

The Lazarette of the “Huntress”

By W. Clark Russell

I stepped into the Brunswick Hotel in the East India Docks for a glass of ale. It was in the year 1853, and a wet, hot afternoon. I had been on the tramp all day, making just three weeks of a wretched, hopeless hunt after a situation on shipboard, and every bone in me ached with my heart. My precious timbers how poor I was! Two shillings, and threepence—that was all the money I possessed in the wide world, and when I had paid for the ale, I was poorer yet by twopence.

A number of nautical men of various grades were drinking at the bar. I sat down in a corner to rest, and abandoned myself to the most dismal reflections. I wanted to get out to Australia, and nobody, it seems, was willing to ship me in any situation on any account whatever. Captains and mates howled me off if I attempted to cross their gangways. Nothing was to be got in the shipping yards. The very crimps sneered at me when I told them that I wanted a berth. “Shake your head, my hawbuck,” said one of them, in the presence of a crowd of grinning seamen, “that the Johns may see the hayseed fly.”

What was I, do you ask? I’ll tell you. I was one of ten children whose father had been a clergyman, and the income “from all sources” of that same clergyman had never exceeded £230 a year. I was a lumbering, hulking lad, without friends, and, as I am now perfectly sensible, without brains, without any kind of taste for any pursuit, execrating the notion of clerkships, and perfectly willing to make away with myself sooner than be glued to a three-legged stool. But enough of this. The long and short is, I was thirsting to get out to Australia, never doubting that I should easily make my fortune there.

I sat in my corner in the Brunswick Hotel, scowling at the floor, my long legs thrust out, and my hands buried deep in my breeches pockets. Presently, I was sensible that some one stood beside me, and looking up, I beheld a young fellow staring with all his might, with a slow grin of recognition wrinkling his face. I seemed to remember him.

“Mr. William Peplow, ain’t it?” said he.

“Why yes,” said I, “and you—and you—?”

“You don’t remember Jem Back then, sir?”

“Yes I do, perfectly well. Sit down, Back. Are you a sailor? I am so dead beat that I can scarcely talk.”

Jem Back brought a tankard of ale to my table, and sat down beside me. He was a youth of my own age, and I knew him as the son of a parishioner of my father. He was attired in nautical clothes, yet somehow he did not exactly look what is called a sailor man. We fell into conversation. He informed me that he was an under-steward on board a large ship called the Huntress, that was bound out of the Thames in a couple of days for Sydney, New South Wales. He had sailed two years in her, and hoped to sign as head steward next voyage in a smaller ship.

“There’ll be a good deal of waiting this bout,” said he; “we’re taking a cuddy full of swells out. There’s Sir Thomas Mason—he goes as Governor; there’s his lady and three daughters, and a sort of suet” (he meant suite) “sails along with the boiling.” So he rattled on.

“Can’t you help me to find a berth in that ship?” said I.

“I’m afraid not,” he answered. “What could you offer yourself as, sir? They wouldn’t have you forward, and aft we’re chock-a-block. If you could manage to stow yourself away— they

wouldn't chuck you overboard when you turned up at sea; they'd make you useful and land you as safe as if you was the Governor himself."

I thought this a very fine idea, and asked Back to tell me how I should go to work to hide myself. He seemed to recoil, I thought, when I put the matter to him earnestly, but he was an honest, kindly-hearted fellow, and remembered my father with a certain degree of respect, and even of affection; he had known me as a boy; there was the sympathy of association and of memory between us; he looked at the old suit of clothes I sat in, and at my hollow, anxious face, and he crooked his eyebrows with an expression of pain when I told him that all the money I had was two and a penny, and that I must starve and be found floating a corpse in the dockyard basin if I did not get out to Australia. We sat for at least an hour over our ale, talking very earnestly, and when we arose and bade each other farewell I had settled with him what to do.

