

## CHAPTER XV

### A Stitch In Time Saves Nine

Like most silent earnest sort of people, my good Viking was a pattern of industry. When in the boats after whales, I have known him carry along a roll of sennet to stitch into a hat. And the boats lying motionless for half an hour or so, waiting the rising of the chase, his fingers would be plying at their task, like an old lady knitting. Like an experienced old-wife too, his digits had become so expert and conscientious, that his eyes left them alone; deeming optic supervision unnecessary. And on this trip of ours, when not otherwise engaged, he was quite as busy with his fingers as ever: unraveling old Cape Horn hose, for yarn wherewith to darn our woolen frocks; with great patches from the skirts of a condemned reefing jacket, panneling the seats of our "ducks;" in short, veneering our broken garments with all manner of choice old broadcloths.

With the true forethought of an old tar, he had brought along with him nearly the whole contents of his chest. His precious "Ditty Bag," containing his sewing utensils, had been carefully packed away in the bottom of one of his bundles; of which he had as many as an old maid on her travels. In truth, an old salt is very much of an old maid, though, strictly speaking, far from deserving that misdeemed appellation. Better be an old maid, a woman with herself for a husband, than the wife of a fool; and Solomon more than hints that

all men are fools; and every wise man knows himself to be one. When playing the sempstress, Jarl's favorite perch was the triangular little platform in the bow; which being the driest and most elevated part of the boat, was best adapted to his purpose. Here for hours and hours together the honest old tailor would sit darning and sewing away, heedless of the wide ocean around; while forever, his slouched Guayaquil hat kept bobbing up and down against the horizon before us.

It was a most solemn avocation with him. Silently he nodded like the still statue in the opera of Don Juan. Indeed he never spoke, unless to give pithy utterance to the wisdom of keeping one's wardrobe in repair. But herein my Viking at times waxed oracular. And many's the hour we glided along, myself deeply pondering in the stem, hand upon helm; while crosslegged at the other end of the boat Jarl laid down patch upon patch, and at long intervals precept upon precept; here several saws, and there innumerable stitches.