

Reid Mayne

The Ocean Waifs: A Story of Adventure on Land and Sea



Томас Майн Рид

**The Ocean Waifs: A Story of
Adventure on Land and Sea**

«Public Domain»

Майн Рид Т.

The Ocean Waifs: A Story of Adventure on Land and Sea / Т. Майн
Рид — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

Chapter One.	5
Chapter Two.	7
Chapter Three.	9
Chapter Four.	11
Chapter Five.	13
Chapter Six.	15
Chapter Seven.	17
Chapter Eight.	19
Chapter Nine.	21
Chapter Ten.	23
Chapter Eleven.	26
Chapter Twelve.	28
Chapter Thirteen.	30
Chapter Fourteen.	32
Chapter Fifteen.	34
Chapter Sixteen.	36
Chapter Seventeen.	38
Chapter Eighteen.	40
Chapter Nineteen.	42
Chapter Twenty.	44
Chapter Twenty One.	46
Chapter Twenty Two.	48
Chapter Twenty Three.	51
Chapter Twenty Four.	53
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	55

Reid Mayne

The Ocean Waifs: A Story of Adventure on Land and Sea

Chapter One. The Albatross

The “vulture of the sea,” borne upon broad wing, and wandering over the wide Atlantic, suddenly suspends his flight to look down upon an object that has attracted his attention.

It is a raft, with a disc not much larger than a dining-table, constructed out of two small spars of a ship, – the dolphin-striker and spritsail yard, – with two broad planks and some narrower ones lashed crosswise, and over all two or three pieces of sail-cloth carelessly spread.

Slight as is the structure, it is occupied by two individuals, – a man and a boy. The latter is lying along the folds of the sail-cloth, apparently asleep. The man stands erect, with his hand to his forehead, shading the sun from his eyes, and scanning the surface of the sea with inquiring glances.

At his feet, lying among the creases of the canvas, are a handspike, a pair of boat oars, and an axe. Nothing more is perceptible of the raft, even to the keen eye of the albatross.

The bird continues its flight towards the west. Ten miles farther on it once more poises itself on soaring wing, and directs its glance downward.

Another raft is seen motionless upon the calm surface of the sea, but differing from the former in almost everything but the name. It is nearly ten times as large; constructed out of the masts, yards, hatches, portions of the bulwarks, and other timbers of a ship; and rendered buoyant by a number of empty water-casks lashed along its edges. A square of canvas spread between two extemporised masts, a couple of casks, an empty biscuit-box, some oars, handspikes, and other maritime implements, lie upon the raft; and around these are more than thirty men, seated, standing, lying, – in short, in almost every attitude.

Some are motionless, as if asleep; but there is that in their prostrate postures, and in the wild expression of their features, that betokens rather the sleep of intoxication. Others, by their gestures and loud, riotous talk, exhibit still surer signs of drunkenness; and the tin cup, reeking with rum, is constantly passing from hand to hand. A few, apparently sober, but haggard and hungry-like, sit or stand erect upon the raft, casting occasional glances over the wide expanse, with but slight show of hope, fast changing to despair.

Well may the sea-vulture linger over this group, and contemplate their movements with expectant eye. The instincts of the bird tell him, that ere long he may look forward to a bountiful banquet!

Ten miles farther to the west, though unseen to those upon the raft, the far-piercing gaze of the albatross detects another unusual object upon the surface of the sea. At this distance it appears only a speck not larger than the bird itself, though in reality it is a small boat, – a ship’s gig, – in which six men are seated. There has been no attempt to hoist a sail; there is none in the gig. There are oars, but no one is using them. They have been dropped in despair; and the boat lies becalmed just as the two rafts. Like them, it appears to be adrift upon the ocean.

Could the albatross exert a reasoning faculty it would know that these various objects indicated a wreck. Some vessel has either foundered and gone to the bottom, or has caught fire and perished in the flames.

Ten miles to the eastward of the lesser raft might be discovered truer traces of the lost ship. There might be seen the *débris* of charred timbers, telling that she has succumbed, not to the storm,

but to fire; and the fragments, scattered over the circumference of a mile, disclose further that the fire ended abruptly in some terrible explosion.

Upon the stern of the gig still afloat may be read the name *Pandora*. The same word may be seen painted on the water-casks buoying up the big raft; and on the two planks forming the transverse pieces of the lesser one appears *Pandora* in still larger letters: for these were the boards that exhibited the name of the ship on each side of her bowsprit, and which had been torn off to construct the little raft by those who now occupy it.

Beyond doubt the lost ship was the *Pandora*.

Chapter Two.

Ship on Fire

The story of the *Pandora* has been told in all its terrible details. A slave-ship, fitted out in England, and sailing from an English port, – alas! not the only one by scores, – manned by a crew of ruffians, scarce two of them owning to the same nationality. Such was the bark *Pandora*.

Her latest and last voyage was to the slave coast, in the Gulf of Guinea. There, having shipped five hundred wretched beings with black skins, – “bales” as they are facetiously termed by the trader in human flesh, – she had started to carry her cargo to that infamous market, – ever open in those days to such a commodity, – the barracoons of Brazil.

In mid-ocean she had caught fire, – a fire that could not be extinguished. In the hurry and confusion of launching the boats the pinnace proved to be useless; and the longboat, stove in by the falling of a cask, sank to the bottom of the sea. Only the gig was found available; and this, seized upon by the captain, the mate, and four others, was rowed off clandestinely in the darkness.

The rest of the crew, over thirty in number, succeeded in constructing a raft; and but a few seconds after they had pushed off from the sides of the ship, a barrel of gunpowder ignited by the flames, completed the catastrophe.

But what became of the *cargo*? Ah! that is indeed a tale of horror.

Up to the last moment those unfortunate beings had been kept under hatches, under a grating that had been fastened down with battens. They would have been left in that situation to be stifled in their confinement by the suffocating smoke, or burnt alive amid the blazing timbers, but for one merciful heart among those who were leaving the ship. An axe uplifted by the arm of a brave youth – a mere boy – struck off the confining cleats, and gave the sable sufferers access to the open air.

Alas! it was scarce a respite to these wretched creatures, – only a choice between two modes of death. They escaped from the red flames but to sink into the dismal depths of the ocean, – hundreds meeting with a fate still more horrible: for there were not less than that number, and all became the prey of those hideous sea-monsters, the sharks.

Of all that band of involuntary emigrants, in ten minutes after the blowing up of the bark, there was not one above the surface of the sea! Those of them that could not swim had sunk to the bottom, while a worse fate had befallen those that could, – to fill the maws of the ravenous monsters that crowded the sea around them! At the period when our tale commences, several days had succeeded this tragical event; and the groups we have described, aligned upon a parallel of latitude, and separated one from another by a distance of some ten or a dozen miles, will be easily recognised.

The little boat lying farthest west was the gig of the *Pandora*, containing her brutal captain, his equally brutal mate, the carpenter, and three others of the crew, that had been admitted as partners in the surreptitious abstraction. Under cover of the darkness they had made their departure; but long before rowing out of gun-shot they had heard the wild denunciations and threats hurled after them by their betrayed associates.

The ruffian crew occupied the greater raft; but who were the two individuals who had intrusted themselves to that frail embarkation, – seemingly so slight that a single breath of wind would scatter it into fragments, and send its occupants to the bottom of the sea? Such in reality would have been their fate, had a storm sprung up at that moment; but fortunately for them the sea was smooth and calm, – as it had been ever since the destruction of the ship.

But why were they thus separated from the others of the crew: for both man and boy had belonged to the forecabin of the *Pandora*?

The circumstance requires explanation, and it shall be briefly given. The man was Ben Brace, – the bravest and best sailor on board the slave-bark, and one who would not have shipped in such a

craft but for wrongs he had suffered while in the service of his country, and that had inducted him into a sort of reckless disposition, of which, however, he had long since repented.

The boy had also been the victim of a similar disposition. Longing to see foreign lands, he had *run away to sea*; and by an unlucky accident, through sheer ignorance of her character, had chosen the *Pandora* in which to make his initiatory voyage. From the cruel treatment he had been subjected to on board the bark, he had reason to see his folly. Irksome had been his existence from the moment he set foot on the deck of the *Pandora*; and indeed it would have been scarce endurable but for the friendship of the brave sailor Brace, who, after a time, had taken him under his especial protection. Neither of them had any feelings in common with the crew with whom they had become associated; and it was their intention to escape from such vile companionship as soon as an opportunity should offer.

The destruction of the bark would not have given that opportunity. On the contrary, it rendered it all the more necessary to remain with the others, and share the chances of safety offered by the great raft. Slight as these might be, they were still better than those that might await them, exposed on such a frail fabric as that they now occupied. It is true, that upon this they had left the burning vessel separate from the others; but immediately after they had rowed up alongside the larger structure, and made fast to it.

In this companionship they had continued for several days and nights, borne backward and forward by the varying breezes; resting by day on the calm surface of the ocean; and sharing the fate of the rest of the castaway crew.

What had led to their relinquishing the companionship? Why was Ben Brace and his *protégé* separated from the others and once more alone upon their little raft?

The cause of that separation must be declared, though one almost shudders to think of it. It was to save the boy *from being eaten* that Ben Brace had carried him away from his former associates; and it was only by a cunning stratagem, and at the risk of his own life, that the brave sailor had succeeded in preventing this horrid banquet from being made!

The castaway crew had exhausted the slender stock of provisions received from the wreck. They were reduced to that state of hunger which no longer revolts at the filthiest of food; and without even resorting to the customary method adopted in such terrible crises, they unanimously resolved upon the death of the boy, – Ben Brace alone raising a voice of dissent!

But this voice was not heeded. It was decided that the lad should die: and all that his protector was able to obtain from the fiendish crew, was the promise of a respite for him till the following morning.

Brace had his object in procuring this delay. During the night, the united rafts made way under a fresh breeze; and while all was wrapped in darkness, he cut the ropes which fastened the lesser one to the greater, allowing the former to fall astern. As it was occupied only by him and his *protégé*, they were thus separated from their dangerous associates; and when far enough off to run no risk of being heard, they used their oars to increase the distance.

All night long did they continue to row against the wind; and as morning broke upon them, they came to a rest upon the calm sea, unseen by their late comrades, and with ten miles separating the two rafts from each other.

It was the fatigue of that long spell of pulling – with many a watchful and weary hour preceding it – that had caused the boy to sink down upon the folded canvas, and almost on the instant fall asleep; and it was the apprehension of being followed that was causing Ben Brace to stand shading his eyes from the sun, and scan with uneasy glance the glittering surface of the sea.

Chapter Three.

The Lord's Prayer

After carefully scrutinising the smooth water towards every point of the compass, – but more especially towards the west, – the sailor ceased from his reconnoissance, and turned his eyes upon his youthful companion, still soundly slumbering.

“Poor lad!” muttered he to himself; “he be quite knocked up. No wonder, after such a week as we’ve had o’t. And to think he war so near bein’ killed and ate by them crew o’ ruffians. I’m blowed if that wasn’t enough to scare the strength out o’ him! Well, I dare say he’s escaped from that fate; but as soon as he has got a little more rest, we must take a fresh spell at the oars. It ’ud never do to drift back to *them*. If we do, it an’t only him they’ll want to eat, but me too, after what’s happened. Blowed if they wouldn’t.”

The sailor paused a moment, as if reflecting upon the probabilities of their being pursued.

“Sartin!” he continued, “they could never fetch that catamaran against the wind; but now that it’s turned dead calm, they might clap on wi’ their oars, in the hope of overtakin’ us. There’s so many of them to pull, and they’ve got oars in plenty, they might overhaul us yet.”

“O Ben! dear Ben! save me, – save me from the wicked men!”

This came from the lips of the lad, evidently muttered in his sleep.

“Dash my buttons, if he an’t dreaming!” said the sailor, turning his eyes upon the boy, and watching the movements of his lips. “He be talkin’ in his sleep. He thinks they’re comin’ at him just as they did last night on the raft! Maybe I ought to rouse him up. If he be a dreamin’ that way he’ll be better awake. It’s a pity, too, for he an’t had enough sleep.”

“Oh! they will kill me and eat me. Oh, oh!”

“No, they won’t do neyther, – blow’d if they do. Will’m, little Will’m! rouse yourself, my lad.”

And as he said this he bent down and gave the sleeper a shake.

“O Ben! is it you? Where are they, – those monsters?”

“Miles away, my boy. You be only a dreamin’ about ’em. That’s why I’ve shook you up.”

“I’m glad you have waked me. Oh! it was a frightful dream! I thought they had done it, Ben.”

“Done what, Will’m?”

“What they were going to do.”

“Dash it, no, lad! they an’t ate you yet; nor won’t, till they’ve first put an end o’ me, – that I promise ye.”

“Dear Ben,” cried the boy, “you are so good, – you’ve risked your life to save mine. Oh! how can I ever show you how much I am sensible of your goodness?”

“Don’t talk o’ that, little Will’m. Ah! lad, I fear it an’t much use to eyther o’ us. But if we must die, anything before a death like that. I’d rather far that the sharks should get us than to be eat up by one’s own sort. – Ugh! it be horrid to think o’t. But come, lad, don’t let us despair. For all so black as things look, let us put our trust in Providence. We don’t know but that His eye may be on us at this minute. I wish I knew how to pray, but I never was taught that ere. Can you pray, little Will’m?”

“I can repeat the Lord’s Prayer. Would that do, Ben?”

“Sartin it would. It be the best kind o’ prayer, I’ve heerd say. Get on your knees, lad, and do it. I’ll kneel myself, and join with ye in the spirit o’ the thing, tho’ I’m shamed to say I disremember most o’ the words.”

The boy, thus solicited, at once raised himself into a kneeling position, and commenced repeating the sublime prayer of the Christian. The rough sailor knelt alongside of him, and with hands crossed over his breast in a supplicating attitude, listened attentively, now and then joining in the words of the prayer, whenever some phrase recurred to his remembrance.

When it was over, and the “Amen” had been solemnly pronounced by the voices of both, the sailor seemed to have become inspired with a fresh hope; and, once more grasping an oar, he desired his companion to do the same.

“We must get a little farther to east’ard,” said he, “so as to make sure o’ bein’ out o’ their way. If we only pull a couple of hours afore the sun gets hot, I think we’ll be in no danger o’ meetin’ *them* any more. So let’s set to, little Will’m! Another spell, and then you can rest as long’s you have a mind to.”

The sailor seated himself close to the edge of the raft, and dropped his oar-blade in the water, using it after the fashion of a canoe-paddle. “Little Will’m,” taking his place on the opposite side, imitated the action; and the craft commenced moving onward over the calm surface of the sea.

The boy, though only sixteen, was skilled in the use of an oar, and could handle it in whatever fashion. He had learnt the art long before he had thought of going to sea; and it now stood him in good stead. Moreover, he was strong for his age, and therefore his stroke was sufficient to match that of the sailor, given more gently for the purpose.

Propelled by the two oars, the raft made way with considerable rapidity, – not as a boat would have done, but still at the rate of two or three knots to the hour.

They had not been rowing long, however, when a gentle breeze sprung up from the west, which aided their progress in the direction in which they wished to go. One would have thought that this was just what they should have desired. On the contrary, the sailor appeared uneasy on perceiving that the breeze blew from the west. Had it been from any other point he would have cared little about it.

“I don’t like it a bit,” said he, speaking across the raft to his companion. “It helps us to get east’ard, that’s true; *but* it’ll help them as well – and with that broad spread o’ canvas they’ve rigged up, they might come down on us faster than we can row.”

“Could we not rig a sail too?” inquired the boy. “Don’t you think we might, Ben?”

“Just the thing I war thinkin’ o’, lad; I dare say we can. Let me see; we’ve got that old tarpaulin and the lying jib-sail under us. The tarpaulin itself will be big enough. How about ropes? Ah! there’s the sheets of the jib still stickin’ to the sail; and then there’s the handspike and our two oars. The oars ’ll do without the handspike. Let’s set ’em up then, and rig the tarpaulin between ’em.”

