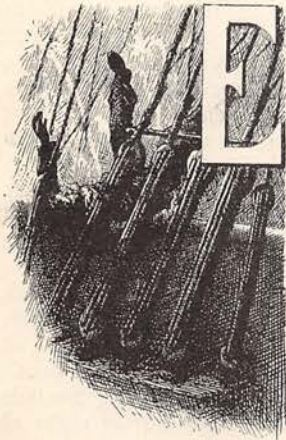


THE QUEEN'S PILOT.

BY ALFRED T. STORY.



"HE FELL INTO THE PORT
FORE-CHAINS" (p. 836).

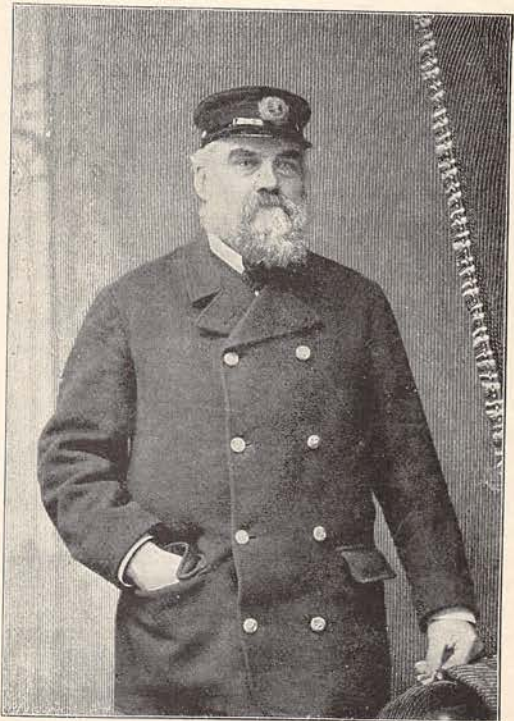
EVERYBODY has heard of the two yachts, the *Victoria and Albert* and the *Osborne*, built specially for Her Majesty and kept exclusively for her personal service. Not, of course, that no one ever makes use of them except the Queen, for of late years they have been more used by other members of the Royal Family than by the Sovereign herself. But they are Her Majesty's own property, and everyone connected with them, from the captain downwards, form, as it were, part of the royal household. The duties of the *Osborne* are confined more particularly to the home waters, although when the Queen goes abroad the smaller yacht generally forms part of the escort of the *Victoria and Albert*, which usually includes also two ironclads.

When the royal yacht thus makes a trip to a foreign port, it is necessary to have a trained pilot on board. Because, though the captain of a ship is supposed to be thoroughly competent to take charge of and navigate his vessel on the high seas, it is no part of his duty to make himself acquainted with the intricate navigation of all the ports, rivers, and estuaries he may have to visit. This he could not possibly do. Hence it devolves upon a special class of men, trained by long experience, to take charge of vessels wishing to enter a particular port. Every port in these islands has its own set of pilots, all more or less highly qualified according to the intricacy of the channels they have to navigate and the importance of the vessels using them.

It is for this reason that the Thames pilot takes such a high position amongst his professional brethren; the navigation of the estuary leading to the first of English rivers being exceedingly difficult, and the ships using it amongst the largest in the world. Special care is taken in the selection and control of these men, who are under the government of the Corporation of the Elder

Brethren of the Trinity House; and hence to be a Trinity House pilot is a distinction amongst the brethren of the craft. When, therefore, a pilot is required for Her Majesty's yacht, he is chosen from amongst the most experienced and cautious of the Trinity House pilots; and, of course, when a man has been tried and approved in this respect, he is always called upon when the services of a pilot are required.

The present Queen's pilot is Mr. Henry Foster, of Dover, who succeeded Mr. Joseph Gray, of Gravesend, in Jubilee year. Mr. Foster is what is known as an inward pilot—that is, he is stationed at Dover, and takes his turn with the other pilots at that port in the steam cutter which is always cruising off Dungeness in readiness to put a pilot on board any vessel requiring one to take it to the Thames. These inward pilots—frequently called Cinque Port pilots—conduct ships as far as Gravesend, where they are taken in charge by a river pilot, whose licence extends from that town to London Bridge. Having seen his vessel safe at Gravesend, the



HENRY FOSTER, TRINITY HOUSE PILOT, DOVER.

