

Keeney's Journal of

Bark TRINITY

Ms. Coll. # 25

Vol. 32

Talk given by Mr. Reeves,
ca. 1924

DIARY OF A SHIPWRECKED SAILOR.

"But I, when I am older and can
choose what I'm to do,
Oh Leerie! I'll go round at night
and light the lamps with you!"

You will recall that Stevenson, in those
charming verses to The Lamplighter, puts these
gracefully childish lines on the lips of the little
fellow who is watching at dusk from the window.

The verses, of course, suggest at once
the hero-worship of childhood - the admiration for
a personality or vocation exemplifying the dreams,
the hopes, the ambitions of tender years.

What boy of normal mind and healthy body
has not had one or more heroes? Generally the idol
is a soldier or sailor or, perchance, a policeman ~~man~~ officer
or fireman for accoutrements have a fascination for
youth and maturer years as well.

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Such is an outline ~~and suggestion~~ of the terrible experience of almost two years' duration that befell this humble sailor man and his companions. Instead of a battle-field trench or the gun-deck of a ship, by the "plastic chance of circumstance," the great adventure of my boyhood hero was staged on this desolate, barren island in storm-tossed icy seas, hundreds and thousands of miles from the nearest continent.

He had not the incentive of conflict, not the inspiration of conquest, not the cheering association of numbers, - only the daily, monotonous fight for existence with a handful of ignorant men for and repulsive companions, and, at the last, with little expectation of rescue, - and yet he carried on.

My boyhood admiration was for the physical man, but, as I have read in this account how this sailor met and endured ~~his~~ ordeal, with courage for the dangers and hardships, with patience to bear the privations and disappointments of those long months of watching and waiting, with hope that was

never given up although sometimes dimmed, with
a faith that all would be well, with a love for
wife and children unfaltering and unabated by
time and distance, - as I read this record, I
realize that ^{here} ~~this~~ was truly a hero, a real man -
body, mind and soul!

My hero was a sailor; but he had neither button of brass nor blouse of blue for distinction or adornment. Indeed, he needed none for his physical perfection required no decoration to attract the attention and command the admiration of man or child; moreover, he was an officer of a whaling ship and sailors of that adventurous calling were more interested in the wear than the glitter of their apparel.

I wish my attempt at a word picture might convey some idea of the impressive and rather picturesque personality I have in my mind's eye; a man erect and over six feet tall - handsome of face and figure, cheeks ruddy with health and the exposure of twenty-three years in the Arctic seas, black eyes that commanded and received attention and action, black hair, moustache and goatee. He did not give the impression of being tall for his broad shoulders, full chest and sinewy arms and legs made a symmetrical whole that was goodly to look upon.

I presume his years of exposure in Arctic latitudes made him quite indifferent to our winter temperatures. I well remember seeing him, when I as a little chap was clad in muffler, mittens and leggings

to protect me from the cold and snow of January, -
I remember seeing him without coat or gloves,
flannel shirt open at the neck, standing in the ~~open~~ ^{wintery air}
watching the children at their coasting, thoughtless
of the inclement weather and apparently as comfortable
as if clothed in the heaviest furs.

Such in appearance as I recall him was
Captain George Keeney who sailed from this port in
the bark Trinity on the first of June 1880 - almost
forty-five years ago - on a voyage for oil that
proved to be one of peril and privation - for some,
death, and probably in the history of the whaling
activities of New London incomparable for hardship
and disaster.

On the globe or the map of the southern
hemisphere if one follows the meridian at 70° east,
toward the South Pole, at about 50° south latitude
will be noted two tiny dots in the south Atlantic
or Indian Ocean. These hardly noticeable specks are
islands about equally distant from the southern ex-
tremity of Africa, the western part of Australia,
and the South Pole - the distance from either point

being about 2,500 miles. One is immediately impressed by the isolation of these islands and if we look at a map of the ocean currents it will be noted that they are in the direct path of the Antarctic drift that sets always to the eastward with the prevailing wind of hurricane force and the accompaniment of ice and snow and sleet and rain.