As the sailor spoke, he had risen to his feet; and after partially drawing the canvas off from the planks and spars, he soon accomplished the task of setting the two oars upright upon the raft. This done, the tarpaulin was spread between them, and when lashed so as to lie taut from one to the other, presented a surface of several square yards to the breeze, – quite as much sail as the craft was capable of carrying.

It only remained for them to look to the steering of the raft, so as to keep it head on before the wind; and this could be managed by means of the handspike, used as a rudder or steering-oar.

Laying hold of this, and placing himself abaft of the spread tarpaulin, Ben had the satisfaction of seeing that the sail acted admirably; and as soon as its influence was fairly felt, the raft surged on through the water at a rate of not less than five knots to the hour.

It was not likely that the large raft that carried the dreaded crew of would-be cannibals was going any faster; and therefore, whatever distance they might be off, there would be no great danger of their getting any nearer.

This confidence being firmly established, the sailor no longer gave a thought to the peril from which he and his youthful comrade had escaped. For all that, the prospect that lay before them was too terrible to permit their exchanging a word, – either of comfort or congratulation, – and for a long time they sat in a sort of desponding silence, which was broken only by the rippling surge of the waters as they swept in pearly froth along the sides of the raft.

Chapter Four.

Hunger. – Despair

The breeze proved only what sailors call a catspaw, rising no higher than just to cause a ripple on the water, and lasting only about an hour. When it was over, the sea again fell into a dead calm; its surface assuming the smoothness of a mirror.

In the midst of this the raft lay motionless, and the extemporised sail was of no use for propelling it. It served a purpose, however, in screening off the rays of the sun, which, though not many degrees above the horizon, was beginning to make itself felt in all its tropical fervour.

Ben no longer required his companion to take a hand at the oar. Not but that their danger of being overtaken was as great as ever; for although they had made easterly some five or six knots, it was but natural to conclude that the great raft had been doing the same; and therefore the distance between the two would be about as before.

But whether it was that his energy had become prostrated by fatigue and the hopelessness of their situation, or whether upon further reflection he felt less fear of their being pursued, certain it is he no longer showed uneasiness about making way over the water; and after once more rising to his feet and making a fresh examination of the horizon, he stretched himself along the raft in the shade of the tarpaulin.

The boy, at his request, had already placed himself in a similar position, and was again buried in slumber.

"I'm glad to see he can sleep," said Brace to himself, as he lay down alongside. "He must be sufferin' from hunger as bad as I am myself, and as long as he's asleep he won't feel it. May be, if one could keep asleep they'd hold out longer, though I don't know 'bout that bein' so. I've often ate a hearty supper, and woke up in the mornin' as hungry as if I'm gone to my bunk without a bite. Well, it an't no use o' me tryin' to sleep as I feel now, blow'd if it is! My belly calls out loud enough to keep old Morphis himself from nappin', and there an't a morsel o' anything. More than forty hours have passed since I ate that last quarter biscuit. I can think o' nothing but our shoes, and they be so soaked wi' the sea-water, I suppose they'll do more harm than good. They'll be sure to make the thirst a deal worse than it is, though the Lord knows it be bad enough a'ready. Merciful Father! – nothin' to eat! – nothin' to drink! O God, hear the prayer little Will'm ha' just spoken and I ha' repeated, though I've been too wicked to expect bein' heard, '*Give us this day our daily bread*'! Ah! another day or two without it, an' we shall both be asleep forever!"

The soliloquy of the despairing sailor ended in a groan, that awoke his young comrade from a slumber that was at best only transient and troubled.

"What is it, Ben?" he asked, raising himself on his elbow, and looking inquiringly in the face of his protector.

"Nothing partikler, my lad," answered the sailor, who did not wish to terrify his companion with the dark thoughts which were troubling himself.

"I heard you groaning, – did I not? I was afraid you had seen them coming after us."

"No fear o' that, – not a bit. They're a long way off, and in this calm sea they won't be inclined to stir, – not as long as the rum-cask holds out, I warrant; and when that's empty, they'll not feel much like movin' anywhere. 'Tan't for them we need have any fear now."

"O Ben! I'm so hungry; I could eat anything."

"I know it, my poor lad; so could I."

"True! indeed you must be even hungrier than I, for you gave me more than my share of the two biscuits. It was wrong of me to take it, for I'm sure you must be suffering dreadfully."

“That’s true enough, Will’m; but a bit o’ biscuit wouldn’t a made no difference. It must come to the same thing in the end.”

“To what, Ben?” inquired the lad, observing the shadow that had overspread the countenance of his companion, which was gloomier than he had ever seen it.

The sailor remained silent. He could not think of a way to evade giving the correct answer to the question; and keeping his eyes averted, he made no reply.

“I know what you mean,” continued the interrogator. “Yes, yes, – you mean that we must die!”

“No, no, Will’m, – not that; there’s hope yet, – who knows what may turn up? It may be that the prayer will be answered. I’d like, lad, if you’d go over it again. I think I could help you better this time; for I once knew it myself, – long, long ago, when I was about as big as you, and hearin’ you repeatin’ it, it has come most o’ it back into my memory. Go over it again, little Will’m.”

The youth once more knelt upon the raft, and in the shadow of the spread tarpaulin repeated the Lord’s Prayer, – the sailor, in his rougher voice, pronouncing the words after him.

When they had finished, the latter once more rose to his feet, and for some minutes stood scanning the circle of sea around the raft.

The faint hope which that trusting reliance in his Maker had inspired within the breast of the rude mariner exhibited itself for a moment upon his countenance, but only for a moment. No object greeted his vision, save the blue, boundless sea, and the equally boundless sky.

A despairing look replaced that transient gleam of hope, and, staggering back behind the tarpaulin, he once more flung his body prostrate upon the raft.

Again they lay, side by side, in perfect silence, – neither of them asleep, but both in a sort of stupor, produced by their unspoken despair.

Chapter Five.

Faith. – Hope

How long they lay in this half-unconscious condition, neither took note. It could not have been many minutes, for the mind under such circumstances does not long surrender itself to a state of tranquillity.

They were at length suddenly roused from it, – not, however, by any thought from within, – but by an object striking on their external senses, or, rather, upon the sense of sight. Both were lying upon their backs, with eyes open and upturned to the sky, upon which there was not a speck of cloud to vary the monotony of its endless azure.

Its monotony, however, was at that moment varied by a number of objects that passed swiftly across their field of vision, shining and scintillating as if a flight of silver arrows had been shot over the raft. The hues of blue and white were conspicuous in the bright sunbeams, and those gay-coloured creatures, that appeared to belong to the air, but which in reality were denizens of the great deep, were at once recognised by the sailor.

“A shoal o’ flyin’-fish,” he simply remarked, and without removing from his recumbent position.

Then at once, as if some hope had sprung up within him at seeing them continue to fly over the raft, and so near as almost to touch the tarpaulin, he added, starting to his feet as he spoke —

“What if I might knock one o’ ’em down! Where’s the handspike?”

The last interrogatory was mechanical, and put merely to fill up the time; for as he gave utterance to it he reached towards the implement that lay within reach of his hands, and eagerly grasping raised it aloft.

With such a weapon it was probable that he might have succeeded in striking down one of the winged swimmers that, pursued by the bonitos and albacores, were still leaping over the raft. But there was a surer weapon behind him, – in the piece of canvas spread between the upright oars; and just as the sailor had got ready to wield his huge club, a shining object flashed close to his eyes, whilst his ears were greeted by a glad sound, signifying that one of the vaulting fish had struck against the tarpaulin.

Of course it had dropped down upon the raft: for there it was, flopping and bounding about among the folds of the flying-jib, far more taken by surprise than Ben Brace, who had witnessed its mishap, or even little William, upon whose face it had fallen, with all the weight of its watery carcass. If a bird in the hand be worth two in the bush, by the same rule a fish in the hand should be worth two in the water, and more than that number flying in the air.

Some such calculation as this might have passed through the brain of Ben Brace; for, instead of continuing to hold his handspike high flourished over his head, in the hope of striking another fish, he suffered the implement to drop down upon the raft; and stooping down, he reached forward to secure the one that had voluntarily, or, rather, should we say, involuntarily, offered itself as a victim.

As it kept leaping about over the raft, there was just the danger that it might reach the edge of that limited area, and once more escape to its natural element.

This, however naturally desired by the fish, was the object which the occupants of the raft most desired to prevent; and to that end both had got upon their knees, and were scrambling over the sail-cloth with as much eager earnestness as a couple of terriers engaged in a scuffle with a harvest rat.

Once or twice little William had succeeded in getting the fish in his fingers; but the slippery creature, armed also with its spinous fin-wings, had managed each time to glide out of his grasp; and it was still uncertain whether a capture might be made, or whether after all they were only to be tantalised by the touch and sight of a morsel of food that was never to pass over their palates.

The thought of such a disappointment stimulated Ben Brace to put forth all his energies, coupled with his greatest activity. He had even resolved upon following the fish into the sea if it should prove

necessary, – knowing that for the first few moments after regaining its natural element it would be more easy of capture. But just then an opportunity was offered that promised the securing of the prey without the necessity of wetting a stitch of his clothes.

The fish had been all the while bounding about upon the spread sail-cloth, near the edge of which it had now arrived. But it was fated to go no farther, at least of its own accord; for Ben seeing his advantage, seized hold of the loose selvage of the sail, and raising it a little from the raft, doubled it over the struggling captive. A stiff squeeze brought its struggles to a termination; and when the canvas was lifted aloft, it was seen lying underneath, slightly flattened out beyond its natural dimensions, and it is scarcely necessary to say, as dead as a herring.

Whether right or no, the simple-minded seaman recognised in this seasonable supply of provision the hand of an overruling Providence; and without further question, attributed it to the potency of that prayer twice repeated.

“Yes, Will’m, you see it, my lad, ’tis the answer to that wonderful prayer. Let’s go over it once more, by way o’ givin’ thanks. He who has sent meat can also gie us drink, even here, in the middle o’ the briny ocean. Come, boy! as the parson used to say in church, – let us pray!”

And with this serio-comic admonition – meant, however, in all due solemnity – the sailor dropped upon his knees, and, as before, echoed the prayer once more pronounced by his youthful companion.

Chapter Six. Flying-Fish

The flying-fish takes rank as one of the most conspicuous “wonders of the sea,” and in a tale essentially devoted to the great deep, it is a subject deserving of more than a passing notice.

From the earliest periods of ocean travel, men have looked with astonishment upon a phenomenon not only singular at first sight, but which still remains unexplained, namely, a fish and a creature believed to be formed only for dwelling under water, springing suddenly above the surface, to the height of a two-storey house, and passing through the air to the distance of a furlong, before falling back into its own proper element!

It is no wonder that the sight should cause surprise to the most indifferent observer, nor that it should have been long a theme of speculation with the curious, and an interesting subject of investigation to the naturalist.

As flying-fish but rarely make their appearance except in warm latitudes, few people who have not voyaged to the tropics have had an opportunity of seeing them in their flight. Very naturally, therefore, it will be asked what kind of fish, that is, to what *species* and what *genus* the flying-fish belong. Were there only one kind of these curious creatures the answer would be easier. But not only are there different species, but also different “genera” of fish endowed with the faculty of flying, and which from the earliest times and in different parts of the world have equally received this characteristic appellation. A word or two about each sort must suffice.

First, then, there are two species belonging to the genus *Trigla*, or the Gurnards, to which Monsieur La Cépède has given the name of *Dactylopterus*.

One species is found in the Mediterranean, and individuals, from a foot to fifteen inches in length, are often taken by the fishermen, and brought to the markets of Malta, Sicily, and even to the city of Rome. The other species of flying gurnard occur in the Indian Ocean and the seas around China and Japan.

The true *flying-fish*, however, that is to say, those that are met with in the great ocean, and most spoken of in books, and in the “yarns” of the sailor, are altogether of a different kind from the gurnards. They are not only different in genus, but in the family and even the order of fishes. They are of the genus *Exocetus*, and in form and other respects have a considerable resemblance to the common pike. There are several species of them inhabiting different parts of the tropical seas; and sometimes individuals, in the summer, have been seen as far north as the coast of Cornwall in Europe, and on the banks of Newfoundland in America. Their natural habitat, however, is in the warm latitudes of the ocean; and only there are they met with in large “schools,” and seen with any frequency taking their aerial flight.

For a long time there was supposed to be only one, or at most two, species of the *Exocetus*; but it is now certain there are several – perhaps as many as half a dozen – distinct from each other. They are all much alike in their habits, – differing only in size, colour, and such like circumstances.

Naturalists disagree as to the character of their flight. Some assert that it is only a leap, and this is the prevailing opinion. Their reason for regarding it thus is, that while the fish is in the air there cannot be observed any movement of the wings (pectoral fins); and, moreover, after reaching the height to which it attains on its first spring, it cannot afterwards rise higher, but gradually sinks lower till it drops suddenly back into the water.

This reasoning is neither clear nor conclusive. A similar power of suspending themselves in the air, without motion of the wings is well-known to belong to many birds, – as the vulture, the albatross, the petrels, and others. Besides, it is difficult to conceive of a leap twenty feet high and two hundred yards long; for the flight of the *Exocetus* has been observed to be carried to this extent,

and even farther. It is probable that the movement partakes both of the nature of leaping and flying: that it is first begun by a spring up out of the water, – a power possessed by most other kinds of fish, – and that the impulse thus obtained is continued by the spread fins acting on the air after the fashion of parachutes. It is known that the fish can greatly lighten the specific gravity of its body by the inflation of its “swim-bladder,” which, when perfectly extended, occupies nearly the entire cavity of its abdomen. In addition to this, there is a membrane in the mouth which can be inflated through the gills. These two reservoirs are capable of containing a considerable volume of air; and as the fish has the power of filling or emptying them at will, they no doubt play an important part in the mechanism of its aerial movement.

One thing is certain, that the flying-fish can turn while in the air, – that is, diverge slightly from the direction first taken; and this would seem to argue a capacity something more than that of a mere spring or leap. Besides, the wings make a perceptible noise, – a sort of rustling, – often distinctly heard; and they have been seen to open and close while the creature is in the air.

A shoal of flying-fish might easily be mistaken for a flock of white birds, though their rapid movements, and the glistening sheen of their scales – especially when the sun is shining – usually disclose their true character. They are at all times a favourite spectacle, and with all observers, – the old “salt” who has seen them a thousand times, and the young sailor on his maiden voyage, who beholds them for the first time in his life. Many an hour of *ennui* occurring to the ship-traveller, as he sits upon the poop, restlessly scanning the monotonous surface of the sea, has been brought to a cheerful termination by the appearance of a shoal of flying-fish suddenly sparkling up out of the bosom of the deep.

The flying-fish appear to be the most persecuted of all creatures. It is to avoid their enemies under water that they take *fin* and mount into the air; but the old proverb, “out of the frying-pan into the fire,” is but too applicable in their case, for in their endeavours to escape from the jaws of dolphins, albigores, bonitos, and other petty tyrants of the sea, they rush into the beaks of gannets, boobies, albatrosses, and other petty tyrants of the sky.

Much sympathy has been felt – or at all events expressed – for these pretty and apparently innocent little victims. But, alas! our sympathy receives a sad shock, when it becomes known that the flying-fish is himself one of the petty tyrants of the ocean, – being, like his near congener, the pike, a most ruthless little destroyer and devourer of any fish small enough to go down his gullet.

Besides the two *genera* of flying-fish above described, there are certain other marine animals which are gifted with a similar power of sustaining themselves for some seconds in the air. They are often seen in the Pacific and Indian oceans, rising out of the water in shoals, just like the *Exoceti*: and, like them, endeavouring to escape from the albigores and bonitos that incessantly pursue them. These creatures are not fish in the true sense of the word, but “molluscs,” of the genus *Loligo*; and the name given to them by the whalers of the Pacific is that of “Flying Squid.”

