

captain, in his piebald language, called the *pum-tackle*, as the bark rolled on the swell, not the less so. We were drifting slowly on the current to the north-ward. As the sun sank, however, the sea breeze filled our sails; and the mist dispersing, we proceeded to the westward; and, coming in full view of the low, sandy hills on the beach; anchored after sunset in about nine fathoms, in the roads of Tampico, directly opposite the Bar at the entrance of the river Panuco, distant about three miles.

This was not so much amiss. But our pleasant dreams of a speedy termination of the present state of our situation, were as yet, far from being realized.

The night was clear and starlight,—how bright and brilliant the constellations stood in the heavens, I cannot describe to you. Even after our short voyage, the breath of the land was delicious, and the heavy dull sound of the breakers on the bar that engirdled the land of wonders before us, was music to our ears, as we lay under our blankets stretched upon the roof of the cabin. We hailed our escape from the arms of winter; from the marshes, quags, mud, and snow of New Orleans,—its thick and polluted air, where the worshippers of Mammon can alone find delight, to the mountains, the vegetation, the eternal summer of New Spain.

Still if I may depict my own feelings, I may confess that there was a weight on my spirit, which, though it could not entirely crush these pleasant hopes and

reflections, seemed to prevent their soaring and running riot. I would not shut my eyes to some signs of probable difficulty which all might have noticed; and I could not prevent certain portents of coming troubles from depressing my mind.

Among the former I may mention the knowledge, that as there was only six or seven feet water on the bar, while our vessel had full ten feet draught, she must consequently be unloaded before she could enter the river. Further, that where we lay, as well as on the whole shelterless and iron-bound coast to the north and south, no vessel could maintain its ground, should any of the prevailing winds arise. In addition, it was whispered about the vessel, that no inconsiderable quantity of contraband goods were concealed on board, and that a recent change in the custom-house of Tampico, combined with the bad name which the Halcyon had already acquired, would probably bring the vessel and all on board into difficulty, in this semi-barbarous country, where law was but imperfectly understood, and still more imperfectly administered.

Moreover, the eyes and ears of some of us on board, were witnesses of much calculated to throw a yet darker veil over the future.

Lovely as the weather had been for some time, the signs of a coming change had gradually thickened upon us. The deep blue of the southern sky had of late, occasionally, towards evening, been flickered with one or two light vapoury and feathery clouds,

like the tail of a wild horse, or of a comet, seemingly balanced over our heads in the upper regions of the atmosphere. The cessation of the steady breeze,—the fluctuating calm of the preceding day,—the superabundant dews,—and more than all, the restless swell now heaving upon the shore from the depths of the Gulf, had all betokened to the practised eye and long experience of *De Vignes*, the near approach of a *Norte*, one of the most dreaded of those violent winds which agitate this land-locked and deceitful sea; and, while others were dreaming of land, he was evidently thinking of storm and tempest, and was preparing for it accordingly. Our chain cable was fitted with a buoy, and arrangements made to slip it at a moment's warning. Before he went to his repose, the top-masts and yards were lowered, every sail on board double reefed, and the decks cleared as far as it was possible to clear them.

With the approach of morning, driving bodies of cold mist covered us once more, and veiled the land from our view. Hour went after hour, and the evil omens thickened around us; the sky became blurred with shapeless masses of reddish clouds, and as the sun rose, a broken and discoloured rainbow was seen in the west. *Ill-omened arch!* how different from the bow after summer rain, spanning the eastern sky at eventide, which we have learned to hail as full of promise!

About ten o'clock, *A. M.* the sea breeze dispersed the mists on the smooth but heaving surface of the

waters, but had no power on the sky, which imperceptibly grew of a deeper dun, especially from the zenith to the south east.

