

## INTERESTING INCIDENTS OF THE LAKE ERIE DISASTER.

The following letter was written by Mr. Aaron Sutton, of New York, to his friends in that city. It is quite interesting, and shows how the art of swimming, in this instance, saved an entire family. It is mentioned, as a curious coincidence, that Mr. Sutton had a brother and sister on board the *Henry Clay*, which was burnt on North River, July 23th., both of whom were saved.

STEAMER SULTANA, Lake Erie, 8th mo. 20, 1852.

DEAR FRIENDS: We left Buffalo last evening at 9 1/2 o'clock, in the ill fated steamer *Atlantic*, the loss of which you will have learned before this reaches you. This morning, about 3 o'clock, when opposite Erie and within six miles of the Canada shore (off Long Point,) our boat came in collision with the propeller *Ogdsensburg*, bound to Buffalo.—Our bow was stove in, and the boat immediately began to sink so rapidly that in fifteen minutes the saloon or promenade deck was under water as far back as midships. The after part being higher, we went back and staid near the stern until driven by the water to the railing, where we waited till the water came about our feet. I then thought it about time to leave, as I expected every moment to see the boat go down with a plunge, as nearly all the wood work that could buoy the coal and engine was then under water. Accordingly my dear wife, with the baby, and I with our dear little Frankey in my arms, left, and pushed away from the wreck to avoid being drawn under with it. (Mary had a life preserver on.) We were therefore wholly dependent on a single life preserver and my dexterity as a swimmer, which last is all that saved our lives. After remaining in the water some 10 or 15 minutes, and seeing that the boat had apparently ceased settling, we returned on board and there sat and waited for some change or relief, which at last fortunately came to hand. After a few minutes, the propeller, although greatly disabled, returned to our assistance, and for prudential reasons, probably, was very cautious about approaching us in a way that would afford a chance for more than a very few to get on board at once. However, they came bows on directly to where we were standing, and I raised Frankey as high as I could reach, and he was taken safely on board. I then caught little Adna and handed him up, but no one reaching for him, and the propeller moving off, I was obliged to hand him back to Mary and take my chance at swimming again, as I had one foot on the propeller, and her moving off let me down into the water, and I was drawn away by the current after the propeller, to some distance from the wreck; but as soon as I could get clear of that, I swam back again, and was once more with Mary and the baby, much relieved feeling that Frankey was safe. We now waited some 15 or 20 minutes before the propeller again returned to us. During this lapse of time, those who were still on the wreck were quieted by a report that the boat was on the bottom, and they were in no danger—(30 fathoms found no bottom.) This feeling of security enabled the propeller to come alongside in safety, and by good management we were soon all on board and in comparative safety. During all this time, the boats of both steamers were employed in picking up those who were in the water and still alive. The dead could not claim attention when life was in peril, and consequently only one body (a child's) was brought away. We could not feel altogether safe yet, as the propeller was badly stove in at the bows, and leaked so that the pumps were full. She now started for Erie, and at 9 1/2 o'clock met the *Sultana* coming out of Erie Harbor, bound for Detroit. We thought best to take it, and go immediately on our journey. We have lost every thing except the things we had on our backs and my watch and purs, so that we have money enough to buy the necessary clothing to finish our journey, and other necessary expenses. As it was only through what I believe to have been gross carelessness that the calamity has happened, I presume we shall recover for our baggage, which at the present moment seems of but little account. According to the best information I have been able to get, there could not have been less than 350 lives lost.

I presume I need not call upon you to imagine any thing of the awfulness of the scene, out of sight of land, (it was quite dark,) in deep water, and at one time with hardly a hope of assistance. To be sure there was no fire, but there was no land, as in the case of those on the *Henry Clay*, to look to. We were, altogether, about an hour and a half with scarcely a hope—death staring us in the face, and numbers drowned and drowning around us. I felt no anxiety for my own fate, but the dear ones who of course clung to me were all I thought of saving. I felt no fear of death for myself; still I fully expected it, not only for myself, but for Mary and the dear children. We hardly hoped, but persevered and were saved. While we were away from the wreck in the water, I saw several dead bodies near us, and one of a man came so near that I was under the painful necessity of pushing it away with my foot, fearing, life not being extinct entirely, we should be caught hold of. My hands of course were tied—Franky in one, with his little arms around my neck, and Mary in the other. I was obliged to propel entirely with my feet—no easy matter for even the best swimmer. I believe we were the only company that left the boat and got back safely. There were a few single men who went when we did, and for the same reasons. Mary was perfectly calm and manageable throughout the whole time, and seemed to fear for the baby more than herself. Frankey, when in the water, cried some, and said, "Frankey wants to go in the boat again," and "Frankey don't want to go in the water any more," and many other things which I cannot now mention. I find that the propeller struck the *Atlantic* near midships, on the larboard side. We have been provided with dry clothes by the passengers on this boat, and all has been done by the captain and officers that was in their power to make us comfortable. A very few only came on their way in the boat, preferring to take the stages around the lake. I shall mail this at Cleveland, at which place the boat will touch for coal. We shall probably get to Detroit to-morrow morning. \* \* \*

A. S.

**OTHER INCIDENTS OF THE WRECK OF THE ATLANTIC.**—Bella Dingwell, the chambermaid, relates that an old lady, addressing her, asked if the boat was sinking. Upon being answered in the affirmative, she requested the chambermaid to go down and fetch her carpet bag. Bella entreated her to try and save herself, and not to think of any thing else: but the poor old lady insisted that she could not go without her carpet bag, and when last seen by the chambermaid, she was endeavoring to make her way below to endeavor to find the coveted article. Bella herself was taken off with but one garment on—a skirt which she found in the cabin having been claimed by its rightful owner.—She displayed much presence of mind, and when told by the second porter that he would do all he could to save her life, she begged him not to run any danger for her, but to look after himself and leave her to her fate.

A gentleman on the *Atlantic* recollects seeing Miss Scammon, of Milwaukie, who was 12 years old, and was on her way home from school at Boston, after the collision.—The poor little girl was distracted, and rushing about as if mad. He seized her and endeavored to calm her fears, when she broke down in terror, rushed overboard, and was drowned.

A gentleman whose name we did not learn, by his coolness and presence of mind, saved his wife and six children. He procured a life preserver and fastened it firmly around his wife first, and then making her descend into the water, he, being a good swimmer, took two of the life-preserving stools which were on board, and put them under each arm. In this manner she managed to support four of her children who clung to her, while the husband was employed in making preparations for his own safety and that of the servant girl who was along. He then took the same precautions for his own safety, and took the other two children and the servant girl under his charge.

A lady who was sleeping in the lower cabin when the vessel struck, relates that she sprung out of her berth and waked a young lady that was in the berth beneath her, but who did not seem to realize the position she was in, for she did not get up. The lady herself had nothing on but their night clothes and a loose dress. She immediately hurried on deck, but so fast did the water gain that she had to be helped through the sky-light by her husband, who was himself in his shirt. She gave him the loose dress after they were saved, and came up to this city on the *Sultana*, when her first application was to find a milliner's shop.