

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CLUB MEN GO A FISHING.

Captain Bloomsbury was perfectly right when he said that almost everything was ready for the commencement of the great work which the Club men had to accomplish. Considering how much was required, this was certainly saying a great deal; but here also, as on many other occasions, fortune had singularly favored the Club men.

San Francisco Bay, as everybody knows, though one of the finest and safest harbors in the world, is not without some danger from hidden rocks. One of these in particular, the Anita Rock as it was called, lying right in mid channel, had become so notorious for the wrecks of which it was the cause, that, after much time spent in the consideration of the subject, the authorities had at last determined to blow it up. This undertaking having been very satisfactorily accomplished by means of dynamite or giant powder, another improvement in the harbor had been also undertaken with great success. The wrecks of many vessels lay scattered here and there pretty numerously, some, like that of the Flying Dragon, in spots so shallow that they could be easily seen at low water, but others sunk at least twenty fathoms deep, like that of the Caroline, which had gone down in 1851, not far from Blossom Rock, with a treasure on board of 20,000 ounces of gold. The attempt to clear away these wrecks had also turned out very well; even sufficient treasure had been recovered to repay all the expense, though the

preparations for the purpose by the contractors, M'Gowan and Co. had been made on the most extensive scale, and in accordance with the latest improvements in the apparatus for submarine operations.

Buoys, made of huge canvas sacks, coated with India rubber, and guarded by a net work of strong cordage, had been manufactured and provided by the New York Submarine Company. These buoys, when inflated and working in pairs, had a lifting capacity of 30 tons a pair. Reservoirs of air, provided with powerful compression pumps, always accompanied the buoys. To attach the latter, in a collapsed condition, with strong chains to the sides of the vessels which were to be lifted, a diving apparatus was necessary. This also the New York Company had provided, and it was so perfect in its way that, by means of peculiar appliances of easy management, the diver could walk about on the bottom, take his own bearings, ascend to the surface at pleasure, and open his helmet without assistance. A few sets likewise of Rouquayrol and Denayrouze's famous submarine armor had been provided. These would prove of invaluable advantage in all operations performed at great sea depths, as its distinctive feature, "the regulator," could maintain, what is not done by any other diving armor, a constant equality of pressure on the lungs between the external and the internal air.

But perhaps the most useful article of all was a new form of diving bell called the Nautilus, a kind of submarine boat, capable of lateral as well as vertical movement at the will of its occupants. Constructed with double sides, the intervening chambers could be filled either with water or air according as descent or ascent was required. A proper supply of

water enabled the machine to descend to depths impossible to be reached otherwise; this water could then be expelled by an ingenious contrivance, which, replacing it with air, enabled the diver to rise towards the surface as fast as he pleased.

All these and many other portions of the submarine apparatus which had been employed that very year for clearing the channel, lifting the wrecks and recovering the treasure, lay now at San Francisco, unused fortunately on account of the season of the year, and therefore they could be readily obtained for the asking. They had even been generously offered to Captain Bloomsbury, who, in obedience to a telegram from Washington, had kept his crew busily employed for nearly two weeks night and day in transferring them all safely on board the Susquehanna.

Marston was the first to make a careful inspection of every article intended for the operation.

"Do you consider these buoys powerful enough to lift the Projectile, Captain?" he asked next morning, as the vessel was briskly heading southward, at a distance of ten or twelve miles from the coast on their left.

"You can easily calculate that problem yourself, Mr. Marston," replied the Captain. "It presents no difficulty. The Projectile weighs about 20 thousand pounds, or 10 tons?"

"Correct!"

"Well, a pair of these buoys when inflated can raise a weight of 30 tons."

"So far so good. But how do you propose attaching them to the Projectile?"

"We simply let them descend in a state of collapse; the diver, going down with them, will have no difficulty in making a fast connection. As soon as they are inflated the Projectile will come up like a cork."

"Can the divers readily reach such depths?"

"That remains to be seen Mr. Marston."

"Captain," said Morgan, now joining the party, "you are a worthy member of our Gun Club. You have done wonders. Heaven grant it may not be all in vain! Who knows if our poor friends are still alive?"

"Hush!" cried Marston quickly. "Have more sense than to ask such questions. Is Barbican alive! Am I alive? They're all alive, I tell you, only we must be quick about reaching them before the air gives out. That's what's the matter! Air! Provisions, water--abundance! But air--oh! that's their weak point! Quick, Captain, quick--They're throwing the reel--I must see her rate!" So saying, he hurried off to the stern, followed by General Morgan. Chief Engineer Murphy and the

Captain of the *Susquehanna* were thus left for awhile together.

