

## PIRACY, MURDER, AND SHIPWRECK. THE "GENERAL WOOD."

The melancholy fate of this merchant ship (says our Singapore correspondent) has excited deep grief throughout the east. The tale is a sad one. Like the *Freak*, and *Harriet Scott*, the *General Wood* has fallen a victim to that cruel policy which sends the most desperate characters transported for crimes which in Europe would be punished with death, without affording on board any guard for the protection of the officers and crew of the vessel.

The ship *General Wood*, 700 tons, Captain *Stokoe*, belonging to Messrs. *Jardine, Matheson, and Co.*, left Bombay about ten months ago for China. After remaining three months at anchor in Whampoa Reach, she proceeded to Hong Kong. Tenders were invited by government officials at Hong Kong; several applications were sent in; but that of the *General Wood* was accepted, the tender being for about 1,800 Spanish dollars. While the ship was at Whampoa two Chinese lascars were shipped; one had previously been two years in the vessel, the other was a new hand. It will be seen in the sequel that one of these Chinese lascars was the leader of the mutiny, and was a very ferocious character. The *General Wood* remained four days at Hong Kong. When it was known that a number of convicts were to be received on board, Captain *Stokoe* authorised the *Serang* to ship eight additional hands, three to work as lascars and five to do duty as sepoys. One of the latter was an European, named *John Green*, who had been employed as an assistant engineer, and desired to work his passage to Bombay. On the 9th of November, 1847, the Chinese convicts, 92 in number, and one Portuguese (*Goa*), transported for piracy, were received on board. When taken on board they were secured by leg-irons and handcuffs, and accompanied to the vessel by a guard of the Hong-Kong police. A prison had been constructed between decks for their reception. When placed in the prison, the handcuffs were removed and taken on shore. Captain *Stokoe* informed the writer that, when he reached the vessel and found that the handcuffs were taken away, he applied to the authorities and received 53 pairs of handcuffs, to be used in the event of any of the convicts being troublesome. When at Hong-Kong, a chain secured the convicts within the limits of the temporary prison. The convicts behaved so well during the passage down from China that but seven pairs of handcuffs were in use. The writer visited the vessel several times while she was at Singapore, and was told by two or three of the Chinese that they had experienced kind usage from the captain; they were, for the most part, under 30 years of age; one of the number spoke English fluently, having been interpreter at Hong Kong, where, giving a false interpretation to some witness's evidence, in a case of murder, by which the villains escaped justice, the interpreter was convicted and sentenced to transportation for life; seventeen were transported for piracy, and several for murder. In fact they were the twice rejected of China. The Portuguese convict was kept apart from the Chinese; he was formerly the servant of Captain *Chamberlain*, who was cut off and barbarously murdered by the pirates who attacked the schooner *Omega*, in March last; it was sworn at the trial that this Portuguese gave information to the parties at Hong-Kong who fitted out the piratical expedition. The *General Wood*, as noticed in the *Straits Times* of Dec. 1st, 1847, narrowly escaped being wrecked in a typhoon near the island of Hainan on the 11th of November. On arrival of the *General Wood* at Singapore, on Nov. 23, it was endeavoured to procure freight to Bombay. At that time purchasers of sugar for that market were not buying, owing to the low price of sugar at Bombay, and the expected heavy arrivals from Siam. This circumstance, trifling in itself, served to delay the vessel several weeks at this port. A good cargo was ultimately obtained, consisting of sugar, sago, tin, and cigars. Lieut. *Seymour*, of the Bombay Cavalry, with his wife (newly married), and Mr. *Andrew Farquhar*, their cousin, were passengers, the latter to Penang only, and the former two to Bombay. After the departure of the *General Wood* some anxiety was felt for her fate, more especially as she had not been seen in the straits, or had reached her destination, Penang. The general impression was that the ship had passed Penang in the night, and would be a long time in working up against the monsoon.

