's faults. Most subjects of which we know anything have been bled white of all interest. There are neither mysteries to attract nor revelations to anticipate. "The End of the War" and "When the Ship will go Home" are taboo. Most of us take refuge in light badinage. Others, like the Third Officer and his colleagues, play bridge for three hours every night. Some study languages and musical instruments; but there are not many of these. Some drink secretly, and are reported later as "sick." Most of us, however, do sim-

ply nothing. We sit, or stand, or walk or lie, with one dull thought in our minds, one vague image before our eyes —the thought, the image, of Release.

It is an unusual state of mind. I had almost written "a curious psychological phenomenon," but I am anxious to make the reader understand, and plain words are best. It is, I say, an unusual state of mind. From the Commander to the scullion, from the Chief Engineer to the coal-passer, we have all gradually arrived at a mood which is all the more passionate because it is inarticulate. With every other outlet dammed, our whole spiritual life is forced along one narrow channel of intense desire. We want to go home. It sounds childish, but that is because the reader does not understand. When he has read through this essay, I hope he will understand. I mean him to.

I drink my tea and eat my toast, and having given Thomas a saucer of milk, I go on duty. Thomas is a large black cat, who shares my vigil. *Allons donc!*

I go aft to the refrigerating-room along a covered alleyway, which none the less leaks; and Thomas, who follows, makes little runs to avoid the drips. It is raining as it can rain only in the Balkans. There is something Scottish about this rain, something dour, persistent, and irritating; and this old obsolete banana boat, converted into a cold-storage, leaks in every seam of her boat-deck, which is all warped by the blazing suns of a Balkan summer. We skip in, Thomas and I, in where there is light and warmth and comfortable noises, and, in our various fashions, carry on.

It is no part of these reflections to

treat of refrigeration. That, being part of modern war, is uninteresting. My oiler, a faded Irishman with a bad leg, does most of the work. I note the log on the desk, thumb the compressor rods, take a few thermometer readings, feel the crank bearings of the engine, and feel bored. Thomas, after watching a couple of cockroaches who persist in risking their lives along the edge of the evaporator-casing, settles down to snooze on the vise-bench. For a time I envy him. I want to sleep again myself. I sit down near the desk, and, sharply alert as to the machine, I permit the rest of me, my soul and body let us say, to take forty winks. I leave the explanation to competent psychologists. It can be done. I need no Psychical Research Society to tell me that my soul and my intellect are differentiate entities. I

know it, because I have kept six-hour watches, because I have been on night duty, because—because of many private reasons, of which it is not seemly that I should speak. Suffice it.

For an hour I sit with folded arms, while the machine pursues its leisurely never-ending race; while the brine-pump lifts first one leg and then the other, gingerly, as though in deep snow; while the electric fans revolve noiselessly in their corners; while the faded Irishman moves uneasily from side to side as he ministers to the needs of the machine. Subconsciously I am aware of all that goes on. So much for the experience and *flair* born of a dozen years at sea.

And, to tell the truth, this is the most hopeless time of the day. I once saw a picture, well known, no doubt: A Hopeless Dawn. My ex-

perience is, that all dawns are hopeless, to those who have to witness them. The legend of the early palæolithic ancestor who spent a night of terror after seeing the sun sink out of sight, and who leaped for joy at the dawning, is too thin. He is no ancestor of mine. For me the period comprised between the hour of two and four is one of unrelieved vacuity. The minutes, the very seconds, seem to deliberate. When, after what seems a long quarter of an hour, I look again at the clock, that white-faced, impassive umpire has registered exactly three minutes. Well, it is three minutes past three. I get up abruptly, startling the faded Irishman who is standing near me, smoking a dirty pipe and thinking of Heaven knows what, and go outside into the open air. And outside in the open air is Salonika.

II

THE rain, in an inconclusive way, has ceased, though the scupper-pipes still gurgle and cluck with the water running from above. I walk along the after deck, climb up the heap of sandbags built round the gun-platform, and take refuge in a sort of canvas sentry-box which the gunners have improvised out of ammunition cases, a spring mattress, and some old tarpaulins. Here I am more than ever solitary at this hour. The gun, looking like a gaunt cab-horse in its gray canvas shroud, droops its muzzle slightly, as though dispirited because we go so rarely to sea. Nothing else can I

see of the ship, save the flagpole, a ghostly outpost of humanity, for beyond it the world has dissolved into a sad chaos of water and sky. There is no wind. The waters of the Gulf lie placid and obscure. The sky-line has vanished, and one has the illusion of floating in infinite space, in a sort of aërial Noah's Ark without any animals. The patches of white in the cloud-canopy are reflected with eerie accuracy in the lifeless and invisible mirror below. One feels a slight vertigo, for all things seem to have been swallowed up, and even Time, that last refuge of saints and sinners, seems to have stopped.

The rain comes as a relief, as though the works of the universe were getting under way again. My knees being exposed, I decide that I have had enough of nature in solu-

tion and climb down from the gun-platform. The moon, which is shining behind the dense clouds, brightens the patches of white, and these are reflected on the wet deck. Picking my way carefully, for all scuttles are screened, I reach the machine-room. Nothing is changed save the hands of the clock: it is now half-past three. The faded Irishman has become a shade more brisk in his movements. From now on he will become more and more active and intelligent in carrying out his duties, until he reaches a climax of senseless energy at four by breaking into speech with a "Well, good-night, sir," and vanishing into his kennel. His place is taken by a somnolent negro.

At four the rain is pouring down with all its old violence, and I make my way along to the mess-room for

more tea. I bump into a damp silent man, a Greek sailor, on night duty. He is supposed to keep a lookout at the gangway and tend the galley-fires. He does both very well. Some sailors are poor hands at stoking. The Russian, who occasionally acts as night-watchman, is no good. They say Russians understand tea. Our Russian understands nothing.

The Japanese second cook, on being called by the Greek mariner, is furious with the fire. The Greek and Arab firemen do not understand that coal-dust is unsuitable for galley fires. There are, at times, international complications.

The Fourth Engineer and I once more foregather in the mess-room. I make the tea, and I do it this way. The tea-pot, of white china, is rinsed and scalded with boiling water. I then put in the correct quantity of

tea, which is an art acquired only in the school of experience. Then I pour on the correct quantity of fresh-boiling water—another art. The tea is left to steep on the hob for as long as it takes to cut, toast, and butter two slices of bread. The tea is now ready. I pour it. Its colour is superb. Having done all this, I cast a look of triumph on the Fourth Engineer, who informs me that there is no milk; very much as a silly young staff officer might tell his general that the army has no ammunition. I retire to my room and return with a cream-jug full of condensed milk of an age so vague that only boiling water can reduce it to a liquid form. Thereupon we sit down, and having exhausted every conceivable subject of conversation six months ago, we drink and munch in silence.

The militarists say that war is

necessary to develop the soul of a nation; without war men would sink into stupidity and sloth.

