

'That,' said Mulvaney, finishing the champagne, 'is a shuparfluous an' impert'nint observation.'

OF THOSE CALLED

[Footnote: 1895]

We were wallowing through the China Seas in a dense fog, the horn blowing every two minutes for the benefit of the fishery craft that crowded the waterways. From the bridge the fo'c'sle was invisible; from the hand-wheel at the stern the captain's cabin. The fog held possession of everything--the pearly white fog. Once or twice when it tried to lift, we saw a glimpse of the oily sea, the flitting vision of a junk's sail spread in the vain hope of catching the breeze, or the buoys of a line of nets. Somewhere close to us lay the land, but it might have been the Kurile Islands for aught we knew. Very early in the morning there passed us, not a cable's-length away, but as unseen as the spirits of the dead, a steamer of the same line as ours. She howled melodiously in answer to our bellowing, and passed on.

'Suppose she had hit us,' said a man from Saigon. 'Then we should have gone down,' answered the chief officer sweetly. 'Beastly thing to go down in a fog,' said a young gentleman who was travelling for pleasure. 'Chokes a man both ways, y' know.' We were comfortably

gathered in the smoking-room, the weather being too cold to venture on the deck. Conversation naturally turned upon accidents of fog, the horn tooting significantly in the pauses between the tales. I heard of the wreck of the Eric, the cutting down of the Strathnairn within half a mile of harbour, and the carrying away of the bow plates of the Sigismund outside Sandy Hook.

'It is astonishing,' said the man from Saigon, 'how many true stories are put down as sea yarns. It makes a man almost shrink from telling an anecdote.'

'Oh, please don't shrink on our account,' said the smoking-room with one voice.

'It's not my own story,' said the man from Saigon. 'A fellow on a Massageries boat told it me. He had been third officer of a sort on a Geordie tramp--one of those lumbering, dish-bottomed coal-barges where the machinery is tied up with a string and the plates are rivetted with putty. The way he told his tale was this. The tramp had been creeping along some sea or other with a chart ten years old and the haziest sort of chronometers when she got into a fog--just such a fog as we have now.'

Here the smoking-room turned round as one man, and looked through the windows.

'In the man's own words, "just when the fog was thickest, the engines

broke down. They had been doing this for some weeks, and we were too weary to care. I went forward of the bridge, and leaned over the side, wondering where I should ever get something that I could call a ship, and whether the old hulk would fall to pieces as she lay. The fog was as thick as any London one, but as white as steam. While they were tinkering at the engines below, I heard a voice in the fog about twenty yards from the ship's side, calling out, 'Can you climb on board if we throw you a rope?' That startled me, because I fancied we were going to be run down the next minute by a ship engaged in rescuing a man overboard. I shouted for the engine-room whistle; and it whistled about five minutes, but never the sound of a ship could we hear. The ship's boy came forward with some biscuit for me. As he put it into my hand, I heard the voice in the fog, crying out about throwing us a rope. This time it was the boy that yelled, 'Ship on us!' and off went the whistle again, while the men in the engine-room--it generally took the ship's crew to repair the Hesperia's engines--tumbled upon deck to know what we were doing. I told them about the hail, and we listened in the smother of the fog for the sound of a screw. We listened for ten minutes, then we blew the whistle for another ten. Then the crew began to call the ship's boy a fool, meaning that the third mate was no better. When they were going down below, I heard the hail the third time, so did the ship's boy. 'There you are,' I said, 'it is not twenty yards from us.' The engineer sings out, 'I heard it too! Are you all asleep?' Then the crew began to swear at the engineer; and what with discussion, argument, and a little swearing,--for there is not much discipline on board a tramp,--we raised such a row that our skipper came aft to enquire. I, the engineer, and the ship's boy stuck to our

tale. 'Voices or no voices,' said the captain, 'you'd better patch the old engines up, and see if you've got enough steam to whistle with. I've a notion that we've got into rather too crowded ways.'

"The engineer stayed on deck while the men went down below. The skipper hadn't got back to the chart-room before I saw thirty feet of bowsprit hanging over the break of the fo'c'sle. Thirty feet of bowsprit, sir, doesn't belong to anything that sails the seas except a sailing-ship or a man-of-war. I speculated quite a long time, with my hands on the bulwarks, as to whether our friend was soft wood or steel plated. It would not have made much difference to us, anyway; but I felt there was more honour in being rammed, you know. Then I knew all about it. It was a ram. We opened out. I am not exaggerating--we opened out, sir, like a cardboard box. The other ship cut us two-thirds through, a little behind the break of the fo'c'sle. Our decks split up lengthways. The mizzen-mast bounded out of its place, and we heeled over. Then the other ship blew a fog-horn. I remember thinking, as I took water from the port bulwark, that this was rather ostentatious after she had done all the mischief. After that, I was a mile and a half under sea, trying to go to sleep as hard as I could. Some one caught hold of my hair, and waked me up. I was hanging to what was left of one of our boats under the lee of a large English ironclad. There were two men with me; the three of us began to yell. A man on the ship sings out, 'Can you climb on board if we throw you a rope?' They weren't going to let down a fine new man-of-war's boat to pick up three half-drowned rats. We accepted the invitation. We climbed--I, the engineer, and the ship's boy. About half an hour later the fog

cleared entirely; except for the half of the boat away in the offing, there was neither stick nor string on the sea to show that the Hespera had been cut down."

'And what do you think of that now?' said the man from Saigon.

PRIVATE LEAROYD'S STORY

And he told a tale.

--Chronicles of Gautama Buddha.

FAR from the haunts of Company Officers who insist upon kit-inspections, far from keen-nosed Sergeants who sniff the pipe stuffed into the bedding-roll, two miles from the tumult of the barracks, lies the Trap. It is an old dry well, shadowed by a twisted pipal tree and fenced with high grass. Here, in the years gone by, did Private Ortheris establish his depot and menagerie for such possessions, dead and living, as could not safely be introduced to the barrack-room. Here were gathered Houdin pullets, and fox-terriers of undoubted pedigree and more than doubtful ownership, for Ortheris was an inveterate poacher and pre-eminent among a regiment of neat-handed dog-stealers.

Never again will the long lazy evenings return wherein Ortheris, whistling softly, moved surgeon-wise among the captives of his craft