

CHAPTER XLIII.

JOURNEY TO MERIDA—VILLAGE OF MOONA—A POND OF WATER, A CURIOSITY—ABOULA—INDIAN RUNNERS—MERIDA—DEPARTURE—HUNUCAMA—SIEGE OF CAMPEACHY—EMBARKATION FOR HAVANA—INCIDENTS OF THE PASSAGE—FOURTH OF JULY AT SEA—SHARK-FISHING—GETTING LOST AT SEA—RELIEVED BY THE HELEN MARIA—PASSAGE TO NEW YORK—ARRIVAL—CONCLUSION.

BUT to return to ourselves. At three, by the light of the moon, we left Uxmal by the most direct road for Merida, Mr. Catherwood in a coché and I on horseback, charged with a letter from the junior majordomo to his compatriot and friend, Delmonico's head chocolate-maker. As I followed Mr. C. through the woods, borne on the shoulders of Indians, the stillness broken only by the shuffle of their feet, and under my great apprehensions for his health, it almost seemed as if I were following his bier. At the distance of three leagues we entered the village of Moona, where, though a fine village, having white people and Mestizoes among its inhabitants, travellers were more rare than in the interior of Central America. We were detained two hours at the casa real, waiting for a relief coché. At a short distance beyond, my guide led me out of the road to show me a pond of water, which in that country was a curiosity. It was surrounded by woods; wild cattle were drinking on the borders, and started like deer at our approach. At the distance of four leagues we reached the village of Aboula, with a plaza enclosed by a rough picket-fence, a good casa real and fine old alcalde, who knew our servant as belonging to the Peon family.

There was no intermediate village, and he undertook to provide us with relief Indians to carry the coché through to Merida, twenty-seven miles. It was growing late, and I went on before with a horse for change, to reach Merida in time to make arrangements for a calèche the next day.

Toward evening it rained hard. At dark I began to have apprehension of leaving Mr. Catherwood behind, sent the servant on to secure the calèche, and dismounted to wait. I was too dreadfully fatigued to ride back, and sat down in the road; by degrees I stretched myself on a smooth stone, with the bridle around my wrist, and, after a dreamy debate whether my horse would tread on me or not, fell asleep. I was roused by a jerk which nearly tore my arm off, and saw coming through the woods Indian runners with blazing pine

torches, lighting the way for the coché, which had an aspect so funereal that it almost made me shudder. Mr. C. had had his difficulties. After carrying him about a league, the Indians stopped, laid him down, and, after an animated conversation, took him up, went on, but in a little while laid him down again, and, thrusting their heads under the cover of the coché, made him an eager and clamorous address, of which he did not understand one word. At length he picked up dos pesos, or two dollars, and gathered that they wanted two dollars more. As the alcalde had adjusted the account, he refused to pay, and, after a noisy wrangle, they quietly took him up on their shoulders, and began trotting back with him to the village. This made him tractable, and he paid the money, threatening them as well as he could with vengeance; but the amusing part was that they were right. The alcalde had made a mistake in the calculation; and, on a division and distribution on the road, by hard pounding and calculating, each one knowing what he ought to receive himself, they discovered that they had been paid two dollars short. The price was a shilling per man for the first, and ninepence for every subsequent league, besides two shillings for making the coché; so that, with four men for relief, it was eight shillings for the first league, and six shillings for every subsequent one; and a calculation of the whole amount for nine leagues was rather complicated.

It was half-past one when we reached Merida, and we had been up and on the road since two in the morning. Fortunately, with the easy movement of the coché, Mr. C. had suffered but little. I was tired beyond all measure; but I had, what enabled me to endure any degree of fatigue, a good cot, and was soon asleep.

The next morning we saw my friend Don Simon, who was preparing to go back and join us. He promised, if we returned, to go down with us and assist in a thorough exploration of the ruins. The Spanish vessel was to sail the next day. Toward evening, after a heavy rain, as the dark clouds were rolling away, and the setting sun was tinging them with a rich golden border, we left Merida. At eleven o'clock we reached Hunucama, and stopped in the plaza two hours to feed the horses. While here, a party of soldiers arrived from the port, waving pine torches, having just returned victorious from the siege of Campeachy. They were all young, ardent, well-dressed, and in fine spirits, and full of praises of their general, who, they said, had remained at Sisal to attend a ball, and was coming on as soon as it was over. Resuming our journey, in an hour more we met a train of calèches, with officers in uniform. We stopped, congratulated the general upon his victory at Campeachy; inquired for a United States' sloop-of-war

which we had heard was there during the blockade; and, with many interchanges of courtesy, but without seeing a feature of each other's faces, resumed our separate roads. An hour before daylight we reached Sisal, at six o'clock we embarked on board the Spanish brig *Alexandre* for Havana, and at eight we were under way.

