

How a Ship Founders.

By W. E. ELLIS.



WE all know what a wreck is, but very few of us have had an opportunity of seeing one with our own eyes. We are glad, therefore, to have an opportunity of presenting a unique little set of photographs, illustrating the various stages in the foundering of a large ocean-going steamer. The photos. were taken by Mr. Cecil Lightfoot, of the Linde British Refrigeration Company, Lower Shadwell, E. This company provided the doomed vessel with her refrigerating machinery, and Mr. Lightfoot was making the first trip in her, for the purpose of explaining to her crew the action of that machinery.

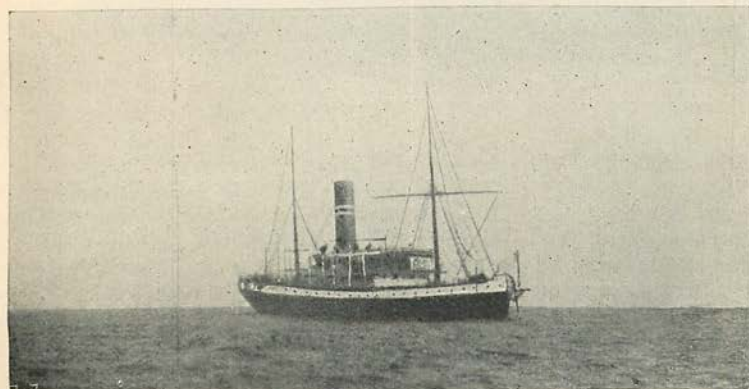
Here is the whole story. The Osaka Steam Navigation Company of Japan placed an order in England for the construction of a passenger steamer, of elegant lines and high speed. This ship, afterwards named the *Tai-Hoku*, was built at Sir Railton Dickson's yard at Middlesbrough, and engined by Richardsons, of Hartlepool. In due time the vessel was ready to be handed over to her owners; and accordingly she was provided

one on which the disaster occurred. It was a Sunday, and a frightfully foggy Sunday at that. This was July 11th, 1897. Here we had better let Mr. Cecil Lightfoot take up the story.

"We positively could not see from one side of the vessel to the other. Our horns and sirens were hooting and screeching like mad. It was about nine o'clock at night, and we were twelve miles to the north-west of Cape Espichel, on the Portuguese coast. I was sitting in one of the main saloons, and the ship was forging steadily but slowly ahead, when, without a moment's warning, there was a truly frightful crash, and I was thrown half-way across the room. I picked myself up, and dashed out without a moment's delay into the alley-way. I waited there for a moment, and then gained the deck in record time. I distinctly saw the outlines of a great steamer slowly dropping astern. She continued to scrape the *Tai-Hoku*, and as she cleared, she struck our ship a kind of parting blow on the poop. Perhaps you can imagine into what a state of confusion our mixed

crew were thrown. Our captain, however, was a splendid fellow, and when he saw the other ship about to strike him, he put his helm hard down, so that the blow was much less severe than it might otherwise have been. Furthermore, he restored absolute order in the ship within half an hour of the collision.

"The next step taken was the letting

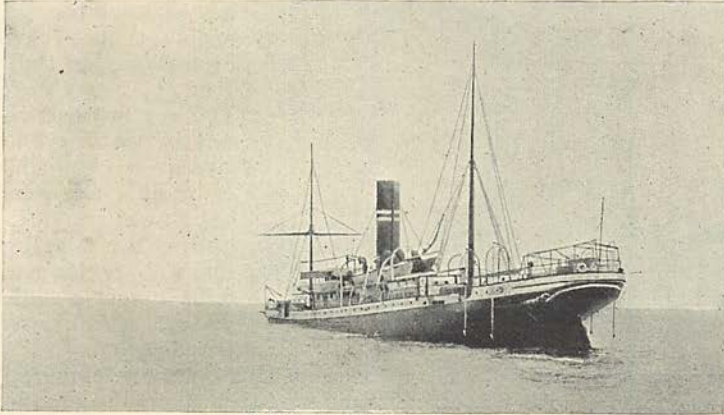


THE DESERTED SHIP—FILLING RAPIDLY.

