

Ship Dis masted.

Emigrants Exciting Experience's

Ship Oxfords Narrow Escape.

Reference recently to the death of Mr. Phillip Tarrant, of Kihikihi and mention that he was one of the passengers on the Ship Oxford, occupying nine months on the voyage to New Zealand from England, has brought a clipping from the Weekly Mail, Cardiff, dated February 17th, 1883---almost exactly fifty years ago.

The story of the ship's exciting experiences in the early stages of the voyage makes interesting reading, for it will doubtless recall memories of other voyages in the days when sailing vessels were the principle means of sea travel. We quote;-

The emigrant ship Oxford left her anchorage under the Flat Holms on thursday, and was towed into Cardiff with the tide for purpose of going into dock. She arrived in the gutway soon after noon, and when she reached the entrance to the Roath Basin, with her crew at work and her passengers thronging the bulwarks, she became an object of interest and curiosity to a large crowd of spectators. She lay-to here for a couple of hours, and then she entered the Roath Basin, and passed through the junction into the East Bute Dock, where she was moored off the buoys. Her movements were watched by hundred of spectators, and great commiseration was expressed for the unfortunate emigrants, whose appearance showed some of the effects of the rough and trying experiences through which they have passed. They all seemed glad to be once more in harbour; and the children played together on the deck, apparently forgetful of the incidence of storm and danger in which they had thus young in life, had been participators. The sailors said that these children were "the best men" during the storm by which the vessel had been overtaken, and they certainly looked remarkably well in health, considering all that had happened to them. The Oxford now is a complete wreck above deck.

Her forttopmast, Maintopmast, and Mizzenhead are gone with all attached and all that remains are the lower masts, with the foreyard, the mainyard, and the Mizzenhead. In the iron plates of the bulwark, on the port side, there are several holes and cracks, caused by the falling of the spars, as the ship laboured in the trough of the sea; but otherwise the hull appears to be in perfectly intact.

On the arrival of the vessel our reporter boarded her and obtained from one of the passengers and crew a narrative of all that occurred since the vessel left Plymouth Sound. The Oxford had on board between 300 and 400.

In addition to a double crew, she had about 310 passengers, of whom 175 were single men, and 75 married couples and children. The passengers were emigrants to New Zealand, many of them being taken out at the expense of the Government of that country, and the vessel was bound to Wellington, whence she was carrying a cargo of Iron rails for the construction of railways. The following are the names of the officers;— Master, Captain Braddick; first mate, Mr John Hogg; second mate, Mr John King; third mate, Mr W Penny; and boatswain, Mr John O'Neil. The passengers a large number of whom were from Ireland, joined the ship at Plymouth on or about the 25th of January, but owing to the heavy weather which prevailed she did not leave the sound until Thursday February 1st. Storm signals had been hoisted just before she started and the log states that everything was got ready for bad weather. She was towed to sea by a tug, and she had not proceeded far before one of her sails was blown away. Early in the afternoon the tug was let go and the vessel proceeded on her voyage in rough weather but without any incident worthy of note until she entered the Bay of Biscay. The entries in the log up to this time are a record of continued heavy gales, with rain, and occasional lightning; but on February the 5th, when the vessel entered the bay, we read that she had the cap of her foretopmast carried away, and that all hands were employed securing it. On the next day the excitement really began. The gale increased very much in violence, and in the heavy seas the ship rolled in such a manner as to intensify the fears of the passengers. The single women were the most terrified. Huddled together in their own cabin without any one of the sterner sex to give them comfort, with the exception of the officers who had no opportunity of communicating to them assurances of their safety,

