

## The Loss of the Birkenhead

(Note on the frontispiece)

THE Birkenhead was an English transport steamer which was wrecked near the Cape of Good Hope in 1852. As all could not be saved, the women and children were put into the boats, while five hundred officers and men standing in the presence of death as calmly as on parade ground went down with the ship. It is said that the King of Prussia at that time caused the splendid story of iron discipline and perfect duty to be read aloud at the head of every regiment in his kingdom.

The frontispiece illustrating this event was painted by the British artist, Thomas M. Hemy, whose companion picture, "The Burning of the Kent", an East Indiaman, is also well known.

In the following poem, supposed to be written by one of the soldiers on board the Birkenhead, Sir Francis Hastings Doyle has commemorated British unflinching adherence to duty, which, thank God, is still characteristic of our race, as recent events gloriously testify.

Right on our flank the crimson sun went down;  
The deep sea rolled around in dark repose;  
When, like the wild shriek from some captured town,  
A cry of women rose.

The stout ship Birkenhead lay hard and fast,  
Caught without hope upon a hidden rock;  
Her timbers thrilled as nerves, when through them passed  
The spirit of that shock.

And ever like base cowards, who leave their ranks  
In danger's hour, before the rush of steel,  
Drifted away, disorderly, the planks  
From underneath her keel.

Confusion spread, for, though the coast seemed near,  
Sharks hovered thick along that white sea-brink.  
The boats could hold—not all—and it was clear  
She was about to sink.

"Out with those boats and let us haste away,"  
Cried one, "ere yet yon sea the bark devours."  
The man thus clamoring was, I scarce need say,  
No officer of ours.

Our English hearts beat true; we would not stir;  
The base appeal we heard, but heeded not;  
On land, on sea, we had our colours, sir,  
To keep without a spot!