

THIS story commences with a text and finishes with a battle which is unique in the History of Battles.

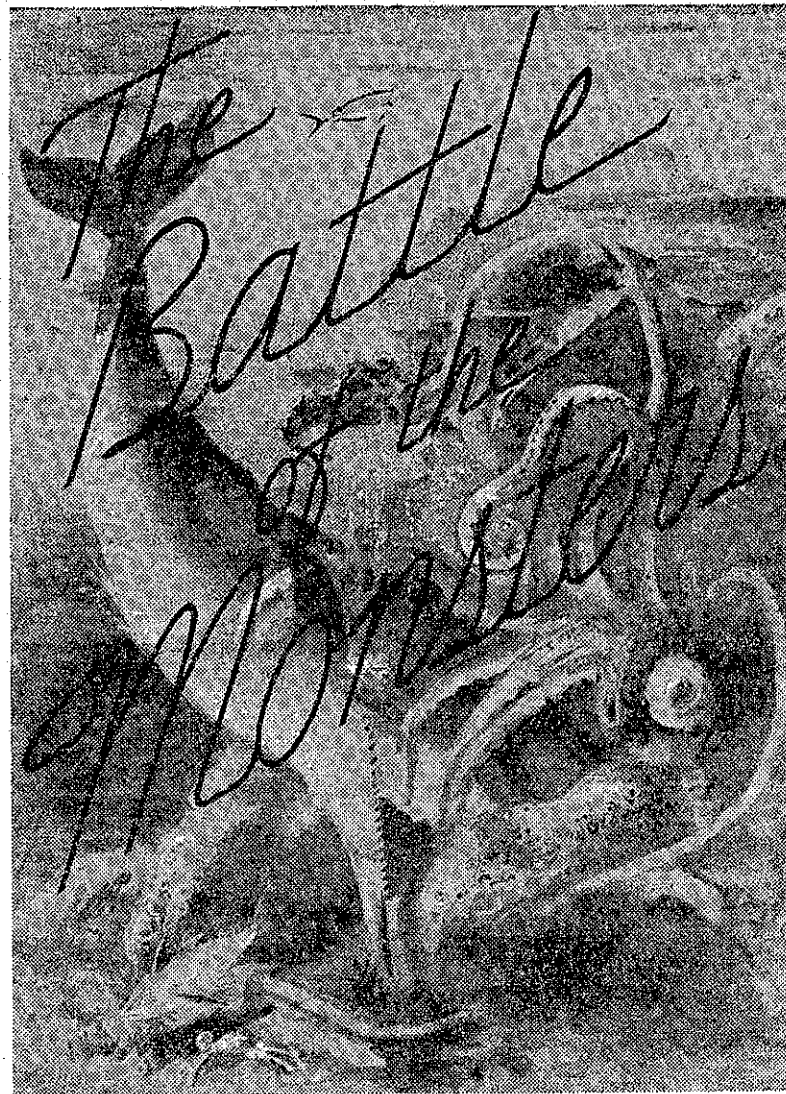
"They that go down to the sea in ships; that do business in Great Waters. These see the wonders of the Lord in the Mighty Deep." Psalm 107-23:24. Not only do they see the wonders of the Lord, but I am firmly of opinion that they see some monstrosities of the other gentleman whose name is unmentionable.

For the sea is the place wherein dwells the largest, the ugliest, the fiercest, and most ruthless of all the monsters created. Truly, the old law of the "survival of the fittest" obtains here, for each one preys on its neighbour literally. Some of these slimy monsters inhabit the deepest deeps of the great oceans, and only come up once in a while, and most often they are not seen when they do come.

The ugliest and really most dangerous of these monsters is the giant octopus, which is only rarely seen, and by most people is looked upon as a myth or a drunken sailor's nightmare. He is no myth, but a filthy, vile-looking reality.

Octopi of many species infest the coral reefs of nearly all of the South Sea Islands, and I may say all tropical and sub-tropical seas. On the reefs at Surprise Island I have seen thousands of very small octopi from three to six inches in diameter—in fact have used hundreds of them for bait. The same thing obtains in numerous other tropical islands, especially on the Great Barrier Reef on the Australian coast.

Then there is another species, with legs about three feet long, and he is fairly numerous in all tropical waters and also in New Zealand. I have seen these fellows as far south as Dunedin, where I once caught one alongside the Rattray Street Wharf. This fellow can be very dangerous, and I once saw one with legs four feet long drown a native in the South Seas. Occasionally one with legs six feet long is seen, but they are not common. These brutes are all dangerous, for once they



A becalmed Schooner in the South Seas;
an alarm; a square mile of sea lashed
white with writhing, weaving tentacles
of a school of Octopi; a ripping savage
attack by Sperm Whales, Sharks and
Killer Whales; Hell let loose.

A gripping tale of a terrible Sea Battle, told from

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"Old Wire Whiskers"

take hold with their tentacles, which are covered with suckers underneath, they cannot let go, even if they would. So be advised and do not handle them dead or alive.

The smaller ones are used for food, especially in New Caledonia, Seychelles, and Mauritius Islands. The natives will eat them in other places, but they are not too partial to them.

But the aristocrat of the octopi, the brute whose weight is measured in cwt. and tons, is only met with, and that very occasionally, around those islands which are only the tops of some huge submarine mountain, such as Vaitupu, Funafuti, Nukufetau, Nanomea, and Nukulailai—all islands of the Ellice Group.

In these islands the depth of water will drop from ten fathoms to three thousand fathoms or more in a surface distance of one mile, and it is in the huge subterranean caverns of these submarine mountains that these huge monsters breed and dwell. They are also occasionally seen in the Mediterranean Sea, and one weighing six tons was taken out of a sunken vessel's hold on the Australian coast.

Victor Hugo in his "Toilers of the Deep," tells a story of one huge brute that infested the coasts of Sicily, whose length was over forty feet—just fancy, forty feet—and breadth thirty feet, and whose huge tentacles were over fifty feet long. It was creditably reported that this brute had pulled over vessels sixty feet in length and twenty feet beam, and had picked their crews out of them and had eaten them as an epicure eats an oyster out of a shell.

Then there is the single-eyed octopus, which is very rare. But this is only by the way.

We had been up to the Gilbert Islands, and were now coming South. Up at Onoatua we had been shown the skull of a huge shark which must have been at least fifty feet long. I offered the natives £10 worth of trade for it, but they refused. The wind was light, and we made very little headway, but a good deal to the westward owing to the current. Then it grew dead calm, and that morning we had the unique experience of seeing a crocodile basking on the top of the warm water, about one hundred miles from any land. We tried to lasso him, but only succeeded in scaring him, and we pulled back to the ship disgusted.

A few minutes after we got aboard we saw the crocodile breach and scutter along the top of the water at the rate of knots, whilst just astern of him was the large (Continued on inside back cover.)