

The True Solution of the Mystery Surrounding the Disappearance of the Crew of the Brig Marie Celeste

Papers Left in Care of A. Howard Linford, M. A., Magdalen College, Oxford, by Abel Fosdyk, an Old Servant, Explain Mystery for Which Many Solutions Have Been Advanced by Sailors and Writers

In the autumn of 1872 a brig called the "Marie Celeste" left New York for Genoa. Several weeks passed; the owners received a notice from the United States consul at Gibraltar as follows: "The American brig Marie Celeste of New York was brought into this port by the British barque Dei Gratia, Marie Celeste picked up on high seas on December 5th abandoned. Brig in perfect condition but was taken possession of by admiralty crew as a derelict. Fate of crew unknown."

The following article explains the mystery: "It was in the early autumn of 1872 that the Mary Celeste sailed out of New York for Europe. She was a smart brigantine as one could wish to see, and looked as new as if she had just come out of the maker's hands. We were bound for Genoa with a cargo of spirits, and I think I might say that no boat of her size—about six hundred tons—got across the Atlantic that autumn with as little damage as the Mary Celeste. It was not only the exterior that was good. Everyone on board found her to be a first class vessel. The light was better by day and at night, there seemed more ventilation, and the bunks were wider and longer than usual, which to a tall man like myself, was a very pleasant discovery. In fact, if only the men in the fo'c'sle had had their instincts in the matter of the light, they would have been almost as good as being in the cabin itself. Curiously, I had intended this to be my last voyage in her, though not owing to the reasons which necessitated my secreting myself later, but because my sister—my only relative—was just back, and I did not wish to return to America for some time. I had also other and more private reasons.

The party aboard consisted of ten men besides the captain and mate, and, in addition, we carried two passengers in the cabin—viz, the captain's wife, Mrs. Briggs, and "Baby," their little girl. Though well beyond those years which would have justified the name, she never went by any other, so far as I can remember. More over, she saved me a rather nice mother did a portrait of herself taken when she was two years old, and so natural did it seem to think of her as "Baby" that that is the only name written on the back of the picture by myself. I fancy Baby was about seven or eight years old, and as she was a bright and vivacious flower as ever blew in the wind or basked in the sunny plains of life, was indirectly the cause of our disaster. She gave a few words of description of her.

Rather square-built and short, she had the appearance of a sturdy girl, but yet there was a look of delicacy in her pale face which was only relieved by a little colour after fits of coughing. She had eyes that seemed to describe her mother used to call them "green," but though I should not have used that word, yet I can find no better—they were large and blue, with long lashes. Her hair was long but not very curly, and when the sun shone on it there was a burnished or chestnut look in it which was a dash of red. I once called her "Carrots," and was in marked disgrace for several hours. She wore usually a dark blue jersey and short frock, and like most of the little girls, she wore short socks and no stockings. She had plump little legs and rather large feet. When the weather in any way admitted of it, she would be on deck crooning little songs or talking to the crew. I think it was her favourite, as I used to tell her stories as I did my work. But, unfortunately, the weather was usually too bad for her to be up much.

The crew were, in the main, following taking the fo'c'sle as a starting point; Joe, who was ship's carpenter, had the bunk above me, and Robin, so-called, I believe, because he was a curious fellow, was in the next to me, whilst Fred and Ginger—whose real name, I fancy, was Odell—and the boy opposite side. In the cross-bunks there was Darcy, a nigger youth, who, I rather think, was a stowaway. At any rate, I quite remember the captain, Briggs, and I, who evidently was under the impression we were thirteen on board, whereas we were fourteen, saying to the man at the door (I think it was the older Williamson): "If I hear any more nonsense about thirteen being on board, I'll jolly well knock your head off, and then I shall knock your head off."

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tween the sides and the ship a slanting fall of water was put on each side. Further, a step was put below, and on the top a small barrel was placed for a sea. This was always called "Baby's quarter-deck." Here she would sit and croon little songs, or walk to and fro and call out: "Ship on the port-bow." This was always an expression I ever heard her use, and she used it quite irrespective of any ship being visible or not.

The second incident occurred when the coming upon what looked at first like a dead whale. As we approached this mysterious object the mate saw through the glasses that there were men on it, and came to the conclusion, which subsequent events proved to be right, that it was a ship turned turtle. As we approached we could see three men on her; it was not until we were alongside that we saw a fourth, or nearly so, and it was apparent that one man was dead, and even decomposed, which made us think the weather had been calmer in the water. After several tides. The second and third proved to be dead, though apparently only recently, but the fourth man was suddenly seized in the region of an easy matter to get him on board, but that proved far from being the case. We heaved to and lowered the boat, but then a difficulty presented itself. The ship's bottom was one mass of barnacles, and it stood some time before we could get the boat on top and crawled along to the mate. He was nearly dead, and could do nothing for himself. A rope was fastened under his armpits, and very slowly and gingerly the mate tried to move him.

