

WRECK OF THE S.S. PORT DOUGLAS. TERRIBLE SUFFERING BY THE PASSENGERS. AN INTERESTING ACCOUNT. (BY ELECTRIC TELEGRAPH.) (FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.) HOBART, July 9. The s.s. .Kaikoura arrived here to-day from London, and brought with her the passengers who were wrecked in the s.s. Port Douglas on the reef off Cape Verde on the North-West African Coast in May last. Their tales are of a most interesting description, but probably that of a passenger whose destination is Launceston possesses the most warmth of feeling and thankfulness for his deliverance. He states that the s.s. Port Douglas, commanded by Captain C. A. Payne, of Melbourne, built by Messrs James Laing and Co., and engined by Messrs Clark and Co., of Sunderland, of 4283 tons register, and with an average steaming capacity of 12½ knots, left Tilbury Docks on Saturday, May 14, for Melbourne and other Australian ports, via the Cape, to make her homeward passage through the Canal. " We experienced," he says, " a stiff breeze and somewhat trying sea down the Channel, reaching Plymouth on Sunday morning, where we had to ship two Government steamlaunches for Sydney. This detained us until early on Tuesday morning, when we again got under way, and soon saw the old country like a faint blue cloud on the horizon. All went merry as a marriage bell till we came abreast of the Capes Almadie (red) and Verde (white) lights, the latter, as I am informed, being one of the best in the possession of France. On the night of the 24th my wife and I, leaning on the port taffrail, were startled by what appeared to us a sudden acceleration of the steamer's speed, and whilst still wondering at this there was a tremendous concussion, and the huge boat jumped and swayed like a living thing in agony. The captain was on the bridge, and the chief engineer close beside us. The latter, with commendable coolness and promptitude, released the steam and seat the crew to work to rake out the fires, thus averting an awful risk of explosion. There was, of course, momentary terror and confusion, women and children shrieking, and men shouting. This, together with the roaring stream and the rushing to and fro of the crew to their posts, caused a bewilderment amongst the most self possessed which is better described as helplessness than fear; still after this first natural excitement had subsided, there was no further semblance of panic, and it was gratifying to witness how tractable and obedient all were in so perilous a position. After some delay the boats were swung, manned, and the passengers got into their places, everything being made ready for lowering at a moment's notice. By great good fortune the ship had grounded on a comparatively flat rock, and being very broad in the beam, her equilibrium was likely to be at least temporarily maintained, though--there being no possibility of ascertaining the extent of damage done--such uncertain security was but little consolation to the poor frightened souls seated swinging in the davits for several hours, waiting for dawn, with the ever present dread of her heeling over upon them to seal their doom forthwith. All night long, signal rockets were fired, and flaring coloured lights shown, to which, however, there was no reply; for, as we subsequently found out, there were no means at the lighthouse-keeper's disposal, which careless state of things did not redound to the credit of French management. One of the children enquired whether our pyrotechnic display was in honour of the Queen's Birthday, a query bearing striking testimony to the fearlessness of innocence; indeed, when the youngsters were once settled in the boats they soon went off to sleep as contentedly as if they had been safely tucked up in their warm cribs at home. At length there was sufficient light, and we were lowered into the sea, but owing to a heavy ground swell, in which the ponderous boats were almost unmanageable, ours had a very narrow escape from being dashed upon the reefs, which lay ominously black between ourselves and the shore. Eventually we were compelled to abandon our first attempt to effect a landing, and more by luck than skill succeeded in getting under the lee of the steamer, boarded her, and obtained some refreshments. Later on in the morning negroes came out and piloted us near enough to terra firma to enable the men, though with much difficulty on account of intervening slippery rocks, to wade in, carrying the women and children with them. French soldiers had been told off to our assistance, but - like pussy - did not seem to relish the idea of wet feet. Before quitting the Port Douglas for the last time we saw from her deck that monster sharks were prowling around us, evidently alive to the chance of a banquet, so that had we once got into the water there would have been but small hope for anyone. We have all to thank God for a marvellous escape from a terrible death, for the more I think of that dreadful night the more convinced am I that our own puny efforts did but little towards our deliverance. We had now to wait in a sort of courtyard attached to a black's dwelling, he I suppose being employed at the lighthouses, and were

