

SHIPS THAT PASSED INTO THE NIGHT

Recent Adventures of the Nourmahal Bring to Mind Tragedies of the Sea in Which Brave Craft Fared Forth Laden with Human Freight and Then Vanished from the Face of the Trackless Deep

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Of all the mysteries that hover about men's doings perhaps none is more intensely felt than that of the missing ship. She leaves port some sunny morning, well found and handled, and is seen no more. She perishes in the dark and leaves—

No black plume as a token of her passing. She dies an unknown death; she is buried without funeral expenses, and she has the grandest sepulchre in the world, unfathomable and incorruptible. But the manner of her end is the secret of the sea.

"Posted at Lloyds as missing." Probably no other phrase has carried with it the weight of woe conveyed in these few words, for every hope has been abandoned then. The great marine underwriting house of Lloyds has paid the insurance on the ship and she has been rubbed off their books forever. Some idea of the meaning of the phrase came with the recent adventures of the Nourmahal, the yacht of Colonel John J. Astor, but happily after a long suspense the word was not set down, and the Nourmahal escaped the fate of those recorded "missing."

Hundreds of persons filled with ambitions, great and small, and strong in the vigor and possibilities of life, go away in the vessel and shout their words of farewell and endearment to the crowds ashore. The weather is fine and the world has put on its best attire. How handsome she looks, the big ship, as she backs out into the stream, turning slowly with a consciousness of splendid power within her, as she heads for the vast solitudes that lie before her!

No thought of disaster enters the mind as she departs, though the tenderhearted shed a few tears as the great hull glides smoothly off. It is a holiday crowd, just entering upon the first step of its Euro-pean excursion, and the air is filled with laughter and fluttering handkerchiefs, and voices call across the ever widening lane of water that separates the ship from the wharf. Swiftly she gathers way as she goes, and now she is across the bar and feels the first breathing lift of the sea—the rise and fall of the mighty breast on which she rests. Then she fades into a glimmer on the sea line before she blends with the mists of the horizon.

A fortnight passes, without news of her. Another week and friends grow anxious. They gather in the agent's office for news. There is a portentous absence of it. Men think, but do not talk. Rumors, perhaps, give encouragement as some clew is followed, lifting believers up on the Himalaya of hope, only to cast them into the chains of despair next day, when the phantom dissolves and leaves them stranded with their broken trust.

Then begins the gambling on the ship, and we hear that fifty per cent reinsurance is offered. Swiftly the sum increases till ninety-five per cent is reached. There is a long pause, to give the ship her last fighting chance, while crowds fill the steamship offices. Then the axe falls and the dreaded bulletin is read, "The Queen of the Seas has been posted at Lloyds as missing."

What has happened to her? Ice, fire, collision, storm? Almost anything is possible, but of one thing there can be no doubt—the Sea has shouted his command, and none may disobey. Far away in the dull, waste spaces, under a wintry sky, the North Atlantic has called with ringing voice and claimed another bride. That is all, for no one comes ashore and we will never know how long she struggled in the clasp of arms. For the gray, ancient Sea has dumb and brims with mystery and brooding thoughts as he draws the dark cover of night across his face, and even the rising sun can bring no secret from him.

And so we ponder on the fate of this great vessel, forever hidden from us, smitten by the sea. She went away; we watched her vanish on the distant skyline; we waited and we wept. But the sea is filled with riddles, and one more will be of little moment to him, for he alone can solve them. Perhaps 'twas fire and ice—arch enemies ill lured by the sea—that bid upon her; perhaps some lonely derelict opposed her in the night, and both went, locked, to death. For ourselves, we only know that the august ship is gone with all her people.

Since ocean steam shipping began few vessels in the North Atlantic trade created in the human breast more lingering hope than the famous old President one she was written off the books at Lloyds. She was a general favorite with the travelling public, many famous men and women electing to travel in her rather than in any other ship between Sandy Hook and the Channel. Tyrone Power, the distinguished actor, always chose her as the vehicle of his peregrinations, and the only sentence or word of any sort that came from the fatid President was written by his hand. For Tyrone Power was among her passengers when she left New York for Liverpool in March, 1841, and toward the end of May, or two months later, when all hope had been surrendered, a bottle was picked up at sea containing a fragment of paper on which was recorded the simple fact that the President was sinking, the signature at the bottom being that of the celebrated player Tyrone Power.

