

# NOTABLE BRITISH NAVAL VICTORY WON OFF THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

(By Richard Wilson, Litt D.)

The affair off Coronel put the heads of the British navy upon their mettle, and within forty days it was followed by a counter stroke, complete and effective. Silently and with steady determination, preparations were made to deal with the Scharnhorst and her companions; and the man who was entrusted with the work was Vice Admiral Sir F. C. Doveton Sturdee.

To the east of the southern portion of South America lies the British group known as the Falkland Islands. Due east of the large island called East Falkland, Sturdee's squadron came within sight of Von Spee's cruisers the British admiral having been helped in finding the "quarry" by the clever wireless signalling of a lady and her servants who lived on the islands, and who were afterwards presented with valuable gifts by the British admiralty as some slight acknowledgement of their timely help.

After the battle off Coronel, the

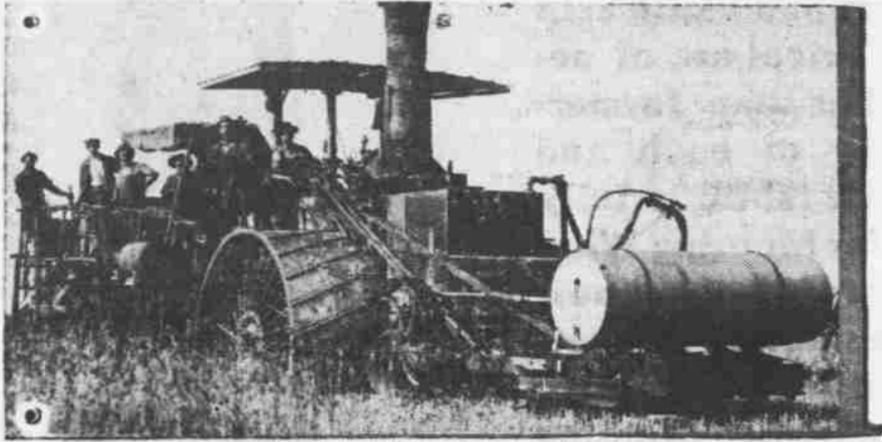
Invincible sighted other hostile ships between nine and ten miles distant; and in a short time the British squadron was moving from the harbor towards the enemy's five ships, which could be plainly seen to the southeast. The day was fine, with a calm sea, a bright sun, a clear sky, and a light breeze from the northwest.

The British vessels at once began a chase in extended order, and the hearts of our men must have been deeply stirred by the admiral's simple signal, "God save the king!" One of the signallers afterwards wrote: "It was taken up and flung far and wide through space by each of the fleet in turn, until it seemed as though it would never cease. I consider it a privilege to have been one of the few to bear the signal." A little after noon Admiral Sturdee came within suitable range of the five enemy ships, and decided to attack with the Invincible, and Inflexible, and the Glasgow. How the officers and crew of the last-named vessel had longed for this happy moment!

The Gneisenau now gamely faced the Invincible and the Inflexible, but about 5 o'clock she lost one funnel and was on fire in several places. She continued however, to reply to the British gunners with a single gun, until, an hour later, she suddenly heeled over and sank. Here is an entry in the diary of one of her officers: "5.10, Hit, hit; 5.12, Hit; 5.14, Hit, hit, hit again! 5.20, After turret gone. 5.40, Hit, hit! On fire everywhere. 5.41, Hit, hit! Burning everywhere and sinking. 5.45, Hit! Men dying everywhere. 5.46, Hit, hit!"

After this the officers had something else to do than make entries in a diary. Boats had been lowered from the Invincible and the Inflexible, life-buoys and ropes were thrown into the water, and about 300 men were saved, "including their captain—a tall man with a black beard."

Meanwhile the Glasgow and the Cornwall had fought and sunk the Leipzig. Like the other German ships, she took fire fore and aft and



A Steam Thresher at Work

Glasgow, along with the battleship Canopus, had put into the harbour of Port Stanley, in East Falkland. The former vessel had been damaged but she was quickly repaired, and when Admiral Sturdee arrived from home, she took her place in his squadron, her officers and men being eager to set things right with the Germans. It was reported that Von Spee's squadron was going to make a raid on the Falklands; but when he came round Cape Horn he found waiting for him eight British ships of war, and, far as we know, this was a complete surprise to him.

At about half-past nine in the morning the Gneisenau and the Nurnberg drew near to Port Stanley Harbor with their guns trained on the wireless station. Between them and the harbor was a long low stretch of land running eastward, behind which lay the Canopus. The surprise of the Germans must have been great when they were met by a smart fire across this low-lying land at a range of about six miles! The two ships stopped, considered, and turned away, hoisting their colors, however, as they did so. About the same time

The signal was given, "Open fire and engage the enemy," and the Inflexible began the battle, followed a few minutes later by the Invincible. This firing was at a range of about nine miles—no opportunity for boarding here, cutlasses in teeth, and pistols in both hands!—but the British gunnery was so good that three of the German ships turned away. Then the Glasgow, with the Cornwall and the Kent, gave chase. We shall follow their work when we have considered that of the heavier craft.

The Invincible engaged the enemy's flagship, the Scharnhorst, and the Inflexible the Gneisenau, the fight being a running one, and the range varying from about eight to nine miles. Before long the German flagship took fire, lost one of her funnels, and slackened her firing. "The effect of our fire," writes Admiral Sturdee, "became more and more apparent in consequence of smoke from fire, and also escaping steam. At times a shell would cause a large hole to appear in her side, through which could be seen a dull red glow of flame." Yet the German kept grimly on with her work.

as the shades of night were closing in she turned over on her port side and disappeared. The Cornwall began to lower boats when the Leipzig was settling down, but the British captain leaped over the rail of the bridge and said, "It's no good; she's going."



While this was going on the Kent was dealing with the Nurnberg, after a desperate chase with only a small amount of fuel to rely upon. When the engineers had done their best and worked up the speed well above the rate which the Kent could do "officially," they reported that their coal was almost used up. Then the

captain suggested that the boats might prove to be useful in such a case! No sooner said than done! The boats were promptly broken up, the pieces smeared with oil and packed by the stokers into the furnaces.

This use of the boats had suggested other means of providing fuel, and soon the men were hurrying to the furnaces with officers, arm-chairs, chests, ladders, and anything which would burn. So the speed limit was much further exceeded, the Nurnberg was caught and sunk, but not before she had put up a stiff fight. Fire was stopped on the Kent when the German hauled down her colors, and every preparation made to save life. As the ship sank the British sailors saw a group of men waving a German ensign fastened to a staff. Only five Germans were re-



scued from the doomed ship.

Only one of the German ships, the fast cruiser Dresden, escaped from the battle, the clouds which overcast the sky in the evening assisting her in getting clear away. The darkness closed in, but near midnight Admiral Sturdee received a message from H. M. S. Bristol to the effect that during the action two enemy transports



had been destroyed near the Falklands, their crews being removed before the ships were sunk. So ended a memorable day in British naval history.



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