

THE RAID OF LE VENGEUR

BY

GEORGE GRIFFITH

Freeditorial 

The Raid of Le Vengeur

I. THE DREAM OF CAPTAIN FLAUBERT

It was the third morning after the naval manoeuvres at Cherbourg, and since their conclusion Captain Leon Flaubert, of the Marine Experimental Department of the French Navy, had not had three consecutive hours' sleep.

He was an enthusiast on the subject of submarine navigation. He firmly believed that the nation which could put to sea the first really effective fleet of submarine vessels would hold the fleets of rival nations at its mercy and acquire the whole ocean and its coasts as an exclusive territory. To anyone but an enthusiast it would have seemed a wild dream and yet only a few difficulties had still to be overcome, a few more discoveries made, and the realisation of the dream would be merely a matter of money and skilled labour.

Now the Cherbourg evolutions had proved three things. The submarines could sink and remain below the surface of the water. They could be steered vertically and laterally, but once ten feet or so below the water, they were as blind as bats in bright sunshine.

Moreover, when their electric head-lights were turned on, a luminous haze through which it was impossible to see more than a few metres, spread out in front of them and this was reflected on the surface of the water in the form of a semi-phosphorescent patch which infallibly betrayed the whereabouts of the submarine to scouting destroyers and prowling gun-boats. The sinking of a couple of pounds of dynamite with a time-fuse into this patch would have consequences unspeakable for the crew of the submarine since no human power could save them from a horrible death.

It was the fear of this discovery that had caused the rigid exclusion of all non-official spectators from the area of the experiments. Other trials conducted in daylight had further proved that the dim, hazy twilight of the lower waters was even worse than darkness. In short, the only chance of successful attack lay in coming to the surface, taking observations, probably under fire, and then sinking and discharging a torpedo at a venture. This, again, was an operation which could only be conducted with any chance of success in a smooth sea. In even moderately rough weather it would be absolutely impossible.

It was these difficulties which joined to a thousand exasperatingly stubborn technical details had kept Captain Flaubert awake for three nights. For him everything depended upon the solution of them. He was admittedly the best submarine engineer in France. The submarines had been proved to be practically non-effective. France looked to him to make them effective.

The troubles in the far East and, nearer home, in Morocco, had brought the Dual Alliance and the British Empire to the verge of war. At any moment something might happen which would shake a few sparks into the European powder magazine. Then the naval might of Britain would be let loose instantly. In a few hours her overwhelming fleets would be striking their swift and terrible blows at the nearest enemy—France—and yet, if he could only give the submarines eyes which could see through the water, France could send out an invisible squadron which would cripple the British fleets before they left port, destroy her mightiest battleships and her swiftest cruisers before they could fire a single shot, and so in a few days clear the Narrow Seas and make way for the invasion of England by the irresistible military might of France. Then the long spell would be broken, and the proudly boasted Isle Inviolable would be inviolable no longer.

It was a splendid dream—but, until the submarines could be made to see as well as steer, it was as far away as aerial navigation itself.

Day was just breaking on the third morning when a luminous ray of inspiration pierced the mists which hang over the border land of sleep and waking, of mingled dream and reality, amidst which Flaubert's soul was just then wandering.

He sat bolt upright in his little camp bed, clasped his hands across his close-cropped head, and, hardly knowing whether he was asleep or awake, heard himself say:

"Nom de Dieu, it is that! What foolishness not to have thought of that before. If we cannot see we must feel. Electric threads, balanced so as to be the same weight as water—ten, twenty, fifty, a hundred metres long, all round the boat, ahead and astern, to port and to starboard! Steel ships are magnetic, that is why they must swing to adjust their compasses."

"The end of each thread shall be a tiny electro-magnet. In-board they will connect with indicators, delicately swung magnetic needles, four of them,

ahead, astern, and on each side; and, as *Le Vengeur*—yes, I will call her that, for we have no more forgotten Trafalgar than we have Fashoda—as she approaches the ships of the enemy, deep hidden under the waters, these threads, like the tentacles of the octopus, shall spread towards her prey!"

