A LETTER
FROM THE ANTARCTIC

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Captain JOHN EDWARD DAVIS, R.N.

A LETTER

FROM THE ANTARCTIC

BY

CAPTAIN J. E. DAVIS, R.N.

FORMERLY SECOND MASTER OF H.M.S. 'TERROR'

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NOTE.

Captain John Edward Davis, R.N., the writer of this interesting letter, entered H.M. Service in 1828 at the age of thirteen, and at the date of writing was second master of the *Terror*, having served in the *Samarang*, *Blonde*, *Beagle* and other ships. His charts and drawings in connection with this expedition were very highly appreciated by the Admiralty.

After employment in England, Ireland and Scotland on the coast survey, he was appointed Naval Assistant to the Hydrographer, from which post he retired shortly before his death in 1877.

He did some useful literary work, and the 'Sun's Azimuth Tables,' prepared by Captain Davis and his son Mr. Percy L. H. Davis, are in extensive use at the present time.

London, 1901.

H.M.S. *Terror,* off Cape Horn :
April 11*th*, 1842.

Dearest Emily—

This immense sheet of paper almost frightens me; and whether I shall fill it I cannot say, but will try. In the first place, I am quite well and ought to be quite happy—and so I really am, but terribly out of spirits; but I thank Almighty God who, in His infinite mercy, has permitted me to live to write once more to you, for we have had a disastrous though successful cruise, and have had one of the most apparently miraculous escapes that the annals of any naval history in the world can record. It is that that has thrown us all in such low spirits, and I should be quite unfitted to relate to you our other adventures, but I have them in a kind of journal which I kept, and from that I shall faithfully copy, so you must not take this letter as the result of my present mood, but as I felt at the time. And, for other better filling up of these memoranda, I shall illustrate it for your amusement with my pen and ink, so give you a better idea of our situations than the best written descriptions.

I wrote to you from the Bay of Islands, I think twice; and promised to write a farewell letter from Chatham Island, but as we did not touch there of

course I could not. We sailed from the Bay of Islands on the 23rd November last year, in company with the *Favorite*, who, after running a few miles in company, separated. She gave us three cheers, and made the signal, "Honour and Success attend you all." We started under as promising circumstances as we did last season, all hands being quite well in health and in good spirits. The *Erebus* had one accident while in the Bay of Islands, in the loss of one of her marines, who was drowned by the capsizing of the dinghy. He was a great loss, as he was the biggest man in the expedition, and one of those jovial characters that by his jokes kept the mess continually laughing round him. While lying there, I had one trip up the river to the potato grounds of one of the chiefs, "Pomare," one of the last of the cannibals, but not many years ago he in a rage killed on of his slaves and ate her. I believe they have not entirely given over the custom yet; of course all those that have embraced the Christian religion have, and it is to be hoped soon that it will be but a "tale of olden times." A Roman Catholic bishop and some priests had arrived there; and I think it will be very detrimental to the advance of Christianity, as the natives are shrewd and very justly say, "Which am I to believe, one tells me one thing and one another." But I think our missionaries, if well supported, will hold well the ground they have got, although the other religion, with its pomp and forgiveness of sins, is more likely to impose on

savages than the unaffected doctrine of our own. While we were there the bishop challenged Mr. Williams (the principal missionary) to a conference before the natives, to be held in the native language, in support of their respective faiths, and some of our officers attended. Mr. Williams was certainly victorious, which was more than was expected, for the Roman was a very clever man and had the gift of the gab certainly; but one of the natives, when appealed to by him, said sarcastically that the bishop gave them very good blankets, whereas Mr. Williams always sold them. That created almost a laugh against the bishop, but the meeting was very well conducted; the natives attended with their Bibles and Testaments, and on being referred to immediately found out the chapter and verse with great facility. Mr. Williams asked them if he had not told them from the first that other sects would arise, and quoted several passages to which they referred with great precision. In the end the bishop unfortunately forgot the meekness and patience of a churchman and on seeing that he lost ground lost his temper with it, which, the natives seeing, did his cause more harm than good. But all these disputes do us good, whichever way they end. I must get away from the Bay of Islands or I shall fill this sheet, large as it is, without getting any further on our cruise.

Well, we sailed on the 22nd and I was of course very sea-sick; we had been with little intermission six months in harbour, and I expected it. I shall

never entirely get over it; I am very unfortunate in that way. On the 24th a man fell overboard from the *Erebus,* and although there was a heavy sea running he got hold of the life-buoy and was saved. We found out afterwards that he had jumped overboard to escape punishment which he richly deserved. They have been too lenient, for I believe fully that severity in the beginning is lenity in the end. However, he got his deserts. That ship is not nearly in such good order as this ship; there is too much familiarity between the men and the officers to please me, and that strikes at the root of all discipline.

