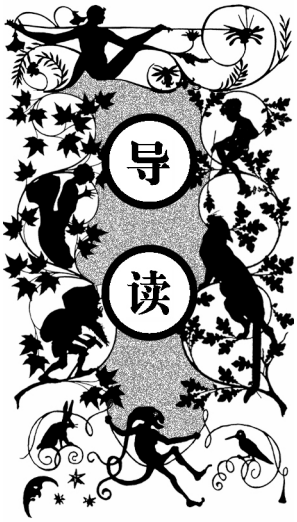
第三章　海 中 漂 流

Chapter 3　Cast Adrift



船上十四名少年所在的蔡尔曼寄宿学校，是新西兰首府奥克兰最有名的学校之一，学校的一百名学生都来自有钱人家。

这所学校于一八六零年二月十五日下午放假，学生们高高兴兴地被家长领走。他们中有十几位家长租用一位学生父亲的船，费用由家长分摊，让孩子们去进行一次环岛旅行。

这些孩子在八到十四岁之间，布里昂和雅克两兄弟是法国人，戈登是美国人，剩下的都是英国人。

多尼范和克罗斯都是十三岁多，上五年级，他俩是堂兄弟。多尼范长得一表人才，显露出傲慢的贵族派头，盛气凌人，总想一个人说了算；五年级的巴克斯特今年十三岁，是商人的儿子；韦布和威尔科克斯都是四年级学生，今年十二岁半，他们的家庭在司法界很有地位；加尼特的父亲是退休船长，塞维斯是富裕移民之子，两人同上三年级，十二岁；九岁的詹金斯父亲是皇家协会会长，上三年级；艾弗森今年也九岁，上二年级，父亲是东正教的牧师；多尔和科斯塔今年八岁，都出身军人家庭。

船上有一名水手长，六名水手和一名厨师，另外还有一名黑人见习水手莫科。游船计划二月十五日出发，十四日晚，少年乘客都上了船。当时，船员都不在船上，船长加尼特要到起航时才来，只有水手长和见习水手在船上。后来水手长去找船员，只留下莫科一人在船上照料，后因他太累了就回舱休息了。

大声喊叫起来

莫科醒来发现船正朝大海漂去，便大声喊叫起来，惊醒了戈登，布里昂、多尼范等人。他们想把帆升起以利用逆风进港，可因帆重，没法调整方向，所以船在风的吹动下走得更远，大家只好升起信号灯等候天亮。

这时，一艘大船向他们驶来，他们的呼叫声被涛声淹没，信号灯也掉到了海里。小船被大船碰了一下，大船继续开走了。几个小时后，刮起了风暴，刮了整整两个星期。人们发现斯鲁吉号失踪后发出了警报，港口经理派两艘小艇到大海寻找了一夜，没有结果，只捞回一些斯鲁吉号上被撞掉的碎片，家长们也以为孩子们已葬身海底了。

Charman's boarding-school was then one of the largest in Auckland, New Zealand. It boasted about a hundred pupils belonging to the best families in the colony, and the course of study and the management were the same as in high-class schools at home.

On February 15th, 1860, in the afternoon, a crowd of boys and their relatives came out of the schoolhouse, merry and happy as birds just escaped from their cage. It was the beginning of the holidays. Two months of independence; two months at liberty! And for some of the boys there was the prospect of a sea voyage which they had talked about for months. How the others envied those who were to go on this cruise which was to circumnavigate New Zealand!

The schooner had been chartered by the boys' friends, and fitted out for a voyage of six weeks. She belonged to the father of one of the boys, William H. Garnett, an old merchant captain in whom everyone felt confidence. A subscription raised among the parents would cover the expenses; and great was the joy of the young folks, who would have found it difficult to spend their holidays better.

The fortunate boys were of all ages from eight to fourteen. With the exception of the Briants, who were French, and Gordon, who was an American, they were all English.

Donagan and Cross were the sons of rich landholders, who occupy the highest social rank in New Zealand. They were cousins; both were a little over thirteen and both in the fifth form. Donagan was something of a dandy and

undoubtedly the foremost pupil in the school. He was clever and hardworking, and his fondness for study and desire to excel easily maintained his position. A certain aristocratic arrogance had gained him the nickname of Lord Donagan, and his imperious character made him strive to take command wherever he might find himself. Hence this rivalry between him and Briant, and it had become keener than ever since circumstances had increased Briant's influence over his companions. Cross was quite an ordinary sort of boy, distinguished by his constant admiration for everything his cousin said or did.

