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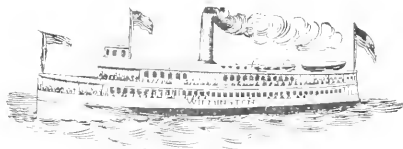
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A COLONIAL APPARITION.

A STORY OF THE CAPE FEAR.

BY
JAMES SPRUNT.



*READ BEFORE THE SOCIETY OF THE
COLONIAL DAMES.*

PUBLISHED BY THE
Wilmington and Southport Steamboat Co.

WILMINGTON, N. C.:
LEGWIN BROS., PRINTERS AND PUBLISHERS.

1898.

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JOHN GILL, Receiver.

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THE CAPTAIN.

A COLONIAL APPARITION.



A BITING storm of sleet and snow is seldom seen in Wilmington. For many years the winter season passed with scarcely frost enough to chill the poor, and then a Christmas season came that will long be remembered for the rigor of its cold.

For several days a blizzard had prevailed along the far north-west, and when the weather warning came, the signal lights—a white above a red—increased the apprehension of a storm.

The week began with dismal, rainy days, black clouds, and bitter cold, and when complacent home-blessed people heard the moaning wind sing dolefully or rush with sudden, smothering fury down the chimney flues, they yawned beside their cheerful fires and made some commonplace remarks about the suffering poor.

At night a gale blew fiercely, some fifty miles an hour. The driving rain was congealed into stinging sleet which smote the cheeks like showers of needles. The dreary lonesome streets bore striking contrast with brighter seasons in the past.

With sudden burst, the howling storm would seize some luckless passenger and bend him double, while his splintered umbrella went flying into space. The second day the havoc of the storm was shown by prostrate fences in the streets, broken branches, tin signs, and chimney pots, with not a few old buildings unroofed and torn as by a hurricane.

To those who watched and prayed for some loved toiler

on the sea, the news of many wrecks along the coast came like a knell of doom. The telegraphic wires were down; but every tardy mail brought word of savage storms which crushed the life from many ship-wrecked sailors from Hatteras to Cape Fear.

How few of those accustomed to everlasting hills can comprehend the awful fury of a storm at sea when broken, helpless ships are tossed in air, where stricken and beaten with maddening fury, they plunge a moment later into the seething hollows, and the foundering fabrics, with their haggard, hopeless crews, sink to rise no more!

The church's prayer for those in peril on the sea is often said unthinkingly; but as the daily record came of shattered ships and drowning men, there went from many hearts a silent invocation for those in such extremity.

The crews on board the lightships never before had seen such fury in the storm. The one on Frying Pan was staunch and safe enough, and rode without a strain through previous gales; but now she leaped upon the wild and sloping sea like some mad animal, and standing for a moment with her bowsprit heavenward, plunged into the foaming chasm of the hollow waters, and vanished in the smother, which seemed to hold her down. The mushroom anchors held until the strain broke the heavy iron chains, and then she drifted in the whirl far out to sea.

The Southport pilots called to mind the frightful gale of April 12, 1877, when five brave men went down, while all that courage, coolness, and good seamanship could do, did not avail.

The coast guard looked upon the saddest sights. They saw dismasted staggering vessels, with shreds of canvas, impelled by rushing seas to imminent destruction on the beach. The acts of heroism performed on such occasions

would fill a volume ; and those who know the service of life-savers have often thought the compensation small.

The third day showed a subsidence of the storm. The glass at times was steadier, but still the mercury stood at 29, denoting heavy gales. The temperature was much below the freezing point. Distressed, bewildered cattle suffered greatly and many died from cold. The wildest birds were dazed and tamed and came for food about the city doors. Beneath a pile of wood was found twelve lifeless frozen partridges, their heads arranged within a circle, as is their nature when asleep. The cruel sufferings of the poor and homeless shut out the thoughts of Christmas gayety, and made the favored ones more kindly to the needy.

The Southport mail boat, Wilmington, made her daily runs without a break, although at times the gale would seize and bend her in its grasp, until her upper rail was partly hidden in the foam ; but Captain Harper knew his craft and kept her well in hand. With steady stare ahead and vice-like grip upon the wheel, he safely steered her up and down, without an accident.