We had two 25ths of November and two Thursdays in the same week owing to our crossing the 180th degree of longitude, and of course that makes me a day older; however, I shall not change my birthday: one thing, we are cheated out of a day's pay. We could not go into Chatham Island as it was so very thick and foggy and it was blowing hard. We passed within a quarter of a mile of some breakers called the Sisters. They must be considerably out in their longitude, for by our reckoning we were well clear of them. It was fortunate for us it was during the day, for if it had been night we might have visited Chatham Island in a manner that would not be very agreeable. We passed this island on the 30th November. Our object was next to steer as far as 150° W., and then proceed to the southward on that meridian. About the 10th or 11th December it became sensibly colder, and after the warm weather

at New Zealand we felt cold with the thermometer at 35°. We began worsted socks and gloves then. About this time the ship was very uncomfortable, owing to the captain being very much out of temper and the gun-room officers quarrelling amongst themselves. They all succumb to the first lieutenant in a disgraceful way. There is a vast difference between respect due to a man's rank and succumbing to his whims and fancies. I am very glad I do not mess with him. I am very content here where there are only three of us and no superiority, although I cannot say that they are what I should choose; but I might have had worse, and conceive it my duty to yield in some measure. We have got a very good rule, that is, if two of us quarrel and do not speak the third is not to speak to those two till they have made it up. However we have not had occasion to put that in force yet, and hope we shall not.

We now had light but fair wind and very foggy, which kept us constantly beating gongs, firing, and ringing bells to keep company with the *Erebus*. On the 15th we were in Lat. 58°, and congratulated ourselves on having made such progress and anticipated such great things; in fact, what we did last time was to be nothing to it. The next day we fell in with the first ice, consisting of large bergs, many of which we passed. I think the first sight of a large iceberg is one of the most magnificent and stupendous in nature, but the novelty soon wears off. We entered pack ice at 4 o'clock on the morning of the 18th in Lat. 63°,

which is much farther to the northward than we did last season, for in this latitude then we had heavy gales and stove some of our boats. The weather was now beautiful, but cold, the temperature below the freezing point. I then had chilblains, which were very troublesome and annoying; I tried to keep them away by soaking my feet with rum every night, but to no purpose. If you had met me at this time you would not have known your brother; my hair was very long, and I had allowed my beard to grow all around under my chin for warmth; thick boots and Jim Crow hat, with a check shirt—altogether we all cut very pretty figures, like a masquerade, such a variety of costumes. About this time the cat gave me a good long job by getting into my drawer in the captain's cabin and tearing some of my charts; she tore six, but fortunately not of much consequence as they were soon repaired. We were now continually sailing through ice, perfectly threading the needle, and the ice scraping along her sides kept a continual noise like distant thunder. Every now and then she would strike heavily against a piece that would make her shake again. On the 19th the cat presented us with three very fine kittens; we made a bed of furs for her in the berth, for it was very cold for them. Such an event as that you may think nothing of, but to us it is a great deal, for a kitten tends to relieve the monotony of such a cruise as this. They were shown on a warmed clean plate to Captain Ross, who was on board, the next day.

On Dec. 23rd the ice became much thicker and heavier, that is, in larger masses, so that the navigation became much more difficult, and we were obliged to bore—that is, pressing the ship through. Sometimes we lay alongside a piece of ice without moving for half an hour, at other times going through channels at first not the breadth of the ship, but by making sail regularly force our way through. It would perfectly astonish you could you see the immense masses we in this manner shove out of the way. Again at other times we had to shove her along with poles; this is very tedious work as well as slow.

On the 22nd we got soundings with 1700 fathoms, and the 23rd we made fast to a floe and watered the ship. While fast we killed a seal of the hair kind, caught three penguins of a kind unknown, and shot lots of white birds. These birds are only found in the antarctic regions; the proper name of them is, I believe, *Procellaria nivea;* they are beautifully white like the snow itself. I have got a couple stuffed.

On Christmas Day we were in Lat. 65°, but blocked up by the ice, just sailing round a pool of water. We all dined with the captain. I thought of you all on that day, and drank your health. I pictured you all sitting round the fire talking and wondering what I was about. When shall I be sitting with you on that day ? for I have not once done so since 1827. On the 30th we got no farther than the Circle, and the ice was so close and thick that we could not proceed; the weather was thick and foggy,

and the mist on the rigging froze as it fell, and as there was danger of fouling or losing each other, there not being room to work, we made fast to the same piece of ice, and of course being only about 50 yards apart there was a great deal of visiting, for we had but to walk across the ice to get to the *Erebus*. So we proposed to see the Old Year out and the New Year in in style on the 31st. I dined on board the *Erebus,* and after dinner Hooker (the assistant surgeon of the *Erebus*) and myself went on the ice and cut out in hard snow the figure of a woman, which we called our "Venus de Medici." She was made sitting down and about eight feet long, and as the snow froze very hard she remained perfect till we left the floe. I assure you that (although I says it as shouldn't) it was not badly executed, and was the cause of a good deal of fun, and was much criticised; after that we cleared away a room by cutting down to the solid ice, and built a table in it, on which to drink the Old Year out and the New Year in. At a few minutes before twelve you would have been stunned with the noise that was made, each ship trying to beat the other—blowing of horns, beating of gongs, squealing of pigs (for the men took the latter under their arms to make them make a noise), and all kinds of diabolical music—and at twelve it was increased by each ship ringing forty-two bells, which is called ringing the New Year in. We then all (I mean the officers of course) assembled at our refreshment room on the ice between the ships where the two captains soon joined us. Captain Ross

was in high spirits, shaking hands with everybody and wishing them a Happy New Year. He then drank the health of all our men (for they were all up), the hands having been turned up to "Splice the main brace." They then cheered him, and the same thing was done by Captain Crozier to the *Erebus,* and after some more drinking and cheering we separated for the night, or morning.

