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A personal account of the loss by Shipwreck of the Steam Packet «Lusitano» near Ericeira on the coast of Portugal, on board which vessel he, his wife, and maid-servant, were passengers on a journey from Oporto to Lisbon. 10th July 1823.

(From the original private document, hitherto unpublished, presented to the Archives of the Lisbon Branch of the Historical Association by the late Stanley Rawes. Esq. C.B.E., a great-great nephew of the Author).

«On Thursday 10th July 1823 embarked at Oporto on board the Steam Packet «Lusitano» (Capt. Boaventura Romero Curran) at three o'clock in the morning, in company with my wife & maid Servant Agnes Hewsen, as Deck Passengers for Lisbon. In consequence of a thick Fog we could not get over the Bar till from five to six o'clock, when the Fog dispersed a little, but soon returned with equal density. Being then clear of the Bar, we proceeded on our Voyage with a smooth Sea & thick Fog without seeing any thing 'till we discovered the high Land near Buarcos Point, which might be about four o'clock in the Evening,

& the Fog rather lighter; In Mondego Bay, a little to the South of Buarcos, we waited 'till a Boat from Figueira brought eleven Passengers on board & took two or three away. We then proceeded on our Voyage without any particular occurrence 'till Friday the 11th at about half past three in the Morning, when I with my Wife, Maid, Mrs. & Miss Burn were laid upon the Deck between the Mizzen Mast & the Binnacle covered with Cloaks: Don António, Dean of the Chapter of Braga, had the Evening previous very kindly offered his Berth in the Cabin to my Wife but she declined it, therefore he lent us his Cloak to cover us during the Night.

We were in this state, both Cabins and Deck full of Passengers in all near two Hundred Souls on board when at the hour above mentioned, hearing a sudden bustle amongst those keeping a look out at the head of the Vessel, and on their calling to the Man at the Helm, I jumped upon my Feet, my Wife who had hitherto been quite exhausted with sickness wanted to do the same but I told her to lay still, under the impression that we were running foul of some Vessel which on account of the Fog had not been discovered 'till we were on the point of falling upon her; However, an instant more convinced me of my Error; our Vessel struck with awful violence, the Blow was repeated to shew the grey of Morning. I could discover through the Fog an Appearance of sand but thought it was surrounded by water; However, it afterwards proved to be the shore, and the appearance of Water beyond it was a mere optical illusion occasioned by the Fog.

On the Vessel striking, the Capt. called to lower down the Boats which were suspended one on each side of the Vessel. In the same Instant of Consternation such a concourse of People rushed into the Boats that they sunk as if they had been of Stone. We had all clung to the upper side of the Deck which was that towards the Sea, the Vessel leaning towards the Shore, striking with great Violence upon the Rocky Ground, and the Sea breaking over us we saw the poor sufferers holding up their hands in

the Water & again sinking out of sight without being able to render them any assistance, it being as much as we could do to hold ourselves to the stations we had taken. The Captain in a fit of desperation put his Hands upon his Head & with the exclamation «Oh Death, we are lost!» plunged into the Sea. Fortunately a few Sailors who were in the Boats swam to the Shore, and as one of them afterwards told me, the Captain reached the Shore exhausted, the Waves burying his Head in the Loose Sand from whence he extricated & dragged him out of the edge of the Water by the Leg in a very weak state.

The Vessel first struck twice upon Sand, & moving forward then struck upon the Rocky Ground, every Wave that came raising her up and dashing her down again on the side with such a tremendous crash as if it would break her in pieces and shake us from our hold, 'till the Tide which was ebbing had fallen so far as to cease raising up the Vessel tho' the Sea continued to break over us. Several articles of wood had been thrown overboard with Ropes tied to them in hopes they would reach the Shore, but the ebbing of the Tide frustrated those endeavours & carried them from the Shore. Two or three persons who had undressed themselves & leaped overboard got hold of a Rope which hung from the Yard Arm & after some time regained the Ship.

