

## CHAPTER XCIII.

### CABLE AND ANCHOR ALL CLEAR.

And now that the white jacket has sunk to the bottom of the sea, and the blessed Capes of Virginia are believed to be broad on our bow--though still out of sight--our five hundred souls are fondly dreaming of home, and the iron throats of the guns round the galley re-echo with their songs and hurras--what more remains?

Shall I tell what conflicting and almost crazy surmisings prevailed concerning the precise harbour for which we were bound? For, according to rumour, our Commodore had received sealed orders touching that matter, which were not to be broken open till we gained a precise latitude of the coast. Shall I tell how, at last, all this uncertainty departed, and many a foolish prophecy was proved false, when our noble frigate--her longest pennant at her main--wound her stately way into the innermost harbour of Norfolk, like a plumed Spanish Grandee threading the corridors of the Escorial toward the throne-room within? Shall I tell how we kneeled upon the holy soil? How I begged a blessing of old Ushant, and one precious hair of his beard for a keepsake? How Lemsford, the gun-deck bard, offered up a devout ode as a prayer of thanksgiving? How saturnine Nord, the magnifico in disguise, refusing all companionship, stalked off into the woods, like the ghost of an old Calif of Bagdad? How I swayed and swung the hearty hand of Jack Chase,

and nipped it to mine with a Carrick bend; yea, and kissed that noble hand of my liege lord and captain of my top, my sea-tutor and sire?

Shall I tell how the grand Commodore and Captain drove off from the pier-head? How the Lieutenants, in undress, sat down to their last dinner in the ward-room, and the champagne, packed in ice, spirted and sparkled like the Hot Springs out of a snow-drift in Iceland? How the Chaplain went off in his cassock, without bidding the people adieu? How shrunken Cuticle, the Surgeon, stalked over the side, the wired skeleton carried in his wake by his cot-boy? How the Lieutenant of Marines sheathed his sword on the poop, and, calling for wax and a taper, sealed the end of the scabbard with his family crest and motto--Denique Coelum? How the Purser in due time mustered his money-bags, and paid us all off on the quarter-deck--good and bad, sick and well, all receiving their wages; though, truth to tell, some reckless, improvident seamen, who had lived too fast during the cruise, had little or nothing now standing on the credit side of their Purser's accounts?

Shall I tell of the Retreat of the Five Hundred inland; not, alas! in battle-array, as at quarters, but scattered broadcast over the land?

Shall I tell how the Neversink was at last stripped of spars, shrouds, and sails--had her guns hoisted out--her powder-magazine, shot-lockers, and armouries discharged--till not one vestige of a fighting thing was left in her, from furthest stem to uttermost stern?

No! let all this go by; for our anchor still hangs from our bows,  
though its eager flukes dip their points in the impatient waves. Let us  
leave the ship on the sea--still with the land out of sight--still with  
brooding darkness on the face of the deep. I love an indefinite,  
infinite background--a vast, heaving, rolling, mysterious rear!

It is night. The meagre moon is in her last quarter--that betokens the  
end of a cruise that is passing. But the stars look forth in their  
everlasting brightness--and that is the everlasting, glorious Future,  
for ever beyond us.

We main-top-men are all aloft in the top; and round our mast we circle,  
a brother-band, hand in hand, all spliced together. We have reefed the  
last top-sail; trained the last gun; blown the last match; bowed to the  
last blast; been tranced in the last calm. We have mustered our last  
round the capstan; been rolled to grog the last time; for the last time  
swung in our hammocks; for the last time turned out at the sea-gull  
call of the watch. We have seen our last man scourged at the gangway;  
our last man gasp out the ghost in the stifling Sick-bay; our last man  
tossed to the sharks. Our last death-denouncing Article of War has been  
read; and far inland, in that blessed clime whither-ward our frigate  
now glides, the last wrong in our frigate will be remembered no more;  
when down from our main-mast comes our Commodore's pennant, when down  
sinks its shooting stars from the sky.

"By the mark, nine!" sings the hoary old leadsman, in the chains. And thus, the mid-world Equator passed, our frigate strikes soundings at last.

Hand in hand we top-mates stand, rocked in our Pisgah top. And over the starry waves, and broad out into the blandly blue and boundless night, spiced with strange sweets from the long-sought land--the whole long cruise predestinated ours, though often in tempest-time we almost refused to believe in that far-distant shore--straight out into that fragrant night, ever-noble Jack Chase, matchless and unmatchable Jack Chase stretches forth his bannered hand, and, pointing shoreward, cries: "For the last time, hear Camoens, boys!"

