

# LETTERS FROM THE PEOPLE.

## FRENCH FRIGATE SHOALS.

SOMETHING ABOUT THESE LONELY ISLETS IN THE  
PACIFIC.

*To the Editor of the San Francisco Call*—SIR: On reading in THE CALL the harrowing details of suffering and privations of the wrecked crew of the Mattie T. Dyer on French Frigate Shoals, I thought it would not be amiss at this time to give future navigators in those dangerous waters some ideas regarding this reef and group of islets. Having made several voyages there, surveying the group, inspecting the guano deposits, etc., I feel competent to report fuller information than is usually found either in Bowditch or the charts.

These islands are about twenty-seven miles farther west than the old charts place them and have been the scene of some twelve or fifteen wrecks. The reef and shoal are crescent-shaped, open to the southwest, inside of which there is a lagoon of still water and good anchorage, as they are located in the northeast trade winds. The outside reef is steep, too, rising abruptly from the deep sea. The breakers dash heavily on this outside barrier and either in the night or day, with a good lookout, can be seen four miles away. Two or three miles inside of this line of breakers and also forming a crescent are sixteen islets. Near the center of the whole inclosure to the south stands an isolated rocky islet, about 150 feet high and somewhat resembling a ship under full sail.

I left some twenty-five Hawaiian natives one summer on these islands, where I erected a cabin, dug a well ten feet deep and set a whaler's trypot. The following winter I returned and found the natives fat and lazy. In the meantime they had captured about 1000 hair seals, 300 pounds of seal oil, a quantity of shark's-liver oil and sharks' fins, which at that time brought 25 cents per pound among the Chinese, together with a good lot of wreckage from the unfortunate vessels lost there.

The waters abound with excellent fish of many varieties. The food supply is on an inexhaustible scale, green turtle, wild fowl and their eggs being found without limit.

If the wrecked mariners had taken a little more time in looking around they would have found it a very cheap boarding-place during these times of depression. Probably the Government would have sent the Charleston for them in time for the next election.

R. BROOKS.

Vacaville, March 19, 1896.