

[From the Waverly Magazine.]

BY LOUIS CHARLES.

Mid-ocean. Upon the bosom of that mighty and never-ending Atlantic—that ocean which so often thrills with horror the soul of the brave mariner who ventures upon it—where the roaring winds sweep the broad waste of waters and vivid lightnings illuminate the scene—upon the bosom of that ocean floated, on the 20th day of June, in the year 18—, a noble ship, carrying her freight of human beings from the continent of Europe to their homes on these, our American shores.

Can anything more grand and imposing be imagined or described? At first, the ship, with every stitch of canvas stretched before the wind filled tight as a sack by the strong breeze, flew rather than sailed along, skipping the waves as they broke beneath her counter, and sending the sparkling spray high into the air. The dolphins and the porpoise gambolled in the midsummer sunshine; the albatross paused in her weary flight across the sea to gaze upon the grand scene beneath. The hungry sharks no longer followed in the wake of the vessel, for what chance had they for fresh victims in calm weather?

The passengers and the sailors were happy—why not? Such weather, such a sky, such a wind, were forebodings of good; those upon the deep rejoiced; those upon the land rejoiced—all joined in a hearty hymn of thanksgiving, for such tranquility had them "God-speed!" Such was the spirit which prevailed upon that noble ship. A few days more and the Volga would be in sight of land—of home—where wives and babies, relatives and friends, awaited them all, eager to express their joy at the happy return and safety of the voyagers. For the sailors, too, were mostly Americans, and had their little families at home in New York expecting them home as anxiously and gratefully as were the parents of the fairest passengers.

That evening, just before dusk, a party of seamen were seated on their trunks in the fore-cabin, discussing, as sailors always do, the prospect for a happy termination of their long journey.

Old Billy Cowan was the oracle of the ship. His age might have been sixty; his hair was snowy white, his figure a little bent; his hand began to tremble a little now in the discharge of duty; but he was nothing daunted by the coming infirmities due to his years, and if one hand was not sufficient to haul ropes, or turn the wheel, why, he used two, rather than to call assistance from a mate, though he was ever ready to lend a helping hand when needed.

If there was a man sick or injured, Bill was first to take his place; any little odd jobs about the ship were given him, and they were always performed readily and well. He had a pleasant word for all, a smile for everybody, consolation for the sick ones, advice for new hands; in fact, his obliging nature combined those qualities so seldom found among sailors—good cheer and good companionship. Is it a wonder that he was liked by the men, or that they looked upon him as an oracle or prophet?

"What's your idea, Sam?" asked one of the sailors, addressing a first-top man.

"It's hard saying, Tom," replied Sam; "you see nobody has been inside that cabin except the captain since we left port. He knows what's in it; I don't, and, what's more, I don't care."

"But it ain't right," continued Tom, peevishly; "it ain't fair for him to keep critters locked up in a cabin, without letting a fellow know what they be. I, for one don't like it."

"Nor I—nor I!" echoed a dozen voices.

"I think it's a gal," shouted one.

"Nonsense!" said old Bill, speaking for the first time. "How can you say that Ned Carter? You know it can't be so. Cap'n Butler would not bother with women—knows his duty too well."

"Then what on earth is it?"

"Ah," said Bill, "what on earth is it? I'm sure I don't know, and, as Sam says, I don't care. The skipper's a perfect right to keep what he likes in the cabin, without a lot of lubbers like us trying to find it out. Let it all lie quiet, mates, whatever it be; better let it alone—maybe it's a rat-leskake."

"Yes, maybe it is," laughed the men. "If it is, let's out with it, and over into the sea!"

They indulged in a hearty laugh, and the subject was dismissed.

"Are we going to have a fair try, Bill?" asked Ned Carter, by way of changing the conversation.

The old man shook his head.

"Dunno, dunno," he said wisely. "Shouldn't wonder if we never reached port. I've sailed many a time under Cap'n Butler, and in some pretty stiff weather, too; but blast me if I ever did feel so queer before!"

"A storm blowing up?"

"No, can't say that it be—my rheumatiz don't feel so; but something too sudden to come on us like a thunder clap, to drown us all without a moment's warning."

bottom of it. "I'll be bound," said Carter. "Well, I mean to find it out before I sleep to-night," announced Tom Denny. "I'll sneak down to the cabin, and when my chance comes I'll just—"

"Coward!" exclaimed Bill. "Why don't you act like a man? Here comes the captain now. Go to him and ask what's in the cabin. He'll tell you if it's anything you ought to know."

"And if it ain't?"

"Then he'll keep it, I suppose."

"Hat in hand, Tom approached the officer."

"Well?" said the captain, kindly.

