

AT THE CHANGE OF THE WATCH

BY G. HAWLEY



UR steamer had just cleared Singapore. My duty in the engine-room was done, and I was sitting with the mate on the bridge watching the downward sweep of the tropic dusk. "It puts me in mind of a theater sunset," he was saying; "they always go by on the run. And that was a pretty theatrical bit you had in the engine-room." he said to my chief, who had joined us. We had found all the nuts but one off the connecting-rod head; had another half-turn been made our engines would have been a scrap-heap.

"Only once has it happened before," said my chief, "and there was a grand tableau, as you call it, but not in the engine-room. Our stem and three wall-eyed junks were the actors. It was up there, jerking his head northwards. "There was nothing but a thousand odd miles of water and a dusting of islands between us and Hongkong."

The mate held a lighted match to the chief's pipe, and set him drifting on with the current of his yarn.

"You see it was years and years ago, and I was second in a local boat—Hongkong to Yokohama. We were the first to employ China firemen. We had been repairing and put on a fresh crew, all except one, Li Chin. It was near monsoon time, and the second day out we were sitting, as we might be here; but there was no sunset on view. It had been hazy all day, and we were watching the moon rising; just past full, it looked as if someone had bashed one side off the true. It got up a haze, big and blood-red, like a fire balloon at old Cremerne. A mean, staggering swell had set in, so oily that it had no more go to it than the slush in a greaser's bucket. We were all pretty well hipped and morose, being company for no one except the sea, and that—well, that looked as if it wanted to be sick and couldn't. Li Chin, who was decent for a heathen, was in charge below.

"My chief was sitting on the rails, and somehow he went over the side. You know pretty well how things like that galvanize everybody. Lose him? No. The oily swell saved him, for the tide ran the boat straight back in her own wake, which was marked out like a dusty road at night through a hilly country. Well, we came to where he was yelling, and got him out. By all law, the old man ought to have got into a splutter, but instead of that he said:

"Look here, Mr. Gamwell—that was my chief's name—I knew something had to happen in this cock-eyed nose-up looking weather, but I don't believe this is the only thing to-night."

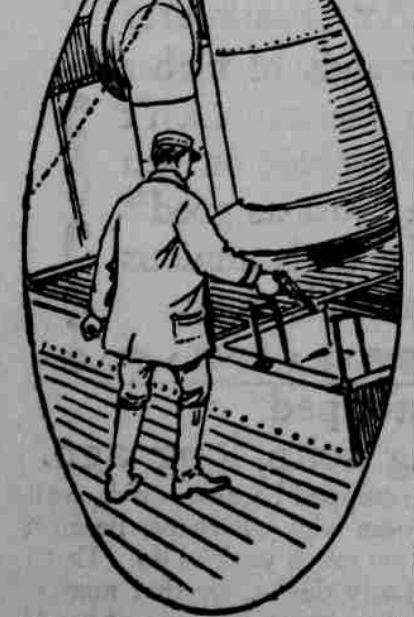
"And we all said together, 'That's just what I was thinking, sir,' as they do at church when the parson pipes out.

"Then send her ahead again and let's get it done with," he said.

"Give her steam, Li Chin," I shouted down the skylight. Li Chin looked up and chattered:

"Hil no talkee talkee; come chop chop." So I went down to him.

"I was pretty green in those days, and whatever came within a hair's breadth of happening made me feel as squeamish as if it had come off. Of course, you grow out of that, but then I felt my hair creep. Our high pressure connecting rod was on the down-throw with only a single nut on! She had the old style of engines remember, and when they went on a burst



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they went handsomely, no tinkering up; new engines, perhaps new shly; may be even bow hands. However, we began to screw up, at least the chief did; he'd only trust himself. Presently he shoved a nut under my nose.

"That your trade mark? he asked. The nut was chipped and scribed with faint spanner marks which I repudiated.

