

The Nemo's Ghost.

BY CHARLES B. LEWIS.

Would you believe that so late as the year 1882 a fine clipper ship had to be sold for a song and converted into a coal barge because of a ghost aboard which gave her a bad name? Such was the case. The Nemo was a Clyde built ship and was launched in 1870. She was built for and owned by Perry Joslyn of Liverpool, who was the owner of six other ships, all voyaging to India or Australia. As a rule, two or three men are killed and as many more badly injured in the building and rigging of a ship, but in the case of the Nemo no man met with the scratch of a finger. The launch was the fairest of a score of ships from the same yard, and when fully rigged and ready for her maiden voyage the new creation was said to be the handsomest vessel hailing from the great port. A valuable cargo was ready for her, and the owner had the luck to secure a skipper in the person of Captain Halpin, who had commanded half a dozen different ships and never met with a serious accident.

We got to sea one day in a way to please all hands, and inside of 24 hours we found the craft to be a witch for sailing. When she got settled down to her pace, she showed the speed of a steamer and carried favorable winds for the first seven days out. Then, one night at 10 o'clock, the breeze died away until the Nemo lost steerage-way, and it was at 11 o'clock that the ghost was first heard of. A man named Charles Jones was on watch on the bows at that hour. He was a sober, dignified man, and the best seaman of the crew. As third mate of the ship I had the watch at that time, while the captain and the other mates were asleep and seven or eight men were lounging about on the fore and main decks. Of a sudden Jones screamed out and came running aft in a state of great excitement. He was in such a state of alarm that it was five minutes before he could relate his story. He was pacing to and fro, he said, keeping a bright lookout and not thinking of anything in particular when he suddenly found something walking beside him. He heard no step or sound, but a "something" stood shoulder to shoulder with him. It wasn't exactly a man, nor yet was it a shadow. The sailor felt its breath on his cheek and turned to seize it, but the "something" laughed at him and glided away. I was greatly provoked with the man and charged him with having slept on his post, though I knew that I did him injustice in this. It was a cloudy night, with the moon breaking through now and then, and I contended that his "something" was but a shadow and ordered him back to his post. Nothing further happened that night, and the next morning the captain called the old man aft and gave him to understand that if he saw or felt any more ghostly visitors it would be bad for him. The crew would talk the matter over and side with Jones, but that anything further would be seen of the "something" no man believed.

Four nights later and two hours after midnight, while the ship was making a good eight knots per hour and everything was going smoothly, as the first mate had the deck, the entire ship was aroused by something which happened in the deckhouse. There were eight or nine men sleeping there, and a man from the watch on deck went in to his chest to get a plug of tobacco. The slush lamp had been turned down, so that the place was but dimly lighted. The man was bending over his chest when something seized him in a clammy embrace and forced him to the floor. He thought it was one of the crew playing him a trick, but he scrambled up to find them all in their bunks and to see a shadow glide away. The sailor set up a shout, the watch below turned out, and presently everybody was on deck, and excitement reigned fore and aft. In return for his story the sailor got a dose of rope's end, though after flogging he still maintained that he been huggied by a ghost. On the quarter deck we explained it away by saying that the man was nervous, but every man forward believed his statements and was satisfied that the ship was haunted. We thought it the best policy to treat the affair with contempt, and, although we could not help but notice how the men hung together in pairs after night had come, we gave the matter no attention. When ten days had gone by and nothing more had turned up, we looked upon the ghost as a good joke and the two men who had seen it were the butt of ridicule. At 1 o'clock of a certain morning, the breeze being small and the night without a moon, though fairly light, the first mate stood looking to windward over the port quarter at what he believed was a sail. His watch were all wide awake, and he could hear the footsteps of the man on lookout as he paced to and fro. The man had been standing still for perhaps five minutes when he felt a hand laid on his arm, an icy breath on his cheek, and as he wheeled about there was the surprise of low laughter. To his surprise and consternation no one was visible. His impression as he turned was that one of the other officers had softly approached him to test his nerve. The man at the helm was nearest to him, but he could not be suspected of having left his post, to play a trick on his officer. In fact, no sailor aboard would have dared to take such a liberty. For a few seconds the mate was as sure that he had a human being to deal with as that he lived, but when he found nothing before him and yet heard the mocking laughter, as if some one were moving away, his flesh began to creep. Going back

to the binnacle, he said to the man at the wheel: "Williams, have you seen or heard anything queer?" "Can I speak out, sir?" asked the man, who betrayed excitement in his voice. "Yes, of course. What did you see?"

