

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### MRS. KEAR SUCCUMBS TO FEVER

DECEMBER 6 continued. -- The Chancellor no longer maintained her equilibrium; we felt that she was gradually going down, and her hull was probably breaking up. The maintop was already only ten feet above water, while the bowsprit, with the exception of the extreme end, that rose obliquely from the waves, was entirely covered.

The Chancellor's last day, we felt, had come.

Fortunately the raft was all but finished, and unless Curtis preferred to wait till morning, we should be able to embark in the evening.

The raft is a very solid structure. The spars that form the framework are crossed one above another and lashed together with stout ropes, so that the whole pile rises a couple of feet above the water. The upper platform is constructed from the planks that were broken from the ship's sides by the violence of the waves, and which had not drifted away. The afternoon has been employed in charging the raft with such provisions, sails, tools, and instruments as we have been able to save.

And how can I attempt to give any idea of the feelings with which, one and all, we now contemplated the fate before us? For my own part, I was possessed rather by a benumbed indifference than by any sense of genuine resignation. M. Letourneur was entirely absorbed in his son, who, in his turn, thought only of his father, at the same time exhibiting a Christian fortitude, which was shown by no one else of the party except Miss Herbey, who faced her danger with the same brave composure. Incredible as it may seem, Falsten remained the same as ever, occupying himself with writing down figures and memoranda in his pocketbook. Mrs. Kear, in spite of all that Miss Herbey could do for her, was evidently dying.

With regard to the sailors, two or three of them were calm enough, but the rest had well-nigh lost their wits. Some of the more ill-disposed among them seemed inclined to run into excesses; and their conduct, under the bad influence of Owen and Jynxstrop, made it doubtful whether they would submit to control when once we were limited to the narrow dimensions of the raft. Lieutenant Walter, although his courage never failed him, was worn out with bodily fatigue, and obliged to give up all active labor; but Curtis and the boatswain were resolute, energetic and firm as ever. To borrow an expression from the language of metallurgic art, they were men "at the highest degree of

hardness."

At five o'clock one of our companions in misfortune was released from her sufferings. Mrs. Kear, after a most distressing illness, through which her young companion tended her with the most devoted care, has breathed her last. A few deep sighs and all was over, and I doubt whether the sufferer was ever conscious of the peril of her situation.

The night passed on without further incident. Toward morning I touched the dead woman's hand, and it was cold and stiff. The corpse could not remain any longer on the main-top, and after Miss Herbey and I had carefully wrapped the garments about it, with a few short prayers the body of the first victim of our miseries was committed to the deep.

As the sea closed over the body I heard one of the men in the shrouds say:

"There goes a carcass that we shall be sorry we have thrown away!"

I looked round sharply. It was Owen who had spoken. But horrible as were his words, the conviction was forced

upon my mind that the day could not be far distant when we  
must want for food.