JOHN BYRON

BYRON'S NARRATIVE OF THE LOSS OF THE WAGER

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Содержание

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ADVERTISEMENT

At a time when every thing connected with the name of Byron is regarded with such general interest, it is a subject of surprise and regret that no popular edition should exist of the Narrative of Commodore Byron. Indeed, to procure any copy at all of the work requires some research and trouble. To supply this deficiency is the object of the present publishers.

To the admirers of the illustrious Poet, the Narrative of the

sufferings of his grandfather will, on more than one account, be acceptable. In the Poems, it is often, whether humorously or pathetically, alluded to; for instance, in the mournfully beautiful stanzas to his sister, written soon after he left England for the last time, he says,

> "A strange doom is thy father's son's, and past
> Recalling, as it lies beyond redress;
> Reversed for him *our grandsire's fate* of yore,
> Had *no rest at sea*, nor I on shore!"

Again, in a different mood, in Don Juan, after having carried his hero through the horrors of a shipwreck, as disastrous and fatal in itself and its consequences as his imagination could conceive, he observes —

> " – for none
> Had suffered more – his hardships were comparative
> To those related in my grand-dad's Narrative."

To which passage he appends the following note: – "Admiral Byron was remarkable for never making a voyage without a tempest. He was known to the sailors by the facetious name of 'foul-weather Jack.'" Indeed, to this narrative the poet is indebted for many of the incidents in that surpassing description of "the dangers of the sea." The awful "whispering" in which, according to the Admiral, the men communicated their first horrid thoughts

of putting one of their number to death for the support of the rest, is admirably preserved and amplified in Don Juan:

> "At length one whispered his companion, who
> Whispered another, and thus it went round,
> And then into a hoarser murmur grew,
> An ominous and wild, and desperate sound,
> And then his comrade's thought each sufferer knew,
> 'Twas but his own, suppressed till now, he found:
> And out they spoke of lots for flesh and blood,
> And who should die to be his fellow's food."

The germ of the conception of the cave-scenes, so beautifully described in the poem, will also be found here; the fondness of Juan for his favourite dog, the voracity with which he devoured the long-withheld food, and many other incidents, were suggested by this Narrative.[1]

To those who would study the character of Lord Byron; discover what qualities of his nature were derived from his ancestors, and what were peculiarly his own; who would trace the effect produced on his writings by early tastes, habits,

[1] Captain Inglefield's account of the loss of the Centaur, (in September, 1782), furnished Byron with many of those trivial incidents, which, as the poet well knew, render a story, to use Gibbon's words, "circumstancial and animated," instead of "vague and languid;" the "eternal difference between fiction and truth." The behaviour of the sailors before the sinking of the ship; some lashing themselves in their hammocks, some putting on their best clothes; the sail made of blankets; the ragged piece of sheet with which they caught the rain-water; the words used by the man who first saw the land, &c. &c., are all faithfully copied or slightly altered from Inglefield.

and associations, the narrative will afford ample material for observation.

Mr. Moore, – who, in paying to genius that tribute which genius alone can fully pay, has shewn how thoroughly he understood the character of the poet (a character, perhaps, after all to be *felt* rather than *explained*), how well he appreciated his virtues and the peculiar circumstances attendant on genius, which palliate, if they do not excuse, his foibles, – remarks, that Lord Byron "strikingly combined, in his own nature, some of the best and perhaps worst qualities that lie scattered through the various characters of his predecessors; the generosity, the love of enterprise, the high-mindedness of some of the better spirits of his race, with the irregular passions, the eccentricity, and daring recklessness of the world's opinion, that so much characterised others." In the character then of the most famous of those "better spirits," as exemplified in his own narrative of his sufferings and adventures, we may discern the source of many of the amiable qualities which descended to and adorned the immortal poet. We shall observe in both the same frankness, generosity, affability, love of excitement, the same mildness, and unassuming modesty. But the contrasts of their characters we shall find even more striking than the resemblances. We shall see in the sailor the ease and contentedness of spirit arising from its agreement with the sphere it moves in – the soul harmonizing with the situation – the man with the circumstances – the Supply equivalent to the Demand. We shall see in the

poet the "high instincts of a creature moving about in worlds not realized" – the large expectancies, the high anticipations, unfulfilled and unanswered; the discontent, the jarring of a being not *at one* with the place of its existence, panting for something above it, aspiring "beyond the fitting medium of desire." We shall see him inordinately yearning after affection and happiness, yet enveloped, as it were, in a nervous network of sensibility, feelingly alive to every the faintest manifestation of slight, neglect, unkindness, – to all that causes sorrow and pain: we shall see the co-existence of these qualities producing necessarily disappointment and disgust; the very capability of enjoying the good, unfitting him for the endurance of the ill; the power of imagination heightening the beauties of the ideal, the keenness of perception aggravating the defects of the real; the consequent struggles for existence in a wounded spirit between "feelings unemployed," affections unreturned, and the bitterness or apathy they engender – between original benevolence and acquired misanthropy. We shall see the sailor habitually yielding himself to the guidance and authority of others, unhesitatingly acknowledging, and, as a matter of course, complying with, the established relations, laws, and customs of society; submitting without repining, question, or surprise, to the vicissitudes of fortune; patient of hardship, uncomplaining of Circumstance. The poet, from the pride of Mind, accustomed ever to decide for itself, to act and reflect always, obstinately questioning even Destiny and Fate; bidding haughty defiance to their Ruler,