The larger of the two volcanic islands is known as Kerguelen's Land and was named after a French naval officer who discovered it in February 1772; Kerguelen revisited the island in 1773 but it is probable that he attempted no extensive survey as he returned to France with the report that he had discovered a new continent.

About this time, Captain Cook was active in exploration and the English government about 1775 sent him to the south^{ern} ocean to locate the newly reported continent. Cook visited the island and gave the names by which they are known today to many of the bays and headlands. He made the statement that, if the island had not already received the name of the discoverer, Kerguelen, he would be inclined to

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call it the Land of Desolation. The island is about ninety miles long and fifty wide.

Familiarly known to whalers as Desolation Islands are Kerguelen Land and its much smaller neighbor which lies about 150 to 200 miles to the southeast and is known as Hurd's Island, discovered and named by a Boston mariner Captain Hurd; and our record has to do with this island which, although first seen and reported by Hurd, was first visited by a New Londoner, Captain E. Darwin Rogers, and for a period of twenty years subsequent to 1856 was an important objective in the operations of the whaling ships.

The island is reported to be a veritable ice island with only enough of land visible here and there to show that it is not an iceberg. In the center a mountain perpetually covered with ice and snow rises to a height of 5,000 feet and, excepting the albatross, no living thing is known to harbour there.

There is not a tree or shrub on the island and the only vegetation is a coarse grass and a variety

of cabbage similar to our so-called skunk cabbage.

The lure that attracted our whaling ships to this most desolate and storm-swept spot was its only mammal - the sea elephant - and for this oil-producing animal it was for the score of years mentioned the greatest rookery and, in consequence, the most profitable hunting ground in the world, the oil obtained being superior to most of the whale oils.

From 1856 to 1876 whalers from New London made almost annual visits to this island and the slaughter of the seals so depleted the herds that the kill ceased to be profitable.

After a lapse of several years, in 1880, as I have noted above, the bark Trinity was fitted out by Lawrence & Company resulting in the misadventure which Captain Keeney's diary details.

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The Trinity was in command of Captain John Williams of Montville with Captain George Keeney, the chronicler, as mate and a crew of fourteen men. The ship touched at the Cape Verde Islands on the 23rd of June, 1880, there taking nineteen Portuguese for

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additional crew. The vessel arrived at Kerguelen's Land on September 4th after a stormy passage of seventy-one days from the Cape Verde Islands. Here the Captain left some supplies and equipment, expecting to return for the winter season in the following June because of the advantage of the superior harbour. The passage from Kerguelen's Island to the northwestern point of Hurd's Island was made in a few days and the ship anchored in Corinthian Bay.

At this point, I quote from Captain Keeney's diary, giving such extracts as will show the wreck and loss of the ship; the privations, hardships and fatalities of the long and dreary months on the island; and the rescue when hope of relief had almost been given up.

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December 25 How I would enjoy this Christmas day with my wife and children, if that were possible! I hope the latter will enjoy their presents and think of their father. My amusement today, as usual, has been to roll casks of blubber to the try works. My hands are so cut up by the iron hoops that I am almost unable to keep up my journal.

December 31 This is the tenth anniversary of my marriage. With all that I have endured in Greenland and in this region, it seems a little strange that I should be able to say that in this time I have had many happy days. Here I am now, ten thousand miles from my darling wife and children. I hope and pray to God that they are all well and happy, and that he will keep us all alive until we meet again.

January 1, 1881. What would I not give to know that, today, my wife and children are alive and happy, and to be with them in our home! Our second officer went off today to live in an old cabin on a hill, so that he might signal a ship, if one should chance to come in sight, sent by friends to look after us, - but the prospect is not cheering.

(January 6 The second day of this month was the pleasantest we have had since our arrival on the island; but for the last three days it seemed as if we should be blown into the sea, so fierce has been the wind. And then the snow and the rain have not added to our comfort; - but, notwithstanding all this I have been blubbering, i.e., trying out the elephant blubber, and that too with broken pots and limited utensils.)