As she gets nearer and nearer they swing round and converge upon the ship that is nearest and biggest. As we dive under her they will point upwards. When they are perpendicular the overhead torpedo will be released. Its magnets will fasten it to the bottom of the doomed ship. *Le Vengeur* will sink deeper, obeying always the warning of the sounding indicator, and seek either a new victim or a safe place to rise in. In ten, fifteen, twenty minutes, as I please, the torpedo will explode, the battleship or the cruiser will break in two and go down, not knowing whose hand has struck her.

"Ah, Albion, my enemy, you are already conquered! You are only mistress of the seas until *Le Vengeur* begins her work. When that is done there will be no more English navy. The soldiers of France will avenge Waterloo on the soil of England, and Leon Flaubert will be the greatest name in the world. Dieu Merci, it is done! I have thought the thought which conquers a world—and now let me sleep."

His clasped hands fell away from his head; his eyelids drooped over his aching, staring eyes; his body swayed a little from side to side, and then fell backwards. As his head rested on the pillow a long deep sigh left his half-parted lips, and in a few moments a contented snore was reverberating through the little, plainly-furnished bedroom.

II. A DINNER AT ALBERT GATE

Curiously enough, while Captain Leon Flaubert had been worrying himself to the verge of distraction over the problem of seeing under water, and had apparently solved it by substituting electric nerves of feeling for the sight-rays which had proved a failure, Mr. Wilfred Wallace Tyrrell had brought to a successful conclusion a long series of experiments bearing upon the self-same subject.

Mr. Tyrrell was the son of Sir Wilfred Tyrrell, one of the Junior Lords of the Admiralty. He was a year under thirty. He had taken a respectable degree at Cambridge, then he had gone to Heidelberg and taken a better one, after which he had come home entered at London, and made his bow to the world as the youngest D.Sc. that Burlington Gardens had ever turned out.

His Continental training had emancipated him from all the limitations under which his father, otherwise a man of very considerable intelligence, suffered. Like Captain Flaubert he was a firm believer in the possibility of submarine navigation, but, like his unknown French rival, he, too, had been confronted with that fatal problem of submarine blindness, and he had attacked it from a point of view so different to that of Captain Flaubert that the difference of method practically amounted to the difference between the genius of the two nations to which they belonged. Captain Flaubert had evaded the question and substituted electric feeling for sight. Wilfred Tyrrell had gone for sight and nothing less, and now he had every reason to believe that he had succeeded.

The night before Captain Flaubert had fallen asleep in his quarters at Cherbourg there was a little dinner-party at Sir Wilfred Tyrrell's house in Albert Gate. The most important of the guests from Wilfred's point of view was Lady Ethel Rivers, the only daughter of the Earl of Kirew. She was a most temptingly pretty brunette with hopelessly dazzling financial prospects. He had been admiring her from a despairing distance for the last five years, in fact ever since she had crossed the line between girlhood and young womanhood.

Although it was quite within the bounds of possibility that she knew of his devotion, he had never yet ventured upon even the remotest approach to direct courtship. In every sense she seemed too far beyond him. Some day she would be a countess in her own right. Some day, too, she would inherit about half a million in London ground-rents, with much more to follow as the leases fell in,

wherefore, as Wilfred Tyrrell reasoned, she would in due course marry a duke, or at least a European Prince.

Lady Ethel's opinions on the subject could only be gathered from the fact that she had already declined one Duke, two Viscounts, and a German Serene Highness, during her first season, and that she never seemed tired of listening when Wilfred Tyrrell was talking—which of itself was significant if his modesty had only permitted him to see it.

But while he was sitting beside her at dinner on this momentous night he felt that the distance between them had suddenly decreased. So far his career had been brilliant but unprofitable. Many other men had done as much as he had and ended in mediocrity. But now he had done something; he had made a discovery with which the whole world might be ringing in a few weeks' time. He had solved the problem of submarine navigation, and, as a preliminary method of defence, he had discovered a means of instantly detecting the presence of a submarine destroyer.

He was one of those secretive persons who possess that gift of silence, when critical matters are pending, which has served many generations of diplomats on occasions when the fates of empires were hanging in the balance.

