

CHAPTER XVII

A clean bill of health at Mauritius--Sailing the voyage over again in the opera-house--A newly discovered plant named in honor of the Spray's skipper--A party of young ladies out for a sail--A bivouac on deck--A warm reception at Durban--A friendly cross-examination by Henry M. Stanley--Three wise Boers seek proof of the flatness of the earth--Leaving South Africa.

On the 16th of September, after eight restful days at Rodriguez, the mid-ocean land of plenty, I set sail, and on the 19th arrived at Mauritius, anchoring at quarantine about noon. The sloop was towed in later on the same day by the doctor's launch, after he was satisfied that I had mustered all the crew for inspection. Of this he seemed in doubt until he examined the papers, which called for a crew of one all told from port to port, throughout the voyage. Then finding that I had been well enough to come thus far alone, he gave me pratique without further ado. There was still another official visit for the Spray to pass farther in the harbor. The governor of Rodriguez, who had most kindly given me, besides a regular mail, private letters of introduction to friends, told me I should meet, first of all, Mr. Jenkins of the postal service, a good man. "How do you do, Mr. Jenkins?" cried I, as his boat swung alongside. "You don't know me," he said. "Why not?" I replied. "From where is the sloop?" "From around the world," I again replied, very solemnly. "And alone?" "Yes; why not?" "And you know me?" "Three thousand years ago," cried I, "when you and I had a warmer job than we have now" (even this was hot). "You were then Jenkinson, but if you have changed your name I don't blame you for that." Mr. Jenkins, forbearing soul, entered into the spirit of the jest, which served the Spray a good turn, for on the strength of this tale it got out that if any one should go on board after dark the devil would get him at once. And so I could leave the Spray without the fear of her being robbed at night. The cabin, to be sure, was broken into, but it was done in daylight, and the thieves got no more than a box of smoked herrings before "Tom" Ledson, one of the port officials, caught them red-handed, as it were, and sent them to jail. This was discouraging to pilferers, for they feared Ledson more than they feared Satan himself. Even Mamode Hajee Ayoob, who was the day-watchman on board,--till an empty box fell over in the cabin and frightened him out of his wits,--could not be hired to watch nights, or even till the sun went down. "Sahib," he cried, "there is no need of it," and what he said was perfectly true.

At Mauritius, where I drew a long breath, the Spray rested her wings, it being the season of fine weather. The hardships of the voyage, if there had been any, were now computed by officers of experience as nine tenths finished, and yet somehow I could not forget that the United States was still a long way off.

The kind people of Mauritius, to make me richer and happier, rigged up the opera-house, which they had named the "Ship Pantai ." [Footnote:

Guinea-hen] All decks and no bottom was this ship, but she was as stiff as a church. They gave me free use of it while I talked over the Spray's adventures. His Honor the mayor introduced me to his Excellency the governor from the poop-deck of the Pantai. In this way I was also introduced again to our good consul, General John P. Campbell, who had already introduced me to his Excellency, I was becoming well acquainted, and was in for it now to sail the voyage over again. How I got through the story I hardly know. It was a hot night, and I could have choked the tailor who made the coat I wore for this occasion. The kind governor saw that I had done my part trying to rig like a man ashore, and he invited me to Government House at Reduit, where I found myself among friends.

It was winter still off stormy Cape of Good Hope, but the storms might whistle there. I determined to see it out in milder Mauritius, visiting Rose Hill, Curipepe, and other places on the island. I spent a day with the elder Mr. Roberts, father of Governor Roberts of Rodriguez, and with his friends the Very Reverend Fathers O'Loughlin and McCarthy. Returning to the Spray by way of the great flower conservatory near Moka, the proprietor, having only that morning discovered a new and hardy plant, to my great honor named it "Slocum," which he said Latinized it at once, saving him some trouble on the twist of a word; and the good botanist seemed pleased that I had come. How different things are in different countries! In Boston, Massachusetts, at that time, a gentleman, so I was told, paid thirty thousand dollars to have a flower named after his wife, and it was not a big flower either, while "Slocum," which came without the asking, was bigger than a mangel-wurzel!