(January 25 For many days nothing but heavy gales, savage storms of snow and hard and unprofitable work in this Indian Ocean Paradise. Even elephant steaks are getting scarce, and there is little danger than any of us will become fat from high living. I have spent about twenty-two years of my life in and about Greenland, but never have I experienced so many and such heavy storms as in this latitude during the last six months.)

January 28 Today I went with two men to a small beach, five miles off, where we killed three small elephants, and between us we brought to our cabin two hundred and ten pounds on our backs. The walking across the ice was very hard, as well as dangerous, on account of the many crevices, - even the hoop-iron soles on our shoes not doing much good.

January 31 Yesterday morning five men went off cruising for food; not long afterwards a terrible storm came on and at night only three men returned. Today we had a hunt for the missing men; I went with one companion to the top of a glacier fifteen hundred feet high, and had a bad fall, but could not find the lost ones. We went up another glacier and there found the dead body of Bernard Kelly, between two fissures. To carry this body with us was impossible, and so after a further search for the other missing man, we returned to our quarters. The bad news we brought dampened the spirits of all the party.

February 8 After several hunts the second of our missing men was found dead on one of the glaciers not far from where poor Kelly was found. This man was our carpenter, a native of Scotland, and his name George Watson. Not far from the spot where these men perished, we found the remains of an old cabin, and having fixed up a kind of double coffin we put both bodies into it, and thus with a simple ceremony buried the poor fellows. That was on the 3d instant, and I could not help feeling that they were better off as dead men, than were the men they left alive on Hurd's Island. If, when they were dying, they had a longing to be with their kindred, they could not be blamed; but I trust they are now in a better world. After the funeral ceremonies we fortunately killed a fine lot of penguins, and carried them on our backs to the wretched place we are compelled to call home. Our shoes and boots are almost worn out, and I don't know what we shall do, for there are no "shin shops" on this island, and it is likely to be inconvenient to travel barefooted on the ice and snow.

February 14 It occurs to me sometimes that, perhaps, because I am so very far from home, my friends forget to pray for my return. I know, of course, that my dear wife and sister could not forget me. I have also thought, at odd moments, that this place might be so far from civilization that even my own prayers could not find their way to heaven. But those thoughts were very foolish. This is Valentine's day, and the whole of us, now on this island, have received a message, in the form of a

terrible hurricane. During a tramp I made along the shore I found the main-top of some unfortunate vessel that had probably gone down off the western shore of the island. The men who perished with her are no doubt happier than we are on this Eldorado island.

February 25 Our bread is nearly all gone, and there is a great scarcity of elephant meat, although I killed one small animal today. Should the penguins leave us, we shall be in danger of starvation. According to the latest "census returns" we have left five barrels of salt pork, ten gallons of molasses, a few pounds of sugar, two hams, twelve quarts of dry peas and beans and a few cans of vegetables and meat for those who may get sick.

March 13 As this was Sunday, I treated myself to one half a biscuit. Hope the time will come when I can have a little more.

March 18 The Portuguese that I have mentioned in my journal were black men, and I have to record the strange fact that even here, on Hurd's Island, and in sight of starvation, there has been a conflict of races. When we had some coal and other stuff to haul up from the place where we were wrecked, the white men would not work with the black men. All right when work was to be done to get oil and make money, but not right when work is to be done to make us comfortable. Yes, there is just as much of the devil in man on this inhospitable shore as in the land of churches.

Today I was successful in killing a new kind of animal. It was a sea hen.

The other day, by way of trying to keep up my spirits, I tried my hand upon my fiddle, but the music was doleful and scarce at the best. Since then I have tried to straighten out my mind by studying arithmetic.

March 26 This has been an exceedingly pleasant day. I don't think a few more of the same sort would hurt us. After a troublesome scarcity of elephants lately on the shore they seem to be coming on again and I killed four yesterday. As things now look, I don't suppose we shall get off this island for a whole year to come, and this is certainly a desolate prospect.

(April 12 This month is going like the last and the one before, hunting for food in the midst of storms of every variety - repairing clothes and trying to make our cabin comfortable. Have been making a canvas bag for carrying meat; it will hold about seventy pounds - a pretty fair quantity for a man to carry on his back over mountains of ice and across soft beaches.)

