

A few   

---

---

**Hours' Experience**  

---

---

**with a Typhoon**  

---

---

**in the China Sea**  

---

---



COMPLIMENTS OF  
**Hinckley & Woods**

*Hale 83low  
Jan 1949*

A Few Hours' Experience  
with a Typhoon in  
the China Sea

---

BY

FREDERIC HINCKLEY

---

BOSTON:  
FISH PRINTING COMPANY

1900

HKMM 20122 0421

*Hel Blom  
Jan 1949*

A Few Hours' Experience  
with a Typhoon in  
the China Sea

---

BY  
FREDERIC HINCKLEY

---

BOSTON:  
FISH PRINTING COMPANY  
1900

## A FEW HOURS' EXPERIENCE WITH A TYPHOON IN THE CHINA SEA.

---

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS of Yale College, in his excellent and most exhaustive work on China, called "The Middle Kingdom," writes as follows of the storms there :

"The increased temperature on the southern coast of China during the months of June and July operates, with other causes, to produce violent storms, along the seaboard, called tyfoons, a word derived from the Chinese 'tafung,' or 'great wind.' These destructive tornadoes occur from Hainan to Chusan, between July and October, gradually progressing northward as the season advances, and diminishing in fury in the higher latitudes. They annually occasion great losses to the native and foreign shipping in Chinese waters, more than half the sailing ships lost on that coast having suffered in them. Happily, their fury is oftenest spent at sea, but when they occur inland, the loss of life is fearful. In August, 1862, and Sept. 21, 1874, the deaths reported in two such storms near Canton, Hong Kong, and their vicinity, were upwards of thirty thousand each. In the latter instance the American

steamer 'Alaska,' of thirty-five hundred tons, was lifted from her anchorage and gently put down in five feet of water near the shore, from which she was safely floated some months afterwards."

The *Geographia Naturalis*, by Varenus, describes typhoons as "Storms which rage with such intensity and fury that those who have never seen them can form no conception of them; you would say that heaven and earth wished to return to their original chaos." Another very concise and almost as graphic description as the above, perhaps, is furnished by a sailor on board the English steamer "Lady Mary Wood," which barely escaped destruction in a typhoon on the passage from Hong Kong to Shanghai. When interviewed by a reporter for a Shanghai paper, in answer to the question "How hard did it blow, Jack?" he replied: "Well, I'll tell yer, it blowed just as hard as it could, and then it jerked."

From such accounts as these one may readily understand how the sailor voyaging through the China Sea at the season of the year when these storms prevail (generally from May to November) experiences no little anxiety and apprehension when all the signs indicate the approach of a typhoon. But signs are not always apparent until the gale is about to burst upon the ship, leaving scant time for preparation; and this was in some measure the condition of the ship "Living Age" in a typhoon that passed over her one November day, 1853, in latitude 13 north and longitude 115 east.

Some four days previous she had left her moorings in Pearl River, just below Whampoa, with a full cargo of tea bound to New York. We passed the naval fleet under Commodore Perry at anchor in the river. He had just returned from his first visit to Japan. As colors were dipped in salute, the band on board his flagship struck up "Home, Sweet Home," sweet music to the homeward bound, which made one almost forget that half the circumference of the globe had yet to be sailed ere the homeland would be sighted.

Once fairly clear of the land the fresh northeast monsoon bore the ship bravely along on her course, and she split her way through the rolling sea at a ten-knot gait, as if every mother, wife and sweetheart were giving a home-pull together on the tow-line. At eight o'clock on the morning of the 17th of November, three days out from land and point of departure, when the officer of the morning watch was relieved, the weather was cloudy, with a fresh breeze from the northeast well on the port quarter, the ship booming along logging ten knots, the mainsail and crossjack hanging in the bunt lines, with all drawing sail set and carrying the foretopmast studding-sail. There was fair promise of a good day's run when the record would be made up at twelve noon, the end of the nautical day, and not until about half-past eight, when a little stronger gust than any before proved too much for the studding-sail boom, which, bending

