

## CHAPTER XXIX

### WE EMBARK ON THE RAFT

DECEMBER 7. -- The ship was sinking rapidly; the water had risen to the fore-top; the poop and forecastle were completely submerged; the top of the bowsprit had disappeared, and only the three mast-tops projected from the waves.

But all was ready on the raft; an erection had been made on the fore to hold a mast, which was supported by shrouds fastened to the sides of the platform; this mast carried a large royal.

Perhaps, after all, these few frail planks will carry us to the shore which the Chancellor has failed to reach; at any rate, we cannot yet resign all hope.

We were just on the point of embarking at 7 A. M. when the Chancellor all at once began to sink so rapidly that the carpenter and men who were on the raft were obliged with all speed to cut the ropes that secured it to the vessel, to prevent it from being swallowed up in the eddying waters.

Anxiety, the most intense, took possession of us all. At the very moment when the ship was descending into the

fathomless abyss, the raft, our only hope of safety, was drifting off before our eyes. Two of the sailors and an apprentice, beside themselves with terror, threw themselves headlong into the sea; but it was evident from the very first they were quite powerless to combat the winds and waves. Escape was impossible; they could neither reach the raft nor return to the ship. Curtis tied a rope round his waist and tried to swim to their assistance; but long before he could reach them, the unfortunate men, after a vain struggle for life, sank below the waves and were seen no more. Curtis, bruised and beaten with the surf that raged about the mast-heads, was hauled back to the ship.

Meantime, Dowlas and his men, by means of some spars which they used as oars, were exerting themselves to bring back the raft, which had drifted about two cables'-lengths away; but, in spite of all their efforts, it was fully an hour -- an hour which seemed to us, waiting as we were with the water up to the level of the top masts, like an eternity -- before they succeeded in bringing the raft alongside, and lashing it once again to the Chancellor's main-mast.

Not a moment was then to be lost. The waves were eddying like a whirlpool around the submerged vessel, and numbers of enormous airbubbles were rising to the surface of the water.

The time was come. At Curtis's word, "Embark!" we all hurried to the raft. Andre, who insisted upon seeing Miss Herbey go first, was helped safely on to the platform, where his father immediately joined him. In a very few minutes all except Curtis and old O'Ready had left the Chancellor.

Curtis remained standing on the main-top, deeming it not only his duty, but his right, to be the last to leave the vessel he had loved so well, and the loss of which he so much deplored.

"Now then, old fellow, off of this!" cried the captain to the old Irishman, who did not move.

"And is it quite sure ye are that she's sinkin'?" he said.

"Ay, ay! sure enough, my man; and you'd better look sharp."

"Faith, then, and I think I will;" and not a moment too soon (for the water was up to his waist) he jumped on to the raft.

Having cast one last, lingering look around him, Curtis

then left the ship; the rope was cut, and we went slowly adrift.

All eyes were fixed upon the spot where the Chancellor lay foundering. The top of the mizzen was the first to disappear, then followed the main-top; and soon, of what had been a noble vessel, not a vestige was to be seen.