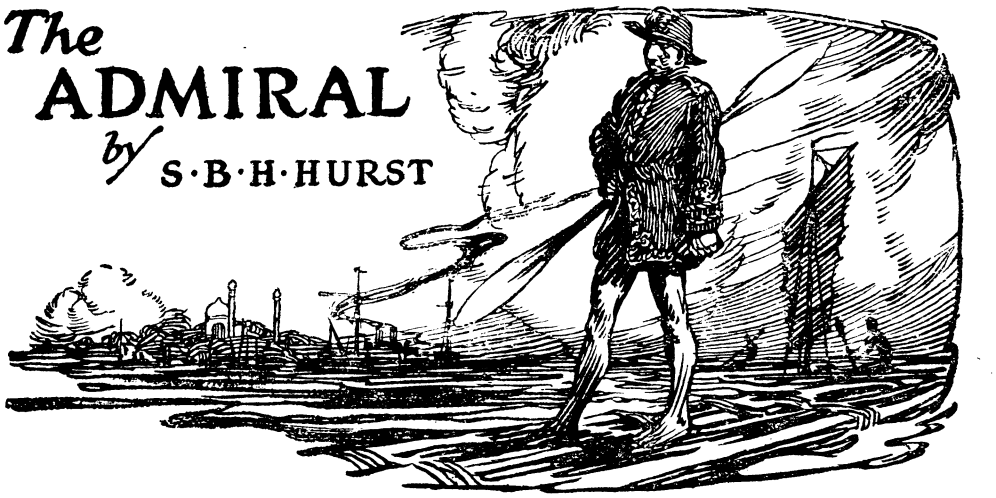
The Admiral
S.B.H. Hurst



Author of "What Happened Between," "Erased" etc.

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YEARS ago, about the time the P & O boats ceased calling at Madras, a battleship and some cruisers moored inside the breakwater. They stayed but a short time, yet their stay gave birth to consequences memorable to many men. And they were born because the Admiral felt lazy. He felt lazy; and so sat down under the awning while a generous sunset made the evening seem even hotter than it was, spite of the ripples of the sea breeze just beginning to reach the ships.

The Admiral watched the shoreward progress of a fleet of catamaran fishermen. He did not call them catamarans because he believed that the only real catamarans are those of Ceylon, which are quite complicated machines with wide outriggers, while the things inhabited by the Madras fishermen were nothing more than clumsy logs, each catamaran consisting of two logs hollowed out a little and fastened together, upon which the almost naked Dravidians squatted, making slow way with paddle or some travesty of sail.

Loaded with fish, these were stubbornly coming shoreward. It seemed to the Admiral that they maintained some sort of order, even if it did seem like the order of a flight of midges, and this argued some one man in charge. A moment later he decided that this idea was fanciful, due to his naval training, and he smiled at the conceit.

The Admiral's ship was at the outer mooring and, as they passed the breakwater, one of the catamarans stopped alongside. He

was a sea-scabbed man of better build than the average, and he regarded the battleship with interest. Then he spoke to the Admiral, not with the salaams of the ordinary native, but decently—as the captain of one ship should speak to the captain of another. As his natural language was Tamil, and as few if any sailors know Tamil, he spoke to the Admiral in a queer sort of English. The Admiral answered. They spoke of the weather together, and then asked questions about their respective vessels. The Admiral explained that it was not exactly a part of his duty to buy fish, but he would see to it that fish were bought. He sent for his servant, told the servant to buy fish, and added:

"And Jones, don't you think that chap would feel better if he had more clothes on? That piece of string around his waist can hardly keep him warm, can it, Jones?"

The Admiral at times loved to descend to the facetious, but as it was no part of the servant's affair to tell the Admiral that it was more comfortable to be without clothes in that atmosphere, he agreed with his master.

"Then," went on the Admiral, expanding, "I will give him some clothes. I noticed that you had rolled up an old coat of mine. Give him that!"

"Very good, sir," answered the servant, who had hoped to sell that old coat to his own slight advantage. "I will give him the coat, sir."