The Huntress was a large frigate-built ship of 1400 tons. On the morning of the day on which she was to haul out of dock I went on board of her. Nobody took any notice of me. The vessel was full of business, clamorous with the life and hurry of the start for the other side of the world. Cargo was still swinging over the main hold, down whose big, dark square a tall, strong, red-bearded chief mate was roaring to the stevedore's men engulfed in the bowels of the ship. A number of drunken sailors were singing and cutting capers on the forecastle. The main-deck was full of steerage, or, as they were then termed, 'tweendeck passengers—men, and seedy women and wailing and frightened, staring children. I did not pause to muse upon the scene, nor did I gaze aloft at the towering spars, where, forward, up in the dingy sky of the Isle of Dogs, floated that familiar symbol of departure, Blue Peter. I saw several young men in shining buttons and cloth caps with gold badges, and knew them to be midshipmen, and envied them. Every instant I expected to be ordered out of the ship by some one with hurricane lungs and a vast command of injurious language, and my heart beat fast. I made my way to the cuddy front, and just as I halted beside a group of women at the booby hatch, James Back came to the door of the saloon. He motioned to me with a slight toss of his head.

"Don't look about you," he whispered; "just follow me straight."

I stepped after him into the saloon. It was like entering a grand drawing-room. Mirrors and silver lamps sparkled; the panelled bulkheads were rich with hand paintings; flowers hung in plenty under the skylight; goldfish gleamed as they circled in globes of crystal. These things and more I beheld in the space of a few heart-beats.

I went after James Back down a wide staircase that sank through a large hatch situated a dozen paces from the cuddy front. When I reached the bottom I found myself in a long corridor, somewhat darksome, with cabins on either hand. Back took me into one of those cabins and closed the door.

"Now listen, Mr. Peplow," said he. "I'm going to shut you down in the lazarette." He pulled a piece of paper from his pocket, on which was a rude tracing. "This is the inside of the lazarette," he continued, pointing to the tracing. "There are some casks of flour up in this corner. They'll make you a safe hiding-place. You'll find a bag of ship's biscuit and some bottles of wine and water and a pannikin stowed behind them casks. There's cases of bottled ale in the lazarette, and plenty of tinned stuffs and grub for the cabin table. But don't broach anything if you can hold out."

"When am I to show myself?"

"When we're out of Soundings."

"Where's that?" said I.

“Clear of the Chops,” he answered. “If you come up when the land’s still in sight the captain’ll send you ashore by anything that’ll take you, and you’ll be handed over to the authorities and charged.”

“How shall I know when we’re clear of the Chops?” said I.

“I’ll drop below into the lazarette on some excuse and tell you,” he answered. “You’ll be very careful when you turn up, Mr. Peploe, not to let them guess that anybody’s lent you a hand in this here hiding job. If they find out I’m your friend, then it’s all up with Jem Back. He’s a stone-broke young man, and his parents’ll be wishing of themselves dead rather than they should have lived to see this hour.”

“I have sworn, and you may trust me, Back.”

“Right,” said he. “And now, is there e’er a question you’d like to ask before you drop below?”

“When does the ship haul out?”

They may be doing of it even whilst we’re talking,” he said.

“Can I make my escape out of the lazarette should I feel very ill, or as if I was going to suffocate?”

“Yes, the hatch it a little un. The cargo sits tall under him, and you can stand up and shove the hatch clear of its bearings should anything go seriously wrong with you. But don’t be in a hurry to feel ill or short ‘o breath. There’s no light, but there’s air enough. The united smells, perhaps, ain’t all violets, but the place is warm.”

He paused, looking at me inquiringly. I could think of nothing more to ask him. He opened the door, warily peered out, then whispered to me to follow, and I walked at his heels to the end of the corridor near the stern. I heard voices in the cabins on either hand of me; some people came out of one of the after berths, and passed us, talking noisily, but they took no heed of me or of my friend. They were passengers, and strangers to the ship, and would suppose me a passenger also, or an under-steward, like Jem Back, who, however, now looked his vocation, attired as he was in a camlet jacket, black cloth breeches, and a white shirt.

We halted at a little hatch-like trap-door a short way forward of the bulkheads of the stern cabins. Back grasped the ring in the center of the hatch, and easily lifted the thing, and laid open the hold.