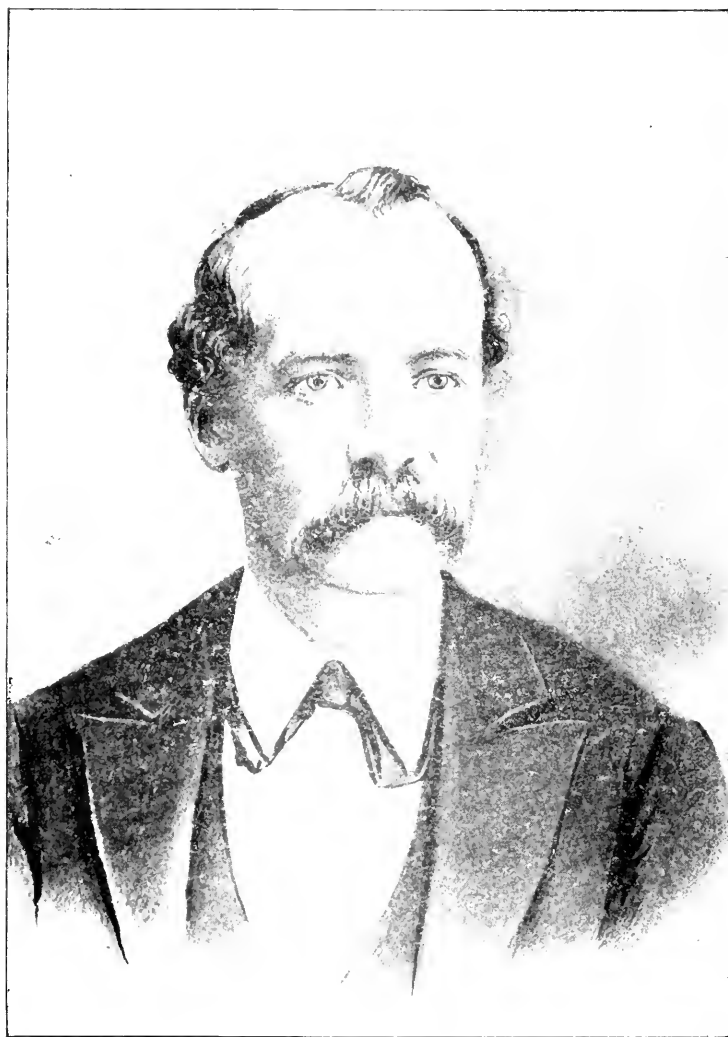
The twenty-fourth brought weather indications of a change ; but such a storm dies slowly, and often comes again in gusts, as if unwilling to depart. The boat was timed to sail at five o'clock, and long before the warning whistle blew, a Southport party came well laden with big parcels for the holidays. With plank hauled in, the rail secured and hawser neatly coiled, the stately steamer shaped her course. But ere the double bells were rung, a little rivet broke away from thousands of its kind, and soon caused trouble with the furnace fires. There was a pause ; then a parley through the speaking tube revealed the fact that nothing less than six hours' work would "mend the kettle" in the engine room. Without assistance from the shore and helplessly adrift, the Captain promptly anchored in the

stream. He, also, told the passengers the truth; and asked them to refrain from visits to the engine room, as everything was being done to make another start.

On similar occasions the average Engineer will seldom rule his spirit, and, when beset by senseless queries, is apt to profane. The chief on board the *Wilmington* was a model of his kind. To one inquirer anxiously obtrusive, he said, the boat had caught a catfish in the strainer which broke the suction valve: and, to a lady who would know the worst, he answered, that a rat was in the cylinder: to a third, a pompous man, he confidentially whispered, that she had lost her centres and that the oilers were in the bilges looking for them. A later messenger was sent by the uneasy passengers, who said on his return that Mr. Platt looked dangerous when he invited him to call again next week. Meantime, a friendly tug appeared and towed the hapless steamer to her landing berth.

The wind and snow increased as darkness came, and all the passengers save one debarked for better quarters on the shore. At nine o'clock a furious sleet intensified the bitter cold. The snow-clad streets at ten o'clock were quite deserted, save here and there a market man might be seen scuttling homeward-bound. Then, disappointed tradesmen put up their shutters in despair: and even noisy revelers retreated with their blatant horns.

The clouds were black and angry looking: and the frequent flashes of lightning—unusual at this season—revealed the awful grandeur of the scene. Sometimes the flaring arc-lights flickered and went out, leaving the wharf as black and dismal as the sky: and then a tipsy raftsman would break the silence at the dock, with lusty cries of "boat ahoy," which brought at length the tired, reluctant ferryman with his twinkling lantern glimmering through the gloom. A ragged, drunken wretch, ejected from a neigh-



THE PASSENGER.

boring bar, blinked stupidly below the hanging light and stumbled into darkness.

Along the western shore the lightwood fires on timber rafts reflected wretched shelters of rough boards, with scant-clad, shivering countrymen hugging the shifting blaze. Upon the eastern side were glowing anchor-lights of vessels waiting at the wharves; while moving lamps upon the stream described the passage of small boats to safer points ashore.

Left with his lonely passenger, the Captain's social quality prevailed. With mainbrace spliced, tobacco-pouch and pipes, an hour was spent in cheerful chat, from which the skipper learned some pleasant tales of old Colonial times.

"Do you remember having read of the extraordinary meeting between Sir William Berkeley, Governor of Virginia, and William Drummond, our first Colonial Governor of North Carolina in 1677?" said the stranger.

The Captain admitted that he did not recall it, and asked if the salutations had been similar to the alleged remark of the Governor of South Carolina to the Governor of North Carolina, that it was a long time between drinks.

"Far from it," replied McMillan, for such was the stranger's name. "He gave him neither drink nor shelter, but said in the almost inconceivable cruelty of his wicked heart: 'Mr. Drummond, you are very welcome; I am more glad to see you than any man in Virginia. 'Fore God, Mr. Drummond, you shall hang in half an hour.'"

"What your honor pleases;" was the calm reply; for our brave Governor had long believed that Berkeley would kill him, without the formalities of Judge or Jury.

"Is it possible," said the Captain, "that such a crime could be committed without severest punishment, and did he really hang him?"

"Alas! such was the case," said McMillan. "Drummond was a man of the noblest impulses. Of him the histo-

rians generally have said that he was of most estimable character, unsullied integrity and great ability. He had retired from office several years previously, having served as Governor three years; and having joined himself to the so-called Bacon rebellion, was hounded by Berkeley to his death. He was a Scots man and a Presbyterian."

"There was another Scots Governor of the Province," said Captain Harper, "a man closely identified with the lower Cape Fear, for whom the first military fort on the river was named."

"You allude, no doubt, to Gabriel Johnson," said Mr. McMillan. "He served for sixteen years, and his was the best administration of Colonial times."

