

# A Nightmare of the Doldrums

By W. Clark Russell

The *Justitia* was a smart little barque of 395 tons. I had viewed her with something of admiration as she lay in mid-stream in the Hooghly—somewhere off the Coolie Bazaar, I think it was. There was steam then coming to Calcutta, though not as steam now is; very little of it was in any sense palatial, and some of the very best of it was to be as promptly distanced under given conditions of weather by certain of the clippers, clouded with studding sails and flying-kites to the starry buttons of their skysail mastheads, as the six-knot ocean tramp of to-day is to be outrun by the fourmasted leviathan thrashing through it to windward with her yards fore and aft.

I—representing in those days a large Birmingham firm of dealers in the fal-lal industries—had wished to make my way from Calcutta to Capetown. I saw the *Justitia* and took a fancy to her; I admired the long, low, piratic run of her hull as she lay with straining hawse-pipes on the rushing stream of the Hooghly; upon which, as you watched, there might go by in the space of an hour some half-score at least of dead natives made ghastly canoes of by huge birds, erect upon the corpses, burying their beaks as they sailed along.

I found out that the *Justitia* was one of the smartest of the Thames and East India traders of that time, memorable on one occasion for having reeled off a clean seventeen knots by the log under a main topgallant-sail, set over a single-reefed topsail. It was murmured, indeed, that the mate who hove that log was drunk when he counted the knots; yet the dead reckoning tallied with the next day's observations. I called upon the agents, was told that the *Justitia* was not a passenger ship, but that I could hire a cabin for the run to Capetown if I chose; a sum in rupees, trifling compared with the cost of transit by steam, was named. I went on board, found the captain walking up and down under the awning, and agreeably killed an hour in a chat with as amiable a seaman as ever it was my good fortune to meet.

We sailed in the middle of July. Nothing worth talking about happened during our run down the Pay of Bengal. The crew foremost were all of them Englishmen; there were twelve, counting the cook and steward. The captain was a man named Cayzer; the only mate of the vessel was one William Perkins. The boatswain, a rough, short, hairy, immensely strong man, acted as second mate and kept a lookout when Perkins was below. But he was entirely ignorant of navigation, and owed to me that he read with difficulty words of one syllable, and could not write.

I was the only passenger. My name, I may as well say here, is Thomas Barron. Our run to the south Ceylon parallels was slow and disappointing. The monsoon was light and treacherous, sometimes dying out in a sort of laughing, mocking gust till the whole ocean was a sheet-calm surface, as though the dependable trade wind was never again to blow.

“Oh, yes,” said Captain Cayzer to me. “we're used to the unexpected hereabouts. Monsoon or no monsoon, I'll tell you what: you're always safe in standing by for an Irishman's hurricane down here.”

And what sort of a breeze is that?” I asked.

“An up-and-down calm,” said he; “as hard to know where it begins as to guess where it'll end.”

However, thanks to the frequent trade puffs and other winds, which tasted not like the monsoon, we crawled through those latitudes which Ceylon spans, and fetched within a few

degrees of the equator. In this part of the waters we were to be thankful for even the most trifling donation of catspaw, or for the equally small and short-lived mercy of the gust of the electric cloud. I forget how many days we were out from Calcutta: the matter is of no moment. I left my cabin one morning some hour after the sun had risen, by which time the decks had been washed down, and were already dry, with a salt sparkle as of bright white sand on the face of the planks, so roasting was it. I went into the head to get a bath under the pump there. I feel in memory, as I write, the exquisite sensation of that luxury of brilliant brine, cold as snow, melting through me from head to foot to the nimble plying of the pump-brake by a seaman.

It was a true tropic morning. The sea, of a pale lilac, flowed in a long-drawn, gentle heave of swell into the southwest; the glare of the early morning brooded in a sort of steamy whiteness in the atmosphere; the sea went working to its distant reaches, and floated into a dim blending of liquid air and water, so that you couldn't tell where the sky ended; a weak, hot wind blew over the taffrail, but it was without weight. The courses swung to the swell without response to the breathings of the air; and on high the light cotton-white royals were scarcely curved by the delicate passage of the draught.

