

CHAPTER II

Failure as a fisherman--A voyage around the world projected--From Boston to Gloucester--Fitting out for the ocean voyage--Half of a dory for a ship's boat--The run from Gloucester to Nova Scotia--A shaking up in home waters--Among old friends.

I spent a season in my new craft fishing on the coast, only to find that I had not the cunning properly to bait a hook. But at last the time arrived to weigh anchor and get to sea in earnest. I had resolved on a voyage around the world, and as the wind on the morning of April 24, 1895, was fair, at noon I weighed anchor, set sail, and filled away from Boston, where the *Spray* had been moored snugly all winter. The twelve-o'clock whistles were blowing just as the sloop shot ahead under full sail. A short board was made up the harbor on the port tack, then coming about she stood seaward, with her boom well off to port, and swung past the ferries with lively heels. A photographer on the outer pier at East Boston got a picture of her as she swept by, her flag at the peak throwing its folds clear. A thrilling pulse beat high in me. My step was light on deck in the crisp air. I felt that there could be no turning back, and that I was engaging in an adventure the meaning of which I thoroughly understood. I had taken little advice from any one, for I had a right to my own opinions in matters pertaining to the sea. That the best of sailors might do worse than even I alone was borne in upon me not a league from Boston docks, where a great steamship, fully manned, officered, and piloted, lay stranded and broken. This was the *Venetian*. She was broken completely in two over a ledge. So in the first hour of my lone voyage I had proof that the *Spray* could at least do better than this full-handed steamship, for I was already farther on my voyage than she. "Take warning, *Spray*, and have a care," I uttered aloud to my bark, passing fairylike silently down the bay.

The wind freshened, and the *Spray* rounded Deer Island light at the rate of seven knots.

Passing it, she squared away direct for Gloucester to procure there some fishermen's stores. Waves dancing joyously across Massachusetts Bay met her coming out of the harbor to dash them into myriads of sparkling gems that hung about her at every surge. The day was perfect, the sunlight clear and strong. Every particle of water thrown into the air became a gem, and the *Spray*, bounding ahead, snatched necklace after necklace from the sea, and as often threw them away. We have all seen miniature rainbows about a ship's prow, but the *Spray* flung out a bow of her own that day, such as I had never seen before. Her good angel had embarked on the voyage; I so read it in the sea.

Bold Nahant was soon abeam, then Marblehead was put astern. Other vessels were outward bound, but none of them passed the *Spray* flying along on her course. I heard the clanking of the dismal bell on Norman's Woe as we went by; and the reef where the schooner *Hesperus*

struck I passed close aboard. The "bones" of a wreck tossed up lay bleaching on the shore abreast. The wind still freshening, I settled the throat of the mainsail to ease the sloop's helm, for I could hardly hold her before it with the whole mainsail set. A schooner ahead of me lowered all sail and ran into port under bare poles, the wind being fair. As the *Spray* brushed by the stranger, I saw that some of his sails were gone, and much broken canvas hung in his rigging, from the effects of a squall.

I made for the cove, a lovely branch of Gloucester's fine harbor, again to look the *Spray* over and again to weigh the voyage, and my feelings, and all that. The bay was feather-white as my little vessel tore in, smothered in foam. It was my first experience of coming into port alone, with a craft of any size, and in among shipping. Old fishermen ran down to the wharf for which the *Spray* was heading, apparently intent upon braining herself there. I hardly know how a calamity was averted, but with my heart in my mouth, almost, I let go the wheel, stepped quickly forward, and downed the jib. The sloop naturally rounded in the wind, and just ranging ahead, laid her cheek against a mooring-pile at the windward corner of the wharf, so quietly, after all, that she would not have broken an egg. Very leisurely I passed a rope around the post, and she was moored. Then a cheer went up from the little crowd on the wharf. "You couldn't 'a' done it better," cried an old skipper, "if you weighed a ton!" Now, my weight was rather less than the fifteenth part of a ton, but I said nothing, only putting on a look of careless indifference to say for me, "Oh, that's nothing"; for some of the ablest sailors in the world were looking at me, and my wish was not to appear green, for I had a mind to stay in Gloucester several days. Had I uttered a word it surely would have betrayed me, for I was still quite nervous and short of breath.