Chapter Seven.

A Cheering Cloud

The particular species of flying-fish that had fallen into the clutches of the two starving castaways upon the raft was the *Exocetus evolans*, or “Spanish flying-fish” of mariners, – a well-known inhabitant of the warmer latitudes of the Atlantic. Its body was of a steel-blue, olive and silvery white underneath, with its large pectoral fins (its wings) of a powdered grey colour. It was one of the largest of its kind, being rather over twelve inches in length, and nearly a pound in weight.

Of course, it afforded but a very slight meal for two hungry stomachs, – such as were those of Ben Brace and his boy companion. Still it helped to strengthen them a little; and its opportune arrival upon the raft – which they could not help regarding as providential – had the further effect of rendering them for a time more cheerful and hopeful.

It is not necessary to say that they ate the creature without cooking it; and although under ordinary circumstances this might be regarded as a hardship, neither was at that moment in the mood to be squeamish. They thought the dish dainty enough. It was its quantity – not the quality – that failed to give satisfaction.

Indeed the flying-fish is (when cooked, of course) one of the most delicious of morsels, – a good deal resembling the common herring when caught freshly, and dressed in a proper manner.

It seemed, however, as if the partial relief from hunger only aggravated the kindred appetite from which the occupants of the raft had already begun to suffer. Perhaps the salt-water, mingled with the saline juices of the fish, aided in producing this effect. In any case, it was not long after they had eaten the *Exocetus* before both felt thirst in its very keenest agony.

Extreme thirst, under any circumstances, is painful to endure; but under no conditions is it so excruciating as in the midst of the ocean. The sight of water which you may not drink, – the very proximity of that element, – so near that you may touch it, and yet as useless to the assuaging of thirst as if it was the parched dust of the desert, – increases rather than alleviates the appetite. It is to no purpose, that you dip your fingers into the briny flood, and endeavour to cool your lips and tongue by taking it into the mouth. To swallow it is still worse. You might as well think to allay thirst by drinking liquid fire. The momentary moistening of the mouth and tongue is succeeded by an almost instantaneous parching of the salivary glands, which only glow with redoubled ardour.

Ben Brace knew this well enough; and once or twice that little William lifted the sea-water on his palm and applied it to his lips, the sailor cautioned him to desist, saying that it would do him more harm than good.

In one of his pockets Ben chanced to have a leaden bullet, which he gave the boy, telling him to keep it in his mouth and occasionally to chew it. By this means the secretion of the saliva was promoted; and although it was but slight, the sufferer obtained a little relief.

Ben himself held the axe to his lips, and partly by pressing his tongue against the iron, and partly by gnawing the angle of the blade, endeavoured to produce the same effect.

It was but a poor means of assuaging that fearful thirst that was now the sole object of their thoughts, – it might be said their only sensation, – for all other feelings, both of pleasure or pain, had become overpowered by this one. On food they no longer reflected, though still hungry; but the appetite of hunger, even when keenest, is far less painful than that of thirst. The former weakens the frame, so that the nervous system becomes dulled, and less sensible of the affliction it is enduring; whereas the latter may exist to its extremest degree, while the body is in full strength and vigour, and therefore more capable of feeling pain.

They suffered for several hours, almost all the time in silence. The words of cheer which the sailor had addressed to his youthful comrade were now only heard occasionally, and at long intervals,

and when heard were spoken in a tone that proclaimed their utterance to be merely mechanical, and that he who gave tongue to them had but slight hope. Little as remained, however, he would rise from time to time to his feet, and stand for a while scanning the horizon around him. Then as his scrutiny once more terminated in disappointment, he would sink back upon the canvas, and half-kneeling, half-lying, give way for an interval to a half stupor of despair.

From one of these moods he was suddenly aroused by circumstances which had made no impression on his youthful companion, though the latter had also observed it. It was simply the darkening of the sun by a cloud passing over its disc.

Little William wondered that an incident of so common character should produce so marked an effect as it had done upon his protector: for the latter on perceiving that the sun had become shadowed instantly started to his feet, and stood gazing up towards the sky. A change had come over his countenance. His eyes, instead of the sombre look of despair observable but the moment before, seemed now to sparkle with hope. In fact, the cloud which had darkened the face of the sun appeared to have produced the very opposite effect upon the face of the sailor!

Chapter Eight. A Canvas Tank

“What is it, Ben?” asked William, in a voice husky and hoarse, from the parched throat through which it had to pass. “You look pleased like; do you see anything?”

“I see that, boy,” replied the sailor, pointing up into the sky.

“What? I see nothing there except that great cloud that has just passed over the sun. What is there in that?”

“Ay, what is there in’t? That’s just what I’m tryin’ to make out, Will’m; an’ if I’m not mistaken, boy, there’s it ’t the very thing as we both wants.”

“Water!” gasped William, his eyes lighting up with gleam of hope. “A rain-cloud you think, Ben?”

“I’m a’most sure o’t, Will’m. I never seed a bank o’ clouds like them there wasn’t some wet in; and if the wind ’ll only drift ’em this way, we may get a shower ’ll be the savin’ o’ our lives. O Lord! in thy mercy look down on us, and send ’em over us!”

The boy echoed the prayer.

“See!” cried the sailor. “The wind is a fetchin’ them this way. Yonder’s more o’ the same sort risin’ up in the west, an’ that’s the direction from which it’s a-blowin’. Ho! As I live, Will’m, there’s rain. I can see by the mist it’s a-fallin’ on the water yonder. It’s still far away, – twenty mile or so, – but that’s nothing; an’ if the wind holds good in the same quarter, it *must* come this way.”

“But if it did, Ben,” said William, doubtingly, “what good would it do us? We could not drink much of the rain as it falls, and you know we have nothing in which to catch a drop of it.”

“But we have, boy, – we have our clothes and our shirts. If the rain comes, it will fall like it always does in these parts, as if it were spillin’ out o’ a strainer. We’ll be soakin’ wet in five minutes’ time; and then we can wring all out, – trousers, shirts, and every rag we’ve got.”

“But we have no vessel, Ben, – what could we wring the water into?”

“Into our months first: after that – ah! it be a pity. I never thought o’t. We won’t be able to save a drop for another time. Any rate, if we could only get one good quenchin’, we might stand it several days longer. I fancy we might catch some fish, if we were only sure about the water. Yes, the rain’s a-comin’ on. Look at yon black clouds; and see, there’s lightning forkin’ among ’em. That ’s a sure sign it’s raining. Let’s strip, and spread out our shirts so as to have them ready.”

As Ben uttered this admonition he was about proceeding to pull off his pea-jacket, when an object came before his eyes causing him to desist. At the same instant an exclamatory phrase escaping from his lips explained to his companion why he had thus suddenly changed his intention. The phrase consisted of two simple words, which written as pronounced by Ben were, “Thee tarpolin.”

Little William knew it was “the tarpauling” that was meant. He could not be mistaken about that; for, even had he been ignorant of the sailor’s pronunciation of the words, the latter at that moment stood pointing to the piece of tarred canvas spread upright between the oars; and which had formerly served as a covering for the after-hatch of the *Pandora*. William did not equally understand why his companion was pointing to it.

He was not left long in ignorance.

“Nothing to catch the water in? That’s what you sayed, little Will’m? What do ye call that, my boy?”

“Oh!” replied the lad, catching at the idea of the sailor. “You mean – ”

“I mean, boy, that there’s a vessel big enough to hold gallons, – a dozen o’ ’em.”

“You think it would hold water?”

“I’m sure o’t, lad. For what else be it made waterproof? I helped tar it myself not a week ago. It’ll hold like a rum-cask, I warrant, – ay, an’ it’ll be the very thing to catch it too. We can keep it spread out a bit wi’ a hollow place in the middle, an’ if it do rain, there then, – my boy, we’ll ha’ a pool big enough to swim ye in. Hurrah! it’s sure to rain. See yonder. It be comin’ nearer every minute. Let’s be ready for it. Down wi’ the mainsail. Let go the sheets, – an’ instead o’ spreadin’ our canvas to the wind, as the song says, we’ll stretch it out to the rain. Come, Will’m, let’s look alive!”

William had by this time also risen to his feet; and both now busied themselves in unlashin’ the cords that had kept the hatch-covering spread between the two oars.

This occupied only a few seconds of time; and the tarpauling soon lay detached between the extemporised masts, that were still permitted to remain as they had been “stepped.”

At first the sailor had thought of holding the piece of tarred canvas in their hands; but having plenty of time to reflect, a better plan suggested itself. So long as it should be thus held, they would have no chance of using their hands for any other purpose; and would be in a dilemma as to how they should dispose of the water after having “captured it.”

It did not require much ingenuity to alter their programme for the better. By means of the flying-jib that lay along the raft, they were enabled to construct a ridge of an irregular circular shape; and then placing the tarpauling upon the top, and spreading it out so that its edges lapped over this ridge, they formed a deep concavity or “tank” in the middle, which was capable of holding many gallons of water.

It only remained to examine the canvas, and make sure there were no rents or holes by which the water might escape. This was done with all the minuteness and care that the circumstances called for; and when the sailor at length became satisfied that the tarpauling was waterproof, he took the hand of his youthful *protégé* in his own, and both kneeling upon the raft, with their faces turned towards the west watched the approach of those dark, lowering clouds, as if they had been bright-winged angels sent from the far sky to deliver them from destruction.

Chapter Nine.

A Pleasant Shower-Bath

They had not much longer to wait. The storm came striding across the ocean; and, to the intense gratification of both man and boy, the rain was soon falling upon them, as if a water-spout had burst over their heads.

A single minute sufficed to collect over a quart within the hollow of the spread tarpauling; and before that minute had transpired, both might have been seen lying prostrate upon their faces with their heads together, near the centre of the concavity, and their lips close to the canvas, sucking up the delicious drops, almost as fast as they fell.

For a long time they continued in this position, indulging in that cool beverage sent them from the sky, – which to both appeared the sweetest they had ever tasted in their lives. So engrossed were they in its enjoyment, that neither spoke a word until several minutes had elapsed, and both had drunk to a surfeit.

They were by this time wet to the skin; for the tropic rain, falling in a deluge of thick heavy drops, soon saturated their garments through and through. But this, instead of being an inconvenience, was rather agreeable than otherwise, cooling their skins so long parched by the torrid rays of the sun.

“Little Will’m,” said Ben, after swallowing about a gallon of the rain-water, “didn’t I say that He ’as sent us meat, in such good time too, could also gi’ us som’at to drink? Look there! water enow to last us for days, lad!”

“’Tis wonderful!” exclaimed the boy. “I am sure, Ben, that Providence has done this. Indeed, it must be true what I was often told in the Sunday school, – that God is everywhere. Here He is present with us in the midst of this great ocean. O, dear Ben, let’s hope He will not forsake us now. I almost feel sure, after what has happened to us, that the hand of God will yet deliver us from our danger.”

“I almost feel so myself,” rejoined the sailor, his countenance resuming its wonted expression of cheerfulness. “After what’s happened, one could not think otherwise; but let us remember, lad, that He is up aloft, an’ has done so much for us, expecting us to do what we can for ourselves. He puts the work within our reach, an’ then leaves us to do it. Now here’s this fine supply o’ water. If we was to let that go to loss, it would be our own fault, not his, an’ we’d deserve to die o’ thirst for it.”

“What is to be done, Ben? How are we to keep it?”

“That’s just what I’m thinkin’ about. In a very short while the rain will be over. I know the sort o’ it. It be only one o’ these heavy showers as falls near the line, and won’t last more than half an hour, – if that. Then the sun ’ll be out as hot as ever, an’ will lick up the water most as fast as it fell, – that is, if we let it lie there. Yes, in another half o’ an hour that tarpolin would be as dry as the down upon a booby’s back.”

“O dear! what shall we do to prevent evaporating?”

“Jest give me a minute to consider,” rejoined the sailor, scratching his head, and putting on an air of profound reflection; “maybe afore the rain quits comin’ down, I’ll think o’ some way to keep it from evaporating; that’s what you call the dryin’ o’ it up.”

Ben remained for some minutes silent, in the thoughtful attitude he had assumed, – while William, who was equally interested in the result of his cogitations, watched his countenance with an eager anxiety.

Soon a joyful expression revealed itself to the glance of the boy, telling him that his companion had hit upon some promising scheme.

“I think I ha’ got it, Will’m,” said he; “I think I’ve found a way to stow the water even without a cask.”

“You have!” joyfully exclaimed William. “How, Ben?”

“Well, you see, boy, the tarpolin holds water as tight as if ’twere a glass bottle. I tarred it myself, – that did I, an’ as I never did my work lubber-like, I done that job well. Lucky I did, warn’t it, William?”

“It was.”

“That be a lesson for you, lad. Schemin’ work bean’t the thing, you see. It comes back to cuss one; while work as be well did be often like a blessin’ arterward, – just as this tarpolin be now. But see! as I told you, the rain would soon be over. There be the sun again, hot an’ fiery as ever. There ain’t no time to waste. Take a big drink, afore I put the stopper into the bottle.”

William, without exactly comprehending what his companion meant by the last words, obeyed the injunction; and stretching forward over the rim of the improvised tank, once more placed his lips to the water, and drank copiously. Ben did the same for himself, passing several pints of the fluid into his capacious stomach.

Then rising to his feet with a satisfied air, and directing his *protégé* to do the same, he set about the stowage of the water.

William was first instructed as to the intended plan, so that he might be able to render prompt and efficient aid; for it would require both of them, and with all their hands, to carry it out.

The sailor’s scheme was sufficiently ingenious. It consisted in taking up first the corners of the tarpauling, then the edges all around, and bringing them together in the centre. This had to be done with great care, so as not to jumble the volatile fluid contained within the canvas, and spill it over the salvage. Some did escape, but only a very little; and they at length succeeded in getting the tarpauling formed into a sort of bag, puckered around the mouth.

While Ben with both arms held the gathers firm and fast, William passed a loop of strong cord, that had already been made into a noose for the purpose, around the neck of the bag, close under Ben’s wrists, and then drawing the other end round one of the upright oars, he pulled upon the cord with all his might.

It soon tightened sufficiently to give Ben the free use of his hands; when with a fresh loop taken around the crumpled canvas, and after a turn or two to render it more secure, the cord was made fast.

The tarpauling now rested upon the raft, a distended mass, like the stomach of some huge animal coated with tar. It was necessary, however, lest the water should leak out through the creases, to keep the top where it was tied, uppermost; and this was effected by taking a turn or two of the rope round the uppermost end of one of the oars, that had served for masts, and there making a knot. By this means the great water-sack was held in such a position that, although the contents might “bilge” about at their pleasure, not a drop could escape out either at the neck or elsewhere.

Altogether they had secured a quantity of water, not less than a dozen gallons, which Ben had succeeded in stowing to his satisfaction.

Chapter Ten.

The Pilot-Fish

This opportune deliverance from the most fearful of deaths had inspired the sailor with a hope that they might still, by some further interference of Providence, escape from their perilous position. Relying on this hope, he resolved to leave no means untried that might promise to lead to its realisation. They were now furnished with a stock of water which, if carefully hoarded, would last them for weeks. If they could only obtain a proportionate supply of food, there would still be a chance of their sustaining life until some ship might make its appearance, – for, of course, they thought not of any other means of deliverance.

To think of food was to think of fishing for it. In the vast reservoir of the ocean under and around them there was no lack of nourishing food, if they could only grasp it; but the sailor well knew that the shy, slippery denizens of the deep are not to be captured at will, and that, with all the poor schemes they might be enabled to contrive, their efforts to capture even a single fish might be exerted in vain.

Still they could try; and with that feeling of hopeful confidence which usually precedes such trials, they set about making preparations.