On the morning of February 10 all doubts were set at rest by the publication of an "extraordinary" from the *Straits Times*, announcing the arrival at Singapore of a native prow from the North Natunas, the nakoda of which, *Aboo*, stated that the *General Wood* was lost on the 23rd of January on Pulo Laut, the northernmost island of the North Natunas, in the China Sea. Other particulars were also given, which left no doubt as to the fate of the missing vessel. All was now anxiety for the fate of the passengers and other supposed survivors. This anxiety was increased by the occurrence at that time of a severe hurricane, in which it was feared the passengers would be lost. On February 20 all anxiety was set at rest by the *Straits Times* publishing in a second edition the following intelligence, which was corroborated by subsequent intelligence received by the government:

On Sunday morning, January 2, at six a.m., the *General Wood* got under weigh, and proceeded as far as the *Carimons*, where she anchored for the night. At one a.m. on the 3rd January a great noise was heard on deck, in consequence of the convicts having got loose. The convicts put out the caddy lights. It was then the second mate's (Mr. *Tummony's*) watch, and he immediately roused the chief mate (Mr. *T. Quintom*) and the third mate (Mr. *Gill*). On reaching the main deck the chief mate was struck on the head with pieces of firewood. Mr. *Quintom* fell down the hatchway from the effect of the blows, and went to the lower deck quarter gallery from whence he managed to get into the sea, and was no more seen. The second mate, finding he could do nothing against so many convicts as assailed him, ran forward and jumped overboard, and he was seen no more. Mr. *Gill*, the third mate, on being roused, and looking out of his cabin-door, received a severe blow on the head; he then withdrew, got his pistols, and went out and fired amongst the convicts. Mr. *Gill* proceeded to Lieutenant *Seymour's* cabin, and fell down groaning, from whence he made for the quarter gallery, and endeavoured to thrust his assailants with a bayonet; but, after receiving many wounds, he got up through the gallery window to the deck, and from thence to the mizen-top, from whence he was dragged to the deck, where his hands were tied. In this exhausting state he remained till morning, and then expired. The captain (*Stokoe*) hearing the alarm, forced the cabin-door, with the assistance of the gunner, but shortly after retreated to Mr. *Seymour's* cabin, where he seems to have lost all presence of mind; at one time he seized his pistols, loaded them, and fired at random. Shortly after, Capt. *Stokoe* endeavoured to cut away one of the quarter-boats, but was unsuccessful; he then got through the quarter-gallery into the sea, and clung to the rope for some time, until quite exhausted, his hold failed, and he sank to rise no more. When the convicts rose *en masse*, the lascar crew, alarmed, made for the rigging; others jumped overboard, and some were killed by the mutineers. At the time of the alarm the passengers were asleep; on waking up, and finding the vessel in possession of the Chinese, they kept for some time in one cabin. Mr. *Farquhar* endeavoured to reach the deck from the quarter-gallery, but, observing a blow directed against his head, he dropped into the water, swam to the rudder, and held on till morning. At day-break the Chinese called all who were in the water to return to the ship, which they did; but on Mr. *Farquhar* attempting to regain the deck, he was struck by a cutlass on the hands, and compelled to let go his hold; he again swam to the rudder, and held on for some hours. A second time he tried to reach the deck, and succeeded. The Chinese then got the ship under weigh, and managed to work her themselves, with the assistance of some of the crew, who were compelled to labour. After sailing twenty days, in various directions (the Chinese not knowing where to proceed), about nine in the morning of January 23 the ship grounded on a reef, distant about nine miles from Pulo Laut, North Natunas. The Chinese, as many as could, including the passengers, took to the boats, and steered for Pulo Laut, which place they reached at about sunset, and landed. When about half-way to the island, the ship went down, head foremost, carrying down with her some of the crew and Chinese, for whom there was no room in the boats. On making the island, four Malays (the only residents in the place) met them; the Chinese endeavoured to prevent the passengers (who spoke Malay) holding a conversation with the Malays. The latter succeeded in securing the whole of the passengers and the remainder of the crew, and conveyed them to their houses, from whence the Malays returned to the beach, to capture the convicts, but succeeded in getting only seventeen, the others having escaped in the ship's boats. The Malays managed to communicate with the *Orang Kya* of Pulo Bungoran, who proceeded himself, before day-break, to Pulo Laut. From thence he conveyed the passengers and others to Bungoran. The *Orang Kya* then went in search of the other Chinese who escaped; but the Malays did not succeed in falling in with them. The *Orang Kya* sent directions to the heads of the numerous islands forming the North Natuna group, to search for and secure the Chinese who escaped, and to forward them to Bungoran. Up to the date of the party leaving the latter place, nothing had been heard of the remaining convicts or the boats. Lieutenant *Seymour* received two cuts over the knee, and was thrown overboard; he fortunately succeeded in getting hold of a rope and held on for some hours. From the statements of eye-witnesses it will be seen that the convicts possessed themselves of the arms chest, which unhappily was left open under the poop ladder. The Chinese rigged themselves out in the captain's and mate's clothes, the better to disguise themselves if seen from another vessel.

