

Literature, &c.

British Magazines for July.

From Hood's London Magazine.

A SEA STORY.

THE sea was pretty quiet: all round the horizon rested dark weighty clouds, thickly packed upon one another, and very slightly silvered at the edges of the descending moon. The ocean, save here and there enlivened by the bright crest of a broken wave, was enveloped in deep gloom. We gazed on every side, eager to learn the reason of our summons, and the meaning of the unusual disturbance among the watch; and you may believe me when I tell you—my very blood curdles as I think of it—that what we very soon saw, struck us for some minutes dumb, and almost lifeless.

About two or three hundred yards to our northward, there stood upon the black waters, the hull of a very large ship. Stood! for there was not a rag of canvas there—no ship's lantern—no noise, no bustle—no human being! And, oh, how she looked! Every thing about her was white—white as though she had been jappanned. Masts, sailyards, ropes, spars, and ladders, all white as snow! The cordage hung motionless upon the masts, like garlands of alabaster; the streamer drooped from the truck like a downward burning white flame.

Did we look at that horrid thing with astonishment, and fear, and dread? I think we did; and all the while she came on, nearer and nearer to us.

"Half-starboard, Tom!" bellowed the Captain, with his hair standing on end. "As sure as I am a sinner, she is the Flying Dutchman!"

"Not she, sir," answered Tom, squirting his tobacco juice through his teeth, whilst his jaws chattered with fright. "Not she, sir—can't be—the thing has got no crew, and she isn't patched together with dead men's bones. The Devil's on board—she is a ship without a soul," continued Tom, his cheeks as pale as death.

"Shall I hail her?" asked the captain.

"Ay, ay, sir!" said I. "We shan't take harm if we treat her decently!"

The captain took up his speaking trumpet, and as well as he could, with a voice that was very much subdued by his alarm, he called to the ghostly-looking vessel, asked her name and course, and the rest of it. No living sign could we see or hear in answer. Only the white masted monster came on; and in spite of the helmsman, in spite of our bracing the sails, in spite of all hands, she was in less than no time within two ships' distance of us, and driving still closer and closer. Let Tom steer as he would, there she was after us, as if we had been a magnet and she a piece of iron attracted by it. With destruction and death before our eyes, we grasped some stakes and hooks, for the white sailyards, like so many spectres' fingers, had already caught our rigging, and cut through our sails; whilst the hideous carcass lifted itself out of the water, and pressed like a mountain upon our little ship. To avoid a collision, we pushed with our implements against the monster, shouting all the while with terror. The planks responded to our blows with hollow murmur, the billows washed the creature's deck, and a melancholy cry, like that of a dying man, assailed our ears, and penetrated to our very hearts. We gave ourselves up for lost; but the next minute a sudden blast of wind tore us asunder, sent the devil off, and thank God, saved our lives.

"She is mauled," exclaimed the captain, who had not recovered yet from the cry. "Look at her! look at her! What an awful mystery is this that moves upon the waters!"

Breathing again, we followed the phantom with an eager gaze, every man trying to strain his eyes further than his mates. The hull was quiet and death-like as before. No helmsman stood at the wheel—no sailor at the ship's side. But at the taffrail we could now discern two white figures, motionless and mute, leaning over the breastwork. White garments fluttered about their bodies, declaring them to be human beings. Our captain called to them again; but again to no purpose: and then the ship vanished silently, as she had appeared in the vapour of the approaching clouds.

There was not one of our ship's crew looking like himself for the twenty-four hours that followed the disappearance of the hull. Every one believed that he had been in the vicinity of the devil, and that some ill-luck would very shortly befall us. Every one had his own conjecture on the subject; and there was nothing too improbable to suspect, or so unlikely that it could not be maintained with the most plausible arguments. Well, the evening came and nothing happened: then the night. The wind blew strong from the north-east. We set all sail, and flew before the breeze. Ah, there we have it again! There is something before us looking very dim on the water. What is it? A ship or a sea-monster? The helmsman puts about. All hands in deck again—all eyes at work—all hearts throbbing. "Shorten sail!" says the captain; and then he himself brought the ship carefully to the dusky object. Ay, ay, there was no mistake about it. There she was—the horrible thing that we had seen the day before, only now—black—black as a coal—hull and masts. Exactly as before, there were the two figures at the taffrail leaning over the poor unhappy mourners. Their light clothing floated in the night wind. The billows broke mournfully against the hull. We again used our stakes for our protection: two or three snatched as the creature glided by us with the swiftness of a ghost, and passed into the surrounding gloom.

