A STORY TO TELL

OF THE ROYAL AND MERCHANT NAVIES

ONE SHILLING

A STORY TO TELL

OF THE ROYAL AND MERCHANT NAVIES

Introduced by the Lord Mayor of Plymouth
(Alderman Henry G. Mason, J.P.)

Foreword by the Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth
(Admiral Sir Ralph Leatham, K.C.B.)

and Illustrated by F/Lt. John R. Barclay, M.C., R.A.F.

TWO ARMADAS Lt. G. P. B. Naish, R.N.V.R.

TWO NAVIES H. M. Tomlinson.

FOR THE SAILORS A Poem
John Masefield, O.M.
(Poet Laureate)

KING GEORGE'S FUND FOR SAILORS
H. M. Pattinson, M.B.E.

Book compiled and produced by
Cpl. Stanley R. Phillips, R.A.F.

PUBLISHED BY PLYMOUTH ROYAL AND MERCHANT NAVIES APPEAL COMMITTEE

Introduced by

THE LORD MAYOR OF PLYMOUTH
ALDERMAN HENRY G. MASON, J.P.

" Had we lived I should have had a tale to tell of hardihood, endurance, and courage of my companions which would have stirred the heart of every Englishman. These rough notes and our dead bodies must tell the tale, but surely, surely, a great rich country like ours will see that those who are dependent on us are properly provided for."

Such were the last words that Captain R. F. Scott, R.N., the intrepid explorer, scribbled in his diary. The story was so heroic that it captured the imagination of people all over the country, and particularly of this, his native city.

The same tale of hardihood, endurance, and courage has ever marked the life of the sailor, and it never was so gloriously demonstrated as during this, the second World War, when added to the sea's natural hazards have been the perils of mine, submarine, torpedo, aerial bombs and the shells of the surface raider.

It has been said that for every convoy that has suffered loss since the War began, two or three have reached their destination intact. This is to the undying credit of the Royal and Merchant Navies, without whose seamanship and courage there would have been for us no food, no " D " day, and no " V " day.

I do not believe that the citizens of this great city, with its long maritime tradition, will forget, or be slow to show their appreciation of, the almost superhuman efforts of its seamen.

Foreword

by

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF • PLYMOUTH
ADMIRAL SIR RALPH LEATHAM • K.C.B.

As I write these words, the Allied Nations are surging forward to victory, not only in Europe but in the Far East too. When you read this book, may it be that victory will have been won over Germany. The air is full of hope for the many—for some, alas, dreams of happiness must seem to have gone for ever.

A sailor, whatever his calling at sea, has a hard life. True, he may enjoy pleasures and reap benefits denied to other men, but separation from his family—often for long periods—is a pain he must constantly suffer. Even in peacetime his life is hazardous—in war, to our sorrow, casualties among seafarers are heavy.

Still, the sailor cheerfully risks life and limb so that the seas may be free and you a free people. His kinsfolk pay dearly when the breadwinner is taken from them, is crippled or ill, or is unemployed. No pension or compensation alone will then suffice to meet even their simple needs. It is to bring comfort and help to the dependants of sailors hard-hit from any cause and to put them again on an even keel that this appeal to your generosity is being made.

I know only too well, after nearly fifty years amongst sailors, how badly your help is needed—and will go on being needed—and what joy it can give.

There is no better medium than King George's Fund for Sailors for distributing your gifts, and "A Story to Tell" should do much to swell its coffers.

A Story to Tell

OF TWO ARMADAS

WHOEVER STANDS ON PLYMOUTH HOE to-day remembers Sir Francis Drake and the game of bowls. The story is apocryphal and first appears in print thirty-six years after the event : it owes its ready acceptance by the schoolboy to Charles Kingsley and Seymour Lucas, and we may all accept it as characteristic of the spacious times of great Elizabeth. On Friday, 19th July, 1588, Lord Howard of Effingham, the Lord Admiral, is at play with his officers when they are surprised by Captain Fleming of the *Golden Hind* with momentous news that the Spanish fleet is sighted off the Lizard, an invasion armada despatched by the most powerful monarch in Europe. The Sea-Dogs gathered round their admiral, Drake, Raleigh, the Hawkinses, Grenville, Fenner and Frobisher, gaze at each other in consternation, for the English fleet lies in the Cattewater taking victuals on board and the wind is at south-west and blows stiffly into the entrance, and we may be sure if the officers are ashore so are half of the ships' companies. Then Sir Francis turns to the game of bowls. " There's time for that," he declares, " and to beat the Spaniards after." And what happens next ? From now on the story can be pieced together, often from the letters written by the chief actors. All is bustle on board the ships throughout the night, transhipping victuals and ammunition and preparing for sea. On the Saturday, against