"Yes, he seems to have influenced the movement of the Scots to this Province after their oppression by the English. I have read that his interest in his suffering countrymen nearly cost him his official place."

"Undoubtedly an attempt was made to turn the Home Government against him," said McMillan; "but the Governor clearly established his innocence of the charge of disloyalty to his King, and proved that his feelings were aroused by a natural affection for his fellow countrymen."

"The clannish feeling of the Scots has been frequently remarked in Wilmington, and especially in the up-country where the greater number of immigrants found their new homes," said the Captain.

"I remember a story of old Kenneth Murchison, the grand-father of the present proprietor of Orton, who lived in Cumberland County on a road which, in his day, was frequented by travellers. Some belated strangers applied for food and shelter for the night; but the old gentleman's house was already full, and he said it was impossible; that further entreaty was useless. He was obdurate; but just as the disappointed and weary travellers were turning away, they fired

their last shot. "But, Mr. Murchison, you must know we are Scotsmen, and surely you would never turn a fellow-countryman from your door?"

"A weel," said he, "ye are none the better for that; but ye may bide." And bide they did, greatly to their enjoyment.

The late British Vice Consul at Wilmington was often imposed upon by wandering vagabonds, and he admitted to me that some Scotsmen were utterly unworthy and degenerate; and yet the most abandoned wretch that ever tramped the streets had always found the Consul easy prey if he could only speak the Scottish dialect."

"I have read a laughable story," said McMillan, "of the dismay of the Wilmington people when McNeill arrived in 1739 with his five hundred wild Highlanders, whose strange cries and uncouth manners so startled the inhabitants that he was hauled up before a magistrate who required of him a bond for their good behavior."

"And yet," said Captain Harper, "those wild and uncouth strangers were not lacking in good sense. The Gaelic language which is spoken yet among the older of that class was music to the ears of those who followed the survivors of Glencoe. Poor as they were, they yet denied themselves the commonest necessities at times, in order that they might provide for the education of their children. It has been said that they served their God and generation well; and 'tis common proof, that their descendants have maintained the love of truth and liberty which brought their fathers to this favored land. When Flora McDonald came in 1774, some of her old-time friends and fellow-countrymen were well advanced as leaders of the colony. At Wilmington a ball was given in her honor and many compliments were paid the beautiful protector of 'Bonnie Prince Charlie.'"

"Indeed she was worthy of it," replied McMillan; "for

she had acquired in Edinboro all the graceful accomplishments of the best society of her day, to which was added such personal courage and striking beauty that her influence among the Scots was almost unbounded. Tradition says that her presence was superb. In the Scotch Counties of upper Cape Fear her name is still held with much the reverence paid that of a patron saint.

“Some years ago, an eccentric person in the settlement claimed to be a lineal descendant of Flora, and in order to substantiate his claim, he always wore a pair of immense ruffles. He would never demean himself by working with his hands, considering manual labor beneath the dignity of a person so highly connected. He became so poor in consequence, that he sometimes went bare-footed; but he was never seen without the ruffles.”

“How was it possible,” asked the Captain, “for the English under the Duke of Cumberland to over-run Scotland and utterly defeat such a fighting race as they had ever proved themselves in other wars?”

“You were never further from the truth of history, my friend, than in believing that the English overcame Scotland at Culloden. The Wizard of the North has said:

“‘A primitive people, residing in a remote quarter of the empire, and themselves but a small portion of the Scottish Highlanders, fearlessly attempted to place the British Crown on the head of the last scion of those ancient kings whose descent was traced to their own mountains. This gigantic task they undertook in favor of a youth of twenty-one, who landed on their shores without support of any kind, and threw himself on their generosity. They assembled an army in his behalf. Their speech, their tactics, their arms, were alike unknown to their countrymen and to the English. Holding themselves free from the obligations imposed by common law or positive statute, they were yet governed by

rules of their own, derived from a general sense of honor, extending from the chief to the lowest of his tribe.

With men unaccustomed to arms, the amount of the most efficient part of which never exceeded 2,000, they defeated two disciplined armies commanded by officers of experience and reputation, penetrated deep into England, approached within ninety miles of the capital, and made the crown tremble on the King's head; retreated with like success, when they appeared on the point of being intercepted between three hostile armies; checked effectually the attack of a superior body detached in pursuit of them; reached the North in safety, and were only suppressed by a concurrence of disadvantages which it was impossible for human nature to surmount.

All this has much that is splendid to the imagination, nor is it possible to regard without admiration, the little band of determined men by whom such actions were achieved, or the interesting young Prince by whom their energies were directed.' "

"It was a heroic struggle against most fearful odds," said the Captain. "I have been told that their subsequent punishment was barbarously extreme."

"Nothing more devilish could have been devised. The unfortunate ones who came to Wilmington had witnessed the execution of one out of every twenty of their companions; the remaining nineteen were banished to America. Many of the leaders were tortured beyond description. Among the subsequent executions was that of a young man, James Dawson, a familiar name in Wilmington, whose betrothed wife desperately resolved to attend the horrid ceremonial. I have read in Scott that she beheld her lover after having been suspended for a few minutes on the gallows, but not dead, (such was the barbarous sentence) cut down, disemboweled and margled by the knife of the executioner. All this she

bore with apparent fortitude : but when she saw the last scene finished by throwing young Dawson's heart in the fire, she drew her head within her carriage, repeated his name, and expired on the spot."

