CHAPTER XIX

Next to Oppenheimer and Morrell, who rotted with me through the years of darkness, I was considered the most dangerous prisoner in San Quentin. On the other hand I was considered the toughest--tougher even than Oppenheimer and Morrell. Of course by toughness I mean enduringness. Terrible as were the attempts to break them in body and in spirit, more terrible were the attempts to break me. And I endured. Dynamite or curtains had been Warden Atherton's ultimatum. And in the end it was neither. I could not produce the dynamite, and Warden Atherton could not induce the curtains.

It was not because my body was enduring, but because my spirit was enduring. And it was because, in earlier existences, my spirit had been wrought to steel-hardness by steel-hard experiences. There was one experience that for long was a sort of nightmare to me. It had neither beginning nor end. Always I found myself on a rocky, surge-battered islet so low that in storms the salt spray swept over its highest point. It rained much. I lived in a lair and suffered greatly, for I was without fire and lived on uncooked meat.

Always I suffered. It was the middle of some experience to which I could get no clue. And since, when I went into the little death I had no power of directing my journeys, I often found myself reliving this particularly detestable experience. My only happy moments were when the sun shone, at

which times I basked on the rocks and thawed out the almost perpetual chill I suffered.

My one diversion was an oar and a jackknife. Upon this oar I spent much time, carving minute letters and cutting a notch for each week that passed. There were many notches. I sharpened the knife on a flat piece of rock, and no barber was ever more careful of his favourite razor than was I of that knife. Nor did ever a miser prize his treasure as did I prize the knife. It was as precious as my life. In truth, it was my life.

By many repetitions, I managed to bring back out of the jacket the legend that was carved on the oar. At first I could bring but little. Later, it grew easier, a matter of piecing portions together. And at last I had the thing complete. Here it is:

This is to acquaint the person into whose hands this Oar may fall, that Daniel Foss, a native of Elkton, in Maryland, one of the United States of America, and who sailed from the port of Philadelphia, in 1809, on board the brig Negociator, bound to the Friendly Islands, was cast upon this desolate island the February following, where he erected a hut and lived a number of years, subsisting on seals--he being the last who survived of the crew of said brig, which ran foul of an island of ice, and foundered on the 25th Nov. 1809.

There it was, quite clear. By this means I learned a lot about myself.

One vexed point, however, I never did succeed in clearing up. Was this island situated in the far South Pacific or the far South Atlantic? I do not know enough of sailing-ship tracks to be certain whether the brig Negociator would sail for the Friendly Islands via Cape Horn or via the Cape of Good Hope. To confess my own ignorance, not until after I was transferred to Folsom did I learn in which ocean were the Friendly Islands. The Japanese murderer, whom I have mentioned before, had been a sailmaker on board the Arthur Sewall ships, and he told me that the probable sailing course would be by way of the Cape of Good Hope. If this were so, then the dates of sailing from Philadelphia and of being wrecked would easily determine which ocean. Unfortunately, the sailing date is merely 1809. The wreck might as likely have occurred in one ocean as the other.

Only once did I, in my trances, get a hint of the period preceding the time spent on the island. This begins at the moment of the brig's collision with the iceberg, and I shall narrate it, if for no other reason, at least to give an account of my curiously cool and deliberate conduct. This conduct at this time, as you shall see, was what enabled me in the end to survive alone of all the ship's company.

I was awakened, in my bunk in the forecastle, by a terrific crash. In fact, as was true of the other six sleeping men of the watch below, awaking and leaping from bunk to floor were simultaneous. We knew what had happened. The others waited for nothing, rushing only partly clad upon deck. But I knew what to expect, and I did wait. I knew that if we

escaped at all, it would be by the longboat. No man could swim in so freezing a sea. And no man, thinly clad, could live long in the open boat. Also, I knew just about how long it would take to launch the boat.

So, by the light of the wildly swinging slush-lamp, to the tumult on deck and to cries of "She's sinking!" I proceeded to ransack my sea-chest for suitable garments. Also, since they would never use them again, I ransacked the sea chests of my shipmates. Working quickly but collectedly, I took nothing but the warmest and stoutest of clothes. I put on the four best woollen shirts the forecastle boasted, three pairs of pants, and three pairs of thick woollen socks. So large were my feet thus incased that I could not put on my own good boots. Instead, I thrust on Nicholas Wilton's new boots, which were larger and even stouter than mine. Also, I put on Jeremy Nalor's pea jacket over my own, and, outside of both, put on Seth Richard's thick canvas coat which I remembered he had fresh-oiled only a short while previous.

Two pairs of heavy mittens, John Robert's muffler which his mother had knitted for him, and Joseph Dawes' beaver cap atop my own, both bearing ear-and neck-flaps, completed my outfitting. The shouts that the brig was sinking redoubled, but I took a minute longer to fill my pockets with all the plug tobacco I could lay hands on. Then I climbed out on deck, and not a moment too soon.

The moon, bursting through a crack of cloud, showed a bleak and savage picture. Everywhere was wrecked gear, and everywhere was ice. The

sails, ropes, and spars of the mainmast, which was still standing, were fringed with icicles; and there came over me a feeling almost of relief in that never again should I have to pull and haul on the stiff tackles and hammer ice so that the frozen ropes could run through the frozen shivs. The wind, blowing half a gale, cut with the sharpness that is a sign of the proximity of icebergs; and the big seas were bitter cold to look upon in the moonlight.

The longboat was lowering away to larboard, and I saw men, struggling on the ice-sheeted deck with barrels of provisions, abandon the food in their haste to get away. In vain Captain Nicholl strove with them. A sea, breaching across from windward, settled the matter and sent them leaping over the rail in heaps. I gained the captain's shoulder, and, holding on to him, I shouted in his ear that if he would board the boat and prevent the men from casting off, I would attend to the provisioning.

