

CHAPTER V.

SEA-URCHINS.

THE labor of putting up a shelter for the night was not hard, since all that was necessary to do was to pile up against two trees the branches they had hewn off in finishing their timber.

After this was done the question of supper presented itself; and since Captain Sammy showed no disposition to do anything about gathering more oysters, the boys started out to do it for themselves.

Bobby had an idea that in order to gather oysters successfully he should wade into the water after them, instead of reaching down from the top of the rocks, as he had seen Captain Sammy do, and his shoes and stockings were off in a twinkling, while his trousers were rolled up as far as possible.

His example was closely followed by Charley; but Dare, who was doubtful as to whether such a proceeding was wise or not, concluded that it was safest to try first for their supper as the little captain had done.

Both Charley and Bobby plunged into the water when they came to the line of reef from which they expected to find the food, while Dare crept along the top of the rocks.

Bobby had taken but a few steps in the desired direction, and was congratulating himself upon having been more wise than Dare, when suddenly he gave vent to a scream that was almost blood-curdling, while his face exhibited signs of the most intense fear.

"What is it? What is the matter?" cried Dare, as he jumped into the water, regardless of the fact that he was not prepared for such immersion, and ran toward the apparently suffering boy.

Bobby paid no attention to his questions, but continued to scream, while he held up first one foot and then the other, thus showing that they were in some way connected with his pain or terror.

"It's a shark! It must be a shark!" cried Charley, now stepping around in the greatest excitement, but attempting neither to aid Bobby or to gain the shore.

At the suggestion that it was a shark Bobby redoubled his efforts at screaming with such success that the din was almost deafening.

Dare tried in vain to quiet Bobby sufficiently to learn what the matter was; but finding that an almost impossible task while Charley was

doing so much to add to the excitement, he said to his screaming brother, in tones that were not exactly mild,

"Now see here, Charley: you are not hurt, and I want you to stop your noise. See if you can hold your tongue long enough to help me get Bob ashore."

It seemed as if Charley had just realized that he was not injured in any way, for he ceased his screams almost as soon as Dare spoke, and, like the sensible boy he usually was, at once commenced to do what he could in aid of his cousin.

When the two boys waded up to where Bobby was standing he had for the moment stopped screaming, and was about to tell what had caused the outcry. But he was interrupted by Charley, who now also commenced to scream loudly, this time from pain rather than fear, and going through the same peculiar motions with his feet that Bobby had been indulging in.

Dare stood for several seconds as if he was paralyzed by the noise, and he was as thoroughly mystified and surprised a boy as ever visited the Florida coast.

"What is the matter?" he cried, forgetting that he was in the water above his knees, and trying to stamp his foot in order to command attention. "Tell me what the matter is, or I shall think you are both crazy."

Charley paid no attention to the question.

He managed to stagger to the projecting reef, across which he leaned, kicking his heels high up in the air, as if only in that position could he find relief.

That Charley was in the same predicament he was helped to restore Bobby to one or two of the five senses he appeared to have been frightened out of, and he started, in a very painful way, for the shore, saying, as he did so,

"We've been bitten by something. It must have been a scorpion, I am sure, and just as likely as not we are poisoned."

"Don't be so foolish," cried Dare, impatiently. "You're old enough to know that scorpions don't live in the water;" and then he added, for he was really afraid they might have been bitten by some poisonous reptile, although he did not want them to know of his fears, "Even if a scorpion had bitten you it wouldn't kill you."

By this time Bobby had gotten high up on the beach, and was examining the sole of one of his feet, which was bleeding considerably.

"Tell me how it felt," asked Dare, nervous and anxious to learn as nearly as possible just what had caused the trouble, for the sight of Bobby's bleeding foot added to his fears.

"All I know about it," sobbed Bob, as he wiped away the blood and sand with the sleeve of his shirt—for his handkerchief was in his coat-pocket, tucked snugly away in one corner

of the camp—"is that when I went to step, after I got out where the water was over my knees, I felt something sting me."

"What's the matter now? Who's killed? Have more pirates come?"

It was Captain Sammy who asked the question. The outcry had broken in upon his smoky reverie, and he had hobbled along the beach at such a rapid pace that his usually red face was now almost crimson, while the perspiration was running down his neck in small streams.

"Bobby and Charley waded in to get some oysters, and something stung them," explained Dare, feeling relieved that Captain Sammy was there to take some of the responsibility from him.

"Stung, eh?" said the little man, as he carefully adjusted his spectacles and examined Bobby's foot with the air of a physician.