"I seen sunthin like a shadder beside you, sir, and I heard a laugh that never come from the throat of a human being. It's a ghost, sir, and this is a doomed ship!"

The mate poolpoohed and bulldozed to make light of the affair, as it was polite to do, but though the man was reduced to silence it was evident that he was fully satisfied that a spook was aboard. Next morning the mate related his experience to the cabin, and as he was a man whose word could not be questioned no one brought ridicule to bear. On the contrary, taking it as an accepted fact that a ghost had been felt, if not seen, by three different persons, we began fishing for some natural and plausible reason to account for the thing. Were the men depressed in spirits? Had they overate? Did each one sleep for the moment? Was the icy breath a sudden puff of wind and was the laughter the creaking of bulkheads as the ship lifted or fell? We argued it out that it must be something of the sort, but the men forward had their own ideas and were very much cowed and put out. However, as in the previous instances, the passage of time worked something of a cure. We were bound for Australia, and we had stretched away into the Indian ocean and weeks had gone by before we got another scare. This time it came to the captain himself. At 10 o'clock at night he sat reading in his cabin when a chill suddenly passed over him and he felt two ice cold hands on his neck. It was as if a strong man had put his thumbs together on the back of the neck and clutched the throat with his fingers. Captain Halpin started up and shook his assailant off and turned to strike him. His idea was that the crew had mutinied and one of the men had stolen in to seize him. No person was there, but as if in answer to the captain's oath of astonishment there was the same low, cynical laughter heard by the others. His stateroom door was standing open and had been for two hours, but the laughter died away in that direction and the door closed. The captain came on deck and called me and whispered that a man had passed into his stateroom. Together we entered and made search, and, of course, found nothing. No man could have been more trying than the others, and all his argument had been born to shred. Something had gripped him, though no marks were left to prove it. Some one or something had laughed, though the captain was all alone in his cabin.

I promised Captain Halpin not to say a word even to my brother officers, and he certainly did not mention the matter, but somehow the particulars of the incident leaked out in a day or two, and during the remainder of the voyage, though the ghost did not appear again, it was the hardest kind of work to maintain discipline. When we reached Sydney at last, every man of the crew cut and ran, and such queer stories were put in circulation that the Nemo had hard work to ship a crew for the return voyage. A broken leg sent me to the hospital, and she sailed without me, but I kept myself posted as to the ghost. Midway between Australia and the Cape the first mate had his throat clutched by cold and unseen hands as he lay in his bunk one evening, and two nights later the same thing happened to a man in the deckhouse. While discipline was upset and things in a bad state the trouble would have passed away if the ghost had not played his pranks on the man at the wheel a few nights subsequently. Every man forward then declared his determination to quit the ship, and they had provisioned two boats and were about to lower them when a man-of-war hove in sight. A signal of distress brought her along, and you can judge how the minds of the men were affected when I say that they preferred going aboard of the man-of-war in irons to returning to duty. Enough men were spared to work the ship home, and though the ghost remained quiet there was an uneasy feeling with all. For four weeks after loading for India the Nemo could not ship a man. The ghost business had got into the newspapers, and the stories were circulated in the taverns, and though men would have taken their chances in a leaky ship they fought clear of spooks. A crew was at last secured by paying extra wages, but after the Nemo had been out 17 days the ghost laid its cold hands on one of the men, and the entire crew, led by the third mate, abandoned the ship at sea. The captain and the two mates stood by her and eventually got her into a port, but her reputation was blasted forever. The case was laid before all sorts of men, and scoffers and believers alike visited the ship in search of a clue. Plenty of deductions and conclusions were arrived at, but they satisfied only a certain few. After many months the Nemo loaded at Liverpool for a South American port, and her crew was composed entirely of Germans fresh from a China voyage. Not one had ever heard of her troubles, but they were fated to find out for themselves. A week after sailing the ghost appeared as lively as ever, and again the crew put off and left her in charge of her officers. She was a doomed ship, and her owner done the wisest thing possible by selling her at the best price he could get. As a coal barge she was never troubled again by the ghost, though why it shouldn't have continued aboard no one can tell. You can form your own theories and draw your own conclusions of the whole affair. I bothered with it for several years, hoping to get at some