Thus, having learnt to keep his love a secret for so many years, he knew how to mask that still greater secret, by the telling of which he could have astonished several of the distinguished guests round his father's dinner table into a paralysis of official incredulity. But he, being the son of an official, knew that such a premature disclosure might result, not only in blank scepticism, for which he did not care, but in semi-official revelations to the Press, for which he did care a great deal. So when the farewells were being said, he whispered to his mother:

"I want you and father and Lady Ethel and Lord Kirew to come up to the laboratory after everyone has gone. I've got something to show you. You can manage that, can't you, mother?"

Lady Tyrrell nodded and managed it.

Wilfred Tyrrell's laboratory was away up at the top of the house in a long low attic, which had evidently been chosen for its seclusion.

As they were going up the stairs Wilfred, sure of his triumph, took a liberty which, under other circumstances, would have been almost unthinkable to him. He and Lady Ethel happened to be the last on the stairs, and he was a step or two behind her. He quickened his pace a little, and then laying his hand lightly on her arm he whispered:

"Lady Ethel."

"Oh, nonsense!" she whispered in reply, with a little tremble of her arm under his hand. "Lady Ethel, indeed! As if we hadn't known each other long enough. Well, never mind what you want to say. What are you going to show us?"

"Something that no human eyes except mine have ever seen before; something which I have even ventured to hope will make me worthy to ask you a question which a good many better men than I have asked—"

"I know what you mean," she replied in a whisper even lower than his own, and turning a pair of laughing eyes up to his. "You silly, couldn't you see before? I didn't want those Dukes and Serene Highnesses. Do something— so far I know you have only studied and dreamt,—and, much and all as I like you—Well, now?"

"Now," he answered, pulling her arm a little nearer to him, "I have done something. I quite see what you mean, and I believe it is something worthy even of winning your good opinion. Here we are; in a few minutes you will see for yourself."

III. THE WATER-RAY

The laboratory was littered with the usual disorderly-order of similar apartments. In the middle of it on a big, bare, acid-stained deal table there stood a glass tank full of water, something like an aquarium tank, but the glass walls were made of the best white plate. The water with which it was filled had a faint greenish hue and looked like seawater. At one end of it there was a curious looking apparatus. A couple of boxes, like electric storage batteries, stood on either side of a combination of glass tubes mounted on a wooden stand so that they all converged into the opening of a much larger tube of pale blue glass. Fitted to the other end of this was a thick double concave lens also of pale blue glass. This was placed so that its axis pointed down towards the surface of the water in the tank at an angle of about thirty degrees.

"Well, Wallace," said Sir Wilfred as his son locked the door behind them, "what's this? Another of your wonderful inventions? Something else you want me to put before my lords of the Admiralty?"

"That's just it, father, and this time I really think that even the people at Whitehall will see that there's something in it. At any rate I'm perfectly satisfied that if I had a French or Russian Admiral in this room, and he saw what you're going to see, I could get a million sterling down for what there is on that table."

"But, of course you wouldn't think of doing that," said Lady Ethel, who was standing at the end of the table opposite the arrangement of glass tubes.

"That, I think, goes without saying, Ethel," said Lord Kirlew. "I am sure Mr. Tyrrell would be quite incapable of selling anything of service to his country to her possible enemies. At any rate, Tyrrell," he went on, turning to Sir Wilfred, "if I see anything in it, and your people won't take it up, I will. So now let us see what it is."

Tyrrell had meanwhile turned up a couple of gas-jets, one on either side of the room, and they saw that slender, twisted wires ran from the batteries to each of the tubes through the after end, which was sealed with glass. He came back to the table, and with a quick glance at Lady Ethel, he coughed slightly, after the fashion of a lecturer beginning to address an audience. Then he looked round at the inquiring faces, and said with a mock professional air:

"This, my Lord, ladies, and gentlemen, is an apparatus which I have every reason to believe removes the last and only difficulty in the way of the complete solution of the problem of submarine navigation."

"Dear me," said Lord Kirlew, adjusting his pince-nez and leaning over the arrangement of tubes, "I think I see now what you mean. You have found, if you will allow me to anticipate you, some sort of Roentgen Ray or other, which will enable you to see through water. Is that so?"

"That is just what it is," said Tyrrell. "Of course, you know that the great difficulty, in fact, the so far insuperable obstacle in the way of submarine navigation has been the fact that a submerged vessel is blind. She cannot see where she is going beyond a distance of a few yards at most."