To attempt a description of the Screams, Horror & Despair with which we seemed surrounded would be impossible; some appeared as calm as the nature of our situation would permit, at least in silent expectation of their Fate, while others lost all command of themselves, screaming in the most wild frantic manner & adding more confusion to the Scene.

At from half past four to five o'clock (as near as I can judge) I saw the Tide had fallen considerably, but had no idea whether it would fall much more or not, therefore considering that if it should then be near low Water something ought to be attempted before the Tide again begun to flow. I could see some people naked on shore who had swum from the Ship but no appea-

rance of assistance for us. In this state of suspense relative to the Tide I wondered no person attempted to swim on shore with a Rope, and mentioning this Idea to the Baron of Villa Pouca (son of Gaspar Teixeira) I proposed making the attempt on condition that should I succeed he would promise me that my Wife should be the first person to be saved by that means. He gave me his Word.

I immediately threw off my Top Coat, Coat & Boots, took a parting Kiss of my dear Wife, and pulled down the Colour Haliard, tied it to another Rope which was fast at one end to the ship, and having coiled the Ropes in such a manner as not to get entangled I took hold of one end & plunged into the Sea. I swam 'till having got to the length of the Cord (which unfortunately was too short to reach the Shore) I tugged some time at the end of the Cord 'till near exhausted I let it drop and immediately afterward came across a small Cord which had reached the Shore & the people were pulling at it. Feeling very weak I laid hold of it in hopes of by that means getting to land, but the Cord being tight, when a high Wave came I was buried considerably under Water, and between the Waves was suspended above the Surface, which fatigued me in such a manner that I let go my hold and the Cord coming across my body turned me topsy turvy in the Water. Two or three Waves which broke over me precipitated me downwards & fateague having caused a quickness of breathing I was not able to hold my Breath 'till I could regain the Surface & consequently drew in a considerable quantity of Water which tended more to reduce my Strength. At length I reached the Shore in such an exhausted state that I lay upon the Sand, the Waves alternately washing over, and again leaving me dry. Feeling the Waves again drawing me back I attempted to crawl up the Sand on my Hands & Knees, but both Legs & Arms refused to obey their Office, I could not move a Limb. Fortunately a Sailor saw me & dragged me by the Arm upon the Beach. I soon attempted to rise, but could not get upon my Legs, therefore lay a little while upon

a Rock 'till a considerable quantity of Water ran from my Mouth & Nostrils, when recollecting the situation of my poor Wife & fellow Passengers I made a convulsive effort & regained my feet, then ran staggering like a drunken Man along the Water's Edge to see if any Rope had reached the Shore (the one which they were pulling at when I was in the Water had broken) but not seeing any I recollected the only plan left was to seek for some town or village where we could get assistance. The land was an immense height above the level of the Sea, & the only way to reach its summit was by climbing a tremendous Precipice, which I undertook and accomplished much to my own astonishment when I considered my weak state, but the Impulse of the Mind gave temporary strength to the Body, After running about a mile I met two sailors belonging to the Ship coming with three or four men to assist us who, I was told, were like Fishes in the Water. They assured me all on board were perfectly safe, as the Vessel would be dry at low Water; this was a cordial Balm to my heart. I then went into a cottage & changed my Wet clothes for the dry ones of the Peasant, borrowed a pair of Shoes & returned again to where the Vessel lay, but the Shoes were so hard my Feet were soon covered with Blood that I was glad to carry them in my hand & again run barefoot.

On my return to the place where the Vessel lay at abt. seven o'clock, the People who came with the two Sailors as above mentioned had managed to get a Rope from the Ship & fastened it on shore, by which means the people on board were safely brought to Land, which was done by the men swimming assisted by the Rope to the side of the Vessel where they could take foothold upon a large Stone, and the Tide having fallen so much that the waves were less troublesome. The Persons on board leaped into the Water where the Conductor received them in his Arms, and both parties keeping hold of the Rope and the Conductor partly swimming were brought safely on Shore. In this manner I had soon the satisfaction of seeing my dear Mary brought to me who on discovering me before she reached

the Shore gave a Scream of joy, as it appears my fate was not known on board. Soon after, Agnes, Mrs. & Miss Burn were also brought on shore.

