

CHAPTER VI

Departure from Rio de Janeiro--The *Spray* ashore on the sands of Uruguay--A narrow escape from shipwreck--The boy who found a sloop--The *Spray* floated but somewhat damaged--Courtesies from the British consul at Maldonado--A warm greeting at Montevideo--An excursion to Buenos Aires--Shortening the mast and bowsprit.

On November 28 the *Spray* sailed from Rio de Janeiro, and first of all ran into a gale of wind, which tore up things generally along the coast, doing considerable damage to shipping. It was well for her, perhaps, that she was clear of the land. Coasting along on this part of the voyage, I observed that while some of the small vessels I fell in with were able to outsail the *Spray* by day, they fell astern of her by night. To the *Spray* day and night were the same; to the others clearly there was a difference. On one of the very fine days experienced after leaving Rio, the steamship *South Wales* spoke the *Spray* and unsolicited gave the longitude by chronometer as 48 degrees W., "as near as I can make it," the captain said. The *Spray*, with her tin clock, had exactly the same reckoning. I was feeling at ease in my primitive method of navigation, but it startled me not a little to find my position by account verified by the ship's chronometer. On December 5 a barkantine hove in sight, and for several days the two vessels sailed along the coast together. Right here a current was experienced setting north, making it necessary to hug the shore, with which the *Spray* became rather familiar. Here I confess a weakness: I hugged the shore entirely too close. In a word, at daybreak on the morning of December 11 the *Spray* ran hard and fast on the beach. This was annoying; but I soon found that the sloop was in no great danger. The false appearance of the sand-hills under a bright moon had deceived me, and I lamented now that I had trusted to appearances at all. The sea, though moderately smooth, still carried a swell which broke with some force on the shore. I managed to launch my small dory from the deck, and ran out a kedge-anchor and warp; but it was too late to kedge the sloop off, for the tide was falling and she had already sewed a foot. Then I went about "laying out" the larger anchor, which was no easy matter, for my only life-boat, the frail dory, when the anchor and cable were in it, was swamped at once in the surf, the load being too great for her. Then I cut the cable and made two loads of it instead of one. The anchor, with forty fathoms bent and already buoyed, I now took and succeeded in getting through the surf; but my dory was leaking fast, and by the time I had rowed far enough to drop the anchor she was full to the gunwale and sinking. There was not a moment to spare, and I saw clearly that if I failed now all might be lost. I sprang from the oars to my feet, and lifting the anchor above my head, threw it clear just as she was turning over. I grasped her gunwale and held on as she turned bottom up, for I suddenly remembered that I could not swim. Then I tried to right her, but with too much eagerness, for she rolled clean over, and left me as before, clinging to her gunwale, while my body was still in the water. Giving a moment to cool reflection, I found that although the wind was

blowing moderately toward the land, the current was carrying me to sea, and that something would have to be done. Three times I had been under water, in trying to right the dory, and I was just saying, "Now I lay me," when I was seized by a determination to try yet once more, so that no one of the prophets of evil I had left behind me could say, "I told you so." Whatever the danger may have been, much or little, I can truly say that the moment was the most serene of my life.

After righting the dory for the fourth time, I finally succeeded by the utmost care in keeping her upright while I hauled myself into her and with one of the oars, which I had recovered, paddled to the shore, somewhat the worse for wear and pretty full of salt water. The position of my vessel, now high and dry, gave me anxiety. To get her afloat again was all I thought of or cared for. I had little difficulty in carrying the second part of my cable out and securing it to the first, which I had taken the precaution to buoy before I put it into the boat. To bring the end back to the sloop was a smaller matter still, and I believe I chuckled above my sorrows when I found that in all the haphazard my judgment or my good genius had faithfully stood by me. The cable reached from the anchor in deep water to the sloop's windlass by just enough to secure a turn and no more. The anchor had been dropped at the right distance from the vessel. To heave all taut now and wait for the coming tide was all I could do.

I had already done enough work to tire a stouter man, and was only too glad to throw myself on the sand above the tide and rest; for the sun was already up, and pouring a generous warmth over the land. While my state could have been worse, I was on the wild coast of a foreign country, and not entirely secure in my property, as I soon found out. I had not been long on the shore when I heard the patter, patter of a horse's feet approaching along the hard beach, which ceased as it came abreast of the sand-ridge where I lay sheltered from the wind. Looking up cautiously, I saw mounted on a nag probably the most astonished boy on the whole coast. He had found a sloop! "It must be mine," he thought, "for am I not the first to see it on the beach?" Sure enough, there it was all high and dry and painted white. He trotted his horse around it, and finding no owner, hitched the nag to the sloop's bobstay and hauled as though he would take her home; but of course she was too heavy for one horse to move. With my skiff, however, it was different; this he hauled some distance, and concealed behind a dune in a bunch of tall grass. He had made up his mind, I dare say, to bring more horses and drag his bigger prize away, anyhow, and was starting off for the settlement a mile or so away for the reinforcement when I discovered myself to him, at which he seemed displeased and disappointed. "Buenos dias, muchacho," I said. He grunted a reply, and eyed me keenly from head to foot. Then bursting into a volley of questions,--more than six Yankees could ask,--he wanted to know, first, where my ship was from, and how many days she had been coming. Then he asked what I was doing here ashore so early in the morning. "Your questions are easily answered," I replied; "my ship is from the moon, it has taken her a month to come, and she is here for a cargo of boys." But the intimation of this enterprise, had

I not been on the alert, might have cost me dearly; for while I spoke this child of the campo coiled his lariat ready to throw, and instead of being himself carried to the moon, he was apparently thinking of towing me home by the neck, astern of his wild cayuse, over the fields of Uruguay.

