

CHAPTER X

They Arrange Their Canopies And Lounges, And Try To Make Things Comfortable

Our little craft was soon in good order. From the spare rigging brought along, we made shrouds to the mast, and converted the boat-hook into a handy boom for the jib. Going large before the wind, we set this sail wing-and-wing with the main-sail. The latter, in accordance with the customary rig of whale-boats, was worked with a sprit and sheet. It could be furled or set in an instant. The bags of bread we stowed away in the covered space about the loggerhead, a useless appurtenance now, and therefore removed. At night, Jarl used it for a pillow; saying, that when the boat rolled it gave easy play to his head. The precious breaker we lashed firmly amidships; thereby much improving our sailing.

Now, previous to leaving the ship, we had seen to it well, that our craft was supplied with all those equipments, with which, by the regulations of the fishery, a whale-boat is constantly provided: night and day, afloat or suspended. Hanging along our gunwales inside, were six harpoons, three lances, and a blubber-spade; all keen as razors, and sheathed with leather. Besides these, we had three waifs, a couple of two-gallon water-kegs, several bailers, the boat-hatchet for cutting the whale-line, two auxiliary knives for the like purpose, and several minor articles, also employed in hunting

the leviathan. The line and line-tub, however, were on ship-board.

And here it may be mentioned, that to prevent the strain upon the boat when suspended to the ship's side, the heavy whale-line, over two hundred fathoms in length, and something more than an inch in diameter, when not in use is kept on ship-board, coiled away like an endless snake in its tub. But this tub is always in readiness to be launched into the boat. Now, having no use for the line belonging to our craft, we had purposely left it behind.

But well had we marked that by far the most important item of a whale-boat's furniture was snugly secured in its place. This was the water-tight keg, at both ends firmly headed, containing a small compass, tinder-box and flint, candles, and a score or two of biscuit. This keg is an invariable precaution against what so frequently occurs in pursuing the sperm whale--prolonged absence from the ship, losing sight of her, or never seeing her more, till years after you reach home again. In this same keg of ours seemed coopered up life and death, at least so seemed it to honest Jarl. No sooner had we got clear from the Arcturion, than dropping his oar for an instant, he clutched at it in the dark.

And when day at last came, we knocked out the head of the keg with the little hammer and chisel, always attached to it for that purpose, and removed the compass, that glistened to us like a human eye. Then filling up the vacancy with biscuit, we again made all tight, driving

down the hoops till they would budge no more.

At first we were puzzled to fix our compass. But at last the Skyeman
out knife, and cutting a round hole in the after-most thwart, or seat
of the boat, there inserted the little brass case containing the
needle.

Over the stern of the boat, with some old canvas which my Viking's
forethought had provided, we spread a rude sort of awning, or rather
counterpane. This, however, proved but little or no protection from
the glare of the sun; for the management of the main-sail forbade any
considerable elevation of the shelter. And when the breeze was fresh,
we were fain to strike it altogether; for the wind being from
aft, and getting underneath the canvas, almost lifted the light
boat's stem into the air, vexing the counterpane as if it were a
petticoat turning a gusty corner. But when a mere breath rippled the
sea, and the sun was fiery hot, it was most pleasant to lounge in
this shady asylum. It was like being transferred from the roast to
cool in the cupboard. And Jarl, much the toughest fowl of the two,
out of an abundant kindness for his comrade, during the day
voluntarily remained exposed at the helm, almost two hours to my one.
No lady-like scruples had he, the old Viking, about marring his
complexion, which already was more than bronzed. Over the ordinary
tanning of the sailor, he seemed masked by a visor of japanning,
dotted all over with freckles, so intensely yellow, and symmetrically
circular, that they seemed scorched there by a burning glass.

In the tragico-comico moods which at times overtook me, I used to look upon the brown Skyeman with humorous complacency. If we fall in with cannibals, thought I, then, ready-roasted Norseman that thou art, shall I survive to mourn thee; at least, during the period I revolve upon the spit.

But of such a fate, it needs hardly be said, we had no apprehension.