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BROCK THE SWIMMER.

Amongst the sons of labour there are none more deserving of their hard earnings than that class of persons denominated Beachmen, on the shores of this kingdom. To those unacquainted with maritime affairs it may be as well to observe, that these men are bred to the sea from their earliest infancy, are employed in the summer months very frequently as regular sailors or fishermen, and during the Autumn, Winter, and Spring, when gales are most frequent on our coast, in going off in boats to vessels in distress, in all weathers, to the imminent risk of their lives; fishing up lost anchors and cables, and looking out for waifs which the winds and waves may cast in their way. In our sea-ports these persons are usually divided into companies, between whom the greatest rivalry exists in regard to the beauty and swiftness of their boats, and their dexterity in managing them: this too, often leads to feats of the greatest daring, which the widow and the orphan have long to deplore. To one of these companies, known by the name of "Layton's," whose rendezvous and "look-out" is close to Yarmouth Jetty, Brock belongs, and in pursuit of his calling the following event is recorded.

About 1 p. m. on the 6th of October 1835, a vessel was observed at sea from this station with a signal flying for a pilot, bearing East, distant about twelve miles: in a space of time incredible for those who have not witnessed the launching of a large boat on a like occasion, the yawl "Increase," eighteen tons burden, belonging to Layton's gang, with ten men and a London Branch Pilot, was under weigh steering for the object of their enterprise. "I was as near as possible being left ashore," said Brock to me; "for at the time the boat was getting down to the breakers, I was looking at Manby's apparatus for saving the lives of persons on a wreck then practising, and but for the 'singing-out' of my messmates which caught my ear should have been too late; but I reached in time to jump in with wet feet."

About four o'clock they came up with the vessel, which proved to be a Spanish brig, Paquette de Bilbao, laden with a general cargo and bound from Hamburg to Cadiz, leaky and both pumps at work. After a great deal of chaffering and haggling in regard to the amount of salvage and some little altercation with part of the boat's-crew as to which of them should stay with the vessel, T. Layton (a Gatt Pilot), J. Woolsey, and George Darling, boatmen, were finally chosen to assist in pumping and piloting her into Yarmouth harbor: the remainder of the crew of the yawl were then sent away. The brig at this time was about five miles to the Eastward of the Newarp Floating Light, off Winterton on the Norfolk coast, the weather looking squally; on passing the Light, in their homeward course, a signal was made for them to go alongside, and they were requested to take on shore a sick man, and the poor fellow being comfortably placed upon some jackets and spare coats, they again shoved off and set all sail (three lugs): they had a fresh breeze from the W. S. W. And now again my readers shall have Brock's own words:—

"There was little better than a pint of liquor in the boat, which the Spaniard had given us, and the bottle had passed once round, each man taking a mouthful, and about half of it was thus consumed: most of us had got a bit of bread or biscuit in his hand, making a sort of light meal, and into the bargain I had hold of the main sheet. We had passed the buoy of the Newarp a few minutes, and the light was about two miles astern: we had talked of our job, (i. e. our earnings,) and had just calculated that by ten o'clock we should be at Yarmouth.

"Alas! nor wife nor children more shall they behold,
Nor friends, nor sacred home."

Without the slightest notice of its approach a terrific squall from the northward took the yawl's sails flat aback, and the ballast, which they had trimmed to windward, being thus suddenly changed to leeward, she was upset in an instant. Her crew and passenger were nine in number.

"Then rose from sea to sky the wild farewell."