(From a photograph by Austin & Co., Dover.)

inward pilot returns to Dover, and again in due rotation goes on board the cutter, takes his ship, and so on. No inward pilot is allowed to take a vessel out of port; to do that is the business of the outward pilot. Both the inward and the outward pilot are paid by a regular charge, fixed by the Board of Trade, and levied on all vessels employing pilots according to tonnage and distance; the receipts made by the Cinque Port pilots being "pooled" and divided equally.

It is not an easy matter for a sailor to become a Trinity House pilot; he must not only be a man of approved character and nerve, but before he can be accepted as a candidate he must have served an apprenticeship to the sea and been in actual command of a square-rigged vessel for four years. Then, having been accepted as a candidate, he is required to pass various examinations to test his knowledge of the waters through which he will have to conduct vessels. His first examination, if passed, qualifies him to pilot vessels of fourteen feet draught and under. He is then a second-class pilot, and he has to serve as such for two years before he can be examined for the higher grade. In all, a pilot has to pass five examinations before he is recognised as a fully qualified first-class pilot, the full qualification comprising the North Channel as far as the Sunk Light, the South Channels to Dungeness, and thence to the Isle of Wight.

But to be a Queen's pilot a man must be familiar not only with the navigation of the Thames and the Channel, but with that of the North Sea generally. And it is greatly to the credit of Trinity House pilots that many of them have a most intimate knowledge of those waters; while some are so thoroughly acquainted with them and with the various estuaries flowing into them that they have little to learn from the local pilots.

Mr. Foster entered upon his seafaring career in the year of the Queen's marriage. Indeed, on the evening of her wedding-day, while watching the fireworks at Deal from the fore-yard of his ship, which was just anchoring in the Downs, he fell into the port fore-chains, and narrowly escaped bringing his life and his first voyage to an abrupt end at the same time. Fortunately, he came off with a few scratches, and was at work again within a few minutes of the accident. His ship was the whaling barque *Sussex*, bound for the South Seas; and he tells a characteristic anecdote of this first night in the Downs. They reached the anchorage in company with another South Sea whaler, the *Pilot*, which was subsequently taken by Solomon Islanders, who massacred the entire crew. She was

retaken by one of H.M. cruisers, and brought back to England in 1843 by a prize crew.

Off Cape Horn the young whaler had another narrow escape, having during a storm been washed out of the ship, and then, with a thoughtfulness unusual in waves, washed in again. Another incident characteristic of the adventurous life of a South Sea whaler happened while they were beating about the Pacific. When amongst the Galapagos Islands they were much in company with the whaler *Sir Andrew Hammond* (Captain Newby, of Deal, master). After leaving her they proceeded to Tumbes, a small town at the entrance of the Gulf of Guayaquil. While in this roadstead they one morning saw a whale-boat sailing towards them from seaward. She was evidently making for them; and coming alongside, it proved to be Captain Newby and a boat's crew, all nearly starved. In chasing a whale near the Galapagos, they got out of sight of the ship, and after trying for hours to find her, shaped their course for the land, and, strange to say, sailed direct for the *Sussex*. They had been more than a week in the boat, and had subsisted during that time upon a few biscuits, a pound of candles, a small keg of water, and some flying-fish. While lying at Tumbes an American whaler arrived and reported that an English whaler had reached Payta, having lost her captain together with a boat's crew. So, after completing her stores, the *Sussex* sailed for Payta, and put Captain Newby and his men on board.

This was only the beginning of misfortunes for Captain Newby, for shortly after this he lost his vessel at De Canores. It was reported to the *Sussex* two years after at Honolulu that he died and was buried there. They were even shown his tombstone; but upon the arrival of the *Sussex* in England, the first person to welcome them at the London Dock head was Captain Newby.

The next noteworthy event in this notable and protracted voyage was a mutiny. This occurred while they were on their way to the Marquesas Islands, the inhabitants of which were then cannibals. The ringleader was a man named Benson, and he and seven others were put in irons and landed at Ohitasak, eight natives being taken in their place. While they were cruising in the Japanese Sea, they fell in with the ship *Eleanor*, of London, Captain Barnett, who during a gale had his leg so crushed with the tiller that it was found necessary to amputate it. The doctor objected to perform the operation, whereupon Barnett sent for the carpenter, who succeeded in cutting off the limb under

the captain's directions. A few weeks afterwards, Foster rowed him and his own captain ashore at Honolulu, and was greatly amused by Captain Barnett showing off a neatly turned wooden leg which he had made himself.