I was royally entertained at Moka, as well as at Reduit and other places--once by seven young ladies, to whom I spoke of my inability to return their hospitality except in my own poor way of taking them on a sail in the sloop. "The very thing! The very thing!" they all cried. "Then please name the time," I said, as meek as Moses. "To-morrow!" they all cried. "And, aunty, we may go, mayn't we, and we'll be real good for a whole week afterward, aunty! Say yes, aunty dear!" All this after saying "To-morrow"; for girls in Mauritius are, after all, the same as our girls in America; and their dear aunt said "Me, too" about the same as any really good aunt might say in my own country.

I was then in a quandary, it having recurred to me that on the very "to-morrow" I was to dine with the harbor-master, Captain Wilson. However, I said to myself, "The Spray will run out quickly into rough seas; these young ladies will have mal de mer and a good time, and I'll get in early enough to be at the dinner, after all." But not a bit of it. We sailed almost out of sight of Mauritius, and they just stood up and laughed at seas tumbling aboard, while I was at the helm making the worst weather of it I could, and spinning yarns to the aunt about sea-serpents and whales. But she, dear lady, when I had finished with stories of monsters, only hinted at a basket of provisions they had brought along, enough to last a week, for I had told them about my wretched steward.

The more the *Spray* tried to make these young ladies seasick, the more they all clapped their hands and said, "How lovely it is!" and "How beautifully she skims over the sea!" and "How beautiful our island appears from the distance!" and they still cried, "Go on!" We were fifteen miles or more at sea before they ceased the eager cry, "Go on!" Then the sloop swung round, I still hoping to be back to Port Louis in time to keep my appointment. The *Spray* reached the island quickly, and flew along the coast fast enough; but I made a mistake in steering along the coast on the way home, for as we came abreast of Tombo Bay it enchanted my crew. "Oh, let's anchor here!" they cried. To this no sailor in the world would have said nay. The sloop came to anchor, ten minutes later, as they wished, and a young man on the cliff abreast, waving his hat, cried, "Vive la *Spray*!" My passengers said, "Aunty, mayn't we have a swim in the surf along the shore?" Just then the harbor-master's launch hove in sight, coming out to meet us; but it was too late to get the sloop into Port Louis that night. The launch was in time, however, to land my fair crew for a swim; but they were determined not to desert the ship. Meanwhile I prepared a roof for the night on deck with the sails, and a Bengali man-servant arranged the evening meal. That night the *Spray* rode in Tombo Bay with her precious freight. Next morning bright and early, even before the stars were gone, I awoke to hear praying on deck.

The port officers' launch reappeared later in the morning, this time with Captain Wilson himself on board, to try his luck in getting the *Spray* into port, for he had heard of our predicament. It was worth something to hear a friend tell afterward how earnestly the good harbor-master of Mauritius said, "I'll find the *Spray* and I'll get her into port." A merry crew he discovered on her. They could hoist sails like old tars, and could trim them, too. They could tell all about the ship's "hoods," and one should have seen them clap a bonnet on the jib. Like the deepest of deep-water sailors, they could heave the lead, and--as I hope to see Mauritius again!--any of them could have put the sloop in stays. No ship ever had a fairer crew.

The voyage was the event of Port Louis; such a thing as young ladies sailing about the harbor, even, was almost unheard of before.

While at Mauritius the *Spray* was tendered the use of the military dock free of charge, and was thoroughly refitted by the port authorities. My sincere gratitude is also due other friends for many things needful for the voyage put on board, including bags of sugar from some of the famous old plantations.

