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THE NEMO'S GHOST.

BY CHARLES B. LEWIS.

Would you believe that so late as the year 1882 a fine clipper ship had to be sold for a song and converted into a coal barge because of a ghost aboard which gave her a bad name? Such was the case.

The Nemo was a Clyde built ship and was launched in 1870. She was built for and owned by Perry Joslyn of Liverpool, who was the owner of six other ships, all voyaging to India or Australia. As a rule, two or three men are killed and as many more badly injured in the building and rigging of a ship, but in the case of the Nemo no man met with the scratch of a finger. The launch was the fairest of a score of ships from the same yard, and when fully rigged and ready for her maiden voyage the new creation was said to be the handsomest vessel hailing from the great port. A valuable cargo was ready for her, and the owner had the luck to secure a skipper in the person of Captain Halpin, who had commanded half a dozen different ships and never met with a serious accident.

We got to sea one day in a way to please all hands, and inside of 24 hours we found the craft to be a witch for sailing. When she got settled down to her pace, she showed the speed of a steamer and carried favorable winds for the first seven days out. Then, one night at 10 o'clock, the breeze died away until the Nemo lost steerage-way, and it was at 11 o'clock that the ghost was first heard of. A man named Charles Jones was on watch on the bows at that hour. He was a sober, dignified man and the best seaman of the crew. As third mate of the ship I had the watch at that time, while the captain and the other mates were asleep and seven or eight men were lounging about on the fore and main decks. Of a sudden Jones screamed out and came running aft in a state of great excitement. He was in such a state of alarm that it was five minutes before he could relate his story. He was pacing to and fro, he said, keeping a bright lookout and not thinking of anything in particular when he suddenly found something walking beside him. He heard no step or sound, but a "something" stood shoulder to shoulder with him. It was not exactly a man, nor yet was it a shadow. The sailor felt its breath on his cheek and turned to seize it, but the "something" laughed at him and glided away. I was greatly provoked with the man and charged him with having slept on his post, though I knew that I did him injustice in this. It was a cloudy night, with the moon breaking through now and then, and I contended that his "something" was but a shadow and ordered him back to his post. Nothing further happened that night, and the next morning the captain called the old man out and gave him to understand that if he saw or felt any more ghostly visitors it would be bad for him. The crew would talk the matter over and side with Jones, but that anything further would be seen of the "something" no man believed.

Four nights later and two hours after midnight, while the ship was making a good eight knots per hour and everything was going smoothly, as the first mate had the deck, the entire ship was aroused by something which happened in the deck-house. There were eight or nine men sleeping there, and a man from the watch on deck went in to his chest to get a plug of tobacco. The flush lamp had been turned down, so that the place was but dimly lighted. The man was bending over his chest when something seized him in a clammy embrace and forced him to the floor. He thought it was one of the crew playing him a trick, but he scrambled up to find them all in their bunks and to see a shadow glide away. The sailor set up a shout, the watch below turned out, and presently everybody was on deck, and excitement reigned fore and aft. In return for his story the sailor got a dose of rope's end, though after flogging he still maintained that he had been hugged by a ghost. On the quarter deck we explained it away by saying that the man was nervous, but every man forward believed his statements and was satisfied that the ship was haunted. We thought it the best policy to treat the affair with contempt, and, although we could not help but notice how the men hung together in pairs after night had come, we gave the matter no attention. When ten days had gone by and nothing more had turned up, we looked upon the ghost as a good joke, and the two men who had seen it were the butt of ridicule. At 1 o'clock of a certain morning, the breeze being small and the night without a moon, though fairly light, the first mate stood looking to windward over the port quarter at what he believed was a sail. His watch were all wide awake, and he could hear the footsteps of the man on lookout as he paced to and fro. The man had been standing still for perhaps five minutes when he felt a hand laid on his arm, an icy breath on his cheek, and as he wheeled about there was the sound of low laughter. To his surprise and consternation no one was visible. His impression as he turned

was that one of the other officers had softly approached him to test his nerve. The man at the helm was nearest to him, but he could not be suspected of having left his post to play a trick on his officer. In fact, no sailor aboard would have dared to take such a liberty. For a few seconds the mate was as sure that he had a human being to deal with as that he lived, but when he found nothing before him and yet heard the mocking laughter, as if some one were moving away, his flesh began to creep. Going back to the binnacle, he said to the man at the wheel: "Williams, have you seen or heard anything queer?" "Can I speak out, sir?" asked the man, who lowered his eyes in his voice.

