

CHAPTER VI.

THE WRECK.

THE boys were obliged to look several moments in the direction Captain Sammy pointed before they could distinguish anything that had the slightest semblance to a boat, and then they saw indistinctly, in the fast-gathering darkness, a small, white cloud on the water that grew to look more and more like a sail.

Captain Sammy seemed almost beside himself with joy, for in this approaching craft he saw the means of escaping from the necessity of giving an invitation to his old enemy the rheumatism, which invitation he felt he should surely give if he slept in the open air all night.

But the boys looked at this boat, which was coming along so merrily under the influence of the strong sea-breeze, with far different thoughts. They had counted on this enforced camping-out as an adventure which could be told their friends at home as having some tinge of danger in it; but to be rescued before nine o'clock in the evening made of it an exceedingly tame affair.

On came the little boat, thus viewed with such opposite feelings by age and youth, until she could be quite clearly distinguished, although the white sail hid those on board from the view of those on the island.

They could almost hear the water ripple around her bow, and Captain Sammy could restrain himself no longer.

"Boat ahoy!" he shouted, using both hands for a speaking-trumpet, and making such exertions that he might have been heard half a mile away.

There was no answering hail from those on board the little craft; and while Captain Sammy was wondering why no reply came the boat luffed up into the wind, presenting to the watchers only the bellying sail and the bow.

"Why—why," stammered Captain Sammy, in surprise—"why, that's my boat!"

The boys thought this rather a rash assertion for the little man to make, since it was impossible to distinguish her with sufficient clearness to be positive as to the fact; but the captain continued:

"That's my boat sure, for there's the very patch I put on her sail last Wednesday."

In trying to make out this distinguishing mark the boys now saw what they had not noticed before. At the mast-head floated a black substance, which Bobby was sure he recognized as the piratical flag Tommy Tucker had dis-

played on the oar shortly after he had captured the craft.

It was all very strange, for it did not seem possible that Master Tucker would come to the island, so great had been his fear of Captain Sammy. Besides, now that it was evening his "crew" must be on shore, transformed into a peaceful boy again.

But as the boat went slowly ahead, and then came up into the wind, there could be no mistake made. Master Tucker was there, and alone, in all the glory of his gorgeous uniform, while his flag floated proudly, even if indistinctly, over him. He surely had come back, although for what purpose it was impossible even to conjecture.

At the sight of this boy, whom he had resolutely put out of his mind, in order that he might be more reconciled to his fate, all of Captain Sammy's anger was aroused again, and intensified because of the revival.

"You villain!" he cried, "come in here this minute and let me get my hands on you once."

It is hardly possible that Captain Sammy thought Tommy would obey the command in view of the implied threat, and yet he waited patiently, as if he expected such would be the case.

"I'm comin' over here in the mornin' to serve you out," cried Tommy, defiantly, to the angry

man; "but I've come now to tell them boys that Ikey went up to the hotel an' told that they wouldn't be home to-night."

"Does my mother know where we are?" asked Dare.

"No; he jest told her that you was off with that old heathen, an' wouldn't be home to-night."

"Did he tell her *why* we couldn't come back?" And Dare grew anxious now.

"Of course he didn't. What kind of a feller do you think I am? If he'd told her that she'd sent over here to-night, an' I hain't goin' to let Cap'en Sammy get away till I've fixed him out, so's he'll be sorry he ever took his leg to me."

"I'll beat it up about your miserable body," roared Captain Sammy, as he started to take off his leg again; but remembering his former mishap, he shook his fist instead.

"*Will* you come in here and take us off?" he shouted.

"No, I won't," was the pirate's defiant reply. "If them fellers want to go home I'll carry 'em over, provided they'll tie you hand an' foot, an' let me pound you as much as I want to first."

Under other circumstances it would have been impossible for the boys to have restrained their laughter at the very comical appearance of Captain Sammy; but now it seemed all too serious for mirth. He ran along on the beach, first this way and then that, shaking his fists at the small

boy in the boat, and acting in every way as if his anger had deprived him of his senses.

"Will you do what I want you to?" asked Tommy, evidently referring to the capture of the captain.

"We can't do that," replied Dare; "but we'll do almost anything else you want us to, if you will take us home."

"I'll never take you away if you don't tie the old heathen," and, from his very decided tone, it was easy to understand that Master Tucker had paid them this evening visit in the sole hope of inducing them to help him to his revenge.

While they had been talking the wind had been increasing in force, and already the waves had begun to put on their white caps, as if preparing for a regular lark. The little craft, laying head to the wind, tossed about like an egg-shell, and Captain Sammy saw that she was being forced slowly but surely toward the beach.

If Tommy could only be induced to remain there long enough he might be aground before he was aware of the fact.

"Keep talking to him," whispered the captain to Dare, "an' we may get our hands on him after all."

But it was almost as if Tommy had heard what his enemy had said, for hardly had the

words been uttered when he discovered his peril, and began making preparations to avoid it.

He got an oar out and began pulling the boat around so that the sail would fill again. Had he been a better sailor he would not have pulled so long before he attended to the sheet and helm, and this same inexperience brought the pirate's voyage to a more speedy ending than he had anticipated.

He worked at the oar until the wind completely filled the sail, forcing the little craft around suddenly, and bearing her directly on to the sharp reef of coral that showed itself just above the water, not more than fifty feet from the main line of the shore, and a little to the right of where the party on the island were standing.

The force of the wind, which was now increasing each moment, sent the boat on toward the sharp coral points, which could pierce her timbers so easily, with a speed that seemed to paralyze Tommy. He made no attempt to divert his craft from the dangerous position in which he had placed her, but clung to the rail, crying for help in the most unpiratical manner.

