

The Mystery of the "MARY CELESTE"

Ernest Lewis to narrate Thrilling
Drama of the Sea

IN any port in the world and in any place where ocean-going sailormen for-gather, sooner or later, when the air is thick with strong tobacco burnt in strong pipes, tongues are loosened and argument reaches the joyous pitch of downright friendly abuse, somebody, through sheer devilment, will mention the Mary Celeste.

The story and the argument are many years old now. There are few of us who have not heard them in one form or another. This ship, the Mary Celeste, picked up off the Azores, with all sails set, with breakfast and hot tea all ready on the fo'c'sle table, the ship's cat curled up asleep on a locker, the galley fire still hot—but without a living soul on board—has become for us not merely a story of a curiosity of the sea, but a tradition, and even a legend.

Just how many stories have been evolved to account for the mystery of this strange crewless barque, who can say? There is a Latin proverb which runs, "Tot homines, tot sententiae." If you talk about the Mary Celeste with old seafaring men who know that great working ocean, the Atlantic, this truism will seem truer than ever. They have turned the ship, according to their tastes, into every form of craft, from the yacht of a millionaire into a small and undistinguished brig which scavenged the sea to glean the flotsam and jetsam to be found after the American Civil War. Writers have always been fascinated by the story. Joseph Conrad drew something from it. Conan Doyle wrote a history of it, and the bibliography of the Mary Celeste—that "white-winged wanderer," that "phantom ship"—makes in itself a small library.

The Mary Celeste set sail from New York on November 7, 1872. It had a scratch crew, with one man, at least (Carl Venholdt), so some versions tell us, shanghaied and thrown on board at the last moment. Benjamin Briggs, the skipper, had his wife with him and, it is supposed, their small child, although there are those who argue that the "baby" spoken of as being aboard was no live baby but merely a baby piano, a "Parlour Poll," as the men called it.

There was grave trouble at that time in finding crews in New York, and it seems very doubtful if the Mary Celeste put to sea with the heterogeneous crew of 14 which the official records attributed to her. For all that, there can be no doubt that the mate had the fighting and the bullying qualities which were essential then in dealing with a crew of blackguards, and, also, that the small craft was carrying a full cargo of whale oil and commercial alcohol. It is also certain that Captain Briggs

was a friend of Captain Moorhouse, master of the British vessel Dei Gratia, which lay alongside the Mary Celeste in New York, and which was destined eventually to find the Mary Celeste derelict off the Azores some three weeks later.

It is from the moment of the departure of these two vessels from America that the mystery and the theories begin. The most authentic news of the Mary Celeste is that she was brought into Gibraltar Harbour on December 13 by a prize crew from the Dei Gratia, who said that she had been found deserted and abandoned six days previously. Captain Moorhouse, of the Dei Gratia, said that she was sailing on a direct course for Gibraltar and, apparently, had been doing so for ten days without a soul on board, as the last entry in the log was dated November 24.

This is the story which a court of inquiry spent weeks in investigating at Gibraltar. The ship was in good order, there had been no plundering (there was even money in the cash-box, and a sewing machine and thimble on the table of the captain's cabin), but the crew had vanished. A sword was found with bloodstains upon it, and on both sides of the bow, cuts were discovered above the water-line seemed to have been made deliberately by an axe, and there were more bloodstains.

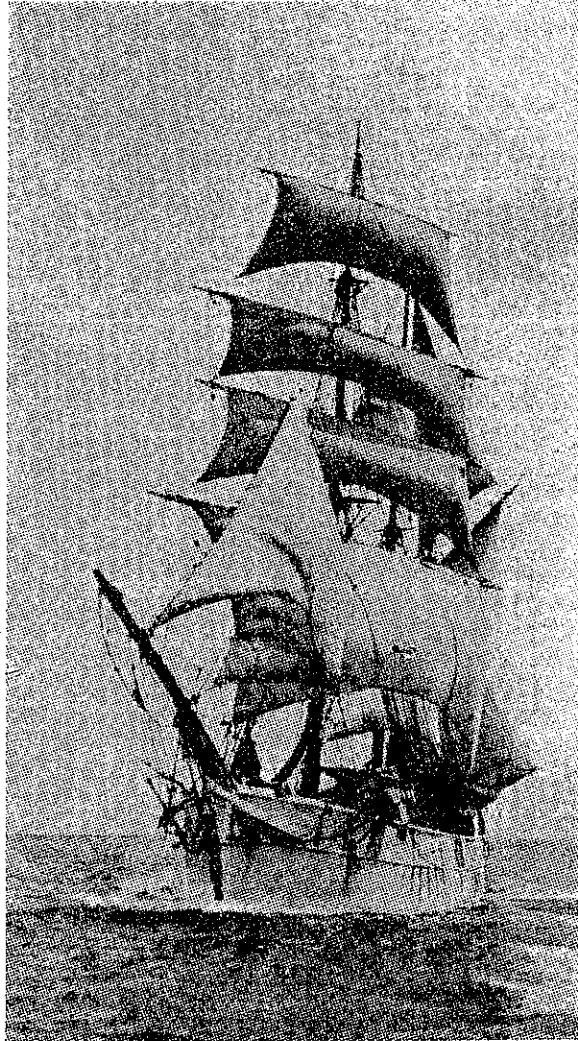
Bloodstains or no, the United States representative at Gibraltar during the inquiry, pooh-poohed any theory of violence and bloodshed, and the story remains to this day a classic mystery of the sea.

Mr. Lewis, who will present this fascinating story to us in a new guise and in a new and thrilling form, is one of the outstanding radio personalities of the Dominion, and it is certain that his Mary Celeste talks will prove to be one of the outstanding radio features of the year.

You may not agree with all he says—you may prefer to evolve a solution of your own after hearing the facts, but one fact remains—if you love the sea as British folks should you cannot fail to be interested in this strange story and problem.

MR. LEWIS'S talks will fall under four headings:—

- (a) February 11: "The Story of the Finding of the Mary Celeste."
- (b) February 18: "The Evidence at the Official Inquiry."
- (c) February 25: "Theories which Purport to Explain the Mystery."
- (d) March 4: "An Explanation of the Mystery."



What was the truth about the "MARY CELESTE"? Many ingenious explanations of this sea-mystery of the 'seventies have been offered by sailors and writers. The full story of this thrilling drama of the sea will be narrated by Mr. Ernest Lewis from 2YA on the following Saturday evenings, February 11, 18, 25, and March 4.