The favorable season now set in, and thus well equipped, on the 26th of October, the *Spray* put to sea. As I sailed before a light wind the island receded slowly, and on the following day I could still see the Puce Mountain near Moka. The *Spray* arrived next day off Galets, Reunion, and a pilot came out and spoke her. I handed him a Mauritius paper and continued on my voyage; for rollers were running heavily at the time, and it was not practicable to make a landing. From Reunion I

shaped a course direct for Cape St. Mary, Madagascar.

The sloop was now drawing near the limits of the trade-wind, and the strong breeze that had carried her with free sheets the many thousands of miles from Sandy Cape, Australia, fell lighter each day until October 30, when it was altogether calm, and a motionless sea held her in a hushed world. I furled the sails at evening, sat down on deck, and enjoyed the vast stillness of the night.

October 31 a light east-northeast breeze sprang up, and the sloop passed Cape St. Mary about noon. On the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th of November, in the Mozambique Channel, she experienced a hard gale of wind from the southwest. Here the *Spray* suffered as much as she did anywhere, except off Cape Horn. The thunder and lightning preceding this gale were very heavy. From this point until the sloop arrived off the coast of Africa, she encountered a succession of gales of wind, which drove her about in many directions, but on the 17th of November she arrived at Port Natal.

This delightful place is the commercial center of the "Garden Colony," Durban itself, the city, being the continuation of a garden. The signalman from the bluff station reported the *Spray* fifteen miles off. The wind was freshening, and when she was within eight miles he said: "The *Spray* is shortening sail; the mainsail was reefed and set in ten minutes. One man is doing all the work."

This item of news was printed three minutes later in a Durban morning journal, which was handed to me when I arrived in port. I could not verify the time it had taken to reef the sail, for, as I have already said, the minute-hand of my timepiece was gone. I only knew that I reefed as quickly as I could.

The same paper, commenting on the voyage, said: "Judging from the stormy weather which has prevailed off this coast during the past few weeks, the *Spray* must have had a very stormy voyage from Mauritius to Natal." Doubtless the weather would have been called stormy by sailors in any ship, but it caused the *Spray* no more inconvenience than the delay natural to head winds generally.

The question of how I sailed the sloop alone, often asked, is best answered, perhaps, by a Durban newspaper. I would shrink from repeating the editor's words but for the reason that undue estimates have been made of the amount of skill and energy required to sail a sloop of even the *Spray's* small tonnage. I heard a man who called himself a sailor say that "it would require three men to do what it was claimed" that I did alone, and what I found perfectly easy to do over and over again; and I have heard that others made similar nonsensical remarks, adding that I would work myself to death. But here is what the Durban paper said:

[Citation: As briefly noted yesterday, the *Spray*, with a crew of one man, arrived at this port yesterday afternoon on her cruise round the

world. The *Spray* made quite an auspicious entrance to Natal. Her commander sailed his craft right up the channel past the main wharf, and dropped his anchor near the old *Forerunner* in the creek, before any one had a chance to get on board. The *Spray* was naturally an object of great curiosity to the Point people, and her arrival was witnessed by a large crowd. The skilful manner in which Captain Slocum steered his craft about the vessels which were occupying the waterway was a treat to witness.]

The *Spray* was not sailing in among greenhorns when she came to Natal. When she arrived off the port the pilot-ship, a fine, able steam-tug, came out to meet her, and led the way in across the bar, for it was blowing a smart gale and was too rough for the sloop to be towed with, safety. The trick of going in I learned by watching the steamer; it was simply to keep on the windward side of the channel and take the combers end on.

I found that Durban supported two yacht-clubs, both of them full of enterprise. I met all the members of both clubs, and sailed in the crack yacht *Florence* of the Royal Natal, with Captain Spradbrow and the Right Honorable Harry Escombe, premier of the colony. The yacht's center-board plowed furrows through the mud-banks, which, according to Mr. Escombe, Spradbrow afterward planted with potatoes. The *Florence*, however, won races while she tilled the skipper's land. After our sail on the *Florence* Mr. Escombe offered to sail the *Spray* round the Cape of Good Hope for me, and hinted at his famous cribbage-board to while away the hours. Spradbrow, in retort, warned me of it. Said he, "You would be played out of the sloop before you could round the cape." By others it was not thought probable that the premier of Natal would play cribbage off the Cape of Good Hope to win even the *Spray*.

