



A COMPLETE STORY.

By ARCHIBALD WILLIAMS.

Illustrated by N. Wilkinson.

THE underwriters at Lloyd's are a philosophic race, and take their losses with resignation. But their stoicism was being sadly tried by the unusual number of the yellow telegrams papering the "Chamber of Horrors," and by the frequency of the single stroke with which the *Lutine's* bell heralds some fresh announcement of wreck and disaster.

In the stormy winter season such things had their place, but it was now mid-summer; the sea had been calm as a mill-pond for weeks, and the Channel remarkably free from fogs. So that nobody could explain the long list of vessels hopelessly overdue under circumstances which were at least mysterious.

For instance, the *Eupatoria* and *Hadleigh Castle* were both signalled off Land's End, but neither reached Southampton. The *Bortas* with all her passengers had disappeared somewhere between Guernsey and Weymouth. An equally uncertain fate overtook the *Seagull* packet between Dover and Ostend. A man found hanging to a floating spar off Great Orme's Head related how the *Gadfly* cattle-boat had suddenly foundered at dawn, before the crew had even time to swing out the boats. At the cause of the calamity he could not even guess.

These and many other vessels had been lost within a few miles of the English coast. It was impossible to ascribe such

a series of disasters to collisions, nor was it likely that a number of hitherto unknown rocks had suddenly risen from the ocean bed. Barratry was, as a motive, out of the question. What then?

The anxiety, felt not only by the underwriters but by the public at large, deepened when a Wilson "Parrot" limped into Hull, her bows gaping from a wound that fought hard with the united bilge-pumps for the mastery. The captain deposed that an explosion had wrought the mischief, and an examination in dock plainly showed that the blow had come from the outside, and that, therefore, a theory of infernal machines placed on board the vessel could not be entertained.

The newspapers had already been well supplied with sensational headlines for a full month when the mystery entered on its second phase. An ironclad flew into the air midway between Shoebury and Sheerness. Two days later a new torpedo destroyer came to a like end further up the Thames, and while British nerves were still raw from that mishap *H.M.S. Smiler* sank with a loud report in the Solent.

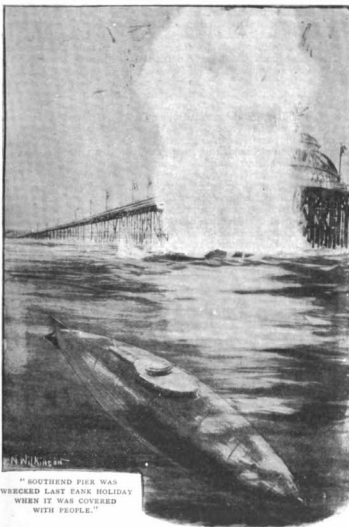
Anxiety and sorrow deepened into panic. What doubts could there now be of a plot aimed, not merely at British shipping, but at the British Empire itself? Thirty-five vessels missing and ten severely damaged was the tale of five weeks; to which the destruction of three units of our

First Line of Defence came as a fitting climax.

Granted a plot, who were the plotters? The fact that France had lately launched a flotilla of new submarine boats lent some colour to the solution offered by more excitable minds, that our great naval rival was the culprit. France had many grudges of old standing against us; the steady increase of her fleet could have but one object; of late there had been much irritation on both sides of the Channel. What more natural than for her to pave the way for an open declaration of hostilities by removing some of our warships?

While popular opinion became thus inflammable in Britain under the smart of many losses, the destruction of two French gunboats between Pelée Island and Cherbourg raised an equally bitter cry on the other side the water against perfidious Albion. Nothing less would satisfy the prevailing Anglophobia than that the French fleets should be immediately mobilised—a move to which the English Government replied in the one way possible. The situation was extremely critical, when news came from America that some agency had sunk five vessels in the New York "Narrows," and spread dismay among Yankee shippers. This impartiality of destruction cleared the political atmo-

sphere, but shrouded the mystery in deeper darkness. France and England concluded that it would be best to shake hands and unite in a search for the common foe. Was it possible, serious people asked, that the prophesied Yellow Peril had at last



"SOUTHEAST PIER WAS
WRECKED LAST HOLIDAY
WHEN IT WAS COVERED
WITH PEOPLE."

arrived in the shape of a Chinese submarine crusade against Western civilisation?

II.

MR. MARCUS HAMMERSLEY, the inventor, was suffering from a reaction after his

ceaseless labours. He reclined in a well-worn armchair, the birthplace of many of his most brilliant ideas, a victim of mingled triumph and anxiety. The last four years had been a continual fight with difficulties and discouragements such as come to those operating in new fields on a large scale; but they had witnessed the completion of his masterpiece of skill and ingenuity—the submarine boat *Otter*. So far so good. But there was another side to the picture. What reception would be given the boat by the British Government? The official trials were fixed for the morrow, and though Hammersley felt great confidence in his creation, he could not disguise the fact that failure would practically be ruin.

