

CHAPTER III

DR. CLAWBONNY

Richard Shandon was a good sailor; he had been commander of whalers in the Arctic seas for many years, and had a wide reputation for skill. He might well be astonished at such a letter, and so he was, but astonished like a man used to astonishments. He fulfilled, too, all the required conditions: he had no wife, children, or relations; he was as free as a man could be. Having no one to consult, he went straight to Messrs. Marcuart's bank.

"If the money is there," he said to himself, "I'll undertake the rest."

He was received by the firm with all the attention due to a man with sixteen thousand pounds in their safes. Sure of that fact, Shandon asked for a sheet of letter-paper, and sent his acceptance in a large sailor's hand to the address indicated. The same day he put himself in communication with the Birkenhead shipbuilders, and twenty-four hours later the keel of the Forward lay on the stocks in the dockyard.

Richard Shandon was a bachelor of forty, robust, energetic, and brave, three sailor-like qualities, giving their possessor confidence, vigour, and sang-froid. He was reputed jealous and hard to be pleased, so he was more feared than loved by his sailors. But this

reputation did not increase the difficulty of finding a crew, for he was known to be a clever commander. He was afraid that the mystery of the enterprise would embarrass his movements, and he said to himself, "The best thing I can do is to say nothing at all; there are sea-dogs who will want to know the why and the wherefore of the business, and as I know nothing myself, I can't tell them. K. Z. is a queer fish, but after all he knows me, and has confidence in me; that's enough. As to the ship, she will be a handsome lass, and my name isn't Richard Shandon if she is not destined for the Frozen Seas. But I shall keep that to myself and my officers."

Upon which Richard Shandon set about recruiting his crew upon the conditions of family and health exacted by the captain. He knew a brave fellow and capital sailor, named James Wall. Wall was about thirty, and had made more than one trip to the North Seas. Shandon offered him the post of third officer, and he accepted blindly; all he cared for was to sail, as he was devoted to his profession. Shandon told him and Johnson (whom he engaged as boatswain) all he knew about the business.

"Just as soon go there as anywhere else," answered Wall. "If it's to seek the North-West passage, many have been and come back."

"Been, yes; but come back I don't answer for," said Johnson; "but that's no reason for not going."

"Besides, if we are not mistaken in our conjectures," said Shandon,

"the voyage will be undertaken under good conditions. The Forward's a bonny lass, with a good engine, and will stand wear and tear. Eighteen men are all the crew we want."

"Eighteen men?" said Johnson. "That's just the number that the American, Kane, had on board when he made his famous voyage towards the North Pole."

"It's a singular fact that there's always some private individual trying to cross the sea from Davis's Straits to Behring's Straits. The Franklin expeditions have already cost England more than seven hundred and sixty thousand pounds without producing any practical result. Who the devil means to risk his fortune in such an enterprise?"

"We are reasoning now on a simple hypothesis," said Shandon. "I don't know if we are really going to the Northern or Southern Seas. Perhaps we are going on a voyage of discovery. We shall know more when Dr. Clawbonny comes; I daresay he will tell us all about it."

"There's nothing for it but to wait," answered Johnson; "I'll go and hunt up some solid subjects, captain; and as to their animal heat, I guarantee beforehand you can trust me for that."

Johnson was a valuable acquisition; he understood the navigation of these high latitudes. He was quartermaster on board the Phoenix, one of the vessels of the Franklin expedition of 1853. He was witness of the death of the French lieutenant Bellot, whom he had accompanied

in his expedition across the ice. Johnson knew the maritime population of Liverpool, and started at once on his recruiting expedition.

Shandon, Wall, and he did their work so well that the crew was complete in the beginning of December. It had been a difficult task; many, tempted by the high pay, felt frightened at the risk, and more than one enlisted boldly who came afterwards to take back his word and enlistment money, dissuaded by his friends from undertaking such an enterprise. All of them tried to pierce the mystery, and worried Shandon with questions; he sent them to Johnson.

"I can't tell you what I don't know," he answered invariably; "you'll be in good company, that's all I can tell you. You can take it or leave it alone."

And the greater number took it.

"I have only to choose," added the boatswain; "such salary has never been heard of in the memory of sailors, and then the certainty of finding a handsome capital when we come back. Only think: it's tempting enough."