"Now this apparatus will make it possible, not only for her to see where she is going up to a distance which is limited only by the power of her batteries, but it also makes it possible for those on a vessel on the surface of the water to sweep the bottom of the sea just as a search-light sweeps the surface, and therefore to find out anything underneath from a sunken mine to a submarine destroyer. I am going to show you, too, that it can be used either in daylight or in the dark, I'll try first with the gas up."

He turned a couple of switches on the boxes as he said this. The batteries began to hum gently. The tubes began to glow with a strange intense light which had two very curious properties. It was just as distinctly visible in the gaslight as if the room had been dark, and it was absolutely confined to the tubes. Not a glimmer of it extended beyond their outer surfaces.

Then the big blue tube began to glow, turning pale green the while. The next instant a blaze of greenish light shot in a direct ray from the lens down into the water. A moment later the astonished eyes of the spectators saw the water in the tank pierced by a spreading ray of intense and absolutely white light. Some stones and sand and gravel that had been spread along the bottom of the tank stood out with magical distinctness wherever the ray touched them. The rest, lit up only by the gas, were dim and indistinct in comparison with them.

"You see that what I call the water-ray is quite distinct from gaslight," said Tyrrell in a tone which showed that the matter was now to him a commonplace. "It is just as distinct from daylight. Now we will try it in the

dark. Lord Kirlaw, would you mind turning out that light near you? Father, turn out the one on your side, will you?"

The lights were turned out in silence. People of good intelligence are as a rule silent in the presence of a new revelation. Every eye looked through the darkness at the tank. The tubes glowed with their strange light, but they stood out against the darkness of the room just like so many pencils of light, and that was all. The room was just as dark as though they had not been there. The intense ray from the lens was now only visible as a fan of light. Tank and water had vanished in the darkness. Nothing could be seen but the ray and the stones and sand which it fell on.

"You see," said Tyrrell, "that the ray does not diffuse itself. It is absolutely direct, and that is one of its most valuable qualities. The electric lights which they use on the French submarines throw a glow on the top of the water at night, and so it is pretty easy to locate them. The surface of the water there, you see, is perfectly dark. In fact the water has vanished altogether. Another advantage is that this ray is absolutely invisible in air. Look!"

As he said this he tilted the arrangement of tubes backwards so that the ray left the water, and that moment the room was in utter darkness. He turned it down towards the tank and again the brilliant fan of light became visible in the water.

"Now," he continued, "that's all. You can light the gas again, if you don't mind."

"Well, Wallace," said Lord Kirlaw when they had got back to the library, "I think we can congratulate you upon having solved one of the greatest problems of the age, and if the Admiralty don't take your invention up, as I don't suppose they will, eh, Tyrrell?—you know them better than I do —I'll tell you what I'll do; I'll buy or build you a thirty-five knot destroyer which shall be fitted up to your orders, and until we get into a naval war with someone you can take a scientific cruise and use your water-ray to find out uncharted reefs and that sort of thing, and perhaps you might come across an old sunken treasure-ship. I believe there are still some millions at the bottom of Vigo Bay."

Before Lady Ethel left, Tyrrell found time and opportunity to ask her a very serious question, and her answer to it was:

"You clever goose! You might have asked that long ago. Yes, I'll marry you the day after you've blown up the first French submarine ship."

IV. IN THE SOLENT

For once at least the British-Admiralty had shown an open mind. Sir Wilfred Tyrrell's official position, and Lord Kirew's immense influence, may have had something to do with the stimulating of the official intellect, but, at any rate, within a month after the demonstration in the laboratory, a committee of experts had examined and wonderingly approved of the water-ray apparatus, and H.M. destroyer Scorchers had been placed at Tyrrell's disposal for a series of practical experiments.

Everything was, of course, kept absolutely secret, and the crew of the Scorchers were individually sworn to silence as to anything which they might see or hear during the experimental cruise. Moreover they were all picked men of proved devotion and integrity. Every one of them would have laid down his life at a moment's notice for the honour of the Navy, and so there was little fear of the momentous secret leaking out.

Meanwhile international events had been following each other with ominous rapidity, and those who were behind the scenes on both sides of the Channel knew that war was now merely a matter of weeks, perhaps only of days.

