The Vanishing Fleets

By Roy Norton

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ILLUSTRATED BY A. WEIL

SYNOPSIS.

"Vanishing Fleets," a story of "what might have happened," opens in Washington with the United States and Japan on the verge of war. Guy Hillier, secretary of the British embassy, and Miss Norma Roberts, chief aide of Inventor Roberts, are introduced as lovers. Japan declares war and takes the Philippines. The entire country is in a state of turmoil because of the government's indifference. Guy Hillier starts for England. Norma Roberts with military officers also leaves Washington on mysterious expedition for the Florida coast. Hawaii is captured by the Japs. All ports are closed. Siego, Japanese spy, discovers secret preparations for war. He follows auto carrying presidential cabinet. He unearths source of great mystery and flees, murmuring, "The gods are with Japon." Fleeing to Pacific coast, Siego is shot down just as journey to get awful news to Japan seems successful. Japan announces intention to attack seaports. Tokyo learns of missing Japanese fleet and whole world becomes convinced that United States has some powerful war agency. England decides to send a fleet to American waters as a Canadian protection against what the British suppose is a terrible submarine flotilla. Hillier is also sent to Canada to attempt to force his way through American lines with a message to the president, in order that protection for the fleet may be assured. Japan appeals to Britain for aid. British fleet departs, amid misgivings of English. Fleet mysteriously disappears, a sailor picked up on a raft being the only evidence of the loss. Powers begin to fear for their safety. Hillier makes a failure of effort to deliver message to the president. War between Great Britain and Germany is threatened. The kaiser disappears. King Edward of England is confronted by Admiral Bevins of the United States, and upon promising to present the missing British admiral the monarch agrees to accompany Bevins on tour, which the latter says will uncover the agent of war and end all conflicts.

CHAPTER XII.

The Dreadnought Returns.

The falling of the heavens would have created little more consternation and excitement in London than the sight which met the residents' eyes on the morning following the king's visit to the Hippodrome. The fog which settled unexpectedly on that night of June dissipated itself as stealthily as it had come, and floated out with the dawn, leaving in its stead a clear sky. And then, as if a rare discovery had been made simultaneously by thousands instead of one, a swarm of people, defying the rush of motors, of omnibuses and hansoms, debouched on the Thames embankment by the stately pile of buildings where parliament convenes, filled the roadsteads, jammed each other against the river wall, and scorned the constables, who vainly strove to maintain order and uninterrupted traffic.

There, resting serenely on the bosom of the river where in times before Roman galleys had floated, was the pride of the British navy, the Dreadnought. Neither an officer of the watch, a sailor, nor a marine bestrode her decks. Inert and untenanted, silent and lifeless, she lay close by the great gray buildings like the last survivor of a defeated army who had crept home to bring a report of disaster and was resting in the shadow of the last refuge. Her unmasked guns stared wide-eyed and mournful; from her crippled funnels came no wisp of curling smoke; from her channels stretched no anchor chains; and she paid no heed to the vagaries of the sluggish current; her prow which had defiantly parted so many seas was nosed into the mud in helplessness; but as an only solace there floated from her stern the unsullied banner of the United Kingdom, and whipped as she was she had come back to her people with colors still flying.

The miracle of her position was greater than the marvel of her return; for above and below that spot on the river were bridges impassable for a boat of half her size, beneath which tugs and other craft were wont to lower their jointed stacks. In all the world there was no known strength or mechanical contrivance that could transport over shallows and bridges 22,000 tons of steel, and then leave it in this prohibited place. Her very appearance bore mute testimony of singular strife. True, she was intact to a point flush with the great steel domes which held her menacing and frowning guns; but her fighting masts, her top rig, and the upper bands of her funnel were riven off as if by one devastating line shot taken full abeam or square astern. The wreckage of this hamper had been removed, so that no debris littered her deserted decks.

For many days of gloom it had been accepted as a fact that nothing but annihilation could account for the disappearance of the squadron which had doggedly sailed away into the mysterious west to vanquish a terrible and unknown enemy or meet a glorious death. Little hope had been sustained as the days of silence went by that any explanation of the defeat might be forthcoming, or that any vessel might return; and now before London's gathered populace was a grim relic which only added to conjecture. From no source could the secret of this mysterious visitation be learned; and so the crowd watched and waited.

