

CHAPTER V THE STORM ON THE INDIAN OCEAN

Two days after this conversation, John Mangles announced that the DUNCAN was in longitude 113 degrees 37 minutes, and the passengers found on consulting the chart that consequently Cape Bernouilli could not be more than five degrees off.

They must be sailing then in that part of the Indian Ocean which washed the Australian continent, and in four days might hope to see Cape Bernouilli appear on the horizon.

Hitherto the yacht had been favored by a strong westerly breeze, but now there were evident signs that a calm was impending, and on the 13th of December the wind fell entirely; as the sailors say, there was not enough to fill a cap.

There was no saying how long this state of the atmosphere might last. But for the powerful propeller the yacht would have been obliged to lie motionless as a log. The young captain was very much annoyed, however, at the prospect of emptying his coal-bunkers, for he had covered his ship with canvas, intending to take advantage of the slightest breeze.

"After all, though," said Glenarvan, with whom he was talking over the subject, "it is better to have no wind than a contrary one."

"Your Lordship is right," replied John Mangles; "but the fact is these

sudden calms bring change of weather, and this is why I dread them. We are close on the trade winds, and if we get them ever so little in our teeth, it will delay us greatly."

"Well, John, what if it does? It will only make our voyage a little longer."

"Yes, if it does not bring a storm with it."

"Do you mean to say you think we are going to have bad weather?" replied Glenarvan, examining the sky, which from horizon to zenith seemed absolutely cloudless.

"I do," returned the captain. "I may say so to your Lordship, but I should not like to alarm Lady Glenarvan or Miss Grant."

"You are acting wisely; but what makes you uneasy?"

"Sure indications of a storm. Don't trust, my Lord, to the appearance of the sky. Nothing is more deceitful. For the last two days the barometer has been falling in a most ominous manner, and is now at 27 degrees. This is a warning I dare not neglect, for there is nothing I dread more than storms in the Southern Seas; I have had a taste of them already. The vapors which become condensed in the immense glaciers at the South Pole produce a current of air of extreme violence.

This causes a struggle between the polar and equatorial winds, which results in cyclones, tornadoes, and all those multiplied varieties of tempest against which a ship is no match."

"Well, John," said Glenarvan, "the DUNCAN is a good ship, and her captain is a brave sailor. Let the storm come, we'll meet it!"

John Mangles remained on deck the whole night, for though as yet the sky was still unclouded, he had such faith in his weather-glass, that he took every precaution that prudence could suggest. About 11 P. M. the sky began to darken in the south, and the crew were called up, and all the sails hauled in, except the foresail, brigantine, top-sail, and jib-boom. At midnight the wind freshened, and before long the cracking of the masts, and the rattling of the cordage, and groaning of the timbers, awakened the passengers, who speedily made their appearance on deck--at least Paganel, Glenarvan, the Major and Robert.

"Is it the hurricane?" asked Glenarvan quietly.

"Not yet," replied the captain; "but it is close at hand."

And he went on giving his orders to the men, and doing his best to make ready for the storm, standing, like an officer commanding a breach, with his face to the wind, and his gaze fixed on the troubled sky.

The glass had fallen to 26 degrees, and the hand pointed to tempest.

It was one o'clock in the morning when Lady Helena and Miss Grant ventured upstairs on deck. But they no sooner made their appearance than the captain hurried toward them, and begged them to go below again immediately. The waves were already beginning to dash over the side of the ship, and the sea might any moment sweep right over her from stem to stern. The noise of the warring elements was so great that his words were scarcely audible, but Lady Helena took advantage of a sudden lull to ask if there was any danger.

"None whatever," replied John Mangles; "but you cannot remain on deck, madam, no more can Miss Mary."

The ladies could not disobey an order that seemed almost an entreaty, and they returned to their cabin. At the same moment the wind redoubled its fury, making the masts bend beneath the weight of the sails, and completely lifting up the yacht.

"Haul up the foresail!" shouted the captain. "Lower the topsail and jib-boom!"

Glenarvan and his companions stood silently gazing at the struggle between their good ship and the waves, lost in wondering and half-terrified admiration at the spectacle.

