

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### EDGING AWAY.

Right before the wind! Ay, blow, blow, ye breezes; so long as ye stay fair, and we are homeward bound, what care the jolly crew?

It is worth mentioning here that, in nineteen cases out of twenty, a passage from the Pacific round the Cape is almost sure to be much shorter, and attended with less hardship, than a passage undertaken from the Atlantic. The reason is, that the gales are mostly from the westward, also the currents.

But, after all, going before the wind in a frigate, in such a tempest, has its annoyances and drawbacks, as well as many other blessings. The disproportionate weight of metal upon the spar and gun decks induces a violent rolling, unknown to merchant ships. We rolled and rolled on our way, like the world in its orbit, shipping green seas on both sides, until the old frigate dipped and went into it like a diving-bell.

The hatchways of some armed vessels are but poorly secured in bad weather. This was peculiarly the case with those of the *Neversink*. They

were merely spread over with an old tarpaulin, cracked and rent in every direction.

In fair weather, the ship's company messed on the gun-deck; but as this was now flooded almost continually, we were obliged to take our meals upon the berth-deck, the next one below. One day, the messes of the starboard-watch were seated here at dinner; forming little groups, twelve or fifteen men in each, reclining about the beef-kids and their pots and pans; when all of a sudden the ship was seized with such a paroxysm of rolling that, in a single instant, everything on the berth-deck--pots, kids, sailors, pieces of beef, bread-bags, clothes-bags, and barges--were tossed indiscriminately from side to side. It was impossible to stay one's self; there was nothing but the bare deck to cling to, which was slippery with the contents of the kids, and heaving under us as if there were a volcano in the frigate's hold. While we were yet sliding in uproarious crowds--all seated--the windows of the deck opened, and floods of brine descended, simultaneously with a violent lee-roll. The shower was hailed by the reckless tars with a hurricane of yells; although, for an instant, I really imagined we were about being swamped in the sea, such volumes of water came cascading down.

A day or two after, we had made sufficient Easting to stand to the northward, which we did, with the wind astern; thus fairly turning the corner without abating our rate of progress. Though we had seen no land since leaving Callao, Cape Horn was said to be somewhere to the west of

us; and though there was no positive evidence of the fact, the weather encountered might be accounted pretty good presumptive proof.

The land near Cape Horn, however, is well worth seeing, especially Staten Land. Upon one occasion, the ship in which I then happened to be sailing drew near this place from the northward, with a fair, free wind, blowing steadily, through a bright translucent clay, whose air was almost musical with the clear, glittering cold. On our starboard beam, like a pile of glaciers in Switzerland, lay this Staten Land, gleaming in snow-white barrenness and solitude. Unnumbered white albatross were skimming the sea near by, and clouds of smaller white wings fell through the air like snow-flakes. High, towering in their own turbaned snows, the far-inland pinnacles loomed up, like the border of some other world. Flashing walls and crystal battlements, like the diamond watch-towers along heaven's furthest frontier.

After leaving the latitude of the Cape, we had several storms of snow; one night a considerable quantity laid upon the decks, and some of the sailors enjoyed the juvenile diversion of snow-balling. Woe unto the "middy" who that night went forward of the booms. Such a target for snow-balls! The throwers could never be known. By some curious sleight in hurling the missiles, they seemed to be thrown on board by some hoydenish sea-nymphs outside the frigate.

At daybreak Midshipman Pert went below to the surgeon with an alarming wound, gallantly received in discharging his perilous duty on the

forecastle. The officer of the deck had sent him on an errand, to tell the boatswain that he was wanted in the captain's cabin. While in the very act of performing the exploit of delivering the message, Mr. Pert was struck on the nose with a snow-ball of wondrous compactness. Upon being informed of the disaster, the rogues expressed the liveliest sympathy. Pert was no favourite.

After one of these storms, it was a curious sight to see the men relieving the uppermost deck of its load of snow. It became the duty of the captain of each gun to keep his own station clean; accordingly, with an old broom, or "squilgee," he proceeded to business, often quarrelling with his next-door neighbours about their scraping their snow on his premises. It was like Broadway in winter, the morning after a storm, when rival shop-boys are at work cleaning the sidewalk.

Now and then, by way of variety, we had a fall of hailstones, so big that sometimes we found ourselves dodging them.

The Commodore had a Polynesian servant on board, whose services he had engaged at the Society Islands. Unlike his countrymen, Wooloo was of a sedate, earnest, and philosophic temperament. Having never been outside of the tropics before, he found many phenomena off Cape Horn, which absorbed his attention, and set him, like other philosophers, to feign theories corresponding to the marvels he beheld. At the first snow, when he saw the deck covered all over with a white powder, as it were, he expanded his eyes into stewpans; but upon examining the strange

substance, he decided that this must be a species of super-fine flower, such as was compounded into his master's "duffs," and other dainties. In vain did an experienced natural philosopher belonging to the fore-top maintain before his face, that in this hypothesis Wooloo was mistaken. Wooloo's opinion remained unchanged for some time.

As for the hailstones, they transported him; he went about with a bucket, making collections, and receiving contributions, for the purpose of carrying them home to his sweethearts for glass beads; but having put his bucket away, and returning to it again, and finding nothing but a little water, he accused the by-standers of stealing his precious stones.

This suggests another story concerning him. The first time he was given a piece of "duff" to eat, he was observed to pick out very carefully every raisin, and throw it away, with a gesture indicative of the highest disgust. It turned out that he had taken the raisins for bugs.

In our man-of-war, this semi-savage, wandering about the gun-deck in his barbaric robe, seemed a being from some other sphere. His tastes were our abominations: ours his. Our creed he rejected: his we. We thought him a loon: he fancied us fools. Had the case been reversed; had we been Polynesians and he an American, our mutual opinion of each other would still have remained the same. A fact proving that neither was wrong, but both right.