A boat, whose flag distinguished her as being of the river patrol, obeyed a hail from the shore, pulled noisily up the stream against the outgoing tide, and circled round the leviathan as though suspecting danger from within. Her chief officer, after due caution, and receiving no response, cautiously directed her along side, and boarded the Dreadnought over the starboard quarter. The ever increasing crowd along the embankment drew in its breath in expectancy, waiting for a revelation. It heard him shout "Below, there!" and leaned forward, listening for whatever response might be given; but nothing was heard save the steady lap of the water and the farthest sounds of early river traffic.

In a Moment More He Stepped to the Rail.

The officer advanced along the deck to the companionway, and leaned curiously into it repeating his hail, and once more there was a wait and no reply. He backed away from the entrance, and hesitated. It was plain that he desired witnesses before invading the precincts of a stricken craft, and in a moment more he stepped to the rail, held a short conversation with those on the decks of his boat and then waited till he was joined by others of that force that guards the Thames. Three men clambered aboard and stood by him until they were joined by two others, who, obeying a low-spoken order, stationed themselves at the head of the companionway. The officer and his assistants advanced slowly, stepped into the darkness and disappeared into the depths of the battle ship, while the suspense along the embankment and on the patrol became more intense. It was several minutes before the investigators reappeared, and then they had gone only a short way into the vessel. They walked to the rail, and the crowd remained waiting. With British taciturnity they declined to answer any of the questions which were shouted to them from the shore.

The little boat swung off, turned her nose out into the stream and steamed hurriedly away at full speed, bent on summoning others of her service; and in less than half an hour returned accompanied by a small flotilla, which spread out and stationed its members close up against the sides of the stranded craft. Another officer of higher authority joined those waiting on the decks of the Dreadnought, and led the way below, ready to learn the worst. He went as into a plague ship manned by the dead expecting to meet nothing but grewsome relics of tragedy, and prepared for shocking sights.

From place to place he advanced almost on tiptoe, and followed by his companions who stared into darker corners or glanced fearfully behind when the echoes of their falling feet clumped hollowly through the steel cavern. Once a weird shriek caused them to spring toward each other with nervous fright, and when the ship's cat came mewing up to them, begging in its abject way for companionship, they looked foolishly at one another like boys who had been startled in the midst of ghost tales told by a camp fire in the woods.

Cabin after cabin and wardroom after wardroom was opened and searched; but nowhere could be found sign of disturbance or conflict. There was not another living being aboard to greet them, nor did they find more awful testimonials of war.

In the captain's quarters, clean and businesslike, the roll-topped desk was closed, and the books on top of it were in order as for inspection. At its side stood a typewriter with the tin resting lightly upon it, and a stenographer's case notebook beside neatly checked and showing that the last letter or order had been completed. On the wardroom table lay a magazine open and turned page downward as though the reader had desired to keep his place and had stepped away from it on a sudden call. In the galleys of this great floating home pots, pans and kettles were placed in orderly array in their racks—no thrifty housewife could have left her kitchen in better state. In the chartroom the traced highways of the ocean's bed were drawn up in their closed cases, and the hoists were not loaded or littered with ammunition as would have been the case had the battle ship been in action when overcome by the enemy. There was nothing above or below offering a key to the enigma.

Puzzled and overcome, the patrolmen took temporary charge of the ship, while a boat hurried away from the miniature flotilla, carrying a detailed report to the admiralty, where the news was received with amazement no less than that which had brought the crowd on the embankment. Subordinates of departments called for their tardy superiors, telephone bells jangled, and British phlegm gave way to excitement; but even in this remarkable state precedent was maintained and routine observed, so that from man to man, going constantly upward, the report reached the first lord of the admiralty.

Then for the first time it was learned that this high and mighty official was missing from his hotel and had been summoned to the palace in the night. No delay could be brooked in an event so startling, and with due ceremony inquiries were instituted for him. This caused an investigation in gray old Buckingham, which spread until it came to the head of government, when it became known that not only was the naval officer missing, but no less a personage than the king of England as well.

