

CHAPTER XXX

OUR SITUATION CRITICAL

WILL this frail boat, forty feet by twenty, bear us in safety? Sink it cannot; the material of which it is composed is of a kind that must surmount the waves. But it is questionable whether it will hold together. The cords that bind it will have a tremendous strain to bear in resisting the violence of the sea. The most sanguine among us trembles to face the future; the most confident dares to think only of the present. After the manifold perils of the last seventy-two days' voyage all are too agitated to look forward without dismay to what in all human probability must be a time of the direst distress.

Vain as the task may seem, I will not pause in my work of registering the events of our drama, as scene after scene they are unfolded before our eyes.

Of the twenty-eight persons who left Charleston in the Chancellor, only eighteen are left to huddle together upon this narrow raft; this number includes the five passengers, namely, M. Letourneur, Andre, Miss Herbey, Falsten, and myself; the ship's officers, Captain Curtis, Lieutenant Walter, the boatswain, Hobart the steward, Jynxstrop the cook, and Dowlas the carpenter; and seven sailors, Austin, Owen,

Wilson, O'Ready, Burke, Sandon, and Flaypole.

Such are the passengers on the raft; it is but a brief task to enumerate their resources.

The greater part of the provisions in the store-room were destroyed at the time when the ship's deck was submerged, and the small quantity that Curtis has been able to save will be very inadequate to supply the wants of eighteen people, who too probably have many days to wait ere they sight either land or a passing vessel. One cask of biscuit, another of preserved meat, a small keg of brandy, and two barrels of water complete our store, so that the utmost frugality in the distribution of our daily rations becomes absolutely necessary.

Of spare clothes we have positively none; a few sails will serve for shelter by day, and covering by night.

Dowlas has his carpenter's tools, we have each a pocket-knife, and O'Ready an old tin pot, of which he takes the most tender care; in addition to these, we are in possession of a sextant, a compass, a chart, and a metal tea-kettle, everything else that was placed on deck in readiness for the first raft having been lost in the partial submersion of the vessel.

Such then is our situation; critical indeed, but after all perhaps not desperate. We have one great fear; some there are among us whose courage, moral as well as physical, may give way, and over failing spirits such as these we may have no control.