Having eaten and drunk in silence, we light cigarettes and go away, he down below to pump the boilers up, I to my machine-room to see how the somnolent negro is going on. He is going on very much as I expected. He wanders like a sleep-walker among the machinery, attending to his duties after his own fashion. I make up the log to four o'clock, examine certain things that may go wrong, but never do, and go out into the alleyway again.

The hopeless dawn is approaching. A ghastly pallor now faintly outlines a mountain which I indolently call Ben Lomond. The Gulf of Salonika is almost entirely surrounded by land, and the city is built on the slopes of a mountain.

Ben Lomond is farther off to the eastward; other mountains form ramparts to the west and north, while the Vardar River delta insinuates itself among the more rugged features in a most curious way. Southward, beyond the headland that marks the entrance, the horizon is closed by the sublime peak of Olympos. The Gulf, therefore, is a kind of bowl, against the rim of which the clouds are condensed and held. Under their caps of cotton-woolly clouds the mountains are white with snow.

We have come out of the void, and dark blobs are now recognizable as ships. Lights glitter along the shore. A motor-lighter passes, her engine exhaust beating the still air like a pulse. The silence is no longer profound or tragic. The world of men, the world of living men, is coming back, and I am glad. I have a

weakness for the world of living men. A steamer, weighing her anchor with much puffing of steam from her windlass-exhaust, blows her whistle. It is a trumpet-blast, completing the rout of the powers of darkness.

There is a crash from our galley. Someone, most probably the Japanese second cook, has dropped the poker. The Japanese second cook is a creature of moods, often passionate. He is, so they say, a student of philosophy at Tokyo University. He has come to sea to earn more money to complete his courses—of philosophy, I suppose. The chief cook, who is a Chinaman, has presumably completed his studies in philosophy, while the third cook, who is an Italian, has never studied philosophy at all. Anyhow, various noises combine to inform me that all three are now in the galley engaged in making

bread and preparing breakfast for the crew in a more or less philosophical manner.

Other sounds assert themselves, too. Weird moans from below announce the Fourth Engineer's success with his boilers. A small dog in the firemen's house aft yelps tediously at an imaginary enemy. He presumes upon his rating as a mascot. A sleepy Greek boy, with weak eyes and legs, appears from the forecastle with a tin tea-pot. He is reported to be a Venizelist. Venizelists, I observe, make poor sailors. The night watchman, who answers to the name of Papa Gregovis, but whose political tendencies are obscure, fades away forward. The oiler in the main engine-room, a one-eyed mulatto, carries his tea-can along.

So an hour passes.

Once again the rain has ceased and

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I go out on the after deck and walk to and fro. I discover the crowded roadstead of Salonika. Black blobs have become transports, misty phantoms have changed into hospital ships, gray shadows into men-of-war. One hospital ship is preparing to move—does move, as I watch her. She is girdled with a necklace of emerald lights. On her rail is a red cross of electric lights. She is very beautiful, a jewelled wraith moving noiselessly across our bows. Several Greek schooners, with all sails set, float near us on the glassy water, waiting for a wind. Time is no object with them. One appears close to our quarter, like a ghost of some past age, a fabulous blue galleon with silver sails. She is part of the ridiculous unreality of the whole business.

III

I DECIDE suddenly to have a pipe, and go in to get tobacco and matches. However, the mess-room steward is bringing in tea and toast for two, so I postpone the pipe. As I sit down on the stool by the desk, the Fourth Engineer comes in, wiping his hands on a piece of waste. He is gay. It is nearly six. The boilers, sanitary, and fresh-water tanks are all full. Everything is in order. At seven he will dive into his room and be no more seen. He sits down beside me and partakes of his seventh cup of tea and piece of toast since nine o'clock last night. He wants to go up for an examina-

tion. He has been away fifteen months as Fourth. He will probably be away another fifteen. He is losing his chances. And they need young men at home.

One of the great advantages of war, the militarists tell us, is that young men get their chance. War gives us scope, provokes initiative, stimulates the soul, quickens the brain.

With my pipe alight, I take up my walk on the after deck. The setting moon is a mere pool of radiance, like an electric lamp swathed in muslin. A rift in the clouds over Ben Lomond shows a pale blue patch of sky with the morning star shining in the middle of it. The lights of the port shine like stars, too, in the rain-washed air. Men move about the ship, launches begin to cross and recross the harbour. A steamer near

us suddenly wakes into life. Electric clusters and arc-lights blaze about her decks, derricks swing and winches rattle. Another ship, a collier, hauls up her anchor and very cautiously, very stealthily, approaches a cruiser, as though she were about to pounce upon her without warning. But the cruiser is in full possession of all her faculties apparently, for hundreds of men appear on deck, whistles are blown, fenders are lowered, ropes are thrown out, and at length the two lie in a close embrace, and the cruiser's Morse light winks rapidly several times to inform the world that all is as it should be.

As I turn from this fascinating spectacle I behold the French lighter approaching. The French lighter is a cumbrous old Turkish sailing ship propelled by a minute French tug lashed to her side. She seems to

have her arm round the tug's shoulders. Loud hammering announces the steam making its way along our water-logged deck-pipes. A shrill whistle from the French tug elicits a similar whistle from someone on our upper deck. Several soldiers in khaki make their appearance about the ship. The French tug and lighter come alongside and are made fast. A swarm of dirty Greeks climb up and begin to remove the hatches.

You cannot honestly say the day has broken. It is much more as though the blank opacity of the night had worn thin. That blue rent in the dirty tarpaulin of the sky over Ben Lomond has closed up, and a fine misty drizzle begins to fall.

I retire to the door of the machine-room, where I encounter my friend the French sergeant-major. He is a handsome Marseillais, by profession

a dealer in antique furniture and *objets d'art.* For two years he has been supervising the transportation of beef and mutton from ship to shore. He is of the opinion that war develops our higher faculties to the utmost, and that without war civilized man would degenerate into a gross preoccupation with material needs. However, just now he is good-humouredly frantic because there is no steam. I inquire what it is that it is. He waves his arms. I say, "*Pas de vapeur?*" Ah! he nods and waves his arms again. I wave mine. In a species of utilitarian French which I find that French men—and women—understand, I inform him that the *vapeur* is on its way, but that it is being retarded by the condensation in the pipes, due to the odious weather. He agrees, and waves his arms. I nod vigorously and wave

mine. We are brothers. We shake hands. He hands me a copy of *L'Opinion* or *L'Indépendant*, diminutive news-sheets dear to the heart of the Armée d'Orient. I deluge him with thanks and he returns to the hatch to load the Greeks with opprobrious epithets.

While perusing the little French paper, I am accosted by the philosophical second cook, the dark-eyed gentleman from Tokyo, and the very human third cook, a dark-eyed gentleman from Naples, who wish to enter the cold storage. I give them the keys and they vanish into a cupboard-like cavity where they blow on their fingers and proceed to quarrel over legs of beef, corpses of sheep, or other less desirable provender.