Little time was given me, however. Scarcely had I managed, helped by the second mate, Aaron Northrup, to lower away half-a-dozen barrels and kegs, when all cried from the boat that they were casting off. Good reason they had. Down upon us from windward was drifting a towering ice-mountain, while to leeward, close aboard, was another ice-mountain upon which we were driving.

Quicker in his leap was Aaron Northrup. I delayed a moment, even as the boat was shoving away, in order to select a spot amidships where the men were thickest, so that their bodies might break my fall. I was not

minded to embark with a broken member on so hazardous a voyage in the longboat. That the men might have room at the oars, I worked my way quickly aft into the sternsheets. Certainly, I had other and sufficient reasons. It would be more comfortable in the sternsheets than in the narrow bow. And further, it would be well to be near the afterguard in whatever troubles that were sure to arise under such circumstances in the days to come.

In the sternsheets were the mate, Walter Drake, the surgeon, Arnold Bentham, Aaron Northrup, and Captain Nicholl, who was steering. The surgeon was bending over Northrup, who lay in the bottom groaning. Not so fortunate had he been in his ill-considered leap, for he had broken his right leg at the hip joint.

There was little time for him then, however, for we were labouring in a heavy sea directly between the two ice islands that were rushing together. Nicholas Wilton, at the stroke oar, was cramped for room; so I better stowed the barrels, and, kneeling and facing him, was able to add my weight to the oar. For'ard, I could see John Roberts straining at the bow oar. Pulling on his shoulders from behind, Arthur Haskins and the boy, Benny Hardwater, added their weight to his. In fact, so eager were all hands to help that more than one was thus in the way and cluttered the movements of the rowers.

It was close work, but we went clear by a matter of a hundred yards, so that I was able to turn my head and see the untimely end of the

Negociator. She was caught squarely in the pinch and she was squeezed between the ice as a sugar plum might be squeezed between thumb and forefinger of a boy. In the shouting of the wind and the roar of water we heard nothing, although the crack of the brig's stout ribs and deckbeams must have been enough to waken a hamlet on a peaceful night.

Silently, easily, the brig's sides squeezed together, the deck bulged up, and the crushed remnant dropped down and was gone, while where she had been was occupied by the grinding conflict of the ice-islands. I felt regret at the destruction of this haven against the elements, but at the same time was well pleased at thought of my snugness inside my four shirts and three coats.

Yet it proved a bitter night, even for me. I was the warmest clad in the boat. What the others must have suffered I did not care to dwell upon over much. For fear that we might meet up with more ice in the darkness, we bailed and held the boat bow-on to the seas. And continually, now with one mitten, now with the other, I rubbed my nose that it might not freeze. Also, with memories lively in me of the home circle in Elkton, I prayed to God.

In the morning we took stock. To commence with, all but two or three had suffered frost-bite. Aaron Northrup, unable to move because of his broken hip, was very bad. It was the surgeon's opinion that both of Northrup's feet were hopelessly frozen.

The longboat was deep and heavy in the water, for it was burdened by the entire ship's company of twenty-one. Two of these were boys. Benny Hardwater was a bare thirteen, and Lish Dickery, whose family was near neighbour to mine in Elkton, was just turned sixteen. Our provisions consisted of three hundred-weight of beef and two hundred-weight of pork. The half-dozen loaves of brine-pulped bread, which the cook had brought, did not count. Then there were three small barrels of water and one small keg of beer.

Captain Nicholl frankly admitted that in this uncharted ocean he had no knowledge of any near land. The one thing to do was to run for more clement climate, which we accordingly did, setting our small sail and steering quartering before the fresh wind to the north-east.

The food problem was simple arithmetic. We did not count Aaron Northrup, for we knew he would soon be gone. At a pound per day, our five hundred pounds would last us twenty-five days; at half a pound, it would last fifty. So half a pound had it. I divided and issued the meat under the captain's eyes, and managed it fairly enough, God knows, although some of the men grumbled from the first. Also, from time to time I made fair division among the men of the plug tobacco I had stowed in my many pockets--a thing which I could not but regret, especially when I knew it was being wasted on this man and that who I was certain could not live a day more, or, at best, two days or three.

For we began to die soon in the open boat. Not to starvation but to the

killing cold and exposure were those earlier deaths due. It was a matter of the survival of the toughest and the luckiest. I was tough by constitution, and lucky inasmuch as I was warmly clad and had not broken my leg like Aaron Northrup. Even so, so strong was he that, despite being the first to be severely frozen, he was days in passing. Vance Hathaway was the first. We found him in the gray of dawn crouched doubled in the bow and frozen stiff. The boy, Lish Dickery, was the second to go. The other boy, Benny Hardwater, lasted ten or a dozen days.

So bitter was it in the boat that our water and beer froze solid, and it was a difficult task justly to apportion the pieces I broke off with Northrup's claspknife. These pieces we put in our mouths and sucked till they melted. Also, on occasion of snow-squalls, we had all the snow we desired. All of which was not good for us, causing a fever of inflammation to attack our mouths so that the membranes were continually dry and burning. And there was no allaying a thirst so generated. To suck more ice or snow was merely to aggravate the inflammation. More than anything else, I think it was this that caused the death of Lish Dickery. He was out of his head and raving for twenty-four hours before he died. He died babbling for water, and yet he did not die for need of water. I resisted as much as possible the temptation to suck ice, contenting myself with a shred of tobacco in my cheek, and made out with fair comfort.

