

CHAPTER XIII.

THE VOYAGE BEGUN.

HOWEVER much the sight of Tommy Tucker standing near the beach, as if meditating some mischief, might have troubled Dare, he was not allowed to spend much time dwelling on his fears.

The speed of the steamer had hardly been checked by the anchors before those on the beach, including Mr. and Mrs. Evans, got into the small boats and rowed out to the *Pearl*.

"Now," said Captain Sammy, in his old commanding way, after all were on board, "we have got to get the craft around to the dock, so that we can get the supplies on board. Dare, you go into the pilot-house and steer as snug along the shore, toward the dock, as possible, while the rest of us pull her. Charley and Bobby will take one boat, and Rogers and I the other, and if we can't walk her along over the water, no one can."

The anchors were raised, the towing-lines made fast, and, under the influence of four oars, the jaunty little steamer glided over the water

at a respectable rate of speed, while Dare, in the pilot-house, was as proud and happy as any boy could be who had so unexpectedly become captain of so fine a steamer as the *Pearl*.

Mr. and Mrs. Evans, as the passengers, examined every part of the boat, and, judging from the admiration on their faces when they finished the inspection, it would not have been a difficult matter to have persuaded them to take a short cruise.

In less than half an hour the steamer was made fast to Captain Sammy's wharf, just opposite a large pile of articles which he had laid out in the morning, and which were put on board of her at once.

There was bedding for the four berths, tables, chairs, and all sorts of cooking utensils, the last mentioned of which Captain Sammy was very careful about, he stating, as the reason of his excessive precaution, that he had shipped as cook, and wanted to know where all his implements were.

Then came water-casks, spare ropes, spars, and cables, and some of the workmen about the deck were set at work filling the tank with water and putting the coal on board.

It was a scene of pleasurable excitement to the boys, for all this hurried preparation told that the time for their departure was very near at hand.

Captain Sammy had taken very good care that there should be no delay about the start, and to that end had done a great deal of work during the morning, as was shown when he handed Mr. Evans a list of eatables which he had ordered, and which had already been brought on to the dock.

By the time the visitors were ready to depart there was absolutely nothing left to be done. The steamer was ready for her voyage. Rogers had announced that the engine was in perfect running order; the boys were sure that everything that was needed was in the cabins; and when the last bushel of coal was put on board Captain Sammy said that his portion of the work was done.

All that remained to be done was for the crew to get their baggage on board, and Mrs. Evans thought the boys had better sleep at the hotel that night, so they could pack, during the evening, everything which they wanted to take with them.

But now, as the question of leaving the steamer alone came up, Dare remembered Tommy's half-uttered threat, and he begged that at least two of them might remain on board, to keep watch against any mischief the ex-pirate might attempt to do.

Captain Sammy growled out something about the foolishness of ever having taken Master

Tucker from Dollar Island, and it was plain to be seen that he was not at all easy in his mind regarding Tommy's ability to do harm.

Mr. Evans seemed to understand that it was not exactly safe to leave the steamer alone, and the question of how the difficulty should be avoided had just come up for discussion, when Captain Sammy settled the matter by saying,

"You boys go to the hotel and get what things you want to take with you. You can bring them here and sleep aboard to-night. I'll stay here till you come back, an' if that Tucker boy so much as shows his head around here, there won't be enough of him left to get back, or my name isn't Sammy Basset."

This plan was carried out, as, in fact, any proposed by the captain usually was, and the boys left the hotel two hours after, promising to see Mr. and Mrs. Evans on the next morning, when they would come down to the pier nearly opposite the hotel, in the *Pearl*, on their way to the Everglades.

When they reached the steamer Captain Sammy was stumping around at a furious rate in the standing-room aft, muttering all sorts of uncomplimentary and threatening things against Tommy Tucker, whom he believed he had seen skulking around the head of the dock.

"Keep a sharp lookout," he said as he went on shore, after the boys had come on board, "and

if that villain comes around here don't stop to have any talk with him, but hang him right up."