The French paper tells me a great deal that I wish to know. I rejoice particularly in the very cavalier

attitude it takes up with regard to neutrals. It trounces Constantine very much as the French sergeant-major trounces the Greek cargo-men. I pass half an hour very pleasantly with *L'Opinion* or *L'Indépendant.*

I find it is seven o'clock. The decks are being washed. Firemen and engine-room men, a variegated crowd of British, Greek, Arab, and negro, pass along and go below. Carpets are being shaken, scuttle-brasses polished, floors scrubbed. The city of Salonika becomes dimly visible, a gray smudge picked out with white columns and red domes. A battleship is going out to practise, and presently you hear the heavy *bang-bang* of her big guns reverberating against the bluffs of the Karaburnou. Stone quarries behind the town take up the tale, and for an hour or so you will hear the explo-

sions sullenly booming in the still, damp air.

The hours drag on. It is a quarter to eight. My somnolent negro suddenly becomes wide awake and hurries along the deck to call his relief. I make a general and particular examination of everything in my care, and, rubbing my chin, decide to shave. There is a tendency to grow slack and slovenly in circumstances like these. One says, "Who cares?" and "What does it matter?" A slow poison of indolence is in the air. I must shave. As a rule I am negligent, but this morning I make a hasty decision that this must end. I will, I announce to myself, shave, breakfast, and go ashore. As a rule I turn in as soon as I have eaten. I will go ashore.

I tell my mate I am going and seek information concerning a convey-

ance. I inquire of the Second Officer which lighter is going away first. He does not know. He never does know. He is the most complete agnostic I have ever met. I ask one of the soldiers, whose king and country have taken him away from his job on a farm and set him to tally meat. He says he thinks the extra British lighter will finish first. I then discover the extra British contingent loading twenty tons of canned goods —sardines, salmon, and cling peaches; why cling peaches, I cannot say. So I drop down the rope ladder to the lighter's deck and discover the two naval stokers getting the engines ready for starting. They are Bolinder engines.

If the reader does not know what a Bolinder engine is, he is a happy man. A Bolinder engine is the devil. I once worked on a ship whose launch had a

Bolinder engine, and it nearly killed me.

By the time the bulbs are hot enough to start, the senior artificer catches sight of me and we fraternize. He is a pale blond middle-aged man with the expression of mingled humility and efficiency common to lower-deck ratings in the Navy. This lighter, he tells me, was under fire at Gallipoli. He shows me a patch on either side of the engine-room plating: the entry and exit of a twelve-pounder shell. It must have passed within a few inches of his neck. With this exception he has led a humdrum parcels-delivery sort of life. Suddenly, as his assistant opens a valve, the engine starts with a roar and then settles down to the fluttery beat and cough of an oil engine with the clutch out.

We discuss the merits and demerits

of Bolinder engines. I hazard the remark that personally I prefer steam. The man's face lights up for a moment as he answers: "Ah, me, too!" You know where you are with steam. Steam is the friend of man. Steam engines are very human. Their very weaknesses are understandable. Steam engines do not flash back and blow your face in. They do not short-circuit and rive your heart with imponderable electric force. They have arms and legs and warm hearts and veins full of warm vapour. We all say that. Give us steam every time. You know where you are with steam.

So much for the trip ashore—one meets a stranger with the knowledge of the craft. As we climb up out of the tiny engine-room, I observe that we are now inside the stone jetty of the Greek harbour. Several large

transports are discharging men, mules, horses, guns, locomotives, and so on. We slip gently alongside, and with a cheery word and a shake of the hand I quit my friend with his cargo of cling peaches and the rest, and jump ashore. It occurs to me in passing that the letters from the front never mention cling peaches and fresh mutton. No, the burden of their song is always "bully beef" and "skilly," whatever that may be. They also speak disparagingly of "tinned stuff."

I cannot get those cling peaches and sardines out of my head.

IV

AND here I am ashore in Salonika! I feel absurdly shy amid so much busy life. It is almost as busy as a provincial town in England on market days. I feel something like an escaped prisoner. They say that convicts, when they are liberated, wander aimlessly about, not knowing what to do with their liberty. I feel just like that. I wander about among huge piles of hardware, stared at critically by sentries of all nations. I make for the Custom House Gate, and I become suddenly aware that the sun is shining through a jagged rent in the white clouds over Ben

Lomond, and that I am very warm indeed.

There is something tragic about Salonika. I have visited many goodly states and cities, and I doubt if there be one other on the globe to compare with Salonika in her ingenious combination of splendour and squalor. She is a dirty queen, sitting in filthy rags, with gems about her noisome girdle, and a diadem upon her scrofulous brow. She babbles in all the tongues of Europe and speaks none of them aright. She has no native language, no native air. She is all things to all men, Jew and Gentile, Moslem and Frank. She is everything and nothing. The winds of heaven blow among the ruined turrets of her citadel, while the mosquitoes from the Vardar swamps sing ten million strong in the purlieus of the port. She is very proud. She

has nothing left to give but death, yet the nations fling themselves upon her and quarrel for the honour of her embrace.

I was thinking all this as I picked my way in the mud along the road to the Place de la Liberté, because I had thought of it often before. It is all true. Quitting the Custom House, which is a building of French design, I pass the Olympos Palace Hotel, an edifice of Berlin architecture, all curls and whirls and involute swirls. At this point is the Place de la Liberté, facing the landing place known as Venizelos Steps. The square is not worthy of the name, being a mere wide strip of Venizelos Street, and consisting exclusively of cafés. The steps are flanked by two kiosks which contain bunks for the night watch. This is the heart of the city. Past this point there rushes a

never-ending tide of tram-cars, pedestrians of all nations, ambulance wagons, motor lorries, cavalry and artillery, donkey carts and mule teams, staff motor-cars and dispatch-riders on motorcycles—good men, bad men, beggar men, thieves.

Along the front Greek schooners are discharging charcoal, paraffin, stone, fish, vegetables, and peanuts. Around the steps crowd many launches—British, French, Italian, Greek, and Serbian; row-boats, sail-boats, ships' cutters awaiting vegetables, and ship's dinghies awaiting their commanders. Old ladies in native costume, caricatures of Queen Victoria as a widow, move to and fro, gossiping. Shoe-shine boys almost trip up the unwary stranger in their endeavours to clean his boots by main force. And then, half a dozen strong, come the news-girls with their loads

of twenty-two different newspapers in six different languages.

They are not very clean little girls, but I regard them with tolerance as they press up to sell me a *Balkan News*. They never by any chance mistake one's nationality. I suppose the English character is noticeable in Salonika. Moreover, the Englishman is a fool about money. I know, because I am a fool about money; yet I am not such a fool as some. The French, Italian, Russian officer, counts his change with meticulous care and gives a very very small tip. The Britisher, officer or man, grasps the coins, looks at them without really knowing whether he is being cheated or not, bestows munificent largesse, and strides out, leaving the Greek waiter full of contempt for the burly fool who parts from his money so easily.

