

be, although she assumed matrimonial honours. She was a bold, pretending, and disagreeable woman, of dubious character, and unlady-like behaviour.

5th. Mr. Johnson and Mrs. Morris, our unfortunate North American passengers, mentioned a few pages back.

We are now enjoying beautiful weather, and I shall resume (D.V.), from Vera Cruz, where we expect to arrive on Tuesday, the 1st.

LETTER VII.

THE SHIPWRECK.

Campeachy, Yucatan,

19th January, 1849.

“CAMPEACHY! Yucatan! 19th January, when you ought to have been in Vera Cruz on the 16th!” Such would have been your natural exclamation, had this account of our voyage reached you first; but although it will not be so, I must proceed to chronicle, even more minutely than heretofore, the new and unlooked-for events and misadventures of our voyage.

We got out of Havana harbour, as I have said, on the morning of the 12th, re-passing the “Morro,” at about nine A.M. We picked up four new passengers, as we were clearing the bay:—a German professor of Daguerriotype, with a Spanish lady, whom he had lately married, and loaded also with his whole stock in trade, with a view to setting up in Mexico. The others were a padre or priest,

from old Spain, a somewhat queer-looking individual; and his companion, a younger man. He might have been the padre's son, were it not that the Catholic clergy, however burthened with a nepotic tribe, are removed from filial claims by their vow of celibacy, and their typical marriage with holy church.

We had a fine run on Friday and Saturday, and now our conversation began to turn on the fatal reefs of Alacranes (*anglice*, scorpions), and on which, it is in the recollection of all, the Tweed was wrecked two years ago. Our surgeon on board the Forth was the same Dr. Rowland who was in the hapless Tweed, and whose conduct, on that occasion, obtained for him so much, and such well-merited praise.

The caution, vigilance, and experience of Captain Sturdee guaranteed to us that no similar misfortune could overtake the gallant Forth.

On Saturday we were all in high spirits; and Captain Sturdee informed his passengers generally, that we could not pass the reef before eight o'clock next morning. He had obtained excellent astral observations, and his course showed a distance of twenty miles from the reefs, when we should come

abreast of them. At noon we were a hundred and seventy-five miles off; and, as we were going eight to eight and a half knots, that gave us till eight o'clock next morning to come to a parallel line with the reef.

Captain Sturdee having the account of the loss of the Tweed, written by Mr. Cameron, the Company's Agent at St. Thomas's, I read it on Saturday forenoon; and at night, when talking of the Alacranes, I said to him (Captain S.) half in joke half in earnest: "Now, let me offer one piece of advice; *Give the Alacranes a very wide berth!*" Without answering me, our commander took my arm, and carried me to his cabin: "Now then," he said, "I wish to show you exactly where we are, and what we are doing." And so he did; and that so satisfactorily, that I went to bed (it was past eleven), fully assured that we were really giving the Alacranes a very wide offing.

Shortly after five in the morning, and while darkness still struggled with the dawn, hurried steps on deck, with some loud orders given, half wakened me from my sleep; in a few seconds after, a movement of the ship made me start up in my berth. I knew the movement and the sound too

well. I had been wrecked before. We were among rocks. I was unable to conceive where we could be. I hurried on my trowsers. I passed H—'s cabin door, with a sinking heart. The vessel now swayed so frightfully from side to side, that I was dashed alternately on the opposite panels of the long passage which formed one range of our cabins. Emerging from it, I was thrown on the second deck. The noises on board, and the dashings of the ship against the rocks, were terrific. I scrambled up the companion. What a scene to witness! Foaming, frantic breakers dashing up against and over the ship, and roaring around us! Sea—only sea, white with foam on every side! And every one staggering, holding on, bewildered with the incessant crashing of the ship's sides and works and machinery, among the sunken rocks.

I saw all in one look: there was nothing but despair; no hope of salvation. To all appearance, the ship was rapidly going to pieces, and about to mingle her timbers and her wreck, with our own bodies, in this furious surf, among the surrounding sharp-pointed rocks.