The Scorchers was lying in the South Dock, at Chatham, guarded by dock police who allowed no one to go within fifty yards of her without a permit direct from headquarters. She was fitted with four water-ray instalments, one ahead, one astern, and one amidships to port and starboard, and, in addition to her usual armament of torpedo-tubes and twelve and three-pounder quick-firers, she carried four torpedoes of the Brennan type which could be dropped into the water without making the slightest splash and steered along the path of the water-ray, towards any object which the ray had discovered.

The day before she made her trial trip Captain Flaubert had an important interview with the Minister of Marine. He had perfected his system of magnetic feelers, and Le Vengeur was lying in Cherbourg ready to go forth on her mission of destruction. Twenty other similar craft were being fitted with all speed at Cherbourg, Brest, and Toulon. Le Vengeur had answered every test demanded of her, and, at the French Marine, the days of the British Navy were already regarded as numbered.

"In a week you may do it, mon Capitaine," said the Minister, rising from his seat and holding out both his hands. "It must be war by then, or at least a few days

later. Prove that you can do as you say, and France will know how to thank and reward you. Victory to-day will be to those who strike first, and it shall be yours to deliver the first blow at the common enemy."

At midnight a week after this conversation a terrible occurrence took place in the Solent. Her Majesty's first-class cruiser Phyllis was lying at anchor about two miles off CowesHarbour, and the Scorcher was lying with steam up some quarter of a mile inside her. She was, in fact, ready to begin her first experimental voyage at 1 a.m. She had her full equipment on board just as though she were going to fight a fleet of submarines, for it had been decided to test, not only the working of the water-ray, but also the possibility of steering the diving torpedoes by directing them on to a sunken wreck which was lying in twenty fathoms off Portland Bill. The Fates, however, had decided that they were to be tried on much more interesting game than the barnacle-covered hull of a tramp steamer.

At fifteen minutes past twelve precisely, when Tyrrell and Lieutenant-Commander Farquar were taking a very limited promenade on the narrow, rubber-covered decks of the Scorcher, they felt the boat heave jerkily under their feet. The water was perfectly calm at the time.

"Good Heavens, what's that?" exclaimed Tyrrell, as they both stopped and stared out over the water. As it happened they were both facing towards the Phyllis, and they were just in time to see her rise on the top of a mountain of foaming water, break in two, and disappear.

"A mine or a submarine!" said Commander Farquar between his teeth; "anyhow—war. Get your apparatus ready, Mr. Tyrrell. That's one of the French submarines we've been hearing so much about. If you can find him we mustn't let him out of here."

Inside twenty seconds the Scorcher had slipped her cable, her searchlight had flashed a quick succession of signals to Portsmouth and Southampton, her boilers were palpitating under a full head of steam, and her wonderful little engines were ready at a minute's notice to develop their ten thousand horse power and send her flying over the water at thirty-five knots an hour.

Meanwhile, too, four fan-shaped rays of intense white light pierced the dark waters of the Solent as a lightning flash pierces the blackness of night, and four torpedoes were swinging from the davits a foot above the water.

There was a tinkle in the engine-room, and she swung round towards the eddying area of water in which the Phyllis went down. Other craft, mostly torpedo boats and steam pinnaces from warships, were also hurrying towards the fatal spot. The head-ray from the Scorcher shot down to the bottom of the Solent, wavered hither and thither for a few moments, and then remained fixed. Those who looked down it saw a sight which no human words could describe.

The splendid warship which a couple of minutes before had been riding at anchor, perfectly equipped, ready to go anywhere and do anything, was lying on the weed-covered sand and rock, broken up into two huge fragments of twisted scrap-iron. Even some of her guns had been hurled out of their positions and flung yards away from her. Other light wreckage was strewn in all directions, and the mangled remains of what had so lately been British officers and sailors were floating about in the mid-depths of the still eddying waters.

"We can't do any good here, Mr. Tyrrell." said Commander Farquar. "That's the work of a submarine, and we've got to find him. He must have come in by Spithead. He'd never have dared the other way, and he'll probably go out as he came in. Keep your rays going and let's see if we can find him."

There was another tinkle in the engine-room. The Scorcher swung round to the eastward and began working in a zigzag course at quarter speed towards Spithead.