The servant did so. The man on the catamaran accepted the gift and went on shoreward with the rest of the fishing fleet. He laid the coat down so that it just escaped the water washing between the logs.

The Admiral felt at peace with the world and still lazy. It had occurred to him to tell Jones to remove the gold braid from the coat, but he had lazily decided that Jones would have sense enough to do that without being told. But Jones, irritated at losing the money the coat would have sold for, merely gave the Dravidian the coat. He never gave the stripes a thought. Also, in his annoyance, he forgot that a cocked hat of the Admiral's, old but still good enough to wear and still better to look at, had been folded up with the coat. The man in the catamaran, as yet unaware of all that had come to him, had gone beyond recall before Jones remembered these things. He then wisely decided to say nothing about his oversight.

Nearing the beach, the man on the catamaran stopped to examine the gift. The other catamarans stopped also, for this man, as the Admiral had laughingly supposed, was the boss and leader of the fleet. Had the Admiral known more about native fishing fleets, he would have known that they never put to sea without a supreme commander.

Now the fleet leader unfolded the coat. He looked like an unusually intelligent Australian bushman; which is not strange, because the bushmen are descendants of the coast wallers of India.

He put on the coat, which fitted rather well. But he was careful not to allow the collar to hide a cloth picture suspended about his neck. This was a picture of a Biblical group which proclaimed the man a Christian, although the people on the cloth had been drowned in perspiration and buried in dirt.

Then, amid exclamations of wonder and delight from his followers, he put on the hat also. That he put it on the wrong way only added to its attractiveness.

Thus arranged he led the way to the beach, for the fishermen lived in crowded huts between Mylapur and old Saint Thome. The smoke of cooking fires was rising a welcome, but the sea breeze robbed the homecomers of their interesting odors.

AS THE fishermen landed, some naval officers, sitting in gharries, watched with interest. The officers

were young, otherwise they would have found no amusement in driving out so far from the European districts. They focussed their eyes upon the figure in the coat.

"By George," exclaimed a sharp-eyed midshipman, "the Admiral himself!"

The officers got out of the carriages for a closer view. The coat and hat, the stripes and gold lace stood out in all their glory, blazed upon by the last of the sunset.

"The ---! It *is* the Admiral!"

"Admiral's rigout. Where did he get 'em?" They approached the fisherman. The coat and hat could not have been stolen, since a Madrasee fisherman could hardly board a battleship and help himself to the sacred property of an admiral. And he could not have bought such things. He would not even if he could. Therefore they had been given to him, and a careless servant had neglected to cut off the insignia.

"But," asked the midshipman, "isn't there a law or something against a blighter like this paradin' around in this Christmas tree finery? Seems to me there is, you know!"

The others, also, had vague remembrance concerning such a regulation.

"We can fix it, though," said a hitherto silent lieutenant.

"How?" came the chorus.

"Make it all regular, of course. Give this Johnny a commission as admiral. He seems to be boss here, anyway!"

The idea was received with enthusiasm, the urbane Dravidian smiled without understanding exactly what it was all about, and the afterglow bathed Madras in tints of subdued beauty.

"Let's tell him!"

"No. Let's fix up his commission first while there's light enough."

"Let Mugliston do it, then. Make him do it. He suggested it, and he was taught how to write when but a child!'

"But don't make it like the testimonial the chap gave his Mohammedan servant in Calcutta. You remember. He wrote,

'This man is the worst --- thief in India.'

An' the poor blighter carried the thing around and showed it with pride to prospective hirers of himself until somebody told him what it meant."

"No," said Mugliston, "this shall be done *en regal*, and I'll sign it in proper form."

"What? Sign it as if it was real?"

"Certainly. It's an admiral's commission, ain't it?"

So those happy young men clustered around Mugliston, who began to write in clear script as follows:

To My Trusty and Well Beloved—

"Hey, what's the blighter's name? Ask him, somebody."

They beckoned to the man in the coat and hat, who went to them, and they received from him, as nearly as they could receive it, his name.

