

"When wind comes," said the General, pronouncing his words as though he found difficulty in preventing his teeth from meeting, "you will proceed on your voyage. The ship is not to be detained a minute on *my* account."

"I want my boat," said Stagg, with a countenance of gloomy astonishment, "and I want my two men."

"So far as my wishes are concerned," continued the General, "you will not waste an instant in search when wind comes. The voyage already threatens to be unusually long. Your boat is of small consequence compared to the loss of time you must incur in perhaps fruitlessly seeking her."

I glanced at the faces of the people who were listening. The general expression was one of disgust and dismay.

"But it's not a question only of the boat, Sir Charles," cried Captain Stagg; "there are four human beings adrift in her, and one—" the General saw what was coming and scowled him into silence.

"My wishes are that when the wind comes

you proceed without a moment's unnecessary delay on your voyage," he exclaimed, letting



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each word drop from his lips as though it were of lead; and then, without a look at us, with-



out a glance at the sea, with a face of wood, he marched to the companion and disappeared.

Colonel Mowbray, a mild-mannered gentlemanly little man, who had stood at my side surveying the General, whilst he talked, with looks of horror, turned to me and said: "He's not accountable. He must not be held to mean what he says. Captain Stagg," he exclaimed, advancing to the skipper, "you will not of course dream of relinquishing your resolution to search for the boat?"

"Only let there come wind!" cried Stagg. "Not that it wouldn't serve the four of them right to leave them to their fate. What! to steal my boat," he roared, clenching his fist, "and gag and frap my second mate as though he were the remains of a tawps'l in a gale of wind!"

Well, one saw clearly enough that, General or no General, the skipper meant to recover his boat if he could come at her; but for the rest of the day we could all of us talk of little more than Sir Charles's inhuman language, the horribly unnatural resolution he had formed, during those hours of darkness in which he

had stood watching the sea, to oblige (if he could) the captain to leave his daughter, not to mention the others, to the dreadful doom, as it seemed to us all, into which she had been courted by her lover; and a deal of talk was also expended in wondering what was going to happen should the boat be picked up and the lovers brought aboard again. But in truth there was nothing to be done; we could only go on surmising, with a vague sort of fancy, of any hour giving us a sight of the boat. For action was impossible; all that day and all the following night the ship lay lifeless; there was not a whisper of air in the wide and blazing circle round, and throughout the hours of darkness the hush, the death-like repose, was even suppremer than on the previous night.

Sir Charles came and went as heretofore; he took his place at the table, ate with his customary appetite, and was noticeable for no other change whatever that I could witness in him—beyond the sickly hue and sudden ageing of his face—than an increase in his reserve. He seldom spoke, and when on deck he walked alone; but we all of us noticed that if he



glanced seawards the act appeared involuntary. There was no suggestion of searching in his gaze, no hint that his mind was out upon that broad breast of waters.

The lovers had eloped on a Wednesday night, and it was not until the following Friday afternoon at about three o'clock that the water in the south-west was darkened by the brushing of a merry breeze of wind, which, flashing into the full breasts of the ship's canvas, heeled her like a schooner in a yacht-match, and once more her metallid forefoot drove shearing in snow through the wrinkled and frothing leagues of brine. Calculations as to the boat's whereabouts, supposing her to be still afloat, had been carefully entered into by Stagg and his mates. It was known that the lovers and the two men had gone away without providing themselves with mast or sail; which simply signified that they counted wholly upon the luck of being picked up by a passing ship. The captain therefore allowed the boat a progress of about two miles in the hour from the moment of her starting; and the space of ocean to be swept comprised an area

whose semi-diameter, starting at the point where the ship had lain becalmed, terminated a league or two beyond the distance it was assumed the boat had attained. Men whose eyes were sharp were stationed at the mastheads, and the ship rushed along on a wild wide hunt. The interest was so profound, the excitement so great, the desire to rescue Miss Primrose at least from the horribly perilous situation her love had hurried her into was so consuming, that the passengers could scarcely be tempted from the deck, even by the ringing of the dinner-bell, whilst a gleam of daylight lived in the west. Until the night came down dark we were overhanging the rail intently staring, uttering ejaculations as one or another of us imagined we saw something black in the distance, some of the younger officers creeping up the mizzen rigging, whilst Burton managed to get as high as the cross-trees, where he stood surveying the sea through an eyeglass. The ladies were incessantly asking if there was anything in sight, and I grew weary at last of poising a telescope for them to look through, so satisfied were they that they had keener eyes



than any of us men, and that they would be the first to see the boat if they knew how to look through a telescope without help.