We stripped all clothing from our dead. Stark they came into the world,

and stark they passed out over the side of the longboat and down into the dark freezing ocean. Lots were cast for the clothes. This was by Captain Nicholl's command, in order to prevent quarrelling.

It was no time for the follies of sentiment. There was not one of us who did not know secret satisfaction at the occurrence of each death. Luckiest of all was Israel Stickney in casting lots, so that in the end, when he passed, he was a veritable treasure trove of clothing. It gave a new lease of life to the survivors.

We continued to run to the north-east before the fresh westerlies, but our quest for warmer weather seemed vain. Ever the spray froze in the bottom of the boat, and I still chipped beer and drinking water with Northrup's knife. My own knife I reserved. It was of good steel, with a keen edge and stoutly fashioned, and I did not care to peril it in such manner.

By the time half our company was overboard, the boat had a reasonably high freeboard and was less ticklish to handle in the gusts. Likewise there was more room for a man to stretch out comfortably.

A source of continual grumbling was the food. The captain, the mate, the surgeon, and myself, talking it over, resolved not to increase the daily whack of half a pound of meat. The six sailors, for whom Tobias Snow made himself spokesman, contended that the death of half of us was equivalent to a doubling of our provisioning, and that therefore the

ration should be increased to a pound. In reply, we of the afterguard pointed out that it was our chance for life that was doubled did we but bear with the half-pound ration.

It is true that eight ounces of salt meat did not go far in enabling us to live and to resist the severe cold. We were quite weak, and, because of our weakness, we frosted easily. Noses and cheeks were all black with frost-bite. It was impossible to be warm, although we now had double the garments we had started with.

Five weeks after the loss of the Negociator the trouble over the food came to a head. I was asleep at the time--it was night--when Captain Nicholl caught Jud Hetchkins stealing from the pork barrel. That he was abetted by the other five men was proved by their actions. Immediately Jud Hetchkins was discovered, the whole six threw themselves upon us with their knives. It was close, sharp work in the dim light of the stars, and it was a mercy the boat was not overturned. I had reason to be thankful for my many shirts and coats which served me as an armour. The knife-thrusts scarcely more than drew blood through the so great thickness of cloth, although I was scratched to bleeding in a round dozen of places.

The others were similarly protected, and the fight would have ended in no more than a mauling all around, had not the mate, Walter Dakon, a very powerful man, hit upon the idea of ending the matter by tossing the mutineers overboard. This was joined in by Captain Nicholl, the surgeon,

and myself, and in a trice five of the six were in the water and clinging to the gunwale. Captain Nicholl and the surgeon were busy amidships with the sixth, Jeremy Nalor, and were in the act of throwing him overboard, while the mate was occupied with rapping the fingers along the gunwale with a boat-stretcher. For the moment I had nothing to do, and so was able to observe the tragic end of the mate. As he lifted the stretcher to rap Seth Richards' fingers, the latter, sinking down low in the water and then jerking himself up by both hands, sprang half into the boat, locked his arms about the mate and, falling backward and outboard, dragged the mate with him. Doubtlessly he never relaxed his grip, and both drowned together.

Thus left alive of the entire ship's company were three of us: Captain Nicholl, Arnold Bentham (the surgeon), and myself. Seven had gone in the twinkling of an eye, consequent on Jud Hetchkins' attempt to steal provisions. And to me it seemed a pity that so much good warm clothing had been wasted there in the sea. There was not one of us who could not have managed gratefully with more.

Captain Nicholl and the surgeon were good men and honest. Often enough, when two of us slept, the one awake and steering could have stolen from the meat. But this never happened. We trusted one another fully, and we would have died rather than betray that trust.

We continued to content ourselves with half a pound of meat each per day, and we took advantage of every favouring breeze to work to the north'ard.

Not until January fourteenth, seven weeks since the wreck, did we come up with a warmer latitude. Even then it was not really warm. It was merely not so bitterly cold.

Here the fresh westerlies forsook us and we bobbed and blobbed about in doldrummy weather for many days. Mostly it was calm, or light contrary winds, though sometimes a burst of breeze, as like as not from dead ahead, would last for a few hours. In our weakened condition, with so large a boat, it was out of the question to row. We could merely hoard our food and wait for God to show a more kindly face. The three of us were faithful Christians, and we made a practice of prayer each day before the apportionment of food. Yes, and each of us prayed privately, often and long.

By the end of January our food was near its end. The pork was entirely gone, and we used the barrel for catching and storing rainwater. Not many pounds of beef remained. And in all the nine weeks in the open boat we had raised no sail and glimpsed no land. Captain Nicholl frankly admitted that after sixty-three days of dead reckoning he did not know where we were.

The twentieth of February saw the last morsel of food eaten. I prefer to skip the details of much that happened in the next eight days. I shall touch only on the incidents that serve to show what manner of men were my companions. We had starved so long, that we had no reserves of strength on which to draw when the food utterly ceased, and we grew weaker with

great rapidity.

On February twenty-fourth we calmly talked the situation over. We were three stout-spirited men, full of life and toughness, and we did not want to die. No one of us would volunteer to sacrifice himself for the other two. But we agreed on three things: we must have food; we must decide the matter by casting lots; and we would cast the lots next morning if there were no wind.

Next morning there was wind, not much of it, but fair, so that we were able to log a sluggish two knots on our northerly course. The mornings of the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh found us with a similar breeze. We were fearfully weak, but we abided by our decision and continued to sail.

But with the morning of the twenty-eighth we knew the time was come. The longboat rolled drearily on an empty, windless sea, and the stagnant, overcast sky gave no promise of any breeze. I cut three pieces of cloth, all of a size, from my jacket. In the ravel of one of these pieces was a bit of brown thread. Whoever drew this lost. I then put the three lots into my hat, covering it with Captain Nicholl's hat.

