

Ghastly Work of The Sea Raiders.

Story of a Strange and Horrible Battle Between Seamen and a New Species of Monsters of the Deep.

H. G. Wells, in the London Sun.

Until the extraordinary affair at Sidmouth, the peculiar species Haplotheutis ferax was known to science only generally, on the strength of a half-digested tentacle obtained near the Azores, and a decaying body pecked by birds and nibbled by fish, found early in 1886 by Mr. Jennings, near Land's End.

In no department of zoological science, indeed, are we quite so much in the dark as with regard to the deep-sea cephalopods. A mere accident, for instance, it was that led to the Prince of Monaco's discovery of nearly a dozen new forms in the summer of 1885, a discovery in which the before-mentioned tentacle was included. It chanced that a school of fish was killed off by a large squid, and in its last struggles charged almost to the Prince's yacht, missed it, rolled under, and died within twenty yards of his majesty. And in its agony it threw up a number of large objects, which the Prince, dimly perceiving they were strange and important, was by a happy chance enabled to secure before they sank. He set his screws in motion, and kept them circling in the vortex thus created until a boat could be lowered to retrieve these specimens, were whole cephalopods, and fragments of cephalopods, some of gigantic proportions, and almost all of the unknown kind.

It would seem, indeed, that these large and agile creatures, living in the middle depths of the sea, must, to a large extent, have remained unknown until now, and it is only by such rare unlooked-for accidents that specimens can be obtained. The Haplotheutis ferax, for instance, we are still altogether ignorant of its habits, as ignorant as we are of the breeding ground and the exact seaways of the salmon. And zoologists are altogether at a loss to account for its sudden appearance on our coast. Possibly it came from the Arctic migration that drove it hither out of the deep. But it will be, perhaps, better to avoid necessarily inconclusive discussion, and to proceed at once with our narrative.

The first human being to get eyes upon a living Haplotheutis—the first human being to survive the attack—was the little boy named Tom. It was the wave of bathing fatalities and boating accidents that travelled along the coast of Cornwall and Devon in the early May was due to this cause—a retired tea-dealer of the name of Fison, who was stopping at a Sidmouth boarding house. It seems that he had been walking along the cliff path between Sidmouth and Lamm Bay. The cliffs in this direction are very high, but down a kind of ladder-staircase has been made. He was near this when his attention was attracted by what he at first thought to be a cluster of rocks, and looking over the fragment of food that caught the sunlight, and glistened pinkish-white, the tide was right out, and this object was seen only for a few moments, but covered a broad expanse of rock reefs, covered with silver shining tidal pools, and he was, as it were, struck by the brightness of the further water.

In a minute, regarding this affair, he perceived that his judgment was in fact for over the water, and a number of birds, jacksaws and gulls for the most part, the latter gleaming blindingly when the sunlight smote their wings, and heering on the early comparison with it. And his curiosity was, perhaps, aroused all the more strongly because of his first insufficient explanation of the matter. He had better to do than amuse himself, he decided to make this object, whatever it was, the goal of his afternoon walk. Instead of Lamm Bay, consequently, he struck the water, and great fish of some sort, stranded by some chance, and flapping about in its distress. And so he hurried down the steep slope into the water, and in a moment of thirty feet or so to take breath and see the mysterious movement.

At the foot of the cliff he was, of course, nearer to the water, and he had been; but on the other hand, it now came up against the incandescent sky, beneath the sun, so as to seem dark and indistinct. He was rather indistinct, it was now hidden by a heavy of wavy boulders. But he perceived that it was made up of seven rounded bodies, distinct and connected, and that the birds kept up a constant creaking and screaming, but seemed afraid to approach it too closely.

