PATHETIC TALE OF THE MARY CELESTE

One of the Most Dramatic of the Sea's Many Mysteries.

THE KEY TO IT NEVER DISCOVERED

She Was Found Off the Azores Driftidly with Sail Partly Set, but Without Trace or Sign of Skipper or Crew, Who Was Never Heard from in Any Way.

From the Boston Globe.

There is many a true tale of the sea that is stranger than fiction, but not a few stranger narratives of ships and their crews are robbed of their mystery and romance after many ears, and this is one of them. For nearly twenty years there has been no secret of death in old ocean's keeping more written and talked about than the strange case of the abandonment of the American brigantine Mary Celeste, off the island of St. Mary, one of the Azores group, and the disappearance of the whole ship's company. The Mary Celeste was found with her lower sails set, with her cargo and rigging undisturbed, the cabin just as it had been when occupied, and the effects of the captain, his wife, the mate, and the crew just as they were when all hands were on board. No satisfactory explanation as to why the vessel was abandoned and what became of the people who sailed in her has ever been given. Through the kindness of a relative of one of the officers of the vessel the Globe is enabled to give in this article a solution of what has for nearly two decades been known as one of the strongest sea mysteries on record.

The Mary Celeste was a small vessel for a square rigger, as they are built nowadays, being 700 and 400 tons register. She was built as a brig, but just before her departure on the eventful voyage with which this story has to do her rig was changed to that of a brigantine, her owner, Captain James Winchester, of New York, thinking her sailing qualities would be improved by fore and aft rig on the main-mast instead of square rig. The vessel was also put in dry dock and overhauled, so that when ready for sea she was in the best shape possible.

SAILED FOR ITALY.

After being loaded with a cargo of alcohol in casks, the Mary Celeste sailed from New York for Genoa, Italy, Oct. 17, 1876. Her captain was Benjamin Briggs, a young man, but one of ample experience as commander of a vessel. He was accompanied by his young wife and their only child, a girl, about 2 years old. Captain Briggs was a native of Marion, Mass. He had been married but a few years before, his wife being from the same town. The first mate of the brigantine was Albert G. Richardson, of Stockton Springs, Me., a village on the Penobscot river. It was from his sister, who resides on Perkins street, Somerville, that the facts given here were obtained. His father is living in the old home by the Penobscot, at the age of 80. William Head, of New York city, was steward. He was unmarried, and made his home with his widowed mother. The crew was picked up in the shipping offices of South street, New York, and included Turks, Italians, and Portuguese, as unpromising a lot as ever swabbed down decks. It was the makeup of this crew which led to the theory, when the vessel was found abandoned, that the captain, his wife, the mate, and the cook had been made away with by the men. The disappearance of the crew, as well as the others, was a circumstance that made the theory untenable and the mystery deeper.

A few days before sailing from New York, Captain Briggs met Captain Morehouse of the English brig Dei Gracia, on the street, and, as they were acquainted, the two men conversed about their vessels and the voyage before them, for the Dei Gracia was also bound for a Mediterranean port. The two captains said good by, with mutual wishes for good luck, and in due time the Dei Gracia put to sea, sailing a few days ahead of the Mary Celeste. That meeting of the two captains was their last, but the courses of their vessels were destined to cross in a strange way before the western ocean was traversed.

The voyage of the Dei Gracia was without incident until Dec. 7, though unfavorable weather was encountered that kept the vessel back and threatened a long voyage. On that day the island of St. Mary, the southernmost of the nine in the Azores group, was sighted and almost at the same time a sail was made out in the offing. The crew refreshed their sea-tried eyes with long looks at the verdant mountains of Santa Maria, but the sail was not lost sight of. It was Mate Devon's watch on deck, and after studying the sail, which the brig was steadily approaching, he found it to be a brigantine. Captain Morehouse took a look at the vessel, and the two men decided that it was the Mary Celeste, which, though she had left New York later than Dei Gracia, might easily be in that latitude, as she was a better sailer than the English vessel.

NO ONE ON BOARD.

It did not take the captain and mate of the Dei Gracia long to see that something was wrong on the Mary Celeste. The vessel was yawning about as if without a helmsman, filling and falling, first on one tack and then on another. All her lower sails were set, but her topsails were furled, and everything was snug aloft. A closer scrutiny of the vessel showed that the boat was missing from the davits of the stern. The longboat's cradle on the forward house was also empty. The English brig ran down alongside the Mary Celeste, a boat was lowered and manned, and Mate Devon went aboard the apparently abandoned brigantine. He climbed over the rail, fully expecting to see evidence of murder or plague on the silent deck. No such sight was in store for him. The decks were as clean as if recently washed down. Every piece of rope was in its place. The sheets were all made fast. The wheel was not lashed, and, as the vessel came up in the wind or filled away, it turned idly back and forth. The lashings of the boat at the stern had been cut, and an axe lay on deck near the davits, just as it had been dropped, evidently, by the man who cut the boat free.