All was ready, but we delayed for a time while each prayed silently and long, for we knew that we were leaving the decision to God. I was not unaware of my own honesty and worth; but I was equally aware of the honesty and worth of my companions, so that it perplexed me how God could decide so fine-balanced and delicate a matter.

The captain, as was his right and due, drew first. After his hand was in the hat he delayed for sometime with closed eyes, his lips moving a last prayer. And he drew a blank. This was right--a true decision I could not but admit to myself; for Captain Nicholl's life was largely known to me and I knew him to be honest, upright, and God-fearing.

Remained the surgeon and me. It was one or the other, and, according to ship's rating, it was his due to draw next. Again we prayed. As I prayed I strove to quest back in my life and cast a hurried tally-sheet of my own worth and unworth.

I held the hat on my knees with Captain Nicholl's hat over it. The surgeon thrust in his hand and fumbled about for some time, while I wondered whether the feel of that one brown thread could be detected from the rest of the ravel.

At last he withdrew his hand. The brown thread was in his piece of cloth. I was instantly very humble and very grateful for God's blessing thus extended to me; and I resolved to keep more faithfully than ever all of His commandments. The next moment I could not help but feel that the surgeon and the captain were pledged to each other by closer ties of position and intercourse than with me, and that they were in a measure disappointed with the outcome. And close with that thought ran the conviction that they were such true men that the outcome would not interfere with the plan arranged.

I was right. The surgeon bared arm and knife and prepared to open a great vein. First, however, he spoke a few words.

"I am a native of Norfolk in the Virginias," he said, "where I expect I have now a wife and three children living. The only favour that I have to request of you is, that should it please God to deliver either of you from your perilous situation, and should you be so fortunate as to reach once more your native country, that you would acquaint my unfortunate family with my wretched fate."

Next he requested courteously of us a few minutes in which to arrange his affairs with God. Neither Captain Nicholl nor I could utter a word, but with streaming eyes we nodded our consent.

Without doubt Arnold Bentham was the best collected of the three of us. My own anguish was prodigious, and I am confident that Captain Nicholl suffered equally. But what was one to do? The thing was fair and proper and had been decided by God.

But when Arnold Bentham had completed his last arrangements and made ready to do the act, I could contain myself no longer, and cried out:

"Wait! We who have endured so much surely can endure a little more. It is now mid-morning. Let us wait until twilight. Then, if no event has appeared to change our dreadful destiny, do you Arnold Bentham, do as we

have agreed."

He looked to Captain Nicholl for confirmation of my suggestion, and Captain Nicholl could only nod. He could utter no word, but in his moist and frosty blue eyes was a wealth of acknowledgment I could not misread.

I did not, I could not, deem it a crime, having so determined by fair drawing of lots, that Captain Nicholl and myself should profit by the death of Arnold Bentham. I could not believe that the love of life that actuated us had been implanted in our breasts by aught other than God. It was God's will, and we His poor creatures could only obey and fulfil His will. And yet, God was kind. In His all-kindness He saved us from so terrible, though so righteous, an act.

Scarce had a quarter of an hour passed, when a fan of air from the west, with a hint of frost and damp in it, crisped on our cheeks. In another five minutes we had steerage from the filled sail, and Arnold Bentham was at the steering sweep.

"Save what little strength you have," he had said. "Let me consume the little strength left in me in order that it may increase your chance to survive."

And so he steered to a freshening breeze, while Captain Nicholl and I lay sprawled in the boat's bottom and in our weakness dreamed dreams and glimpsed visions of the dear things of life far across the world from us.

It was an ever-freshening breeze of wind that soon began to puff and gust. The cloud stuff flying across the sky foretold us of a gale. By midday Arnold Bentham fainted at the steering, and, ere the boat could broach in the tidy sea already running, Captain Nicholl and I were at the steering sweep with all the four of our weak hands upon it. We came to an agreement, and, just as Captain Nicholl had drawn the first lot by virtue of his office, so now he took the first spell at steering. Thereafter the three of us spelled one another every fifteen minutes. We were very weak and we could not spell longer at a time.

By mid-afternoon a dangerous sea was running. We should have rounded the boat to, had our situation not been so desperate, and let her drift bow-on to a sea-anchor extemporized of our mast and sail. Had we broached in those great, over-topping seas, the boat would have been rolled over and over.

Time and again, that afternoon, Arnold Bentham, for our sakes, begged that we come to a sea-anchor. He knew that we continued to run only in the hope that the decree of the lots might not have to be carried out. He was a noble man. So was Captain Nicholl noble, whose frosty eyes had wizened to points of steel. And in such noble company how could I be less noble? I thanked God repeatedly, through that long afternoon of peril, for the privilege of having known two such men. God and the right dwelt in them and no matter what my poor fate might be, I could but feel well recompensed by such companionship. Like them I did not want to die,

yet was unafraid to die. The quick, early doubt I had had of these two men was long since dissipated. Hard the school, and hard the men, but they were noble men, God's own men.

I saw it first. Arnold Bentham, his own death accepted, and Captain Nicholl, well nigh accepting death, lay rolling like loose-bodied dead men in the boat's bottom, and I was steering when I saw it. The boat, foaming and surging with the swiftness of wind in its sail, was uplifted on a crest, when, close before me, I saw the sea-battered islet of rock. It was not half a mile off. I cried out, so that the other two, kneeling and reeling and clutching for support, were peering and staring at what I saw.

"Straight for it, Daniel," Captain Nicholl mumbled command. "There may be a cove. There may be a cove. It is our only chance."

Once again he spoke, when we were atop that dreadful lee shore with no cove existent.

"Straight for it, Daniel. If we go clear we are too weak ever to win back against sea and wind."