"I recall an expression of Victor Hugo in his account of the Paris deviltries of 1793, which seems to apply in this case," said the Captain:—"the words 'these were times when men were more like wolves than they are now.'"

"Your information interests me greatly," he continued. "We shall have steam in half an hour; can you beguile the time with something new to me about the river history?"

"Have you ever heard of the execution of the Scottish Highlanders at Brunswick during the American Revolution?" asked McMillan.

"The subject is entirely strange to me," replied the Captain; "pray proceed."

"My great grand-father," continued Mr. McMillan, "was William McMillan, of Edinboro, who enlisted with the Camerons in the Rebellion of '45; and, after Culloden, was compelled to leave his country.

He was fortunate in being personally acquainted with Governor Gabriel Johnston, of North Carolina, who kindly and cordially invited him to make his home among the Cape Fear Scotsmen already settled on the lands now known as Robeson County.

At first he stopped at Waddell's Ferry; and in course of time became imbued with the spirit of the Whigs, who held among their number not a few whose wounded spirits had never healed since the oppression of their countrymen. The daring exploits of the Tory, Colonel David Fanning, whose rapid marches and reckless bravery were equal to any emergency, had become the talk and the terror of many who knew how cruel and how desperate was this scourge of the enemy.

On the 13th of September, 1781, Col. Fanning and Col. McNeill, with a small force, entered Hillsboro by different routes at dawn, taking the town by surprise. In a few moments, they seized Governor Burke and his entire suite with other prominent inhabitants numbering forty or fifty persons, whom they conducted with great celerity to Wilmington, where they were lodged in jail by Major Craig, the British Commandant of that town. This remarkable feat, one of the most memorable in the history of North Carolina, involved the destiny of my ancestor and of many others whose homes lay in the track of this evil-minded man.

Fanning appears also, to have been remarkable for the facility and accuracy with which he obtained information respecting every person and everything within the range of his operations; therefore, it is not surprising that my great grandfather fell into his hands together with two other Highland Whigs who had been marked as doomed men, because of their so-called treason in violating the oath, reluctantly given, which bound them to a hostile sovereign.

After delivering Governor Burke and party into the hands of Major Craig at Wilmington, Colonel Fanning continued his march to the town of Brunswick, now a ruin on Orton Plantation, in whose harbour lay several British ships of war, and also an old prison hulk which was anchored in the bay a greater distance from the wharves, just opposite the Sugar Loaf. To this gloomy, loathsome, floating cell my ancestor and his companions were at once consigned, whence, after agonizing dread and fruitless efforts to escape, they were brought again on the shore, put through the mockery of a trial and sentenced by Fanning to immediate execution. The hour was one o'clock and the unfortunate Scotsmen were given but few moments for their preparations for the end.

While the unwilling soldiers were being drawn by lot for

their obnoxious duty, the thoughts of these brave men who were to sacrifice their lives for American independence, turned sadly to the old familiar scenes in far off bonnie Scotland, then to the loved ones in the new home among the pine trees of Carolina, where they had fondly hoped to live and die in peace. The place of execution was near the ruins of Governor Tryon's palace at Russellboro between King Roger's house at Orton and the town of Brunswick. A pine tree, to which the victims were bound, still marks the memorable spot where these two nameless martyrs' dust is now reposing.

At length, a platoon of soldiers of the line drew up before the doomed but fearless men and, at the word, discharged their pieces simultaneously: two quivering bleeding bodies were drawn aside and then McMillan was brought forward and unbound a few paces from the tree. He was a powerful man, and years before had been the champion of a curling club who, "put the stone" with strength like that of Samson; and like Samson he sent an earnest agonizing prayer to Heaven for help so needful in such extremity. Held firmly by two stalwart guards, he drew his muscle to its utmost tension and quickly smote one of them senseless at his feet; the other seized him round the waist and bore him to the ground. But the desperate prisoner with almost superhuman strength broke clear away; and, though covered by a dozen muskets whose contents pierced his clothing yet leaving himself unharmed, he ran with the speed of a frightened deer into the friendly shelter of the neighboring woods; and setting his face to the northwest continued with varying speed from two o'clock in the afternoon a distance of seventy miles, reaching his home in Robeson at daylight, the following morning.

He long survived the troublous times and died in 1800.

The Orton people hold an old tradition that on stormy

nights ghosts of these two Scotsmen sometimes walk abroad, and also row a phantom boat in search of vessels bound for foreign parts.

An aged negro who had lived for more than seventy years upon the place, is quite familiar with the tale, and showed a curious friend of mine the execution tree, well-known in olden times and often talked about. It bore some rude inscription, long since obliterated by the hand of time."

McMillan's weird, uncanny tale impressed the Captain strongly and made him strangely silent. The moaning wind and crackling sleet against the window sash conspired to chill the cheerful flow of ready conversation and made them dread the dangerous run through storm and darkness at so late an hour, for it was now near midnight.

Just then the mate appeared bearing a message from the engineer that steam was ready. The Captain glanced above the wheel and tapped the aneroid, which indicated twenty-nine and a-half—a very ugly record; but mail-boats cannot choose their weather, and so were given the orders:

"Haul in the gang plank! Let go the bow line! Ease the stern line! Let go all! Haul in!" Buffeted by the wind and hail, the boat swung out upon the ebbing tide and started on her long-delayed return. On dark and cloudy nights the river lights are of little use, so dim and insufficient is their glow; and on this night they seemed almost obliterated in the thick and dismal weather which prevailed. At times, the Captain slowly felt his way without a guiding mark; while Peter Jorgensen, the watchful mate, kept the lead line going constantly.