Unhappily no preconcerted plan appears to have suggested itself to the officers and crew in the event of the convicts rising. The captain assured the writer that the convicts were, as children, "willing to do all that was required of them;" in vain did the writer endeavour to dissuade the

commander, who was kind even to a fault—and, as is now seen, to a great fault too. The captain, officers, and crew appear to have been taken by a surprise that rendered them powerless, or the convicts would probably have been either overcome or made powerless, since their only means of offence at the onset consisted of billets of wood; they subsequently got possession of the arms on board, which gave them full possession of the vessel. Only one convict died from a shot-wound, inflicted by Mr. Gill, the third mate—a mere youth—who persevered to the last in attacking the Chinese. On the morning after the tragedy, poor Gill, with hands secured together, was thrown upon the deck: he requested a drop of water, but the Chinese threatened with death whoever had the temerity to give this gallant youth (exhausted from loss of blood) a little water to drink! The Chinese appeared not to have the courage to throw Mr. Gill overboard; to hide his throes and wounds they threw over him a blanket, and, when dead, cast his body into the sea. Had Mr. Gill been aided by two others gallantly minded like himself, the convicts would most likely have been subdued.

Lieut. Seymour, of the Bombay cavalry, with his lady, also passengers, give, perhaps, a somewhat fuller detail of what took place within the cabins: and from that gentleman's statement the following is extracted:

At about half-past one or two in the morning, we were awakened by a loud noise on deck, and the smashing of glass inside the cuddy. I immediately rose and went to the door of our cabin, for the purpose of ascertaining the reason of the uproar. I had scarcely touched the handle, when the door which separates the captain's cabin from ours was thrown suddenly open, and Captain Stokoe rushed in, exclaiming "For God's sake shut the door, and keep it fast." He was almost immediately followed by Mr. Andrew Farquhar, one of the passengers. Having secured the entrance, I turned and asked the captain to tell me what was the matter, but could get no reply from him. He [the captain] appeared to have lost all his presence of mind, and kept running up and down, exclaiming at different intervals, "O, merciful Father, what have I done that this should happen?" "O, blessed Jesus, save us!" &c. All this time he had his pistol-case in his hands. After repeating the question over and over again as to what had occurred, he informed me that the convicts had risen, and had taken possession of the vessel and cuddy, where the arms had been placed. I then asked him as to whether anything could be done, and what had become of the mates and crew? His reply was, "The convicts have got the fire-arms; nothing can now be effected." He was ignorant of the fate of his officers, and the lascars must have all hid themselves. After this Capt. Stokoe became calmer, and commenced loading his pistols. Just as this was done we heard the cries of Mr. Gill, the third officer, followed by heavy blows. The moans became fainter and fainter. Captain Stokoe went outside the cabin door, and fired his pistols without any effect. He then rushed back again, dragging Mr. Gill, whom he threw upon the mattress, which happened to be on the floor. Mr. Gill had a sheet thrown around him, and was one mass of blood from head to foot; he lay there groaning, and on our asking him where he was wounded, he said he did not know; but from the excruciating pain he was suffering in his thigh, thought it must be broken. He must have been dreadfully mutilated, as not a white spot could be seen on his body from the large quantity of blood. Captain Stokoe was perfectly incapacitated from doing anything, and remained without acting at all. I put the question to him as to whether there was any way of getting down into the hold where we might hide Mrs. Seymour and her ayah; he said at first no, but afterwards commenced tearing up the planks which covered the locker, but to our disappointment the aperture by the rudder down to the hold was too small for even Mrs. S. to attempt. We then requested Capt. S. to speak to the Chinese and offer them the boat if they would spare our lives. His answer was, "Those wretches know no mercy." He said he would try and speak to the convicts, and went out of the quarter gallery port for that purpose, after which we neither saw nor heard anything more of him. When Capt. S. had left us I put out all the lights in our cabin for fear of the convicts seeing what we were about. During the time I held the door it was twice tried to be opened by the convicts, but, on finding it secured, they retired. I then directed Mrs. Seymour and the Ayah to hide themselves in the quarter gallery as the last resource. I could see through the chinks of the door what was going on in the cuddy. The convicts seemed busy knocking off their irons and rifling the mate's cabin. After some time a body of them, armed with the ship's axes, spears, &c., commenced breaking in the cabin doors, and, seeing it was then useless for me alone to stand by the door any longer, I retired to the quarter-gallery, where the rest were, exclaiming "The convicts are breaking open the doors." Mr. Andrew Farquhar then left us, and we saw no more of him until the morning. We then heard them breaking open our cabin door. There was a scuffle. Mr. Gill, who had been lying on the cabin floor, immediately rushed into the quarter-gallery, bringing with him a bayonet (the only available weapon that we had during the whole period), and closed the door after him, desiring me to assist him in securing the same. The convicts, after trying two or three times to force it, without success, withdrew. We now knew our only hope of safety lay in our remaining quiet where we were until daylight, which we thought must then be near at hand. At the time we imagined the convicts would either take to the boats and leave the ship, or some vessel might come down to render us assistance. We sat in dreadful suspense for about an hour or more, and our feelings may be well imagined when we heard over our heads the sound of a person being dragged forward, followed by blows, evidently inflicted by a heavy sharp instrument upon some soft substance, and then a dull splash in the water—this was repeated five times. After a lapse of a minute or two, we heard the clashing of the men's leg-irons as they again came to our door; on finding it secure they burst in one of the panels and thrust their spears and swords through; upon which Mr. Gill called out, "I say Foki, why for you want to kill me?" which was answered by "Come out, come out," and a repetition of the thrusting of the spears and swords. Mr. Gill took the bayonet to offer resistance, but in the attempt got dreadfully cut and wounded about the hand, the Chinese taking good care not to come within the reach of any weapon that we might have but to keep at spears' length; they then broke the rest of the door to splinters. Mr. Gill, being in the way of their weapons, was unable to stand the agony from the wounds he was receiving, got out of the quarter gallery window, after which he was

ceiling, got out of the quarter gallery window, after which he was no more seen. I had taken up my sword, but found, owing to its length, and the confined place we were in, that I was unable to use it, especially, as I said before, on account of the convicts being out of the reach of any weapon. As yet, we hoped we might escape, for they were ignorant of our being on board, having broken open the door, and sealing the port open, and it also being dark we remained unperceived, and the Chinese retired; it was however for a few paces only, for one of them returned bearing a lantern in his hand, from the reflection of which we were discovered. I was immediately dragged out and surrounded by a number of the convicts armed with every description of arms that they had been able to lay hold of; they then forced me forward to the weather gangway, where they made signs I was to go overboard, and, to facilitate my egress, commenced to cut me down. I fell over some spars, and received two cutlass wounds, and in attempting to evade others, fell backwards with my head foremost into the sea. Not being able to swim, I laid hold of a rope that was over the ship's side; whilst in that position two men were thrown overboard close to me,—one a corpse, but the other not being hurt got into the main chains, whence he would not render me any assistance, although I entreated him to do. Not being able to hold any longer, and feeling almost sure that all had been murdered on board, I gave myself up as lost, and let go my hold. By chance I floated to the after part of the ship, where the ship's gig was suspended with one end in the water (Captain Stokoe having attempted to cut it away during the night), and remained there concealed until daylight, when I was called up by the convicts, who assured me I should not be hurt if I came on board. I did so with difficulty, being very much bruised from the heavy swell that kept continually striking the boat against the ship's stern. I there met Mr. Farquhar and Mrs. Seymour, who had suffered no hurt, but had been dreadfully frightened by the Chinese, who had repeatedly menaced her life. They frequently said that had she been the wife of Mr. Caldwell, the deputy-superintendent of police at Hong-Kong, they would have chopped her into pieces. When on deck I perceived a brig at anchor close to leeward of us. The Chinese, on finding we could not navigate the ship for them, confined us to our cabin, and being shown by the Chinese sailors on board, they slipped the cable and stood to the south-east, striving to avoid Singapore Harbour. After we were under weigh I observed the ship's gig floating towards the land; and the brig noticed before standing after us with all sail set, when she suddenly changed her course and steered for Singapore. The same evening we saw a ship standing towards us; the convicts then put the crew under hatchways and handcuffed them. The ship passed on without noticing us. At night the gunner's mate attempted to run the ship ashore; but the Chinese being too vigilant, he could not succeed. Mrs. Seymour's Ayah, from the effects of the first night's fright, became deranged on the third day, and notwithstanding our endeavours to prevent her jumped overboard and was drowned. After tacking off and on at the pleasure of the Chinese day after day, on Friday, Jan. 20, we sighted the Great Natunas.

