CHRISTMAS ON THE ATLANTIC.

"But are you not afraid of crossing the Atlantic at such an inclement season as this?" was the query put to me four years ago this month. (December.)

"Certainly not," I replied; "a man who has been twice around the world—twice rounded Cape Horn—need surely fear no other voyage; and, moreover, what is a 3000 miles' passage in a large and powerfull steamer but a few days' short trip?"

And yet that few days' short trip, which I was ready to undertake with such indifference, turned out the most trying voyage I ever undertook, and never wish to experience again.

I had come to America from New Zealand in a return whale-ship, and after several months' residence in the States, took my passage home to Great Britain in a large steamer which still runs from New York to Liverpool. I went on board Wednesday, December, 1871. I had taken a steerage passage, as my funds were then nearly run out. I went on board at 11 o'clock in the morning, and found all in a bustle and turmoil of a start. At noon exactly we got under way, but had not steamed out of dock above an hour when a dense fog came on, and we were compelled to stop. All that afternoon and succeeding night we remained in the same place, ringing an alarm-bell every few minutes, and it was not until near mid-day on Thursday that we were enabled once more to make a start. This delay was the more vexation to me from my having lost nearly the whole of my luggage, owing to the carelessness of an express-man, to whom I had entrusted it for conveyance from the hotel to the vessel. I found, some weeks afterwards, that it had been placed on board a ferry-boat by mistake; and after, Heaven only knows, how many wanderings and adventures, it arrived at last, some time in the following summer, in England, the boxes broken open and deprived of the most valuable of their contents.

I fretted and fumed, then, over the delay of the steam-packet, so near the shore, as I thought I should have had more than sufficient time to recover my missing effects.

On Thursday, at noon, we once more got under steam, favored, as well, by a stiff, fair breeze. A motley mob of passengers forward, consisting of some thirty males, and fourteen of the opposite sex: two or three returning from California, laden with golden spoil; three ex-militiamen, and a Birmingham man, who came on board hugging a demijohn of whisky, which he applied most assiduously to his lips, with scarce any intermission; several Irishmen, and one or two Scotchmen, and myself, the only Englishman, except Brummagem, as we called him, who was almost a cosmopolitan. Among the other sex were two actresses, and a popular vocalist.

Thursday and Friday we made good way, and every thing seemed to promise a fair, speedy and successful voyage. Friday night we were all disturbed by Brummagem, who had drunk himself into an attack of delirium tremens, and aroused us and alarmed his female neighbor in the cabin, separated from him by a thin wooden partition, by violently kicking down the partition aforesaid, considerably to the damage of his feet, and then tumbling out of his bunk with an open-bladed bowie-knife, threatening to cut all our throats. I rushed off for, and returned with, the doctor. After some delay, and at a cost of a good deal of coaxing, we prevailed upon him to return to his berth, where, after taking a large dose of laudanum, he fell asleep, while we carefully removed all weapons of an offensive nature from his person. The jug of whisky he had already emptied; beneath his pillow were a quantity of English sovereigns—some fifty or sixty. Next morning when he awoke, his first look-out was for his bottle, and we found him snuffing at the empty hole.

"Throw it overboard," said his neighbor, an Irishman; "shure it's a marine."

"No," he replied; "I will keep it for the good it has done"—that good being well nigh his death.

Of all the characters I ever met with his was the strangest. The cool, quiet way he related his adventures in California, told, as they were, with such an evident simplicity as to bear the impress of truth; and yet, being some of the most horrible records of murder, theft, and almost every conceivable crime, I can never forget: and yet, amidst all was a sort of careless devilry and good temper, and occasional outburst of generosity.

Another character we had was a genuine specimen of the "Green Isle," impulsive, one moment tipsy and sinning, and very shortly after sober and repenting; continually uttering vows and making resolutions, the next moment to be broken; your warmest friend one hour, and wanting to break your head the next. Andy was his name.

I must mention two more of my fellow-passengers before I proceed with the account of our voyage. One was an old, God-fearing man, from Rahway, New Jersey, cheery, pleasant, always having a kind word, ever ready to do a kind deed, and when not otherwise employed, walking up and down the narrow space between our berths, singing hymns, more to himself than for the delectation of others—him we called, by general consent, "Old Dad." The last character was my chum—the one who slept in the berth below me—a young Irishman named Connolly, from Chicago, where he had been an employe as clerk on the railway, on his road home to Ireland to claim some property—a small farm in the neighborhood of the city of Dublin. He was a brisk, business-like, gentlemanly fellow.

