

his partner to her seat, he himself retiring to have a *cigarette* between the dances. So that it appeared to me pretty clear that the Campeachy young ladies go to balls to dance—but only and exclusively to dance. We retired early; but after being much amused and gratified.

On the whole, we have spent a pleasant time here, and on all sides, but especially from our more intimate friends, Mr. and Madame Gutierrez and family, we have experienced much kindness and received many attentions.

LETTER XIII.

THE COMMANDER, THE OFFICERS, AND THE
VOLUNTEER.

Yucatan, 22nd January, 1849.

THE day after our arrival at Campeachy, on the 18th instant, a meeting of all our passengers took place, at eleven in the morning, myself in the chair; when I explained, both in English and Spanish, the expediency and duty on our part, before we began to disperse, of coming to a general understanding on three points:—first, Whether we should not address a letter to Captain Sturdee on the loss of the *Forth*; secondly, How we should collect the money necessary to defray the expenses incurred since the loss of the vessel, when the Steam Company ceased to have any responsibility towards us; and thirdly, What steps ought to be taken for the purpose of getting to our respective destinations. I proposed that a Committee should be named to act for the body at large; and this

being agreed to, after some discussion, Messrs. Adoue, Lomer, Silvester, and Celis, with myself, were named by a plurality of votes.

Captain Sturdee handsomely offered, on the part of the Company (the Royal Mail Steam-packet Company), to pay the Bella Isabel in full, leaving us only to make a present to her captain, as he had behaved so well, and to settle with the owners and men of the large canoe, San Francisco, who had helped us off from the wreck, and assisted in saving some of the luggage, by bringing on shore what Captain Sturdee's boats were unable to take.

The latter had left at Perez Island his four principal boats, including the life-boat, which he now made over to the owners of the Bella Isabel, giving them, besides, two hundred and fifty dollars in cash, very handsome remuneration, considering the additional sums they would recover for salvage, to be effected by these very boats, now the property of Captain Batista's employers.

In the Committee we agreed to make a present of two hundred dollars to Don Manuel Batista, the captain of the Bella Isabel, and to give the same amount to the owner and crew of the San Francisco, although I fancy the latter, as expe-

rienced wreckers, had already reaped a plenteous harvest from the old Forth.

I proposed a present to our own poor sailors of the Forth; but the Committee objected. It was alleged, *without proof*, that some of our men had robbed.

I was requested to draw up a letter of thanks to Captain Sturdee and his officers, and to Lieutenant Molesworth, while Mr. Celis undertook one to Captain Batista. These letters being unanimously approved of by the Committee, we called a meeting of all the passengers, with Captain Sturdee and his officers, for Saturday, the 20th, in a room of the hotel.

I was "in the chair," Captain Sturdee on one side of me, and Lieutenant Molesworth on the other. After some preliminary remarks, I read the following letter to Captain Sturdee:—

"Campeachy, 20th January, 1849.

"Sir,

"We, the undersigned, passengers on board the Royal Mail Steam-packet Forth, bound for Vera Cruz, but lost on the coral-reefs of Alacranes, early in the morning of the 14th instant, having

met here yesterday, unanimously resolved to address the present letter to you.

"We have, accordingly, to express to you our admiration of the qualities which you displayed, and the services you rendered to us, during the trying scene of the shipwreck. We bear our earnest and unqualified testimony to the caution, vigilance, and unremitting personal attention which you dedicated to the safety of the ship, from the day we were placed under your charge at St. Thomas's up to the hour of our loss; and we thankfully record that you owe to your own energetic and intrepid conduct, the consolation you now enjoy, in saying that, of a hundred and twenty-six souls placed on the brink of eternity, not one life, under the blessing of Almighty God, was lost!

"Your unwearied exertions, together with those of your officers and crew, saved the greater part of our property on board; and your wise and judicious arrangements brought us to this port, in comparative comfort and perfect safety.

"For the obligations we thus lie under to you, joined to the unvaried kindness and attention which we all individually received on board your

vessel, accept of our grateful thanks; and for the heavy losses you have personally sustained, as well as for the deep anxiety of mind which you have naturally suffered, we can only proffer the expression of our heartfelt sympathy.

"To your first officer, Mr. Wilson, to your surgeon, Mr. S. B. Rowland, and to all the other officers under your command, please express our warmest thanks for their unwearied exertions, and obliging conduct, during the whole of the trying period of our loss.

"We sincerely hope that every justice will be done to your merits on your return to England; and with our best wishes for your speedy and safe arrival there, and for your health and prosperity through life,

"Believe us to be,

"Sir,

"Yours very sincerely."

(Signed by all the passengers.)

[One passenger, I may observe, refused to sign—our eccentric German, Herr Kriesmar. He did so on *national*, although not rational, grounds, just as he had refused, in making a sketch of the island

of Perez, to introduce the British flag which was flying on a mound near the huts. Kriesmar held it to be, as an inveterate punster said, a *flag-rant* usurpation.]

Captain Sturdee spoke feelingly and well in answer to the few observations addressed to him, and then (a copy of our letter having previously been given to him), he read the following answer:—

“*Campeachy, 20th January, 1849.*”

“Ladies and Gentlemen,

“From my present state of mind, I feel assured I need hardly ask the indulgence of a brief reply to the letter you have this day presented to me, relative to the late melancholy event.