The idea of such a fate impending momentarily over H—, unmanned me. My soul was filled with

unutterable anguish. I was to prepare her at once to die; and to meet, in the midst of health, so awful, so cruel a death, before my very eyes! So young, so full of life and hope; impelled by the strength of her affections to follow me across the deep; and now, without a moment's warning, to seal her filial piety with her blood! Never shall I forget, for a day together, the grief and agony of that moment.

All that I have here set down passed in three or four minutes; that is, from the time of "Breakers a-head" being called out, to the moment of my rushing down from the main-deck to H—'s cabin, to bring her up while there was yet time. All were now astir; and I found H—, trembling and agitated, in the passage. Instead of comforting her, I could only tell her to prepare to die; that we had no hope. But I urged her upon deck, undressed as she was, only adding her slippers and cloak. I recollected the Tweed. With the same difficulty as before, listening still to crashes which sounded as the knell of every one on board, holding on, swaying backwards and forwards, slipping, bruised and wet, we got to one of the side-seats on deck, where the evening before we

had sat so securely, enjoying the breeze, and talking of our approaching arrival at Vera Cruz.

Meantime, the first noise and confusion inseparable from such a state of things having been hushed by Captain Sturdee, he then calmly, but resolutely, told every one on board, that the safety of all depended on order and silence being maintained; that the responsibility rested with him; and that he *must* be obeyed. He then went on giving out his commands with admirable coolness and precision. I had H— reclining in my arms, while Captain Sturdee himself, Lieutenant Molesworth, Dr. Rowland, and others, came to re-assure her of ultimate safety; although I knew well, in my own mind, they had then no more hope than I had myself.

At that moment, at the commencement, we had, I say, no hope; but the first movement of despair very soon gave way to calmer feelings: and it is remarkable, as well as most creditable to the females on board, that not one cry, shriek, or lamentation was heard from beginning to end of our perilous shipwreck.

The "Forth" struck at twenty minutes past five on Sunday morning, January 14th. Captain

Sturdee, as was the case with myself, could not comprehend, at first, *where* we were. It appeared a physical impossibility that we should be on the Alacranes; but while he was making the remark to me, our worthy friend Rowland, who stood by, gravely shook his head, and said, it looked to him the *very place*. And too true it was: as daylight opened up, we discovered that we were on that fatal reef; and that, whatever might become of the passengers, the fate of the ship was inevitable, for nothing now could prevent her from going to pieces.

We had at first expected and feared that the "Forth" would immediately break up, even before the boats could be lowered, as a last resource for the preservation of life. We were, however, agreeably surprised to find the ship, although full of water, holding together, which, of course, was our salvation; the fact being, that, after the first few tremendous blows which the vessel received, whilst striking against the wall, as it were, of the coralline mass, Captain Sturdee was able to back her, and then run her inside the reef, where, rocking and swaying and crashing still, the "Forth" made herself a bed between two ledges, which held her

frame upright, as in a narrow slip. We did not at all foresee this temporary safety on board; and therefore Captain Sturdee continued to take his measures towards saving the lives of his passengers and ship's company, in case of the vessel suddenly breaking up. He gave orders to hoist out the two life-boats, capable of holding from sixty to eighty persons each. Our minds, meantime, were greatly relieved by perceiving how remarkably and unexpectedly well our strong ship bravely withstood the blows of the coral rocks, and the buffetings of the wild breakers. The life-boat on the port side of the ship was stove in by a heavy surf, and we were a good deal disheartened to see her thus rendered entirely useless. But with the boat on the starboard side we were more fortunate; for it was got safely over the ship's side, and floated beneath us. One after another, the rest of the boats were launched—the pinnace, the gig, the mail-boat, and the cutter.

When I saw we must get into the life-boat, and there be exposed to all the roughness of the sea, I determined to return to H—'s cabin for some more clothing. The ship was rolling as much as ever, and it was a difficult matter to go below.

