

CHAPTER XXXII

On My Way to Australia The Dangers of the Deep

By the great mercy of God, we entered the port of Sydney, one of the finest seaports in the whole world.

Our voyage had been one of the shortest on record, and it would have been one of the most pleasant ever made if, when three hundred miles from the shore, we had not been assailed by a hurricane, which very nearly sent us to wait the great Judgment day in a watery grave.

Till then, we had always had fine weather and fair winds. Even when crossing the tropics, and when over the equator, we had not met anything but the most pleasant weather and fair winds. We had not even had a single day of that extreme heat which is so dreaded by the traveler.

A strong, fresh breeze from the east had constantly blown over us, filled our sails, and given us a spring atmosphere. But when we reached the south latitude, between the 34th and 35th degrees, the skies began to be covered with dark and threatening clouds. Lightnings such as I had never seen, and claps of thunder such as I had never heard, accompanied with such torrents of rain as fall only in these parts of the globe, told us that our bright and sunny days were at an end, and that we had to prepare ourselves for a change of scenery, thoughts and aspirations. It was evident that we were just encountering the equinox gale so much feared even by the most expert and tried mariners.

On the 28th, at about 3 P. M., our noble ship began to groan under the blows of the furious waves, in a way that would strike with terror the bravest hearts. She began to go up to the top of the waves, and to plunge into the profound

abyss dug before her by the receding seas, in the most fearful manner.

It soon became absolutely impossible for anyone to stand on his feet without being hurled, with the most tremendous violence, if he were not well tied with a rope, or if he had not his hands grasping some well-fastened object.

Though, in my two voyages to Europe, I had seen pretty big waves, nothing could be compared with the mountainous, tumbling billows which rolled over us with such terrific noise and such irresistible power on this never-to-be-forgotten day. But the more furiously the hurricane roars above and around, the more sublime is the grand spectacle before our eyes. Every aperture and door on the windward were, at first, firmly shut to prevent the waves from entering and filling the ship. Only one door, on the leeward, remained open for some time, at my earnest request, that I might see and admire to my full heart's content, the unspeakable grandeur and terrible beauties of the most fearful storm I had ever seen.

During the last fierce conflict which took place in our Canada Presbyterian Church about instrumental music, one of the opponents said that God Almighty had evidently formed the human throat as the only instrument of music to proclaim His majesty, His power and His mercies. No doubt that good brother would have changed his mind had he been near me, there, on that steamer. For, every part of the noble ship had a voice; every rope and string had a voice; every wave had a voice; every clap of thunder had a voice to speak to us of the power and majesty of God as no human throat ever spoke. Yes; when the united sounds of the roaring hurricane, the thundering waves, the moaning billows, the whistling ropes, the cracking ribs of the ship, the breaking of the chairs and tables of the dining saloon, hurled on every side, mixed with the constant claps of thunder, struck the chords of our soul, the irresistible and infinite power of God was revealed to us as it could not be revealed by any man's throat.

In fact, were not, then, the very angels of God striking the strings of convulsed nature to sing with David: 'Who is so great a God as our God? Thou art the God that doeth wonders; Thou hast declared Thy strength among the people. The waters saw Thee, O God, the waters saw Thee; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled. The clouds poured waters, the skies sent out a sound; Thine arrows also went abroad. The voice of Thy thunder was in the heavens; the lightnings lightened the world; the earth trembled and shook. Thy way is on the sea, and Thy path on the great waters; and Thy footsteps are not known.'

I never felt as then how we are disposed to form different judgments about the same thing according to the different emotions or passions of the moment. That noble steamer which had appeared so large with her 334 feet length, and so strong with the iron and steel material with which she is entirely built—that steamer, which looked so like a giant of the seas when we went aboard of her in the calm basin of San Francisco, looked as a powerless bundle of straw when tossed about and attacked from every side by the furious waves of the raging Pacific Ocean.

