

"MAN OVERBOARD!" A STORY OF SEA-SERVICE.

BY VICE-ADMIRAL SIR W. KING HALL, K.C.B.



Y readers must picture to themselves a fine line-of-battle ship named the *Calcutta*, carrying eighty-four guns, and, with extra men to supply the wants of the China Fleet added to her own crew, numbering nearly 900 souls, whilst rolling before a fair wind with every practicable stitch of canvas spread, the white foam thrown from either bow, running along from eight to nine miles an hour; and in the words of the poet—

"She walked the waters
like a thing of life,
And seemed to dare the
elements to strife."

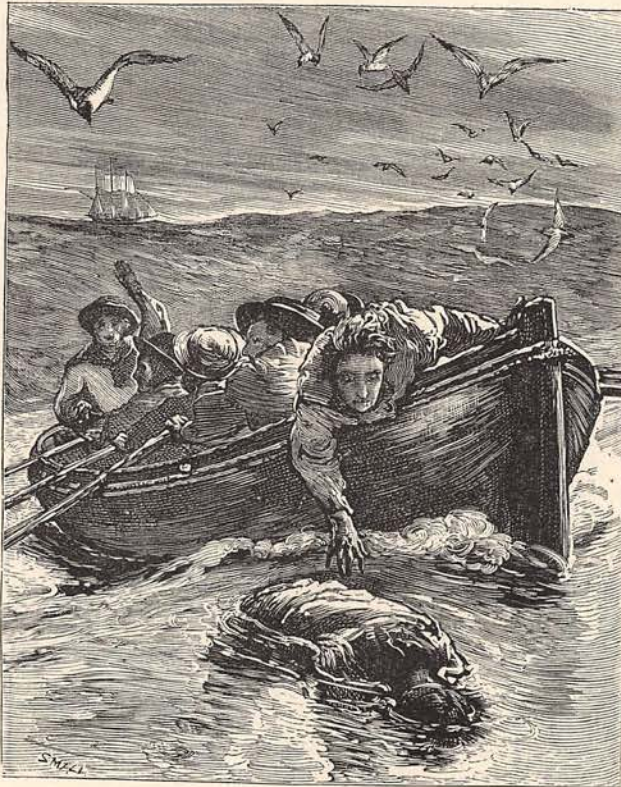
It was the month of July, 1856, consequently some years before the era of ironclads, and when the traditional pride of our noble service gloried in the stories of chivalrous courage handed down from generations, and to handle a ship and manœuvre under canvas was the height of the ambition of our rising young officers. But crafty cunning, and the wholesale destruction of life with the least risk to those who effect it, is the education now necessary

—torpedoes, gun-cotton, monster guns sufficiently powerful, when the shot and shell fired from them take effect, to make a hole in the side large enough to drive an omnibus through (passengers on the roof included). This is a slight digression, but still it is a happy and contented thought to remember that the path of duty is always found to be the path of safety, and there will be never wanting leaders, or followers, in Old England's navy.

To resume. It was about sunset. The decks were shaking through the spirit of the dancers on the main-deck, to the sound of the fiddle, whilst on the fore-castle the hearty chorus from good lungs made the old ship ring again, as sea-songs followed in rapid succession—for the moment one ended another was commenced. Suddenly the cry came from some half-a-dozen voices—"Man overboard!" This startling announcement invariably sends a thrill through a ship, as it did on

this occasion. The life-buoy was let go, ship rounded-to, sail taken off her, and the two cutters dispatched with great expedition and quietness. As the man was passed like a black speck in the white foam, it was observed he could not swim. The usual information was at once brought to the captain—viz., the name of the man, and the cause of the accident. His name was

John Shea, and he was performing some duty on the bowsprit, or over the bows. It soon became dusk, and whilst the canvas on the mainmast flapped lazily and monotonously against the masts as the ship rose and fell to the sea, there were heard the low tones of the crew, some leaning over the sides of the ship, others in the rigging and on the booms and boats amidships, the officers and captain on the poop—all actuated by the same wish to see the boats returning, and give the earliest information. Dusk was fast changing to dark, and stars began to peep, in the words of the nursery rhyme, looking like "diamonds in the sky." In about a quarter of an hour



"APPARENTLY LIFELESS" (p. 238).