Private read. room

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"Yes, of course. What did you see?" "I seen sunthin like a shadder beside you, sir, and I heard a laugh that never come from the throat of a human being. It's a ghost, sir, and this is a doomed ship!"

The mate poochpooed and bulldozed to make light of the affair, as it was polite to do, but though the man was reduced to silence it was evident that he was fully satisfied that a spook was aboard. Next morning the mate related his experience to the cabin, and as he was a man whose word could not be questioned no one brought ridicule to bear. On the contrary, taking it as an accepted fact that a ghost had been felt, if not seen, by three different persons, we began fishing for some natural and plausible reason to account for the thing. Were the men depressed in spirit? Had they overate? Did each one sleep for the moment? Was the icy breath a sudden puff of wind and was the laughter the creaking of bulkheads as the ship lifted or fell? We argued it out that it must be something of the sort, but the men forward had their own ideas and were very much cowed and put out. However, as in the previous instances, the passage of time worked something of a cure. We were bound for Australia, and we had stretched away into the Indian ocean and weeks had gone by before we got another scare. This time it came to the captain himself. At 10 o'clock at night he sat reading in his cabin when a chill suddenly passed over him and he felt two ice cold hands on his neck. It was as if a strong man had put his thumbs together on the back of the neck and clutched the throat with his fingers. Captain Halpin started up and shook his assailant off and turned to strike him. His idea was that the crew had mutinied and one of the men had stolen in to seize him. No person was there, but as if in answer to the captain's oath of astonishment there was the same low, cynical laughter heard by the others. His stateroom door was standing open and had been for two hours, but the laughter died away in that direction and the door closed. The captain came on deck and called me and whispered that a man had passed into his stateroom. Together we entered and made search, and, of course, found nothing. No man could have been more upset. His experience had been even more trying than the others, and all his argument had been torn to shreds. Something had gripped him, though no marks were left to prove it. Some one or something had laughed, though the captain was all alone in his cabin.

I promised Captain Halpin not to say a word even to my brother officers, and he certainly did not mention the matter, but somehow the particulars of the incident leaked out in a day or two, and during the remainder of the voyage, though the ghost did not appear again, it was the hardest kind of work to maintain discipline. When we reached Sydney at last, every man of the crew cut and ran, and such queer stories were put in circulation that the Nemo had hard work to ship a crew for the return voyage. A broken leg sent me to the hospital, and she sailed without me, but I kept myself posted as to the ghost. Midway between Australia and the Cape the first mate had his throat clutched by cold and unseen hands as he lay in his bunk one evening, and two nights later the same thing happened to a man in the deckhouse. While discipline was upset and things in a bad state the trouble would have passed away if the ghost had not played his pranks on the man at the wheel a few nights subsequently. Every man forward then declared his determination to quit the ship, and he had provisioned two boats and were about to lower them when a man-of-war hove in sight. A signal of distress brought her along, and you can judge how the minds of the men were affected when I say that they preferred going aboard of the man-of-war in irons to returning to duty. Enough men were spared to work the ship home, and though the ghost remained quiet there was an uncanny feeling with all. For four weeks after loading for India the Nemo could not ship a man. The ghost business had got into the newspapers, and the stories were circulated in the taverns, and though men would have taken their chances in a leaky ship they fought clear of spoons. A crew was at last secured by paying extra wages, but after the Nemo had been out 17 days the ghost laid its cold hands on one of the men, and the entire crew, led by the third mate, abandoned the ship at sea. The captain and the two mates stood by her and eventually got her into a port, but her reputation was blasted forever. The case was laid before all sorts of men, and scoffers and believers alike visited the ship in search of a clew. Plenty of deductions and conclusions were arrived at, but they satisfied only a certain few. After many months the Nemo loaded at Liverpool for a South American port, and her crew was composed entirely of Germans fresh from a China voyage. Not one had ever heard of her troubles, but they were fated to find out for themselves. A week after sailing the ghost appeared as lively as ever, and again the crew put off and left her in charge of her officers. She was a doomed ship, and her owner did the wisest thing possible by selling her at the best price he could get. As a coal barge she was never troubled again by the ghost, though why it shouldn't have continued aboard no one can tell. You can form your own theories and draw your own conclusions of the whole affair. I bothered with it for several years, hoping to get at some satisfactory elucidation, but it remains a mystery still. If there had been no ghost, the ship would not have been twice abandoned and finally sold for a fifth of her cost, and that such was the case there are a hundred newspaper articles to prove. Indeed the bulk is in commission today, and is always pointed out as the "ghost ship."