On one occasion Foster came very near making a meal for a shark. He must be allowed to tell the yarn in his own words, however:—

"One day during a calm," he says, "I jumped overboard for a swim, leaving a rope over the side by which to get up when tired. The cook, however, hauled it in by way of a joke. I had got a little way from the ship when the mast-head man cried out, 'Shark coming!' I at once swam for the rope, but finding it hauled in, I called out for another. The chief mate ran and threw one, which I immediately grasped, but was so frightened that I had no power or strength to get up without assistance, as the rope was all greasy from lying in the oily scuppers. Seeing this, the mate clapped on to haul me up, when the rope slipped through my hands to the bare end, where, providentially, there was a knot. That saved my life, for as they hauled me up the side, the shark's head followed and came within a few inches of my feet.

"It will hardly be believed," continues Mr. Foster, "but immediately after I was on board, one of our Marquesas natives jumped

overboard right on to the shark's back and scared him away. This native, whom we had named Sussex after the ship, seemed quite to enjoy the fun, and said that he would face a shark at any time with a good sheath-knife."

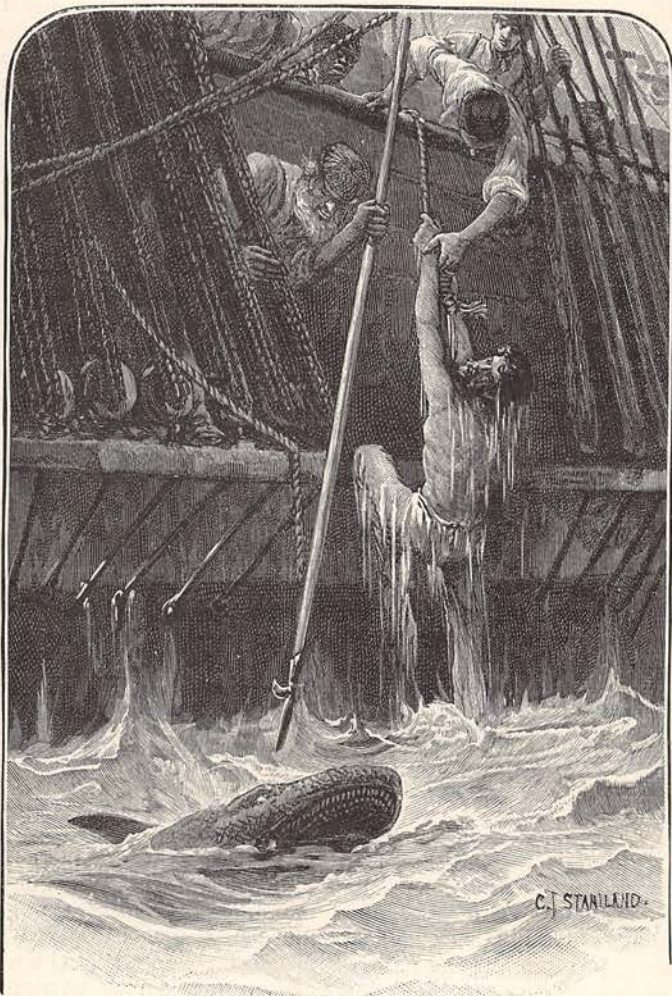
Speaking of the Island of Zeby, off the east

end of Gilolo Island, which lies to the north-west of New Guinea and right under the Equator, Mr. Foster says its harbour, on account of its beauty and safety, is called by the whalers "Abraham's Bosom." Wood and water can be had in abundance; alligators also abound. Speaking of the latter, Mr. Foster tells the following yarn:—

"The London whaler *Melluish*, while lying here, sent some of her crew on shore for water, and two of her men who were suffering from scurvy were taken on shore at the same time and buried in the loose mould up

to their necks as a remedy. While the watering party were away, the alligators came and took off their heads."

Not many sailors probably could say with Mr. Foster that he began and finished his four years' apprenticeship in the same vessel and on the same voyage. He completed his term just before reaching Table Bay, homeward bound, in January, 1844, and was at once rated as an able seaman. He recounts an amusing story of this sojourn at the Cape.



"AS THEY HAULED ME UP THE SIDE, THE SHARK'S HEAD FOLLOWED."

The crew having been eight or nine months without liberty, asked to be allowed two or three days on shore, and when the stores were completed refused to get the anchor up. Accordingly, the captain of the port was sent for. He proved to be a Scotchman, named McLeod, and "an uncommon hand with the tongue" for one of his profession. Calling the men aft, he fairly swamped them with long words; finally winding up with: "Besides, my good men, don't you see the profusion of anti-scorbutics your captain has provided?" This was a clincher, and the men, after looking at one another for a minute, said, "'Profusion! anti-scorbutics!' what's them, Bill? He must be a clever fellow. Let's fall to." And in less than an hour the barque was running down to Rotten Island under all sail.