But perhaps Brock's words on this occasion will excite more interest than Byron's. "'Twas terrible to listen to the cries of the poor fellows, some of whom could swim, and others who could not. Mixed with the hissing of the water and the howlings of the storm, I heard shrieks for mercy, and some that had no meaning but what arose from fear. I struck out to get clear of the crowd, and in a few minutes there was no noise, for most of the men had sunk, and, on turning round, I saw the boat was still kept from going down by the wind having got under the sails. I then swam back to her, and assisted an old man to get hold of

one of her spars. The boat's side was about three feet under water, and for a few minutes I stood upon her, but I found she was gradually settling down, and when up to my chest I again left her and swam away, and now for the first time began to think of my own awful condition. My companions were all drowned, at least I supposed so. How long it was up to this period from the boat's capsizing I cannot exactly say; in such cases, sir, there is no time; but now I reflected that it was half-past 6 p. m. just before the accident occurred; that the nearest land at the time was six miles distant; that it was dead low water, and the flood tide setting off the shore, making to the southward; therefore should I ever reach the land, it would take me at least fifteen miles setting up with the flood before the ebb would assist me."

At this moment a rush horse-collar, covered with old netting, which had been used as one of the boat's fenders, floated close to him, which he laid off, and getting his knife out he stripped it of the net-work, and, by putting his left arm through it, was supported till he had cut the waistband of his petticoat trousers, which then fell off; his striped frock, waistcoat, and neckcloth were also similarly got rid of, but he dared not try to free himself of his oiled trousers, drawers, or shirt, fearing that his legs might become entangled in the attempt; he therefore returned his knife into the pocket of his trousers, and put the collar over his head, which, although it assisted in keeping him above water, retarded his swimming; and after a few moments thinking what was best to be done, he determined to abandon it. He now, to his great surprise, perceived one of his messmates swimming ahead of him, but he did not hail him. The roaring of the hurricane was past; the cries of drowning men were no longer heard: and the moonbeams were casting their silvery light over the smooth surface of the deep, calm and silent as the grave over which he floated, and into which he saw this last of his companions descend without a struggle or a cry as he approached within twenty yards of him. Yes, he beheld the last of his brave crew die beside him; and now he was alone in the cold silent loneliness of night, more awful than the strife of the elements which had preceded. Perhaps at this time something might warn him that he too would soon be mingled with the dead,

"With not one friend to animate and tell
To others' ears that death became him well."

But if such thoughts did intrude, they were but for a moment; and again his mental energies, joined with his lion heart and bodily prowess, cast away all fear, and he reckoned the remotest possible chances of deliverance, applying the means,

"Courage and Hope both teaching him the practice."

Up to this time Winterton Light had served, instead of a landmark, to direct his course, but the tide had now carried him out of sight of it, and in its stead "a bright star stood over where" his hopes of safety rested. With his eyes steadfastly fixed upon it, he continued swimming on, calculating the time when the tide would turn. But his trials were not yet past. As if to prove the power of human fortitude, the sky became suddenly overclouded, and "darkness was upon the face of the deep." He no longer knew his course, and he confessed that for a moment he was afraid; yet he felt that "fear is but the betraying of the succors which reason offereth," and that which roused him to further exertion would have sealed the fate of almost any other human being—a sudden short cracking peal of thunder burst in stunning loudness just over his head, and the forked and flashing lightning at brief intervals threw its vivid fires around him. This, too, in its turn, passed away, and left the wave once more calm and unruffled; the moon (nearly full) again threw a more brilliant light upon the bosom of the sea, which the storm had gone over without waking from its slumbers. His next effort was to free himself from his heavy-laced boots, which greatly encumbered him, and in which he succeeded by the aid of his knife. He now saw Lowestoft High Lighthouse, and could occasionally discern the tops of the cliffs beyond Gorleston on the Suffolk coast. The swell of the sea drove him over the Cross Sand Ridge, and he then got sight of a buoy, which, although it told him his exact position, as he says, "took him rather a-back," as he had hoped he was nearer the shore. It proved to be the chequered buoy of St. Nicholas Gatt, off Yarmouth, and opposite his own door, but distant from the land four miles. And now again he held council with himself, and the energies of his mind seem almost superhuman: he had been five hours in the water, and here was something to hold on by; he could have even got upon the buoy, and some vessel might come near to pick him up; and the question was, could he yet hold out four miles? But, as he says, "I knew the night air

