

## CHAPTER XV

Arrival at Port Denison, Queensland--A lecture--Reminiscences of Captain Cook--Lecturing for charity at Cooktown--A happy escape from a coral reef--Home Island, Sunday Island, Bird Island--An American pearl-fisherman--Jubilee at Thursday Island--A new ensign for the Spray --Booby Island--Across the Indian Ocean--Christmas Island.

On the morning of the 26th Gloucester Island was close aboard, and the Spray anchored in the evening at Port Denison, where rests, on a hill, the sweet little town of Bowen, the future watering place and health-resort of Queensland. The country all about here had a healthful appearance.

The harbor was easy of approach, spacious and safe, and afforded excellent holding-ground. It was quiet in Bowen when the Spray arrived, and the good people with an hour to throw away on the second evening of her arrival came down to the School of Arts to talk about the voyage, it being the latest event. It was duly advertised in the two little papers, "Boomerang" and "Nully Nully," in the one the day before the affair came off, and in the other the day after, which was all the same to the editor, and, for that matter, it was the same to me.

Besides this, circulars were distributed with a flourish, and the "best bellman" in Australia was employed. But I could have keelhailed the wretch, bell and all, when he came to the door of the little hotel where my prospective audience and I were dining, and with his clattering bell and fiendish yell made noises that would awake the dead, all over the voyage of the Spray from "Boston to Bowen, the two Hubs in the cart-wheels of creation," as the "Boomerang" afterward said.

Mr. Myles, magistrate, harbor-master, land commissioner, gold warden, etc., was chairman, and introduced me, for what reason I never knew, except to embarrass me with a sense of vain ostentation and embitter my life, for Heaven knows I had met every person in town the first hour ashore. I knew them all by name now, and they all knew me. However, Mr. Myles was a good talker. Indeed, I tried to induce him to go on and tell the story while I showed the pictures, but this he refused to do. I may explain that it was a talk illustrated by stereopticon. The views were good, but the lantern, a thirty-shilling affair, was wretched, and had only an oil-lamp in it.

I sailed early the next morning before the papers came out, thinking it best to do so. They each appeared with a favorable column, however, of what they called a lecture, so I learned afterward, and they had a kind word for the bellman besides.

From Port Denison the sloop ran before the constant trade-wind, and made no stop at all, night or day, till she reached Cooktown, on the

Endeavor River, where she arrived Monday, May 31, 1897, before a furious blast of wind encountered that day fifty miles down the coast. On this parallel of latitude is the high ridge and backbone of the tradewinds, which about Cooktown amount often to a hard gale.

I had been charged to navigate the route with extra care, and to feel my way over the ground. The skilled officer of the royal navy who advised me to take the Barrier Reef passage wrote me that H. M. S. Orlando steamed nights as well as days through it, but that I, under sail, would jeopardize my vessel on coral reefs if I undertook to do so.

Confidentially, it would have been no easy matter finding anchorage every night. The hard work, too, of getting the sloop under way every morning was finished, I had hoped, when she cleared the Strait of Magellan. Besides that, the best of admiralty charts made it possible to keep on sailing night and day. Indeed, with a fair wind, and in the clear weather of that season, the way through the Barrier Reef Channel, in all sincerity, was clearer than a highway in a busy city, and by all odds less dangerous. But to any one contemplating the voyage I would say, beware of reefs day or night, or, remaining on the land, be wary still.

"The Spray came flying into port like a bird," said the longshore daily papers of Cooktown the morning after she arrived; "and it seemed strange," they added, "that only one man could be seen on board working the craft." The Spray was doing her best, to be sure, for it was near night, and she was in haste to find a perch before dark.

Tacking inside of all the craft in port, I moored her at sunset nearly abreast the Captain Cook monument, and next morning went ashore to feast my eyes on the very stones the great navigator had seen, for I was now on a seaman's consecrated ground. But there seemed a question in Cooktown's mind as to the exact spot where his ship, the Endeavor, hove down for repairs on her memorable voyage around the world. Some said it was not at all at the place where the monument now stood. A discussion of the subject was going on one morning where I happened to be, and a young lady present, turning to me as one of some authority in nautical matters, very flatteringly asked my opinion. Well, I could see no reason why Captain Cook, if he made up his mind to repair his ship inland, couldn't have dredged out a channel to the place where the monument now stood, if he had a dredging-machine with him, and afterward fill it up again; for Captain Cook could do 'most anything, and nobody ever said that he hadn't a dredger along. The young lady seemed to lean to my way of thinking, and following up the story of the historical voyage, asked if I had visited the point farther down the harbor where the great circumnavigator was murdered. This took my breath, but a bright school-boy coming along relieved my embarrassment, for, like all boys, seeing that information was wanted, he volunteered to supply it. Said he: "Captain Cook wasn't murdered 'ere at all, ma'am; 'e was killed in Hafrica: a lion et 'im."