His eyes wandered to a couple of photographs on the mantelpiece. The first, showing a winsome girl in dainty dress, seemed to afford the necessary antidote to his nervous condition. His eyes brightened, and he sprang up, exclaiming, "Faugh! What a dismal croaker I have become! I'm glad Milly and the men at the yard cannot read my thoughts at this distance, or they would be ashamed of me! And you, Matrondola, my friend," he continued, taking up the photograph of a dark, handsome man, and looking at it affectionately, "you shall have a word of how things have gone, though you don't write as often as you did."

He took his pen and wrote—

"MY DEAR STEFANO,

"She is finished at last, my *Otter*, a thing of beauty, as I am sure you would allow, and to me at least, I hope, a joy for ever. Yes! finished, as you prophesied she would be, in due time. I can now almost afford to smile when I recall the black day on which *Otter* the First was burnt to a heap of twisted plates with all my machinery and precious scale-drawings. If you had not been in Southsea to encourage me, I verily believe I should have sold my ideas to Armstrong to exploit for what they were worth. I am heartily thankful that I didn't. There was truth in your saw, *Al primo colpo non casca l'albero*, or as we put it, 'Rome wasn't built in a day.' It has been slow work, because my suspicions that the fire came from foul play made me reduce my staff to a dozen men whom I could trust implicitly. Besides, that little blaze cost me fifteen thousand, and at the present moment my bank balance would be a dear bargain for ten pounds.

"However, the official trials come off to-morrow in the Solent, and if all goes well

the Admiralty will buy her for a good round sum, and then I shall rejoice, and a pair of dear eyes will sparkle in Kensington. In fact, *amigo mio*, my bachelorhood will come to a fitting end in a church.

"When you were last over here I could not, for obvious reasons, show you, the dearest of my male friends, the many details in which the *Otter* has struck out original lines. Here I may but hint at a few: the light accumulators for which the world has sought in vain these many years; the oxygenators which render me far more independent of the upper air than any whale, as they take us a hundred miles at one charge, and are easily replenished by electrolysis of water. And at what a pace she moves! None of your beggarly twelve knots an hour, but a good round twenty; and keeps it up. She is a living creature; she sees far ahead with my new water telescope; my audiophone is a splendid ear for her; and the proximometer is as sensitive as a butterfly's antennæ to the approach of any other body! Excuse an inventor's enthusiasm, old fellow; it is often a delicate flower, destined to perish beneath the cold breath of 'official trials.'

"The latter, by the bye, are supposed to be a secret—open enough for everyone to know just what is going to happen; so that I expect my expensive darling will play to a pretty large gallery to-morrow. And no wonder, with the *Teredo* looming so large. There are thousands in these islands who have to mourn the loss of friends, thanks to the dastardly pranks of that craft; and I assure you that I would gladly forego any reward, and give all possible *Otter* profits into the bargain, for the pleasure of laying that scoundrelly captain by the heels and completing the circuit of my accumulators with his wretched carcass.

"Have you heard of his latest exploits—the wrecking of the Southend Pier last Bank Holiday when it was covered with people, and a destructive invasion of our new harbour at Dover? I wonder whether there is only one vessel, because if it is so it must be as fast as my *Otter*, to judge by the way it gets about. After sneering at the 'submarine' for so long, our authorities are being rudely awakened to the gravity of their mistake. 'Tis whispered, and this particular whisper tells the truth, that an empty barrel floated in among our Channel Fleet the other night, the searchlights picked it up, and before you could

say 'Jack Robinson' the Admiralty was a good deal poorer in shot and shell. This serves to show the nervous tension in our navy, which is not manned by cowards.

"I wonder when we shall meet again. As soon as you can tear yourself away from your scholarly retirement at Tivoli come over to Southsea again. You shall have a trip in the *Otter*; and, in spite of your professed indifference to things mechanical, I am sure you will find it a thrilling experience. By the bye, be a good fellow and burn this. You know that I can trust you like myself; but servants have eyes, and even these mere hints might have a value in the right quarter.

"You now owe me three letters. Have you been travelling lately, or is the weight of your learning too much for your pen?"

"Yours affectionately,

"MARCUS HAMMERSLEY."

These two men became acquainted somewhat dramatically during a boat excursion to the famous Blue Grotto of Capri. A sudden storm rose and capsized the boat, and Matrondola would certainly have been drowned had not the engineer come to his aid and brought him safely to land. Matrondola insisted on carrying off his rescuer

to his home at Tivoli, and Hammersley was very relieved to escape thither from the fuss made over him as the saviour of a well-known writer and scholar.