"Three fathoms!" shouted Peter; "by the mark, two half! Mark two! Now one fathom, sir! She is shoaling fast!" A moment more they reached the lights at Clarendon too late for luck; for the widened river caught the full

force of the gale, which driving the boat, sent her hard aground. Although the tide was running downward fast, the shifting wind came round a point or two and helped the backing engine to put her off again.

Once more they started, but at slower speed and groped their way along the narrow channel as a blind man often does upon familiar paths.

“Of all the nights I ever saw in ups and downs for twenty years I never saw the match of this;” said Captain Harper to his friend.

“I ran the blockade off your bar in several steamers during our late war; was under fire for twenty hours and narrowly escaped; a Federal cruiser sank us off the coast, and captured all our crew. I have seen many heavy gales at sea; but I never saw in all my life such a dismal, fearful night as this,” replied the lonely passenger.

“The heavy gloom increases,” said the anxious Captain. “I fear we are astray again. Can you see any lights ahead? The snow is blinding;—we should be off the lower jetties. I’ll give a spoke or too a’port!”—But at this moment, the wheel refused to move—“Here’s worse luck still,” he cried; “the rudder chains are jammed.”

“We are out of the channel, sir!” shouted the watchful Peter Jorgensen from the deck below; “she shoals again!—two fathoms!—one, three-quarters!—by the mark one a half! one fathom! We’re on the lower jetty, sir!” And ere the full stop gong had sounded in the engine room, the ship went crashing over the soft timbers of the State obstruction, which had not felt a keel in nearly seventy years. It is sad to say, the Captain swore; and sadder still, he kept on swearing.

The Presbyterian passenger concurred in every oath, but did not give expression to his rage.

“Thank you,” he said, as Harper turned apologetically;



THE MATE.

“the provocation’s great.” This sally soon restored the Captain to his calm and normal temperament.

The tide was at low-water slack; and every effort exerted to twist her off, made matters worse. After careful search, no damage was apparent; then lights were set, and fires reduced, until the turning of the tide which would float her clear.

All hands, save Peter Jorgensen, were glad to seek the comfort of the furnace fires. He, only, walked the upper deck despite the cruel weather; his thoughts reverting to the father-land and to the Christmas seasons of the past.

As he stood below the sheltering upper deck and pictured to his mind the scenes of his early home in distant Denmark, he seemed to see the “Jule Aften” preparation for the feast of rice which always comes before the sacred service of the following holy day.

Then, filled his contemplative mind, the memories of the simple sports and homely games of village men and women; and music and dancing and drinking everywhere, but nothing to excess. And, too, the early prayers at Church before the Christmas dawn; familiar faces of friends of long ago and those of dearer memory, filled his eyes and made a swelling in his throat.

A sudden icy gust of wind awoke him from his dream.

When he turned to walk again he saw the standing figure of a man clad in rough, dripping garments, with hair and beard unkempt and flecked with snow, and a face distorted with agonizing dread. His right hand grasped the weather rail; the other pointed east by south towards Big Sugar Loaf.

“How came you here? What do you want?” said Peter, drawing nearer with hand outstretched to touch him. No answer came.

“Who are you?” shouted Peter, “are you mad?” And

as he reached to seize him, his hand fell on the empty air—the man was gone!

A moment later, when Peter reached the pilot house, his face was ashy and his legs were limp from fright. The Captain gave an angry glance, and turning to McMillan, said: "The man is drunk."

"I am not drunk," declared the terror-stricken mate. "I have not touched a drop this night. I—have—seen—a ghost!" And then with frightened looks he told them of the apparition.

"Now I know for a certainty that you are drunk," said Captain Harper. "Who ever saw a ghost? McMillan, did you ever see a ghost?"

"I doubt not Mr. Jorgensen has supernatural causes for his alarm. A Scotsman born is often charged with native superstition. I know of things in my experience beyond the range of our so-called Philosophy. But let us search for Peter's ghost, and then discuss the cause of his disordered mind."

"Well said," replied the Captain; "call all hands!"

"Excuse me, Captain," said the shivering mate; "I would not for a present of the ship look on that awful face again."

With an angry exclamation of disgust, the Captain reached the speaking tube and ordered up the crew.

Each man was questioned, and all declared that none other than those present had been on board that night.

"Now," said the Captain, "let every man attend me while I search the boat."

McMillan joined the party and every nook and corner, up and down, was closely scrutinized with safety lamps, in vain.

The skipper still looked vexed; but when he saw the

drawn and anxious face of his devoted mate, he seemed quite ill at ease.

In vain he questioned and cross-questioned the unhappy man.

“Did you see this person approaching you?” said he.

“I did not, sir,” the mate replied.

“I was standing on the lee side near the turn of the after cabin and my thoughts were not excited: I was thinking of my home in Denmark. A sudden gust of icy wind swept around the deck. I thought the wind was shifting from northeast; and, when I turned to walk around the bend, I saw the figure standing on the port quarter outside the rail and grasping it with one hand, while with the other it pointed down the river. At first, I thought it had climbed on board and was trying to get over the rail. When I spoke it made no answer; I then advanced to touch it, but it was not there.”

“Did it seem to try to speak to you?” enquired Mc-Millan.

“I cannot tell,” said Jorgensen. Its lips did not move, neither did any sound come from its mouth; but, O, that fearful face; I can never forget it.”

“What did it indicate—did it seem to have a fit?”

