

## CHAPTER XIV

A testimonial from a lady--Cruising round Tasmania--The skipper delivers his first lecture on the voyage--Abundant provisions--An inspection of the *Spray* for safety at Devonport--Again at Sydney--Northward bound for Torres Strait--An amateur shipwreck--Friends on the Australian coast--Perils of a coral sea.

February 1, 1897, on returning to my vessel I found waiting for me the letter of sympathy which I subjoin:

A lady sends Mr. Slocum the inclosed five-pound note as a token of her appreciation of his bravery in crossing the wide seas on so small a boat, and all alone, without human sympathy to help when danger threatened. All success to you.

To this day I do not know who wrote it or to whom I am indebted for the generous gift it contained. I could not refuse a thing so kindly meant, but promised myself to pass it on with interest at the first opportunity, and this I did before leaving Australia.

The season of fair weather around the north of Australia being yet a long way off, I sailed to other ports in Tasmania, where it is fine the year round, the first of these being Beauty Point, near which are Beaconsfield and the great Tasmania gold-mine, which I visited in turn. I saw much gray, uninteresting rock being hoisted out of the mine there, and hundreds of stamps crushing it into powder. People told me there was gold in it, and I believed what they said.

I remember Beauty Point for its shady forest and for the road among the tall gum-trees. While there the governor of New South Wales, Lord Hampden, and his family came in on a steam-yacht, sight-seeing. The *Spray*, anchored near the landing-pier, threw her bunting out, of course, and probably a more insignificant craft bearing the Stars and Stripes was never seen in those waters. However, the governor's party seemed to know why it floated there, and all about the *Spray*, and when I heard his Excellency say, "Introduce me to the captain," or "Introduce the captain to me," whichever it was, I found myself at once in the presence of a gentleman and a friend, and one greatly interested in my voyage. If any one of the party was more interested than the governor himself, it was the Honorable Margaret, his daughter. On leaving, Lord and Lady Hampden promised to rendezvous with me on board the *Spray* at the Paris Exposition in 1900. "If we live," they said, and I added, for my part, "Dangers of the seas excepted."

From Beauty Point the *Spray* visited Georgetown, near the mouth of the river Tamar. This little settlement, I believe, marks the place where the first footprints were made by whites in Tasmania, though it never grew to be more than a hamlet.

Considering that I had seen something of the world, and finding people here interested in adventure, I talked the matter over before my first audience in a little hall by the country road. A piano having been brought in from a neighbor's, I was helped out by the severe thumping it got, and by a "Tommy Atkins" song from a strolling comedian. People came from a great distance, and the attendance all told netted the house about three pounds sterling. The owner of the hall, a kind lady from Scotland, would take no rent, and so my lecture from the start was a success.

From this snug little place I made sail for Devonport, a thriving place on the river Mersey, a few hours' sail westward along the coast, and fast becoming the most important port in Tasmania. Large steamers enter there now and carry away great cargoes of farm produce, but the *Spray* was the first vessel to bring the Stars and Stripes to the port, the harbor-master, Captain Murray, told me, and so it is written in the port records. For the great distinction the *Spray* enjoyed many civilities while she rode comfortably at anchor in her port-duster awning that covered her from stem to stern.

From the magistrate's house, "Malunnah," on the point, she was saluted by the Jack both on coming in and on going out, and dear Mrs. Aikenhead, the mistress of Malunnah, supplied the *Spray* with jams and jellies of all sorts, by the case, prepared from the fruits of her own rich garden--enough to last all the way home and to spare. Mrs. Wood, farther up the harbor, put up bottles of raspberry wine for me. At this point, more than ever before, I was in the land of good cheer. Mrs. Powell sent on board chutney prepared "as we prepare it in India." Fish, and game were plentiful here, and the voice of the gobbler was heard, and from Pardo, farther up the country, came an enormous cheese; and yet people inquire: "What did you live on? What did you eat?"