I only found for H— a dressing-gown and velvet cape. I then went into my own cabin, and laid hold of my own dressing-gown, a good thick one, and therefore a prize. I did not even *think* of bringing up either money or papers: I only thought of our lives; indeed, I can safely say, I only thought of H—'s preservation.

As I returned with the things saved, and had reached the last step of the companion-ladder, a sudden lurch of the ship sent me to the bottom of the stairs, head-foremost. Completely stunned for a few seconds, two or three of the ship's people kindly hastened to my support. I was assisted to the side of poor H—, whose troubles were only increased by this untoward accident.

Captain Sturdee now gave orders (seven A.M.) that all his passengers and some of his crew should get into the life-boat. Mr. Barleigh, the fourth officer, and a very fine young fellow, took the command of it; and, descending first with his men, they greatly assisted in carrying through the operation of lowering the passengers from the high deck of the rolling "Forth," to the pitching boat in the gulf below, now raised by a wave, now in a

trough of the sea, and the spray, throughout, dashing over and into her.

H—'s first impression was, that only females and children were to go into the boat; but, on learning that I and other passengers would also descend, she went more readily through the frightful trans-shipment; her hands besmeared with tar, her scanty apparel soiled and wet, her hair dishevelled, and her stockingless feet in a pair of soaking slippers.

But she was well cared for by our gallant and dexterous friend, Lieutenant Molesworth, who successively took all the children and females down to the boat, in which Barleigh stood, ready to receive each deposit as it came. Thus, the former, taking H— in his left arm, grasped a rope attached to the ship in his right hand, and, swinging himself with his burden into the air, he dropped rapidly into the unsteady boat, where Barleigh, with his own body, broke Molesworth's fall; while both secured H— from coming into contact with sharp points, or striking against the seats of the boat.

In this manner Molesworth, regardless of the

incidental blows which fell to his own share, saved the limbs of the ladies, the children, and the stewardess; and when I was about to descend as I best could (for I was much lamed in the back), Molesworth insisted on my getting on his back, and off he swung with me, and I landed without hurt on one of the seats. There was something of a rush afterwards of passengers, some meeting with cuts and bruises; yet the boat received in all seventy persons; and, under the circumstances, with an absence of accident that would be incredible, were the skill and coolness of the officers kept out of sight.

Well, we were out of the ship; but there we lay alongside, exposed to two dangers: one, of the life-boat's side being stove in against the ship, as it heavily swung about in the surf; the other, that of the reef and breakers which lay between us and smooth water. You are to understand, that the Alacranes stretch over a space of about eighteen miles in length, and eight in breadth. Round this expanse, as a band, are the *arrecifes*, or "reefs;" in the great centre are the *baxos*, or "shoals." Around and amidst the former, the peaked and jagged bulwarks of the latter, the

broken sea rages ; while over the smooth-bottomed shoals, of course, it is peaceful and unruffled.

To remain where we were, was impossible ; to pass over the reef without swamping, or having our boats knocked to pieces, seemed equally beyond a possibility. Yet we prepared for the latter alternative, at the risk of all perishing : we, in the boat, made up our minds for an immediate struggle with death, or for the chance of getting over the coral rocks, foaming with breakers, on which our ship had stranded.

To give you an idea of our appearance during the first hour, and of what was passing, is not very easy. Imagine our large, flat, uncovered barge, which, however it may be filled, will not sink, and requiring from twenty to twenty-five men to row it, with seats only for the rowers : such was our life-boat. We were all huddled together, therefore, in the bottom of the boat. Our feet and legs were immersed in the constantly accumulating sea-water, which we kept shipping in such quantities, as not only to drench us, but literally, every now and then to take away our breath. This water many of us, myself included, were engaged in baling out as we best could.

A portion of our men in the boat, released from the ordinary discipline, proved to be brawlers and blasphemers, endeavouring to command, instead of continuing to obey. The *good* men tried to restrain the other wretches, and quietly did their duty. The passengers were passive, although at the beginning three or four of them got so alarmed with the whole position of the life-boat, that they scrambled out of it, receiving many blows and bruises, but yet preferring to run their risk on board the ship.