In great disasters by sea or land where swift Death ravages, men cry aloud in their excitement and distress; but when a calamity threatens a nation and a king is involved, they seek to hide their emotions. Hence it was that in the palace men came hurriedly together without words to those around, and in whispers expressed their anxiety. It was recalled with alarm that the kaiser had left his palace in an equally unceremonious manner, decoyed by a stranger, and enticed into the night. Nor was his fate as uncertain or with more ground for question, because there he had been traced to a carriage which had driven away. The king of England had gone into his garden, and the guards at the gates swore he had not passed the portals, which they watched. And for their pains they were doubted and placed under temporary detention until the king should return to prove that they were not in a conspiracy against the state.

Perhaps the alarm would have been less keen were it not for the tale of the kaiser; but the cases were so parallel that the conclusion was instantly formed that England's monarch was probably in as great jeopardy as his fellow ruler who had now been gone for many days. The nobles looked at one another askance, and asked what times were these when no person might be so august as to be immune from seizure. Where was the limit to be reached? What could be expected next? Was there no possible protection even for the heads of government and society?

In the offices of the admiralty those of more or less prominence in the department held a conference and detailed men to take charge of the Dreadnought. There could be no attempt to rehabilitate her at that time, inasmuch as it would be impossible ever again to bring her into service without destroying a span of the bridge below; therefore no coroner's inquest could have convened with more solemnity than did those men who took charge of and boarded this great dead thing of the sea.

A derelict cast upon an open sandy beach offered more chance of salvage than the greatest vessel of the greatest navy of the world, nosed in the mud and practically walled in. And while she lay in this state of helplessness there was forming round English shores a formidable flotilla of other war vessels flying the British flag, which had been summoned from all waters of the globe to protect the mother country from German invasion or if need arose gallantly to seek death beds in the sea in the attempt to fend off the American terror should it be directed against the island ruler of the waves.

As they advanced, captains of this great navy arrived in London in response to urgent summons and hastened to the admiralty. One and all they were asked to pass expert opinion on the condition of the Dreadnought, and offer a solution of the methods used to bring her to that singular anchorage in the river; but, like children groping in the mist, they could formulate no probable theory nor give any lucid explanation. They looked at each other in amazement, wagged their heads and admitted their inability. Plague would have left dead men at their posts, or battle would have left more serious scars than the cutting away of the fighting masts and the wrecking of the stacks; but even then who would navigate her to home waters, and what could account for her presence in a place where even a small sea-going craft could not go? If that nation in the west had a submarine of terrific speed and unknown power it might perhaps destroy a ship; but by what means could it force it under or over a bridge of solid masonry and steel?

And so the men of the sea passed down and back, while the people of London spent the time in trying to see the latest evidence of disaster, took turns in crowding to the embankment, and then went to their homes. Business came to a halt, shops were unopened and desks were closed. In the government offices men moved helplessly, and in homes throughout the country families sat within doors gravely discussing the latest manifestation of power.

Nor was the public aware that in higher circles another cause for anxiety had been uncovered, which was nothing less than the disappearance of the prime minister. A king, a prime minister and the first lord of the admiralty taken at one time! It was sufficient to make others of prominence look at one another questioning when their turn might come and what the end would be. No one was safe in this great crisis, when thrones tottered on their settings and men were whisked away in the night, when the most powerful vessels of war were defied by the wisdom of science and ingenuity of invention might be dominated and handled like toys.

There was no ground for belief that any power other than the United States might have been the controlling spirit in this long series of untoward events, but from that nation came no word, only a silence more menacing than the thunder of distant guns, and more terrible and ominous than an open display of invincible arms. It took no great stretch of imagination to people the air with phalanx on phalanx of stern and implacable foemen bent on invasion when the time seemed ripe. A country which could flaunt the world was capable of anything, and it was not believable that she was acting without a purpose. But what means did she take? What would be her next move? How had she accomplished those victories already scored upon her tally sheet? Only one hope for partial explanation remained, and that was based upon the return to sanity of a maddened sailor who had come to them on a life raft from the unknown, as the only witness of a disaster, and the only living link.

And even while the anxious officials thought of him a group of surgeons and specialists were standing round a cot in a hospital watching this man breathe his last. Now that his importance had increased a hundredfold Death was intervening and sealing his lips. He passed away as silently as he had been found, his jumbled wits giving no new and tangible clew, speechless as he had been picked up on a life raft in mid ocean, and speechless he voyaged out into another world.

