THE UMBRIA AT HER DOCK

HER PASSENGERS SAFE ON SHORE AT LAST.

BROKEN SHAFT THE CAUSE OF THEIR LONG DELAY.

ANXIOUS DAYS OF PERIL WHILE AT THE MERCY OF THE WAVES—OIL POURED UPON THE TROUBLED WATERS—STRANGE CONDUCT OF THE GALLIA'S COMMANDER IN REFUSING TO AID THE UMBRIA—THE BOHEMIA'S UNSUCCESSFUL EFFORT TO TOW THE DISABLED VESSEL—THE SKILL OF HER OFFICERS FINALLY BRINGS HER INTO PORT UNDER HER OWN STEAM—GREETED WITH CHEERS AND TEARS—PASSENGERS PRAISE THE SHIP'S COMPANY.

The Cunard pier on the North River and the adjacent water front was the scene of an enlivening spectacle yesterday morning. Fully a thousand persons were assembled there, and all were in a most joyous mood. They were there to welcome the big Cunard steamship Umbria and the many passengers the vessel carried.

It was an exuberant and an exultant throng. The moment the big liner was sighted by the watchers, hats were tossed in air, handkerchiefs fluttered, and cheer after cheer was heard.

The vessel moved slowly up the river—much too slowly for those who were eager to join their friends ashore, and for the ones who had so long and anxiously watched for news of the overdue vessel. It was nearly 10 o'clock before the high black bow of the Cunarder swept into view from behind the National Line pier and swung in toward the Cunard wharf. Then, as the watchers obtained glimpses of their belated friends, pandemonium reigned.

One enthusiastic individual climbed upon a pierhead and called for three cheers for Capt. McKay. They were given with a will, and then the engineer, passengers, officers, and ship were cheered. Passengers leaned over the rails and shouted greetings and messages to their friends on shore, but as all were talking at once no one could distinguish what was said in the babel of voices.

Above the storm of cheers, greetings, and inquiries could be heard a stentorian voice asking "How are you?" "How are you?" That was apparently all the owner of the voice wanted to know, but who it was he was so anxious about no one could discover. A number of young women worked off their excess of spirits by waltzing over the rough flooring of the pier, a performance which was viewed with mild astonishment by their brothers or some one else's brothers.

Aided by two tugs, the big hull of the liner was slowly swung into the pier, crushing the ice against her massive iron sides. As she ranged alongside the pier shed, all view of her was shut off from those inside the building. The crowd then surged in a dense mass around the great portals where the gangways were. To that waiting throng it seemed as if the gates would never be swung open, but in reality the docking of the vessel was very expeditious.

Finally the gates flew apart, disclosing a section of the vessel and the ranks of passengers ranged on the decks ready for disembarking. The "How-are-you?" man broke out again. Looking in the direction from which the monosyllabic inquiries were coming in stentorian notes, one could see a bald head and a pair of arms wildly tossing in the air. Some one was about to propose three cheers for him, when attention was directed to the steamship again. The gangplanks were being swung into position, and those who did not want to get off the ship were seeking a vantage spot from which she could be readily boarded.

At last the gangplank was in position, and then a form dashed down the incline, and a moment later a florid-faced man was pushing and elbowing his way through the mass of humanity packed around the foot of the gangplank. He lost his hat, but gained the honor of being the first passenger to land. He was J. E. T. Pitcairn of Dayton, Stoke-on-Trent, England.

The stream of humanity which followed him over the gangplank dissolved in little groups as soon as it reached the pier. Kissing, hugging, handshaking, and volubility were then in order. Everybody had a thousand questions to ask and no one had time to answer one.

The story the passengers finally managed to tell is one of absorbing interest. Its outline was already familiar, but the details of how the vessel became disabled and how the passengers fared during their long detention on the crippled ship were yet to be learned.

The one incident which seemed to have made the deepest impression upon them was that of the fruitless appeal for aid made to the Cunard Company's steamship Gallia. The episode, if correctly described, is remarkable in more ways than one. Few instances can be recalled where a vessel has deliberately failed to heed an appeal for assistance made by another ship in distress, but such was declared to have been the course that recommended itself to the Captain of the Gallia.