This is by the way. We are learning so many things in this war, that quite possibly the Englishman abroad may learn to keep his money in his pocket. Personally, I have not much to spend, and each drachma must produce its utmost value. But I can gratify my native craving to be thought a philanthropist when I buy a paper. I give all those dirty little girls a penny each.

Do not misunderstand me. I do not say they are ugly little girls. Their noses do not run in the embarrassing way common among the street-children of a northern clime. They are all different. One is dark, with long thick brows over black eyes, her hair in a thick plait. Another is blonde and has a red nose. Another is quite tall and will probably become a dancer, she has such neat little legs

and feet. Her stockings, by the way, are not a pair. Another has a pair but no garters, and she looks very untidy. Yet another has garters but no stockings, and her legs are very dirty. A very tiny little person has only one forlorn copy of a Greek paper, and she is thrust away by her more muscular rivals. I give her a penny, too. I am popular.

When all are recompensed they sidle away, looking back wistfully for a moment. I dare say they are wondering if I am a millionaire in disguise. Then the whirling vortex of Venizelos Steps sucks them in again; they spy another sailor coming ashore, and they collect and fling themselves upon him, a compact, yelling Macedonian phalanx of youthful amazons.

Turning eastward, one sees the city front curving very gently as far

as the White Tower, nearly a mile away. Beyond that superb landmark the new suburban town spreads out indefinitely amid shabby foliage. The view up Venizelos Street is closed by a covered-in bazaar. The yellow buildings of the front are a confusing medley of cafés, cigarette shops, hotel entrances, paper shops, hardware shops, barbers' shops, cinema theatres, Turkish baths, a fish-market, farriers' shops, *cafés-chantants*, charcoal stores, more cigarette shops, more cafés; a few immense private houses with interesting courtyards and discontented-looking sentries in battered boxes, one or two small houses with tremendous walnut doors and black iron hinges, bolts, and window-bars; and finally, just as the heat and acrid smells from motors and horses begin to parch the throat, and the devilish

cobbles to tire the unaccustomed feet, there is a café in a covered garden, with the White Tower standing alone in a grass plot at the waterside.

V

SALONIKA makes her own beer, but it is not of uniform quality. Sometimes the litre will be very palatable. Often the best thing to do is to leave it. Dutch beer is drunk, and is very good. I am afraid saccharine takes the place of malt in the local product. At the worst, one can get passable coffee and good brandy. Seated among the uniforms at the little tables, you may regard Salonika in a characteristic mood.

The sun shines strongly now through immense piled-up masses of white clouds, and there is sufficient wind to sail a boat across the Gulf.

The Greek standard waves gently from the top of the White Tower. The White Tower, let it be said, is a perfectly round cylinder of white-washed stone, surmounted by a smaller turret and a flag-staff. There is one small door over which is an inscription in Turkish, very beautiful to look at, utterly incomprehensible unless you know Turkish. One or two small windows and a small ledge half way up are the only breaks in the vast, smooth surface. The Turks used it for some purpose, I suppose, or they would not have built it. The legend has it that it was called at one time The Bloody Tower, but that may have been only a manner of speaking. I have been shipmate with a Turk only once or twice in my life, and so far as I know them they are competent, orderly, well-bred people. I very much regret that

fate has made us enemies in this war.

As I was saying, the blue-and-white Greek standard floats from the battlements of the White Tower. All around you float officers of the Greek army in blue-and-silver full uniforms. They look slightly theatrical, because all the other armies are in service clothes. The ends of their silver-plated scabbards are muddy. So are their spurs. Many of them are handsome in a fashion-plate way: dead-white skin, dead-black moustaches, long legs, thin noses, dark eyes, empty foreheads. One in particular attracts one's attention. He is wearing blue-and-white cocks' feathers in his hat, white kid gloves on his hands, and immense Hessian boots with silver spurs on his feet. His sword is across his knees and he is explaining

something with great energy to his companions.

A French air-man, who has skinned his nose (possibly in a sudden descent) and who wears the Military Cross, sits behind a glass of vermouth. Several Russian lieutenants, in their beautiful green tunics and soft leather boots, are conversing with a French major. An Italian captain is reading a book. An English captain is talking to a lady. Some Serbian officers appear to be talking to themselves. Not one of them seems to have anything to do. Perhaps they think the same of me. Let us take the car back. The tall and handsome Greek officers cram into one poor little Ford runabout and rattle off up the road. Let us take the car. A Salonika tram-car is interesting, believe me.

They nearly always haul a second-

class trailer behind them. We go second class. It is a very small car, and it is very full. The fare is a penny. A Greek penny is a nickel coin with a hole in the centre, so that it looks like an aluminium washer. The occupants of the car are of all ages. Boys and girls and priests are in the majority. The children are going to school, as may be seen by the books in their hands. The priests are going—wherever priests go in the morning. If they were going to the barber's it would do them no harm. I admit that their flowing black gowns and extraordinary top hats are picturesque; but why should the picturesque persist in being insanitary?

I like the children better. They are clean and wholesome. Most of them, I observe, have ticket-books, from which the conductor removes a coupon. This arrangement, I sus-

pect, is favoured by the parents, because the children might save the fare and go to the pictures instead. The car passes the doors of several cinema theatres, and the youngsters babble excitedly as they discuss the vivid posters that are stuck up outside.

One lad of twelve is deep in a penny dreadful. I look over his shoulder and wish I could decipher the story. He wears a low-necked suit with sailor collar and French tie, blue corduroy shorts, patent-leather button boots, and silk socks. His brown legs are bare. The whole look of him is Byronic, save that instead of a slouch hat he wears a peaked naval cap on one side of a dark head. Byronic, too, are the illustrations to his dreadful. A girl is tied to a railway line and two desperadoes struggle with daggers. I peep farther over his shoulder. He

is so absorbed in the story that he notices nothing. I muse upon his future. What will he be, when he grows up? Is his father a Venizelist? Of what race is he? How does this Grecian sprig, who reads penny dreadfuls in an electric tram-car, regard us Britishers who have come over the sea, like the Romans and Normans and Franks of old, to leave our bones on the Balkan ranges? Out in the Gulf ride his country's war-ships with a foreign flag on their gaffs. Does he care? I doubt it. He turns over the page without looking up.

But of a sudden there is a blare of martial music. The car has stopped. We are in the midst of a procession. Let us get out. We reach the side-walk with a run and find the procession is wheeling round the corner, just beyond, into the *Place*, and up

Venizelos Street. It is the new Greek Nationalist Army—new uniforms, new rifles, new mountain batteries, new officers—all very new. They march in fifties, and cries of "Venizelos!" "Viva!" and other less articulate noises mingle with much clapping of hands and clinking of scabbards. Our glorious friend with the cocks' feathers and white kid gloves is in all his glory now, directing the procession. He salutes continually. After the soldiers come motor-cars with generals and admirals. Some of the generals are, in the words of the penny novelette, a blaze of decorations. No mortal man could live long enough or have valour enough to earn all the medals these gentlemen wear in tiers on their padded bosoms. However, everybody claps, so I clap, too. They are all going to the front to-

morrow, they say, so let us bury criticism. So they pass. I stand near a large-sized sergeant-major of the R. F. A. and I observe a peculiar expression of astonishment on his bronzed face as he salutes. If I read it aright he is thinking, "Well, I'm blowed! What a circus!"