“All’s clear,” said he, looking along the corridor. “Down with you, Mr. Peploe.” I peered into the abyss, as it seemed to me; the light hereabouts was so dim that but little of it fell through the small square of hatchway, and I could scarcely discern the outlines of the cargo below. I put my legs over and sank, holding on with a first voyager’s grip to the coaming of the hatch; then, feeling the cargo under my feet, I let go, and the instant I withdrew my hands, Back popped the hatch on.

The blackness was awful. It affected me for some minutes like the want of air. I thought I should smother, and could hardly binder myself from thrusting the hatch up for light, and for the comfort of my lungs. Presently the sense of suffocation passed. The corridor was uncarpeted; I heard the sounds of footsteps on the bare planks overhead, and, never knowing but that at any moment somebody might come into this lazarette, I very cautiously began to grope my way over the cargo. I skinned my hands and my knees, and cut my small clothes against all sorts of sharp edges in a very short time. I never could have realized the like of such a blackness as I was here groping through. The deepest midnight overhung by the electric cloud would be as bright as dawn or twilight compared to it.

I carried, however, in my head the sketch Back had drawn of this interior, and remembering that I had faced aft when my companion had closed me down, I crawled in the direction in which

I imagined the casks and my stock of bread and wine lay; and to my great joy, after a considerable bit of crawling and clawing about, during which I repeatedly wounded myself, I touched a canvas bag, which I felt, and found full of ship's bread, and on putting my hand out in another direction, but close by where the bag was, I touched a number of bottles. On this I felt around, carefully stroking the blackness with my maimed hands, and discovered that I had crawled into a recess formed by the stowage of a number of casks on their bilge; a little space was left behind them and the ship's wall; it was the hiding-place Back had indicated, and I sat down to breathe and think, and to collect my wits.

I had no means of making a light; but I don't believe that in any case I should have attempted to kindle a flame, so great would have been my terror of setting the ship on fire. I kept my eyes shut, fancying that that would be a good way to accustom my vision to the blackness. And here I very inopportunately recollected that one of the most dreadful prison punishments inflicted upon mutinous and ill-behaved felons is the locking of them up in a black room, where it is thought proper not to keep them very long lest they should go mad; and I wondered how many days or hours it would take to make a lunatic of me in this lazarette, that was as black certainly as any black room ever built for refractory criminals.

I had no clothes save those I wore. Stowaways as a rule do not carry much luggage to sea with them. I had heard tell of ships' slop-chests, however, and guessed when I was enlarged and put to work, the captain would let me choose a suit of clothes and pay for them out of my wages. I did not then know that it is not customary for commanders of ships to pay stowaways for their services. Indeed, I afterwards got to hear that far better men than the average run of stowaway were, in their anxiety to get abroad, very willing to sign articles for a shilling a month, and lead the lives of dogs for that wage.

I had come into the ship with a parcel of bread and cheese in my pocket: feeling hungry I partook of this modest refreshment, and clawing round touched a bottle, pulled the loosely-fitted cork out, and drank. This small repast heartened me, I grew a little less afraid of the profound blackness, and of the blue and green lights which came and went upon it, and began to hope I should not go mad.

The hours sneaked along. Now and again a sort of creaking noise ran through the interior, which made me suppose that the ship was proceeding down the river in tow of a tug. Occasionally I heard the tread of passengers overhead. It pleased me to hear that sound. It soothed me by diminishing the intolerable sense of loneliness bred by the midnight blackness in which I lay. The atmosphere was warm, but I drew breath without difficulty. The general smell was, indeed, a complicated thing; in fact, the lazarette was a storeroom. I seemed to taste ham, tobacco, cheese, and fifty other such matters in the air.

I had slept very ill on the preceding night, and after I had been for some hours in the lazarette I felt weary, and stretched myself along the deck between the casks and the ship's wall, and pillowed my head on my coat. I slept, and my slumber was deep and long. My dreams were full of pleasing imaginations—of nuggets of extraordinary size, chiefly, and leagues of rich pasture land whitened by countless sheep, all branded with the letter P. But after I had awakened and gathered my wits together, I understood that I had lost all count of time, that I should not know what o'clock it was, and whether it was day or night, until I had got out. I was glad to find that the blackness was not so intolerable as I had dreaded. I felt for the biscuits and bottles, and ate and drank as appetite dictated. Nobody in all this while lifted the hatch. No doubt the steward had plenty of stores for current use in hand, and there might be no need to break out fresh provisions for some weeks.