would soon finish me, and had I stayed but a few minutes upon it, and then altered my mind, how did I know that my limbs would again resume their office?" He found the tide (to use a sea term) was broke; it did not run so strong; so he abandoned the buoy, and steered for the land, toward which, with the wind from the Eastward, he found he was now fast approaching. The last trial of his fortitude was now at hand, for which he was totally unprepared, and which he considers (sailors being not a little superstitious) the most difficult of any he had to combat. Soon after he left the buoy, he heard just above his head a whizzing sound, which his imagination conjured into the prelude to the "rushing of a mighty wind," and close to his ear there followed a smart splash in the water, and a sudden shriek that went through him, such as is heard

"When the lone sea bird wakes its wildest cry."

The fact was, a large grey gull, mistaking him for a corpse, had made a dash at him, and its loud discordant scream in a moment brought a countless number of these formidable birds together, all prepared to contest for and share the spoil.

These large and powerful foes he had now to scare from their intended prey, and, by shouting and splashing with his hands and feet, in a few minutes they vanished from sight and hearing.

He now caught sight of a vessel at anchor, but a great way off, and to get within hail of her he must swim over Corton Sands (the grave of thousands,) the breakers at this time shewing their angry white crests. As he approached, the wind suddenly changed: the consequence of which was that the swell of the sea met him. And now again for his own discription:

"I got a great deal of water down my throat, which greatly weakened me, and I felt certain that, should it continue, it would soon be all over, and I prayed that the wind might change, or that God would take away my senses before I felt what it was to drown. In less time than I am telling you, I had driven over the sand into smooth water; the wind and swell came again from the Eastward, and my strength returned to me as fresh as in the beginning."

He now felt assured that he could reach the shore, but he considered it would be better to get within hail of the brig, some distance to the Southward of him, and the most difficult task of the two, as the ebb tide was now running, which, although it carried him towards the land, set to the Northward: and to gain the object of his choice would require much greater exertion. But here comes Brock again:—

"If I gained the shore, could I get out of the surf, which at this time was heavy on the beach? and supposing I succeeded in this point, should I be able to walk, climb the cliffs and get to a house? if not, there was little chance of life remaining long in me; but if I could make myself heard on board the brig, then I should secure immediate assistance. I got within two hundreds yards of her, the nearest possible approach, and, summoning all my strength, I sung out as well as if I had been on shore." He was answered from the deck, a boat was instantly lowered, and at half-past 1 a. m., having swam seven hours in an October night, he was safe on board the brig Betsy of Sunderland, coal laden, at anchor in Corton Roads, fourteen miles from the spot where the boat was capsized. The captain's name was Christian.

Once safe on board, "Nature cried enough;" he fainted, and continued insensible for some time. All that humanity could suggest was done for him by Christian and his crew; they had no spirits on board, but they had bottled ale, which they made warm, and by placing Brock before a good fire, rubbing him dry, and putting him in hot blankets, he was at length with great difficulty enabled to get a little of the ale down his throat; but it caused excruciating pain, as his throat was in a state of high inflammation from breathing (as a swimmer does) so long the saline particles of sea and air, and it was now swollen very much, and, as he says, he feared he should be suffocated. He, however, after a little time fell into a sleep, which refreshed and strengthened him, but he awoke to intense bodily suffering. Round his neck and chest he was perfectly flayed; the soles of his feet, his hands, and his hamstrings were also equally excoriated. In this state at about 9 a. m., the brig getting under weigh with the tide, he was put on shore at Lowestoft, in Suffolk, and immediately despatched a messenger to Yarmouth with the sad tidings of the fate of the yawl and the rest of her crew.

Being now safely housed under the roof of a relative, with good nursing and medical assistance, in five days from the time of the accident, with a firm step he walked back to Yarmouth, to confirm the wonderful rumours circulated respecting him, and to receive the congratulations of his friends and kindred.