The story was graphically told by the passengers of the Umbria. The officers of that vessel were inclined to be very reticent on the subject. Capt. McKay admitted that he had rather not talk about it at all. No such feeling animated the passengers, who did not hesitate to denounce the action of the Gallia's commander.

As described by the passengers, the Umbria was lying to with crippled engines when the Gallia was sighted. That was on Monday last. A heavy gale from the northwest was blowing at the time, and tremendous seas were running. The Umbria was keeping her head to them by means of a sea anchor which had been placed over the bows. The outlook was ominous and depressing in the extreme. An anxious lookout had been kept for passing vessels, and, although the officers would not acknowledge it, there is reason to believe that Capt. McKay was considering the advisability of accepting the services of the next vessel that offered a tow.

A little before noon of that day a glad shout went through the ship. The loneliness of the wind-swept ocean had been broken by a phantomlike tracing of spars against the dark background of clouds to the eastward. The passengers hurried on deck and strained their eyes in the direction in which the sail was reported. A darker smudge upon the horizon was all the keenest-eyed among them could detect at first, but as the vessel drew nearer they were able to distinguish her outlines.

The Umbria's international signal code number was run up to the masthead. A few minutes later three other bits of color fluttered from one of the reeling spires of the approaching vessel. They told that she was the British steamship Manhanset, bound from Swansea for New-York. While her Captain was considering the amount of salvage money that would be his when his ship had towed the disabled Cunarder to port, another shadowy tracing of spars and funnel was descried by the lookout. It lay to the westward, and within a short time was made out to be a big steamship bound east. A little while later it was discovered that it was one of the Cunard Company's own steamships, the Gallia.

If the passengers had had any doubts of a speedy termination of their trials, they were dispelled when the news went round that another Cunarder was bearing down upon them. As soon as the vessel was made out to be the Gallia, the bright visions of salvage money vanished from the mind of the Manhanset's commander, and, gracefully dipping her colors, the big freighter bade farewell to the Cunarder and proceeded upon her way.

Signals were exchanged with the Gallia as she drew near the Umbria. The first that flew from the masthead of the Umbria read, "I am disabled. Stand by." In response, three squares of bunting were run up to the Gallia's peak. Translated, the message conveyed was, "Can't stand by. We are carrying mails."

It is said that Capt. McKay, who is the Vice Commodore of the Cunard fleet, then signaled back: "We hold you responsible." The officers refused to discuss the subject yesterday, and the passengers could not say what the signals read.

It is quite evident that some one on the Umbria was something more than astonished at the conduct of the Gallia. Capt. McKay was seen to shake his head and was heard to say, "What do you think of that? Who would ever have suspected such conduct from a Cunarder?"

Later in the day he admitted to some of the passengers that it was a grave error of judgment on the part of Capt. Ferguson of the Gallia. Capt. McKay said he was as much surprised at it as any one could be, and could find no explanation for it.

The reason Capt. McKay wanted the Gallia to lay by was that repairs to the Umbria's disabled shaft had been almost completed, and the test to see if the fractured parts would hold together was about to be made. If a break occurred there would have been nothing for it but to ask of the Gallia a tow to port.

In commenting on the action of that vessel's commander, Simon Stern, a New-York lawyer, who was one of the Umbria's saloon passengers, said it was inexplicable on any basis from which it could be considered. The Umbria, he said, was in the trough of the sea, and every hour was drifting out of the course of steamships. The engineers had promised that the repairs would soon be finished, and it was only a matter of a few hours when the engines would be turned over and it could be known whether the bolts which had been put in to secure the fractured parts would hold or not. Moreover, the ship had been four days drifting about the ocean, tossed by wind and wave, and helpless as a log. The result of this was that her passengers were in no mood for charity, and did not hesitate to say some very hard things about the Gallia and her master.

Meanwhile the gale, which came pouring out of the northwest with cyclonic force, gave no signs of abating. The ocean looked doubly desolate to the passengers, who saw anything but a cheerful prospect before them. The vessel was riding to a cornucopia-shaped anchor made of canvas, which served as a drag and kept her head to the swell. But it did not prevent her from drifting, and the following noon showed her to be fully fifty miles from the locality she was in when passed by the Gallia and Manhanset.

Toward nightfall the seas became so heavy that Capt. McKay sought to relieve the laboring of his vessel by the use of oil over the bows. The liquid, which was poured through the hawse pipes in liberal quantities, had the usual stilling effect upon the waves, and the big ship made better weather of it after its use was resorted to.