"Good," said Mugliston. "Here goes then:"

To My Trusty and Well Beloved Meta Dass: Greeting! Whereas—

And he wrote as much as he could remember and a whole lot more of what he imagined was to be found written in the commission of an admiral of the British Navy.

"Now," he said, carefully surveying his pen in the faint light, "now for the real beauty of the thing. Now for the signature."

And he signed the admiral's commission with an excellent

VICTORIA R. & I.

Now the young men had been too decent to laugh at the appearance of the fisherman in the coat and hat and, during the performance of the commission, in spite of facetious remarks, they had not smiled. So

they admired the commission gravely, although gravity at times became difficult.

"My word," whispered a brother lieutenant to Mugliston. "My word, Mug, you're a wonder! That sig's the real article. Think of the banks you could rob. You're wasted in the navy, for what's a lieutenant's pay compared to what you could earn as a forger?"

Meta Dass was more than grave. His raiment had taken on an almost religious significance. That it was the cause of the sahib's writing was obvious, and he decided that they had been sent to meet him by the tired man on the great ship who had ordered his servant to give the coat and hat. This was, therefore, government business, and about it was honor. Well, to Meta Dass, the almost maharaja of the fishing fleet, honor was due. In truth, it had been too long delayed!

The officers found it necessary to salute the commission before presenting it to the fisherman. The saluting was done solemnly, but the midshipman had to turn his head to cough violently.

THEN they lined up, facing Meta Dass, whose followers clustered respectfully behind him. Mug- liston advanced a yard, the paper in his hands. Gravely he read the commission, the men behind him saluting again when he came to the signature of the queen. They looked somewhat like mechanical images in an outlandish temple, their faces being a bit strained, as it were. But the soft, cooling sea breeze was as incense burning to the gods of deep places.

Mugliston gave the commission to the proud Meta Dass.

"It's all a bit irregular," he said, as if apologizing to the unseen spirit of the regulations, "but it's awful real to this poor Johnny. Perhaps I had better explain to him. Don't rag, you fellows—" this suggestion was unnecessary— "It's a joke an' all that, but it don't seem like one. This chap thinks it's all real, you know."

"Then tell him it is real, Mug," said he who had spoken of forgers. "Tell him it's real. With so many lies on your poor conscience, another won't make any difference. An' tell him what an admiral is. One or two of 'em have told you what you are often enough!"

Mugliston looked at the sea-scabbed man, a figure of humble toil, yet of some mastery of soul. The gulf between them seemed gone. "Meta Dass!"

The new admiral came closer, and Mugliston noticed a curious smell that seemed to be part of the man.

"Meta Dass—" unconsciously Mugliston fell into a sort of high-brow pidgin— "Meta Dass, great honor has been done you, you understand?"

"Yes, sir, me un'stand."

"The --- you do—er, I am glad you do. Alleesamee, maybe I had better explain some more. This very unusual thing— not happen often, you know. Come to think of it, I don't believe it ever happened before, and it isn't likely to happen again. So, you see, it is a great honor. You now admiral, as this paper says. And you are the only one just like the one you are."

"Yes, sir, me the only admiral. Me un'stand—boss, big man."

"This chit, this paper says so. You keep him careful, no lose."

Mugliston had lost the high-brow form of address with which he had so gallantly started.

"Me never loose," said Meta Dass firmly, his gnarled fingers clutching the precious document.

"Very well, Admiral," said Mugliston, conscious that his friends were saluting again, and trying to place the not altogether strange smell that clung to the new flag officer.

It was of the sea, but it seemed to be more an intimate part of the sea than any of the sea smells with which Mugliston was acquainted. He thought of the dark, eternal ooze, festering thousands of fathoms deep, and he had a vision of monsters wallowing in that belly of the oceans.

"Very well, Meta Dass," he said, "and I am sure you will be a credit to the admirals of all time. Don't believe admirals have to stand for this sort of jaw when getting their commissions, but this is a bit irregular. I'm no good at preaching, but there's a lot about admirals I could tell you. An admiral must carry on so that he can say, 'Thank God I did my duty' or 'the torpedos, go ahead!' You savvy?"