Yet the barque had steerage way. When I looked through the grating at her metallised fore-foot I saw the ripples plentiful as harp strings threading aft, and whilst I dried myself I watched the slow approach of a piece of timber hoary with barnacles, and venerable with long hairs of seaweed, amid and around which a thousand little fish were sporting, many-colored as though a rainbow had been shivered.

I returned to my cabin, dressed, and stepped on to the quarter-deck, where I found some men spreading the awning, and the captain in a white straw hat viewing an object out upon the water through a telescope, and talking to the boatswain, who stood alongside.

“What do you see?” I asked.

“Something that resembles a raft,” answered the captain.

The thing he looked at was about a mile distant, some three points on the starboard bow. On pointing the telescope, I distinctly made out the fabric of a raft, fitted with a short mast, to which midway a bundle—it resembled a parcel—was attached. A portion of the raft was covered by a white sheet or cloth, whence dangled a short length of something chocolate-colored, indistinguishable even with the glass, lifting and sinking as the raft rose and fell upon the flowing heave of the sea.

“This ocean,” said the captain, taking the glass from me, “is a big volume of tragic stories, and the artist who illustrates the book does it in that fashion,” and he nodded in the direction of the raft.

“What do you make of it, boatswain?” I asked.

“It looks to me,” he answered in his strong, harsh, deep voice, “like a religious job—one of them rafts the Burmuh covies float away their dead on. I never see one afore, sir, but I've heard tell of such things.”

We sneaked stealthily towards the raft. It was seven bells—half-past seven—and the sailors ate their breakfast on the fore-castle, that they might view the strange contrivance. The mate, Mr. Perkins, came on deck to relieve the boatswain, and, after inspecting the raft through the telescope, gave it as his opinion that it was a Malay floating bier—“a Mussulman trick of ocean burial, anyhow,” said he.

There should be a jar of water aboard the raft, and cakes and fruit for the corpse to regale on, if he ha'n't been dead long.”

The steward announced breakfast; the captain told him to hold it back awhile. He was as curious as I to get a close view of the queer object with its white cloth and mast and parcel and chocolate-colored fragment half in and half out like a barge's leeboard, and he bade the man at the helm put the wheel over by a spoke or two; but the wind was nearly gone, the barque scarcely responded to the motion of her rudder, the thread-like lines at the cutwater had faded, and a roasting, oppressive calm was upon the water, whitening it out into a tingling sheen of quicksilver with a fiery shaft of blinding dazzle, solitary and splendid, working with the swell like some monstrous serpent of light right under the sun.

The raft was about six cables' lengths off us when the barque came to a dead stand, with a soft, universal hollowing in of her canvas from royal to course, as though, like something sentient, she delivered one final sigh before the swoon of the calm seized her. But now we were near enough to resolve the floating thing with the naked eye into details. It was a raft formed of bamboo canes. A mast about six feet tall was erected upon it; the dark thing over the edge proved a human leg, and, when the fabric lifted with the swell and raised the leg clear, we saw that the foot had been eaten away by fish, a number of which were swimming about the raft, sending little flashes of foam over the pale surface as they darted along with their back or dorsal fins exposed. They were all little fish; I saw no sharks. The body to which the leg belonged was covered by a white cloth. The captain called my attention to the parcel attached to the mast, and said that it possibly contained the food which the Malays leave beside their dead after burial.

"But let's go to breakfast now, Mr. Barron," said he, with a slow, reproachful, impatient look round the breathless scene of ocean. "If there's any amusement to be got out of that thing yonder there's a precious long, quiet day before us, I fear, for the entertainment."

We breakfasted, and in due course returned on deck. The slewing of the barque had caused the raft to shift its bearings, otherwise its distance remained as it was when we went below.

"Mr. Perkins," said the captain, "lower a boat and bring aboard that parcel from the raft's juremast, and likewise take a peep at the figure under the cloth, and report its sex and what it looks like."

