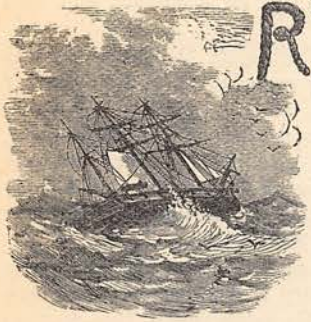


IN SEARCH OF THE SHIPWRECKED.



RIGHT in the middle of the great highway to Australia, about 700 miles from the Cape of Good Hope, there is a group of uninhabited islands called the Crozets, upon which, within the last sixty years, at least two companies of shipwrecked people have had to spend many months in misery and almost in despair. These islands have recently been visited by H.M.S. *Comus*, under special instructions of the Admiralty, for the double purpose of ascertaining if any "cast-aways" were living there, and to establish provision depôts for the benefit of any poor wretches who might hereafter be driven upon those barren rocks.

For a long time fears had been entertained that some of the crews and passengers of certain "missing ships" might have taken refuge on the Crozets; but after a long and careful search all through the group, and after repeatedly firing guns to call attention to the ship's presence, Captain East, who was in command, perfectly satisfied himself that there were no human beings on any of the islands, waiting to be rescued. It would have been good news for the friends of passengers in the *Knowsley Hall* and other ships, who had written to Captain East, if he could have brought them some tidings of those for whose safety they had continued to hope against hope, but he has no such message to deliver. No traces whatever were found to indicate that any shipwrecked people had been on the islands since the survivors of the *Strathmore* left them in 1876.

It was the story told by these survivors which led to the visit of the *Comus* to the Crozets. That story also revived the recollection of a shipwreck which occurred at the same place more than half a century before, when fifteen men were doomed to remain in captivity there a year and ten months. In the narrative which was given by the rescued crew of the *Princess of Wales* another Defoe might have found ample materials for another "Robinson Crusoe." One of their number, named Goodridge, did indeed write an account of the terrible experiences of himself and his companions on the "desert island," which was so full of interest that for many years he lived on the profits of the sale of his book. The *Princess of Wales* was on a voyage to Prince Edward's Island, when she struck on one of the Crozet rocks. The crew escaped in two boats, but they saved nothing from the wreck except a tinder-box, a frying-pan, a gridiron, a lance, and a few knives. The two boats speedily got separated, and for a long period the men in each supposed that their companions were lost. Seven men

landed from one of the boats on the 17th of March, and it was not until the following December that they had the joy of seeing their eight shipmates rowing up to the beach in search of better quarters than those in which they had thus far kept up the struggle for existence. Both parties had gone through precisely similar hardships, and had adopted the same devices in providing themselves with food and clothing. They caught and killed seals and penguins and molly-hawks; and when their clothes were worn out, new garments were made of seal-skins, which the poor fellows sewed together with sinews of the sea-elephants by means of an old nail sharpened as a needle.

All through the twenty-two months of their dreary residence on the island, one old man made it his duty to keep watch for passing ships; and when at last he exclaimed, "A sail! a sail!" the men rushed to the highest part of the island and lighted a fire with the blubber of the sea-elephants. This signal fortunately attracted the attention of a schooner, the captain of which sent a boat ashore. The poor fellows were so eager to escape from their prison that they could not wait until the boat reached the beach; they dashed into the water and made towards the boat, but finding themselves hampered by their seal-skin trousers, threw them off, and so gained the boat, much to the consternation of their rescuers, who were more than half inclined to think that they had met with a new race of beings! The whole of the fifteen men were at once taken on board the *Philo*, of Boston, and in due course were forwarded to England.

The survivors of the *Strathmore* were not detained on the Crozets so long as were the sailors of the *Princess of Wales*, but their experiences were in every way as painful and extraordinary.

When the *Strathmore* left Gravesend, on April 19th, 1875, she had on board fifty passengers and a crew of thirty-eight men. She had not been long at sea before some of the sailors got at the wines and spirits, and rendered themselves so incapable of attending to their duties, that for a considerable time the whole work of the ship had to be done by three men besides the officers. As the Equator was approached the still half-intoxicated wretches insisted upon the observance of what used to be the invariable custom on "crossing the Line"—that of shaving the "Johnny Raws." More drunkenness followed, and with most of her crew helpless, and her passengers disgusted and in dread of what might happen, the good ship sped to her doom. For some days before the catastrophe she sailed under a gentle breeze in weather so thick that no observations could be taken, and the captain was so far mistaken in his calculations of her whereabouts, that only two hours before she struck he declared that they were eighty-seven miles away to the south of the Crozet group. Not a few of the passengers had sad

