

## CHAPTER XII

### More About Being In An Open Boat

On the third morning, at break of day, I sat at the steering oar, an hour or two previous having relieved Jarl, now fast asleep. Somehow, and suddenly, a sense of peril so intense, came over me, that it could hardly have been aggravated by the completest solitude.

On a ship's deck, the mere feeling of elevation above the water, and the reach of prospect you command, impart a degree of confidence which disposes you to exult in your fancied security. But in an open boat, brought down to the very plane of the sea, this feeling almost wholly deserts you. Unless the waves, in their gambols, toss you and your chip upon one of their lordly crests, your sphere of vision is little larger than it would be at the bottom of a well. At best, your most extended view in any one direction, at least, is in a high, slow-rolling sea; when you descend into the dark, misty spaces, between long and uniform swells. Then, for the moment, it is like looking up and down in a twilight glade, interminable; where two dawns, one on each hand, seem struggling through the semi-transparent tops of the fluid mountains.

But, lingering not long in those silent vales, from watery cliff to cliff, a sea-chamois, sprang our solitary craft,--a goat among the Alps!

How undulated the horizon; like a vast serpent with ten thousand folds coiled all round the globe; yet so nigh, apparently, that it seemed as if one's hand might touch it.

What loneliness; when the sun rose, and spurred up the heavens, we hailed him as a wayfarer in Sahara the sight of a distant horseman. Save ourselves, the sun and the Chamois seemed all that was left of life in the universe. We yearned toward its jocund disk, as in strange lands the traveler joyfully greets a face from home, which there had passed unheeded. And was not the sun a fellow-voyager? were we not both wending westward? But how soon he daily overtook and passed us; hurrying to his journey's end.

When a week had gone by, sailing steadily on, by day and by night, and nothing in sight but this self-same sea, what wonder if disquieting thoughts at last entered our hearts? If unknowingly we should pass the spot where, according to our reckoning, our islands lay, upon what shoreless sea would we launch? At times, these forebodings bewildered my idea of the positions of the groups beyond. All became vague and confused; so that westward of the Kingsmil isles and the Radack chain, I fancied there could be naught but an endless sea.