On one side of me sat H—, all her clothes dripping ; on my other side were Mr. and Mrs. C—, the German professor of Daguerriotype, and his Spanish wife, both, but especially the latter, presenting to one's view an impersonation of silent despair. The professor was bleeding profusely from a deep wound in his foot, received on dropping into the boat : the wife, thin, pale, livid, her night-clothes soaked and adhering to her form, her long black hair wild and dishevelled, might have well formed a study for either the pencil or the chisel. Farther down sat Dr. D— and his pretty little *Chihuahua* wife, whose large dark eyes, sad yet restless, turned ever and anon on the crying

infant in her arms; while a Mr. L— and his wife (who had preferred the voyage up and down the Gulf, to quarantine at Havana), abandoned, as unmanageable, their two larger children to their terror and their screams. On the other side of H— was young Jenkin, a lad greatly attached to us; he and several others near me seeming much depressed. Herr D— looked sadly around him; while, at the prow of the boat, Herr L—, without shoes or stockings, but with abundance of philosophical *sang froid*, patiently waited the issue of our perilous adventure.

Before proceeding farther, I must go back to the primary circumstances attendant on the loss of the "Forth," seeing that on this most important point I have yet said nothing.

At eleven o'clock on Saturday night, Captain Sturdee and his first officer, Mr. Wilson, had obtained excellent sights of Aldebaran and Sirius, demonstrating, to a certainty, that we had so far made good our course, which, as laid down, carried us on a parallel with the Alacranes, at eighteen to twenty miles' distance from them. At twelve, Captain Sturdee pricked off his course on his chart: and he then found we were sixty to sixty-

four miles south-east from the edge of the Alacranes: such course, as I say, leading us completely clear of the reef. He retired to rest at twelve, with orders given to Mr. Wilson to be called at five A.M. At midnight the deep sea log was heaved, and no bottom found.

It thus appears certain that, during five hours and a half, we must have run twelve and a half knots on a leeward course; when, by dead reckoning, we were only going from eight to eight and a half knots. This can *only* be accounted for on the hypothesis that an impetuous ocean under-current had, within the last six hours of our voyage, swept us along to our fate. Yet the question is immediately asked, "How came it that the breakers were not seen before we came upon them?" They *were* seen; but unhappily Mr. Wilson, confident that he could not be near the Alacranes, did not call Captain Sturdee, believing that what the man on the look-out considered to be breakers, were only the beams of the moon falling on the horizon. Poor fellow! much he has suffered, and, I fear, must still suffer, for his involuntary mistake.

At about twenty minutes past five, however,

before the dawn of day, the man on the look-out aloft called, "Breakers a-head!" and Mr. Wilson immediately ordered the sails to be backed. At this moment Captain Sturdee had already got out of his berth, preparing to go on deck. He heard Wilson, rushed up in his shirt, saw the breakers through the dim light, and called out, "Stop her! Back her!" It was too late; we were on the reef, among the breakers; when the crashes I have mentioned commenced. As a last resource, "Turn a-head: full speed!" was ordered; and by this and some subsequent manœuvre, the ship swayed round, and got into a dock-like bed within the outer reef; to which circumstance, under a merciful Providence, we doubtless owed our safety. Had the ship remained a few minutes more, perhaps one, outside the reef, where she got her first great blow, she must have become unmanageable altogether, have gone to pieces, and every soul on board must apparently have perished.

To return, then, to the life-boat. While we sat in it, rocked by the waves, and engaged in preventing her from striking the ship's side, the raging breakers continuing to dash up against us; while Captain Sturdee was eagerly scanning the

danger of our attempting to cross them; you may guess what our feelings were, when, about eight A.M., we heard from the ship a loud cry of "A sail in sight!" We forgot, for a moment, the difficulty of getting at the vessel, or of her getting at us. A tremendous cheer followed the announcement. Our flag was hoisted; and, soon after, boom! went our first gun of distress. It fell solemnly on our ears. In a minute another was fired; and soon afterwards Captain Sturdee, bending over to us said, "They have seen us, and are bearing down upon us." Another loud cheer from the ship, re-echoed from the life-boat, seemed to inspire all with new hope, and called for many a fervent ejaculation of thanksgiving to God, for the mercy extended to us.

