

## PEOPLE WHO FACE DEATH : LIFEBOAT MEN.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE QUEER PASSENGER'S STORY."

**W**HOOISHT! The rocket mounted into space and the falling points of fire were driven away and scattered by the fierce nor'-nor'-easter. Indeed, the wind blew in such violent squalls that it was not easy to stand upon the Aldeburg beach in the early morning of the 20th November last. It was almost as difficult to peer through the blinding scud out into the storm-tossed waters.

"Ah, there she is!" the cry goes up: for, balanced on the top of a huge billow, a vessel is seen in dire distress driving full upon the Sizewell Bank—water-logged, her masts going, a helpless wreck. A moment only and she is lost to view, sucked down by the hungry sea. No! she was only hidden in the trough of the waves. Look! she is again tossed upwards, and a pitiless force hurries her onward to the fatal shoals.

Help! help! for within an hour she is doomed to certain destruction!

Help is at hand; but is it possible that any boat can live in such a sea? And if so, who will dare the tempest? The question is answered: if a rescue is possible here are eighteen brave men who mean to succeed. The lifeboat is run down to the water, but the heavy surf continually breaks over her, and it is difficult to keep her head to the sea, the huge waves dashing her broadside on the shore. At length, however, by the help of two warps and many willing hands, she is fairly launched, and under swelling canvas breasts the waves in gallant style. The drenching spray sweeps over her, to fall astern with a swash like the rattle of musketry, a "thousand gaping graves" are around her, the attempt seems madness, yet still she struggles onward.

And now the men, as they crowd close to the bulwarks, can see the wreck plainly—a mere hull, deep in the water, and washed by every wave. She is the Russian barque *Venscapen*, of 660 tons burden, with a crew of fourteen hands, laden with firewood, bound from Kotka for London.

The lifeboat nears the shoals, but it is evident that the vessel is fast breaking up. Hurry, hurry, brave men, for in half an hour it will be too late!

Wives, sweethearts, friends, on shore, strain their sight to follow the flying boat, the drifting vessel; it is a race for dear life, Death lurking on the sunken sands. Death riding the hurricane, Death in the roaring seas!

At the most critical moment the mizen sheet becomes unhooked and cracks with a loud report in the wind. Alas! for the lifeboat and her gallant crew! But a cool hand is at the helm, and luckily the threatened danger is averted. The sail is caught and fastened, and bounding forward, the boat is soon under the lee of the wreck, and ventures as near to it as she can. Yes, there are all the crew anxiously waiting! Steady now, steady! One by one the fourteen poor fellows drop into the boat, and are taken off safe and sound. The rescue has been effected only just in time, for ten minutes later the vessel is driven upon the banks and dashed to pieces.

There are now thirty-two men in the lifeboat, but they are by no means out of danger. The seas are so mountainous that the coxswain dare not attempt to make for the shore, but steers for Harwich. Fortunately, they meet with no mishap save the lengthened cold and exposure, and enter the harbour in safety at eleven o'clock.



"IT IS A RACE FOR DEAR LIFE."

What say the oldest inhabitants of Aldeburg? Why, that "it was the best service ever rendered here!" And the Committee of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, to mark their approval, unanimously awarded to James Cable, coxswain of the Aldeburg lifeboat, the second service clasp, for the gallant fellow already wore the medal.

Those who know Clacton under its summer holiday aspect only, would have been astonished at the sight presented on the morning of January 4th. A furious wind was raging, and blowing a heavy gale from the south-east, snow fell in fierce squalls, it was bitterly cold, and as to the sea, it was a sight to terrify the boldest.

The coxswain of the *Albert Edward* lifeboat was anxiously looking out to sea when, at a quarter past eight o'clock, he sighted a vessel in dire distress driving towards the Buxey Sands, and a quarter of an hour later she took the ground. By nine o'clock the lifeboat was launched and steered for the wreck under close-reefed foresail and jib. On nearing her it was seen that she was being rapidly knocked to pieces; the masts had already gone by the board, and each sea, as it made a clean sweep over her, left something less for the next to take. Some of the crew clung to the bulwarks, but most of them to the deck-house, which afforded a slight shelter, although every wave threatened to tear them away.