or yielding with sullen indifference or gloomy repining; if confessing the necessity of compliance, hardly resigned. We shall find the sailor sustaining his cheerfulness in every situation; the poet, plunging, perhaps from constitutional melancholy, into misery; acted upon by that strong attraction, that irresistible impulse towards the dark and the sad, that capability, strikingly described by himself, of "learning to love despair." We shall see throughout the difference between the continual presence and the comparative absence of consciousness, that power by which Self, rising as it were above itself, makes itself the subject of microscopic observation. In the writings especially, of each, we shall observe the operations of these opposite properties. The sailor writes on, unaware and thoughtless of the effect of what he writes: the poet, in his letters particularly, seems to know intuitively the effect on others of every word he sets down; he reads their thoughts, he hears their remarks as he writes; and this knowledge, so immediate that its effects on his style seem almost unintentional, continually modifies his expressions, giving the appearance of affectation to what is no more than a natural result of his quick perception and extreme sensitiveness. In every action, too, of the poet, important or trivial, the working of this principle, so hard to be discovered in the sailor, is equally evident. He looks always to the effect: nothing seems done solely for itself: the love of admiration, of being remarkable, of standing alone, however disguised, may almost always be detected. Finally, we shall not fail to observe throughout, the

contrast between the single and the "many-sided" mind; between the ordinary and the extraordinary; between the Mortal made immortal by force of circumstances; the Immortal, in spite of circumstances, asserting and maintaining his inborn immortality.

Yet, enhanced as the interest attaching to this narrative is, by the connection of its author with one of the greatest of the master-minds of these latter days, it is a work which of itself may well demand and obtain our attention and regard. The incidents it relates are peculiarly of that complexion which has caused it to be remarked (as Byron himself has somewhere) that Fiction, however wonderful, must often yield to Truth. It is a striking specimen of the romance of real life. The spectacle of a member of an old and noble family, accustomed to the comforts and luxuries that attend high birth, reduced to the necessity, at one time, of beating his *shirt* in order to crush the vermin it was useless to attempt to get rid of by washing; and at another, of making a meal (eagerly, as he himself confesses,) of the putrid remains of a favourite dog, is as well calculated to excite the curiosity of the observer of mankind as to gratify the taste of the reader of romance. And if the extraordinary nature of the incidents themselves arouse our wonder, the manner in which they are related will insure and fix our sympathy. The simple, unaffected style, slightly tinged with the quaintness of old phraseology; the total absence of any thing like striving after effect; the apparent unconsciousness of the narrator that he must be the object of admiration or pity; the freedom from all attempts

to disguise some feelings, or to affect and assume others; the modesty, the frankness, which characterize this narration, while they give additional interest to the work itself, afford indisputable testimony to the amiableness of the author. To have imitated so correctly this natural style, is one of the highest triumphs of the genius of Defoe, in his romance of Robinson Crusoe.

Considered, then, either as an useful appendage to the Works and Life of Byron; as an aid in forming an estimate of his character; or as an account of sufferings and adventures which would appear suitable rather to a romance than to a journal of events actually experienced; an illustration of the strange vicissitudes human life may undergo, of the extremities and hardships human nature may bear; or, in short, as a specimen of simple and beautiful writing, this work can scarcely fail of affording delight and gratification to the reader.

JOHN BYRON, the second son of William, the fourth Lord Byron, by his third wife, was born at Newstead Abbey, November 8th, 1723, and at an early age entered as a midshipman in the British navy. He still held that rank in 1740, when the expedition to the South Sea against the Spaniards took place under the command of Commodore Anson. The Wager, Captain Cheap, to which Mr. Byron belonged, was separated from the rest of the squadron, and wrecked on a desert island to the southward of Chiloe (47° south lat.) After encountering the most dreadful sufferings from famine, a small number of the crew, including the Captain and Mr. Byron,

reached the isle of Chiloe, and surrendered themselves prisoners to the Spaniards. They were afterwards removed to Chili, and detained some time at Valparaiso and St. Jago; but were at length allowed to return to England, where they arrived after an absence of more than five years. At a subsequent period, Mr. Byron published his "Narrative." The young seaman was not deterred by his misfortunes from pursuing his naval career; he returned to the service of his country, and commanded the America, in Boscawen's action off Cape Lagos, August 18, 1759. His skill and enterprising spirit afterwards occasioned his appointment to the command of an expedition fitted out to make discoveries in the South Sea.[2] He sailed from England, June 21st, 1764, and having circumnavigated the globe, returned home in May, 1766. Several islands were explored in this voyage, which were afterwards visited by Bougainville and Cooke; and experiments were also made to determine the accuracy of Harrison's time-keeper, and its consequent value as a means of ascertaining the longitude. This officer subsequently was made an admiral, and commanded in the West Indies during the American war. Admiral Byron was much beloved in the navy, more so, perhaps, than any other officer except Nelson. He died in 1798, leaving one son, John, who dying before his uncle, Lord Byron, the title of the latter descended to his only son, George Gordon, the poet.

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[2] Byron's ship in this expedition was the Dolphin: she was the second ship ever coppered in the British navy.

BYRON'S NARRATIVE OF THE Loss of the Wager

The equipment and destination of the squadron fitted out in the year 1740, of which Commodore Anson had the command, being sufficiently known from the ample and well-penned relation of it under his direction, I shall recite no particulars that are to be found in that work. But it may be necessary, for the better understanding the disastrous fate of the Wager, the subject of the following sheets, to repeat the remark, that a strange infatuation seemed to prevail in the whole conduct of this embarkation. For though it was unaccountably detained till the season for its sailing was past, no proper use was made of that time, which should have been employed in providing a suitable force of sailors and soldiery; nor was there a due attention given to other requisites for so peculiar and extensive a destination.