A difference of nationality and pursuits did not prevent a deep and firm friendship forming between the two men; and Hammersley was unfeignedly glad when, two years later, the task of collating some MSS. in the British Museum brought Matrondola to England, and gave him the chance of visiting Southsea. During the visit, the *Otter* was destroyed by fire so completely that Hammersley, in spite of his firm square jaw, for the moment despaired of his great ambition—to give England first place among the nations in this particular branch of naval construction.

They parted at Southampton. Passengers' friends had all gone ashore, and the gangway was on the point of being raised, when Hammersley dashed up it and thrust a paper packet into his friend's hand. "Here, old fellow, a dockerman says you dropped this; tried to get at you, but they wouldn't let him on board."

Then he sprang down again, while Matrondola, very white-faced, turned the packet over to see that the seals had not been touched, and stowed it safely away.

Hammersley noticed his face. "The poor chap feels a bit queer over so nearly losing his precious codices," he said to himself; "though even if he had, it wouldn't have been a patch on my little business," he added, bitterly.



"HAMMERSLEY STOOD ON THE FEW FEET OF UNSUBMERGED TURTLEBACK, AND COULD SEE THE WARSHIPS READY FOR HIS ATTACK."

III.

DAWN was just breaking as the *Otter*, with empty tanks, glided from the Outer Camber, Portsmouth, towards the Channel. Hammersley, standing on the few feet of unsubmerged turtleback aft of the conning-tower, could see lines of warships riding majestically in their protecting crinolines of torpedo netting, ready for his attack.

The first trial was to be a test of secrecy of movement. The *Otter*, starting from

dropping oil there, and trying every one of the many delicate instruments in which the *Otter* abounded. In the tubes fore and aft nestled the deadly torpedoes charged with the explosives that would bring the last chapter of the *Antediluvian's* history to a sudden close.

At the appointed hour the submarine sank slowly from sight, and headed for the Hurst Castle entrance. Seventy minutes later three suction mines clung to the bottoms of as many ironclads.

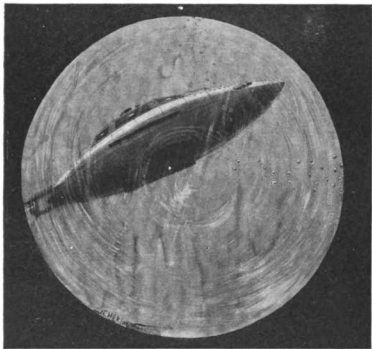
Hammersley's ear was hard pressed to the audiophone, which transmitted sounds from a receiver floating on the surface. So far no gun had roared the signal of detection.

The *Otter* then ran off in a N.E. direction towards the anchored hulk. Since the telescope had not sighted it as soon as he expected, Hammersley touched a lever, and an indicator showed that the *Otter* was gradually rising. He touched the lever again, and an auto-

matic regulator kept the vessel a dozen feet below the surface. Then a tube, topped by a tiny mirror, thrust a few inches out of water, revealed the hulk a hundred yards to the left. The motors soon made a dark object visible from the conning-tower.

"Try the Orloff first," shouted Hammersley to Cartwright, his second in command. "If that fails we will go about for the other."

Cartwright pressed a knob. The *Otter* shivered as the torpedo started, and at once went astern full speed. The missile struck



"LOOKING INTO THE GLASS PLATE OF THE CONNING-TOWER, HAMMERSLEY SAW AN EXACT REPLICA OF THE 'OTTER.'"

Ventnor, had to enter the Solent, guarded at both ends by ironclads, affix half a dozen suction mines to their bottoms, blow up an old hulk moored for the purpose, and get clear away without being perceived. After that would follow speed and submersion tests.

The *Otter* slipped past Bembridge, rounded the Point, left Sandown and Shanklin on the right, and came to off Ventnor. There Hammersley and his select crew made a final and exhaustive examination of the machinery, tightening a bolt here,

the netting, and a tiny torpedo darted from its nose and burst a gap through which its parent followed. A moment later the unfortunate hulk parted with a terrific report, which sent a shudder through all the spectators.

Only two things now remained: to mine three more ships, and get away unseen by the many sharp eyes watching overhead. The first difficult operation being finished, Hammersley had begun to congratulate himself, when the audiophone sent down an ear-splitting noise. His face lengthened.

"They've seen us," he groaned. "Beaten on the post. We've got to go up now and listen to remarks."

But the conning-tower had scarcely felt air when the sea around seethed with shell in a manner truly terrific.

