

CHAPTER XIV

Jarl's Misgivings

About this time an event took place. My good Viking opened his mouth, and spoke. The prodigy occurred, as, jackknife in hand, he was bending over the midship oar; on the loom, or handle, of which he kept our almanac; making a notch for every set sun. For some forty-eight hours past, the wind had been light and variable. It was more than suspected that a current was sweeping us northward.

Now, marking these things, Jarl threw out the thought, that the more wind, and the less current, the better; and if a long calm came on, of which there was some prospect, we had better take to our oars.

Take to our oars! as if we were crossing a ferry, and no ocean leagues to traverse. The idea indirectly suggested all possible horrors. To be rid of them forthwith, I proceeded to dole out our morning meal. For to make away with such things, there is nothing better than bolting something down on top of them; albeit, oft repeated, the plan is very apt to beget dyspepsia; and the dyspepsia the blues.

But what of our store of provisions? So far as enough to eat was concerned, we felt not the slightest apprehension; our supplies proving more abundant than we had anticipated. But, curious to tell,

we felt but little inclination for food. It was water, bright water, cool, sparkling water, alone, that we craved. And of this, also, our store at first seemed ample. But as our voyage lengthened, and breezes blew faint, and calms fell fast, the idea of being deprived of the precious fluid grew into something little short of a monomania; especially with Jarl.

Every hour or two with the hammer and chisel belonging to the tinder box keg, he tinkered away at the invaluable breaker; driving down the hoops, till in his over solicitude, I thought he would burst them outright.

Now the breaker lay on its bilge, in the middle of the boat, where more or less sea-water always collected. And ever and anon, dipping his finger therein, my Viking was troubled with the thought, that this sea-water tasted less brackish than that alongside. Of course the breaker must be leaking. So, he would turn it over, till its wet side came uppermost; when it would quickly become dry as a bone. But now, with his knife, he would gently probe the joints of the staves; shake his head; look up; look down; taste of the water in the bottom of the boat; then that of the sea; then lift one end of the breaker; going through with every test of leakage he could dream of. Nor was he ever fully satisfied, that the breaker was in all respects sound. But in reality it was tight as the drum-heads that beat at Cerro-Gordo. Oh! Jarl, Jarl: to me in the boat's quiet stern, steering and philosophizing at one time and the same, thou and thy breaker were a

study.

Besides the breaker, we had, full of water, the two boat-kegs, previously alluded to. These were first used. We drank from them by their leaden spouts; so many swallows three times in the day; having no other means of measuring an allowance. But when we came to the breaker, which had only a bung-hole, though a very large one, dog-like, it was so many laps apiece; jealously counted by the observer. This plan, however, was only good for a single day; the water then getting beyond the reach of the tongue. We therefore daily poured from the breaker into one of the kegs; and drank from its spout. But to obviate the absorption inseparable from decanting, we at last hit upon something better,--my comrade's shoe, which, deprived of its quarters, narrowed at the heel, and diligently rinsed out in the sea, was converted into a handy but rather limber ladle. This we kept suspended in the bung-hole of the breaker, that it might never twice absorb the water.

Now pewter imparts flavor to ale; a Meerschaum bowl, the same to the tobacco of Smyrna; and goggle green glasses are deemed indispensable to the bibbing of Hock. What then shall be said of a leathern goblet for water? Try it, ye mariners who list.

One morning, taking his wonted draught, Jarl fished up in his ladle a deceased insect; something like a Daddy-long-legs, only more corpulent. Its fate? A sea-toss? Believe it not; with all those

precious drops clinging to its lengthy legs. It was held over the ladle till the last globule dribbled; and even then, being moist, honest Jarl was but loth to drop it overboard.

For our larder, we could not endure the salt beef; it was raw as a live Abyssinian steak, and salt as Cracow. Besides, the Feegee simile would not have held good with respect to it. It was far from being "tender as a dead man." The biscuit only could we eat; not to be wondered at; for even on shipboard, seamen in the tropics are but sparing feeders.

And here let not, a suggestion be omitted, most valuable to any future castaway or sailaway as the case may be. Eat not your biscuit dry; but dip it in the sea: which makes it more bulky and palatable. During meal times it was soak and sip with Jarl and me: one on each side of the Chamois dipping our biscuit in the brine. This plan obviated finger-glasses at the conclusion of our repast. Upon the whole, dwelling upon the water is not so bad after all. The Chinese are no fools. In the operation of making your toilet, how handy to float in your ewer!