He was right. I obeyed. He drew his watch and looked, and I asked the time. It was five o'clock. He stretched out his hand to Arnold Bentham, who met and shook it weakly; and both gazed at me, in their eyes extending that same hand-clasp. It was farewell, I knew; for what chance

had creatures so feeble as we to win alive over those surf-battered rocks to the higher rocks beyond?

Twenty feet from shore the boat was snatched out of my control. In a trice it was overturned and I was strangling in the salt. I never saw my companions again. By good fortune I was buoyed by the steering-oar I still grasped, and by great good fortune a fling of sea, at the right instant, at the right spot, threw me far up the gentle slope of the one shelving rock on all that terrible shore. I was not hurt. I was not bruised. And with brain reeling from weakness I was able to crawl and scramble farther up beyond the clutching backwash of the sea.

I stood upright, knowing myself saved, and thanking God, and staggering as I stood. Already the boat was pounded to a thousand fragments. And though I saw them not, I could guess how grievously had been pounded the bodies of Captain Nicholl and Arnold Bentham. I saw an oar on the edge of the foam, and at certain risk I drew it clear. Then I fell to my knees, knowing myself fainting. And yet, ere I fainted, with a sailor's instinct I dragged my body on and up among the cruel hurting rocks to faint finally beyond the reach of the sea.

I was near a dead man myself, that night, mostly in stupor, only dimly aware at times of the extremity of cold and wet that I endured. Morning brought me astonishment and terror. No plant, not a blade of grass, grew on that wretched projection of rock from the ocean's bottom. A quarter of a mile in width and a half mile in length, it was no more than a heap

of rocks. Naught could I discover to gratify the cravings of exhausted nature. I was consumed with thirst, yet was there no fresh water. In vain I tasted to my mouth's undoing every cavity and depression in the rocks. The spray of the gale so completely had enveloped every portion of the island that every depression was filled with water salt as the sea.

Of the boat remained nothing--not even a splinter to show that a boat had been. I stood possessed of my garments, a stout knife, and the one oar I had saved. The gale had abated, and all that day, staggering and falling, crawling till hands and knees bled, I vainly sought water.

That night, nearer death than ever, I sheltered behind a rock from the wind. A heavy shower of rain made me miserable. I removed my various coats and spread them to soak up the rain; but, when I came to wring the moisture from them into my mouth, I was disappointed, because the cloth had been thoroughly impregnated with the salt of the ocean in which I had been immersed. I lay on my back, my mouth open to catch the few rain-drops that fell directly into it. It was tantalizing, but it kept my membranes moist and me from madness.

The second day I was a very sick man. I, who had not eaten for so long, began to swell to a monstrous fatness--my legs, my arms, my whole body. With the slightest of pressures my fingers would sink in a full inch into my skin, and the depressions so made were long in going away. Yet did I labour sore in order to fulfil God's will that I should live. Carefully,

with my hands, I cleaned out the salt water from every slight hole, in the hope that succeeding showers of rain might fill them with water that I could drink.

My sad lot and the memories of the loved ones at Elkton threw me into a melancholy, so that I often lost my recollection for hours at a time. This was a mercy, for it veiled me from my sufferings that else would have killed me.

In the night I was roused by the beat of rain, and I crawled from hole to hole, lapping up the rain or licking it from the rocks. Brackish it was, but drinkable. It was what saved me, for, toward morning, I awoke to find myself in a profuse perspiration and quite free of all delirium.

Then came the sun, the first time since my stay on the island, and I spread most of my garments to dry. Of water I drank my careful fill, and I calculated there was ten days' supply if carefully husbanded. It was amazing how rich I felt with this vast wealth of brackish water. And no great merchant, with all his ships returned from prosperous voyages, his warehouses filled to the rafters, his strong-boxes overflowing, could have felt as wealthy as did I when I discovered, cast up on the rocks, the body of a seal that had been dead for many days. Nor did I fail, first, to thank God on my knees for this manifestation of His ever-unfailing kindness. The thing was clear to me: God had not intended I should die. From the very first He had not so intended.

I knew the debilitated state of my stomach, and I ate sparingly in the knowledge that my natural voracity would surely kill me did I yield myself to it. Never had sweeter morsels passed my lips, and I make free to confess that I shed tears of joy, again and again, at contemplation of that putrefied carcass.

My heart of hope beat strong in me once more. Carefully I preserved the portions of the carcass remaining. Carefully I covered my rock cisterns with flat stones so that the sun's rays might not evaporate the precious fluid and in precaution against some upspringing of wind in the night and the sudden flying of spray. Also I gathered me tiny fragments of seaweed and dried them in the sun for an easement between my poor body and the rough rocks whereon I made my lodging. And my garments were dry--the first time in days; so that I slept the heavy sleep of exhaustion and of returning health.

When I awoke to a new day I was another man. The absence of the sun did not depress me, and I was swiftly to learn that God, not forgetting me while I slumbered, had prepared other and wonderful blessings for me. I would have fain rubbed my eyes and looked again, for, as far as I could see, the rocks bordering upon the ocean were covered with seals. There were thousands of them, and in the water other thousands disported themselves, while the sound that went up from all their throats was prodigious and deafening. I knew it when: I saw it--meat lay there for the taking, meat sufficient for a score of ships' companies.

I directly seized my oar--than which there was no other stick of wood on the island--and cautiously advanced upon all that immensity of provender. It was quickly guessed by me that these creatures of the sea were unacquainted with man. They betrayed no signals of timidity at my approach, and I found it a boy's task to rap them on the head with the oar.