Here I was reminded of distressful days gone by. I think it was in 1866 that the old steamship Soushay, from Batavia for Sydney, put in at Cooktown for scurvy-grass, as I always thought, and "incidentally" to land mails. On her sick-list was my fevered self; and so I didn't see the place till I came back on the Spray thirty-one years later. And now I saw coming into port the physical wrecks of miners from New Guinea, destitute and dying. Many had died on the way and had been buried at sea. He would have been a hardened wretch who could look on and not try to do something for them.

The sympathy of all went out to these sufferers, but the little town was already straitened from a long run on its benevolence. I thought of the matter, of the lady's gift to me at Tasmania, which I had promised myself I would keep only as a loan, but found now, to my embarrassment, that I had invested the money. However, the good Cooktown people wished to hear a story of the sea, and how the crew of the Spray fared when illness got aboard of her. Accordingly the little Presbyterian church on the hill was opened for a conversation; everybody talked, and they made a roaring success of it. Judge Chester, the magistrate, was at the head of the gam, and so it was bound to succeed. He it was who annexed the island of New Guinea to Great Britain. "While I was about it," said he, "I annexed the blooming lot of it." There was a ring in the statement pleasant to the ear of an old voyager. However, the Germans made such a row over the judge's mainsail haul that they got a share in the venture.

Well, I was now indebted to the miners of Cooktown for the great privilege of adding a mite to a worthy cause, and to Judge Chester all the town was indebted for a general good time. The matter standing so, I sailed on June 6, 1897, heading away for the north as before.

Arrived at a very inviting anchorage about sundown, the 7th, I came to, for the night, abreast the Claremont light-ship. This was the only time throughout the passage of the Barrier Reef Channel that the Spray anchored, except at Port Denison and at Endeavor River. On the very night following this, however (the 8th), I regretted keenly, for an instant, that I had not anchored before dark, as I might have done easily under the lee of a coral reef. It happened in this way. The Spray had just passed M Reef light-ship, and left the light dipping astern, when, going at full speed, with sheets off, she hit the M Reef itself on the north end, where I expected to see a beacon.

She swung off quickly on her heel, however, and with one more bound on a swell cut across the shoal point so quickly that I hardly knew how it was done. The beacon wasn't there; at least, I didn't see it. I hadn't time to look for it after she struck, and certainly it didn't much matter then whether I saw it or not.

But this gave her a fine departure for Cape Greenville, the next point ahead. I saw the ugly boulders under the sloop's keel as she flashed over them, and I made a mental note of it that the letter M, for which

the reef was named, was the thirteenth one in our alphabet, and that thirteen, as noted years before, was still my lucky number. The natives of Cape Greenville are notoriously bad, and I was advised to give them the go-by. Accordingly, from M Reef I steered outside of the adjacent islands, to be on the safe side. Skipping along now, the *Spray* passed Home Island, off the pitch of the cape, soon after midnight, and squared away on a westerly course. A short time later she fell in with a steamer bound south, groping her way in the dark and making the night dismal with her own black smoke.

From Home Island I made for Sunday Island, and bringing that abeam, shortened sail, not wishing to make Bird Island, farther along, before daylight, the wind being still fresh and the islands being low, with dangers about them. Wednesday, June 9, 1897, at daylight, Bird Island was dead ahead, distant two and a half miles, which I considered near enough. A strong current was pressing the sloop forward. I did not shorten sail too soon in the night! The first and only Australian canoe seen on the voyage was encountered here standing from the mainland, with a rag of sail set, bound for this island.

A long, slim fish that leaped on board in the night was found on deck this morning. I had it for breakfast. The spry chap was no larger around than a herring, which it resembled in every respect, except that it was three times as long; but that was so much the better, for I am rather fond of fresh herring, anyway. A great number of fisher-birds were about this day, which was one of the pleasantest on God's earth. The *Spray*, dancing over the waves, entered Albany Pass as the sun drew low in the west over the hills of Australia.

At 7:30 P.M. the *Spray*, now through the pass, came to anchor in a cove in the mainland, near a pearl-fisherman, called the *Tarawa*, which was at anchor, her captain from the deck of his vessel directing me to a berth. This done, he at once came on board to clasp hands. The *Tarawa* was a Californian, and Captain Jones, her master, was an American.

