



Block Island and the Palatine

Charles Skinner

North American

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Block Island, or Manisees, is an uplift of clayey moorland between Montauk and Gay Head. It was for sailors an evil place and “bad medicine” for Indians, for men who had been wrecked there had been likewise robbed and ill treated—though the honest islanders of to-day deny it—while the Indians had been driven from their birthright after hundreds of their number had fallen in its defence. In the winter of 1750-51 the ship *Palatine* set forth over the seas with thrifty Dutch merchants and emigrants, bound for Philadelphia, with all their goods. A gale delayed them and kept them beating to and fro on the icy seas, unable to reach land. The captain died—it was thought that he was murdered—and the sailors, a brutal set even for those days, threw off all discipline, seized the stores and arms, and starved the passengers into giving up their money.

When those died of hunger whose money had given out—for twenty guilders were demanded for a cup of water and fifty rix dollars for a biscuit—their bodies were flung into the sea, and when the crew had secured all that excited their avarice they took to their boats, leaving ship and passengers to their fate. It is consoling to know that the sailors never reached a harbor. The unguided ship, in sight of land, yet tossed at the mercy of every wind and tenanted by walking skeletons, struck off Block Island one calm Sunday morning and the wreckers who lived along the shore set out for her. Their first work was to rescue the passengers; then they returned to strip everything from the hulk that the crew had left; but after getting her in tow a gale sprang up, and seeing that she was doomed to be blown off shore, where she might become a dangerous obstruction or a

derelict, they set her on fire. From the rocks they watched her drift into misty darkness, but as the flames mounted to the trucks a scream rang across the whitening sea: a maniac woman had been left on board. The scream was often repeated, each time more faintly, and the ship passed into the fog and vanished.

A twelvemonth later, on the same evening of the year, the islanders were startled at the sight of a ship in the offing with flames lapping up her sides and rigging, and smoke clouds rolling off before the wind. It burned to the water's edge in sight of hundreds. In the winter following it came again, and was seen, in fact, for years thereafter at regular intervals, by those who would gladly have forgotten the sight of it (one of the community, an Indian, fell into madness whenever he saw the light), while those who listened caught the sound of a woman's voice raised in agony above the roar of fire and water.

Substantially the same story is told of a point on the North Carolina coast, save that in the latter case the passengers, who were from the Bavarian Palatinate, were put to the knife before their goods were taken. The captain and his crew filled their boats with treasure and pulled away for land, first firing the ship and committing its ghastly freight to the flames. The ship followed them almost to the beach, ere it fell to pieces, as if it were an animate form, bent on vengeance. The pirates landed, but none profited by the crime, all of them dying poor and forsaken.

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