satisfactory elucidation, but it remains a mystery still. If there had been no ghost, the ship would not have been twice abandoned and finally sold for a fifth of her cost, and that such was the case there are a hundred newspaper articles to prove. Indeed the hull is in commission today, and is always pointed out as the "ghost ship."

LAW OF THE SEA.

BY CHARLES B. LEWIS.

All writers of sea stories devote chapters to what is called "the sentiment of the sea," and all readers of the same feel their pulses thrill as they read of heroic rescues. This "sentiment" may have been observable 50 years ago, and now and then you read of a rescue worthy of heroes, but as a matter of fact shipowners and sea captains are anything but sentimental in these days of money making. Of ten ships who sight a signal of distress at sea eight will sneak past it if possible, and the other two will be more interested in the salvage question than in the saving of life. Shippers want their goods shipped as soon as possible. Shipowners overload and underman their vessels and yet want them to make quick voyages. Sea captains must "crack on" and do their best, and so it comes about that aid is seldom extended when there is reasonable excuse for doing it.

In the year 1880 the brig Wellcome left the port of Liverpool for the West Indies, having on board 180 men, women and children, who were going to settle on one of the islands. She had a crew of 15 men, a supercargo and two cabin passengers, bringing the total up to almost 200. Fine weather accompanied the craft until she had accomplished two-thirds of the voyage. Then a gale sprang up which dismasted her and sent her drifting back over her wake. The gale had scarcely abated when a fire broke out, and though it was extinguished after a hard fight a great quantity of provisions was consumed and much of the fresh water was sacrificed. Not a spar was left aboard for jury masts, and as the rudder had been carried away and there was four feet of water in the hold the people realized that the wreck could not be abandoned too soon.

Soon after we of the ship Evening Star sighted the wreck. We were sailing under the Holland flag, commanded by a Holland captain and mate, and I believe the craft was of that nationality. She was bound from Demerara to New York, loaded mostly with sugar. I believe, and had been detained in Demerara a couple of weeks to ship a crew. It so happened that an American man-of-war to which I belonged as an enlisted man put into that port for some slight repairs, and 12 of us deserted in a body to go aboard of the Star. We were all sailors. It does not excuse our action to say that the Holland brought this desertion about by the promise of high wages. He wanted a crew and did not care how the men came to him. We had a close shave from being captured by our captain, but got to sea all right, and as the weather was good and the wind favorable the Holland "cracked on" to make up for lost time. One morning just after sunrise we found the drifting brig square in our path and only two or three miles away. After a brief look at her through the glass captain and mate fell to cursing at their ill luck. As a matter of fact we had neither water nor provisions to spare, and the ship was loaded down to the mark with cargo, but when we heard our officers propose to pass the wreck without notice every man of the ten was ready for mutiny.

We demanded that communication be opened with the unfortunate people, and after a good deal of growling the Star ran down to them and sent a boat aboard. The report of the mate when he returned was to the effect that the people were on quarter allowance, with much sickness among the women and children, and that they desired to abandon the wreck and be taken aboard of the ship. We had spare spars aboard, and the Holland offered to sell three or four sticks for about three times their value, the payment to be made in gold on delivery. The captain of the brig declined buying, as he was satisfied that the shattered hull could never be worked into port, even if fully provisioned. The Holland then agreed to sell one cask of water and about 30 pounds of bread, but just as we were ready to transfer the goods a squall came up, and that gave him an excuse for sailing away. His firm intention was to abandon the wreck to her fate, and as soon as we realized it the ten of us went aft in a body and assured him that unless he bore up and furnished relief we should refuse duty and take the consequences. He blustered and threatened and brought out his pistols, but we were firm, and at length he gave orders to put the ship about.

