

## THE TRANSIT OF VENUS.

### VOYAGE OF THE SWATARA FROM CROZET TO HOBART TOWN.

GETTING AWAY FROM CROZET ISLAND—  
KERGUELEN SIGHTED—ROYAL SOUND—  
THE WHALING QUARTERS—THE STOP  
AT THIS POINT—RAMBLES ON SHORE—  
SCENERY—AN OBSERVATION PARTY  
LANDED—START FOR TASMANIA—VERY  
ROUGH WEATHER—ARRIVAL AT HOBART  
TOWN.

*From Our Special Correspondent.*

HOBART TOWN, Tasmania,  
Monday, Nov. 9, 1874.

In my last letter I described the succession of storms which prevented us from landing an observing party on Crozet Island. The attempt was abandoned at daylight on the morning of Sept. 2, and immediately after the fires beneath our boilers were allowed to burn out, and the ship was put under sail. During the whole of that day it blew a heavy gale from the northward, and the atmosphere was very thick, but as we increased our distance from the island the wind moderated, and in less than thirty-six hours it became quite light. For the next two days we encountered a heavy swell, and the ship rolled much, but, with the exception of occasional snow-squalls, the weather was, on the whole, fine.

At 1:30 on the afternoon of Sunday, Sept. 6, we sighted Fortune Island, whose rocky shores were curling the never-ceasing surf a hundred feet toward heaven. The charts of these waters are very defective, and as we knew that the mainland of Kerguelen Island could not be far off, it was, to say the least, highly desirable to sight it before dark. By the aid of the wind alone this could not have been done: so steam was raised, and at 3:40 P. M. the engines were started. Providence favored us, and at 4 P. M. the mountain tops of Kerguelen broke the level line of the distant horizon. Soon after darkness set in, and we proceeded more slowly, first to the southward until we were clear of Cape Bourbon (the south-western point of Kerguelen Island), and then to the eastward. When morning broke, we were off the centre of the southern side of the island, about twenty-five miles south-west of Mount Ross. Running in obliquely toward the land, when we arrived abreast of Cape Challenger we were not more than a mile off shore, and at that distance we coasted along past Cape George, Greenland Harbor, and Cape Maclear, into Royal Sound. The scenery was wild and grand. Scarcely any level land was visible, only bare and rugged mountains, some of which reared their naked heads six thousand feet above the sea. Frequently the land terminated in vast precipices, hundreds of feet high, from which were split huge masses of rock, forming Cyclopean towers and pyramids and needles. Occasionally the bases of the cliffs were worn into caverns, and again into blow-holes through which the surf spouted fiercely. Finally, as if these varied forms were not enough, Nature in her lavishness has added color: the cliffs between Capes Challenger and Maclear being beautifully tinted by metallic oxides, red predominating.

Royal Sound is a magnificent inlet, six miles wide, and of unknown length. It has never been surveyed, and has only been explored about twenty miles by the whalers and sealers. We ran up it eleven miles, to Island Harbor, and there anchored at 5:30 P. M. Sept. 7. In the harbor we found the American whaling and sealing schooner Charles E. Colgate, 185 tons burden, and carrying a crew of twenty-six men. She belongs to a New-England firm, whose vessels have long fished these waters. Thirty years ago they discovered this harbor, and finding it adapted to their wants, they erected two huts on Hog Island, and have ever since made it their head-quarters. Until recently the very existence of such a place has been unknown to the rest of mankind, but for all that it is as snug a little haven as could well be desired. It is bounded by Grave, Cat, Hog, and North Islands, which being situated in the middle of the Sound, are disposed that they inclose a basin perhaps a mile square, completely sheltering it in every direction, and yet leaving channels spacious enough to permit the easy entrance of a frigate. The names of these islands are suggestive. Grave Island is so called because it contains a rude cemetery, in which rest the mortal remains of fifteen poor seamen,

"Under the sod and the dew,  
Waiting the Judgment Day."

They died in the midst of hardships, far away from home and friends, but who dare say that on this inhospitable shore they sleep less sweetly than the denizens of Green-Wood or Mount Auburn? When life's duties have been well done, what matters it where rest our ashes? Hog Island receives its name from the fact that the whalers usually have a number of hogs running wild on it; and the appellation North Island simply indicates that that little spot of land forms the northern side of the harbor. How the remaining island came to be called Cat I am sure I don't know. I never saw anything but penguins on it, and a jolly set they were, with their solemn, helpless waddle, reminding one so forcibly of a troupe of over-fed Aldermen. Johnnies, the sailors call them, and the name seems to fit them well. They always went in droves, a big fellow at the head, and all the rest following in almost military order; but there was one thing they never could accomplish, and that was keeping step. In fact the whole crowd always walked so unsteadily as to give rise to strong suspicions that they might be on a spree. The naturalists call them birds, but they cannot fly, and I think them more of a success as fish. On shore it is easy enough to walk up to them and capture them, if you feel so disposed, but prior to making the attempt it is well to be provided with thick gloves, for they are stout little chaps and make a fierce resistance, biting savagely. If they once get into the water, however, you may as well say "Good by, Johnnie," for they swim with astonishing rapidity, keeping their bodies almost entirely beneath the surface.