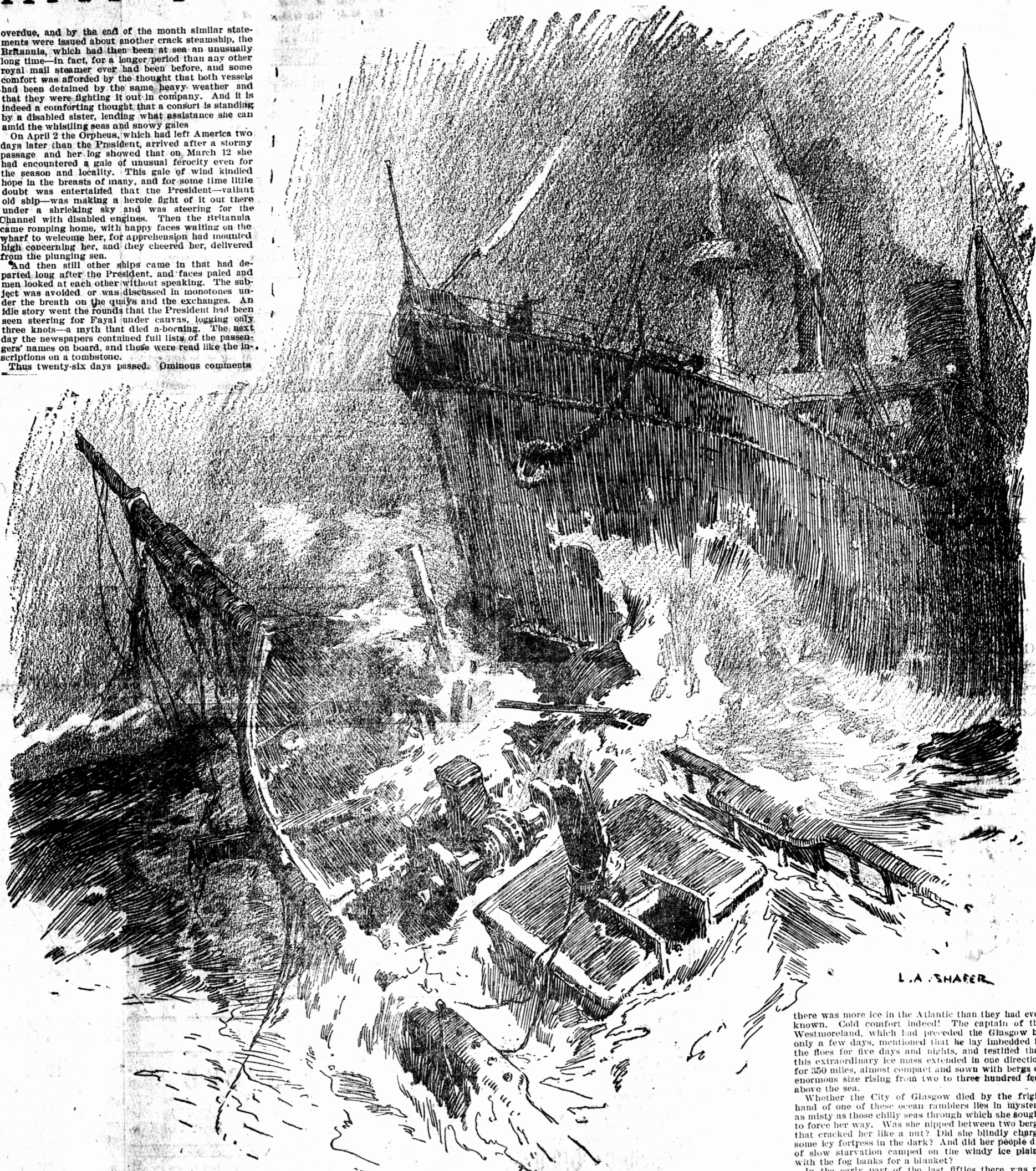
When disaster overtakes vessels in the Atlantic it is generally the case that they are westward bound at the time because the westerly gales are the winds and the most difficult to weather out. But the President faded out of human sight bound to the eastward. There were 320 persons on board all told when she passed out by Sandy Hook that afternoon, and she was due in Liverpool in twelve or fourteen days, according to the weather. And a good deal still depends on the weather in the western ocean. In spite of 40,000 tons displacement and 70,000 horse power, and twenty knots often dwindle to ten when the surly old fellow gets his back up.

