

## **The Wreck and Rescue of a Scotch Fishing Crew**

### **From a Narrative by James M'Kendrick**

The sea has many charms and attractions, and has afforded to many, of all classes, much joy and real pleasure. But alas! alas! It has caused much sorrow, and many have painfully proved the truth of God's Word when He says- "There is sorrow on the sea, it cannot be quiet" (Jer. xlix., 23). What thrilling adventure and terrible peril, what exposures, privations, and hardships through howling winds, raging waves, and ships on fire are recorded.

Let us introduce our readers to a most thrilling and touching incident, which occurred on the 24th day of September, in the year 1866, in an arm of the sea called the Moray Firth, on the Banffshire coast, in Scotland. The coast referred to is thickly studded with villages of fisher folks, varying in population from a few hundreds to several thousands, which, from time to time, have been the scenes of remarkable revivals and wondrous awakenings by the Holy Spirit of God; and, as a result, many thousands all along the coast are bright, happy Christians who know Jesus as their own personal Saviour, and are daily rejoicing in the forgiveness of sins, and they love to testify by their lips and their lives that they are saved; "born again," and going to heaven. We trust our readers knows their sins forgive through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, too.

Amongst the villages referred to is the well-known fishing village of Findochty, and here lives the well-known and notable family of the "Sutherlands"; notable because of their devotion to Christ, and leading men in every good work; but especially in their efforts to spread the Gospel, speaking publicly and privately of Jesus and His love. On the day referred to, this family, five brothers (Willie, John, Jamie, Sandy, and Joseph), a nephew (a boy), and a man named Smith, seven in all, had gone to sea in a small boat to prosecute their daily and dangerous calling. All went well as they sped to the fishing grounds in their tiny craft across the waters, and in a few hours they had their lines "shot and hauled" again, and their boat fairly laden with haddocks and other fish.

All was soon in readiness for the homeward journey. The sail was quickly set, and once more the little barque was making for the Findochty Harbour, driven rapidly by a rising gale that had suddenly begun to blow. Onward the boat sped, and anxiously the crew were hoping soon to reach the harbour. The wind increased in force, and the waves, now lashed into fury, beat against their little boat. But alas! They were doomed to disappointment. A sudden gust of wind, a huge wave, and the little boat went right over, and all the crew were left struggling with the maddening billows of a Moray Firth gale. Anxious hearts and tear-dimmed eyes gathered at the harbour, as wives, mothers, sisters, and other relatives strained their weeping eyes, and tried to pierce the blinding spray and gathering gloom of that stormy ocean, trying to catch a sight of their loved ones returning.

Their hearts rose to the God of heaven, the God of the ocean, the God in whom they had put their trust, that He would preserve and protect amid that raging gale those so near and dear to them. As they prayed to God, they looked again and again for their loved ones' return, but in vain. Little did they know that, drenched with raging billows and exhausted by terrific waves, their dear ones were battling betwixt life and death. With a wonderful presence of mind and a great effort they all got hold of the keel of the boat-(any who have never been at sea in a storm can but very imperfectly realize how awful must have been their position)-and in this way were able to keep their heads above the water. Then began an experience of almost unequalled parallel of boldness, courage, confidence in God, and conversion to God, as well as of cowardice and cruelty.

As the seven clung for support to the keel of the boat; the boy James was supported by Sandy, his uncle, who, being the strongest of the seven, felt it his duty to look after the boy, his father not being able; and in this way they tried to withstand the waves that dashed with their relentless fury over them. It became evident the boat could not support the weight of the seven. What was to be done? Life was dear to all alike. The noble-hearted Sandy, seeing the peril of all, and knowing his ability as a swimmer, let go the keel, determined to risk his own life rather than add to the peril of the others. With a death-like grip they clung to the keel, and bravely met the merciless waves that every moment threatened to wash them away and give

them a watery grave. Again and again the boy Jamie was washed off by the waves, and always Sandy caught him and replaced him upon the boat. And in this terrible plight they prayed to their God and Father in Heaven that it might please Him to send them help and deliverance. And as they clung to the keel and cried to God, suddenly a large fishing boat was seen coming their way at a rapid rate, for now the gale was strong. Sandy cheered the others and told them to prepare to board the coming boat, which was evidently coming to rescue them, and sailing closely by them. Willie, John, Joseph, and Smith – these only were in a position to take advantage of the passing boat. With the grasp of drowning men, they seized the gunwhale of the passing boat. Some got aboard and then pulled the others in.