It soon became evident to the most as well as to the least expert that we were in imminent danger of perishing. At any moment we expected that some part of the engine would give way, or that the axle of the screw would break, or that the fires would be put out by the torrents of water which every wave was throwing into the doomed ship. At about 4 P. M. one of those waves had struck me in the breast and hurled and rolled me more than thirty feet from the leeward towards the windward side, without more ceremony than if I had been a straw. After this I crawled to my room to change my clothing, but it was to find it flooded with water, and to see my floating trunks tossed about me as if they were in the midst of a deep and rapid river.

Unable to continue our course without an evident danger of foundering, the captain ordered the course of the ship

changed, and put her bow instead of her side to the hurricane. In that position, the mountains of water, hurled upon us with such tremendous power, might roll over the ship without upsetting her entirely. We had the hope that, at the setting sun, the hurricane might subside a little, as is sometimes the case; but we were to be disappointed. The terrible storm, instead of subsiding, increased its fury at the approach of the night, and the foaming mountains of the furious ocean struck more and more mercilessly the bow, and often even the sides of the ship. The frightful flashes of lightning seemed more and more to wrap us as in a sheet of fire; the continuous peals of thunder, with the rolling billows beating constantly against us, as bomb shells, caused our model steamer to reel, tremble and shake at every shock, as if the angel of death had struck her with the avenging sword. To add to the terrors of our situation, at the setting sun we saw that the captain had ordered the crew to have the life boats ready at a moment's notice to be launched to the sea, as the last resource when the steamer would sink. I hope that not a single one of our friends who will read these lines will ever personally experience the horrors of that hour, when the terrible night spread her mantle over us all. Oh! what sublime pages I would write, if I could describe, in their plain grandeur and solemnity, the episodes of the six hours which passed over us from the beginning of the night till three o'clock next morning, when we heard the Good Master's voice telling us, "Fear not, I am with you." Human language is inadequate and powerless to tell of those terrible, but at the same time superhumanly grand and sublime things. In those solemn hours, how the silent prayers which escape from the recesses of the heart and the soul are fervent, humble, pressing! How the merciful Saviour's voice comes as celestial music to the redeemed sinner's soul: "I go to My Father to prepare you a place. When it is ready, I will come and take you with me, and where I am there shall you be also."

From the very first day of the voyage, I had made it one of my most important duties to find out among the multitude of travelers those whom the Saviour of the world had selected for His own, and, by the great mercy of God, I had found them. They were not very numerous, but how sublime and simple, how ardent and sincere was their faith and their love for the Lamb who had been slain for them, and in the blood of whom they had washed their robes! How many times they had drawn my tears of joy, when, gathered together every day, at 3 P. M., they had raised their supplicating hands to the throne of mercy! As soon as the danger had become imminent, the greater part of the fervent Christians gathered with me in a corner of the splendid upper saloon, and, shall I tell it? Yes. When I found myself in the midst of those praying brethren and sisters, almost every idea of danger went out from my mind. But at about two o'clock, after midnight, the hurricane seemed again to increase its fury; the claps of thunder became more terrible, and the raging billows seemed to make a supreme effort to dash into pieces the iron sides of our vessel then half-filled with water. A wave now struck with such tremendous force that it seemed to me, and to everyone, that the steamer was broken into two pieces. The small window before me having been smashed, allowed me to see the most terrible and magnificent spectacle which can be given to man to contemplate. Literally the sea did not look any longer like a sheet of water, but an ocean of fire. Every wave, every billow looked like the pines of the forest when the devouring element is burning their noble heads during the night. Before those fires the darkness of night had almost entirely disappeared. The heavens above seemed also to be an ocean of fire, by the constant flashes of lightning. The phosphorous lights of the sea, brought to the surface and beaten by the hurricane, seemed to have transformed the Pacific Ocean into a seething caldron of burning elements, on which our half-wrecked ship was hopelessly struggling for life.

After I had had a glimpse of that marvelous and awful vision, I turned towards those of my praying friends who were nearer to me, and I said: "It is a miracle that we are not already perished; our merciful God wants to try our faith; but He wants also to save us. Oh! let us go to Him and pray as the apostles went to Him and prayed, when they awoke Christ at the very moment they were perishing."