After the uniforms come the civilian members of the new Greek Government. There is a good deal of the theatrical star about their appearance, due, I suppose, to the silk hats and opera cloaks and lavender gloves they affect. They wear their hair rather longer than our politicians, too. My sergeant-major salutes, but I catch his eye. He throws up his chin and grins, as though to say, "I'm doin' this by orders, so don't blame me."

Presently the motor-cars change to pair-horse carriages. Some are

clapped, some are hissed by the crowd on sidewalk and balcony. The pair-horse carriages change to one-horse and the sergeant-major ceases to salute. Several political gentlemen in one-horse vehicles lift their silk hats. As no one claps they put them on again, and sit back with expressions of rigid ill temper on their faces.

One does not believe in this sort of thing for a moment. It is all too unreal. The superficial reason for this doubt in a spectator's mind is that the public never knows what is actually going on. One of the great advantages of war, they tell us, is that it clears the air. We learn who are our real enemies and who are our real friends. War is that something, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness. War abolishes sham and pretense.

But there is another reason. You cannot impose liberty upon a people any more than you can make them good by legislation. Rousseau, whose prescience in this matter is almost uncanny, asserts this. "Every people," he says, "to which its situation gives no choice save that between commerce and war, is weak in itself: it depends on its neighbours, and on circumstances; its existence can never be more than short and uncertain." And he quotes with approval this maxim: "Liberty may be gained, but it can never be recovered."

Well, they are gone, and General Sarrail, who has been standing on Venizelos Steps with Colonel Christodoulos, shakes hands with that gentleman and hurries back to his office. I remark as he passes that he carries no sword and wears no decorations whatever.

It is now eleven o'clock and I decide on a walk up Venizelos Street before going aboard.

Venizelos Street is the Bond Street and Fifth Avenue of Salonika. All the great stores of the city are here. I don't suppose an American or a Londoner would call them great stores. They are no counterparts of Wanamaker's or Harrods', of Greenhut Cooper's or Whiteley's. But they are great in comparison with the aboriginal hole in the wall which the oriental calls a shop. Here in Venizelos Street, you can buy everything you want and many hundreds of things you don't. There is a good bookshop, if you read French. Dutch and American goods predominate at present. There is a bank with formidable sentries marching to and fro, possibly to intimidate withdrawals. There is a tailor who

will undertake every conceivable uniform, and make them all utterly wrong.

We pass all these and come to smaller establishments—the inevitable postcard and cigarette shops, shops with figs hung in festoons and vegetable marrows blocking the tiny entrance. At length we cross Jean Tsimiski Street, which is the Fleet Street of Salonika. Here are forged the thunderbolts of the press. Here, high up in a yellow barrack, is conceived and executed the daily issue of the *Balkan News*, the only paper of its kind. If you are a poet, go upstairs and see the editor. So long as you do not mention Mount Olympos or the Red Light District, he will be glad to publish your works in daily instalments.

I am no poet, so Jean Tsimiski Street is passed and we enter the

covered bazaar. Here we are in the Orient. Here are no fixed prices, but a battle royal over every deal. Here the merchant stands outside and uses all the eloquence of which he is capable to lure you into his tiny fastness. If he happens to be inside and he sees your eye flicker ever so slightly toward his wares, he is out in a flash and implores you to inspect his stock. Sooner or later you will fall. You see some gimcrack or other which takes your fancy. You are dragged within. You ask the price. Having appraised your position in life, he names a figure, about two hundred per cent. above what he expects. You laugh in his face and walk out. He pursues you, abating a hundred per cent. You walk on, and he offers it on your own terms. You return and agree to take it. Then, instead of concluding the deal,

this exasperating person will probably show you something else and offer to throw it in for another ten francs!

And it is all rubbish. Turkish slippers and fezzes made in Austria, daggers made in Germany, Japanese silks and fans, black amber ornaments advertised as from Erzerum, but probably from Germany, ancient coins and vases, ikons, and charms—all the junk of the foolish traveller, is here. I observe smart British nurses buying souvenirs for friends in Balham and Birmingham, smart subalterns purchasing cigarette-cases and walking-stick handles, daggers, and silly old Turkish pistols. But after all, they are young, and quite probably they do not know the East. I recall my first trip to the Orient in a tramp steamer, when I, too, bought:

Walkin' sticks o' carved bamboo, an' blow-
fish stuffed an' dried;
Fillin' my bunk wi' rubbishry the Chief put
over-side.

After all, this is the time of their lives, these foolish young people with their curios and their wrist-watches and the stars on their shoulders and in their eyes.

So, walking through the bazaar, one sees another phase of the only thing worth looking at—humanity. One sees the little Turkish boy being fitted with a suit in an outfitter's, or the little Turkish maiden buying a comb. One meets the Jewishy tout, who speaks all languages—"Oh, yes. Engleesh, all right, Johnny"; the fatuous humbug! One sees French soldiers buying buttons and needles and thread; the canny creatures! One sees solemn bearded Israelites, in flowing gabardines, stalking to and

fro, conversing, strangely enough, in Spanish. One sees these things or one does not, according to one's temperament and training. Personally, I would like to see more of them. I feel there is something in this Babel for me, if I could but stay and catch the subtle cosmopolitan spirit of it. But that may not be. It is time to return. I go on at two!

VI

TO DEPICT a monotony is a difficult and precarious art, and needs for its justification a grand ulterior aim. Such an aim would be out of place in these simple papers. I merely wish to make the reader see, as well as I can, how the glory of war throws a certain sombre shadow over the lives of some obscure seafarers—a shadow in which little save the unregarded virtues of patience and vigilance can grow.

But even in such conditions there are gleams in the dark. Even to phlegmatic Britishers the astonishing phantasmagoria of Balkan life pre-

sents occasional phases of comedy and interest. As for example:

Before going aboard I decide to have another drink. At first I think of going into Floca's. Floca's is the Ritz-Carlton of Salonika; but it is not Salonika. It is merely a small replica of Walker's at Alexandria, the Eastern Exchange at Port Said, the Verdi at Genoa, or Florian's at Venice. The British officer has popularized Floca's, and so has made Floca, if such a person exist, rich. The uniforms of five nations mingle at the marble-topped tables. It is the only place where you can get tea in a city which never drinks tea. Here the nurses and the subalterns can eat chocolate éclairs and Sally Lunns under the very noses of brigadiers. Floca's reeks of wealth and Occidental refinement. I stand in the Place de la Liberté and con-

template the glittering throng within the great doors. And I turn away. I decide against Floca's. I know a less reputable place where it will be quiet, and where the beer is a penny a litre cheaper. *Allons donc.*

It is round the corner, on the sea front, between the market and an unfortunate alley where mendicants eat fish with their fingers and quarrel over stray *lepta*. It is what is known as a *café-chantant*, a large lofty barn of a room, with a plush balcony for customers, a small stage, and a piano. This sort of establishment does its profitable business at night, when I am in bed. Nevertheless, I imagine that it can never be more amusing than when I see it, its harsh decrepitude revealed in the clear dancing sunlight reflected from the sea, and the gloom of its corners alive with bizarre forms.