We now leave for a little, Sandy, Jamie, and the boy, and witness the cowardice and cruelty of the passing boat's crew. The four who got aboard rightly expected that an effort would be made to rescue the other three, and that at once they would turn their boat and make an effort to save the others. But alas! alas! Their fond hopes were doomed, and as the boat sped on, Joseph said, "Aren't you going back for the others?" "No, we can't; the sea is too heavy for our boat," was the reply. "Oh, you will not leave our brothers to perish?" was the vain appeal. A threat of being thrown overboard was the only answer. Once more, imploringly, they cried, "Oh, don't leave our brothers, oh, save them; make one attempt, make one "take," and I will give you \$100," said John. But their piteous appeals were all in vain.

Almost demented, and filled with grief and despair at the thought of leaving the others to perish, Joseph seized a large ballast stone, and holding it in both hands above his head, by way of a threat, he cried, "We shall all drown together" (meaning he would put the stone through the bottom of the boat and sink it), when one of the cruel crew felled him with a stick. Both appeal and resistance were useless, and utterly exhausted from exposure and filled with the deepest grief, they lifted their hearts to God in prayer for them they had left to perish; and with heavy hearts and weeping eyes they were soon landed at Buckie Harbour (to which port this port belonged).

"We must thank you, that through your boat we are rescued and spared from a watery grave to-day. But what can we say to the public about your conduct towards the others, in leaving them to drown?" They looked at each other, and one said, "Didn't I tell you what it would be?" For he, more cowardly than the others, had proposed to let all perish, rather than run any risk in an attempt to save them; and to add sin to crime, they all swore there were only four on the bottom of the boat, and that they rescued them all. This lie they told to hide their cowardice and cruelty. "Be sure your sin will find you out." God says so, and be sure it will; and with them it was so, as the sequel will show.

Let us now return to Sandy, Jamie, and the boy who had been left to perish. They gladly saw their brothers and Smith get aboard, and gladly hoped that the moment of their deliverance was at hand, and

eagerly they watched for the boat to make a “take” and rescue them. But alas! With horror and surprise they saw the boat pursue its course, leaving them behind. They could even behold the efforts and vain appealing of their brothers on their behalf. They saw their brothers overpowered and beaten down, and the boat fast receding from their sight. What anguish now seized them, and despairingly Jamie said – “Oh, Sandy, shairly oor brithers ‘Il nae lea’ us tae droon.” Sandy said – “Oor brithers widna lea’ us, but they canna help themsel’s”.

He saw them overpowered, but the eye of God was upon them in their peril; the God of the ocean was caring for His children, and was preparing for their rescue, though they knew it not. With their hopes blasted and hearts crushed, and strength fast failing, they clung with tenacity to their little boat that had buoyed them up so long. Their position had improved a bit; four were gone. There was less weight upon the top, and with its tossing and the waves beating, the stones used for ballast had come out, and the boat rose higher in the water. Being more buoyant, it afforded more support to the three who clung to it. Sandy, keeping hold of the boy lest he should be washed away, supported himself with his other hand. Yet with this little advantage strength was fast failing.

The furious waves had battered and beaten them in a most merciless manner. Again and again they had to let go, unable to resist the terrible force of some waves, but were always able to lay hold again. Jamie, feeling his strength failing, said, “Sandy, I’m dune. I canna haud on mucle langer,” for now and again certain waves completely engulfed and submerged them. At this point a great wave had carried the boy away, and as they all rose above the water, Sandy caught the boy and again replaced him. They all now felt their end was near, and Sandy, a good singer, raised his voice and sang:-

*What is this that steels upon my frame? Is it death?  
Which soon will quench the vital flame – is it death?  
If this be death, I soon shall be  
From every pain and sorrow free,  
I shall the King of glory see, All is well.*

*I now am stepping on the shore, All is well,  
My struggles here are nearly o’er, All is well.  
My soul is free from every fear,  
My hope is full, my title clear,  
And best of all, the Lord is here, All is well.*

*Cease, cease to weep, my friends, for me, All is well.  
My sins are pardoned, I am free, All is well.  
The monster Death has lost his sting,  
My happy soul is on the wing,  
Beyond the grave I soon shall sing, All is well.*

*The sweat of death is on my brow, All is well.  
My feet are in the river now, Al is well.  
There’s not a cloud which does arise  
To hide my Jesus from my eyes;  
I soon shall mount the upper skies, All is well.*

*Tune, tune your harps, ye saints in glory, All is well,  
I'll repeat the pleasing story, All is well.  
Bright angels are from glory come,  
I hear them whispering in my room;  
They wait to waft my spirit home, All is well.*

*Hark, hark, my Lord and Master calls me, All is well.  
I come to see Thy face in glory, All is well.  
Farewell my friends, adieu, adieu,  
I can no longer stay with you,  
My glittering crown appears on view, All is well.*

*Jamie was too weak and exhausted to sing, but when Sandy had finished, Jamie repeated:-*