Our eyes were anxiously turned to the west, where we could again descry the range of coast, the foam-covered line of breakers on the bar, and the tall masts of a number of vessels within it. Six or eight of various burden were seen riding at anchor in the open roadstead; either watching, like ourselves, for communication with the shore, or, outward bound, for the reception of their cargo. Our glasses were constantly directed to the bar for some indication that the signals for a pilot were observed; but hours came and went, without the slightest sign of recognition. As the day passed the meridian, however, a black spot was seen among the breakers, and then another, and we soon distinguished two Custom-house boats pulling north and south, to communicate with other ships. When it became evident that neither seemed to consider us as within their beat, the captain resolved to send the shallop with two men to communicate with them. Two more hours of uncertainty followed, when the boat-men came back, stating that the answer returned by the officers was, that we must come and anchor nearer the shore, before they would board us. *Old De Vignes* gave a terrific growl on hearing this; glanced at the thickening sky, and at the eastern horizon; and, after a moment's hesitation, gave the necessary orders to obey, and to run the goelette in. The anchor was weighed; and a momentary exultation was felt by all,

as we found ourselves at length riding at anchor again within hail.

What then occurred is now like a dream to me; that a boat should have come aboard of us, and that hardly an individual should have left the goelette, when at this time our fate might have been foreseen by the most heedless on board, seems to me to be perfectly incomprehensible. The crowded state of the vessel was the source of discomfort to all; our water and our biscuit were both known to be running short, and the signs of the impending tempest could no longer be misunderstood. Yet no one stirred—for why, no one could give a reason but the poor one, that the few who went, must go without baggage ashore, and the impulse seemed to be ‘to stick by the stuff.’ The boat was after an instant’s parley pushed off again with its wild half-savage, pirate-looking crew, who were accompanied by the supercargo of the goelette, after giving the promise, that early next morning all the passengers should be landed, and the discharge of the cargo forthwith commenced. They hoisted the sail—were soon carried to the bar, and disappeared among the huge waves which broke upon it.

The momentary bustle over, we had time to comprehend our position, and it grew more dreary every instant. The wind now blew steadily from the S. E. and the swell rose with it. The sky began to lose its uniform shade, and to jag and rend into shapeless masses of heavy clouds. The man-of-war-bird was

seen high up in the atmosphere, breasting the breeze, and scudding out to sea; while the bands of white pelicans, which we had watched soaring and diving in the roadstead during the morning, quitted their toils and wheeled their heavy flight over the breakers to the sheltered sands and lagoons of the land. It seemed as if all were leaving us and our ill-starred neighbours to their fate. It was evident that the latter had taken the alarm, and were hastily preparing for the coming struggle with the powers of the air and ocean. One brig partly discharged, which lay about a mile nearer the Bar, trusting probably to the weight of water which was now rolling in upon the land, resolved to attempt the passage, and setting her sails, stood in boldly for the shore. The day must have been near its close, for we had difficulty to descry her motions distinctly in the thickening haze. She was seen to career mid-way among the breakers, when suddenly her change of position and inclination, told us that she had struck. A few minutes of intense anxiety followed. To return was impossible, and if she did not advance, her total loss was unavoidable. We saw her heave and strike heavily three or four times, as the sea rolled in upon her, and had given her up for lost, when providentially a heavier billow than ordinary carried her over the last ridge, and righting, she was in safety. How we envied her!

As evening darkened the deck, the wind increased, and the captain no longer made a secret of his conviction, that we should be driven out to sea before morn-

ing. There was something like despair painted on the visages of some, when this became known; and a volley of curses, deep, not loud, answered the announcement.

We were not left long in uncertainty, 'The ship to the southward is scudding!' said one. 'There goes the brig!' exclaimed another. I remember I was in my usual position on deck, near the little tiller; now and then glancing at the dim form of our nearest neighbour; or searching into the gloom to windward, striving to penetrate the dusk out of which one spectral foam-tipped billow was heaving and passing under us after another, urged by the impulse of a strong but steady wind,—when all of a sudden the goelette received a shock from the opposite quarter which staggered all upon deck, and steadied her completely for the moment.

'*El Norte!*' yelled the mate at my elbow, as a torrent of wind and spray swept over the deck. '*El Norte!*' echoed Cortina, the shipless captain, 'I lost my ship in the last!' '*El Norte!*' shouted the bravo, excited by the coming struggle with the elements, for which he had been preparing himself by stripping almost naked, and tying a ragged handkerchief about his head. 'Helm hard down, slip the chain-cable!' responded the Captain, as he hoisted the jib with his own hands; and instantly the harsh sound of the iron was heard passing out at the bow. The vessel began to change her direction, when suddenly she was brought to again with a jerk, and a cry forward announced that the last bolt of the chain refused to pass through the hawse-hole.