On the afternoon of our second day at Island Harbor the American whaling and sealing schooner Emma Jane, eighty-six tons burden, came in from the watering place at Molloy Point, on the other side of the Sound. Her Captain had seen us enter the harbor, and the sight of such a large vessel in that out-of-the-way place had so aroused his curiosity that he could not resist the temptation of going to see who and what we were. Both the Colgate and the Emma Jane had been in this region for two years, and as it was more than a year since they had heard from home, they were delighted to get all the newspapers we possessed.

Hog Island has on it two hills, the highest of which attains an altitude of more than four hundred feet, and to the summit of this, I, in company with some other gentlemen, ascended on the afternoon of Sept. 9. As the country here is typical of all that we saw in Kerguelen, it is best to describe it rather minutely. We landed on a beach which was hard and dry, but immediately beyond it the surface became soft, wet, and boggy. This seemed due to the cir-

cumstance that it is everywhere covered with a peculiar moss which grows in loose spongy tufts a foot or two in diameter, thus preventing any proper drainage. The sealers call the tufts "tussocks," and the moss itself "bread root," because on a pinch its roots are edible, and have a rather agreeable sweetish taste. It is altogether a strange plant, and is said to be confined to the subantarctic islands of the Southern Hemisphere. Its branches are from six to ten inches long, and about half or three-quarters of an inch in diameter, and as they lie upon the ground they look more like the fringes of a large tassel than anything else. Besides this moss the only other plant occurring in sufficient quantity to be noticed is the Kerguelen cabbage, which bears a strong general resemblance to our own vegetable of the same name. However, its stem is longer, sometimes attaining a height of two feet, and its head is neither so large, nor so compact. Its flavor is quite bitter, and before it can be eaten it requires long boiling in several changes of water.

The landscape, then, is made up of many rocks, an occasional stream or pond, and the ever-present moss, whose downy surface is unbroken save by a few cabbage-stalks, trees and bushes having no place on the island. As we stumbled along from tussock to tussock, every step sinking deep into the spongy surface, we soon found that even the hillsides themselves were not dry. Everything seemed as if it had been soaking from all eternity; but the sealers say that in January and February the stems of the moss become so dry that they may be readily set on fire and burned. The hill was steep and rugged. The rock cropping out frequently in great ledges, and again in vast broken masses like the ruins of some long-forgotten edifice. Yet everywhere it bore unmistakable evidence of its volcanic origin, often being precisely similar in appearance to the slag from a blast-furnace. As usual in this formation, the hills mostly affected a conical shape, their summits being formed of rocks with nearly vertical faces, which, from a distance, produced the effect of basalt crowns. When we reached the top of the hill we were ascending it required but little imagination to convert it into an extinct crater, but I doubt if it ever did really vomit smoke and flames. The day was stormy, and the wind blew a living gale, but we crouched down behind the rocks and enjoyed the magnificent view of the Sound. It recalled to my memory a far distant scene among the Thousand Isles of the St. Lawrence. There, however the islands are small and covered with cedar trees; here they are much larger, each one being a hill, whose naked sides are surmounted by a battlement of frowning rock. There everything suggests peace and contentment, here all is rude and savage; but in each case island crowds on island as far as the eye can reach. What need to describe our descent? The walk through the tussocks was as tiresome as a walk through a bog always is, and the weather was miserably wet and disagreeable, but that made small difference to us, for we were clad in rubber from head to foot. Suffice it to say that just before dark we reached the Swatara, well pleased to have had a run on shore, and with excellent appetites for our dinners.