This neglect not only rendered the expedition abortive in its principal object, but most materially affected the condition of each particular ship; and none so fatally as the Wager, which being an old Indiaman brought into the service on this occasion, was now fitted out as a man of war; but being made to serve as a store ship, was deeply laden with all kinds of careening geer, military and other stores, for the use of the other ships;

and, what is more, crowded with bale goods, and encumbered with merchandise. A ship of this quality and condition could not be expected to work with that readiness and ease which was necessary for her security and preservation in those heavy seas with which she was to encounter. Her crew consisted of men pressed from long voyages to be sent upon a distant and hazardous service: on the other hand, all her land-forces were no more than a poor detachment of infirm and decrepid invalids from Chelsea hospital, desponding under the apprehensions of a long voyage. It is not then to be wondered, that Captain Kid, under whose command the ship sailed out of the port, should in his last moments presage her ill success, though nothing very material happened during his command.

At his death he was succeeded by Captain Cheap, who still, without any accident, kept company with the squadron till we had almost gained the southernmost mouth of Straits Le Maire; when, being the sternmost ship, we were, by the sudden shifting of the wind to the southward, and the turn of the tide, very near being wrecked upon the rocks of Staten Land; which, notwithstanding, having weathered, contrary to the expectation of the rest of the squadron, we endeavoured all in our power to make up our lost way and regain our station. This we effected, and proceeded on our voyage, keeping company with the rest of the ships for some time; when, by a great roll of a hollow sea, we carried away our mizen mast, all the chain plates to windward being broken. Soon after, hard gales at west coming on with a

prodigious swell, there broke a heavy sea in upon the ship, which stove our boats, and filled us for some time.

These accidents were the more disheartening, as our carpenter was on board the Gloucester, and detained there by the incessant tempestuous weather, and sea impracticable for boats. In a few days he returned, and supplied the loss of the mizen-mast by a lower studding-sail boom; but this expedient, together with the patching up of our rigging, was a poor temporary relief to us. We were soon obliged to cut away our best bower anchor to ease the fore-mast, the shrouds and chain plates of which were all broken, and the ship in all parts in a most crazy condition.

Thus shattered and disabled, a single ship, (for we had now lost sight of our squadron) we had the additional mortification to find ourselves bearing for the land on a lee shore, having thus far persevered in the course we held, from an error in conjecture; for the weather was unfavourable for observation, and there are no charts of that part of the coast. When those officers who first perceived their mistake, endeavoured to persuade the captain to alter his course, and bear away, for the greater surety, to the westward, he persisted in making directly, as he thought, for the island of Socoro; and to such as dared from time to time to deliver their doubts of being entangled with the land stretching to the westward, he replied, that he thought himself in no case at liberty to deviate from his orders; and that the absence of his ship from the first place of rendezvous, would entirely frustrate the whole squadron in the first object of their attack, and

possibly decide upon the fortune of the whole expedition. For the better understanding the force of his reasoning, it is necessary to explain, that the island of Socoro is in the neighbourhood of Baldivia, the capture of which place could not be effected without the junction of that ship, which carried the ordnance and military stores.

The knowledge of the great importance of giving so early and unexpected a blow to the Spaniards, determined the captain to make the shortest way to the point in view; and that rigid adherence to orders from which he thought himself in no case at liberty to depart, begot in him a stubborn defiance of all difficulties, and took away from him those apprehensions, which so justly alarmed all such as, from an ignorance of the orders, had nothing present to their minds but the dangers of a lee shore.[3]

We had for some time been sensible of our approach to the land, from no other tokens than those of weeds and birds, which are the usual indications of nearing the coast; but at length we

[3] Captain Cheap has been suspected of a design of going on the Spanish coast without the Commodore; but no part of his conduct seems to authorise, in the least, such a suspicion. The author who brings this heavy charge against him, is equally mistaken in imagining that Captain Cheap had not instructions to sail to this island, and that the Commodore did neither go nor send thither, to inform himself if any of the squadron were there. This appears from the orders delivered to the captains of the squadron, the day before they sailed from St. Catherine's (L. Anson's Voyage, B.I.C. 6.); from the orders of the council of war held on board the Centurion, in the bay of St. Julian, (C. 7.); and from the conduct of the Commodore (C. 10.) who cruized (with the utmost hazard) more than a fortnight off the isle of Socoro, and along the coast in its neighbourhood. It was the second rendezvous at Baldivia, and not that at Socoro, that the Commodore was forced by necessity to neglect.

had an imperfect view of an eminence, which we conjectured to be one of the mountains of the Cordilleras. This, however, was not so distinctly seen but that many conceived it to be the effect of imagination: but if the captain was persuaded of the nearness of our danger, it was now too late to remedy it; for at this time the straps of the fore jeer blocks breaking, the fore-yard came down; and the greatest part of the men being disabled through fatigue and sickness, it was some time before it could be got up again. The few hands who were employed in this business now plainly saw the land on the larboard beam, bearing N.W., upon which the ship was driving bodily. Orders were then given immediately by the captain to sway the fore-yard up, and set the fore-sail; which done, we wore ship with her head to the southward, and endeavoured to crowd her off from the land: but the weather, from being exceedingly tempestuous, blowing now a perfect hurricane, and right in upon the shore, rendered our endeavours (for we were now only twelve hands fit for duty) entirely fruitless. The night came on, dreadful beyond description, in which, attempting to throw out our topsails to claw off the shore, they were immediately blown from the yards.

In the morning, about four o'clock, the ship struck. The shock we received upon this occasion, though very great, being not unlike the blow of a heavy sea, such as in the series of preceding storms we had often experienced, was taken for the same; but we were soon undeceived by her striking again more violently than before, which laid her upon her beam ends, the sea making

a fair breach over her. Every person that now could stir was presently upon the quarter-deck; and many even of those were alert upon this occasion, that had not showed their faces upon deck for above two months before: several poor wretches, who were in the last stage of the scurvy, and who could not get out of their hammocks, were immediately drowned.

