

THE LOSS OF THE "ROYAL GEORGE."

(By James Payne, in Harper's Handy Series.)

In a letter which Miss Martineau once showed me, from a relative of hers, long dead, addressed to her great-niece from Southsea, near Portsmouth, and dated August 9, 1782, there occurred this singular passage:

"The day is calm and pleasant, and as I sit at the open window, the great vessel in the offing, betwixt me and the Fair Island" (the Isle of Wight used to be so called), "seems to sway not a hand-breadth, nor to flutter a single pennant." Then, in a trembling hand, but still the same, was added: "A dreadful thing has happened. When I had written that beginning of my letter, Dorothy, I looked again southward; the sea was waveless as before, and the Fair Island sparkled in the sun, but betwixt us and it I saw no trace of the great three-decker. I thought my brain had gone wrong, and rang the bell for Agnes; but when she too could see nothing of her, a terrible apprehension took hold of me; and when the alarm-guns from the fort began to thunder, I knew the vessel had gone down. I hear near a thousand men were aboard of her."

This was the famous "wreck of the 'Royal George,'" immortalized by the verse of Cowper. She was a ship of one hundred guns, carrying brass 24-pounders on her main deck, brass 32-pounders on her middle deck, and iron 32-pounders on her lower deck. Her lanterns were so large that the men used to enter them to clean them. She had six months' provisions on board, and many tons of shot. The blue flag of the "brave Kempenfelt" was flying at her mizzen, and in two days she was to leave Spithead to join the fleet in the Mediterranean.

So sudden and unexpected a catastrophe was never before heard of in nautical annals; but the cause of it is common enough. It arose from the obstinacy and fool-hardiness of the lieutenant of the watch. These caused the death of some eight hundred human beings. It is not necessary to mention his name; indeed, the sailor from whose personal narrative I compile the story, and who had probably just joined the ship, did not know his name, though of course it could be discovered easily enough. "He was, if I remember right," hesays, "the third lieutenant, a good-sized man between thirty and forty. Fortunately for himself, perhaps, he was drowned with the rest."

The accident arose through the heeling over of the ship. It was necessary to lay her on her side to get at the water-cock, situated in that part of the hold called the well, in order to replace it by a new one. The operation was begun at eight o'clock in the morning. The ship at that time was full of Jews, women, and people selling all sorts of things, as was usual on the eve of a long voyage. The last lighter, with rum on board, had just come alongside, and was lashed to the larboard side of the vessel and the men were piped to clear her, and stow the rum in the hold. Though the water was almost level with the port-holes through which the larboard guns were run out, no danger seems at first to have been apprehended. The sea dashed in with every wave, and disturbed the mice in the lower deck, and the men amused themselves with hunting them in the water. "There was a rare game going on," are the words of the narrator.

By nine o'clock the weight of the rum barrels and of the sea water brought the larboard port-holes still lower, and the carpenter applied to the third lieutenant to

give orders to "right ship, as she could not bear it." But the lieutenant gave him a very short answer. The captain—Captain Waghorn—was on board, and also the admiral, but admirals and captains are not consulted in such matters. The lives of those at sea, as of those of land, are mainly in the hands of subordinates. In a very short time the carpenter repeated his warning, and the lieutenant answered, "Sir, if you can manage the ship better than I can, you had better take the command." In a minute or two afterward, it is true, the fool-hardy officer ordered the drummer to be called to beat to right ship, but it was then too late. There was not time to beat his drum, or even time to get it. "Let us try," said our sailor to the lieutenant of his gun, "to house our gun out without waiting for the drum, as it will help to right the ship." They pushed the gun, but it ran back on them, and they could not start it. Then I cried, "Ned, the ship is sinking, jump out at the port-hole!" He did so, but I believe he was drowned, for I never saw him again. I followed him. I saw the port-holes as full of heads as they could cram, trying to get out.

What a picture! Imagine all those poor fellows struggling to escape through a space not large enough for one tenth of them, up an incline as steep as the peaked roof of a house, and with a hungry sea rushing in behind them! Above all, think of the poor women! Our sailor holding on to the best-bower anchor, which hung above the port, seizes hold of one, and drags her out, but at that moment the draught of air from between-decks, caused by the sinking of the ship, blows him off his feet. Then the huge mass goes down, and draws him down with it. He tries to swim, but cannot "though I plunged as hard as I could with both hands and feet; but when the ship touched bottom, the water boiled up a good deal, and I felt that I could swim, and began to rise." So, even if a vessel with a hundred guns goes down and takes you or me with her, there is some use, you see, in having learned to swim. When he comes to the surface he hears—what a sound at such a moment!—the cannons ashore firing their signals of distress, but he can see nothing. His face is covered with tar, a barrel of tar having been staved in as the ship went down, and its contents spread over the water. He strikes it away from his eyes as well as he can, and looks about him.

The fore, main, and mizzen tops of the huge ship were all above water, and he climbs up into comparative safety. In the shrouds of the mizzen-top he finds the admiral's baker, and sees the woman he has just pulled out of the port-hole rolling by. He seizes her once more, and hangs her head over one of the ratlines of the mizzen-shrouds, like clothes to dry, which is the best he can do for her; but a surf comes and knocks her backward, and "away she went, rolling over and over." Strangely enough, the poor creature is saved after all by the boat of a frigate lying at Spithead, whose captain has just put off to the rescue. "I must look to those who are in more danger than you, my lad," he sings out to our sailor, as he goes by.

"Ay, ay, sir," is the reply: "I am safely moored enough."

The captain of the "Royal George," though, strange to say, he could not swim, was picked up alive. But out of nearly a thousand men, which was the ship's complement, although some were on leave, and sixty marines had gone ashore that very morning, only a very few were saved: Government allowed five pounds to them for the loss of their things. "I saw the list, and there were but seventy-five."