I asked leave to go in the boat, and when she was lowered, with three men in her, I followed Mr. Perkins, and we rowed over to the raft. All about the frail bamboo contrivance the water was beautiful with the colors and movements of innumerable fish. As we approached we were greeted by an evil smell. The raft seemed to have been afloat for a considerable period; its submerged portion was green with marine adhesions or growths. The fellow in the bows of the boat, manœuvring with the boathook, cleverly snicked the parcel from the juremast and handed it along to the mate, who put it beside him without opening it, for that was to be the captain's privilege.

"Off with that cloth," said Mr. Perkins, "and then backwater a bit out of this atmosphere."

The bowman jerked the cloth clear of the raft with his boathook; the white sheet floated like a snowflake upon the water for a few breaths, then slowly sank. The body exposed was stark naked and tawny. It was a male. I saw nothing revolting in the thing: it would have been otherwise perhaps had it been white. The hair was long and black, the nose aquiline, the mouth puckered into the aspect of a harelip; the gleam of a few white teeth painted a ghastly contemptuous grin upon the dead face. The only shocking part was the footless leg.

"Shall I hook him overboard, sir?" said the bowman.

"No, let him take his ease as he lies," answered the mate, and with that we returned to the barque.

We climbed over the side, the boat was hoisted to the davits, and Mr. Perkins took the parcel out of the stern-sheets and handed it to the captain. The cover was a kind of fine canvas, very neatly stitched with white thread. Captain Cayzer ripped through the stitching with his knife, and exposed a couple of books bound in some kind of skin or parchment. They were probably the Koran, but the characters none of us knew. The captain turned them about for a bit, and I stood by looking at them; he then replaced them in their canvas cover and put them down upon the skylight, and by-and-by, on his leaving the deck, he took them below to his cabin.

The moon rose about ten that night. She came up hot, distorted, with a sullen face belted with vapor, but was soon clear of the dewy thickness over the horizon and showering a pure greenish silver upon the sea. She made the night lovely and cool: her reflection sparkled in the dew along the rails, and her beam whitened out the canvas into the tender softness of wreaths of cloud motionless upon the summit of some dark heap of mountain. I looked for the raft and saw it plainly, and it is not in language to express how the sight of that frail cradle of death deepened the universal silence and expanded the prodigious distances defined by the stars, and accentuated the tremendous spirit of loneliness that slept like a presence in that wide region of sea and air.

There had not been a stir of wind all day: not the faintest breathing of breeze had tarnished the sea down to the hour of midnight when, feeling weary, I withdrew to my cabin. I slept well, spite of the heat and the cockroaches, and rose at seven. I found the steward in the cabin. His face wore a look of concern, and on seeing me he instantly exclaimed— “The captain seems very ill, sir. Might you know anything of physic? Neither Mr. Perkins nor me can make out what’s the matter.”

“I know nothing of physic,” I answered, “but I’ll look in on him.”

I stepped to his door, knocked, and entered. Captain Cayzer lay in a bunk under a middling-sized porthole; the cabin was full of the morning light. I started and stood at gaze, scarce crediting my sight, so shocked and astounded was I by the dreadful change which had happened in the night in the poor man’s appearance. His face was blue, and I remarked a cadaverous sinking in of the eyeballs; the lips were livid, the hands likewise blue, but strangely wrinkled like a washer-woman’s. On seeing me he asked in a husky whispering voice for a drink of water. I handed him a full pannikin, which he drained feverishly, and then began to moan and cry out, making some weak miserable efforts to rub first one arm, then the other, then his legs.

The steward stood in the doorway. I turned to him, sensible that my face was ashen and asked some questions. I then said, “Where is Mr. Perkins?”

He was on deck. I bade the steward attend to the captain, and passed through the hatch to the quarter-deck, where I found the mate.

“Do you know that the captain is very ill?” said I.

“Do I know it, sir? Why, yes. I’ve been sitting by him chafing his limbs and giving him water to drink, and attending to him in other ways. What is it, d’ye know, sir?”

“*Cholera!*” said I.

“Oh, my God, I hope not! “ he exclaimed. How could it be cholera? How could cholera come aboard?”

“A friend of mine died of cholera at Rangoon when I was there,” said I. “I recognize the looks, and will swear to the symptoms.”

“But how could it have come aboard? “ he exclaimed, in a voice low but agitated.

My eyes, as he asked the question, were upon the raft. I started and cried, “Is that thing still there?”

