

A Funeral at Sea.

By J. H. BARKER.



LIFE on board one of the large liners which run from Southampton or London to the Cape is almost ideal. After the first week of the trip, calm seas and glorious sunshine are experienced, and on board we are free from the rush of business life, and can laze away our time to our heart's content. No letters to be looked through, no clients or customers to interview, and no morning paper to read. If that is not a holiday, what is?

For certain reasons, the first part of the voyage is not so enjoyable to some as to others, for the Bay of Biscay has a very bad name, and although it may be a bugbear whose growl is often worse than its bite, nevertheless, it sometimes acts up to its reputation. However, when Madeira is past, all thoughts of *mal de mer* are put aside, everyone begins to take a fresh interest in the trip, and things in general begin to "brighten up." Deck chairs are placed in the shady parts of the deck, and we recline in comfort and talk scandal (for scandal is talked even on board), read novels and smoke.

Soon after "The Canaries" are left behind, however, a committee is formed, and a programme of sports and entertainments drawn up, to enliven the remaining fortnight of the voyage. There are cricket for the more energetic, bull-board, quoits, sports, concerts, dances (including a fancy dress ball), etc., in which everyone takes part, and a good time is provided for one and all.

But life at sea, as on land, is not all sunshine and happiness, and I shall ever remember a certain lovely hot morning in December, when we were still nine or ten days' sail from

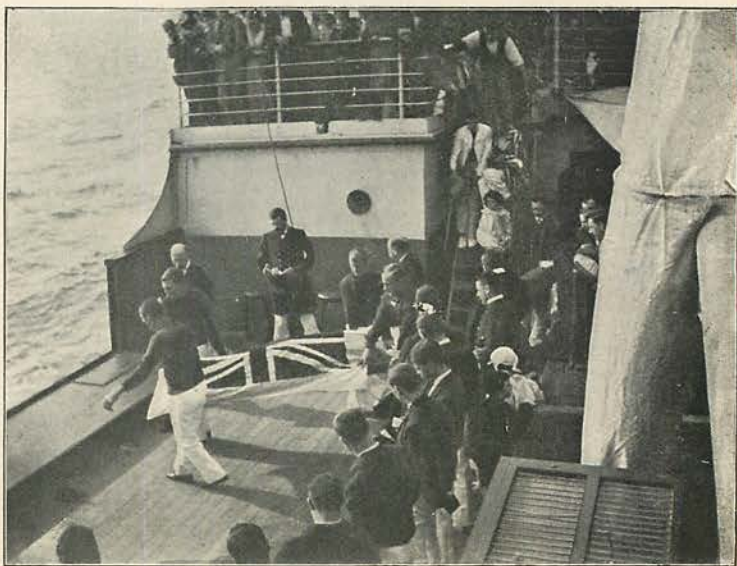
Cape Town, and those of us who cared for the luxury were having beef-tea and biscuits in the saloon, when the captain's clerk came in, and said: "There's to be a funeral this afternoon at four o'clock."

I can never forget the change that came over the company. It seemed as though a thunderbolt had fallen. A few minutes before we had all been talking of the various amusements which were to take place during the day, and no thought, except of pleasure, had entered our minds.

"Who is dead?" we asked, and were told that a steerage passenger had died of consumption.

There were no games that day: it seemed as though the life on board had completely changed.

At four o'clock nearly all the passengers came on deck to attend the funeral. The ceremony was to take place in the "afterwell" of the vessel, the lower deck being kept for the officers and men who were to take part in the service. The "gangway" was taken down, everything prepared, the engines slowed down, and the body was borne out on to the deck by the "bosun" and three of his men, and placed near the side of the vessel.



From a

BRINGING THE BODY ON DECK.

(Photograph.



From a

DURING THE BURIAL SERVICE.

[Photograph.]

the engines were stopped altogether, and then there was absolute stillness and silence, broken only by the voice of the captain and the ripple of the water as the ship still moved along her way.

"We, therefore, commit her body to the deep . . ." and at these words the men who had stood by the "coaming" on which the body rested raised it gently up, there was a dull splash, and the body sank to rise no more, until the great day when the deep shall give up her dead.

At sea the body is sewn up in a canvas sack, which is heavily weighted at the foot, and this is laid on a "coaming" (a part of one of the hatches), which takes the place of a bier. The whole is covered with a Union Jack, which is fastened to the four corners of the "coaming," so that when the time comes to commit the body to the deep the one end of the "coaming" is raised and the body slips off into the water, leaving the flag in its place.

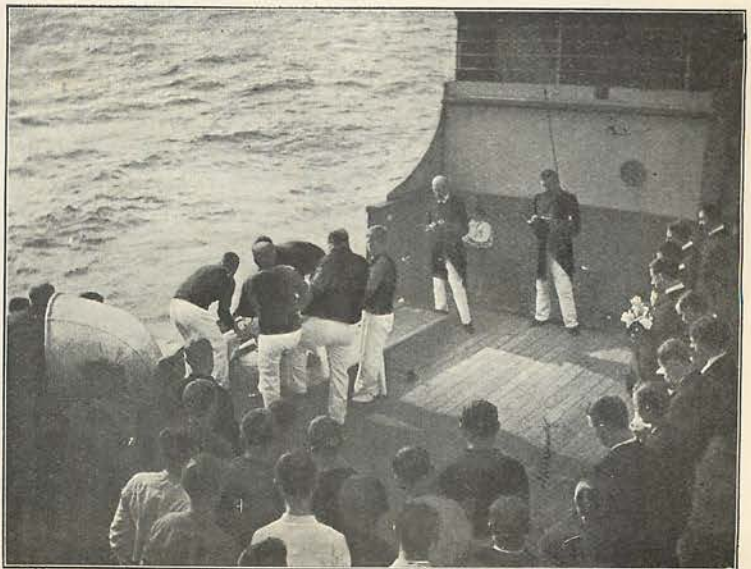
The captain and first officer read the burial service between them, the other officers and men joining in the responses.

Never have I heard the service read more impressively than it was that December day, and during parts of the reading there were few dry eyes to be seen amongst the passengers. The beautiful words are impressive at any time, but at sea their beauty is magnified a hundredfold.

A few minutes after the service had commenced, at a signal from the first officer,

Everything was done in the most reverent spirit, and when at the close of the service the engines were again put full steam ahead, the "gangway" closed up, and the ordinary routine of ship-life resumed, I could not help thinking that there is something very grand in having the profound sea for a tomb. God seemed nearer in that solitude than in the crowded city.

As I was going down to my cabin a little later I met one of the officers, who



From a

ALLOWING THE BODY TO SLIDE INTO THE SEA.

[Photograph.]



From a) SHOWING THE FLAG LEFT BEHIND, AFTER THE BODY HAS GONE. [Photograph.]

said, "Not been taking the funeral, have you?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Well, it's your own look-out, and you have to take the risk yourself."

A little farther down I came across one of the engineers, and he asked me the same question. I told him I had taken a few

usual life on board, and to our games and frivolities; and by a few, perhaps, the solemn act of burying the dead had been forgotten ere we gained our first view of the beautiful Table Bay, with the picturesque town and grand Table Mountain in the background, but on some of us, I feel sure, it will have a lasting influence.

snap-shots, and he said, "You have? I wouldn't have done it for anything you could have given me."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Don't you know that to photograph a funeral on board ship is about the most unlucky thing you could do? Anyhow, it's your own risk, so it does not matter to me. Still, I would not take such a risk myself."

Not being superstitious, no harm accrued from my daring.

Gradually we got back again to our



From a) AT THE CLOSE OF THE SERVICE. [Photograph.]