In this dreadful situation she lay for some little time, every soul on board looking upon the present minute as his last; for there was nothing; to be seen but breakers all around us. However, a mountainous sea hove her off from thence, but she presently struck again, and broke her tiller. In this terrifying and critical juncture, to have observed all the various modes of horror operating according to the several characters and complexions amongst us, it was necessary that the observer himself should have been free from all impressions of danger. Instances there were, however, of behaviour so very remarkable, they could not escape the notice of any one who was not entirely bereaved of his senses; for some were in this condition to all intents and purposes; particularly one, in the ravings of despair brought upon him, was seen stalking about the deck, flourishing a cutlass over his head and calling himself king of the country, and striking every body he came near, till his companions, seeing no other security against his tyranny, knocked him down. Some, reduced before by long sickness and the scurvy, became on this occasion as it were petrified and bereaved of all sense, like inanimate logs, and were bandied to and fro by the jerks and rolls of the

ship, without exerting any efforts to help themselves. So terrible was the scene of foaming breakers around us, that one of the bravest men we had could not help expressing his dismay at it, saying it was too shocking a sight to bear; and would have thrown himself over the rails of the quarter-deck into the sea, had he not been prevented: but at the same time there were not wanting those who preserved a presence of mind truly heroic. The man at the helm, though both rudder and tiller were gone, kept his station; and being asked by one of the officers, if the ship would steer or not, first took his time to make trial by the wheel, and then answered with as much respect and coolness as if the ship had been in the greatest safety; and immediately after applied himself with his usual serenity to his duty, persuaded it did not become him to desert it as long as the ship kept together. Mr. Jones, mate, who now survives not only this wreck, but that of the Litchfield man of war upon the coast of Barbary, at the time when the ship was in the most imminent danger, not only shewed himself undaunted, but endeavoured to inspire the same resolution in the men; saying, "My friends, let us not be discouraged: did you never see a ship amongst breakers before? Let us try to push her through them. Come, lend a hand; here is a sheet, and here is a brace; lay hold; I don't doubt but we may stick her yet near enough to the land to save our lives." This had so good an effect, that many who before were half dead, seemed active again, and now went to work in earnest. This Mr. Jones did purely to keep up the spirits of the people as long as possible;

for he often said afterwards, he thought there was not the least chance of a single man being saved. We now ran in between an opening of the breakers, steering by the sheets and braces, when providentially we stuck fast between two great rocks; that to windward sheltering us in some measure from the violence of the sea. We immediately cut away the main and foremast; but the ship kept beating in such a manner, that we imagined she could hold together but a very little while. The day now broke, and the weather, that had been extremely thick, cleared away for a few moments, and gave us a glimpse of the land not far from us. We now thought of nothing but saving our lives. To get the boats out, as our masts were gone, was a work of some time; which when accomplished, many were ready to jump into the first, by which means they narrowly escaped perishing before they reached the shore. I now went to Captain Cheap (who had the misfortune to dislocate his shoulder by a fall the day before, as he was going forward to get the fore-yard swayed up), and asked him if he would not go on shore; but he told me, as he had done before, that he would be the last to leave the ship; and he ordered me to assist in getting the men out as soon as possible. I had been with him very often from the time the ship first struck, as he desired I would, to acquaint him with every thing that passed; and I particularly remarked, that he gave his orders at that time with as much coolness as ever he had done during the former part of the voyage.

The scene was now greatly changed; for many who but a few

minutes before had shewn the strongest signs of despair, and were on their knees praying for mercy, imagining they were now not in that immediate danger, grew very riotous, broke open every chest and box that was at hand, stove in the heads of casks of brandy and wine as they were borne up to the hatchways, and got so drunk, that several of them were drowned on board, and lay floating about the decks for some days after. Before I left the ship, I went down to my chest, which was at the bulkhead of the wardroom, in order to save some little matters, if possible; but whilst I was there the ship thumped with such violence, and the water came in so fast, that I was forced to get upon the quarter-deck again, without saving a single rag but what was upon my back. The boatswain and some of the people would not leave the ship so long as there was any liquor to be got at; upon which Captain Cheap suffered himself to be helped out of his bed, put into the boat, and carried on shore.

It is natural to think, that to men thus upon the point of perishing by shipwreck, the getting to land was the highest attainment of their wishes; undoubtedly it was a desirable event; yet, all things considered, our condition was but little mended by the change. Whichever way we looked, a scene of horror presented itself: on one side the wreck (in which was all that we had in the world to support and subsist us), together with a boisterous sea, presented us with the most dreary prospect; on the other, the land did not wear a much more favourable appearance: desolate and barren, without sign of culture, we could hope

to receive little other benefit from it than the preservation it afforded us from the sea. It must be confessed this was a great and merciful deliverance from immediate destruction; but then we had wet, cold, and hunger, to struggle with, and no visible remedy against any of these evils. Exerting ourselves, however, though faint, benumbed, and almost helpless, to find some wretched covert against the extreme inclemency of the weather, we discovered an Indian hut, at a small distance from the beach, within a wood, in which as many as possible, without distinction, crowded themselves, the night coming on exceedingly tempestuous and rainy. But here our situation was such as to exclude all rest and refreshment by sleep from most of us; for besides that we pressed upon one another extremely, we were not without our alarms and apprehensions of being attacked by the Indians, from a discovery we made of some of their lances and other arms in our hut; and our uncertainty of their strength and disposition, gave alarm to our imagination, and kept us in continual anxiety.