The astonished mate of the Dei Gracia looked about the deserted decks, then descended to the cabin. He was nervously apprehensive of finding evidences of murder there, but in this too he failed. The cabin was just as it would be if the ship's company were on board. The captain's watch hung from the bracket of the swinging lamp over the table. On the table was a slate, on which some notes for the logbook were jotted down. The date of the entry was Nov. 24, showing that the vessel had been left to her own devices nearly two weeks when found. Under the entry of the slate, which recorded light wind and fair weather, were the words, "Fanny, my dear wife." This, it was afterward learned, was in the handwriting of the mate, who probably started this message to his wife while his shipmates were lowering the boat, and did not have time to finish it.

Mate Devon, of the Dei Gracia, continued his inspection of the cabin like one who expects to see the dead before him at every turn. He looked in the captain's room, and there saw the clothes of the infant, and in one of the berths the imprint of the little head on the pillow, where the child's mother had put it to sleep, and whence she had taken it when called on to leave the ship. The other berths were undisturbed, showing that the abandonment of the vessel must have taken place in the evening. In the storeroom the ship's provisions were undisturbed, except that one drawer containing canned meats had been pulled out, and part of its contents apparently removed. In the gallery everything was just as the cook had apparently left them when clearing up after supper. In one of the sailor's chests was found a £5 English note, and several articles of value left behind showed that the crew must have left hastily.

WHY THE CREW LEFT.

Thoroughly mystified, Captain Morehouse decided, after hearing the mate's story and inspecting the vessel for himself, to take the brigantine to Gibraltar. Mate Devon was put in charge and was given two men as crew to navigate the ship. It was nearly 1,200 miles to "the rock," and the voyage was not an easy one to make with only two men as crew—two superstitious men who considered themselves on board a fated ship in the bargain. In all that 1,200 miles the two sailors could not be persuaded to go below once. They preferred sleeping on deck to seeking rest in the cabin, and they would drink water from the butts on deck rather than go into the galley to make coffee.

Finally anchor was dropped in the blue waters under the shadow of the mighty rock of Gibraltar, and from the little white-walled city clinging to the base of the rock word was cabled to New York of the arrival. Captain Winchester was obliged to go across to claim the vessel and settle the claim for salvage, which was finally fixed by the English admiralty court at $50,000. This was paid by Captain Morehouse of the Die Gracia, and after lying three months in the harbor of Gibraltar the Mary Celeste was put in charge of a new captain and proceeded to her port of destination.

When the news of the finding of the Mary Celeste became known there was one very important point in the case which was not made public, according to the sister of Mate Richardson. Mate Devon of the Dei Garacia knew of it. Some time after the incidents related here Captain Lyman T. Richardson of the brig Valencia, a brother of Mate Richardson of the Mary Celeste, sought out the mate of the Dei Garacia, and from him learned the story of the finding of the abandoned brigantine. Mate Devon said that while on the vessel he took off the main hatch to inspect the cargo, and found that the head of one cask of the alcohol was out. He made a careful examination of the cask, and came to the conclusion that the barrel of spirits had exploded, as everything about it indicated that an explosion had taken place. This, in the minds of Mate Devon and Captain Richardson, explained the whole mystery of the hasty departure of the ship's company, who, fearing that the whole cargo might blow up, had taken to the boat with the intention of standing by developements.

NEVER HEARD FROM.

It was learned by Captain Richardson that the Mary Celeste's long boat had been crushed while the vessel was loading, and as Captain Briggs did not want to wait for a new boat to be built, or the old one repaired, he had sailed with only one boat, the one at the stern davits. Into this small boat then the people on the brigantine must have hurried when the explosion took place in the cargo. In the vicinity of the Azores there is a short, lively chop to the sea, caused by the strong currents and the breaking up of the ocean swell, and in this chop the overloaded jolly boat must have filled, leaving the occupants to the mercy of the sea. It may have been the purpose of the captain to tow astern in the boat, but an accident to the painter would have been enough to cast the boat adrift, while in the darkness there would be little chance of finding their runaway vessel.