I order my beer from a Greek gentleman who reluctantly leaves a political conversation to attend to me. Although I am almost the only customer, there are quite a dozen people engaged round the piano and in front of a camera. For this is rehearsal-time for the artists who grace the stage in the evening. A weary pianist in Greek khaki strums the air of a song, and a rouged and jewelled lady leans over him, singing and beating time with her hands and feet. Another young lady sits near me, *her* feet on the table in front of her, showing much stocking, humming a song, and pretending to study the sheet of music she holds before her. Her hat is on one side. So, for that matter, is her nose. Suddenly she rises and begins to walk aimlessly among the tables, still humming her song. I don't think it

is a very good song, to judge by the hum. Suddenly she emits a squall, which is answered by another squall behind the curtains of the little stage, and a bony female, in green silk and spangles, thrusts her frizzled head and stringy neck through the opening. They talk, and when each has elicited from the other a wild gust of laughter, the spangled one vanishes, only to appear immediately at the side.

My attention is now attracted to a dark corner where strangely garbed forms are writhing in an apparently interminable embrace. The photographer, an itinerant of the streets, fusses methodically with his prehistoric camera. Several Jewesses, their eyes flashing on either side of large powdered noses, sit round, drinking vermouth and gin, and watching the dim performance with

tolerant smiles. At length, by moving several tables nearer, I can make out a couple of acrobats engaged in tying themselves into a sort of human clove-hitch. They seem to me to be attempting the impossible. Perhaps they are. Perhaps they are idealists, like the brothers in the Goncourts' novel, "Les Frères Zemganno." I am, in this matter, *par excellence* a detached spectator. One is short and thick, the other slim and athletic. I see the face of the latter peering up from between the legs of his colleague—a thin, distorted face, with strained, unseeing, yet strangely watchful-looking eyes, the cheeks smeared with rivulets of perspiration, the brow damp and pallid. Suddenly they collapse and fall apart. Another failure. They hold their wrists, regarding each other with expressions of pain and malevolence. The pho-

tographer continues to potter about, ignoring their futile antics until he is given the word.

They elect to take a breathing spell, and the spangled lady assumes her position on the carpet, keeping up all the while a torrent of conversation with the student of song, who is now seated on a table near by. Another figure emerges from the wings of the stage, a dreadful travesty of a hero, a hero with bandy legs, yellow whiskers, and a false nose of heroic dimensions. He is dressed in yellow and red. He and the spangled lady strike a love-attitude, he registering dignity, she hopeless passion. The photographer bestirs himself, dives under his black cloth, and waves a mesmerizing hand back and forth, to lend emphasis to his own muffled commands. With an abrupt gesture he snatches the cap from the lens,

beats time in the air slowly—one, two, three—claps it on again, and the group smile foolishly at each other.

It is amusing, yet I see a good deal of pathos in these poor strolling players. They are doing their best. No doubt, in the evening, when the tables are thronged, and the music strives with the babel of voices and the clink of glass, they have their reward.

I confess, however, to a sporting interest in the acrobats who are unable to attain the position in which they desire to be photographed. I order a fresh beer. Several shoeblacks, paper-boys, peanut-vendors, and itinerant chocolate-merchants have come in, and regard me with chastened expectancy. I am *persona non grata* to these infernal pests of the Levant. By instinct, when I turn

to look at them, they recognize my antipathy. Each in his turn examines my expression with shrewd skill, and fades away into the dazzling clangour of the street. At length our protagonists, emerging from a thicket of stacked chairs where they have been secluded during the last scene, take their stand once more upon the dingy carpet and look around with a *morituri-te-salutamus* expression. They grasp hands. The tall one pulls sharply. The short one makes a miraculous ascent into the air. For an instant his curved body and bent limbs are poised in unstable equilibrium, and one might imagine him but that moment descended from above. For me he is foreshortened. I see him as one sees the angel who is hurling the thunderbolt in Tintoretto's never-to-be-forgotten masterpiece. The piano is hushed. Now he is

poised on the other's hands, on one hand. *Enfin!* In tense silence the photographer removes his lens-cap; there is a quiver of the outflung hand and the tall athlete flutters his eyelids as he looks up with awful anxiety —*pouf!* It is finished, and we all breathe again as the short athlete comes down with a jump. I feel very glad indeed that they have succeeded. I like to see human beings succeed.

Over at the piano, however, I can detect nothing that resembles success. The peripatetic student of song and the musical reservist are not having a very happy time. She has not even a vaudeville voice. From the manner in which the accompanist slaps the music and snarls over his shoulder at her, I gather that she has not yet mastered the notes. Every minute or so she turns her back on

him and feigns a passionate withdrawal. He, poor wight, with a Balkan winter in the trenches in front of him, pays not the slightest attention to her tantrums. Then, after a perfectly furious altercation, they find a basis of agreement. She is to go on the stage and sing the song without words. *Bon!* She skips up, showing a great deal of stocking as she adjusts her garters and pulls down her cheap little jacket. But it appears that she cannot sing the song, even without words. She begins:

La-la, la-la la-la-h-lah!
La-la . . .

and stops, looking at me, of all people, with profound suspicion, as though I had stolen the rest of her *lahs*.

A Jewess interjects a sentence, and both the accompanist and the young lady, to my astonishment, shriek with

laughter. I laugh, too. It is infectious if bewildering. I realize how hopeless it would be for me to try to comprehend their intricate psychology. I am a mere spectator from an alien planet, watching for a brief instant the antics of inexplicable shadows on a screen. I drink my beer and drift out into the noise and dazzle. I must go aboard.

I skip across the road, dodging a trolley-car, an ambulance wagon, a donkey with silver-plated harness and a raw red chasm on his rump, a mad boy on a pink bicycle, and a cart drawn by two enormous oxen, their heads bowed beneath a massive yoke. I gain the sea wall and follow it until I reach the kiosks that flank the dirty marble steps of the Venizelos landing. A boy in a boat immediately waves his arms and beckons to me as if I were the one

person in Salonika who could rescue him from life-long indigence. A *lustros*, the cynical name given to the home-grown shoe-shine boy, flings himself at my feet and endeavours gently to lift one of them to his box.

