Jenson's Travels.

LETTER NO. 1.

Saturday, February 15th 1896. Elder Frank Cutler and I, intent upon a missionary and historical tour to the Tuamotu Islands, boarded the fine schooner Teavaroa, Henry Mervin, supercargo, at 11 o'clock a. m., and at 12 o'clock noon we set sail and left the Papeeti wharf island of Tahiti. The wind being contrary and a very little of it at that, it took us two hours to get out of the harbor, having to tack a number of times. The American mail vessel, Tropic Bird, had moon of her sails set as we passed her ready to go to sea, but could not get out against the wind. The island of Tahiti and also the neighboring island Moorea, with their grand lofty mountains look grand and imposing from the sea. Having cleared the reef at 2 o'clock p. m., we soon struck the trade wind, which filled our sails nicely, and enabled us to take a northeasterly course. There was quite a heavy swell on the ocean which caused everybody on board, who were not sailors, to reel and stagger; and contrary to my usual expectations I got seasick, and fed the fishes several times during my first night on the Teavaroa. In fact Elder Cutler and I spent a miserable night lying on the cabin deck and trying in vain to sleep; it was too warm and sickly in the cabin below.

Sunday, February 16th. We had kept a northeasterly course all night, and at 10 a. m., we sighted the island of Makatea straight ahead. Failing to make the windward side we passed its extreme northwest point within a distance of 300 yards at 2 p. m., which gave us an excellent opportunity of studying the formation and vegetation of the island. Makatea is an uplifted coral island situated in latitude 15° 52' south, longitude 148° 20' west of Greenwich, or about 225 miles northeast of Tahiti; it is about five miles long by four wide, and produces copra, beans, sweet potatoes, etc., which latter products the natives have commenced to import to other islands. Makatea, unlike all the other Tuamotu islands is elevated in the centre, its highest point being 250 feet above sea level and is covered with a brush called tamanu. The only village on the island is situated on the northeast coast; the inhabitants numbering about 250, are now nearly all Josephites. The island has recently been visited by Elders Eugene M. Cannon and Alonzo F. Smith, but with wear success I do not know at present.

The west coast of Makatea was very interesting to look at, as we sailed by; its nearly perpendicular walls rise to a height of about one hundred feet (perhaps more) and they abound with caves and numerous strange formations—the work of corals and the actions of water during the past centuries. After leaving Makatea, we continued our voyage in the direction of Raginea.

Monday, February 17th. The early morning hour found us beating off the south coast of Raginea, which is the largest of all the Tuamotu islands extending as it does from northwest to southeast about forty-two miles and is twenty miles wide on an average. Its centre is situated in latitude 15° 50' south and longitude 147° 20' west of Greenwich. This island like most of its sister islands consists merely of a coral reef, which here and there is covered with trees. Some of these patches are several miles long and from a few yards to half a mile or more in width; but others contain only a few acres, some of them as seen from a distance puts one in mind of a huge bouquet of flowers. The lagoon inside the reef abound with coral sheds for which the natives dive whenever the lagoon is open for that purpose. Cocoa-nut trees are plentiful on this island, and the export of cobra amounts to something like 300 tons a year. Raginea, which translated means "long heaven" was one of the islands of the Tuamotu group where Elder Benjamin F. Grouard and other Elders at an early day, preached the Gospel with success and branch organizations were kept up till about 1878, when the Josephite missionaries and converts succeeded in identify themselves with their organization.