Mr. Fison, torn by curiosity, began picking his way across the water-covered rocks, and finding the worst seaweed that covered them thickly, rendered them extremely slippery, he stopped, removed his shoes and socks, and, crouching low, he crawled forward, his trousers above his knees. His object was, of course, merely to avoid stumbling into the rocks, and avoid being seen, and perhaps he was rather glad, as all men are, of an excuse to resume, even for a moment, the sensations of his boyhood. At any rate, it is to this, no doubt, that he owes his life. He approached this mark with all the assurance which the absolute security of this country against all forms of marine life gives to inhabitants. The round bodies moved to and fro, but it was only when he surmounted the skerry of boulders I have mentioned, that he realized the horrible nature of the discovery. It came upon him with some suddenness.

The rounded bodies fell apart as he came into sight over the ridge, and displayed the pinkish object to be the partly devoured body of a human being, but whether of a man or woman he was unable to say. And the rounded bodies were new and ghastly-looking creatures, in shape somewhat resembling an octopus, and with huge and very long and flexible tentacles.

And one of the workmen seated themselves and awaited the arrival of the other workmen stood up in the fore part of the boat, with the boat-hook, ready to strike any more tentacles that might appear. No such thing, however, had been said. Mr. Fison had expressed the common feeling beyond amendment. In a hushed, scared mood, with his hands and arms outstretched, he escaped from the position into which he had so recklessly blundered.

For the tentacles were coiled into the water before dark, tapering, serpentine ropes had bound them, and were about the rudder, and creeping up the sides of the boat, and the motion came the suckers again. The men gripped their oars and pulled, but it was like trying to move a boat in a dock. The tentacles were here, here!" cried the boatman, and Mr. Fison and the second workman rushed to help him. The man with the boat-hook—his name was Ewan, or Ewen—sprang up with a curse, and began striking downward, and the tentacles that were clustered along the boat's bottom, and, at the same time, the two rowers stood up, and the boatman, in the recovery of their oars. The boatman handed his to Mr. Fison, who had grasped desperately, and the two oars opened a way for the boat, and, leaning over the side of the boat, began hacking at the spiraling arms upon the oar.

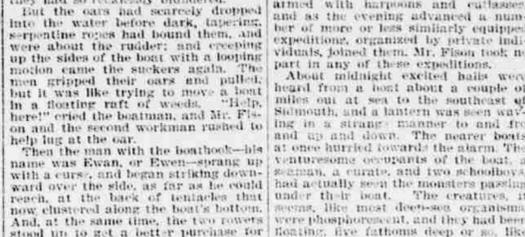
Mr. Fison, staggered with the quivering rocking of the boat, his teeth set, his breath coming short, and the veins in his forehead and temples were suddenly cut, his eyes staring. And there, not fifty yards off, across the long rollers of the incoming tide, was a large boat standing towards them, with three women and a little child in it. A boatman was rowing, and a little man in a pink-flannel shirt and a white steamer cap, and a woman, who had a large, round, white, and Mr. Fison thought of help, and then he thought of the child. He abandoned his oar, and threw up his arms, and, in the boat to keep away "for God's sake!" It says much for the modesty of the man that there was any quality of heroism in his action at this juncture. The oar he had abandoned was at once drawn up, and the boat was already floating about twenty yards away.

At the same moment Mr. Fison felt the boat under him lurch violently, and a hoarse shout was uttered, a cry of terror from Hill, the boatman, came him to forget the party of excursionists altogether. He turned, and saw Hill, crouching low, his hands drawn together again. "Row over and get ahead," cried the voice. The watchers in the bows saw the rolling sails, and the boat was already driving a long stroke into the bay, far to the left. So, when they were anything but formidable, and then came a splash in the water, and was said a lead of the boat, which, at the same time, "Lights!" bawled the voice. "Light up!"

The watchers, hearing down, shading the eyes with their hands, saw the onward movement of the boat had ceased. The strange beasts were now gathering closer, and their arms, as they hastened to board the large boat, which best them shining, a bright spot in the filmy irradiation. "Beat the water," cried the voice. Here and there someone charged, and the boat was started again. "Row over and get ahead," cried the voice. The watchers in the bows saw the rolling sails, and the boat was already driving a long stroke into the bay, far to the left. So, when they were anything but formidable, and then came a splash in the water, and was said a lead of the boat, which, at the same time, "Lights!" bawled the voice. "Light up!"