"Yes, sir. Me Christian."

"The ---! That makes it easier for me. Next time you happen to be sailin' in company with the missionary who herds your flock, you get him to tell you about some admirals he has heard about. All I can say now is that when the other chap thinks he has you licked, you carry on as if you hadn't really started to fight. That's all just now. Good-by, Admiral."

And saluting as if he were taking leave of his own commander-in-chief, Mugliston departed with his friends. They sat on the midshipman for saying that as Meta Dass was admiral of the fleet, they ought to have given him a union jack to fly at the masthead of his flag-ship.

NOT from the missionary—of whom, for reasons of his own, the Admiral was at that time somewhat shy—but from various sources Meta Dass learned about the lives of great admirals. What he learned fused with the Bible stories of the missionary, and the memory of the tired man who had so colorfully garbed him. But if his ideas were at times hazy, his pride in his title was always clear, and out of the clouds of his imagination he—perhaps half unconsciously—wove the golden thread of a great truth.

He went on giving the law to his people, arbitrating their domestic troubles. He was an admiral, carrying about with him the queen's commission, and he allowed no one to forget this, yet he remained very much the Dravidian fish-waller just as, in spite of his clinging to Christianity, he remained at heart a savage.

The routine of his life was not changed. He wore the gorgeous coat and hat, and the missionary—or another missionary, maybe —gave him a new picture to replace the one effaced, but continual splashings in salt water did not improve the coat, and the wind often blew off the hat. Yet he was known to all as "The Admiral" and, in the giving of his title was never a suspicion of ridicule. At night, out with his fleet, he imagined himself as one of a company of great admirals, and the dream grew with the years.

YEARS passed. Meta Dass was in the process of becoming a legend, which is the naked truth with a few ornaments strung around it. The wonderful coat passed from patches into non-existence, but the Admiral never again went without a coat. He lost the hat, but that troubled him little as he was more comfortable without it, but he was never without an old coat in the inside pocket of which was always, carefully wrapped and sewed, the commission.

Sometimes he would talk about the evening it came to him, how the sahibs saluted, how the queen's name was *signed* to it. In time he told how she had actually signed it herself, and after her death he almost believed she had.

Years passed. Taking his fleet out to fish in the streaky phosphorescence of the warm night water, the Admiral watched reminiscently a large man-of-war making

toward moorings behind the breakwater. He thought of the tired man, the giving of the coat and hat, the writing of the commission, and wondered if any of those sahibs of old days were on this warship. She did not enter the breakwater as in the old days, but turned and twisted, and the Admiral knew why she did this. All the fishermen knew that a great war raged, although it had not touched them, but only the Admiral knew exactly why the man-of-war took such a course. From orders given, he had guessed the truth, but it was beneath his dignity to explain to his followers who had also heard the orders. A power boat had fussed alongside the Admiral's catamaran weeks before, and an Englishman had hailed:

"Oh, Admiral, how are you. You're lookin' fit. You saw all this work going on around breakwater. Yes? Well, you savvy cable. Yes, cable. Yes, lay big cable there. Now, this is order from burra sahib, you must not let any of your chaps go across that line of cable. You see this fine?"

There was no line visible, but the Admiral understood a line of bearing and nodded. He stood easily upon his rocking logs, straightening his old body, proud to confer with this sahib about important matters.

"Good, you see him. Well, you must not pass across that line. Big trouble if you do. Government give you , you know. You and your catamarans must keep away off this side—the farther the better. You'll do this, won't you, Admiral?"

"Me do."

"And no let any of your men cross over."

"If he does, I beat him."

"But he mustn't."

"I no let."

"Good egg. By-by, Admiral."