“The terms of kindness in which it is couched are such, that, had the occurrence even been of a totally different nature, I could not have adequately replied to it; but I do assure you, with feelings of the greatest sincerity, that your approval of my conduct and exertions, since the melancholy morning of our shipwreck, is to me the greatest consolation you could administer, and alleviates, in a great degree, the anxiety which now almost overpowers me.

“I feel that I but express the feelings of my officers, when I return you their heartfelt thanks for your opinion expressed of them. And believe me, your sympathy for my present losses will be ever cherished by me, while I return you from the bottom of my heart, my own for the losses you have sustained, and the privations you have undergone.

“Wishing you health and happiness, and safe and speedy voyages to your destinations, I am, with feelings of the greatest respect,

“Ladies and Gentlemen,

“Your obedient servant,

(Signed) “E. T. STURDEE,

“late Commander of the R. M. S. P. Forth.”

“*To the Passengers of the late R. M. S. P. Forth.*”

Captain Sturdee, with his gallant officers now standing aside (we had only two or three chairs for the ladies), I shortly addressed Mr. Molesworth, and then read to him the following letter, drawn up by Mr. Lawrence:—

“Dear Sir,

“We, the undersigned passengers on board the late R. M. S. P. Forth, wrecked on the

Alacranes reef, on the 14th inst., cannot separate without taking this opportunity of recording our high admiration of your conduct in nobly volunteering to cross the reef, on the 14th instant, on which a heavy surf was running, when it was uncertain whether there was water to float even the smallest boat. Your intrepid conduct, whilst it was only what might have been expected from one holding a commission in that service whose prowess is recognised by every nation and in every clime, forms a bright example to others, and will long be gratefully remembered by us, in proving your readiness to risk your own life, in order, if possible, to secure the safety of your fellow passengers, and the rest on board.

"We trust your conduct will not pass unnoticed by those who are able substantially to reward you. Be pleased to accept of this humble, but sincere, expression of gratitude for the services you rendered, not only in the moment of danger, but subsequently in assisting to rescue our property from the wreck.

"That you may rise to eminence in that service, to which we feel sure you will prove an ornament, and that every happiness may attend you through

life, is the earnest wish of your obliged and grateful fellow-passengers."

(Signed by every one, saving and excepting the patriotic Kriesmar.)

"To Lieutenant G. M. F. MOLESWORTH, R.N."

Mr. Molesworth expressed himself in grateful terms for the testimony which we had borne to his exertions, but which he modestly disclaimed, *in toto*, as being due to him; and he then read his answer couched in the following terms:—

"I cannot sufficiently thank you for the kind manner in which you have expressed yourselves in regard to my conduct on the morning of the 14th of January. What little I did was with a view to assist Captain Sturdee in his difficult, responsible situation, and I felt amply rewarded for my exertions by the safety of the passengers over the reef. I am convinced that, had not the duty of the officers obliged them to remain on the ship*, there is not one who would not gladly have volunteered his services on that morning.

* None of the officers, during a wreck, such as the Forth, are permitted to leave the ship, or boat, on other service.

“Wishing you all a safe and pleasant passage to your different destinations, with many thanks,

“I remain,
“Your obliged humble servant,
(Signed) “G. M. F. MOLESWORTH.”

The young captain of the brigantine, to whom we lay under so many obligations, was not at the meeting; but the following letter, originally in Spanish, here translated, was read:—

[Translation.]

“Sir,

“We, the undersigned, passengers on board the English steam-packet Forth, which struck on the reefs of the Alacranes, address ourselves to you, in order to manifest—That the promptitude with which you hastened to our assistance; the efficiency and zeal which you displayed, in your efforts to save us; the generosity with which you at once offered us the vessel under your command, with everything you had on board; and the polite attention which we have received from you, not only during our stay at the Island of Perez, but in crossing with you to this port,—have altogether made an indelible impression upon us. We hope,

therefore, that this simple manifestation, aided by your own frank heart, will lead you to comprehend the amount of our gratitude. And we have only further to beg that you will accept, as a slight proof of our acknowledgments, the sum of two hundred dollars.

“We subscribe ourselves
“Your most obedient Servants.”

(Signed by the passengers, always excepting the too fastidious Germanic dreamer of dreams, but the otherwise amiable botanist, Herr Kriesmar.)

“Mr. Manuel Batista,
“Captain of the brigantine *Bella Isabel*.”

Thus ended our public meeting, in harmony and good-feeling, with perhaps one or two exceptions; although no one could venture to manifest outwardly any dissatisfaction, when the general sympathies ran so strongly the other way.