It was the 24th of June; and now, as we thought, all our troubles were ended. The morning was fine. We had eight passengers, all Spanish; one of whom, from the interior, when he came down to the shore and saw the brig in the offing, asked what animal it was. From my great regard for the captain, I will not speak of the brig or of its condition, particularly the cabin, except to say that it was Spanish. The wind was light; we breakfasted on deck, making the top of the companion-way serve as a table under an awning. The captain told us we should be in Havana in a week.

Our course lay along the coast of Yucatan toward Cape Catoche. On Sunday the 28th, we had made, according to the brig's reckoning, about 150 miles, and were then becalmed. The sun was intensely hot, the sea of glassy stillness, and all day a school of sharks was swimming round the brig. From this time we had continued calms, and the sea was like a mirror, heated and reflecting its heat. On the 4th of July there was the same glassy stillness, with light clouds, but fixed and stationary. The captain said we were incantado or enchanted, and really it almost seemed so. We had expected to celebrate this day by dining with the American consul in Havana; but our vessel lay like a log, and we were scorching, and already pinched for water; the bare thought of a 4th of July dinner meanwhile making Spanish ship-cookery intolerable. We had read through all the books in the mate's library, consisting of some French novels translated into Spanish, and a history of awful shipwrecks. To break the monotony of the calm, we had hooks and lines out constantly for sharks; the sailors called them, like the alligators, *ennemigos de los Christianos*, hoisted them on deck, cut out their hearts and entrails, and then threw them overboard. We were already out ten days, and growing short of provisions; we had two young sharks for dinner. Apart from the associations, they were not bad—quite equal to young alligators; and the captain told us that in Campeachy they were regularly in the markets, and eaten by all classes. In the afternoon they gathered around us fearfully. Everything that fell overboard was immediately snapped up; and the hat of a passenger which fell from his head had hardly touched the water before a huge fellow turned over on his side, opened his ugly mouth above the water, and swallowed it; luckily, the man was not under it. Toward evening we caught a leviathan,

raised him four or five feet out of the water with the hook, and the sailors, leaning over, beat his brains with the capstan bars till he was motionless; then fastening a rope with a slipnoose under his fins, with the ship's tackle they hoisted him on deck. He seemed to fill half the side of the vessel. The sailors opened his mouth, and fastened the jaws apart with a marlinspike, turned him over on his back, ripped him open, and tore out his heart and entrails. They then chopped off about a foot of his tail and threw him overboard; what he did I will not mention, lest it should bring discredit upon other parts of these pages which the reader is disposed to think may be true; but the last we saw of him he seemed to be feeling for his tail.

In the afternoon of the next day we crossed a strong current setting to north-west, which roared like breakers; soundings before 120 fathoms; during the evening there was no bottom, and we supposed we must have passed Cape Catoche.

On the 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th, there was the same dead calm, with a sea like glass and intense heat. We were scant of provisions, and alarmed for entire failure of water. The captain was a noble Spaniard, who comforted the passengers by repeating every morning that we were enchanted, but for several days he had been uneasy and alarmed. He had no chronometer on board. He had been thirty years trading from Havana to different ports in the Gulf of Mexico, and had never used one; but out of soundings, among currents, with nothing but the log, he could not determine his longitude, and was afraid of getting into the Gulf Stream, and being carried past Havana. Our chronometer had been nine months in hard use, jolted over severe mountain roads, and, as we supposed, could not be relied upon. Mr. Catherwood made a calculation with an old French table of logarithms which happened to be on board, but with results so different from the captain's reckoning that we supposed it could not be correct. At this time our best prospect was that of reaching Havana in the midst of the yellow fever season, sailing from there in the worst hurricane month, and a quarantine at Staten Island.

On the 13th of July everything on board was getting scarce, and with crew and passengers twenty in number, we broached our last cask of water. The heat was scorching, and the calm and stillness of the sea were fearful. All said we were enchanted; and the sailors added, half in earnest, that it was on account of the heretics; sharks more numerous than ever; we could not look over the side of the vessel without seeing three or four, as if waiting for prey.

On the 14th the captain was alarmed. The log was thrown regu-

larly, but could not give his position. Toward evening we saw an enormous monster, with a straight black head ten feet out of water, moving directly toward us. The captain, looking at it from the rigging with a glass, said it was not a whale. Another of the same kind appeared at the stern, and we were really nervous; but we were relieved by hearing them spout, and seeing a column of water thrown into the air. At dark they were lying huge and motionless on the surface of the water.