The power boat departed. The Englishman mopped his face, muttering:

"Got to tell 'em something, but can't tell 'em the truth. A warning's all one can do. But that old Admiral's a pretty wise old bird. I wonder how much he knows or guesses. Anyway, he won't talk even if he does know what the cable really is. It's funny, but he'll no more think of telling his men what he thinks or guesses than an admiral in the navy would think of discussin' his battle plans with the ship's cook."

And going out, that still, warm evening, the Admiral watched the course of the warship, and the course she took was drawn upon his brain. He grinned slightly, and his rheumy old eyes brightened. He was an admiral. The Englishman in the power boat had known that he would understand about the cable. But only those in authority have such secrets. He glanced contemptuously at his uncomprehending fellows. Then he watched the man-of-war going into moorings and wondered again about the navy officers of old days, and if any of them were on board this great fighting vessel.

The catamarans went on seaward, the day went out in a blaze of glory and the Admiral chose the place for fishing—about ten miles off shore, the fleet settling around him. The dark covered them like warm velvet. Now and then a man would hum softly a quaint and very ancient tune, but for the most part they fished silently. The Admiral did not fish. His earnings were a percentage of the takings of the others. He crouched, huddled in his coat, thinking of many things, of his youth and the dead. At his feet was the flare pot, ordered to be carried to warn steamers that came too close.

THE hours passed to that one in which the ogre spirits of the land come out to settle their differences with the green ones of the deep. The fish had stopped biting. The hour could be told by their appetites, for it was known that they were afraid to eat when the spirits bickered.

The Admiral, drowsing, heard a grunt and a gurgle, then a splash. It roused him as it roused others, who chattered.

"Who made that noise?" he growled.

Three men made answer.

"Ramysawmy made it."

The Admiral considered. He did not like to be disturbed this way. He would enjoy brow-beating Ramysawmy, whom he did not like, either.

"Send Ramysawmy to me," he ordered, speaking as a rajah who does not address a culprit directly.

"He cannot be sent," many voices made reply.

"Why not?" rasped the Admiral.

There was a silence.

"Why not—?" the Admiral spoke beyond print.

A new voice made reply.

"Because he has gone to ---," answered this new voice with grim assurance.

"Oh," the Admiral spoke almost casually. "Who sent him there?"

"I did," said the new voice, while the fleet breathed whisperingly through the dark, and the water between the catamarans seemed to laugh as at some great jest.

"Then come over here to me and tell me why you sent Ramysawmy to ---," commanded the Admiral.

For although he would report that a man had fallen overboard and had been drowned in spite of desperate efforts to save him, his head struck against a catamaran and he sank immediately, and the authorities would pretend to believe him, since it was worse than useless to try to investigate, the Admiral always insisted on having the details of such affairs, and his men never lied to him. They knew that he would discover the lie, and preferred what he might say about their taking his law into their low hands to what he might order done when he found out that a lie had been told to him.

So the man who had sent Ramysawmy to --- worked his catamaran alongside the flag ship. Even in that thick dark, the Admiral could see the ripples of emotion contorting the man's face.

"Well?" the Admiral asked shortly.

The man's breath came in sobs, his body twitched.

"Ramysawmy was familiar with my wife," he said, mastering his gaspings.

"Oh," chuckled the Admiral cruelly. "And you were never familiar with another man's wife?"

The man seemed about to argue, but the Admiral cut him short.

"Son of many liars," he said, "if you never were it was because the woman would have none of you. Besides, what is a woman, anyhow?"

And the admiral gestured easily as one may, whom age has made immune.

"Very little," admitted the man, "unless she happens to be your own."

"The woman is not the point, fool," the Admiral barked somewhat inconsistently. "The point is that you killed without first asking me. There are many, less kind than me, who would order you killed, perhaps slowly, for doing this. You have heard of what the old Rajah of Travancore used to do! You neither consulted me about your filthy domestic affairs nor gained my consent to send Ramysawmy to ---. But because Ramysawmy was no use on earth and because he will suffer horribly in hell, he was a Christian, as we all are, and the Christian hell is the worst of all hells, which is something for you to think about.