“Ay,” said the mate, “we haven’t budged a foot all night.”

The suspicion rushed upon me whilst I looked at the raft, and ran my eyes over the bright hot morning sky and the burnished surface of sea, sheeting into dimness in the misty junction of heaven and water.

“I shouldn’t be surprised,” said I, “to discover that we brought the cholera aboard with us yesterday from that dead man’s raft yonder.”

“How is cholera to be caught in that fashion?” exclaimed Mr. Perkins, pale and a bit wild in his way of staring at me.

“We may have brought the poison aboard in the parcel of books.”

“Is cholera to be caught so?”

Undoubtedly. The disease may be propagated by human intercourse. Why not then by books which have been handled by cholera-poisoned people, or by the atmosphere of a body dead of the plague?” I added, pointing at the raft.

“No man amongst us is safe, then, now?” cried the mate,

“I’m no doctor,” said I; “but I know this, that contagious poisons such as scarlet fever and glanders, may retain their properties in a dormant state for years. I’ve heard tell of scores of instances of cholera being propagated through articles of dress. Depend upon it,” said I, “that we brought the poison aboard with us yesterday from that accursed death-raft yonder.”

“Aren’t the books in the captain’s cabin?” said the mate.

“Are they?”

“He took them below yesterday, sir.”

“The sooner they’re overboard the better,” I exclaimed, and returned to the cabin.

I went to the captain, and found the steward rubbing him. The disease appeared to be doing its work with horrible rapidity; the eyes were deeply sunk and red; every feature had grown sharp and pinched as after a long wasting disease; the complexion was thick and muddy. Those who have watched beside cholera know that terrific changes may take place in a few minutes. I cast my eyes about for the parcel of books, and, spying it, took a stick from a corner of the berth, hooked up the parcel, and, passing it through the open porthole, shook it overboard.

The captain followed my movements with a languid rolling of his eyes but spoke not, though he groaned often, and frequently cried out. I could not in the least imagine what was proper to be done. His was the most important life on board the ship, and yet I could only look on and helplessly watch him expire.

He lived till the evening, and seldom spoke save to call upon God to release him. I had found an opportunity to tell him that he was ill of the cholera, and explained how it happened that the horrible distemper was on board, for I was absolutely sure we had brought it with us in that parcel of books; but his anguish was so keen, his death so close then, that I cannot be sure he understood me. He died shortly after seven o’clock, and I have since learned that that time is one of the critical hours in cholera.

When the captain was dead I went to the mate, and advised him to cast the body overboard at once. He called to some of the hands. They brought the body out just as the poor fellow had died, and, securing a weight to the feet, they lifted the corpse over the rail, and dropped it. No burial service was read. We were all too panic-stricken for reverence. We got rid of the body quickly, the men handling the thing as though they felt the death in it stealing into them through their fingers—hoping and praying that with it the cholera would go. It was almost dark when this hurried funeral was ended. I stood beside the mate, looking around the sea for a shadow of wind in any quarter. The boatswain, who had been one of the men that handled the body, came up to us.

“Ain’t there nothing to be done with that corpus out there?” he exclaimed, pointing with a square hand to the raft. “The men are agreed that there’ll come no wind whilst that there dead blackie keeps afloat. And ain’t he enough to make a disease of the atmosphere itself, from horizon to horizon?”

I waited for the mate to answer. He said gloomily, “I’m of the poor captain’s mind. You’ll need to make something fast to the body to sink it. Who’s to handle it? I’ll ask no man to do what I wouldn’t do myself, and rat me if I’d do *that!*”

“We brought the poison aboard by visiting the raft, bo’sun,” said I. “Best leave the thing alone. The corpse is too far off to corrupt the air, as you suppose; though the imagination’s nigh as bad as the reality,” said I, spitting.

“If there’s any of them game to sink the thing, may they do it?” said the boatswain. “For if there’s ne’er a breeze of wind to come while it’s there—”

“Chaw!” said the mate. “But try ’em, if you will. They may take the boat when the moon’s up, should there come no wind first.”