Our neighbors, the ladies, after their recovery from sea-sickness, mostly spent their time in singing; and here, by-the-way let me observe, as surely as we had an extra spell of singing, so surely there followed a gale of wind. Over and over again we observed this to be the case: within twenty-four hours of a night of song we had a gale—a meteorological phenomenon I leave to others to explain.

All Friday, Saturday and Sunday we progressed favorably; strong, steady breeze, and full steam, going, according to the almost proverbial nautical myth, sixteen knots an hour; although I must confess my experience has seldom or never really exceeded ten knots an hour. We spent our time in narrating, each in turn, our personal adventures. For example:

"Well chaps, I suppose it's now my turn" (Brummagem *loquitur*). "I'm no hand much at what you call tale-making, but I can tell you what once happened to me in Frisco. I was green, then, just arrived, in fact, and not up to the dodges as I now am. I'm a printer by trade, and a rare good 'un it is at times. Yes, Sir! I tell you I've made many a pile, ay, and spent them as fast as made. Well, I'll tell you, my first job was at the newspaper office—type setter—and I made thirty dollars a week. I chummed with another young fellow who had been at the diggings. One day we went on a spree, and both got blessed tight—so tight I got wild; I do sometimes." (We all believed him, for we had seen a specimen.) "I don't know how it happened, but a fellow at the bar began to fight me. I tell you my blood was up, and I quickly had my knife into him; see, this was the knife. That fellow ain't the last I guess it touched. I believe he died, but I ain't sure, for you see I got sobered like at the row they kicked up, so made a bee-line for home, and packed up a few traps, and we—I and my chum made a start of it for some new diggings he'd heard of. Well, we got there, but it wasn't in my line, do you see; my hands ain't used to such hard work as it turned out, and the grog-shops were a long way off. Bob, however, made out pretty well; and I stuck to it as well as I could, until one day we agreed to go down to the bar for a drink; and we went, and a jolly time we had of it for a day or two, until one night, the third night I think it was, mates, we both got warm like at a game at Hooka [sic], and he called me a —— liar, and then we fought and I quieted him; and then I cut for it, but I got his belt. I'm sorry now, d've see, I hurt him; but it was just here, if I didn't do it to him he would have to me. I then made my way back to Frisco, and took up my old trade. I'm now bound for home."

I cannot give, nor should I like to try to give, the whole account of his adventures; and yet this man-murderer, and what not he had been in the course of his life, had some touch of softness in his heart, was not altogether bad (as who is?); for on our arrival at Glasgow the following morning he called me into his bed-room (he was then far advanced in a consumption, owing to his habits), and told me he wanted me to go out with him, and help him to buy a new suit of handsome black clothes and a gold watch and chain, saying he would not leave Glasgow until he had got them; "for my folks are somewhat more than common, and up in the world, and I would not like them to be ashamed of me, or their neighbors think me beneath them." And so he stayed three days in Glasgow until the clothes were made; the gold watch and chain I saw bought myself; and doubtless he was received by his brother as one well to do—an excellent example of well-earned success, to be shown off to the admiring neighbors in his full-blown glory of gold watch, chain, and full dress.

Monday morning, at 7 o'clock, I was lying careless in my berth, lazily smoking a short clay pipe, until O'Connolly had finished his ablutions, and done with soap, dish and towel, and left me room to commence mine. For so we arranged it, turn and turn about—one morning he first, the next morning myself. He had finished, and at length gone out on deck. I still procrastinated, not liking to give up my pipe just as I was in the full relish of it, and so another quarter of an hour passed in a smoky, dreamy state of quiescence, out of which I was abruptly startled by the sudden entrance of Connolly—pale, agitated and flurried.

"Hello!" I cried out, "what's up, man, to scare you that way? Is the ship going to the bottom, or have you seen Jim's ghost?" (Brummagem's chum's ghost, which he said always haunted him.)

"I believe, Drummond," said he, "upon my soul I do, that she is going to the bottom—that—we are sinking."

