

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SHIPWRECK.

The next day the "Alaska" entered the harbor of Brest. The damage which she had sustained was fortunately not important. An engineer who was applied to immediately promised that her injuries should be repaired in three days. It was therefore not a very serious delay, and they could make up for it in a measure by taking in coal. They would therefore not be obliged to stop at Gibraltar for this purpose, as they had at first intended. Their next stopping-place was to be at Malta, which they hoped to reach twenty-four hours earlier than they had at first expected, and thus would reduce the time of their delay in reality to two days. They therefore had nothing to worry themselves about, and everyone felt disposed to view the accident in the most philosophical manner.

It soon became evident that their mischance was going to be turned into a festival. In a few hours the arrival of the "Alaska" became known through the town, and as the newspapers made known the object of the expedition, the commander of the Swedish vessel soon found himself the recipient of the most flattering attentions. The admiral and Mayor of Brest, the commander of the port, and the captains of the vessels which were lying at anchor, all came to pay an official visit to Captain Marsilas. A dinner and a ball were tendered to the hardy explorers, who were to take part in the search for the "Nordenskiöld." Although the

doctor and Mr. Malarius cared little for such gatherings, they were obliged to take their places at the table which was prepared for them. As for Mr. Bredejord, he was in his true element.

Among the friends invited by the admiral, was a grand-looking old man with a refined but sad countenance. He soon attracted Erik's attention, who felt a sympathy for him which he could hardly explain. It was Mr. Durrien, Honorary Consul-general, and an active member of the Geographical Society, who was well known on account of his travels and researches in Asia Minor and the Soudan.

Erik had read his works with very great interest, and he mentioned that he had done so, when he had been presented to the French savant, who experienced a feeling of satisfaction as he listened to the enthusiastic young man.

It is often the fate of travelers, when their adventures make a stir in the world, to receive the loud admiration of the crowd; but to find that their labors are appreciated, by those who are well informed and capable of judging, does not occur so frequently. Therefore the respectful curiosity of Erik went straight to the heart of the old geographer, and brought a smile to his pale lips.

"I have never attached any great merit to my discoveries," he said, in reply to a few words from Erik, regarding the fortunate excavations which had recently been made. "I went ahead seeking, to forget my own

cruel misfortunes, and not caring so much for the results as I did for prosecuting a work which was in entire accordance with my tastes. Chance has done the rest."

Seeing Erik and Mr. Durrien so friendly, the admiral took care to seat them together at table, so that they could continue their conversation during dinner.

As they were taking their coffee, the young lieutenant of the "Alaska" was accosted by a little bald-headed man, who had been introduced to him as Dr. Kergaridec, who asked him without any preamble to what country he belonged. A little surprised at first by the question, Erik answered that he was from Sweden, or, to be more exact, from Norway, and that his family lived in the province of Bergen. Then he inquired his motive for asking the question.

"My motive is a very simple one," answered his interlocutor. "For an hour I have been studying your face across the table, while we were at dinner, and I have never seen anywhere such a perfect type of the Celt as I behold in you! I must tell you that I am devoted to Celtic studies, and it is the first time that I have met with this type among the Scandinavians. Perhaps this is a precious indication for science, and we may be able to place Norway among the regions visited by our Gaelic ancestors?"

Erik was about to explain to the worthy savant the reasons which would

invalidate this hypothesis, when Dr. Kergaridec turned away to pay his respects to a lady who had just entered the room, and their conversation was not resumed.

The young lieutenant of the "Alaska" would probably never have thought of this incident again, but the next day as they were passing through a street near the market, Dr. Schwaryencrona said suddenly to him:

"My dear child, if I have ever had a doubt as to your Celtic origin, I should have lost it here. See how you resemble these Bretons. They have the same brown eyes, black hair, bony neck, colored skin and general appearance. Bredejord may say what he likes, but you are a pure-blooded Celt--you may depend upon it." Erik then told him what old Dr. Kergaridec had said to him, and Dr. Schwaryencrona was so delighted that he could not talk of anything else all the day.

With the other passengers of the "Alaska," Tudor Brown had received and accepted an invitation from the prefect. They thought up to the last moment that he would go in his accustomed dress, for he had made his appearance in it just as they were all going ashore to the dinner. But doubtless the necessity of removing his precious hat appeared too hard to him, for they saw him no more that evening.

When he returned after the ball, Erik learned from Mr. Hersebom that Tudor Brown had returned at seven o'clock and dined alone. After that, he had entered the captain's room to consult a marine chart; then he had

returned to the town in the same small boat which had brought him on board.

This was the last news which they received of him.