The first thing was to make hooks and lines. There chanced to be some pins in their clothing; and with these Ben soon constructed a tolerable set of hooks. A line was obtained by untwisting a piece of rope, and respinning it to the proper thickness; and then a float was found by cutting a piece of wood to the proper dimensions. And for a sinker there was the leaden bullet with which little William had of late so vainly endeavoured to allay the pangs of thirst. The bones and fins of the flying-fish – the only part of it not eaten – would serve for bait. They did not promise to make a very attractive one; for there was not a morsel of flesh left upon them; but Ben knew that there are many kinds of fish inhabiting the great ocean that will seize at any sort of bait, – even a piece of rag, – without considering whether it be good for them or not.

They had seen fish several times near the raft, during that very day; but suffering as they were from thirst more than hunger, and despairing of relief to the more painful appetite, they had made no attempt to capture them. Now, however, they were determined to set about it in earnest.

The rain had ceased falling; the breeze no longer disturbed the surface of the sea. The clouds had passed over the canopy of the heavens, – the sky was clear, and the sun bright and hot as before.

Ben standing erect upon the raft, with the baited hook in his hand, looked down into the deep blue water.

Even the smallest fish could have been seen many fathoms below the surface, and far over the ocean.

William on the other side of the raft was armed with hook and line, and equally on the alert.

For a long time their vigil was unrewarded. No living thing came within view. Nothing was under their eyes save the boundless field of ultramarine, – beautiful, but to them, at that moment, marked only by a miserable monotony.

They had stood thus for a full hour, when an exclamation escaping from the lad, caused his companion to turn and look to the other side of the raft.

A fish was in sight. It was that which had drawn the exclamation from the boy, who was now swinging his line in the act of casting it out.

The ejaculation had been one of joy. It was checked on his perceiving that the sailor did not share it. On the contrary, a cloud came over the countenance of the latter on perceiving the fish, – whose species he at once recognised.

And why? for it was one of the most beautiful of the finny tribe. A little creature of perfect form, – of a bright azure blue, with transverse bands of deeper tint, forming rings around its body. Why did Ben Brace show disappointment at its appearance?

“You needn’t trouble to throw out your line, little Will’m,” said he, “that ere takes no bait, – not it.”

“Why?” asked the boy.

“Because it’s something else to do than forage for itself. I dare say its master an’t far off.”

“What is it?”

“That be the *pilot-fish*. See! turns away from us. It gone back to him as has sent it.”

“Sent it! Who, Ben?”

“A shark, for sarten. Didn’t I tell ye? Look yonder. Two o’ them, as I live; and the biggest kind they be. Slash my timbers if I iver see such a pair! They have fins like lug-sails. Look! the pilot’s gone to guide ’em. Hang me if they bean’t a-comin’ this way!”

William had looked in the direction pointed out by his companion. He saw the two great dorsal fins standing several feet above the water. He knew them to be those of the *white shark*: for he had already seen these dreaded monsters of the deep on more than one occasion.

It was true, as Ben had hurriedly declared. The little pilot-fish, after coming within twenty fathoms of the raft, had turned suddenly in the water, and gone back to the sharks; and now it was seen swimming a few feet in advance of them, as if in the act of leading them on!

The boy was struck with something in the tone of his companion’s voice, that led him to believe there was danger in the proximity of these ugly creatures; and to say the truth, Ben did not behold them without a certain feeling of alarm. On the deck of a ship they might have been regarded without any fear; but upon a frail structure like that which supported the castaways – their feet almost on a level with the surface of the water – it was not so very improbable that the sharks might attack them!

In his experience the sailor had known cases of a similar kind. It was no matter of surprise, that he should feel uneasiness at their approach, if not actual fear.

But there was no time left either for him to speculate as to the probabilities of such an attack, or for his companion to question him about them.

Scarcely had the last words parted from his lips, when the foremost of the two sharks was seen to lash the water with its broad forked tail, – and then coming on with a rush, it struck the raft with such a force as almost to capsize it.

The other shark shot forward in a similar manner; but glancing a little to one side, caught in its huge mouth the end of the dolphin-striker, grinding off a large piece of the spar as if it had been cork-wood!

This it swallowed almost instantaneously; and then turning once more in the water appeared intent upon renewing the attack.

Ben and the boy had dropped their hooks and lines, – the former instinctively arming himself with the axe, while the latter seized upon the spare handspike. Both stood ready to receive the second charge of the enemy.

It was made almost on the instant. The shark that had just attacked was the first to return; and coming on with the velocity of an arrow, it sprang clear above the surface, projecting its hideous jaws over the edge of the raft.

For a moment the frail structure was in danger of being either capsized or swamped altogether, and then the fate of its occupants would undoubtedly have been to become “food for sharks.”

But it was not the intention of Ben Brace or his youthful comrade to yield up their lives without striking a blow in self-defence, and that given by the sailor at once disembarassed him of his antagonist.

Throwing one arm around a mast, in order to steady himself, and raising the light axe in the other, he struck outward and downward with all his might. The blade of the axe, guided with an

unswerving arm, fell right upon the snout of the shark, just midway between its nostrils, cleaving the cartilaginous flesh to the depth of several inches, and laying it open to the bones.

There could not have been chosen a more vital part upon which to inflict a wound; for, huge as is the white shark, and strong and vigorous as are all animals of this ferocious family, a single blow upon the nose with a handspike or even a billet of wood, if laid on with a heavy hand, will suffice to put an end to their predatory courses.

And so was it with the shark struck by the axe of Ben Brace. As soon as the blow had been administered, the creature rolled over on its back; and after a fluke or two with its great forked tail, and a tremulous shivering through its body, it lay floating upon the water motionless as a log of wood.

William was not so fortunate with his antagonist, though he had succeeded in keeping it off. Striking wildly out with the handspike in a horizontal direction, he had poked the butt end of the implement right between the jaws of the monster, just as it raised its head over the raft with the mouth wide open.

The shark, seizing the handspike in its treble row of teeth, with one shake of its head whipped it out of the boy's hands: and then rushing on through the water, was seen grinding the timber into small fragments, and swallowing it as if it had been so many crumbs of bread or pieces of meat.

In a few seconds not a bit of the handspike could be seen, – save some trifling fragments of the fibrous wood that floated on the surface of the water; but what gave greater gratification to those who saw them, was the fact that the shark which had thus made “mince-meat” of the piece of timber was itself no longer to be seen.

Whether because it had satisfied the cravings of its appetite by that wooden banquet, or whether it had taken the alarm at witnessing the fate of its companion, – by much the larger of the two, – was a question of slight importance either to Ben Brace or to William. For whatever reason, and under any circumstances, they were but too well pleased to be disembarrassed of its hideous presence; and as they came to the conclusion that it had gone off for good, and saw the other one lying with its white belly turned upwards upon the surface of the water – evidently dead as a herring – they could no longer restrain their voices, but simultaneously raised them in a shout of victory.

Chapter Eleven.

A Lenten Dinner

The shark struck upon the snout, though killed by the blow, continued to float near the surface of the water its fins still in motion as if in the act of swimming.

One unacquainted with the habits of these sea-monsters might have supposed that it still lived, and might yet contrive to escape. Not so the sailor, Ben Brace. Many score of its kind had Ben coaxed to take a bait, and afterwards helped to haul over the gangway of a ship and cut to pieces upon the deck; and Ben knew as much about the habits of these voracious creatures as any sailor that ever crossed the wide ocean, and much more than any naturalist that never did. He had seen a shark drawn aboard with a great steel hook in its stomach, – he had seen its belly ripped up with a jack-knife, the whole of the intestines taken out, then once more thrown into the sea; and after all this rough handling he had seen the animal not only move its fins, but actually swim off some distance from the ship! He knew, moreover, that a shark may be cut in twain, – have the head separated from the body, – and still exhibit signs of vitality in both parts for many hours after the dismemberment! Talk of the killing of a cat or an eel! – a shark will stand as much killing as twenty cats or a bushel of eels, and still exhibit symptoms of life.

The shark's most vulnerable part appears to be the snout, – just where the sailor had chosen to make his hit; and a blow delivered there with an axe, or even a handspike, usually puts a termination to the career of this rapacious tyrant of the great deep.

"I've knocked him into the middle o' next week," cried Ben, exultingly, as he saw the shark heel over on its side. "It ain't goin' to trouble us any more. Where's the other un?"

"Gone out that way," answered the boy, pointing in the direction taken by the second and smaller of the two sharks. "He whipped the handspike out of my hands, and he's craunched it to fragments. See! there are some of the pieces floating on the water!"

"Lucky you let go, lad; else he might ha' pulled you from the raft. I don't think he'll come back again after the reception we've gi'ed 'em. As for the other, it's gone out o' its senses. Dash my buttons, if't ain't goin' to sink! Ha! I must hinder that. Quick, Will'm, shy me that piece o' sennit: we must secure him 'fore he gives clean up and goes to the bottom. Talk o' catching fish wi' hook an' line! Aha! This beats all your small fry. If we can secure it, we'll have fish enough to last us through the longest Lent. There now! keep on the other edge of the craft so as to balance me. So-so!"

While the sailor was giving these directions, he was busy with both hands in forming a running-noose on one end of the sennit-cord, which William on the instant had handed over to him. It was but the work of a moment to make the noose; another to let it down into the water; a third to pass it over the upper jaw of the shark; a fourth to draw it taut, and tighten the cord around the creature's teeth. The next thing done was to secure the other end of the sennit to the upright oar; and the carcass of the shark was thus kept afloat near the surface of the water.

To guard against a possible chance of the creature's recovery, Ben once more laid hold of the axe; and, leaning over the edge of the raft, administered a series of smart blows upon its snout. He continued hacking away, until the upper jaw of the fish exhibited the appearance of a butcher's chopping-block; and there was no longer any doubt of the creature being as "dead as a herring."

"Now, Will'm," said the shark-killer, "this time we've got a fish that'll gi'e us a fill, lad. Have a little patience, and I'll cut ye a steak from the tenderest part o' his body; and that's just forrard o' the tail. You take hold o' the sinnet, an' pull him up a bit, – so as I can get at him."

The boy did as directed; and Ben, once more bending over the edge of the raft, caught hold of one of the caudal fins, and with his knife detached a large flake from the flank of the fish, – enough to make an ample meal for both of them.

It is superfluous to say that, like the little flying-fish, the shark-meat had to be eaten raw; but to men upon the verge of starvation there is no inconvenience in this. Indeed, there are many tribes of South-Sea Islanders – not such savage either – who habitually eat the flesh of the shark – both the blue and white species – without thinking it necessary even to warm it over a fire! Neither did the castaway English sailor nor his young comrade think it necessary. Even had a fire been possible, they were too hungry to have stayed for the process of cooking; and both, without more ado, dined upon raw shark-meat.

When they had succeeded in satisfying the cravings of hunger, and once more refreshed themselves with a draught from their extemporised water-bag, the castaways not only felt a relief from actual suffering, but a sort of cheerful confidence in the future. This arose from a conviction on their part, or at all events a strong impression, that the hand of Providence had been stretched out to their assistance. The flying-fish, the shower, the shark may have been accidents, it is true; but, occurring at such a time, just in the very crisis of their affliction, they were accidents that had the appearance of design, – design on the part of Him to whom in that solemn hour they had uplifted their voices in prayer.

It was under this impression that their spirits became naturally restored; and once more they began to take counsel together about the ways and means of prolonging their existence.

It is true that their situation was still desperate. Should a storm spring up, – even an ordinary gale, – not only would their canvas water-cask be bilged, and its contents spilled out to mingle with the briny billow, but their frail embarkation would be in danger of going to pieces, or of being whelmed fathoms deep under the frothing waves. In a high latitude, either north or south, their chance of keeping afloat would have been slight indeed. A week, or rather only a single day, would have been as long as they could have expected that calm to continue; and the experienced sailor knew well enough that anything in the shape of a storm would expose them to certain destruction. To console him for this unpleasant knowledge, however, he also knew that in the ocean, where they were then afloat, storms are exceedingly rare, and that ships are often in greater danger from the very opposite state of the atmosphere, – from *calms*. They were in that part of the Atlantic Ocean known among the early Spanish navigators as the *Horse Latitudes*, – so-called because the horses at that time being carried across to the New World, for want of water in the becalmed ships, died in great numbers, and being thrown overboard were often seen floating upon the surface of the sea.

A prettier and more poetical name have these same Spaniards given to a portion of the same Atlantic Ocean, – which, from the gentleness of its breezes, they have styled “*La Mar de las Damas*” (the Ladies’ Sea).

Ben Brace knew that in the Horse Latitudes storms were of rare occurrence; and hence the hopefulness with which he was now looking forward to the future.

He was no longer inactive. If he believed in the special Interference of Providence, he also believed that Providence would expect him to make some exertion of himself, – such as circumstances might permit and require.

Chapter Twelve.

Flensing a Shark

The flesh of the shark, and the stock of water so singularly obtained and so deftly stored away, might, if properly kept and carefully used, last them for many days; and to the preservation of these stores the thoughts of the sailor and his young companion were now specially directed.

For the former they could do nothing more than had been already done, – further than to cover the tarpauling that contained it with several folds of the spare sail-cloth, in order that no ray of the sun should get near it. This precaution was at once adopted.

The flesh of the shark – now dead as mutton – if left to itself, would soon spoil, and be unfit for food, even for starving men. It was this reflection that caused the sailor and his *protégé* to take counsel together as to what might be done towards preserving it.

They were not long in coming to a decision. Shark-flesh, like that of any other fish – like haddock, for instance, or red herrings – can be dried in the sun; and the more readily in that sun of the torrid zone that shone down so hotly upon their heads. The flesh only needed to be cut into thin slices and suspended from the upright oars. The atmosphere would soon do the rest. Thus cured, it would keep for weeks or months; and thus did the castaways determine to cure it.

No sooner was the plan conceived, than they entered upon its execution. Little William again seized the cord of sennit, and drew the huge carcass close up to the raft; while Ben once more opened the blade of his sailor's knife, and commenced cutting off the flesh in broad flakes, – so thin as to be almost transparent.

He had succeeded in stripping off most of the titbits around the tail, and was proceeding up the body of the shark to *flense* it in a similar fashion, when an ejaculation escaped him, expressing surprise or pleasant curiosity.

Little William was but too glad to perceive the pleased expression on the countenance of his companion, – of late so rarely seen.

“What is it, Ben?” he inquired, smilingly.

“Look 'ee theer, lad,” rejoined the sailor, placing his hand upon the back of the boy's head, and pressing it close to the edge of the raft, so that he could see well down into the water, – “look theer, and tell me what you see.”

“Where?” asked William, still ignorant of the object to which his attention was thus forcibly directed.

“Don't you see somethin' queery stickin' to the belly of the shark, – eh, lad?”

“As I live,” rejoined William, now perceiving “somethin'”, “there's a small fish pushing his head against the shark, – not so small either, – only in comparison with the great shark himself. It's about a foot long, I should think. But what is it doing in that odd position?”

“Sticking to the shark, – didn't I tell 'ee, lad!”

“Sticking to the shark? You don't mean that, Ben?”

“But I do – mean that very thing, boy. It's as fast theer as a barnacle to a ship's copper; an' 'll stay, I hope, till I get my claws upon it, – which won't take very long from now. Pass a piece o' cord this way. Quick.”

The boy stretched out his hand, and, getting hold of a piece of loose string, reached it to his companion. Just as the snare had been made for the shark with the piece of sennit, and with like rapidity, a noose was constructed on the string; and, having been lowered into the water, was passed around the body of the little fish which appeared adhering to the belly of the shark. Not only did it so appear, but it actually was, as was proved by the pull necessary to detach it, and which required all the strength that lay in the strong arms of the sailor.

He succeeded, however, in effecting his purpose; and with a pluck the parasite fish was separated from the skin to which it had been clinging, and, jerked upwards, was landed alive and kicking upon the raft.