On New Year's Day I wished you all many many happy returns of it; and my dear mother, I hope she will see many more, and may she never have cause to complain of any of her children, and may they (myself included) never fail in their duty and love towards her. Well, after breakfast we received our New Year's Gift from the Queen, that is a jacket, pair trowsers, two pairs boot hose, two comforters, two pairs mittens, one red shirt, a Welsh wig, a knife, and some thread, the boots being reserved for next year. So my kit will be increased considerably in quantity. The red shirts are very handy as they last a fortnight; I have not had on a white shirt since I left the Bay of Islands. We all dined together in the gunroom, and after dinner, at about eight in the evening, we all went to a ball-room having been previously cut, with sofas all round, of course all made of snow. Flagstaffs were planted with the Royal Standard; two or three silk Union Jacks, besides other flags, presenting, I assure you, a very gay appearance. I must mention the sign-boards (for it was supposed to be

an inn): one was "The Erebus and Terror," and the other, rigged on a boat-hook staff and an ice-axe, presented the figure of Bacchus in one corner and Britannia in another, and something else equally fine in the others, but it puzzled my powers of discernment to decipher what they were intended to represent. But in the centre was painted "The Pilgrims of the Ocean," and on the reverse (but I ought not to mention that as it was rather egotistical, but it was copied from the 'Quarterly Review'), "The Pioneers of Science," at which Captain Ross was greatly amused. On the signal being given (a gun from the *Erebus*) the two captains made their appearance (under a rather irregular salute of musketry from a party of the men rigged as a guard of honour) and took their seats on a raised snow sofa, and soon after the ball commenced. Of course Captain Crozier and Miss Ross opened the ball with a quadrille; after that we had reels and country dances. Ices and refreshments were handed round, the former in the greatest profusion (the boatswain of the *Erebus* performing the part of host under the title of Mr. Boniface). You would have laughed to see the whole of us, with thick overall boots on, dancing, waltzing and slipping about, and all the fun imaginable going on. Ladies fainting with cigars in their mouths, to cure which the gentlemen would politely thrust a piece of ice down her back. But it would require a "Boz" to give any idea of the ridiculous scene; it was beyond all description, and the best of it was

there was not an ill word the whole time, although there were some very heavy falls and many a sore face from the blows of the snowballs. All was taken in good part, and, as the Vicar of Wakefield says, "What was wanting in wit was made up in laughter." No accident occurred to me, without I may mention that a lady burnt the back of my hand with a cigar. In the next room some of the men were playing "Bell the cat." At about one o'clock as the captains left we first pelted them with snowballs and then cheered them, both of which honours they took with equally good humour. After a great deal of fatigue (for it is hard work dancing in such heavy clothing, especially as we use a little more exertion than we would at a ball on shore) I was glad to get to bed at three o'clock in the morning, and I quite forgot it was Sunday morning, and in fact Sunday was a complete day of rest. I afterwards did a bit of a picture of the scene which has been greatly praised, and I have been asked to get it engraved and so ensured against loss, but there are two people to give their consent to that; but I shall wait till we get to England before I say anything about it, and then I might get two or three things lithographed if they are worth it, and the interest excited about the ships great. The next day, to end the festivities, the men had racing in sacks, catching a pig with a greased tail, and climbing a greased staff for a prize, which created a great deal of amusement and fun.

We now began to tire of each other's company, and

on the 6th we cast off, the ice appearing slack to the southward. We left a cask with a paper in it on the ice, signed by all the officers of both ships, and my Venus was left entire. We did not make much progress, for we were stopped next day. We might have gone to the westward, but Captain Ross was determined to go eastward as Bellingshausen, the Russian navigator was obliged to turn back, and I think he thought there was land near. We caught a seal 11 feet 4 inches long here, and some enormous penguins weighing upwards of 70 pounds, but the largest we caught afterwards weighed 79—I think about the largest ever caught. The *Erebus* caught a seal larger by a few inches in length, and weighing upwards of 800 pounds.