"In what followed I can never quite settle Li Chin's share in the program. This was how we were after we had

fixed all tight again: Li Chin was leaning through the eccentric rods with the lamp; I was half in, half out the crank pit, and the chief was at my back. He had the spanner. All in a breath he dragged me backwards, flat, my head cracking on the plates, and I saw the spanner go'spit through the standards. It didn't hit any metal but something soft. Then he clapped his hand on my face and held me stone tight, and something came down and rubbed by my chest, scratching me—no more—and through his fingers I could see the crank moving, but it had passed me. If anyone believes that engines haven't souls, just you stick him in the crank pit, and let her go, only dead slow and just to clear him. That converted me.

"He dragged me right out, missing in my ear:

"Whip up on deck; tell 'em to shoot on sight any who leave the stoke-hole." He slammed the iron door 'tween the boilers and us and turned on Li Chin, who was still holding the lamp, and had him by the throat before he could finish:

"No bobbery, all samee white man." As I jumped past the starting platform I saw one of the new stokers lying on his back, his face a thing of horror. That was the soft thing the span-

ner hit, and you know what size a connecting rod takes.

"Both mates and the old man were on the bridge watching something ahead. All in a sweat I sang out my message, and the old man never asked why or wherefore, but popped in the chart-room and slipped a revolver in the second mate's hand, saying:

"It's come to us then." The mate didn't move, so the old man yelled at him:

"Why d'ye stand there, Mac? Are you white livered?"

"Now Mac was a Greenock man, and he said:

"Y' ken, I want orders frae you, and I'll shoot your ain brother. Just in a quiet and matter-of-fact way. And, Scott, he would. I know them.

"Shoot anything that comes out of the stoke-hole," said the old man, and Mac slid along whistling soft and quiet to his station. Yes, that was it, 'Annie Laurie'; but it wasn't for her that he laid down and died. Poor Mac; he got sand-bagged at New Orleans over a chit of a Yankee girl not fit to black his boots.

"The old man grabbed me by the arm. "Look here," he said, pointing out three sails wallowing along between us and the moon. "That's the little game your friends below are after. Their friends are coming to join in. And by thunder, so is our stem!" He turned on the chief mate like a flash:

"You jump down with Mac into the stoke-hole, and make every pig-tail heathen stoke her up to the blow-off. Wipe 'em out if they've any lip. Scott!"

"He was tramping up and down like a terror. I never dreamt that a man with a wife and family looked like a demon.

"You," he cried to me, "jump below and don't let the engines move a hand's breadth till I ring her. Then let her rip."

"I only went below the skylight and told the chief from there; I didn't care to pass that thing on the platform again. And besides I wanted to see what was going to happen. I was all on the jump, like a white-faced girl; so I staid looking out.

"The steamer was wallowing in the trough like a lame duck. All the crew had turned out forward after fixing up the turned-in Chinis firemen.

"The three junks came on in a line abreast down the wind.

"There was a heathenish feeling about everything—that red, lop-sided moon making a big crawly snake on the oily water; the three junks sliding along, and us laid silent. There were three things I remember: The slap of the water under our stern, the rattle of the junks' sails flapping against their masts and our old man's fist; he was pounding time on the rail.

"The she began to blow off. "All at once he roared out:

"Port, hard a-port!" and rang her full speed, and we began to move. Lord! in three minutes we had got our pace.

"The junks had turned after us at first, but they seemed to guess something was wrong, for one sheered off. Presently we'd done the half circle and headed stem on to the other two. Then I reckon they realized.

"The first broke out into lights and shouts; she was right under our bows, and you could hear her split like dry firewood. Her big batteded mauls rattled on our forecast like a shower of canes. The sea itself seemed to yell all round us as we steamed through the cargo of drowning pirates.