It appears after I left the Ship, a young gentleman Sr. Jozé Eleuterio Barbaza de Lima, a Student at the University of Coimbra, kindly called my wife to take her station near him, but on her answering she was afraid to let go her hold where she was he assured her his situation was preferable & she might depend upon his assistance as far as lay in his power, & that she should be saved before himself. She accordingly followed his advice, when a Person said the Englishman who had jumped overboard was lost. She heard this & exclaimed «Is my Husband lost?», but Mr. Lima succeeded in persuading her that she had mistaken the man, he was speaking of those who had sunk in the Boat, and that I was safe on shore; however he afterwards confessed he was fully convinced at the same time that I was drowned. This Gentleman kept his Word, and had my Wife conveyed on Shore as soon as possible, & also the other English Females above mentioned before himself.

Most of the Passengers having got on shore, & the Tide so low that we could walk on board, Mr. Lima & I returned to the Ship for our luggage which we got on Shore apparently safe except a Hat, Coat, Boots, & a few loose Articles of that sort which I had lost, & a Shawl, etc., of my Wife's, but unfortunately a Board had been taken out of the bottom of Mr. Lima's Trunk and thirty seven Moidores stolen therefrom. However, this was not discovered until after his arrival in Lisbon, many people complaining of their Trunks being broke open and plundered in the midst of the Confusion. A poor unfortunate Clergyman. Sr. João Bernardo Nogueira, had his leg broke by someone falling upon it during the rolling and striking of the Vessel. On getting our Luggage on Shore, we all set about taking off our wet clothes and putting on dry ones, the contents of our Trunks being only partially wet from the Water which had washed over the Decks, consequently had not wet through the whole.

While we were dressing upon the Beach some of our drowned Comrades which the Tide had left were laying near us, but such was the general state of our Minds that those objects which at any other time would have made us shudder, scarce seemed to make any impression upon us, even including the Females.

I should suppose the number of Lives lost on this occasion to be about thirty or from that to forty, amongst whom were supposed to be neither Women nor Children, but I have since been informed that the dead Body of a Woman has been washed on shore, and one of the Sailors has informed me that a Woman was in the Boat when it went down, but she floated on Shore & the next Wave was taking her back again when a Sailor who had reached the Beach just before laid hold of her & dragged her out; she had left her child on board which was fortunately saved likewise.

We had brought from Oporto a couple of Roasted Fowls, a boiled Tongue, Cheese, Butter, Bread & a Pocket Flask of Brandy, which were thrown open for the benefit of all, tho' dirty & wet with Salt Water; it was devoured in a moment. My Wife could not eat & for myself I was in a burning Fever, my Head distracted with Pain & my Tongue clave to the Roof of my Mouth without that the Sun was hot, and tho' ready to faint for want of something, could not swallow a bit of Bread if my Life had depended upon it.

I ought not to omit mentioning here the heroic conduct of a young Lady, Sr.<sup>a</sup> Dona Carlota Joaquina de Mendonça Machado Araujo, who behaved with great spirit and presence of mind; no sooner on shore than she got Wine & Spirits which belonged to some of the Passengers, & administered it to all who stood in need; her conduct was truly praiseworthy, indeed many of the men might blush on comparing her Conduct with their own.

Having again ascended the Precipice from the Shore & got our Luggage carried up, we after some time obtained a Cart to take it to the Cottage where I had taken off my wet Clothes

some Hours before. We formed a party of seven, consisting of Sr. Jozé Eleuterio Barboza de Lima, Sr. António Pinto Rezende, Mrs. & Miss Burn, my Wife, Maid Servant & myself. The name of the place we were at is Cambellos, which consists of a few miserable Cottages. We were there informed the Place where our disaster occurred is called Praia do Porto Chão, a little South of Praia Formosa, about a League & a half North of Ericeira, and about three Leagues distant from Mafra. After some hours delay at this Place we got a Cart for our Luggage, a Horse & six asses for ourselves to Mafra. A Sailor who passed us, having a Hat which belonged to one of the poor People who was drowned, lent it to me 'till my arrival in Lisbon.