What could she be? We puzzled our brain again and again, and made a hundred strange guesses; but not one, however, that was satisfac-

tory. Our captain would have it, that she was simply, an abandoned ship, given over as a prize to the ocean; that she was her own mistress, roving the sea at her own pleasure. And yet, if such were the case, how were the two apparently female forms at the taffrail to be accounted for?

Next day the wind veered. It came up sharply from the south-east, compelling us to tack, and drove us back some distance towards the channel. During the night we passed many ships, principally Spaniards: we asked them if they could give us any intelligence of a strange vessel, but they had not even seen any thing of the kind: and for the next two days and nights we were fortunate enough to escape another meeting. On the third night, however, about a quarter of a mile ahead of us, the spectre made herself visible. It was a lovely night. The moon almost changed into day; and she drew, as if with a pencil, the outline of masts and rigging, upon the silvery mirror of the slumbering ocean. The two white figures were leaning still, like faithful watchmen, over the breastwork of the taffrail. "They are dead, or else farished," exclaimed the captain. "God only knew; we shuddered; and the captain went on to pray to Heaven to sink the wanderer, or to hide it from men's eyes for ever. Let me tell you lads, there is nothing so horrible in this world as a deserted ship, everlastingly driving about the waves. It is as if the ghostly creature were seeking the soul which had forsaken it. It goes like a shadow over the waters, and seems to get no rest, until these shatter and swallow her up."

We spent three days more, much annoyed and distressed by the wind, and met with no further adventure until, as evening approached, we sighted the lighthouse here, on Heligoland. Do you know what home sickness is? I were not sick for home, but absolutely voracious and furious for it; and you can't be surprised, after all our danger and alarm. Our spirits rose wonderfully when we got in sight of shore. Our captain had got some business to do here, and orders were accordingly given to make for land. As for myself, I had not seen the red rocks of my native place for eight years, and my heart was ready to give way for joy. You know pretty well how a Heligolander loves his little bit of red earth; how he looks forward to it from the stormy sea, and how he longs and hopes to rest his weary head upon it, if he isn't tucked up beforehand in the white foam shroud of old father Neptune.

The gigantic rock rose magnificently from the deep. A flickering glare from the lighthouse shone down upon it, as it passed on its way to the reflecting sea. We were coming gradually to the shore, when, all on a sudden, a hollow crash resounded in the air. We listened. The sound was repeated—once more and again. There was nothing to be seen; we could discover no cause for such a noise. I recollected that pieces of the island give and drop away from time to time, and made the captain easy by telling him the fact. Tom, however, very soon made him as uneasy, for the next moment he bellowed out—

"Look! look! the ship, the ship!"

We followed his outstretched arm, frightened to death, and saw amongst the ledge of rocks that runs far out to sea, and rests on the broad sand, the tall hull of our mate ship, now dismasted, and fast wedged in the jaggy ridge. The surf was already foaming high over the wreck. Blow followed blow. The black hull kicked up its heels, to go around more violently than ever, and to run with more certainty into the pitiless jaws of the spiteful sea. There were the white figures, too, beaming forth as often as the surf rolled back, or burst in frothy eddies, over the unhappy wreck.

"Let go the anchor; put out the long boat!" cried the captain. "We'll see the monster that we have had to deal with!"

The crew obeyed in silence. Six hands by command of the captain, jumped into the boat. I was one of them. A sail was hoisted, a few strokes of the oar heeled the wind, and we soon cut through the tractable water.

The ever-watchful eyes of the Heligolanders had, in the meanwhile, perceived the stranded ship, and all was activity on the foreland. The pilot bell summoned the mariners to the strand; lights waved along the narrow shore; and before we could reach the shoals, a fleet of boats shot from all sides through the water. We were, however, the first at the wreck, and found the loosened timbers already struggling with the angry surf. At the risk of being washed away, we climbed the deck, and close upon our heels the greedy pilots followed. Eager as you are, my boys, on most occasions I can tell you that the bravest pilots here felt their ardor cool, and tough hearts sicken. The spectacle was too strange, too new, too fearful to allow the gratification of wicked passions, or even their presence.

The ship, contrary to our expectation, had its full complement of hands. She was really manned—but with dead bodies only—with corpses such as we had never seen before, such as no tongue or pen can describe them. At the mainmast, upon a rich variegated carpet, sat two men: they looked like father and son. The elder, wrapped in costly fur, held with his right hand the arm of his young companion. He seemed as if he were gently feeling his wrist, whilst his open staring eye, with an evident expression of the deepest solicitude, rested on the boy's face, which had dropped upon his bosom. Upon the cabin stairs lay a woman pressing a dead body to her own cold breast. She was young, slender of figure, sweet featured; lovely as an angel, even in death. I think I see her glossy black hair, fluttering unloosed in the usury wind! The scene that awaited us in the cabin was still more singular. Here upon the cushioned benches lay many bodies, all of which had apparently parted with their souls without much pain. One or two