*My Jesus I love Thee, I know Thou art mine,  
For me all the glory Thou did'st resign;  
My gracious Redeemer, my Saviour art Thou,  
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.*

*I love Thee because Thou hast first loved me,  
And purchased my pardon on Calvary's tree;  
I love Thee for wearing the thorns on Thy brow,  
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.*

When Jamie had finished, Sandy said, “We might have a little devotion and prayer, before we sink beneath the waves, and go to be for ever with our blessed Lord Jesus and Saviour” They felt their moments were few, and that the end was at hand, that with a few more heavy waves they would sink beneath the angry billows. And Sandy lifted his eyes to his heavenly Father and poured out his heart in praise and prayer to God. He praised God who had sought them in their sins and saved them through the death and resurrection of His dear Son, and had given them peace, pardon and joy, and the blessed assurance that they were saved. To die was richest gain to them, and to be “absent from the body was to be present with the Lord,” and to depart was only to be “with Christ, which was far better.” And while thus engaged in praise and prayer, the boy Jamie suddenly cried, “Oh, Uncle Sandy, I’m nae saved.”

The warm, noble-hearted Sandy felt keenly the imploring cry of his little nephew, and knowing there was not a moment to lose, he said, “Wee, Jamie, my laddie, ye ha’e the same chance as the deen’ thief,” and he told him of the thief who was dying in his sins on the cross by the side of the Son of God who was dying for his (the thief’s) sins, and how he turned his dying eyes to the suffering Saviour and cried, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into Thy kingdom,” and how Jesus at once replied, “To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise”; and in this manner Sandy encouraged the boy to put his trust in Jesus, and receive Him to be his Saviour, and that if he trusted Jesus they would all go to Heaven together.

And again Sandy lifted his heart to thank God, saying, “Oh, my Father, I thank Thee for the salvation Jamie and I are enjoying, through our Saviour’s precious blood, for our sure hope and sweet home beyond this watery grave. But oh, Father, the boy’s nae saved – wee Jamie’s nae ready tae

dee. Ye saved the deein' thief, oh, save the drooning laddie for Jesus' sake!" Never was prayer more earnestly offered, and never was prayer more quickly answered. The boy called out, "Oh, Uncle Sandy, I'm saved, I'm saved; I've trusted Jesus and I know I'm saved," and with tears of joy and hearts full of gratitude they praised God for hearing and answering their prayers in saving "the drooning laddie."

Thus their fast – expiring strength, the little that remained, was employed in praise, prayer, and thanksgiving to God, and encouraged by the immediate answer to prayer Sandy would cast his eyes across the water, hoping that even at the last moment the God in whom they trusted would send deliverance. If his eyes were not deceiving him he thought he saw a boat, and watching keenly he saw between the waves a dark object. It would appear, then disappear between the mountainous billows. He was afraid to kindle a false hope in the bosom of the others. At last he saw it was a large fishing boat, and by throwing up a buoy he was able to attract their attention.

This was a large boat from the neighbouring village of Portessie that had gone out to search the sea and look for a small boat from that port which had not returned; and when they did discover it, the "Skipper Simpson" refused to accept a rope to be towed by them to the harbour.

Let me give "Skipper Simpson's story as related to the writer, and then let all who doubt or deny the existence of a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God account for Skipper Simpson's conduct. I said to him, "Why did you refuse their rope and the help they offered you when you were in such danger?" He said, "To this day I can't tell you why I refused their help, for often I would have been glad of such help when I have been in far less danger. But though I needed their help that day, and knew that the skipper and the crew of the rescue boat were angry at my refusal, I felt somehow I dare not accept it.

But I said, "Stand by me, and we will try and make the harbour." Offended at my refusal, the skipper shouted to his crew, "Put up the helm, boys; put her round, and let us make for home." If I had accepted their offer, the Sutherlands must have perished." Let infidels and unbelievers explain why Simpson refused help in such terrible peril. God heard the cry of His drowning children, and as the rescue boat was putting round for home, God directed them in the way of the drowning trio, and with all speed they bore down on them. As soon as Sandy knew they were seen, he cried, "haud on, haud on, there's help coming-haud on." God had heard, and in this unexpected way God was answering prayer. Rapidly the rescue boat drew near and found Sandy, Jamie, and the boy, strength gone, ready to perish, and utterly exhausted. As quick as warm hearts and willing hands could do it, they were brought on board, and rapidly were making for Findochty Harbour, where the weeping friends and neighbours had been watching and waiting their return.

