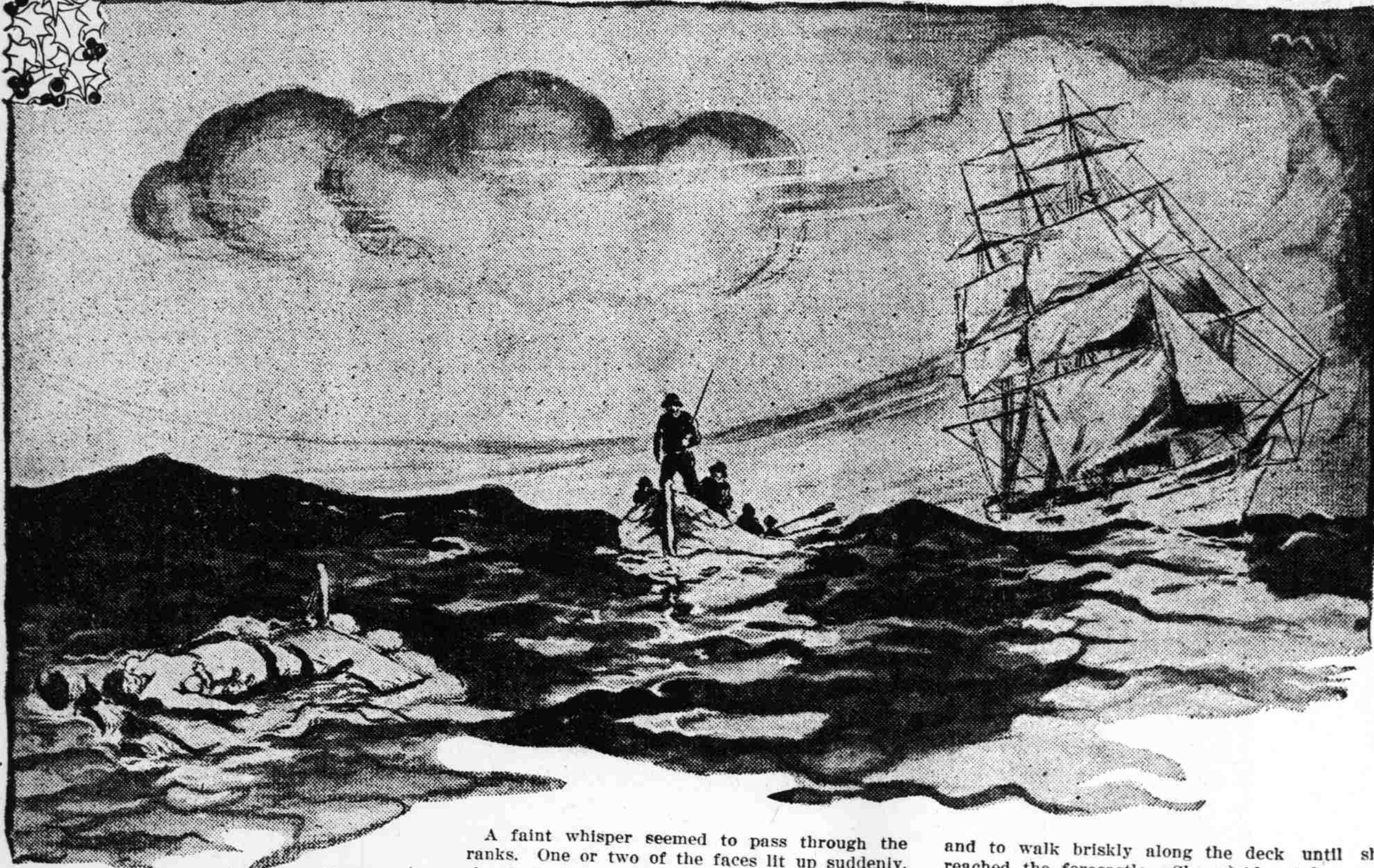


"Unto Us a Child Is Given"



By FRANK H. SHAW.

SAID Mrs. Hapshott: "You're a hard man, Hiram Hapshott. I never knew it until now—I named you for a kindly husband ashore."

"Ashore and at sea are two different places," replied the captain of the Urah B. Gaster. "When I'm ashore I take things easy; when I'm at sea I act accordingly. Sailormen are dogs, and the more you beat a dog the better it is. So with sailors. Grind 'em down, rule 'em with an iron hand, and they'll not only do their work at the run but they'll come crawling along and ask you for more. That's my experience, and 30 years at sea, man and boy, hasn't inclined me to dispute facts as they stand."