For several days afterward bodies would

suddenly come up to the surface at the spot where the ship had sank, "forty and fifty at a time. The watermen made a good thing of it; they would take from the men their bukles, money, and watches; then making fast a rope to their heels, would tow them to land."

The poet who sings of the calamity tells us "no tempest gave the shock," and indeed there was scarcely any breeze at all. The ship was anchored, and had not even a stitch of canvas on to keep her steady.

Sixty years afterwards the interest of this terrible event had by no means died away, and I will remember, as a boy, going on board the ship that was stationed above the scene of the calamity, to see the divers who were still employed upon the wreck. The aspiration of the poet,

Weigh the vessel up,
Once dreading by her foes,

was never realized; but almost everything was taken out of her; and more fancy articles—paper-knives, work-boxes, &c.—affirmed to have been made from her timbers, were sold, I am afraid, than the "Royal George," big as she was, could ever have furnished. At our seaside places of resort you may purchase them even now at bazars—old fashioned articles, with this tomb-like inscription on them: "This desk" (or letter-weight, or paper knife) "was made out of the wood of the 'Royal George,' sunk off Spithead in 1782, with eight hundred of her crew."

THE FISHERMAN AND HIS WIFE.

There was once a fisherman who lived with his wife in a ditch, close by the seaside. The fisherman used to go out all day long a fishing, and one day, as he sat on the shore with his rod, looking at the shining water and watching his line, all on a sudden his float was dragged away deep under the sea; and in drawing it up he pulled a great fish out of the water. The fish said to him, "Pray let me live: I am not a real fish; I am an enchanted prince, put me in the water again, and let me go." "Oh," said the man, "you need not make so many words about the matter; I wish to have nothing to do with a fish that can talk; so swim away as soon as you please." Then he put him back into the water, and the fish darted straight down to the bottom, and left a long streak of blood behind him.

When the fisherman went home to his wife in the ditch, he told her how he had caught a great fish, and how it had told him it was an enchanted prince, and that on hearing it speak he had let it go again. "Did you not ask it for anything?" said the wife. "No," said the man, "what should I ask for?" "Ah!" said the wife, "we live very miserably here in this nasty, stinking ditch, do go back and tell the fish we want a little cottage."

The fisherman did not much like the business; however, he went to the sea, and when he came there the water looked all yellow and green. And he stood at the water's edge, and said,

O man of the sea!
Come listen to me,

For Alice my wife,
The plague of my life,
Hath sent me to beg a boon of thee?"

Then the fish came swimming to him and said, "Well, what does she want?" "Ah!" answered the fisherman, "my wife says that when I had caught you, I ought to have asked you for something before I let you go again; she does not like living any longer in the ditch, and wants a little cottage." "Go home, then," said the fish, "she is in the cottage already." So the man went home, and saw his wife standing at the door of a

cottage. "Come in, come in," said she, "is not this much better than the ditch?" And there was a parlor, and a bed-chamber, and a kitchen, and behind the cottage there was a little garden with all sorts of flowers and fruits, and a courtyard full of ducks and chickens. "Ah!" said the fisherman, "how happily we shall live!" "We will try to do so at least," said his wife.

Everything went right for a week or two, and then Dame Alice said, "Husband, there is not room enough in this cottage, the courtyard and garden are a great deal too small; I should like to have a large stone castle to live in; so go to the fish again, and tell him to give us a castle." "Wife," said the fisherman, "I don't like to go to him again, for perhaps he will be angry; we ought to be content with the cottage." "Nonsense!" said the wife, "he will do it very willingly; go along and try."

The fisherman went; but his heart was very heavy; and when he came to the sea it looked blue and gloomy, though it was quite calm, and he went close to it, and said,

O man of the sea!
Come listen to me,

For Alice my wife,
The plague of my life,

Hath sent me to beg a boon of thee?"

"Well, what does she want now?" said the fish. "Ah!" said the man very sorrowfully, "my wife wants to live in a stone castle." "Go home then," said the fish, "she is standing at the door of it already." So away went the fisherman, and found his wife standing before a great castle. "See," said she, "is not this grand?" with that they went into the castle together, and found a great many servants there, and the rooms all richly furnished and full of golden chairs and tables; and behind the castle was a garden, and a wood half a mile long, full of sheep, and goat, and hares, and deer; and in the courtyard were stable and cow-houses.

"Well!" said the man, "now will we live contented and happy in this beautiful castle for the rest of our lives." "Perhaps we may," said the wife; "but let us consider and sleep upon it before we make up our minds: so they went to bed."

The next morning, when Dame Alice awoke, it was broad daylight, and she joggled the fisherman with her elbow, and said, "get up, husband, and bestir yourself, for we must be king of all the land." "Wife, wife," said the man, "why should we wish to be king? I will not be king." "Then I will," said Alice. "But, wife," answered the fisherman, "how can you be king? the fish cannot make you king." "Husband," said she, "say no more about it, but go and try; I will be king!" So the man went away, quite sorrowful to think that his wife should want to be king. The sea looked a dark-grey color, and was covered with foam as he cried out,

O man of the sea!
Come listen to me,

For Alice my wife,
The plague of my life,

Hath sent me to beg a boon of thee!"

"Well, what would she have now?" said the fish. "Alas!" said the man, "my wife wants to be king."

"Go home," said the fish; "she is king already."

Then the fisherman went home; and as he came close to the palace, he saw a troop of soldiers, and heard the sound of drums and trumpets; and when he entered in, he saw his wife sitting on a high throne of gold and diamonds, with a golden crown upon her head; and on each side of her stood six beautiful maidens, each a head taller than the other.

"Well, wife," said the fisherman, "are you king?"