Another eye-witness, referring to the body of poor Gill, remarks:

I saw a quantity of blood about the starboard gangway. Some one was laying on the starboard side of the poop, as if he was asleep. A blanket was thrown on him, on which was a quantity of blood, and some on the deck and hencoops. I saw the person under the blanket move several times. There were four or five Chinese keeping watch over him with cutlasses. . . . Saw neither captain nor officers. The Chinese tindal and carpenter were standing on the poop, giving directions how the ship should be steered. . . . On the 20th day the ship struck on a reef of coral; the ship had all sail set. Got out the boats. In the first cutter were about 45 Chinese. The passengers were on the poop. It was told the Chinese if they killed any one the Malays would not spare them, as the country was under the rule of a Malay rajah. The convicts wanted to kill the lady passenger, but after it was explained to them that the Malays would look upon them as pirates and treat them as such if they did so, they desisted. . . . One of the Chinese convicts hanged himself to a tree during the night, after which two of the crew kept watch over them with swords provided by the Dattoo Kya.—(Straits Times, Feb. 24.)

After detailing the melancholy affair of the General Wood, the editor of the *Straits Times* says:

We trust the melancholy fate of the General Wood will be the last instance of sending away convicts without a military guard. For the government to pass an act disallowing the transport of convicts without a military guard were an easy task, but the authorities generally do not impose responsibility on themselves. It would, perhaps, more effectually carry out the object were the insurance offices to unite, and all, without exception, refuse to grant policies unless military guards were placed on board convict ships. Government would be forced to comply with the reasonable demand of underwriters. The insurance offices here suffer considerable loss by the General Wood catastrophe. The ship, we suppose, was insured by her owners, Messrs. Jardine, Matheson, and Co., in China, but for what amount we do not know. The whole of the risks taken upon the vessel and cargo probably exceeded two lakhs of rupees, in addition to which there was a large amount of cargo shipped here by Arabs, who religiously avoid opposing fate by insuring their property.

The convicts brought over in the Malay prows have been examined at the police-office, and committed for piracy and murder. They appear reckless as to their fate; one of the number is the interpreter referred to above. The Portuguese is reported to have behaved well: he not only cooked for the passengers, but at Pulo Laot he acted as sentry over the Chinese. The convicts will not be tried until the sessions next month: in the meantime the government has acted with great liberality towards the Orang Kya or Rajah of the North Natunas. The Straits executive has resolved to present the Orang Kya with a gold mounted kris, a silver sree box, and 500 Spanish dollars, as a token of remembrance for the great service rendered to British subjects thrown upon his shores. Nothing more has been heard respecting the 46 Chinese convicts that escaped in the long and quarter boats belonging to the ship; it is thought probable they would endeavour to reach the Anambas or South Natunas: in either case they would be delivered up to the English. The hon. company's steamer Hooghly, and her Majesty's sloop Ringdove, are about to proceed to the Natunas and Anambas, in search of the escaped pirates.