On the following morning Captain Jones brought on board two pairs of exquisite pearl shells, the most perfect ones I ever saw. They were probably the best he had, for Jones was the heart-yarn of a sailor. He assured me that if I would remain a few hours longer some friends from Somerset, near by, would pay us all a visit, and one of the crew, sorting shells on deck, "guessed" they would. The mate "guessed" so, too. The friends came, as even the second mate and cook had "guessed" they would. They were Mr. Jardine, stockman, famous throughout the land, and his family. Mrs. Jardine was the niece of King Malietoa, and cousin to the beautiful Faamu-Sami ("To make the sea burn"), who visited the *Spray* at Apia. Mr. Jardine was himself a fine specimen of a Scotsman. With his little family about him, he was content to live in this remote place, accumulating the comforts of life.

The fact of the *Tarawa* having been built in America accounted for the crew, boy Jim and all, being such good guessers. Strangely enough,

though, Captain Jones himself, the only American aboard, was never heard to guess at all.

After a pleasant chat and good-by to the people of the Tarawa, and to Mr. and Mrs. Jardine, I again weighed anchor and stood across for Thursday Island, now in plain view, mid-channel in Torres Strait, where I arrived shortly after noon. Here the Spray remained over until June 24. Being the only American representative in port, this tarry was imperative, for on the 22d was the Queen's diamond jubilee. The two days over were, as sailors say, for "coming up."

Meanwhile I spent pleasant days about the island. Mr. Douglas, resident magistrate, invited me on a cruise in his steamer one day among the islands in Torres Strait. This being a scientific expedition in charge of Professor Mason Bailey, botanist, we rambled over Friday and Saturday islands, where I got a glimpse of botany. Miss Bailey, the professor's daughter, accompanied the expedition, and told me of many indigenous plants with long names.

The 22d was the great day on Thursday Island, for then we had not only the jubilee, but a jubilee with a grand corroboree in it, Mr. Douglas having brought some four hundred native warriors and their wives and children across from the mainland to give the celebration the true native touch, for when they do a thing on Thursday Island they do it with a roar. The corroboree was, at any rate, a howling success. It took place at night, and the performers, painted in fantastic colors, danced or leaped about before a blazing fire. Some were rigged and painted like birds and beasts, in which the emu and kangaroo were well represented. One fellow leaped like a frog. Some had the human skeleton painted on their bodies, while they jumped about threateningly, spear in hand, ready to strike down some imaginary enemy. The kangaroo hopped and danced with natural ease and grace, making a fine figure. All kept time to music, vocal and instrumental, the instruments (save the mark!) being bits of wood, which they beat one against the other, and saucer-like bones, held in the palm of the hands, which they knocked together, making a dull sound. It was a show at once amusing, spectacular, and hideous.

The warrior aborigines that I saw in Queensland were for the most part lithe and fairly well built, but they were stamped always with repulsive features, and their women were, if possible, still more ill favored.

I observed that on the day of the jubilee no foreign flag was waving in the public grounds except the Stars and Stripes, which along with the Union Jack guarded the gateway, and floated in many places, from the tiniest to the standard size. Speaking to Mr. Douglas, I ventured a remark on this compliment to my country. "Oh," said he, "this is a family affair, and we do not consider the Stars and Stripes a foreign flag." The Spray of course flew her best bunting, and hoisted the Jack as well as her own noble flag as high as she could.

On June 24 the *Spray*, well fitted in every way, sailed for the long voyage ahead, down the Indian Ocean. Mr. Douglas gave her a flag as she was leaving his island. The *Spray* had now passed nearly all the dangers of the Coral Sea and Torres Strait, which, indeed, were not a few; and all ahead from this point was plain sailing and a straight course. The trade-wind was still blowing fresh, and could be safely counted on now down to the coast of Madagascar, if not beyond that, for it was still early in the season.

I had no wish to arrive off the Cape of Good Hope before midsummer, and it was now early winter. I had been off that cape once in July, which was, of course, midwinter there. The stout ship I then commanded encountered only fierce hurricanes, and she bore them ill. I wished for no winter gales now. It was not that I feared them more, being in the *Spray* instead of a large ship, but that I preferred fine weather in any case. It is true that one may encounter heavy gales off the Cape of Good Hope at any season of the year, but in the summer they are less frequent and do not continue so long. And so with time enough before me to admit of a run ashore on the islands en route, I shaped the course now for Keeling Cocos, atoll islands, distant twenty-seven hundred miles. Taking a departure from Booby Island, which the sloop passed early in the day, I decided to sight Timor on the way, an island of high mountains.

