The VANISHING FLEETS

BY ROY NORTON

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ILLUSTRATED BY A. WEIL

They Stood for a Moment, the King and the Admiral.

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. At the most inopportune moment Japan declares war. Japan takes the Philippines. The entire country is in a state of turmoil because of the government's indifference. Guy Hillier starts for England with secret message and is compelled to leave Norma Roberts, who with military officers also leaves Washington on mysterious expedition for an isolated point on the Florida coast. Hawaii is captured by the Japs. All ports are closed. Jap fleet is fast approaching western coast of America. 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 save Nippon." 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. Tokio 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 upon 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.

CHAPTER XI.—Continued.

To summon a king, a prime minister and the highest official of the earth's most mighty navy to a private interview at midnight! Even in times like these it seemed preposterously impudent; but this man came as a friend from the land of silent terror which threatened to conquer the world, was undoubtedly in deadly earnest, and was a means of information between what had actually happened and what was to come.

"'Time will not wait, even for kings,'" quoted the monarch with some undershade of bitterness, and from his guest came the whispered return:

"No, time cannot wait, even for kings."

The monarch slowly settled back into the hollow depths of his chair and, as if seeking a moment's respite to review the situation, looked upward at the hangings of his box and then out toward the garish lights of the stage. The hush of expectancy over the house had reached a climax of intensity, and the master of ceremonies in a raucous voice was shouting toward the roof in deliberately prolonged tones: "Are—you—all—ready?" From somewhere above them came a faint response, "Yes," and then with speed gathered by its long flight through the air there came flashing comet-like from high above an extended splotch of white, the sound of a sharp splash, and a burst of applause as the "event of the evening," a high dive, was consummated. Neither occupant of the royal box paid any attention to this feat. Bevins remained in an attitude of expectancy, waiting for the king's next words. The success or failure of his enterprise might depend upon them, and in this light they seemed of almost tragic consequence.

"What do you propose?" the ruler asked, again facing the admiral as though there had been no lapse of time; and the other, relieved by this sign of assent, gave an involuntary and deep-drawn sigh of relaxation.

"If your majesty will be so kind, I think it best that I should meet you in the palace within an hour after your departure from this theater. That will give leeway for the other gentlemen to respond to the summons and be there at the appointed time."

The band struck up "God Save the King," in token of the closing of the performance, and from where they were they could see the audience standing, in total ignorance of the presence of his majesty and unaware of the fact that a momentous interview, involving life and death, peace and war, and the welfare of empire was being conducted in a tiny overhanging box above them, while a leering mask of tragedy stared hollow-eyed from the stage as if in mockery. The king and the admiral were both on their feet, the one looking absentmindedly through an aperture, his mind concentrated on the decision he must make, and the other watching and waiting with breathless suspense. Below the throng began a steady movement toward the exits, constantly dissipating itself, and the house was almost emptied before the officer had his reply.

"Very well, you may come, and I shall have the others sent for at once."

Bevins gave a quick start of exultation; but his companion continued without a pause:

"I shall be there within half an hour, and shall instruct the guard at the outer gate to admit you immediately on your arrival."

His companion held up a hand as if forgetting something. "If your majesty pleases, I should prefer that you instruct the guard at the private entrance leading from the garden in the rear."

To this also the king acceded, attributing it to a desire for concealment on the part of his companion, who almost at once made his adieu, passed out beyond the curtains, through the door, and joined the last of the lagging crowd. The fog had not abated, but seemed even more impenetrable than in the earlier hours of the evening and rendered traffic more difficult. Here and there came the glow and halation of an arc light, dimly showing through a veil and lighting up a tiny radius in the gloom. A constable kept calling: "Keep close to the wall! Keep close to the wall!" his voice sounding from a long distance and muffled. Cabmen were insistently shouting, and when Bevins came to the first street crossing he was almost run down by a slow-moving automobile whose eyes stared at him suddenly like those of a great beetle. It was the king driving to his residence.

At Buckingham palace, where the royal banner was hanging sodden from its staff, the guards with busbys coated with the perspiration of the night, tramped briskly to and fro at the great iron gates in front as well as past the gates of the garden on Buckingham road, a half mile in the rear. The time of the appointment was past when the guard at the private entrance received the expected visitor with a comment of surprise and apology that he had not been accompanied through the gardens by the farther sentries.

"Very thoughtless and unusual, sir," he said, "and I'll report them at once."

"No, no, don't do that," Bevins hastily requested. "I wished to come alone. By his majesty's permission," he added, and the man conducted him to the private audience chamber, where he was given a seat.

The prime minister entered only a few minutes later and stared hard at Bevins, evidently trying to recall whether or not they had met before, and seeming to remember something familiar in the face. They waited without speaking until the lord of the admiralty appeared, showing from his garb that he had been compelled to hasten his coming; and then came the king.

