

THE SPECTRE HELMSMAN.

BY SYLVANUS COBB, JR.

In the summer of 1839 the ship "Vulcan," under the command of Capt. Isaac Johnson, was on her homeward-bound passage from the Indies, with half a cargo of tea, and she stopped at Cape Negro, on the coast of Benguela, after a lot of ivory, to make up her load. Having gone on shore, at the Cape, the captain learned from the native contractor that he would have to go some fifteen miles up the Cannibal's river, as the elephant hunters had all the boats further up in the country, so that consequently they had not been enabled to bring the ivory down.

Capt. Johnson was somewhat disappointed at this cause of delay, but without waiting to find useless fault he determined to man his own boats, and proceed at once up the river. It required four trips to bring all the ivory down, but as they had opportunity to take advantage of the slight tides, the task was accomplished in four days. On the last trip the captain went himself, leaving the first mate in charge of the ship, and on arriving at the small village where the ivory was stored, he was not a little surprised to find that nearly all the miserable huts were deserted. Several times Capt. Johnson inquired the meaning of this, but the natives were either unable, or unwilling, to give any plain answer, and it was not until the last lot of tusks had been conveyed to the boats, and the natives had been remunerated for their labor, that the least clue could be obtained to the cause of this strange desertion; and then, for the first time, the captain received the startling intelligence that the cholera was sweeping down the river!

As soon as this fact became known to the seamen, they wildly huddled into their boats, as though the fearful death-angel was at their heels, and silently, yet with powerful strokes, they pulled down the fatal stream. At length they reached their ship, and though they breathed somewhat more freely as they trod their own deck, yet each countenance bore the stamp of deep fear. The ivory was soon got on board, and with all haste the old "Vulcan" was got under way. It was nearly night when the ship got off, and with a good breeze from the northward and eastward, she stood well on her course. On the next morning, shortly after breakfast, and while the crew had begun to think that they had no occasion for further fear, a young man, named Walter Addison, was taken suddenly sick.

Young Addison was the favorite of both the officers and the crew, and as it was reported that he was thus ill, a general consternation seized upon all hands. The young man felt at first a giddiness and a sickly chill, and in the course of two hours he sank into an alarming debility, the countenance assuming a deadly paleness, and his skin bearing all the appearance of a corpse. Poor Addison suffered till noon, and then the startling announcement went through the ship that he was dead!

This was the first, but who should be next! A panic had seized upon the men—the cholera was with them, and none dared remove the form of their dead shipmate from his berth. Night approached, and with it came an almost dead calm, but the corpse still remained in the fore-cabin, and the men dare go thither. The captain urged that the longer presence of the body would breed more dangerous contagion, but the only answer he received was a mournful shake of the heads about him. At length, finding that all arguments were useless, he turned to his mate and asked him if he would assist himself in throwing the body of the dead man overboard. The mate, at first, hesitated, but in a moment he signified his consent, and together, himself and the captain, went down into the fore-cabin. They dared not remain long enough in the fore-cabin to sew it up, nor even to attach to it a single blanket, but throwing over it a sack, they managed to get it up on deck and lay it across the bulwarks of the starboard bow. A moment Capt. Johnson hesitated—he opened his lips, breathed a prayer for the soul of the departed, and then, while a shudder ran over his frame, he let the cold form of young Walter Addison slide into the blue water! Instinctively he cast his eyes over the side as the dead was done, and by the pale phosphorescent light he could just see the corpse sink, then rise and sink again, and then with a heavy step and still heavier heart, he walked aft.

The first watch had been set, but the other watch dared not go below, and huddling themselves beneath the long-boat, they sought the repose which they feared to seek where their companion had died; but each seemed to fear his neighbor, for none knew where the contagion might be. At eleven o'clock the slight breathings of the air, which seemed for the last few hours to have had no settled point, began to gather more force from the northward and westward, and ere long a good fresh breeze filled the ship's canvas, and started through the water. The wind continued to increase, and before midnight all hands were called to take in the top-gallant sails. At twelve o'clock the mid-watch was set, and all hands were, for a few moments, brought in contact with each other. No further symptoms of the dreaded pestilence had appeared, and they began to take hope.

