

THE TRANSIT OF VENUS.

THE SWATARA ON HER WAY FROM CAPE TOWN TO KERGUELEN.

THE DEPARTURE FROM TABLE BAY—ROUGH
WEATHER—POSSESSION ISLAND—DE-
SCRIPTION OF THE PLACE—THE CROZET
GROUP—CLIMATE—OFF FOR KERGUELEN.

From Our Own Correspondent.

HOBART TOWN, Tasmania, }
Saturday, Oct. 10, 1874. }

At 1 P. M., Aug. 17, we began to haul out of the dock at Cape Town, and in an hour and three-quarters we cleared the bulk-heads and were fairly into Table Bay. Here we lay till 4:15 P. M., when the engines were started and we steamed out to sea. There was very little wind, so the ocean was quite smooth, and we held our course within two or three miles of the land. As we coasted along, the sun fell low in the west, and his rays clothed the flanks of Table Mountain and the Twelve Apostles in a vesture of purple and gold, gorgeous beyond all description. For a time the scene was like fairy land, but as the shades of night fell on the waters the mountains put on more sombre hues, and presently disappeared altogether, leaving us alone with the twinkling stars over our heads.

Next morning at 9:30 we stopped our engines and trusted our progress to the favoring breezes. All day long there was a heavy swell, and the wind kept increasing till at night it became a howling gale in which the ship pitched and rolled so heavily that it was impossible to stand upon her decks without holding on. On the morning of Aug. 19 the wind was still high, but by evening it moderated to a top-gallant breeze. The sea remained rough for a couple of days, and after that we had a week of fine weather with no drawback whatever, except occasionally a heavy swell, and a few squalls such as always occur in that part of the world.

DOGS IN A STORM.

At Cape Town the members of the Crozet and Kerguelen parties purchased some dogs to take to their stations, and the behavior of these animals during rough weather furnished us much amusement. They could not become accustomed to the motion of the ship, and whenever she rolled deeply they would always face the weather side of the deck, and try to walk in that direction—that is, they always strove to walk up-hill; probably with the idea of preventing themselves from falling, they knew not whither. During the gale mentioned above, the decks sometimes stood at an angle of thirty-five or forty degrees, and at such instants the thorough demoralization of the dogs would have been pitiable if it had not been so laughable. They crouched down close to the deck and tried to hang on with their claws, but all in vain; they slipped helplessly from side to side, and then, with tails between their legs and bodies quivering with abject terror, they looked beseechingly to the men around them and whimpered for help.

On the afternoon of Aug. 28, the wind, which was blowing pretty strongly, came out dead ahead, and, in order to save time fires were lighted under the boilers, and at 6:30 P. M. the sails were furled, and the engines were started. However, the steam did us little good, for before midnight the wind freshened to a gale so severe that we were obliged to heave to. Next day about noon the weather moderated sufficiently to allow us to proceed on our course, but the atmosphere became thick and foggy, and the sea continued very rough.

SIGHTING THE CROZET ISLANDS.

At daylight on Sunday morning, Aug. 30, Hog Island, the most westerly of the Crozet group, was sighted, appearing like a mass of mountains, their summits concealed by clouds, and their flanks, down to the level of the sea, never entirely free from rolling masses of mist. We passed within two miles of its southern shore, but the circumstances were not such as to enable us to form any trustworthy notion of its character. Not a tree nor a bush was visible, and, although on the south-east side the hills were lower, and covered with green, (probably moss,) still the whole place impressed us as bleak and desolate.

A HARD GALE—POSSESSION ISLAND.