To hearten them up the crew of the lifeboat gave a cheer, and then bore away to windward, where they let go the anchor. Drifting down, they came to the end of their cable, but, unfortunately, could not get near enough to the vessel. No time was to be lost, and it was hastily decided to lift the anchor and drop again. On attempting to haul in the anchor, it was found to have fouled something on the sand, and it was impossible to move it. Without more ado the cable was promptly cut, and the lifeboat sailed direct for the wreck.

On getting under her lee it was discovered that she could not be reached for the floating tangle of masts and wreckage alongside, which was tumbling about in the heavy seas. So signs were made to the crew to tie something floatable to a rope and fling it over the side for the lifeboat to pick up. Though difficult and dangerous, it was managed, and the line was



UNDER THE LEE OF THE WRECK.

thrown overboard, but alas! only to foul the wreckage. And now it seemed indeed as if their last hope was gone!

Yet the brave men in the lifeboat did not despair! Once more they sailed to windward, and once more made for the wreck, and this time succeeded in throwing a grappling-iron into the rigging. It held, and then three of the crew with extreme caution crawled out on the mast. A rope was thrown from the lifeboat for them to make fast, but not understanding, the first man clung to the boat without doing so, and just then the grappling loosed hold. The crew managed somehow to drag the man into the boat, and the others crawled back to the vessel, which was now bumping worse than ever, and threatened every moment to break up completely.

There was nothing for it but to sail to windward again, and again drop down on the wreck; and this time a grappling was thrown on board. The crew were now able to haul their boat between the floating wreckage and the vessel, so that the men could jump into it. The captain, however, was so utterly exhausted that he was powerless to help himself. A rope was made fast round his body, and the coxswain was just about to lift him into the boat when a great wave struck her, the coxswain slipped on the icy thwarts and fell between the lifeboat and wreck, receiving as he did so

a terrible blow and cut over the eye, which rendered him insensible. For all that he had fast hold of the line that was round the captain, so they were both dragged with difficulty through the surf into the boat, and only just in time, as the grappling had again parted.

Under close-reefed sails the lifeboat made for Clacton, and had a fearful journey, during which one of the crew was struck a severe blow with the sheet block, which knocked him senseless. At half-past two in the afternoon they reached the pier, covered with ice and half dead with the cold.

In the month of November, 1893, the schooner *Sophia*, of Frederica, manned by a crew of six persons, and laden with a cargo of deals and boards, set sail for Aberdovey.

To leave the Swedish harbour the crew had to cut away the ice that had closed round her, and the rest of that day and the following night she sailed through a blinding snowstorm.

The weather became so bad that she dropped anchor off Ulvosund, and waited patiently as might

by fierce squalls of snow and sleet, and, to make matters worse, the captain completely lost his reckoning. Whilst driving about, the sport of the elements, she chanced to sight a lightship. Knowing that danger was near, the biggest anchor was let out, but it would not hold, and the vessel rolled and plunged so fearfully that it was evident that something must be done at once to ease her, or she would founder. By dint of great exertion, for the ice-encrusted rigging flayed the men's hands, the main-mast and foretop-mast were cut away, and then the anchor held.

From six o'clock in the afternoon until midnight the schooner lay off the lightship, and by that time the half-dozen men aboard her were well-nigh exhausted with their terrible sufferings. It was blowing a whole gale from the east-south-east, with snow squalls; the bitter blast seemed to cut them like a knife and froze them through and through. Little shelter could be obtained, for the disabled vessel was swept by every sea, and as the water fell it turned to ice on deck and rigging.



AT CLOSE QUARTERS.

be for four weeks before she could proceed. Again she encountered head winds and bad weather, and again she had to anchor, this time off Elsinore, where she lay another two weeks. Then the skies cleared, and under favourable conditions she began to cross the North Sea.