"How calm the waves, how mild the balmy gale!  
The Halcyons call, ye Lusians spread the sail!  
Appeased, old Ocean now shall rage no more;  
Haste, point our bowsprit for yon shadowy shore.  
Soon shall the transports of your natal soil  
O'erwhelm in bounding joy the thoughts of every toil."

\* \* \* \* \*

THE END.

As a man-of-war that sails through the sea, so this earth that sails through the air. We mortals are all on board a fast-sailing, never-sinking world-frigate, of which God was the shipwright; and she is but one craft in a Milky-Way fleet, of which God is the Lord High Admiral. The port we sail from is for ever astern. And though far out of sight of land, for ages and ages we continue to sail with sealed orders, and our last destination remains a secret to ourselves and our officers; yet our final haven was predestinated ere we slipped from the stocks at Creation.

Thus sailing with sealed orders, we ourselves are the repositories of the secret packet, whose mysterious contents we long to learn. There are no mysteries out of ourselves. But let us not give ear to the superstitious, gun-deck gossip about whither we may be gliding, for, as yet, not a soul on board of us knows--not even the Commodore himself; assuredly not the Chaplain; even our Professor's scientific surmisings are vain. On that point, the smallest cabin-boy is as wise as the Captain. And believe not the hypochondriac dwellers below hatches, who will tell you, with a sneer, that our world-frigate is bound to no final harbour whatever; that our voyage will prove an endless

circumnavigation of space. Not so. For how can this world-frigate prove our eventual abiding place, when upon our first embarkation, as infants in arms, her violent rolling--in after life unperceived--makes every soul of us sea-sick? Does not this show, too, that the very air we here inhale is uncongenial, and only becomes endurable at last through gradual habituation, and that some blessed, placid haven, however remote at present, must be in store for us all?

Glance fore and aft our flush decks. What a swarming crew! All told, they muster hard upon eight hundred millions of souls. Over these we have authoritative Lieutenants, a sword-belted Officer of Marines, a Chaplain, a Professor, a Purser, a Doctor, a Cook, a Master-at-arms.

Oppressed by illiberal laws, and partly oppressed by themselves, many of our people are wicked, unhappy, inefficient. We have skulkers and idlers all round, and brow-beaten waisters, who, for a pittance, do our craft's shabby work. Nevertheless, among our people we have gallant fore, main, and mizzen top-men aloft, who, well treated or ill, still trim our craft to the blast.

We have a brig for trespassers; a bar by our main-mast, at which they are arraigned; a cat-o'-nine-tails and a gangway, to degrade them in their own eyes and in ours. These are not always employed to convert Sin to Virtue, but to divide them, and protect Virtue and legalised Sin from unlegalised Vice.

We have a Sick-bay for the smitten and helpless, whither we hurry them out of sight, and however they may groan beneath hatches, we hear little of their tribulations on deck; we still sport our gay streamer aloft. Outwardly regarded, our craft is a lie; for all that is outwardly seen of it is the clean-swept deck, and oft-painted planks comprised above the waterline; whereas, the vast mass of our fabric, with all its storerooms of secrets, for ever slides along far under the surface.

When a shipmate dies, straightway we sew him up, and overboard he goes; our world-frigate rushes by, and never more do we behold him again; though, sooner or later, the everlasting under-tow sweeps him toward our own destination.

We have both a quarter-deck to our craft and a gun-deck; subterranean shot-lockers and gunpowder magazines; and the Articles of War form our domineering code.

Oh, shipmates and world-mates, all round! we the people suffer many abuses. Our gun-deck is full of complaints. In vain from Lieutenants do we appeal to the Captain; in vain--while on board our world-frigate--to the indefinite Navy Commissioners, so far out of sight aloft. Yet the worst of our evils we blindly inflict upon ourselves; our officers cannot remove them, even if they would. From the last ills no being can save another; therein each man must be his own saviour. For the rest, whatever befall us, let us never train our murderous guns inboard; let

us not mutiny with bloody pikes in our hands. Our Lord High Admiral will yet interpose; and though long ages should elapse, and leave our wrongs unredressed, yet, shipmates and world-mates! let us never forget, that,

Whoever afflict us, whatever surround,  
Life is a voyage that's homeward-bound!

THE END