It was half-past twelve o'clock. An old seaman named Bill Shippen had the helm, while the remainder of the watch were either in the gangway or else forward. The wind continued fresh, but yet steady, and the old ship was close hauled upon it, lying some

two points off her true course. The ship's bell was suspended over the binnacle, and old Shippen reached over and struck the first half hour after midnight. He had just resumed his position, and was gazing intently at the compass, when he felt a hand laid upon his shoulder, and on turning around, he beheld, by the struggling beams of the binnacle lamp, the pale, deathly features of Walter Addison!

For an instant the old sailor remained rooted to the spot, and then, uttering a sharp cry of fear, he let go the wheel and darted forward. In a moment the ship began to fall off, and as she brought the flat surface of broad canvas to the wind, she heeled over alarmingly; but soon the pale spectre that had frightened the helmsman from his post, caught the wheel, and laid the helm hard down, and ere long the ship was once more to the wind.

Shippen's cry had started all hands from their listlessness, for they thought the cholera-fiend had assailed him, but from his broken ejaculations they soon learned what was the matter, and in a body they crowded aft, and by the dim light from the binnacle, they saw the spectre helmsman! Every knee trembled, and every tongue clove to the roof of its mouth. None dared to approach him, nor did any move back. At this juncture the captain came on deck. His eye caught the corpse-like form that still held the wheel, and he, too, was riveted to the spot where he stood.

"Shipmates, relieve me from here or I shall faint. I am cold and weak!" at length came from the lips of the seeming spectre, in faint agonizing tones.

Captain Johnson hesitated an instant, and then he rushed forward, and laid his hand on the trembling form before him. It was cold and wet, but he knew that it was a living man! One after another of the men gathered about, and ere long all knew that young Walter Addison still lived! The captain had him conveyed to the cabin, where everything that could be thought of was administered for his comfort, and it was not long ere he sufficiently revived to give an account of his strange escape from the cold deep grave to which he had been consigned.

It seemed that young Addison had fallen into that death-like lethargy which not unfrequently results from sudden cholera, and which, as all who are acquainted with the disease must be aware, so nearly resembles death, that even the best physicians have been deceived by it. The sudden immersion in the cold water had revived his dormant senses, and as the ship had but a slight motion at the time, he came to a partial realization of his situation ere she had passed him, and by considerable exertion he managed to get hold of the rudder-chains. He tried to call for assistance, but his tongue was so swollen that he found it impossible, and after remaining upon the chains long enough to gain more strength, he worked his way up till he got hold of the lanyards of the cabin dead-lights. From thence he reached the lashings of the stern-board, but here weakness again overpowered him, and after working his way into the boat, he remained some time insensible, but at length he revived and came on board. He had tried to speak, but he could not. When the helmsman fled from the wheel, he had sense enough to see the ship's danger, and from the impulse of a sort of instinct, he seized the wheel and brought her up to the wind.

The morning dawned, and the next day passed—then another, and another, but the death-fiend came not again! He had lost his first intended victim, and he left the ship in peace.

Statistics of Drunkenness in Britain.

From a return of the number of convictions for drunkenness in the United Kingdom, we find that England produced during the year 135,004 convictions, which, in relation to the number of its denizens, is equal to 59 per 10,000. Ireland presented relatively a more abundant crop—79,354 convictions, equal to 147 per 10,000 people, therefore between two and three times the English ratio. That more people are excited in Ireland to break the peace through drink than in England is obvious on the figures. Irishmen are more quarrelsome in their cups than Englishmen, and this tends to make the former appear in the police returns greatly more drunken. But a moderately drunk Irishman probably fights and gets into a police-cell; an Englishman only as moderately drunk probably reaches his home in safety. Persons who have been before the magistrates four or more times during the year may be taken as habitual drunkards. In England 4 1/2 per cent. of the total convictions are referable to the habitual offenders. In Ireland the ratio is 14.7 per cent., or nearly thrice that of England. For some unexplained reason the Metropolitan Commissioners of Police have only returned the figures for about one-fourth of London, and a very bad fourth, for the ratio of conviction is 264, or more than fourfold that of England generally. In Liverpool the proportion is 329 per 10,000 of its population; there the habitual drunkards supply 18 per cent. of the convictions. But Dublin is even worse than Liverpool, for in the Irish metropolis 416 convictions go to 10,000 persons, and 22 per cent. of habitual offenders to total convictions. In convictions Cork is nearly as bad, being 382 per 10,000, and, as regards the habitually worse, those forming 35 per cent. of total. Londonderry is the smallest place in the table, and there are possible some peculiar conditions there which make its proportion, even for Ireland, excessive. The convictions were 1,142 per 10,000 inhabitants, its habitual drunkards contributing to nearly one-half of the convictions.