canesticks, with the remains of burnt-out candles, stood upon the table; others were lying overturned upon the floor. There was no lack of victuals and drink. Some gentlewomen lay dead in their hammocks. Near one bed, the captain of the ship was kneeling. His head had fallen upon the breast of the corpse asleep within it. It required some self-command, courage, and contempt of death, not to lose one's reason in the midst of all these horrors. Many a pilot turned paler than the corpses before him, shook from head to foot, and hurried back upon deck again. Once there, he made his way off faster than he came, leaped into his boat, and was ashore again in no time. And can you wonder at it? Not a man would have staid five minutes upon the vessel, if our captain had not found a sheet of paper nailed fast down to the table, which he said contained a full account of the ship and her passengers, and which he made his own crew stop to listen to. This was the substance of the paper:

The vessel was the property of a Portuguese merchant, and was named the Donna Isabella. The captain's name was Don John Christalvo, and was bound with his ship to Java. The freight consisted of tropical fruits, Portuguese wines and preserves. There were, likewise, a few tons of arsenic, and several cases of cinabar. Shortly before setting out from Oporto, Don Christalvo had married a very beautiful young lady, who accompanied him on his voyage to Java. This same lady had been formerly promised by her parents to a daring, ill-mannered, and impetuous man, although she herself had always protested against the act—had said that she could never love him, and therefore would never wed him. Don Rodrigo, for that the wicked fellow's name, no sooner saw how the maiden loved Christalvo, than he resolved to take a dreadful revenge of both of them as soon as they should marry, and he sent them all kind of threats, thinking to prevent the union. The lovers did not think lightly of his menaces, for they knew his evil temper; still they hoped, by absenting themselves, to put it out of his power to hurt them. Rodrigo learnt their intentions, and when he found he could not upset them, he disguised himself in the most artful manner, and got himself hired as steward on board the good ship Isabella. Thus the mortal enemy of the newly-married couple, unknown to any one, was quite near enough to be the destruction of one or both of them. He knew what food they ate—what wine they drank; and upon this knowledge he built his demoniacal plan of vengeance. One morning he adroitly opened one of the tons of arsenic, and mixed with the wine which they were accustomed to drink, more than was required of the fatal poison to cause death. It was not long after the ship had sailed, and, as it happened, on the birthday of Don Christalvo. The captain gave a feast in honor of the day, and invited the whole of the ship's company to the celebration. Not a sailor was left out. All were as happy as dolphins, drank the health of the young couple over and over again, and, I need not tell you, drank at the same time their own death. Rodrigo had thrown so much arsenic into the wine, that almost immediately after partaking of it, the innocent victims began to feel its fearful effects. But the poor women had suffered more—they who had only sipped the wine, and not drank freely of it. When Rodrigo perceived the havoc produced by his unparalleled atrocity, and saw that of the whole number he must remain on board the only living creature, he became suddenly horror-struck, and went raving mad. In a fit of insanity and remorse, he plunged into the sea, and went to the bottom. The captain had just time enough to draw up a short narration, for within a few hours of the celebration, the ship was nothing better than a dead house. Amongst the passengers, there were, as the ship's list notified, two sisters, following their brother to Sumatra. These were the two figures at the taffrail, which had so many times filled us with amazement and terror. They had, no doubt, taken only a very small portion of the poisoned wine; and, probably, had sought alleviation of their pain in the open air, where, affectionately embracing, they at length calmly awaited the death to which all their fellow-passengers had been doomed. According to the date of the paper, the murderous business must have been transacted the day before the storm came on. To withstand its fury, the sisters had lashed themselves to the breastwork, and thus, each reposing on the breast of the other, they had expired in sweet sisterly love.

As soon as we had collected these particulars, we made all haste from the scene of desolation. And it was high time, for the blustering waves were bouncing against the shattered hull, with a force that threatened its instant destruction. We buried all the bodies in the sea. No, not all—the two smiling and fond sisters we took with us in the boat, rowed them ashore, and buried them in one grave on the east side of the church. A small tombstone which weather and neglect together have almost demolished, shows their resting place.

The Illuminated Magazine.

THE TICKET PLAGUE.

OR, THE WAR OF PRICES.

[From an article under this title, we make the following selections.]

