

Chapter XL.

It was written that there, in the nursery of our navigating ancestors, I should learn to walk in the ways of my craft and grow in the love of the sea, blind as young love often is, but absorbing and disinterested as all true love must be. I demanded nothing from it--not even adventure. In this I showed, perhaps, more intuitive wisdom than high self-denial. No adventure ever came to one for the asking. He who starts on a deliberate quest of adventure goes forth but to gather dead-sea fruit, unless, indeed, he be beloved of the gods and great amongst heroes, like that most excellent cavalier Don Quixote de la Mancha. By us ordinary mortals of a mediocre animus that is only too anxious to pass by wicked giants for so many honest windmills, adventures are entertained like visiting angels. They come upon our complacency unawares. As unbidden guests are apt to do, they often come at inconvenient times. And we are glad to let them go unrecognised, without any acknowledgment of so high a favour. After many years, on looking back from the middle turn of life's way at the events of the past, which, like a friendly crowd, seem to gaze sadly after us hastening towards the Cimmerian shore, we may see here and there, in the gray throng, some figure glowing with a faint radiance, as though it had caught all the light of our already crepuscular sky. And by this glow we may recognise the faces of our true adventures, of the once unbidden guests entertained unawares in our young days.

If the Mediterranean, the venerable (and sometimes atrociously ill-tempered) nurse of all navigators, was to rock my youth, the providing of the cradle necessary for that operation was entrusted by Fate to the most casual assemblage of irresponsible young men (all, however, older than myself) that, as if drunk with Provençal sunshine, frittered life away in joyous levity on the model of Balzac's "Histoire des Treize" qualified by a dash of romance de cape et d'épée.

She who was my cradle in those years had been built on the River of Savona by a famous builder of boats, was rigged in Corsica by another good man, and was described on her papers as a 'tartane' of sixty tons. In reality, she was a true balancelle, with two short masts raking forward and two curved yards, each as long as her hull; a true child of the Latin lake, with a spread of two enormous sails resembling the pointed wings on a sea-bird's slender body, and herself, like a bird indeed, skimming rather than sailing the seas.

Her name was the Tremolino. How is this to be translated? The Quiverer? What a name to give the pluckiest little craft that ever dipped her sides in angry foam! I

had felt her, it is true, trembling for nights and days together under my feet, but it was with the high-strung tenseness of her faithful courage. In her short, but brilliant, career she has taught me nothing, but she has given me everything. I owe to her the awakened love for the sea that, with the quivering of her swift little body and the humming of the wind under the foot of her lateen sails, stole into my heart with a sort of gentle violence, and brought my imagination under its despotic sway. The Tremolino! To this day I cannot utter or even write that name without a strange tightening of the breast and the gasp of mingled delight and dread of one's first passionate experience.