"Nonsense, man," I replied; "why, there's not wind enough to turn a child's toy. How can she sink?"

He said no more, but again went out, and in ten minutes so frightened that I caught the infection, and, leaping out of my bunk, began to hurry on my clothes as fast as my excitement would let me, listening meanwhile to his words—words which came stammering out of his quivering lips:

"My God, Drummond, we are sinking! We have sprung a leak, and the vessel is filling fast; we are going—going down to the bottom."

A few moments more and I was on deck myself, still thinking and hoping that Connolly had either mistaken or had exaggerated the evil. The steamer was an iron ship, built in three compartments, and heavily laden with wheat in bulk; that is, put loosely down the hold without bags. So heavily laden was the vessel, that a great part of the coal for the use of the steamer was down in the engine-room. Going on deck, I met with the first mate, who was just going into his cabin, having come up out of the engine-room.

"Mr. Campbell," I said, "is there anything wrong with the vessel? Has anything gone amiss?"

"Oh, nothing particular," said he; "just a little water has got in—that's all."

I did not, however, like the doubting way in which he said it, nor yet an evident effort he seemed to make at subduing some feeling or other; he, who generally was so cool and collected.

"Oh! Mr. Campbell," I again exclaimed, "do tell me the truth—the whole truth. I do not say I will not be frightened, but I will try not to be, and if I can be of any use, I shall be only too glad."

"Man, man," he replied, "go aft yourself, and look down into the engine-room, and ye will not need to speer any more questions."

Aft I went, and there down below, far down in the depths of the vessel, I saw a crowd of men hurrying backward and forward, busily—oh, how busily!—shoveling away at some coals. The captain, the mates, black and begrimed, were hastily issuing orders; and—most fearful of all sounds on board a vessel, next only to the roaring and cracking of flames; a sound once heard never to be forgotten afterward—the dull, heavy plash of waters, as the ship slowly and ceaselessly rolled from side to side. Just then one of the engineers came up.

"Is the leak a very bad one?" I asked.

"God only knows" he said. "Thus much I know: There are ten feet of coal down in that hole, and the water is bubbling out of the top of it."

On Monday morning, at 10 o'clock, the water had gained considerably on, as despite all our utmost efforts to keep it under; and what was still worse, we could not find out where it was. The removal of the coal had occupied us so long and detained us so much, what quantity of water there might be in the hold now I feared to ask, and I was not at all sure that a correct answer would be returned. I could only guess, from the looks of both officers and men, that it was more than serious. I strove to forget our danger in working wherever I could or wherever I was most wanted.

At noon, "Man the pumps!" had been ordered some time, but, alas! no pumps would work. The wheat had got in and choked them all. Six or seven hands were at each pump, and brought up, with hard labor and no small difficulty, more wheat than water. The leak was telling on us fast, and there was danger of its reaching and putting out the engine fires. If it did that, may God in His mercy help us!

At 3 o'clock, afternoon, "All hands on deck!" That order had come at last. How startlingly it fell upon the ears of passengers!—never heard but in times of sharp peril and urgent extreme distress: what wonderful strength it gives to the limbs and muscles, causing the hearers to attempt and accomplish feats of labor they would never have dreamed of else! We all quickly mustered on deck, all now fully alive with a sense of our peril.

"Off hatches!" needed no second order. "Throw cargo overboard!" was instantly obeyed. I and Andy jumped down into one of the holds and hoisted up barrels of resin and sacks of coals. Despair lent me strength as well as others, and many a weight was lifted, many a feat accomplished that we none of us dreamed we could perform. Almost in silence we wrought—wrought all that long, long afternoon. Biscuits and brandy were served out to us at short intervals. Meanwhile, blankets had been thrown overboard with the faint hope of the leak drawing them in. A vain hope! Still it gained on us—gained on us slowly, quietly, surely.

There we were, 490 miles from the nearest land, Newfoundland; in the depth of winter; ice all around us; the very boats belonging to the vessel leaky and not to be trusted, even could we have launched them in the rough sea then running, or lived in the extreme cold then existing. No hope there! It must be the ship or not at all. Ah! how we all toiled. I, for one, although I wrought until nature was well-nigh overcome, could not, dared not, cease to sit down and think. Think, and see the dark, cold waters creeping in on us: to hear their dull, heavy wash from side to side! It nearly drove me wild. Better work the fingers to the bone than sit and think. Creeping slowly nearer and nearer the fires. Nay, now and again, as the vessel rolled a little heavier than usual, daring even to look into them, and splash into the open mouths of the furnaces, quickly to be driven out again in angry jets of steam. Still the water gains on us.