I remained in Gloucester about two weeks, fitting out with the various articles for the voyage most readily obtained there. The owners of the wharf where I lay, and of many fishing-vessels, put on board dry cod galore, also a barrel of oil to calm the waves. They were old skippers themselves, and took a great interest in the voyage. They also made the *Spray* a present of a "fisherman's own" lantern, which I found would throw a light a great distance round. Indeed, a ship that would run another down having such a good light aboard would be capable of running into a light-ship. A gaff, a pugh, and a dip-net, all of which an old fisherman declared I could not sail without, were also put aboard. Then, top, from across the cove came a case of copper paint, a famous antifouling article, which stood me in good stead long after. I slapped two coats of this paint on the bottom of the *Spray* while she lay a tide or so on the hard beach.

For a boat to take along, I made shift to cut a castaway dory in two athwartships, boarding up the end where it was cut. This half-dory I could hoist in and out by the nose easily enough, by hooking the throat-halyards into a strop fitted for the purpose. A whole dory would be heavy and awkward to handle alone. Manifestly there was not

room on deck for more than the half of a boat, which, after all, was better than no boat at all, and was large enough for one man. I perceived, moreover, that the newly arranged craft would answer for a washing-machine when placed athwartships, and also for a bath-tub. Indeed, for the former office my razeed dory gained such a reputation on the voyage that my washerwoman at Samoa would not take no for an answer. She could see with one eye that it was a new invention which beat any Yankee notion ever brought by missionaries to the islands, and she had to have it.

The want of a chronometer for the voyage was all that now worried me. In our newfangled notions of navigation it is supposed that a mariner cannot find his way without one; and I had myself drifted into this way of thinking. My old chronometer, a good one, had been long in disuse. It would cost fifteen dollars to clean and rate it. Fifteen dollars! For sufficient reasons I left that timepiece at home, where the Dutchman left his anchor. I had the great lantern, and a lady in Boston sent me the price of a large two-burner cabin lamp, which lighted the cabin at night, and by some small contriving served for a stove through the day.

Being thus refitted I was once more ready for sea, and on May 7 again made sail. With little room in which to turn, the *Spray*, in gathering headway, scratched the paint off an old, fine-weather craft in the fairway, being puttied and painted for a summer voyage. "Who'll pay for that?" growled the painters. "I will," said I. "With the main-sheet," echoed the captain of the *Bluebird*, close by, which was his way of saying that I was off. There was nothing to pay for above five cents' worth of paint, maybe, but such a din was raised between the old "hooker" and the *Bluebird*, which now took up my case, that the first cause of it was forgotten altogether. Anyhow, no bill was sent after me.

The weather was mild on the day of my departure from Gloucester. On the point ahead, as the *Spray* stood out of the cove, was a lively picture, for the front of a tall factory was a flutter of handkerchiefs and caps. Pretty faces peered out of the windows from the top to the bottom of the building, all smiling *bon voyage*. Some hailed me to know where away and why alone. Why? When I made as if to stand in, a hundred pairs of arms reached out, and said come, but the shore was dangerous! The sloop worked out of the bay against a light southwest wind, and about noon squared away off Eastern Point, receiving at the same time a hearty salute--the last of many kindnesses to her at Gloucester. The wind freshened off the point, and skipping along smoothly, the *Spray* was soon off Thatcher's Island lights. Thence shaping her course east, by compass, to go north of Cashes Ledge and the Amen Rocks, I sat and considered the matter all over again, and asked myself once more whether it were best to sail beyond the ledge and rocks at all. I had only said that I would sail round the world in the *Spray*, "dangers of the sea excepted," but I must have said it very much in earnest. The "charter-party" with myself seemed to bind me, and so I sailed on. Toward night I hauled

the sloop to the wind, and baiting a hook, sounded for bottom-fish, in thirty fathoms of water, on the edge of Cashes Ledge. With fair success I hauled till dark, landing on deck three cod and two haddocks, one hake, and, best of all, a small halibut, all plump and spry. This, I thought, would be the place to take in a good stock of provisions above what I already had; so I put out a sea-anchor that would hold her head to windward. The current being southwest, against the wind, I felt quite sure I would find the *Spray* still on the bank or near it in the morning. Then "stradding" the cable and putting my great lantern in the rigging, I lay down, for the first time at sea alone, not to sleep, but to doze and to dream.