glad to lie on the ground wherever we could find shelter from the blazing tropical sun, the heat of which most of us had never felt before, until mules arrived to carry the weaklings of our flock to some barracks about four miles distant, we men having to tramp through a very desert, weary and depressed as we were. When we reached these military quarters we found the commandant hospitably disposed, he setting before us plenty of vin ordinaire and the sour yeastless bread so unpalatable to an Englishman, yet under existing need acceptable enough. He also permitted us to rest as comfortably as spare space would admit of during the four or five hours which elapsed before conveyances came to take us on to Dakar, in the province of Senegal. I shall not forget that ten mile drive in a hurry, crammed into a species of springless tumbrill and hurried over an indescribable road suffering from that sleepless fatigue which invariably succeeds intense nervous strain, and in a state of semi-stupor we were jolted and cramped, our bones and muscles aching incessantly as we thought longingly of cosy beds in our native land, perhaps never to be enjoyed by us again. What indeed would we not have given for a sweet patch of mother earth and nothing but a starry canopy for covering ? Dakar hove in sight, and we were precious glad to crawl into the French hotel provided for us, though instantly surrounded by jabbering messieurs et mesdames, and still more pertinaciously inquisitive niggers, who handled us and our scanty belongings with impunity. First of all rooms were allotted to us, or rather as many of us as were fortunate enough to get them; some having to creep into any corner they could find, there not being proper accommodation for our number. Then we sat down to a bad specimen of characteristic spread a la Francais, after which we retired to bed not yet having recovered from the horror of what might have been. The foam cressed billows still hovered around, rearing their dreadful forms like dark phantoms against the peaceful steamer. The agony of suspense returned, increased rather than modified by its unreality, and when the morning's sun's rays fell upon us waking it was with more blessed relief that we looked into each other's eyes and knew the grim ordeal was indeed an event of the past. Dakar is picturesquely situated on the north shore of a North-West African bay. It was captured from the Portuguese by the French, and is now an indifferently fortified seaport, principally used as a coaling station. The ordnance is out of date, and decidedly inferior ; nor is there evidence of much strength or any power of resistance. The garrison consists of from 2000 to 3000 troops-marine artillery, spahis (light cavalry for quelling native disturbances), and infantry. It is here that the British Consul resides, who, unfortunately for us, was absent in France at the time of our mishap. Unfortunately, as is frequently the case on large passenger boats, there were some of the rougher sons of Britain amongst us, who under the influence of cognac foolishly allowed their "Rule Britannia" instincts to encourage in them a wild desire to rule Dakar also;

and the consequences of this intemperate ambition were most humiliating and lamentable, for after threeo days we were ignominiously and indiscriminately bundled out of the hotel. Now was assigned to a neighbouring restaurant proprietor the responsibility of billeting and boarding us, but this did not turn out satisfactorily, with the result that eventually we begged to be taken back to the hotel, and our prayer was answered. We had been duly informed that the New Zealand Shipping Company were under contract to call for and convey us to our destination in the s.s. Kaikourn, and most anxiously did we await her arrival, for sickness with a bad form of colic had already seized several of us, and we felt that fever was lurking near at hand, yet in the midst of these severe trials another grievous blow added to our misery. A French schooner was chartered to bring our baggage round from the Port Douglas, and all but the heaviest having been transshipped rode at anchor to take the remainder aboard in the morning. Through unexplicable misadventures she broke from her anchorage, drove on to the rocks, and went to pieces, drowning a negro. Many of us sustained irreparable loss. The owners of the schooner sent a small sum of money towards the relief of the most destitute, otherwise the poor creatures would have had to proceed in what they stood. Words fail to express the grief which came of this last dire calamity ; poor old humanity with its thousand and one cares strives nobly, with more or less success, to live down such bitter trouble, and its fell sting recurs with gradually diminished pain. Here were the tear-stained faces of heart-broken mothers, the stern, sad looks of brave bread-winners, who in years to come will look back upon the scenes of the African coast, where much so precious lies buried in the deep. In conclusion, I must state on behalf of my wife and myself, as well as all our fellow passengers, that Captain Payne, under exceptionally trying conditions, did all that lay in him as a man to meet the grave responsibility of having lost his vessel and the inhumanity with which he was treated by the French, which must have lain like an incubus upon him."