

LETTER IX.

THE ISLAND OF PEREZ.

As the Island of Perez is one of the few "lions" I can bring before you, being a place which so few travellers visit, and those few so very much against their will, I shall give you without apology, some more minute details than my own of what passed there during our three days' stay, as extracted from a long letter written by H—, from Campeachy.

"Campeachy, 26th January, 1849.

"You will have received, I hope, before this reaches you, intelligence of our safe arrival in this place, which is one we decidedly never intended to visit. I am sure (at least if I may judge by myself), you have but a faint idea of Yucatan, or its port Campeachy; but by-and-by,

I may do something towards enlightening you on the subject. In the meantime, I shall here just touch on our adventures, referring you for a more particular account to my father's Journal, which of course you will see.

"After getting into the life-boat, we there awaited our fate, sitting in the water already collected, and which was every moment increased by the waves, which washed over and drenched us. Then we had some of the men with bruised feet, and hands all bloody; the women with dishevelled hair, and pale faces; and the children crying.

"After long remaining thus, we heard a cry from the topmast of 'A Sail!' and yet I hardly understood the meaning of the 'Hurrah!' which was raised. The captain, however, leaning towards us, said, 'There is a sail in sight; I have signalled, and shall fire the distress guns.' Five minutes after, he returned, and added, 'She has seen, and is bearing down upon us.'

"Another cheer, loud and long, followed these words; and the next thing that became clear to me was, that as doubts were entertained of there being sufficient water on the reefs to float the boats, fears arose for our lives, should the passage be

attempted. Mr. Molesworth then volunteered to cross in one of the smaller boats, which was instantly manned by four volunteers; and then the lieutenant equipped in a sailor's 'Jersey,' with telescope in hand, taking the helm, ordered the men to go off.

"You may fancy how eagerly that little boat was watched, as it plunged through the huge breakers, which seemed very often to have swallowed it up; but as it always reappeared, every one seemed to feel more thankful and hopeful. At last, a loud cheer from the steamer announced that the little boat was safe in the smooth water.

"Of course it was still uncertain whether the large boat could pass as the little cutter had done; and, with feelings of a very mixed kind, I saw the rope cut attaching us to the steamer, which was still keeping nobly up. I really thought it impossible that we could cross through those mountains of sea, and knew that the time had come when our fate was to be decided, one way or the other. Some of the sailors near me tried to 'cheer me up,' as they said, assuring me it was all right; and, indeed, one after another, we worked through the fearful waves, each breaking over us, and

bathing us from head to foot, while the boat was at last three-fourths filled with water. Every breaker, as it rose upon us, I thought would sweep us away; but still, after each, I heard 'Another passed!' and at last the smooth water was reached, when the cheering re-commenced, echoed by our friends on board, who, of course, had, with the deepest interest, watched our course; for, in the first place, there were so many of us; and, in the second, because our safety augured security for the other boats.

"Waiting for these, our men lay on their oars, in smooth water. Whilst there, we saw Mr. Molesworth return towards the Forth in a canoe, passing near enough to call out to us, that 'there was land and a vessel near at hand.'

"We reached the brigantine between four and five P.M. The ladies were all put on board the *Bella Isabella*, which was so small and inconvenient, that only the husbands of the three ladies accompanied us, the other gentlemen remaining on the little island of Perez, a quarter of a mile from our anchorage.

"Almost every one believed that the Forth would break up during the night, and that little or

nothing more would be got out of her; and so it was immediately determined that we should be put on 'allowance,' sailors and every one else faring alike.

"On board the brigantine, we also had our discomforts; for the cabin, which, of course, was not large, was to serve as a sleeping apartment for Mr. and Mrs. L— and two children; Doctor D—, wife, and child; Mr. and Mrs. C—; the stewardess, the captain, and two mates! So, considering we were within the tropics, you may imagine it presently became pretty close; and accordingly, as soon as I saw all my female companions as soundly asleep as though they had been in the most comfortable quarters, I left them, preferring the moonlight on deck. Young *Agapito* Jenkins accompanied me; and, after some search, we found seats, on which we placed ourselves, so as to command a full view of the recently desert, but now thickly inhabited island of Perez.

