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"How We Saved the Barge"

Written by Arthur Helliard and composed by Cuthbert Clarke.

Performed by Bransby Williams.

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I'm a Captain, that's what I am, Sir, a nautical man by trade,
Though I ain't tricked out in a uniform with buttons of gold and braid.
I ain't the Captain it's true of one of these floating grand hotels,—
It's true as I ain't the skipper of one of these Clacton or Yarmouth Belles.
I'm the Captain of this ere barge, Sir, wot's known as the "Slimy Sal,"
And a faster boat there ain't on the length or breadth of the whole canal.
Though I'll own so far as the breadth's concerned that ain't much praise o' course
And the number of knots an hour she makes has summat to do with the horse.
Have I ever had any adventures, the same as one meets at sea?
I should rather just think as I 'ave, Sir, not one, but a dozen may be.
If it wasn't as 'ow my throat's so dry as to almost stop my breath
I'd tell yer the way as the missis and me was snatched from the jaws of death.
Her courage it was too as saved us, 'er courage what pulled us through
Or I wouldn't be standing here thirsty, ...well thank'ee, don't mind if I do.
One morning, some two or three weeks ago, our cargo had all been stowed,
We'd 80 odd tons of coal aboard which o' course was a fairish load,—
We'd got a new 'orse that day, Sir, too good for the job a lot,
He'd once been a Derby winner, though 'is name I've clean forgot.
He was standing harnessed on to the barge, the missis and I was aboard,
When all of a sudden we feels a jerk and he starts of his own accord.
Something or other had startled him, what it was I never could think
Though I fancy he'd 'eard some gent like you wot 'ad offered to stand me a drink.
I flew like a flash to the rudder, and I pushes it hard a-lee,
And the missis 'ad 'oisted a flag of distress to the chimbley, I could see.
We 'adn't a fog'orn or whistle aboard, but the missis she yells like two,

But the louder she screamed out " Clear the course." the faster the old 'orse flew
. He thought he was back in the days gone by, a-winning some famous race,
'Twas a race with Death for the missis and me at that awful 'eadlong pace.
'Ouses and trees went flying by — a mighty splash and a shock —
And we'd passed bang through, without paying too, the closed-up gates of a lock.
Just then when we'd whizzed through a tunnel she yells from the lower deck
And says "If that 'orse ain't pulled up pretty quick, I can see as we're in for a wreck
We only got thirty or forty miles till we gets to the end of the course
It's a case of which 'olds out the longest — the bloomin' canal or the horse."
But before I tells 'ow we was saved, Sir, there's one thing I'd like yer to know,
My missis was once in a circus, as a hartist I mean, years ago,
She used to perform on the tight-rope and wonderful tricks too she done,
But of course, that's all finished and over her weight being seventeen stun.
Then she comes on the deck where I stood, Sir, and I sees a gleam come in her eye
She says "It's a chance in a thousand, but it's one as I'm willing to try.
The 'eadlong career of the 'orse must be stopped, it's our last and our only hope.
There's only one way to get at 'im, I must walk to his back on the rope."
She gives me one farewell 'ug Sir, takes an oar for a pole in 'er hands
Then smiling, as tho' in a circus, on the tow-rope a second she stands.
I closed both my eyes after that, Sir for the sight would a made me unnerved
For a 'orrible death 'twould 'ave meant for 'er if the barge for a moment had swerved.
But I opens 'em wide in a moment for I 'ears a loud kind of a crack
And I sees that theer 'orse all collapse in a 'eap, for the missis 'ad broken 'is back.
As soon as the crisis was over, on the deck in a swoon, Sir, I dropped,
But the barge went on for a mile and a arf on its lonesome afore it was stopped,
Why didn't we cut thro' the rope, Sir, and 'ave let the 'orse loose instead?
Just fancy you thinking o' that now, why it never came into my 'ead!!