Immediately after clearing the eastern side of Hog Island we caught some glimpses of the group of rocky islets known as the Twelve Apostles, but owing to the fog they were never well seen. Hog and Possession Islands are forty-two miles apart, and by noon we were almost midway between them. At 3 P. M., when we were nine miles from the westernmost point of Possession Island, the wind began to increase in violence, and by 4:30 P. M. it was blowing a gale, and the air was so thick with rain, snow, and mist that it was impossible to see a quarter of a mile ahead. We were then off the north-west end of the island, four miles from the shore, and the wind was blowing from the south. The northernmost point of the island was only seven and a half miles distant, and we were trying to round it in the hope of finding shelter under its lee. However, the gale was too much for us, and with the ship under double-reefed topsails, the island enveloped in fog, and darkness rapidly approaching, there was nothing for it but to lie to on the port tack, and that was accordingly done. During the night the gale was very severe, but toward morning it abated, and at daylight we found Hog Island and the Twelve Apostles again in sight. In fifteen hours we had drifted thirty-seven miles dead to leeward, and we were then forty-two miles north-west of Possession Island. In order to reach it, the ship's head was put about, the sails furled, and the engines started; but, with a high wind and heavy sea both against us, our progress was necessarily slow. In the afternoon the fog cleared away, and, although the sky was still cloudy, we obtained our best view of the island. Its north-west end was toward us, and seemed to consist of a mass of hills piled one above the other, terminating in two principal peaks five thousand feet high, with a saddle-shaped depression (filled with smaller peaks) between them. For perhaps a thousand feet from the sea level the land was bare, but everything above that was covered with snow. Of trees and bushes there were none. About 4 P. M. we arrived opposite the island, and as we ran along its north-eastern side we were somewhat protected from the wind, and the water became smoother. This helped us considerably, and by 6:30 P. M., just as daylight was fading into darkness, we got into America Bay. It was blowing fresh outside, but close to the shore we found complete shelter from the wind, in water as smooth as a mill-pond, and there we anchored for the night.

ASPECT OF THE ISLAND.

In general shape Possession Island may be regarded as a parallelogram, with its longest sides lying from north-west to south-east. It is about seven miles broad by thirteen long, and, as the land is everywhere steep and precipitous, it is best characterized as the summit of a mountain range protruding from the sea. Ship Bay, a small pocket 1,000 feet wide by 1,500 feet deep, situated about the middle of the south-east end of the island, is by far its best harbor, and in fact is the only one shown on the latest English Admiralty charts. At the head of the bay there is a sandy beach a few yards in extent, and a strip of tolerably level ground, upon which the sealers have built a hut, where they some times reside during the sealing season. The bay is completely land-locked on three sides, and small vessels may lie there in perfect security during any storm except a south-easterly one. With the wind from that direction the

waves roll freely in, creating a surf in which nothing can live, and the only safe course is to get up anchor and run out. Fortunately during the Summer months, (December to February,) south-east winds are rare, and vessels seldom visit the island at any other season.

In former years the sealers frequently left parties here for months at a time, and they, of course, became familiar with the island and gave names to all the principal localities. From a man who had belonged to one these parties I obtained the following information:

Starting from Ship Bay and going northward, we come first to a little beach known as "Shallop," and further on to another known as "Gaff Topsail." Beyond the latter lies "Capstan Point," which forms the north-east corner of the island. Rounding Capstan Point brings us to the north-east side of the island, and proceeding along it in a north-westerly direction, we come successively to Sandy Bay, America Bay, Windy Bay, and Ebie Bay, the latter taking its name from a ship which was wrecked there years ago. Windy Bay and Ebie Bay are contiguous to each other, being separated only by a strip of land called Ebie Bay Point. Beyond Ebie Bay is situated the most northerly point of the island, which is a huge vertical rock forming the north-east side of North Bay, and from that circumstance called "North Bay Perpendicular." Passing now to the north-west end of the island, and proceeding along it in a south-westerly direction, we arrive first at North Bay, and then at North-west Bay. Still further on is the most western point of the island, which has received the appellation of "Hole in the Wall," on account of a perforation in the rock through which a schooner might sail. Returning to Ship Bay, and going south-westward along the south-eastern end of the island, we come first to West Bay, then to South-west Bay, and finally to South-west Bay Point, which is the southern extremity of the island. At all these bays and beaches it is possible to land in a whale-boat during calm weather, but Ship Bay, America Bay, Windy Bay, Ebie Bay, and North-west Bay are the only places where even a sealing schooner can anchor. All of them are open to the sea, but, as they lie on three sides of the island, by shifting from one to another a small vessel can always find shelter. For a ship as large as the Swatara there is not a safe anchorage in the island. On account of being exposed to the prevailing winds the south-western side of the island is lashed by a surf so heavy that even the sealers give it a wide berth, and this shore is consequently little known.

THE CROZETS.

