

CHAPTER III

A King For A Comrade

At the time I now write of, we must have been something more than sixty degrees to the west of the Gallipagos. And having attained a desirable longitude, we were standing northward for our arctic destination: around us one wide sea.

But due west, though distant a thousand miles, stretched north and south an almost endless Archipelago, here and there inhabited, but little known; and mostly unfrequented, even by whalers, who go almost every where. Beginning at the southerly termination of this great chain, it comprises the islands loosely known as Ellice's group; then, the Kingsmill isles; then, the Radack and Mulgrave clusters. These islands had been represented to me as mostly of coral formation, low and fertile, and abounding in a variety of fruits. The language of the people was said to be very similar to that of the Navigator's islands, from which, their ancestors are supposed to have emigrated.

And thus much being said, all has been related that I then knew of the islands in question. Enough, however, that they existed at all; and that our path thereto lay over a pleasant sea, and before a reliable Trade-wind. The distance, though great, was merely an extension of water; so much blankness to be sailed over; and in a

craft, too, that properly managed has been known to outlive great ships in a gale. For this much is true of a whale-boat, the cunningest thing in its way ever fabricated by man.

Upon one of the Kingsmill islands, then, I determined to plant my foot, come what come would. And I was equally determined that one of the ship's boats should float me thither. But I had no idea of being without a companion. It would be a weary watch to keep all by myself, with naught but the horizon in sight.

Now, among the crew was a fine old seaman, one Jarl; how old, no one could tell, not even himself. Forecastle chronology is ever vague and defective. "Man and boy," said honest Jarl, "I have lived ever since I can remember." And truly, who may call to mind when he was not? To ourselves, we all seem coeval with creation. Whence it comes, that it is so hard to die, ere the world itself is departed.

Jarl hailed from the isle of Skye, one of the constellated Hebrides. Hence, they often called him the Skyeman. And though he was far from being piratical of soul, he was yet an old Norseman to behold. His hands were brawny as the paws of a bear; his voice hoarse as a storm roaring round the old peak of Mull; and his long yellow hair waved round his head like a sunset. My life for it, Jarl, thy ancestors were Vikings, who many a time sailed over the salt German sea and the Baltic; who wedded their Brynhildas in Jutland; and are now quaffing mead in the halls of Valhalla, and beating time with their cans to

the hymns of the Scalds. Ah! how the old Sagas run through me!

Yet Jarl, the descendant of heroes and kings, was a lone, friendless mariner on the main, only true to his origin in the sea-life that he led. But so it has been, and forever will be. What yeoman shall swear that he is not descended from Alfred? what dunce, that he is not sprung of old Homer? King Noah, God bless him! fathered us all. Then hold up your heads, oh ye Helots, blood potential flows through your veins. All of us have monarchs and sages for kinsmen; nay, angels and archangels for cousins; since in antediluvian days, the sons of God did verily wed with our mothers, the irresistible daughters of Eve. Thus all generations are blended: and heaven and earth of one kin: the hierarchies of seraphs in the uttermost skies; the thrones and principalities in the zodiac; the shades that roam throughout space; the nations and families, flocks and folds of the earth; one

and all, brothers in essence--oh, be we then brothers indeed! All things form but one whole; the universe a Judea, and God Jehovah its head. Then no more let us start with affright. In a theocracy, what is to fear? Let us compose ourselves to death as fagged horsemen sleep in the saddle. Let us welcome even ghosts when they rise. Away with our stares and grimaces. The New Zealander's tattooing is not a prodigy; nor the Chinaman's ways an enigma. No custom is strange; no creed is absurd; no foe, but who will in the end prove a friend. In heaven, at last, our good, old, white-haired father Adam will greet all alike, and sociality forever prevail. Christian shall join hands

between Gentile and Jew; grim Dante forget his Infernos, and shake sides with fat Rabelais; and monk Luther, over a flagon of old nectar, talk over old times with Pope Leo. Then, shall we sit by the sages, who of yore gave laws to the Medes and Persians in the sun; by the cavalry captains in Perseus, who cried, "To horse!" when waked by their Last Trump sounding to the charge; by the old hunters, who eternities ago, hunted the moose in Orion; by the minstrels, who sang in the Milky Way when Jesus our Saviour was born. Then shall we list to no shallow gossip of Magellans and Drakes; but give ear to the voyagers who have circumnavigated the Ecliptic; who rounded the Polar Star as Cape Horn. Then shall the Stagirite and Kant be forgotten, and another folio than theirs be turned over for wisdom; even the folio now spread with horoscopes as yet undeciphered, the heaven of heavens on high.

Now, in old Jarl's lingo there was never an idiom. Your aboriginal tar is too much of a cosmopolitan for that. Long companionship with seamen of all tribes: Manilla-men, Anglo-Saxons, Cholos, Lascars, and Danes, wear away in good time all mother-tongue stammerings. You sink your clan; down goes your nation; you speak a world's language, jovially jabbering in the Lingua-Franca of the forecastle.