“I will tell you what it seemed to me,” said Peter. “If your only child was drowning before your eyes and you were powerless to save it; and if you suddenly saw some one standing near whom you knew was equal to its rescue, I think you would have done as that ghost did. I say it was a ghost—a human being could not vanish before my eyes like that.”

“The night is dark; perhaps you were asleep and only dreamed of what you saw.”

“A man who was asleep, sir—you will pardon me—

could not walk in such bitter cold and hold a lantern in his hand as I did then."

"Was it burning brightly, and did you see the features of the figure? Had you ever seen such a face before?"

"I was standing within a yard of the stranger," said Peter. "My lamp shone clearly three times as far. Besides, the ship's lights from the after cabin made the deck quite visible."

"The whole thing is utterly incomprehensible," said Captain Harper, "and if ghosts are taking their walks abroad to-night, we may see troops of them before we get out of this confounded mess."

"We lie quite near the dead Colonial town of Charlestown, built by the Yeaman's colony, which came in 1665. They numbered some eight hundred, and when they abandoned it for other parts, they left a hundred of their number in the graveyard near. Perhaps this is their calling night; in which event, look out for further company. How is the tide, Mr. Jorgensen?"

"It has been running up for quite two hours," said Peter. "She is already lifting a little, sir."

The Captain sharply scanned the weather glass, which had risen steadily; the snow and sleet had ceased; the gale was abating, but the wind was still high and it came in gusts, veering several points at intervals. The temperature had also risen from 18 to 22 degrees. In less than an hour the constant motion of the screw had slowly eased the steamer from the ragged timber; then, with hopeful courage, they made another start towards their destination.

With the widening of the river, they encountered a heavy sea which kept the forward deck awash and made the little boat roll heavily. Sea birds dashed past them on graceful curving wing; their hoarse cries mingling with the sound of the whistling wind and splashing waves; their movement

scarcely visible until quite near at hand. Suddenly, attracted by the wheel house lights, a blinded gull came crashing through the glass and fell quivering and bleeding at the Scotsman's feet.

"The foul fiend is abroad this night," cried McMillan in great agitation. "Beware of further trouble, Captain; this is the worst of all bad omens."

The Captain was more hopeful, and having passed Big Island light in safety, was heading for the Angel stake light number nine, off Lilliput.

"If you keep a sharp lookout," said he, "you may see another ghost. Old Admiral Frankland, of the Royal Navy, owned the plantation, Lilliput, just off our starboard bow; and he, also, may be on a cruise to-night in company with the other spooks."

"I have heard," said McMillan, "that this old rice plantation was really owned by Sir Thomas Frankland, in 1750. Perhaps, you know that he was a great grandson of Oliver Cromwell, and that he also held the high distinction of an Admiral of the White."

As the lights of Kendal and of Orton were safely passed, remarks were made about the ancient reputation of these fine plantations, famous in history by the lives of Eleazer Allen, of Kendal, and the lordly King Roger Moore, who founded Orton—the grandest of the old Colonial homes.

Below old Orton light the river broadens to at least three miles, and here a squall struck the boat, and made her pitch and roll quite lively in the heavy swell.

"There," said the Captain, pointing to the western shore, "is one of the most interesting ruins in America. Beyond that fringe of timber, was Tryon's palace, which minute men from Brunswick and from Wilmington surrounded and demanded the surrender of the King's Commissoner—and mark you, this first overt act preceding the war of Revolu-

tion occurred ten years before the Declaration of American Independence; nine years before the battle of Lexington; and nearly eight years before the Boston Tea Party, of which so much is made in story books. The Boston men disguised themselves as Indians; but Ashe and Waddell scorned such subterfuge. After seizing the British warship's rowing barge, they placed it on wheels, and, having formed their men in marching order, with it moved in triumphal procession to Wilmington.

“The Boston incident is a famous one; but who has heard of this far more daring deed? Perhaps that lonely spot, which should be the Mecca of every lover of liberty, is unknown to many of our nearest neighbors.”

The words were scarcely uttered, when they were startled by a human cry coming from the direction of the further shore.

McMillan stepped out upon the slanting deck and holding to the upper rail, gazed anxiously into the darkness whence the cry had come. Sometimes the rolling vessel would almost pitch him into the boiling waters which threw up gleams of phosphorescent light, leaving a track of radiance for many miles astern, and then, the flying spray, ripped from the heaving water by the rushing bow, would shoot above the pilot house and drench him to the skin.

The incessant shrieking of the wind, the many noises of the splashing waves, the deep and thunderous roar of bellowing surf on Carolina Beach confused and troubled him. Meantime a sharp blast from the steamer's whistle had brought the mate up to the Captain's side.

“Did you hear a hail just now?”

“I did, sir,” answered Peter, “and it sounded like a syren whistle.”

“Impossible,” said Captain Harper; “more likely some poor cast-a-way. Hark! there it is again.”

Instantly reaching for the signal wire, he rang full stop, and as the steamer sank into the hollow troughs, he blew three quick and piercing blasts.

For several moments the steamer rose and fell upon the waves, and then there came borne on the howling wind an awful, agonizing shriek which brought McMillan to the wheelhouse—a look of terror in his face.

“On deck,” shouted the Captain.

“Aye, aye, sir,” came the answer from below.

“What sound was that?”

“We do not know, sir. It seemed to come from off the Sugar Loaf.”