During the day Teuira, the Hawaiian captain of the Teavaroa, related the following incident in his life. Some time in 1882 he sailed from Tahiti bound for Tahiti as master of the schooner Anna Tocran, having twelve souls on board, including himself, all sailors. There were eight men, three women and one child. The schooner was a vessel of seventeen tons register. After proceeding about 155 miles from the port of embarkation, a terrific whirlwind struck the vessel and capsized her, spilling most of the passengers in the ocean. The captain, not being on deck on time, but asleep in the cabin, was not aware of what had happened till he felt his feet and soon his whole body in the water. He made a spring for the cabin door and soon found himself together with nine others sitting on the keel of the vessel, which by this time had turned completely upside down. But two of the women were missing, one of whom was the captain's own wife. Though they were supposed to be drowned already Teuira who like most natives of the Pacific islands is a good diver and swimmer, dove under water and feel tried to force his way into the cabin, but as one or more heavy boxes lodged against the door from the inside he was at first unable to effect an entrance; but succeeded, after diving several times in pushing the door open, when he found the two women standing in water to the neck, being just able to breathe. Holding one of them to follow him at a time by diving for the door, he succeeded in pulling them out from the interior of the vessel, and then helped them to a position on the keel. Thus all hands were saved so far, but how to proceed next was a question of vital importance. Most of the others seemed to have lost their presence of mind and could think of no means of escape from the doomed vessel, but the captain so aided by the others, set to work to fasten the little boat which was secured to the deck or rigging of the vessel deep under the water. This he did by diving down repeatedly and staying under the water as long as possible working at the ropes. At length his toil was rewarded, and to the great joy of all the little crew, scarcely too lost long, was floating on top of the water. To bail it out was an easy task; but after eight persons had got into it, it commenced to sink, thus showing that it was altogether inadequate to carry away any more than half of the shipwrecked people, and even that number would by no means be safe in case of stormy weather and a rough sea. Something else must yet be done in order to save all. Though considerably exhausted from his previous diving the captain renewed his labors under water, and succeeded after going down many times in unfastening the booms of the ship, and bringing them together with some of the sails to the service. All hands now went to work assisting the captain in constructing a sort of a craft, by tying the two booms together with three ropes in such a way that the boat occupied a central position between them, being lashed to the timber, and thus prevented from sinking. Secured in this manner all the people after deciding to make their way to Tahiti if possible, left the capsized vessel at 6 o'clock on a Friday evening, the capsizing having occurred in the morning. A woman's shawl fastened to a short stick or paddle which was raised from the raft served the purpose of a sail, the canvas taken from the schooner having been used to wrap around the boat. Being exposed to the mercy of wind and waves, the oblong raft was kept head-ing to the direction of Tahiti for three days, but as the wind was contrary, that island was about as far off at the end of that time as when they started out. The wind blowing in the direction of Rarotu, it was now decided on a change course and head for that island and after suffering terribly from want of food and water, a single box of oranges being the only eatables secured from the schooner, Rarotu was finally reached on the Saturday, just eight days from the time of the ship's wrecking. As the raft was thrown violently against the reef, all the people were cast into the sea, but they had strength enough left to swim to shore, and thus they were all saved. The people of Rarotu treated the unfortunate navigators with great kindness, and after recuperating for several days, they were taken back on another vessel to their own island, Tubuai. As an appreciation of bravery and true merit, Captain Teuira was subsequently awarded a gold medal by the French government, of which he appears to be justly proud.

Tuesday, February 18th. Early in the morning the island of Kaukura was seen straight ahead, and we were making good speed towards it when the wind suddenly died out and left us drifting helplessly at sea. About noon, however, a breeze sprang up which enabled us to reach that particular motu or part of Kaukura which is known as Raitahiti where some of the people are located temporarily to gather and dry cocoanuts for the markets. At 2 o'clock p. m., the ship's boat was launched and Elder Cutler and I landed together with a part of the crew who were going to work with the cobra. The passage over the reef at this point is a dangerous one, and several accidents have happened of late both to men and boats, but the weather being good, we got safely in. On landing we met a number of natives, who greeted us warmly and invited us into one of their huts, where we were given cocoanut milk to drink. We then engaged in long conversations with some of the leading men present, among whom were Teuraroe who presides over the Josephite organization on the island of Kaukura. Elder Cutler talked a long time to the people who gathered to see us, and they all seemed very much pleased with what they heard, and when we left, they presented us with two baskets of cocoanuts and two live chickens. We returned to the ship after sundown.