True to his calling, the Skyeman was very illiterate; witless of Salamanca, Heidelberg, or Brazen-Nose; in Delhi, had never turned over the books of the Brahmins. For geography, in which sailors should be adepts, since they are forever turning over and over the

great globe of globes, poor Jarl was deplorably lacking. According to his view of the matter, this terraqueous world had been formed in the manner of a tart; the land being a mere marginal crust, within which rolled the watery world proper. Such seemed my good Viking's theory of cosmography. As for other worlds, he weened not of them; yet full as much as Chrysostom.

Ah, Jarl! an honest, earnest Wight; so true and simple, that the secret operations of thy soul were more inscrutable than the subtle workings of Spinoza's.

Thus much be said of the Skyeman; for he was exceedingly taciturn, and but seldom will speak for himself.

Now, higher sympathies apart, for Jarl I had a wonderful liking; for he loved me; from the first had cleaved to me.

It is sometimes the case, that an old mariner like him will conceive a very strong attachment for some young sailor, his shipmate; an attachment so devoted, as to be wholly inexplicable, unless originating in that heart-loneliness which overtakes most seamen as they grow aged; impelling them to fasten upon some chance object of regard. But however it was, my Viking, thy unbidden affection was the noblest homage ever paid me. And frankly, I am more inclined to think well of myself, as in some way deserving thy devotion, than from the rounded compliments of more cultivated minds.

Now, at sea, and in the fellowship of sailors, all men appear as they are. No school like a ship for studying human nature. The contact of one man with another is too near and constant to favor deceit. You wear your character as loosely as your flowing trowsers. Vain all endeavors to assume qualities not yours; or to conceal those you possess. Incognitos, however desirable, are out of the question. And thus aboard of all ships in which I have sailed, I have invariably been known by a sort of thawing-room title. Not,--let me hurry to say,--that I put hand in tar bucket with a squeamish air, or ascended the rigging with a Chesterfieldian mince. No, no, I was never better than my vocation; and mine have been many. I showed as brown a chest, and as hard a hand, as the tarriest tar of them all. And never did shipmate of mine upbraid me with a genteel disinclination to duty, though it carried me to truck of main-mast, or jib-boom-end, in the most wolfish blast that ever howled.

Whence then, this annoying appellation? for annoying it most assuredly was. It was because of something in me that could not be hidden; stealing out in an occasional polysyllable; an otherwise incomprehensible deliberation in dining; remote, unguarded allusions to Belles-Lettres affairs; and other trifles superfluous to mention.

But suffice it to say, that it had gone abroad among the Areturion's crew, that at some indefinite period of my career, I had been a "nob." But Jarl seemed to go further. He must have taken me for one

of the House of Hanover in disguise; or, haply, for bonneted Charles Edward the Pretender, who, like the Wandering Jew, may yet be a vagrant. At any rate, his loyalty was extreme. Unsolicited, he was my laundress and tailor; a most expert one, too; and when at meal-times my turn came round to look out at the mast-head, or stand at the wheel, he catered for me among the "kids" in the fore-castle with unwearied assiduity. Many's the good lump of "duff" for which I was indebted to my good Viking's good care of me. And like Sesostris I was served by a monarch. Yet in some degree the obligation was mutual. For be it known that, in sea-parlance, we were chummies.

Now this chummying among sailors is like the brotherhood subsisting between a brace of collegians (chums) rooming together. It is a Fidus-Achates-ship, a league of offense and defense, a copartnership of chests and toilets, a bond of love and good feeling, and a mutual championship of the absent one. True, my nautical reminiscences remind me of sundry lazy, ne'er-do-well, unprofitable, and abominable chummies; chummies, who at meal times were last at the "kids," when their unfortunate partners were high upon the spars; chummies, who affected awkwardness at the needle, and conscientious scruples about dabbling in the suds; so that chummy the simple was made to do all the work of the firm, while chummy the cunning played the sleeping partner in his hammock. Out upon such chummies!

But I appeal to thee, honest Jarl, if I was ever chummy the cunning. Never mind if thou didst fabricate my tarpaulins; and with Samaritan

charity bind up the rents, and pour needle and thread into the frightful gashes that agonized my hapless nether integuments, which thou calledst "ducks;"--Didst thou not expressly declare, that all these things, and more, thou wouldst do for me, despite my own quaint thimble, fashioned from the ivory tusk of a whale? Nay; could I even wrest from thy willful hands my very shirt, when once thou hadst it steaming in an unsavory pickle in thy capacious vat, a decapitated cask? Full well thou knowest, Jarl, that these things are true; and I am bound to say it, to disclaim any lurking desire to reap advantage from thy great good nature.

Now my Viking for me, thought I, when I cast about for a comrade; and my Viking alone.