

CHAPTER VIII.

WORKING THE RAFTS.

OWING to the heavy logs which were towed by the sail-boat in which Mr. Evans had come to the rescue, the trip from Dollar Island to Tampa was a long one, and during it the boys were benefited by listening to a discussion regarding the work which they had undertaken.

Mr. Evans had asked Captain Sammy some questions relative to the *Pearl*, and the little man was in exactly the right mood for conversation, so that the boys were able to gather very much useful information.

Then the question of how much work was involved in raising the sunken boat by the means of the rafts came up, and the captain inclined to the belief that the three boys could do it unaided in four or five days. He also volunteered the information that they could hire planks enough to make a double covering for the framework of logs, and by this means their work would be very much lessened.

Mr. Evans told Dare that he could order the necessary lumber hauled to the place where they

would need it, and have the bill sent to him. He also bargained with Captain Sammy for the purchase of a small boat he owned, which the boys would need in building the rafts, and which would afterward be useful as a tender to the *Pearl*, in case she was successfully floated.

Therefore the boys were ready for work as soon as they should reach the shore, and it seemed to them as if Tommy's attempt to injure Captain Sammy had resulted very much in their favor.

In order not to spend the time necessary to go to the hotel for breakfast, Dare asked that he and Bobby should be allowed to go directly to Captain Sammy's dock, where they could get both the boat and the chain-cables, while Charley went to the hotel for sufficient food to serve them as breakfast and dinner.

This Mr. Evans consented to, while Captain Sammy forwarded matters very much by saying that he would attend to ordering the lumber and nails, and then the sail-boat was headed for the sunken *Pearl*.

Upon arriving there the logs were left anchored near the beach, and, since it was then ebb-tide, they would be aground ready for the boys to begin work on them by the time they should return.

Here also Mr. Evans and Charley were landed, as they were then nearer the hotel than

they would be at the little captain's dock, and then the sail-boat started again.

At the dock the tender was brought out of the boat-house, in which she had been placed to protect her from the rays of the sun, and the boys were surprised to find that she was as neat and serviceable a little craft as they could have wished for. From the way in which she had been spoken of they expected to find an ordinary boat, rather the worse for wear, instead of one that hardly bore marks of usage.

The building in which Captain Sammy stored what he called "odds and ends" looked more like a regular shop than an ordinary storehouse, for in it could have been found almost everything necessary to fit out a vessel for a long cruise.

After the chain-cables, which were to be passed under the *Pearl* and fastened to the rafts, had been laid aside for transportation, Captain Sammy selected a number of smaller chains, which, he explained, could be used to fasten the ends of the logs together.

Hammers, wrenches, and a quantity of stout staples to fasten the ends of the chains, were also selected from the general stock; and when at last the little man concluded that they had enough with which to begin work, it was found that they made altogether too much of a load for the small boat to carry.

"You can take the smaller things with you,

an' I'll send the heavier stuff by the same team that takes the lumber," said Captain Sammy, and the boys started at once, only too anxious to begin operations without farther loss of time.

Although they had not spent much time at the dock, they found Charley waiting for them when they rounded the point beyond which the *Pearl* lay in her watery resting-place.

He had with him a plentiful supply of provisions and a pail of water; but the wonderfully good news which he brought received more immediate attention than the food did, hungry as they were.

The landlord of the hotel, who knew, as almost every one in Tampa did by this time, of the work which the boys had on hand, had proposed to Mr. Evans that the young workmen be saved the trouble and time of walking back and forth from the hotel to the scene of their labors. In order to avoid this he had offered to loan them a shelter-tent and some bedding; and Mr. Evans having accepted the offer, the tent would be sent down some time during the day.

It was great news, to be sure, and they felt that even if they did not succeed in raising the *Pearl* they should have a glorious time camping out on the beach.

After their excitement had subsided sufficiently they ate their breakfast, and a very hearty one they made, too; and then, the tide having

gone down so far as to leave the logs high and dry, they began their work, which they felt confident would be crowned with success.

The two timbers that were to form the sides of one of the rafts were hollowed out at each end, so that the logs which were to be placed on them would rest firmly, and the same work was performed on those that were to serve as ends. Then the four were laid together, forming very nearly a square, and around these overlapping ends were placed chains, which were made secure by driving staples through the links into the logs.

It was nearly two hours before the first frame was thus made ready for the planking, but the time was well spent, for the timbers were fastened as securely as a carpenter could have done it.

This work was hardly completed when Captain Sammy, seated on a huge load of lumber, rode slowly down the beach, and under his direction the planks were laid across the logs and nailed firmly in their places. In this way a double flooring was laid, which, although it was not water-tight, of course, would have very great buoyancy, that even a larger craft than the *Pearl* could hardly overcome.

While this work was being done some of the men from the hotel brought the tent and bedding, and Captain Sammy exerted himself to

give a good many more than the necessary orders for its erection, at the same time that he was issuing commands thick and fast to the builders of the rafts.

Therefore, by the time the boys were ready for their dinner they were able to eat it within the tent, through the open flaps of which they could see one of their lifting-machines all ready to be floated off to the sunken steamer, whose smoke-stack was then showing above the water.

Captain Sammy had invited himself to dinner, and, despite the manner in which he had ordered them around during the forenoon, they were glad to have him with them, for, with all his bluster and scolding, his companionship was pleasant, and he rendered them a great deal of assistance.

