

Koupets had been expecting this, and a shot from his revolver, striking the chief in the diaphragm, threw the natives into confusion, as the majority of the persons present were booked to be buried alive with the fallen chief. A disorderly rush was checked by a single volley, and Koupets and his party reached mid-stream without a scratch.

The journey down-stream was as long as it was uneventful, and the party regained a good deal of its lost strength. It was interrupted by a cataract hedged in by so thick a jungle that it was impossible to cut a way for the canoes. The little army, taking to its legs, came out at last upon an open plain, and sighted a distant village that turned out (in the end) to be Adoshaf.

A few miles from Adoshaf Koupets found a number of mutilated corpses, and a dying maniac, from whom he gleaned no information. A mile further a starving woman told him that the folk of Adoshaf had been exterminated by devils. Two miles from the village the aforesaid devils, perceiving Koupets and his merry men, came out on horseback, with long spears and shrill cries, at the charge.

The wary and resourceful Koupets, who had extended his men in a long line, caused the wings to fall back, and having thus bunched the line of horsemen, unmasked the Maxim and swept them away. The battle was over in three minutes, and an hour later the conquerors were in the market place receiving the submission of the "devils," who had been utterly demoralized by the annihilation of their fiercest fighting men by what appeared to them to be magic.

Koupets was highly elated at his victory, and dreamt of empire. "Glory and Galicia," said he, "have always been synonymous." And forthwith he set up the Gallician flag in the market-place, unfurled it ceremonially, and took possession of Adoshaf in the name of his country and its government, though, having been seven years lost to civilization, he had no idea what the form of that government might be, and even less of what is ever the last thing a brave man thinks of—the political situation.

III.

Croisière Joyeuse.

First Lieutenant Finn was certainly the only man on his ship to be trusted with the navigation. Balustan does not produce born sailors. Finn was of a conquered race of seafaring folk, and hated Balustan as Moses hated the Egyptians. The Khan of Balustan never suspected that the declaration of war would see half his ships sunk by his own officers.

However, the world was at peace, and First Lieutenant Finn saw a brave show of bunting from the bridge of the battleship "Luschbuze" as she steamed grandly out of the harbor of Sebastian, beneath the muzzles of the biggest fortress guns in the world.

It was a commonplace that Sebastian was impregnable. Though indeed it had once fallen within the memory of living men, conditions of war had changed. It was now-a-days not even approachable. It was said that its arsenal held munitions of war sufficient for a three years' siege.

The "Luschbuze" was a battleship-cruiser of the latest pattern, and her armament was superior to that of any other ship in the world. She had been in commission for not quite a year, and hoisted the pennant of Rear Admiral Tsoke. In her bunkers were 3,000 tons of the best English steam coal, and her orders were to cruise in the Axine until it was exhausted.

Landsmen have the fixed idea that cruising has something of *dolce far niente* in its constitution. They think

of the Norfolk Broads, or Dr. Lunn's pleasure parties. But the cruise of a battleship is hard work, the next best thing to action—and hard work formed no portion of the program of Rear Admiral Tsoke. That gallant seaman—the "Nelson of the North" of English newspapers—accordingly steamed out of sight of land, and out of touch of ships, and there by night incontinently emptied two of his three thousand tons of coal into the stormy Axine.*

This tedious but necessary labor ended, the ward-room returned to its untiring round of baccarat and strong drink, while the Cinderella of the ship, First Lieutenant Finn, went ahead—dead slow—to the convenient harbor of an island most highly favored by nature, where the hardships of naval discipline might be deservedly mitigated by the amenities of social intercourse with a race whose ladies were renowned throughout three continents for their virtues rather than for their virtue.

It was here that the first ray of the star of First Lieutenant Finn's destiny lit his horizon. "I shall have to go and blow those poor devils out of the water, I see," said Rear Admiral Tsoke, in an expansive moment, to his lieutenant.

"Yes, sir?" interrogatively.

"The brave Koupets has come out at Adoshaf, and raised the banner of Galicia. See there!" and he handed across a copy of the Balustan "New Times."

They drank to Koupets the brave, and to Galicia the glorious, their ally, and heartily wished to God they were in Tetulia, where the girls are gladdest. They also drank the deepest of damnations to treacherous Noibla, the country that had made forcible diplomatic protest against the seizure of Adoshaf, and with a jabber—unintelligible, thank God, to bluff, hardy, honest seamen!—about "spheres of influence" and the like, raised a little hell in the chancelleries.

There was, however, no anxiety in the simple mind of First Lieutenant Finn. He never expected promotion, having no noble relatives, or even a wealthy lady to interest herself in his career. He knew that war would not come, on the general principle that "nothing ever happens." If it did, he conceived it his first duty to God and man to run the "Luschbuze" upon such a rock and in such weather that so much as a splinter of her would never be seen again.

It was the last day of their stay in the island. Tsoke, thinking that the fleet might be mobilized and sent somewhere in such a way that he would have to do something, resolved to lose himself in the Axine until the crisis was over. He hastily got to sea, and cruised about for a fortnight in a choppy temper, which increased upon him daily, the weather becoming and remaining exceedingly bad, and his luck at baccarat worse.

At the end of that period he spoke a British ship, two days out from Sebastian, learned that the crisis was ended peacefully, and, longing for the flesh-pots of the arsenal, got rid of another 500 tons of coal in the night, and ordered Finn to lay a straight course for Sebastian, where he arrived without further adventure.

With a sense of duty done, the Nelson of the North lay to, and went off in a boat with his captain to dinner. No sooner were they landed, however, than the naval police quietly arrested them, and lodged them in separate cells furnished with ample stationery and such other adjuncts to the art of writing as a paternal government deemed fitting for their rank.

*Improbable statements occurring in this story are facts, for which I can give chapter and verse.—A. C.