Its kicking was not allowed to continue for long. Lest it might leap back into the water, and, sluggish swimmer as it was, escape out of reach, Ben, with the knife which he still held unclasped in his hand, pinned it to one of the planks, and in an instant terminated its existence.

“What sort of a fish is it?” asked William, as he looked upon the odd creature thus oddly obtained.

“Suckin’-fish,” was Ben’s laconic answer.

“A sucking-fish! I never heard of one before. Why is it so-called?”

“Because it sucks,” replied the sailor.

“Sucks what?”

“Sharks. Didn’t you see it suckin’ at this ’un afore I pulled it from the teat? Ha! ha! ha!”

“Surely it wasn’t that, Ben?” said the lad, mystified by Ben’s remark.

“Well, boy, I an’t, going to bamboozle ye. All I know is that it fastens onto sharks, and only this sort, which are called *white sharks*; for I never seed it sticking to any o’ the others, – of which there be several kinds. As to its suckin’ anythin’ out o’ them an’ livin’ by that, I don’t believe a word o’ it; though they say it do so, and that’s what’s given it its name. Why I don’t believe it is, because I’ve seed the creature stickin’ just the same way to the coppered bottom o’ a ship, and likewise to the sides o’ rocks under the water. Now, it couldn’t get anything out o’ the copper to live upon, nor yet out o’ a rock, – could it?”

“Certainly not.”

“Then it couldn’t be a suckin’ them. Besides, I’ve seed the stomachs o’ several cut open, and they were full of little water-creepers, – such as there’s thousands o’ kinds in the sea. I warrant if we rip this ’un up the belly, we’ll find the same sort o’ food in it.”

“And why does it fasten itself to sharks and ships, – can you tell that, Ben?”

“I’ve heerd the reason, and it be sensible enough, – more so than to say that it sucks. There was a doctor as belonged in the man-o’-war where I sarved for two years, as was larned in all such curious things. He said that the suckin’-fish be a bad swimmer; and that I know myself to be true. You can tell by the smallness o’ its fins. Well, the doctor, he say, it fastens on to the sharks and ships so as to get carried from place to place, and to the rocks to rest itself. Whenever it takes a notion, it can slip off, and go a huntin’ for its prey; and then come back again and take a fresh grip on whatever it has chosen to lodge itself.”

“It’s that curious thing along the back of its head that enables it to hold on, isn’t it?”

“That’s its sticking-machine; and, what be curious, Will’m, if you were to try to pull it off upwards or backwards you couldn’t do it wi’ all your strength, nor I neither: you must shove it forrard, as you seed me do just now, or else pull it to pieces before it would come off.”

“I can see,” said William, holding the fish up to his eyes, “that there are rows of little teeth in that queer top-knot it’s got, all turned towards the tail. It is they, I suppose, that prevent its slipping backwards?”

“No doubt, lad, – no doubt it be that. But never mind what it be just now. Let us finish flensin’ o’ the shark; and then if we feel hungry we can make a meal o’ the sucker, – for I can tell you it’s the best kind o’ eatin’. I’ve ate ’em often in the South-Sea Islands, where the natives catch ’em with hooks and lines; but I’ve seen them there much bigger than this ’un, – three feet long, and more.”

And so saying, the sailor returned to the operation, thus temporarily suspended, – the *flensing* of the shark.

Chapter Thirteen.

The Sucking-Fish

The fish that had thus singularly fallen into their hands was, as Ben had stated, the sucking-fish, *Echeneis remora*, – one of the most curious creatures that inhabit the sea. Not so much from any peculiarity in appearance as from the singularity of its habits.

Its appearance, however, is sufficiently singular; and looking upon it, one might consider the creature as being well adapted for keeping company with the ferocious tyrant of the deep, on whom it constantly attends.

Its body is black and smooth, its head of a hideous form, and its fins short and broadly spread. The mouth is very large, with the lower jaw protruding far beyond the upper, and it is this that gives to it the cast of feature, if we may be permitted to speak of “features” in a fish.

Both lips and jaws are amply provided with teeth; and the throat, palate, and tongue are set profusely with short spines. The eyes are dark, and set high up. The “sucker” or buckler upon the top of its head consists of a number of bony plates, set side by side, so as to form an oval disc, and armed along the edges with little tentacles, or teeth, as the boy William had observed.

His companion’s account of the creature was perfectly correct, so far as it went; but there are many other points in its “history” quite as curious as those which the sailor had communicated.

The fish has neither swim-bladder nor sound; and as, moreover, its fins are of the feeblest kind, it is probably on this account that it has been gifted with the power of adhering to other floating bodies, by way of compensation for the above-named deficiencies. The slow and prowling movements of the white shark, render it particularly eligible for the purposes of the sucking-fish, either as a resting-place or a means of conveyance from place to place; and it is well-known that the shark is usually attended by several of these singular satellites. Other floating objects, however, are used by the sucking-fish, – such as pieces of timber, the keel of a ship; and it even rests itself against the sides of submerged rocks, as the sailor had stated. It also adheres to whales, turtles, and the larger kinds of albacore.

Its food consists of shrimps, marine insects, fragments of molluscous animals, and the like; but it obtains no nutriment through the sucking-apparatus, nor does it in any way injure the animal to which it adheres. It only makes use of the sucker at intervals; at other times, swimming around the object it attends, and looking out for prey of its own choice, and on its own account. While swimming it propels itself by rapid lateral movements of the tail, executed awkwardly and with a tortuous motion.

It is itself preyed upon by other fish, – diodons and albacores; but the shark is merciful to it, as to the pilot-fish, and never interferes with it.

Sucking-fish are occasionally seen of a pure white colour associating with the black ones, and also attending upon the shark. They are supposed to be merely varieties or *albinos*.

When sharks are hooked and drawn on board a ship, the sucking-fishes that have been swimming around them will remain for days, and even weeks, following the vessel throughout all her courses. They can then be taken by a hook and line, baited with a piece of flesh; and they will seize the bait when let down in the stillest water. In order to secure them, however, it is necessary, after they have been hooked, to jerk them quickly out of the water; else they will swim rapidly to the side of the ship, and fix their sucker so firmly against the wood, as to defy every attempt to dislodge them.

There are two well-known species of sucking-fish, – the common one described, and another of larger size, found in the Pacific, the *Echeneis australis*. The latter is a better shaped fish than its congener, can swim more rapidly, and is altogether of a more active habit.

Perhaps the most interesting fact in the history of the *Echeneis* is its being the same fish as that known to the Spanish navigators as the *remora*, and which was found by Columbus in possession of the natives of Cuba and Jamaica, *tamed, and trained to the catching of turtles!*

Their mode of using it was by attaching a cord of palm sennit to a ring already fastened round the tail, at the smallest part between the ventral and caudal fins. It was then allowed to swim out into the sea; while the other end of the cord was tied to a tree, or made fast to a rock upon the beach. The *remora* being thus set – just as one would set a baited hook – was left free to follow its own inclinations, – which usually were to fasten its sucking-plates against the shell of one of the great sea-turtles, – so famed at aldermanic feasts and prized by modern *gourmets*, and equally relished by the ancient Cuban *caciques*.

At intervals, the turtle-catcher would look to his line; and when the extra strain upon it proved that the *remora* was *en rapport* with a turtle, he would haul in, until the huge *chelonian* was brought within striking distance of his heavy club; and thus would the capture be effected.

Turtles of many hundreds' weight could be taken in this way; for the pull upon the *remora* being towards the tail, – and therefore in a backward direction, – the sucking-fish could not be detached, unless by the most violent straining.

It is a fact of extreme singularity, that a similar method of capturing turtles is practised on the coast of Mozambique at the present day, and by a people who never could have had any communication with the aborigines of the West Indian Islands, much less have learnt from them this curious craft of angling with a fish!

A smaller species of the sucking-fish is found in the Mediterranean, – the *Echeneis remora*. It was well-known to the ancient writers; though, like most creatures gifted with any peculiarity, it was oftener the subject of fabulous romance than real history. It was supposed to have the power of arresting the progress of a ship, by attaching itself to the keel and pulling in a contrary direction! A still more ridiculous virtue was attributed to it: in the belief that, if any criminal in dread of justice could only succeed in inducing the judge to partake of a portion of its flesh, he would be able to obtain a long delay before the judge could pronounce the verdict of his condemnation!

Chapter Fourteen.

A Sail of Shark-Flesh

It wanted but a little while of sunset, when the sailor and his young comrade had finished flensing the shark. The raft now exhibited quite an altered appearance. Between the two upright oars several pieces of rope had been stretched transversely, and from these hung suspended the broad thin flitches of the shark's flesh, that at a distance might have been mistaken for some sort of a sail. Indeed, they acted as such; for their united discs presented a considerable breadth of surface to the breeze, which had sprung up as the evening approached, and the raft by this means moved through the water with considerable rapidity.

There was no effort made to steer it. The idea of reaching land was entirely out of the question. Their only hope of salvation lay in their being seen from a ship; and as a ship was as likely to come from one direction as another, it mattered not to which of the thirty-two points of the compass their raft might be drifting. Yes, it *did* matter. So thought Ben Brace, on reflection.

It might be of serious consequence, should the raft make way to the westward. Somewhere in that direction – how far neither could guess – that greater raft, with its crew of desperate ruffians, – those drunken would-be cannibals, – must be drifting about, like themselves, at the mercy of winds and waves: perhaps more than themselves suffering the dire extreme of thirst and hunger. Perhaps, ere then, one of their own number may have been forced to submit to the horrid fate which they had designed for little William; and which, but for the interference of his generous protector, would most certainly have befallen him.

Should he again fall into their clutches, there would be but slight chance of a second escape. His protector knew that. Ben knew, moreover, that his own life would be equally sure of being sacrificed to the resentment of the ribald crew, with whom he had formerly associated.

No wonder, as he felt the breeze blowing on his cheek, that he looked towards the setting sun, to ascertain in what direction the raft was being borne. No wonder that his anxious glance became changed to a look of satisfaction when he perceived that they were moving eastward.

"To the east'ard it are, sure enough," said he, "and that be curious too. 'T an't often I've see'd the wind blow from the westward in these latitudes. Only another catspaw in the middle o' the calm. 'T won't last long; though it won't matter, so long's it don't turn and blow us t'other way."

The expressed wish not to be blown "t'other way" needed no explanation. William understood what that meant. The fearful scene of the preceding day was fresh in his memory. That scene, where half a score of fiend-like monsters, threatening his life, were kept at bay by one heroic man, – that was a tableau too terrible to be soon forgotten.

Nor had he forgotten it, even for a moment. Perhaps, during that brief conflict with the sharks, the nearer danger may have driven it for an interval out of his mind; but that over, the dread remembrance returned again; and every now and then, – even while engaged in the varied labours that had occupied them throughout the day, – in a sort of waking dream he had recalled that fearful vision. Often – every few minutes in fact – had his eyes been turned involuntarily towards the west, – where, instead of looking hopefully for a ship, his anxious glance betrayed a fear that any dark object might be seen in that direction.

On finishing their task, both were sufficiently fatigued, – the strong sailor as well as his feebler companion. The former still kept his feet, anxiously scanning the horizon; while the latter laid himself along the bare boards of the raft.

"Little Will'm," said the sailor, looking down at the boy, and speaking in gentle tones, "you'd better spread the sail under ye, and get some sleep. There be no use in both o' us keeping awake. I'll watch till it gets dark, an' then I'll join you. Go to sleep, lad! go to sleep!"

William was too wearied to make objection. Drawing the skirt of the sail over the raft, he lay down upon it, and found sleep almost as soon as he had composed himself into the attitude to enjoy it.

The sailor remained standing erect; now sweeping the horizon with his glance, now bending his eye restlessly upon the water as it rippled along the edge of the raft, and again returning to that distant scrutiny, – so oft repeated, so oft unrewarded.

Thus occupied, he passed the interval of twilight, – short in these latitudes; nor did he terminate his vigil until darkness had descended upon the deep.

It promised to be a dark, moonless night. Only a few feebly gleaming stars, thinly scattered over the firmament, enabled him to distinguish the canopy of the sky from the waste of waters that surrounded him. Even a ship under full spread of canvas could not have been seen, though passing at a cable's length from the raft.

It was idle to continue the dreary vigil; and having arrived at this conviction, the sailor stretched himself alongside his slumbering companion, and, like the latter, was soon relieved from his long-protracted anxiety by the sweet oblivion of sleep.

Chapter Fifteen.

The Mysterious Voice

For several hours both remained wrapped in slumber, oblivious of the perils through which they had passed, – equally unconscious of the dangers that surrounded and still lay before them.

What a picture was there, – with no human eye to behold it! Two human forms, a sailor and a sailor-boy, lying side by side upon a raft scarce twice the length of their own bodies, in the midst of a vast ocean, landless and limitless as infinity itself both softly and soundly asleep, – as if reposing upon the pillow of some secure couch, with the firm earth beneath and a friendly roof extended over them! Ah, it was a striking tableau, that frail craft with its sleeping crew, – such a spectacle as is seldom seen by human eye!

It was fortunate that for many hours they continued to enjoy the sweet unconsciousness of sleep, – if such may be termed enjoyment. It was long after midnight before either awoke: for there was nothing to awake them. The breeze had kept gentle, and constant in the same quarter; and the slight noise made by the water, as it went “swishing” along the edge of the raft, instead of rousing them acted rather as a lullaby to their rest. The boy awoke first. He had been longer asleep; and his nervous system, refreshed and restored to its normal condition, had become more keenly sensitive to outward impressions. Some big, cold rain-drops falling upon his face had recalled him to wakefulness.

Was it spray tossed up by the spars ploughing through the water?

No. It was rain from the clouds. The canopy overhead was black as ink; but while the lad was scrutinising it, a gleam of lightning suddenly illumined both sea and sky, and then all was dark as before.

Little William would have restored his cheek to its sail-cloth pillow and gone to sleep again. He was not dismayed by the silent lightning, – for it was that sort that had flickered over the sky. No more did he mind the threatening rainclouds. His shirt had been soaked too often, by showers from the sky and spray from the sea, for him to have any dread of a ducking.

It was not that, – neither the presence of the lightning nor the prospect of the rain, – that kept him awake; but something he had heard, – or fancied he had heard, – something that not only restrained him from returning to repose, but inspired him with a fear that robbed him of an inclination to go to sleep again.

What was it he had heard or fancied? A noise, – a *voice*!

Was it the scream of the sea-mew, the shriek of the frigate-bird, or the hoarse note of the nelly?

None of these. The boy-sailor was acquainted with the cries of all three, and of many other sea-birds besides. It was not the call of a bird that had fallen so unexpectedly on his ear, but a note of far different intonation. It more resembled a voice, – a human voice, – the voice of a child! Not of a very young child, – an infant, – but more like that of a girl of eight or ten years of age!

Nor was it a cry of distress, though uttered in a melancholy tone. It seemed to the ear of the lad – freshly awakened from his sleep – like words spoken in conversation.

But it could not be what he had taken it for! Improbable, – impossible! He had been deluded by a fancy; or it might be the mutterings of some ocean bird with whose note he was unacquainted.

Should he awake his companion and tell him of it? A pity, if it should prove to be nothing, or only the chattering of a sea-gull. His brave protector had need of rest. Ben would not be angry to be awakened; but the sailor would be sure to laugh at him if he were to say he had heard a little girl talking at that time of night in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Perhaps Ben might say it was a mermaid, and mock him in that sort of style?

No: he would not run the risk of being ridiculed, even by his best of friends. Better let the thing pass, and say nothing about it.

Little William had arrived at this resolution, and had more than half determined to treat the sound he had heard as an *aurical* delusion. He had even replaced his cheek upon the sail-cloth pillow, when the very same sound again fill upon his ear, – this time more distinctly heard, as if either the utterance had been clearer or the being that made it was nearer!

