

THE POLYNESIAN.

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COMMUNICATED.

To the Editor of the Polynesian,
SIR,—I enclose you a brief account of the Wreck of the Whaler Independence, and a nineteen days voyage in a whale-boat, performed by myself and others, which I have been requested to make public through your valuable paper. Four years have elapsed since the events transpired, but should you judge the narrative one that would interest your readers, you are at liberty to place it before them.

Yours respectfully,
M. CALKIN.

Honolulu, Sept. 22, 1840.

How do you head? South by east, sir. Mr. Gibson, keep the ship to the wind, and call me at 12 o'clock. Thus said Capt. Brayton, as he left the deck at 9 o'clock on the evening of Dec. 13, 1835.

The Independence had been at sea twenty five months, and had nearly accomplished the object of her voyage; a few days of successful fishing, and her course would have been homeward; but fate, and Starbuck Island had other plans in view for our amusement. At sunset the island bore south east, distant about 15 miles, the ship steering by the wind, headed south by east; at 9 o'clock Capt. B. judged the land to bear about east, 10 miles distant, which would place the ship out of all danger, as the land was directly to windward. Consequently he left the ship in charge of the watch on deck, and retired to his berth, and unfortunately for us the watch on deck retired to the windlass and forehatches for the same laudable purpose—even the boy at the helm in his somnific indulgence did not dream of danger. The ship thus left her own master, took it upon herself to obey to the letter the last injunction of Capt. B. "keep her to the wind."

The wind which by common consent is allowed of all things to be most fickle and changeable, hauled to the north which brought the ship to head directly for the island, and ten minutes before 11 o'clock she struck the reef with such force as to tear her bottom out, and her keel and floor timbers came floating alongside. It was but the work of a moment to lower away the boats and pull out to seaward of the breakers which rose dashing against the rocks with frightful fury. The next sea which came rolling in, unshipped the rudder and burst in the cabin windows. Capt. B. and a boats crew including myself remained on board to secure the instruments and charts.

Finding that the ship was not likely to go to pieces immediately, we commenced throwing overboard such articles as would drift ashore. Bread, clothing, casks of water, &c. At ten minutes before 12 finding the surf rising fast and breaking over her, we got out another boat and left her with what few things we had saved, and anchored at a distance from the ship.

At daylight the surf had risen so as to render it impossible to board the wreck with the boats. Capt. B. and a boats crew jumped overboard and swam to her, and after throwing overboard the pigs, fowls, turkeys and goats, and cutting away the masts, swam back to the boats in safety. At 2 P. M. we effected a landing without accident, but not without difficulty. The island was surrounded by a coral reef, on which the surf broke with great violence, but by watching a good opportunity we pulled in on the crest of

a heavy roller and the instant the boat touched bottom all hands jumped out and carried her ashore, before a succeeding wave could overtake us, and in this manner we landed all our boats in safety.

On our arrival at the ship, one mile from our landing, we found she had forced her way about 10 feet into the reef, crushing the coral-rocks so as to hold her fast by the head, which prevented her swinging round broadside to the shore. In which case without doubt we should all have perished, as the surf would have swept her decks, and she have gone to pieces before any thing could have been saved. And had we escaped the danger of the surf, it would only have been to meet a fate more horrid still, of death from hunger and thirst on a barren shore, without a boat, chart or compass to enable us to leave the island.

The ship's jib boom projected so far over the rocks as to enable us to board her from the shore; by which means we saved many articles of use, and sails for tents. The goats and pigs and a few fowls reached the shore in safety, also most of the things cast overboard the night before. After having erected our tents, we laid our weary limbs on the sand and slept soundly.

After partaking of such a breakfast as we were glad to get, we formed two parties. One to remain by the wreck and save such articles as might wash ashore, and the other to traverse the island in search of water. The island lies in Lat. 5° 39' south, and Long. 155° 56' west; it is about fifteen miles in circumference, and the highest point fifteen feet above the level of the ocean, is of coral formation, destitute of vegetation except a shrub of scrubby growth from one to three feet high, which grows in patches and afforded shelter to immense numbers of birds nests.

About sunset the discovery party arrived, having ascertained that no water could be obtained on the island. They had dugged in many places but found nothing but salt water. They had in their route picked up the remains of two pistols, one musket, a bucket, and several case bottles, one of which had contained papers; the cork had decayed and the paper had become wet and adhered to the sides of the bottle. The musket had been destroyed by rust, the thick portion only of the barrel remaining and the brass trimmings lying beside it, with the ramrod which had rusted down to about the size of a knitting pin. Two deck beams of a large ship and a capstain also were found partially covered with earth, over which shrubbery had grown.

The ship continued to break up by the action of the surf and to float ashore in broken fragments; several casks of bread and small stores came ashore, also a few casks of water, and one of the try pots washed up on the beach. After the luxury of a cold water tea, we called all hands together for a consultation on the propriety of leaving the island in the boats. Twelve out of twenty-two of us decided to take the boats and steer for the Society Islands. Bearing south easterly about 11 degrees distant.