"EFFINGHAM GRENVILLE RALEIGH DRAKE

DEDICATED

the wind blowing straight up the narrow harbour, the English fleet puts to sea. First they must warp out of the Cattewater, and according to Fuller, curious collector of gossip, Howard himself sets the example by hauling at a rope. Six ships only get away before nightfall. During the Sunday a total of 54, Queen's ships and merchantmen-at-war, pass St. Nicholas's Island, Penlee and Rame Head and work slowly to windward down Channel, keeping inshore, to join their Lord Admiral, who has gained the coveted position to windward of the Spaniards, now off Fowey, which Spaniards, having mistaken the Lizard for Rame Head and wasted time lying hove-to for a Council of War, have now lost their opportunity of catching the English ships in harbour, without provisions and half-manned. So on the morning of the 21st July, 54 English ships, merchant and men-of-war, their companies determined to defend their country, menace the Invincible Armada of 120 ships and more : so was the stage set when the threat of invasion materialized 350 odd years ago.

Meantime great efforts were being made to send out succour, as soon as powder and shot could be collected and ships got ready and seamen impressed. The warning beacons were burning up and down the coast and sweating horses carried messengers to and from the Court. The militia were being hastily drilled with pike and bill, but men cast a sigh of relief as the little ships drove the enemy slowly before them up Channel. In trying to-day to picture the rival fleets we must shut our eyes to the grey steel monsters that spell warship to us : forget turbines and torpedoes and guns that throw screaming destruction beyond the clearest horizon :

HERE'S TO THE BOLD AND FREE

and we must open our eyes on a cleaner, younger world. Howard's flagship, the *Ark Royal*, was rated 800 tons and bore 425 men upon her books. The Lord Admiral considered her " the odd ship in the world for all conditions," and she had been built only the previous year to the most enlightened designs. Her 30 heavy guns, cannon and culverin, were mounted low in the waist and their most effective range was 80 paces, though they could carry 2,000. She had four masts and a bowsprit. The English and Spanish ships were much alike. As the two fleets passed in sight of the Hoe we may be sure there was a buzz of conversation amongst the greybeards gathered round William Hawkins, the Mayor, and narrowly watching the course of the battle, the puffs of smoke from culverin and saker and the progress of the ships hurrying out of the Sound to join in the pursuit. It is remarkable how unfairly legend has dealt with the resounding victory that was obtained over the might of Spain. Gloriana herself did not do justice to the prowess of her sailors. " The Lord blew and they were scattered," was written of the Armada in Latin on the commemorative medal she caused to be struck. Modern research has proved how wrong she was in

TO THE MEN

her estimate. Hard fighting defeated the Spanish Armada; hard fighting in the Channel and off the Flemish coast, and a resolute pursuit to the northward by men who had expended their ammunition and did not realize the extent of the defeat they had administered, but hung on to the rear of the enemy expecting that sooner or later the bluff would be called. Legend has certainly exaggerated the superior size and armament of the individual Spanish ships (the biggest ship present in the two fleets was probably the English *Triumph* of 1,100 tons, and a Spaniard has recorded his feeling of dizziness when standing on the towering poop-royal deck over the stern of an English-built galleon), but it has also given the full credit of the Armada's overthrow to divine interference, whereas the truth would seem to be that the battle-worn ships of Spain had but to contend with strong westerly winds which caused little inconvenience to any but themselves. The victory was the demonstration of the superior seamanship and gunnery of the English seamen. In truth, a glorious victory had been obtained, but misery and want awaited these same seamen who were neglected by their countrymen after the battle had been won. No provision had been made for the sick and hurt, who were put ashore to die of neglect and filth.