And when I had so killed my third and my fourth, I went immediately and strangely mad. Indeed quite bereft was I of all judgment as I slew and slew and continued to slay. For the space of two hours I toiled unceasingly with the oar till I was ready to drop. What excess of slaughter I might have been guilty of I know not, for at the end of that time, as if by a signal, all the seals that still lived threw themselves into the water and swiftly disappeared.

I found the number of slain seals to exceed two hundred, and I was shocked and frightened because of the madness of slaughter that had possessed me. I had sinned by wanton wastefulness, and after I had duly refreshed myself with this good wholesome food, I set about as well as I could to make amends. But first, ere the great task began, I returned thanks to that Being through whose mercy I had been so miraculously preserved. Thereupon I laboured until dark, and after dark, skinning the seals, cutting the meat into strips, and placing it upon the tops of rocks to dry in the sun. Also, I found small deposits of salt in the nooks and crannies of the rocks on the weather side of the island. This I rubbed into the meat as a preservative.

Four days I so toiled, and in the end was foolishly proud before God in that no scrap of all that supply of meat had been wasted. The unremitting labour was good for my body, which built up rapidly by means of this wholesome diet in which I did not stint myself. Another evidence of God's mercy; never, in the eight years I spent on that barren islet, was there so long a spell of clear weather and steady sunshine as in the period immediately following the slaughter of the seals.

Months were to pass ore ever the seals revisited my island. But in the meantime I was anything but idle. I built me a hut of stone, and, adjoining it, a storehouse for my cured meat. The hut I roofed with many sealskins, so that it was fairly water-proof. But I could never cease to marvel, when the rain beat on that roof, that no less than a king's ransom in the London fur market protected a castaway sailor from the elements.

I was quickly aware of the importance of keeping some kind of reckoning of time, without which I was sensible that I should soon lose all knowledge of the day of the week, and be unable to distinguish one from the other, and not know which was the Lord's day.

I remembered back carefully to the reckoning of time kept in the longboat by Captain Nicholl; and carefully, again and again, to make sure beyond any shadow of uncertainty, I went over the tale of the days and nights I had spent on the island. Then, by seven stones outside my hut, I kept my

weekly calendar. In one place on the oar I cut a small notch for each week, and in another place on the oar I notched the months, being duly careful indeed, to reckon in the additional days to each month over and beyond the four weeks.

Thus I was enabled to pay due regard to the Sabbath. As the only mode of worship I could adopt, I carved a short hymn, appropriate to my situation, on the oar, which I never failed to chant on the Sabbath. God, in His all-mercy, had not forgotten me; nor did I, in those eight years, fail at all proper times to remember God.

It was astonishing the work required, under such circumstances, to supply one's simple needs of food and shelter. Indeed, I was rarely idle, that first year. The hut, itself a mere lair of rocks, nevertheless took six weeks of my time. The tardy curing and the endless scraping of the sealskins, so as to make them soft and pliable for garments, occupied my spare moments for months and months.

Then there was the matter of my water supply. After any heavy gale, the flying spray salted my saved rainwater, so that at times I was grievously put to live through till fresh rains fell unaccompanied by high winds. Aware that a continual dropping will wear a stone, I selected a large stone, fine and tight of texture and, by means of smaller stones, I proceeded to pound it hollow. In five weeks of most arduous toil I managed thus to make a jar which I estimated to hold a gallon and a half. Later, I similarly made a four-gallon jar. It took me nine weeks. Other

small ones I also made from time to time. One, that would have contained eight gallons, developed a flaw when I had worked seven weeks on it.

But it was not until my fourth year on the island, when I had become reconciled to the possibility that I might continue to live there for the term of my natural life, that I created my masterpiece. It took me eight months, but it was tight, and it held upwards of thirty gallons. These stone vessels were a great gratification to me--so much so, that at times I forgot my humility and was unduly vain of them. Truly, they were more elegant to me than was ever the costliest piece of furniture to any queen. Also, I made me a small rock vessel, containing no more than a quart, with which to convey water from the catching-places to my large receptacles. When I say that this one-quart vessel weighed all of two stone, the reader will realize that the mere gathering of the rainwater was no light task.

Thus, I rendered my lonely situation as comfortable as could be expected. I had completed me a snug and secure shelter; and, as to provision, I had always on hand a six months' supply, preserved by salting and drying. For these things, so essential to preserve life, and which one could scarcely have expected to obtain upon a desert island, I was sensible that I could not be too thankful.

Although denied the privilege of enjoying the society of any human creature, not even of a dog or a cat, I was far more reconciled to my lot than thousands probably would have been. Upon the desolate spot, where

fate had placed me, I conceived myself far more happy than many, who, for ignominious crimes, were doomed to drag out their lives in solitary confinement with conscience ever biting as a corrosive canker.

However dreary my prospects, I was not without hope that that Providence, which, at the very moment when hunger threatened me with dissolution, and when I might easily have been engulfed in the maw of the sea, had cast me upon those barren rocks, would finally direct some one to my relief.

If deprived of the society of my fellow creatures, and of the conveniences of life, I could not but reflect that my forlorn situation was yet attended with some advantages. Of the whole island, though small, I had peaceable possession. No one, it was probable, would ever appear to dispute my claim, unless it were the amphibious animals of the ocean. Since the island was almost inaccessible, at night my repose was not disturbed by continual apprehension of the approach of cannibals or of beasts of prey. Again and again I thanked God on my knees for these various and many benefactions.

Yet is man ever a strange and unaccountable creature. I, who had asked of God's mercy no more than putrid meat to eat and a sufficiency of water not too brackish, was no sooner blessed with an abundance of cured meat and sweet water than I began to know discontent with my lot. I began to want fire, and the savour of cooked meat in my mouth. And continually I would discover myself longing for certain delicacies of the palate such as were part of the common daily fare on the home table at Elkton. Strive

as I would, ever my fancy eluded my will and wantoned in day-dreaming of the good things I had eaten and of the good things I would eat if ever I were rescued from my lonely situation.