A little after we left Cambellos, at a place called Assenta, we were met by the Juiz de Fora of Torres Vedras, who obliged us to unload the Cart that he might see we took nothing more than our own. He being satisfied, we proceeded on our journey, and a little after dark arrived at a Village called Picanceira, about a league & a half from Mafra. We were informed the principal Person in the Village was Sr. Joaquim Manuel de Carvalho, a Farmer & Captain in the Militia. Sr. Lima, who had been very active all the Day in seeing after the Luggage &c. &c., went to the said Captain; informed him of our situation and begged for a Night's Lodging.

The good man received us in the most hospitable manner, but soon after we had sat down in the House, poor Lima, over fatigued both in Body & Mind, fell senseless on the floor, but after a little time it passed off in a Hysteric & he recovered again. We got Tea & Supper, the former went like a Balsam to my stomach and was of infinite service to me. We then had a good Night's rest, and after Breakfast next morning, took leave of our generous Host with many thanks for his kind treatment.

On our arrival at Mafra, Sr. Lima proposed calling upon the Juiz de Fora to beg he would provide us with the means of Conveyance for ourselves & Luggage; we found him very polite & attentive. He immediately sent out an Alcaide to embargo



Beasts for us. A Chaise just having arrived from Lisbon with People & about to return empty, was taken up for us. Five of the Beasts which had brought us from Cambellos to Mafra were also detained, much against the Will of their owners, but it was the only means we had of proceeding on our journey, and being aware how unhappy our Friends must be 'till our fate was known, we were anxious to lose no time. About 3 o'clock in the afternoon, my Wife and Mrs. Burn set off in the Chaise, and arrived in Lisbon at Midnight, but we were delayed 'till five o'clock waiting for a cart to convey our Luggage. At length it arrived, and we set off at a very slow rate, afraid to leave it behind for fear of Robbery. A little after dark we arrived at Chelleiros, better than a League from Mafra, where we were met by Mrs. Burn's son in a Chaise coming for his sister, & at the same Place we fell in with an empty Chaise going to Lisbon which I engaged for myself & Maid, and having all dismounted to take into consideration whether we should travel all night or rest by the way, our Donkeys and their drivers made their exit unperceived, no doubt pleased at having tricked us so cleverly, though by waiting a little longer they might have gone with their Money in their Pockets. However, we then all got into the two Chaises 'till we arrived at Pero Pinheiro where we stopped, supped & fed the Horses. Messrs. Lima & Rezende remained all Night with the Luggage & the rest of us proceeded on our way in the two Chaises. At Sabugo we met my Clerk & Mr. Benj, Ellerton going to seek us, with orders from Mrs. Ellerton whether they found us dead or alive to convey us to Lisbon be the expense what it might. However, they had met my Wife & Mrs. Burn on the Way who had relieved them of their anxiety. We then continued our Route & arrived at home about five o'clock in the Morning of Sunday the 13th of July, when I found my poor Wife in Bed very feverish and poorly, her Knees quite raw & very much inflamed, besides many contusions upon the Legs which were considerably swelled, & have since confined her to Sofa under the Doctor's hands. She was not aware when she

received those wounds but supposed it must have been when the Ship was striking with such Violence. Immediately on my arrival I sent off a Chaise to meet our two Companions who remained with the Luggage. It met them at Bellas, but as they kept company with the Cart it was three o'clock before they arrived, just in time for Dinner.

I have since been informed that at two o'clock in the Morning we passed close to a Yacht distant two Leagues from the Land, therefore our course must have been extremely erroneous from that time to be on shore at or before half past three, however, as the Land could not be seen the distance could only have been taken from supposition.

One of the perils we escaped was that of Fire, but I must confess the Idea of it never struck me 'till the danger was over. There are three Fires under the Boiler, two were put out by the Water which came in at the bottom of the Vessel, and the third above the reach of the Water in consequence of the Vessel laying upon her side was put out by the Vapour arising from the other two. Thank God we who have escaped to tell the Tale have reason to rejoice.»

«JOHN WILBY»