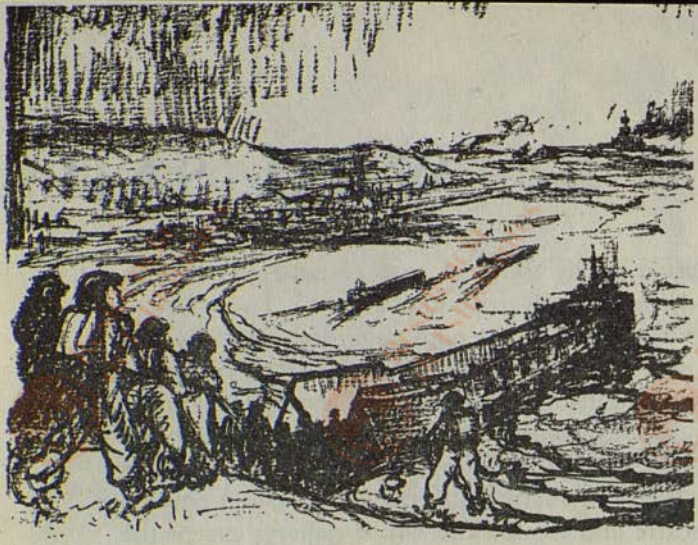
In 1590 Plymouth men—Drake, Hawkins, and others—founded the Chest at Chatham for the relief of sick and worn-out mariners. Notice that the mariners are to support themselves, for the money is to be obtained by a deduction of 6d. a month from the wages of all able seamen serving with the fleet. The original chest, with its five keyholes, is now preserved in the National Maritime Museum at

Greenwich. In 1692 Greenwich Palace was thrown open to the sick and wounded of the fleet after the victories of Barfleur and La Hogue. Public funds were appropriated (and in 1705 the effects of Kid the pirate) and Greenwich Hospital became an asylum for superannuated seamen. Both these charities were designed for the benefit of British seamen generally, although administered by the Royal Navy. But here it must be recalled how close was the bond, or perhaps how little was the cleavage, between the personnel of the two services before the institution of Long Service men in the Royal Navy in the year 1852. All seamen from King Alfred's day and earlier, were liable to be called upon for national service ; a state of affairs the country has again accepted. On enlistment the seaman was paid imprest money, or pay in advance, and, in the eighteenth century anyway, such bounty as had been advertised. Unfortunately the seamen did not come forward to volunteer at the outbreak of a war in sufficient numbers. This was not surprising, for compared with conditions in the Merchant Service and in Privateers those in the Royal Navy with regard to pay and victuals were shocking. On the threat of war the Establishment of the Royal Navy was

WHO SAIL

at once increased nearly fourfold, and perhaps 30,000 men were required immediately to equip a fleet. Thus the infamous Press Gang was generally regarded even by the seamen as a necessary evil, though the hardships caused to individuals were universally detested. Theoretically only seamen were liable to impressment, but necessity knows no law, and we can read in the *Naval Chronicle* for 1803 how during a Hot Press in Plymouth " one Press Gang entered the Dock Theatre and cleared the whole gallery, except the women." During the period of a war the Navy hung on to the men it had obtained; in peaceful times between commissions only a selected few of the ship's company remained in Admiralty employ. Seamen therefore willynilly served haphazardly in both H.M. and merchant ships according to the state of the times. This applied to officers as well as men: Nelson returned at the age of fourteen from a voyage before the mast in a merchant ship imbued, as he himself tells us, with a strong prejudice against service in the Royal Navy.

