

## CHAPTER XVII

### In High Spirits, They Push On For The Terra Incognita

There were now fourteen notches on the loom of the Skyeman's oar:--So many days since we had pushed from the fore-chains of the Arcturion. But as yet, no floating bough, no tern, noddy, nor reef-bird, to denote our proximity to land. In that long calm, whither might not the currents have swept us?

Where we were precisely, we knew not; but according to our reckoning, the loose estimation of the knots run every hour, we must have sailed due west but little more than one hundred and fifty leagues; for the most part having encountered but light winds, and frequent intermitting calms, besides that prolonged one described. But spite of past calms and currents, land there must be to the westward. Sun, compass, stout hearts, and steady breezes, pointed our prow thereto. So courage! my Viking, and never say drown!

At this time, our hearts were much lightened by discovering that our water was improving in taste. It seemed to have been undergoing anew that sort of fermentation, or working, occasionally incident to ship water shortly after being taken on board. Sometimes, for a period, it is more or less offensive to taste and smell; again, however, becoming comparatively limpid.

But as our water improved, we grew more and more miserly of so priceless a treasure.

And here it may be well to make mention of another little circumstance, however unsentimental. Thorough-paced tar that he was, my Viking was an inordinate consumer of the Indian weed. From the Arcturion, he had brought along with him a small half-keg, at bottom impacted with a solitary layer of sable Negrohead, fossil-marked, like the primary stratum of the geologists. It was the last tier of his abundant supply for the long whaling voyage upon which he had embarked upwards of three years previous. Now during the calm, and for some days after, poor Jarl's accustomed quid was no longer agreeable company. To pun: he eschewed his chew. I asked him wherefore. He replied that it puckered up his mouth, above all provoked thirst, and had somehow grown every way distasteful. I was sorry; for the absence of his before ever present wad impaired what little fullness there was left in his cheek; though, sooth to say, I no longer called upon him as of yore to shift over the enormous morsel to starboard or larboard, and so trim our craft.

The calm gone by, once again my sea-tailor plied needle and thread; or turning laundress, hung our raiment to dry on oars peaked obliquely in the thole-pins. All of which tattered pennons, the wind being astern, helped us gayly on our way; as jolly poor devils, with rags flying in the breeze, sail blithely through life; and are merry although they are poor!