It was the old Adam in me, I suppose--the taint of that first father who was the first rebel against God's commandments. Most strange is man, ever insatiable, ever unsatisfied, never at peace with God or himself, his days filled with restlessness and useless endeavour, his nights a glut of vain dreams of desires wilful and wrong. Yes, and also I was much annoyed by my craving for tobacco. My sleep was often a torment to me, for it was then that my desires took licence to rove, so that a thousand times I dreamed myself possessed of hogsheads of tobacco--ay, and of warehouses of tobacco, and of shiploads and of entire plantations of tobacco.

But I revenged myself upon myself. I prayed God unceasingly for a humble heart, and chastised my flesh with unremitting toil. Unable to improve my mind, I determined to improve my barren island. I laboured four months at constructing a stone wall thirty feet long, including its wings, and a dozen feet high. This was as a protection to the hut in the periods of the great gales when all the island was as a tiny petrel in the maw of the hurricane. Nor did I conceive the time misspent. Thereafter I lay snug in the heart of calm while all the air for a hundred feet above my head was one stream of gust-driven water.

In the third year I began me a pillar of rock. Rather was it a pyramid,

four-square, broad at the base, sloping upward not steeply to the apex. In this fashion I was compelled to build, for gear and timber there was none in all the island for the construction of scaffolding. Not until the close of the fifth year was my pyramid complete. It stood on the summit of the island. Now, when I state that the summit was but forty feet above the sea, and that the peak of my pyramid was forty feet above the summit, it will be conceived that I, without tools, had doubled the stature of the island. It might be urged by some unthinking ones that I interfered with God's plan in the creation of the world. Not so, I hold. For was not I equally a part of God's plan, along with this heap of rocks upjutting in the solitude of ocean? My arms with which to work, my back with which to bend and lift, my hands cunning to clutch and hold--were not these parts too in God's plan? Much I pondered the matter. I know that I was right.

In the sixth year I increased the base of my pyramid, so that in eighteen months thereafter the height of my monument was fifty feet above the height of the island. This was no tower of Babel. It served two right purposes. It gave me a lookout from which to scan the ocean for ships, and increased the likelihood of my island being sighted by the careless roving eye of any seaman. And it kept my body and mind in health. With hands never idle, there was small opportunity for Satan on that island. Only in my dreams did he torment me, principally with visions of varied foods and with imagined indulgence in the foul weed called tobacco.

On the eighteenth day of the month of June, in the sixth year of my

sojourn on the island, I descried a sail. But it passed far to leeward at too great a distance to discover me. Rather than suffering disappointment, the very appearance of this sail afforded me the liveliest satisfaction. It convinced me of a fact that I had before in a degree doubted, to wit: that these seas were sometimes visited by navigators.

Among other things, where the seals hauled up out of the sea, I built wide-spreading wings of low rock walls that narrowed to a cul de sac, where I might conveniently kill such seals as entered without exciting their fellows outside and without permitting any wounded or frightening seal to escape and spread a contagion of alarm. Seven months to this structure alone were devoted.

As the time passed, I grew more contented with my lot, and the devil came less and less in my sleep to torment the old Adam in me with lawless visions of tobacco and savoury foods. And I continued to eat my seal meat and call it good, and to drink the sweet rainwater of which always I had plenty, and to be grateful to God. And God heard me, I know, for during all my term on that island I knew never a moment of sickness, save two, both of which were due to my gluttony, as I shall later relate.

In the fifth year, ere I had convinced myself that the keels of ships did on occasion plough these seas, I began carving on my oar minutes of the more remarkable incidents that had attended me since I quitted the peaceful shores of America. This I rendered as intelligible and

permanent as possible, the letters being of the smallest size. Six, and even five, letters were often a day's work for me, so painstaking was I.

And, lest it should prove my hard fortune never to meet with the long-wished opportunity to return to my friends and to my family at Elkton, I engraved, or nitched, on the broad end of the oar, the legend of my ill fate which I have already quoted near the beginning of this narrative.

This oar, which had proved so serviceable to me in my destitute situation, and which now contained a record of my own fate and that of my shipmates, I spared no pains to preserve. No longer did I risk it in knocking seals on the head. Instead, I equipped myself with a stone club, some three feet in length and of suitable diameter, which occupied an even month in the fashioning. Also, to secure the oar from the weather (for I used it in mild breezes as a flagstaff on top of my pyramid from which to fly a flag I made me from one of my precious shirts) I contrived for it a covering of well-cured sealskins.

In the month of March of the sixth year of my confinement I experienced one of the most tremendous storms that was perhaps ever witnessed by man. It commenced at about nine in the evening, with the approach of black clouds and a freshening wind from the south-west, which, by eleven, had become a hurricane, attended with incessant peals of thunder and the sharpest lightning I had ever witnessed.

I was not without apprehension for the safety of the island. Over every

part the seas made a clean breach, except of the summit of my pyramid. There the life was nigh beaten and suffocated out of my body by the drive of the wind and spray. I could not but be sensible that my existence was spared solely because of my diligence in erecting the pyramid and so doubling the stature of the island.

Yet, in the morning, I had great reason for thankfulness. All my saved rainwater was turned brackish, save that in my largest vessel which was sheltered in the lee of the pyramid. By careful economy I knew I had drink sufficient until the next rain, no matter how delayed, should fall. My hut was quite washed out by the seas, and of my great store of seal meat only a wretched, pulpy modicum remained. Nevertheless I was agreeably surprised to find the rocks plentifully distributed with a sort of fish more nearly like the mullet than any I had ever observed. Of these I picked up no less than twelve hundred and nineteen, which I split and cured in the sun after the manner of cod. This welcome change of diet was not without its consequence. I was guilty of gluttony, and for all of the succeeding night I was near to death's door.

