

## In the Days of Our Sailing Fleet

68 MEN AFLOAT ON A PAN OF ICE IN MID-OCEAN

(H. F. SHORTIS)

I am sure that there is nothing more pleasure to our thousands of exiled fellow-countrymen in the United States and Canada than the perusal through the columns of the Telegram of accounts of the adventures of daring, adventures, hardships and miraculous escapes of our sailors in the days long past and gone, when they prosecuted our great industry in the square-riggers in the fifties, sixties and seventies of the past century. The days of our great sailing fleet were indeed the most interesting, romantic, and heroic periods in the annals of our country, and I am sure that the patriotic old Evening Telegram will be a welcome visitor in the homes of the Newfoundlanders—especially during the Feast of Christmas. Thousands of our countrymen are members of the various Newfoundland Clubs in Boston, New York and the other cities of the great Republic, as well as in Canada, and they eagerly look out for the arrival of the Home Papers, the contents of which will remind them of the happy days they spent in the land of their Birth. These Clubs are the means of keeping our fellow-countrymen in touch with each other, of passing many happy hours in re-telling old remembrances and reminiscences of the past. There are several of these Clubs in Boston alone, and they are composed of men, many old acquaintances of my own, for whom I have always had the highest respect. They are banded together for a good and noble purpose. The aim and object of their community is for the uplifting of the moral status of each other, and Associations with this end in view must be recognized as a body of gentlemen. For the real definition of the word—gentleman—must be sought for in the moral and intellectual standing of the individual rather than in the accident of birth or social distinction. Many of them, I may say, are men to whom the re-creating of the prowess and daring of our forefathers

WILL BE INTENSELY INTERESTING.

and I now propose to relate acts of heroism and courage performed by the hardy Newfoundland sealer in generations gone by. The traditions of the past are the glorious heritage of the Newfoundlander. All history teaches us that the greatest deeds performed by the human race were the outcome of a spirit of emulation, and a desire to imitate the actions of generations which have gone before. Such institutions in Boston amongst our countrymen are doing good work for their descendants in that city, New York and elsewhere. They are encouraging a taste for literature and the highest ideals, and, above all, they are inculcating into the minds of their children, and their grandchildren,

dren, a love for the Old Home, its people and its history, which they can look back to with pride, and enable them to hold up their heads with the greatest in the land of their adoption as being scions of that good old stock of English, Irish and Scottish progenitors, who were reckoned as second to none on this side of the Atlantic, or the other side.

The outposts literally teem with stories of adventure of all matters of interest relating to our country, and I consider that whilst it may be all very well to know what the Gauls, Romans, the Egyptians and Phoenicians, Spartans and Macedonians, etc., were doing and saying a few thousand years ago, it would be far more to our advantage, and to those who come after us, if we were to devote more attention to the glorious career, the social customs of our people, their trials and hardships, trade and commerce, etc., which were part and parcel of their every day life, and give outsiders some idea of it.

**THE GRAND OLD RACE** of men and women from which we sprung. History records the adventurous spirit which actuated the Norsemen in their voyages North, South, East and West in centuries gone by, but these intrepid adventurers chose their own time at which to start on their voyages of discovery or commercial enterprise. On the other hand, our Vikings and their hardy and intrepid crews, if I may use the expression, actually waded through the water from St. John's on the South to Battle Harbor on the North, removing the great pans of ice with their feet as they clung to the "rams," which were erected on the bows of their brigs, brigantines and schooners in the shape of a triangle, and thus overcame the power and force of the Arctic current and the ice-floes of the Hoods and Harps. Those great monsters of the Arctic waters, the icebergs—those sources of menace and terror to the navigators of all nations were utilized by our hardy fishermen and sealers as a means of safety. They fearlessly ran their little vessels towards them, and moored them to leeward, thus avoiding being carried away out of their course by the running ice. Mythology tells us that the argosies of ancient Greece went in search of the Golden Fleece, yet leaves it to our imagination to know what became of them; but, there is no doubt at all about our argosies going in search of the Golden Fleece, and in returning with it also, in the shape of thousands of "pelts" of Hoods and Harps, which indeed prove a Golden Fleece to the hardy toilers, and which occurs annually, founded not upon Mythology, but actual fact and ocular demonstration.

And now I will give a brief account of the terrible experience of a New-

foundland crew at the seal-fishery in the good brigantine "Renfrew" in the Spring of 1888. The story is authentic as far as it goes, as it was procured from the lips of a venerable old fisherman who was one of the crew of that ship in the above year.

## LOSS OF BRIGANTINE "RENFREW."

On the 28th of February, 1888, skipper Darius Blandford sailed for the icefields in the brigantine "Renfrew," which carried a maltopsail, with a crew of 68 men, and on the 19th March, 200 miles off the Labrador coast, she became crushed in the ice. The crew managed to save some provisions and a sail which they utilized as a covering or camp while on the ice, where they remained for eleven days and nights before being rescued.