The fracture of the shaft, the officers say, occurred on the afternoon of Friday, Dec. 23. As described by Chief Engineer Tomlinson, the break occurred between the collars of the thrust shaft, which is a section of the shaft nearest to the engine. The fracture was discovered before the shaft broke altogether, and the officer of the watch was immediately notified that it was necessary to stop the engines, and the order to that effect was given. That was at 5:30 o'clock Friday afternoon. The passengers did not at first notice that the engines had ceased to throb, and it was several hours later before they discovered the cause.

The section of the shaft which showed the flaw is 25 inches in diameter. Chief Engineer Tomlinson made an examination of the fracture and decided that his mechanics would be able to so strengthen it with bolts and clamps as to make the machinery serviceable. Gaps had to be cut in the massive steel collars and bolts inserted in the apertures. Chiseling steel is rather a slow process, even with the best of appliances, and the work did not progress very fast.

Meanwhile, Capt. McKay was sending many messages to the chief engineer regarding the break and the prospect of repairing it. No definite assurance could be given, as the bolting together of the collars was simply an experiment, and no one could tell what would be the result. The ship lay to all that night, with a fresh gale blowing from the northeast. When morning came, but little progress had been made in repairing the break, although mechanics, in relief gangs, had been working upon it all night.

Soon after daylight a sail was sighted to the westward. As the vessel drew near, she was made out to be the steamship Bohemia of the Hamburg-American Packet Company, outward bound from New-York. Capt. McKay concluded not to trust to his engines and to ask the vessel for a tow back to port.

Owing to the heavy gale the progress of the Hamburg liner was very slow, and it was nearly noon before she hove to near the Cunarder. That vessel's signaled request for assistance was readily acceded to, and preparations were made for running out a hawser.

This was found to be a very difficult task owing to the gale. The Cunarder first attempted to throw a line to the Hamburg vessel from a mortar which she carried on the forecastle, but, after several failures, that method was abandoned.

Then it was determined to lower a boat from the Umbria. The first officer of that vessel and a crew of eight men undertook the work of carrying the lines to the Bohemia. The boat was launched in safety, although it had many narrow escapes from being dashed to pieces against the sides of the steamship.

Passengers watched the operation with keen interest. As was remarked yesterday, many of them had often wondered how a little boat would look in the great waves that were swelling against the sides of the steamship, and the way this lifeboat of the Cunarder was handled excited their warmest admiration.

The sort of undertaking it was can be better appreciated when it was told that although the Bohemia was only 600 yards distant, it took three hours to run the line to her. Then the boat returned and was hoisted on its davits.

The line, which had been carried to the Bohemia, was made fast to a heavier piece of rope, which, in turn, was connected with a steel hawser of great strength. When that was made fast, the Bohemia swung her head to the westward and began steaming against the gale, dragging her heavy burden after her.

The hawser was alternately sagging to the water's edge and then whipping taut as a bar of steel. The strain upon it proved too severe, and a little before midnight it was carried away.

Both ships were then enveloped in a blinding snowstorm—a storm so thick that the lights of the Bohemia were invisible to the people on the Umbria.

As soon as the cable parted, the latter vessel began to sound signals of distress from her steam whistle. The officer heard answering blasts, and then all was silence except the dash of waves and the dismal shrieking of the gale through the rigging.

What became of the vessel that had tried to assist them, the officers of the Cunarder do not know. It is conjectured that she searched for her tow, but lost it in the thickness and proceeded upon her way.

Engineer Tomlinson says that repairs were finished early on Tuesday morning. The engines were then turned over very slowly, and the vessel ran under reduced speed for two hours. Then the bolts gave way, necessitating another stop. The ship lay to four hours and then started again.

This time the repairs held until 6:30 o'clock Wednesday night, when the couplings broke again. Other bolts were put in, and after a two hours' delay the ship resumed her journey.

This time the bolts held, and as the sea had gone down, the ship was able to steam at the rate of six knots an hour. She increased her speed as she drew near land, and when she passed Fire Island, Friday night, the vessel was traveling at a twelve-knot gait. She dropped anchor off the Quarantine station at an early hour. The Health Officer paid her an unusually early visit and allowed her to proceed after a very brief detention.

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