

MEMORIES OF A GREAT DISASTER IN ANNALS OF UPPER LAKE NAVIGATION

WHEN THE STEAMER ASIA WENT DOWN.

It was just twenty-eight years ago on Sept. 14, that the Asia went down in Georgian Bay—that memorable disaster in which 200 lives were blotted out, while two others were saved just by a miracle, says a writer in the Toronto Telegram.

The Sunday before the wreck—I remember it well—was such another as last Sunday (Sept. 11). I spent part of the day on the Asia, between Little Current and Manitowaning, while the ship was on the last voyage she was destined to complete. It was perfect September weather, warm as August, not a breath of air stirring, and a haze as of the beginning of Indian summer spread over sea and land.

A night shortly before the storm broke also is fixed in my memory. About twelve o'clock the heavens were fairly ablaze with those

"Fearful lights which never beacon
Save when kings or heroes die."

Even the night before Flodden itself could not have equalled the awful glory of that September midnight in 1882. It was not alone the northern heavens that were illuminated. From the horizon on all sides were great waves of light shot up towards the zenith, and there formed the most fantastic, brilliant figures.

THAT AWFUL WEDNESDAY NIGHT

But it was different on the Wednesday afternoon when the Asia left Collingwood. The storm king was just beginning to make itself felt, and the old ship was badly buffeted before she reached Owen Sound. Why the captain left the shelter of the latter port that Wednesday night no man knows. He must have known what was waiting for him outside. But he did leave in the midst of darkness and storm, and he followed not the comparatively safe route up under the high lands of the Indian Peninsula and then across the islands which furnish slight breaks in "the Gap" dividing the mainland from Manitoulin; he followed the shore-line for a time and then struck boldly across the storm-tossed bay for French River. He attempted to cross the full width of the Georgian Bay, while that inland sea was torn and driven by the greatest storm in the memory of living man. It is probable the captain counted on the fact that he had a following sea and thought he would be safe as long as he could keep his ship before it.

ON TO ITS DOOM.

At all events, when morning broke there was no very serious alarm among the passengers. True, it was rough, but there were no Mackinawites aboard at that season. The passengers were mostly lumbermen and hardy merchants and farmers from near Manitoulin—men who had seen the teeth of a gale before. There was no thought of a regular breakfast, however. There was too much sea on for that. A few snatched a bite in the steward's pantry, and then hastened out to look once more on the ever-increasing gale. Still the ship rolled on, although from the top of every monster wave great sheets of water were caught up and driven with fierce force over the crest of the billows.

THE WIND CHANGED, AND THEN.

But suddenly there was a change. The wind had been blowing steadily from the south-west. Quick as a flash it veered and came with increased strength from the north-east. Then mighty waves, formed by the cross currents of wind, crashed together and masses of foam flew up as high as a church steeple. That was too much for the Asia. She staggered under the tremendous blows, delivered first upon one side and then upon the other. Men and women were thrown about in the cabin and jammed in a heap at the companion-way leading to the hurricane deck. Some prayed, others tore their hair in anguish; while others again were stupefied with the horror of the situation. The captain, crew and many of the passengers neither prayed nor raved. Down between decks they went and worked like men, throwing over cattle and horses in order to lighten the ship, while up above the Rev. Mr. James, a Methodist minister, moved about with great fortitude, administering spiritual consolation to those in need, while his own heart was breaking because of the knowledge that his wife was doomed to accompany him to a watery grave.

BOATS WERE CAST AWAY.

But prayer and tears and toil were all in vain. The bulwark crashed in, water poured down into the fires, the

upper works began to break up, and then all knew that the end was at hand. What little panic there had been before was all over now. Whether it was the stupor of despair or the resignation of the Christian is not known, but there was no outcry from passengers; the only noise was the shrieking of the gale, and the crash of breaking timbers.

Then the boats were cast away. Just as they were going D. A. Tinkis—the "boys" all called him "Dunk," said to his uncle, J. H. Tinkis, who stood at his side on the wrecked steamer—

"Let us jump and swim for them?"
"You go if you like; it's no use me trying," was the reply.
Dunk jumped, and uncle and nephew were parted forever.

SWAM TO LIFEBOAT.

Young Tinkis was a magnificent swimmer and as cool as an iceberg. He struck out boldly, and whenever any wreckage from the vessel approached him he joined his hands above his head to avoid being stunned. He swam to the lifeboat and asked to be drawn in.

"I don't think there is much use in your coming in here," replied Purser McDougall, who sat in the stern sheets, "but you may try it."

Dunk was helped in and in another moment the Asia disappeared. About the same time the other small boats too were swamped, and the lifeboat and her passengers were left alone on the angry waste of waters. Even the metallic boat had a life and death struggle.

Time and again she was upset and every time that she was righted it was found that one or more of the occupants had been swept away. Purser McDougall was one of the first to go. Others were caught one after the other. But at last the sea began to calm down and the boat turned over no more.

THE LAST HYMN.

Presently the distant glimmer of the lighthouse at Byng Inlet came in view. And now he half-dozen or so survivors thought they were safe at last. Joyously yet reverently led by the mate they joined in that grand old hymn which never meant as much as then:—

"Light in the darkness, sailor, day is
at hand,
See over the foaming billows fair
Heaven's land.
Drear was the voyage, sailor, now
almost o'er,
Leave the poor old stranded wreck,
And pull for the shore."

"THE CAPTAIN IS DEAD."

They did not know that they yet had to face an enemy but little less dreadful than that they had just escaped from. Exhaustion followed the intense nervous strain, caused by long hours of struggle and watching. Captain Savage was among the first to succumb. His head sank on his breast. His companions thought for a moment he was sleeping, but a moment later it was told in an awed whisper that "the captain is dead."

A little later on a brawny youth named Little from Manitoulin, one of those who had acted the part of a hero in trying to lighten the ship in the morning, also succumbed. By and by the mate, he who had led but a few minutes before in the revival hymn, likewise succumbed. In a short time only two were left alive, D. A. Tinkis and Miss Morrison. Eventually these reached one of the islands in Parry Sound. Here it seemed for a time as if they had only escaped drowning to die of starvation. The minutes lengthened into hours, the hour into days and still no sail or hope or rescue appeared. At last just as they were about to yield to despair an Indian appeared in a sailboat, and the two survivors of the most dreadful disaster that ever occurred on our inland seas were taken into Parry Sound harbor the Sunday following the Thursday on which the vessel went down.

There are other stories that might be told, stories of the dreary loneliness of many Manitoulin firesides that first Christmas "after the Asia went down." The story of the almost miraculous escape of the Manitoba, now the Carmona, from sharing the fate of the Collingwood propeller and the all too awful tale of the fate worse than death that has befallen some of those who lost their protectors and guardians in that fierce storm 28 years ago.

Some of these things may be told some day. But meantime the recurrence of the anniversary never fails to recall the memory of the 200 who went down to their deaths amid the roar of the equinoctial gale of Sept. 14, 1882.

A wise wife advises her husband against doing the things she wants him to do.

KING ROOSEVELT.

And calling the official choir to his side he directed them to sing the national anthem:

My country, 'tis to Me
You owe all fealty—
Sing, blast you, sing!
Down with Democracy,
Cant and hypocrisy,
Hail Theocracy,

Hail to the King!
And after the chorus had been repeated the delegation of Intelligent Voters departed and butted their brains out against the palace walls.—
New York Sun.

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