like a bow with the strain, snapped short off just outside the outer boom iron, did we have any feeling that the ship was getting more than the benefit of a howling northeast monsoon, which must be utilized for all it was worth. So the carpenter was set at work to get out a rough spar and work it down for another boom, while the broken end of the old one was transferred from the yard to the deck. But ere this work was fairly underway the quickly freshening breeze made it necessary to clew up and furl the light upper sails. Before the watch had completed this work, it was evident enough more canvas still must be taken in, and the call of "All hands on deck to shorten sail!" brought the starboard watch out again, having only partly finished their breakfast. And still no one supposed there could be anything more than a stiff gale to contend with. The sky, while overcast with heavy clouds, with occasional rain squalls, did not at the time wear an unusually threatening appearance, and the barometer standing at 29.60 was but little below normal; besides, it was late in the season for a typhoon. However, there was a rapidly increasing fierceness in the blasts which made plenty of work for every able hand on board, and the intervals were short between clewing down and clewing up; between reef tackles two blocks for a close reef and clewlines block and becket for a snug furl; so that by dint of sharp attention to the business, at twelve o'clock noon every stitch of canvas on yard

and boom was held by gaskets and snugly furled; and none too soon, for it was plain enough to see and feel that there was trouble in the air and the sea. The wind, which was at first from the northeast, veered gradually to the north, which fact was evidence that a typhoon was approaching. The ship was hove to on the port tack under bare poles, relieving tackles hooked to the tiller and securely fastened, and the man at the wheel lashed, that he might not be blown away.

By this time the seas were running high, and as the ship headed up to them her bow was deluged and the decks were half waist deep as the water tumbled over the weather rail. Finally she gave a plunge which sent her jib boom under water clear to the fore royal stay, and when she emerged from the dive the boom, buckling like a spring board, snapped off just outside the bowsprit cap and drifted under the lee bow. There was nothing to be done about it, however, in the fury of the storm; so long as the stick did not hammer the ship's side in, no farther trouble was apprehended in that direction. By two P.M. the typhoon was doing its worst; the tumult in the air was something indescribable; the roar of the gale, unlike any other sound ever heard, completely drowned all other sounds except the hiss of the rain in the rushing squalls, which at times, as it tore through the midship bulwark port on the weather side, was not unlike the hiss of escaping steam from a locomotive. The lowering clouds almost

enveloped the ship in darkness, and the terrific wind as it swept on tore away the tops of the rising seas, sending them in a smother of salted spray across the ship, now almost on her beam ends, and drifting helpless as a log wherever the fury of the elements sent her. With all other discomforts there was a sense of physical oppression, due to the low pressure of the atmosphere, which gave one a feeling of some heavy weight bearing down upon him.

At this time all hands were gathered together on the grating under the break of the forward part of the cabin, somewhat sheltered, waiting for whatever the climax might be, having done everything possible for the safety of the ship. While standing there we saw a mass of wreckage drop alongside to leeward. Looking aloft, we found that the foretopgallant and royal mast, with the yards, the maintopmast, maintopgallant and royal masts, with yards attached, also the mizzen-topgallant and royal masts, had been blown from aloft by the irresistible wind, and were hanging, a tangled mass of spars, rigging and sails alongside. This sudden dismantling relieved the ship in a great measure from the leverage which the terrible force of the storm upon her lofty spars was making, in a way to strain her hull beyond the safety point. Until four P.M. there was no abating in the fury of the storm, and the ship was drifting helplessly whither the gale should send her. They had been anxious and

weary hours of waiting, but about that time it was evident the worst was past, and by six o'clock the wind had ceased to a moderate gale, the ship slowly righted and rode once more on nearly even keel. The carpenter sounded the pumps, but found no water in the well. It was a great relief to see the sounding-rod appear almost dry to the tip, showing that notwithstanding the terrible strain of wind and sea the good ship was staunch and tight in her hull. Although there was a woeful looking mass of wreckage in the broken spars, tangled rigging and torn sails churning the water alongside, with a weary job ahead to clear it away and get it on board, yet no one was disheartened at the outlook, but rather felt an emotion of gratitude and thankfulness that they were not to be listed in the record:

"Of ships dismasted that were hailed  
And sent no answer back again."