One heavy roll—a sharp plunge forward—a loud noise, fearful exceedingly in its strangeness—half sob, half screech—as the steam rushed violently up the pipe—a quick, shivering tremble through the whole ship—and then for a few seconds—seconds which seemed hours—a deep silence. The fires were out, and the vessel for the time being lay helplessly rolling in the trough of the sea. How deep, how angrily sounded the swaying waters then! and what a sad, utterly sad look of despair crept over all our faces! One man there was cool, calm, collected—the captain. Foremost had he been in all the toil; bravest was he now in all the danger.

"I have done all I can," he said quietly, "and I can now do little more. I much fear we are going down. Let those who cannot work pray to God—to Him who now must be our best and surest refuge; and may he give us all grace to say His will be done!"

He ordered the pumps to be manned as usual and kept going, and then went for a short time into his cabin. I went up on to the poop and looked down upon the surging waters around, and in a dreamy sort of way tried to realize it—tried to think what would be the best to do. To sit there until she slowly settled, and the waters washed me off? To go down into the lowest part of the vessel, and put off to the very last moment the final struggle? To make an attempt in the boats, to perish by a more lingering death of cold and starvation? Or plunge at once into the sea and put an end to it? All these thoughts flashed quickly through my mind. And then came thoughts of the past. All my past life seemed to move in solemn review through my mind; all my past deeds and sins; things long ago forgotten and buried in the oblivion of the past—revivified, as doubtless they will be in the last great day when time shall be no more.

In those few fleeting moments were compressed a lifetime; and then came sad thoughts of what my friends would say at home—how they would wonder at my non-arrival; wonder what had become of the ship; what had been our fate—all hidden in that vast repository of so many sad secrets—the sea. Face to face have I been, more than once, with Death; but then the danger was momentary, sharp, of a few moments' continuance. But, oh! the dreadful wear of the soul in meeting Death thus, and fighting him hour by hour, inch by inch, as it were—the slow fading away of all hope, and the sure encroach of despair!

I cannot but mention the brave conduct of the women. They shamed some of us men by their quiet, still manner. Ready and prepared they all seemed for any emergency. No shrieking or confusion. They sat in their cabins, some praying, and nearly all silently weeping. One poor lady—a widow, with a little child of some six or seven years of age—her son, and her only one—came on the deck to me, and, bursting into tears, she said:

"Oh, Sir! do you think there is really no hope for us—none whatever? I do not care so much for myself, but it does seem hard for my little boy to meet such a fate."

Dear mother's heart of hers! even in that sad, fearful hour her child was her sole thought, her sole care. Oh, mother's love! the only true reality of entire abnegation of self.

Once more I roused myself and went below, to find the sailors and crew becoming mutinous and rebellious. Some wanted to take the boats, and were trying—partly by persuasions, and partly by threats—to obtain provisions from the ship's stewards; while others, more determined, were bent upon breaking into and obtaining the wine and spirit stores. They were just coming aft as I descended the gangway—a disorderly body of some thirty or forty men.

"Go back to your posts, men!" were the words I heard from the first mate—words to which they seemed inclined to pay no attention.

"Back, men, all of you!" he spake loudly and firmly.

Two or three of the foremost came forward, each, as we could see, armed with a bowie knife.

"We want brandy," they said, "and, d—n it, we mean to have it too!"

The captain did not answer, but quietly stepped back into his cabin, and returned with a revolver in his right hand. Most of the passengers ranged themselves alongside or behind him, as well as the officers. "Now, my men," said the captain, "I do not want to resort to hard measures. God knows we are all in a sufficiently bad plight, and any moment we may be called before Him. Let me tell you all quietly to return to your work. I have no brandy to spare. The little we have on board ship will be more than wanted, and I neither can nor will give it to you."

"We will see about that," said one of the men, advancing another step.

The captain took a step or two forward, and, drawing a chalk-line on the deck, said:

"The first man that steps over that I will shoot."

