

CHAPTER XXI

Man Ho!

Slowly, fitfully, broke the morning in the East, showing the desolate brig forging heavily through the water, which sluggishly thumped under her bows. While leaping from sea to sea, our faithful Chamois, like a faithful dog, still gamboled alongside, confined to the main-chains by its painter. At times, it would long lag behind; then, pushed by a wave like lightning dash forward; till bridled by its leash, it again fell in rear.

As the gray light came on, anxiously we scrutinized the features of the craft, as one by one they became more plainly revealed. Every thing seemed stranger now, than when partially visible in the dingy night. The stanchions, or posts of the bulwarks, were of rough stakes, still incased in the bark. The unpainted sides were of a dark-colored, heathenish looking wood. The tiller was a wry-necked, elbowed bough, thrusting itself through the deck, as if the tree itself was fast rooted in the hold. The binnacle, containing the compass, was defended at the sides by yellow matting. The rigging--shrouds, halyards and all--was of "Kaiar," or cocoa-nut fibres; and here and there the sails were patched with plaited rushes.

But this was not all. Whoso will pry, must needs light upon matters for suspicion. Glancing over the side, in the wake of every scupper-

hole, we beheld a faded, crimson stain, which Jarl averred to be blood. Though now he betrayed not the slightest trepidation; for what he saw pertained not to ghosts; and all his fears hitherto had been of the super-natural.

Indeed, plucking up a heart, with the dawn of the day my Viking looked bold as a lion; and soon, with the instinct of an old seaman cast his eyes up aloft.

Directly, he touched my arm,--"Look: what stirs in the main-top?"

Sure enough, something alive was there.

Fingering our arms, we watched it; till as the day came on, a crouching stranger was beheld.

Presenting my piece, I hailed him to descend or be shot. There was silence for a space, when the black barrel of a musket was thrust forth, leveled at my head. Instantly, Jarl's harpoon was presented at a dart;--two to one;--and my hail was repeated. But no reply.

"Who are you?"

"Samoa," at length said a clear, firm voice.

"Come down from the rigging. We are friends."

Another pause; when, rising to his feet, the stranger slowly descended, holding on by one hand to the rigging, for but one did he have; his musket partly slung from his back, and partly griped under the stump of his mutilated arm.

He alighted about six paces from where we stood; and balancing his weapon, eyed us bravely as the Cid.

He was a tall, dark Islander, a very devil to behold, theatrically arrayed in kilt and turban; the kilt of a gay calico print, the turban of a red China silk. His neck was jingling with strings of beads.

"Who else is on board?" I asked; while Jarl, thus far covering the stranger with his weapon, now dropped it to the deck.

"Look there!--Annatoo!" was his reply in broken English, pointing aloft to the fore-top. And lo! a woman, also an Islander; and barring her skirts, dressed very much like Samoa, was beheld descending.

"Any more?"

"No more."

"Who are you then; and what craft is this?"

"Ah, ah--you are no ghost;--but are you my friend?" he cried, advancing nearer as he spoke; while the woman having gained the deck, also approached, eagerly glancing.

We said we were friends; that we meant no harm; but desired to know what craft this was; and what disaster had befallen her; for that something untoward had occurred, we were certain.

Whereunto, Samoa made answer, that it was true that something dreadful had happened; and that he would gladly tell us all, and tell us the truth. And about it he went.

Now, this story of his was related in the mixed phraseology of a Polynesian sailor. With a few random reflections, in substance, it will be found in the six following chapters.