I had read somewhere of a fishing-schooner hooking her anchor into a whale, and being towed a long way and at great speed. This was exactly what happened to the *Spray* --in my dream! I could not shake it off entirely when I awoke and found that it was the wind blowing and the heavy sea now running that had disturbed my short rest. A scud was flying across the moon. A storm was brewing; indeed, it was already stormy. I reefed the sails, then hauled in my sea-anchor, and setting what canvas the sloop could carry, headed her away for Monhegan light, which she made before daylight on the morning of the 8th. The wind being free, I ran on into Round Pond harbor, which is a little port east from Pemaquid. Here I rested a day, while the wind rattled among the pine-trees on shore. But the following day was fine enough, and I put to sea, first writing up my log from Cape Ann, not omitting a full account of my adventure with the whale.

The *Spray*, heading east, stretched along the coast among many islands and over a tranquil sea. At evening of this day, May 10, she came up with a considerable island, which I shall always think of as the Island of Frogs, for the *Spray* was charmed by a million voices. From the Island of Frogs we made for the Island of Birds, called Gannet Island, and sometimes Gannet Rock, whereon is a bright, intermittent light, which flashed fitfully across the *Spray's* deck as she coasted along under its light and shade. Thence shaping a course for Briar's Island, I came among vessels the following afternoon on the western fishing-grounds, and after speaking a fisherman at anchor, who gave me a wrong course, the *Spray* sailed directly over the southwest ledge through the worst tide-race in the Bay of Fundy, and got into Westport harbor in Nova Scotia, where I had spent eight years of my life as a lad.

The fisherman may have said "east-southeast," the course I was steering when I hailed him; but I thought he said "east-northeast," and I accordingly changed it to that. Before he made up his mind to answer me at all, he improved the occasion of his own curiosity to know where I was from, and if I was alone, and if I didn't have "no dorg nor no cat." It was the first time in all my life at sea that I had heard a hail for information answered by a question. I think the chap belonged to the Foreign Islands. There was one thing I was sure of, and that was that he did not belong to Briar's Island, because he

dodged a sea that slopped over the rail, and stopping to brush the water from his face, lost a fine cod which he was about to ship. My islander would not have done that. It is known that a Briar Islander, fish or no fish on his hook, never flinches from a sea. He just tends to his lines and hauls or "saws." Nay, have I not seen my old friend Deacon W. D---, a good man of the island, while listening to a sermon in the little church on the hill, reach out his hand over the door of his pew and "jig" imaginary squid in the aisle, to the intense delight of the young people, who did not realize that to catch good fish one must have good bait, the thing most on the deacon's mind.

I was delighted to reach Westport. Any port at all would have been delightful after the terrible thrashing I got in the fierce sou'west rip, and to find myself among old schoolmates now was charming. It was the 13th of the month, and 13 is my lucky number--a fact registered long before Dr. Nansen sailed in search of the north pole with his crew of thirteen. Perhaps he had heard of my success in taking a most extraordinary ship successfully to Brazil with that number of crew. The very stones on Briar's Island I was glad to see again, and I knew them all. The little shop round the corner, which for thirty-five years I had not seen, was the same, except that it looked a deal smaller. It wore the same shingles--I was sure of it; for did not I know the roof where we boys, night after night, hunted for the skin of a black cat, to be taken on a dark night, to make a plaster for a poor lame man? Lowry the tailor lived there when boys were boys. In his day he was fond of the gun. He always carried his powder loose in the tail pocket of his coat. He usually had in his mouth a short dudeen; but in an evil moment he put the dudeen, lighted, in the pocket among the powder. Mr. Lowry was an eccentric man.

At Briar's Island I overhauled the Spray once more and tried her seams, but found that even the test of the sou'west rip had started nothing. Bad weather and much head wind prevailing outside, I was in no hurry to round Cape Sable. I made a short excursion with some friends to St. Mary's Bay, an old cruising-ground, and back to the island. Then I sailed, putting into Yarmouth the following day on account of fog and head wind. I spent some days pleasantly enough in Yarmouth, took in some butter for the voyage, also a barrel of potatoes, filled six barrels of water, and stowed all under deck. At Yarmouth, too, I got my famous tin clock, the only timepiece I carried on the whole voyage. The price of it was a dollar and a half, but on account of the face being smashed the merchant let me have it for a dollar.