It was a matter of no small pride to me in South Africa to find that American humor was never at a discount, and one of the best American stories I ever heard was told by the premier. At Hotel Royal one day, dining with Colonel Saunderson, M. P., his son, and Lieutenant Tipping, I met Mr. Stanley. The great explorer was just from Pretoria, and had already as good as flayed President Kruger with his trenchant pen. But that did not signify, for everybody has a whack at Oom Paul, and no one in the world seems to stand the joke better than he, not even the Sultan of Turkey himself. The colonel introduced me to the explorer, and I hauled close to the wind, to go slow, for Mr. Stanley was a nautical man once himself,--on the *Nyanza*, I think,--and of course my desire was to appear in the best light before a man of his experience. He looked me over carefully, and said, "What an example of patience!" "Patience is all that is required," I ventured to reply. He then asked if my vessel had water-tight compartments. I explained that she was all water-tight and all compartment. "What if she should strike a rock?" he asked. "Compartments would not save her if she should hit the rocks lying along her course," said I; adding, "she must be kept away from the rocks." After a considerable pause Mr. Stanley asked, "What if a swordfish should pierce her hull with its

sword?" Of course I had thought of that as one of the dangers of the sea, and also of the chance of being struck by lightning. In the case of the swordfish, I ventured to say that "the first thing would be to secure the sword." The colonel invited me to dine with the party on the following day, that we might go further into this matter, and so I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Stanley a second time, but got no more hints in navigation from the famous explorer.

It sounds odd to hear scholars and statesmen say the world is flat; but it is a fact that three Boers favored by the opinion of President Kruger prepared a work to support that contention. While I was at Durban they came from Pretoria to obtain data from me, and they seemed annoyed when I told them that they could not prove it by my experience. With the advice to call up some ghost of the dark ages for research, I went ashore, and left these three wise men poring over the Spray's track on a chart of the world, which, however, proved nothing to them, for it was on Mercator's projection, and behold, it was "flat." The next morning I met one of the party in a clergyman's garb, carrying a large Bible, not different from the one I had read. He tackled me, saying, "If you respect the Word of God, you must admit that the world is flat." "If the Word of God stands on a flat world--" I began. "What!" cried he, losing himself in a passion, and making as if he would run me through with an assagai. "What!" he shouted in astonishment and rage, while I jumped aside to dodge the imaginary weapon. Had this good but misguided fanatic been armed with a real weapon, the crew of the Spray would have died a martyr there and then. The next day, seeing him across the street, I bowed and made curves with my hands. He responded with a level, swimming movement of his hands, meaning "the world is flat." A pamphlet by these Transvaal geographers, made up of arguments from sources high and low to prove their theory, was mailed to me before I sailed from Africa on my last stretch around the globe.

While I feebly portray the ignorance of these learned men, I have great admiration for their physical manhood. Much that I saw first and last of the Transvaal and the Boers was admirable. It is well known that they are the hardest of fighters, and as generous to the fallen as they are brave before the foe. Real stubborn bigotry with them is only found among old fogies, and will die a natural death, and that, too, perhaps long before we ourselves are entirely free from bigotry. Education in the Transvaal is by no means neglected, English as well as Dutch being taught to all that can afford both; but the tariff duty on English school-books is heavy, and from necessity the poorer people stick to the Transvaal Dutch and their flat world, just as in Samoa and other islands a mistaken policy has kept the natives down to Kanaka.

I visited many public schools at Durban, and had the pleasure of meeting many bright children.

But all fine things must end, and December 14, 1897, the "crew" of the Spray, after having a fine time in Natal, swung the sloop's dinghy

in on deck, and sailed with a morning land-wind, which carried her clear of the bar, and again she was "off on her alone," as they say in Australia.