The remaining 10 of our number chose to take their chance on the island, in hopes some vessel might pick them up—not wishing to risk themselves in the

boats. Now our plans were hid, we set about putting them into execution as soon as possible. We took the try pot which would contain about three barrels and fitted a cover to it, suspending over it a large cask into which was inserted a pipe leading from the boiler. This served as a condenser for the steam. The boiler was then filled with sea water and a fire kindled with wood from the wreck. It has been said that a watched pot never boils; but despite that saying, our pot did boil, notwithstanding it was watched with an intensity of interest, by those whose lives might and probably would have depended upon the success of the experiment. Joy beamed in every countenance when in about two hours our rude distillery sent forth a small, but steady stream of fine fresh water. And it proved to be literally a fountain of life to those whom we left on the island. The goats and fowls remained about the tents, but the hogs became immediately wild, so that it was necessary when we wished to kill one, to lay in wait for them as they came down to the shore in the night and dart the harpoon into them. The shore of the island was lined with fish, and the interior with a great variety of birds and eggs. A few turtle also wandered up the beach during the night, some of which never wandered back again, having met with a reverse not only of fortune, but position. Several casks of bread had washed up the beach, so that we judged it safe for those who wished to remain on the island to do so.

Dec. 19, got things in readiness and attempted to launch our boats for leaving the island, but the surf ran so high that we were compelled to relinquish the undertaking, after having capsized our boat and severely bruising the second mate and myself among the rocks in the breakers.

The wind continued strong from the north east, with a heavy sea which dashed against the rocks forming a complete wall of foam and spray around the island, bidding defiance to any attempt which we might make to pass their bounds. Making a virtue of necessity, we hauled our boat up again and deciding to remain on the island for the time being, we erected a flag staff and set a signal after which we mustered all hands for council.

With the loss of the ship Captain B. lost the legal right of command over the crew. Thus we were thrown together a little community without government, which though small bid fair soon to be one of the most independent little colonies imaginable. Foreseeing the difficulties which might arise in a company of men without law or restraint, we voted to form a government. Accordingly we elected a Governor, Lieut. Governor, Sheriff, and four Constables, who were to frame a code of laws and present them to the community with the penalties attached. This to some may seem ludicrous but we found the advantage of it directly. Our statesmen and officers who were not enticed into office for the sake of the spoils, were no doubt of the very first quality, but fortunately never had occasion to prove themselves such.

Dec. 24. The surf had so far gone down as to encourage us to make another attempt to launch the boats, which we effected without accident. Captain B. the

first mate and myself took each a boat and three men, making twelve of us. When ready for sea our sea stores and outfits read thus; to each boat thirty gallons water, sixty pounds bread, and one change of sea clothes per man, which was as much as the boats would carry with safety—if the word safety could be properly applied to such an expedition. We left our comrades on the island supplied with one boat, quadrants, charts, and compass, books, clothing, and about two years supply of bread, which with the natural resources of the island and distillery, we thought might make them comfortable for at least two years.

At sunset we waved a parting adieu to our comrades who were sitting on the beach, and spreading our little sails bid adieu to Starbuck Island and its tenants. Thus we cast ourselves loose upon the mighty ocean and the mercy of heaven with sensations which, to be realized, must be felt.

Captain B. had a good chronometer which made it desirable that we should keep company with him, and we carried lights during the night for that purpose. We shaped our course for the Society Islands and run through the night with a strong wind and rough sea, giving us to understand that a voyage of necessity was not necessarily a voyage of comfort. It required one man to steer, one to bale water out of the boat as it washed over her side, one to hold on to the main sheet in case of a sudden squall, and the last to look out for the other boats; so the only way that we could relieve the watch was to change our respective occupations in the boats. This we did for two days and nights, but nature would be trifled with no longer. Judge of my surprise when on the third night I awoke and found myself fast asleep, which was literally a fact. I had a consciousness of existence and knew that I was positively asleep and also knew the danger of being asleep, but had not power to shake off my drowsiness. I strove and strove again to conquer, till in imagination I was engaged in a deadly combat with some huge monster whose terrifying growl broke the spell. I sprang up in a fright at the risk I had run expecting the severest censure from my comrades for my imprudence, which I no doubt should have received, but for the simple fact that every soul of them was fast asleep and some of them imitating to perfection the monstrous growl that frightened me into existence. I of course denounced the whole bunch of them as a set of sleepy heads and spoke largely on the folly of putting all our lives in jeopardy for the sake of a nap. Our boat was her own mistress for about three hours, and really behaved like a lady, that is, she had her own way, but the risk we had run was frightful.

At daylight we found that we had parted company with the mate's boat, and put back a few miles in search of them fearing they might have met with some accident; dangers surrounded us on every side; running at the rate of about six miles the hour we were in danger of capsizing by any sudden change of the the wind—of shipping a sea and foundering, of running on to a whale, or against a floating piece of wood—and more especially were we in danger from the presumptuous but well meant gambols of a shoal of Porpoises, which