A fortnight passed without any tidings from the President. No one wondered, though, for it had been a terrible winter in the North Atlantic and commerce had been held up by the elements almost for months. As the spring approached, too great quantities of ice had been reported in the trade routes, and it was thought that the President was delayed because of it. As the days passed, though, without news telegrams and items in the press cautiously and briefly called attention to the fact that the big steamer—for she was a sort of grayhound in those far off days—was now

overdue, and by the end of the month similar statements were issued about another crack steamship, the Britannia, which had then been at sea an unusually long time—in fact, for a longer period than any other royal mail steamer ever had been before, and some comfort was afforded by the thought that both vessels had been detained by the same heavy weather and that they were fighting it out in company. And it is indeed a comforting thought that a consort is standing by a disabled sister, lending what assistance she can amid the whistling seas and snowy gales.

On April 2 the Orpheus, which had left America two days later than the President, arrived after a stormy passage and her log showed that on March 12 she had encountered a gale of unusual ferocity even for the season and locality. This gale of wind kindled hope in the breasts of many, and for some time little doubt was entertained that the President—valiant old ship—was making a heroic fight of it out there under a shrieking sky and was steering for the Channel with disabled engines. Then the Britannia came romping home, with happy faces waiting on the wharf to welcome her, for apprehensions had mounted for the plunging sea.

And then still other ships came in that had departed long after the President, and faces paled and men looked at each other without speaking. The subject was avoided or was discussed in monotonous undertone the breath on the quills and the exchanges. An idle story went the rounds that the President had been seen steering for Fayal under canvas, logging only three knots—a myth that died a-borning. The next day the newspapers contained full lists of the passengers' names on board, and these were read like the inscriptions on a tombstone. Thus twenty-six days passed. Ominous comments



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PERHAPS SOME LONELY DERELICT OPPOSED HER IN THE NIGHT.

were made relative to the boat's construction, and there were those who could recall many faults and lesions in her hull, fancied or real. Friends were warned to hope no longer, but to make their minds up to the melancholy belief that in the two days' storm reported by the Orpheus the President had foundered near the Devil's Blow Hole, in 45 North, 45 West. But on April 13 a letter reached London which professed an electrified effect. It was addressed to the family of one of the passengers, stating that the President had sustained serious damage to her steering gear and engines and had been sighted over toward Madeira. The news was hailed with demonstrative joy, which the following day turned into a public demonstration when the Irish packets reported a large black steamer waiting outside for high water. Messengers darted about, crowds flocked to the river-side and the flag of the consignee was hoisted to acclaim the President's arrival.

Friends and families were certain now that this must be their ship that had come in from the heaving storm. Excitement rose above restraint and Liverpool went almost mad with joy. Mutual congratulations filled the air and every one hung on the smoke and haze that brooded over the river and the offing, and when it finally thinned away and people saw that the hull beyond was not the President's the public grief was deeper than their previous joy. The same day it was discovered that the letter mentioning Madeira was nothing but a barbaous and brutal hoax. Drowning men will grasp at straws, though, and yet once again public hope surged high when on April 12 a London merchant received a letter bearing the latest postmark asserting that a vessel had arrived at Waterford, reporting that she had left the President

repairing at Bermuda. This letter was addressed to the brother-in-law of Captain Roberts, the President's commander, and the city was greatly agitated. Men met each other with the happy greeting, "Well, have you heard that the old President is safe after all?" in Bermuda, you know. Another mistake? No, not this time, and it was several days before the people learned that once more they had been cheated with the malice of the devil.