"I call it cruelty," said his wife without heat, for she was a woman of sadness.

She knew the cause of that sadness, as did her husband, but it was never mentioned between them by a tacit agreement. Twenty-five years of married life had resulted in a fine endurance of marital affection—the skipper's long absences from home might have accounted for that in some measure. The two were good friends, and bickering between them was a thing unknown. There had been one child—very many years ago, but it only raised its voice once in the great world and before the mother's heart had quickened in response the voice was stilled forever. The Lord had given; He had also taken away, and Mrs. Hapshott endeavored to say "Blessed be the name of the Lord" with a good grace, though at times the saying was hard.

To hide his emotion the captain threw gruffness into his voice. "I'm thinking I made a mistake in bringing you to sea, lass," he said. "It isn't a place for women, least of all soft-hearted women such as you are. But you begged and prayed, and the owners seemed willing—"

"It got to be lonely waiting there ashore, Hiram," she said simply. "It was at nights, when the wind howled and the snow fell everywhere—I saw other women happy and companionable, with their men about them; and it—it was more than I could stand. It would have been easier if—there'd—if Amos had lived." He understood, and his rough gnarled hand crept out along the rail until it rested on hers with the pressure of sympathy.

"Hiram, I want to ask you a favor. 'Tis Christmas day in two days' time. Are you going to give the men a Christmas—a proper Christmas?"

Hapshott opened his mouth and laughed, a laugh that was pregnant with cynicism.

"Give them a Christmas—a proper Christmas! By which I suppose you mean a holiday and Christmas fare? Why, lass, they wouldn't know what to do with it if they had it. Besides, we aren't fitted for Christmas meals. There's a brace of chickens in the coop that'll make our dinner that day—I've been saving them up on purpose; but beyond the pig for 'ard—"

"Give them a proper Christmas, Hiram," pleaded Mrs. Hapshott earnestly. "It's a wonderful day ashore, though a sad one. That is, for me," she amended. "I always get thinking of the Child and of how happy His mother must have been, though she lost Him, too; she lost Him."

She thought the wound was fairly healed, but the hot tears gushed to her faded, pathetic eyes. Hapshott himself turned away, for he knew the ache at her heart; it companioned the void at his own.

"All hands muster aft," cried Captain Hapshott. The men slouched along to the afterdeck and grouped themselves under the poop break. The moon sprang up from the blackening sea, and shone redly upon them; a full round ball. It showed sullen, despondent faces, faces without a hope. Mrs. Hapshott drew near to the pinrail and looked down, her heart wailed full of pity. She had done something—she had given these overworked beasts of burden one day's rest at least.

"It's stand by till midnight tomorrow," said the skipper in a voice that he fondly hoped betrayed no shame. "There's a holiday from now on. You'll take your wheels and lookouts as usual; beyond that—nothing. Understand?"

A faint whisper seemed to pass through the ranks. One or two of the faces lit up suddenly, sloughed off their assumed age, and became young and comely once more. It was Christmas eve, and thoughts flew with lightning speed to long forgotten homes, where Christmas had been a festival of delight in those bygone days before the hungry sea claimed them as its own.

"You've got to thank my wife for that," went on Hapshott. "She's asked me to give you a Christmas—a Christmas you'll have. Make the most of it. There'll be a fresh mess served for dinner tomorrow, and there'll be grog for all hands at eight bells. That's all—dismiss."

The men broke up, walked forward slowly, then, as if moved by a common impulse, they came back.

"Ve vish der lady for to dank," grunted a German sailmaker, fingering his cap. "Hey, boys, vat you say? Ain't it right?"

"Yes—ja—dot's it, Hans," came the replies. Mrs. Hapshott was aware of a strange compression in her throat; her eyes smarted. A stiffening of the crew was followed by something faintly resembling a cheer; then the men went forward slouchingly. Their tongues were busy and they wondered.

Still more did they wonder Christmas day when, two bells having sounded aft, Mrs. Hapshott appeared among them, her arms piled high with gifts. From the commencement of the voyage her nimble hands had been busy with pins and wool, and now there was something for them all, warm caps that completely covered a man's head and held him immune from frostbite in the most rigorous weather; mufflers, jerseys; not one was forgotten. Even the greasy cook, a man of foul speech and unclean habits, found himself the possessor of a sleeved waistcoat knitted out of the fleeciest wool.