"Please, sir, we're all bound to know what kind of a beast you've locked in all to yourself in the aft cabin. Is it a gal or a monkey?"

"It is neither."

"Let us see for ourselves."

"My friend, I tell you once for all that you will never know from me what creature breathes the air of that cabin. When we reach port I may tell you—not before."

"But we've a right to know."

"I deny it. The cabin is mine, and I have a right to occupy it as I will. Attend to your duty like a man, and you will never have cause to regret it."

"Will you tell us?"

"Decidedly not."

The captain turned upon his heel, and left the sailor discontentedly muttering to himself some half broken sentence about seeing it anyhow, whether or no.

Is the reader rash enough to follow me into the cabin, and see for himself the creature that created such excitement among the crew?

The cabin was dimly lighted; crouching in a corner was a human figure—that of the captain's brother, Charles Butler. The unfortunate young man had but just recovered from a most shocking case of coast fever. His body had regained its health—its faculties of eating, sleeping and walking; but his brain was crazed; a single flash of sense would never again find birth in his young head. He was a raving maniac.

Captain Butler loved his brother Charles dearly, and it well nigh broke his heart to see him thus afflicted. Unknown to any of his crew, he had concealed him in the cabin, and there he tended him, nursed him, watched over him, wondering, day by day, night after night, if it was really true, after all that there could be no cure for him and that he must remain mad.

When he entered the cabin on the night in question, Captain Butler found his brother in a state of feverish excitement.

"Devils! devils!" he cried. "Drive them back! The ship is doomed, for I am on it! The avenger has been taken on board, and he will wreak his terrible revenge on you all! You will perish by the sea, for it is the sea that makes you live! To-morrow you die! Take your last look at the moon to-night—she will shine no more for you! The stars, too—let us bid them farewell, for in another day they shall twinkle o'er our graves! The sea is calm, the wind is still, the waves will be all the more ready to swallow you up—the starving sharks will feast upon your bodies!"

Then suddenly his tone changed; hot tears rushed from his eyes and coursed down his cheeks. He crouched upon the floor at his brother's feet and begged to be saved from the monsters that he saw attacking him on all sides.

"Father—brother—don't let them take me away! I feel the dark waters close over me, for we shall all perish together! I am serious, old man, and say all this to warn you. I am sorry for you all, but what I am ordered to do, I must do as well as I can, and not one of you shall ever see your homes again. No, no, but do not let me perish, captain! Take me in the little boat with you! Let this old sea sink, she is doomed, for the avenger is in her! Do you know the avenger brother? If I tell you where to find the villain who is to scuttle the ship, will you promise me to secure him? Promise me to kill him, and I will tell you his name. Brother, the avenger is myself!"

Here he sank, exhausted, in his brother's arms. After that he remained quiet; and the captain left him, to repair on deck and give the necessary orders. He did not visit the cabin again that night, but paced the deck in a state of mental agony, easier imagined than described.

It wanted but half an hour of dawn, when there resounded a cry, both loud and shrill, sounded throughout the ship, heard alike by passengers and crew, and striking fear to the bravest heart.

"A leak."

"Three feet of water in the hold!" cried the carpenter.

"Men," cried the captain resolutely, "now is the time for you to show us your true pluck. Three feet of water is nothing; we have a fair wind, a smooth sea, good pumps, willing hands and we can be saved!"

The pumps were soon rigged, and for two hours worked unceasingly.

"Four feet of water in the hold!"

With renewed efforts the sailors worked, but with no better success.

The passengers, some twenty in number, appeared on deck, seriously alarmed at the peril of the situation. They were promptly reassured by the energetic conduct of the captain, who

set the example by seizing the pump himself and working with the men.

"Five feet in the hold!" cried the carpenter.

Then the men began to show signs of discouragement, and Captain Butler exerted himself in vain to rouse their energies. It was useless.

"We can't leave the vessel," he said, "let us lower the boats while there is time to do so, and wait."

The boats were launched, and the passengers were lowered and placed in a place of safety.

"Six feet in the hold!"

The crew began to descend in the boat.

"Stop!" thundered the captain. Every man here has a heart, I know. In my cabin is a poor young man, my brother. He is crazy. Shall he perish?"

"No—save him!" replied the sailors.

"Let three men come with me to rescue him. He can—"

"Eight feet of water in the hold!" roared the carpenter.

"Quick!" said the captain, as he descended the stairs. "God grant that we save him!"

With a cry of horror he drew back in dismay, for there before him, stood the door wide open; the cabin was empty—the madman gone!

"Brother, brother!" groaned the captain. "Must I leave you here to perish, or am I doomed to share your fate?"