"Because I did not like Ramysawmy, I will be good to you and make the punishment a light one. You have given me trouble, for I shall have to make report about a man drowned, and I am tired of being bothered with making reports. Besides, I have made so many of the same sort that I

often see the magistrate sahib grin under his mustache when I make them, as if he did not quite believe what I said. I do not like to be thought a liar, because it lowers me to your level. For this trouble you have given me you will pay me one rupee. Go!"

It was a large fine as such fines went, but the man did not protest. He went away in his catamaran, thinking that it was almost worth a rupee to have the fun of sending Ramysawmy to ——, but that it was far too much to pay for a wife's protection. No wife was worth so much. He would give her a large beating next day when the fleet went home.

THEN the fish started biting again, and the Admiral drowsed. Into his dreaming crept a measured pulse. Then it stopped. It came again, lulling him. It again stopped, and its stopping aroused him. As he opened his eyes to stare around the measured beat started again. It was an approaching steamer, but what puzzled the Admiral was its stopping and then going on again—its hesitating, as it were, its feeling its way. There was no need for any steamer to feel its way in those waters.

The men went on fishing, hardly taking any notice. They left decisions to the Admiral, although he was sarcastic about making flares and had said that it didn't matter much if a steamer hit a catamaran—it couldn't hurt the steamer. So the peculiar actions of the approaching steamer escaped even those fishermen who had heard her, for as yet there was no sight of her.

The Admiral stared in the direction of the sound. The engines were going very slowly. Then they stopped" again and again went on. The Admiral decided that there was engine trouble. He wondered at her showing no lights until he recollected a similar phenomenon, and remembered being told that the machine making the lights had gone wrong with the rest of the engines. Knowing nothing of engines or dynamos, the rarity of such an occurrence did not trouble his present conclusions.

The steamer came quite close to the catamarans before the Admiral heard her stop again. She acted very quietly, so that he saw her looming like a darker cloud against the rest of the night. His men began chattering loudly, but not a one dared suggest to the Admiral that he light the flare. Then the Admiral heard—but so quietly was it done that the sheaves of the blocks hardly made a sound—heard a boat lowered. This was distinctly unusual, and the Admiral could imagine no reason for it. The sahibs could hardly have stopped and lowered a boat to buy fish. Steamers had occasionally bought fish during the years of the Admiral's tenure, but they had never lowered boats in order to do so. They had shouted for the catamarans to come alongside. The boat rowed softly towards the fleet. The chatter of it could be heard a mile or more on that still air. The boat stopped alongside a catamaran some distance from the Admiral's, and a voice asked in English. "Who boss man here?"

A dozen fishermen directed the questioner to the Admiral.

"Hush, you chatter like a lot of parrots." The officer in the boat seemed needlessly irritated. "So—" as the boat reached the catamaran of the crouching Admiral—"so, you head man here, eh?"

The Admiral did not like to be called head man, for so many years no sahib had ever called him anything but Admiral, but he grudgingly admitted that he was.

"So, and you fish around here long time, eh?"

The Admiral had fished around there for more than fifty years, and said so.

"Good," went on the boat's officer. "And you know coast and harbor pretty

well, eh?"

"I know him all—outside breakwater, inside—long way out. I know him all," replied the Admiral proudly.

"Good, very good," said the officer. "And you see big ship—big fight-ship—go in harbor today?"

"Yes, I see him go in."

"Good. Well, that big ship and my ship consorts—friends, you know—and come long way to here, from England. Come along with him, but our engines break down."

"Yes, I heard him," interrupted the Admiral.

"Eh?"

"I heard him stop. Then you go ahead again, then stop."

The officer smiled, his voice became even more cordial.

"That is so. You observant man. Good. Engines break down. Big ship in hurry, no can wait. So my ship come along alone. Now I don't know way in. Never been here before. Want pilot. Pay you five rupees."

