

## CHAPTER V

### OUT AT SEA

The wind was favourable, though it blew in April gales. The Forward cut through the waves, and towards three o'clock crossed the mail steamer between Liverpool and the Isle of Man. The captain hailed from his deck the last adieu that the Forward was destined to hear.

At five o'clock the pilot left the command in the hands of Richard Shandon, the commander of the brig, and regained his cutter, which, turning round, soon disappeared on the south-west. Towards evening the brig doubled the Calf of Man at the southern extremity of the island. During the night the sea was very rough, but the Forward behaved well, left the point of Ayr to the north-west, and directed its course for the Northern Channel. Johnson was right; once out at sea the maritime instinct of the sailors gained the upper hand. Life on board went on with regularity.

The doctor breathed in the sea air with delight; he walked about vigorously in the squalls, and for a savant he was not a bad sailor.

"The sea is splendid," said he to Johnson, coming up on deck after breakfast. "I have made its acquaintance rather late, but I shall make up for lost time."

"You are right, Mr. Clawbonny. I would give all the continents of the world for a corner of the ocean. They pretend that sailors soon get tired of their profession, but I've been forty years on the sea and I love it as much as the first day."

"It is a great pleasure to feel a good ship under one's feet, and if I'm not a bad judge the Forward behaves herself well."

"You judge rightly, doctor," answered Shandon, who had joined the talkers; "she is a good ship, and I acknowledge that a vessel destined for navigation amongst ice has never been better equipped. That reminds me that thirty years ago Captain James Ross, sailing for the North-West passage----"

"In the Victory," added the doctor quickly, "a brig about the same tonnage as ours, with a steam-engine too."

"What! you know about that?"

"Judge if I do," answered the doctor. "Machines were then in their infancy, and the Victory's kept her back; the captain, James Ross, after having vainly repaired it bit by bit, finished by taking it down, and abandoned it at his first winter quarters."

"The devil!" said Shandon. "You know all about it, I see."

"Yes. I've read the works of Parry, Ross, and Franklin, and the reports

of McClure, Kennedy, Kane, and McClintock, and I remember something of what I've read. I can tell you, too, that this same McClintock, on board the Fox, a screw brig in the style of ours, went easier to his destination than any of the men who preceded him."

"That's perfectly true," answered Shandon; "he was a bold sailor was McClintock; I saw him at work. You may add that, like him, we shall find ourselves in Davis's Straits in April, and if we succeed in passing the ice our voyage will be considerably advanced."

"Unless," added the doctor, "it happens to us like it did to the Fox in 1857, to be caught the very first year by the ice in Baffin's Sea, and have to winter in the midst of the icebergs."

"We must hope for better luck," answered Johnson. "If a ship like the Forward can't take us where we want to go, we must renounce all hope for ever."

"Besides," said the doctor, "if the captain is on board he will know better than we do what must be done. We know nothing as yet; his letter says nothing about what our voyage is for."

"It is a good deal to know which way to go," answered Shandon quickly. "We can do without the captain and his instructions for another month at least. Besides, you know what I think about it."

"A short time ago," said the doctor, "I thought like you that the

captain would never appear, and that you would remain commander of the ship; but now----"

"Now what?" replied Shandon in an impatient tone.

"Since the arrival of the second letter I have modified that opinion."

"Why, doctor?"

"Because the letter tells you the route to follow, but leaves you ignorant of the Forward's destination; and we must know where we are going to. How the deuce are you to get a letter now we are out at sea? On the coast of Greenland the service of the post must leave much to wish for. I believe that our gentleman is waiting for us in some Danish settlement--at Holsteinborg or Uppernawik; he has evidently gone there to complete his cargo of sealskins, buy his sledges and dog, and, in short, get together all the tackle wanted for a voyage in the Arctic Seas. I shouldn't be at all surprised to see him come out of his cabin one of these fine mornings and begin commanding the ship in anything but a supernatural way."

"It's possible," answered Shandon drily; "but in the meantime the wind is getting up, and I can't risk my gallant sails in such weather."

Shandon left the doctor and gave the order to reef the topsails.

"He takes it to heart," said the doctor to the boatswain.

"Yes," answered the latter, "and it's a great pity, for you may be right, Mr. Clawbonny."

In the evening of Saturday the Forward doubled the Mull of Galloway, whose lighthouse shone to the north-east; during the night they left the Mull of Cantyre to the north, and Cape Fair, on the coast of Ireland, to the east. Towards three o'clock in the morning, the brig, leaving Rathlin Island on her starboard side, disembogued by the Northern Channel into the ocean. It was Sunday, the 8th of April, and the doctor read some chapters of the Bible to the assembled seamen. The wind then became a perfect hurricane, and tended to throw the brig on to the Irish coast; she pitched, and rolled, and tossed, and if the doctor was not seasick it was because he would not be, for nothing was easier. At noon Cape Malinhead disappeared towards the south; it was the last European ground that these bold sailors were to perceive, and more than one watched it out of sight, destined never to see it again. They were then in 55 degrees 57 minutes latitude and 7 degrees 40 minutes longitude by the Greenwich meridian.

The storm spent itself out about nine o'clock in the evening; the Forward, like a good sailor, maintained her route north-west. She showed by her behaviour during the day what her sailing capacities were, and as the Liverpool connoisseurs had remarked, she was above all, a sailing vessel. During the following days the Forward gained the north-west with rapidity; the wind veered round south, and the sea had a tremendous swell on; the brig was then going along under

full sail. Some petrels and puffins came sailing over the poop; the doctor skilfully shot one of the latter, and it fell, fortunately, on the deck. The harpooner, Simpson, picked it up and brought it to its owner.