I resist this infamous proposal. I ignore the demented youth in the boat. I walk out on the marble jetty and look calmly about for our own dinghy. It occasionally happens that I am in time to join the captain as he returns. I do not think that he likes the idea very much, but he makes no audible protest when an engineer sits beside him. However, there is no sign of either skipper or dinghy, so I turn again to the youth in the boat. He rows hastily to the steps, and motions me to get in and recline on his scarlet cushions. But I am not to be cozened. I demand a tariff. According to the guide-book

he may charge me one drachma (about twenty cents) for a trip, without luggage, to the outer harbour. I am prepared to give two, since it is war-time and bread is dear. We begin to haggle. It is a phase of human folly very distasteful to an Englishman, this stupid enthronement of cunning and knavish bluff in the forefront of all levantine transactions. The Anglo-Saxon is torn with the conflict of disparate desires. He wishes to show his unutterable scorn for the whole performance by flinging a triple fare in the huckster's face, and he has also a profound moral conviction that he ought "on principle" to pay the exact legal demand. I have done both. There is a certain amount of pleasure in each. I weigh their merits as I stand on Venizelos Steps and haggle with the boatman. Thus:

Boatman.—Boat! Boat! You want boat? All right.

Fare.—How much to beef-ship?

Boatman.—T'ree shillin', yes. You want boat!

Fare.—Yes, I want a boat, but only for hire to go to the beef-ship. How much?

Boatman.—T'ree shillin'.

Fare.—Too much.

[*He turns away and fills his pipe with great care, and, sitting on the marble parapet, contemplates the harbour. This is very disconcerting to the Boatman. He ties up and steps ashore, to follow the matter up. He approaches the Fare, who smokes stolidly.*]

Boatman.—You want boat?

Fare.—Ah! How much to the beef-ship?

Boatman.—How mooch? T'ree shillin'.

Fare.—No. Two francs.

Boatman.—Come on. T'ree francs, eh? Yaas.

Fare [*stolidly*].—I will give you two francs.

Boatman.—Yaas. All raight. 'Alf-a-crown, eh?

Fare.—Half-a-crown is three francs. I will give you *two.*

Boatman.—Two shillin'?

Fare [*patiently*].—No. You see, it's this way: if you take me to the beef-ship, I will give you two francs. Do you get that right? Two! One and one. Two.

Boatman.—All raight. Come on.

[*He goes down the steps.*]

Fare.—You understand then: two francs. No more.

Boatman [*blankly*].—No more?

Fare [*blandly*].—No more. What did you think?

Boatman.—T'ree shillin'.

Fare [*getting into the boat and taking the tiller lines*].—I shouldn't be surprised if some Englishman killed you for saying "three shillings," my friend.

If he were not so dirty he would be a nice-looking lad of the 1917 class. He is dressed in the usual composite rags of the Greek proletariat, part khaki, part European, part Turkish. He does not look as if he belonged to a conquering race. Neither, I suppose, do I; but the cases are not similar. My young boatman does not regard Janina as I regard the capture of Quebec, for example. Goodness only knows what he does regard, or how. He may be one of the conquered race. I ask him with large gestures to illustrate my meaning, if he is going to enlist, soldier —fight—gun—bang!—beat Bulgar —eh? He is puzzled, and perseveres

with his oars. I reflect that he may be an anti-Venizelist. Presently, as we clear the inside shipping, he asks, as every Greek boatman asks:

"When your ship go away, eh?"

And I tell him a deliberate, cold-blooded lie! We do not inform Greek boatmen when our ships are going away.

About this time my attention is held by the appearance of the sky. It is a sky I have learned to regard with a certain amount of interest. As my young boatman steps his mast and hoists his sail, I observe, high above the rolling banks and islets of cumulous vapour in the bowl of the Gulf, a film of transparent dapple-gray clouds assembling. The whole of the upper air is mottled with their confusing texture. A delightful sky in peace-times, a sky veiling the sun and

making high noon agreeable. A sky to watch through the open window in springtime. A sky to paint, with a foreground of yellow crocuses and green grass and brown girls. A sky to look up at, from where one lies on the heather, and dream a boy's strange and delicate dreams.

One of the advantages of war is the deeper and more intense interpretation one learns to give to the common phenomena. This gay, romantic sky used to be nothing more than gay and romantic. Now I watch it with an experienced apprehension. And as I pass a man-of-war, I observe that the anti-aircraft crew are at drill. There is something curiously affectionate in the aspect of an anti-aircraft crew at work. The gunner is seated and his assistants are all grouped about him, heads together, as though whispering to each other

the most delightful secrets. Perhaps they are.

We come leisurely alongside. Standing on the grating at the foot of the accommodation ladder, I pay my young friend his two francs with a bonus of twopence. For a single moment he stands, from life-long habit, in an attitude eloquent of despair. I go up the ladder, smiling blandly at his outflung hands and upraised indignant eyes. Then he recovers himself, makes a gesture consigning the whole race of Englishmen to perdition, pockets the money, and rows away. Once more I am on board, and it is nearly two o'clock.

VII

IT SHOULD never be forgotten, in a review of the seafaring life, that these casual and irrelevant encounters with the offscourings of hybrid races, though priceless to the philosopher and the artist, are of no human value to the sailor at all. The jaded landsman imagines that we seamen "see the world" and view "mankind from China to Peru." He romantically conceives us extracting the fine essences from the crude masses of humanity with whom we are thrown in contact in the seething ports of the Orient. He figures us ecstatically savouring the "unchanging East" and beholding "strange lands

from under the arched white sails of ships." It must be confessed that popular fiction confirms these illusions. We who work in ships are supposed to be prototypes of Mr. Kipling's "Tramp Royal"—a flattering but untrue assumption.

But while an intelligent person can see readily that, to the unimaginative seafarer, this continual procession of detached images will have no positive significance, very few observers realize how such an environment tends also to indurate the soul. Yet so it is. In our rough, homely way, we are fatigued with distinctions, and reduce the Unknown to common denominators. We call Hindoos "coolies," Chinamen "Chinks," Americans "Yanks," Spaniards "Dagoes," Italians "Spaghettis," and we let it go at that. We are majestically incurious about them

all. There is no British type so narrow, so dogmatic, so ignorant, so impervious to criticism, so parochial in its outlook, as the seafaring man or officer. You would imagine, from our ideas, that we had remained all our days in our home towns. Indeed most of us have. Our real life beats in the little houses in Penarth, Swansea, Seaforth, White Inch, or South Shields. We have very little passion for the bizarre. We become callous to the impact of the stray alien, and feed our narrow hearts with wistful visions of an idealized suburban existence.

Going on at two is quite a different thing from the ghastly affair of the small hours. Each period of the day has its own subtle quality, which no arbitrary rearrangement of our own hours of work and rest can destroy. And two o'clock in the afternoon is a

time of disillusion, a time when a man has neither great faith nor profound convictions. The morning is gone, the evening too far away. Even tea-time seems at an immense and tragic distance. It is the slack-water period of the day. And it is the period when a man may perhaps experience, in the space of a flash, a peculiar sensation of being an impostor! It is, I suppose, in such moments that generals, commanders, chief engineers, and the like jump overboard. It is a sensation extraordinarily vivid and brief. No external evidence is of any avail to neutralize its dire and dreadful omniscience. No personal written record, no esteem of lifelong friends, no permanent and visible accomplishment can shield the sensitive human soul, thus suddenly stripped bare by some devilish cantrip of its own

mechanism. One feels a hollow sham.