The officer turned his face from the Admiral and looked at the dim, pearly faces of his impassive men, thinking:

"As the captain said, it's our only chance. To try to get in without local help would mean failure. This man may be an efficient pilot. He ought to be if he knows about the mines. When we get him on board we must find out about that, but we are certainly no worse off with him than without him. If he can take us through, it's our one chance to pull off the big thing. If we get her, nothing else matters. But will he suspect when we ask questions? Why should he—when he thinks we are English? And what if he does? He won't bother about it. The money is all he will think about. India is seething with revolution, and these fellows hate the British."

He turned to the Admiral.

"Well, hurry up! Will you take us in?"

"Not enough money," grunted the Admiral.

"All right, I give ten rupees," said the officer quickly.

The Admiral simulated entire lack of interest in ten rupees, a large sum to a Dravidian fisherman.

"You wait today. See way in yourself then," he said indifferently.

"I give thirty rupees, and that's my last offer," snapped the officer.

This was tremendous money to the Admiral, but he hesitated artistically. Since the night of the commission his great, unattainable dream had been to be, if but for a moment, a person of importance on board an English man-of-war. His musing upon the lives of great admirals had woven this into a living if pathetic ambition. He was proud to be asked to pilot the ship, but the instincts of the centuries caused him to appear as if falling asleep. There was even the simulation of a snore.

"All right, then."

The officer gave low-voiced orders. He seemed about to return to his ship.

"I take you in," said the Admiral. "First, give me money."

The officer did not want to waste any more of the darkness. He gave the Admiral the thirty rupees, and the Admiral called to a man who sometimes acted for him.

"I am going to command this warship," he said. "Afterwards, they will then send me on shore with honor. You take care of the fleet."

ONCE on board, the Admiral shook off his seeming indifference, became much interested and alert. Taken to where he could con, he began to talk to the officer as a friend to whom he wished to show off all he knew. It was an opportunity the Admiral had long waited

for.

"Go in different way now," he said to the boat officer who stood by his side and talked English so easily.

"So," the officer was keenly alert.

The Admiral laughed.

"Yes, you know—mines. But only me know. Sahib say 'Don't cross line of cable,' but I savvy. And I watch big ship and know how she go inside. Twist this way, then that way so not to touch mines. My low fellows, they no savvy. Think cable and I no tell 'um."

The officer could have hugged the old man. But he restrained himself. This was luck beyond anything hoped for. He had expected a long siege of questions to find out if the Admiral knew about any mines. Luck was with them, and they would torpedo the battleship. After that, whether they got out again safely or not did not matter so much.

"Yes, I know," he said casually. "You be careful you don't hit one of them, or big noise and go to ---, you know."

"I savvy," the Admiral grinned appreciatively.

"Our orders are to anchor alongside big ship, so you take us same way," said the officer.

"I do it," said the Admiral, thinking that the engine trouble had been mended, since the ship went ahead slowly, but without hitch. "Why no lights?" he asked, his mind reverting to what he had once been told about engines and lights.

"Orders not to carry lights," said the officer readily.

"Oh, I savvy."

They went on, the night hiding them. The Admiral was seldom a self-analyst, but he wondered at the tense feeling of excitement that had got under his skin until the tense mental atmosphere of all aboard began to stimulate his old brain.

"I Admiral," he said to the officer.

"Eh?"

"Yes, long ago men like you give me commission, writing by queen." Here the Admiral saluted, to the concealed amusement of the officer. "It in here." The Admiral thrust his hand inside his coat and crackled the paper. "I know fight ships, like this. You have—what you call— shoot out in front, run along water and hit other ships—*bang*, eh?"

"Of course," the officer felt that this was something like a game of chess. "All English ships like this one have torpedos."

"Of course. I savvy," said the Admiral. "I think you better *dhow torra"*

The officer, acquainted with the vernacular of the colashes, told the man at the wheel—

"Port!"

"Port, sir," answered the man in excellent English.

"*Marram*—steady you go," ordered the Admiral, and he was obeyed.

"*Weejow*—starboard—*torra, torra*," he said to the officer who transmitted the course to the man at the wheel.

Thirty rupees. Thirty useful pieces of silver. They would buy much comfort. Thirty rupees! But why did he feel so uncomfortable about the money?