the noise of the oars was distinguished, and expressions were heard—"I think I see her"—"Isn't that her on the starboard quarter?"—and at the moment several voices called out, "Boat on starboard quarter, sir!" Soon the progress of the boat and her position was shown by the sparkling foam of phosphorescent brightness, as her bows rose on the crest of the wave. But being to windward, it was requisite she should be pretty close before hailing. The subdued talk was heard—"He is all right, Bill"—"They have got him, I am sure of it." On nearing the stern of the ship, the captain called out, "Silence!" and perfect quiet ensued, not even a whisper being heard when he hailed—"Have you picked up the man?" The wind bore back the clear, loud, and disappointing reply—"No, sir; we have picked up the life-buoy—have not seen the man." Again the low buzz of voices was heard in tones of despondency and sorrow. On the boat coming

alongside, the captain walked from the poop to the quarter-deck to receive the report of the officer in charge of her, whilst the crew filled both gangways and the foremost part of the quarter-deck, all anxious to hear the news. Brief was the report, and disappointing. Nothing had been seen of the poor fellow. They had hoped to have found him near the life-buoy, and had searched well; but as it was known he could not swim, it appeared certain he must have gone down. "What of the other boat?" was asked. "We heard her pulling, and she cannot be far off." This boat was hoisted up, and in the opinion of all on board our poor shipmate was lost. Several minutes elapsed, and the absent boat not appearing, some few began to think there was a hope that yet he might be saved; and as there was nothing in the weather to cause any anxiety respecting the safety of the boat, it was concluded by the few sanguine ones that they were having a careful examination about the spot before returning. But the general impression from the report was that we should not see him again. The anxiety and eagerness to watch for the appearance of the absent boat was scarcely visible, and confined to those on duty, and many of the crew left the upper deck—a gloom pervaded the ship, for it was considered our first misfortune from her having been put in commission. Some of the older men and petty officers, however, walked in two's and three's rapidly in the gangways, speaking little, but thinking much—a practice very common among sailors when serious thoughts upon passing events occupy their minds. Suddenly many voices announced, "Boat in sight on beam, and hailing, sir." A pin might have been heard to drop, figuratively speaking, on the upper deck; but the shuffling sound from the feet of men running up from the decks below for a moment or two prevented hearing what the officer in the boat was saying. As she was rapidly closing, this short delay was compensated for when a loud, cheery, ringing voice, each word singly and most distinctly uttered, was heard—"The—man—is—saved—sir!" There were a few who in the feeling of joy clapped their hands, and gratitude was felt to God for His goodness. I have no doubt, had it been daylight, or even moonlight, tears of thank-

fulness would have been seen trickling down many a furrowed cheek, judging from the backs of hands applied to eyes. As the boat pulled round the stern, a hearty "Well done!" uttered by the captain to the officer and his men feebly represented his happiness and satisfaction at their success. The man was carried up the side and to the sick bay, and placed under the care of the medical officers, the boat hoisted up, and whilst the officer related this account to the captain, each of the men forming the crew of the boat had a small knot of comrades round him, to whom he told how John Shea was found.

Knowing that the first boat had picked up the life-buoy, as they were aware the man was near it when let go from the ship, and knowing that the man could not swim, they concluded that he was drowned, and were returning, when they heard a sudden screeching of sea-birds on their starboard (or right) side, and decided to alter their course, and pull in the direction from which the noise proceeded. They found, right under where the birds were hovering, the apparently lifeless body of their shipmate, insensible and floating on his stomach. He had not spoken or moved since. The report came from the medical officer that life was not extinct—there was hope; and in about an hour he was recovering consciousness, and all going on well. Anxiety and sadness now gave place to joy and gladness, and as the hour prescribed by the regulations of the service for smoking had passed, permission to light pipes was granted. The fiddler wished to enjoy his "baccy" also, so his sounds were not heard, and from poop to fore-castle great happiness existed.

The next day Shea was at his duty, and in his statement to the captain acknowledged his ignorance of all that happened from the time of his falling overboard until he recovered in the sick bay. Two things were pointed out to him—from the truth of the words contained in the good old Book—that "in the midst of life we are in death," and that "the hairs of our head are all numbered"—verified in many ways to the crew, who performed good and gallant service for two and a half years in China, including the capture of Canton and the Taku Forts, Peiho River.

SOME PRACTICAL HINTS ON THE ACQUIREMENT OF LANGUAGES.



T is a true proverb which asserts that "there is no royal road to learning," and the mortal who expects to become a proficient in a science, an art, or a language without hard work is doomed to disappointment, let fallacious quacks advertise what they like to the contrary. I was much amused by a sly allusion to these catchpenny deceivers in a burlesque which I saw a good many years ago. The subject of the travesty was *The Lady of Lyons*. Claude Melnotte, tempted by the first villain (in a song) to pass himself off as an Italian prince, replies that he does not know the language. But this natural objection is pooh-poohed by his adviser, who, triumphantly producing a small

volume from his pocket, exclaims, or rather sings—"Here you are! 'Italian in a quarter of an hour!" which is really hardly an exaggeration of some of the linguistic promises held out by some adventurers. But though it is necessary to give time and trouble, there are several methods, some of which are recommended by common sense, while others are stupid to a degree. The wisdom of making Latin and Greek the principal elements of a boy's education has been very much disputed of late years. "Why not teach them living languages, which will be of use to them?" ask the objectors. Well, in the first place, the mere acquirement of a foreign tongue, or indeed of any amount of general information, is of quite secondary