Night fell over London, infolding a stricken city where none came upon the streets and men within doors whispered to each other, dreading what the morrow might bring forth. The heart of Britain, beating with dogged determination to the last, was broken. America was the master of fate, and could deal out its awards or blows with the inexorableness of a god.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Russian Schools.

Our secondary schools are bad, the primary schools are not better, but it is to the superior school that we must look for the heart of putrefaction. It is the superior school which sets the bad example, which depraves youth, habituating it to idleness and inculcating revolutionary principles.—Journal de St. Petersburg.

WHY NOT OWN LAND?

ONE OF THE BEST WAYS TO MAKE MONEY IS TO INVEST IN WESTERN CANADA.

"Deep down in the nature of every properly constituted man is the desire to own some land." A writer in the Iowa State Register thus tersely expresses a well-known truth. The question is where is the best land to be had at the lowest prices, and this the same writer points out in the same article. The fact is not disguised that the writer has a personal interest in the statement of his case, and there is no hidden meaning when he refers to Western Canada as presenting greater possibilities than any other part of the American Continent, to the man who is inclined to till the soil for a livelihood and possible competence. What interests one are the arguments advanced by this writer, and when fairly analyzed the conclusion is reached that no matter what personal interest the writer may have had, his reasons appear to have the quality of great soundness. The climatic conditions of Western Canada are fully as good as those of Minnesota, the Dakotas or Iowa, the productiveness of the soil is as great, the social conditions are on a parity, the laws are as well established and as carefully observed. In addition to these the price of land is much less, easier to secure. So, with these advantages, why shouldn't this—the offer of Western Canada—be embraced. The hundreds of thousands of settlers now there, whose homes were originally in the United States, appear to be satisfied. Once in awhile complaints are heard, but the Canadians have never spoken of the country as an Eldorado no matter what they may have thought. The writer happened to have at hand a few letters, written by former residents of the United States, from which one or two extracts are submitted. These go to prove that the writer in the Register has a good basis of fact in support of his statements regarding the excellency of the grain growing area of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. On the 29th of April of this year W. R. Conley, of Lougheed, Alberta, wrote a friend in Detroit. He says: "The weather has been just fine ever since I came here in March, and I believe one could find if he wanted to some small patches of snow around the edge of the lake. There is a frost nearly every morning; at sunrise it begins to fade away, then those blue flowers open and look as fresh as if there had been no frost for a week. . . . There is no reason why this country should not become a garden of Eden; the wealth is in the ground and only needs a little encouragement from the government to induce capital in here. There is everything here to build with; good clay for brick; coal underneath, plenty of water in the spring lakes, and good springs coming out of the banks."

MAKING THE MOST OF IT.

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by local applications, as they cannot reach the diseased portion of the ear. There is only one way to cure deafness, and that is by constitutional remedies. Deafness is caused by an inflamed condition of the mucous lining of the Eustachian Tube. When this tube is inflamed you have a rumbling sound or imperfect hearing, and when it is entirely closed, Deafness is the result, and unless the inflammation can be taken out and this tube restored to its normal condition, hearing will be destroyed forever; nine cases out of ten are caused by catarrh, which is nothing but an inflamed condition of the mucous surfaces.

We will give One Hundred Dollars for any case of Deafness (caused by catarrh) that cannot be cured by Hall's Catarrh Cure. Send for circulars, free.

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Take Hall's Family Pills for constipation.

Prince Rupert's Drops.

Prince Rupert's drops are drops of molten glass, consolidated by falling to water. Their form is that of a tadpole. The thick end may be hammered pretty smartly without its breaking, but if the smallest portion of the thin end is nipped off the whole flies into fine dust with explosive violence. These toys, if not invented by Prince Rupert, were introduced by him into England.

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This if followed up will cure an acute cold in 24 hours. The ingredients can be gotten at any drug store.

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A Toast.

The latest thing in toasts comes from "upstate," and was responded to by the father of 12 daughters, who claims that he ought to know.

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They also relieve Distress from Dyspepsia, Indigestion and Too Hearty Eating. A perfect remedy for Dizziness, Nausea, Drowsiness, Bad Taste in the Mouth, Coated Tongue, Pain in the Side, TORPID LIVER. They regulate the Bowels. Purely Vegetable.

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CARTER'S LITTLE LIVER PILLS.

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Per Salzer's catalog page 120.

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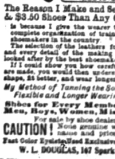

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