"Let go your sheets, and put your helm hard down!" shouted Captain Sammy, forgetting, in his eagerness to save the boat, that he was giving advice which, if followed, would enable the marauder to escape.

But Master Tucker, in his agitation, was incapable of deciding what ought to be done, or even of understanding what was said to him.

He remained by the rail, looking at the reef toward which he was being borne, while his craft was at the mercy of both wind and waves, which were dashing her onward to destruction.

With only one thought, and that of trying to save Master Tucker when the final crash came and he was hurled into the water, the three boys, regardless of the wounds caused by the sea-urchins, ran down the beach. Captain Sammy, still shouting his orders to the terrified pirate, followed their example, and all stopped opposite the point toward which the boat was heading.

It was but a few moments before Tommy Tucker's career as a pirate was ended.

The boat, lifted high on a wave larger than the preceding ones, hung for a single instant over the reef below, and then was dashed upon it with a force that shattered every timber, and, fortunately for him, hurled the pirate captain entirely over it almost upon the beach.

Master Tucker was not at all injured by the fall; but he was terribly frightened at being thus literally thrown at the feet of the man whom he expected would murder him at the very least.

Before the boys could reach him—and they started to his aid at once, fearing lest he was in-

jured by the fall—the disheartened pirate, who had lost both weapons and his gorgeous cap, sprang to his feet and made all speed toward the interior of the island.

His short voyage, during which he had destroyed nothing more than Captain Sammy's boat and temper, was ended; his craft was a complete wreck upon the little reef, and the pirate himself a prisoner upon the same island to which he had doomed the others.

It was a quick ending to Master Tucker's dream of wickedness, and one that seemed all the more cruel to him since he had never dreamed that pirates were in the habit of being wrecked.

When his boat first struck the reef Captain Sammy dashed into the water as if he was going to her rescue, regardless of the rheumatism; but before he had gotten in above his knees he turned around and came back.

He knew from the sound when she struck the reef that she had been injured beyond all hope of mending, and that it would be a more than foolish task to attempt to wade out to where she was being torn in pieces by the waves.

"Look out for the oars and sail," he shouted to the boys, while he waited for the small water-cask—which he always carried, no matter how short a voyage he was making—in the hope that it would be washed ashore, affording them an

opportunity of replenishing their stock of water.

It was hardly ten minutes, so furious had the waves become, and so strong did the wind blow directly toward the land, before the boys had secured three of the oars, and, soon after, the sail came ashore directly in front of the captain.

He ordered the boys to drag the canvas up to the camp, and they wondered why he remained there so anxiously, when there was no longer a hope that any portion of the boat, save small fragments, could be washed ashore.

But Captain Sammy's watching was at length rewarded, and when he saw the water-cask floating heavily on the waves he rushed into the water for the second time, and brought it ashore triumphantly.

"It come just in time," he said, gleefully, "for there hain't over an' above half a pint of water in my canteen, an' you boys would have wanted a drink pretty soon."

In fact, they began to grow thirsty just as soon as they realized how near they had come to being without any water, and it was not until they had each drunk twice from the cask that they felt satisfied, even though they had not thought of it before.

Captain Sammy spread the wet sail out in front of the fire to dry, and as he sat gazing at it and smoking he felt very much relieved in

mind, for now they would at least have a covering over their heads.

It was quite natural the boys should wonder as to what had become of Tommy Tucker, and Dare proposed that they should go in search of him. But Captain Sammy put an end to any such philanthropic plan by saying,

"Let him alone, an' in the morning I'll go after him myself, an' then—"

The captain did not finish the sentence, but his face was very expressive as to what Master Tommy's fate would be when he should have him in his power.

Dare trembled for the misguided pirate until he realized that it would be one thing for Captain Sammy to go after the fugitive, and quite another matter to catch him, owing to the disparity in legs. But he thought it was cruel to leave Tommy alone on the island all night, even though he had done them so much harm.

"Don't you think we had better try and find him, so that he can sleep with us to-night?" Dare asked. "It won't do any harm, and you can punish him in the morning."

"He wouldn't have a chance to sleep very much if he should dare to show his nose around here to-night," said Captain Sammy, in such a vindictive tone that Dare concluded that perhaps it would be less painful for Tommy to sleep

alone, and anywhere he could find a place, rather than with them.

The boat-sail was far from being dry when the little man took it from the fire and spread it over the boughs of the trees as a shelter-tent. But the hour was late, and the captain anxious that the party under his charge should get to sleep as soon as possible.

But even after the boys were stretched out on the hard sand, and Captain Sammy had laid himself down between them and the fire, as if to keep them from rolling out of bed, sleep did not appear inclined to pay them a visit.

They listened anxiously to each sound, and at every rustling of the leaves they fancied they heard Tommy, coming to ask that he might be allowed to share their camp with them.

Then, when the time wore on, and each occupant of the tent, save Dare, had yielded to slumber, the boy began to grow very nervous and unhappy, because of the possible fate of the pirate. He feared lest all kinds of accidents might befall him, until his imagination had conjured up so much suffering for Tommy that he attempted to crawl cautiously out over Captain Sammy to go in search of him.

But it seemed as if the little man slept with one eye open, for no sooner did Dare make the first movement toward getting out than the captain said, much as if he had not been asleep at

all, but had been lying awake reading the boy's thoughts,

"You may put some more wood on the fire; but don't you try to find that Tucker boy, because I shall make it very uncomfortable for him if he comes around here to-night."

So all that Dare's kindly impulse resulted in was the replenishing of the fire, and then he crawled in behind Captain Sammy again, wishing he could know that Tommy was at least safe from bodily harm.