This problem whirled in the Admiral's brain until he almost forgot the officer and the ship on whose bridge he stood.

Then it came to him, suddenly as a shooting star and flashing like a star. Thirty pieces of silver. The story his various missionaries had so often told. The awful betrayal. The low Judas. Thirty pieces of silver, the price paid for betraying the Son of God, as the missionaries had explained. That was it. But why, the Admiral wondered, should this concern him at that moment. True, he had been paid thirty pieces of silver, but it was for doing honorable work, for piloting a British ship to where she could

anchor alongside her friend; for guiding her safely past the dangerous, deadly mines. Why should he feel disturbed?

Driven by the tremendous urge of the story of the great betrayal, the old Admiral's brain began to work as it had never worked before. In some strange way that story had become connected with the commission in his pocket and with the thirty rupees. Honor in his pocket, but also, thirty pieces of silver. But this was silly. He was being paid for doing honorable work. But was it work of honor? Of course it was. Piloting a British ship. How could that be otherwise than honorable? And, anyway, thirty rupees would buy many desirable things.

"Dhow torra," he said, irritated, trying to forget the story that clings about thirty pieces of silver.

But he could not put it out of his mind. And then, suddenly, he found himself considering very carefully the manner of his hiring, the quiet of it, the behavior of the ship on which he stood. And he understood. War, and this ship an enemy. Would the safety of an English ship coming to anchor have been left to the chance of his being picked up? The Admiral felt humble, then angry. Would an English ship not have known the passage through the mines? No lights, no signals? He did not need to go on. The Admiral respected fighters. The men on this ship were brave men. They wanted to blow up the big ship in the harbor. This was fair war. They were risking their lives for their king and country. He saw it all, and thirty rupees haunted him. What was Meta Dass, with his British commission and the enemy's thirty pieces of silver?

WELL, he could take this ship safely past the mines, and thirty rupees would buy many desirable things. It was wealth, and the ship on whose deck he stood was absolutely safe with him guiding her. Why should he trouble. He was an old man. He had not made the war. And the thirty pieces of silver the missionaries talked about had to do with affairs very different from ships—that thirty was not the thirty of Meta Dass, and times had changed since thirty pieces of silver was the price of betrayal. It might not mean the same thing now. It was not his affair.

If it was, the government or some sahib should have told him not to pilot enemy ships. He had not been told, or even paid by the government. And this fair-spoken officer had given him thirty rupees. Was it not his duty to be honest and earn the money?

They were closing in on the mine field. The crew stiffened at their stations, torpedos ready.

"Beechme secun ," said the Admiral, and the officer translated to the man at the wheel.

Thirty rupees. On that big ship inside might be sleeping the sahib who had given the commission, the tired man who so long ago had given the coat and hat. The Admiral's twitching fingers gripped at the paper in his pocket. Thirty pieces of silver!

"Weejow, now. You soon pass mine and anchor."

"Good," the officer seemed to find it difficult to breathe.

There came to the Admiral memories of what he had been told about the lives of great admirals, and these admirals seemed to be watching him.

It was very easy and quite natural for Meta Dass to feel that the spirits of those great dead were gathered there to watch him. Almost he could hear them talking about him. Real, living spirits, whispering to one another. His old figure straightened. He felt very proud. Then he felt the thirty rupees in his pocket.

Very quietly the enemy ship crept forward. The night grew darker before the dawn. They were at the passage between the

mines. To go on as they were meant going through clear. Either to port or starboard meant striking a mine.

"Weejow sicar—hard a-starboard," commanded the Admiral in a clear voice.

He patted the pocket containing his commission, then thrust the thirty rupees into the hand of the astounded officer, whose starting eyes saw this aged and uncouth fisherman salute someone invisible as the lieutenant of the commission had saluted so long ago.

The spirits of the great admirals took shape. And the instant before the ship struck the mine and was blown into indistinguishable fragments, the Admiral said with a sigh of satisfaction:

"Thank God. Done my duty!"