In the seventh year of my stay on the island, in the very same month of March, occurred a similar storm of great violence. Following upon it, to my astonishment, I found an enormous dead whale, quite fresh, which had been cast up high and dry by the waves. Conceive my gratification when in the bowels of the great fish I found deeply imbedded a harpoon of the common sort with a few fathoms of new line attached thereto.

Thus were my hopes again revived that I should finally meet with an opportunity to quit the desolate island. Beyond doubt these seas were frequented by whalemen, and, so long as I kept up a stout heart, sooner or later I should be saved. For seven years I had lived on seal meat, so that at sight of the enormous plentitude of different and succulent food I fell a victim to my weakness and ate of such quantities that once again I was well nigh to dying. And yet, after all, this, and the affair of the small fish, were mere indispositions due to the foreignness of the food to my stomach, which had learned to prosper on seal meat and on nothing but seal meat.

Of that one whale I preserved a full year's supply of provision. Also, under the sun's rays, in the rock hollows, I tried out much of the oil, which, with the addition of salt, was a welcome thing in which to dip my strips of seal-meat whilst dining. Out of my precious rags of shirts I could even have contrived a wick, so that, with the harpoon for steel and rock for flint, I might have had a light at night. But it was a vain thing, and I speedily forwent the thought of it. I had no need for light when God's darkness descended, for I had schooled myself to sleep from sundown to sunrise, winter and summer.

I, Darrell Standing, cannot refrain from breaking in on this recital of an earlier existence in order to note a conclusion of my own. Since human personality is a growth, a sum of all previous existences added together, what possibility was there for Warden Atherton to break down my spirit in the inquisition of solitary? I am life that survived, a

structure builded up through the ages of the past--and such a past! What were ten days and nights in the jacket to me?--to me, who had once been Daniel Foss, and for eight years learned patience in that school of rocks in the far South Ocean?

* * * * *

At the end of my eighth year on the island in the month of September, when I had just sketched most ambitious plans to raise my pyramid to sixty feet above the summit of the island, I awoke one morning to stare out upon a ship with topsails aback and nearly within hail. That I might be discovered, I swung my oar in the air, jumped from rock to rock, and was guilty of all manner of livelinesses of action, until I could see the officers on the quarter-deck looking at me through their spyglasses. They answered by pointing to the extreme westerly end of the island, whither I hastened and discovered their boat manned by half a dozen men. It seems, as I was to learn afterward, the ship had been attracted by my pyramid and had altered its course to make closer examination of so strange a structure that was greater of height than the wild island on which it stood.

But the surf proved to be too great to permit the boat to land on my inhospitable shore. After divers unsuccessful attempts they signalled me that they must return to the ship. Conceive my despair at thus being unable to quit the desolate island. I seized my oar (which I had long since determined to present to the Philadelphia Museum if ever I were

preserved) and with it plunged headlong into the foaming surf. Such was my good fortune, and my strength and agility, that I gained the boat.

I cannot refrain from telling here a curious incident. The ship had by this time drifted so far away, that we were all of an hour in getting aboard. During this time I yielded to my propensities that had been baffled for eight long years, and begged of the second mate, who steered, a piece of tobacco to chew. This granted, the second mate also proffered me his pipe, filled with prime Virginia leaf. Scarce had ten minutes passed when I was taken violently sick. The reason for this was clear. My system was entirely purged of tobacco, and what I now suffered was tobacco poisoning such as afflicts any boy at the time of his first smoke. Again I had reason to be grateful to God, and from that day to the day of my death, I neither used nor desired the foul weed.

* * * * *

I, Darrell Standing, must now complete the amazingness of the details of this existence which I relived while unconscious in the strait-jacket in San Quentin prison. I often wondered if Daniel Foss had been true in his resolve and deposited the carved oar in the Philadelphia Museum.

It is a difficult matter for a prisoner in solitary to communicate with the outside world. Once, with a guard, and once with a short-timer in solitary, I entrusted, by memorization, a letter of inquiry addressed to the curator of the Museum. Although under the most solemn pledges, both

these men failed me. It was not until after Ed Morrell, by a strange whirl of fate, was released from solitary and appointed head trusty of the entire prison, that I was able to have the letter sent. I now give the reply, sent me by the curator of the Philadelphia Museum, and smuggled to me by Ed Morrell:

* * * * *

"It is true there is such an oar here as you have described. But few persons can know of it, for it is not on exhibition in the public rooms. In fact, and I have held this position for eighteen years, I was unaware of its existence myself.

"But upon consulting our old records I found that such an oar had been presented by one Daniel Foss, of Elkton, Maryland, in the year 1821. Not until after a long search did we find the oar in a disused attic lumber-room of odds and ends. The notches and the legend are carved on the oar just as you have described.

"We have also on file a pamphlet presented at the same time, written by the said Daniel Foss, and published in Boston by the firm of N. Coverly, Jr., in the year 1834. This pamphlet describes eight years of a castaway's life on a desert island. It is evident that this mariner, in his old age and in want, hawked this pamphlet about among the charitable.

"I am very curious to learn how you became aware of this oar, of the

existence of which we of the museum were ignorant. Am I correct in assuming that you have read an account in some diary published later by this Daniel Foss? I shall be glad for any information on the subject, and am proceeding at once to have the oar and the pamphlet put back on exhibition.

"Very truly yours,

"HOSEA SALSBURTY." {1}