down of the officers in slings for the purpose of examining the sides of the ship. After careful inspection, however, they reported that there was very little apparent damage, beyond a few started plates. Not content with this, Captain Conradi ordered the carpenter to report every half-hour. At a little after ten o'clock, 5ft. of water was reported in the fore-hold. Now, it was the captain's intention to make for Malta,

with a British captain and enough hands to take her over to Antwerp, where she was to pick up a mixed cargo, consisting largely of cast-iron pipes. The *Tai-Hoku* was also under orders to take up the remainder of her crew at Antwerp. Altogether, there were forty-nine hands, including Japanese, niggers, Belgians, Swedes, and Germans—a very mixed lot indeed.

The fifth day out from Antwerp was the



"DOWN BY THE HEAD."

Millfield, of Whitby, bore down upon us, in response to our flag-signal 'N. C.'—which, according to the International code, means 'in distress—require assistance.' The captain of this ship conferred with our own commander as to the desirability of towing the *Tai-Hoku*, and Captain Conradi and some of the officers once more went on board their ship to

but when 7ft. was reported at eleven o'clock, he decided to make for Lisbon instead. An anxious night, you may be sure. At half-past four in the morning the inexorable carpenter reported 16ft. of water!

"The ship was slowly sinking; there could be no doubt of that; already she was noticeably down by the head, and her forward compartments were slowly but surely filling.

"Everything was managed splendidly. When 18ft. was reported, the boats were lowered, and each given its proper complement of provisions, instruments, and flags. All through the fatal Sunday, and all night also, the fog was of extraordinary density. Sirens and horns, other than our own, were heard very frequently, but one could see nothing.

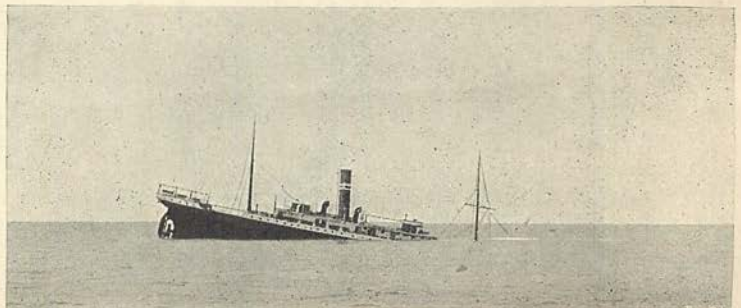
"At last the carpenter reported 22ft. of water, and then the captain ordered everybody into the boats at a minute's notice. I dashed downstairs to see if I could save any of my belongings, but the only thing I could find at the moment was my little hand camera. I passed the strap about my shoulders in such a way that the instrument in no way impeded my movements.

"After taking to the boats, we remained very near the ship—within a hundred yards or so. By this time day had dawned, and I was able to take the first two photographs. There was, however, a considerable interval between them. After two or three hours, a large vessel, which proved to be the

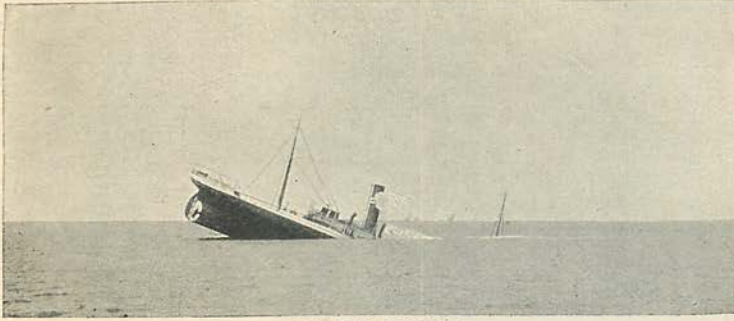
make the necessary arrangements. Immediately afterwards, however, the sinking steamer began to roll heavily, and the attempts at towing had to be abandoned.