While lying at Island Harbor a reconnoissance was made to see if there was a place suitable for an observing station in that neighborhood, but none was found. Upon consulting with the whalers, they said that the best locality would be near the Watering Place, at Molloy Point, and the Captain of the Emma Jane agreed to pilot us over there. Accordingly, on the morning of Sept. 10, steam was got up, and at 7:30 A. M. we left Island Harbor, and crossed the sound to Molloy Point, seven miles distant, where we anchored at 8:35 A. M. We lay three-quarters of a mile from the shore, and nearly due west of us stood the Point, a bold and rather steep promontory, out of which the bare rock jutted in many places. It forms the western side of a shallow bay, behind which rises a chain of hills, perhaps a thousand feet high, and in the rear of them again there is a mountain range whose lofty peaks are crowned with snow and ice. But a short distance to the east of Molloy Point the hills are cleft by a shallow stream some ten feet wide, the offspring of the mountains above, whose limpid waters leaping over their stony bed produce almost the only sounds which break the silence of the air. Here the whalers and sealers replenish their water-casks, and from that circumstance the little bay has come to be known as the Watering Place. The vegetation and character of the country is the same as at Island Harbor. Of animals we saw only birds, but they were numerous—mostly ducks and penguins. Of the latter there is a large rookery on the western side of the Point.

A careful reconnoissance of the whole neighborhood showed that the surface of the ground was everywhere wet and boggy, the only tolerably dry place discovered being on a kind of terrace about half way up the south-western face of Molloy Point, and here Lieut. Commander Ryan, chief of the Kerguelen party, decided to locate his station. Accordingly, on the afternoon of Sept. 10, the landing of the outfit of his party was commenced, and from that time until it was completed no delays were made except those caused by the weather. This, however, gave us much trouble. From early morning till the middle of the afternoon it generally alternated between sunshine and fierce squalls of wind, rain, and snow, the latter being frequently so thick that it was impossible to see objects fifty feet distant. Toward sunset the wind always became very fresh, and once (on Friday, Sept. 11,) it became a severe gale, which sprang up without any warning, and attained its height in less than fifteen minutes from its commencement. All our boats were down, and many of our officers and men were ashore at the time, but fortunately they all got escape on board again. Some had a narrow escape, however. One of the boats, a little skiff which had been purchased at the Cape of Good Hope, was beaten to pieces by the sea against the side of the ship, and the last man in her was left hanging to one of the boat-falls. The violence of the storm was so great that an attempt to hoist the steam-launch failed, and she finally got adrift and was lost. The other boats were all got safely on board. The ship herself was so severely tried that she dragged her anchor about half a mile, but, by veering out one hundred and twenty fathoms of chain, dropping a second anchor, and steaming head to the gale, she was brought up again.

The history of the landing was briefly as follows: On Thursday, Sept. 10, a lot of lumber was landed, and the building of a hut for the party to live in was commenced. On Friday, work on the hut was continued, much of the outfit of the party was landed, and three tents were put up to receive the more perishable articles as they came on shore. To the surprise of every one these tents stood unharmed through the gale which blew that night. By Saturday evening everything belonging to the party was ashore, except their personal baggage, and the hut had so far progressed that its sides

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## VOYAGE OF THE SWATARA.

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were up, and it was roofed in. At 1 o'clock on the afternoon of Sunday, Sept. 13, the party finally left the ship, a number of the officers accompanying them to take a last look at the station. At 4 P. M. the good bys were all said, and an hour later our anchor was up, and the Swatara was steaming slowly down the sound. As she got under way, a salute of five guns was fired from her howitzers. The weather was finer than at any other time since our arrival, and the ten miles' run to the entrance of the Squid was soon accomplished. Just at dark we cleared the headlands and got fairly to sea, but for the sake of a good offing we continued to steam till 10 P. M., when the fires were allowed to burn out, and the ship was put under canvas.

For the first nine days of our passage the weather was cold, with frequent snow-squalls, and the wind was so high that we often had double reefs in our topsails. Of course, under such circumstances, the sea was very rough and the ship rolled heavily, making life on board as disagreeable as possible. On one occasion matters became so bad that we were actually pooped, but not dangerously. Toward night on the 22d of September both the wind and sea began to go down, and the next day the temperature, which had been ranging between 30° and 40°, rose to 50°. On the 24th the weather had become so fine that we crossed royal yards and set studding-sails for the first time since leaving the Cape of Good Hope. On the 26th it fell nearly a dead calm, and for the next four days we drifted along before the lightest of breezes, coming from such a quarter as to force us considerably off our course. At noon on the 30th we were within two hundred and seventy miles of Hobart Town, and, as there was coal enough in the ship to steam that distance, fires were lighted and the engines were started. The next morning found us off the southern end of Tasmania, with the land in full sight, and the water being as smooth as a mill-pond, our progress was very rapid. At 11 A. M. we entered D'Entrecasteaux Channel, and at 2:50 P. M. we debouched from it into the Derwent River. All the way up the scenery had been charming and our enjoyment of it had been heightened by the absolute perfection of the day, yet no one was sorry when, at 4 P. M. (Oct. 1) our anchor was dropped abreast of Hobart Town. We were all weary of the ceaseless motion of the sea, and glad once more to be able to set our feet on solid ground. W.