In this miserable hovel, one of our company, a lieutenant of invalids, died this night; and of those who for want of room took shelter under a great tree, which stood them in very little stead, two more perished by the severity of that cold and rainy night. In the morning, the calls of hunger, which had been hitherto suppressed by our attention to more immediate dangers and difficulties, were now become too importunate to be resisted. We had most of us fasted eight and forty hours, some more; it was

time, therefore, to make inquiry among ourselves what store of sustenance had been brought from the wreck by the providence of some, and what could be procured on the island by the industry of others: but the produce of the one amounted to no more than two or three pounds of biscuit dust reserved in a bag; and all the success of those who ventured abroad, the weather being still exceedingly bad, was to kill one sea-gull, and pick some wild cellery. These, therefore, were immediately put into a pot, with the addition of a large quantity of water, and made into a kind of soup, of which each partook as far as it would go; but we had no sooner thrown this down than we were seized with the most painful sickness at our stomachs, violent reachings, swoonings, and other symptoms of being poisoned. This was imputed to various causes, but in general to the herbs we made use of, in the nature and quality of which we fancied ourselves mistaken; but a little further inquiry let us into the real occasion of it, which was no other than this: the biscuit dust was the sweepings of the bread-room, but the bag in which they were put had been a tobacco bag; the contents of which not being entirely taken out, what remained mixed with the biscuit-dust, and proved a strong emetic.

We were in all about a hundred and forty who had got to shore; but some few remained still on board, detained either by drunkenness, or a view of pillaging the wreck, among which was the boatswain. These were visited by an officer in the yawl, who was to endeavour to prevail upon them to join the rest; but

finding them in the greatest disorder, and disposed to mutiny, he was obliged to desist from his purpose and return without them. Though we were very desirous, and our necessities required that we should take some survey of the land we were upon; yet being strongly pre-possessed that the savages were retired but some little distance from us, and waited to see us divided, our parties did not make this day, any great excursions from the hut; but as far as we went, we found it very morassy and unpromising. The spot which we occupied was a bay formed by hilly promontories, that to the north so exceeding steep, that in order to ascend it (for there was no going round, the bottom being washed by the sea), we were at the labour of cutting steps. This, which we called Mount Misery, was of use to us in taking some observations afterwards, when the weather would permit: the southern promontory was not so inaccessible. Beyond this, I, with some others, having reached another bay, found driven ashore some parts of the wreck, but no kind of provision; nor did we meet with any shellfish, which we were chiefly in search of. We therefore returned to the rest, and for that day made no other repast than what the wild cellery afforded us. The ensuing night proved exceedingly tempestuous; and, the sea running very high, threatened those on board with immediate destruction by the parting of the wreck. They then were as solicitous to get ashore, as they were before obstinate in refusing the assistance we sent them; and when they found the boat did not come to their relief at the instant they expected it, without considering how

impracticable a thing it was to send it them in such a sea, they fired one of the quarter-deck guns at the hut; the ball of which did but just pass over the covering of it, and was plainly heard by the captain and us who were within. Another attempt, therefore, was made to bring these madmen to land, which, however, by the violence of the sea, and other impediments, occasioned by the mast that lay alongside, proved ineffectual. This unavoidable delay made the people on board outrageous: they fell to beating every thing to pieces that fell in the way; and, carrying their intemperance to the greatest excess, broke open chests and cabins for plunder that could be of no use to them: and so earnest were they in this wantonness of theft, that one man had evidently been murdered on account of some division of the spoil, or for the sake of the share that fell to him, having all the marks of a strangled corpse. One thing in this outrage they seemed particularly attentive to, which was, to provide themselves with arms and ammunition, in order to support them in putting their mutinous designs in execution, and asserting their claim to a lawless exemption from the authority of their officers, which they pretended must cease with the loss of the ship. But of these arms, which we stood in great need of, they were soon bereaved, upon coming ashore, by the resolution of Captain Cheap and Lieutenant Hamilton of the marines. Among these mutineers which had been left on board, as I observed before, was the boatswain; who, instead of exerting the authority he had over the rest, to keep them within bounds as much as possible, was

himself a ringleader in their riot: him, without respect to the figure he then made, for he was in laced clothes, Captain Cheap, by a blow well laid on with his cane, felled to the ground. It was scarce possible to refrain from laughter at the whimsical appearance these fellows made, who, having rifled the chests of the officers' best suits, had put them on over their greasy trowsers and dirty checked shirts. They were soon stripped of their finery, as they had before been obliged to resign their arms.

The incessant rains, and exceeding cold weather in this climate, rendered it impossible for us to subsist long without shelter; and the hut being much too little to receive us all, it was necessary to fall upon some expedient, without delay, which might serve our purpose: accordingly the gunner, carpenter, and some more, turning the cutter keel upwards, and fixing it upon props, made no despicable habitation. Having thus established some sort of settlement, we had the more leisure to look about us, and to make our researches with greater accuracy than we had before, after such supplies as the most desolate coasts are seldom unfurnished with. Accordingly we soon provided ourselves with some sea-fowl, and found limpets, muscles, and other shell-fish in tolerable abundance; but this rummaging of the shore was now becoming extremely irksome to those who had any feeling, by the bodies of our drowned people thrown among the rocks, some of which were hideous spectacles, from the mangled condition they were in by the violent surf that drove in upon the coast. These horrors were overcome by the distresses of our people,

who were even glad of the occasion of killing the gallinazo (the carrion crow of that country), while preying on these carcases, in order to make a meal of them. But a provision by no means proportionable to the number of mouths to be fed, could, by our utmost industry, be acquired from that part of the island we had hitherto traversed: therefore, till we were in a capacity of making more distant excursions, the wreck was to be applied to as often as possible, for such supplies as could be got out of her. But as this was a very precarious fund in its present situation, and at best could not last us long; considering too that it was very uncertain how long we might be detained upon this island the stores and provision we were so fortunate as to retrieve, were not only to be dealt out with the most frugal economy, but a sufficient quantity, if possible, laid by to fit us out, whenever we could agree upon any method of transporting ourselves from this dreary spot. The difficulties we had to encounter in these visits to the wreck, cannot be easily described; for no part of it being above water except the quarter-deck and part of the fore-castle, we were usually obliged to purchase such things as were within reach, by means of large hooks fastened to poles, in which business we were much incommoded by the dead bodies floating between decks.