“We cannot send assistance; our boat would never live in such a sea,” said Captain Harper to the mate. “Station your men at once with casting lines both fore and aft. Take your position well forward in the eyes, and hail me when you see the cause of this distress. McMillan, you can help me at the wheel if you will hold her steady while I look about.”

At once the orders were obeyed and every head was bent with eager gaze towards the old Colonial anchorage, where, strange to say, the prison ship had been moored far back in revolutionary times.

“What is the so-called Sugar Loaf?” McMillan asked.

“It is the highest elevation on the river banks,” said Captain Harper; “a steep and shining bluff of sand which can be seen for many miles. It was a noted Indian settlement in olden times.”

“Then it is possible,” McMillan said, “that some wild animal on shore has made the cry we heard.”

“It is a desert place,” replied the Captain; “there are no such wild creatures there. The sound we heard is on the water—there it comes again!”

Above the moaning wind, which came in fitful gusts and

died away like voices in the distance, there rose again that cry for help beginning with a shriek and ending with a wailing sound as of mortal agony.

“On deck there,” shouted Captain Harper—“what do you see?”

“We cannot make it out, sir,” responded Peter from his station. “I think we are drifting out of the channel, sir.”

Again three blasts came from the steamer’s whistle, and with her head towards the stake light No. 1, on Midnight shoal, the Captain gave the signal for dead slow ahead, which kept the vessel from the shoaling water dangerously near.

A repetition of the scream drew all attention toward the place, whence it seemed to come.

While Peter’s eyes were straining in the darkness, a hand was laid on his shoulder which made him start and utter a cry of terror.

He, turning, saw the Engineer, who shouted :

“Look yonder, man!—just off the weather bow!” And as he looked, the word was passed to others, and immediately all were striving for a better point of view.

The squall had ceased, but it left a heavy swell; the clouds were moving slowly in broken drifts; the stars came out and with their faint light made dimly visible the distant shore—now blotted out by passing shadows, and anon, revealed in vague and hazy outline.

Upon the troubled water, two cable lengths abeam, appeared an object like a boat surrounded by a phosphorescent glow above which played a pale and lambent light, which gradually approaching nearer, revealed an ancient rowing barge so foul with barnacles and slimy seaweed that Peter thought she might have been afloat a hundred years.

The Captain rubbed his eyes, and looked again. Then turning to McMillan, said: “You seem to be acquainted



THE ENGINEER.

with supernatural things ; for all the river ghosts have come with you to-night. There's something wierd about that thing, and I am not inclined to wait."

"They must be mortal men in trouble," he replied, "for spirits could not howl like that."

"There comes that awful hail again," said Captain Harper, now thoroughly excited ; "and it is not from yonder object ; it seems to permeate the air."

"On deck, there !"

"Aye, aye, sir," said Peter Jorgensen.

"Stand by and throw that barge a line."

An inarticulate reply denoted Peter's fright. The barge was now a cable's length away. There was no sound of oars ; but in a minute more the frightened people on the Wilmington beheld two tall, gaunt, human forms, in tattered Highland dress, from which emerged their bare and boney legs in heavy chains, extending to their scarred and bloody wrists. As the battered hulk with its strange occupants drew nearer, McMillan saw depicted in their sad and weary faces the deep-marked lineaments of settled disappointment and distress. Their hands uplifted in beseeching attitude, their worn and yearning faces, recalled to his excited mind the story of the prison ship with all its scenes of cruelty and woe.

For several minutes—which seem hours to those on board—the Captain stood awe stricken at the sight, but suddenly, with trembling voice, he shouted to the mate. "Stand by and heave those men a line."

As Peter came with shaking limbs, the barge was lifted on a swelling wave which hurled it almost to his arms ; and as he heaved the rope across the rotten hulk, the fabric and its gruesome, voiceless crew was gone. All eyes were turned upon the wierd, uncanny sight, and when the strange thing melted into the gloomy shadows of the night, the

hopeless mystery appalled and silenced every one on board.

Without a word the course was laid again, and hardly had the ship resumed her speed, when from the darkness just ahead came once again that shrieking, wailing sound. Again the boat was put half speed, as Peter shouted, "Starboard ! Hard-a-starboard, sir ; we are running down a wreck."

The Captain quickly turned the helm and narrowly escaped collision with a mass upon the waves which proved to be a vessel bottom up—to which was clinging two poor, wretched seamen, disabled and exhausted with the cold.

A cheerful hail assured the men of coming safety as Captain Harper, with dexterous hand, steered near enough to pass a line by which the wretched creatures came on board.

As Peter held his lantern to the face of one of the rescued seamen who had fainted on the deck, he raised both hands and shrieked to the Captain : " This is the man who came on board when we were run ashore ? "

The skipper and McMillan quickly scanned the stranger's face, which proved the accuracy of Jorgensen's description.

" How could this be ? " said Captain Harper.

" His spirit was abroad in search of help," replied McMillan. " I've read and heard of similar phenomena."

" Then how do you explain the phantom of the barge ? "

" I dinna ken," replied the Scotsman, and then was silent.

The cast-a-ways were promptly warmed and fed, and then they told a thrilling story of distress. Their vessel was a schooner bound from Nassau for a Northern port, when the gale had wrecked them off the coast. Bearing up for Wilmington, they fell into a heavy sea which shifted their scant ballast and rolled the vessel on beam ends.

In peril of their lives, the crew had worked hard to cut away the broken spars and rigging ; but all their efforts to

right the vessel failed. The captain, mate and three men of the crew were washed away; the other two clung to the hulk, which drifted on the rising tide into the river—an extraordinary incident, but not unparalleled. The two survivors though growing weaker from exposure every hour, had continued to shout together in hope of rescue from the shore.