Although Plymouth Dockyard was first established as late as 1689, the facilities offered by the town and its position relative to the open Atlantic had ensured that long previously the various anchorages in the Sound had seen the origin or rendezvous of maritime expeditions bound for discovery, colonization, trade or war. From Plymouth sailed Drake and after him Cavendish to encompass the world; Sir Humphrey Gilbert for Newfoundland and Sir Richard Grenville for Virginia; Sir Martin Frobisher and Master Davis for the North-West Passage; Sir Walter Raleigh for Guiana. In 1620 the Pilgrim Fathers departed for



America to found a new Plymouth and secure themselves from religious persecution. During the long French wars ships from Lord Hawke's fleet and Lord St. Vincent's lay for a week at a time in Cawsand Bay watering and refitting in the midst of arduous work blockading Brest (the impatient St. Vincent, the admiral who quelled mutinies, allowing no shore leave and howling at his captains to waste no time in port). A long-remembered sight of sea-power was in 1794 when : " The British fleet, riding triumphant upon the waves, with the gallant Howe, and those brave veterans, who distinguished themselves with him, in the famed First of June, was seen stretching its tremendous line from Rame Head to the Lizard Point." And to have done with the French wars, a famous oil painting in the National Maritime Museum depicts another memorable occasion, Napoleon showing himself at the gangway of the *Bellerophon* to boats full of sightseers, who, strangely enough, displayed little or no resentment against the man who had for so long disturbed the peace of Europe ; in fact, the most unfavourable comment made by his immediate captors seems

IN BRITISH SHIPS

to be that: "In eating he sometimes made use of his left hand in lieu of a fork."

Indeed, it is trite to remark on the close connection Plymouth has always had with the sea and sailors. Boats throng the steps at the Barbican and Mutton Cove. Sailors hurry, stroll and frolic in George Street and Fore Street. Fleets and convoys shelter in the Sound. Fishing vessels sail in and out of Sutton Pool, tramp steamers fill Millbay Docks and the jetty at Cattedown, cable-ships load at Turnchapel, passenger liners anchor behind the magnificent Breakwater, the construction of which has turned part of the Sound into a Harbour of Refuge, and ships of the Royal Navy steam in and out of the Hamoaze. Plymouth is intimately linked with the British sailor both in peace and war. To-day we wage another and the greatest of all wars. As always we depend upon our sailors for the necessities of life. Let's get back to Plymouth Hoe. It is June 6th, 1944, and "D" Day; no admirals are playing bowls, but a handsome monument commemorates the deeds of Howard and Drake and the Sound is filled with all and extraordinary types of shipping, merchantmen and men-of-war, getting underway and proceeding into action in defence of their country. But there is no Armada to be met coming up Channel this time, they themselves form the Armada, an Armada of invasion destined to free ourselves and our allies, who are taking a big part in it. The seamanship and gunnery of the British sailors will again prevail.

G. P. B. NAISH.

AND THE RODNEYS YET TO BE."

SIR HENRY NEWBOLT.

FOR THE SAILORS

Even in peace, scant quiet is at sea ;
In war, each revolution of the screw,
Each breath of air that blows the colours free,
May be the last life movement known to you.

Death, thrusting up or down, may disunite
Spirit from body, purpose from the hull,
With thunder, bringing leaving of the light,
With lightning letting nothingness annul.

No rock, no danger, bears a warning sign,
No lighthouse scatters welcome through the dark ;
Above the sea, the bomb ; afloat, the mine ;
Beneath, the gangs of the torpedo-shark.

Year after year, with insufficient guard,
Often with none, you have adventured thus ;
Some, reaching harbour, maimed and battle-scarred,
Some, never more returning, lost to us.

But, if you 'scape, tomorrow, you will steer
To peril once again, to bring us bread,
To dare again, beneath the sky of fear,
The moon-moved graveyard of your brothers dead.

You were salvation to the army lost,
Trapped, but for you, upon the Dunkirk beach ;
Death barred the way to Russia, but you crosst ;
To Crete and Malta, but you succoured each.

Unrecognized, you put us in your debt ;
Unthanked, you enter, or escape, the grave ;
Whether your land remember or forget
You saved the land, or died to try to save.

