

CHAPTER IX.

Departure. — Voyage round Cape Horn. — Cape Pigeons.—
Arrival at Valparaiso.

Two weeks were happily spent at Rio, which will be long remembered by the writer, and many of his companions, who shared the elegant hospitalities of our countrymen and others there. To Mr. Brown, our Chargé d’Affaires, and Mr. Wright, our Consul, we were indebted for many civilities and great kindness.

At daylight on the 10th of September 1831, being ready for sea, we got under way, with a light land-breeze, and “fanned” out of the magnificently picturesque harbour of Rio Janeiro, and again tossed on the Atlantic, towards the boisterous regions ruled by the Cape Spirit!

“Farewell to the land where the clouds love to rest,
Like the shroud of the dead on the mountain’s cold breast ;

To the cataract's roar, where the eagles reply,
And the lake her lone bosom expands to the sky!"

Before sunset, Cape Frio was lost sight of, and we only thought of the storms we might encounter in passing into "Le Grand Ocean," as the French most emphatically term the Pacific.

Cape Horn appears to be truly the *patria nimborum*. Very few days of the year, summer or winter, are cloudless; they are all the same, cold and stormy. I have passed it four times; once in summer, once in winter, once in spring, and once in the autumn. In all these passages the thermometer sank as low as 32° F., and was on no one day above fifty. I have conversed with sealers who have spent whole years on the Cape; with whalers who have doubled it in every month in the year; with the masters of merchant-vessels trading to the Pacific; and they all concur in giving a stormy character to this region. I have also examined the log-books of many vessels, and have found them to agree, very generally, upon this subject. The journals of voyagers, particularly of the earlier navigators, give most fearful accounts of the tempests and disasters generally encountered in passing

from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. And if shipwreck in our time be less frequent than in the earlier ages, it must be attributed to the great improvements in marine architecture, seamanship, and navigation, and not to any amelioration of the climate of the Cape and its vicinity. For we find that a distinguished naval commander, who visited the Pacific nearly twenty years since, holds the following language: "The passage round Cape Horn from the eastward, I assert from my own experience, is the most dangerous, most difficult, and attended with more hardships, than that of the same distance in any other part of the world."*

Of the very many merchant-vessels annually doubling Cape Horn, very few have been lost. The number that yearly pass the Cape may be estimated at three hundred, yet, so far as I have been able to learn, shipwrecks and total losses have not averaged one a year.

The principal difficulties of this navigation arise from the constant prevalence of the winds from the westward, with but little variation.

* Porter's Journal, vol. i. p. 82. See also the Voyages of La Perouse, Lord Anson, Basil Hall, Frezier, &c.

Vessels bound to the Pacific have to contend with these winds, which are accompanied with cold cutting rains, snow, hail, and sleet; and their crews are exhausted more by the continuance than by the severity of the weather. Such was our own case in the passage of 1831, and that of several merchant-vessels with whose officers I have conversed.

The usual route pursued, going from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, is to pass between the Falkland Islands and the main, and draw round the land as much as the prevailing winds will permit. Vessels always, if possible, "make the land" of the Cape; that is, approach near enough to see it, and then hold their way westward, until they reach the meridian of eighty or eighty-five degrees of west longitude, before attempting to steer to the northward. If successful in gaining that meridian, without being driven far to the southward, the passage is generally short;—the voyage from the latitude of 40° south, in the Atlantic, to Valparaiso, is made in from thirty to thirty-five days.

It frequently happens, however, that vessels are driven as far as 63°, and even 64° south,

where, if to the eastward of the meridian of Cape Horn, they meet with icebergs, and suffer severely from the cold. Vessels have been occasionally forty, fifty, sixty, and in some instances seventy days contending with wind and storms, before being able to get to the westward, when "hugging the land;" while, at the very same period, the same region has been passed by others in from fifteen to twenty days, by pursuing the southern route. The combined experience of whalers and sealers goes to establish that, in high southern latitudes, the winds prevail from the eastward during a great part of the year, which is directly contrary to what is true as respects the direction of the winds in the vicinity of the land. In fact, it seems that the winds in this part of the world blow comparatively in narrow veins; and it has been remarked by the most experienced navigators, that gales do not blow home to the land.

It is the opinion of the most intelligent seamen that vessels should not pass through Straits La Mair; that they should keep close in to the land, and not go south of 57° south, but beat between that parallel and the land, until they may reach

the meridian of 85° west longitude, before attempting to get to the northward. Though the wind blows generally from the westward, varying from south, south-west, to north, north-west, it occasionally comes from the eastward. Of three vessels that doubled Cape Horn in October 1831, the first was thirty-one days from lat. $45^{\circ} 40'$ S. long. $58^{\circ} 30'$ W. in the Atlantic, to lat. $34^{\circ} 30'$ S. long. $79^{\circ} 15'$ W. in the Pacific. She reached $59^{\circ} 31'$ S. Her log-book does not show that she had the wind from the eastward at any one time; it varied from south to north, north-west. The second vessel was thirty days from lat. $40^{\circ} 21'$ S. long. $54^{\circ} 5'$ W. in the Atlantic, to lat. $30^{\circ} 46'$ S. long. $73^{\circ} 30'$ W. in the Pacific. She passed through Straits La Mair, and went as far as $57^{\circ} 54'$ S. She had an easterly wind for several days. The third, was twenty-nine days from lat. $50^{\circ} 48'$ S. long. 61° W. in the Atlantic, to lat. $45^{\circ} 5'$ S. long. $80^{\circ} 17'$ W. She reached as far as $59^{\circ} 7'$ south latitude. This vessel experienced some heavy gales, but had the advantage of easterly winds for several days.