The island of Kaukura is twenty-six miles long from northwest to southeast and ten miles broad on an average. Its west point is in latitude 15° 49' south, longitude 146° 50' west, and about 195 miles northeast of Tahiti. It has a boat entrance near the northwest end. About 200 tons of cobra is exported from the island per year. The lagoon also abound with pearls, but it is closed at present. Among those Elder Cutler and I met on shore the two white traders of the island, one (Peter Peterson) was a Shakespeare Dane, the other (George Richmond) an American from the State of Massachusetts. No schooner or other vessel from Tahiti having called for a long time, the island had been short of provisions for over two months, and even the traders asserted that they had been without bread for three weeks. All the flour consumed here is imported from San Francisco, and is sold by the local traders at the rate of seven Chilian dollars per 100 pounds. Mr. Richmond has married a native wife with whom he has twelve children. The other man simply lives with a native woman.

Wednesday, February 19th. The shipping of cobra was continued from yesterday, and it took all day before the crew finished their labors. In the evening all the men came on board, and the ship stood off and on all night as she had done all day. Elder Cutler and I remaining on board, spent the day reading and writing. The day was exceedingly hot, and life on the Teavaroa that day free in consequence anything but pleasant. About fourteen tons of cobra was taken on board. Cobra has only been known in the Pacific ocean during the last twenty years. It was first introduced by Godefroi and company, the well known Hamburg House, who laid the foundation of the German interests in the South seas. The introduction of cobra changed the face of the atoll trade and gave a new value to the low atolls or lagoon islands which are the cocoanut's natural home. The kernel of the nut is dried and sent to Hamburg or other European ports, where the oil is extracted, and the refuse sent as oil cake to England. The cocoanut palm loves the sea air, and the salt spray, and on these low atolls it gets both. The absence of grass or other competing growths makes the cost of cultivation small. The cost of gathering the harvest is also easy. The fruit which ripens on the tree, is collected and husked when it falls; and the kernel, after being dried in the sun, is cut up and loaded in bulk in the ship's hold. The natives are very skillful in the preparation of cobra, and they seem to have the work connected with it.

Thursday, February 20th. We awoke early enough to behold the beautiful sunrise, at which time we were only half a mile off Panau, the only village of any importance on the island of Kaukura. At 6 o'clock a. m., Elder Cutler and myself landed with the ship's boat which brought goods on shore. The boat landing here is quite safe, and consists of a break in the reef through which a small vessel can approach the dry sandy beach within one hundred feet or so. As soon as we landed the inhabitants of the village flocked around to shake hands and bid us welcome, and we were at once conducted through the main portion of the village to the house of Teuru, the native trader whom we had met before on the neighboring motu. The principal men of the island soon gathered or rather followed us there, and we now spent about an hour in lively conversation, telling them something about Church history, and showing them views, specimens of corals from some of our Temples, etc., which seemed to interest them very much. When we were ready to leave, some of them made us presents of shells, and said they were much pleased with our visit.

The village of Panau occupies nearly the entire surface of the motu known by that name, which is about half a mile long by a quarter of a mile wide and is covered with young thrifty cocoanut trees. These have all been planted since the cyclone in 1878, when the entire island was bereft of its fine growth of trees and brush of every kind; also the whole village was destroyed, only one house being left standing, and the ruined condition of that one was pointed out to us as we passed. The most imposing structure of the village is the Catholic Church, a stone building surmounted with a little spire, which presents a fine appearance from the sea. The meeting house which the Josephites are using is a plain lumber structure with board shutters instead of windows. This also was built after the cyclone, mostly from the material which had been in the former one that was blown down by the storm. The main thoroughfare of the village is shaded on both sides with cocoanut trees, and the houses, many of which are built in European style, lie scattered somewhat irregular on both sides of the alley. Before the cyclone the island contained over 600 inhabitants; now it has scarcely much above half of that number according to the best information we could obtain, as one hundred persons perished during the storm. This catastrophe need not have happened; but when the natives saw their island almost inundated by ocean water which the terrific wind blowed over it, and their cocoa-nut trees pulled up by the roots or break square over in other instances, some of them seemed to lose their presence of mind and ordinary judgment, as they took to their boats and pushed off out to the lagoon; but of course no boat could live upon the water in such weather, and the consequence was that all those who embarked were drowned, while all who remained on land escaped with their lives though they lost nearly all their property. No other island of the Tuamotu group suffered in that storm to such an extent as Kaukura, as the centre or the heaviest part of the cyclone seemed to strike it with all its force.

