

With Poet and Story Teller.

TO THE SORROWFUL.

(DEDICATED TO MRS. HATTIE B. GRINNELL.)

CARRY your sorrows to a place apart,
And sit with them in silence for awhile.
They are God's messages, sent to reconcile
His vastest ways with each poor human heart;
And you shall learn that all their keenest smart
Is under law—as the seasons of the year,
Which bring the flower to bloom, the seed to bear,
And then pass calmly, having done their part.

February 10, 1899.

—E. G.

THE BURNING OF THE SARAH SANDS.

By RUDYARD KIPLING.

MEN have sailed the seas for so many years, and have done such amazing things in the face of danger, difficulty and death, that no one tale of heroism exists which cannot be capped by at least a score of others. But since the behavior of bodies of untried men under trying circumstances is always interesting, and since I have been put in possession of some facts not generally known, I have chosen for my contribution the story of the Sarah Sands.

She was a small four-masted—you must specially remember the masts—iron built screw steamer of eleven hundred tons, chartered to take out troops to India. That was in 1857, the year of the Indian mutiny, when anything that could sail or steer was in great demand; for troops were being thrown into the country against time.

Among the regiments was the 54th of the line, now the second battalion of the Dorset regiment—a good corps, about a hundred years old with a very fair record of service, but in no way differing so far as one can see, from a hundred other regiments.

It was hurried out in three ships. The headquarters, that is to say the lieutenant-colonel, the regimental books, the pay chest, band and colors—you must specially remember the colors—with some fourteen officers, three hundred and fifty-four of the rank and file, and perhaps a dozen women left Portsmouth on August 15, all packed tight on the Sarah Sands.

Her crew, with the exception of the engineers and firemen, seemed to have been foreigners and pier-head jumpers, picked up at the last minute. They were bad, lazy and insubordinate.

The accommodation for the troops was generally described as "inferior," and what men called inferior in '57 would now be called vile. Nor, in spite of the

need, was there any great hurry about the Sarah Sands. She was two long months reaching Cape Town, and she stayed there five days to coal, leaving on October 20th. By this time the crew were all but openly mutinous, and the troops, who must have learned a little of seamanship, worked her out of harbor.

On November 7th, nearly three weeks later, a gale struck her and carried away her foremast, and it is to be presumed that the troops turned to and cleared away the wreckage. On November 11th, the real trouble began, for in the afternoon of November 11th—three months out from Portsmouth—a party of soldiers working in the hold, saw smoke coming up from the after hatch.

They were then, maybe, within a thousand miles of Mauritius, in half a gale and a sea full of sharks. Captain Castle, the skipper, promptly lowered and provisioned the boats; with some difficulty got them overboard and put the women into them. Some of the sailors, the bad kind—the engineers and firemen and a few others behaved well—jumped into the long boat and kept away from the ship. They knew she carried two magazines full of cartridges.

The troops, on the other hand, did not make any use, but under their officers' orders, cleared out the starboard or right hand magazine, while volunteers tried to save the regimental colors. These stood at the end of the saloon, probably clamped against a partition behind the captain's chair, and the saloon was full of smoke. Two lieutenants made a dash for them and were nearly suffocated; a ship's quartermaster, Richard Richmond was his name, put a wet cloth over his face, managed to tear down the colors, and then fainted. A private, and his name was W. Wiles, dragged out both Richmond and the colors, and the two men dropped senseless on deck, while

the troops cheered. That, at least was a good omen.

The saloon must have been one of the narrow, cabin lined old fashioned "cuddies" placed above the screw and all the fire was in the stern of the ship, behind the engine room. It was blazing very close to the port or left hand magazine, and as an explosion there would have blown the Sarah Sands in two they called for more volunteers, and one of the two lieutenants who had been choked in the saloon went down first and passed up a barrel of ammunition, which was joyfully hoisted overboard. After this example work went on with regularity.