Captain Flaubert, however, had decided to do the unexpected and, thirty minutes after the destruction of the Phyllis, Le Vengeur was feeling her way back into the Channel past the Needles. She was steering, of course, by chart and compass, about twenty feet below the water. Her maximum speed was eight knots, but Captain Flaubert, in view of possible collisions with rocks or inequalities on the sea-floor, was content to creep along at two.

He had done his work. He had proved the possibility of stealing unseen and unsuspected into the most jealously guarded strip of water in the world, destroying a warship at anchor, and then, as he thought, going away unseen. After doing all that it would be a pity to meet with any accident. War would not be formally declared for three days at least, and he wanted to get back to Cherbourg and tell the Minister of Marine all about it.

The Scorcher zigzagged her way in and out between the forts, her four rays lighting up the water for a couple of hundred yards in every direction, for nearly an hour, but nothing was discovered.

"I believe he's tried the other way after all," said Commander Farquar after they had taken a wide, comprehensive sweep between Foreland and Southsea. "There's one thing quite certain, if he has got out this way into the Channel we might just as well look for a needle in a haystack. I think we'd better go back and look for him the other way."

The man at the wheel put the helm hard over, the bell tinkled full speed ahead in the engine-room. The throbbing screws flung columns of foam out from under the stern, and the little black craft swept round in a splendid curve, and went flying down the Solent towards Hurst Point at the speed of an express train. Off Ryde she slowed down to quarter speed, and the four rays began searching the sea bottom again in every direction.

Le Vengeur was just creeping out towards the Needles, feeling her way cautiously with the sounding indicator thirty feet below the surface, when Captain Flaubert, who was standing with his Navigating Lieutenant in the glass domed conning-tower, lit by one little electric bulb, experienced the most extraordinary sensation of his life. A shaft of light shot down through the water. It was as clean cut as a knife and bright as burnished silver. It wavered about hither and thither for a few moments, darting through the water like a lightning flash through thunderclouds, and then suddenly it dropped on to the conning-lower of Le Vengeur and illuminated it with an almost intolerable radiance. The Captain looked at his Lieutenant's face. It was almost snow white in the unearthly light. Instinctively he knew that his own was the same.

"Tonnerre de Dieu!" he whispered, with lips that trembled in spite of all his self-control, "what is this, Lieutenant? Is it possible that these accursed English have learnt to see under water? Or, worse still, suppose they have a submarine which can see?"

"In that case," replied the Lieutenant, also in a whisper, "though Le Vengeur has done her work, I fear she will not finish her trial trip. Look," he went on, pointing out towards the port side, "what is that?"

A dimly-shining, silvery body about five feet long, pointed at both ends, and driven by a rapidly whirling screw had plunged down the broad pathway of light and stopped about ten feet from Le Vengeur. Like a living thing it slowly

headed this way and that, ever drawing nearer and nearer, inch by inch, and then began the most ghastly experience for the Captain and his Lieutenant that two human beings had ever endured.

They were both brave men well worthy the traditions of their country and their profession; but they were imprisoned in a fabric of steel thirty feet below the surface of the midnight sea, and this horrible thing was coming nearer and nearer. To rise to the surface meant not only capture but ignominious death to every man on board, for war was not declared yet, and the captain and crew of *Le Vengeur* were pirates and outlaws beyond the pale of civilisation. To remain where they were meant a death of unspeakable terror, a fate from which there was no possible escape.

"It is a torpedo," said the Lieutenant, muttering the words with white trembling lips, "a Brennan, too, for you see they can steer it. It has only to touch us and—"

A shrug of the shoulders more expressive than words said the rest.

"Yes," replied Captain Flaubert, "that is so, but how did we not know of it? These English must have learnt some wisdom lately. We will rise a little and see if we can get away from it."

He touched a couple of buttons on a signal board as he said this. *Le Vengeur* rose fifteen feet, her engines quickened, and she headed for the open sea at her best speed. She passed out of the field of the ray for a moment or two. Then three converging rays found her and flooded her with light. Another silvery shape descended, this time to the starboard side. Her engines were put to their utmost capacity. The other shape on the port side rose into view, and ran alongside the conning-tower at exactly equal speed.