In order to secure what we thus got, in a manner to answer the ends and purposes above-mentioned, Captain Cheap ordered a store tent to be erected near his hut as a repository, from which nothing was to be dealt out but in the measure and proportion

agreed upon by the officers; and though it was very hard upon us petty officers, who were fatigued with hunting all day in quest of food, to defend this tent from invasion by night, no other means could be devised for this purpose so effectual as the committing this charge to our care; and we were accordingly ordered to divide the task equally between us. Yet, notwithstanding our utmost vigilance and care, frequent robberies were committed upon our trust, the tent being accessible in more than one place. And one night, when I had the watch, hearing a stir within, I came unawares upon the thief, and presenting a pistol to his breast, obliged him to submit to be tied up to a post till I had an opportunity of securing him more effectually. Depredations continued to be made on our reserved stock, notwithstanding the great hazard attending such attempts; for our common safety made it necessary to punish them with the utmost rigour. This will not be wondered at, when it is known how little the allowance which might consistently be dispensed from thence, was proportionable to our common exigencies; so that our daily and nightly task of roving after food, was not in the least relaxed thereby; and all put together was so far from answering our necessities, that many at this time perished with hunger. A boy, when no other eatables could be found, having picked up the liver of one of the drowned men (whose carcase had been torn to pieces by the force with which the sea drove it among the rocks), was with difficulty withheld from making a meal of it. The men were so assiduous in their research after the few things which

drove from the wreck, that in order to have no sharers of their good fortune, they examined the shore no less by night than by day; so that many of those who were less alert, or not so fortunate as their neighbours, perished with hunger, or were driven to the last extremity. It must be observed, that on the 14th of May we were cast away, and it was not till the 25th of this month that provision was served regularly from the store tent.

The land we were now settled upon was about 90 leagues to the northward of the western mouth of the straits of Magellan, in the latitude of between 47 and 48° south, from whence we could plainly see the Cordilleras; and by two Lagoons on the north and south of us, stretching towards those mountains, we conjectured it was an island. But as yet we had no means of informing ourselves perfectly, whether it was an island or the main; for besides that the inland parts at a little distance from us seemed impracticable from the exceeding great thickness of the wood, we had hitherto been in such confusion and want (each finding full employment for his time, in scraping together a wretched subsistence, and providing shelter against the cold and rain), that no party could be formed to go upon discoveries. The climate and season too were utterly unfavourable to adventurers, and the coast, as far as our eye could stretch seaward, a scene of such dismal breakers as would discourage the most daring from making attempts in small boats. Nor were we assisted in our enquiries by any observation that could be made from that eminence we called Mount Misery, toward land, our prospect

that way being intercepted by still higher hills and lofty woods: we had therefore no other expedient, by means of which to come at this knowledge, but by fitting out one of our ship's boats upon some discovery, to inform us of our situation. Our long-boat was still on board the wreck; therefore a number of hands were now dispatched to cut the gunwale of the ship, in order to get her out. Whilst we were employed in this business, there appeared three canoes of Indians paddling towards us: they had come round the point from the southern Lagoons. It was some time before we could prevail upon them to lay aside their fears and approach us; which at length they were induced to do by the signs of friendship we made them, and by shewing some bale-goods, which they accepted, and suffered themselves to be conducted to the captain, who made them, likewise, some presents. They were strangely affected with the novelty thereof; but chiefly when shewn the looking-glass, in which the beholder could not conceive it to be his own face that was represented, but that of some other behind it, which he therefore went round to the back of the glass to find out.

These people were of a small stature, very swarthy, having long, black, coarse hair, hanging over their faces. It was evident, from their great surprise, and every part of their behaviour, as well as their not having one thing in their possession which could be derived from white people, that they had never seen such. Their clothing was nothing but a bit of some beast's skin about their waists, and something woven from feathers over

the shoulders; and as they uttered no word of any language we had ever heard, nor had any method of making themselves understood, we presumed they could have had no intercourse with Europeans. These savages, who upon their departure left us a few muscles, returned in two days, and surprised us by bringing three sheep. From whence they could procure animals in a part of the world so distant from any Spanish settlement, cut off from all communication with the Spaniards by an inaccessible coast and unprofitable country, is difficult to conceive. Certain it is, that we saw no such creatures, nor ever heard of any such, from the Straits of Magellan, till we got into the neighbourhood of Chiloe: it must be by some strange accident that these creatures came into their possession; but what that was, we never could learn from them. At this interview we bartered with them for a dog or two, which we roasted and eat. In a few days after, they made us another visit, and bringing their wives with them, took up their abode with us for some days; then again left us.