Jan. 9th. On the same spot we were Christmas Day, and blowing hard, so we were in hopes it would break the ice up; but alas, no, we were in despair, fearing we should not get beyond Weddell. There appeared no prospect of it; still, Captain Ross persevered, and I believe he was the only person that said it was capital, just the thing he wanted. I think he wanted to make the best of a bad bargain; but he said he never looked at the dark side of things, and he was right. We again made fast to a floe piece on the 15th, and the ice was very close and heavy, and, it blowing a strong breeze to the south-westward, we made sail, towing the immense piece of ice. She kept striking so heavily as to keep all the bells ringing. On the 18th, in the afternoon the

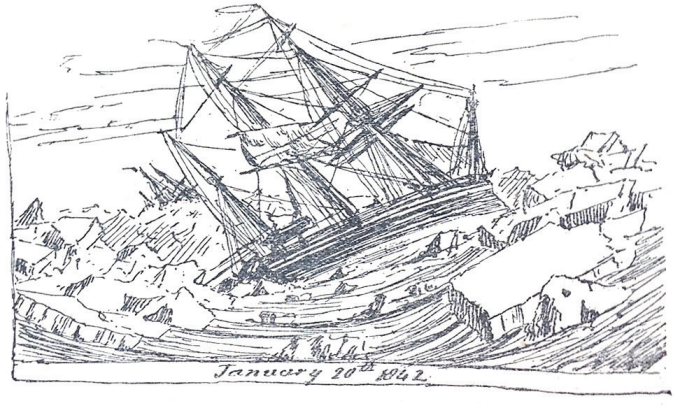
weather became very thick and misty; at about half past five we found ourselves close to a large berg, in very dangerous proximity. We were obliged to make all sail, still keeping fast to our floe, and just cleared it; it was an immense mass, and through the mist appeared more so than it really was. We were drifting right down on it, and there was a heavy swell on at the time; the next morning it was blowing very hard. The *Erebus* carried away two hawsers and lost two ice anchors, and we lost one of each.

I must now tell you of one gale of wind the most dangerous I was ever in—but this is not the escape I alluded to in the commencement of my letter, but was bad enough, as our hawsers carried away and we were obliged to go. On the morning of the 20th it blew a heavy gale of wind; there we were in the midst of very heavy ice with a very heavy swell on. The ship at times striking hard, it was very difficult to pass clear of the largest pieces which threatened at times to crush us. We had no sail set but the main-top sail clewed down, and set the fore-stay sail now and then to forge her ahead. At times we could not see the *Erebus's* top-mast-bends, the swell was so high (and she was close to us). Sometimes we thought that the pieces we came against would grind us to powder; and in fact no ordinarily built ship would have stood such a hammering for half an hour, it would soon have knocked a hole in her bottom. We were afraid for our bowsprit, it being so low, but we

experienced a greater loss in our rudder, which was broken and rendered useless at ten in the forenoon. A tongue of ice got under it and completely ground it round, splitting it all the way up, tore two of the braces of the gudgeons out of the stem-bolts and carried away three of the pintles (all of which were the size of a line-of-battle ship's), and the rudder as it was was immovable. The *Erebus* also wrung the head of hers. Here we were then, two unmanageable ships drifting about in an unknown sea, expecting land to be under our lee, and no possibility of helping ourselves. We got our spare rudder up, and put it together, but could do nothing more, and we had a doubt whether it would ship or not owing to the gudgeons being torn away. I suppose the Dockyard men thought that impossible, and, instead of having spare gudgeons between the others and pintles on the spare rudder to match, they were both fitted alike. Perhaps you will not understand my technical expressions, but if you ask Captain Blake (to whom if you like you may show the letter as it may be interesting to him) he will I know be kind enough to explain. How anxiously did we watch the barometer, for it went lower (with one exception) than we had ever had it before. The weather moderated towards evening, and the next day (the 21st) we were enabled to make fast to a piece of ice, which I assure you we were very glad to do. We immediately examined all our damage. The *Erebus'*s rudder was soon repaired and we patched up ours as a spare one by scarfing it and

filling up with oak plank, and hooping it round with ice saws which we were obliged to cut up for the purpose. We had great difficulty in shipping the spare one, owing to the remaining gudgeons being bent, and after trying for a whole day we managed it, and it is now holding by three instead of six. Our other damages were not much; both ships lost a great deal of copper, which was curled up like brown paper, a great deal of it about the bows being 80 oz., or nearly three times the usual thickness. All the steps on the sides were torn off, and we carried away a spare top-sail yard which protruded a little too far out. Every one said they had never seen or experienced such an awful day. Those that had been to the north confessed that in all their dangers there they had nothing equal to that. The usual smile had gone from Captain Ross' countenance and he looked anxious and careworn. They said he was most anxious for this ship, she having been so badly handled to the northward, which she has never recovered. The day after making fast was Sunday; we were at work all day and night, but they had church in the *Erebus,* and it may give you an idea of what Captain Ross thought of it when he said that beautiful prayer of thanksgiving in the "Forms of Prayer to be used at Sea," commencing "Oh most mighty and gracious good God," returning thanks for our escape from imminent danger. It was the first time I have ever known it to be read publicly. We have broken up one of our whale boats which had got smashed while hanging at the stern the day before the

gale. The sketch will give you but a poor idea of our situation on the 20th.