"I hope you'll have a merry Christmas, men," said Mrs. Hapshott, and they cheered her—they were gaining practice—until the idle yards seemed to swing in answer.

Dinner time came round, and steaming kits were passed into the forecabin, kits that contained savory joints from the porker killed overnight. The men ate and were thankful, but when a monster plum pudding appeared they stared with awe-struck eyes.

"Don't thank me, thank the missus," said the cook, who brought the duff in person. "She made it herself—last night; mixed the whole bloomin' thing with her own hands. Ain't it a 'oner?"

It was a very giant among puddings, and as toothsome as it was vast. Came, in the midst of the revels, a call aft, where the steward stood at the capstan with a dipper in his hand. Each man, presenting a pannikin, received a tot of sterling grog, for Captain Hapshott had resolved to do the thing well now he was embarked upon it; no half-water measures for him. Each man, receiving his allowance, raised his drinking vessel in the direction of Mrs. Hapshott, who was watching them from above, and drank a silent toast to her and to the memory of Christmases past.

So the wonderful day passed away and once again night drooped down upon the sea.

Mrs. Hapshott rose, slipped on her clothing and went swiftly out on deck.

"Hiram—what was that?" The skipper had awakened and, missing her, had made for the deck. The faint streaks in the sky showed him a strange figure, clad in a gaudy sleeping suit such as sailors love. Mrs. Hapshott clutched at his arm and held tightly.

"What's what?" He had been thinking what a fool he would seem if the story were ever told of the day now past, and his manner was ungracious.

"That!" Her finger was outstretched and quivering, but all beyond was still dark. "A sea bird—your nerves are on edge," he told her.

Mrs. Hapshott drew herself to the taffrail and leaned out, listening. The wind was walling again; the ship had almost lost her way; she was only crawling through the water to the accompaniment of flapping canvas aloft.

"Hiram, it wasn't a sea bird!" The woman's voice was full of something to which her husband could put no name.

"It must have been—what else could it be, lass?"

"To me it sounded like—but, no, that's foolishness. My mind is playing me tricks, husband."

But she did not leave the rail for fully twenty minutes, and then it was to step down the ladder.

and to walk briskly along the deck until she reached the forecabin. She could not have explained to herself what impulse took her there; it was something outside herself, some strange power working detached, yet compelling her to obey its behests.

She crouched up in the bows, watching the sparkle of water spring gurgling from the forefoot, watching the frothing bubbles stream away on either side the black bluff bow.

Vainly she shook herself and assured her own heart of its foolishness. Vainly she tried to drag herself away from her self-appointed post. The air was chill with the beginnings of the dawn wind; she shivered repeatedly and remained.

Mrs. Hapshott lifted her eyes and searched the sea's far rim. Her gaze returned, only to be lifted again; suddenly she stiffened where she stood, and her ears strained.

She sprang upon the rail and stood there erect, her eyes peering intently. Was it fancy or could she actually see something?

There, in the middle distance—a veritable speck in the waste of waters—was it a shadow, was it the fin of a lurking shark, or was it—was it? Two seconds she looked, then she ran aft, the men watching her in wonder.

"Hiram—out there—what is it, what is it? Hiram, I heard a cry!"

She was clutching at him hysterically and pointing with trembling finger. To humor her he fetched his binoculars and focussed them. Madly, madly, she thought him. He searched idly for a moment, then his figure became rigid.

"Back the mainyard!" he roared in mighty voice. From the forepeak, whither he had descended, the mate came aft at a run; the men following fast.

"There's a raft out there—some one on it," said Hapshott slowly, his voice almost drowned by the clatter of the swinging yards.

It was Captain Hapshott himself who sprang into the boat that was hastily lowered; it was he who urged the rowers onward. Mrs. Hapshott, now that the thing was done, was possessed by a curious calmness, that yet held expectancy—something strange was happening out there beyond the range of her vision; but all was working together for good. She tried to focus the binoculars on the boat and on the fragment that floated ahead, but she was all unused to the task, and could make out nothing but a blur.

The boat turned—hung motionless; those aboard were busy at some task. Then the oars shot out like the limbs of a gigantic spider; Mrs. Hapshott's heart beat faster and faster—so fast that only with difficulty could she draw her breath.