If it was not the voice of a girl, – a very young girl, – then the boy-sailor had never listened to the prattling of his younger sister, or the conversation of his little female playmates. If it was a young mermaid, then most assuredly could mermaids talk: for the sound was exactly like a string or series of words uttered in conversation!

Ben must be aroused from his slumber. It could not be an illusion. Either a talking mermaid, or a little girl, was within earshot of the raft.

There was no help for it: Ben must be aroused.

“Ben! Ben!”

“Ho – hah – ow – aw – what’s the row? – seven bells, I bean’t on the dog-watch. Hi, hi, oh! it’s you, little Will’m. What is’t, lad?”

“Ben, I hear something.”

“Hear somethin’! Well, what o’ that, boy? Theer ’s allers somethin’ to be heerd: even here, in the middle o’ the Atlantic. Ah! boy, I was dreamin’ a nice dream when ye woke me. I thought I war back on the ole frigate. ’T wa’nt so nice, eyther, for I thought the bos’n war roustin’ me up for my watch on deck. Anyhow, would a been better than this watch here. Heerd something ye say? What d’ye mean, little Will’m?”

“I heard a voice, Ben. I think it was a voice.”

“Voice – o’ a human, do ye mean?”

“It sounded like that of a little girl.”

“Voice o’ a little girl! Shiver my timbers, lad, you’re goin’ demented! Put yer face close to mine. Let me see ye, boy! Are ye in yer senses, Will’m?”

“I am, Ben. I’m sure I heard what I’ve said. Twice I heard it. The first time I wasn’t sure; but just now I heard it again, and if – ”

“If there hadn’t been gulls, an’ boobies, an’ Mother Carey’s chickens, as squeals and chitters just like little childer, I’d a been puzzled at what ye be a tellin’ me; but as I knows there be all o’ these creators in the middle o’ the broad ocean, – and mermaids too, I dare say, – then, ye see, little Will’m, I must disbelieve that ye heard anything more than the voice of – a man, by – !”

As the sailor terminated his speech with this terrible emphasis, he started into an upright attitude, and listened with all his ears for another utterance of that harsh monotone that, borne upon the breeze and rising above the “sough” of the disturbed water, could easily be distinguished as the *voice of a man*.

“We’re lost, Will’m!” cried he, without waiting for a repetition of the sound; “we’re lost. It’s the voice of Le Gros. The big raft is a bearin’ down upon us wi’ them bloodthirsty cannibals we thought we’d got clear o’. It’s no use tryin’ to escape. Make up your mind to it, lad; we’ve got to die! we’ve got to die!”

Chapter Sixteen.

Other Waifs

Had it been daylight, instead of a very dark night, Ben Brace and his youthful comrade would have been less alarmed by the voices that came up the wind. Daylight would have discovered to them an object, or rather collection of objects, which, instead of repelling, would have attracted them nearer.

It was not the great raft that was drifting to leeward, nor was it the voice of Le Gros or any of his wicked companions, that had been heard; though, in the excitement of their fears, that was the first thought of the two castaways.

Could their eyes have penetrated the deep obscurity that shrouded the sea, they would have beheld a number of objects, like themselves, adrift upon the water, and like them, at the mercy of the winds and waves. They would have seen pieces of timber, black and charred with fire; fragments of broken spars, with sails and cordage attached and trailing after them; here and there a cask or barrel, sunk to the level of the surface by the weight of its contents; pieces of packing-cases, torn asunder as if by some terrible explosion; cabin-chairs, coops, oars, handspikes, and other implements of the mariner's calling, – all bobbing about on the bosom of the blue deep, and carried hither and thither by the arbitrary oscillations of the breeze.

These various objects were not all huddled up together, but scattered unequally over a space of more than a square mile in extent. Had it been daylight, so that the sailor could have seen them, as they appeared mottling the bright surface of the sea, he would have experienced no difficulty in determining their character. At a glance he would have recognised the *débris* of the burnt ship, from which he and his companion had so narrowly escaped, – the slave-bark *Pandora*.

He would have looked upon these objects with no very great surprise, but in all likelihood with a feeling of considerable satisfaction: as offering the means for recruiting the strength of his own slight embarkation, which was barely sufficient to sustain the weight of himself and his companion, and certainly not strong enough to withstand the assault of the most moderate of storms.

In the midst of the “waifs” above enumerated, however, there was one not yet named, – one that differed greatly from all the rest, – and which, had it been seen by them, would have caused extreme surprise both to Ben Brace and little William.

It was a raft, not a great deal larger than their own, but altogether of different construction. A number of planks most of them charred by fire, with a sofa, a bamboo chair, and some other articles of furniture, had been rudely bound together by ropes. These things, of themselves, would have made but a very clumsy craft, no better for navigating the great ocean than that upon which Ben and the boy were themselves embarked. But the buoyancy of the former was secured by a contrivance of which the sailor had not had the opportunity of availing himself. Around its edge were ranged hogsheads or water-casks, evidently empty. They were lashed to the plank; and being bunged up against the influx of the water, kept the whole structure afloat, so that it would have carried a ton or two without sinking below the surface.

There was a smaller cask floating alongside, attached to the timbers by a piece of rope that was tightly looped around the swell. But this could not have been designed to increase the buoyancy of the raft: since it was itself almost submerged, evidently by the weight of something it contained.

Such a congeries of objects might have drifted side by side by chance, or the caprice of the currents; but they could not have tied themselves together in such fashion. There was design in the arrangement; and in the midst of the circle of empty hogsheads might have been seen the contriver of this curious craft. He was, of course, a human being, and a man; but such an one as, under any circumstances, would arrest the attention of the beholder; much more in the singular situation in

which he was then met with. He was a black man, in the fullest sense of the word; a true negro, with a skin shining like ebony; a skull of large size, and slightly square in shape, covered with a thick crop of curling wool, so close and short as to appear *felted* into the skin. A brace of broad ears stood prominently out from the sides of his head; and extending almost from one to the other, was a wide-gaping mouth, formed by a pair of lips of huge thickness, protruding far forward, so as to give to the countenance those facial outlines characteristic of the chimpanzee or gorilla.

Notwithstanding his somewhat abnormal features, the expression of the negro's face was far from being hideous. It was not even disagreeable. A double row of white teeth, gleaming between the purplish lips, could be exhibited upon ordinary occasions in a pleasant smile; and the impression derived from looking upon the countenance was, that the owner of it was rather good-natured than otherwise. Just then, as he sat upon the raft, gazing over the bulwark of hogsheads, its expression was one of profound and sombre melancholy. No wonder!

The negro was not alone. Another individual shared with him the occupancy of the raft; – one differing from him in appearance as Hyperion from the Satyr. A few feet from him, and directly before his face, was a little girl, apparently about ten or twelve years of age. She was seated, or rather cowering, among the timbers of the raft, upon a piece of tarpauling that had been spread over them, her eyes bent upon her black companion, though occasionally straying, with listless glance, over the sombre surface of the sea. Although so young, her countenance appeared sad and despondent, as if under the belief that there was little hope of escape from the fearful situation in which she was placed, and as if her little spirit had long ago surrendered to despair.

Though not a negro like her companion, the girl could scarce be called *white*. Her complexion was of that hue known as olive; but her hair, although curling, hung in long locks down over her shoulders; and the crimson hue deeply tinting her cheeks told that in her blood there was more Caucasian than negro.

Any one who had visited the western coast of Africa, on seeing this little girl, would easily have recognised in her features the type of that mixed race which has resulted from long intercourse between the Portuguese “colonists” and the sable indigenes of the soil.

Chapter Seventeen.

How Snowball escaped from the Slaver

On this curious embarkation, drifting about amid the remains of the wrecked ship, there were only the two human figures, – the negro and the little girl. It is superfluous to say that they were also a portion of the wreck itself, – other castaways who had, so far, succeeded in saving themselves from the fearful doom that had overtaken, no doubt, every one of the wretched beings composing the *cargo* of the slaver.

The negro upon the raft, though black as the blackest of his unfortunate countrymen, was not among the number of those who had been carried as *freight*. On the contrary, he was one of the crew, – the lord of the caboose, and known upon the slave-bark by the satirical *soubriquet* of “Snowball.”

Although originally a slave from Africa, and by race a Coromantee, Snowball had long been in the enjoyment of his liberty; and, as cook or steward, had seen service in scores of ships, and circumnavigated the globe in almost every latitude where circumnavigation was possible.

Though not naturally of a wicked disposition, he was by no means particular as to the company he kept, or the sort of ship he sailed in, – so long as the wages were good and the store-room well supplied; and as these conditions are usually found on board of a slaver, it was not Snowball’s first voyage in a vessel of the kind. It is true that he had never sailed in company with a more ribald crew than that of the *Pandora*; but it is only justice to say, that, long before the fatal interruption of that voyage, even he had become tired of their companionship, and had been almost as eager to get away from the ship as Ben Brace or little William.

He, too, had been deterred from attempting to escape while upon the African coast, by the knowledge that such an attempt would have been worse than idle. In all likelihood it would have ended in his being captured by his own countrymen, – or, at all events, by people of his own colour, – and sold once more into that very slavery from which he had formerly succeeded in emancipating himself.

Though Snowball’s morality was far from being immaculate, there was one virtue which he was not wanting, – gratitude. But for the possession of this, he might have been alone upon the raft, and, perhaps, less caring in what direction the winds and waves might carry him. As it was, his sole thought and anxiety was about his little companion, whose safety was as dear to him as his own.

It will be asked why Snowball felt this unselfish solicitude. The child could not be his own? Complexion, features, everything forbade the supposition that there could be anything of kinship between her and her sable protector.

Nor was there the slightest. On the contrary, the little girl was the daughter of one who had once been Snowball’s greatest enemy, – the man who had sold him into slavery; but who had afterwards won the negro’s gratitude by restoring to him his freedom. This person had formerly owned a trading fort on the coast of Africa, but of late years had been a resident of Rio in Brazil. His daughter, born in the former country, previous to his leaving it, was crossing the great ocean to rejoin him in his new home in the western world. Hence her presence on board the *Pandora*, where she had been a passenger under the protection of Snowball.

And well had the negro performed his duty as protector. When all the others had forsaken the ship, and the flames were fast spreading over her decks, the faithful negro had gone below, and, rousing the girl from her sleep, – for she had been slumbering unconscious of the danger, – had borne her amidst flames and smoke, at the imminent risk of his own life, and passing through the cabin windows with his burden in his arms, he had dropped down into the sea under the stern of the burning bark.

Being an excellent swimmer, he had kept afloat for some minutes, sustaining both himself and his burden by his own strength; but after a while he succeeded in clutching on to the davit-tackle by

which the gig had been let down into the water, and having passed his foot through a loop in the end of it, he remained half suspended, half afloat on the water. Soon after came the explosion, caused by the ignition of the gunpowder; and as the vessel was blown to pieces, the sea around became strewn with fragments of shattered timber, cabin furniture, sea-chests, and the like. Laying hold on those pieces that were nearest, he succeeded in forming a rude sort of raft, upon which he and his *protégé* were enabled to pass the remainder of the night.

When morning dawned, Snowball and the little Lalee – such was the name of the child – were the only beings who appeared to have survived the catastrophe, – the wretched creatures who at the last moment had escaped from the “tween-decks” were no longer in existence.

Having been brought from the interior of the African continent, – and from a district where there are no great lakes or rivers, – but few of them could swim; and those few had become the prey of the sharks, that in scores were swimming around the frail craft. As the sun rose over the ocean, and lit up the scene of that terrible tragedy, Snowball saw not a living creature save his own *protégé*, the sharks, and their satellites.

The negro knew, however, that the *Pandora*’s own people had escaped. He had witnessed the clandestine departure of the gig, containing the skipper and his confederates.

This he had seen, while gazing through the windows of the cabin, previous to launching himself upon that last desperate leap. He had also been a witness to the departure of the great raft carrying the crew.

It may appear strange that he did not swim towards it, and share the fortunes of his former associates. Why he did not do so is easily explained. By an accident, arising from his own negligence, the ship had been set on fire. He was aware of this; and he knew also that both captain and crew were equally cognisant of the fact. The former, just after the discovery, assisted by the brutal mate, had administered to him (Snowball) such a chastisement as he would not soon forget; while the crew, on becoming acquainted with the circumstance, were upon the point of tossing him into the sea; and would no doubt have carried their design into execution, but for the presence of the appalling danger impelling them to look to their own safety. The negro knew, therefore, that, were he to seek safety on the great raft, it would only be to throw himself into merciless hands, certain to spurn him back with vengeful indignation, or fling him into the jaws of the hideous monsters already swimming around the ship, and quartering the sea in every direction.

For this reason had Snowball chosen to trust to his own strength, – to chance, – to anything rather than the mercy of his old associates, with whom, for a long period past, he had been far from a favourite.

Perhaps it had turned out for the best. Had he succeeded in reaching the great raft, and been permitted to share with its occupants their chances of safety, it is more than probable that the little Lalee might have become the victim of that horrid attempt from which the little William had so narrowly escaped!

Chapter Eighteen.

Snowball amid the Drift

The adventures of Snowball and his *protégé*, from the blowing up of the *Pandora* until six suns had risen and gone down over the ocean, if not so varied as those of Ben Brace and his *protégé*, were nevertheless of sufficient interest to deserve a brief narration.

Supported by the few sticks which he had been able to draw together, he had remained during the rest of the night in the midst of the floating fragments.

He had listened to the wild shouts of vengeful rage, proceeding from the throats of the slaves as they clutched at the great raft, and were beaten back by those who occupied it. He had seen the broad sail suddenly hoisted, and the dark mass gradually gliding away over the ocean. He had heard many an agonising yell as, one by one, the few strong swimmers who survived the rest either sank by exhaustion or were dragged down in the jaws of the numerous sharks; until, the last shriek having sounded in his ears, all became silent as the tomb, while the sombre surface of the sea once more lay motionless around him. Even the ravening monsters, for a moment, seemed to have forsaken the spot, – as if each, having secured a sufficient prey, had gone down to devour it undisturbed in the dark unfathomed caverns of the deep.

When morning dawned upon the scene, although many objects met the eye of the negro and his companion, there was no human being within sight; and Snowball knew that, with the exception of the six men who had rowed off in the gig, and the crew upon the great raft, there were no other survivors of the slaver.

The crew having spread a sail to get out of reach of the drowning wretches who were clutching at their raft, the latter was soon carried out of sight; while the six in the gig had rowed off as fast as they were able, in order to get out of reach of their own companions! For these reasons, when day broke over the ocean, neither boat nor raft were visible from the spot where the catastrophe had occurred.

It may appear strange that none of the living cargo of the slaver had succeeded in saving themselves, by clinging to some fragment of the wreck; and Snowball thought so at the time.

The truth was, that those who could swim had struck out after the raft, and had followed it so far that they were not able to swim back to the burning vessel; while the others, in the wild terror produced by the proximity of the flames, had leaped despairingly into the sea, and sunk upon the instant.

The early sunbeams, as they fell slantingly over the surface of the sea, told the negro that he was alone, – alone with the little Lalee, – alone in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, – afloat upon a few sticks, – without a morsel of food to eat, without a drop of water to drink!

It was a terrible situation, – sufficient to produce despair even in the stoutest heart.

But Snowball was not one of the despairing sort. He had been too often in peril of life – both by sea and land – to be unnerved even in that dread hour; and instead of permitting his spirits to become prostrated, he bethought him of how he might make the best of the circumstances by which he was surrounded.

An object that came under his eye, just as the day began to break, kindled within him a faint gleam of hope, and urged to making an effort for the salvation of himself and his helpless companion. This object was a small keg, or beaker, which chanced to be floating near him, and which, from some mark upon it, Snowball recognised. He knew that it had been standing in a corner of the caboose, previous to the blowing up of the bark; and, moreover, that it contained several gallons of fresh water, which he had himself surreptitiously abstracted from the common stock, previous to the time that the slaver's crew had agreed to being put upon rations.

