

Wreck of the San Francisco—Rescue of Passengers.

The wreck of the Steamer San Francisco is a most remarkable sea-disaster.

She was a new vessel—well built—had every thing necessary—and as a craft of the sea was considered as strong as any vessel could be built.

The San Francisco was chartered by Government, and had on board over 900 souls.

Now for the voyage, the wreck, the rescue:

The San Francisco left New York, December 22d. That day, and the next, light breezes played upon the water. As the night of the 23d drew to a close, a fresh breeze sprung up,—the clouds heavy, and the wind angry. On the 24th, buffeting winds blew. Now it was calm; now wild. But at 9 P. M., the whistle of the tempest was heard, and the sea rose rapidly.

At 10 P. M., that day, the San Francisco broached to, head to the northward.

Every effort was now made to stem the waves, and to escape the violence of the winds.

In vain. The tempest blew the sails into rags—steam, even, was powerless. The ship at 11 P. M., that day, was going ten knots, when she again broached to, to northward, and all efforts to get her off, failed.

The sails were rent—the ship labored severely. All the people were ordered forward in order to prepare for the worst.

At 1½ P. M., the engine stopped—the end of the air pump piston rod breaking off, the sparker, also, blowing away, leaving the steamer at the mercy of the wind and waves.

Now came a scene which baffles description. The ship lay in a trough of the sea. Every wave which came tearing her guards, loosening her flanks fore and aft on both sides, and making her a wreck. The water began to gain. The ship was lightened; all hands were engaged in clearing decks; bail-gangs were arranged; but all seemed to avail nothing.

At 7 P. M., the foremast went overboard with all the rigging attached. At 9 A. M., shipped a heavy sea, which swept the sides of the ship, and washed overboard a large number of the passengers, including Col. Washington, Major Taylor and wife, Capt. Field, Lieut. Smith, two ladies, names unknown, three civilians, also unknown, and about 150 privates: Brooks (a waiter), the barber, and a young man named Duckett (the carpenter's brother) were killed. Up to this time the water had gained much.—The ship was now open in the seams over the wales. A large part of her quarter deck was stove in, and it was only by the greatest exertions that the ship was kept afloat. A gang of soldiers was set apart to hold blankets around the shafts to prevent the flowing in of water. Made an attempt to cut away the mizzen mast, but it could not be accomplished on account of the ship's laboring.

The scene here was terrible. Lieut. Winder thus describes the wild fury of the wave which caused death to stand out upon the waters as a living thing:

I had gone below but a few moments before this terrible crash, and was lying at the foot of the steps at the time. I never experienced such a sensation as when the water came pouring into the cabin, together with the debris of the upper cabin, down upon my head and breast. I was swept across the cabin with terrible force, but after three attempts succeeded in regaining my feet. I supposed that the ship had broken in half, and that we were fast sinking. I followed after some I saw going on deck, and on reaching it my blood ran cold at the sight of the poor fellows struggling among the fragments in the sea; the waves were, to my eyes, frightful; we could render no assistance whatever, and, in fact, expected ourselves that we should go down every minute. With great difficulty we clung to the deck, the sea making a perfect breach over us, and the cold so great that an hour longer must have finished us. Close by me was Major Wyse, his young wife and babe. It was a truly heart-rending sight. The poor child must have been nearly frozen. About this time Mr. Medires, the first officer of the ship, than whom no braver sea-

man lives, came aft with an axe; this not only surprised me, but greatly raised my hopes. I watched him closely until he approached the only remaining mast. He attempted to cut it away, but the sea ran so high that he was unable to do it. This was the first time I was aware that the ship was not full of water. Soon after this our gallant Commodore Watkins came along. I asked him what our chances were; he replied, "Good." I then determined to get into the cabin.

Dec. 25.—The ship labored heavily; but the leaks did not gain. During that night the weather moderated. Then, lo, a vessel heaved in sight. Oh, the joy of that hour! But Dec. 26 a fresh gale began, with a high sea, when the Maria of Liverpool hove in sight! And the cheers of the soldiers told of their hope and joy. But the wild winds blew, and soon neither the Maria nor Napoleon were to be seen.

Dec. 27.—The heavens were black, and the sea in tumult. The steamer was lightened, wreck cleared, and every preparation made for the worst. Cut away officers' rooms and upper deck, and shifted the steering wheel aft on quarter deck. During the night, much the same. Nothing to be seen of the Maria. At 10 o'clock, A. M., started the engine; it worked about ten minutes and the bucket again gave out. Bent the storm-mizzen. Lost a seaman overboard named Alexander. Saw a bark hove to windward.