"After the extraordinary excitement under which we had laboured, I enjoyed very much my seat on deck, watching the moonbeams on the calm sea, and thinking over all the incidents of the day. This, however, did not prevent me at last from

feeling very cold, for the nights now were chill, and our clothes were quite wet; so we made towards the smoke of the caboose fire. It was a sort of shed, only just large enough for two persons, and we found it occupied by the Spanish cook and one of the Forth's servants, who, in his hurry to get on deck in the morning, had fallen and broken his arm. The cook relinquished his place to me, and I sat for an hour, in an atmosphere of thick smoke, drying my clothes and warming myself. The fire, I suppose, made me sleepy; and what with this, and the excitement and fatigue I had gone through, I felt at last quite worn out. Yet I could not return to the horrid cabin. So I lay down on the deck, with a cloak for a mattress, and a carpet-bag for a pillow; and there I slept soundly for upwards of two hours.

"As soon as light dawned, I got up, and of course looked first of all towards the island, where I saw every one astir, and preparing the boats for an expedition to the wreck, which made me turn to the old Forth; and I was surprised to observe that she remained in the same state as when she was abandoned.

"I began to long to be on the island, with my

father and the more congenial of our companions. So I asked Jenkins to leave in the next boat, and ask if I might go on shore. Soon after, the boat returned, in charge of Mr. Molesworth, with whom, nothing loth, I went on shore, and was cordially received by many of my kind friends, and welcomed to Perez. I found my father suffering from the effects of his fall; and, of course, all had passed a miserable night.

“Having inspected the arrangements of the Perez Barracks, which did not take long, and said ‘Good morning,’ in many different styles, from the formal bow to the cordial shake of the hand, during which operation I had frequently occasion to smile at the strange appearance and costume of most of our companions; I next sallied forth to take a survey of the ‘Isle of Beauty.’ Mr. Lawrence was my cicerone, with whom I made the *grand tour*, so you may fancy our territories were not very extensive. My father, although lame, and Mr. Hamilton, were indefatigably busy all the morning shell-gathering, and they made a beautiful collection as a remembrance of Perez.

“The only green production of Perez is that

species of the cactus which bears the prickly pear, and which we found just ripe, and in great abundance. It is the size of a small pear, of a bright pink colour, with a thick skin, with but little flavour, and full of pips; but being juicy it was in great requisition by the new inhabitants.

“After our walk, we returned to breakfast, which consisted of soup and four little biscuits each, with half a pint of water. No plates, no spoons, knives, forks, salt, or any such superfluities of life; although I, being the only lady of the party, was elegantly served; for a pewter spoon having turned up, it was made over to me, and my soup was served in a neat little pan! The others got shells, broken plates, tumblers, bits of tin, etc.; but on the whole, the *déjeuner* went off very pleasantly. The doctor (who had before been wrecked under frightful circumstances in the Tweed), laughed at and joked those who were inclined to be *nice*, comparing, with good effect, his present happy condition with that which fell to the lot of his companions and himself when the Tweed was lost.

“The arrival of the first boat with all sorts of

provisions, put our old good-natured Scotch cook into high glee. Of course every one rushed down to the shore to see what had been brought, and it was amusing to behold the variety of things scattered on the beach, and the eagerness with which some sought out their property. *We* found but little; yet it was odd to see how some of the most insignificant things came to light. Among a quantity of biscuits, pretty well soaked in sea water, I espied one of the little knitting books which — gave me. A sailor brought me my pebble brooch, and the one-half of my father's eye-glass; while he himself had the other half from a different man. Another thing which I discovered, wet and soiled, amongst a quantity of rubbish, was the toilet pincushion which A—L— made for me the night before we left England. Such trifles have become relics more valuable than I ever thought they could possibly be.