Just then, a dull hissing was heard above the noise of the elements. The steam was escaping violently, not by the funnel, but from the safety-valves of the boiler; the alarm whistle sounded unnaturally loud, and the yacht made a frightful pitch, overturning Wilson, who was at the wheel, by an unexpected blow from the tiller. The DUNCAN no longer obeyed the helm.

"What is the matter?" cried the captain, rushing on the bridge.

"The ship is heeling over on her side," replied Wilson.

"The engine! the engine!" shouted the engineer.

Away rushed John to the engine-room. A cloud of steam filled the room. The pistons were motionless in their cylinders, and they were apparently powerless, and the engine-driver, fearing for his boilers, was letting off the steam.

"What's wrong?" asked the captain.

"The propeller is bent or entangled," was the reply.

"It's not acting at all."

"Can't you extricate it?"

"It is impossible."

An accident like this could not be remedied, and John's only resource was to fall back on his sails, and seek to make an auxiliary of his most powerful enemy, the wind. He went up again on deck, and after explaining in a few words to Lord Glenarvan how things stood, begged him to retire to his cabin, with the rest of the passengers. But Glenarvan wished to remain above.

"No, your Lordship," said the captain in a firm tone, "I must be alone with my men. Go into the saloon. The vessel will have a hard fight with the waves, and they would sweep you over without mercy."

"But we might be a help."

"Go in, my Lord, go in. I must indeed insist on it. There are times when I must be master on board, and retire you must."

Their situation must indeed be desperate for John Mangles to speak in such authoritative language. Glenarvan was wise enough to understand this, and felt he must set an example in obedience. He therefore quitted the deck immediately with his three companions, and rejoined the ladies, who were anxiously watching the *DENOUEMENT* of this war with the elements.

"He's an energetic fellow, this brave John of mine!" said Lord Glenarvan, as he entered the saloon.

"That he is," replied Paganel. "He reminds me of your great Shakespeare's boatswain in the 'Tempest,' who says to the king on board: 'Hence! What care these roarers for the name of king? To cabin! Silence! Trouble us not.'"

However, John Mangles did not lose a second in extricating his ship from the peril in which she was placed by the condition of her screw propeller. He resolved to rely on the mainsail for keeping in the right route as far as possible, and to brace the yards obliquely, so as not to present a direct front to the storm. The yacht turned about like a swift horse that feels the spur, and presented a broadside to the billows. The only question was, how long would she hold out with so little sail, and what sail could resist such violence for any length of time. The great advantage of keeping up the mainsail was that it presented to the waves only the most solid portions of the yacht, and kept her in the right course. Still it involved some peril, for the vessel might get engulfed between the waves, and not be able to raise herself. But Mangles felt there was no alternative, and all he could do was to keep the crew ready to alter the sail at any moment, and stay in the shrouds himself watching the tempest.

The remainder of the night was spent in this manner, and it was hoped

that morning would bring a calm. But this was a delusive hope.

At 8 A. M. the wind had increased to a hurricane.

John said nothing, but he trembled for his ship, and those on board.

The DUNCAN made a frightful plunge forward, and for an instant the men thought she would never rise again. Already they had seized their hatchets to cut away the shrouds from the mainmast, but the next minute the sails were torn away by the tempest, and had flown off like gigantic albatrosses.

The yacht had risen once more, but she found herself at the mercy of the waves entirely now, with nothing to steady or direct her, and was so fearfully pitched and tossed about that every moment the captain expected the masts would break short off. John had no resource but to put up a forestaysail, and run before the gale.

But this was no easy task. Twenty times over he had all his work to begin again, and it was 3 P. M. before his attempt succeeded.

A mere shred of canvas though it was, it was enough to drive the DUNCAN forward with inconceivable rapidity to the northeast, of course in the same direction as the hurricane.

Swiftness was their only chance of safety. Sometimes she would get in advance of the waves which carried her along, and cutting through them with her sharp prow, bury herself in their depths.

At others, she would keep pace with them, and make such enormous leaps that there was imminent danger of her being pitched over on her side, and then again, every now and then the storm-driven sea

would out-distance the yacht, and the angry billows would sweep over the deck from stem to stern with tremendous violence.