These two men had a long talk on the object of their journey and the likelihood of anything satisfactory being accomplished. The man of the sea candidly acknowledged his apprehensions. He had done everything in his power towards collecting suitable machinery for fishing up the *Projectile*, but he had done it all, he said, more as a matter of duty than because he believed that any good could result from it; in fact, he never expected to see the bold adventurers again either living or dead. Murphy, who well understood not only what machinery was capable of effecting, but also what it would surely fail in, at first expressed the greatest confidence in the prosperous issue of the undertaking. But when he learned, as he now did for the first time, that the ocean bed on which the *Projectile* was lying could be hardly less than 20,000 feet below the surface, he assumed a countenance as grave as the Captain's, and at once confessed that, unless their usual luck stood by them, his poor friends had not the slightest possible chance of ever being fished up from the depths of the Pacific.

The conversation maintained among the officers and the others on board the *Susquehanna*, was pretty much of the same nature. It is almost needless to say that all heads--except Belfast's, whose scientific mind rejected the *Projectile* theory with the most serene contempt--were filled with the same idea, all hearts throbbed with the same emotion. Wouldn't it be glorious to fish them up alive and well? What were they doing just now? Doing? Doing! Their bodies most probably were lying in a shapeless pile on the floor of the *Projectile*, like a heap of clothes,

the uppermost man being the last smothered; or perhaps floating about in the water inside the Projectile, like dead gold fish in an aquarium; or perhaps burned to a cinder, like papers in a "champion" safe after a great fire; or, who knows? perhaps at that very moment the poor fellows were making their last and almost superhuman struggles to burst their watery prison and ascend once more into the cheerful regions of light and air! Alas! How vain must such puny efforts prove! Plunged into ocean depths of three or four miles beneath the surface, subjected to an inconceivable pressure of millions and millions of tons of sea water, their metallic shroud was utterly unassailable from within, and utterly unapproachable from without!

Early on the morning of December 29th, the Captain calculating from his log that they must now be very near the spot where they had witnessed the extraordinary phenomenon, the *Susquehanna* hove to. Having to wait till noon to find his exact position, he ordered the steamer to take a short circular course of a few hours' duration, in hope of sighting the buoy. But though at least a hundred telescopes scanned the calm ocean breast for many miles in all directions, it was nowhere to be seen.

Precisely at noon, aided by his officers and in the presence of Marston, Belfast, and the Gun Club Committee, the Captain took his observations. After a moment or two of the most profound interest, it was a great gratification to all to learn that the *Susquehanna* was on the right parallel, and only about 15 miles west of the precise spot where the Projectile had disappeared beneath the waves. The steamer started at once in the direction indicated, and a minute or two before

one o'clock the Captain said they were "there." No sign of the buoy could yet be seen in any direction; it had probably been drifted southward by the Mexican coast current which slowly glides along these shores from December to April.

"At last!" cried Marston, with a sigh of great relief.

"Shall we commence at once?" asked the Captain.

"Without losing the twenty thousandth part of a second!" answered Marston; "life or death depends upon our dispatch!"

The Susquehanna again hove to, and this time all possible precautions were taken to keep her in a state of perfect immobility--an operation easily accomplished in these pacific latitudes, where cloud and wind and water are often as motionless as if all life had died out of the world. In fact, as the boats were quietly lowered, preparatory for beginning the operations, the mirror like calmness of sea, sky, and ship so impressed the Doctor, who was of a poetical turn of mind, that he could not help exclaiming to the little Midshipman, who was standing nearest:

"Coleridge realized, with variations:

The breeze drops down, the sail drops down,
All's still as still can be;
If we speak, it is only to break
The silence of the sea.

Still are the clouds, still are the shrouds,
No life, no breath, no motion;
Idle are all as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean!"

Chief Engineer Murphy now took command. Before letting down the buoys, the first thing evidently to be done was to find out, if possible, the precise point where the Projectile lay. For this purpose, the Nautilus was clearly the only part of the machinery that could be employed with advantage. Its chambers were accordingly soon filled with water, its air reservoirs were also soon completely charged, and the Nautilus itself, suspended by chains from the end of a yard, lay quietly on the ocean surface, its manhole on the top remaining open for the reception of those who were willing to encounter the dangers that awaited it in the fearful depths of the Pacific. Every one looking on was well aware that, after a few hundred feet below the surface, the pressure would grow more and more enormous, until at last it became quite doubtful if any line could bear the tremendous strain. It was even possible that at a certain depth the walls of the Nautilus might be crushed in like an eggshell, and the whole machine made as flat as two leaves of paper pasted together.

