

AGROUND ON A SANDBANK.

The very unpleasant experience of passing a night on a sandbank in Port Phillip Bay was unexpectedly afforded the passengers by the steamer *Lonsdale*, on her way from Queenscliff to Geelong, on Thursday. The vessel was chartered by the Ballarat Licensed Victuallers' Association to convey excursionists to the 'Cliff, it being the annual marine outing under the auspices of the society. When the Ballarat contingent of pleasure seekers arrived in Geelong by special trains, they were joined by about 50 Geelong residents who were desirous of having a trip by water to the Heads, and the *Lonsdale* left the Moorabool-street wharf with 710 passengers. Everything passed right merrily until six o'clock in the evening, when the vessel was returning with her living freight to this port. The atmosphere was rather thick with smoke from bush fires, and there was a slight haze on the surface of the water, but at a distance of over three miles there was no difficulty of discerning objects ahead. Hugging the coast all the way from the 'Cliff, Captain John Richardson kept the *Lonsdale* in shallow water, and, missing one of the buoys marking off the deep water, he landed the steamer on St. George's bank, a large patch of sand extending from the shore to about three-quarters of a mile into the sea. The vessel was travelling at the rate of eleven knots per hour, and had reached a position about midway between St. Leonards and Portarlington, the latter township being nearly three miles distant. The steamer bumped heavily on the ground three times before she came to a standstill by planting her prow well into the sandy bottom, over which there was a depth of water to the extent of 6ft 9in. The tide was rapidly falling, and all hope of getting clear until the tide rose had to be abandoned after several ineffectual attempts to get off had been made. Fortunately the water was perfectly calm, and the consternation among the passengers, about half of whom were females, was not as marked as it would have been under other circumstances. The misfortune was good-humoredly borne, despite the aggravating sight of watching the steamers *Edina* and *Excelsior* steaming away to Melbourne, apparently unaware of the position of the *Lonsdale*, which was a long way out of her proper course. What object the captain had in being so close in shore when the shoal is so distinctly marked on the bay charts will be a matter for the consideration of the Steam Navigation Board, and it would be unfair to prejudge

the case. When it was ascertained that there was no probability of the vessel being again afloat until three o'clock on Friday morning the passengers resigned themselves to their fates, being assured by the captain that unless the sea became rough there was no cause for alarm. A substantial tea was prepared, and those persons who had not provided for themselves procured all provisions at moderate prices. The steamer was well found by the caterer, there being an abundant and ample supply of everything requisite to satisfy the appetites of the great crowd of excursionists. In the meantime a fishing smack put off from St. Leonards, and it was engaged to convey the chief officer of the steamer to Portarlington, so that a telegram might be sent to Melbourne for assistance. Among those who went ashore in the boat were Mr Foster, president of the Ballarat Licensed Victuallers' Association, and Mr H. Wright, one of the railway guards, and telegrams were sent to Geelong and Ballarat giving brief information regarding the accident. At nine o'clock in the evening the boat returned with two other boats, one being under the charge of Mounted-constable Wilson, of Portarlington, who informed the captain that he had duly notified at headquarters in Geelong and Melbourne the unfortunate position of the steamer, and that he would willingly assist the vessel and passengers. One boat from Portarlington remained by the steamer until midnight, and the constable and the fishermen stayed until the steamer got afloat shortly before half-past 2 o'clock yesterday morning, she having been aground nearly eight hours and a half. The enforced imprisonment on board the *Lonsdale* was borne with, as the lion. C. E. Jones remarked, "Christian fortitude," which was taken as a special compliment from a consistent teetotaler as applied to "publicans and sinners." Mr Jones speedily set to work in entertaining the passengers on the quarter-deck, which was rigged up as a concert hall, and well lighted with the electric lights. Songs, recitations, and humorous readings and speeches were indulged in, and the audience appreciated the special efforts made by the ladies and gentlemen who volunteered to amuse them. In another part of the large steamer a brass band from Ballarat was engaged for a ball, given on the spacious deck; in a third quarter an improvised minstrel troupe gave an entertainment, in which Messrs E. Knight, W. Beales, and H. Kohn, of Geelong, were the chief elements in the comic business. The sons of Scotia and as many of their friends as had "an ear for pipe music" assembled on the bows of the *Lonsdale* and listened to

as they were on pipe music associated on the bows of the Lonsdale and listened to the clever manipulation of the bagpipes by a Highlander resident in Ballarat, and who wore distinguishing medals for service in Egypt and elsewhere. Parties of quoit and card players were formed in all parts of the steamer, so that the time on hand was spent as merrily as circumstances would permit. Persons who preferred to sleep away the annoyance of the detention were "coiled up" in every direction, and fortunately the night air on the bay was just warm enough to be agreeable without rendering it necessary to search for blankets and overcoats. During the whole of the time the Lonsdale was aground anxious eyes strained in the direction of Melbourne in search for the lights of a steamer which it had been promised would be sent to the assistance of the excursionists. None, however, were in sight, and disappointment was expressed in many quarters. At two a.m. a slight trembling in the steamer indicated that the rapidly making tide was lifting the vessel off the bed of sand, and, assisted by her powerful paddles, the Lonsdale drew gradually out of the ground and went astern into deep water shortly before 2.30 a.m. After going astern for half a mile a steamer's lights were observed on the starboard bow, emerging from the thick haze which overspread the sea. The steamer bore down to the Lonsdale, and it was discovered to be the favorite old tug boat the Williams, which had been searching in the mist for the Lonsdale for some hours, but her captain would not go further in shore when the man at the lead signalled that only 3 fathoms were registered by the line. The guiding buoy from the channel leading from Queenscliff, and which would have given the captain of the Lonsdale an opportunity of ascertaining his whereabouts, could not be found by either vessel, and the Williams was ordered to Melbourne, as her services were not required. Captain Richardson determined upon anchoring until daylight, much against the will of the president of the Victuallers' Association. At five a.m. the fog commenced to lift off the land, and under very easy steam the Lonsdale was permitted to creep up abreast of the Portarlington jetty, and even then not far enough away from the shore to ensure safety. The engines were slowed down owing to the density of the haze on the bay, and Geelong was ultimately reached at seven a.m. Throughout the night people in this town who had relatives on board the Lonsdale kept anxious watch in the vicinity of the wharves for the missing steamer, and when she emerged from the smoke and mist close up to the

missing steamer, and when she emerged from the smoke and mist close up to the western baths, or half a mile from the true course, a sigh of relief was emitted by most of the passengers. Although no ill-feeling was exhibited by the excursionists, there was no concealment of the fact that they were annoyed at the mishap which had made a miserable failure of the publicans' picnic this year, which had promised to be the greatest success achieved by the association. The special trains which had been engaged to convey the picnickers back to Ballarat were found waiting at the railway station, and the party left for the goldfields city about half an hour after arriving at the Moorabool-street wharf.