It was some time before he discovered that another rope was fastened round his waist and hidden by a mass of seaweed. This was a relief, and I should believe it, only they were so much spread about that I should have thought it impossible to find them. I should very much like to know what wonderful thing happened that night, and if anybody else saw it besides our own crew.

When at last he was got on board he was taken below and put into blankets and a little rum poured over his head. He was about four o'clock in the afternoon, and I heard no more of him till I took some supper down into the cabin. As, however, I had heard that he was still alive, but had not spoken. In the morning he was in the same condition, but I had once seemed to see him, though he realized that there was someone there. All that day he still hung on to life, but seemed unable to get up.

In the evening the captain's wife came up and said she had been trying for a long while to get him to give his name, and she had not succeeded, and after a little while had added "Bristol." It was, at that time, as I have said, that he hoped for, but, alas! it was destined to be all the information that we were ever to get, for in the night he slipped his cable and went to his long home.

On the following day we carried his body up on deck and quietly committed it to the sea. He had not spoken a word since he had been taken down a few hours before. So did poor Ebenezer of Bristol, and I think it is interesting to know his surname for we assumed Ebenezer to be his Christian name—nor the name of the ship, as we found in such melancholy plight.

Those that go down to the sea in ships must needs see strange sights, and few are strange to those who have been in the sea of an unknown man who had come into our lives only to pass out again. But, unfortunately, had known how soon they, too, would go down into those unknown depths where no one will ever see them, and they might, perhaps, have been less inclined to frivolity and more to sober contemplation.

"What!" shouted the captain; "you mean to say a man can't swim in his clothes?" That remark was repeated by the captain partly in answer to the mate's remarks and partly in talking to himself for several minutes, somewhat after the following style: "Not an ordinary man can't," repeated the mate. "A man—can't—swim—in—his—clothes—hey?" "You mustn't judge by yourself; you're an exceptional swimmer. There aren't many that can swim like you." "So—a—man—can't—swim—in—his—clothes—hey?" "You know what I mean—generally speaking, a person who can swim in the ordinary way, or—"

"A—man—can't—swim—in—his—clothes—hey?" "Oh, well, it's no use my saying anything—I'm sure I never meant an offence." "Fancy that now—a man can't swim in his clothes!" "Oh, Ben, dear," said Mrs. Briggs, "do say something else." "A man can't swim in his clothes," said Mrs. Briggs, trying to change the subject, "get on with your breakfast, there's a dear. Isn't there enough sugar in the porridge?" "Indeed, if I remember right, the porridge was as yet hot for her to have tasted it—Mrs. Briggs put another spoonful of sugar in it."

"A man can't swim in his clothes, hey?" "Well, never mind about that now, dear, come and have your breakfast. I'll get it ready for you." "I'll get it ready for you," said Mrs. Briggs, as if deliberately, as if, as she said, "I'm going to—have—my—breakfast—yet."

"Not going to have your breakfast? Stuff and nonsense!" "I'm not going to have my breakfast yet." "Why not, pray?" "I'm going to have a swim in my clothes, and I don't want to get wet." "You're not—don't you think it?" "Oh, aren't I? We shall see about that."

"What are you taking on so about?" said the mate. "I didn't mean you. We all know you can do anything in the water." "But neither fatter nor calmer nor angrier words had the least effect, and so Mrs. Briggs tried the one great woman's argument—tears.

"Sobering," she pointed out that he was not well—that she was not well and he knew she wasn't well—that he didn't think of her a bit—that he was going to get on with his work, and to go and do silly things like that. "That'll do, that'll do," said the captain.

"Besides," put in the mate, "you've got on a good suit of clothes. Where's the sense in spoiling them? If it had been me it wouldn't have mattered, but to spoil 'em for the sake of these slops overboard when we get in." "It was an unfortunate sentence." "Very well—now look here, Harry," said the captain, "I'll give you a new suit if I don't get lost in five minutes. Now, that's fair, isn't it? I'm sure you are thinking of doing it," said the mate, who, I could see, was most anxious to prevent such folly.

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who, clasped hold of me, and we went down, down, down, locked in each other's embrace, turning over and over through the cold, gurgling water. I strained and struggled, pulled, tugged, kicked, and bit; I bent back and tried with all my might to rid myself of the incubus which clutched me. At last I got my left arm at full length against the forehead of my enemy, and in utter desperation—I can only plead that as my exertions failed, I turned with all my might my thumb into his eye. Instantly his clasp relaxed—but to what good? How could I ever regain the surface—nearly bursting, as I already was, for want of breath?

"Oh! at last the air! Oh, that gasp, what it was to me! I have often heard it said that we never know the value of a thing till we have lost it. I know it now. Who could ever realize that a breath of God's pure air could mean so much to anyone? But it was not for long; almost immediately my head went under again. I quickly struggled up, coughing, choking, panting, and realized that the mate had said, that it is not easy to swim in one's clothes.

I determined to get on my back and see if I could not regulate my breathing. The kidneys began to clog up, get sluggish and filter or strain out only a part of the poisonous waste matter and uric acid, all the rest remains in the blood and circulates through the system, where it lodges in the joints and muscles, and causes all the trouble.

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