"Gentlemen," he said, turning to the others, "this is Admiral Robert Bevins of the United States navy."

Had he said: "Gentlemen, here is an assassin with a pocketful of bombs," the effect on the members of his cabinet could have been hardly less marked. Bevins bowed and extended his hand to each in turn, assuring them of his friendliness. The king himself without parley conducted them to a more private room, and offered each in turn a cigar, after which he looked inquiringly at his guest, who answered by drawing from his pocket a sealed dispatch, which he delivered. It was torn open and read in silence, passing from hand to hand, after which the admiral, without prelude, plunged into his subject.

"As will be witnessed by the dispatches I have brought, the United States wishes nothing more than complete harmony. It has been compelled for the sake of peace to adopt rather unprecedented methods, which I can assure you will at least revolutionize all methods of warfare as generally understood. The letter is to reassure his majesty."

The two members of the ministry looked at each other in strained suspense, and eagerly waited for the American to continue, which he did after brief thought, in which time he gravely studied the king's face.

"It has not been pleasant for my country to take the steps it has; but there were no other means of establishing and maintaining—perhaps forever—a continued state of peace. Gentlemen, I believe that the day of war has nearly seen its sunset. I believe if you will intrust yourselves to my care for the next few hours, under my assurance as a representative of my government and as a friend of his majesty's, that no harm will come to any of you, that I can convince you of what I have said, as well as of the uselessness of strife."

Again there was silence, while those in the room looked at each other questioningly.

"Yes, it will require your leaving the palace," the admiral continued as if responding to an interrogation, and then with grim humor added, "that notwithstanding the disappearance of the kaiser and his chancellor."

The ministers shook their heads, indicating that it was impossible. The monarch, however, sat steadily watching and listening, flicking the ash now and then from his cigar and smoothing an end of leaf which had pulled loose.

"The reason this is necessary," the officer hastened to add, "is that your people will never understand the power of the United States nor believe in it on less distinguished testimony than that which you will be able to render. Even then it will be hard for them to comprehend that my country is in possession of an engine of war that could bring all nations to its feet, or annihilate them if it chose."

His hearers stiffened up for a moment, reading in this placid assertion a threat.

"No, it not a menace to you or the world, if you will but grant my wish. Gentlemen, I am asking you to be my guests in the name of humanity, which is above all rulers and above all governments!" His voice was vibrant and almost pleading in his anxiety to gain his point.

The king alone seemed half inclined to go. "I have known Bevins for 30 years," he said slowly, "and we have been very good friends, indeed intimate at times, and I would intrust my life in his keeping; but a man and a king are two different beings. As a man I would go at once; but as the representative head of a nation I cannot take the risk unless there is no other way."

The minister and the lord of the admiralty spoke together in their disapproval, and besought their superior to refuse such a demand under any and all conditions. Bevins saw that he was losing his point, and stepped into the breach.

"Wait!" he begged, rising to his feet. "Will your majesty permit me to bring other proof that what I ask is for the best?"

The king nodded.

"Then grant me an order to the guard at the door which will enable me to pass without interruption and return."

There was the pressure of a button, an order to the equerry to do as the visitor wished, and the officer bowed himself out of the room.

His majesty's advisers began an impassioned appeal that he should under all circumstances refuse to leave the security of his palace. They pointed out the dangers which might assail him in many ways, despite the fact that his visitor was his friend; but to all of these advices he made no reply, lounging in a careless attitude and blowing wreaths of smoke toward the shaded electric lights above his head. There was a rap at the door, and it was thrown open by an equerry, who stood at attention, his face betraying no sign of anything unusual.

Into the room entered another visitor, followed by Bevins, who closed the door after him. The materialization of a ghost could have created no greater surprise. The king dropped his cigar on the carpet and, like his companions, jumped to his feet and stood like a statue. The prime minister's hand was half poised in the air and remained there while the lord of the admiralty shoved his head forward in an attitude of awe-struck questioning.

The king broke the silence. "Field! is that you?" he asked, in utter astonishment.

"Yes, your majesty, it is I," and he advanced to meet the king, who suddenly held out his hand.

The others rushed forward almost incoherent in greeting the admiral who had sailed away in command of the great fleet of demonstration and had been given up as dead.

Field was apparently enjoying the situation, and waited until they began to ask question before expressing his views. "I am under my word of honor, or I might say parole—"

"Not that," Bevins interrupted. "You are not a prisoner."

"Well, under promise then, that I shall say nothing concerning the mystery which I now thoroughly understand." He made a little grimace as if the subject brought up unpleasant recollections of defeat, and went on. "I am here to-night as the guest of our friend the admiral. He has told me of his failure to convince you that what he asks is necessary, and I have come to add my arguments to his, urging upon you to do as he says. He has told you the truth when he says that it may mean an end to war."

