

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### How They Steered On Their Way

When we quitted the Chamois for the brigantine, we must have been at least two hundred leagues to the westward of the spot, where we had abandoned the Arcturion. Though how far we might then have been, North or South of the Equator, I could not with any certainty divine.

But that we were not removed any considerable distance from the Line, seemed obvious. For in the starriest night no sign of the extreme Polar constellations was visible; though often we scanned the northern and southern horizon in search of them. So far as regards the aspect of the skies near the ocean's rim, the difference of several degrees in one's latitude at sea, is readily perceived by a person long accustomed to surveying the heavens.

If correct in my supposition, concerning our longitude at the time here alluded to, and allowing for what little progress we had been making in the Parki, there now remained some one hundred leagues to sail, ere the country we sought would be found. But for obvious reasons, how long precisely we might continue to float out of sight of land, it was impossible to say. Calms, light breezes, and currents made every thing uncertain. Nor had we any method of estimating our due westward progress, except by what is called Dead Reckoning,--the computation of the knots run hourly; allowances' being made for the

supposed deviations from our course, by reason of the ocean streams; which at times in this quarter of the Pacific rim with very great velocity.

Now, in many respects we could not but feel safer aboard the Parki than in the Chamois. The sense of danger is less vivid, the greater the number of lives involved. He who is ready to despair in solitary peril, plucks up a heart in the presence of another. In a plurality of comrades is much countenance and consolation.

Still, in the brigantine there were many sources of uneasiness and anxiety unknown to me in the whale-boat. True, we had now between us and the deep, five hundred good planks to one lath in our buoyant little chip. But the Parki required more care and attention; especially by night, when a vigilant look-out was indispensable. With impunity, in our whale-boat, we might have run close to shoal or reef; whereas, similar carelessness or temerity now, might prove fatal to all concerned.

Though in the joyous sunlight, sailing through the sparkling sea, I was little troubled with serious misgivings; in the hours of darkness it was quite another thing. And the apprehensions, nay terrors I felt, were much augmented by the remissness of both Jarl and Samoa, in keeping their night-watches. Several times I was seized with a deadly panic, and earnestly scanned the murky horizon, when rising from slumber I found the steersman, in whose hands for the time being

were life and death, sleeping upright against the tiller, as much of a fixture there, as the open-mouthed dragon rudely carved on our prow.

Were it not, that on board of other vessels, I myself had many a time dozed at the helm, spite of all struggles, I would have been almost at a loss to account for this heedlessness in my comrades. But it seemed as if the mere sense of our situation, should have been sufficient to prevent the like conduct in all on board our craft.

Samoa's aspect, sleeping at the tiller, was almost appalling. His large opal eyes were half open; and turned toward the light of the binnacle, gleamed between the lids like bars of flame. And added to all, was his giant stature and savage lineaments.

It was in vain, that I remonstrated, begged, or threatened: the occasional drowsiness of my fellow-voyagers proved incurable. To no purpose, I reminded my Viking that sleeping in the night-watch in a craft like ours, was far different from similar heedlessness on board the Arcturion. For there, our place upon the ocean was always known, and our distance from land; so that when by night the seamen were permitted to be drowsy, it was mostly, because the captain well knew that strict watchfulness could be dispensed with.

Though in all else, the Skyeman proved a most faithful ally, in this one thing he was either perversely obtuse, or infatuated. Or, perhaps, finding himself once more in a double-decked craft, which

rocked him as of yore, he was lulled into a deceitful security.

For Samoa, his drowsiness was the drowsiness of one beat on sleep, come dreams or death. He seemed insensible to the peril we ran. Often I sent the sleepy savage below, and, steering myself till morning, at last I made a point of slumbering much by day, the better to stand watch by night; though I made Samoa and Jarl regularly go through with their allotted four hours each.