We cast off on the 27th and made a little southing, and made fast again on the 29th. We had a great alarm on the 27th, the day we cast off; the weather being very damp, and the lower deck in consequence being also very damp, we lighted the apparatus below for warming the ship. About two in the afternoon I thought there was more smoke than there ought to be, and I went and asked if they had been putting more fuel on, and was told that they had not. Presently after clouds of smoke burst up the hatchway, perfectly stifling. We knew then that something had taken fire, and the tube that only ought to have emitted heat was emitting smoke into all the cabins and got intensely hot, so much so that in the captain's cabin I could not bear my hand near the aperture. I thought that the stove had been so heated as to set fire to the

beams—however we got the fire-engine under weigh, and passed water down and poured it down the smoke funnel; we could hardly work, the clouds of smoke were so dense. After about three hours' hard work we got the fire under, and found that a number of plugs supplied for the Pateraroes which had been stowed in the funnel, and all of which we thought to be out, had taken fire and caused the alarm. It is well we got off as we did, for the ship is so lumbered with combustible matter that any part of the ship taking fire would be attended with serious results.

On the 31st we cast off, and, to our inexpressible delight, on the 2nd February we were in clear water. We had been now since the 23rd December coming 100 miles; do you not call that perseverance? But the season was now so far advanced that we had little hopes of doing anything. This was in Lat. 68° S., and last year we had turned back from 78° on the 11th February, so we thought that we should soon have to turn.

On the morning we got clear I had an accident that put me on the sick list for some time. A jug of boiling water capsized by the roll of the ship over my right hand and raised a delightful blister, and as my work is mostly right-hand work it was a great nuisance. The first few days it was very painful, and the cold kept it back.

After leaving the ice we again fell in with the pack which trended to the westward, so we kept along the edge of it till we came near our old track of the

year before, and in Lat. 77° crossed it. On the 20th February we had a dreadful gale, not from the force of the wind, for that is nothing; but the spray as it broke over us froze when it touched the deck, so that there was not a particle of the ship visible for ice. Between the deadeyes of the lower rigging was a perfect mass, and all overhead gear carried away from the weight of ice which formed in large lumps on it. The worst of this kind of weather is the unmanageable state of the ship, and the men of the watch cannot move to warm themselves, and when a spray comes over them they are literally moving lumps of ice. At midnight we made a pack right ahead. After beating the gear with sticks for half an hour we managed to wear, but the *Erebus* could not till the third time of trial. We thought Captain Ross would have turned back after that, for it was very evident that the winter had set in; but no, it became finer, and to the southward we steered, and on the 23rd, at half past seven in the evening, we reached the highest southern latitude ever reached, being six miles further than we were last year. It was a lovely evening, and the last ten or twelve miles we were sailing through pancake ice—that is, ice of this year's growth. I have given you an outline on the other side of the sheet. The *Erebus* sounded, and we tacked in the spot she did, so that neither ship could say she was beyond the other. No one will ever beat that in this longitude, that I may safely say. The barrier was not so high as

H.M. Ships 'Erebus' and 'Terror' in Lat. 78° 10′ S. and Long. 161° W.

Soundings 290 fathoms. Off the Ice Barrier, February 23, 1842.
Height of barrier from 80 to 120 feet perpendicular.

where we made it last year, but more irregular, and appeared to rise gradually inland (if I may so term it). We steered along it to the northward, and next day we had the rendezvous "Falkland Islands." We steered back along the edge of the pack, and on the 26th passed through a great quantity of very yellow young ice; some of it was bottled off. I did not preserve any, for I have but barely sufficient room for myself without bottled water.

On the 28th, in the afternoon, we got amongst a great number of icebergs (which always congregate at the point of a pack); some of them were several miles in extent, and at one time we counted ninety. Towards evening we found we had got into a regular bay of them, and were obliged to haul close on a wind to clear them. Just before 9 o'clock the *Erebus* weathered a large one (which was a great object to weather), about a quarter of a mile, and we being to leeward weathered it also, but within thirty yards; the sea between us and it was like a cauldron of boiling water, and breaking against it with great fury. I hardly breathed while we were passing it. The hands were on deck to tack, but she would not have gone round. They said in the *Erebus* that it was a very pretty sight, but more interesting to those that are safe than to those present. This paper is not the best in the world for scribbling etchings on, but "a bad carpenter"—you know the old proverb. I must get on, for I shall never get back.

On the 1st March we again saw the pack, and

passed round the sharp end of one off which were a great number of seals. This was in Lat. 67½°. My hand had got well, but broke out again, having used it too much, for my work was greatly behind, and Captain Ross had given me a chart to make, about 80 inches long and 50 broad, besides two circular ones to fill up—in case of falling in with any homeward bound ship off the Horn he would have one

ready to go. By keeping to the westward of the track we went down in we kept clear of the pack. We passed many icebergs, but saw nothing of the pack, which we were very glad of as the nights were closing in very dark. On the 7th we passed some seaweed, and of course there were many conjectures as to where it could have come from. We had a slight aurora two or three days. We saw no ice on

the 10th, 11th or 12th, so we flattered ourselves we were clear of it altogether, and were steering east for Long. 124°, a spot marked by Major Sabine as the spot of maximum intensity, which we have found incorrect.