Perfectly conscious of the nature of the tremendous risk they were about to run, Marston, Morgan, and Murphy quietly bade their friends a short farewell and were lowered into the manhole. The Nautilus having room enough for four, Belfast had been expected to be of the party but, feeling a little sea sick, the Professor backed out at the last moment,

to the great joy of Mr. Watkins, the famous reporter of the N.Y. Herald, who was immediately allowed to take his place.

Every provision against immediate danger had been made. By means of preconcerted signals, the inmates could have themselves drawn up, let down, or carried laterally in whatever direction they pleased. By barometers and other instruments they could readily ascertain the pressure of the air and water, also how far they had descended and at what rate they were moving. The Captain, from his bridge, carefully superintended every detail of the operation. All signals he insisted on attending to himself personally, transmitting them instantly by his bell to the engineer below. The whole power of the steam engine had been brought to bear on the windlass; the chains could withstand an enormous strain. The wheels had been carefully oiled and tested beforehand; the signalling apparatus had been subjected to the rigidest examination; and every portion of the machinery had been proved to be in admirable working order.

The chances of immediate and unforeseen danger, it is true, had been somewhat diminished by all these precautions. The risk, nevertheless, was fearful. The slightest accident or even carelessness might easily lead to the most disastrous consequence.

Five minutes after two o'clock, the manhole being closed, the lamps lit, and everything pronounced all right, the signal for the descent was given, and the Nautilus immediately disappeared beneath the waters. A double anxiety now possessed all on board the Susquehanna: the

prisoners in the Nautilus were in danger as well as the prisoners in the Projectile. Marston and his friends, however, were anything but disquieted on their own account, and, pencil in hand and noses flattened on the glass plates, they examined carefully everything they could see in the liquid masses through which they were descending.

For the first five hundred feet, the descent was accomplished with little trouble. The Nautilus sank rather slowly, at a uniform rate of a foot to the second. It had not been two minutes under water when the light of day completely disappeared. But for this the occupants were fully prepared, having provided themselves with powerful lamps, whose brilliant light, radiating from polished reflectors, gave them an opportunity of seeing clearly around it for a distance of eight or ten feet in all directions. Owing to the superlatively excellent construction of the Nautilus, also on account of the scaphanders, or suits of diving armor, with which Marston and his friends had clothed themselves, the disagreeable sensations to which divers are ordinarily exposed, were hardly felt at all in the beginning of the descent.

Marston was about to congratulate his companions on the favorable auspices inaugurating their trip, when Murphy, consulting the instrument, discovered to his great surprise that the Nautilus was not making its time. In reply to their signal "faster!" the downward movement increased a little, but it soon relaxed again. Instead of less than two minutes, as at the beginning, it now took twelve minutes to make a hundred feet. They had gone only seven hundred feet in thirty-seven minutes. In spite of repeated signalling, their progress

during the next hour was even still more alarming, one hundred feet taking exactly 59 minutes. To shorten detail, it required two hours more to make another hundred feet; and then the Nautilus, after taking ten minutes to crawl an inch further, came to a perfect stand still. The pressure of the water had evidently now become too enormous to allow further descent.

The Clubmen's distress was very great; Marston's, in particular, was indescribable. In vain, catching at straws, he signalled "eastwards!" "westwards!" "northwards!" or "southwards!" the Nautilus moved readily every way but downwards.

"Oh! what shall we do?" he cried in despair; "Barbican, must we really give you up though separated from us by the short distance of only a few miles?"

At last, nothing better being to be done, the unwilling signal "heave upwards!" was given, and the hauling up commenced. It was done very slowly, and with the greatest care. A sudden jerk might snap the chains; an incautious twist might put a kink on the air tube; besides, it was well known that the sudden removal of heavy pressure resulting from rapid ascent, is attended by very disagreeable sensations, which have sometimes even proved fatal.

It was near midnight when the Clubmen were lifted out of the manhole. Their faces were pale, their eyes bloodshot, their figures stooped. Even the Herald Reporter seemed to have got enough of exploring. But

Marston was as confident as ever, and tried to be as brisk.

He had hardly swallowed the refreshment so positively enjoined in the circumstances, when he abruptly addressed the Captain:

"What's the weight of your heaviest cannon balls?"

"Thirty pounds, Mr. Marston."

"Can't you attach thirty of them to the Nautilus and sink us again?"

"Certainly, Mr. Marston, if you wish it. It shall be the first thing done to-morrow."

"To-night, Captain! At once! Barbican has not an instant to lose."

"At once then be it, Mr. Marston. Just as you say."

