

## CHAPTER III.

### OPEN PIRACY.

THE idea of a boy so small as Tommy Tucker turning pirate, in the belief that he could thereby better wreak his vengeance on Captain Sammy, was very funny to our three boys, as they walked home that night; and lengthy was the discussion as to how long he might continue his piratical career.

Mrs. Evans did not think Tommy was such a dangerous character as to make it necessary for her to inform the authorities of his whereabouts, and, greatly to Dare's relief, she promised to say nothing about the matter. But she did insist that the boys should not become friendly with him, unless it was to try to persuade him of the evil and folly of his ways.

Bobby was not in favor of acting as missionary to Master Tommy, for he was rather inclined to be afraid of him; but Dare promised to try to do the would-be pirate chieftain all the good he could, although he hardly thought he could effect as much with his tongue as Captain Sammy could with his leg.

That night, after the question of Tommy's piracy had been discussed, the boys laid Captain Sammy's offer before Mr. Evans more in detail than they had done before supper, and, to their great delight, were told that they might suspend their studies during the time they were engaged in raising the *Pearl*, provided they gathered all possible information as to the supposed formation and history of the Everglades. Mrs. Evans also stipulated that they study, from such authorities as were obtainable, the cause and formation of the coral reefs which enframed the State of Florida in a net-work so dangerous to navigation.

Such study as that seemed but play, and they were perfectly willing to give the required promises.

On the following morning they were at the wreck of the *Pearl* nearly as soon as the sun had peeped over the trees at the quaint little town of Tampa; and they had brought their dinner with them, in order that they might not be obliged to waste any time in the walk to the hotel for something to eat.

As yet they had no idea how they were to go to work to raise the sunken steamer. Dare had asked his father to advise with them as to how they should proceed; but Mr. Evans had refused to have anything to say about the matter, alleging that, since Captain Sammy had made such an

offer as he had, it was but right that they should work and plan unaided, for that was the price they were to pay for the use of the boat after she was afloat.

It was high-water when they arrived on the beach opposite the point where the *Pearl* lay submerged, and it seemed much more of a task to raise her than it had appeared when a portion of her upper works was visible.

Both Charley and Bobby looked upon Dare as the leader of the enterprise; therefore, instead of making any suggestions as to the work on hand, they looked to him for orders.

Dare was almost at a loss to know how they should set about their work, although he had spoken so confidently the day before; but he did not then care to acknowledge that fact fully.

"I don't exactly know how we are going to raise her," he said, after as long a delay as he dared to make, lest his companions should discover how entirely he was at a loss to know how to proceed; "but there is one thing sure, and that is, we must build some stout rafts, which we can anchor along-side of her."

As he said this a perfectly feasible plan for raising the boat presented itself, and he added,

"If we could make rafts large and stout enough, we could get some chain-cables, pass them under the *Pearl* at low-water, and make them fast to the rafts. When the tide rises, of

course the rafts would raise the steamer, and we could float her in nearer the shore, doing the same thing each day, until we got her where she would be wholly uncovered at low-water."

The plan seemed so simple that the other boys came to the conclusion that raising steamboats was the easiest thing in life, and the question of how large the rafts should be was being discussed, when Captain Sammy was seen stumping along the beach toward them.

"Well, boys, have you got the *Pearl* afloat yet?"

"We've hardly had time for that yet, sir," replied Dare; "but we shall do it."

Then Dare asked the little man what he thought of the plan he had just proposed, and was delighted at the hearty approval it met with.

"I have got some small chain-cables that will be just the thing, and you can go to my dock for them whenever you are ready for them. Of course the success of your plan depends more upon your raft than anything else, and if you'll row me over to that little island there I'll show you some trees that will make excellent timbers for the heavier portions, although, of course, it will take you some time to get them ready for use."

As he spoke Captain Sammy pointed to a small island, about two miles from where they

were standing, and which appeared to be covered with a fine growth of heavy timber.

Dare's idea had been that they could buy some thick planks, which would make better rafts than any they could build of trunks of trees; but thinking Captain Sammy might have some reasons of his own for wanting to visit Dollar Island, as it was called, he agreed to the proposition, and all started for the little captain's boat.

Before Dollar Island was reached the boys found that Captain Sammy could be quite a tyrant when he was on the water, for he kept them pulling at the oars, while he sat in the stern-sheets and steered, much as if they were a crew which were obliged to serve him.

But it was not such a remarkably hard pull, after all, and when they stepped ashore on the beautiful little island they felt fully repaid for their work.

"Now, one of you stay by the boat, while the others come with me around the shore," said Captain Sammy, as he placed the luncheon the boys had brought with them carefully under the stern seat, and then started along the shore, leaving them to follow as they chose.