The exact spot where I was stranded was at the Castillo Chicos, about seven miles south of the dividing-line of Uruguay and Brazil, and of course the natives there speak Spanish. To reconcile my early visitor, I told him that I had on my ship biscuits, and that I wished to trade them for butter and milk. On hearing this a broad grin lighted up his face, and showed that he was greatly interested, and that even in Uruguay a ship's biscuit will cheer the heart of a boy and make him your bosom friend. The lad almost flew home, and returned quickly with butter, milk, and eggs. I was, after all, in a land of plenty. With the boy came others, old and young, from neighboring ranches, among them a German settler, who was of great assistance to me in many ways.

A coast-guard from Fort Teresa, a few miles away, also came, "to protect your property from the natives of the plains," he said. I took occasion to tell him, however, that if he would look after the people of his own village, I would take care of those from the plains, pointing, as I spoke, to the nondescript "merchant" who had already stolen my revolver and several small articles from my cabin, which by a bold front I had recovered. The chap was not a native Uruguayan. Here, as in many other places that I visited, the natives themselves were not the ones discreditable to the country.

Early in the day a despatch came from the port captain of Montevideo, commanding the coastguards to render the *Spray* every assistance. This, however, was not necessary, for a guard was already on the alert, and making all the ado that would become the wreck of a steamer with a thousand emigrants aboard. The same messenger brought word from the port captain that he would despatch a steam-tug to tow the *Spray* to Montevideo. The officer was as good as his word; a powerful tug arrived on the following day; but, to make a long story short, with the help of the German and one soldier and one Italian, called "Angel of Milan," I had already floated the sloop and was sailing for port with the boom off before a fair wind. The adventure cost the *Spray* no small amount of pounding on the hard sand; she lost her shoe and part of her false keel, and received other damage, which, however, was readily mended afterward in dock.

On the following day I anchored at Maldonado. The British consul, his daughter, and another young lady came on board, bringing with them a basket of fresh eggs, strawberries, bottles of milk, and a great loaf of sweet bread. This was a good landfall, and better cheer than I had found at Maldonado once upon a time when I entered the port with a stricken crew in my bark, the *Aquidneck*.

In the waters of Maldonado Bay a variety of fishes abound, and fur-seals in their season haul out on the island abreast the bay to

breed. Currents on this coast are greatly affected by the prevailing winds, and a tidal wave higher than that ordinarily produced by the moon is sent up the whole shore of Uruguay before a southwest gale, or lowered by a northeaster, as may happen. One of these waves having just receded before the northeast wind which brought the *Spray* in left the tide now at low ebb, with oyster-rocks laid bare for some distance along the shore. Other shellfish of good flavor were also plentiful, though small in size. I gathered a mess of oysters and mussels here, while a native with hook and line, and with mussels for bait, fished from a point of detached rocks for bream, landing several good-sized ones.

The fisherman's nephew, a lad about seven years old, deserves mention as the tallest blasphemer, for a short boy, that I met on the voyage. He called his old uncle all the vile names under the sun for not helping him across the gully. While he swore roundly in all the moods and tenses of the Spanish language, his uncle fished on, now and then congratulating his hopeful nephew on his accomplishment. At the end of his rich vocabulary the urchin sauntered off into the fields, and shortly returned with a bunch of flowers, and with all smiles handed them to me with the innocence of an angel. I remembered having seen the same flower on the banks of the river farther up, some years before. I asked the young pirate why he had brought them to me. Said he, "I don't know; I only wished to do so." Whatever the influence was that put so amiable a wish in this wild pampa boy, it must be far-reaching, thought I, and potent, seas over.

Shortly after, the *Spray* sailed for Montevideo, where she arrived on the following day and was greeted by steam-whistles till I felt embarrassed and wished that I had arrived unobserved. The voyage so far alone may have seemed to the Uruguayans a feat worthy of some recognition; but there was so much of it yet ahead, and of such an arduous nature, that any demonstration at this point seemed, somehow, like boasting prematurely.

The *Spray* had barely come to anchor at Montevideo when the agents of the Royal Mail Steamship Company, Messrs. Humphreys & Co., sent word that they would dock and repair her free of expense and give me twenty pounds sterling, which, they did to the letter, and more besides. The calkers at Montevideo paid very careful attention to the work of making the sloop tight. Carpenters mended the keel and also the life-boat (the dory), painting it till I hardly knew it from a butterfly.