April 16 How sadly disappointed will my wife be when the month of April shall have passed by and the Trinity not arrived. Her suspense will be worse than mine. I cannot tell when we can get away, but she does not know whether I have been wrecked at sea or on the island.

April 21 Today I have been repairing an old sled for the Portuguese, and again mending my clothes. I have given to Captain Williams one-half of the grape jelly which my dear sister gave me before leaving dear old New London. Of the outside shirts given to me by my wife I have given one to each of the Portuguese who go hunting with me. When I am somewhat comfortable, I haven't the cheek to let them go on the beaches shivering when I can help them.

May 9 Our steward bolted and said he could not do any more cooking for the mess, as he needed exercise, etc. The captain then asked me if I would do the cooking. I said I was willing and able to cook for myself, but not for the mess; according to the old proverb I have witnessed enough to compel me to say "Every man for himself and the devil for all." But we have found a man to do the cooking. After shirking his duty, the steward asked the captain to play a game of cards, and they played several games together. Pretty poor business that, according to my view of things in general. Have today been making our table smaller and cleaning it. The principal reason for its not being clean was that the ex-steward was so tall he could not conveniently get down to it, excepting at meal times, and besides he was generally too much fatigued to keep the table clean.

June 1 This is the first day of our winter just one year since I left home, by far the longest and most terrible year I ever experienced. At six o'clock this evening I discovered

a comet bearing about W.S.W. from the island.

June 2 Yesterday a comet, and today one or two of the volcanoes seem to be getting excited. We have seen flame as well as smoke coming out of the craters and ascending about one hundred feet into the air. We are not in a condition, I confess, to be overwhelmed with a shower of stones and sand if there is anything of that kind in the offing. It has been snowing very hard and our cabbage garden is entirely covered, so that there is likely to be a scarcity of the Hurd's Island saur kraut.

June 13 We are at last without vinegar for our table. For my part I would rather be without bread than vinegar, with our style of living. Our ex-steward is still making trouble. By way of increasing the variety of my labors, I have lately been mending shoes, hauling driftwood, making sleds and also a lance or two out of old trowels for killing elephants.

June 21 This has been our shortest day - seven hours and twenty-eight minutes long. The days are not near as short here as I have known them in Greenland. The weather here, in regard to frost, cannot be compared with Greenland, but it is far more disagreeable and depressing. Have walked eight miles through a deep snow and killed eleven penguins, and have frequently walked much further and not killed a single bird. The weather is too horrible to go out much and I have been reading my few books over and over again. If there is a ship coming this way, I hope my wife will send a good stock of reading matter and

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a cubic foot of letters.

July 14 Have been making thread out of twine, of which our supply is small. The quantity allotted to each man is twenty-five needles full per month. Today I enjoyed my last bit of chewing tobacco;- have on hand one large spoonful of snuff which I will employ as a substitute. My limited use of tobacco, hitherto, has been about the only comfort I have enjoyed on this paradise of an island. I wish I had five hundred pounds on hand, so that I might leave off the habit gradually and not in this sudden manner.

July 14 (con) Have been washing clothes again. This our mess do once in two weeks; but the poor Portuguese never do any washing as they have nothing but what they carry on their backs, and nothing to wash. They are the most wretched men in appearance I ever saw and yet they are perfectly healthy. They, like us, need some recreation, and lately have been fighting among themselves; and after thus quieting their nerves, they sing songs and have a good time generally. One of these fellows is walking about with a deep hole in his back, made by a knife; and another might be said to be hunting in the snow for one of his thumbs which was bitten off by a friend.

October 16 This morning we were made very happy by having a report brought to us that there were two ships at anchor off Fairchild's Beach, about six miles from the shanties. In a short space of time all hands went to the beach, but on reaching the shanty occupied by Easmonds, we found to our dismay that the

two ships were nothing but icebergs, which were drifting along the shore. Our disappointment was almost too much for flesh and blood to bear.

October 17 This is the anniversary of our being wrecked on Hurd's Island and it has been the longest and most disagreeable year of my whole life. It now looks as if there was no ship coming to our rescue. Surely the owners of the Trinity are well aware that we had not sufficient provisions to last thirty-five men from the time we sailed until the present date.