And I heard, then, prayers such as I had never heard. For a whole hour cries of faith and love, cries of hope and joy, went from this little band of children of God to the Mercy Seat, such as the spirit of life and light alone can give. Yes; there was a struggle that night, on that little corner of the raging Pacific Ocean, in which love and mercy were again to win the day against the justice and wrath of God.

A few minutes after three, a young and very dear sister, the widow of an English officer, said to me: "Do you not feel that the storm is not so strong, and the ship is not so terribly tossed about as one hour ago?" "Evidently," I answered, "the Lord has heard the voice and the humble supplications of His poor, perishing servants. Let us bless Him."

And, falling on our knees, we together sent from our hearts and lips to the throne of mercy the sublime hymn of David. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's. The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy; Who will not always chide, neither will He keep His anger forever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy to them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our

transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those that remember His commandments to do them. The Lord hath prepared His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom ruleth over all. Bless the Lord, ye His angels that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His word. Bless ye the Lord all ye His hosts, ye ministers that do His pleasure. Bless the Lord, all His works, in all places of His dominion! Bless the Lord, O my soul!"

It was then nearly four in the morning. The threatening voice of the thunder was silenced, and the hurricane had visibly lost more than half its strength. We were all chilly and exhausted. We left each other, to take some rest.

At seven, I was awakened by the warming rays of the bright sun shining upon me through the broken window of my room. I was soon on the deck to gaze again on that treacherous Pacific Ocean, which seemed so well disposed a few hours before to bring me below its bitter and angry waves. Though the roaring billows were still very high, it was evident that the One who commands the storms, and they are still, had passed by us, and heard our humble but ardent supplications.

I joined my voice with the voice of all His creatures, the wind and the sea, the sun and the light, the earth and heavens, to praise and bless Him; and I went to the captain to know if our noble ship had sustained any serious damage. "Not much," he said, "she has admirably fought the terrible battle. But so sudden a cessation of that hurricane is one of the most extraordinary things I have seen in my life. Those

equinoctial storms generally last three days, and they very often keep us a whole week suspended by a thread between life and death." "Ah," I answered, "you were not aware that you had on board some of the children of those fishermen who caused Christ to stop the storm on the Sea of Galilee?" "I wish," he answered with a smile, "that I would have always on board some of those Galileean fishermen's children."

With the fair wind and big waves to push us towards the long wished for shores of Sydney, we arrived in the evening about eight o'clock.

As soon as the anchor was let down, as the sanitary laws of the country prevented us from landing immediately, I went among the passengers to request them to come and pass that last Sabbath evening in hearing what our friend David had to tell us about the storm of the previous night, and they gladly gathered to listen to the sublime words of the royal prophet, which I read and commented upon: "Oh! that men would praise the Lord for His goodness and His wonderful works to the children of men; And let them sacrifice the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and declare His works with rejoicings. They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters. These see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep. For He commandeth the stormy wind, which lifteth the waves thereof. They mount to the heaven, they go down again to the depths, their soul is melted, because of troubles. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their troubles, and He bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet, so He bringeth them unto the desired haven. Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! Let them exalt Him also in the congregation of the people, and praise Him in the assembly of the elders."

No! I have never seen anything like the profound and deep impression of those words of the Divine Book when they fell on my companions, who had, with me, just come out from that watery grave dug under our feet by that terrible hurricane. Both Jews and Christians, Romanists and Protestants, atheists and infidels, as well as fervent disciples of the Gospel, vied with each other in praising and thanking God with cheerful heart, singing the most beautiful hymns of the Moody and Sankey collection.

This last Sabbath service which we had on board was one of the most solemn and most touching episodes of my life, and I am sure that it will never be forgotten by those who took part in it. We had begun at eight P. M., and it was ten before we could put an end to it. For every one wanted to praise the great and merciful God who had seen their tears, heard their prayers, silenced the storm, made the furious waves still, and saved them. Every one felt and proclaimed that, indeed, our God is a prayer-hearing God.