Among the natives with whom we conversed at Panau was an old man by the name of Telopea, who claimed to have met the late Elder Benjamin F. Grouard on the island of Raginea about the year 1852, or just before that Elder returned to America. He also said that there was a continuous branch of the Church on Kaukura from the time the American Elders left till the Josephites came.

About 7:30 a. m., we returned to the ship which about half an hour later set sail for the neighboring island of Arutua about twenty miles distant. About 10 a. m., the tree tops of that island were seen ahead; but as the wind was contrary, it took us till late in the afternoon to reach a point off Rautini, the name of that particular motu of Arutua where the village stands and the people live. About 3 p. m., the ship's boat was launched and left for the village, I jumped in at the last moment, but Elder Cutler, who was not through with his bulletin, was left behind. As the wind blowed toward the island, the ship dared not go in close to the reef, hence the crew had to row the boat a long distance to the place of landing, and as the sea had a very heavy swell on, the rowing was difficult, and we were tossed about considerably before we got through the passage and reached the stone wharf in front of the village. Here I was in a fix without an interpreter, as the few Saints temporarily located on the island were fishing the shells soon gathered around me at the house to which I was first conducted, but the native brother who was our fellow passenger and who also landed could talk a very little broken English, and I got along as well as I could with his services. I also introduced myself to Mr. Carl Hanson, a Swede, and one of the traders of the island, from whom I obtained several particulars in regard to the island of Arutua, which is nearly circular in shape and measures about fifteen miles across; lagoon included in most places. Too pass which our boat came through is the only passage which connects the lagoon with the ocean; it is deep enough for vessels of twenty or thirty tons burden only, and the current often runs very swift and it is on the southeast or windward side of the island, the entrance is very dangerous. The little village, which is nearly hidden from sight in the cocoanut grove lies on a small motu on the right hand side as we enter. The reef round the lagoon is pretty well covered with vegetation except on the west and south where there is considerable bare reef. Arutua is noted for its fine pearl shells, some of which are marvels for size. In one year (1886) fifteen tons of shells were fished out of the lagoon; but this season has been an unsuccessful one and all the transient divers are preparing to leave, as they cannot find shells in paying quantities. The cyclone of 1878 destroyed most of the trees at Arutua, hence the present beautiful growth of cocoanut trees consists mostly of new plantations. Arutua is about 215 miles northwest of Tahiti. That and the two neighboring islands Kaukura and Apataki were named the Pallizer islands by Captain Cook.

Before I left the village Marerenu, a brother in the Church made me a present of a fine pair of shells, and we returned to the ship about sundown, reaching it with much difficulty, as the rowing had to be done against the wind and high rolling waves.

Friday, November 21st. We had sailed to and fro all night, and when the light of the morning dawned upon us we were coasting along the west line of Apataki, but just as the crew was getting the boat ready to go ashore, a drenching rain storm set in, which continued all day, and thus we were compelled to spend a very dull day in an inactive condition of mind. The rain struck the vessel which somewhat relieved the monotony; but the real excitement of the day was the catching of a large sword fish (on the fish line) which had been towing the ship for some distance. The fish which weighed several hundred pounds and was a beautiful specimen of its kind was successfully hauled alongside the vessel, where he was speared or harpooned almost to death; but just as the crew which was considerably excited, was on the act of taking him bodily on board, the fish made one last desperate struggle and thus jerked himself loose from the hands that held him and was lost, as he sank in the ocean. It was too bad. We could have got him just as well as not, had the crew not been so excited that they neglected to secure him with rope before attempting to haul him on board. In the afternoon notwithstanding the rain, Mr. Hervin and part of the crew landed in the boat. On their return it was decided to sail at once for the island of Marihi, distant about sixty miles in a northeasterly direction. Consequently, about sundown we set sail for that island and the wind being favorable and the weather now being good, we sped toward Marihi at the rate of ten miles an hour during the night.

ANDREW JENSON.

ISLAND OF MARIHI, Tuamotu Archipelago, South Pacific Ocean, February 22nd, 1896.

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