John Masefield

A Story to tell

OF TWO NAVIES

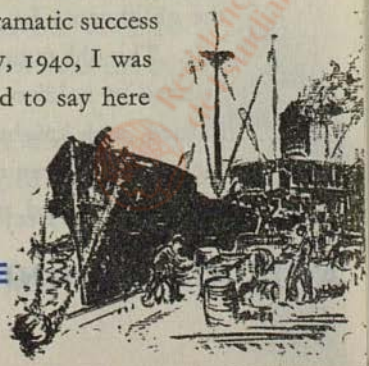
Is it necessary to remind England of her seamen? No, there is no need at all to-day—we are at war. But to-morrow? For memory wanders; and so our care is often indifferent for those who have served faithfully, but are silent! When safe once more, everyone is free to do the best for himself. This allows little time to think of others, even of those who, for the common welfare, gave their lives. This neglect, to be just, is not simply a wilful avoidance of a debt. It is nothing like that. It comes of a natural desire, which we all feel, to turn away from an immediate past ugly with monstrous shadows, and if possible to forget it. But the ardours and endurances of the men who served us well are of that past, with their ships, nameless to most of us, whether under the White or the Red Ensign, too often going down blazing.

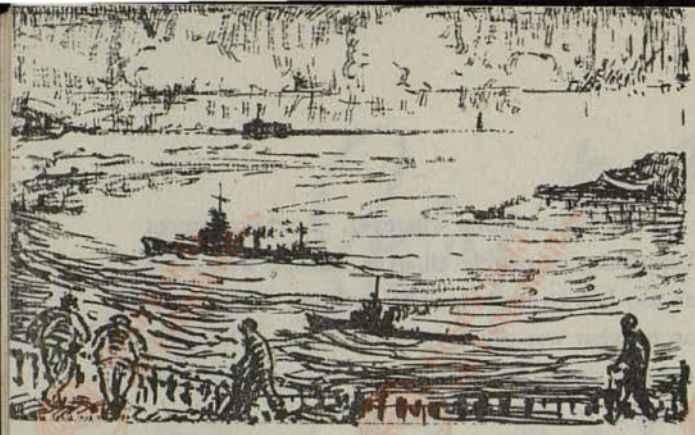
The immediate past will hardly bear thinking about, but it would be better to keep it in mind, and for more than one reason. History is but a looking backward, by the thoughtful, to learn why we happen to be where we are. Without knowledge of the causes which brought us to our present standing ground, and made us what we are, and gave us what we have of good and ill,

there is no hope for the future, none whatever. At this moment we see what is happening to people all over Europe who were careless till it was too late to be wise; or anyhow, did not pay sufficient attention to what was going on about them. The darkness which covered our own country is lifting. It is getting light. And, in this moment of relief from an oppression almost unbearable, we are acutely conscious that but for the sea, and our seamen, the English way of life, which has taken so long to grow and to shape each year somehow nearer to the heart's desire, would have disappeared.

In this new light very few things yet are clear, but one very certainly does stand out. Let the pessimists and cynics say what affords them an odd pleasure, still, this war has revealed a vast power for good in the spirit of our fellow countrymen; and we had only a vague inkling of that before we were challenged. We have reason to be grateful, not only because our coasts were kept from invasion, but for the good will and cunning, and the buoyancy of heart when hope was hardly worth looking at, and for the pride in seeing to it that worthy traditions were never broken. Our people have high quality, and it was that brought about the miracle. We look around at the wreckage in sorrow, but with the certain knowledge that we can build fairer cities.

Everyone knows that all the causes of dramatic success are never obvious, when looked for. In July, 1940, I was in the West Country. (And I may be allowed to say here that the only man I've ever met who could plan and overlook the building of a ship, without a blue print, but with his adze in





his hand, and rig her, launch her, and then take her across the Western Ocean and home again, was a man of Devon.) In that fateful July I saw Plymouth waiting for what was to come. I know Plymouth. It is a gain in life to stand by the tribute to Drake, to remember something of the past, and to see a British cruiser in the offing. It is always helpful to gain a surmise of continuity. So, while we were watching for we did not know what, except that the Germans would make the most of their grand opportunity, now they had us alone, I remembered, and with a pleasant measure of confidence returning, the character of the men who made all the difference to the world in 1588. Drake and Hawkins had long had that other memorable July in sight, and had come to their decisions; one of them was revolutionary—it even frightened the old-timers—for they had discarded the conventional ship of war. The old notion of such a ship was that of a castle afloat, manned by soldiers. Castles are unweatherly at sea, it had been learned, and knights in armour are not the gunners to judge canvas and the run of the waters, when the game is hot. Nimble ships were wanted, with heavier gun-power, and seamen to handle