We had to beat up to the wreck, and by the time we reached her there was half a gale blowing and the sea was so heavy that we could not transfer the provisions. At the end of an hour the Holland was for making sail again, but we refused to touch a rope. He and his mate, both armed with blaying pins, sought to drive us aloft, but we disarmed them and locked them in their staterooms. Among us was a man who had made several voyages as mate and was competent to handle a ship, and he was installed as captain and given an able seaman as mate. We had hoped to get the provisions to the wreck before night, but the gale continued, and we had to stand by her for 30 hours before it was safe to launch a boat. We had mutinied and taken possession of the ship, but we felt that circumstances justified it. Neither harm nor insult was offered our officers. After a few hours they were allowed full liberty, and not one of us entered the cabin. There were many threats

to the punishment we should receive when the ship arrived in port, but we stood firm and kept clear of any further quarrels.

When wind and sea finally subsided, we boarded the wreck, to find that one woman and four children had died in the last 24 hours and that the living were entirely out of food and water. There was no doctor aboard, the leak was hardly to be kept under, and it was plain that another 24 hours would send the wreck to the bottom of the sea. It was therefore resolved to transfer every body to the ship. Our captain and mate raved like madmen when they heard of this decision, and the last named became so violent that we had to bind him hand and foot. The wreck had lost all her boats, but the ship had three and when the work of transferring began it was not interrupted until every person had been brought off. Then we secured most of the personal baggage of crew and passengers, and by the time the last boatload was alongside the Star the wreck rolled heavily to stabbard and port and went to the bottom of the sea.

The ship had no accommodation whatever for passengers, and you can imagine the mess we were in when that crowd of people were taken aboard. The Holland flatly refused to act as captain or to have anything to do with the castaways. He said we had deposed him by mutiny and must now run things to suit ourselves and take the consequences. Everybody had to put on quarter allowance at once, and a shift was made up whereby the women and children were at least sheltered. After consultation it was decided to make for the Bermudas, and on the third day after taking the people off the wreck we sighted the American ship Ocean Queen and secured from her several hundred gallons of water and a quantity of flour and biscuit. It was a run of seven days to the islands, and during the last four days no adult had food enough to keep down the pangs of hunger. The mate proved so obstinate and dangerous that his bonds were not released, but he shared the food and water with the rest and was treated as kindly as circumstances would permit.

None of us believed that we could be punished for taking the ship out of the captain's hands to save human life, and I am sure we should not have been meddled with for the presence of a man-of-war in port. We had informed the Holland of our readiness to work the ship to her port of destination, and he seemed to think favorably of the matter, but no sooner did he learn of the presence of the man-of-war than he appealed to her commander. As a result the ten of us were at once arrested and flung into prison to await the action of the law. I never found out just where they intended to send us for trial, but presume it was Holland. For some reason or other there was a long delay, and at length matters were complicated by our being claimed as deserters from an American man-of-war. The people whom we had saved were grateful enough. God knows, but all others looked upon us as a lot of pirates who ought to have been hung as soon as captured.

When we had been in jail for five months, we got word from an American who was pretty thoroughly posted on the case that we should soon be sent away for trial and that we might expect at least five years' imprisonment apiece. This news decided us to make an attempt to break jail, and one night, a week later, using tools which a guard had been bribed to pass in to us, we sawed away the bars of a window and gained our liberty. Proceeding to the harbor, we found an American schooner ready to sail and awaiting our coming, and before our escape was discovered we were miles at sea. Five of us surrendered to the naval authorities and took our punishment and served out the remainder of our enlistment, but what became of the others I do not know. But for our action 200 people would have been left to go down with a wreck on which they had drifted and suffered for days and weeks, and yet that action was rank mutiny, and had the ship been English instead of Dutch our two leaders would probably have been hung and the rest of us got long terms in prison.

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