And now, my dearest Emily, I approach the awful morning of the 13th; but I must pause and consider how I am to relate it, for when my thoughts lead me from one circumstance to another connected with it I shudder and feel sick; but I will first describe the events circumstantially and then tell you my own thoughts about it. On the morning of Saturday, 12th March, the wind was light, but it rapidly increased and by noon it blew very hard, and the evening set in stormy and very thick hazy weather, with a heavy sea running and pitch dark. At midnight we passed what was thought to be an ice-blink (that is a light thrown from large masses of ice). On Sunday morning it was my messmate Moore's watch, when he thought he saw an ice-blink ahead and broad on one of our bows.* We were going nearly eight knots and had just reefed the topsails, and we were going to haul up to clear it on the other hand, but the *Erebus* made the signal to keep further off, and we bore away again, closing the blinks rapidly. Moore had told the captain, who was on deck at the time, and asked him to haul up without waiting for the *Erebus,* who apparently did not see it, and we were just going to do so at 12.50 when the *Erebus* must have

* The port bow is meant—see plan.

seen the ice ahead, but not that which was now well on our beam and which she could not have weathered, and she could not have tacked in such a heavy sea, and there was no room. She must have run right on the berg, which was now dimly visible with a small darkness that looked like a gap or a small opening in it. Her destruction would have been inevitable, but Providence, by a dreadful accident, averted that calamity and saved her, for, as we were both suddenly hauling to the wind on opposite tacks, we came in contact; the *Erebus* striking this ship heavily on the starboard cathead, breaking our anchor right in two and taking the cat-head and a part of the anchor away, carrying away flying jibboom and jibboom, the former of which broke in three places and snapped close off at the cap, and carried away the lower studding-sail boom. Her damage was much greater, losing her bowsprit close off at the bows, fore-top-mast and main-top-gallant-mast, and the whole of the cat-head and anchor. After striking several times very hard she worked further aft, our anchors being cleared. She next struck us near the gangway, she then splintered the immense strengthening pieces outside which prevented our being cut down. Our yard-arms were now striking at every roll, and broke all the booms and boom-irons, which came tumbling down without hurting anyone. She then (working further aft) struck us abreast the mizen-mast several times, smashed the quarter boat, broke the ice-plank, and again shattered the strengthening piece outside and tore off all the iron

work. We then separated, she carrying away our spanker-boom.

All this time we had been bodily drifting on the bergs, so that when we cleared the *Erebus* we found an enormous iceberg close under our lee. A dreadful shipwreck and death then appeared inevitable; there was no alternative but to run for the dark place we had seen before, which might be an opening; or be smashed on the face of the cliff. The helm was immediately put a-starboard, and with the assistance of the sails she answered it very well. We were immediately rushing past an enormous berg, the ship being perfectly covered with the foam caused by the sea breaking against it. Every moment we were expecting the ship to strike ice right ahead. "Hard-a-port" was screamed out from forward (then indeed hope died within us); "Hard-aport; brace round the head-yards." "Shiver the main-top-sail," cried the Captain, as if he were steering into any harbour. The men flew to the ropes, although I should think at that moment that there was not one on board but thought all hope was fled. She came round, and passed through an opening between two bergs not twice the breadth of the ship, the foam and spray dashing over us on each side as we passed. Several other alarms were given owing to the brash (small stuff washed from the bergs) looking more like bergs in the darkness, but we were safe, but did not know it. The next cry was "Where's the *Erebus*?"—our own danger had made us entirely forget her for the time. All eyes

were immediately straining through the gloom to find her. We burnt a blue light, and soon after had the happiness of seeing her burn one which we immediately answered; we knew then that she was safe, which with her losses we never expected. We then lay to, anxiously waiting for daylight to find the extent of her damages. As soon as it could be distinguished she made the signal that: "All was well, and that they could repair all their damages." We answered: "Thank God, we are the same."

And now, my dearest Emily, I must if possible describe my own proceedings and feelings during that eventful hour, for it was not more than that time from our getting foul till we were safe: I was in bed, and on the sick list with my hand. I had been awoke by the noise of reefing topsails, and lay awake listening. I knew something must be wrong, by the constant commands to the helmsman. At last some one regularly screamed out down the fore hatchway, "All hands bear a hand on deck, every one"—and immediately after came a crash. "Good God," cried I, "we are foul of an iceberg." I opened my door, to prevent its being jammed, and hurriedly put on two or three articles of dress and jumped up the hatchway, fully expecting to see the cliff of an iceberg over our heads, instead of which, just abreast the gangway were the bows of the *Erebus,* on top of a sea, as far as the copper above our gunwale, her fore-top-mast and bowsprit gone. Down she came crash, with a shock that nearly knocked me

down; our men had all rushed up half naked and were perfectly bewildered. Nothing could be done more than we had, which was to set the fore-sail and brace the headyards up. Crash, crash, again and again as she worked aft. I had gone under the ice-plank, as I expected every moment to see her fore-mast come on board of us, which would have taken our mizzen-mast in its fall, and I had more protection under a heavy piece of wood than on the open deck, but, thanks be to God, a belly-stay (an extra stay to the fore-mast independent of the bowsprit) held it. Up she would stand; "Clear the ice-plank," cried a dozen voices; down she came, crash went the ice-plank, at the same time the boat was cut in two as with an immense hatchet. "Thank God, she is clear," cried I, as she passed under our stern, snapping our spanker-boom in two as if it had been a straw.