forebodings of their impending fate, and some of them refused to leave the deck for the night. At a quarter to four in the morning of the 1st of July the *Strathmore* went heavily on to the rocks, and immediately began to fill and settle down. Amid the scene of confusion and terror that followed, the captain seemed like a man distraught; with his hands clasped convulsively behind his back, he paced up and down the deck, shouting wildly, "It's all over with us! we are all drowned!" With as much energy as they could command, the scarcely sober seamen got out the boats, only to let one after another sweep away on the waves. The dazed captain could give no orders, and the poor terror-stricken passengers were left to shift for themselves, and even had to struggle with the selfish sailors for places in the boats that were finally launched. Big seas broke over the ship, and the unfortunate creatures who were too young or too feeble to climb into the rigging were swept overboard and drowned. The captain, the first mate, and a passenger were the first to disappear. Then, as the life-boat passed under the projecting rigging, two brothers leapt for "dear life;" but one fell short of the boat and was lost. When the crowded boat had drifted away from the ship, all but five of those in the rigging made their way down to the deck-house, and thence to the fore-castle-head. Here they waited, hungry and cold and miserable, until daybreak. The second mate and a party then contrived to launch the gig, and the third mate, with three other men, put off in the dingy. At first the gig was rowed along the north of the island, but as no landing-place was found there they passed round to the south side, where a safe landing was at length effected. Shortly afterwards the life-boat was observed drifting about some little distance away; she was towed to the beach by the men in the gig, who then went back to the ship. The five survivors still left in the rigging were safely brought away, but night having come on, and with it a dense fog, nothing further could be done towards rescuing the unfortunate people crowded together in the fore-castle-head. They were of necessity left to pass the weary hours in terror and misery indescribable. It was a bitterly cold night, and they had no food except a few biscuits, and none could tell whether the ship might not go down before daylight permitted the boat to return. Happily, all were taken off next morning, and the night following the *Strathmore* disappeared. Forty-nine souls in all were found to have been saved from the wreck, amongst them being but one woman and one child. The first night a boat's canvas served as a tent for the lady and the boy; all the rest had to be content to sleep on the cold rock and under the open sky.

It was hoped that some part of the cargo or passengers' luggage would float ashore as the ship broke up, but the only package that reached the poor people was a blanket-chest, which, however, besides a few welcome coverlets, also contained some knives and forks, a few spoons, some tins of preserved meats, and two parasols. These tins and parasols proved exceedingly serviceable, the empty canisters

being used as pans, and even as lamps, while the parasol wires were converted into needles. With these rough needles, and threads drawn out of the boat's canvas, or long grass when thread was no longer to be had, the men stitched penguin-skins together, and so made themselves "new garments" when their old ones became unwearable. An albatross was killed the first day, and served the people with meat for about three weeks; then they had grey-birds and penguins; and when birds could not be caught, they lived on a sort of grass like the tops of carrots, which abounded on the island. When the canisters were worn out, the cooks of the party made use of hollow stones in which to boil the birds and vegetables. No trees grow on the island, and therefore to build themselves a hut the castaways had to gather up all the scraps of wood that happened to float ashore. One poor fellow died shortly after the party landed, apparently from fright and excitement, and four others succumbed to the terrible hardships and privations of life on a desert island. To attract the attention of passing ships a tower about twelve feet high was built of turf, and an oar placed on the top. From July to January only four ships passed close enough to the islands to be seen; two of them went very near, but the signals made by the shipwrecked folks with blankets appear not to have been observed from the sea. It was not until the 21st of January that their presence on the islands was discovered. An American whaler was passing, when the captain, who had gone up aloft to have a look at the vast rocks, noticed something unusual on one spot, and ordered his ship to stand in, that he might ascertain what it was. A man was sent aloft into the "crow's-nest," and reported that some kind of signal was being made by people on shore. Boats were quickly lowered and sent off to the island; the lady and five feeble men were first taken to the American ship; provisions were afterwards carried to the overjoyed castaways, and next morning they were all rescued from the barren and lonely spot on which they had spent nearly seven miserable months. At first the American captain proposed to leave the rescued party on Hog Island (one of the Crozets) until he had finished his cruise, but he was persuaded to change his course, so that the poor creatures, who had already suffered so much, might as speedily as possible be sent back to England.

When the Crozets were visited by H.M.S. *Comus*, at the early part of last year, the cairn erected by the passengers of the *Strathmore* was still standing; and could be seen at a great distance. An old hut found in another part of Apostle Island (where the *Strathmore* was wrecked) was stored with provisions; Penguin Island was found quite inaccessible; but on Hog Island and Possession Island huts were built by the crew of the *Comus*, and after being well filled with tinned meats of various kinds, they were covered over with painted canvas, and a notice-board fixed to each, bearing the following words:—"These provisions are only for shipwrecked people.—H.M.S. *Comus*, March 6th, 1880."