An hour later the steward told me that two of the sailors were seized with cramps and convulsions. After this no more was said about taking the boat and sinking the body. The mate went into the forecabin. On his return, he begged me to go and look at the men.

“Better make sure that it’s cholera with them too, sir,” said he. “You know the signs;” and, folding his arms, he leaned against the bulwarks in a posture of profound dejection.

I went forward and descended the forecabin, and found myself in a small cave. The heat was over-powering; there was no air to pass through the little hatch; the place was dimly lighted by an evil-smelling lamp hanging under a beam, but, poor as the illumination was, I could see by it, and when I looked at the two men and spoke to them, I saw how it was, and came away sick at heart, and half dead with the hot foul air of the forecabin, and in deepest distress of mind, moreover, through perceiving that the two men had formed a part of the crew of the boat when we visited the raft.

One died at six o’clock next morning, and the other at noon; but before this second man was dead three others had been attacked, and one of them was the mate. And still never a breath of air stirred the silver surface of the sea.

The mate was a strong man, and his fear of death made the conflict dreadful to behold. I was paralyzed at first by the suddenness of the thing and the tremendous character of our calamity, and, never doubting that I must speedily prove a victim as being one who had gone in the boat, I cast myself down upon a sofa in the cabin and there sat, waiting for the first signal of pain, sometimes praying, or striving to pray, and seeking hard to accustom my mind to the fate I regarded as inevitable. But a keen and biting sense of my cowardice came to my rescue. I sprang to my feet and went to the mate’s berth, and nursed him till he died, which was shortly before midnight of the day of his seizure—so swift and sure was the poison we had brought from the raft. He was dropped over the side, and in a few hours later he was followed by three others. I cannot be sure of my figures: it was a time of delirium, and I recall some details of it with difficulty, but I am pretty sure that by the morning of the fourth day of our falling in with the accursed raft the ship’s company had been reduced to the boatswain and five men, making, with myself, seven survivors of fifteen souls who had sailed from Calcutta.

It was some time about the middle of the fifth day—two men were then lying stricken in the forecabin—the boatswain and a couple of seamen came aft to the quarter-deck where I was standing. The wheel was deserted: no man had grasped it since the captain’s death; indeed, there was nothing to be done at the helm. The ocean floated in liquid glass; the smell of frying paint,

bubbled into cinders by the roasting rays, rose like the stench of a second plague to the nostrils. The boatswain and his companions had been drinking; no doubt they had broached the rum casks below. They had never entered the cabin to my knowledge, nor do I believe they got their liquor from there. The boatswain carried a heavy weight of some sort, bound in canvas, with a long laniard attached to it. He flung the parcel into the quarter-boat, and roared out—

If that don't drag the blistered cuss out of sight I'll show the fired carcass the road myself. Cholera or no cholera, here goes!"

"What are you going to do?" said I.

"Do?" he cried; "why sink that there plague out of it, so as to give us the chance of a breeze. Ain't this hell's delight? What's a-going to blow' us clear whilst *he* keeps watch?" And he nodded with a fierce, drunken gesture towards the raft.

"You'll have to handle the body to sink it," said I. "You're well men, now; keep well, won't you? The two who are going may be the next taken."

The three of them roared out drunkenly together, so muddling their speech with oaths that I did not understand them. I walked aft, not liking their savage looks. Shouting and cursing plentifully, they lowered the boat, got into her by descending the falls, and shoved off for the raft. They drew alongside the bamboo contrivance, and I looked to see the boat capsize, so wildly did they sway her in their wrath and drink as they fastened the weight to the foot of the body. They then sank the corpse and, with the loom of their oars, hammered at the raft till the bamboos were scattered like a sheaf of walking-sticks cut adrift. They now returned to the barque, clambered aboard, and hoisted the boat.

The two sick men in the forecastle were at this time looked after by a seaman named Archer. I have said it was the fifth day of the calm; of the ship's company the boatswain and five men were living, but two were dying, and that, not counting me, left three as yet well and able to get about.