Baxter, too, was a fifth-form boy. Thirteen years of age, a cool, thoughtful, ingenious fellow, who could do almost anything with his hands, he was the son of a merchant who was not particularly well off.

Webb and Wilcox, both about twelve and a half, were in the fourth form. They were not particularly bright, and were rather inclined to be quarrelsome. Their fathers were wealthy men, and held high rank among the magistracy of New Zealand.

Gamett and Service were in the third form. They were both twelve years old. One was the son of a retired merchant captain, the other's father was well-to-do. The families were very intimate, and Service and Garnett were almost inseparable. They were good-hearted boys, not over fond of work, and if they had been given the key of the fields, as the French call it, they would not have let it rest idle in their pockets. Garnett had an over-mastering passion—he loved an accordion! And he took it with him on board the yacht, to occupy his spare time in a way befitting a sailor's son. Service was the school wag, the liveliest and noisiest of the lot, a devourer of travellers' tales, and a worshipper of Robinson Crusoe and the Swiss Family Robinson, which he knew by heart.

Among the boys, two were nine years old. The first of these was Jenkins, the son of the secretary of the New Zealand Royal Society; the other was Iverson, whose father was the minister of St. Paul's Church. Jenkins was in the third form, Iverson in the second; but both were good boys. Dole and Costar were each a year younger than Iverson, and were the sons of military officers. They were both little fellows, Dole very obstinate, and Costar very greedy. Both were in the first form, and both knew how to read and write.

Of the three others, Gordon, the American, was about fourteen, and his

somewhat angular build already betrayed his Yankee origin. Slightly awkward, and a little heavy, he was far and away the steadiest boy in the fifth form; though there was nothing very brilliant about him, he had a clear head and a strong fund of common sense. His tastes were serious, and he was of an observant character and cool temperament. He was methodical even to the slightest detail, classifying his ideas m his head like the things in his desk, where everything was classified, docketed, and entered in its special notebook. His companions liked him, and recognised his good qualities. He was a native of Boston, but, having neither father nor mother, he had been taken care of by his guardian, a consular agent who had made his fortune and settled in New Zealand.

Briant and his brother were the sons of a French engineer, who, for two years and a half, had been employed in charge of the works for draining a marsh in the centre of the North Island. Briant was thirteen, an intelligent lad with no particular liking for hard work, and figuring with undesirable frequency at the wrong end of the fifth form. When he wanted to, however, he speedily rose in the class thanks to his facility of assimilation and his remarkable memory. He was bold, enterprising, active, quick at repartee, and good-natured. He was generally liked, and when the schooner was in difficulties his companions, with a few exceptions, did as he told them, principally from his having gained some nautical knowledge on his way out from Europe. Though young, he was ‘a true Frenchman.’

His young brother, Jack, would have been the school jester had it not been for Service. He spent his time chiefly in inventing new modes of mischief for his schoolfellows’ benefit, and being consequently in hot water; but for some reason his conduct on the vessel differed from what it had been at school.

Such were the schoolboys whom the storm had cast ashore in the Pacific. During the cruise round New Zealand the schooner was to have been commanded by Garnett’s father, one of the best yachtsmen in Australasia. Many times had the schooner been sighted off the coast of Australia from the southermost cape of Tasmania to Torres Straits, and even in the seas of the Moluccas and the Philippines, which are so dangerous to vessels even of greater tonnage. But she was a well-built boat, handy, staunch, and fit to keep

the sea in all weathers.

The crew was to have consisted of the mate, six sailors, a cook and a boy, Moko, the young negro of twelve, whose family had been in the service of a well-known.New Zealander for many years. And we ought to mention Fan, a dog of American extraction, which belonged to Gordon, and which never left her master.

The day of departure had been fixed for 15th February. The schooner lay moored at the end of Commercial Pier. The crew was not on board when, on the evening of the 14th, the young passengers embarked. Captain Garnett was not expected till the last moment, and the mate and the boy received Gordon and his companions, the men having gone ashore to take a parting glass. When the yacht had been cleared of visitors, and the boys had all gone to bed, so as to be ready early next morning for the start, the mate decided that he would go up into the town and look for his men, leaving Moko in charge. And Moko was too tired to keep awake…

What had happened after the mate left was a mystery, but, accidentally or purposely, the moorings had got cast off without anyone on board being the wiser.