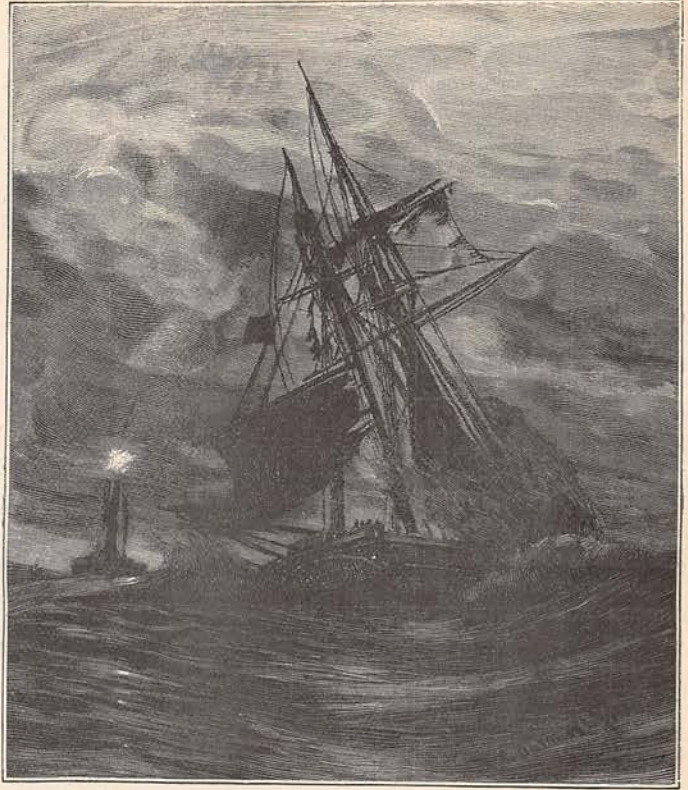
But the bad weather pursued her; she was buffeted

To add to their misfortunes the schooner began to drag her anchor, and then the chain parted, and she drove helplessly before the wind. No other anchor could be let out, as there was no more cable on board. Several steamers were sighted, but they could afford no help in such a sea.

By-and-by land was in view, and shortly after the

schooner struck the beach at Happisburg, near Hasbro. The unfortunate crew made a desperate resolve to try to reach the shore in their little boat. She was launched successfully over the side, two men got into her, and the others were preparing to follow, when it was seen that those on shore were trying to effect their rescue. The men got on board again, and then, in an agony of suspense, waited results. Twice a line was thrown from the rocket apparatus unsuccessfully; the third time it held, but as it was being drawn in it parted, and again the poor perishing men were driven to despair; they could make now no further efforts, for they were half dead and frozen with the awful cold.

If the weather were bad at sea it was equally terrific ashore. At Palling, near Great Yarmouth, the thermometer stood a long way below freezing-point, and the roads were slippery with ice. At 11 o'clock a messenger arrived in hot haste at the station, from Hasbro, with the news that a vessel was ashore at that place, and that their attempts to launch the lifeboat had been futile owing to the terrible seas. Immediately on receipt of the intelligence preparations were made to launch the lifeboat *Good Hope*. This was accomplished after great difficulty, and in half an hour her crew were aboard and she started for the wreck. In the attempt to reach her, sails were used, but the gale being from the east-south-east, the wind was not always favourable, and at times the men had to pull at the oars. This was fearful work, as the spray turned to ice on the oars, and the men's hands became numb and chilled. They were soaked to the skin with the flying spray, and their overalls, coats and hats were soon encased in ice. Still they persevered, and after an hour of terrible suffering reached what was left of the schooner *Sophia*; but it seemed impossible to get near her



"FROM SIX O'CLOCK IN THE AFTERNOON UNTIL MIDNIGHT THE SCHOONER LAY OFF THE LIGHTSHIP" (p. 370).

owing to the mass of floating wreckage—for she was fast breaking up—the extreme cold and the heavy sea. The unfortunate crew were almost powerless to render any assistance, though several desperate attempts were made to get at them. Perseverance was, however, at last crowned with success; the men were rescued, but so exhausted was their condition that it was doubtful if they would ever recover. The lifeboat was an hour and a half in making the shore, for the rescuers, too, had suffered most severely.

A. E. BONSER.

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## COMING KINGS AND QUEENS.

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ONE of the most interesting figures in Europe at the present time is the little Girl-Queen of Holland, who was born at the Hague on the last day of August, 1880, and is therefore in her fourteenth year. Her father—King William III. of Holland—was a man of sixty-three when his daughter first opened her eyes on this troublesome world; but he lived to see her through the trials of a somewhat delicate infancy, and she was ten years old when he died, on November

23rd, 1890. But it is through her mother that the child-queen appeals to English people; for Queen Emma, as she is familiarly called, is the elder sister of our own Duchess of Albany, having been the second daughter of the Prince and Princess of Waldeck-Pyrmont, and married to the King of Holland when she was just one-and-twenty. The Waldeck-Pyrmont princesses were brought up in a very affectionate and domesticated family circle, and lived more quietly than the daughters of most English country gentlemen.