

The Survivors of the Chancellor

by

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The Chancellor

CHARLESTON, September 27, 1898. -- It is high tide, and three o'clock in the afternoon when we leave the Battery quay; the ebb carries us off shore, and as Captain Huntly has hoisted both main and top sails, the northerly breeze drives the Chancellor briskly across the bay. Fort Sumter ere long is doubled, the sweeping batteries of the mainland on our left are soon passed, and by four o'clock the rapid current of the ebbing tide has carried us through the harbor mouth.

But as yet we have not reached the open sea we have still to thread our way through the narrow channels which the surge has hollowed out amongst the sand-banks. The captain takes a southwest course, rounding the lighthouse at the corner of the fort; the sails are closely trimmed; the last sandy point is safely coasted, and at length, at seven o'clock in the evening, we are out free upon the wide Atlantic.

The Chancellor is a fine square-rigged three-master, of 900 tons burden, and belongs to the wealthy Liverpool firm of Laird Brothers. She is two years old, is sheathed and secured with copper, her decks being of teak, and the base of all her masts, except the mizzen, with all their fittings, being of iron. She is registered first class, A 1, and is now on her third voyage between Charleston and Liverpool. As she wended her way through the channels of Charleston harbor, it was the British flag that was lowered from her mast-head; but without colors at all, no sailor could have hesitated for a moment in telling her nationality, -- for English she was, and nothing but English from her water-line upward to the truck of her masts.

I must now relate how it happens that I have taken my passage on board the Chancellor on her return voyage to England.

At present there is no direct steamship service between South Carolina and Great Britain, and all who wish to cross must go either northward to New York or southward to New Orleans. It is quite true that if I had chosen a start from New York I might have found plenty of vessels belonging to English, French, or Hamburg lines, any of which would have conveyed me by a rapid voyage to my destination; and it is equally true that if I had selected New Orleans for my embarkation I could readily have reached Europe by one of the vessels of the National Steam Navigation Company, which join the French transatlantic line of Colon and Aspinwall. But it was fated to be otherwise.

One day, as I was loitering about the Charleston quays, my eye lighted on this vessel. There was something about the Chancellor that pleased me, and a kind of involuntary impulse took me on board, where I found the internal arrangements perfectly comfortable. Yielding to the idea that a voyage in a sailing vessel had certain charms beyond the transit in a steamer, and reckoning that with wind and wave in my favor there would be little material difference in time; considering, moreover, that in these low latitudes the weather in early autumn is fine and unbroken, I came to my decision, and proceeded forthwith to secure my passage by this route to Europe.

Have I done right or wrong? Whether I shall have reason to regret my determination is a problem to be solved in the future. However, I will begin to record the incidents of our daily experience, dubious as I feel whether the lines of my chronicle will ever find a reader.

Crew And Passengers

SEPTEMBER 28. -- John Silas Huntly, the captain of the Chancellor, has the reputation of being a most experienced navigator of the Atlantic. He is a Scotchman by birth, a native of Dundee, and is about fifty years of age. He is of the middle height and slight build, and has a small head, which he has a habit of holding a little over his left shoulder. I do not pretend to be much of a physiognomist, but I am inclined to believe that my few hours' acquaintance with our captain has given me considerable insight into his character. That he is a good seaman and thoroughly understands his duties I could not for a moment venture to deny; but that he is a man of resolute temperament, or that he possesses the amount of courage that would render him, physically or morally, capable of coping with any great emergency, I confess I cannot believe. I observed a certain heaviness and dejection about his whole carriage. His wavering glances, the listless motion of his hands, and his slow, unsteady gait, all seem to me to indicate a weak and sluggish disposition. He does not appear as though he could be energetic enough ever to be stubborn; he never frowns, sets his teeth, or clenches his fists. There is something enigmatical about him; however, I shall study him closely, and do what I can to understand the man who, as commander of a vessel, should be to those around him "second only to God."

Unless I am greatly mistaken there is another man on board who, if circumstances should require it, would take the more prominent position -- I mean the mate. I have hitherto, however, had so little opportunity of observing his character, that I must defer saying more about him at present.