Then he stumped along up the pier, looking behind and around everything large enough to afford shelter to a boy of Tommy's size.

Dare lighted the swinging lamp that hung in the centre of the little cabin, and after they had arranged their belongings in such a way as to make the place look home-like, and with their guns where they could get at them readily, the boys went on deck to watch for the approach of the pirate.

But Captain Sammy was either mistaken as to having seen Tommy, or the boy had been frightened away when the little man made the search of the dock, for no signs were seen of him up to ten o'clock, and then the captain and crew of the *Pearl* "turned in."

The novelty of the situation, and the thought that they were actually on the steamer which was to take them on their famous trip, served to keep them in a state of wakefulness that almost amounted to remaining on watch, and it was nearly morning when the last one of them sank into a slumber that was disturbed by dreams of all kinds of possible and impossible adventures.

It was hardly daylight when Dare awoke on the following morning; but he roused up his crew, so that everything might be put in the

neatest trim before the cook and engineer arrived.

The beds were made, the cabins swept again, and everything on deck disposed of in such a way as to make the best show, and by sunrise Captain Sammy made his appearance at the head of the dock.

He had evidently counted on finding the boys asleep, and had probably enjoyed the anticipation of scolding them, as sleepy-heads, for his face showed plainest signs of disappointment when he found them up and at work.

He had brought what he called his "dunnage," in a canvas bag, and, after throwing it carelessly into one of the berths, began his official duties by getting the breakfast on the stove that stood in one corner of the engine-room.

By the time Tom Rogers arrived the breakfast had been eaten, and he and Charley went at once into the engine-room. The smoke that soon began to pour out of the smoke-stack told that they were getting ready for the start as quickly as possible.

Soon the noise of escaping steam was heard, and no unmusical sound ever rang in Dare's ears so pleasantly as did that.

He took his station in the pilot-house some time before it was possible to start, and swung the wheel around in anxious expectancy, while Bobby rushed from one end of the boat to the

other as if he thought the entire business devolved on him.

"Now, keep your eye peeled," said Captain Sammy to Dare, after what had seemed to be a long time of waiting; "ring the bell once when you are ready. I'll cast off the lines now."

Dare sounded the whistle just once, for the sake of hearing it, Bobby seemed to be lifted right off his feet by the music, Captain Sammy cast the hawsers, and Dare pulled the engine-room bell with a vigor that promised to snap the wire if repeated.

Slowly the wheels commenced to revolve, and the *Pearl* began to glide away from the dock, while from the pilot-house, the bow, and the engine-room sounded a shout of joy and triumph.

Dare's head almost swam with delight as the little steamer went ahead at full speed, and Captain Sammy took up his station just in front of the pilot-house to assure himself that the young captain was not entirely incapacitated for duty by excitement.

On approaching the pier, at which he was to say adieu to his parents, Dare sounded the whistle until he saw his father and mother come out of the house, and then he turned his attention to making a creditable landing.

Captain Sammy contented himself by simply watching Dare's proceedings, ready to take command if necessary, but allowing the boy to act

on his own responsibility so long as he was managing the craft properly.

Mr. and Mrs. Evans were already on the pier when Dare rang the first bell to "slow down," and when the *Pearl* was taken along-side the wharf almost as skilfully as an experienced captain would have done it, both his father and Captain Sammy expressed to Dare their appreciation of his skill in managing the steamer.

The stay here was not a long one, for all hands were anxious to be as far on their journey as possible before night, since it had been decided that, unless it was absolutely necessary, the *Pearl* should not be run after dark, thereby lessening the risks and labor.

Dare proposed to take his father and mother out for a short sail, but Mr. Evans refused, adding, however, that if the invitation was given after the return from the Everglades it might be accepted.

Then the "good-byes" were spoken, the boys were cautioned to obey Captain Sammy implicitly, Dare went into the pilot-house again, and everything was ready for the actual beginning of the voyage.

The bell was rung for the engine to be started, the whistle sounded as a parting salute, and when the wheels began to revolve, and the *Pearl* sailed swiftly away, the trip to the Everglades had begun.