It was but the work of a minute to secure this keg, and attach it by a strong cord to the piece of timber on which the ex-cook was seated astride.

But for this unexpected supply of water Snowball might probably have yielded to despair. Without water to drink he could not have reckoned on a long lease of life, – either for himself or his *protégé*. So opportunely had the keg come before his eyes as to seem a Providential interference; and the belief or fancy that it was so stimulated him to a further search among the fragments of the shattered ship.

There were many queer things around him, – like himself bobbing about upon the tiny waves. One, however, soon monopolised his attention; and that was a barrel of somewhat flimsy structure, and about the size of those usually employed for carrying flour. Snowball recognised it also as an old acquaintance in the store-room, and knew that it was filled with the best kind of biscuit, – a private stock belonging to the captain.

Its contents could not fail to be saturated with salt-water, for the barrel was not water-tight; but the ex-cook could dry them in the sun, and render them, if not palatable, at least eatable.

The biscuit-barrel was soon fished up out of the water, and placed high and dry upon the little raft.

Snowball was next struck with the necessity of improving the quality of his craft, by giving it increase both in size and strength. With this intention – after having possessed himself of an oar, out of several that were adrift – he commenced paddling about among the floating fragments, here and there picking up such pieces as appeared best suited to his purpose.

In a short while he succeeded in collecting a sufficient number of spars and other pieces of timber, – among which figured a portion of his own old tenement, the caboose, – to form a raft as large as he might require; and to his great satisfaction he saw around him the very things that would render it *seaworthy*. Bobbing about on the waves, and at no great distance, were half a dozen empty water-casks. There had been too many of them aboard the slaver: since their emptiness was the original cause of the catastrophe that had ensued. But there were not too many for Snowball's present purpose; and, after paddling first to one and then another, he secured each in turn, and lashed them to his raft, in such fashion, that the great hogsheads, sitting higher in the water than the timbers of the raft, formed a sort of parapet around it.

This task accomplished, he proceeded to collect from the wreck such other articles as he fancied might be of service to him; and, thus occupied, he spent several days on the spot where the *Pandora* had gone to pieces.

The slight breezes that arose from time to time, and again subsided, had not separated his raft from the other objects still left floating near. In whatever direction they went, so went he: since all were drifting together.

The idea had never occurred to the negro to set up a sail and endeavour to get away from the companionship of the inanimate objects around him, – souvenirs as they were of a fearful disaster. Or rather it had occurred to him, and was rejected as unworthy of being entertained. Snowball, without knowing much of the theory of navigation, had sufficient practical acquaintance with the great Atlantic Ocean, – especially that part of it where lies the track of the dreaded “middle passage,” – long remembered by the transported slave, – Snowball, I say, was sufficiently acquainted with his present whereabouts, to know that a sail set upon his raft, and carrying him hither and thither, would not add much to the chances of his being rescued from a watery grave. His only hope lay in being picked up by some passing vessel; and, feeling convinced of this, he made no effort to go one way or the other, but suffered himself to be drifted about, along with the other waifs of the wreck, whithersoever it pleased the winds or the currents of the ocean to carry him.

Chapter Nineteen.

Snowball at Sea on a Hencoop

For six days had Snowball been leading this sort of life, along with the little Lalee, – subsisting partly on the sea-steeped biscuit found in the barrel, and partly upon other provisions which had turned up among the drift; while the precious water contained in the keg had hitherto kept them from suffering the pangs of thirst.

During these six days he had never wholly surrendered himself up to despair. It was not the first, by several times, for the old sea-cook to have suffered shipwreck; nor was it his first time to be cast away in mid-ocean. Once had he been blown overboard in a storm, and left behind, – the ship, from the violence of the wind, having been unable to tack round and return to his rescue. Being an excellent swimmer, he had kept afloat, buffeting with the huge billows for nearly an hour. Of course, in the end, he must have gone to the bottom, as the place where the incident occurred was hundreds of miles from any land. But just as he was on the point of giving in, a hencoop came drifting past, to which he at once attached himself, and this being fortunately of sufficient size to sustain his weight, hindered him from sinking.

Though he knew that the hencoop had been thrown out of the ship by some of his comrades, after he had gone overboard, the ship herself was no longer in sight; and the unlucky swimmer, notwithstanding the help given him by the hencoop, must eventually have perished among the waves; but the storm having subsided, and the wind suddenly changing into the opposite quarter, the vessel was wafted back on her old track, and passing within hail of Snowball, his comrades succeeded in rescuing him from his perilous situation.

With the retrospect of such an experience, – and Snowball could look back upon many such, – he was not the man to yield easily to despair. On the contrary, he now acted as if he believed that there was still not only some hope, but a considerable chance of being delivered from the dilemma in which the late disaster of the *Pandora* had placed him.

Scarce an hour during the six days had he permitted to pass in idleness. As already stated, he had collected ample materials from the wreck floating around him. Out of these he had formed a good-sized raft, having spent much time and labour in giving it strength and security. This accomplished, and all the provisions he could find safely stored upon it, he had devoted the rest of his time to fishing.

There were many fish in the neighbourhood of the wreck. Fearful fish they were too: for they were sharks: the same that had made such havoc among the unfortunate creatures who had constituted the cargo of the slaver. These voracious monsters, – though satiated for a time with their human prey, – had not forsaken the spot where the *Pandora* had gone to pieces; but on the square mile of surface strewn by the floating fragments of the wreck they could still be seen in pairs, and sometimes in larger numbers, with their huge sail-like fins projecting high above the water, veering about as if once more hungry, and quartering the sea in search of fresh victims.

Snowball had not succeeded in capturing any of the sharks, though he had spared no pains in endeavouring to do so. There were other large fish, however, that had made their appearance in the proximity of his raft, attracted thither by the common prospect of food promised by the wreck of the slaver. There were albacores, and bonitos, and dolphins, and many other kinds of ocean fish, rarely seen, or only upon such melancholy occasions. With a long-handled harpoon, which Snowball had succeeded in securing, he was enabled to strike several of these creatures; so that by the evening of the sixth day, his larder was considerably increased, – comprising, in the way of fish, an albacore, a brace of bonitos, with three satellites of the sharks, – a pilot-fish and two sucking-fish.

All these had been ripped open and disembowelled, after which their flesh, cut into thin slices, and spread out on the tops of the empty water-casks that surrounded the raft, was in process of being cured by drying in the sun.

Befriended by the fine weather, Snowball had succeeded, one way and another, in accumulating no mean store of provisions; and, so far as food went, he felt confident, both for himself and his companion, of being able to hold out not only for days, but for weeks or even months.

He felt equal confidence in regard to their stock of water. Having gauged the keg in his own rude way, and satisfied himself as to the quantity of its contents, he had made a calculation of how long it might last, and found that by a careful economy it could be depended upon for a period of several weeks.

Reposing upon these pleasant data, on the night of the sixth day he had gone to rest with a feeling of confidence that soon enticed his spirit into the profoundest slumbers.

Not that Snowball had gone without sleep during the other five nights spent upon his raft. He had slept a little on each of them. Only a little, however; for, as most of them had been moonlight nights, he had kept awake during the greater portion of each, on the lookout over the surface of the ocean, lest some ship, sailing near, might glide past silently and unseen, and so deprive him of a chance of being picked up.

The little Lalee had also borne part in these nocturnal vigils, – taking her turn when Snowball became too weary to keep awake; and so, in alternate watches, had the two been in the habit of tiring out the long hours of the night. To this practice the sixth night had proved an exception. There was no moon in the sky; there were no stars; not a glimmer of light, either in the firmament of the heavens or on the face of the deep. The sky above and the sea below were both of one colour, – the hue of pitch. On such a night it was idle to keep watch. A ship might have passed within a cable's length of the raft, and still remained unseen; and, filled with this conviction, both Snowball and his companion, after the night had fairly closed over them, stretched their bodies along the pieces of sail-cloth that formed their respective couches, and surrendered their spirits to the sweet enchantment of sleep.

Chapter Twenty.

The Flash of Lightning

Snowball began to snore almost as soon as he had closed his eyelids, and as if the shutting of his eyes had either occasioned or strengthened the current of breath through his nostrils.

And such a sound as the snore of the Coromantee was rarely heard upon the ocean, – except in the “spouting” of a whale or the “blowing” of a porpoise.

It did not wake the little Lalee. She had become accustomed to the snoring of Snowball, – which, instead of being a disturber, acted rather as a lullaby to her rest.

It was only after both had been asleep for many hours after midnight, – in fact when Lalee was herself sleeping less soundly, and when a snore, more prolonged and prodigious than any that had preceded it, came swelling through the nostrils of the sea-cook, – it was only then that the young girl was awakened.

Becoming aware of what had awakened her, she would have gone to sleep again; but just as she was about re-composing herself upon her sail-cloth couch, a sight came before her eyes that caused her not only to remain awake, but filled her with a feeling of indescribable awe.

On the instant of opening her eyes, the sky, hitherto dark, had become suddenly illumined by lightning, – not in streaks or flashes, but as if a sheet of fire had been spread for an instant over the whole canopy of the heavens.

At the same time the surface of the sea had been equally lighted up with the vivid gleam; and among the many objects drifting around the raft, – the remnants of the wreck, with which the eyes of the little Lalee had now become familiarised, – she saw, or fancied she saw, one altogether new to her.

It was a human face and figure, in the likeness of a beautiful boy, who appeared to be kneeling on the water, or on some slight structure on a level with the surface of the sea!

The lightning had revealed other objects beside him and over him. A pair of slender sticks, standing some feet apart, and in a perpendicular position, with some white strips suspended between them, in the gleam of the lightning shone clear and conspicuous.

It is not to be wondered at that the little Lalee should feel surprise at an apparition, – so unexpected, in such a place, and under such circumstances. It is not to be wondered at that her first impulse should be to rouse her companion out of his snoring slumbers.

She did so upon the instant, and without waiting for another flash of lightning either to confirm her belief in what she had seen, or convince her that it was only an apparition, – which her fancy, disturbed by the dreams in which she had been indulging, had conjured up on the instant of her awaking.

“Wha’s dat you say?” inquired Snowball, abruptly awakened in the middle of a superb snore; “see something! you say dat, ma pickaninny? How you see anyting such night as dis be? Law, ma lilly Lally, you no see de nose before you own face. De ’ky ’bove am dark as de complexyun ob dis ole nigga; you muss be mistake, lilly gal! – dat you muss!”

“No, indeed, Snowball!” replied Lalee, speaking in gumbo Portuguese, “I am not mistaken. It wasn’t dark when I saw it. There was lightning; and it was as clear as in daylight for a little while. I’m sure I saw some one!”

“What was de some one like?” interrogated Snowball, in an accent that proclaimed incredulity. “Was ’um a man or a woman?”

“Neither.”

“Neider! Den it muss ha’ been, – ha! maybe it war a mermaid!”

“What I saw looked like a boy, Snowball. O, now I think of it, like that boy.”

“What boy you ’peak ’bout?”

“He who was aboard the ship, – the English boy who was one of the sailors.”

“Ah! you mean de little Will’m, I ’pose. I reck’n dat ’ere lad hab gone to de bott’m ob de sea long afore dis, or else he get off on de big raff. I know he no go ’long wi’ de cappen, ’case I see de little chap close by de caboose after de gig row ’way. If he hab go by de raff dem ruffins sure eat him up, – dat be if dey get hungry. Dey sure do dat! Hark! what’s dat I heer? Sure’s my name be Snowball, I hear some ’un ’peak out dere to win’ard. D’you hear anything, lilly Lally?”

“Yes, Snowball: I think I did.”

“What you tink you?”

“A voice.”

“What sort o’ voice?”

“Like a boy’s voice, – just like *his*.”

“Who you mean?”

“The boy-sailor aboard the ship. O, listen! There it is again; and surely I hear another?”

“Gorramity! little gal, you ’peak de troof. Sure ’nuff dere am a voice, – two ob dat same. One am like de boy we ’peak ’bout, – odder more like a man o’ full groaf. I wonder who dey can be. Hope ’t an’t de ghoses of some o’ de *Pandoras* dat ha’ been drowned or eat up by de sharks. Lissen ’gain, Lally, an’ try make dem out.”

Having imparted this injunction, the negro raised himself into a half-erect attitude; and facing to windward with his arms resting upon one of the empty casks, – which, as already stated, formed a sort of circular parapet around his raft, – he remained silent and listening.

The little Lalee had also assumed a half-erect attitude; and, by the side of her sable companion, kept peering out into the darkness, – in the hope that another flash of lightning might again reveal to her eyes the features of that beautiful boy, who, alone of all upon that fated ship, had made upon her mind an impression worthy of being remembered.

Chapter Twenty One.

To the Oars

“We’ve got to die!”

As the sailor gave utterance to these words of fearful import, he started from his recumbent position, and, half-erect upon the raft, remained listening, – at the same time endeavouring with his glance to pierce the darkness that shrouded the surface of the deep.

Little William, terrified by the speech of his protector, made no rejoinder, but with like silence continued to look and listen.

There was nothing visible save sea and sky; and these, in the dim obscurity, were not to be distinguished from each other. A raft or boat, – even a large ship, – could not have been seen at two cables’ distance from that on which they were drifting along; and the only sounds now heard were the sighing of the night breeze, and the “swish” of the water as it swept along the sides of their slight embarkation.

For five minutes or more there was nothing to interrupt this duetto of winds and waves, and Ben was beginning to believe he had been mistaken. It might not have been the voice of a man, nor a voice at all. He was but half awake when he fancied hearing it. Was it only a fancy, – an illusion? It was at the best very indistinct, – as of some one speaking in a muttered tone. It might be the “blowing” of a porpoise, or the utterance of some unknown monster of the sea: for the sailor’s experience had taught him that there are many kinds of creatures inhabiting the ocean that are only seen at rare intervals even by one who is constantly traversing it, and many others one may never see at all. Could the sounds have proceeded from the throat of some of these human-like denizens of the deep, known as *dugongs*, *lamantins*, *manatees*, and the like?

It was strangest of all that William had heard the voice of a girl: for the lad still adhered to the belief that he had done so. That might have been the cry of a bird, or a mermaid; and Ben would have been ready enough to accept the latter explanation. But the voice of a young girl, coupled with that of a man, rendered the circumstance more mysterious and altogether inexplicable.

“Didn’t you hear a man’s voice, lad?” he asked at length, with a view either of dissipating his doubts or confirming them.

“I did,” replied the boy. “Yes, Ben; I’m sure I did, not loud, but muttered like. But I don’t know whether it was Le Gros. O, if it was!”

“Thee have good reason to know his ugly croak, the parleyvoo in’ scoundrel! That thee have, Will’m! Let’s hope we are both mistaken: for if we’re to come across them ruffins on the big raft, we needn’t expect mercy at their hands. By this time they’ll be all as hungry as the sharks and as ravenin’ too.”

“Oh!” exclaimed William, in accents of renewed fear, “I hope it’s not them!”

“Speak low, lad!” said the sailor, interrupting him, “only in whispers. If they be near, the best thing for us are to keep quiet. They can’t see us no more than we can them; anyhow, till it come mornin’. If we could hear the sound again so as to make out the direction. I didn’t notice that.”

“I did,” interrupted William. “Both the voices I heard were out this way.”

The boy pointed to leeward.

“To leuart, you think they wur?”

“I’m sure they came from that quarter.”

“That be curious, hows’ever,” said the sailor. “If’t be them on the big raft they must a passed us, or else the wind must a veered round, for we’ve been to leuart o’ them ever since partin’ wi’ ’em. Could the wind a gone round I wonder? Like enough. It be queer, – and it’s blowing from the west in this part o’ the Atlantic! ’Tan’t possible to say what point it be in, hows’ever, – not without a compass.