Bobby was anxious to be left as boat-keeper, a position which Dare and Charley were only too willing to accord him; so they started off after the little captain, while Bobby curled him-

self up on the bank, where he could watch the boat and take his ease at the same time.

He had been on guard in this leisurely fashion more than an hour, when he was startled by a sound from among the trees just behind him, and at the same time saw a little round head, surmounted by a wonderful kind of cap, just moving out from behind the trunk of a tree.

"Who's that?" he asked, quickly.

"Captain Thomas Tucker," was the bold reply, in a very thin, squeaky voice, as the rather diminutive form of the pirate chieftain came into view, closely followed by another boy, of about the same size and appearance, whom Bobby concluded was the pirate crew, Ikey Jones.

Master Tucker still wore the long coat, but he had made several additions to it. On each shoulder was sewn a piece of yellow cloth, evidently intended as epaulettes; around his waist was a large piece of red flannel, tied as a sash, and in this was stuck a pistol, without a lock, and a small carving-knife. The cap was evidently the pirate's crowning glory; it had several strips of red and yellow cloth tied around it, with long ends hanging down on one side, while in the gay-colored folds were fastened several feathers, that gave a startling appearance to the whole costume.

The crew, as represented in the meek-looking

person of Ikey Jones, wore no distinguishing marks of a sanguinary calling save a leathern belt around the waist, in which was placed a not very dangerous-looking table-knife.

Now, Bobby was rather a coward, more especially when he was alone, and the appearance of these two avowed pirates, when he thought his party were the only ones on the island, rather frightened him.

"Where's the old heathen gone?" asked Master Tucker, as sternly as his thin voice would permit.

"Who?" asked Bobby, in surprise.

"The old heathen—Captain Sammy."

"He's somewhere along the shore, with Dare and Charley. How did you get here?"

"Took an old boat that would just hold together, an' started after you did."

Bobby trembled with apprehension, for if the piratical crew had followed them so closely they must have had some sinister motive.

"Look here, now," said Tommy, as he and Ikey went toward Captain Sammy's boat: "here's me an' Ikey Jones, an' there's you. Now, that's enough to make a little pirate's crew, if you say you'll come with us. You shall be the mate, an' boss Ikey 'round as much as you want to. Will you do it?" And Tommy began to push the boat off, as though there was no question but that Bobby would accept the offer.

"No, I won't; and you mustn't touch the boat, or Captain Sammy will be angry," said Bob. But his courage was not sufficient to admit of his going down to the boat and pulling her up on to the beach again.

"I'll tell you what I'll do if you'll come," said Master Tucker, persuasively, having now launched the boat until she was held only by the anchor-rope. "Ikey has to go home every night at seven o'clock, an' I'll let you go too, so's you won't get into any trouble with your aunt."

This idea of being a pirate by day and a peaceful citizen by night was a new phase of life to Bobby, but yet he was not pleased with it.

"I tell you I don't want to be a pirate," he repeated; "and you must pull the boat up again, for Captain Sammy will be here pretty soon."

Tommy glanced over his shoulder quickly to assure himself that the little man was not in sight, and then he said, sternly, while Ikey Jones got behind him, in order to be safe in case Bobby should be made angry,

"There's no use talkin', for I'm a reg'lar pirate now, an' you don't want to fool 'round much with me. I come here to get this boat, an' to have you fellers join me; but if you won't, I'll take the boat anyhow, an' I'll serve you out awful if you try to stop me."

"But it's stealing to take her, and we can't get home again if we don't have her."

"I can't help that, for I'm a pirate," was the brief reply of Master Tucker, as he motioned his crew to get on board, and then giving the boat a vigorous push, he jumped into her, and the pirates were afloat.

It was not until the little craft was at such a distance from the shore that it was impossible to get at her that Bobby had sufficiently recovered from his fear and surprise to run down to the beach. There he called, imploringly,

"Come back, Tommy! come back, an' don't be so mean as to steal Captain Sammy's boat!"

Tommy paid no attention to the appeal. He had come out that morning all equipped for his piratical work, and he proceeded to business at once.

He took from his pocket the symbol of his new calling—the horrible black flag, which had been made from pieces of a dress of his mother's. The material, which was about one yard long and half as wide, had originally been black, but was now a sort of dingy green. In the centre was what had probably been intended for a skull and cross-bones made of white cloth, but which really looked like an unskilfully made Jack-o'-lantern with the face chalked.

This terrible symbol of death Master Tucker tied to one of the oars, and planted it firmly in the bow of the boat, where it hung as innocently as ever it did on Mrs. Tucker's person.

Then, seating himself in the stern-sheets, with the tiller-ropes in his hands, the newly-fledged pirate gave the order for his crew to pull at the oars, and the piratical craft slowly left the island, while Bobby stood on the beach in a state of agitation not easily to be described.