In his journal noting the incidents of the day, the captain writes: "This is the hardest blow I have ever experienced during my sea life of twenty-two years."

With the abatement of the storm work was at once commenced to clear away the wreckage and get it on board. There was little use in making sail, for the weather backstays hanging across the braces with the weight of the spars and sails attached, prevented trimming yards to the wind, so the ship still drifted before

the light breeze blowing from the eastward. After three days and nights continuous work, stopping only for meals, the encumbering material was stowed about the decks, ready for use in rigging up the partially dismantled craft, and getting her in shipshape condition once more. Such sail as was left aloft was set, and with light northerly winds the ship once more began edging on her homeward course. The men were allowed to take a much-needed rest, as they were pretty thoroughly exhausted from their long continuous work.

When the time came to make sail, it was discovered that in addition to the broken spars, the main and mizzen masts were both sprung just below the futtock bands. To make them at all safe it was necessary to fish them with heavy oak scantling. These were secured by winding the stream chain around, and driving heavy wedges to tighten it. Then the work of sending masts aloft, setting up rigging, getting yards across and sails bent, furnished full employment night and day for nearly two weeks, the work being done by watches, regularly relieved. In the meantime the chief officer received a wound from a falling block, incapacitating him for duty for several days, and it was a material loss in the prosecution of the work, as he was almost a whole watch in himself for energy and ability. In ten days from the time of her partial dismantling all the spars were aloft, the rigging set up, sails bent, and the ship slowly sailing on her

homeward course in very light baffling winds, having made but little headway while refitting, and it was not until thirty days from the date of departure at Hong Kong that we were clear of Java Head. The average distance sailed per day, including the time we were repairing damages and getting ready to spread canvas, was about fifty miles.

From this time on there were but the usual incidents experienced in a voyage across the Indian Ocean: rounding the Cape of Good Hope; running down the mild southeast trade-winds of the South Atlantic; flirting with cat's-paws and baffling winds crossing the Equator; and finally booming once more through the brisk northeast trades to the vicinity of the Gulf Stream.

Three pretty severe gales were encountered after leaving the Orient before we reached our port of destination: two of them in the vicinity of the Cape of Good Hope and one on the eastern edge of the Gulf Stream; the last bringing the ship down to close reefs. But the work of rigging and repairing after the damage by the typhoon, had been done with all possible care, and the ship stood the test of three gales without further injury, notwithstanding two weak lower masts. That we were able to carry our canvas pretty well in a good breeze is evident from the record in the journal of the captain, which reports: "Ten vessels were passed on the voyage, sailing a race with us on the same course."

On the 13th of March, one hundred and eighteen days from Canton, having sailed twelve thousand one hundred miles, we sighted land in the afternoon, and at seven P.M. we were boarded by a pilot, under whose guidance the ship threaded her way early the next morning through the fleet of vessels bound in and out of port and along the shore, where

“ From the hilltop looked the steeple  
And the lighthouse from the Strand.”

Soon the familiar sight of the tall spire of old Trinity on Broadway greeted our eyes, a sight of which we had taken a farewell glance when starting on our circuit around the world, just fifteen months and eighteen days before.

Once safely secured at the pier there was short ceremony in the leave-takings, as passengers, officers and crew bade the ship good-by and departed their different ways on shore, the only ones to meet on board again being the captain, with the brave little woman, his wife, and the officers two months later, when they sailed on another trip around the world, which ended before completion in fatal disaster to the ship, as related in the story “The Wreck of the Living Age.”