November 5 Today six of us went eight miles and brought home 500 penguin eggs. Some of the men are able to eat eighteen of these large eggs in one day, but I can only manage nine of them when I wish to leave room for three or four pounds of elephant meat. With this entry I finish the first volume of my journal, which is of about one hundred and thirty pages.)

This is the 10th of November, 1881, and I enter upon the second volume of my journal.

November 17 Today the captain, third mate and myself went over one of the glaciers to visit a penguin rookery, and we obtained about five hundred eggs. I wish my dear children could see this rookery, but I do not want them to come to Hurd's Island for that or any other purpose. At this season of the year there are millions of penguins assembled in one spot. As soon as their young are old enough to take to the water they all leave the island and do not return until the next November.

November 24 Still stormy and O how lonesome! The time is passing in which we may look for relief. Perhaps the Government may send a ship to look after our fate; anything in the shape of a vessel, if she only arrives before next June. We have visited another penguin rookery and obtained fifteen hundred eggs, and those which we could not bring to the shanty were burried in the snow, and among the rocks.

This is the birthday of my beloved wife. Must I be absent from her when the next one comes round? I hope not.

December 1 This day is the beginning of our second summer on Hurd's Island. I have seen many places in the world which I think preferable to this island away down towards the South Pole.

December 12 Yesterday the third mate and I had some little fun in catching sea hens with hook and line. We baited the hooks just as we do for fishing, and waited for swallows instead of bites. We made a feast of the bodies we caught, and saved the feathers for beds in the future. Today I soled a pair of light slippers with steel soles, cut out of a sword blade. I do not wish to remain here long enough to wear them out.

December 15 This morning we were greatly surprised to see two of the men we had put ashore at Corinthian Bay on the 24th of October, 1880. We soon learned that the whole party were alive and well. They had braved the fourteen tedious months in fine style. They reported an abundance of elephants during the winter season, but they did not use them for food, preferring penguin meat.

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They told us that Henry Story, their head man, had managed to construct a small scow boat for the purpose of cruising around the coast and exploring, but he soon lost the little craft. He then took down enough of their shanty to build another boat - seven and a half feet long and three and a half feet wide and one foot deep. In this frail affair Story and his friend James Gill actually made a passage of eighteen miles to a point near our shanty. Story was surprised to find that we were still upon the island, as he thought that the Trinity had been driven off to the eastward and had returned to New London. Their object in coming to the place where we were was to find some provisions, if possible, that might have been left on shore. We were so glad to see these men that they were several thousand times welcome to all our hospitality.

December 25 The two men from Corinthian Bay left here to return, taking one of our white sailors. Story told us he had some elephant lances and guns to spare, and he would bring some to us after a while, as we have few of the former and none of the latter. Another Christmas day has arrived, and I hope my wife and children are alive and well and happy. God grant that we may be permitted to meet again.

December 31 The most important incident I have now to record is this: I went off upon an elephant hunt today, and although I did not see a single elephant in a tramp of twelve miles, nor any penguins, I did find an old boot-heel, out of which I got

twenty-six composition nails which will be of great use to me and which I accept as my New Year's present.

January 1, 1882. And this is what they call the happiest day of all the year. I don't believe my wife and children and sister are so very happy today in their far-off home. But should it be my privilege ever to return, all the darkness of these times will be forgotten in our thankfulness. May God be with us all!

January 10 Today I launched a cask in the sea, in which I placed a letter, giving an account of our being wrecked and of our condition on the island. I thought the cask might possibly drift across towards Australia and be picked up by a ship that would come to our relief.