The new sinkers were soon attached to the Nautilus, which disappeared once more with all its former occupants inside, except the Herald Reporter, who had fallen asleep over his notes, or at least seemed to be. He had probably made up his mind as to the likelihood of the Nautilus ever getting back again.

The second descent was quicker than the first, but just as futile. At 1152 feet, the Nautilus positively refused to go a single inch further. Marston looked like a man in a stupor. He made no objection to the

signal given by the others to return; he even helped to cut the ropes by which the cannon balls had been attached. Not a single word was spoken by the party, as they slowly rose to the surface. Marston seemed to be struggling against despair. For the first time, the impossibility of the great enterprise seemed to dawn upon him. He and his friends had undertaken a great fight with the mighty Ocean, which now played with them as a giant with a pigmy. To reach the bottom was evidently completely out of their power; and what was infinitely worse, there was nothing to be gained by reaching it. The Projectile was not on the bottom; it could not even have got to the bottom. Marston said it all in a few words to the Captain, as the Clubmen stepped on deck a few hours later:

"Barbican is floating midway in the depths of the Pacific, like Mahomet in his coffin!"

Blindly yielding, however, to the melancholy hope that is born of despair, Marston and his friends renewed the search next day, the 30th, but they were all too worn out with watching and excitement to be able to continue it longer than a few hours. After a night's rest, it was renewed the day following, the 31st, with some vigor, and a good part of the ocean lying between Guadalupe and Benito islands was carefully investigated to a depth of seven or eight hundred feet. No traces whatever of the Projectile. Several California steamers, plying between San Francisco and Panama, passed the Susquehanna within hailing distance. But to every question, the invariable reply one melancholy burden bore:

"No luck!"

All hands were now in despair. Marston could neither eat nor drink. He never even spoke the whole day, except on two occasions. Once, when somebody heard him muttering:

"He's now seventeen days in the ocean!"

The second time he spoke, the words seemed to be forced out of him. Belfast admitted, for the sake of argument, that the Projectile had fallen into the ocean, but he strongly denounced the absurd idea of its occupants being still alive. "Under such circumstances," went on the learned Professor, "further prolongation of vital energy would be simply impossible. Want of air, want of food, want of courage--"

"No, sir!" interrupted Marston quite savagely. "Want of air, of meat, of drink, as much as you like! But when you speak of Barbican's want of courage, you don't know what you are talking about! No holy martyr ever died at the stake with a loftier courage than my noble friend Barbican!"

That night he asked the Captain if he would not sail down as far as Cape San Lucas. Bloomsbury saw that further search was all labor lost, but he respected such heroic grief too highly to give a positive refusal. He consented to devote the following day, New Year's, to an exploring expedition as far as Magdalena Bay, making the most diligent inquiries

in all directions.

But New Year's was just as barren of results as any of its predecessors, and, a little before sunset, Captain Bloomsbury, regardless of further entreaties and unwilling to risk further delay, gave orders to 'bout ship and return to San Francisco.

The Susquehanna was slowly turning around in obedience to her wheel, as if reluctant to abandon forever a search in which humanity at large was interested, when the look-out man, stationed in the fore-castle, suddenly sang out:

"A buoy to the nor'east, not far from shore!"

All telescopes were instantly turned in the direction indicated. The buoy, or whatever object it was, could be readily distinguished. It certainly did look like one of those buoys used to mark out the channel that ships follow when entering a harbor. But as the vessel slowly approached it, a small flag, flapping in the dying wind--a strange feature in a buoy--was seen to surmount its cone, which a nearer approach showed to be emerging four or five feet from the water. And for a buoy too it was exceedingly bright and shiny, reflecting the red rays of the setting sun as strongly as if its surface was crystal or polished metal!

"Call Mr. Marston on deck at once!" cried the Captain, his voice betraying unwonted excitement as he put the glass again to his eye.

Marston, thoroughly worn out by his incessant anxiety during the day, had been just carried below by his friends, and they were now trying to make him take a little refreshment and repose. But the Captain's order brought them all on deck like a flash.

They found the whole crew gazing in one direction, and, though speaking in little more than whispers, evidently in a state of extraordinary excitement.

What could all this mean? Was there any ground for hope? The thought sent a pang of delight through Marston's wildly beating heart that almost choked him.

The Captain beckoned to the Club men to take a place on the bridge beside himself. They instantly obeyed, all quietly yielding them a passage.

The vessel was now only about a quarter of a mile distant from the object and therefore near enough to allow it to be distinguished without the aid of a glass.

What! The flag bore the well known Stars and Stripes!