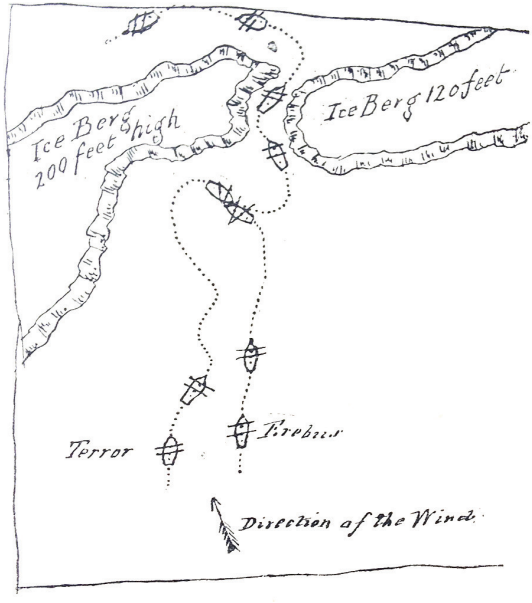
But my joy was of short continuance, for no sooner were we clear of the *Erebus* than we had this immense berg under our lee, and so close that we already appeared to be in the foam. My thoughts from this time till we were through the passage were agonising. I believe myself to be no coward; I have often been in danger, and perhaps have had more than my share of it, but never till those moments did I in reality know what fear was; and, Emily, what were my fears? I was afraid to stand before a severe though merciful and just God; I was not fit to die. What would I not have given at that time for a single day to prepare myself for

such an awful change! What thoughts passed in rapid succession through my brain! The events of a life passed in review before me in a few moments, and what had I to trust to to expect mercy? Alas, nothing. I thought of my poor dear, dear mother, that she should lose a second son, and no one to bear the tale—the years of suspense and hope she would be in, to be at last disappointed. Emily, I thought of all these things, but the occurrence themselves took much less time than it has taken me to write them. I wonder now I did not lose my self-possession; but no, perhaps it was from example that I did not, but I repeated the orders and got what was necessary done more coolly in appearance than I felt The Captain himself, when it was all over, said that he had not the slightest idea what he did during the time or how we got through. The men on the whole behaved very well throughout; only one was running about out of his senses, but two or three were crying. It was truly the time when "shrieked the timid and stood still the brave." I looked round me when the first blue light was burnt, and, to see the ghastly appearance of everyone's face, in which horror and despair were pictured, the half-naked forms of the men thrown out by the strong light, oh! it was horrible, truly horrible. That time will never be effaced from my memory. After daylight, and we had signalized with the *Erebus*, I went to my cabin; and never did a sinner offer up to the throne of the Almighty more sincere thanks for the reprieve granted to us, through

His almighty mercy, to prepare myself for a change. I cried with the Psalmist, “Oh Lord, teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

Emily, I fear I have been doing wrong in entering so minutely into all the circumstances of that dreadful time, but these are the thoughts I wrote the same day, and I then determined to send them to you without alteration. I think you will bear me witness that I never alarm you, but on this occasion you must return thanks to God for his preservation of your brother. But you must not from this be alarmed for my safety in the next trip; consider,—we were supposed to be all clear of dangers, and next time we shall come directly north instead of running along in dark nights in the parallel of 60°. We might go a thousand times more to the South Pole without experiencing one-half the dangers we have this time. The following diagram may give you an idea of our situation, in which the arrow denotes the direction of the wind; the red the *Terror*, and the black the *Erebus*; the dotted line the passage the ships made through the water. You are to suppose yourself looking down on their decks, and the strokes across the ships are the way the yards were braced. I cannot attempt any sketches of the ships with my pen and ink, it would be impossible to give the slightest effect of the intense darkness, &c. You may imagine the force with which the *Erebus* struck us when I tell you that her spare anchor in the

act of falling must have come in collision with our side, which drove the palms of it right into her through copper and all; that in this way she conveyed it 800 miles, when it must have worked out. I have written all this at sea, fearing I shall not have time in harbour,



and we have not communicated with the Erebus since the occurrence, so I might have to add a little when we do.

Falkland Islands. Here we are, safe and not sound, but all in good health, thank God. We arrived here on the 6th, having been 185 days at sea, and 188 without once seeing land. It was the anniversary of our arrival at Hobarton last year,

and in one way in the same state, that is, we had not one on the sick list, and the *Erebus* only one. But the ships, how different! We both of us look perfectly shattered. All I have written concerning the Erebus is correct with the exception . that she did not lose her main-top-gallant mast, but we cut her gunwale down to the deck, and the anchor that was drove into her side broke and left a large piece in. They describe the scene much the same as I have done; they gave themselves over, and say that when we cleared them we appeared to bound forward to what they thought certain destruction. We disappeared suddenly, and they did not believe the gap was an opening between two bergs, but merely an indentation in one. They, after parting, set the mainsail and backed the yard (the fore-sail was split and unmanageable owing to the top-mast lying across it). They then backed close to one berg (the seas breaking right over her), and when close to it filled and went through the same opening. I think a little attention to the diagram may give you a better idea than my written description.