What he saw did not appear to frighten him very much, for he took out his knife very deliberately, and, after some little cutting of the flesh, which caused Bobby to scream again, he drew out of the foot a long, dark-greenish splinter, which he held up laughingly.

"They've stepped on some sea-urchins, that's all; and the next time they wade around this coast they had better keep their shoes on."

Great was the relief of all three of the boys at knowing that the matter was no worse; but the

faces of the two sufferers clouded again very quickly as Captain Sammy went to work with his knife, and they knew each of the spines of the sea-urchins must be dug out.

Owing to the fact that his eyesight was not very keen Captain Sammy was not remarkably quick about his work, and more than once had Bobby cried aloud and pulled his foot back from the detaining grasp, but all without troubling the little sailor in the least.

He continued at his work until he had extracted thirteen of the needle-like spines from the feet of the two boys; and then, after advising them to bandage the injured members with their handkerchiefs, rather than try to put on their shoes, he hobbled back to his perch on the rocks, to resume his pipe and vengeful dreams of Tommy Tucker.

There were no farther thoughts of oysters after the surgical operations were ended, and, in fact, it seemed as if the fright and pain had quieted their hunger so far that they no longer thought of it.

With Dare's assistance Charley and Bobby limped back to the rude brush camp, and there they lay, with feet smarting with pain, thinking over the same subject that was occupying Captain Sammy's attention—the pirates and their work.

Dare, from whose clothing the water was

trickling in little streams, had commenced to undress, for the purpose of hanging his clothes before the fire, when Captain Sammy shouted from his rocky perch,

"Here! what *are* you goin' to do now?"

"Going to dry my clothes," replied Dare, still continuing his work.

"Stop it!" roared the little man, energetically, as he hobbled toward the camp. "It would be worse than wading into the water barefoot to undress here."

"Why?" asked Dare, in surprise. "My clothes are soaked with water, and I don't see any reason why I shouldn't dry them."

"You'd see and feel more'n ten thousand reasons why you shouldn't as soon as you were undressed. Haven't you been complaining of the mosquitoes all day? They are active little fellows down here in Florida, especially just at nightfall, and I had rather step on two sea-urchins than to give them a chance at my naked body."

There was no need for the captain to say any more; Dare realized at once the trouble he would have been in had he done as he proposed, and he contented himself with wringing the water from his coat and vest, and squeezing it from his trousers-legs as best he could, sitting as near as possible to the fire, in order to dry them.

When the sun set, and the shadows began to lengthen, the wind came up from the sea, causing the fire to roar and crackle in a cheerful way that had a soothing effect upon the one-legged man.

The warmth was grateful to all; and the smoke, which was now driven closer to the ground, served to keep the mosquitoes away to a certain extent; and in case anything should have been learned of their misfortunes, by those on shore, the flames would serve as a beacon.

"Now make yourselves just as comfortable as you can," said Captain Sammy, as he seated himself so near the blaze that he ran great danger of setting his wooden leg on fire, in order that he might ward off the expected attack of rheumatism. "It ain't any kind of use to grumble at what you can't help, an' you might as well have a good time as to sit mopin' 'round."

This was good advice; but it sounded rather strange, coming as it did from the one who had been doing all the grumbling, while the boys had really made the best of the adventure.

From the first moment Dare had seen the little captain, with his wooden leg, he was sure that he had a perfect fund of stories from which he might draw without fear of exhausting it, and he thought the time might be pleasantly occupied in listening to them.

"Can't you tell us some stories, sir?" he asked,

both fearing and hoping that the request would call forth one of those fits of scolding for which Captain Sammy was famous, and out of which the desired stories would finally come.

"Stories!" growled the little man. "Do you s'pose I went to sea jest for the sake of gettin' a lot of stories to tell to boys who have got me in such a scrape as you have?"

"No, sir," replied Dare, thinking the latter portion of the captain's speech had especial reference to Bobby. "But you would have had the adventures, whatever you might have gone to sea for; and now that we are here, and where we can't get away, we would like very much to hear of them."

It seemed as if Captain Sammy was about to accede to the request, for he reseated himself in a more comfortable position, and gazed out over the water, as if he expected from there would come memories which would aid him in the task.

Dare, who was watching him closely, saw his face suddenly light up, and felt certain that thoughts of some pleasant episode in his life had come to the little man. But just when he expected to hear him commence a story Captain Sammy jumped to his feet, and cried, joyfully,

"Here's a boat now! Those little rascals must have told where we were, and some one has come for us!"

Then he stood gazing out over the water with as much anxiety as if he were a shipwrecked sailor who had been waiting months in the hitherto vain hope of seeing a friendly sail.