They pulled up the fainting men with ropes, while those who did not faint grabbed what they could get at in the smother, and an official and serene quartermaster sergeant stood on the hatch as he jotted down the number of barrels in his note book. They pulled out all except two which slid from the arms of a fainting man—there was a great deal of fainting that afternoon—and rolled out of reach. Besides these were a couple of barrels of signalling powder for the ship's use; but this the troops did not know, and were the more comfortable for their ignorance.

Then the flames broke through the afterdeck, the light attracting shoals of sharks and the mizzenmast flared up and went overboard with a crash. This would have veered the stern of the ship head to wind, in which case the flames must have swept forward, but a man with a hatchet ran along the bulwarks and cut the wreck clear, while the boats surged and rocked at a safe distance, and the sharks tried to upset them with their tails.

A captain of the 54th—he was a jovial soul and made jokes throughout the war—beated a party of men to cut away the bridge, the deck cabins, and everything else that was inflammable—this in case of the flames sweeping forward again—while a provident lieutenant with some more troops lashed spars and things together for a raft, and other gangs pumped desperately on to wirt was left of the saloons and the magazines.

One record says quaintly: "It was necessary to make some deviation from the usual military evolutions while the flames were in progress." The men formed in sections, countermarched round the forward part of the ship, which may perhaps be better understood when it is stated that those with their faces to the afterpart where the fire raged were on their way to relieve their comrades who were working below. Those proceeding "forward" were going to recruit their exhausted strength, and prepare for another attack when it came their turn.

No one seemed to have much hope of saving the ship, so long as the last powder was exploded. Indeed, Captain Castle told an officer of the 54th that the game was up, and the officer replied, "We'll fight till we're driven overboard." It seemed he would be taken at his

word, for just then the signalling powder and the ammunition casks went up, and the ship from midships aft looked like one volcano.

The cartridges splintered like crackers, and cabin doors and timbers were shot up all over the deck, and two or three men were hurt. But—this isn't in any official record—just after the roar of it, when the stern was dipping and all believed the Sarah Sands was setting for her last lurch, some merry jester of the 54th cried: "Lights out!" and the jovial captain shouted back, "All right, we'll keep the old woman afloat yet."

Not one man of the troops made any attempt to get on the rafts; and when they found the ship was still floating, they went to work double tides. At this point in the story we come across Mr. Frazer, the Scotch engineer, who, like all his countrymen, had been holding his trump card in reserve. He knew the Sarah was built with a water-tight bulkhead behind the engine-room and the coal bunkers, and he proposed to cut through the deck above that bulkhead and down the fire. Also he pointed out that it would be as well to remove the coal in the bunkers, as the bulkhead was almost red hot and the coal was catching.

So volunteers dropped into the bunkers, each man for the minute or two that he could endure, and shovelled away the singeing, fuming fuel, and other volunteers were lowered with ropes into the bonfire aft, and when they could throw no more water they were hauled up half-roasted.

Mr. Frazer's plan saved the ship; although every particle of wood in the after part of her was destroyed, and a bluish vapor hung over the red-hot iron beams and ties, and the sea for miles about looked like blood under the glare, as they pumped and passed water in buckets, flooding the stern, sluicing the bulkhead and damping the coal beyond the bulkhead all through the long night. The very sides of the ship were red hot, so that they wondered when the plates would buckle and wrench out the rivets and let the whole fight down to the sharks.

The mizzenmast, as you know, had gone; the mainmast, although wrapped round with wet blankets, was afloat, and everything abaft the mainmast was one red furnace. There was the constant danger of the ship, now broadside on in the heavy sea, falling off before the wind and leading the flames forward again. So they haled the boats to tow and hold her head to wind, but only the gig obeyed. The others had all they could do to keep afloat; one of them had been swamped, though all the people were saved, and as for the long boat full of mutinous seamen, she behaved infamously. One record says that "She only held aloof but consigned the ship and all she carried to perdition." So the Sarah Sands fought for her own life alone.