The next evening at five o'clock Tudor Brown had not made his appearance. He knew, however, that the machinery of the "Alaska" would be repaired by that time, and her fires kindled, after which it would be impossible to defer her departure. The captain had been careful to notify every one. He gave the order to hoist the anchor.

The vessel had been loosened from her moorings when a small boat was signaled making all speed toward them. Every one believed that it carried Tudor Brown, but they soon saw that it was only a letter which had been sent on board. It occasioned general surprise when it was discovered that this letter was directed to Erik.

When he opened it, Erik found that it simply contained the card of Mr. Durrien, the Honorary Consul-general, and member of the Geographical Society, with these words written in pencil:

"A good voyage--a speedy return."

We can not explain Erik's feelings.

This attention from an amiable and distinguished savant brought tears

to his eyes. In leaving this hospitable shore where he had remained three days, it seemed to him as if he was leaving his own country. He placed Mr. Durrien's card in his memorandum book, and said to himself that this adieu from an old man could not fail to bring him good luck.

It was now the 20th of February. The weather was fine. The sun had sunk below the horizon, leaving a sky as cloudless as that of summer.

Erik had the watch during the first quarter, and he walked the quarter-deck with a light step. It seemed to him that, with the departure of Tudor Brown, the evil genius of the expedition had disappeared.

"Provided that he does not intend to rejoin us at Malta or Suez," he said to himself.

It was possible--indeed, even probable--if Tudor Brown wished to spare himself the long voyage which the "Alaska" would make before reaching Egypt. While the vessel was going around the coasts of France and Spain, he could, if it so pleased him, stay for a week in Paris, or at any other place, and then take the mail packet either to Alexandria or Suez, and rejoin the "Alaska" at either of those places; or he could even defer doing so until they reached Singapore or Yokohama.

But this was only a possibility. The fact was that he was no longer on board, and that he could not cast a damper upon the spirits of the

company.

Their dinner, also, which they took at six o'clock, as usual, was the gayest which they had yet sat down to. At dessert they drank to the success of the expedition, and every one, in his heart, associated it, more or less, with the absence of Tudor Brown. Then they went on deck and smoked their cigars.

It was a dark night, but in the distance toward the north they could see the light of Cape Saint Matthew. They soon signaled, also, the little light on the shore at Bec-du-Raze, which proved that they were in their right course. A good breeze from the north-east accelerated the speed of the vessel, which rolled very little, although the sea was quite rough.

As the dinner-party reached the deck, one of the sailors approached the captain, and said: "Six knots and a quarter."

"In that case we shall not want any more coal until we arrive at Behring's Straits," answered the captain. After saying these words, he left the doctor and went down to his room. There he selected a large chart, which he spread out before him under a brilliant light, which was suspended from the ceiling. It was a map of the British Admiralty, and indicated all the details of the course which the "Alaska" intended to take. The shores, the islands, the sand-banks, the light-houses, revolving lights, and the most minute details were all clearly marked out. With such a chart and a compass it seemed as if even a child might

be able to guide the largest ship through these perilous passes; and yet, a distinguished officer of the French Navy, Lieutenant Mage, who had explored the Niger, had been lost in these waters, with all his companions, and his vessel, the "Magician."

It had happened that Captain Marsilas had never before navigated in these waters. In fact, it was only the necessity of stopping at Brest which had brought him here now, otherwise he would have passed a long distance from shore. Therefore he was careful to study his chart attentively, in order to keep his proper course. It seemed a very easy matter, keeping on his left the Pointe-du-Van, the Bec-du-Raze, and the Island of Sein, the legendary abode of the nine Druidesses, and which was nearly always veiled by the spray of the roaring waters; he had only to run straight to the west and to the south to reach the open sea. The light on the island indicated clearly his position, and according to the chart, the island ended in rocky heights, bordered by the open sea, whose depth reached one hundred meters. The light on the island was a useful guide on a dark night, and he resolved to keep closer to it than he would have done in broad daylight. He therefore ascended to the deck, and told Erik to sail twenty-five degrees toward the southwest.

This order appeared to surprise the young lieutenant.

"To the south-west, did you say?" he asked in a respectful manner, believing that he had been mistaken.

"Yes, I said to the south-west!" repeated the commander, dryly: "Do you not like this route?"

"Since you ask me the question, captain, I must confess that I do not. I should have preferred running west for some time."

"To what purpose? we should only lose another night."

The commander spoke in a tone that did not permit of any contradiction, and Erik gave the order which he had received. After all the captain was an experienced seaman in whom they might have perfect confidence.