The ministers and the lord of the admiralty looked shocked; but the king made a decision without hesitancy. "I will accept, and believe it best that the others should accompany me." It was conclusive.

They donned their light coats, and when the monarch stepped from his wardrobe a moment later he, too, was garbed for his trip and preceded them down the hallways, through corridors and arched doors, over heavy carpets where the noise of their feet was deadened, and across tiled floors where the ring of their boot-heels disturbed the silence. Only once did the king halt, and that was for Bevins to indicate whether it was desirable to pass through the private door or into the broader corridor leading toward the front of the palace. They chose the former course, passed the wondering sentry at the door, and out into the night. The odor of June flowers came to them on every side through the weird veil of fog, and from the drive beyond the pile of stone and brick came the steady clattering of horses' hoofs. They walked closely together, the king holding Bevins' arm. The sentry heard their feet steadily crunching out over the graveled walks, started at the sound of a melancholy, far-reaching whistle, wondering whether it was a signal of some strange import, and then resumed his usual motionless attitude. The king and his ministers had been taken by the fog, the night and the mystery.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

USE FOR WASTED WOOD

Government Trying to Save Half the Trees Now Thrown Away.

According to the statistics of government experts less than 50 per cent. of the average tree as it stands in the woods comes into the market in the form of merchantable products. The remainder is allowed to go to waste.

The growing scarcity of timber has caused the government to try to find a use for all of it. Laboratories were established to investigate the value for pulp purposes of various abundant woods and to save the valuable spruce and poplar forests for lumber.

Experimental studies resulted in a method of chemical examination which not only demonstrates the relative value of turpentine obtained from the pine tree by various methods, but also shows that it is possible by steam distillation processes to obtain from refuse southern pine a grade of turpentine equal for all practical purposes to gum spirits, which is the product obtained by scarifying the trunks of living trees.—The Pathfinder.

The Other Half Is Waiting.

One of the most pitiable sights in the world is that of people who are using only a small bit of their ability, while the rest of it is waiting to be used. It is still ineffective because of the many little weaknesses or peculiarities, the bad habits, or the lack of preparation, which handicap and make practically ineffective the whole life.—Success Magazine.

WESTERN CANADA'S SPLENDID CROP YIELD FOR 1908.

AMERICANS PROFITED LARGELY AND SEND BACK SATISFACTORY REPORTS.

The census branch of the Department of Agriculture, Ottawa, Canada, has completed its returns of the showing of Western Canada's grain yield for 1908, and the reports make very interesting reading. In the three provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, which comprise what may be known as Central Canada, there was a total wheat yield of about 107,000,000 bushels, worth to the farmer about $85,000,000; in addition to this the oat, barley and flax crops were worth another $35,000,000. Letters have been received from many of the settlers from the United States. From these, that of Rev. Oscar L. King has been selected. He lives in the vicinity of Edmonton, Alberta, and what he says will be of interest to those who contemplate moving to Central Canada. Every line of the letter is interesting. Those who wish for the particulars as to how to secure homesteads and preemptions should write any Canadian Government agent. Mr. King says:

"Mr. M. V. McInnes, Detroit, Michigan: I am well satisfied with Alberta. This country offers excellent opportunities for anyone to make a good home for himself and family if he is willing to put up with a few hard knocks for the first two or three years. But it is worth a few hard knocks to get a 160-acre farm of rich, productive land with no mortgage on it. This province is well fitted for grains, stock raising and dairying. We have found the climate generally healthful, more healthful than Michigan, and although the thermometer sometimes drops to 40 degrees below zero in winter, yet we do not seem to feel that temperature any more than we did 5 or 10 degrees below zero in Michigan. We like the winters.

"The Government takes great interest in the education of the people and quickly aids the settlers in establishing schools where they are called for. The schools, though graded differently than those in the States, are efficient and advancing. Our great drawback has been the limited and inadequate railway facilities, but new roads are being rapidly built and many more are projected through various parts of the province. The new policy of the Alberta government to construct a great many branch lines throughout the province will greatly help all parts of the country. If those new settlers who have to go back a considerable distance from existing railroads and towns to find free homesteads will but locate along the line of a projected railroad they will in two or three years be near both town and railroad. When I first came to this country three and a half years ago the homestead I took was 75 miles from a railroad town; now there is a railroad 25 miles north, another 25 miles south, and a third is being built through my neighborhood.

"I think the prairie country or country that is partly prairie offers much better opportunities than the hilly portions."

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It never did yet hurt to lay down likelihoods and forms of hope.—Shakespeare.

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