"The fact is," answered the sailor, "it is tempting; enough to live on till the end of one's days."

"I don't hide from you," continued Johnson, "that the cruise will be long, painful, and perilous; that is formally stated in our instructions, and you ought to know what you undertake; you will very

likely be required to attempt all that it is possible for human beings to do, and perhaps more. If you are the least bit frightened, if you don't think you may just as well finish yonder as here, you'd better not enlist, but give way to a bolder man."

"But, Mr. Johnson," continued the sailor, for the want of something better to say, "at least you know the captain?"

"The captain is Richard Shandon till another comes."

Richard Shandon, in his secret heart, hoped that the command would remain with him, and that at the last moment he should receive precise instructions as to the destination of the *Forward*. He did all he could to spread the report in his conversations with his officers, or when following the construction of the brig as it grew in the Birkenhead dockyard, looking like the ribs of a whale turned upside down. Shandon and Johnson kept strictly to their instructions touching the health of the sailors who were to form the crew; they all looked hale and hearty, and had enough heat in their bodies to suffice for the engine of the *Forward*; their supple limbs, their clear and florid complexions were fit to react against the action of intense cold. They were confident and resolute men, energetically and solidly constituted. Of course they were not all equally vigorous; Shandon had even hesitated about taking some of them, such as the sailors Gripper and Garry, and the harpooner Simpson, because they looked rather thin; but, on the whole, their build was good; they were a warm-hearted lot, and their engagement was signed.

All the crew belonged to the same sect of the Protestant religion; during these long campaigns prayer in common and the reading of the Bible have a good influence over the men and sustain them in the hour of discouragement; it was therefore important that they should be all of the same way of thinking. Shandon knew by experience the utility of these practices, and their influence on the mind of the crew; they are always employed on board ships that are intended to winter in the Polar Seas. The crew once got together, Shandon and his two officers set about the provisions; they strictly followed the instructions of the captain; these instructions were clear, precise, and detailed, and the least articles were put down with their quality and quantity. Thanks to the cheques at the commander's disposition, every article was paid for at once with a discount of 8 per cent, which Richard carefully placed to the credit of K. Z.

Crew, provisions, and cargo were ready by January, 1860; the Forward began to look shipshape, and Shandon went daily to Birkenhead. On the morning of the 23rd of January he was, as usual, on board one of the Mersey ferry-boats with a helm at either end to prevent having to turn it; there was a thick fog, and the sailors of the river were obliged to direct their course by means of the compass, though the passage lasts scarcely ten minutes. But the thickness of the fog did not prevent Shandon seeing a man of short stature, rather fat, with an intelligent and merry face and an amiable look, who came up to him, took him by the two hands, and shook them with an ardour, a petulance, and a familiarity "quite meridional," as a Frenchman would

have said. But if this person did not come from the South, he had got his temperament there; he talked and gesticulated with volubility; his thought must come out or the machine would burst. His eyes, small as those of witty men generally are, his mouth, large and mobile, were safety-pipes which allowed him to give passage to his overflowing thoughts; he talked, and talked, and talked so much and so fast that Shandon couldn't understand a word he said. However, this did not prevent the Forward's mate from recognising the little man he had never seen before; a lightning flash traversed his mind, and when the other paused to take breath, Shandon made haste to get out the words, "Doctor Clawbonny!"

"Himself in person, commander! I've been at least half a quarter of an hour looking for you, asking everybody everywhere! Just think how impatient I got; five minutes more and I should have lost my head! And so you are the commander Richard? You really exist? You are not a myth? Your hand, your hand! I want to shake it again. It is Richard Shandon's hand, and if there is a commander Shandon, there's a brig Forward to command; and if he commands he will start, and if he starts he'll take Dr. Clawbonny on board."

"Well, yes, doctor, I am Richard Shandon; there is a brig Forward, and it will start."

"That's logic," answered the doctor, after taking in a large provision of breathing air--"that's logic. And I am ready to jump for joy at having my dearest wishes gratified. I've wanted to undertake such

a voyage. Now with you, commander----"

"I don't----" began Shandon.

"With you," continued Clawbonny, without hearing him, "we are sure to go far and not to draw back for a trifle."