I was haunted by the beauty of the landscape all about, of the natural ferneries then disappearing, and of the domed forest-trees on the slopes, and was fortunate in meeting a gentleman intent on preserving in art the beauties of his country. He presented me with many reproductions from his collection of pictures, also many originals, to show to my friends.

By another gentleman I was charged to tell the glories of Tasmania in every land and on every occasion. This was Dr. McCall, M. L. C. The doctor gave me useful hints on lecturing. It was not without misgivings, however, that I filled away on this new course, and I am free to say that it is only by the kindness of sympathetic audiences that my oratorical bark was held on even keel. Soon after my first talk the kind doctor came to me with words of approval. As in many other of my enterprises, I had gone about it at once and without second thought. "Man, man," said he, "great nervousness is only a sign of brain, and the more brain a man has the longer it takes him to get over the affliction; but," he added reflectively, "you will get over it." However, in my own behalf I think it only fair to say that I am

not yet entirely cured.

The *Spray* was hauled out on the marine railway at Devonport and examined carefully top and bottom, but was found absolutely free from the destructive teredo, and sound in all respects. To protect her further against the ravage of these insects the bottom was coated once more with copper paint, for she would have to sail through the Coral and Arafura seas before refitting again. Everything was done to fit her for all the known dangers. But it was not without regret that I looked forward to the day of sailing from a country of so many pleasant associations. If there was a moment in my voyage when I could have given it up, it was there and then; but no vacancies for a better post being open, I weighed anchor April 16, 1897, and again put to sea.

The season of summer was then over; winter was rolling up from the south, with fair winds for the north. A foretaste of winter wind sent the *Spray* flying round Cape Howe and as far as Cape Bundooro farther along, which she passed on the following day, retracing her course northward. This was a fine run, and boded good for the long voyage home from the antipodes. My old Christmas friends on Bundooro seemed to be up and moving when I came the second time by their cape, and we exchanged signals again, while the sloop sailed along as before in a smooth sea and close to the shore.

The weather was fine, with clear sky the rest of the passage to Port Jackson (Sydney), where the *Spray* arrived April 22, 1897, and anchored in Watson's Bay, near the heads, in eight fathoms of water. The harbor from the heads to Parramatta, up the river, was more than ever alive with boats and yachts of every class. It was, indeed, a scene of animation, hardly equaled in any other part of the world.

A few days later the bay was flecked with tempestuous waves, and none but stout ships carried sail. I was in a neighboring hotel then, nursing a neuralgia which I had picked up alongshore, and had only that moment got a glance of just the stern of a large, unmanageable steamship passing the range of my window as she forged in by the point, when the bell-boy burst into my room shouting that the *Spray* had "gone bung." I tumbled out quickly, to learn that "bung" meant that a large steamship had run into her, and that it was the one of which I saw the stern, the other end of her having hit the *Spray*. It turned out, however, that no damage was done beyond the loss of an anchor and chain, which from the shock of the collision had parted at the hawse. I had nothing at all to complain of, though, in the end, for the captain, after he clubbed his ship, took the *Spray* in tow up the harbor, clear of all dangers, and sent her back again, in charge of an officer and three men, to her anchorage in the bay, with a polite note saying he would repair any damages done. But what yawing about she made of it when she came with a stranger at the helm! Her old friend the pilot of the *Pinta* would not have been guilty of such lubberly work. But to my great delight they got her into a berth, and the neuralgia left me then, or was forgotten. The captain of the steamer, like a true seaman, kept his word, and his agent, Mr.

Collishaw handed me on the very next day the price of the lost anchor and chain, with something over for anxiety of mind. I remember that he offered me twelve pounds at once; but my lucky number being thirteen, we made the amount thirteen pounds, which squared all accounts.

I sailed again, May 9, before a strong southwest wind, which sent the *Spray* gallantly on as far as Port Stevens, where it fell calm and then came up ahead; but the weather was fine, and so remained for many days, which was a great change from the state of the weather experienced here some months before.