On the 2nd April, directly to the southward of the Horn, the *Erebus* had the misfortune to lose a man; it was blowing very fresh and a heavy sea when a man fell from the main yard, struck the gunwale and fell overboard; he got on the lifebuoy and was there nearly an hour, but before the ships could fetch him he had fallen off and drowned. She is very unfortunate, for that is the third she has lost by being drowned.

On our arrival here, there was not a despatch or letter waiting for any one; we had made certain of getting some and were of course much disappointed, but fortunately the Governor had a Navy List which brought good with it, for we found that Captain Crozier was promoted, as also the first Lieutenant and senior mate of the Erebus, and last, though not least, our shipmate Mowbray, at which I assure you all hands were delight. Mowbray's was unexpected, although God knows he deserved it long ago. He would not believe it for some time, he was perfectly overjoyed; in fact I never heard more sincere congratulations from everyone than I did to him, for he is very much liked. Of course he expected to remain as clerk in charge, but to his great astonishment Captain Ross gave them all (with the exception of Captain Crozier) an acting order to serve in their new ranks. It is certainly a great stretch of power and more than an admiral would dare do, but Captain Ross does it on the plea that he could not spare the services of one of them, and that it would be an act of injustice to let them remain as they were when the Admiralty thought them fit to serve in a higher capacity. His having three great friends in the Admiralty, he thinks, will confirm his appointments, and he says he can now made certain of every one's promotion; and it promises well, for the old Admiralty made all he applied for. I do not know if I told you that he wrote about me from the Bay of Islands to Captain Beaufort; I saw a copy of it, it was very flattering, certainly, but you know

I am not over sanguine and no not put much faith in recommendations. However I think you may look at the bottom of the list of masters about this time twelvemonths, but mind I only hope so then, but *expect* it when the ship is paid off. I was delighted to see that Ingram was promoted; I see also several old messmates.

We have very strong reports that we are to remain her till we proceed south again. that is to say, if the Admiralty allow us to do so; if that is the case we shall remain eight or nine months here, but before I close this I may be able to tell you with more certainty. I shall not be sorry if we do. for there is no possibility of spending money; we live on beef, geese, rabbits and snipe, and pay nothing for any of it. The worst of the place is that we cannot get bread, vegetables or anything in that way; but if a vessel, which is expected every day, is sent to Rio with our despatches we shall be able to send for rise and a few substitutes. Of course I am working away at charts again, and have got to do all I did last year over again. We are going to lay the ships on shore at this place, and the *Erebus* is already clearing out to do so. The observatories are up and at work, so we are all busy—I shall be glad to see the day we are not. You must turn over now to the first page, for (more than I expected) I must begin to cross.

May Day. It is fortunate for you I am very busy, for I was going to write another letter and not send this, but I have not time and so must send it. This

is too melancholy, and I find I have said more than I ought. I am afraid it will make you uneasy about what I sincerely wish to take place—that is, another trip to the southward. I certainly hope we shall go, although I think it will delay my promotion. At the same time you receive this you ought to receive another from me enclosing a bill for 36 pounds odd, also two letter that I wish forwarded and the postage paid on. as also do for the one enclosed, and I shall probably trouble you with some more, for that is the only way I can send them. I am really nearly blind, for I have been working night and day to get some charts ready for England which *must* go. I hope you have complied with my request with regard to the music I asked you to send to Miss Stephen; I should not like them to think me ungrateful for their many kindnesses to me. If you have *not, buy* some and send it and I will pay for it. Also if you have another of those fancy fairs at which nick-nacks are selling so cheap please buy a whole lot for me,. for I have got a whole host of little sweethearts in the Antipodes and I must send them something by and by. I have made a new acquaintance to-day in Lieutenant Robinson of the *Arrow*; he says he knew father, and knows you all; he knew me, too, when I was a boy. He is likely to go to England, and he says he will call. I hope he will, if it is any satisfaction to you. He offered to take letters or anything, but I thought on this occasion you would prefer paying the post and getting them quicker than

otherwise. He asked if you were married yet, I told him that I hoped so, although I was not aware of it; in fact I hope you are both well married before this, but Gosport is not the best place in the world for that kind of thing.

May 2nd. I have finished my chart, and Captain Ross said it could not be better, which is a great deal from him. So now good-bye. I do not know how you will manage to wade through all this. Give my kind love to Henry and Home when you write, and to aunts when you see them. Kiss my dear, dear mother for me. or I will send her one myself here in the corner X I hope and trust she is well in health. As for Ellen. you may kiss her—and yourself, too—and. with love and remembrances to all the girls and friends, I am, as I ever shall remain,

Your affectionate brother,

JACK.

I have got three days' holidays now my chart is finished, and then I must begin again. I do not know if I told you—if I have there is no harm in repeating it, and that is to write to me *immediately* you receive this, directing to the Falkland Islands via *Rio Janeiro*, sending at the same time one or two letters if you have received any for me; after that continue to send to the Cape. God bless you. Good-bye. Munday the son of the baker is quite well, and as fat as a pig. I need not say that Mowbray is well but not quite so fat.

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