"By God, then, I will try it!" answered the man.

He had scarcely planted his foot on the line before the captain fired, and the man's right arm hung wounded. Two mates sprang forward, and, seizing the man, they fettered his feet, and, attended by the doctor, carried him off below. The remainder of the crew, awed by what had passed, turned round, and, with many a muttered curse, returned to their places.

"Now," said the captain, turning to the passengers, "if any of you like to try the boats, in preference to remaining on the ship (which I frankly confess I do not expect to keep afloat many minutes longer), I will fit them out for you as well as I am able; but I must fairly tell you, I much doubt whether they will float, much less live in a sea like this; setting aside the bitter cold, which would not let you live long, exposed, as you would be, to it. However, it is for you to decide. My station and my duty are here, on board, to the last."

Yet slowly, but surely, the water all this time was creeping on us.

"God be merciful to us all, sinners!" exclaimed a full, deep voice.

"We all turned, and there, standing behind us, was an old gray-headed minister, bareheaded, with a deep, calm look on his face—that face turned upward from the deep, black waters to the bright serene blue of God's blue heavens.

"'One deep calleth another,'" he continued; "because of the noise of the water-pipes; all thy storms and waves are gone over me!' 'God is our hope and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the waters rage and swell. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.' 'Thou, O Lord, who stillest the raging of the sea, hear, hear us, and save us that we perish not!'"

Oh, how deep was the response: "Save us that we perish not!" and oh, at that hour, in that our peril, the comfort of those few words so spoken—ay, even comforting to the most sinful and heedless among us! For where else could we look in such a time as that? And the answer came to that good old man's prayer, verily.

I said the answer came. Scarce were the words out of his mouth when a voice was heard once more: "I have found the leak!" It came from the old carpenter, who had been indefatigably at work. It appeared afterward that, as soon as the leak was sprung, he had suspicions which rested upon a leaden feed-pipe, and they turned out true. The pipe had burst—it might be, from the effect of the cold—and instead of feeding the boilers it was filling the ship; and, foot by foot, amidst the black, sooty water in the hold, the old man had felt his way until he had came on the leak.

"I have found the leak!" The words were scarce out of his mouth when the deep, bass voice again resounded:

"'Out of the deep I have called unto Thee, O Lord; Lord hear my voice!' 'So when they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, He delivereth them out of their distress.'"

"Thank God!" was our response, and straightway there came new vigor into our frames, new hope in our souls, new strength into our hands. And with a loud, bursting cheer, we all made for the engine-room. Quickly a large wooden plug was wrapped round with a portion of a blanket, a long wooden handle fastened to a mallet and the plug driven into the hole. Despite the cold, coats and jackets were doffed, buckets handed out, and all set to work to bale out the water. Thus in hope we wrought until midnight, passing the buckets from hand to hand; a few of the crew on deck having put on all the canvas she could carry.

About midnight the wind gradually freshened into a gale, and we had to take in sail, in which I assisted; and so freshly did it blow that it tore open a loose flannel jacket I wore, and took it, together with my hat, overboard; and yet so intent were the par y below lading out the water, that none of them neither heard the wind roaring nor felt the tossing and pitching of the vessel. Toward morning the gale abated, and, cold, wet and weary, but very thankful, I betook myself to my berth for an hour or two's rest.

Our next fear was whether or no the water had injured the machinery. To our great thankfulness we found it had not, and by Tuesday night we got the water so far under that the fires were once more lighted, and the first sound I heard on Wednesday morning (sweeter to me than the sweetest music) was the regular throb, throb, once more of the engine; and on dressing and going on deck, I saw two regular small jets of water flowing from the ship's side pumped out by a donkey engine.

Our troubles were not yet, however, entirely over. We had still much to undergo before we reached home.

Two or three mornings after the Monday of the leak of the vessel, Andy went out of the cabin in a state of "half seas over." I do not mean this as a wretched pun; he was, in fact, half tipsy, and made his way down to the engine-room. He had not been away more than half an hour before he came back perfectly sober, and looked exceedingly grave and serious. Without a word he betook himself to his berth, where, to our great astonishment, he remained without speaking a word for above an hour.

"Andy, what is the matter?" I asked.

Matter?" he replied; "matter enough. We