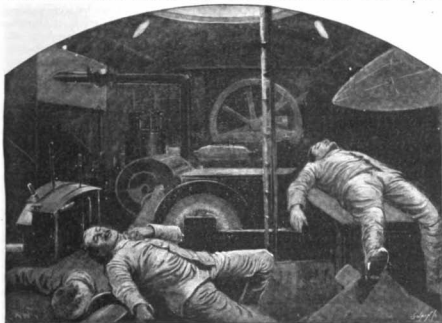
"Great heavens! this is a bit too real! They're firing at us," gasped Cartwright, opening the tanks till the darkened port-holes proclaimed the danger past. Hammersley mopped his brow with a bit of oily

"Three-pounders in action, and the vessels under way, sir," pronounced the man at the mirror. "Seems as if they were firing at summat fifty yards ahead; I can see the water still spurting some tune."

Cartwright and his captain looked at each other for a few moments; they then took a deep breath and ejaculated simultaneously, "The *Teredo*!"

And scarcely had they said it when something passed between them and the light. Hammersley squinted through the thick glass plate of the conning-tower, and saw silhouetted above them an exact replica of the *Otter*—bugee-shaped bows, square stern, flat bottom. Was it a mirage or an illusion? No, for the object began to move. Something tore past the tower, leaving a train of silver bubbles behind it, and at that Hammersley pressed the starting lever right down till the motors buzzed.

"The aft torpedo, Cartwright. Don't waste it; it's our only one." The *Otter* trembled from a shock. "They hit us, but



"HAMMERSLEY FOUND THAT ALL THE CONTROLLERS OF THE SUBMARINE WERE DEAD."

cotton waste. He could hear the roar of artillery, and the shriek of steam sirens.

"Up with the mirror!" he shouted; "look alive! and see what the dickens all this fuss is about."

it glanced," said the captain, white but calm. The *Teredo* still rode overhead like a hawk above its prey, the ugly muzzle of its fore tube now and then looking downward threateningly.

The torpedo went off on its deadly errand, but only grazed the *Teredo's* propeller.

"We must run for it now," snapped the captain, steering his vessel under the other's keel. "Out oil-cans, and drench all bearings."

"Best go up, sir; we'll travel faster on the top, and some of us have wives and families at home."

Hammersley discouraged the speaker by a look, and inquired for the log.

"Twenty knot point five, sir."

Yet the *Teredo* hung on like a burr, running six to the *Otter's* half-dozen, until Hammersley's face became dark with doubts and suspicion. The enemy seemed to be the equal in speed of a boat which travelled eight knots faster than any previous submarine. The proximometer began to ring loudly, and a crackling told that the automatically reversed motors were dragging against the spin of the screw. For a moment the *Otter* shot to the surface, enabling Hammersley to see the projecting masts of a sunken pleasure steamer—a *Teredo* victim—about eighty yards straight ahead. He saw his chance to use the sepia tube, and pressed a button. A glass cylinder flew from the *Otter's* stern and exploded, darkening the water with a black, sticky fluid. Then Hammersley ported hard, and the *Otter* groaned as it shot round the wreck.

"Now for the emergency accumulators." The log showed an additional two knots. "The sepia tube balked him," said the captain grimly. "He'll strike France before he touches us, I reckon."

And so they returned unscathed to Portsmouth, where they heard how H.M.S. *Dragon* had received dangerous wounds in the quarter, and the *Centaur* had a bulkhead blown in, fortunately without loss of life in either case.

There were, of course, many long faces in consequence, and Hammersley felt very

sore at this unexpected turn of events. The trial had indeed proved the value of his inventions, but it had also shown him that they had been stolen, and made murderously useful.

Early next morning a small boat came across from the Wight, and a fisherman related excitedly that, having the day before noticed the masts of the sunken steamer suddenly cant seawards, as though from a shock, he had gone out to ascertain the cause. He thought there was something protruding from the vessel's side, and that they had better come and see for themselves what it might be. In a few minutes the *Otter* stood towards the wreck at its highest speed. The situation revealed itself at a glance—the *Teredo* stuck fast in the steamer's bow, fairly caught in its own snare, the conning-tower jammed against the top of the opening blown by a torpedo, the diving chamber against the bottom, so that the occupants were cut off from all means of escape. To loose so dangerous a creature from the trap was a nice operation.

But Hammersley noticed that the screw was motionless, and drawing his conclusions therefrom, he sent down a diver who passed a five-inch coir cable round the *Teredo*, which, swathed in nets to obstruct torpedoes, was dislodged by a warship that came up to offer help. Hammersley claimed the right of exploration. The cover of the conning-tower having been forced up, he essayed to enter, but for some time the fetid odour drove him back. When he at last was able to descend, he saw three men lying among the machinery, and a fourth stretched over a small table in one corner. He turned over the bodies of the first three and felt in vain for signs of life. Then he approached the figure at the table, and when he raised the head a horrified exclamation escaped him, for the death-distorted features were those of his trusted friend, the scholarly collater of codices, Stefano Matrondola.