This man Archer, when the boatswain and his companions went forward, came out of the forecastle, and drank at the scuttle-butt in the waist. He walked unsteadily, with that effort after stateliness which is peculiar to tipsy sailors; his eyes wandered, and he found some difficulty in hitting the bunghole with the dipper. Yet he was a civil sort of man when sober; I had occasionally chatted with him during his tricks at the wheel; and, feeling the need of some one to talk to about our frightful situation, I walked up to him, and asked how the sick men did.

"Dying fast," he answered, steadying himself by leaning against the scuttle-butt, "and a-ravin' like screech-owls."

"What's to be done, Archer?"

"Oh, God alone He knows!" answered the man, and here he put his knuckles into his eyes, and began to cry and sob.

"Is it possible that this calm can last much longer?"

"It may last six weeks," he answered, whimpering. "Down here, when the wind's drawn away by the sun, it may take six weeks afore it comes on to blow. Six weeks of calm down here ain't thought nothen of," and here he burst out blubbering again.

"Where do you get your liquor from?" said I.

"Oh, don't talk of it, don't talk of it!" he replied, with a maudlin shake of the head.

"Drinking'll not help you," said I; "you'll all be the likelier to catch the malady for drinking. This is a sort of time, I should think, when a man most wants his senses. A breeze may come, and we ought to decide where to steer the barque to. The vessel's under all plain sail, too, and here we are, four men and a useless passenger, should it come on to blow suddenly—"

“We didn’t sign on under you,” he interrupted, with a tipsy scowl, “and as ye ain’t no good either as sailor or doctor, you can keep your blooming sarmons to yourself till they’re asked for.”

I had now not only to fear the cholera but to dread the men. My mental distress was beyond all power of words to convey: I wonder it did not quickly drive me crazy and hurry me overboard. I lurked in the cabin to be out of sight of the fellows, and all the while my imagination was tormenting me with the first pangs of the cholera, and every minute I was believing I had the mortal malady. Sometimes I would creep up the companion steps and cautiously peer around, and always I beheld the same dead, faint blue surface of sea stretching like an ocean in a dream into the faint indefinable distances. But shocking as that calm was to me, I very well knew there was nothing wonderful or preternatural in it. Our forefoot five days before had struck the equatorial zone called the Doldrums, and at a period of the year when a fortnight or even a month of atmospheric lifelessness might be as confidently looked for as the rising and setting of the sun.

At nine o’clock that night I was sitting at the cabin table with biscuit and a little weak brandy and water before me, when I was hailed by some one at the open skylight above. It was black night, though the sky was glorious with stars: the moon did not rise till after eleven. I had lighted the cabin lamp, and the sheen of it was upon the face of Archer.

“The two men are dead and gone,” said he, “and now the bo’sun and Bill are down. There’s Jim dead drunk in his hammock. I can’t stand the cries of sick men. What with liquor and pain, the air below suffocates me. Let me come aft, sir, and keep along with you. I’m sober now. Oh, Christ, have mercy upon me! It’s my turn next, ain’t it?”

I passed a glass of brandy to him through the skylight, then joined him on deck, and told him that the two dead bodies must be thrown overboard, and the sick men looked to. For some time he refused to go forward with me, saying that he was already poisoned and deadly sick, and a dying man, and that I had no right to expect that one dying man should wait upon another. However, I was determined to turn the dead out of the ship in any case, for in freeing the vessel of the remains of the victims might lie my salvation. He consented to help me at last, and we went into the forecabin, and between us got the bodies out of their bunks, and dropped them, weighted, over the rail. The boatswain and the other men lay groaning and writhing and crying for water; cursing at intervals. A coil of black smoke went up from the lamp flame to the blackened beam under which the light was burning. The atmosphere was horrible. I bade Archer help me to carry a couple of mattresses on to the forecabin, and we got the sick men through the hatch, and they lay there in the coolness with plenty of cold water beside them and a heaven of stars above, instead of a lowpitched ceiling of grimy beam and plank dark with processions of cockroaches, and dim with the smoke of the stinking slush lamp.

All this occupied us till about half-past ten. When I went aft I was seized with nausea, and, sinking upon the skylight, dabbled my brow in the dew betwixt the lifted lids for the refreshment of the moisture. I believed that my time had come, and that this sickness was the cholera. Archer followed me, and seeing me in a posture of torment, as he supposed, concluded that I was a dead man. He flung himself upon the deck with a groan, and lay motionless, crying out at intervals.” God, have mercy! God, have mercy!” and that was all.