Christmas of 1895 found the *Spray* refitted even to a wonderful makeshift stove which was contrived from a large iron drum of some sort punched full of holes to give it a draft; the pipe reached straight up through the top of the forecastle. Now, this was not a stove by mere courtesy. It was always hungry, even for green wood; and in cold, wet days off the coast of Tierra del Fuego it stood me in good stead. Its one door swung on copper hinges, which one of the yard apprentices, with laudable pride, polished till the whole thing

blushed like the brass binnacle of a P. & O. steamer.

The *Spray* was now ready for sea. Instead of proceeding at once on her voyage, however, she made an excursion up the river, sailing December 29. An old friend of mine, Captain Howard of Cape Cod and of River Plate fame, took the trip in her to Buenos Aires, where she arrived early on the following day, with a gale of wind and a current so much in her favor that she outdid herself. I was glad to have a sailor of Howard's experience on board to witness her performance of sailing with no living being at the helm. Howard sat near the binnacle and watched the compass while the sloop held her course so steadily that one would have declared that the card was nailed fast. Not a quarter of a point did she deviate from her course. My old friend had owned and sailed a pilot-sloop on the river for many years, but this feat took the wind out of his sails at last, and he cried, "I'll be stranded on Chico Bank if ever I saw the like of it!" Perhaps he had never given his sloop a chance to show what she could do. The point I make for the *Spray* here, above all other points, is that she sailed in shoal water and in a strong current, with other difficult and unusual conditions. Captain Howard took all this into account.

In all the years away from his native home Howard had not forgotten the art of making fish chowders; and to prove this he brought along some fine rockfish and prepared a mess fit for kings. When the savory chowder was done, chocking the pot securely between two boxes on the cabin floor, so that it could not roll over, we helped ourselves and swapped yarns over it while the *Spray* made her own way through the darkness on the river. Howard told me stories about the Fuegian cannibals as she reeled along, and I told him about the pilot of the *Pinta* steering my vessel through the storm off the coast of the Azores, and that I looked for him at the helm in a gale such as this. I do not charge Howard with superstition,--we are none of us superstitious,--but when I spoke about his returning to Montevideo on the *Spray* he shook his head and took a steam-packet instead.

I had not been in Buenos Aires for a number of years. The place where I had once landed from packets, in a cart, was now built up with magnificent docks. Vast fortunes had been spent in remodeling the harbor; London bankers could tell you that. The port captain, after assigning the *Spray* a safe berth, with his compliments, sent me word to call on him for anything I might want while in port, and I felt quite sure that his friendship was sincere. The sloop was well cared for at Buenos Aires; her dockage and tonnage dues were all free, and the yachting fraternity of the city welcomed her with a good will. In town I found things not so greatly changed as about the docks, and I soon felt myself more at home.

From Montevideo I had forwarded a letter from Sir Edward Hairby to the owner of the "*Standard*," Mr. Mulhall, and in reply to it was assured of a warm welcome to the warmest heart, I think, outside of Ireland. Mr. Mulhall, with a prancing team, came down to the docks as soon as the *Spray* was berthed, and would have me go to his house at once,

where a room was waiting. And it was New Year's day, 1896. The course of the Spray had been followed in the columns of the "Standard."

Mr. Mulhall kindly drove me to see many improvements about the city, and we went in search of some of the old landmarks. The man who sold "lemonade" on the plaza when first I visited this wonderful city I found selling lemonade still at two cents a glass; he had made a fortune by it. His stock in trade was a wash-tub and a neighboring hydrant, a moderate supply of brown sugar, and about six lemons that floated on the sweetened water. The water from time to time was renewed from the friendly pump, but the lemon "went on forever," and all at two cents a glass.

But we looked in vain for the man who once sold whisky and coffins in Buenos Aires; the march of civilization had crushed him--memory only clung to his name. Enterprising man that he was, I fain would have looked him up. I remember the tiers of whisky-barrels, ranged on end, on one side of the store, while on the other side, and divided by a thin partition, were the coffins in the same order, of all sizes and in great numbers. The unique arrangement seemed in order, for as a cask was emptied a coffin might be filled. Besides cheap whisky and many other liquors, he sold "cider," which he manufactured from damaged Malaga raisins. Within the scope of his enterprise was also the sale of mineral waters, not entirely blameless of the germs of disease. This man surely catered to all the tastes, wants, and conditions of his customers.

Farther along in the city, however, survived the good man who wrote on the side of his store, where thoughtful men might read and learn: "This wicked world will be destroyed by a comet! The owner of this store is therefore bound to sell out at any price and avoid the catastrophe." My friend Mr. Mulhall drove me round to view the fearful comet with streaming tail pictured large on the trembling merchant's walls.

I unshipped the sloop's mast at Buenos Aires and shortened it by seven feet. I reduced the length of the bowsprit by about five feet, and even then I found it reaching far enough from home; and more than once, when on the end of it reefing the jib, I regretted that I had not shortened it another foot.