When asked if they had seen the *Wilmington* before, one said he had been partly unconscious for a time and thought he saw a steamer coming to their aid; but he could not for a moment recall the scene described by Peter Jorgensen.

Once more the steamer made her way towards her destination. At Federal Point they saw the first faint streaks of early dawn; and while McMillan's mind dwelt on the sacred story of lowly Bethlehem in the far-off East, the brightness of the morning star grew paler in the radiance of the dawning Christmas day.

The Southport wharf was reached at last; the boat was berthed and moored in silence. So hushed and beautiful, the day appeared after the terrors of the dreadful night; and as the weary toilers separated for their holiday, their hearts were full of thankfulness.

As Captain Harper trudged through crunching snow and reached the higher level of Fort Johnston of Colonial times, he turned at the gateway of the ancient garrison to gaze upon a scene of loveliness. Below the sleeping, snow-bound village lay Battery Island, shimmering in the morning glory like a field of floating ice, while sunbeams danced along the rippling waters of the bay, reflecting rainbow tints upon the ice-clad spars of anchored vessels outward bound.

Around Cape Fear, old Neptune's racers rushed with crested manes, ever charging and reforming for the fray. Above it all, secure, serene and beautiful, old Bald Head Light House pierced the blue, amidst a wilderness of snow.

Beyond Smith's Island rose the ocean's murmur like the dreamy roaring of a sea-shell to the listening ear, while far away upon the heaving bosom of the sea, the bell-buoy rocked and rang in ceaseless harmony. A little storm-tossed coaster neared the wharf and lowered her glistening sails, while chuckling blocks gave out a pleasant sound. Then puny waves appeared, and seemed to whisper, as they gently kissed the welcome shore.

Along the shining beach from Caswell to Fort Fisher the tossing breakers rose and fell in the sheen of the rising sun, and from the deeps the mystic voices of the sea joined in the song of the angels. "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will to men."

Before the Harper cottage gate a robin sang his joyous note, and when the Captain bent above the cradle of his motherless boy, the sleeping baby stirred and smiled; perhaps he too, had heard the angels in the sky.



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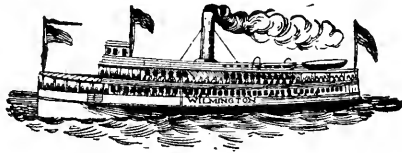
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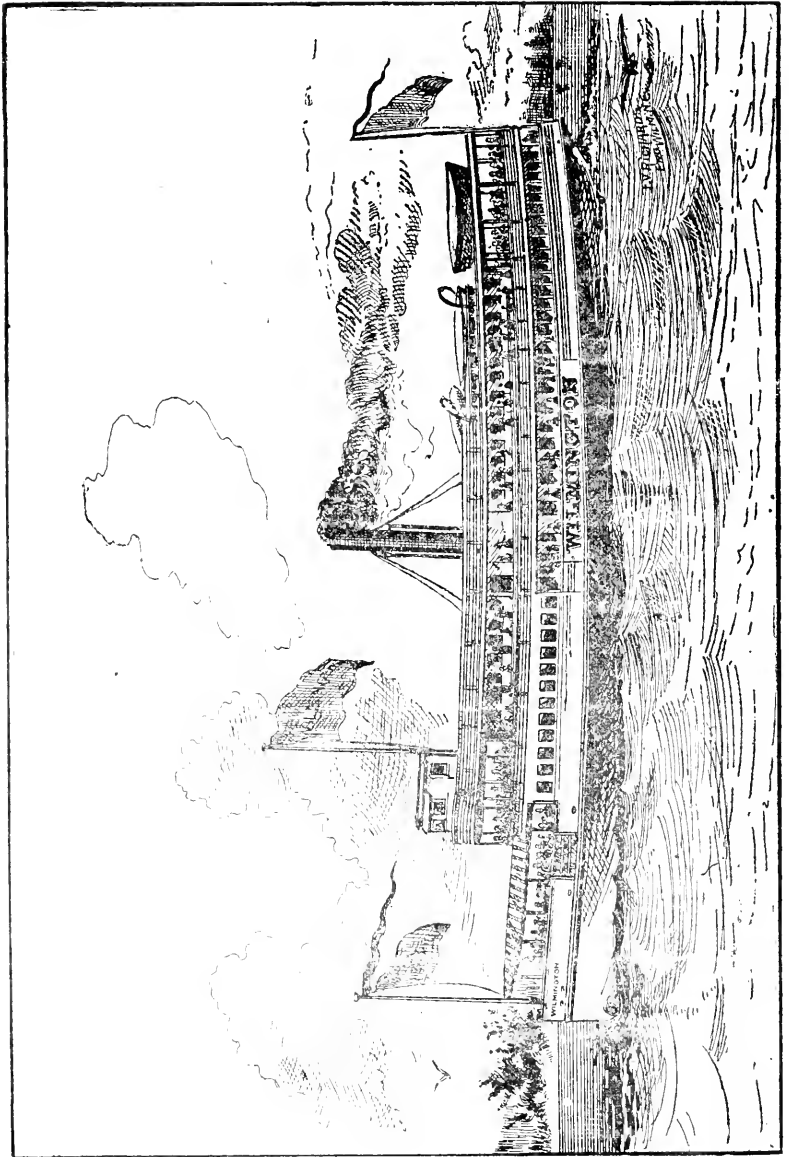
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