I had lain, according to my own computation, very nearly two days in this black hole, when I felt a movement in the ship which immediately upset my stomach. The vessel, I might suppose, was in the Channel; her pitching grew heavier, the lazarette was right aft, and in no part of the vessel saving the bows could her motion be more sensibly felt. I was speedily overcome with nausea, and for many long hours lay miserably ill, unable to eat or drink. At the expiration of this time the sea ran more smoothly; at all events, the ship's motion grew gentle; the feeling of sickness suddenly passed, leaving me, indeed, rather weak, yet not so helpless but that I could sit up and drink from a bottle of wine and water, and eat a dry ship's biscuit.

Whilst I was munching the tasteless piece of sea bread, sitting in the intense blackness, pining for the fresh air and the sunshine, and wondering how much longer I was to wait for Back's summons to emerge, the hatch was raised. I shrank and held my breath, with my hand grasping the biscuit poised midway to my mouth, as though I had been withered by a blast of lightning. A faint sheen floated in the little square. It was the dim lustre of distant lamplight, whence I guessed it was night. The figure of a man cautiously dropped through the hatchway, and by some means, and all very silently, he contrived to readjust the hatch, shutting himself down as Back had shut me down. The motion of the ship, as I have said, was gentle, the creaking noises throughout the working fabric were dim and distant; indeed, I could hear the man breathing as he seemed to pause after bringing the hatchway to its bearings over his head. I did not suppose that the captain ever entered this part of the ship. The man, for all I could conjecture, might be one of the mates, or the boatswain, or the head steward, visiting the lazarette on some errand of duty, and coming down very quietly that the passengers who slept in the cabins on either hand the corridor should not be disturbed. Accordingly, I shrank into the compactest posture I could contort myself into, and watched.

A lucifer match was struck; the flame threw out the figure of a man standing on the cargo just under the hatch; he pulled out a little bull's-eye lamp from his pocket and lighted it, and carefully extinguished the match. The long, misty beam of the magnified flame swept the interior like the revolving spoke of a wheel as the man slowly turned the lens about in a critical search of the place, himself being in blackness. The line of light broke on the casks behind which I crouched, and left me in deep shadow unperceived. After some minutes of this sort of examination, the man came a little way forward and crouched down upon a bale or something of the sort directly abreast of the casks, through whose cant-lines I was peering. He opened the lamp and placed it beside him; the light was then full upon his figure.

He might have been an officer of the ship for all I knew. His dress was not distinguishable. but I had his face very plain in my sight. He was extremely pale; his nose was long and aquiline; he wore moustaches, whiskers, and a short beard, black, but well streaked with grey. His eyebrows were bushy and dark; his eyes were black, and the reflected lamplight shot in gleams from them, like to that level spoke of radiance with which he had swept this lazarette. His hair was unusually long, even for that age of the fashion, and his being without a hat made me guess he was not from the deck, though I never doubted that he was one of the ship's company.

When he opened the bull's-eye lamp and put it down, he drew something out of his pocket which glittered in his hand. I strained my sight, yet should not have managed to make out what he grasped but for his holding it close to the light; I then saw that it was a small circular brass box; a kind of little metal cylinder, from whose side fell a length of black line, just as tape draws out of a yard measure. He talked to himself, with a sort of wild, scowling grin upon his face, whilst he inspected his brass box and little length of line; he then shut the lamp and flashed it upon what I saw was a medium-sized barrel, such, perhaps, as a brewer would call a four-and-a-

half gallon cask. It rested on its bilge, after the manner in which the casks behind which I lay hidden were stowed.