And the ship, at this hour, is strangely deserted. Those who have work are gone to it, those who are off duty are resting after a hot lunch. The day's ration of meat is gone; the soldiers are on an upper deck, out of sight. Thomas, stretched to an incredible length on the deck steam-guard, snoozes in gross comfort. Ibrahim-el-Din, an Arab coal-passer, is smoking a meditative cigarette by the after-rail. The faded Irishman is perambulating in his stiff way round the machine, and I take charge for another six hours. A Greek sailor, no doubt a Venizelist, is painting a bulkhead in an amateur fashion. As I look through one of the after-window scuttles I observe our agnostic Second Officer drift past. He is probably going to resume his

erotic novel, a species of fiction for which he has a strange passion.

For an hour or so I look out of my machine-room window upon an untidy after-deck, and reflect upon the vicissitudes of War. Visible through the crystalline atmosphere, Salonika, floored with a jade-green sea and domed with dappled azure, resembles the painted curtain of some titanic theatre. It is in fact one of those monstrous "theatres of war" which are now giving a continuous performance to the whole world. But for us on transports that painted curtain is never lifted. We see nothing of the performance. We are mere stage carpenters, or caterers, or perhaps only stray freight wagons which bring some homely necessary material to the grand display.

Such are my thoughts, more or less, when I catch sight suddenly of

my friend Tubby, the fat marine, standing on the gun-platform and excitedly waving his arms toward the Vardar Marshes. I run out on deck. Tubby comes hurrying along, shouting in the hoarse voice that goes with immense girth and a short neck:

"See 'im, sir? A Tawb! A Tawb!"

And so it is a *Taube*. After a momentary search of the upper reaches of the air, I spot him, a far-distant dot. And as we gather in a tense little knot on the after-deck, straining our eyes, clawing tentatively for a peep through the binoculars, the enemy monoplane sails serenely toward us, and the guns begin to go. From the men-of-war near by, from invisible batteries concealed ashore, the sharp cracks echo, and we watch the oncoming dot ten thousand feet above the sea. Tubby says ten thousand feet, and although

I don't believe he knows anything about it, he has been in the Navy and possesses the prestige of the Senior Service. He certainly knows more about it than we do.

And observe how greedily we make the most of this little bit of war which has come to us. Now he is right over us, sailing across a broad shield of speckless blue, and we see the small white plumes of shrapnel suddenly appear, above, below, and around him. He sails on. He must be doing seventy miles an hour. Somebody doubts this. We ignore him, and push the speed up to eighty miles. Say eighty miles an hour. Golly! That was a close one. A white plume appears right in front of him. He sails on. Evidently he has no bombs. Tubby says: "Tawbs don't carry no bombs." What a mine of information he is! Again a

hit, a palpable hit. But he sails on. There is something sublime about this. Of course he is a German and therefore damnable. But—but—well, he is damnably adventurous. I wonder what he is doing. Has he a sweetheart, a German *Mädchen?* I am supposed to believe she would not have the wit to love him for this dare-devil eagle-swoop over Salonika. I don't think, however, that patriotism compels me to hate that airman up there. *Crack-crack!* go the guns. He sails on. He is, so far, supreme. A dim sporting instinct, which used to have free rein at school, shoots through my mind and I discover in myself no passionate desire to see him hit. He himself seems to have no anxieties whatever. I recall a line from Shelley:

> He rides upon the platform of the wind,
> And laughs to hear the fireballs roar behind.

Now he is over Ben Lomond and is turning toward Monastir, whence we suppose he has come. Other batteries behind the town welcome him and the Navy resigns itself, for once, to frustration. Crack after crack, plume after plume. Now he is behind a cloud, and our attention is taken up for a moment by the sight of our own machines manœuvring for position in the offing. And the next time we see him he is coming down. Tubby says so. Personally, I imagined him to be going up; but I never contradict a navy man. Somebody else says he is hit. Our lieutenant, on the upper deck with the commander, looking through his prismatic glasses, says it looks like it. I glance at our group, all eyes raised to the sky, mouths open, emblems of receptive vacuity.

Reluctantly we abandon our pre-

cious "Tawb" to the inland ranges and return to the mundane life once more. Tubby walks to and fro, a short man of enormous size, discoursing of "Tawbs." I call him my mythological monster, for he has served in the "'*Ercles*," the "'*Ecuba*," the "*You roper*," the *Endymion* and the "*Amfi-trite*." When we go to sea, Tubby stands or sits by his gun and keeps a lookout for submarines. He is one of Hardy's Wessex yokels. When the war came, he was malting at Malmesbury, and doing a small delivery-wagon business for a local hardware store. He looks it. He could pose for John Bull, a beef-eating, ale-drinking, Saxon John Bull. Now he is also an expert on "Tawbs." What tales he will tell by the malt-house fires in the winters to come! Tales, perhaps, of "Tawbs!"

And so, in idle talk and modest

vigilance, the day wears on, until the sun is setting in turbulent reds and purples beyond the Vardar, and the peak of Olympos, showing for a brief moment above the billows of vapour, is flushed an exquisite pale rose colour. Lights begin to twinkle on the shore. Those on day work begin to appear after their wash, loafing about until dinner, smoking cigarettes, arguing after the foolish, dogmatic way of sailors, getting heated over nothing, condemning a nation in a thoughtless phrase. Some are writing home, for a mail goes soon. Some come into the machine-room for a drink of water, or for a chat.

The Fourth Engineer, who had viewed the aeroplane dressed in blue serge trousers and an unbuttoned pajama jacket, now appears in his uniform, still a little drowsy after his day's sleep, but smiling in his pleas-

ant boyish way. Our conversation is not intellectual. We really have not much to say. It would not bear writing down. Nor would a comic paper take our jokes. Nevertheless, we talk and laugh and pass the time. For myself, I talk to everybody: I talk to the nigger firemen and the Chinese cook, to the dog and the cat, to the canary in my room and the parrot who blasphemes so bitterly on the fore-deck.

So I keep in practice. For some day we shall have Peace, and we shall go home, over the well-remembered road to Malta and Gib, and over the mountainous western-ocean swell that is for ever charging across the Bay. Some day this will happen, and we shall speak the Tuskar once again, tie up in the old dock, and step ashore. And we shall take our way, some of us, through the quiet

countryside, where friends await us, friends who will bid us tarry awhile and tell them our tales of foreign parts, as mariners have done and always will do, while ships come home from sea.

THE END

THIS VOLUME WAS PRINTED BY
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
AT THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS
GARDEN CITY, LONG ISLAND, N. Y.
THE PRINTING WAS COMPLETED
IN THE MONTH OF SEPTEMBER
MCMXX





Nancy Hanks Lincoln Public Library