"Nasty game that, Mr. Clawbonny," he said.

"It will make an excellent meal, on the contrary," said the doctor.

"You don't mean to say you are going to eat that thing?"

"And so are you, old fellow," said the doctor, laughing.

"Poh!" replied Simpson, "but it's oily and rancid, like all other sea birds."

"Never mind!" answered the doctor, "I have a peculiar way of cooking that game, and if you recognise it for a sea bird I'll consent never to kill another in my life."

"Do you know how to cook, then?"

"A savant ought to know how to do a little of everything."

"You'd better take care, Simpson," said the boatswain; "the doctor's a clever man, and he'll make you take this puffin for a grouse."

The fact is that the doctor was quite right about his fowl; he took off all the fat, which all lies under the skin, principally on the thighs, and with it disappeared the rancidity and taste of fish which is so disagreeable in a sea bird. Thus prepared the puffin was declared excellent, and Simpson acknowledged it the first.

During the late storm Richard Shandon had been able to judge of the qualities of his crew; he had watched each man narrowly, and knew how much each was to be depended upon.

James Wall was devoted to Richard, understood quickly and executed well, but he might fail in initiative; he placed him in the third rank. Johnson was used to struggle with the sea; he was an old stager in the Arctic Ocean, and had nothing to learn either in audacity or sang-froid. The harpooner, Simpson, and the carpenter, Bell, were sure men, faithful to duty and discipline. The ice-master, Foker, was an experienced sailor, and, like Johnson, was capable of rendering important service. Of the other sailors Garry and Bolton seemed to be the best; Bolton was a gay and talkative fellow; Garry was thirty-five, with an energetic face, but rather pale and sad-looking. The three sailors, Clifton, Gripper, and Pen, seemed less ardent and resolute; they easily grumbled. Gripper wanted to break his engagement even before the departure of the Forward; a sort of shame kept him on board. If things went on all right, if there were not too many risks to run, no dangers to encounter, these three men might be depended upon; but they must be well fed, for it might be said that they were led by their stomachs. Although warned beforehand,

they grumbled at having to be teetotallers; at their meals they regretted the brandy and gin; it did not, however, make them spare the tea and coffee, which was prodigally given out on board. As to the two engineers, Brunton and Plover, and the stoker, Warren, there had been nothing for them to do as yet, and Shandon could not tell anything about their capabilities.

On the 14th of April the Forward got into the grand current of the Gulf Stream, which, after ascending the eastern coast of America to Newfoundland, inclines to the north-east along the coast of Norway. They were then in 57 degrees 37 minutes latitude by 22 degrees 58 minutes longitude, at two hundred miles from the point of Greenland. The weather grew colder, and the thermometer descended to thirty-two degrees, that is to say to freezing point.

The doctor had not yet begun to wear the garments he destined for the Arctic Seas, but he had donned a sailor's dress like the rest; he was a queer sight with his top-boots, in which his legs disappeared, his vast oilcloth hat, his jacket and trousers of the same; when drenched with heavy rains or enormous waves the doctor looked like a sort of sea-animal, and was proud of the comparison.

During two days the sea was extremely rough; the wind veered round to the north-west, and delayed the progress of the Forward. From the 14th to the 16th of April the swell was great, but on the Monday there came such a torrent of rain that the sea became calm immediately. Shandon spoke to the doctor about this phenomenon.



"It confirms the curious observations of the whaler Scoresby, who laid it before the Royal Society of Edinburgh, of which I have the honour to be an honorary member. You see that when it rains the waves are not very high, even under the influence of a violent wind, and when the weather is dry the sea is more agitated, even when there is less wind."

"But how is this phenomenon accounted for?"

"Very simply; it is not accounted for at all."

Just then the ice-master, who was keeping watch on the crossbars of the topsails, signalled a floating mass on the starboard, at about fifteen miles distance before the wind.

"An iceberg here!" cried the doctor.

Shandon pointed his telescope in the direction indicated, and confirmed the pilot's announcement.

"That is curious!" said the doctor.

"What! you are astonished at last!" said the commander, laughing.

"I am surprised, but not astonished," answered the doctor, laughing; "for the brig Ann, of Poole, from Greenspond, was caught in 1813

in perfect ice-fields, in the forty-fourth degree of north latitude, and her captain, Dayernent, counted them by hundreds!"

"I see you can teach us something, even upon that subject."

"Very little," answered Clawbonny modestly; "it is only that ice has been met with in even lower latitudes."

"I knew that already, doctor, for when I was cabinboy on board the war-sloop Fly----"

"In 1818," continued the doctor, "at the end of March, almost in April, you passed between two large islands of floating ice under the forty-second degree of latitude."

"Well, I declare you astonish me!" cried Shandon.

"But the iceberg doesn't astonish me, as we are two degrees further north."

"You are a well, doctor," answered the commander, "and all we have to do is to be water-buckets."

"You will draw me dry sooner than you think for; and now, Shandon, if we could get a nearer look at this phenomenon, I should be the happiest of doctors."

"Just so, Johnson," said Shandon, calling his boatswain. "It seems to me that the breeze is getting up."

"Yes, commander," answered Johnson; "we are making very little way, and the currents of Davis's Straits will soon be against us."

"You are right, Johnson, and if we wish to be in sight of Cape Farewell on the 20th of April we must put the steam on, or we shall be thrown on the coasts of Labrador. Mr. Wall, will you give orders to light the fires?"

The commander's orders were executed, an hour afterwards the steam was up, the sails were furled, and the screw cutting the waves sent the Forward against the north-west wind.