An electric shudder of glad surprise shot through the assembled crowd. They still spoke, however, in whispers, hardly daring to utter their thoughts aloud.

The silence was suddenly startled by a howl of mingled ecstasy and rage from Marston.

He would have fallen off the bridge, had not the others held him firmly. Then he burst into a laugh loud and long, and quite as formidable as his howl.

Then he tore away from his friends, and began beating himself over the head.

"Oh!" he cried in accents between a yell and a groan, "what chuckleheads we are! What numskulls! What jackasses! What double-treble-barrelled gibbering idiots!" Then he fell to beating himself over the head again.

"What's the matter, Marston, for heaven's sake!" cried his friends, vainly trying to hold him.

"Speak for yourself!" cried others, Belfast among the number.

"No exception, Belfast! You're as bad as the rest of us! We're all a set of unmitigated, demoralized, dog-goned old lunatics! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"Speak plainly, Marston! Tell us what you mean!"

"I mean," roared the terrible Secretary, "that we are no better than a lot of cabbage heads, dead beats, and frauds, calling ourselves

scientists! O Barbican, how you must blush for us! If we were schoolboys, we should all be skinned alive for our ignorance! Do you forget, you herd of ignoramuses, that the Projectile weighs only ten tons?"

"We don't forget it! We know it well! What of it?"

"This of it: it can't sink in water without displacing its own volume in water; its own volume in water weighs thirty tons! Consequently, it can't sink; more consequently, it hasn't sunk; and, most consequently, there it is before us, bobbing up and down all the time under our very noses! O Barbican, how can we ever venture to look at you straight in the face again!"

Marston's extravagant manner of showing it did not prevent him from being perfectly right. With all their knowledge of physics, not a single one of those scientific gentlemen had remembered the great fundamental law that governs sinking or floating bodies. Thanks to its slight specific gravity, the Projectile, after reaching unknown depths of ocean through the terrific momentum of its fall, had been at last arrested in its course and even obliged to return to the surface.

By this time, all the passengers of the Susquehanna could easily recognize the object of such weary longings and desperate searches, floating quietly a short distance before them in the last rays of the declining day!

The boats were out in an instant. Marston and his friends took the Captain's gig. The rowers pulled with a will towards the rapidly nearing Projectile. What did it contain? The living or the dead? The living certainly! as Marston whispered to those around him; otherwise how could they have ever run up that flag?

The boats approached in perfect silence, all hearts throbbing with the intensity of newly awakened hope, all eyes eagerly watching for some sign to confirm it. No part of the windows appeared over the water, but the trap hole had been thrown open, and through it came the pole that bore the American flag. Marston made for the trap hole and, as it was only a few feet above the surface, he had no difficulty in looking in.

At that moment, a joyful shout of triumph rose from the interior, and the whole boat's crew heard a dry drawling voice with a nasal twang exclaiming:

"Queen! How is that for high?"

It was instantly answered by another voice, shriller, louder, quicker, more joyous and triumphant in tone, but slightly tinged with a foreign accent:

"King! My brave Mac! How is that for high?"

The deep, clear, calm voice that spoke next thrilled the listeners outside with an emotion that we shall not attempt to portray. Except

that their ears could detect in it the faintest possible emotion of triumph, it was in all respects as cool, resolute, and self-possessed as ever:

"Ace! Dear friends, how is that for high?"

They were quietly enjoying a little game of High-Low-Jack!

How they must have been startled by the wild cheers that suddenly rang around their ocean-prison! How madly were these cheers re-echoed from the decks of the Susquehanna! Who can describe the welcome that greeted these long lost, long beloved, long despaired of Sons of Earth, now so suddenly and unexpectedly rescued from destruction, and restored once more to the wonderstricken eyes of admiring humanity? Who can describe the scenes of joy and exuberant happiness, and deep felt gratitude, and roaring rollicking merriment, that were witnessed on board the steamer that night and during the next three days!

As for Marston, it need hardly be said that he was simply ecstatic, but it may interest both the psychologist and the philologist to learn that the expression How is that for high? struck him at once as with a kind of frenzy. It became immediately such a favorite tongue morsel of his that ever since he has been employing it on all occasions, appropriate or otherwise. Thanks to his exertions in its behalf all over the country, the phrase is now the most popular of the day, well known and relished in every part of the Union. If we can judge from its present hold on the popular ear it will continue to live and flourish for many a

long day to come; it may even be accepted as the popular expression of triumph in those dim, distant, future years when the memory not only of the wonderful occasion of its formation but also of the illustrious men themselves who originated it, has been consigned forever to the dark tomb of oblivion!