For half a century the Crozets were much frequented by vessels in search of seals and sea-elephants; but, by the year 1850 these animals were almost exterminated, and since then the islands have been little visited. As usual, the seals lived in rookeries, the principal one on Possession Island being at Hole in the Wall; but the sea-elephants were found everywhere along the shore. The season was from the beginning of January to the end of March, and during these months the sealing parties resided on the island in huts built for the purpose, one of which was at Ship Bay, three at America Bay, and one at North Bay. The latter is probably now in ruins, but the others are still standing. America Bay was a sort of central station, from which paths diverged to various parts of the island. The routes were as follows: To Windy Bay, forty-five minutes' walk, over two ranges of hills; to Ship Bay, two hours' walk, over a mountain; to North Bay, five hours' walk, over three mountains; to West Bay and to South-west Bay there were also paths, but they led over a very steep and difficult part of the island. To walk from Windy Bay to Ebie Bay occupied an hour and a half, and to walk from North Bay to North-west Bay occupied two hours, the path in each case leading over a range of hills. It is possible to walk from North-west Bay to Hole in the Wall, but it is hard climbing, and usually occupied at least twelve hours. Beyond that the hills are so rugged that the sealers regarded it as impossible to penetrate them. All these routes lead through the interior, because the coast is too precipitous to be traversed anywhere, except on the north-eastern end of the island, where the land is comparatively low, and there is no difficulty in walking along the shore from Ship Bay to Shallop and Gaff Topsail Beaches.

THE WEATHER.

The weather at the Crozets is generally stormy and disagreeable, but the range of temperature is probably not greater than in England. In winter snow always covers the mountains and hill-tops, and frequently extends down to the very shore itself. There, however, it rarely falls to so great a depth as twelve inches, and usually melts in a few days. The sealers care little for science, and I cannot discover that they ever kept any meteorological register here, but they tell me that in the dead of Winter the ice on the fresh-water ponds sometimes attains a thickness of sixteen or eighteen inches, which indicates a temperature not very different from that of central New-York during the months of January and February. For three-quarters of the year the sky is almost continually overcast, and for days, and even weeks, together, neither sun, moon, nor stars are visible; but in January, February, and March, the weather becomes finer and there are days of sunshine during which it is warm enough for a man to work comfortably in the open air without a coat. The sealers used frequently to cultivate little garden patches near their huts, but they never succeeded in raising anything save a few small radishes and some miserable potatoes about the size of walnuts—the climate is too wet and cold to bring anything to perfection. The native flora of the island is very scanty and is similar to that of Kerguelen, which will be described hereafter.

VAIN ATTEMPT TO LAND—OFF FOR KERGUELEN.

Our visit to Possession Island was paid too early in the season for fine weather—nor did we get any. We anchored in America Bay at dark on the last day of August. Toward midnight the atmosphere became somewhat thick, and the wind gradually increased in force till by daybreak it was blowing hard from the north-west, and, as the bay is open in that direction, our position was no longer safe. Accordingly, at 5:30 A. M. we got up our anchor and departed; but this was a matter of no regret to any one, for we never contemplated landing there, and under the most favorable circumstances we would not have remained more than an hour or two longer. We wished to establish our party at Ship Bay, five miles distant, and thither the vessel's head was directed. When we arrived there we hoped to find some place sufficiently sheltered to enable us to land; but, alas, we were doomed to disappointment. The wind drew around the island in such a way that the lee was very imperfect, and to send a boat's crew ashore would have been almost equivalent to condemning them to death by drowning. It blew a gale all day, and night came on without any prospect of its abating. To run in shore and anchored would have involved the certain destruction of the ship, and to lie off the island in such a night would have been scarcely less hazardous. We adopted the only safe course—we ran off shore to a sufficient distance, and there lay till morning. At daylight we had drifted thirty-five miles to the south-east from Ship Bay, and, as the storm had not lulled in the least, it would hardly have been possible for us to regain that point before nightfall. What was to be done? Ever since we had been in the neigh-

borhood of the Crozets the weather had been one continued succession of storms, and no man could say when they would abate. The expedition was pressed for time, and if we lingered longer here it was clearly at the risk of causing the New-Zealand and Chatham Island parties to arrive at their stations too late for the transit. With these and other difficulties besetting us, it was deemed best to abandon the Crozet stations, and the ship's head was reluctantly pointed toward Kerguelen.