"At our request, the *Millfield* left us immediately after this, she being in a hurry to get home. It was our intention to row up the Tagus to Lisbon, but the crew being of very poor quality, this proved a pretty difficult matter. At any rate, we determined to see the last of our ship. The end was now very near. One extraordinary occurrence that hastened it was the displacement of the engines, which, as the *Tai-Hoku's* head began to go down, and her stern to come up, fell right through the ship with a rumbling sound like distant thunder, and doubtless made another great breach in the bow.

"After another period of anxious waiting, the bridge fell forward, at the same time jerking the cords that communicated with the sirens, and causing them to send a weird scream over the face of the waters. The next moment—having, so to speak, wished us farewell—the huge ship dived deliberately head-foremost into 300ft. of water, and was never seen again. As the sea rushed into the



ANOTHER STAGE.



LAST FEW MOMENTS.

furnaces, steam and water-gas were generated; and these, rushing up through the smoke-stack, caused a kind of explosion, which is very plainly seen in the last photograph I took, just as the ship was disappearing. The upward rush of steam carried a great quantity of soot from the flues, and this caused a dark cloud to hover over the place where the *Tai-Hoku* sank. There was no whirlpool of any kind. When this great vessel of 3,100 tons took her last dive, the little flotilla of boats could not have been more than 150yds. distant. Standing by after her disappearance, we saw pathetic bits of wreckage coming slowly to the top—hen-coops, a boat, fire-buckets, seats, life-belts, and so on.

"When we had seen the last of our ship we set to work to row to Lisbon. As I have hinted before, there was not much work to be got out of the crew. For one thing, they were rather scared by the sharks, which abound in those waters, and of which we saw three. At about two miles from land, a vessel bore down upon us, and met us at Cascaes Bay, a little to the north of the River Tagus. She proved to be a Portuguese pilot-cutter, and from her appearance we date the commencement of a further chapter of troubles.

"You would have thought that, consider-

ing our condition, we might at least have been allowed to land. Not so, however. You see, we had no doctor on board to give us a clean bill of health. We were kept waiting for hours in a blazing sun with nothing to drink except a little water, which was positively hot.

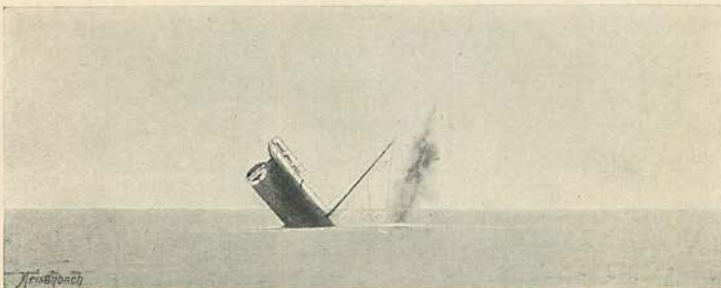
"At the Custom House we were examined by doctors, and were then allowed to go to an hotel, but were actually forbidden to take any of our belongings with us from the boats!

"I forgot to mention that on our way up the Tagus we passed the ship which had been the cause of all our misfortunes.

"This was the *Eastbourne*, Smyrna to Hull, and she it was who had run down the *Tai-Hoku* on the night of July 11th, afterwards disappearing in the fog.

"I came home in the Royal Mail steam-packet *Nile*, which called at Lisbon on its way from Pernambuco. I afterwards learned that the beautiful *Tai-Hoku* was, with her cargo, insured for £100,000."

Of course, the destruction of the Japanese vessel led to an important action at law. This was decided on October 30th last, at the High Court of Justice, before Mr. Justice Barnes and the Trinity Masters. The *Eastbourne* proved to be a vessel of 2,240 tons gross, with a general cargo, and a crew of twenty-three hands. The case was all against her. She was proved to have been going too fast, considering the state of the weather, and not to have taken adequate precautions in the way of look-out and whistle-sounding.



FINAL PLUNGE—BOILERS EXPLODING.