In about half an hour’s time the sensation of sickness passed. I went below for some brandy, swallowed half a glass, and returning with a dram for Archer, but the man had either swooned or fallen asleep, and I let him lie. I had my senses perfectly, but felt shockingly weak in body, and I could think of nothing consolatory to diminish my exquisite distress of mind. Indeed, the capacity of realization grew unendurably poignant. I imagined too well, I figured too clearly. I

pictured myself as lying dead upon the deck of the barque, found a corpse by some passing vessel after many days and so I dreamt, often breaking away from my horrible imaginations with moans and starts, then pacing the deck to rid me of the nightmare hag of thought till I was in a fever, then cooling my head by laying my cheek upon the dew-covered skylight.

By-and-by the moon rose, and I sat watching it. In half an hour she was a bright light in the east, and the shaft of silver that slept under her stretched to the barque's side. It was just then that one of the two sick men on the fore-castle sent up a yell. The dreadful note rang through the vessel, and dropped back to the deck in an echo from the canvas. A moment after I saw a figure get on to the fore-castle-rail and spring overboard. I heard the splash of his body, and, bounding over to Archer, who lay on the deck, I pulled and hauled at him, roaring out that one of the sick men had jumped overboard, and then rushed forward and looked over into the water in the place where the man had leapt, but saw nothing, not even a ripple.

I turned and peered close at the man who lay on the fore-castle, and discovered that the fellow who had jumped was the boatswain. I went again to the rail to look, and lifted a coil of rope from a pin, ready to fling the fakes to the man, should he rise. The moonlight was streaming along the ocean on this side of the ship, and now, when I leaned over the rail for the second time, I saw a figure close under the bows. I stared a minute or two, the color of the body blended with the gloom, yet the moonlight was upon him too, and then it was that after looking awhile, and observing the thing to lie motionless, I perceived that it was the body that had been upon the raft! No doubt the extreme horror raised in me by the sight of the poisonous thing beheld in that light and under such conditions crazed me. I have a recollection of laughing wildly, and of defying the dark floating shape in insane language. I remember that I shook my fist and spat at it, and that I turned to seek for something to hurl at the body, and it may have been that in the instant of turning, my senses left me, for after this I can recall no more.

The sequel to this tragic and extraordinary experience will be found in the following statement, made by the people of the ship *Forfarshire*, from Calcutta to Liverpool:—"August 29, 1857. When in latitude 2° 15' N. and longitude 79° 40' E. we sighted a barque under all plain sail, apparently abandoned. The breeze was very scanty, and though we immediately shifted our helm for her on judging that she was in distress, it took us all the morning to approach her within hailing distance. Everything looked right with her aloft, but the wheel was deserted, and there were no signs of anything living in her. We sent a boat in charge of the second officer, who returned and informed us that the barque was the *Justitia*, of London. We knew that she was from Calcutta, for we had seen her lying in the river. The second officer stated that there were three dead bodies aboard, one in a hammock in the fore-castle, a second on a mattress on the fore-castle, and a third against the coamings of the main-hatch; there was also a fourth man lying at the heel of the port cathead—he did not seem to be dead. On this Dr. Davison was requested to visit the barque, and he was put aboard by the second officer. He returned quickly with one of the men, whom he instantly ordered to be stripped and put into a warm bath, and his clothes thrown overboard. He said that the dead showed unmistakable signs of having died from cholera. We proceeded, not deeming it prudent to have anything further to do with the ill-fated craft. The person we had rescued remained insensible for two days; his recovery was then slow, but sure, thanks to the skilful treatment of Dr. Davison. He informed us that his name was Thomas Barron, and that he was a passenger on board the *Justitia* for Capetown. He was the travelling representative of a large Birmingham firm. The barque had on the preceding Friday week fallen in with a raft bearing a dead body. A boat was sent to bring away a parcel from the raft's mast,

and it is supposed that the contents of the parcel communicated the cholera. There were fifteen souls when the vessel left Calcutta, and all perished except the passenger, Thomas Barron.”