"Ten feet in the hold!" thundered the carpenter. Make haste for your lives—she's sinking!

The boats were gained and pushed off from the sinking ship. Suddenly a figure appeared upon the deck, rushing wildly to and fro. It was the maniac. The terrible fright he had experienced, joined to some other natural cause, had given him back his senses; he was no longer mad, but sane enough to understand his terrible position, and shout for help.

The water had already reached the bulwarks, and Charles Butler climbed up the shrouds of the mainmast.

"Help, William!" he cried. For God's sake don't let me die like this! I am not mad—take me off! If you are men, take me off, before I go mad again!

An attempt was made to return to the rescue, but the boats were obliged to keep out of the vortex of the sinking vessel, and the madman was the only victim to the trap he had set for others. The "Volga," with Charles Butler still hanging for dear life to the top of the mainmast, in the middle of the calm Atlantic, sank under the deep, dark blue wave.

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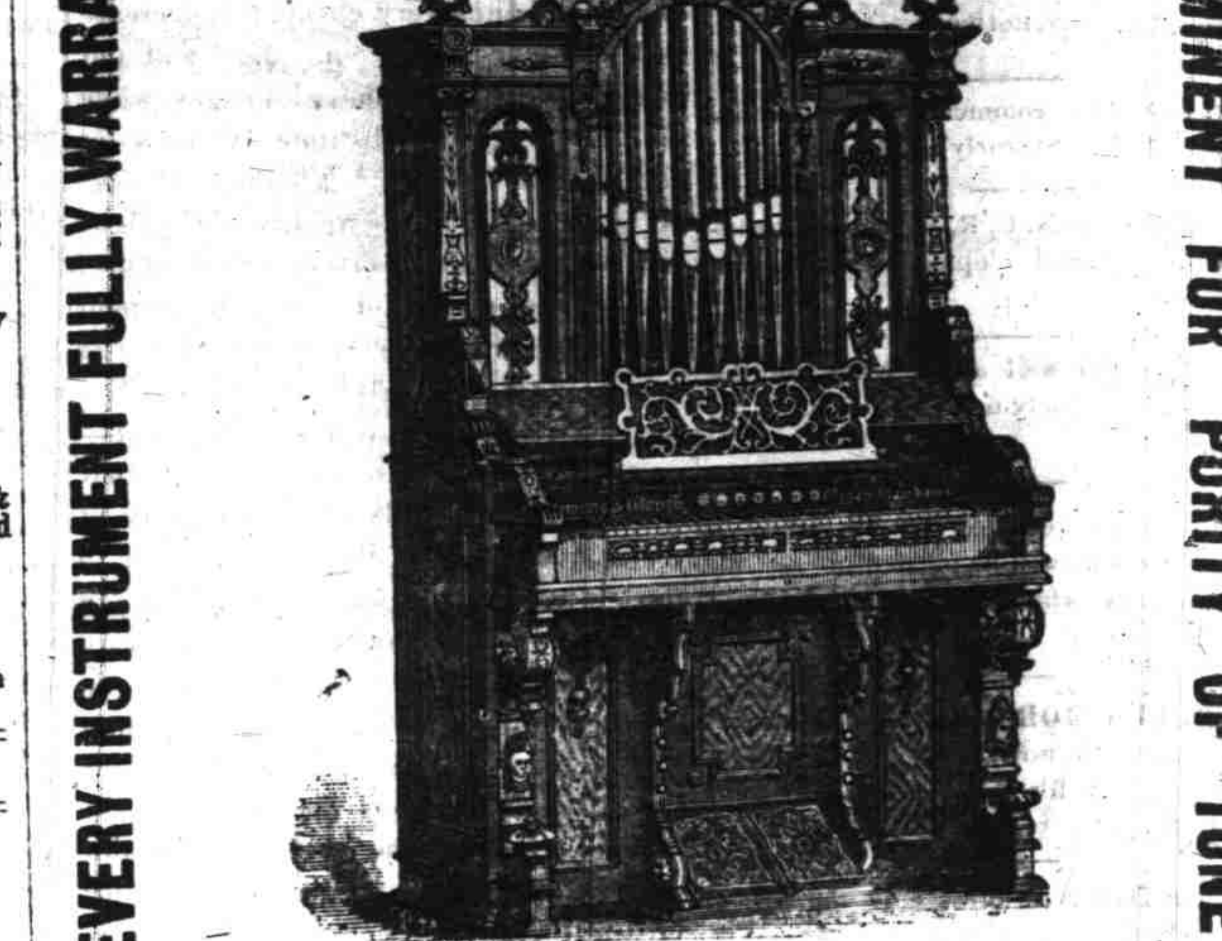
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