It was a dark night. The land-breeze was strong, and the tide running out, and away went the schooner out to sea. When Moko awoke he found they were adrift!

His shouts brought up Gordon, Briant, Donagan and a few of the others from below, but there was nothing they could do. They called for help in vain. None of the harbour lights Were visible. The yacht was right out in the gulf three miles from land.

At the suggestion of Briant and Moko, the boys tried to get sail on the vessel so as to beat back into harbour. But the sail was too heavy for them to set properly, and the result was that the schooner, instead of keeping her head up, dropped dead away to leeward. Cape Colville was doubled, and the strait between Great Barrier Island and the mainland run through, and soon the schooner was off to the eastward, many miles from New Zealand.

This was serious. There could be no help from the land. If a vessel were to come in search, several hours must elapse before she could catch them, even

supposing that she could find them in the darkness. And even when day came, how could she descry so small a craft on the high sea? If the wind did not change, all hope of returning to land must be given up. There remained only the chance of being spoken by some vessel on her way to a New Zealand port. And to meet this, Moko hastened to hoist a lantern at the foremast head. And then all that could be done was to wait for daylight.

Many of the smaller boys were still asleep, and it was thought best not to wake them.

Several attempts were made to bring the schooner up in the wind, but all were useless. Her head fell off immediately, and away she went drifting to the eastward.

Suddenly a light was sighted two or three miles off. It was a white masthead light, showing a steamer under way. Soon the side lights, red and green, rose above the water, and the fact of their being seen together showed that the steamer was steering straight for the yacht.

The boys shouted in vain. The wash of the waves, the roar of the steam blowing off, and the moan of the rising wind united to drown their voices. But if they could not hear the cries, the look-outs might see the light at the schooner's foremast? It was a last chance, and unfortunately, in one of her jerky pitches, the halliard broke and the lantern fell into the sea, and there was nothing to show the presence of the schooner, which the steamer was steering straight down upon at the rate of twelve knots.

In a few seconds she had struck the other vessel, and would have sunk her, had she not taken her on the slant close to the stern; as it was she carried away only part of the nameboard.

The shock had been so feeble that the steamer kept on, leaving the schooner to the mercy of the approaching storm. It is occasionally true, unfortunately,that captains do not trouble about stopping to help a vessel they have run into. But in this case some excuse could be made, for those on board the steamer felt nothing of the collision, and saw nothing of the schooner in the darkness.

Drifting before the wind, the boys might well think they were lost. When day came the wide horizon was deserted. In the Pacific, ships bound from

Australia to America, or from America to Australia, take a more notherly or more southernly route than their own. Not one was sighted, and although the wind moderated occasionally, yet it never ceased blowing from the westward.

How long this drifting was to last, neither Briant nor his comrades knew. In vain they tried to get the schooner back into New Zealand waters. It was under these conditions that Briant, displaying an energy superior to his age, began to exercise an influence over his companions, to which even Donagan submitted. Although with Moko's help he could not succeed in getting the schooner to the westward, he could, and did, manage to keep her navigable. He did not spare himself. He watched night and day. He swept the horizon for any chance of safety. And he threw overboard several bottles containing an account of what had happened to the schooner; it was a slender chance, doubtless, but he did not care to neglect it.

A few hours after the vessel had left Hauraki Gulf, the storm arose, and for two weeks it raged with unusual, impetuosity. Assaulted by enormous waves, and escaping a hundred times from being overwhelmed by the mountains of water, the schooner had now gone ashore on some unknown land in the Pacific.

What was to be the fate of these shipwrecked schoolboys? Where was help to come from if they could not help themselves?

Their families had only too good reason to suppose that they had been swallowed up by the sea. When it was found that the vessel had disappeared the alarm was given, and there is no need to dwell on the consternation the news produced.

Without losing an instant, the harbour-master sent out two small steamers in search, with orders to explore the gulf and some miles beyond it. All that night, though the sea grew rough, the little steamers sought in vain; and when day came and they returned to Auckland, it was to deprive the unfortunate relatives of every hope. They had not found the schooner, but they had found the planking knocked away in collision by the Qnito

And on the planking were three or four letters of the schooner's name. It seemed certain that the vessel had met with disaster, and gone down with all on board a dozen miles off New Zealand.