From 1840 to 1896 counts fifty-six years of sea-service which the Queen's pilot has seen, and forty of them have been spent as a Trinity House pilot. He has naturally many stirring adventures to relate, but none abide in his memory so freshly as those of his initial four years' cruise in a whaler. He is now the senior pilot at Dover, although there are one or two older at Deal.

Two or three times a year he is called upon to pilot the Queen or some member of the Royal Family across the North Sea, from Port Victoria to Flushing or Copenhagen, and in addition has not infrequently to pilot the vessels of other royalties or foreign men-of-war. Like most men who have come in contact with the Prince of Wales, Mr. Foster has great admiration for His Royal Highness, who, he says, "gives so little trouble." And he records how one dark rough night, when the Prince was going to Flushing, he telegraphed to Port Victoria, telling Captain Fullerton he need not trouble to lay the *Victoria and Albert* alongside the pier—no easy matter—as he would go on board in the launch. "And without any stir or parade—in the dark and wet—before anyone hardly knew of the Prince's arrival, the captain came to me and said, 'His Royal Highness is on board; we can start.' That's what I call a rare royal touch!" says the pilot in admiration.

As before stated, Mr. Foster was preceded in the office of Queen's pilot by Mr. Joseph Gray, of Gravesend, who held the position for some eighteen years. Mr. Gray is quite a character in his way; and the commander of many a man-of-war—as well American and Russian as English—if he should happen to read these lines, will bear me out when I say that beneath his quiet exterior there is more than an ordinary amount of "real grit" in his composition.

Mr. Gray is looking forward to the time when he will have perforce to retire from his arduous duties as pilot, but he hopes it may not be for some years yet; although it was in 1842 that he entered upon his apprenticeship to the seafaring profession. Even before that he had had some taste of life on the salt water, just to see how he would like it.

South Shields was his native place, and thence he sailed in the collier *Columbus* successively as apprentice, second mate, mate, and master. From her he went to the *Tasso* as master. But the *Columbus* was the finer vessel of the two, and Mr. Gray is not a little proud of the old ship, a painting of which hangs in his drawing-room by Scott, of Newcastle, and to it he turns from time to time with admiring eyes. The sight of it calls up memories of his early days; and though he tells you that he was "never in trouble," he confesses that once, while on a voyage to the Baltic in the *Tasso*, they came very near going on to the rocks. "It was blowing a hurricane right on shore, and nothing could have saved us if Providence had not come to our aid," he says, recounting the adventure. "We were near the Swedish coast when the storm came on. The Swedish coast is nothing but rocks, whereas the other side of the Baltic is all sand right up to Cronstadt. The wind was blowing from the sou'-west straight on to the rocks, and we were going with it. There is a lighthouse at the place called Moropolen. It is a revolving light, and every time it revolved it shone full upon the ship and upon the rocks, for which we were driving without being able to help ourselves. There was a mountainous sea, which was washing right over us; and as it was freezing at the time, we were covered with ice—deck, rigging, and everything. We made sure we should go on the rocks—there seemed nothing to help us. We could do nothing but let the sea go over us, and we hardly thought we could live another hour. But just when we had given up all hope, suddenly the wind shifted to the nor'-west, and blew us right off the land. It went round in an instant, and then we knew we were saved. That was one of the closest shaves I ever had, and we owed our escape solely to Providence."

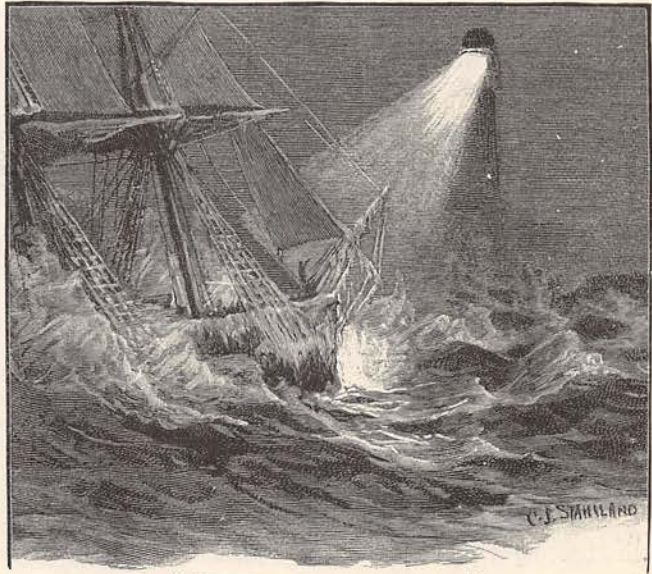
Mr. Gray became a light-draught pilot in 1857, and he passed his last examination before the pilotage board of the Trinity House in 1863. At first he had to do what is known as "turn" work. All the "outward" pilots' names are put on a roster, and when a vessel coming down the river wants a pilot, the first man on the list has to take her, big or little, sailing vessel or steamer. In this way each pilot takes his turn, unless he