Having a full set of admiralty sheet-charts of the coast and Barrier Reef, I felt easy in mind. Captain Fisher, R.N., who had steamed through the Barrier passages in *H. M. S. Orlando*, advised me from the first to take this route, and I did not regret coming back to it now.

The wind, for a few days after passing Port Stevens, Seal Rocks, and Cape Hawk, was light and dead ahead; but these points are photographed on my memory from the trial of beating round them some months before when bound the other way. But now, with a good stock of books on board, I fell to reading day and night, leaving this pleasant occupation merely to trim sails or tack, or to lie down and rest, while the *Spray* nibbled at the miles. I tried to compare my state with that of old circumnavigators, who sailed exactly over the route which I took from Cape Verde Islands or farther back to this point and beyond, but there was no comparison so far as I had got. Their hardships and romantic escapes--those of them who escaped death and worse sufferings--did not enter into my experience, sailing all alone around the world. For me is left to tell only of pleasant experiences, till finally my adventures are prosy and tame.

I had just finished reading some of the most interesting of the old voyages in woe-begone ships, and was already near Port Macquarie, on my own cruise, when I made out, May 13, a modern dandy craft in distress, anchored on the coast. Standing in for her, I found that she was the cutter-yacht *Akbar* [Footnote: *Akbar* was not her registered name, which need not be told], which had sailed from Watson's Bay about three days ahead of the *Spray*, and that she had run at once into trouble. No wonder she did so. It was a case of babes in the wood or butterflies at sea. Her owner, on his maiden voyage, was all duck trousers; the captain, distinguished for the enormous yachtsman's cap he wore, was a Murrumbidgee [Footnote: The Murrumbidgee is a small river winding among the mountains of Australia, and would be the last place in which to look for a whale.] whaler before he took command of the *Akbar*; and the navigating officer, poor fellow, was almost as deaf as a post, and nearly as stiff and immovable as a post in the ground. These three jolly tars comprised the crew. None of them knew more about the sea or about a vessel than a newly born babe knows about another world. They were bound for New Guinea, so they said; perhaps it was as well that three tenderfeet so tender as those never reached that destination.

The owner, whom I had met before he sailed, wanted to race the poor old *Spray* to Thursday Island en route. I declined the challenge, naturally, on the ground of the unfairness of three young yachtsmen in a clipper against an old sailor all alone in a craft of coarse build; besides that, I would not on any account race in the Coral Sea.

"*Spray* ahoy!" they all hailed now. "What's the weather goin' t' be? Is it a-goin' to blow? And don't you think we'd better go back t' r-r-refit?"

I thought, "If ever you get back, don't refit," but I said: "Give me the end of a rope, and I'll tow you into yon port farther along; and on your lives," I urged, "do not go back round Cape Hawk, for it's winter to the south of it."

They purposed making for Newcastle under jury-sails; for their mainsail had been blown to ribbons, even the jigger had been blown away, and her rigging flew at loose ends. The *Akbar*, in a word, was a wreck.

"Up anchor," I shouted, "up anchor, and let me tow you into Port Macquarie, twelve miles north of this."

"No," cried the owner; "we'll go back to Newcastle. We missed Newcastle on the way coming; we didn't see the light, and it was not thick, either." This he shouted very loud, ostensibly for my hearing, but closer even than necessary, I thought, to the ear of the navigating officer. Again I tried to persuade them to be towed into the port of refuge so near at hand. It would have cost them only the trouble of weighing their anchor and passing me a rope; of this I assured them, but they declined even this, in sheer ignorance of a rational course.

"What is your depth of water?" I asked.

"Don't know; we lost our lead. All the chain is out. We sounded with the anchor."

"Send your dinghy over, and I'll give you a lead."

"We've lost our dinghy, too," they cried.