A Sensible Husband.

Athens, Ga., has a husband whose head is decidedly level. An exchange says of him:—

Recently his wife got to liking an other fellow. The two made an arrangement to elope, which the husband discovered. He didn't get into a passion, nor try to commit murder. He went to his wife and said,—

"Look here, there's no use of your eloping. I do not object to your going. I'll hitch up the horse and take you to the railroad depot, and I'll give you two hundred dollars to start in life with."

He was as good as his word, and did everything in his power to aid the couple in their speedy departure. As he shook hands with the brovet husband, he said,—

"Old fellow, I don't wish you any worse luck than you'll get with this woman. Be as happy as you can with her, and then you won't think yourself in Paradise."

Florida.

It would be difficult to find a climate in any part of the world more agreeable than that of Florida. The winters are delightful; five days out of six being bright and cloudless, and of the most agreeable temperature. In the southern portion of the peninsula frost is never felt, and even as far north as the Suwanee river, there are generally but two or three nights in the whole winter that ice as thick as a half dollar is found. In fact, the winter in Florida resembles very much the season which in the Middle States is termed "Indian Summer," except that in Florida the sky is perfectly clear, and the atmosphere more dry and elastic. Rain but rarely falls, three, four, and not unfrequently five weeks, of bright, clear and cloudless days occur constantly. This is one of the greatest charms of the winter climate in Florida; and in this respect it forms a striking contrast with almost every State in the Union. The climate being so salubrious, it is not to be wondered at that Florida is becoming a resort for Northern people during the winter months. It is almost a paradise. The moonlight is never more lovely than here. The cool breezes from the Gulf and the "broad Atlantic" always refresh the night; no matter how hot the day, the night is cool and pleasant; the richest perfumes of flowers and flowering trees regale the wanderers at eventide. The birds sing the loudest, longest and sweetest, and the mocking-bird claims the land for his own peculiar delight, and he is as saucy as if he owned it all. No body can rest easy who has not seen Florida.

The Liquor Interest.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, the boys are marching! How many of them? Sixty thousand! Sixty full regiments, every man of which will, before twelve months shall have completed their course, lie down in the grave of a drunkard! Every year during the past decade has witnessed the same sacrifice; and sixty regiments stand behind this army ready to take its place. It is to be recruited from our children and our children's children. "Tramp, tramp, tramp"—the sounds come to us in the echoes of the footsteps of the army just expired; tramp, tramp, tramp—the earth shakes with the tread of the host now passing; tramp, tramp, tramp, comes to us from the camp of the recruits. A great tide of life flows resistlessly to its death. What in God's name are they fighting for? The privilege of pleasing an appetite, of conforming to a social usage, of filling sixty thousand homes with shame and sorrow, of loading the public with the burden of pauperism, of crowding our prison-houses with felons, of detracting from the productive industries of the country, of ruining fortunes and breaking hopes, of breeding disease and wretchedness, of destroying both body and soul in hell before their time.

