

The story of the voyage was then told. It was not a tale of exciting incidents, but one of great danger, from which they were delivered by the interposition of Divine Providence. It is seldom in history that a record so close to being written: "Sailed, and never heard of," has been changed to "Vessel burned at sea; all hands saved," as in this instance. Truly the Guion line had on this occasion passengers who were the special objects of Divine watchcare.

Saturday, December 12, was the date set for the "Abyssinia" to sail from New York, but by the loading of her cargo she was delayed one day. The vessel was not one of the regular transatlantic fleet of Guion & Co. (being slower and smaller than any of the others—3500 tons burden), but has been engaged in the trade between China and Canada. She was not fitted for general passenger traffic, and had limited accommodations in both cabin and steerage quarters. The "Alaska" having been put in dock for the winter, the "Abyssinia" was brought to the New York and Liverpool route for a few trips. When she left the first named port she had on a general cargo of cotton, bacon, oil, hardwood, etc. There were nineteen cabin and forty steerage passengers, destined for various parts of Europe.

Considerable rough weather was experienced, and on the morning of the fifth day out, Friday, December 18, one of the boilers got to leaking. This caused a reduction to half speed while repairs were being made. About noon some excitement was observed among the crew, but some time elapsed before even the most inquisitive passenger could get any information as to the cause. Two or three persons from the cabin went down to the engine room, and there discovered that the place was flooded to a depth of two or three inches with water. A little farther forward one of the crew was chopping a hole through the floor while another had a hose from which issued a stream of water.

"What's up? Fire?" inquired Elder Kerr, who was nearest the sailor with the ax.

"Yes, a little, not much; will soon have it out," was the response.

"It looks to me like a good deal, if I am any judge," said Elder Kerr, who caught a glimpse of the flames through the newly made aperture in the floor.

On the deck an interesting performance was going on. There was no disorder, but the faces of the officers were an anxious look. Sailors were hurrying to and fro in obedience to orders, and a gang of men were at work trying to liberate one of the ship's boats, but with poor success. At this time no vestige of human life could be seen except on the ship—nothing but a vast expanse of foam-crested waves and the heavy dark clouds from which was pouring a drizzling rain which soon turned to snow.

An hour passed by and the passengers had not yet begun to realize the full danger which was upon them, though some were getting decidedly uneasy at seeing occasional puffs of smoke and tongues of flame through openings in the hold. About 2 p. m. a long line of smoke became visible to the rear and right of the vessel, probably eight miles distant. It was from a steamer which

the straining eyes of those on deck could see was overtaking the "Abyssinia," on a line about four miles to the south. The captain had been intently watching the stranger, and as the passengers, who were now grasping the true situation, hurried on deck, excitement ran high.

Slowly the new arrival, which proved to be the "Spree," came up parallel with the disabled vessel, and signals of distress were displayed. The master of the German vessel, Captain Willigerod, had evidently been watching the other, for within two minutes of the flying of the signals he changed his course and bore down upon the burning steamer, coming to a stop about three-quarters of a mile distant, to insure his own safety. By this time he could see that the Guion vessel was doomed, and signalled that he was willing to take all on board.

The passengers were huddled together, with blanched faces, eagerly watching the movements of the "Spree," which was to them a messenger of salvation as welcome as it had been unexpected two hours before. Some of the women, particularly those weakened by sea sickness, were crying, but there was no confusion. Two of the "Spree's" boats, each manned by a crew of sturdy German sailors, were quickly dropped on to the waves. The promptness of the action was a strong contrast to the tedious work of launching three of the "Abyssinia's" boats. The first one did get down before the foremost of the German's came alongside, but that was all; into it the women were lowered. Then followed the male passengers, and after them the crew, Captain Murray descending last.

The task of making the transfer was far from easy and pleasant. A blinding showstorm had set in, and the waves ran so high that it was with great difficulty that the small boats were kept from being dashed against the ships' sides. The people were lowered into the boats by means of ropes fastened around their bodies, and when a start was made across the space between the steamers, it looked from the crest of every wave as if the yawning gulf below would claim them as its own.

On coming alongside the "Spree," rope ladders were let down, and each person securely tied with one or two ropes, the other ends being in the hands of half a dozen stout Germans. Then one after another, as directed, passengers would make a grab for the rope ladder on which to mount, and sometimes were tossed far out of its reach. But the sailors above hoisted away with a will, and most of the passenger passed up to the rail much as if they had been bags of sand.

One man, a baker on board the "Abyssinia," was caught between a small boat and the steamer, and was considerably bruised, though his injuries were not dangerous. A lady whose weight was close to 200 pounds, proved almost too much for the hoisting party which had her in tow. She was held by two ropes, and one moment was swinging in mid-air, while the next, by the movement of the vessel, she was dipped into the crest of an angry wave. The old time ducking-stool never did its work better. It took several minutes to get her over the rail, but she was finally landed safely

on deck, without serious injury, and given prompt care.

Before the passengers were lowered from the "Abyssinia," the flames were shooting up the main hatchways, and thick wreaths of smoke curled upwards, presenting a weird picture amid the sombre surroundings of clouds and water. By 4:15 p. m., within four hours after the discovery of the fire, the last person had safely reached the deck of the "Spree." The centre of the other vessel was ablaze, the flames lapping around mainmast, shrouds and sails, and burning brightly with the grease and tar. A few minutes later, when the "Spree" resumed her course, the ill-fated vessel appeared a mass of fire, clearly outlined against the black background of sky and sea. Soon all was lost to view, and night closed around as the Norddeutscher steamer plowed on in the darkness and storm.

On board the "Spree," warmth, dry clothing, food and all things necessary for the comfort of the rescued party were provided. They had lost everything except what they had on, not even being allowed to take their small valises with them. No effort was made to save passengers' baggage; in fact there was little time, and the risk was great. The officers and crew of the German boat are spoken of in terms of highest praise for their brave, courageous and generous conduct; the officers of the "Abyssinia" are also commended for their coolness and discipline, but of the rest of the crew the only thing said is that most of them acted "ugly." However, the passengers were too full of gratitude for their remarkable preservation to do otherwise than feel charitable towards the weaknesses of their fellow-men. The all-absorbing sentiment was one of thanks to those who were the means of rescuing them from death, and of praise to the kind and merciful Providence who sent such timely aid. Had it not been for the "Spree's" appearance all must have perished within a short time, for it was not possible for one of the small boats to have lived in the storm which raged during the night and next day.

The remainder of the voyage was accomplished without any special event transpiring except that between three and four o'clock in the morning of Sunday, December 20th, the "Spree" gave assistance to the steamer "Iona," which had a broken shaft, and picked up two men who were thrown into the sea in an attempt to launch one of the "Iona's" boats; one of the men died shortly after being taken out of the water.

As to the cause of the fire on the "Abyssinia," it is said that it was spontaneous combustion in the cotton. Another opinion, and one that seems most reasonable in view of the rapid spread of the flames, is that while getting the fire out to repair the damaged boiler, the wood and inflammable material close by was ignited and communicated the fire to several barrels of oil and a large quantity of bacon stored in close proximity.

It is fortunate that there were very few passengers on board the "Abyssinia;" had there been a large number a panic could not have been avoided, and it is doubtful whether many more could have been rescued with the few boats on the steamers. But travelers are learning to avoid "tubs" that are