the weapons, ships able to go about quickly to give the other broadside ; and to fight, not to disable and board the enemy, but to sink him. With elusive movements and heavier metal, three shots were fired to the Spanish one, in that chase up Channel long ago. While I remembered this in Plymouth in our own July, there high overhead flickered some of our fighter planes. We were indeed in another age ; but was it not fair to assume that the traditional cunning and audacity, and prescience for the lively way to confound a foe confident in his greater strength, had now also taken to the clouds ? Soon we actually witnessed that it was in the air, as well as on the waters.

Yet let us note carefully here that this is no estimate of material things. Had there been but a test of the weight of material, the Germans would easily have won. In fact, the world outside assumed we were already done for. Spirit shapes the outcome, when it has time and room in which to inform activity. And though material is purchasable, spirit cannot be bought and paid for. It is there or it is not ; it is a gift, an anonymous gift. But consider its worth ! It has given us the liberty to move as we will, and to make our own decisions ; and without those dangerous privileges life would be an insufferable punishment. We have cause, then, to be grateful, and to remember the men who had that high value to give, and freely gave it when the hour struck ; for once more they not only saved their country, but changed the course of history.

We have been told that whatever is sown, whether by citizen or statesman, by an inexorable law is reaped. And if neglect should follow the service of those who have kept safe our standing?

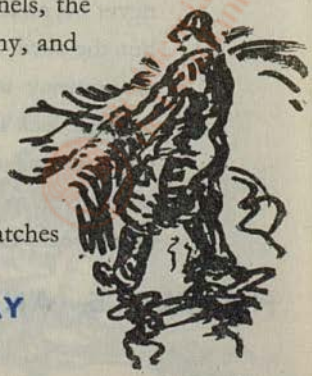
SUCH AS PASS ON THE SEAS UPON

What might come after that? We will not consider an event that it is intended shall not arise, not this time. It did after the other grand occasion, I know. Shortly before the outbreak of this war, I was voyaging in a cargo ship, and heard from men wearing war decorations stories of the indifference shown, when at last they came ashore, which I will not repeat. I found it embarrassing to face the gay ridicule of our national verities from an English mariner wearing a token of valour won in battle, especially as I could not rebuke him for his cheerful mockery, since he happened to keep to the facts. One midnight, this war but two months old, I was listening to the broadcast, and was told casually that that ship had been sunk by gun-fire. And my friend? I don't know yet. No word has come. Evidently, though, those men bore us no ill-will. At the signal, they vanished into the blue again, and there they still are, we hope, and some day will make port again.

For sea-power, first and last, rests in a sufficiency of the right men, who inherited a great tradition, and know how to keep it. A sufficiency of the right ships, of course, they must have; but the machines would be powerless to move to the best of their

weight without an unfaltering spiritual endowment. We are an island people. Without our ships the wheels would cease to turn, even on agricultural tractors, and our chimneys to smoke. Produce without transport is useless. Sea transport for islanders, who have factories and workshops, is as vital as air for breathing. Nature is capricious with her gifts, and compels men to travel to exchange commodities ; and not only merchandise, but ideas. The Royal Navy, and our Merchant Marine, probably have done more than official diplomacy and the electric telegraph to spread in far countries notions of what British values are. Foreigners have known our ships and men, regularly and in numbers, for much more than a century, and have noted their standards in conduct and commerce. In the Far East, the house flags of our regular lines, P. and O., B.I., Blue Funnel, Ben, Glen and Shire, have won a respect not always accorded to the national emblems of some nations. How compute that service ? It cannot be done. It is invaluable, but it is not reckoned in the country's statistics. The present world civilization was brought about by the steamship, and the Red Ensign was flown everywhere and all the time.