Booby Island I had seen before, but only once, however, and that was when in the steamship *Soushay*, on which I was "hove-down" in a fever. When she steamed along this way I was well enough to crawl on deck to look at Booby Island. Had I died for it, I would have seen that island. In those days passing ships landed stores in a cave on the island for shipwrecked and distressed wayfarers. Captain Airy of the *Soushay*, a good man, sent a boat to the cave with his contribution to the general store. The stores were landed in safety, and the boat, returning, brought back from the improvised post-office there a dozen or more letters, most of them left by whalers, with the request that the first homeward-bound ship would carry them along and see to their mailing, which had been the custom of this strange postal service for many years. Some of the letters brought back by our boat were directed to New Bedford, and some to Fairhaven, Massachusetts.

There is a light to-day on Booby Island, and regular packet communication with the rest of the world, and the beautiful uncertainty of the fate of letters left there is a thing of the past. I made no call at the little island, but standing close in, exchanged signals with the keeper of the light. Sailing on, the sloop was at once in the Arafura Sea, where for days she sailed in water milky white and green and purple. It was my good fortune to enter the sea on the last quarter of the moon, the advantage being that in the dark nights I witnessed the phosphorescent light effect at night in its greatest splendor. The sea, where the sloop disturbed it, seemed all ablaze, so that by its light I could see the smallest articles on deck, and her wake was a path of fire.

On the 25th of June the sloop was already clear of all the shoals and dangers, and was sailing on a smooth sea as steadily as before, but with speed somewhat slackened. I got out the flying-jib made at Juan Fernandez, and set it as a spinnaker from the stoutest bamboo that Mrs. Stevenson had given me at Samoa. The spinnaker pulled like a sodger, and the bamboo holding its own, the Spray mended her pace.

Several pigeons flying across to-day from Australia toward the islands bent their course over the Spray. Smaller birds were seen flying in the opposite direction. In the part of the Arafura that I came to first, where it was shallow, sea-snakes writhed about on the surface and tumbled over and over in the waves. As the sloop sailed farther on, where the sea became deep, they disappeared. In the ocean, where the water is blue, not one was ever seen.

In the days of serene weather there was not much to do but to read and take rest on the Spray, to make up as much as possible for the rough time off Cape Horn, which was not yet forgotten, and to forestall the Cape of Good Hope by a store of ease. My sea journal was now much the same from day to day--something like this of June 26 and 27, for example:

June 26, in the morning, it is a bit squally; later in, the day blowing a steady breeze.

On the log at noon is

	130 miles
Subtract correction for slip	10 "
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	120 "
Add for current	10 "
	-----
	130 "

Latitude by observation at noon, 10 degrees 23' S.  
Longitude as per mark on the chart.

There wasn't much brain-work in that log, I'm sure. June 27 makes a better showing, when all is told:

First of all, to-day, was a flying-fish on deck; fried it in butter.

133 miles on the log.

For slip, off, and for current, on, as per guess, about equal--let it go at that.

Latitude by observation at noon, 10 degrees 25' S.

For several days now the *Spray* sailed west on the parallel of 10 degrees 25' S., as true as a hair. If she deviated at all from that, through the day or night,--and this may have happened,--she was back, strangely enough, at noon, at the same latitude. But the greatest science was in reckoning the longitude. My tin clock and only timepiece had by this time lost its minute-hand, but after I boiled her she told the hours, and that was near enough on a long stretch.

On the 2d of July the great island of Timor was in view away to the nor'ard. On the following day I saw Dana Island, not far off, and a breeze came up from the land at night, fragrant of the spices or what not of the coast.

On the 11th, with all sail set and with the spinnaker still abroad, Christmas Island, about noon, came into view one point on the starboard bow. Before night it was abeam and distant two and a half miles. The surface of the island appeared evenly rounded from the sea to a considerable height in the center. In outline it was as smooth as a fish, and a long ocean swell, rolling up, broke against the sides, where it lay like a monster asleep, motionless on the sea. It seemed to have the proportions of a whale, and as the sloop sailed along its side to the part where the head would be, there was a nostril, even, which was a blow-hole through a ledge of rock where every wave that dashed threw up a shaft of water, lifelike and real.

It had been a long time since I last saw this island; but I remember my temporary admiration for the captain of the ship I was then in, the *Tawfore*, when he sang out one morning from the quarter-deck, well aft, "Go aloft there, one of ye, with a pair of eyes, and see Christmas Island." Sure enough, there the island was in sight from the royal-yard. Captain M---had thus made a great hit, and he never got over it. The chief mate, terror of us ordinaries in the ship, walking never to windward of the captain, now took himself very humbly to leeward altogether. When we arrived at Hong-Kong there was a letter in the ship's mail for me. I was in the boat with the captain some hours while he had it. But do you suppose he could hand a letter to a seaman? No, indeed; not even to an ordinary seaman. When we got to the ship he gave it to the first mate; the first mate gave it to the second mate, and he laid it, michingly, on the capstan-head, where I could get it.