About three on the morning of Novem-

ber 12th, pumping, bucketing, sluicing and damping, they began to hope that they had beaten the fire. By nine o'clock they saw steam coming up instead of smoke, and at midday they called in the boats and took stock of the damage. From the mizzenmast aft there was nothing you could call ship, except the shell of her. It was a steaming heap of scrap-iron, with twenty feet of black, greasy water flooding across the bent and twisted beams and rods, and in the middle of it all, four huge water-tanks rolled to and fro, thundering against the naked sides.

Moreover—they could not see this till things had cooled down—the powder had blown a hole right through the port quarter, and every time she rolled the sea came in green. Of the four masts only one was left, and the rudder-head stuck up all bald and black and naked among the jam of collapsed deck-beams. The photograph of the deck looks exactly like that of a gutted theatre after the flames and the fireman have done their worst.

They spent the whole of the 12th pumping water out as zealously as they had pumped it in; they lashed the loose tanks as soon as they were cool enough to touch; and they plugged the hole at the stern, with hammocks, sails and planks, and a sail over all. Then they rigged up a horizontal bar gripping the rudder-head. Six men sat on planks on one side and six on the other, hauling on it with ropes and letting go as they were told. That made as good a steering-gear as they could expect.

On November 13th, still pumping, they spread one sail on their solitary mast—it was very lucky that the Sarah Sands had started with four of them,—and took advantage of the trade-winds to make for Mauritius. Captain Castle, with one chart and one compass, lived in a tent where some cabins had once been, and at the end of twelve days he sighted land.

Their average run was about four knots an hour; and it is no wonder that as soon as they were off Port Louis Mauritius, Mr. Frazer, the Scotch engineer, wished to start his engines. The troops looked down into the black hollow of the ship as the shaft made its first revolution, shaking the hull horribly, and if you can realize what it means to be able to see a naked screw shaft at work from the upper deck of a liner you can realize what has happened to the Sarah Sands.

They waited outside Port Louis for the day-light, and were nearly dashed to pieces on a coral reef. Then they came in without loss of a single life, very dirty their clothes so charred that they hardly dared take them off, and very hungry. Port Louis gave them public banquets in the market place, and the French inhabitants were fascinatingly polite, as only the French can be.

But the records say nothing of what befell the sailors who "consigned the ship to perdition." One account merely hints that "this was no time for retri-

bution," but the troops probably administered their own justice during the twelve days' sail to port. The men who were berthed aft, the officers and the women lost everything they had, and the companies berthed forward lent them clothes, and canvas to make clothing.

On December 20th they were all re-embarked on the Clarendon. It was poor accommodation for heroes. She had been condemned as a coolie-ship, was full of centipedes and other animals picked up in the Brazil trade; her engines broke down frequently, and her captain died of exposure and anxiety during a hurricane. It was January 25th before she reached the mouth of the Hoogly.

By this time many men probably considered this quite as serious as the fire—the troops were out of tobacco, and when they came across the American ship, Hamlet, Captain Lecran, lying at Kedgeree, on the way to Calcutta, the officers rowed over to ask if there was any tobacco for sale. They told the skipper the history of their adventures, and he said:

"Well, I'm glad you're come to me, because I have some tobacco. How many men are you?"

"Three hundred," said the officers. Thereupon Captain Lecran got out four hundred pounds of best Cavendish, and a thousand Mania cigars for the officers, and refused to take payment on the ground that Americans did not accept anything from shipwrecked people.

They were not shipwrecked at the time, but evidently they had been shipwrecked quite enough for Captain Lecran, because when they rowed back a second time, and insisted on paying, he only gave them some more grog, "which," says the record, "caused it to be dark when we returned to our ship." After pipes were lit "our band played 'Yankee Doodle,' blue lights were burned, the signal-gun fired," that must have been a lively evening at Kedgeree, "and everything in our power was had recourse to, so as to convey to our American cousins our appreciation of their kindness."

Last of all the commander-in-chief issued a general order to be read at the head of every regiment in the army. He was pleased to observe that "the behavior of the 54th Regiment was most praiseworthy, and by its result must render manifest to all the advantage of subordination and strict obedience to orders under the most alarming and dangerous circumstances in which soldiers can be placed."

That is the moral of the tale.—Youth's Companion.

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