

## **SAGAS OF THE EARLY DAYS.**

# **SOME TRAGEDIES OF THE BAR**

**BY WINDSOR LANG.**

**U**NFORTUNATELY many of the early shipping disasters were real sea-tragedies. At times the flooded condition of the river, or adverse state of the bar, coupled with a lengthy spell of "southerly busters," prevented the boats from crossing either in or out for weeks, or even months, at a time. Consequently as his schooner lay at anchor in Mobbs' Bay, and in the company of other vessels similarly placed, many a skipper chafed at the enforced delay as he paced and re-paced his deck, ever watchful for a favourable break in the weather.

In 1851, nine schooners, each fully laden with cedar, and awaiting the long-deferred time for departure, were conveniently anchored near the inner lip of the channel where it entered Mobbs' Bay—approximately close to the spot later occupied by the crane-wharf used for the southern breakwater. Their respective skippers had long awaited the moment favourable for weighing anchor, and putting out to sea. Tension was broken, and all hearts were lightened when one beautifully clear and sunny morning heralded in a new Spring day.

**T**HE SKY was practically cloudless. Scarcely a ripple disturbed the bar. A light breeze from the north-west was favourable for the outward passage. By 9.30 a.m. the "Bramble", "Heroine", "Lucy Ann", and "Anna Maria" had lifted anchor, cleared the bar, and put out to sea.

The decks of the remaining five craft buzzed with activity. The skippers' eagerness approximated impetuosity. Each schooner fouled the other in the twisting, fast-running, narrow channel, and became hopelessly entangled. Tempers were frayed

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ed, and verbal exchanges acrimonious,  
but actually, as events thickened, this  
mishap proved to be a blessing in  
disguise. The first four vessels were  
scarcely clear of the entrance than a  
singular-looking cloud appeared from  
out of the west, in the track of a  
fast-freshening wind. It turned out  
to be the advance warning of a  
typhoon. With tropical rapidity it  
launched a terrific onslaught upon  
the bar. The "Bramble", "Heroine",  
and the "Lucy Ann" were each over-  
whelmed with the first crash of the  
storm, and not seen again. They had  
foundered at once with all hands —  
one man excepted — in full sight  
of the stirred-up settlement ashore.  
One man — the cook of the "Lucy  
Ann" — who, by the way, was credit-  
ed with being unable to swim, grab-  
bed some floating wreckage, and  
pushing clear of the over-turned  
hulk, was picked up by those on the  
sadly-battered "Anna Maria".

In the course of a few hours the  
gale moderated, and eventually wore  
itself out, leaving the "Anna Maria"  
floating helplessly adrift. The west-  
erly wind rendered it impossible for  
her to come in over the crossing, and  
her -stripped condition militated

against her continuing on her trip to  
Sydney. Her master, Captain Harry  
Capps, anchored his crippled ship off  
the entrance. With calm, skill, re-  
source, and highly-commendable des-

source, and highly-commendable despatch, he contrived to make a jury mast from a derrick he had on board. To this he attached his spare canvas, and with this improvised rig he continued to Sydney, where he arrived six weeks later. Each of the lost vessels had carried 5 hands and a skipper, so that 17 lives were lost from that burst of fury. The "Anna Maria" ended her sea career next year when she was overtaken by a gale between Sydney and Newcastle.

**O**NE DAY, whilst the foregoing tragedy was still fresh in the memories of the settlers, Skipper Jack Adams, in the "Madge Wildfire", faced the bar, bent on sailing in with the favouring breeze. The crossing was swollen by a swift run of floodwaters, and the north-easterly wind had contributed towards the heavy, sullen seas. The crossing was a swirl of angry waters.

To watchers the schooner appeared to be making satisfactory headway, but as the vessel passed the outer point of North Head, for some unknown reason she sheered off towards the rocks. Almost simultaneously she was struck and lifted by a huge, following roller, and left in a half-capsized condition. Before she could recover, a second heavy sea overturned and engulfed the listing ship. Every one on board perished, and in the matter of minutes the "Madge Wildfire" had become scattered driftwood.

wood.

But the insatiable sea claimed still further victims during that troublous

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season. In that same year the small schooner "George", cleared the Tweed Heads, and sailed into the murk caused by a scowling sky. Before long she ran into a strongly-blowing easterly gale, and thick, hazy weather. Night came down with pitch blackness, as she neared Cape Byron.

To the skipper's disquiet, early in the night the easterly gale stiffened. Brown (a super cargo), and Green (the sole passenger carried), found conditions on deck to be so uncomfortable that they went down below into the tiny cabin. Just before midnight the captain joined them in the cabin, and voiced his uneasiness over the bleak prospect — beset by a fierce easterly gale, and with a forbidding rockbound coast on his lee. He announced his intention of getting clear by using the top-gallant sail.

After lighting his pipe he left hurriedly for the deck. Above the whine and roar of the storm the two left in the cabin heard orders for additional sail being snapped out by the master. Shortly after, as if in answer, the craft gave a sudden lurch, and took on a list. From that list she did not recover. In fact almost immediately, when they found themselves immersed in sea water, and standing on the cabin roof, they

and standing on the cabin roof, they divined that she had completely overturned. In the inky blackness they were aware of an ominous silence. From the sluggish roll of the boat they hazarded the guess that the freight of cedar was keeping her sufficiently buoyant to permit of her keeping afloat. Providentially, the wrenched timbers of the ship allowed their compartment to be adequately ventilated, so that a plentiful supply of fresh air came in, but cooped up in that cramped space, restricted on account of its being water-logged, theirs was a most unenviable plight. One can form some idea of both their physical and mental agonising tortures when it is realised that they had to spend two nights and two days in this confinement — without food or water, cold and miserably wet, suffering from cramp, their sight, most of the time, being unable to pierce the intense darkness, uncertain of their geographical whereabouts, and so placed that they could but conjecture on the course of current events.

At long, long last came a variation in their ordeal. Without warning the derelict rolled and heaved to the accompaniment of a succession of rapid bumps. The two in the confined cabin were hurled about and bruised, until, thoroughly exhausted, they lapsed into a state of unconsciousness, but not before their drooping spirits had been revived by the supposition that the boat had drifted into some surf

drifted into some surf.

**S**TEVE KING and Johnny Boyd had left their cedar camp inside Brunswick Heads, and taken a stroll out on to the headlands fronting the neighbouring sea to survey the extent of the possible destruction caused as a result of the fierce gale. They came upon the over-turned hulk of the "George" lying awash in the shallow waters of the surf.

Boyd clambered on board, without set purpose, thumped on the up-turned portion of the hulk, and expressed his sympathy for those who had manned this vessel during the storm. He was amazed to have his thump answered by a faint responsive knocking from within. Boyd scrambled off the wrecked craft, threw off any hampering article of clothing, ran back to the camp, and secured an axe as well as more assistance.

Boyd and King hacked a hole in the schooner's side, and pulled out the imprisoned and over-wrought couple from that "hell ship". Kindly and willing hands carried the weak, dazed men to the settlement. Care-

fully tended, they made a speedy recovery. Eventually the two men returned to Sydney via the Richmond, to which latter place the story of their gruelling experience had preceded them.

It transpired that after being  
over-turned, the vessel had drifted  
as a hulk, for about 10 miles, during  
the time that Brown and Green had  
been undergoing their incarceration.