CAPT. JAMES C. LUCE DEAD

THE COMMANDER OF THE LOST SHIP ARCTIC.

STORY OF THE CAREER OF A WELL-KNOWN NAVIGATOR — THE TERRIBLE EVENT WHICH CLOUDED ALL HIS LIFE—RECALLING THE LOSS OF THE ARCTIC—AS TOLD BY THE CAPTAIN HIMSELF.

Capt. James C. Luce, formerly of the Collins Line steamer Arctic, that was lost off Cape Race in 1854, and for nearly a quarter of a century Inspector of the Great Western Marine Insurance Company, died suddenly, in his home at New-Rochelle, on Wednesday, of heart disease. He was in the office of the insurance company as usual on Tuesday, and his death was entirely unexpected. He leaves a widow, but no children, and was very highly esteemed by his business associates. He was a native of Rochester, Mass., and his death was reported in October, 1854, when the Arctic was lost; but it was subsequently learned that he had been rescued, and he lived to see many more years of active life, although his latter years were embittered by the recollection of the terrible disaster in which several hundred persons lost their lives—a disaster, however, for which he was in no way responsible. The wreck of the Collins Line steam-ship Arctic at noon on Wednesday, Sept. 27, 1854, was the great event in Capt. Luce's life, and his associates say he never went to sleep afterward, without a vision of the terrible catastrophe before his mind. On the 11th of October, 1854, the first news of the wreck of the Arctic reached this City by one of the survivors, Mr. George H. Burns, messenger for the Adams Express Company. It was then reported that more than 300 lives were lost, many of the victims being New-Yorkers. The story of the loss of the vessel is best told by Capt. Luce himself, who was rescued at the last minute. In his report to his employers, dated Quebec, Oct. 14, 1854, he says:

"It becomes my painful duty to inform you of the total loss of the Arctic, under my command, with many lives, and I fear among them must be included your own wife, daughter, and son, of whom I took a last leave the moment the ship was going down, without ever expecting to see the light of another day to give you an account of the heart-rending scene. The Artic sailed from Liverpool on Wednesday, Sept. 20, at 11 A. M., with 233 passengers and a crew of about 160. Nothing of special note occurred during the passage until Wednesday, Sept. 27, when, at noon, we were on the Banks, in latitude 46° 45' north, and longitude 52° west, steering west by compass. The weather had been foggy during the day; generally a distance of one-half to three-quarters of a mile could be seen, but at intervals of a few minutes a very dense fog, followed by being sufficiently clear to see one or two miles. At noon I left the deck for the purpose of working out the position of the ship. In about 15 minutes I heard the cry of 'Hard starboard!' from the officer of the deck. I rushed on deck, and had just got out when I felt a crash forward, and at the same moment saw a steamer under the starboard bow: at the next moment she struck against our guards and passed astern of us. The bows of the strange vessel seemed to be literally cut or crushed off for full 10 feet, and, seeing that she must probably sink in a few minutes, and taking a hasty glance at our own ship, and believing that we were comparatively uninjured, my first impulse was to endeavor to save the lives of those on board the sinking vessel. The boats were cleared, and the first officer and six men left with one boat, when it was found our own ship was leaking fearfully. The engineers were set to work, being instructed to put on the steam-pumps, and the four deck-pumps were worked by the passengers and crew, and the ship headed for the land, which I judged to be about 50 miles distant. I was compelled to leave my boat, with the first officer and crew, to take care of themselves. Several ineffectual attempts were made to stop the leak by getting sails over the bows; but finding the leak gaining on us very fast, notwithstanding all our very painful efforts to keep her free, I resolved to get the boats ready, and as many ladies and children placed in them as possible; but no sooner had the attempt been made than the firemen and others rushed into them, in spite of opposition. Seeing this state of things, I ordered the boats astern to be kept in readiness until order could be restored, when, to my dismay, I saw them cut the ropes in the bow and soon disappear astern in the fog. Another boat was broken down by persons rushing at the davits, and many were precipitated into the sea and drowned. This occurred while I had been engaged in getting the starboard guard-boat ready, and placed the second officer in charge. When the same fearful scene as with the first boat was being enacted, men leaping from the top of the rail, 20 feet, crushing and maiming those who were in the boat. I then gave orders to the second officer to let go and row after the ship, keeping under or near the stern, to be ready to take on board women and children as soon as the fires were out, and the engines stopped. My attention was then drawn to the other quarter-boat, which I found broken down, but hanging by one tackle. A rush was made for her also, and some 15 got in and cut the tackle, and were soon out of sight. I found that not a seaman was left on board, nor a carpenter, and we were without any tools for building a raft, as our only hope. The only officer left was Mr. Dorlan, the third mate, who aided me, with the assistance of many of the passengers, who deserve great praise for their coolness and energy, in doing all in their power up to the very latest moment before the ship sank. The Chief Engineer, with a part of his assistants, had taken our smallest deck boat, and before the ship went down, and pulled away with about 15 persons. We had succeeded in getting the fore and main yards and two topgallant yards overboard, and such other small spars and materials as we could collect, when I was fully convinced that the ship must go down in a very short time, and not a moment was to be lost in getting the spars lashed together to form a raft, to do which it became necessary to get the life-boat (our only remaining boat) into the water. This being accomplished, I saw Mr. Dorlan, the third officer, in charge of the boat, taking care to keep the oars on board to prevent them from leaving the ship, hoping still to get most of the women and children in this boat. At last they had made considerable progress in collecting the spars, when an alarm was given that the ship was sinking, and the boat was shoved off without oars or anything to help themselves with; and when the ship sank the boat had got clear, probably an eighth of a mile, to leeward. In an instant, about 4:45 P. M., the ship went down, carrying every soul on board with her. I soon found myself on the surface, after a brief struggle, with my own helpless child in my arms, when again I felt myself impelled downward to a great depth, and before I reached the surface a second time had nearly perished, and lost the hold of my child. As I again struggled to the surface of the water a most awful and heartrending scene presented itself to my view—over 200 men, women, and children struggling together amid pieces of wreck of every kind, calling on each other for help, and imploring God to assist them. Such an appalling scene may God preserve me from ever witnessing again. I was in the act of trying to save my child, when a portion of the paddle-box came rushing up edgewise, just grazing my head, falling with its whole weight upon the head of my darling child. Another moment I beheld him lifeless in the water. I succeeded in getting on to the top of the paddle-box in company with 11 others; one, however, soon left for another piece, finding that could not support so many. Others remained until they were, one by one, relieved by death. We stood in water, at a temperature of 45°, up to our knees, and frequently the sea broke directly over us. We soon separated from our friends on other parts of the wreck, and passed the night, each one of us expecting every hour would be our last. At last the wished-for morning came, surrounding us with a dense fog—not a living soul to be seen but our own party, seven men being left. The day continued foggy, except just at noon, as near as we could judge, we had a clear horizon for about half an hour, and nothing could be seen but water and sky. Night came on, thick and dreary, with our minds made up that neither of us would again see the light of another day. Very soon three more of our suffering party were relieved by death, leaving Mr. Allen, a young man, and myself. Feeling myself getting exhausted, I now sat down for the first time, about 8 o'clock in the evening, on a trunk which providentially had been found on the wreck. In this way I slept a little throughout the night, and became somewhat refreshed. About an hour before daylight—now Friday, the 29th—we saw a vessel's light near to us. We all three exerted ourselves to the utmost of our strength in hailing her, until we became quite exhausted. In about a quarter of an hour the light disappeared, to the east of us. Soon after daylight a bark hove in sight to the northwest, the fog having lightened a little, steering apparently for us; but in a short time she seemed to have changed her course, and again we were doomed to disappointment; yet I felt hope that some of our fellow-sufferers may have been seen and rescued by them. Shortly after we had given up all hopes of being rescued by the bark, a ship was discovered to the east of us, steering directly for us. We now watched her with the most intense anxiety as she approached. The wind changing caused her to alter her course several points. About noon they fortunately discovered a man on a raft near them, and rescued him. This man proved to be a Frenchman, who was a passenger on board the steamer which we came in collision with. He informed the Captain that others were near, on pieces of the wreck; and, going aloft, he saw us and three others. We were the first to which the boat was sent, and were safely taken on board about 3 P. M. The ship proved to be the Cambria, of this port, Capt. John Russell."

The disaster was caused by a collision, in a heavy fog, with the French propeller Vesta. A subsequent report of Capt. Luce's return to this City says: "At all the stations where he stopped Capt. Luce was greeted with cheers, and when the train reached Yonkers, the place of his residence, he found two long lines of citizens formed, through which he walked, receiving warm congratulations and a hearty welcome."

James C. Luce was born at Rochester, Mass., in 1806. He began his seafaring life at the age of 16 years, and was put in command of a ship before he was 21. From that time up to 1850 he was a very successful commander. In that year, on account of the eminence he had attained as a skilful navigator and able Captain, he was invited to take command of the Arctic. In this position he never met with an accident until May, 1854, when, as the Arctic was passing the southern coast of Ireland, on her homeward voyage, she struck on the Tuscar rock, but was soon got off. Of the nine vessels that he commanded before taking the Arctic seven were lost after he left them. Capt. Luce was married twice. The first time, in 1833, to a Miss Leonard, of Massachusetts, who died in 1836, after having given birth to a son, Robert, now dead. In 1838 he married Miss Elizabeth Fearing, who survives him. The second wife was the mother of the child, Willie, who was lost in the Arctic disaster.

The arrangements for Capt. Luce's funeral have not yet been made.

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