"God is good, else you would have lost yourselves," and "Farewell" was all I could say.

The trifling service proffered by the *Spray* would have saved their vessel.

"Report us," they cried, as I stood on--"report us with sails blown away, and that we don't care a dash and are not afraid."

"Then there is no hope for you," and again "Farewell." I promised I would report them, and did so at the first opportunity, and out of humane reasons I do so again. On the following day I spoke the steamship Sherman, bound down the coast, and reported the yacht in distress and that it would be an act of humanity to tow her somewhere away from her exposed position on an open coast. That she did not get a tow from the steamer was from no lack of funds to pay the bill; for the owner, lately heir to a few hundred pounds, had the money with him. The proposed voyage to New Guinea was to look that island over with a view to its purchase. It was about eighteen days before I heard of the Akbar again, which was on the 31st of May, when I reached Cooktown, on the Endeavor River, where I found this news:

May 31, the yacht Akbar, from Sydney for New Guinea, three hands on board, lost at Crescent Head; the crew saved.

So it took them several days to lose the yacht, after all.

After speaking the distressed Akbar and the Sherman, the voyage for many days was uneventful save in the pleasant incident on May 16 of a chat by signal with the people on South Solitary Island, a dreary stone heap in the ocean just off the coast of New South Wales, in latitude 30 degrees 12' south.

"What vessel is that?" they asked, as the sloop came abreast of their island. For answer I tried them with the Stars and Stripes at the peak. Down came their signals at once, and up went the British ensign instead, which they dipped heartily. I understood from this that they made out my vessel and knew all about her, for they asked no more questions. They didn't even ask if the "voyage would pay," but they threw out this friendly message, "Wishing you a pleasant voyage," which at that very moment I was having.

May 19 the Spray, passing the Tweed River, was signaled from Danger Point, where those on shore seemed most anxious about the state of my health, for they asked if "all hands" were well, to which I could say, "Yes."

On the following day the Spray rounded Great Sandy Cape, and, what is a notable event in every voyage, picked up the trade-winds, and these winds followed her now for many thousands of miles, never ceasing to blow from a moderate gale to a mild summer breeze, except at rare intervals.

From the pitch of the cape was a noble light seen twenty-seven miles; passing from this to Lady Elliott Light, which stands on an island as a sentinel at the gateway of the Barrier Reef, the Spray was at once in the fairway leading north. Poets have sung of beacon-light and of pharos, but did ever poet behold a great light flash up before his path on a dark night in the midst of a coral sea? If so, he knew the meaning of his song.

The *Spray* had sailed for hours in suspense, evidently stemming a current. Almost mad with doubt, I grasped the helm to throw her head off shore, when blazing out of the sea was the light ahead.

"Excalibur!" cried "all hands," and rejoiced, and sailed on. The

*Spray* was now in a protected sea and smooth water, the first she had dipped her keel into since leaving Gibraltar, and a change it was from the heaving of the misnamed "Pacific" Ocean.

The Pacific is perhaps, upon the whole, no more boisterous than other oceans, though I feel quite safe in saying that it is not more pacific except in name. It is often wild enough in one part or another. I once knew a writer who, after saying beautiful things about the sea, passed through a Pacific hurricane, and he became a changed man. But where, after all, would be the poetry of the sea were there no wild waves? At last here was the *Spray* in the midst of a sea of coral. The sea itself might be called smooth indeed, but coral rocks are always rough, sharp, and dangerous. I trusted now to the mercies of the Maker of all reefs, keeping a good lookout at the same time for perils on every hand.

Lo! the Barrier Reef and the waters of many colors studded all about with enchanted islands! I behold among them after all many safe harbors, else my vision is astray. On the 24th of May, the sloop, having made one hundred and ten miles a day from Danger Point, now entered Whitsunday Pass, and that night sailed through among the islands. When the sun rose next morning I looked back and regretted having gone by while it was dark, for the scenery far astern was varied and charming.