He scolded because he was obliged to stay there and superintend the operations, when both he and they knew that it was his own pleasure to be there. He fussed about this thing and that until the boys were more than ever convinced that his petulant ways concealed a good-natured, cheery old gentleman.

But during all the time, when he talked of almost everything, not one word did he speak regarding the pirate of Dollar Island.

From the time they had returned to the mainland, even though so many things had occurred to make him happy, Dare had been anxious re-

garding Tommy Tucker, and now, while they were enjoying an after-dinner rest, and Captain Sammy appeared to be in such excellent humor, he resolved to speak a good word for the captive.

At first he tried to bring the conversation around so that the little man would voluntarily speak of the prisoner; but in this he was unsuccessful, for the Captain studiously avoided a mention of the ex-pirate's name.

Then Dare spoke of the discomfort of being obliged to remain in such a place as Dollar Island, and concluded by reminding the Captain that Tommy was there, with nothing to eat, and no chance of making his escape.

"An' I hope he will stay there, too," said Captain Sammy, savagely. "I jest hope he'll have to stay there two weeks, anyhow; an' then when he gets over here I'll make it lively enough for him, so he'll forget he's ever been lonesome."

"But he would starve to death!" exclaimed Dare, horrified at the thought of any one being forced to remain so long in such a place.

"Starve? Not a bit of it. He knows how to find plenty to eat; an' if he does go hungry a little while it'll do him a power of good."

Surely it did seem as if, in Captain Sammy's present state of mind, he would never consent to any plan for Tommy's relief; but Dare had no idea of giving up so easily. He told the captain boldly that he was anxious to go after the

boy, and asked him to consent to their going, because, in a certain sense, it was for him to say how much punishment Tommy should receive.

Captain Sammy was, or professed to be, in a towering rage when Dare concluded, and declared that they should not go to Dollar Island, if he was obliged to stand guard over them all night in order to prevent it.

Dare argued and entreated for a long time, but all to no purpose, until Captain Sammy, as if tired at being urged so strongly, said, with a growl of impatience,

"If I'll agree to your goin' after that villain will you agree to look out for him while you are here, an' be responsible for him?"

Dare hesitated; he was not quite willing to promise so much, for fear he could not carry it out, but yet he felt very anxious to release the boy.

"I'll do the best I can, sir," he replied, after some thought, "and we'll make him promise to behave himself."

"Oh, he'll promise it quick enough," sneered Captain Sammy; "he'll promise anything; but you've got to see that he keeps his word."

"We'll all do the best we can to look out for him, won't we, boys?" asked Dare, pleased at the thought that he had won Captain Sammy over after such a struggle.

Charley and Bobby nodded their heads, to

show that they accepted their portion of the contract, although Bobby was not as cheerful about it as Dare would have liked to see him.

"Now, I'll give my consent to the plan if you'll promise that you won't go after him until to-morrow morning," said Captain Sammy, with a terrible frown. "One day isn't enough to give him all he needs of Dollar Island."

Dare thought it the refinement of cruelty to keep the poor fellow there so long, no matter how much wrong he had done; but Captain Sammy was firm in the stand he had taken, and no amount of persuasion could shake him.

"Not an hour sooner," he said, decidedly; "and when you land him even then you want to be sure an' keep him away from here, or I'll—" Captain Sammy tapped his wooden leg in a way that told plainly enough what he would have said.

Dare was obliged to content himself with this leniency on the part of the injured captain; but he promised himself that they would start at a very early hour on the next morning.

"Now," and Captain Sammy jumped to his feet, as if he had just discovered that they had been wasting valuable time, "if you boys think you can waste your time in this way, you are mistaken. The *Pearl* will never show her bows above water if you don't go to work."

There was no need of urging the boys to ex-

ertion, and as soon as he had shown that he was ready to continue the labor they were at it with a will.

Owing to the little man's disposition to work as well as command, the second raft was built in less time than the first; and when Captain Sammy started for home it was with the promise that he would return at low-water on the following day and help them to make fast to the steamer.

Both rafts were anchored so that there could be no possibility of their drifting away during the night, and the boys felt that they had reason to be satisfied with their day's work.

Shortly after Captain Sammy had left them Mr. and Mrs. Evans paid them a visit—Mr. Evans coming for the purpose of bringing them something to eat, and his wife that she might be sure they would be safe and comfortable during the night.

It was while Dare was talking with his parents about the difficulty he had had in persuading Captain Sammy to allow them to go for Tommy that his mother suggested that one of the boys find out where Mrs. Tucker lived, so that she might be told of her son's whereabouts.

Charley volunteered to carry in the information to the pirate's mother; and when his parents returned to the hotel he accompanied them, leaving Dare and Bobby to look out for the

camp, and to speculate upon their chances for lifting the steamer the next day.

When Charley returned he reported that he had found Mrs. Tucker's house without much trouble, and had told her where her son was. She had been very anxious about him, but as soon as she knew where he was she appeared to think that he would get home in some way, and seemed perfectly indifferent about the matter, save that she said she hoped Captain Sammy would whip some of Tommy's foolish ideas out of his head.

The boys were tired enough to go to bed very early that night; but before they did so they were obliged to wait until the tide had floated the rafts, so they could anchor them in the proper position for beginning the morrow's work.

When that was done, and their boat had been drawn up some distance on the beach, the boys rolled into their camp-bed, where the ripple of the water on the beach lulled them to sleep in a remarkably short time.