A cold chissel was procured, and while it was employed to cut the iron bolt, all who were aware of the circumstances were inclined to check their breath. Our position was truly one of no ordinary peril, as the strain upon the forward timber threatened to tear it out of the ship, in which case we must instantly have gone down.

At length the bolt was severed, and the vessel, free from all obstacles, whirled round, and began to fly before the wind.

Such a wind I had till then, never witnessed. The sea was apparently levelled under its pressure; and far and near seemed like a carpet of driving snow, from the sleet and foam which was raised and hurried along its surface.

Thus we turned our backs on the shore, and drove hour after hour in storm and darkness into the unknown void before us.

What appearances were there in the sky I do not know, as our vision was limited to a narrow circle of half a furlong around us, but if the disorder of the clouds answered that of the waves, there must have been awful doings over our heads.

The sea, in spite of the tremendous force of the wind which I have alluded to, was not long to be lulled in this unnatural slumber, but began to rise and toss us about in fearful wise; and yet it was not till we had run under shortened sail for many hours, in a direction which carried us out of all danger of the coast, and we lay to under three-reefed mainsail and

trysail, that we felt all the discomfort of our situation.

By this time the decks, washed by the sea, had been cleared of all lumber. The cocks and hens had been drowned in the coops, the boat had been half staved, the binnacle and compass broken, and all the inhabitants forced by the wet and the chillness of the atmosphere, to herd together below deck.

Meantime, what between the crowded state of the cabins, the violence of the storm, the shocks received from the strife of waters in which we were involved, the fears and terrors of some, the horrid and blasphemous language uttered by others of the desperadoes about us, the dirt and impurity surrounding us, and the quarrelling and caballing of the crew, our position was truly unenviable.

Morning brought no cessation of the tempest. The wind continued to blow with terrific violence, and daylight found us riding and rocking among a tumult of billows, whitened by the driving surf, and enveloped by a grey misty cloud of agitated vapour. The pumps were sounded every half hour. The *Halcyon* was however sound, and the captain's arrangements well and knowingly made; and there we rode, while one immense billow after another swelled up like a huge monster out of the mist to windward, advanced topling towards us, with its broad-spread moving slopes marbled by the bands of creamy foam, and after a moment of seeming hesitation whether it should go over or under us, was seen vanishing to leeward.

The history of hours thus spent must be passed over. This first day the *Halcyon's* stomach seemed to be annihilated. Nobody cared for sustenance, and cooking was out of the question. Some hope had been entertained that the storm might lull at sunset, the same hour that it had arisen; but the evening apparently darkened over us more gloomily than before, and all the live-long night the wild wind and wild waves continued to struggle on the agitated bosom of the Gulf. Our cabin was a Pandemonium.

Towards noon the second day, the wind began to abate, the vapour to disperse, and the clouds to grow more transparent. An imperfect observation taken at twelve o'clock shewed us that we had been driving about one hundred and fifty miles to the S. E. of *Tampico*. With evening it fell dead calm, while the sea continued to roll mountains high, and the goelette for the following twenty-four hours was tossed about like a cork in a boiling pot.

Both bread and water were becoming scarce, and we were put upon an allowance of the latter. After the cessation of the Norte the sky became perfectly clear, and the weather warm, with glorious moonlight nights. The lightness and variableness of the wind, however, had allowed us to make but little way; the more so, as we were, during the calms, at the mercy of the powerful currents in these seas.