they sometimes gave way to their feelings of terror and screamed again and again, while the tears ran down their faces. The married couples and the single men were not easily pacified whilst the poor children, though disturbed by the heavy roll of the vessel, did not seem to have the intelligence to realise their danger. On the whole the behaviour of the passengers, both at this time and through the voyage, was excellent, and although at moments of greatest peril, the doors of their cabin were kept locked, they did not, despite their natural fear, give way to anything like a panic. On Tuesday the foretopmast was carried away with the exception of the spars, which came down with a great crash. About the same time the main topgallant mast was lost, and all hands had to be employed to clear away the wreckage. The weather did not abate, and at midnight the maintopmast gave way at the cap at the violence of the gale, and fell, as one of the passengers said, "With a thundering crash, smashing the bulwarks and two more boats"-- the port boat and the skids. The night was one which those on board the vessel will never forget. The passengers were expecting every moment to be engulfed in the troubled waters, but at urgent request of the Officers they remained quiet, and made no attempt to crowd onto the deck. The crew were employed cutting away, and the passengers speak of their gallantry in terms of the highest praise. Wednesday brought no improvement, and on the morning of that day the Mizzenmast and the topgallantmast were carried away, taking with them the port lifeboats and the davits. There was a heavy gale blowing from the South west, and a tremendous sea running, and it was with the greatest difficulty the crew succeeded in cutting away the wreckage, and getting it clear of the ship. The vessel was now left without any topmast, and with only three serviceable boats, but one of the passengers, in noting this fact in his diary, added as a set-off, "we have as good a crew as ever sailed; a braver and better lot could not be found." The passengers appear to have had full confidence in their Officers and crew, and although the vessel was an almost total wreck they did not give up hope of being saved from a watery grave. The captain had decided to put back to the nearest port, and the lower yards were secured, and the sails given to the wind in the best manner possible. Under these circumstances the ship laboured very heavily; but on the following day (Thursday) the weather moderated, and soon after breakfast the hearts of all were gladdened by the appearance of another vessel within signalling distance. This proved to be the Norgengold a Norwegian barque bound for London, and she promised to send assistance to the disabled ship. Late on the same day the steamship Jamacian of Liverpool hove in sight, and was spoken to. Her captain asked Captain Braddick where

he wished to go, and the latter replied that he would like to be towed to the nearest port. The captain of the Jamacian promised to do this, and said he would lay by till morning; but, when morning dawned, to the consternation of those on board the Oxford, she was nowhere to be seen. The weather had again become rough, and it is supposed that the Jamacian had all her work cut out to take care of her self in the storm. The outlook on Friday was ominous. Another heavy gale had set in, and there was every indication of continued bad weather. Early in the morning the hatchways were fastened down lest the ship should fill with water, and during the day the experiences of the crew and passengers were very rough and trying. On Saturday the morning broke fine, with the sun shining and a favourable wind, and the sails were held up and an attempt made to get back across the Bay of Biscay. But the abatement did not continue long, and on Sunday another gale set in, which at length developed into a more terrific storm than had previously overtaken the vessel. There were heavy squalls, with lightning, and the foresail being split the vessel was left, as the log states, to the mercy of the wind and the sea. At this time the Captain did not know the position of his vessel, and the night is described by the passengers as one of the most fearful character--their hopes of rescue being now almost abandoned. The crew remained on deck all night, and several of them including the captain, were injured, while to intensify the excitement the vessel had a narrow escape of being run down by another large ship, which appeared, like the Oxford, to be perfectly helpless. The Seven Stones Light-vessel and the Wolf Lighthouse were now sighted, and the captain bore up for the Bristol Channel, the Longships being eventually passed about ten miles distance, at midday on Monday. Then, ^{her} it was that the steamship Troutbeck noticed the distressed vessel, and gave that assistance which enabled her to come to anchor, in a place of safety. The remainder of the story is more mild, but the eldest mariners on the ship affirm that they never before experienced such a long stress of weather of so terrific a character. The conduct of the crew was most excellent. Their gallantry and their kindness won for them not only the respect but the affection of the passengers, and on Thursday they gave expression to their feelings in a manner which marks their warmest sincerity. They made a subscription amongst themselves, and collected £13--10s, for distribution to the crew, and also prepared and presented an address of sincere appreciation. The Cardiff pilots in anticipation of the ship docking purchased 800 oranges for the children of the passengers. The emigrants will probably leave Cardiff Friday by train for Plymouth where they will be transferred to another of the companies ships for their destination-- Wellington, New Zealand. It is understood that the repairs to the ships will be done in Cardiff.