Besides the captain and this mate, whose name is Robert Curtis, our crew consists of Walter, the lieutenant, the boat-swain, and fourteen sailors, all English or Scotch, making eighteen altogether, a number quite sufficient for working a vessel of 900 tons burden. Up to this time my sole experience of their capabilities is, that under the command of the mate, they brought us skillfully enough through the narrow channels of Charleston; and I have no reason to doubt that they are well up to their work.

My list of the ship's officials is incomplete unless I mention Hobart the steward and Jynxstrop the negro cook.

In addition to these, the Chancellor carries eight passengers, including myself. Hitherto, the bustle of embarkation, the arrangement of cabins, and all the variety of preparations inseparable from starting on a voyage for at least twenty or five-and-twenty days have precluded the formation of any acquaintanceships; but the monotony of the voyage, the close proximity into which we must be thrown, and the natural curiosity to know something of each other's affairs, will doubtless lead us in due time to an exchange of ideas. Two days have elapsed and I have not even seen all the passengers. Probably seasickness has prevented some of them from making an appearance at the common table.

One thing, however, I do know; namely, that there are two ladies occupying the stern cabin, the windows of which are in the aft-board of the vessel.

I have seen the ship's list, and subjoin a list of the passengers. They are as follows:

Mr. and Mrs. Kear, Americans, of Buffalo.

Miss Herbey, a young English lady, companion to Mrs. Kear.

M. Letourneur and his son Andre, Frenchmen, of Havre.

William Falsten, a Manchester engineer.

John Ruby, a Cardiff merchant; and myself, J. R. Kazalton, of London.

Bill Of Lading

SEPTEMBER 29. -- Captain Huntly's bill of lading, that is to say, the document that describes the Chancellor's cargo and the conditions of transport, is couched in the following terms:

Bronsfeld and Co., Agents, Charleston:

I, John Silas Huntly, of Dundee, Scotland, commander of the ship Chancellor, of about 900 tons burden, now at Charleston, do purpose, by the blessing of God, at the earliest convenient season, and by the direct route, to sail for the port of Liverpool, where I shall obtain my discharge. I do hereby acknowledge that I have received from you, Messrs. Bronsfeld and Co., Commission Agents, Charleston, and have placed the same under the gun-deck of the aforesaid ship, seventeen hundred bales of cotton, of the estimated value of 26,000 L., all in good condition, marked and numbered as in the margin; which goods I do undertake to transport to Liverpool, and there to deliver, free from injury (save only such injury as shall have been caused by the chances of the sea), to Messrs. Laird Brothers, or to their order, or to their representatives, who shall on due delivery of the said freight pay me the sum of 2,000 L. inclusive, according to the charter-party, and damages in addition, according to the usages and customs of the sea.

And for the fulfillment of the above covenant, I have pledged and do pledge my person, my property, and my interest in the vessel aforesaid, with all its appurtenances. In witness whereof, I have signed three agreements all of the same purport, on the condition that when the terms of one are accomplished, the other two shall be absolutely null and void.

Given at Charleston, September 13th, 1869.

J. S. HUNTLY.

From the foregoing document it will be understood that the Chancellor is conveying 1,700 bales of cotton to Liverpool; that the shippers are Bronsfeld, of Charleston, and the consignees are Laird Brothers of Liverpool. The ship was constructed with the especial design of carrying cotton, and the entire hold, with the exception of a very limited space reserved for passenger's luggage, is closely packed with the bales. The lading was performed with the utmost care, each bale being pressed into its proper place by the aid of screw-jacks, so that the whole freight forms one solid and compact mass; not an inch of space is wasted, and the vessel is thus made capable of carrying her full complement of cargo.

Something About My Fellow Passengers

SEPTEMBER 30 to October 6. -- The Chancellor is a rapid sailer, and more than a match for many a vessel of the same dimensions. She scuds along merrily in the freshening breeze, leaving in her wake, far as the eye can reach, a long white line of foam as well defined as a delicate strip of lace stretched upon an azure ground.

The Atlantic is not visited by many gales, and I have every reason to believe that the rolling and pitching of the vessel no longer incommode any of the passengers, who are all more or less accustomed to the sea. A vacant seat at our table is now very rare; we are beginning to know something about each other, and our daily life, in consequence, is becoming somewhat less monotonous.