"I looked over the rail; we'd hit the other and smashed one side off, and as

seven feet to the mile. The indefatigable Kansas keeps the mills in active operation, and the reservoirs are always full of water, which is drawn off as it is required for purposes of irrigation. These small individual pumping-plants have certain advantages over the canal systems which prevail elsewhere. The irrigator has no entangling alliances with companies or co-operative associations, and is able to manage the water-supply without deferring to the convenience of others or yielding obedience to rules and regulations essential to the orderly administration of systems which supply large numbers of consumers. The original cost of such a plant, exclusive of the farmer's own labor in constructing his reservoirs and ditches, is \$200, and the plant suffices for ten acres. The farmer thus pays \$20 per acre for a perpetual guaranty of sufficient "rain" to produce bountiful crops; but to this cost must be added \$2 per acre as the annual price of maintaining the system.—Century.

"Grandma Stowe."

At Hartford, Conn., where the aged Harriet Beecher Stowe lived, they tell a good story, which the Boston Commonwealth reports, of her precocious grandson.

A neighbor found him swinging rather too vigorously another neighbor's front gate, and warned him that Mr. Smith might not like it. Whereupon the independent young gentleman remarked that "I don't care for Mr. Smith, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is his."

"Do you know who wrote those words?" asked the friend, deeply shocked. "Oh," was the nonchalant reply, "I d'no—Grandma Stowe, I suppose."

Times Have Changed.

A Maine paper notes as evidence of the change that has come over methods and men that whereas in old times the paymaster on the Kennebec ice fields never used anything but cash and brotherly love in making payments, he now keeps a loaded revolver on his table as a precaution against the possibility of bold thieves trying to snatch his pile of greenbacks.

Women of fairness are very rare; they have been so spoiled by flattery.

When spring opens all of New York's asphalt streets are to be patrolled by policemen mounted on bicycles. It will behoove crooks in that city to have their pockets full of carpet tacks with a view to covering forced retreats.

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Co-Operative Idea Among Farmers.

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TOPICS OF THE TIMES.

A CHOICE SELECTION OF INTERESTING ITEMS.

Comments and Criticisms Based Upon the Happenings of the Day—Miscellaneous and News Notes.

Dr. Jameson has put a lien on immortality. He has been "done in wax" for a museum.

While New York is debating whether or not Ben Franklin was a gentleman Chicago is preparing to erect a statue of him to cost \$25,000.

We are sorry to learn that Aubrey Beardsley is dying of consumption, but even in this sad hour nature preserves her balance; Johanna, Barnum's chimpanzee, has drawn a picture of herself.

Has it come to you how good a thing it is to do good things for your own sake? If you say something bright to a dense man you are doubly entertained—by your witticism and by his density.

New York City is doing everything possible to encourage the one and a half pound baby born there the other day to remain on the island and grow. In the Greater New York movement every little helps.

Mr. Gladstone may have some special reason for proposing to return to Parliament, but it cannot be to obtain a hearing. The old statesman has only to take the floor anywhere and the world comes to order.

Irrigation by Windmills.

It was found that in the Arkansas valley water could be obtained by shallow wells ranging in depth from eight to twenty feet. This is raised by hundreds of windmills into hundreds of small reservoirs constructed at the highest point of each farm. The uniform eastward slope of the plains is

morning. We made the heathens stoke us back to Hongkong—and jail. I went to the hospital completely knocked over.

"You know Aberdeen? Yes, well, you know that old house against the town hall—an eating-house; his widow keeps that now, and if ever you're stuck up say as you know one who sailed with him. And if you're flush—" Black and White.

Japanese Swords.

The Japanese, whose civilization was old before ours began, have produced beautiful examples of the sword-maker's art. The Japanese nobleman carried his swords as the insignia of his rank. He wore one on each side, thrust into the folds of his sash.

These swords have been handed down as heirlooms from father to son; and it was not unusual for families of ancient lineage to have as many as fifteen hundred of them—marvels of costly and artistic workmanship—in their possession. The scabbards are richly lacquered, and bound about with a silken cord in a curious pattern. The blade is curved, and the round guard is pierced to carry a small dagger. This guard, called a tsuba, is decorated with curious designs; and so great is the ingenuity of the Japanese metal-workers that among the thousands of swords they have produced it is impossible to find two guards exactly alike. They are prized so highly by collectors that large sums of money have been paid frequently for an antique sword, only that it might be ruthlessly torn apart to secure the guard.—St. Nicholas.

