



LOSS OF THE "KENT,"

The "Kent" had become water-logged, and already betrayed symptoms of settling. The upper deck now contained over 600 persons, the majority being officers, soldiers, women, and children, belonging to the 31st regiment of foot, and the heart-rending spectacle I will leave you partly to imagine; described it cannot be so as to give you an adequate notion of what occurred. If I tell you that some gazed stupidly around, deprived by terror of speech; that others howled in the frenzy of despair; that veteran soldiers and sailors sat stern and immovable directly over the powder magazine, asking only that death would not delay its coming; that some had fallen on their knees sending wild supplications to heaven,—then you may dimly know the horrors of that hour.

In one of the spasmodic lurches which the "Kent" gave the binnacle became unshipped, and the mariner's compass was smashed to pieces. A man sent by the fourth officer into the foretop to reconnoitre waved his hat with joy, and shouted, "A sail on the lee-bow." The words were echoed on deck, "a sail, a sail!" A sail then signified delivery from the jaws of death; so the announcement converted wailings into cheers—three genuine British cheers, cheers of gratitude and hope.

The minute guns of the "Kent" were fired; her flags of distress were hoisted. The half-burning, half-water-logged vessel staggered towards the stranger brig under three or four small sails. A quarter of an hour of breathless suspense intervened. The brig seemed to pay no heed to the loud-mouthed proclamations of the guns; and the flags fluttered in vain. But, Heaven be thanked! at last the British colors showed out on the brig, now crowding all sail, and bearing down upon the "Kent." It was the "Cambria," bound to Vera Cruz.

Now arose the difficulty of reaching the "Cambria's" deck, where Captain Cook and his men stood to welcome them. One regulation was insisted upon—the children first; and the first baby handed by the "Kent's" fourth mate, who had charge of the boat, to the captain of the brig was the infant son of Major Macgregor. The last child was deposited in safety, and next came the women's turn. There were sturdy arms held out to receive them, and they were encouraged at every favorable rise of the boat to leap. One

mishap only occurred during this risky operation; a lady sprang short of the hand she would have grasped, but quick as thought seized a rope accidentally hanging over the brig's side, and was hauled safely on board.

Strangely enough, many of the soldiers who had throughout the day never swerved in their obedience and strict discipline, even when confronted by the two ever-present perils—foundering and explosion—shrank from the ordeal of the spanker-boom and its rope.

Two or three soldiers sprang into the water with their children and perished with them. A young lady resolutely refused to quit her father. To one man the harrowing alternative of losing his wife or four children was presented; he selected his wife, and the children were drowned. A soldier, himself possessing neither wife nor child, insisted on having three children lashed to him; with them he leaped into the sea, and swam for the boat. Failing to reach it he returned, and when he had signalled to be drawn up again two of the children were found to be dead. A poor fellow falling between the boat and brig had his head cut to pieces, and then fell over into the burning hold of the "Kent." Several soldiers, impatient at the length of time occupied by the boats in going to and returning from the "Cambria," flung themselves overboard and sank. One of them had actually reached the boat, and was raising his hand to seize the gunwale, when the boat suddenly pitched, the bow smote him on the head, and he instantly went down.

Last came Captain Cobb's turn. Once more he tried to raise the dumb despairing men clinging to the foot of the boom into action. Other voices also warned them, viz., the reverberating voices of the guns, which, their tackle having been snapped in twain by the flames, fell into the blazing hold, and exploded with tremendous force. Then, reluctantly, Captain Cobb hauled himself over the heads of the poor fellows by the topping-lift, and dropped into the boat. A boat still kept watch and ward under the "Kent's" stern, and the expostulations and encouragements of her crew succeeded in inducing one of the paralysed men aloft to dare the dangerous descent, which he accomplished in safety. Slowly and sadly the boatmen were at length driven away from the spot by the flames bursting through the cabin windows. The twenty or thirty men who would not be saved were now beyond human aid. There were lost by the destruction of the "Kent" 54 soldiers, 1 woman, and 20 children belonging to the 31st regiment, 1 seaman and 5 boys, total, 81 persons.

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