* * * The custom of denoting the prices of goods exposed for sale in shop windows, by means of tickets affixed, is of many years' growth, but of comparatively recent enormity. In the days of our fathers, and in our own very early days when merit and modesty held a closer association than at present, the salesman was satisfied to place samples of his goods in the windows of his shop, and there

let them speak for themselves by their form, texture, and other visible properties. A good article, at a fair price, was the rule and habit of his dealing. He did not make protestations of incomparable cheapness; he did not tempt you with things uncommonly low—things with a showy face and bad constitution. In those days there were no mock beavers at four-and-nine—no linen shirts at six-and-three—no Saxony dress coats at two-thirteen. Good faith prevailed between vender and purchaser, and affairs went on pretty comfortably. This wholesome and healthy state of trade, however, was too good to last. Spots began to appear on the surface—incipient indications of something wrong. Here and there a tradesman, discontented with the amount of custom falling to his share, and anxious to push his business into brisker circulation, took to underselling his brethren, and gave intelligible hints of his design, by means of certain bits of paper or pasteboard, attached to his commodities, and expressing the prices at which he would part with them. At first the innovation met with little favour; the supplanting spirit which seemed to have given it birth, was doubtless thought discreditible. The shops in which it was practised were of the meaner order, and were something like an air of being ashamed of themselves. By degrees, however, the influence of bad example, and the love of experiment, gave extension to the evil. The spots increased in number and size—the eruption was manifestly spreading, and its existence became particularly apparent among the linen drapers. The development of the mischief was promoted by that very unhealthy stimulant, the pressure of taxation. The attempts of the honest and conscientious tradesman to stand unlabelled and unticketed, grew fainter and more unavailing, till at length the infection was submitted to, right and left;—and now, you shall walk from Piccadilly to Whitechapel, and not find one shop in twenty where the plague is absent—where the leprosy is not;—and the like may be said as to the condition of retail trade all over the country.

Of the various effects which have sprung out of this great and grievous change, no adequate description can be given within a short compass; but a few sketchy details may be here attempted. If sellers are to live, profits must be had; but amidst the decline and fall of prices, when men are fighting one another with figures, how are profits to be maintained? They are not maintained—they are miserably abridged—and, to prevent their downright annihilation, much ingenuity and many expedients are rendered indispensable. Articles expressly suited to the game of reduction must be got up. Goods must cease to be good, lest prices should cease to pay. As the money scale graduates downwards, so the shades of quality must descend, through every degree of deterioration, through every step of inferiority. As nobody is attracted, however by things which are at once bad and bad looking, there arises a further necessity, that which calls forth all the arts of seeming into active operation. It often happens that men, in order to go on, must seem virtuous: in like manner, articles to go off, must seem good. A pleasing exterior, a specious appearance, is on no account to be wanting, how little soever the flattering promise may be confirmed by the sequel. As a natural consequence of this system, we have hats that make us ashamed of their company after the first shower—shoes that gape, long before they have had much exercise—coats that part with their buttons as easily as a gentleman dismisses a slight acquaintance—and watches that do so go, as never to deviate into time. In articles of luxury, as well as in those professing utility, the same kind of issue takes place. You are a luxurious man, for instance, with a shallow pocket;—it is a cold, clear day, and you fancy a cigar. Your eye is caught by a smart, florid looking shop, where many elegant convolutions of the fragrant weed are displayed in compact bundles, each surmounted by a pink ticket, of very curious scissor-shape. The prices marked are of exemplary moderation; and your choice, partly determined by your finances, falls on a lot quoted as low as sixpence-half penny a dozen. The name they bear is one which you never heard of before, but it "reads well" on the ticket, and the cigars, though rather small, have a nice glossy smoothness, and are well barrelled out towards the middle; and, in short, you buy a dozen. Arrived at home—for you scorn to smoke in the streets—you proceed to make trial of your bargain. Ignition is accomplished—you set your lips to work—"a strange invisible odour hits the sense"—an odour coarse, acrid, and totally unlike that of any cigar you ever noosed in lobby, saloon, steamboat, or elsewhere. With a wry face, and a resolution to know the worst you cut the thing open, and unravel its interior. Of what does it consist? It is not tobacco—it is not dock leaf—it is not cabbage—no, it is coloured paper—and you, the purchaser, are "done brown."

In that simpler and sounder state of trade which preceded the ticket system, the relations between price and quality were such as to admit of being understood and borne in mind by any person of average common sense. Now, on the contrary, all is complexity and confusion. London is one vast Cheapside, where everything cries "Come, buy me!" The shop windows present an outspread chaos of figures, and look like arithmetical puzzles—being, of a truth, the wonder of little boys, and the despair of older heads. The man who meditates an outlay, and attempts the comparison of pretensions to his favour, is like a ship tossed about on the ocean without rudder or compass. The waves of doubt and conjecture allow him no rest; and fears of bumping upon the latent rocks of roguery haunt his imagination. "To buy, or not to buy," becomes a question almost as perplexing to him as that which held in