chooses to forego it, as some do, for "choice" work. Any private individual or company owning vessels may choose their own pilot, and this is done to a large extent. These "choice" pilots, as they are called, make large incomes in comparison with the humbler "turn" men. As already stated, the rates for piloting are fixed by law, so that in this respect all are equal; but the "choice" men get more ships to pilot than the "turn" men, and they have the finest vessels, and so their receipts are greater.

It does not follow that the "choice" pilot is always the better and more experienced man, because in these matters influence goes for something; but it is nevertheless true that large firms and companies like the P. and O., the Orient, the Castle Line, Messrs. Bullard and King, and others, would not commit their vessels to any but the most experienced hands.

In course of time Gray began to get a share of this "choice" work, and this grew until he did nothing else. Then, towards the end of the 'sixties, he was appointed royal pilot, and had the piloting of the *Victoria and Albert* whenever the Queen or any member of the Royal Family was travelling to the Continent. For eighteen years he held this important post, which speaks a great deal for the trust reposed in his knowledge and care. Nor did anything ever happen to the royal yacht to show that this confidence was misplaced. A little mishap, however, did once occur to the *Victoria and Albert*, which occasioned a slight passing sensation at Brighton and startled some of the people on board.

As it happened, however, there were no passengers in her, the yacht being simply on her way from Southampton to Flushing to bring over some royal relatives. They were going along with a south-west wind, and when about ten miles east of the Oars lightship—consequently nearly abreast of Brighton, a heavy sea struck the vessel on the starboard quarter, and broke the Queen's barge to pieces. "It was blowing hard," says Mr. Gray, "though not particularly rough, and we could hardly account for the accident. However, the barge was smashed to bits, and some portions of it bearing the Queen's arms and monogram went ashore at Brighton, and being recognised, caused no little stir. When we reached Flushing



"WE WERE COVERED WITH ICE."

there were telegrams awaiting us from the Admiralty, inquiring what had happened."

Something much more serious occurred once when Mr. Gray was piloting the Russian Imperial yacht *Derjava* from Copenhagen to the Thames with the Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh on board, together with a large party of well-known people, including Admiral Popoff and Lord Mount-Edgcumbe. Mr. Gray's account of the affair is as follows:—

"We had stormy weather immediately after we left Copenhagen, and a rough time nearly all the way over. There was a high sea with strong winds in the lower part of the Cattegat, where we washed part of the figure-head away.

"When we got round the Skaw the wind became more favourable, because of our altered course, though we still had a hard easterly gale, which, as we got well into the North Sea, increased in severity. Then it came on rain and sleet, which did not improve matters. Indeed, it turned out a fearful bad night, and so thick that we could scarcely see anything. What now happened I have never been able to account for; it is a mystery to me, as it was so all on board.

"Towards morning we found ourselves among the sands off Yarmouth. I thought we were forty miles away, when, to my astonishment, I caught sight of the Newarp lightship. I only saw it for an instant; but there was no mistaking its three lights. We were going right for it in the direction we had come, and I knew that to get there we must have come right over Smith Knole, just north of Yarmouth. We had run a fearful

risk ; but it happened to be high water, and so we got over without touching. I remember the night well, as the Duke of Edinburgh was on the bridge till eleven o'clock.

"There was great consternation when it was discovered where we were, and a consultation took place in the chart-room. I had to go down. The captain could not speak a word of English, but the executive officer could, and so could Admiral Popoff. The Admiral said to me : 'This is a bad job, pilot.' I said : 'It might have been, sir.' He said : 'How has the ship got here?' Said I : 'That I can't account for anyhow.' Then the Admiral said : 'The light that you say showed three lights, the officer on watch says showed only two.' I replied that I was certain that it showed three lights, and that it was the Newarp lightship. He said : 'You seem very positive.' I said : 'I am so positive, that if you go on, I shall take it as the three-light lightship.' 'Then,' said he, 'if

abated, and we anchored that night about nine o'clock at the Nore. We were so much behind that the Admiralty telegraphed to the different signal stations along the coast, asking if the *Derjava* had been seen. After anchoring I had to go with a boat's crew to Sheerness to wire to the Admiralty that all was right.