There bean't even the glimmer o' a star in the sky; and if there wur we couldn't make much o' it; since the north star bean't seen down in these latitudes. Thee be sure the sound come from leuart?"

"O, I am quite sure of it, Ben; the voices came up the wind."

"Then we'd best go the same way and gie 'em as wide a berth as possible. Look alive, lad! Let's down wi' them flitches o' the shark-meat: for it's them that's driftin' us along. We'll take a spell at the oars, and afore daylight we may get out o' hearin' o' the voices, and out of sight o' them as has been utterin' o' them."

Both rose simultaneously to their feet, and commenced taking down the slices of half-dried shark-flesh, and placing them upon the sail-cloth, – with the intention, as the sailor had counselled it, to unship the oars that had been doing duty as masts, and make use of them in their proper manner.

While engaged in this operation both remained silent, – at intervals stopping in their work to listen.

They had got so far as to clear away the suspended flitches, and were about unfastening the cords where they were looped around the upright oars, when another cord, attached to one of the latter, caught their attention. It was the piece of rope which closed the mouth of their tarpauling water-bag, and held the latter in such a position as to keep the "cask" from leaking.

Fortunately they were doing things in a deliberate manner. If they had been acting otherwise, and had rashly "unstepped" the mast to which that piece of rope was attached, their stock of fresh water would have been rapidly diminished, – perhaps altogether spilled into the salt sea, before they should have become aware of the disaster. As it was, they perceived the danger in good time; and, instead of taking down the oar, at once desisted from their intention.

It now became a question as to whether they should proceed any further in the design of rowing the raft to windward. With a single oar they could make but little way; and the other was already occupied in doing a duty from which it could not possibly be spared.

It is true there were still left the fragments of the hand spike that had been ground between the teeth of the surviving shark, and afterwards picked up as they drifted past it. This might serve instead of the oar to support the mouth of the water-bag; and as soon as this idea occurred to them they set about carrying it into execution.

It took but a few minutes of time to substitute one stick for the other; and then, both oars being free, they seated themselves on opposite sides of the raft, and commenced propelling it against the wind, – in a direction contrary to that in which the mysterious voices had been heard.

Chapter Twenty Two.

Ship Ahoy!

They had not made over a dozen strokes of their oars, – which they handled cautiously and in silence, all the while listening intently, – when their ears were again saluted by sounds similar to those first heard by little William, and which he had conjectured to be the voice of a young girl. As before, the utterance was very low, – murmured, as if repeating a series of words, – in fact, as if the speaker was engaged in a quiet conversation.

“Shiver my timbers!” exclaimed the sailor, as soon as the voice again ceased to be heard. “If that bean’t the palaver o’ a little girl, my name wur never Ben Brace on a ship’s book. A smalley wee thing she seem to be; not bigger than a marlinspike. It sound like as if she wur talkin’ to some un. What the Ole Scratch can it mean, Will’m?”

“I don’t know. Could it be a mermaid?”

“Could it? In course it could.”

“But are there mermaids, Ben?”

“Maremaids! Be theer maremaids? That what you say? Who denies there ain’t? Nobody but disbelevin land-lubbers as never seed nothin’ curious, ’ceptin’ two-headed calves and four-legged chickens. In coorse there be maremaids. I’ve seed some myself; but I’ve sailed with a shipmate as has been to a part o’ the Indyan Ocean, where there be whole schools o’ ’em, wi’ long hair hangin’ about their ears an’ over their shoulders, just like reg’lar schools o’ young girls goin’ out for a walk in the outskirts o’ Portsmouth or Gravesend. Hush! theer be her voice again!”

As the sailor ceased speaking, a tiny treble, such as might proceed from the tongue of a child, – a girl of some eight or ten years old, – came trembling over the waves, in tones that betokened a conversation.

A moment or two elapsed; and then, as if in reply to the words spoken by the child, was heard another voice, – evidently that of a man!

“If the one be a maremaid,” whispered Ben to his companion, “the other must be a mareman. Shiver my timbers, if it ain’t a curious confab! Moonrakers and skyscrapers! what can it mean?”

“I don’t know,” mechanically answered the boy.

“Anyhow,” continued the sailor, apparently relieved by the reflection, “*It ain’t the big raft*. There’s no voice like that little ’un among its crew o’ ruffins; and that man, whosomever he be, don’t speak like Le Gros. I only thought so at first, bein’ half asleep.

“If it be a school o’ maremaids,” pursued he, “theer an’t no danger, even wi’ theer men along wi’ ’em. Leastwise, I never heerd say there wur from maremaids more’n any other weemen; an’ not so much, I dare ay. Sartin it bean’t the Frenchman, nor any o’ that scoundrel crew. Lord o’ mercy! It might be a ship as is passing near us!”

As this thought occurred to the speaker, he raised himself into an erect attitude, as if to get a better view.

“I’ll hail, Will’m,” he muttered; “I’ll hail ’em. Keep your ears open, lad; and listen for the answer. *Ship ahoy!*”

The hail was sent in the direction whence the mysterious sounds appeared to have proceeded. There came no response; and the sailor, after listening attentively for a second or two, repeated the “Ship ahoy!” this time in a louder key.

Quick as an echo the words came back, though it could not be an echo. There are no echoes upon the ocean; besides, the voice that repeated the well-known phrase was quite different from that of him who had first pronounced it. Though different both in tone and accent, it was evidently a human voice; and, as evidently, that of a man. A rude, rough voice it was; but it is superfluous to

say that, to the ears of Ben Brace and his youthful companion, it sounded sweeter than any music to which they had ever listened. The words "Ship ahoy!" were soon succeeded by others, proceeding from the same lips.

"Gorramity!" spoke the strange voice, "who de debbil call dar? Dat some'dy in de boat? Dat you, Capten? Am it you, Massa Grow?"

"A negro," muttered Ben to his companion. "It's Snowball, the cook. It can't be anybody but him. In the name o' Neptune how has the darkey got there? What's he aboard o'? He warn't on the great raft wi' the rest. I thought he'd gone off in the captain's gig. If that wur so, then it's the boat that is near us."

"No," replied William, "I'm sure I saw Snowball by the caboose after the gig had rowed away. As he wasn't with them on the big raft, I supposed he'd been drowned, or burned up in the ship. Surely, it's his voice? There it is again!"

"Ship ahoy-hoy-hoy!" once more came the words pealing over the water in a loud prolonged drawl. "Ship ahoy, some'dy call out dar? What ship am dat? Am it a ship at all? Or am it some o' de wreck Pandoray?"

"Castaways," responded Ben. "Castaways of the bark *Pandora*, Who calls? Snowball! Be it you?"

"Dat same chile, – who am you? Am it you, massa Capten, – in de gig?"

"No."

"Massa Grow, den, on de big raff?"

"Neither," responded the sailor. "It's Ben, – Ben Brace."

"Golly! you say so, Massa Brace! How you be dar, unless you on de big raff?"

"I'm on a raft of my own. Have you one, Snowball?"

"Ya, massa Ben, ya! I make um out o' de wreck an de water-cask."

"Are ye all alone?"

"Not 'zackly dat. The pickaninny be long wi' me, – de cabing gal. You know de lilly Lalee?"

"Oh! she it be!" muttered Ben, now remembering the little cabin passenger of the *Pandora*. "You bean't movin', be you?"

"No," responded Snowball, "lying on de water like a log o' 'hogany wood. Han't move a mile ebba since de bustin' ob de powder ball."

"Keep your place then. We've got oars. We'll row down to you."

"We – you say we? You got some'dy sides yaself on dat raff?"

"Little Will'm."

"Lilly Willum, – ah? dat ere brave lilly lad. See 'im jess as I go down in de cabin fo' get de pickaninny. See 'im forrard with axe, – he knock off de gratin' ob de fore-hatch, – he set all dem 'ere niggas free. It warn't no use, – not bit good o' dem. Dey all got eat up by de shark, or dey go down straight to de bottom. Gorramity! how dey s'riek an' 'cream, an' jump overboard into de water!"

Neither the sailor nor Little William paid any heed to the negro's half-soliloquised narrative, further than to make use of his voice to guide them through the darkness towards the spot whence it proceeded. On discovering that it was Snowball who was near, both had turned upon their own craft, and were now rowing it in the opposite direction to that in which, but the moment before, they had been so eagerly propelling it.

As they now pulled to leeward, they had the wind in their favour; and by the time the negro arrived at the end of his disjointed narrative, they were within half a cable's length of him, and, through the darkness, were beginning to distinguish the outlines of the odd embarkation that carried Snowball and his *protégé*.

Just then the lightning blazed across the canopy of heaven, discovering the two rafts, – each to the other. In ten seconds more they were *en rapport*, and their respective crews congratulating each

other, with as much joyfulness as if the unexpected encounter had completely delivered them from death and its dangers!

Chapter Twenty Three.

The Rafts en Rapport

Two travellers meeting in the midst of a lone wilderness, even though strangers to each other, would not be likely to pass without speaking. If old acquaintances, then would they be certain to make the longest pause possible, and procrastinate their parting till the last moment allowed by the circumstances. If these circumstances would permit of their reaching their respective destinations by the same route, how sorry would each be to separate, and how happy to enter into a mutual alliance of co-operation and companionship!

Just like two such travellers, or two parties of travellers, meeting in the midst of the desert, – a wilderness of land, – so met, in the midst of the ocean, – the wilderness of water, – the two rafts whose history we have hitherto chronicled. Their crews were not strangers to each other, but old acquaintances. If not all friends in the past, the circumstances that now surrounded them were of a kind to make them friends for the future. Under the awe inspired by a common danger, the lion will lie down with the lamb, and the fierce jaguar consorts with the timid capivara no longer trembling at the perilous proximity.

But there was no particular antipathy between the crews of the two rafts thus singularly becoming united. It is true that formerly there had been some hostility displayed by the negro towards Little William, and but little friendship between the former and Ben Brace. These, however, were things of the past; and during the last days of their companionship on board the *Pandora* the sentiments of all three had undergone a change. An identity of interests had produced a certain three-cornered sympathy, – obliterating all past spite, and establishing, if not positive friendship, at least a sort of triangular forgiveness. Of course this affection was of the isosceles kind, – Ben and Little William being the *sides*, and Snowball the *base*. It is scarce necessary to say, that, meeting again under the circumstances described, all past spite, had there been any, would have been forgiven and forgotten.

Fortunately this had been already done. Between Ben and Snowball, and Snowball and Little William, the hatchet had been long ago buried; and they now met, not as enemies, but as old acquaintances, – almost as friends: nay, we might say, *altogether* as friends. If not so before, the common danger had made them so now, and amicably did they greet one another.

After such an encounter, it is superfluous to say that no thought of again separating entered into the minds of any of the party. The crews of both rafts knew that their destinations were identical.

Each was an *ocean waif*, seeking to escape from the wilderness of waters, – longing for deliverance from a common danger. In company they might have a better chance of obtaining it. Why should they separate to search for it?

The question did not occur to either, – in thought or in word. From the moment of their meeting, instinct told them that their destinies were the same, – that their action in future should be united.

After the two rafts had collided together, and those involuntary but joyful salutations were exchanged between their crews, the respective skippers became occupied with the more serious business of uniting the frail embarkations into one, and rendering them for the future inseparable.

“Snowball!” inquired the sailor, “have you got any spare rope?”

“Plenty o’ dat ’ere,” responded the ex-cook of the *Pandora*.

“Yar am a coil o’ strong sinnet. Dat do?”

“That’s the stuff,” responded Ben. “Heave it this way, ye son of a sea-cook! Heave!”

“Now,” continued he, laying hold of the coil of sennit, and tossing back one end over an empty water-cask. “Make fast there, Snowey! I dare say we can lay alongside safe enough till daylight! After that we’ll splice together in a better sort o’ way.”

The ex-cook, obedient to the injunctions of the seaman, seized hold of the end of rope thrown to him, and made it fast to one of the spars which comprised his singular craft; while at the same time Ben busied himself in tying the other end to the piece of handspike erected upon his own.

Soon each completed his task; and after some time spent in a mutual detail of the adventures that had befallen them since the hour of separation on the deck of the ill-fated Pandora, it was agreed that all should go to rest for the remainder of the night, and with the earliest light of day take measures to perpetuate the union of the two wandering waifs thus unexpectedly brought into companionship.

Chapter Twenty Four.

Reconstructing the Raft

The crews of both rafts were astir by early dawn, the sailor arousing one and all from their slumbers. The rising sun, as it shone over the ocean, fell upon four faces, all wearing a very different expression from that which they had exhibited at his setting on the day before. If not positively cheerful, there was at least hopefulness in their looks: for their renewed companionship had mutually inspired one and all with renewed hopes of deliverance. Indeed, it was evident even to the youngest of the party, that this unexpected union of strength would materially increase the chances of escape from the common danger; since the two strong men working together could do many things that would have been impossible to either of them alone, – to say nothing of the encouragement and confidence always springing from concerted action.

The very fact of their having come together in the way they had done seemed something more than accidental. It looked less like mere accident than that they had been favoured by the hand of Providence; and even the rude seaman, and the still ruder sea-cook, were only too glad to give way to the fancy that Providence was interfering on their behalf.

Certainly, the succession of fortunate events with which both had been favoured, – and which had not only hitherto sustained them, but promised to preserve their lives for a still longer period, – certainly, these circumstances were sufficient to beget the belief that they were specially under the protection of some power less capricious than mere chance.

The fact of their having encountered each other – even when one of them had been in the act of taking measures to avoid the encounter – was of itself something to strengthen this conviction, and increase their hopefulness for the future.

This very effect it produced; and it was for that reason that Ben Brace was so early astir, and so early in arousing the others.

The sailor had had too much experience in the capriciousness of the wind to believe that such calm weather as they had been enjoying for days would last much longer; and he had got up betimes with a view of uniting the two rafts, and strengthening the structure that might spring out of their union, so that it might resist whatever storm should threaten.

To attempt constructing a craft of such capability did not seem so hopeless to the skilful seaman. Before it had appeared so; but now, with the materials composing the two rafts, and others which the morning sun disclosed drifting about upon the surface of the sea, the thing looked less of an impossibility. In fact, it did not appear at all impossible; and for this reason Ben and the black at once came to the determination to attempt it.

After a short time spent in deliberation, it was resolved to break up the lesser raft, – that which had hitherto carried the sailor and little William. The planks composing it could be transferred to the larger and better structure which Snowball had got together; and this was furthermore to be reconstructed and considerably enlarged.

It was not designed to make any great alteration in the shape or fashion which Snowball had chosen for his craft, which displayed great ingenuity on the part of its designer. As it was deemed proper enough, his design was to be retained, – only the construction was to be on a larger scale.

Before setting to work, it was essential that something in the shape of a breakfast should be swallowed. This was drawn from the stores which Snowball had been engaged for days in accumulating, and consisted simply of biscuit and dried “bonito.”

In the absence of any fire, the ex-cook had no opportunity to exercise his peculiar vocation, else the meal might have been more palatable. The biscuits from having had a salt bath were a little

briny to the taste; but that signified little to such sharp appetites as they were called upon to satisfy; and it was not such a bad breakfast, when washed down, as it was, with a little *wine* and water.

You may be asking whence came the wine; and this was the very question which the sailor addressed to Snowball, on discovering such a commodity upon his craft.

The answer was easy enough. A small cask of “Canary” had been one of the items among the cabin stores. At the explosion it had been pitched into the sea; and not being quite full had freely floated on the surface. Snowball had taken possession of it by attaching it to his timbers.

Breakfast over, the work of reconstruction commenced. As a preliminary, the flitches of shark-meat were removed from the little raft, now doomed to destruction; while that ingenious contrivance of the sailor, – the canvas water-cask, – now no longer required, was emptied of its contents; which, with the greatest care, were decanted into the safe depository of one of the empty hogsheads that had been hitherto acting as supports to the embarkation of Snowball.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.