Dec. 29.—Moderate and pleasant. The sea going down quite fast. The bark sent a boat, and Capt. Watkins, of the San Francisco, went on board, and soon returned, and commenced embarking passengers at about 2.30 P. M. At 3 P. M., ran a hawser to the bark, to which she held on. Before night, succeeded in getting on board the Kilby upwards of 100 persons, men, women, and children, including Col. Gates and family, Capt. Gardner, Lieut. Murray, Major Merchant and family, Capt. Judd and lady, Lieut. Fremont and family, Mr. G. W. Aspinwall, and Mr. J. L. Graham. Also sent on board a quantity of stores. During the night, the wind increasing, with squally weather. At 10 P. M., the Kilby let go our hawser. In the morning, nothing to be seen of the Kilby. Later part, a gale of wind from southwest, and cloudy. Louis Hestator died, (a waiter.)

Dec. 30.—Throughout the day a strong gale from the southwest, and cloudy weather, with showers of rain. The ship laboring heavily, and striking hard under her guards and beams. Carried away the port after-guard. A larger number sick, and many dying daily. Heaving coal overboard.

Dec. 31.—Continues with a moderate gale from the southwest, and cloudy weather.—The soldiers heaving coal overboard. During the night much the same. At about 2 A. M. made a ship standing to windward.—Fired guns throughout the remainder of the night. At 9½ A. M. was spoken by the British ship Three Bells, of Glasgow, and the Captain promised to lay by us. Latter part of the night employed as above. Wm. Wilson, mate, died.

Jan. 1.—Throughout the day a strong gale from the northwest, and heavy sea, the ship laboring heavily. The Three Bells still kept in company, and occasionally passing close under our lee. Many of the people sick, and dying fast.

Jan. 2.—Continues with a fresh gale from the northwest, and high sea. The wind more moderate. Built two rafts, cut away the ship's guards, stopping leaks, &c. Launched one raft, and made it fast. At daylight, the raft gone. The ship still in company, and passing under our lee.

Jan. 3.—Continues with a moderate gale from the northwest and cloudy weather.—At about 1 P. M. the Three Bells' boat came alongside. Sent Mr. Gretton, second officer, on board to charter the Three Bells to the United States government, through Wyre, the senior officer on board. Latter part moderating some. The Three Bells holding on to the windward. At about 8-30 made another sail running before the wind and apparently steering directly for us. Hoisted our colors, union down. The strange sail shortened sail, and passed close under our stern; spoke to us, and asked if we wished

to leave the ship—to which Capt. Watkins replied he did. The Captain of the Antarctic then told us to be of good cheer, that he would have us all off. He then filled his main topsail, and shot ahead some three miles.

Jan. 4.—She wore ship and lowered away two boats. The Three Bells also sent her boat, and we succeeded in embarking some seventy or eighty passengers before night.—During the night moderate and pleasant with a prospect of a fine day. Fired our guns through the night, and our companions burned blue lights. At 7 A. M. commenced embarking our passengers again. The Three Bells' long boat out, and she being short of provisions and water, the long boat was much used for transporting water and provisions. To-day the Antarctic was able to lower only one boat for want of oars.

Jan. 5.—Continues moderate and pleasant. Getting along quite fast and embarking troops and provisions. At sunset had all the passengers, a quantity of provisions and water embarked. During the night quite pleasant. At 7 A. M. commenced again at landing water, provisions, &c., to the Three Bells, also the crew. At 10.30 A. M. all out of the ship except Capt. Watkins, Mr. Marshall, (chief engineer,) and myself; we then left, Capt. Watkins, being the last. Capt. Watkins, Mr. Schell, (purser, Mr. Barton, 3d officer, and Mr. Mason, 4th officer, with Lieut. Chandler, Lieut. Winder, Mr. Rankin, and carpenter, Washington Duckett—excepting the above, all officers of the ship and army, returned in the Three Bells.

Lt. Winder says:—
On the bark Kilby there are about 50 men, of company J. Mr. George Aspinwall, Lorimer Graham of N. Y., Capt. Gardner of the Dragons, Col. Yates and family, Major Merchant and family, Col. Burke, Drs. Shatterlee, Wirtz, Capt. Judd and lady, Lieut. Loser and lady, and their sister: Lt. Fremont and family, and Lieut. Van Vost. When the Kilby left she had but a small quantity of provisions and water; great doubts are expressed as to her safety. Provisions were being conveyed on board of the Kilby, and a boat that was sent to her for that purpose was unable to return, owing to the roughness of the weather. I may as well relate a melancholy incident in this connection. On board this boat was Commissary Sergeant McIntire; he was carried off by the Kilby, while his wife and two children remained on board the San Francisco. The mother and one of her children died on board the Three Bells; the second child, a fair-haired little boy of three years old, has been adopted by the soldiers, who tend him with almost maternal solicitude. But to return—toward daylight this morning, the aspect of our affairs was the darkest, and most disheartening we had. During that day the pumps were declared useless; we kept quiet, however; the ladies being out of the way, we felt somewhat relieved. To lighten the ship we cut holes through the deck, and commenced throwing the fuel and other heavy articles overboard.