For a long time after the finding of the Mary Celeste the anxious relatives of the captain, mate and cook clung to the hope that they might have been picked up. The secretary of the navy issued a request that all vessels passing the latitude and longitude where the brigantine was abandoned should jog in the vicinity twenty-four hours before proceeding. This did no good, however, for not the slightest clue to the fate of the ship's company was ever obtained, and after Captain Richardson saw Mate Devon and talked with him, the widow of Mate Richardson, and his mother, as well as the widowed mother of the cook, put on mourning for their loved ones, whom they gave up as dead. They accepted the theory advanced by Mate Devon as the only tenable one as to the abandonment of the vessel, and they held the mystery of the Mary Celeste as no mystery at all, in spite of the many tales that have been woven out of the facts in the case, with more or less imaginative embroidery thrown in.

One theory advanced was that the crew of the Dei Gracia made away with the crew of the Mary Celeste by throwing them overboard, for the purpose of securing the ship and the salvage that would be paid after she was taken into port. Owing to the character of the captain and mate of the Dei Gracia this theory fell flat.

SOME SOUTHERN SCHOOLS.

An Educational Controversy Displeasing to Georgia Men.

From the Sun.

The ratio of illiteracy is highest, 44.5 per cent., in New Mexico, a territory, and lowest, 3.1 per cent., in Nebraska. The disbursements in all the states for educational expenses amounts to nearly $250,000,000 a year. Toward this total New York state contributes $20,000,000, and of this the city of New York $6,000,000. The appropriations of other states for school purposes vary considerably, being $19,000,000 in Pennsylvania, $16,000,000 in Illinois, $12,000,000 in Ohio, and $10,000,000 in Massachusetts. North Carolina spends in a year on education less than $800,000, and South Carolina only $550,000. Georgia's expenditures for school purposes are by no means liberal, and the sparseness of the appropriation has given rise, latterly, to considerable local conflict in the Cracker State.

By the census of 1890 the population of Georgia was, in round figures, 1,900,000, and the population of West Virginia by the same census was 770,000, or considerably less than half. But while West Virginia expends in a year $1,000,000 on education, Georgia expends only $1,685,000 for the same purpose, with the result that the ratio of illiteracy in Georgia is very much higher and the school accommodations are very much inferior. There are 700,000 children of school age in the state of Georgia, and the average school attendance is less than 300,000. The country schoolhouses are so poorly built as to be uninhabitable in winter, when the farmers do not need the assistance of their children and when they would be at liberty to attend school. The state tax now levied does not provide nearly as much money as is needed, and the school commissioner will ask the legislature to levy a school tax in each county. He estimates that a tax of one-quarter of one per cent. would enable the authorities in all of the rural counties to build good schoolhouses, employ competent teachers, and keep schools open nine months in the year. Several counties have already voluntarily tried the system of levying such a special tax as the commissioner demands.

The publication of these facts is displeasing to many patriotic Georgia men, who are not slow in declaring that the lack of school accommodations is by no means limited to their state, some of them going so far as to add that they have read the same charge against the city of New York, the opulent condition of the finances of which, they declare, ought to be a guarantee against such lack of accommodation. They further say that the average duration of the school year in Georgia is 114 days, against 97 in Florida, 87 in Tennessee, 86 in South Caroline, 75 in Alabama, and 63 in North Carolina—the lowest of all the states. The ratio of illiteracy in North Carolina is 43 per cent. of the whole population over the age of 10, and is nearly as large as in the territory of New Mexico. There are 8,300 school teachers in North Carolina, a larger number than in any New England state with the single exception of Massachusetts; but for some reason, which does not appear to be entirely plain, 4,500 of the school teachers of North Carolina are men, whereas in most of the states of the country, and notably so in New England and the west, the great majority of school teachers are women. The salaries paid to male teachers are usually larger than those paid to female teachers, and it may be due to this fact that North Carolina stands so poorly in respect to school instruction. $630,000 of the school fund going for teachers' salaries and only $150,000 for all other expenses. In Pennsylvania, for instance, the salaries of teachers of schools amount collectively to less than one-half of the total school expenditures. Georgia is another state in which, though in a smaller ratio, male teachers predominate. Nearly the entire school fund of Georgia goes for teachers' salaries; there is very little left for anything else.

MIXED MYTHOLOGY.

From the Bloomington Eye.

The musical manager who protested when he found a performer in his orchestra holding his bow during a rest, saying to him, "I don't pay you to rest!" was superintending the arrangement of some performers who were representing allegorical characters.

"Here in front," said the author of the piece which was to be given, "we will put in nine muses."

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