I now saw him pull a spile or spike of wood out of the head of the barrel, and insert the end of the black line attached to the small brass piece in the orifice. This done he fitted a key to the brass box and wound it up. He may have taken twenty turns with the key; the lazarette was so quiet that I could distinctly hear the harsh grit of the mechanism as it was revolved. All the while he was thus employed he preserved his scowling smile, and whispered to himself. After he had wound up the piece of clockwork he placed it on the bale where his lamp had stood, and taking the light made for the hatchway, under which he came to a stand whilst he extinguished the bull's-eye. I then heard him replace the hatch, and knew he was gone.

The arrangement he had wound up ticked with the noise of a Dutch clock. I had but little brains in those days, as I have told you, and in sad truth I am not overloaded with that particular sort of cargo at this hour; but I was not such a fool as not to be able to guess what the man intended to do, and what that hollow, desperate ticking signified. Oh, my great God, I thought to myself, it is an infernal machine! and the ship will be blown up!

My horror and fright went far beyond the paralyzing form; they ran a sort of madness into my blood and vitalized me into desperate instant action. Utterly heedless *now* of hurting and wounding myself, I scrambled over the casks, and directed by the noise of the ticking, stretched forth my hand and grasped the brass machine. I fiercely tugged it, then feeling for the slow match, as I guessed the line to be, I ran it through my fingers to make sure I had pulled the end out of the barrel. The murderous thing ticked in my hand with the energy of a hotly-revolved capstan, whilst I stood breathing short, considering what I should do, whilst the perspiration soaked through my clothes as though a bucket of oil had been upset over me. Heavens! the horror of standing in that black lazarette with an infernal machine ticking in my hands, and a large barrel of gunpowder, as I easily guessed, within reach of a kick of my foot! I trembled in every limb and sweated at every pore, and seemed to want brains enough to tell me what ought next to be done!

How long I thus stood irresolute I don't know; still clutching the hoarsely-ticking piece of clockwork. I crawled in the direction in which I supposed lay the casks behind which I had hidden. I had scarcely advanced half a dozen feet when the mechanism snapped in my fingers; a bright flash, like to the leap of a flame in the pan of a flint musket, irradiated the lazarette; the match was kindled, and burnt freely. The first eating spark was but small; I extinguished the fiery glow between my thumb and forefinger, squeezing it in my terror with the power of the human jaw. The ticking ceased; the murderous thing lay silent and black in my hand. I waited for some minutes to recover myself, and then made up my mind to get out of the lazarette and go on deck, and tell the people that there was a barrel of gunpowder in the after-hold, and that I had saved the ship from having her side or stern blown out.

I pocketed the brass box and match, but it took me above half an hour to get out of the infernal hole. I fell into crevices, went sprawling over pointed edges, and twice came very near to breaking my leg. Happily, I was tall, and when I stood on the upper tier of cargo I could feel the deck above me, and once, whilst thus groping, I touched the edge of the hatchway, thrust up the cover, and got out.

I walked straight down the corridor, which was sown with passengers' boots, mounted the wide staircase, and gained the quarter-deck. I reeled and nearly fell, so intoxicating was the effect of the gushing draught of sweet, fresh night-wind after the stagnant, cheesy atmosphere of the lazarette. A bull's eye shone on the face of a clock under the break of the poop; the hour was

twenty minutes after two. Nothing stirred on the main deck and waist; the forward part of the ship was hidden in blackness. She was sailing on a level keel before the wind, and the pallid spaces of her canvas soared to the trucks, wan as the delicate curls and shreds of vapor which floated under the bright stars.

I ascended a flight of steps which led to the poop, and saw the shadowy figures of two midshipmen walking on one side the deck, whilst on the other side, abreast of the mizzen rigging, stood a third person. I guessed by his being alone that he was the officer of the watch, and stepped over to him. He drew himself erect as I approached, and sang out, "Hallo! who the devil are you?"

"I'm just out of your lazarette," said I, "where I've saved this ship from having her stern blown out by an infernal machine!"

He bent his head forward and stared into my face, but it was too dark for him to make anything of me. I reckoned he was the second mate; his outline against the stars defined a square, bullet-headed, thick-necked man. On a sudden he bawled out to the two midshipmen, who had come to a stand on t'other side the skylight—

"Mr. Freeling, jump below and call the captain. Beg him to come on deck at once, young gentleman."