“The boats continued to go and come till dusk, and the shore was at last completely strewn with the queerest things imaginable. I picked up some leaves of ‘Emile,’ a stray volume of ‘Monte Christo,’ and some sheets of music; and these from among barrels of biscuits, hams,

clothes of all sorts, soaking wet; Spanish jackets and English pea coats, ladies' bonnets and officers' cocked-hats, shoes, dishes, bunches of keys, smashed trunks, blankets, and in short every conceivable sort of thing. An accordion and a fiddle, too, were found and soon claimed. One amusing part of the affair was, that most of the sailors having lost their hats, and suffering accordingly while working on board, from the rays of the sun, the captain told them just to help themselves to the “tile” that fitted them best. Thereupon, all the hat-boxes were rifled, and the result was, that some of the men, only half-dressed, returned with new and fashionable hats, one with the Admiralty agent's cocked-hat, another with a faded pink, *transparent bonnet*, and yet another with the *Padre's* immense shovel hat (like Basilio's). One of the officers* had got possession of my father's straw-hat, and in fact, *égalité* and *fraternité* were the watch-words, as far as hats went. Mr. L— said he saw one

* This officer was our first engineer, Mr. Angus, a highly meritorious officer, and a man most deservedly esteemed by every one of us, was (I record with sorrow), the same Mr. Angus who perished in the Amazon.—W. P. R.

of the sailors 'sporting a pair of his best dress trousers,' and soon after the man went up and apologised to Mr. L—— for 'having made so free,' but having no other clothing, he had taken the liberty, etc., offering at the same time to return the article in question very soon!

"At the risk of being laughed at, I must describe my own attire, certainly rather peculiar. I wore a night dress, black silk petticoat, and shawl which had replaced my boat-cloak of the day before. Then my old straw bonnet, which weathered the storm, and is even now still in existence. I can assure you, I was complimented by all on my elegant *toilette*, and was even congratulated on having recovered a *dress*. That day the captain brought me my watch, which he had found under my pillow. And, at the same time, turning to Mr. Molesworth, who stood by, he said, 'And your omnibus (the name given to a sea chest), old fellow, is coming. I got it up myself, and it was left on deck; but I made them return for it, and—there it is'!

"The next day, then, I was able to go on shore with a dress, a cloak, and a bonnet, which, though not in the very best trim, were considered highly respect-

able. As I had more clothing in wear, too, than the other ladies, I had the pleasure of supplying their wants for the passage by the *Bella Isabel*.

"At about five in the afternoon, the dinner was served; and the stores having increased, so was this, our second meal, to a satisfactory extent; which caused the doctor to remark, that we should never be able to get up any sympathy or compassion in England, when we were obliged to confess that our dinner consisted of soup, hard biscuits, and pork-chops, '*à discretion*.' The large sea biscuits served as plates, when the crockery fell short; and Mr. Molesworth kindly provided me with a silver spoon and fork, which he had fished out of his 'omnibus' for my use.

"We did not get off till about seven o'clock, when it was quite dark. My father accompanied me this time, and Captain Sturdee insisted, notwithstanding his fatigue, on seeing us safely to the *Bella Isabel*. The pulling against the fatal currents of the gulf was tremendous, and *without* Captain Sturdee we should have been carried back to the island. As it was, all the muscular strength and energies of the men were required to reach the *Bella Isabel*.

“Next morning, as a relief to an uneasy night, we were early on the island, and found Captain Sturdee busy preparing for our departure. He had had considerable trouble during the night in keeping some of his men in order, for, in such cases, there is never wanting some ringleader to move less daring men to evil. But the self-reliance of our commander, and his calm, but resolute manner, daunted the bad men, and reassured the good. Among our own class, too, there were two or three whose characters came out in many disagreeable traits. Indeed, as you may imagine, we got to know our fellow-passengers more thoroughly during the last week, than we might have done in years of ordinary intercourse. For instance, we never fancied that Mr. M—, apparently a thoughtless, light-hearted sailor, could show so much kindly feeling and forethought for others, which, joined to his untiring exertions for the general good, secured him the good opinion of all. Among the disagreeables, Mr. D—, I think, made himself the most notorious. I could hardly have supposed that any man could have shown himself, under such circumstances, so thoroughly selfish. But the contrast, perhaps, only served to make us

appreciate all the more our friend Captain Sturdee, whose mental exertions and bodily fatigue were excessive, yet borne with the utmost equanimity and constancy. I felt for him very much indeed, and do most sincerely trust that the efforts now being justly made to exonerate him from all blame may be successful.