"Shall we haul you up, str?" hailed the mate, reaching far outboard, and from Captain Hapshott's lips came a hoarse, unreal cry that Jones took as an affirmative.

The boat shot alongside; still the captain's wife did not move from her position by the mizzenmast. The tackles were hooked on, men swarmed up them and added their weight to the falls; the boat leaped upward, was swung inboard.

"Bear a hand here," she heard her husband say, and then the mists vanished from her eyes and she saw clearly. Captain Hapshott was coming aft, talking earnestly to the mate. And in his arms he carried a little child!

Mrs. Hapshott acted exactly as if she had been expecting this gift from the sea. She held out her arms and took the wailing mite, hushing it deftly against that broad maternal bosom of hers, coaxing it, smiling down into its crumpled face. It mattered nothing to her how the babe had come—it was there; its tiny fingers around her finger; its little head nestled against her heart.

"A dead woman and a living child—no signs of identification." The words came to her fitfully, forcing themselves through the strange, hallowed joy that filled her being. "No telling what's happened—must be wife of some skipper—sole survivors—who knows? The woman's dead, poor thing—but the child seems strong enough—w'd be later."

"If we'd been sailing yesterday we'd have passed it in the dark likely," said the mate; "we'd never have seen it. God! look at Mrs. Hapshott; she's grown younger."

The skipper walked across to his wife. "We'll have to advertise," he said, shakily, toying with the little grasping hands. "But likely no one will claim it—it's as much ours as any ready—"

"Unto us a child is given," said Mrs. Hapshott solemnly. "Hiram, this is God's Christmas present to you and me."

DANIELS SUBMITS PROGRAM FOR NAVY

APPROVAL OF CONGRESS FOR CONSTRUCTION OF EIGHTY-EIGHT VESSELS ASKED.

IF WE DO NOT ENTER LEAGUE

Three-Year Program Recommended Includes Building of One Cruiser and Three Battleships.

Washington.—Approval of another three-year naval building program, involving the construction of 88 vessels, if the United States does not enter the league of nations or a similar world organization, is given by Secretary Daniels in his annual report to President Wilson.

"If the United States is not to enter into any agreement with the other powers of the earth, which are now bound together in the league of nations," says the naval secretary, "I feel compelled to approve the recommendation of the general board that Congress authorize three-year program to be begun as soon as the capital ships now under construction are launched."

The three-year program recommended by the general board to be under way by 1924 includes the construction of three battleships, one battle cruiser, 30 light cruisers, eight gunboats, 18 destroyer leaders, 12 mine laying submarines, 6 cruiser submarines, a 4 airplane carrier, 3 destroyer tenders and 3 submarine tenders.

No specific recommendations for appropriations for new construction during the next fiscal year are included in the secretary's report.

Contest Seat in Congress. Washington.—Dr. J. I. Campbell, republican opponent of Congressman Doughton, will contest the election of the eighth North Carolina district congressman. This was decided upon at a meeting of the republican congressional committee which met to consider the evidence.

Southern Would Issue Bonds. Washington.—The Southern Railway company asked permission of the Interstate commerce commission to issue \$5,900,000 of development and guarantee mortgage bonds at 4 per cent, payable April 1, 1926, to be pledged as security in part for government bonds of \$3,325,000 to be expended for equipment.

Scramble For Concessions. New York.—A mad scramble among the world powers for industrial and commercial concessions in Russia were forecast by Washington G. Vanderlip, American mining engineer, who landed here bearing documents involving \$3,000,000 worth of Kamchatka oil and coal lands and fisheries.

Rumanian Senate Bombed. London.—A bomb was thrown among members of the Rumanian senate shortly after it had assembled, and M. Grecanu, a member of the ministry, and Bishop Radu, were killed, says a Central News dispatch.

Accept Reduction in Wages. Chicago.—More than 70,000 negro laborers of Chicago and vicinity have agreed to accept a reduction in wages rather than lose their jobs on account of reduced production. R. E. Parker, president of the American Unity Labor union, announced.

Suspend Students For Hazing. Gainesville, Fla.—Forty-five students of the University of Florida were indefinitely suspended as a result of a faculty investigation of the shaving of heads of lower classes by members of the upper classes.

Long Range Machine Gun. Washington.—Development of a new machine gun, with an effective range said to be twice as great as that of the Browning machine gun, was announced by the war department.