As the boat approached, their consternation grew. What could it mean? A Portessie boat. Why is it coming here? There is something strange about it. What is it? She glides betwixt the pier heads and all eyes are upon it. No explanation was required, the Sutherlands' boat has been wrecked. The Portessie boat has saved Sandy, Jamie, and Willie's Jamie, the others are drowned. These were the hurried and natural conclusions of all the on-lookers. The rescued were brought ashore. The aged, weeping mother of the five brothers was the first to cry-"Where's the others?" Quickly Sandy told of the passing boat, and how four scrambled aboard. It seemed incredulous. Why did the boat not take them all? Why did it not turn back for them? These were questions not easily

answered from a fisher's point of view, for they consider no danger too great that they might help each other in a time of peril.

Sandy assured his mother that the other four were safe at Buckie. "Twixt doubts and fears the mother started for Buckie, but ere she had gone a mile she saw four men coming. With slow steps and heavy hearts they were walking home. How could they break the sad news? How could they tell of the three left to perish in the water? These and kindred questions filled their minds as they approached Findochty, when they saw a woman hurriedly approaching.

They looked: "It's mother! Oh, what shall we say? How can we meet her? She rushed forward frantic with joy, and embracing Joseph, she said, "Sandy told me you were all safe, but I could hardly believe it." They stared at each other. Had mother's reason been dethroned? How could Sandy tell her since they had left him and the others perishing in the sea? Was it possible that they also had been saved. Joseph ventured to ask, "Mother, where did you see Sandy?" "At home," she replied. "A Portessie boat picked them up and brought them home, and they are all safe." Who can describe or even imagine their feelings of joy, and their deep, deep praise and thanksgivings to God as they hurried homewards to meet those whom they had already mourned as dead? They were soon together, and with all their Christian friends and relatives they were praising and worshipping God for all His rich and wondrous love to them that day: and as they related their terrible experience in all its detail, and how the Lord in His grace had saved wee Jamie's soul on the bottom of the boat, and how the Lord heard and answered all their prayers, it became the occasion of great rejoicing and of exceeding thanksgiving to God, and they all lived to show by their lives their deep, deep gratitude to God for all His love to them.

John lived to see his family become men and women and trust their mother's Saviour and truly serve their father's God. He fell asleep in Jesus about ten years ago. Jamie's only child rejoices in Jesus as her Saviour. Jamie departed to be with Jesus two years ago. The boy Jamie is now a man with boys and girls of his own, and he, his father, Joseph, and Sandy, with their wives and families, still live and love and serve their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who died to redeem them with His precious blood. May we all trust and serve the blessed Saviour, and may we all meet at last where there will be no more sea and no more sorrow.

*Where the child shall meet its mother,  
And the mother meet her child,  
And where friends that death divided  
Shall be gathered from the wild.  
Brothers, sisters, may you and I meet and rest  
Amid the holy and the blest.*

A very few years after that memorable incident, during the herring fishing season at Peterhead, a terrible storm suddenly burst while the boats were at sea. With all speed every crew sought to reach the harbour-one crew, the skipper of which was a great friend of the Sutherlands, and a very devoted Christian man. As they made for the harbour they saw a boat apparently in a helpless condition. "Let us bear down upon that boat, boys," cried the Christian skipper; "perhaps they need our help." And surely they did need help. Their mast had been broken by the fury of the wind, and in its fall had broken the skipper's leg and hurt and injured others of the crew, and in that plight they lay a helpless prey to a devouring ocean and destructive

gale. The Christian skipper and his crew were soon alongside, and seeing their plight, boarded their boat to render what aid they could. Only one thing could be done, and that at greatest risk-make fast a rope to the stem of the wreck and tow it to the harbour.

At once this was done, and the work of rescue at greatest peril begun. Oh, what must have been the feelings of the skipper (who lay moaning with his leg broken) and the other injured members of the crew, when this heroic Christian skipper, looking at him, said, "Aren't you the skipper and the crew that left my friends, the Sutherlands, to perish in the Moray Firth?" Ashamed of his conduct, and overcome by the kindness that was now being shown to him, he burst into tears and confessed his conduct that day.

Skipper Flett said, "We are Christians, we are saved by the precious blood of Christ; therefore we can't treat you as you treated them. We shall stand by you, and we shall either live or die together"; and though several boats were wrecked and lives were lost that day, through the mercy of God the rescuers and the rescued safely reached the harbour, the injured were attended, the broken leg was set and all recovered, and Skipper Flett always felt so thankful to God that he was enabled to set before that crew the kindness of God, and recompense to them good for evil, in that he was able to befriend in the day of distress those who deserted his friends in the day of their peril.

May all this thrilling incident and narrative richly magnify the love and grace of God in the eyes of every reader, and endear the Lord Jesus our Saviour to every heart. This will fully accomplish the object for which it is written, and gratify the heart's desire of all concerned. "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life*" (John 3:16)