Then *Le Vengeur* sank another thirty feet, doubled on her course, and headed back towards Spithead. The ray followed her, found her again, and presently there were the two ghostly attendants, one on each side, as before. She turned in zigzags and curves, wheeled round in circles, and made straight runs hither and thither, but it was no use. The four rays encircled her wherever she went, and the two torpedoes were ever alongside.

Presently another feature of this extraordinary chase began to develop itself. The torpedoes, with a horrible likeness to living things, began to shepherd *Le Vengeur* into a certain course. If she turned to starboard then the silvery shape on that side made a rush at her. If she did the same to port the other one ran up to within a yard or so of her and stopped as though it would say: "Another yard, and I'll blow you into scrap-iron."

The Lieutenant was a brave man, but he fainted after ten minutes of this. Captain Flaubert was a stronger spirit, and he stood to his work with one hand on the steering wheel and the fingers of the other on the signal-board. He knew that he was caught, and that he could expect nothing but hanging as a common criminal. He had failed the moment after success, and failure meant death. The Minister of Marine had given him very clearly to understand that France would not be responsible for the failure of Le Vengeur.

The line of his fate lay clear before him. The lives of his Lieutenant and five picked men who had dared everything for him might be saved. He had already grasped the meaning of the evolutions of the two torpedoes. He was being, as it were, steered into a harbour, probably into Portsmouth, where in time he would be compelled to rise to the surface and surrender. The alternative was being blown into eternity in little pieces, and, like the brave man that he was, he decided to accept the former alternative, and save his comrades by taking the blame on himself.

He touched two more of the buttons on the signal-board. The engines of Le Vengeur stopped, and presently Tyrrell and Commander Farquar saw from the deck of the Scorcher a long, shining, hale-backed object rise above the surface of the water.

At the forward end of it there was a little conning-tower covered by a dome of glass. The moment that it came in sight the Scorcher stopped, and then moved gently towards Le Vengeur. As she did so the glass dome slid back, and the head and shoulders of a man in the French naval uniform came into sight. His face looked like the face of a corpse as the rays of the searchlight flashed upon it. His hair, which an hour ago had been black, was iron-grey now, and his black eyes stared straight at the searchlight as though they were looking into eternity.

Then across the water there came the sound of a shrill, high-pitched voice which said in perfectly correct English:

"Gentlemen, I have succeeded and I have failed. I destroyed your cruiser yonder, I would have destroyed the whole British Navy if I could have done so, because I hate you and everything English. Le Vengeur surrenders to superior force for the sake of those on board her, but remember that I alone have planned and done this thing. The others have only done what I paid them to do, and France knows nothing of it. You will spare them, for they are innocent. For me it is finished."

As the Scorchers' men looked down the rays of the searchlight they saw something glitter in his hand close to his head—a yellow flash shone in the midst of the white, there was a short flat bang, and the body of Captain Leon Flaubert dropped out of sight beside the still unconscious lieutenant.

Le Vengeur was taken into Portsmouth. Her crew were tried for piracy and murder, and sentenced to death. The facts of the chase and capture of Le Vengeur were laid before the French Government, which saw the advisability of paying an indemnity of ten million dollars as soon as Le Vengeur, fitted with Wilfred Tyrrell's water-ray apparatus, made her trial trip down Channel and blew up half-a-dozen sunken wrecks with perfect ease and safety to herself.

A few weeks later, in recognition of his immense services, the Admiralty placed the third-class cruiser Venus at the disposal of Mr. Wilfred and Lady Ethel Tyrrell for their honeymoon trip down the Mediterranean.

The declaration of war of which the Minister had spoken to Captain Flaubert, remained a diplomatic secret, and the unfortunate incident which had resulted in the blowing up of a British cruiser in time of peace, was publicly admitted by the French Government to be an act of unauthorised piracy, the perpetrators of which had already paid the penalty of their crime. The reason for this was not very far to seek. As soon as Wilfred Tyrrell came back from his wedding trip Le Vengeur was dry-docked and taken literally to pieces and examined in every detail. Thus everything that the French engineers knew about submarine navigation was revealed.

A committee of the best engineers in the United Kingdom made a thorough inspection with a view to possible improvements, and the result was the building of a British submarine flotilla of thirty enlarged Vengeurs. And as a couple of these would be quite sufficient for the effective blockade of a port, the long-planned invasion of England was once more consigned to the limbo of things which may only be dreamt of.

THE END