

A Return From Oblivion

By WILLIAM CHANDLER

It is not an uncommon occurrence for two youngsters who are chums to agree that if possible the one who dies first will appear in the spirit to the other. I don't think such agreements are as apt to be made now as formerly, for belief in the reappearance of those who have died is not what it was when I was young. Scientists have taken up the matter, but the laity don't feel much interest in it.

I made one of these agreements with Dick Atherton when we were eighteen years old. Dick became a sailor, and on one of his voyages the vessel he sailed in was wrecked, and all on board were lost. At any rate, if any of them escaped death he was never heard from. I took to the water, too, but not in the same line as Dick. I began on river work and eventually came to own and run a steamer that I usually laid up in winter, but ran as an excursion boat in summer.

One season I had contracted to take a party of excursionists out of Boston harbor around Cape Ann. For several days before our sailing everything went wrong. The government inspector took it into his head to find fault with a lot of things which he required me to improve, and I knew that if I didn't attend to them myself I wouldn't be ready to keep my contract for the excursion. The consequence was that I got no sleep for two nights and a day before we left Boston.

I had several hundred persons aboard and, rounding Cape Ann, preferred to rely on myself rather than on any one else. I was passing Thatcher's light when I began to feel so drowsy that I feared to fall asleep, notwithstanding the fact that the lives of so many human beings were dependent on my keeping awake. I was tired, too, and when I had a clear course ahead of me I sat down on the seat behind the wheel, reaching forward to take it whenever required. This I should not have done. A man may go to sleep on his feet. He is much more liable to do so while sitting.

Slumber got me, though, at last. I must have slept quite awhile. Suddenly I awoke, frightened out of my wits, for I knew what it was to go to sleep at the wheel. There was a man standing between me and it, turning it rapidly. Whether he was really hazy or not I couldn't say. He certainly looked so through my sleepy eyes. I tried to wake myself enough to get up and take the wheel from him, but somehow, considering that he was there, I couldn't do it.

"Go to sleep, Tom," he said. "You're not in fit condition for a pilot."

Whether I was not entirely awake, whether I was dreaming, I couldn't make out, but the voice was certainly Dick Atherton's. Then I dreamed that I said to him:

"Dick, have you come back to keep your promise when we were youngsters?"

"I've come back to keep you from running full headway against Folly point," was the reply.

I have said that I dreamed this, because that's the way it seemed to me. What it really was might be another matter.

I woke up again later, looked ahead and saw that there was clear sailing. Thompson, one of my steersmen, was at the wheel.

"Great heavens!" I exclaimed. "Can

it be that I've been asleep?"

"Reckon you have, sir."

"How long have you been at the wheel?"

"About ten minutes. I happened to look ahead, and the boat was heading for Folly point. I ran up here to see what was up and found you asleep and a man at the wheel who was sheering off. He gave me the wheel and left the pilothouse."

"A man?"

"Yes, sir, he was a man. Why do you think he was anything else?"

"What did he look like?"

"I didn't notice him very particularly. I was too much upset by the narrow escape. But I remember that his hair was red."

Dick Atherton's hair was red. When he was a boy we called him Reddy.

So horrified was I at my narrow escape from sacrificing a boatload of excursionists that I had scarcely time to wonder about Atherton or his ghost. I asked Thompson if he felt sure he could attend to the wheel safely, and when he replied that he could I told him I would go below and rest a bit, for I was completely knocked out by what had occurred. Leaving the pilothouse, I walked aft through the crowd of excursionists—they were ignorant of the frightful doom they had escaped—and was about to go down the stern companionway when I felt a hand on my shoulder. Turning, there stood Dick Atherton. He was ten years older than when I had last seen him, but I recognized him at once. He was looking mighty serious. Putting a finger to his lips, he said: "Don't get broken up over it, old man. Only I and the man who relieved me at the wheel know about it."

Dick then briefly explained. He had escaped the wreck of his vessel and spent a year in the east, mostly Japan. Returning, he had seen an advertisement of the excursion on my boat, my name being mentioned as master. He

had come aboard without making himself known and had gone up to the pilothouse to surprise me, but instead it was I who had surprised him.

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Bulletin No. 5

The Bethlehem Steel Company's Offer to Serve the United States

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Isn't it worth while finding out the actual facts before plunging ahead into an expenditure of \$11,000,000 of the people's money for a Government armor plant?

To clear up the whole situation, and to put it on a basis as fair and business-like as we know how to express it, we now make this offer to the Government:

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CHAS. M. SCHWAB, Chairman
EUGENE G. GRACE, President

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