

## CHAPTER XX

### EXAMINATION OF THE HOLD

NOVEMBER 15 to 20. -- The examination of the hold has at last been made. Among the first things that were found was the case of picrate, perfectly intact, having neither been injured by the water, nor of course reached by the flames. Why it was not at once pitched into the sea I cannot say; but it was merely conveyed to the extremity of the island, and there it remains.

While they were below, Curtis and Dowlas made themselves acquainted with the full extent of the mischief that had been done by the conflagration. They found that the deck and the cross-beams that supported it had been much less injured than they expected, and the thick, heavy planks had only been scorched very superficially. But the action of the fire on the flanks of the ship had been of a much more serious character; a long portion of the inside boarding had been burned away, and the very ribs of the vessel were considerably damaged; the oakum caulking had all started away from the butt-ends and seams; so much so that it was little short of a miracle that the whole ship had not long since gaped completely open.

The captain and the carpenter returned to the deck with

anxious faces. Curtis lost no time in assembling passengers and crew, and announcing to them the facts of the case.

"My friends," he said, "I am here to tell you that the Chancellor has sustained far greater injuries than we suspected, and that her hull is very seriously damaged. If we had been stranded anywhere else than on a barren reef, that may at any time be overwhelmed by a tempestuous sea, I should not have hesitated to take the ship to pieces, and construct a smaller vessel that might have carried us safely to land; but I dare not run the risk of remaining here. We are now 800 miles from the coast of Paramaribo, the nearest portion of Dutch Guiana, and in ten or twelve days, if the weather should be favorable, I believe we could reach the shore. What I now propose to do is to stop the leak by the best means we can command, and make at once for the nearest port."

As no better plan seemed to suggest itself, Curtis's proposal was unanimously accepted. Dowlas and his assistants immediately set to work to repair the charred frame-work of the ribs, and to stop the leak; they took care thoroughly to calk from the outside all the seams that were above low water mark; lower than that they were unable to work, and had to content themselves with such repairs as they could

effect in the interior. But after all the pains there is no doubt the Chancellor is not fit for a long voyage, and would be condemned as unseaworthy at any port at which we might put in.

To-day the 20th, Curtis having done all that human power could do to repair his ship, determined to put her to sea.

Ever since the Chancellor had been relieved of her cargo, and of the water in her hold, she had been able to float in the little natural basin into which she had been driven. The basin was enclosed on either hand by rocks that remained uncovered even at high water, but was sufficiently wide to allow the vessel to turn quite round at its broadest part, and by means of hawsers fastened on the reef to be brought with her bows towards the south; while, to prevent her being carried back on to the reef, she has been anchored fore and aft.

To all appearance, then, it seemed as though it would be an easy matter to put the Chancellor to sea; if the wind were favorable the sails would be hoisted; if otherwise, she would have to be towed through the narrow passage. All seemed simple. But unlooked-for difficulties had yet to be surmounted.

The mouth of the passage is guarded by a kind of ridge of basalt, which at high tide we knew was barely covered with sufficient water to float the Chancellor, even when entirely unfreighted. To be sure she had been carried over the obstacle once before, but then, as I have already said, she had been caught up by an enormous wave, and might have been said to be LIFTED over the barrier into her present position. Besides, on that ever memorable night, there had not only been the ordinary spring-tide, but an equinoctial tide, such a one as could not be expected to occur again for many months. Waiting was out of the question; so Curtis determined to run the risk, and to take advantage of the spring-tide, which would occur to-day, to make an attempt to get the ship, lightened as she was, over the bar; after which, he might ballast her sufficiently to sail.

The wind was blowing from the northwest, and consequently right in the direction of the passage. The captain, however, after a consultation, preferred to tow the ship over the ridge, as he considered it was scarcely safe to allow a vessel of doubtful stability at full sail to charge an obstacle that would probably bring her to a dead lock. Before the operation was commenced, Curtis took the precaution of having an anchor ready in the stern, for, in the event of the attempt being unsuccessful, it would be necessary to bring the ship back to her present moorings. Two more anchors

were next carried outside the passage, which was not more than two hundred feet in length. The chains were attached to the windlass, the sailors worked at the hand-spikes, and at four o'clock in the afternoon the Chancellor was in motion.

High tide would be at twenty minutes past four, and at ten minutes before that time the ship had been hauled as far as her sea-range would allow; her keel grazed the ridge, and her progress was arrested. When the lowest part of her stern, however, just cleared the obstruction, Curtis deemed that there was no longer any reason why the mechanical action of the wind should not be brought to bear and contribute its assistance. Without delay, all sails were unfurled and trimmed to the wind. The tide was exactly at its height, passengers and crew together were at the windlass, M. Letourneur, Andre, Falsten, and myself being at the starboard bar. Curtis stood upon the poop, giving his chief attention to the sails; the lieutenant was on the forecastle; the boatswain by the helm. The sea seemed propitiously calm and; as it swelled gently to and fro, lifted the ship several times.

"Now, my boys," said Curtis, in his calm clear voice, "all together! Off!"

Round went the windlass; click, click, clanked the chains as link by link they were forced through the hawse-holes.

The breeze freshened, and the masts gave to the pressure of the sails, but round and round we went, keeping time in regular monotony to the sing-song tune hummed by one of the sailors.

We had gained about twenty feet, and were redoubling our efforts when the ship grounded again.

And now no effort would avail; all was in vain; the tide began to turn: and the Chancellor would not advance an inch. Was there time to go back? She would inevitably go to pieces if left balanced upon the ridge. In an instant the captain has ordered the sails to be furled, and the anchor dropped from the stern.

One moment of terrible anxiety, and all is well.

The Chancellor tacks to stern, and glides back into the basin, which is once more her prison.

"Well, captain," says the boatswain, "what's to be done now?"

"I don't know," said Curtis, "but we shall get across somehow."