January 12 A glorious day. Early this morning Henry Story made his appearance again, and brought us from Corinthian Bay the lances and guns he had promised, proving himself to be a true man. At six o'clock this evening we were all made more than happy by seeing a full-rigged steamship off the south side of the island. She was about six miles distant and running under topsails in an easterly direction, with all her other sails hauled down. The effect of this surprise on our people was something strange. They set up the most unearthly howling and yelling, such as I never heard before. They swung their arms, jumped like kangaroos, threw their caps, hats, and old coats into the air. Then we made a signal to the ship, with a blanket hitched to a lance pole, and in five minutes the good ship answered us by coming to the wind on the starboard tack, by clewing up her topsails,

and running up the stars and stripes to the mizen peak. This was enough. We knew that we had not been forgotten nor given up as lost. As soon as the ship had furled all her sails she bore to the eastward under steam, and after various other movements finally brought to in about twelve feet of water, and found good anchorage for such an open roadstead.

In the meantime and although night was coming on, all hands went to work collecting and packing what little clothing we had, so as to be ready for leaving the shanties in which we had spent so many long and lonely and unhappy months. We took our stuff to a point about two miles off, on the northeastern part of the island, where we expected to be taken off. There we built a large blubber fire as a signal for the boats that might come after us, and all hands waited patiently for daybreak.

January 13 This morning at eight o'clock we saw the breakfast signal set on the main. Then we knew we had not much longer to wait. At nine o'clock we were made happy by seeing a boat pull for the point where we were waiting, and on reaching the surf she was at once partly filled with water. Three of the ship's officers were in the boat, viz: Lieut. George A. Bicknell, Ensign Henry C. Gearing and Assistant-Surgeon Charles W. Rush. After answering all necessary questions in regard to whom we were, and how we came to be here on this desolate island, Lieut. Bicknell ordered Ensign Gearing to signal the ship for the first and second cutters, when the officers, with Captain Williams, went out to the ship. When the cutters arrived they were at once loaded with our

chests and bags and returned to the ship, then three boats came and were also loaded, and not long after we were all on board the friendly ship, and received a genuine American welcome. When the boats were hoisted, all hands were called and orders given to get the ship underway. She then steamed for Corinthian Bay, at which place she was brought to at nine in the evening, in nine fathoms of water, but it was too late to do anything more until the next day.

January 14 At six o'clock this morning the remnant of our crew were all brought on board the good U. S. ship Marion. Breakfast was served fore and aft, and the vessel started for Desolation Island. The Trinity crew took a last but short look at Hurd's Island - I for one wishing never to see it again. Captain Williams and myself are quartered in the Marion's steerage - he messing in the wardroom and I with the steerage officers. We are treated with the utmost kindness and hospitality as well as respect by all the officers, who seem to vie with each other for the privilege of befriending us. Nor should the fact be omitted here that, after our crew had all been thoroughly scrubbed and one man, who was supposed to be black, turned out to be the whitest of the lot, a suit of new navy blue was given to each one and all were made comfortable.

January 16 The Marion came to anchor last night in Greenland Harbor, at the southeastern point of Desolation Island, which place gets its name from the green appearance of the land near by, during the summer season. At six this morning our ship got under way, proceeding northward, intending to call at Royal Sound and

Betsus Cove, but the weather prevented, and then kept away for Cape Town, Cape of Good Hope.

February 20 Arrived this morning at Cape Town, Cape of Good Hope, just thirty-five days from Desolation.

April 5 On the 28th day of February we sailed from Cape Town in the steamship Trojan for Southampton. On the 19th of March we reached Plymouth, and on the 20th, Southampton. On the 22d I sailed for United States in the steamship Illinois, and on the 4th of April arrived at Philadelphia. On my arrival in New London today I found my wife and children, from whom I had not heard a word for twenty-two months, all alive and well. I thank all my New London friends for all the sympathy they have expressed for me and my family and for their exertions in causing a Government ship to be sent for our relief. For all this and my safe return I am sincerely grateful to the Good Being who has again filled my home with sunshine.

Before concluding this chapter it behooves me to add a few words about the two men who had the chief management of affairs during the unfortunate expedition of the brig Trinity. Her captain, John L. Williams, was born in the town of Montville, Conn., and belongs to that gallant band of navigators who have done so much for the fame of New London as the starting-place of whaling and other ocean expeditions. The first officer of the Trinity, from whose interesting journal I have been permitted to quote the foregoing pages, was Captain George Keeney. He was