Whenever the weather permitted, which was now grown something drier, but exceeding cold, we employed ourselves about the wreck, from which we had, at sundry times, recovered several articles of provision and liquor: these were deposited in the store-tent. Ill-humour and discontent, from the difficulties we laboured under in procuring subsistence, and the little prospect there was of any amendment in our condition, was now breaking out apace. In some it shewed itself by a separation of settlement and habitation; in others, by a resolution of leaving the captain

entirely, and making a wild journey by themselves, without determining upon any plan whatever. For my own part, seeing it was the fashion, and liking none of their parties, I built a little hut just big enough for myself and a poor Indian dog I found in the woods, who could shift for himself along shore, at low water, by getting limpets. This creature grew so fond of me, and faithful, that he would suffer nobody to come near the hut without biting them. Besides those seceders I mentioned, some laid a scheme of deserting us entirely: these were in number ten; the greatest part of them a most desperate and abandoned crew, who, to strike a notable stroke before they went off, placed half a barrel of gunpowder close to the captain's hut, laid a train to it, and were just preparing to perpetrate their wicked design of blowing up their commander, when they were with difficulty dissuaded from it by one who had some bowels and remorse of conscience left in him. These wretches, after rambling for some time in the woods, and finding it impracticable to get off, for they were then convinced that we were not upon the main, as they had imagined when they first left us, but upon an island within four or five leagues of it, returned and settled about a league from us; however, they were still determined, as soon as they could procure craft fit for their purpose, to get to the main. But before they could effect this, we found means to prevail upon the armourer and one of the carpenter's crew, – two very useful men to us, who had imprudently joined them, – to come over again to their duty. The rest, (one or two excepted) having built a punt,

and converted the hull of one of the ship's masts into a canoe, went away up one of the Lagoons, and never were heard of more.

These being a desperate and factious set, did not distress us much by their departure, but rather added to our future security: one in particular, James Mitchell by name, we had all the reason in the world to think had committed no less than two murders since the loss of our ship; one on the person found strangled on board, another on the body of a man whom we discovered among some bushes upon Mount Misery, stabbed in several places, and shockingly mangled. This diminution of our numbers was succeeded by an unfortunate accident much more affecting in its consequences, I mean the death of Mr. Cozens, midshipman; in relating which with the necessary impartiality and exactness, I think myself obliged to be more than ordinarily particular. Having one day, among other things, got a cask of peas out of the wreck, about which I was almost constantly employed, I brought it to shore in the yawl; when having landed it, the captain came down upon the beach, and bid me to go up to some of the tents and order hands to come down and roll it up; but finding none except Mr. Cozens, I delivered him the orders, who immediately came down to the captain, where I left them when I returned to the wreck. Upon my coming on shore again, I found that Mr. Cozens was put under confinement by the captain, for being drunk and giving him abusive language: however, he was soon after released. A day or two after, he had some dispute with the surgeon, and came to blows: all these

things incensed the captain greatly against him. I believe this unfortunate man was kept warm with liquor, and set on by some ill-designing persons; for, when sober, I never knew a better natured man, or one more inoffensive. Some little time after, at the hour of serving out provisions, Mr. Cozens was at the store tent; and having, it seems, lately had a quarrel with the purser, and now some words arising between them, the latter told him he was come to mutiny; and without any further ceremony, fired a pistol at his head, which narrowly missed him. The captain, hearing the report of a pistol, and perhaps the purser's words, that Cozens was come to mutiny, ran out of his hut with a cocked pistol in his hand, and, without asking any questions, immediately shot him through the head. I was at this time in my hut, as the weather was extremely bad; but running out upon the alarm of this firing, the first thing I saw was Mr. Cozens on the ground, weltering in his blood: he was sensible, and took me by the hand, as he did several others, shaking his head, as if he meant to take leave of us. If Mr. Cozens' behaviour to his captain was indecent and provoking, the captain's, on the other hand, was rash and hasty: if the first was wanting in that respect and observance which is due from a petty officer to his commander, the latter was still more unadvised in the method he took for the enforcement of his authority; of which, indeed, he was jealous to the last degree, and which he saw daily declining, and ready to be trampled upon. His mistaken apprehension of a mutinous design in Mr. Cozens, the sole motive of this rash

action, was so far from answering the end he proposed by it, that the men, who before were much dissatisfied and uneasy, were by this unfortunate step thrown almost into open sedition and revolt. It was evident that the people, who ran out of their tents, alarmed by the report of fire-arms, though they disguised their real sentiments for the present, were extremely affected at this catastrophe of Mr. Cozens (for he was greatly beloved by them): their minds were now exasperated, and it was to be apprehended, that their resentment, which was smothered for the present, would shortly shew itself in some desperate enterprise. The unhappy victim, who lay weltering in his blood on the ground before them, seemed to absorb their whole attention; the eyes of all were fixed upon him; and visible marks of the deepest concern appeared in the countenances of the spectators. The persuasion the captain was under, at the time he shot Mr. Cozens, that his intentions were mutinous, together with a jealousy of the diminution of his authority, occasioned also his behaving with less compassion and tenderness towards him afterwards than was consistent with the unhappy condition of the poor sufferer: for when it was begged as a favour by his mess-mates, that Mr. Cozens might be removed to their tent, though a necessary thing in his dangerous situation, yet it was not permitted; but the poor wretch was suffered to languish on the ground some days, with no other covering than a bit of canvass thrown over some bushes, where he died. But to return to our story: the Captain, addressing himself to the people thus assembled, told them, that it was his

resolution to maintain his command over them as usual, which still remained in as much force as ever; and then ordered them all to return to their respective tents, with which order they instantly complied. Now we had saved the long-boat from the wreck, and got it in our possession, there was nothing that seemed so necessary towards the advancing our delivery from this desolate place, as the new modelling this vessel so as to have room for all those who were inclined to go off in her, and to put her in a condition to bear the stormy seas we must of course encounter. We therefore hauled her up, and having placed her upon blocks, sawed her in two, in order to lengthen her about twelve feet by the keel. For this purpose, all those who could be spared from the more immediate task of procuring subsistence, were employed in fitting and shaping timber as the carpenter directed them; I say, in procuring subsistence, because the weather lately having been very tempestuous, and the wreck working much, had disgorged a great part of her contents, which were every where dispersed about the shore.

