

Isle of Wight County Press
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“THIS WAS A MAN”

The glory of a brave self-sacrificing deed streaks with light the gloom occasioned by the sad fatality which occurred near the Needles on Saturday morning last. The cutter of the yacht Corinne (Mr Chas. GOSCHEN) was sailing in Scratchell's Bay, having on board the nephew and niece of the owner – children aged respectively nine and thirteen – and a crew of five men. A sudden gust from the land capsized the boat, and there immediately ensued a terrible struggle for life in the strong running tide. While the rest of the crew appear to have looked only to their own safety, the mate – brave John GAWN – directed his efforts towards saving the two children. He made for the place where he saw them struggling, he reached them, he took them both in his strong grasp, and swam for some distance with them, bearing them up one on either shoulder. Fortunately a boat, with willing hands on board, was near, and the children were rescued; but Gawn, utterly exhausted, sank. He rose and was pulled into the boat; but it was too late. The brave heart had ceased its beating. The act of self-sacrifice was perfected – the truly-heroic GAWN had perished in his successful endeavour to save the children.

At the inquest on the body of the deceased on Monday, the jury placed on record their high appreciation of his conduct, and at the same time some surprise was expressed that he received no help from his comrades. We share this surprise, though we know how strong in ordinary mortals is the instinct leading them to think first of saving their own lives, and few and far between as the visits of angels are those nobler souls in whom the law of self-preservation is annulled by the sublimer law of self-sacrifice. Amongst there the gallant GAWN now takes his place, and his epitaph might well read, in Shakespeare's words, “This was a man.”