The United States ship Brandywine doubled

Cape Horn in December 1826. She was thirty-seven days from Rio de Janeiro to Valparaiso, and went as far as 58° south. The United States ship *Guerriere* doubled the Cape in May 1829. She went as far as $58^{\circ} 37'$ south, and had very little easterly wind. She was sixty days from Rio de Janeiro to Valparaiso. The United States ship *Falmouth* doubled the Cape in October 1831. She was forty-nine days from Rio de Janeiro to Valparaiso, and went as far as $62^{\circ} 5'$ south latitude.

The commander of an English whale-ship, who has doubled the Cape eighteen times, (four times in the month of March, when he found the wind prevailing from the eastward,) recommends the month of March to enter the Pacific, and November to return.

The master of an American merchant-ship, who has doubled the Cape eight times, thinks it advisable, in case of strong head winds, "to lay to" under Staten Land, and there wait for a favourable opportunity.

From all we can learn, it seems advisable not to pass through the Straits La Mair; to keep close in with the land, say within twenty or thirty

miles; not to go south of 57° ; and not to attempt to decrease the latitude until in the meridian of 85° west, no matter how promising the appearances of the weather may be. The reasons given for this course are, first, though the winds be mostly from the westward, they are not constantly from that quarter; second, that the gales are not so severe near the land, and do not blow home; third, that there are no currents setting on shore; and fourth, by not being too far south, advantage may be taken of a favourable wind, that in a few hours might carry the vessel beyond the parallel of the Cape, which would be unavailing if the ship should be as far as 63° south, (as has been recommended,) because these winds do not always last long enough to carry a vessel many hundred miles.

Within a few years, another passage has been successfully tried by several vessels; that which originally led to the Pacific—the Straits of Magellan. From their entrance on the Atlantic to Cape Pillar on the Pacific, is estimated to be from three to four hundred miles. The breadth varies from eight to twenty miles. The water is deep, the anchorage good, the surface generally

smooth, and both its coasts abound in safe and convenient harbours, which may always be gained seasonably by vessels passing through the straits. About a year since, an American barque, drawing more than fifteen feet water, passed through in four days; the master informed us that he encountered no difficulty of any kind whatever. Sealers, who frequent that part of the world, are quite familiar with the navigation, and do not hesitate between it and going round the Cape. One of his Britannic Majesty's vessels of war, properly equipped for the purpose, is now engaged in surveying the Straits of Magellan, and it is to be hoped that the report of her commander will do much to dispel the objections to taking that route to the Pacific.

This subject is one which merits the attention of navigators; and if each one would forward an extract from his log-book to some of the public journals, with such observations as might suggest themselves, it might be soon settled.* The Sailor's Magazine would, no doubt, publish any-

* Silliman's Journal for April 1834 contains an interesting article on this subject, by M. F. Maury, of the United States navy.

thing that might have a tendency to clear this matter from the uncertainty at present connected with it. It is to be hoped, that navy officers, cruising in the Pacific, will not be backward in collecting and forwarding information upon the subject to the editor of the "Military and Naval Magazine," which ought to be cherished by the talent and patronage of both branches of the service.

From latitude 22° south in the Atlantic, our ship was followed to Valparaiso by numbers of petrels, or Cape pigeons. They were of two kinds, the spotted and the silvery. The first is rather larger than the domestic pigeon, but, from the thickness of its plumage, weighs much less. The feet are three-toed and webbed; the eyes are black; the bill hooked, with one exterior nostril; tail short. The breast is beautifully white, and the back, wings, and tail, spotted black and white; and from that circumstance, Frezier says, the sailors called them *damiers*, or draught-boards.* Its motions are graceful. It sails about the stern of vessels at sea, sometimes balancing itself upon the wing, and again drop-

* Frezier, Voyage to the South Sea, London, 1717.

ping gently to the surface, to pick up any crumbs that may have been thrown overboard, and then mounts upon its untiring course. When caught, as many were with hook and line trailed over the stern, it is unable to rise from the deck, and attempts to defend itself by ejecting the contents of the stomach and a pure yellow oil of a fishy odour.

The silver variety is of about the same size. The breast is a brilliant white, and the back, wings, and tail, are of a light leaden hue, but of silvery brightness; in other respects it does not differ very much from the first.

On the 8th of October, though nearly four hundred miles from land, (the latitude being $61^{\circ} 49'$ south, and the longitude $74^{\circ} 50'$ west,) the birds still followed us. Besides the pigeons, numbers of albatross were caught at the stern, and afforded fine sport to many persons on board. On the 9th, the wind changed from west to south-west by west, and all the birds left us, but returned again on the 11th, when the wind hauled to the northward and westward, and remained with us till we arrived at Valparaiso. The largest alba-

tross caught measured seven feet from the tip of one wing to the tip of the other.

On the 18th, the latitude was $50^{\circ} 28'$ south, and the longitude $79^{\circ} 53' 15''$ west, and we all indulged in the hope that we had passed all the perils and tedium of the Cape; for the long deep blue swell, which distinguishes the Pacific from the Atlantic, was now remarked by everybody; but we had not yet passed "where Chiloe's tempests sweep," and were therefore disappointed. On the 19th the barometer sunk to 28.75 inches, and we soon after had a fresh gale, that rendered it prudent to "lie to under a close-reefed main-top-sail." On the 20th we furled the main-top-sail, and lay to under "the fore and aft sails," for the purpose of trying the qualities of the ship more than from necessity, and it was not till the 24th that we got a fine breeze from the west. Our position was that day $42^{\circ} 41'$ south latitude, and $77^{\circ} 45'$ west longitude. From that time the weather remained pleasant, and the winds favourable, till we arrived at Valparaiso.