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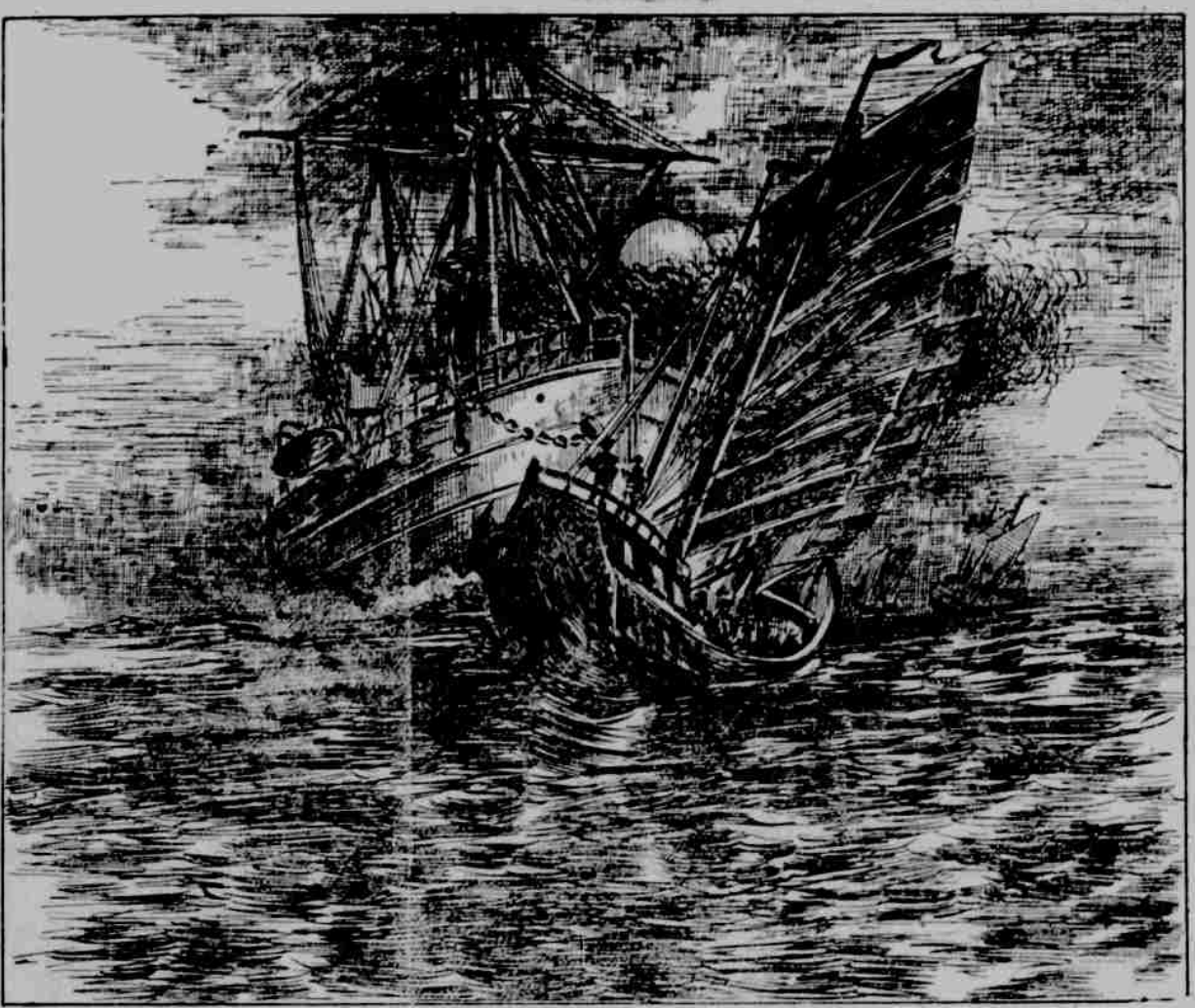
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