It is not easy to convey, even to Englishmen, for most of them live and work out of sight of masts and funnels, the sense of the compulsion of the ocean on our destiny, and the quality of the men who serve our cause afloat. Ashore, those men pass unnoticed. They are lost in the crowd. But if ever you have suffered heavy weather in the Western Ocean, so heavy indeed that the deck was swept, the boats stove, and the hatches



INHABITANTS OF OUR ISLAND MAY

opened, and saw her crew save her—they were lost to sight when the waters went over them—if you have witnessed that, and then, in that wilderness where you had barely survived, you had seen in the murk and welter another ship, labouring too, but heading into it, and saluting with the Red Ensign, you would know the thrill at the heart.

I doubt it would be proper for me to say anything to Plymouth about the White Ensign. I have but sailed under it, a mere guest, at various times. That flag is at home in Plymouth. It represents a dedicated fellowship, with so rigorous a code that the ship and her purpose is all, and her men ministrants. An outsider, made free of the wardroom with its blithe company, is always aware that there are rites and acceptances of which he is not, and can never be, an initiate. He may know ships and the sea well enough, but the shrill call of the bos'n's pipe goes clean through him, as an uncanny warning from a world not his. That guest on the quarter deck feels much humbler than usual. He knows that the safeguarding of what the British think best for themselves has been given to this ship and her company, whatever the merriment at the mess-table. This war was not far off when, from the low

freeboard of a light cruiser, which since has won renown, I saw, a mile to starboard, something that removed a doubt or two from the future ; for already there was no question of Germany's intent. Under a high and sombre coast, the clouds dark and quick, and the seas sullen and heavy, in northern waters that afterwards repeatedly witnessed the defence of our convoys, was one of our battle squadrons passing ; and that grave impression of power, as of destiny on its course, was remembered when we ashore could learn nothing of what was happening between us and the enemy. Beyond the horizon, somewhere, those ships were ; one could sleep on that assurance.

H. M. Tomlinson.

GOD ; THAT WE MAY

A Story to tell

OF KING GEORGE'S FUND FOR

K.G.F.S. In an age when initials and synthetic words are legion these symbols are unfamiliar. Yet in the four words which they denote a whole story is written—the care of a well-beloved sovereign for that most worthy and noble section of his people, his sailors. A Sailor King and his sailormen.

The men and women of England are ever mindful of the fact, and they glory in the knowledge, that the dominion of the seas is their priceless heritage; a heritage won for them by the sea kings of old and kept by their sons and their daughters through the ages.

An imperishable grandeur sheds its warm light on the deeds which have been recorded in the long and valiant history of our seafarers—but eternal splendour enshrouds also those unsung heroes who, unspectacular, have done their simple duty scorning the cost.

The cost! That must be paid. We who now live in safety and who stood alone by the valour of our sons, cannot ignore it.

Through the years great-hearted people have striven to see to it that those who suffer do not suffer without hope, without care and without affection. Dependants left by those who braved

RETURN IN SAFETY TO ENJOY THE BLESSINGS OF

the perils of the deep time after time until their call came, their last voyage was made, must have their chance to live as proud sons and daughters of Britain's proud race.

SAILORS

Hosts of Marine Benevolent Institutions have been founded, for all of which there is great work to do. The confusion of many appeals for such splendid work has militated against some of these Institutions, and so a central distributing Fund was established during the last Great War. Its expenses are minute in relation to its magnitude, and it is managed by men of high character and great experience. It commands our confidence. With the vast store of knowledge at the disposal of its Committee it is certain that money is distributed to institutions to the best advantage of those for whom it is collected: the men of the Royal Navy and its Auxiliaries, of the Royal Marines, of the Merchant Navy and of the Fishing Fleet.

The people of Plymouth who have read with glowing hearts the story this book has to tell need no teaching in the ways of the sea—men of Devon have written the finest pages of our maritime history and our citizens gladly acknowledge the debt and are not found wanting.

The unfolding of our seafarers story can never be completed —all the books in Christendom could not contain its pages—nor unveil the glory that lies upon the dead and the living of an heroic age—let us remember that they suffered and they died, the men of two navies, that we and those we love might live.

H. M. PATTINSON.

THE LAND, WITH THE FRUITS OF OUR LABOURS.

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