About two days after this time, the Three Bells, Capt. Creighton, came in sight; we first saw his lights during the night, and fired signal guns for assistance. He bore up for us in the morning, but the sea ran so high that we could only communicate by means of writing questions and answers with chalk in large letters upon a board.—In reply to a request to lay by us, he said he was short of provisions and leaking badly. He wore ship and passed us; as he did so, himself and crew gave us three hearty cheers as an assurance that he would not desert us; he assured we replied to these demonstrations no less heartily. He drew ahead and laid his vessel to, and remained by us during the night. On the next day, the sea still running very high, and we having no boats and he only two, we made two rafts for conveying the passengers on board his ship, but found that they could not live in the sea that was then running. On the third night came near losing him. On the fourth day another sail appeared to windward of us, close by the Three Bells, and the latter signaled her. Both bore down for us. The second ship proved to be the Antarctic, bound for Liverpool. Both laid by us that

night, as it was too rough to do anything more than getting off a few of the men. On the fifth day, being fine, we transported all of the officers, passengers and crew, with the exception of the ship's officers, engineers and firemen, numbering some 25 or 30 men. We also succeeded in getting some provisions and water conveyed on board of the Three Bells. We kept the men at the pumps during the day and night, and discovered and stopped her leak. The next morning we got off all the remainder of those who were on the San Francisco, and made sail for New York, and the Antarctic sailed for Liverpool.

Previous to falling in with the Three Bells, a sort of congestive diarrhoea broke out among the men on board the San Francisco, owing to exposure to wet and cold, over work, and an undue indulgence in the pickled meats, pickled cabbage, &c. Those who were seized by this disease, died in a few hours after the attack. Corporal Smith, of Company G, came to me and said his child was sick; the doctor visited it, and an hour after the man himself sent for me, as he was dying. I went to him and ascertained that such was the case. Soon after I was informed by his wife that her husband and child were dead. I had her brought into the cabin and put into a state room with her child and sister. During the night the mother was found dead, and she was followed soon after by the other child. The sister still survives. Many cases occurred, and many robust persons were seized in one hour and died the next. About thirty persons died upon the Three Bells.

This ship brought home 135 men, as follows: companies G, 14; A, 18; D, 25; L, 19; B, 14; I, 12; H, 12; K, 13; and 8 musicians. The Antarctic carried off Lts. C. S. Winder, and J. G. Chandler, together with 175 non-commissioned officers, women, musicians and privates.

I cannot accord too much praise to Capt. Creighton, and his officers, for their bravery and uniform kindness to us unfortunates.—They are indeed our saviors, and nothing can possibly repay them for their self-sacrificing humanity, save the warm glow of satisfaction that necessarily accompanies conduct so eminently humane and philanthropic.

When we arrived in port we had just half a day's allowance of water, and the continuance of yesterday's fog would have placed us in a desperate situation. For several days previous we were put upon short allowance of water, so that you see we escaped one peril, but came near suffering another not much less appalling.

I would desire to speak in terms of fitting commendation of a worthy man who eminently distinguished himself on board of the San Francisco; I mean Sergeant Brown, who, for five nights, during the most terrific period of the storm, labored unceasingly in keeping the ship clear of water, and by his energy and self-sacrificing devotion did more to keep his fellow soldiers to their duty than almost any other man on board.

One of the most terrible features of this shocking disaster, was the outbreak of cholera, occasioned by the dissipation of a portion of the troops, and of the white and colored waiters. While the ship was at the mercy of the waves, many of these individuals, as is too often the case at such seasons, determined since they had given up the idea of escaping to enjoy themselves before the ship went down. In the confusion that prevailed, the store-room was left unfastened, and the contents were too tempting to be withstood. They accordingly indulged their appetites without restraint. They partook of preserves, cakes, sweetmeats, dainties of all kinds *ad libitum*, and then repaired to the spirit room, where they washed down their repasts with copious and undiluted draughts. The effects of this conduct unexpectedly manifested themselves in violent attacks of cramp and diarrhoea. Some of the debauchees died in less than ten hours from the time of seizure; others laid a day or two, while some recovered altogether. We are informed by an officer that nearly sixty individuals perished in this manner, some dying on board the Three Bells, while on her way to this port; others were put on board the Antarctic, so much reduced by diarrhoea as to give but little prospect of recovery.