



TO CARE FOR HIM WHO HAS BORNE THE BATTLE, AND FOR HIS WIDOW AND ORPHANS.

ESTABLISHED 1877-NEW SERIES.

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THE C. C. C.

Monthly Meetings of the Club of Curious Characters.

BANCA STRAITS.

Lee Chang Makes Trouble, and a Mutiny is Quelled.

THE CAPTAIN'S DEATH.

A Howling Storm and the Wreck of the Belle.

BY LIEUT. MASON A. SHUFFELDT, U. S. N.

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PART II-continued.

THE VOYAGE.

EN days after we entered the Banca Straits, a broad channel that separates the large island of Banca from the coast of the larger island of Sumatra. It is a bad place for sailing ships. For days and days, sometimes, they only roll upon a breezeless sea. Not a breath of air ripples the surface of the bluest water on the globe. If close to either coast, grand scenery lifts itself from early morning to breathless night on every side. Mountains that are brightly green with the densest luxuriant tropical vegetation are set like pieces of pure velvet against a cloudless sky, and below these are valleys where the graceful cocoa thrives or the long leaves of the banana hang listless in the glare of a remorseless sun. Here and there a little brown-roofed village peeps out from amidst a mass of trees, or a cluster of brown-skinned natives can be seen down on the sandy beach hauling up their long and narrow bark canoes. But not a breath of air; not a sound, save the creak of the yards responding to the idle motion of the ship, or the flap of a useless sail against a swaying mast.

I had but little to do those first 10 days. I helped the Captain with his navigation, which was simple enough, and now and then gave a pull or two to help out the men. The Captain found not only kind and considerate, but saw no evidences of harsh treatment or cruelty on his part toward the crew. We came to know each other—messing together as we did—very well. I found him a well-informed man in very many respects. He was a good conversationalist, and from the odd collection of books he had in his cabin he would often quote queer passages or read them over to me again and again. He had an old chess-board, too, and many nights we sat opposite watching each other's moves till the hanging lamp grew dim and the shadows of the tropical night gathered gloom in our little cabin. The men generally went to the pumps at 8 in the morning, and again at 4 in the afternoon—never at night. One night, when the Captain and myself were sitting over an unsettled game of chess of the night before, I asked:

"How much water do you generally carry?"

"About 10 inches," he said; "the pumps suck at four."

"So the days went by—hot, tropical days, with little wind, but plenty of sun. Little by little we got through the Banca Straits, and braced up sharp to a fresh breeze from the northeast, to gain an entrance to the Straits of Sunda, a narrow passageway that separates the two great islands of Java and Sumatra, and is the eastern gateway to the great Indian Ocean. It is a channel, too, full of little islands and of countless and aimless currents and wayward breezes. The mountain island of Krakatoa rears aloft its barren head in the center, and the midway group is just east of it. This was before the terrific eruption of 1883, when Krakatoa was split in half, and Anjir Head, the light-house point of Java, swept out of existence."

"I was there," said the Count, quietly, "I was there in the middle of it; First Mate of as good a ship as ever slipped her ways; I was there."

"Were you?" said the Man with the Hump. "I was not."

"Well," he continued, "we got through the Sunda Straits without much trouble, and a few days more found the little Belle floating on the broad bosom of the Indian Sea. We had seen the last of Anjir Head about a week back, and with a light breeze after us, our bluff-browed little craft was doing her best to the westward. One night in the cabin—we had been playing chess—the Captain said to me, 'Mate, I'm not well—not like myself a bit.'"

"What's the matter. Where do you feel sick?"

"All over—sort of—with little creeps and shakes—kind of. I've been trying not to think of it for a day or so, but it's getting worse. I'm certain, and I must do something. Are you a bit of a doctor?"

when I came on deck it was only to take my 'sight,' and give the course to the man at the wheel.

"The sixth day of the Captain's illness I left him about dark, sleeping soundly. I went on deck to take a look about. The sky was clear overhead and full of twinkling stars, but to the westward hung gloomily a heavy bank of leaden clouds. I asked the Lascar at the wheel how many people were on deck. He said four, counting himself. I took the wheel myself and told him to go below and break out all hands. They came up after a while, followed by the Chinaman, who had gradually taken the place of Second Mate, and exercised much influence over them.

"Aloft, all of you," I shouted, "and furl the light sails!"

"I took a turn of a rope about a spoke of the wheel and grabbed the Chinaman by the arm.