"But----" began Shandon again.

"For you have shown what you are made of, commander; I know your deeds of service. You are a fine sailor!"

"If you will allow me----"

"No, I won't have your bravery, audacity, and skill put an instant in doubt, even by you! The captain who chose you for his mate is a man who knows what he's about, I can tell you."

"But that's nothing to do with it," said Shandon, impatient.

"What is it, then? Don't keep me in suspense another minute."

"You don't give me time to speak. Tell me, if you please, doctor, how it comes that you are to take part in the expedition of the Forward."

"Read this letter, this worthy letter, the letter of a brave

captain--very laconic, but quite sufficient."

Saying which the doctor held out the following letter to Shandon:--

"INVERNESS,

"Jan. 22nd, 1860.

"To Dr. Clawbonny.

"If Dr. Clawbonny wishes to embark on board the Forward for a long cruise, he may introduce himself to the commander, Richard Shandon, who has received orders concerning him.

"THE CAPTAIN OF THE 'FORWARD,'

"K. Z."

"This letter reached me this morning, and here I am, ready to embark."

"But, doctor, do you know where we are going to?"

"I haven't the slightest idea, and I do not care so that it is somewhere. They pretend that I am learned; they are mistaken, commander. I know nothing, and if I have published a few books that don't sell badly,

I ought not to have done it; the public is silly for buying them.

I know nothing, I tell you. I am only an ignorant man. When I have the offer of completing, or rather of going over again, my knowledge of medicine, surgery, history, geography, botany, mineralogy, conchology, geodesy, chemistry, natural philosophy, mechanics, and hydrography, why I accept, of course."

"Then," said Shandon, disappointed, "you do not know where the Forward is bound for?"

"Yes, I do; it is bound for where there is something to learn, to discover, and to compare--where we shall meet with other customs, other countries, other nations, to study in the exercise of their functions; it is going, in short, where I have never been."

"But I want to know something more definite than that," cried Shandon.

"Well, I have heard that we are bound for the Northern Seas."

"At least," asked Shandon, "you know the captain?"

"Not the least bit in the world! But he is an honest fellow, you may believe me."

The commander and the doctor disembarked at Birkenhead; the former told the doctor all he knew about the situation of things, and the mystery inflamed the imagination of the doctor. The sight of the brig

caused him transports of joy. From that day he stopped with Shandon, and went every day to pay a visit to the shell of the Forward. Besides, he was specially appointed to overlook the installation of the ship's medicine-chest. For Dr. Clawbonny was a doctor, and a good one, though practising little. At the age of twenty-five he was an ordinary practitioner; at the age of forty he was a savant, well known in the town; he was an influential member of all the literary and scientific institutions of Liverpool. His fortune allowed him to distribute counsels which were none the worse for being gratuitous; beloved as a man eminently lovable must always be, he had never wronged any one, not even himself; lively and talkative, he carried his heart in his hand, and put his hand into that of everybody. When it was known in Liverpool that he was going to embark on board the Forward his friends did all they could to dissuade him, and only fixed him more completely in his determination, and when the doctor was determined to do anything no one could prevent him. From that time the suppositions and apprehensions increased, but did not prevent the Forward being launched on the 5th of February, 1860. Two months later she was ready to put to sea. On the 15th of March, as the letter of the captain had announced, a dog of Danish breed was sent by railway from Edinburgh to Liverpool, addressed to Richard Shandon. The animal seemed surly, peevish, and even sinister, with quite a singular look in his eyes. The name of the Forward was engraved on his brass collar. The commander installed it on board the same day, and acknowledged its reception to K. Z. at Leghorn. Thus, with the exception of the captain, the crew was complete. It was composed as follows:--

1. K. Z., captain; 2. Richard Shandon, commander; 3. James Wall, third officer; 4. Dr. Clawbonny; 5. Johnson, boatswain; 6. Simpson, harpooner; 7. Bell, carpenter; 8. Brunton, chief engineer; 9. Plover, second engineer; 10. Strong (negro), cook; 11. Foker, ice-master; 12. Wolsten, smith; 13. Bolton, sailor; 14. Garry, sailor; 15. Clifton, sailor; 16. Gripper, sailor; 17. Pen, sailor; 18. Warren, stoker.