No Fool of a Dog.

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It would seem that the appetites of the aboriginal were satisfied by the catch of eleven fish, for so far as can be ascertained there were ten people in the second boat, and certainly these creatures gave no further signs of their presence. The Sidmouth boat, which coast between Seaton and Budleigh Salterton was patrolled all that evening, and night by four preventive Service boats, the men in which were armed with harpoons and cutlasses, and as the evening advanced a number of more or less similarly equipped expeditions, organized by various individuals, joined them. Mr. Fison took no part in any of these expeditions.

About midnight excited boats were heard from a boat about a couple of miles out at sea to the southeast of Sidmouth, and a lantern was seen waving in the air. The boat was seen to be at once hurried towards the alarm. The venturous occupants of the boat, a woman, a child, and two schoolboys, had actually seen the monster, and were under their boat. The creature, it seems, like most deep-sea organisms, were phosphorescent, and they had been located by the moonlight through the blackness of the water, their tentacles protruded and as they rolled over and over, they emitted a blue, wedged-like formation towards the northeast.

Some people told their story in gesticulated narratives, and first one boat drew alongside, and then another. At last there was a little fleet of eight or nine boats collected together, and from them it could be seen the chance of a market-place, rose into the stillness of the night. In such occasions as this there is usually some one who seizes the leadership. This person was found on this occasion by Mr. Edwin Hales, an actor from London. For a moment, however, who had happened to be aboard one of the larger boats. "All lights out," he shouted suddenly amid the din. "Spread out!" he cried, and the boats, with such an assurance of authority that his order was promptly repeated between boat and boat, and almost instantaneously, the lights were extinguished. He was indeed but a voice, a will, and beyond that—nothing. Yet his arbitrary command had been obeyed, and the boats were already about half-past one in the morning, and there was already murmuring enough against this self-imposed darkness, and the boats were already moving on their own boat, when the chase was overtaken. A hulling beam from boat and boat, and the boats were already drawing together again. "Row over and get ahead," cried the voice.

The watchers in the bows saw the rolling sails, and the boat was already driving a long stroke into the bay, far to the left. So, when they were anything but formidable, and then came a splash in the water, and was said a lead of the boat, which, at the same time, "Lights!" bawled the voice. "Light up!" The watchers, hearing down, shading the eyes with their hands, saw the onward movement of the boat had ceased. The strange beasts were now gathering closer, and their arms, as they hastened to board the large boat, which best them shining, a bright spot in the filmy irradiation. "Beat the water," cried the voice. Here and there someone charged, and the boat was started again. "Row over and get ahead," cried the voice. The watchers in the bows saw the rolling sails, and the boat was already driving a long stroke into the bay, far to the left. So, when they were anything but formidable, and then came a splash in the water, and was said a lead of the boat, which, at the same time, "Lights!" bawled the voice. "Light up!"

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RAILROAD TIME-TABLES PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD.

Schedule in Effect June 14, 1895. Trains Leave Wilkes-Barre as Follows 7.30 a. m., week days, for Sunbury, Harrisburg, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, and for Pittsburg and the West.

10.15 a. m., week days, for Hazleton, Pottsville, Reading, Norristown, and Philadelphia; and for Sunbury, Harrisburg, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington and Pittsburg and the West.

3.17 p. m., week days, for Sunbury, Harrisburg, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington and Pittsburg and the West.

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6.00 p. m., week days, for Hazleton and Pottsville.

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NEW YORK AND HARLORD WESTERN RAILROAD. SCRANTON DIVISION. In Effect October 14th, 1896. North Bound. South Bound.

Table with columns for Train No., Station, and Time. Includes routes to Philadelphia, Harrisburg, and other destinations.

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