"Stay down with me," I said; "we'll clew up."

"In a little while we had the Belle's lofty canvas off her. The leaden clouds still hung lazily in the western horizon, and only a gentle breeze rippled the moonlit sea. I waited an hour—two hours—the western clouds seemed sinking in the horizon. I grew tired and went below, giving the Lascar the wheel again, and crawled into the hole that led to my bunk and was soon sound asleep. I WAS AWAKENED LONG AFTER MIDNIGHT by strange sounds. I lay drowsily trying to comprehend them. First, I became aware that the ship was rising and falling as if in a heavy sea. Then I heard the splash of angry water now and then against her side close to my head. Then her broad stern would come down with a tremendous thump on each sea, and I heard the steady clank of iron against iron.

"The cabin was dark, very dark. Presently I heard someone trying to strike a match. I looked out the hole of my berth. To my horror I saw the Captain, standing in his shirt, attempting to light the cabin lamp. I got out as soon as I could and ran toward him. He had succeeded in lighting the wick when I reached him. He stood grinning at me, with the half-burned match in his hand. I put on the tube and shade to prevent the smoke, then I took him gently by the arm. He dropped the match.

"She's busted, Mate!" he said. "She's busted with a whizz!"

"He held in his nervous fingers the metal key to the chronometer. I took it from him and stepped into his cabin. I opened the mahogany box and placed my ear as close as I could to the instrument. There was no tick. I inserted the key. It turned around and around with no responding click. I rested on my knees there a long time looking at its white face and gilt hands, now so motionless. It was the only one we had, and its manœuvre broken. I shut down the lid and went out into the cabin. The Captain was seated in a chair by the table. He had taken down the chessboard and laid out the figures. He held a bishop in his nervous fingers as I entered.

"Mate," he grunted, "I've got you—check!"

"I took him by the arm and led him to his bunk. He went quietly, and after getting in pulled the bedclothes over his head.

"I opened the medicine-chest and found a bottle labeled 'morphia.' I gave him a good dose, mixed with rum and water. Soon he slept soundly. The clank of iron against iron still kept up its harsh jangle on the upper deck. I hurriedly dressed and climbed up the little ladder. What a sight met my gaze. The sky was black with hurrying clouds. The rising wind shrieked through the old rigging, and the brig was plunging like a race-horse through a tremendous phosphoric sea. I glanced at the wheel. The same Lascar was still there. I

"I sprang off the poop and down amidst the men at the pump. Some stopped working at my appearance. The others did not, but kept on more vigorously.

"Stop it! I shouted; 'stop it!' They all ceased working then.

"How much water is there?"

"A tall Lascar, one who had stopped pumping as I approached, said: 'Master, there is over fourteen inches, and more come all the time.'"

"Drop it, all of you!" I shouted, "and aft to the braces!"

"He did so; some reluctantly, some with zeal.

"Hard up!" I yelled to the Lascar at the wheel. "Bring her north!"

"The brig sluggishly obeyed her helm. The Lasars as sluggishly pulled at the braces. At last I got her before the wind, and let go myself the upper topsail halliards. Then I sent the men aloft to furl these. While they were doing that I sounded the well and found 11 inches in her bilge. But the pounding under her stern had

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"For 58 days we had cloudless skies and a steady monsoon. We made all the sail we could. The brig leaked a good deal, but not dangerously. The crew seemed contented and happy, and I saw but little of my friend the Chinaman. On the sixty-eighth day, in the morning, I expected to sight the Rodrigues Island. I did not do so; nor the next day, nor the day following. I began to fear that I had passed it, and hauled the brig farther north. Five days passed, and no land was made. We were averaging about 150 miles a day. Five days would make 750 miles. At that rate we must have passed, the Mauritius. I said nothing to anybody about our position. I knew only one thing: we were lost in the Indian Ocean. Still I kept on; there was nothing else to do, and I knew that at least we would find the Madagascar coast. Eight days more passed away. On the evening of the last of these we passed a large vessel, with many lights showing. I hoisted the bark to, and tried to hail her. It was of no use. She was soon lost in the gathering darkness.

"That night rain came down in torrents. I never saw a blacker sky. Suddenly the wind rose. From fitful squalls it rapidly grew to a steady gale. From a steady gale it as rapidly increased to an Indian cyclone. We all worked together to get the sail off the Belle. I tried once to heave her to; it was impossible. I took the wheel myself and let her fly before it. Worse and worse it came down upon us. A sky so black, lightning so vivid and a shrieking wind so cutting I never had experienced before. I was holding the spokes of the wheel when a dark form came creeping on his stomach along the slippery deck toward me. It was my friend, the big Lascar. He reached the wheel and, in face of the blasting gale, pulled himself up alongside of me. He put his hand to his mouth:

"Land, Captain; see, right ahead!"