The prosperity of the liquor interest, covering every department of it, depends entirely on the maintenance of this army. It cannot live without it. It never did live without it. So long as the liquor interest maintains its present prosperous condition, it will cost America the sacrifice of 60,000 men every year. The effect is inseparable from the cause. The cost to the country of the liquor traffic is a sum so stupendous that any figures which we should care to give would convict us of trifling. The amount of life absolutely destroyed, the amount of industry sacrificed, the amount of bread transformed into poison, the shame, the unavailing sorrow, the crime, the poverty, the pauperism, the brutality, the wild waste of vital and financial resources, make an aggregate so vast—so incalculable vast—that the only wonder is that the American people do not rise as one man and declare that this great curse shall exist no longer. Diligent conventions are held on the subject of peace by men and women who find it necessary to fiddle to keep themselves awake. A hue and cry is raised about woman suffrage, as if any wrong which may be involved in woman's lack of the suffrage could be compared to the wrongs attached to the liquor interest! Does any sane woman doubt that women are suffering a thousand times more from rum than any political disability?

The truth is that there is no question before the American people today that begins to match in importance the temperance question. The question of American Slavery was never anything but a baby by the side of this; and we prophesy that within ten years, if not within five, the whole country will be awake to it, and divided upon it. The organizations of the liquor interests, the vast funds at its command, the universal feeling among those whose business

is pitted against the national prosperity and the public morals—these are enough to show that, upon one side of this matter at least, the present condition of things and the social and political questions that lie in the immediate future are apprehended. The liquor interest knows there is to be a great struggle, and is preparing to meet it. People both in this country and Great Britain are beginning to see the enormity of this business—are beginning to realize that Christian civilization is actually poisoned at its fountain, and that there can be no purification of it until the source of the poison is dried up.—Scribner's Monthly.

Somnambulism Extraordinary.

ONE OF THE MOST REMARKABLE CASES ON RECORD.

A conductor of street-cars named Leslie, boards at a house nearly opposite the office of the car company. The house is nearly sixty feet front, three stories high, and Leslie's room is in the top story. Adjoining the building is one of a lower altitude, the roof of which is about six feet below Leslie's window. East of this are the car stables. Between 11 and 12 o'clock one night Leslie was seen, in his night-dress, cutting up all sorts of queer pranks on the roof of his boarding-house. He was here throwing a series of flip-flaps, dancing backward and forward, and gesticulating in the strangest possible manner. He then walked down to the eaves of the roof, where he seated himself, with his legs dangling over the street. Jumping up, he marched along the edge of the roof to the western parapet wall, which is only a brick thick, up which he walked to the chimney, which he mounted and passed round it. Coming down from his perilous perch he walked over the roof, stopping by the way to go through the manual of arms, till he reached the eastern parapet, from which he jumped down on to the roof of the little tight rope practice, walking along the wire of the fire alarm telegraph, divesting himself of his shirt while in this queer position, and throwing it down on the roof, the crowd meanwhile being in breathless suspense at the danger in which the poor fellow was. He then jumped back on the roof, resumed his shirt, throw a first-rate summersault, and climbed up to the roof-bridge of the house. These sort of evolutions were continued without any apparent fatigue or thought of danger for some time. He then jumped down on to the stable roof, some four or five feet lower, and marched up and down the front wall of the building, some hundred feet in length, going through the manual exercises the while in the most perfect manner. He returned by the course he had come, climbing the bare wall at the east end of the middle building without any apparent difficulty, and making a clean leap of several feet through his window into his bedroom. A number of the officers of the car company went into his room immediately, where they found Leslie lying on his bed evidently fast asleep, though with staring, wide-open eyes. After some difficulty he was awakened from his stupor, but was unable to give any reason for his strange antics; being evidently unconscious that anything unusual had occurred. His attention was called to his blackened hands and bleeding feet, but he could not give any idea as to how they came in that condition. Altogether it is one of the most extraordinary cases of somnambulism on record, and well worthy the attention of the scientific. His fellow employees say that he has on several former occasions been caught while on several sleep-walking excursions, but never before had he indulged in such a remarkable series of gymnastic feats.—St. Louis Times.

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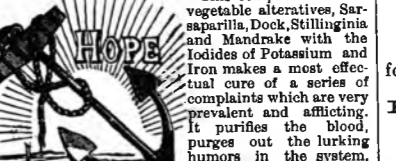
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