M. Letourneur, our French fellow-passenger, often has a chat with me. He is a fine tall man, about fifty years of age, with white hair and a grizzly beard. To say the truth, he looks older than he really is: his drooping head, his dejected manner, and his eye, ever and again suffused with tears, indicate that he is haunted by some deep and abiding sorrow. He never laughs; he rarely even smiles, and then only on his son; his countenance ordinarily bearing a look of bitterness tempered by affection, while his general expression is one of caressing tenderness. It excites an involuntary commiseration to learn that M. Letourneur is consuming himself by exaggerated reproaches on account of the infirmity of an afflicted son.

Andre Letourneur is about twenty years of age, with a gentle, interesting countenance, but, to the irrepressible grief of his father, is a hopeless cripple. His left leg is miserably deformed, and he is quite unable to walk without the assistance of a stick. It is obvious that the father's life is bound up with that of his son; his devotion is unceasing; every thought, every glance is for Andre; he seems to anticipate his most trifling wish, watches his slightest movement, and his arm is ever ready to support or otherwise assist the child whose sufferings he more than shares.

M. Letourneur seems to have taken a peculiar fancy to myself, and constantly talks about Andre. This morning, in the course of conversation, I said:

"You have a good son, M. Letourneur. I have just been talking to him. He is a most intelligent young man."

"Yes, Mr. Kazallon," replied M. Letourneur, brightening up into a smile, "his afflicted frame contains a noble mind. He is like his mother, who died at his birth."

"He is full of reverence and love for you, sir," I remarked.

"Dear boy!" muttered the father half to himself. "Ah, Mr. Kazallon," he continued, "you do not know what it is to a father to have a son a cripple, beyond hope of cure."

"M. Letourneur," I answered, "you take more than your share of the affliction which has fallen upon you and your son. That M. Andre is entitled to the very greatest commiseration no one can deny; but you should remember, that after all a physical infirmity is not so hard to bear as mental grief. Now, I have watched your son pretty closely, and unless I am much mistaken there is nothing that troubles him so much as the sight of your own sorrow."

"But I never let him see it," he broke in hastily. "My sole thought is how to divert him. I have discovered that, in spite of his physical weakness, he delights in traveling; so for the last few years we have been constantly on the move. We first went all over Europe, and are now re- turning from visiting the principal places in the United States. I never allowed my son to go to college, but instructed him entirely myself, and these travels, I hope, will serve to complete his education. He is very intelligent, and has a lively imagination, and I am sometimes tempted to hope that in contemplating the wonders of nature he forgets his own infirmity."

"Yes, sir, of course he does," I assented.

"But," continued M. Letourneur, taking my hand, "although, perhaps, HE may forget, I can never forget. Ah, sir, do you suppose that Andre can ever forgive his parents for bringing him into the world a cripple?"

The remorse of the unhappy father was very distressing, and I was about to say a few kind words of sympathy when Andre himself made his appearance. M. Letourneur hastened toward him and assisted him up the few steep steps that led to the poop.

As soon as Andre was comfortably seated on one of the benches, and his father had taken his place by his side, I joined them, and we fell into conversation upon ordinary topics, discussing the various points of the Chancellor, the probable length of the passage, and the different details of our life on board. I find that M. Letourneur's estimate of Captain Huntly's character very much coincides with my own, and that, like me, he is impressed with the man's undecided manner and sluggish appearance. Like me, too, he has formed a very favorable opinion of Robert Curtis, the mate, a man of about thirty years of age, of great muscular power, with a frame and a will that seem ever ready for action.

While we were still talking of him, Curtis himself came on deck, and as I watched his movements I could not help being struck with his physical development; his erect and easy carriage, his fearless glance and slightly contracted brow all betoken a man of energy, thoroughly endowed with the calmness and courage that are indispensable to the true sailor. He seems a kind-hearted fellow, too, and is always ready to assist and amuse young Letourneur, who evidently enjoys his company. After he had scanned the weather and examined the trim of the sails, he joined our party and proceeded to give us some information about those of our fellow-passengers with whom at present we have made but slight acquaintance.

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