The midshipman rushed into the cuddy.

"What's this yarn about blowing out the ship's stern?" continued the second mate, as I rightly took him to be.

I related my story as straightforwardly as my command of words permitted. I told him that I had wanted to get to Australia, that I was too poor to pay my passage, that I had been unable to find employment on board ship, that I had hidden myself in the lazarette of the *Huntress*, and that whilst there, and within the past hour, I had seen a man fit a slow match into what I reckoned was a barrel of gunpowder and disappear after setting his infernal machine a-going. And thus speaking, I pulled the machine out of my pocket, and put it into his hand.

At this moment the captain arrived on deck. He was a tall man, with a very deep voice, slow, cool, and deliberate in manner and speech.

"What's the matter?" he inquired, and instantly added, "Who is this man?"

The second mate gave him my story almost as I had delivered it.

The captain listened in silence, took the infernal machine, stepped to the skylight, under which a lamp was dimly burning, and examined the piece of mechanism. His manner of handling it by some means sprang the trigger, which struck the flint, and there flashed out a little sun-bright flame that fired the match. I jumped to his side and squeezed the fire out between my thumb and forefinger as before. The captain told the two midshipmen to rouse up the chief mate and send the boatswain and carpenter aft.

"Let there be no noise," said he to the second mate. "We want no panic aboard us. Describe the man," said he, addressing me, "whom you saw fitting this apparatus to the barrel." I did so. "Do you recognize the person by this lad's description?" said the captain to the second mate.

The second mate answered that he knew no one on board who answered to the likeness I had drawn.

"Gentlemen, I swear he's in the ship!" I cried, and described him again as I had seen him when the open bull's-eye allowed the light to stream fair upon his face.

But now the arrival of the chief officer, the boatswain, and the carpenter occasioned some bustle. My story was hastily re-told. The carpenter fetched a lantern, and the whole group examined the infernal machine by the clear light.

“There’s no question as to the object of this piece of clockwork, sir,” said the chief officer.

“None,” exclaimed the captain; “it flashed a few minutes ago in my hand. The thing seems alive. Softly now. The passengers musn’t hear of this: there must be no panic. Take the boatswain and carpenter along with you, Mr. Morritt, into the lazarette. But mind your fire.” And he then told them where the barrel was stowed as I had described it.

The three men left the poop. The captain now examined me afresh. He showed no temper whatever at my having hidden myself on board his ship. All his questions concerned the appearance of the man who had adjusted the machine, how he had gone to work, what he had said when he talked to himself—but this question I could not answer. When he had ended his inquiries he sent for the chief steward, to whom he related what had happened, and then asked him if there was such a person in the ship as I had described. The man answered there was.

“What’s his name?”

“He’s booked as John Howland, sir. He’s a steerage passenger. His cabin’s No. 2 on the starboard side. His meals are taken to him into his cabin, and I don’t think he’s ever been out of it since he came aboard.”

“Go and see if he’s in his cabin,” said the captain.

As the steward left the poop the chief mate, the boatswain, and carpenter returned.

“It’s as the young man states, sir,” said Mr. Morritt. “There’s a barrel of gunpowder stowed where he says it is with a hole in the head ready to receive the end of a fuse.”

“Presently clear it out, and get it stowed away in the magazine,” said the captain, calmly. “This has been a narrow escape. Carpenter, go forward and bring a set of irons along. Is there only one barrel of gunpowder below, d’ye say, Mr. Morritt?”

“No more, sir.”

“How could such a thing find its way into the lazarette?” said the captain, addressing the second mate.

“God alone knows!” burst out the other. “It’ll have come aboard masked in some way, and it deceived me. Unless there’s the hand of a lumper in the job—does *he* know no more about it than what he says?” he cried, rounding upon me.

At this moment the steward came rushing from the companion way, and said to the captain, in a trembling voice, “The man lies dead in his bunk, sir, with his throat horribly cut.”

“Come you along with us,” said the captain, addressing me, and the whole of us, saving the carpenter and second mate, went below.