## AFLOAT ON A PAN.

When they woke up in the morning there was not a pan of ice to be seen except the one on which they were camped. Such is the effect of the Arctic current on a field of ice very often. What a condition for 68 men to be placed! What awful anxiety and suspense they must have undergone! Picture! readers of the Telegram, 68 men 200 miles off the Labrador coast on a single pan of ice on the 31st March! On April 1st, the schooner "Argo," Master, Mow, in sight, and shortly afterwards the splendid brig "Confederate," Capt. Thomas Green, of Harbor Grace. I remember the "Confederate." She was built in Prince Edward Island, was a beautiful model, and as strong as wood and iron could make her. She was about 168 tons. The "Confederate" was lost in 1895. She left Harbor Grace on the 8th January with a load of cod oil for Bristol, Munden Allan, master. She had a hard time and was knocked about for about fifty (50) days, when about 200 miles off the coast of Ireland she was sighted by the Anchor Line steamer "Concordia" in distress, with flag flying Union Jack down. Another steamer of the same line was some days overdue, and the captain of the "Concordia" was ordered to steer northerly to have a look out for her, and he sighted the "Confederate." He sent his first officer on board, but he returned saying that although the "Confederate's" decks were awash, and no bulwarks left, Captain Allan said he would remain on his ship, if the steamer could provide him with water and provisions, as he had lost all his water, and his provisions were spoiled. The first officer brought such a report of the condition of the "Confederate" that the Captain of the "Concordia" sent him again, and recommended Capt. Allan to abandon as another gale was rising fast. This was the last of the "Confederate," and some of her cargo was washed ashore on the coast of Ireland.

I lost all interest in the "Confederate" after she had been sighted by a brigantine. It was a pleasure to look at her when she was a brig, and kept in such order by Capt. Tom Greene that she almost rivalled the "Petunia" when sailing out of Tessler's and commanded by the veteran Capt. Charles Nicholas. Part of the "Renfrew's" crew was taken on board the "Confederate," and the greater part on board the "Argo." But their misfortunes by no means had ceased, as two days after the "Argo" went to the bottom of the sea.

## SHIPWRECK NO. 3.

Shortly after another vessel came to the rescue, but I do not know her name. The skipper's name was Thos. Osmond, and he took the crew on board. Very shortly after boarding this vessel she also went to the bottom, which makes shipwreck No. 3, and leaves three crews on the ice.

## MAROONED ON GREY ISLAND.

After some time they managed to land on one of the Grey Islands, and it was then their real hardship commenced, having to travel all day and part of the night through snow to find a place of shelter. Some of the men became exhausted and gave up all hope. A number travelled on in the darkness, barely averting a terrible catastrophe by walking, in the dark, to the very edge of a precipice. After some time on the Grey Islands, the first named crew were taken off by Capt. Winsor in the brigantine "Billow," which also was crushed in the ice so badly that the crew had to leave her on two occasions and take to the boats, but finally, after they had managed to make some repairs to keep her afloat until the 9th of May, they reached Greenspond safely.

## FURTHER DETAILS.

There are many other details of this eventful voyage which would read like a romance, only I know of many instances in which our hardy sealers have conquered all difficulties and come out alright. But the telling of such would scarcely be credited by an outsider, and yet the Newfoundland sealer, after such terrible adventures, would speak of his experience as if it were all in the day's work. Our own people can readily imagine the terrible plight in which the crew of the "Renfrew" found themselves. For a ship's crew to be shipwrecked three times in the one voyage, is, I am safe to say, unprecedented in the annals of our country. The "Renfrew" was about 80 miles off Round Hill Islands, Labrador, when the gale from the north struck her. They had to run the vessel into the ice for shelter on the 19th March. The heavy pressure of ice cut under the vessel, took away the keel, and the ship filled with water. They then got out boats, food, sails by getting on the yardarm and cutting away the lanyards, when the canvas blew off on the ice.

## BRIG "CONFEDERATE" TO THE RESCUE.

After a few days they sighted a vessel about 5 miles to the West, which of the men travelled over the ice and got on board the "Confederate." The rest of the crew remained on the ice. The crew walked away from the "camp" on the ice for two or three miles when the weather would permit.

## LOSE THEIR MOLASSES.

Everything went along fairly well, under the circumstances, until one night the pan "rafted," which made every man jump to his feet, when they found the head burst out of the molasses puncheon, which put them on a molasses allowance. After thirteen days they saw a small vessel about six miles to the Northwest, so they took to their boats or punts, and boarded her—the "Argo," Captain Mason. The crew was divided, some going on board Osmond's vessel, and others on board another vessel. The "Argo" was lost on the Grey Islands.

## LOST ON THE BREAKERS.

After a short time on board Osmond's vessel, another storm came on which brought them in contact with breakers, off Twillingate, and the vessel was lost. By terrible hardship in travelling they managed to reach Twillingate, where owing to a scarcity of food, they were put on an allowance for ten days, when fortunately another vessel took them home after one of the most terrible experiences in our history. The other part of the crew which landed on the Grey Islands had a much harder experience, and no other body of men, except Newfoundlanders would have survived.

## REMINISCENCES.

Having reached the allotted span, I can look back for a period of sixty years, and I often wonder what kind of men had we in those days? Were they of the ordinary flesh and blood, or were they iron? Fearless, daring, agile they courted danger, and the "best man on a pan," or the one who would lace up the greater number of seals in a "tow" was looked upon with greater respect than were the ablest politicians, the highest dignitaries, aye, even the Governor himself.

## FILLED HER IN THE HARBOR.

Sometimes masters and ships were very fortunate and found the seals very near their own homes in the early days of the past century. I can describe many such "strokes of luck," and here is one of them.

About the year 1848, Capt. James Burden, grandfather of Dr. Burden of this city, after losing his small vessel called the "Little Brothers," procured another named the "Jasper." She was built at Indian Arm, Bonavista Bay, and sailed for some years previous

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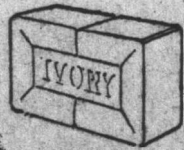
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