On the 15th, to our great joy, a slight breeze sprang up in the morning, and the log gave three miles an hour. At twelve o'clock we took the latitude, which was in $25^{\circ} 10'$, N. and found that in steering *southward* at the rate of three miles an hour by the log, we were fifty-five miles to the northward of the reckoning of the day before. The captain now believed that we were in the midst of the Gulf Stream, had been so, perhaps, two or three days, and were then 200 or 300 miles past Havana. Mr. Catherwood's chronometer gave 88° longitude; but this was so far out of the way by our dead reckoning, that, with our distrust of the chronometer, we all disregarded it, and the captain especially. We were then in a very bad position, short of provisions and water, and drifted past our port. The captain called aft passengers, sailors, cook, and cabin-boy, spread the chart on the companion-way, and pointed out our supposed position, saying, that he wished to take the advice of all on board as to what was best to be done. The mate sat by with the log-book to take notes. All remained silent until the cook spoke, and said that the captain knew best; the sailors and passengers assented; for, although we considered it all uncertain, and that we were completely lost, we believed that he knew better than anybody else. The captain pointed out the course of the Gulf Stream, said it would be impossible to turn back against it, and, having a light, favourable breeze, recommended that we should follow the stream, and bear up for New Providence for a supply of provisions and water. All assented, and so we put about from the south, and squared the yards for the north-east. At that moment we considered ourselves farther from Havana than when we started.

With most uncomfortable feelings we sat down to a scanty meal. Supposing that we were in the Gulf Stream and in the track of vessels, the captain sent a man aloft to look out for a sail, who very soon, to our great joy, reported a brig to leeward. We hoisted our flag, and bore down upon her. As we approached she answered our signal, and with a glass we recognised the American ensign. In an hour we were nearly within hailing distance; the captain could not speak English, and gave me the speaking-trumpet; but fancying, from his move-

ments, that our countryman did not like the Spanish colours, and afraid of some technical irregularity in my hail, which would make us an object of suspicion, we begged him to lower the jolly-boat. This was lying on the deck, with her bottom upward, and her seams opened by the sun. The water poured into her, and before we were fifty yards from the brig she was half full. We sat up on the gunwale, and two of the men had as much as they could do to keep her afloat, while we urged the others to pull. Sharks were playing around us, and for a few moments we wished to be back on board the old brig. A breeze seemed to strike the vessel, which for two or three minutes kept steadily on; but, to our great relief, she hove to and took us on board. Our Spanish colours, and our irregular movement in attempting to board without hailing, had excited suspicion, and the sailors said we were pirates; but the captain, a long, cool-headed down-easter, standing on the quarter with his hands in his pockets, and seeing the sinking condition of our boat, said, "Them's no pirates." The brig was the Helen Maria, of North Yarmouth, Sweetzer, master, from Tobasco, and bound to New York! The reader cannot imagine the satisfaction with which I greeted on the high seas a countryman bound for New York. My first question was whether he could take us on board, next for provisions and water for our friends, and then where we were. He showed us his observation for the day. We were about 400 miles from the spot we supposed. The current which sets up between Cape Catoche and Cape Antonio the captain had taken for the Gulf Stream. If we had attended to Mr. C.'s chronometer we should not have been far out of the way. As it was, we were perfectly lost; and if we had not met this vessel, I do not know what would have become of us. The captain was but seven days from Tobasco, with a wind that had carried away one of his sails, and had lost one of his men. He had no surplus of provisions, particularly with two additional passengers; but he sent on board what he could, and a supply of water. We returned, told the captain, much to his surprise and astonishment, of his position, not more than 200 miles from Sisal, and bade all hands farewell. They were not sorry to get rid of us, for the absence of two mouths was an object; and though perhaps, in their hearts, they thought their bad luck was on account of the heretics, it was pleasant, that with all our vexations, parting thus on the wide ocean, we shook hands with captain, passengers, sailors, cook, and cabin-boy, having no unkind feeling with any one on board.

Our new vessel had a full cargo of logwood, the deck being loaded even with the quarter, and stowed so close that the cabin-door was

taken off, and the descent was over a water-cask; but the change from the Spanish to the American vessel was a strange transition. The former had a captain, two mates, and eight sailors; the latter one mate and three sailors, with plank over the deck-load for sailors to run on, an enormous boom mainsail, and a tiller instead of a wheel, sweeping the whole quarter-deck, and at times requiring two men to hold it. In the evening we had two or three hours of calm; we were used to it, but the captain was annoyed; he detested a calm; he had not had one since he left Tobasco; he could bear anything but a calm. In the evening the charm was broken by a squall. The captain hated to take in sail, held on till the last moment, and then, springing from the tiller, hauled on the ropes himself, and was back again at the rudder, all in a flash. Mr. C. and I were so well pleased with the change that we were in no hurry; and, noticing the shortness of hands, and stumbling over logwood, we suggested to the captain that if he lost another man he would have difficulty in carrying his vessel into port; but he put this down at once by swearing that, if he lost every hand on board, the mate and he could carry her in themselves, deck-load and all.

On the 31st of July we arrived at New York, after an absence of nearly ten months, and nine without receiving any intelligence whatever from our friends at home. In the hope of making another journey with the reader to Yucatan, I now bid the reader farewell.

THE END.