"What!" I shrieked; "what do you say?"

"The words were hardly out of my mouth when the lower foretopsail, which was still on her, split with a loud report, and the yard went sharp up of its own accord.

"Quick," I yelled; "help me! hard down! hard down!"

"We rode on the top of a huge billow that was seething and frothing about us. The Belle did not answer her helm. We were going faster than the wind. The canvas flapped and splashed. The big Lascar and I held fast to the now useless wheel. The vast water receded. I felt a sickening grating, a kind of quivering, as of some one dying; another deluge of ponderous water; more grating; more trembling; then a crash; a breaking of huge timbers; an uproar of distracted voices; the tottering of lofty spars and masts; and, but not that, before I realized that we were wrecked on the coast of the vast island called Madagascar."

"I struck him with the pin across the head."

ceased, and I knew the leak to be there. The wind and sea did not seem to increase. When the men came down we cleared up the lower foretopsail, and I went aloft with them to furl it. Through with that, I ran down into the cabin and brought up a jug of Java rum and gave each man a heavy dose. Then, with a cheer, I ran to the pump, they all following me, and commenced to work like a horse at the rusty old brakes. We toiled an hour, and I sounded the well. Only six inches, and she sucked at four! I shouted that out to them, and they all shouted back and went to work still more vigorously.

"I left the brake and went under the forecastle deck. Digging around in an old chest, I found a pair of ancient handirons. I took these and slipped them quietly on the wrists of my still-unconscious friend, Lee Chang. Then I shouted to my big Lascar at the pump, and we two carried him up on the poop and made him fast, with many turns, to the rail for the main rigging. The brig was much easier now, and both the wind and sea decreasing, I felt much easier, when I heard a shout at the pump and saw that the men had ceased working. I ran down to them.

"She sucks no more water—all go!"

"I sounded the well; three and one-half inches."

"Go below," I said; "go below, all of you, except two hands, and turn in."

"Then I slowly walked aft and descended the cabin hatch. The light was still burning in the swinging lamp; the chess-board still lay upon the table—most of the figures were capsized and scattered about by the violent motion of the brig; a chair, too, lay with its back upon the floor, and a huge cockroach (the ship was filled with them) stood blinking and winking at me from the edge of the little seaside balcony. I lit a candle and entered the Captain's room. He lay, with the clothes tossed about him, upon his back. I stepped softly towards him. I raised a nervous hand to reach his pulse. There was none. I placed my ear against his chest. The heart had ceased to beat. I took a small glass from his desk and held it to his lips. There was no moisture there.

"The Captain was dead."

"And I? In the middle of a vast sea unknown to me; in a leaky vessel with a half-mad crew; with a useless chronometer. What was I to do? I dropped his dead hand, and, sinking in his oily chair, buried my head in my hands and—thought."

The Man with the Hump, after a somewhat lengthy silence, slowly unfolded his arms, and, reaching down, took up and drained of a glass of sherry that stood on the table in front of him.

"I intend," he continued, "to make the rest of my adventurous voyage—the story of that adventurous voyage—brief. It is only a connecting link with the curious creature I was afterwards brought in contact with. To continue," he said, pulling at his beard a moment and again crossing his arms upon his chest, "next morning I called the crew together. The sea was quite calm, and there wasn't much wind. I told them plainly of the Captain's death, of the trouble with the Chinaman, (who, by-the-way, had revived and was staring savagely at me from the rail all during my speech,) of the broken chronometer, of our small chances of reaching Mauritius, and finally that I intended to take charge of the brig and do the best I could for all hands. Some grumbled, some talked amongst themselves. Finally all seemed to think it best, and in a body they went forward.

"Next day I buried the Captain. I found an old prayerbook in his cabin, much soiled, and read the service over him. The big Lascar and I had already sewed him up in a spare hammock. The whole crew was present at the ceremony except the Chinaman. The latter I had made up my mind about. I kept him in irons for about 10 days, on the poop, and gave him short rations. He seemed thoroughly subdued. I had him searched, and took everything from him. By that time I had gained so much authority with the crew that I did not fear him, so I let him

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