We now sent frequent parties up the Lagoons, which sometimes succeeded in getting some sea-fowl for us. The Indians appearing again in the offing we put off our yawl, in order to frustrate any design they might have of going up the Lagoon towards the deserters, who would have availed themselves of some of their canoes to have got upon the main. Having conducted them in, we found that their intention was to settle among us, for they had brought their wives and children

with them, in all about fifty persons, who immediately set about building themselves wigwams, and seemed much reconciled to our company; and, could we have entertained them as we ought, they would have been of great assistance to us, who were yet extremely put to it to subsist ourselves, being a hundred in number; but the men, now subject to little or no control, endeavoured to seduce their wives, which gave the Indians such offence, that in a short time they found means to depart, taking every thing along with them; and we, being sensible of the cause, never expected to see them return again. The carpenter having made some progress in his work upon the long-boat, in which he was enabled to proceed tolerably, by the tools and other articles of his business retrieved from the wreck, the men began to think of the course they should take to get home; or rather, having borrowed Sir John Narborough's Voyage of Captain Cheap, by the application of Mr. Bulkely, which book he saw me reading one day in my tent, they, immediately upon perusing it, concluded upon making their voyage home by the Straits of Magellan. This plan was proposed to the captain, who by no means approved of it, his design being to go northwards, with a view of seizing a ship of the enemy's, by which means he might join the Commodore: at present, therefore, here it rested. But the men were in high spirits from the prospect they had of getting off in the long-boat, overlooking all the difficulties and hazards of a voyage almost impracticable, and caressing the carpenter, who indeed was an excellent workman, and deserved

all the encouragement they could give him. The Indians having left us, and the weather continuing tempestuous and rainy, the distresses of the people for want of food become insupportable. Our number, which was at first one hundred and forty-five, was now reduced to one hundred, and chiefly by famine, which put the rest upon all shifts and devices to support themselves. One day, when I was at home in my hut with my Indian dog, a party came to my door, and told me their necessities were such, that they must eat the creature or starve. Though their plea was urgent, I could not help using some arguments to endeavour to dissuade them from killing him, as his faithful services and fondness deserved it at my hands; but, without weighing my arguments, they took him away by force and killed him; upon which, thinking that I had at least as good a right to a share as the rest, I sat down with them, and partook of their repast. Three weeks after that I was glad to make a meal of his paws and skin, which, upon recollecting the spot where they had killed him, I found thrown aside and rotten. The pressing calls of hunger drove our men to their wit's end, and put them upon a variety of devices to satisfy it. Among the ingenious this way, one Phips, a boatswain's mate, having got a water puncheon, scuttled it; then lashing two logs, one on each side, set out in quest of adventures in this extraordinary and original piece of embarkation. By this means he would frequently, when all the rest were starving, provide himself with wild fowl; and it must have been very bad weather indeed which could deter him from

putting out to sea when his occasions required. Sometimes he would venture far out in the offing, and be absent the whole of the day: at last, it was his misfortune, at a great distance from shore, to be overset by a heavy sea; but being near a rock, though no swimmer, he managed so as to scramble to it, and with great difficulty ascended it: there he remained two days with very little hopes of any relief, for he was too far off to be seen from shore; but fortunately a boat, having put off and gone in quest of wild fowl that way, discovered him making such signals as he was able, and brought him back to the island. But this accident did not so discourage him but that soon after, having procured an ox's hide, used on board for sifting powder, and called a gunner's hide, by the assistance of some hoops he formed something like a canoe, in which he made several successful voyages. When the weather would permit us, we seldom failed of getting some wild fowl, though never in any plenty, by putting off with our boats; but this most inhospitable climate is not only deprived of the sun for the most part, by a thick, rainy atmosphere, but is also visited by almost incessant tempests. It must be confessed, we reaped some benefit from these hard gales and overgrown seas, which drove several things ashore; but there was no dependence on such accidental relief; and we were always alert to avail ourselves of every interval of fair weather, though so little to be depended on, that we were often unexpectedly and to our peril overtaken by a sudden change. In one of our excursions I, with two more, in a wretched punt of our own making, had no sooner landed

at our station upon a high rock, than the punt was driven loose by a sudden squall; and had not one of the men, at the risk of his life, jumped into the sea and swam on board her, we must in all probability have perished; for we were more than three leagues from the island at the time. Among the birds we generally shot, was the painted goose, whose plumage is variegated with the most lively colours; and a bird much larger than a goose, which we called the race-horse, from the velocity with which it moved upon the surface of the water, in a sort of half flying, half running motion. But we were not so successful in our endeavours by land; for though we sometimes got pretty far into the woods, we met with very few birds in all our walks. We never saw but three woodcocks, two of which were killed by Mr. Hamilton, and one by myself. These, with some humming-birds, and a large kind of robin redbreast, were the only feathered inhabitants of this island, excepting a small bird with two very long feathers in his tail, which was generally seen amongst the rocks, and was so tame, that I have had them rest upon my shoulder whilst I have been gathering shell-fish. Indeed, we were visited by many birds of prey, some very large; but these only occasionally, and, as we imagined, allured by some dead whale in the neighbourhood, which was once seen. However, if we were so fortunate as to kill one of them, we thought ourselves very well off. In one of my walks, seeing a bird of this latter kind upon an eminence, I endeavoured to come upon it unperceived with my gun, by means of the woods which lay at the back of that eminence; but when I

had proceeded so far in the wood as to think I was in a line with it, I heard a growling close by me, which made me think it advisable to retire as soon as possible; the woods were so gloomy I could see nothing; but as I retired, this noise followed me close till I had got out of them. Some of our men did assure me, that they had seen a very large beast in the woods; but their description of it was too imperfect to be relied upon. The wood here is chiefly of the aromatic kind; the iron wood, a wood of a very deep red hue, and another, of an exceeding bright yellow. All the low spots are very swampy; but what we thought strange, upon the summits of the highest hills were found beds of shells, a foot or two thick.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.