But we stared in vain. Nothing hove into view this side of sunset. The captain shortened sail after dark and ordered lanterns to be shown and rockets to be fired, not unwisely suspecting that if the four were still afloat they would by this time have had enough of their open boat and endeavour to make for the ship should she drive with her lamps and her fireworks into the sphere of their horizon. But though we jogged slowly through the night, with penetrating eyes searching the dusk, and lanterns bravely burning along the rail, nothing showed, and when the grey dawn broke with a dirty scud, like smoke, blowing up off the rim of the south-west horizon, and a long tumble of frothing sea crossing a strong northerly swell that had risen suddenly in the night, the ocean brimmed bare to the slope of the sky.

Yet for three successive days did Stagg persevere. Over and over again the braces were manned, the course shifted, and the ship's keel

driven along a new line of quest. Sir Charles's demeanour had hardened into utter impenetrability. One explored his countenance in vain for the vaguest hint of what was passing in his mind. He asked no questions—took visibly no interest whatever in the manœuvring of the ship, came and went, ate and drank, and seemed to find a gloomy and perhaps savage satisfaction in exhibiting himself as a triumph of insensibility.

I happened to be in the saloon on the last day of the hunt. The General was seated alone on a sofa near his cabin with spectacles on nose, reading a book. There was a strong sailing wind blowing—a fair wind for our voyage, but foul for the line of hunt we were just then steering along, and the vessel was breaking the seas angrily as she leaned from the wind with her yards almost fore and aft. The captain came below, and seeing Sir Charles, stood looking at him with an air of irresolution for a moment or two; then stepping up to him exclaimed:

“General, I fear we must give up the search.”



Sir Charles seemed not to hear. Indeed, he did not raise his eyes, as though unconscious of the presence of the man who stood in front of him. Stagg was nettled.

"The boat's not to be found, Sir Charles," he exclaimed in a harsh voice, "and as we've sighted nothing that could have fallen in with her, and as there's been likewise some stiff seas running, it looks uncommonly like as though she's foundered."

"What is it you want to tell me?" said Sir Charles, frowning as he gazed at the skipper over the tops of his spectacles.

"Why, that we must give up seeking and proceed on our voyage."

"I told you to do so at the first opportunity the wind offered," thundered the General.

The skipper with a single pause of disgust and astonishment—and salt-hardened as the fellow's soul was, I believe he was as much shocked as I and two or three others who at the other end of the saloon had listened to this brief conversation—the little skipper, I say, rounded upon his heels and ran on deck. His

voice swept through the hum of the wind in a roar that was swiftly re-echoed, and in a few minutes the decks were filled with sailors busy in bracing the yards for the ship to come to her course for the voyage to India.

And here terminated the extraordinary incident I have endeavoured to relate, so far as my association with it goes. Upon the subsequent behaviour of the General, upon Captain Stagg's very tardy apology to me, upon what was said, and no doubt thought, by the passengers, I might enlarge. But let me hasten rather to the issue of this curious ocean experience of us passengers aboard the *Light of Asia*.

I had been in India two years when a brother officer, who had not long joined, asked me if I had come from England in the same ship that had brought out Sir Charles Primrose.

I answered yes.

"Then," cried he, "you were in the ship when his daughter eloped with a young fellow named Cunningham in an open boat?"

"All this," said I, "is no news to me."