“Mr. L—, too, we hope we may consider as one of our friends. Although of an entirely different character from Mr. Molesworth, he was not less kind and attentive to the comfort of others, nor less earnest in an unostentatious way, to exert himself in the promotion of that comfort, and in the active service of all around him. Then as for Mr. H.—, his constant care of my father (who was suffering from the effects of his fall), and his unremitting kindness on the island, won for himself the sincere regard and gratitude of us both. Let me not forget our young friend Jenkins, whom I have before mentioned as my companion, and who displayed an affectionate nature throughout.

“I have omitted to tell you that in front of the huts on the island, there was a heap of large pieces of coral, in the centre of which was a

flag-staff, and flying from it, when we arrived, was a little white bunting, which was soon replaced by the Union Jack. The sailors, too, got up a sort of flag on their hut—a square piece of canvass, on which was very neatly painted the ‘The Sailors’ Home.’ We had some amusement this morning from a proposal of Mr. Molesworth, that, as we were now so comfortable on the Island of Perez, with the British flag flying, we should take possession of it in the name of her Majesty, feeling assured of her royal gratitude for so valuable an addition to her territory. Hereupon, that we should form a colony, elect a governor, organise a military and naval force, etc., were propositions immediately brought forward by others present; and under this annexation, such high-sounding titles as Governor-general, Admiral of the Station, Postmaster-general, Physician in Ordinary, President of the Museum of Natural History (Collector of Perez shells), etc., were distributed to the satisfaction of all parties.

“But I am afraid you will think I am never to leave Perez, and so I really must try to get on board of the ‘Bella Isabel.’ You must

excuse, however, my being so prolix over the days of the island, as being, for a lady recently from the ‘west-end,’ certainly something out of the common.

“Well, then, let us say ‘good-bye’ to the island, hoping, as we did on really taking leave of it on the evening of the 16th, that we may never see it more, although anything but ungrateful for the refuge it afforded us.

“We put off going on board till dark, knowing that whatever might be the discomforts of Perez, those of the brig would be greater. It was very late before every one got on board, but there at last they all were, stowed away in a small ship in which there was scarcely standing room for them. The sheep and poultry were moving about us, threading their way through the crowd of passengers from ‘stem to stern’ (observe my nautical terms), and looked very happy. Then this little, dirty Spanish vessel, after our beautiful, large, clean decks! It was indeed a change. However, we were fortunate in the weather, which continued to be lovely. I went to bed early, and had a better night’s rest, the cabin being now entirely given up to the ladies. At

eight A.M., next morning, we were out of the Channel, and nothing particular occurred during the day. We were so hemmed in on deck that, after I had taken a seat, I was unable to leave it, and there I exchanged compliments with our friends on our improved toilets, for indeed we were told that some were 'got up totally regardless of expense.' We had now more to eat and drink than we wished, and luxuries were added in the shape of oranges, guava jelly, and a little Madeira, together with chocolate for the ladies. Thus hoping that another day would take us to Campeachy, we got through our time without much *ennui*. Next day was so calm and still that we were half afraid we might not be in time to land at Campeachy that evening. However, in the afternoon a slight breeze sprang up, and at last we were rejoiced to make out from the deck the prettily situated town of Campeachy. Still more pleased were we to come to anchor about half-past five P.M. The health or visit boat came off soon after, and then I had the privilege of accompanying the first *official* party, consisting of the captain, my father, and two others, in our own old Forth boat (the

only one we brought), rowed by four of our good 'Forth' men. In ten minutes afterwards, we were on the jetty of Campeachy harbour."

These "Extracts" have run to such a length that here I may conclude this letter, claiming for my next some attention to my own version of some of the matters here handled.