

And it was well that this was so. Already while a few leagues north of the Horn, a fierce snow storm had borne down upon her with its howling premonitions of what was to come. And before the next four weeks were over, even the best of her new gear was to be subjected to conditions that would put the old ship's sea-worthiness to the test. No sooner had she passed beyond the lee of Staten Island and hauled up to the Westerly wind that was blowing half a gale, than the battle royal had begun. As the afternoon of September first wore to a close the streaky appearance of the cloud-darkened sky gave promise of plenty of wind before long, and before darkness set in the ship was relieved of her top-gallant sails, and all was made snug for the night. All night the wind blew strong and fresh, but it was not regarded as a serious storm, so the Landseer kept beating away and working to windward, and on the third day of September sighted the Diego Ramirez, a group of islands some sixty miles West of Cape Horn.

But now the wind grew stronger. The sky assumed a dull leaden appearance, and huge masses of scud came drifting up from the West. The low moaning of the rigging, and the storm petrels scimming the waves, were ominous of coming fury. The upper topsails had now to be taken in, and the flying jib was secured. As the gale grew wilder, the wretchedness of the situation was increased by the rain and sleet which came driving past in an almost horizontal direction; while the darkness of the long antarctic night which was now coming on, lent additional gloom. The worst, however, was not yet. The rising gale piled up the waves before it. Huge green seas with foaming caps madly rushed and trampled on one another in their seeming eagerness to engulf the ship. Any progress was impossible. For a while she lay to under lower topsails, straining and groaning as she plunged into the billows. But she still had too much canvas. At eight o'clock in the evening the word was passed, "All hands on deck to shorten sail," "Goosewing the lower topsails," and a further attempt was made to ease the ship. To goosewing a topsail, the weather clew of the sail is hauled up, and as much of the sail as possible is furled, while the lee clew remains sheeted home. By this means very little sail is left exposed, though there still remains enough to keep the ship close to the wind. This task was accomplished with great difficulty and no little danger. When the ship rolled down, her rails were filled with water, so that it required the utmost caution in passing fore and aft; lest one should be caught in the floods which washed about amidships. This fate befell the writer. Slipping on the watery deck a violent lurch threw him to the rail which was about to go under, and he had only time to grasp a near-by rope, when he was buried in the deluge of water that poured over. It was only for minute, as the ship soon righted, yet had it not been for close-fitting oil-clothes, a very serious wetting would