"I had heard," said he, "that you were in



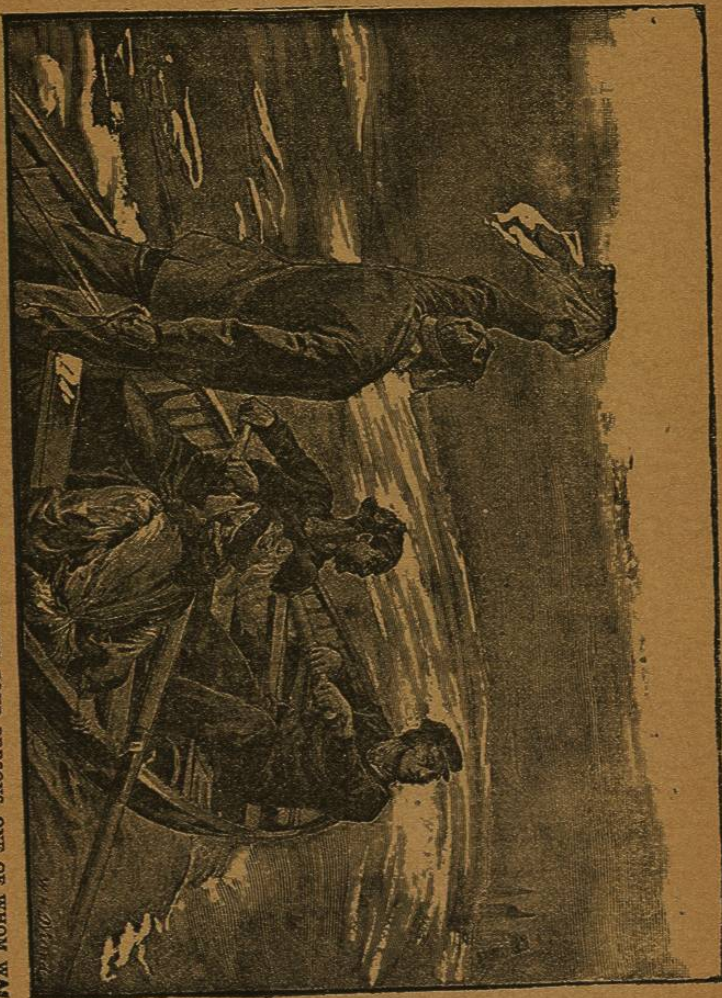
the *Light of Asia*. Did you ever hear the sequel of the elopement?"

"I should think," said I, "that the story of that sequel must be sought for at the bottom of the sea."

"Oh dear no," he exclaimed, "wait a minute: I have the full particulars of it in my room." He went away and returned after a little with a cutting from an Indian newspaper—the *Times of India*, I believe it was. It is long ago since I read it, and my memory is not what it was; but to the best of my recollection it was to this effect:

"At such and such a date," making the period some seven or eight months from the day of the elopement, "a large American ship, named the *Constance Warwick*, arrived at the Port of New York, and her master, a person named Ephraim Kerr, related the following, probably in the form of a deposition, but such as it was it speedily found its way into the newspapers. Captain Kerr, during the homeward voyage from Madagascar, when something to the north of the Cape of Good Hope on the Atlantic side, fell in with a large

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three-masted schooner with colours flying, 'To Speak.' The topsail was laid to the mast and the schooner ranged alongside within hailing distance. Her captain, standing in the mizzen rigging, informed Captain Kerr that when in latitude 2° N. he had fallen in with an open boat containing four persons, one of whom was a lady. The schooner was bound to a Western Australian port; the people she had rescued wanted to return to England; would the *Constance Warwick* receive them? Captain Kerr replied that his ship was bound to New York, and that if the four persons were willing to be carried to that city, he would be glad to take them on board. On this a boat containing a lady and gentleman and two sailors, rowed by a couple of the schooner's men and steered by the master of the schooner, put off and came alongside the *Constance Warwick*."

Needless to say that the lady and gentleman were Mr. Cunningham and Miss Primrose, and the others the two seamen who had formed part of the crew of the *Light of Asia*.

"The master of the schooner took Captain Kerr aside and told him that the lady and gen-

tleman and sailors had explained their situation thus: That they belonged to an East Indiaman bound to Calcutta, that having been tempted by the sight of a wreck to explore her, they, on a calm still day, with the permission of the captain of the Indiaman, who considered two seamen crew enough for the boat, started for the wreck; but a change of weather happening very suddenly, they lost the ship. This was their story. The master of the schooner told Captain Kerr that he didn't believe it. First, the boat was found fairly victualled, and this certainly did not suggest that the party had started on a holiday jaunt for an hour or two. Next, it was not to be supposed that the boat would have been despatched without an officer in charge of her. However, be the truth what it might, they had stuck to this story, and as it was no business of the master of the schooner, he had made, outside a few questions, no very particular enquiries.

"The *Constance Warwick* proceeded on her voyage to New York, and during the run one of the sailors, whilst muddled with rum, gave the whole story to a number of the American



Jacks as they were seated, during their watch below, in the fore-castle. This was repeated to the mate; the mate communicated it to Captain Kerr, who, on asking Mr. Cunningham if the narrative were true, was assured that it was absolutely so."

Thus it was that the story found its way into print. It was republished in the English newspapers and copied by the Indian journals. But locomotion, whether by sea or land, was, as we all know, sluggish in those days; and hence the length of time that elapsed before I, who was then in India, got the news of the sequel of the incident as related by the Captain of the *Constance Warwick* at New York.

When many years after I returned to England I made inquiries about Mr. and Mrs. Cunningham, but never could get to hear more than that after the death of old Mrs. Cunningham, her son had let or sold the property he inherited, and settled with his wife somewhere in the South of France.

THE END.