Slight as was the change in her course, it sufficed to modify sensibly the sailing of the vessel. The "Alaska" commenced to roll a great deal, and to dip her prow in the waves. The log indicated fourteen knots, and as the wind was increasing, Erik thought it prudent to take a couple of reefs.

The doctor and Mr. Bredejord both became a prey to seasickness, and descended to their cabins. The captain, who had for some time been pacing up and down the deck, soon followed their example.

He had hardly entered his own apartment when Erik stood before him.

"Captain," said the young man, "I have heard suspicious noises, like waves breaking over rocks. I feel conscientiously bound to tell you that

in my opinion we are following a dangerous route."

"Certainly, sir, you are gifted with tenaciousness," cried the captain.

"What danger can you fear when we have this light at least three good miles, if not four, distant from us?"

And he impatiently with his finger pointed out their position upon the chart, which he had kept spread out upon his table.

Erik followed the direction of his finger, and he saw clearly that the island was surrounded by very deep waters. Nothing could be more decisive and reassuring, in the eyes of a mariner. But still he felt sure that it was not an illusion, those noises which he had heard, and which certainly were made by waves breaking upon a rocky shore very close to them.

It was a strange case, and Erik hardly liked to acknowledge it to himself, but it did not seem to him that he could recognize in this profile of the coast which lay spread out before his eyes the dangerous spot which he remembered in the same geographical studies which he had pursued. But could he venture to oppose his dim impressions and vague remembrances against a chart of the British Admiralty? Erik dared not do it. These charts are made expressly to guard navigators against errors or any illusions of their memory. He therefore bowed respectfully to his chief and returned to his position on deck.

He had scarcely reached it when he heard this cry resounding through the vessel, "Breakers on the starboard!" followed almost immediately by a second shout of "Breakers on the larboard!"

There was a loud whistle and a clattering of many feet followed by a series of effective maneuvers. The "Alaska" slackened her course, and tried to back out. The captain made a rush up the stairs.

At this moment he heard a grating noise, then suddenly a terrible shock which shook the vessel from prow to stern. Then all was silent, and the "Alaska" remained motionless.

She was wedged in between two submarine rocks.

Commander Marsilas, his head bleeding from a fall, mounted the deck, where the greatest confusion reigned. The dismayed sailors made a rush for the boats. The waves dashed furiously over the rocks upon which the vessel had been shipwrecked. The distant light-houses, with their fixed lights, seemed to reproach the "Alaska" for having thrown herself into the dangers which it was their duty to point out. Erik tried vainly to penetrate through the gloom and discover the extent of the damage which the vessel had sustained.

"What is the matter?" cried the captain, still half-stunned by his fall.

"By sailing south-west, sir, according to your orders, we have run upon

breakers," replied Erik.

Commander Marsilas did not say a word. What could he answer? He turned on his heel, and walked toward the staircase again.

Their situation was a tragical one, although they did not appear to be in any immediate peril. The vessel remained motionless between the rocks which seemed to hold her firmly, and their adventure appeared to be more sad than frightful. Erik had only one thought--the expedition was brought to a full stop--his hope of finding Patrick O'Donoghane was lost.

He had scarcely made his somewhat hasty reply to the captain, which had been dictated by this bitter disappointment, than he regretted having done so. He therefore left the deck to go in search of his superior officer with the generous intention of comforting him, if it were possible to do so. But the captain had disappeared, and three minutes had not elapsed when a detonation was heard.

Erik ran to his room. The door was fastened on the inside. He forced it open with a blow of his fist.

Commander Marsilas lay stretched out upon the carpet, with a revolver in his right hand, and a bullet wound in his forehead.

Seeing that the vessel was shipwrecked by his fault, he had blown his brains out. Death had been instantaneous. The doctor and Mr. Bredejord,

who had run in after the young lieutenant, could only verify the sad fact.

But there was no time for vain regrets. Erik left to his two friends the care of lifting the body and laying it upon the couch. His duty compelled him to return to the deck, and attend to the safety of the crew and passengers.

As he passed the door of Mr. Malarius, the excellent man, who had been awakened by the stopping of the vessel, and also by the report of the pistol, opened his door and put out his white head, covered by his black silk night-cap. He had been sleeping ever since they left Brest, and was therefore ignorant of all that had occurred.

"Ah, well, what is it? Has anything happened?" he asked quietly.

"What has happened?" replied Erik. "My dear master, the 'Alaska' has been cast upon breakers, and the captain has killed himself!"

"Oh!" said Mr. Malarius, overcome with surprise. "Then, my dear child, adieu to our expedition!"

"That is another affair," said Erik. "I am not dead, and as long as a spark of life remains in me, I shall say, 'Go forward!'"