"Next morning there was a kind of court-martial, to inquire how the ship got out of her course. Someone suggested that the compass might be out of order. Admiral Popoff asked if there could be a current in that part of the North Sea that had not been marked in the charts. The Duke of Edinburgh said that was impossible. Lord Mount-Edgumbe, who was in the navy and captain of a ship himself, said : 'I took particular care in looking after the pilot. I was struck with the attention he paid to the ship, especially to the steering, and I do not think anyone could have brought the ship better.' So in



"SENT UP A FLARE-LIGHT AS A DISTRESS SIGNAL."

it is as you say, and we go according to your judgment, what is the next light we shall come to?' 'The Croton lightship—a red revolving light,' said I. 'And how long before we sight it?' he asked. I told him, and he said : 'All right, go on ;' and in a short time we saw the Croton light. It was a fearful morning ; but afterwards the storm

the end it was decided that they could not account for the ship getting so much out of her course. And that they did not consider I was to blame is shown by the fact that I took the *Derjava* back to Copenhagen."

Two other experiences stand out with special distinctness in Mr. Gray's recollection. One of them occurred when he was piloting

the *Benita*, belonging to the Ryde Line of Belgian Royal Mail steamers, from Flushing to Gravesend. It was in the month of January, and after they had started it turned out a fearful night, pitch dark, with heavy snow, and a gale from the E.S.E., blowing right on the Goodwin Sands.

Mr. Gray considers this his worst experience.

"I never knew such a snow-storm," he says. "It snowed continuously for three days and three nights; and for the sailor snow is worse than fog. You can't open your eyes for it. We could only feel our way, and hardly that. The captain said to me: 'You will be right over to France if you do not mind.' 'All the better,' said I. 'We shall be better over in France to-night than here.' I knew we were not far from the Goodwins. We were in reality close on the Sands, but did not touch. If we had touched we should have knocked the bottom of her in, for the *Benita* was an iron ship, and there were four hundred people below, and we had to batten them down. The sea was so high that you could not tell the broken water from any other sea. We were sounding all the while, and the soundings showed deep water. That was because the Goodwin Sands are quite steep where we were, and we were on the very edge of them. Nothing could have saved us, if it had not been for a poor fellow right in front of us—a Norwegian barque, as it proved, called the *Woodville*. She went on the Sands, and immediately sent up a flare-light as a distress signal. That saved us. The instant I saw the flare I cried out, 'Hard a starboard!' We had four men at the helm, and she went out. The captain said: 'You'll see nothing,' still believing that we were near the coast of France. I said: 'It is too thick to see anything;' but if we had not starboarded the helm when we did, we should have gone right on the Goodwin, and nothing could have saved us.

"After we had gone a short distance the wind suddenly went round from E. to N.N.E., which made it better for us, as well as for the shipwrecked crew. In fact that, and the dropping of the water at the same time, saved them. We stopped for half an hour to see if we could help them, but we dared not go too near with such a big ship. However, their signal was seen at Deal and Ramsgate, and the lifeboats came out and took them off. But you may imagine what a night it was when three men were washed out of one of the lifeboats and drowned.

"As I said before, I was never out in such a night; it was the worst experience I ever had, and it turned my hair grey. When I set out on that ship my hair was dark, without a trace of grey; when I came back it was quite grey.

"The *Woodville*, being a wooden ship



MR. JOSEPH GRAY, THE QUEEN'S FORMER PILOT.
(From a photograph by J. Willis, Gravesend.)

loaded up with deals, was got off and towed to London. She was a new vessel, and that was her first voyage. I afterwards saw her in the Commercial Dock, and told the captain that but for his being just in front of us and going on the sands as he did, and making a light, we should have been on and probably all lost."

Thus, though often running narrow risks, the veteran pilot prides himself that he was "never in trouble." Nor did he cost the underwriters a five-pound note in all his experience until March last year, when a ship he was piloting ran against another vessel in the fog. It was no fault of his, and the owners exonerated him from blame. "Still," said he in referring to the affair, "it spoiled my record of forty years."