To cut a long story short, you may imagine us on the afternoon of the fifth day from the date of our

mishap, once more within sight of land; and approaching our anchorage with feelings which you can well conceive, when you recollect the heart-burning we had before experienced, and the hopelessness of a speedy communication with the shore, combined with the present state of the vessel, the nausea which we could not but feel at our prolonged forced contact with the most godless and abandoned set of human beings I ever was in company with; and more than all, the fact that the signs of another Norte had been thickening around during the day, and now at the approach of night, were becoming too evident to admit of misinterpretation. Upon one subject we were all agreed this time, that if we left the Halcyon without a rag, we would not let another opportunity slip through our fingers. Well, our signal was once more fluttering in the wind, and we came to our old anchoring-ground. One or two of our former neighbours were also seen regaining their port—the greater part were yet missing. With what anxiety we directed our eyes to the bar. An hour went by, evening with its menace narrowed the horizon; the wind which had brought us in blew stiffer and stiffer. I had begun to give up my hope, for, without being able to account for it, I had indulged a little,—and had as a duty begun to school myself into resignation to the will of God, whatever that might be; when two specks were seen in the breakers, and shortly we saw two boats pulling for us with might and main. The one was a revenue-barge, and the other a cockleshell of a boat belonging to an American brigantine

within the bar, whose captain, out of friendship for De Vignes, risked the passage with two sailors, and came to warn him of the bad odour in which the Halcyon stood at Tampico, and the difficulties which would attend his proceedings.

I saw at once that as far as our captain was concerned, he was contented to remain out at sea, till time should permit his agents to make the necessary arrangements with the custom-house officers, which were not as yet terminated; and that the fate of his passengers was nothing in his eyes. He, however, clamoured for water, and that earnestly, and made no secret of his belief that he must again go out to sea. But we needed no spur to make us wish to escape from the Halcyon. There was no bond between us and our companions but that of dire necessity, and chivalrous deference or devotion were here quite out of place. It was evident that each must shift for himself. Besides, among the many kinds of justice to be done, that kind usually termed 'justice to oneself,' is not always to be disregarded. A timely application to the captain of the brigantine secured us the use of his skiff, which was in truth a mere toy, so fragile that the weight of my two companions and myself was almost too much for it, and sunk it to the water's edge. To this we speedily consigned our persons, leaving our goods and chattels to their fate. De Vignes had quarrelled with his acquaintance the instant he set his foot on deck, so that he had nothing to detain him; and after three minutes stay, the little boat

was scudding under a thin linen lugsail, over the broad swell, which was now rolling, in increasing volumes at the lapse of every ten seconds, in towards the land.

The feeling of exultation was warm in our bosoms as the distance between us and our late prison momentarily increased. There was however a peril in advance, which soon claimed our attention, and that was the passage of the bar, which now exhibited a broad band of breakers. But we felt stout-hearted, even in a moment of indecision, when it was suspected that we were missing the narrow passage and driving to destruction. There was an instant when we seemed on the point of being overwhelmed by the huge masses of foam which rose like columns on either hand, and took the wind out of the sail. In fact we gave the southern breaker a very perilous shave; yet all sat steady, and in another minute, the bar and the Gulf were behind us, and we were passing with wind and tide up the river Panuco.

How beautiful appeared those green and wooded shores—how delicious the perfume from the scented mimosa bushes on the banks—how welcome the sight of the firm land and its habitations!

A sail of six miles brought us after dark to the new town. I believe the most heedless of us felt his heart swell with emotion of gratitude to God for our deliverance. Before us, the setting sun glistened sweetly on all objects—while behind, it lighted up the white bar,

over which we could discern the masts of the Halcyon as she stood in relief, against the dark curtain of clouds thickening in the windward. We met a boat-load of water going out to her under the care of the supercargo; but it never reached her, as by the time they got to the bar, the night and coming storm forbade the attempt; and I may at once mention, that long before dawn, the ill-fated Halcyon, without bread, water, and with all her passengers, save eight, who contrived, like ourselves, to land, had been compelled once more to spread her wings, and to speed on the breath of a second violent Norte out to sea; and that ten days elapsed before we heard of her third approach to the coast.

This trial was spared De Pourtales, M<sup>c</sup>Euen, and your humble servant; and we never forgot to bless God, day by day, for it. At the same time we had our trials, being reduced to one shirt a-piece, and to a state of great impatience, which is not to be wondered at when you learn that we were here in a position where we could neither advance nor recede, that the period of three short months was all which our other arrangements could permit us to devote to New Spain, and that from circumstances hereafter to be explained, one-third of this time was swallowed up on the very threshold of the country.

My next shall introduce you to the Fonda de la Bolza, as our melancholy place of sojourn at Tampico.