

CHAPTER V

AN UNUSUAL ROUTE

OCTOBER 7. -- This is the tenth day since we left Charleston, and I should think our progress has been very rapid. Robert Curtis, the mate, with whom I continue to have many a friendly chat, informed me that we could not be far off the Bermudas; the ship's bearings, he said, were lat. 32 deg. 20' N. and long. 64 deg. 50' W. so that he had every reason to believe that we should sight St. George's Island before night.

"The Bermudas!" I exclaimed. "But how is it we are off the Bermudas? I should have thought that a vessel sailing from Charleston to Liverpool, would have kept northward, and have followed the track of the Gulf Stream."

"Yes, indeed, sir," replied Curtis, "that is the usual course; but you see that this time the captain hasn't chosen to take it."

"But why not?" I persisted.

"That's not for me to say, sir; he ordered us eastward, and eastward we go."

"Haven't you called his attention to it?" I inquired.

Curtis acknowledged that he had already pointed out what an unusual route they were taking, but that the captain had said that he was quite aware what he was about. The mate made no further remark; but the knit of his brow, as he passed his hand mechanically across his forehead, made me fancy that he was inclined to speak out more strongly.

"All very well, Curtis," I said, "but I don't know what to think about trying new routes. Here we are at the 7th of October, and if we are to reach Europe before the bad weather sets in, I should suppose there is not a day to be lost."

"Right, sir, quite right; there is not a day to be lost."

Struck by his manner, I ventured to add, "Do you mind, Curtis, giving me your honest opinion of Captain Huntly?"

He hesitated a moment, and then replied shortly, "He is my captain, sir."

This evasive answer of course put an end to any further interrogation on my part.

Curtis was not mistaken. At about three o'clock the look-out man sung out that there was land to windward, and descried what seemed as if it might be a line of smoke in the northeast horizon. At six, I went on deck with M. Letourneur and his son, and we could then distinctly make out the low group of the Bermudas, encircled by their formidable chain of breakers.

"There," said Andre Letourneur to me, as we stood gazing at the distant land, "there lies the enchanted archipelago, sung by your poet Moore. The exile Waller, too, as long ago as 1643, wrote an enthusiastic panegyric on the islands, and I have been told that at one time English ladies would wear no other bonnets than such as were made of the leaves of the Bermuda palm."

"Yes," I replied, "the Bermudas were all the rage in the seventeenth century, although latterly they have fallen into comparative oblivion."

"But let me tell you, M. Andre," interposed Curtis, who had as usual joined our party, "that although poets may rave, and be as enthusiastic as they like about these islands, sailors will tell a different tale. The hidden reefs that lie in a semicircle about two or three leagues from shore make

the attempt to land a very dangerous piece of business. And another thing, I know. Let the natives boast as they will about their splendid climate, they are visited by the most frightful hurricanes. They get the fag-end of the storms that rage over the Antilles; and the fag-end of a storm is like the tail of a whale; it's just the strongest bit of it. I don't think you'll find a sailor listening much to your poets -- your Moores, and your Wallers."

"No doubt you are right, Mr. Curtis," said Andre, smiling, "but poets are like proverbs; you can always find one to contradict another. Although Waller and Moore have chosen to sing the praises of the Bermudas, it has been supposed that Shakspeare was depicting them in the terrible scenes that are found in 'The Tempest.'"

I may mention that there was not another of our fellow-passengers who took the trouble to come on deck and give a glance at this strange cluster of islands. Miss Herbey, it is true, was making an attempt to join us, but she had barely reached the poop, when Mrs. Kear's languid voice was heard recalling her for some trifling service to her side.