Mr. Lawrence and myself, after a due and somewhat minute examination of the whole circumstances of the Forth's case, and Captain Sturdee's

conduct, considered it our duty to express ourselves more clearly on the subject than a mixed company of passengers, among whom foreigners predominated, could do. So, taking Captain Sturdee by the arm, while Messrs. Lawrence and Molesworth, with H— and Jenkins followed, we proceeded from the inn to my *own apartments*, where Mr. Lawrence read, and afterwards delivered to our late commander, a letter thus worded:—

*“ Campeachy,
“ 20th January, 1849.*

“ Dear Captain Sturdee,

“ At a meeting of the passengers of the Royal Mail Steam-packet, Forth, wrecked on the Alacranes Reef, on the 14th instant, held this day, it was resolved to present you and your officers with a letter of thanks, for your kindness and exertions, previously and subsequently to that unfortunate event; but, the majority being foreigners, it was decided not to express any opinion as to the causes which led to it, or the precautionary measures adopted by you to avoid it. We, however, not presuming to suppose that our opinion will have any weight with those by

whom the merits of the case will hereafter be judged; yet, thinking that it may be satisfactory to you to know that some amongst your passengers have perfect confidence in your seamanship, beg to state that, after having carefully examined the ship's position at noon, on the 13th, the distance run by log subsequently, as compared with the observations taken by yourself at different times, between that hour and midnight, which proved beyond doubt, that the course had been made good; we cannot refrain from expressing our individual conviction, that greater caution than your own could not have been observed; and that the accident was such as scarcely any foresight could have avoided, arising from our experiencing one of those currents which they whose lives have been spent in navigating the Gulf of Mexico justly term 'invincible.'* Had those who may, hereafter, be disposed to question your caution and prudence, been on board from the period of our embarkation under your care at St. Thomas's; had they seen you, as we did, pass sleepless nights, sacrificing all personal

* This was the expression of Captain Batista, a Mexican-gulf mariner, when speaking of that sea and its dangers.

comfort, when dangers were at hand; they would hesitate, before condemning you in the present instance. To your coolness and intrepidity we are indebted, under the blessing of God, for the preservation of our lives; and to your subsequent exertions, as well as to your unvaried kindness, attention, and urbanity, we owe many alleviations of those miseries which are the unavoidable concomitants of a shipwreck.

"Feeling, therefore, that a letter, in however strong language couched, cannot adequately express our gratitude to you, it is our intention to request our friends at home to present you with a small token of our high admiration of your skill as a seaman, and of our deep regard for your personal worth.

"We sincerely trust that, on your return to England, you will have a full measure of justice meted out to you, feeling convinced that an impartial examination will fully exonerate you from all blame.

"Deeply sympathising with you in the severe personal losses which you have sustained, and wishing you every happiness and success in your future career, we remain, again tendering you our

best thanks for your great kindness from first to last,

"Your sincere friends,

"WM. PARISH ROBERTSON,

"EDWARD LAWRENCE.

"H. ROBERTSON."

The reading of this letter overcame Captain Sturdee's feelings. He retired from the table to another seat, much agitated. Poor fellow! He had indeed had much mental suffering to undergo since the fatal morning of the fourteenth, and a revulsion of feeling, as the drama drew to a close, was natural and inevitable.

Next morning we received the following answer from him:—

"*Campeachy, 21st January, 1849.*

"My dear Friends and Passengers,

"I have already expressed in my former letter that you have administered to me the greatest consolation that I could have received in expressing, in the kindest and handsomest terms, that my exertions had met with your approbation.

"This last token of your esteem and regard I am utterly at a loss, how to acknowledge.

"It will be cherished by me to the longest day of my existence, and will be the bright ray for my memory to rest upon, when contemplating the melancholy ordeal through which we have just passed. I am,

"My dear friends and passengers,

"Yours very sincerely,

(Signed) "E. T. STURDEE."

"To Miss ROBERTSON and
Messrs. ROBERTSON and LAWRENCE."

There was yet one more letter which Captain Sturdee received, signed by Lieutenant Densten as well as by Lieutenant Molesworth, which ran as follows:—

"Sir,

"Having been wrecked in the R. M. S. P. Forth, under your command, on the morning of the 14th instant, and having carefully examined the log and chart, we are of opinion that it was only by an unaccountable current, that the ship struck on the Alacranes reef, and we consider that no blame can possibly be attached to you.

"Knowing, as you did, by good sights and mer. alt. the latitude $22^{\circ} 26'$ north, and longitude

$86^{\circ} 40'$ west at noon, as well as the latitude $22^{\circ} 33'$ north, at 8 hours 50 minutes by the star Aldebaran, and latitude $22^{\circ} 29'$ at 11 hours 4 minutes P.M. by Sirius, fully confirmed you in the correctness of your course, and the distance run by D.R. up to 11 P.M., being such as to require the ship to average upwards of 12 knots, in order to near the reef before day-light. We cannot too strongly express ourselves with regard to the careful manner in which you looked after the safety of the ship, regardless of rest, when near land or shoals, and the seamanlike conduct and coolness displayed by you, when the vessel struck.

"We have the honour to remain,

"Your obedient servants,

(Signed) "F. DENSTEN, Lieut. R.N.,

"G. F. M. MOLESWORTH,

"Lieut. H.M.S. 'Wellesley.'"

"To E. T. STURDEE, Esq.,
late Commander of the R. M. S. P. Forth."

Such were the honourable testimonials which our friend, Captain Sturdee, took with him to England, and well he deserved them.