Still there was the danger of attempting to cross the reef; and here the gallant Molesworth came forward to offer assistance. As in such cases the officers belonging to the ship itself are not allowed to leave her, he, the young naval lieutenant, volunteered the attempt to cross first in the cutter, to ascertain whether the reef was practicable or not. Let me do our own officers the bare justice, as Molesworth himself afterwards took an opportunity

of doing, to say that one and all of them would joyfully have performed the service in question, had duty permitted them; though this, of course, in no way detracts from the gallantry of Mr. Molesworth.

In a moment four of our best sailors volunteered to man the cutter, and they all jumped in with alacrity, to make their perilous experiment. We learned afterwards from Molesworth, that he did not expect to be able to cross, and had the boat swamped, all those in her could scarcely fail to perish among the breakers. Lieutenant M., however, took leave of all with an animated look, and the little boat then dashed into the midst of the boiling surf, Molesworth cheering on his men, and waving his hat as he advanced.

It was nervous work for us, threescore and ten, huddled together, and oscillating between life and death, to look upon the apparently frail, yet buoyant skiff, which, bravely careering over the treacherous waters, covered with a crust of frosted silver, as it were, tried to make its way over a sharp ridge of coral, now surging upwards, now sinking into a trough momentarily left by the angry breakers, but drenched throughout by heavy seas. Yet there

sat Molesworth, self-possessed, as the stormy petrel, in ocean's wildest mood, and there sat his hardy companions, pulling against eternity. At every boat's-length advance, the little bark was saluted by loud cheers from life-boat and steamer. On, on it went, tugging and struggling; until one simultaneous hurrah proclaimed that the climbing breakers had been surmounted, and that the daring cutter was in smooth water. Those only who have outlived such dangers, can thoroughly understand or appreciate the thrill of that last loud cheer. A moment after, up stood Molesworth in the stern sheets, and first waving his cap, then cheerily turning to his little crew, the canvas was spread, and away steered the cutter for the "sail in sight."

By this time we had discovered that beside the larger vessel which we had descried, there were several small craft a few miles distant, and Captain Sturdee thought he also saw land. And so, indeed, it proved to be—the little desert island of Perez, in fact, with which we were about to become familiar.

Now, then, it was our turn to cross the breakers, a yet more nervous and difficult business than that of the skiff, considering the number of lives at stake: but our men took their places in their seats;

Barleigh stood at the helm, and in another half minute we were in the midst of the surf.

It required almost superhuman exertions to move the boat through the terrific breakers. The sea appeared to be unwilling to lose its prey. It broke over us in strength so great, and sheets so broad, that it was as if a waterfall or cataract were playing over us. We made a slow and painful progress; now beaten back, now advancing. But, in the end, we were as fortunate as Molesworth: our great open barge, three-fourths full of water, with all its load of human beings, at length rode in a calm sea! As I looked at H—, even drenched, pallid, and exhausted as she was, how deep was my gratitude to God!

LETTER VIII.

THE SHIPWRECK CONTINUED.

BEFORE I recommence my narrative, I will give you an extract from H—'s first letter from Campeachy, shortly stating her feelings, and impressions, under so new and trying an event in her life as a shipwreck so perilous as was hers.

“Campeachy, Jan. 19th, 1849.

“I HOPE no vague reports of the event which has befallen us, may reach you before you receive our own version of it. Distressing as that event has been, we can never be sufficiently grateful to a merciful Providence for our deliverance, and that of so many others, from a frightful death.

“You cannot expect a clear account of all that has taken place, since I last wrote to you. My mind is still so unsettled, that I hardly know how to write; indeed, till we got ashore here last evening, we were kept in such constant excitement, that