In this alarming situation and amid dreadful alternations of hope and despair, the 12th of December passed away, and the ensuing night, John Mangles never left his post, not even to take food.

Though his impassive face betrayed no symptoms of fear, he was tortured with anxiety, and his steady gaze was fixed on the north, as if trying to pierce through the thick mists that enshrouded it.

There was, indeed, great cause for fear. The DUNCAN was out of her course, and rushing toward the Australian coast with a speed which nothing could lessen. To John Mangles it seemed as if a thunderbolt were driving them along.

Every instant he expected the yacht would dash against some rock, for he reckoned the coast could not be more than twelve miles off, and better far be in mid ocean exposed to all its fury than too near land.

John Mangles went to find Glenarvan, and had a private talk with him about their situation, telling him frankly the true state of affairs, stating the case with all the coolness of a sailor prepared for anything and everything and he wound up by saying he might, perhaps, be obliged to cast the yacht on shore.

"To save the lives of those on board, my Lord," he added.

"Do it then, John," replied Lord Glenarvan.

"And Lady Helena, Miss Grant?"

"I will tell them at the last moment when all hope of keeping out at sea is over. You will let me know?"

"I will, my Lord."

Glenarvan rejoined his companions, who felt they were in imminent danger, though no word was spoken on the subject.

Both ladies displayed great courage, fully equal to any of the party.

Paganel descanted in the most inopportune manner about the direction of atmospheric currents, making interesting comparisons, between tornadoes, cyclones, and rectilinear tempests.

The Major calmly awaited the end with the fatalism of a Mussulman.

About eleven o'clock, the hurricane appeared to decrease slightly.

The damp mist began to clear away, and a sudden gleam of light revealed a low-lying shore about six miles distant.

They were driving right down on it. Enormous breakers fifty feet high were dashing over it, and the fact of their height showed John there must be solid ground before they could make such a rebound.

"Those are sand-banks," he said to Austin.

"I think they are," replied the mate.

"We are in God's hands," said John. "If we cannot find any opening for the yacht, and if she doesn't find the way in herself, we are lost."

"The tide is high at present, it is just possible we may ride over those sand-banks."

"But just see those breakers. What ship could stand them. Let us invoke divine aid, Austin!"

Meanwhile the DUNCAN was speeding on at a frightful rate.

Soon she was within two miles of the sand-banks, which were still veiled from time to time in thick mist.

But John fancied he could see beyond the breakers a quiet basin, where the DUNCAN would be in comparative safety.

But how could she reach it?

All the passengers were summoned on deck, for now that the hour of shipwreck was at hand, the captain did not wish anyone to be shut up in his cabin.

"John!" said Glenarvan in a low voice to the captain, "I will try to save

my wife or perish with her. I put Miss Grant in your charge."

"Yes, my Lord," replied John Mangles, raising Glenarvan's hand to his moistened eyes.

The yacht was only a few cables' lengths from the sandbanks. The tide was high, and no doubt there was abundance of water to float the ship over the dangerous bar; but these terrific breakers alternately lifting her up and then leaving her almost dry, would infallibly make her graze the sand-banks.

Was there no means of calming this angry sea? A last expedient struck the captain. "The oil, my lads!" he exclaimed.

"Bring the oil here!"

The crew caught at the idea immediately; this was a plan that had been successfully tried already. The fury of the waves had been allayed before this time by covering them with a sheet of oil.

Its effect is immediate, but very temporary. The moment after a ship has passed over the smooth surface, the sea redoubles its violence, and woe to the bark that follows. The casks of seal-oil were forthwith hauled up, for danger seemed to have given the men double strength. A few hatchet blows soon knocked in the heads, and they were then hung over the larboard and starboard.

"Be ready!" shouted John, looking out for a favorable moment.

In twenty seconds the yacht reached the bar. Now was the time.

"Pour out!" cried the captain, "and God prosper it!"

The barrels were turned upside down, and instantly a sheet of oil covered the whole surface of the water. The billows fell as if by magic, the whole foaming sea seemed leveled, and the DUNCAN flew over its tranquil bosom into a quiet basin beyond the formidable bar; but almost the same minute the ocean burst forth again with all its fury, and the towering breakers dashed over the bar with increased violence.