

The Mystery .. of the .. Marie Celeste



Astounding Evidence Unearthed.



THE much-discussed mystery of the derelict Marie Celeste is revived in the "Quarterly Review" by Mr. Harold T. Wilkins, who has made an examination of the records of the Vice-Admiralty Court at Gibraltar, where the official inquiry into the finding of the ship was held. Mr. Wilkins expresses the opinion that there is no mystery attaching to the finding of the allegedly abandoned vessel. He says that the members of the missing crew were undoubtedly the victims of piracy, and that the culprits were the master and the crew of the Dei Gratia, the vessel which brought the Marie Celeste to port. The motive for the crimes in the claim for salvage, which amounted to £1,700.

It is 58 years since the staunch brigantine of 282 tons was found derelict in the North Atlantic. She had left New York for Genoa on November 7, 1872, with a cargo of alcohol. Her captain was Benjamin Briggs, who was also part owner. On board were the captain and his wife and child, two mates, a steward, and four seamen. On November 25, 17 days after the ship had left New York, at 8 o'clock in the morning, someone wrote the last entry in the log of the Marie Celeste. Just 12 days later the British brig Dei Gratia, commanded by Captain Morehouse, came upon her with all sails set, steering erratically. On boarding her he found that she had been abandoned. Since then amazing legends have grown up concerning the condition in which the crew of the Dei Gratia found the Marie Celeste, and there has been engendered a mystery that has closed the eyes of a host of investigators to the facts. Research among archives on both sides of the Atlantic and among the documents of the Vice-Admiralty Court has supplied evidence which, to-day, were the suspects alive, would justify their arrest, according to Mr. Wilkins, on a charge of murder and piracy on the high seas.

The first point made by Mr. Wilkins is that between November 25, when she was allegedly abandoned, and December 5, when she was sighted by the Dei Gratia, the derelict held her course for 10 days with the wheel loose. During that period she covered 507 miles. Expert nautical evidence proves that owing to the direction of the winds the sails must have been altered by someone. More significant still was the evidence given at the inquiry to the effect that the Dei Gratia left New York eight days after the Marie Celeste. It has since been proved that the Dei Gratia actually left 10 days before the Marie Celeste. The two ships had lain alongside one another in New York. The presumption is that the Dei Gratia waited in the course of the Marie Celeste, boarded her by means of subterfuge, and murdered her crew. It is stated that the investigation of the Vice-Admiralty Court at Gibraltar was not sufficiently thorough, especially in the light of information to the effect that the mate of the Dei Gratia had destroyed valuable evidence. It is now known also that Morehouse, the master of the Dei Gratia, was sailing under an alias, and that he was a man of evil repute named Boyce. Mr. Wilkins also supplies a large number of small but damning details, all pointing to the one conclusion, that by means of a carefully laid plot to obtain salvage for the vessel the crew of the Marie Celeste was done to death.