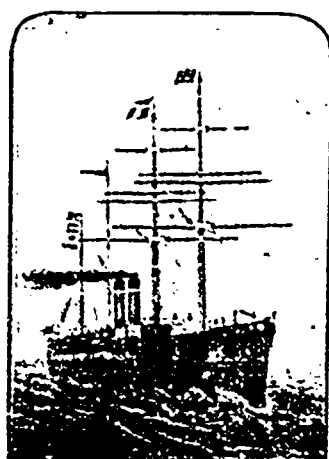


## .... A GHOST AT SEA ....

THE AWFUL EXPERIENCE OF A CANADIAN BUYER ON HIS CHRISTMAS TRIP HOME.



zon, and said: "It looks like a ghost." Someone else said scoffingly: "It's the only ghost a sober man ever sees."

Stoddart's clear grey eye flashed, and he put in quickly: "You are wrong." We all started. No one who knew Stoddart ever scoffed at what he said.

"Do you mean," said one, "that you can tell us a ghost story—you?"

"No, not a story, an actual experience," he returned quietly. "Tell us," was the cry all around. Stoddart, in his deliberate way, took his cigar out of his mouth, and began in the low, distinct tones that were characteristic of him:

"I have crossed the Atlantic many times. Whenever possible I took the Montcalm—took, I say, for I never take her now. On the voyage in question I was returning very late from my fall trip, having been detained in London by private business until December. On embarking at Liverpool I found there were an unusually large number of saloon passengers for the time of year. I noticed a peculiar expression on the steward's face when I said that my state room was 97, lower berth. I followed him below. On the way we met the ship surgeon, who shook hands and said: 'Where are you quartered this trip?' 'In 97,' I replied, and the expression on the doctor's face caused me to regard him with surprise. He looked uncomfortable and nervous. 'You may find—share mine with me,' he stammered. 'I shall be glad of your company.'

"I thank you very much, doctor, but I shall no doubt be quite comfortable without inconveniencing you," I replied, and proceeded to 97 with the steward. The stateroom seemed to be one of the usual sort on board the Montcalm—comfortable if you are a good sailor, a place of misery if you are not. I had no misgivings, although it struck me as rather an annoying thing that I could not, even at that season, get a room to myself. There was a good-sized travelling bag already at one side of the room, and a man's overcoat thrown into the upper berth. I said nothing, mentally resolving to steer clear of my companion as far as possible. It's a safe plan to avoid bores at sea. On assembling for tea at six o'clock I could not see a face I knew among the passengers. I retired early and was in a drowsy condition when the occupant of the upper berth came

in. I had drawn the curtain across my own berth and could not see him. He seemed a hasty sort of a man, for he undressed quickly, tossed his boots outside the door with some noise, and climbed hurriedly into his upper berth.

"I fell into a heavy sleep and had some uneasy dreams. I was awakened suddenly in the night by the sound of my fellow passenger jumping out of the berth and landing with a thud on the floor. He threw the door open and rushed out. I waited a full two minutes, for it doesn't do to be too cranky about the habits of your companions on board ship. As he did not return I threw aside the curtain and peered out. The room was dark, and the passageway outside but dimly lighted by a distant lamp. The room was very cold, and a strong smell of stale sea-water greeted my nostrils. The porthole was open. I reached up and closed it and then shut the door. In a few minutes I was asleep again, and it was seven in the morning before I woke. The upper berth was empty, and the clothes of its former occupant were scattered about the room. After dressing and going on deck I sought the captain and related the episode. He drew me aside and said: 'Mr. Stoddart, you are a man who can keep silence about an unpleasant affair. Your room-mate has disappeared. We fear he has gone overboard, for we cannot find him anywhere. What makes me the more uncomfortable is that he is the second passenger who has similarly disappeared from stateroom 97. You might change your room to-night and say nothing of this matter to anyone, will you?'

"As to keeping silence, certainly, captain, but I see no reason to change my berth. I am quite comfortable in 97, and am in no way superstitious.' 'As you please, of course,' he retorted shortly, 'but I would have liked to close up 97 altogether.' Nothing more was said. On retiring the second night I was not quite so easy in mind as I expected. The idea of my room-mate—dead, drowned—tossing about among the waves two hundred miles astern, would dwell in my mind. Just as I was about to step into bed a draft of cold air struck me, and, turning, I saw that the porthole was wide open! I closed it quickly, with an angry imprecation at the steward's carelessness.

"I lay awake for some time, occasionally glancing at the porthole, which I could just see from where I lay, and which, in the darkness, looked like a faintly-luminous soup-plate suspended in blackness. I believe I must have lain there for an hour, and, as I remember, I was just dozing into sleep, when I was roused by a draft of cold air, and by distinctly feeling the spray of the sea blown upon my face. I started to my feet, and not having allowed in the dark for the motion of the ship, I was instantly thrown violently across the state-room upon the couch which was placed beneath the porthole. I recovered myself immediately, however, and climbed upon my knees. The porthole was again wide open and fastened back!

"Now these things are facts. I was wide awake when I got up, and I should certainly have been waked by the fall had I still been dozing. Moreover, I bruised my elbows and knees badly, and the bruises were there on the following morning to testify to the fact, if I myself had doubted it. The porthole was wide open and fastened back—a thing so unaccountable that I remember very well feeling astonishment rather than fear