We walked along the corridor obedient to the captain’s whispered injunction to tread lightly, and make no noise. The midnight lantern faintly illuminated the length of the long after passage. The steward conducted us to a cabin that was almost right aft, and threw open the door. A bracket lamp filled the interior with light. There were two bunks under the porthole, and in the lower bunk lay the figure of the man I had beheld in the lazarette. His throat was terribly gashed, and his right hand still grasped the razor with which the wound had been inflicted.

“Is that the man?” said the captain.

That’s the man,” I answered, trembling from head to foot, and sick and faint with the horror of the sight.

“Steward, fetch the doctor,” said the captain, “and tell the carpenter we shan’t want any irons here.”

The narrative of my tragic experience may be completed by the transcription of two newspaper accounts, which I preserve pasted in a commonplace book. The first is from the *Sydney Morning*

Herald. After telling about the arrival of the *Huntress*, and the disembarkation of his Excellency and suite, the writer proceeds thus:—

“When the ship was five days out from the Thames an extraordinary incident occurred. A young man named William Peploe, a stowaway, whilst hidden in the lazarette of the vessel, saw a man enter the place in which he was hiding and attach a slow match and an infernal machine to a barrel of gunpowder stored amidships of the lazarette, and, from what we can gather, *on top of the cargo!* When the man left the hold young Peploe heroically withdrew the match from the powder and carried the machine on deck. The youth described the man, who proved to be a second-class passenger, who had embarked under the name of John Howland. When the villain’s cabin was entered he was found lying in his hunk dead, with a severe wound in his throat inflicted by his own hand. No reason is assigned for this dastardly attempt to destroy a valuable ship and cargo and a company of souls numbering two hundred and ten, though there seems little reason to doubt that the man was mad. It is certain that but for the fortunate circumstance of young Peploe lying hidden in the lazarette the ship’s stern or side would have been blown out, and she must have gone down like a stone, carrying all hands with her. On the passengers in due course being apprised of their narrow escape, a purse of a hundred guineas was subscribed and presented by his Excellency to young Peploe. The captain granted him a free passage and provided him with a comfortable outfit from the ship’s slop-chest. It is also understood that some situation under Government has been promised to Mr. William Peploe in consideration of the extraordinary service rendered on this memorable occasion.”

My next quotation is from the pages of the Nautical Magazine, dated two years subsequent to the publication of the above in the Australian paper:—

“A bottle was picked up in March last upon the beach of Terceira, one of the Azores, containing a paper bearing a narrative which, unless it be a hoax, seems to throw some light on the mysterious affair of the *Huntress*, for the particulars of which we refer our readers to our volume of last year. The paper, as transmitted by the British Consul, is as follows:—

“Ship *Huntress*. At sea, such and such a date, 1853.

“I, who am known on board this vessel as John Howland, am the writer of this document. Twenty years ago I was unjustly sentenced to a term of transportation across seas, and my treatment at Norfolk Island was such that I vowed by the God who made me to be revenged on the man who, acting on the representation of his creatures, had caused me to be sent from Hobart Town to that hellish penal settlement. That man, with his wife and children, attended by a suite, is a passenger in this ship, and I have concerted my plan to dispatch him and those who may be dear to him to that Devil to whom the wretch consigned my soul when he ordered me to be sent as a further punishment to Norfolk Island. The destruction of this ship is ensured. Nothing can avert it. A barrel of gunpowder was stowed by well-bribed hands in the East India Docks in the lazarette, to which part of the bold access is easy by means of a small trap door. I am writing this three-quarters of an hour before I proceed to the execution of my scheme, and the realization of my dream of vengeance. When I have completed this document I will place it in a bottle, which I shall carefully cork and seal and cast into the sea through my cabin porthole. I am sorry for the many who must suffer because of the sins of one; but that one must perish, and immediately, in which hope, craving that, when this paper is found it may be transmitted to the authorities at home, so that the fate of my bitter enemy may be known, I subscribe myself,

“ISRAEL THOMAS WILKINSON,

“Ex-Convict and Ticket-of-Leave Man.”