

## CHAPTER IX

### The Watery World Is All Before Them

At sea in an open boat, and a thousand miles from land!

Shortly after the break of day, in the gray transparent light, a speck to windward broke the even line of the horizon. It was the ship wending her way north-eastward.

Had I not known the final indifference of sailors to such disasters as that which the Arcturion's crew must have imputed to the night past (did not the skipper suspect the truth) I would have regarded that little speck with many compunctions of conscience. Nor, as it was, did I feel in any very serene humor. For the consciousness of being deemed dead, is next to the presumable unpleasantness of being so in reality. One feels like his own ghost unlawfully tenanting a defunct carcass. Even Jarl's glance seemed so queer, that I begged him to look another way.

Secure now from all efforts of the captain to recover those whom he most probably supposed lost; and equally cut off from all hope of returning to the ship even had we felt so inclined; the resolution that had thus far nerved me, began to succumb in a measure to the awful loneliness of the scene. Ere this, I had regarded the ocean as a slave, the steed that bore me whither I listed, and whose vicious

propensities, mighty though they were, often proved harmless, when opposed to the genius of man. But now, how changed! In our frail boat, I would fain have built an altar to Neptune.

What a mere toy we were to the billows, that jeeringly shouldered us from crest to crest, as from hand to hand lost souls may be tossed along by the chain of shades which enfilade the route to Tartarus.

But drown or swim, here's overboard with care! Cheer up, Jar!! Ha! Ha! how merrily, yet terribly, we sail! Up, up--slowly up--toiling up the long, calm wave; then balanced on its summit a while, like a plank on a rail; and down, we plunge headlong into the seething abyss, till arrested, we glide upward again. And thus did we go. Now buried in watery hollows--our sail idly flapping; then lifted aloft--canvas bellying; and beholding the furthest horizon.

Had not our familiarity with the business of whaling divested our craft's wild motions of its first novel horrors, we had been but a rueful pair. But day-long pulls after whales, the ship left miles astern; and entire dark nights passed moored to the monsters, killed too late to be towed to the ship far to leeward:--all this, and much more, accustoms one to strange things. Death, to be sure, has a mouth as black as a wolf's, and to be thrust into his jaws is a serious thing. But true it most certainly is--and I speak from no hearsay--that to sailors, as a class, the grisly king seems not half so hideous as he appears to those who have only regarded him on shore,

and at a deferential distance. Like many ugly mortals, his features grow less frightful upon acquaintance; and met over often and sociably, the old adage holds true, about familiarity breeding contempt. Thus too with soldiers. Of the quaking recruit, three pitched battles make a grim grenadier; and he who shrank from the muzzle of a cannon, is now ready to yield his mustache for a sponge.

And truly, since death is the last enemy of all, valiant souls will taunt him while they may. Yet rather, should the wise regard him as the inflexible friend, who, even against our own wills, from life's evils triumphantly relieves us.

And there is but little difference in the manner of dying. To die, is all. And death has been gallantly encountered by those who never beheld blood that was red, only its light azure seen through the veins. And to yield the ghost proudly, and march out of your fortress with all the honors of war, is not a thing of sinew and bone. Though in prison, Geoffry Hudson, the dwarf, died more bravely than Goliath, the giant; and the last end of a butterfly shames us all. Some women have lived nobler lives, and died nobler deaths, than men. Threatened with the stake, mitred Cranmer recanted; but through her fortitude, the lorn widow of Edessa stayed the tide of Valens' persecutions. 'Tis no great valor to perish sword in hand, and bravado on lip; cased all in panoply complete. For even the alligator dies in his mail, and the swordfish never surrenders. To expire, mild-eyed, in one's bed, transcends the death of Epaminondas.