Smith Opposes Blue Sunday. New York.—The Motion Picture Theatrical association made public a telegram from Governor Smith expressing opposition to any movement which would forbid "wholesome amusement" on Sunday.

Ex-Congressman Commits Suicide. Montezuma, Ga.—Former Congressman E. B. Lewis, 65, president of the First National Bank of Montezuma and also president of the Lewis Banking company, of this city, shot and killed himself here.

Board Assumes Jurisdiction. Roanoke, Va.—The United States railroad labor board has assumed jurisdiction over the differences between the Norfolk & Western Railway company and the Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen now taking a vote on a proposed strike.

Bank Reserves Lower. New York.—The actual condition of clearing house banks and trust companies for the week shows they hold \$11,247,910 reserve in excess of legal requirements.

CONDENSED NEWS FROM THE OLD NORTH STATE

N. C. B. FOUR 1920's Burlington.—The Burlington tobacco market has been flooded with tobacco during the past week.

Winston-Salem.—The first storm of the season visited this city following a severe all-day rain.

Charlotte.—Brought to the city by his father, Detective Alex. W. on a liquor count, C. M. West, fined \$25 and costs for receiving liquor, in the recorder's court.

Concord.—The first annual meeting of the North Carolina War Mothers was held here. Delegates from all the five chapters in the state were present.

Salisbury.—Rev. Dr. George H. the Lutheran church, has moved to Salisbury to live and has purchased a home.

Hickory.—The handsome new organ of the Church of the Ascension installed during the last two weeks was used and its music enjoyed by the congregation and friends.

Raleigh.—Mr. C. T. Bailey, former newspaper man and at one time postmaster of the city of Raleigh, died at Rex Hospital from pneumonia, which set in after a fall in which Mr. Bailey broke his shoulder.

High Point.—Deputy Sheriff J. E. Wagner and three revenue officers captured two copper stills near a branch several miles from this city. Harry D. Smith, one of the alleged operators, was arrested and released under a \$500 bond.

Greensboro.—Two young boys, white, one negro, who are serving sentences for larceny in the Guilford county jail, returned to the jail after a brief period of liberty. They got hungry, they said, was the reason for coming back after having escaped.

Rich Square.—Six years ago Northampton county abolished the office of county treasurer and appointed the Farmers bank of Woodland as financial agent of the county, to serve without compensation. The service has been entirely satisfactory, saving the county about \$2,500 a year.

Winston-Salem.—Matthew C. Clanton, aged 90 years died at his home near Rural Hall.

Charlotte.—An automobile, a Buick, and half a gallon of liquor, were captured by Jim Paxton and other officers who were answering another call in Dilworth.

Salisbury.—The 8th, 9th and 10th of this month are days that will mean much to North Carolina, for her poultry raising industry is to be boosted mightily.

Durham.—County Officers Edwin Morgan and Hall made a visit to Lebanon township about eight miles from the city and bagged two wild.

Washington.—Joe L. Baker, formerly managing editor of The Charlotte Observer and now holding the same position with the Asheville Citizen, was married in Philadelphia to Miss Edna May Cox.

Mooreville.—E. Martin Hodgins of O'Ford, was crushed to death in a sewer ditch at the Mooreville cotton mills when the walls caved in and caught him underneath.

Cope.—Robbers entered the Bank of Cope but it is not known whether they secured any money or valuables. The vault was found locked with the combination blown off.

Asheville.—Local grocers announced reductions averaging 10 per cent on vegetable and many staples, following an announcement by wholesale men that reductions averaging 35 per cent had been made.

Lenoir.—Burglars entered Edrith's department store here and made a complete getaway with a bunch of clothing and shoes. The entrance was made from the front by smashing the plate glass window.

Fayetteville.—A mass meeting of several hundred cotton farmers here adopted resolutions severely condemning the federal reserve board for its handling of the present crop situation and censuring Governor Harding for "his criticism of farmers for holding their cotton for higher prices."

Tarboro.—At his home in this city Mr. C. J. Austin, an old and faithful Confederate veteran, passed away at the age of 78, following an attack of pneumonia.

Chapel Hill.—After three quarters of desperately hard playing with both teams gaining frequently but neither able to score, Chapel Hill scored two ward in the fourth quarter, scored two touchdowns, and won the high school championship of North Carolina for the second year in succession by defeating Monroe here, 14 to 0.