As late as the middle of May there were still those to be found who believed in the President's safety, and a leaf from the logbook of a Portuguese vessel was published, stating that she had passed a large disabled vessel. Then came the final announcement of the bottle message from Tyrone Power, which in itself possibly may have been a merry jest, and after that came nothing. No further tidings from the North Atlantic, which had clapped its finger's paw upon the steamship and swallowed her at a single gulp.

Thirteen years later the City of Glasgow, a screw steamship, left the Jersey for Philadelphia on March 1, the year being 1854. She also was a large vessel, and every berth was filled. There were on board 111 first class passengers, 283 in the steerage and 76 in the crew, footing up a grand total of 480 persons, or exactly quadruple the number of those who left New York in the President. She was not so well known a vessel, but that is something that the grim old fellow that sits gray and pondering out there on the horizon does not consider, for

The shambling sea is a sexton old, and well his work is done. With an equal grave for ord and nave he buries them every one.

But she was a fine, Clyde-built vessel, the City of Glasgow, and her commander, James Morrison, was an experienced and able seaman, well versed in the temperamental vagaries of the Atlantic; and you have to try to overcome them as best you may by familiarizing yourself with his bad humors. At any rate, it was generally thought that no better shipmaster ever coned his vessel across the western ocean in those days than Captain Morrison, and undoubtedly every precaution as to the proximity of ice and derelicts was taken by this prudent man, though the oldest of all sailor phrases tells us that "any old thing can happen at any time at sea."

So no anxiety was shown over the City of Glasgow when a few days more than the usual limit had passed by and she was not reported. Some years, though, the ice breaks up very early in Baffin Bay and the giant bergs float down the current and stop many a tight ship in their path. Many

An errand princess of the North, A virgin, showy white, Sails adown the summer seas To realms of burning light.

But sailormen do not regard these gleaming wanderers as rosiely as poets do, and when the City of Manchester reached Liverpool, having left Philadelphia about the same time that the City of Glasgow left the latter port, and reported that the ice fields off Newfoundland were breaking up, men shook their heads and made no comment. That the break-up of the fields was a good thing in itself was true, but it was equally true that it meant the straggling of the ocean with heavy ice which vessels, however powerful, in those days might meet in mortal strife.

All the arriving transatlantic steamers testified that

there was more ice in the Atlantic than they had ever known. Cold comfort indeed! The captain of the Westmoreland, which had preceded the Glasgow by only a few days, mentioned that he lay imbedded in the floes for five days and nights, and testified that this extraordinary ice mass extended in one direction for 350 miles, almost compact and sown with bergs of enormous size rising from two to three hundred feet above the sea.

Whether the City of Glasgow died by the frigid hand of one of these ocean ramblers lies in mystery as misty as those chilly seas through which she sought to force her way. Was she nipped between two bergs that cracked her like a nut? Did she blindly charge some icy foray in the dark? And did her people die of slow starvation cramped on the windy ice plains with the fog banks for a blanket?

In the early part of the last fifties there was no more popular steamship line out of New York to Liverpool than the Collins. The vessels of this great company were the successful rivals for a long while of the Cunard ships, and, flying the American flag and maintaining a high standard of efficiency in every detail, they obtained and held the cream of the American passenger trade. One of the best ships of the line, the Pacific, was particularly favored, and when she left Liverpool toward the close of January, 1856, she carried her usual complement of first class passengers, there being all told 180 persons on board. She was sighted in St. George's Channel a few hours later and then dipped below the horizon for good—the Atlantic. Unlike the other heroines of the deep whose fair names Dame Rumor apt alive for weeks, the Pacific was never reported, and there was no mention of her as a phantom ship, disabled, beating up for impossible ports. Her well known figure, that had long been famous on the wild Atlantic, just faded into the perspective of time without the blast of heraldic beat on mischief. Somewhere in the Western Ocean something happened, and when the storm was spent or the berg had tramped by a vacant sea had left its flagging torso to the sun.

The City of Boston in 1870 was added to the roll of missing ships, in the grimest register in all the world, for when a stately ship has ceased to answer "Here" a hundred tragedies in one combine with the City of Boston throws out in clear relief the unquenchable hope that burned in Detroit, and, with a curious fancy that the Boston papers would first contain the perspective of time and her explanation always followed—"I have not heard from Jim yet, but I hope to this coming week."