It has been mentioned, that Annatoo took her turn at the helm; but it was only by day. And in justice to the lady, I must affirm, that upon the whole she acquitted herself well. For notwithstanding the syren face in the binnacle, which dimly allured her glances, Annatoo after all was tolerably heedful of her steering. Indeed she took much pride therein; always ready for her turn; with marvelous exactitude calculating the approaching hour, as it came on in regular rotation. Her time-piece was ours, the sun. By night it must have been her guardian star; for frequently she gazed up at a particular section of the heavens, like one regarding the dial in a tower.

By some odd reasoning or other, she had cajoled herself into the notion, that whoever steered the brigantine, for that period was captain. Wherefore, she gave herself mighty airs at the tiller; with extravagant gestures issuing unintelligible orders about trimming the sails, or pitching overboard something to see how fast we were going. All this much diverted my Viking, who several times

was delivered of a laugh; a loud and healthy one to boot: a phenomenon worthy the chronicling.

And thus much for Annatoo, preliminary to what is further to be said. Seeing the drowsiness of Jarl and Samoa, which so often kept me from my hammock at night, forcing me to repose by day, when I far preferred being broad awake, I decided to let Annatoo take her turn at the night watches; which several times she had solicited me to do; railing at the sleepiness of her spouse; though abstaining from all reflections upon Jarl, toward whom she had of late grown exceedingly friendly.

Now the Calmuc stood her first night watch to admiration; if any thing, was altogether too wakeful. The mere steering of the craft employed not sufficiently her active mind. Ever and anon she must needs rush from the tiller to take a parenthetical pull at the fore-brace, the end of which led down to the bulwarks near by; then refreshing herself with a draught or two of water and a biscuit, she would continue to steer away, full of the importance of her office. At any unusual flapping of the sails, a violent stamping on deck announced the fact to the startled crew. Finding her thus indefatigable, I readily induced her to stand two watches to Jarl's and Samoa's one; and when she was at the helm, I permitted myself to doze on a pile of old sails, spread every evening on the quarter-deck.

It was the Skyeman, who often admonished me to "heave the ship to"

every night, thus stopping her headway till morning; a plan which, under other circumstances, might have perhaps warranted the slumbers of all. But as it was, such a course would have been highly imprudent. For while making no onward progress through the water, the rapid currents we encountered would continually be drifting us eastward; since, contrary to our previous experience, they seemed latterly to have reversed their flow, a phenomenon by no means unusual in the vicinity of the Line in the Pacific. And this it was that so prolonged our passage to the westward. Even in a moderate breeze, I sometimes fancied, that the impulse of the wind little more than counteracted the glide of the currents; so that with much show of sailing, we were in reality almost a fixture on the sea.

The equatorial currents of the South Seas may be regarded as among the most mysterious of the mysteries of the deep. Whence they come, whither go, who knows? Tell us, what hidden law regulates their flow. Regardless of the theory which ascribes to them a nearly uniform course from east to west, induced by the eastwardly winds of the Line, and the collateral action of the Polar streams; these currents are forever shifting. Nor can the period of their revolutions be at all relied upon or predicted.

But however difficult it may be to assign a specific cause for the ocean streams, in any part of the world, one of the wholesome effects thereby produced would seem obvious enough. And though the circumstance here alluded to is perhaps known to every body, it may

be questioned, whether it is generally invested with the importance it deserves. Reference is here made to the constant commingling and purification of the sea-water by reason of the currents.

For, that the ocean, according to the popular theory, possesses a special purifying agent in its salts, is somewhat to be doubted. Nor can it be explicitly denied, that those very salts might corrupt it, were it not for the brisk circulation of its particles consequent upon the flow of the streams. It is well known to seamen, that a bucket of sea-water, left standing in a tropical climate, very soon becomes highly offensive; which is not the case with rainwater.

But I build no theories. And by way of obstructing the one, which might possibly be evolved from the statement above, let me add, that the offensiveness of sea-water left standing, may arise in no small degree from the presence of decomposed animal matter.