

CHAPTER XV.

THE NIGHT ALARM

EVEN though the boys did think that there was no need of their going to bed so soon, just because they were to start at an early hour in the morning, every one of them was asleep in less than ten minutes after they had rolled into their berths.

Tom Rogers slept in the engine-room, and he had retired before Captain Sammy finished his rather long-winded lecture on coral reefs; therefore, as soon as the boys were asleep the little man was left entirely without companionship.

He tried to read, but, owing to the crack in the glasses of his spectacles and the rather dim light in the cabin, he was forced to give up the attempt. Then he went on deck, examined the anchor cable, to see that it did not chafe the wood-work; took a squint at the lantern, to make sure it was in the proper position; and, having nothing else to do, went to bed also.

The *Pearl* lay as motionless as if she were still high and dry on the beach at Tampa, and there appeared to be no reason whatever why all hands

should not have a pleasant and quiet night's rest. The night was cold enough to make the warmth of the bedclothes feel comfortable to the occupants of the cabin, but not so cold as to prevent the cabin-door from being left open, to admit a free circulation of air.

It seemed to Dare that it must have been midnight, when he was awakened by hearing Captain Sammy shout, angrily,

"Now, what are you about? Why don't you lie still and give other folks a chance to sleep?"

Of course Dare supposed that Charley or Bobby had got out of his berth; so, without seeing any one, he asked,

"Who is it? What are you up for?"

"I'm not up. What are you doing?" replied Captain Sammy; and it was easy to tell by the tones of his voice that he was irritated by Dare's question.

"I'm not doing anything. You awakened me when you spoke," replied Dare, in an injured tone.

"Then it's one of the other boys, and I do wish they knew enough to let other people sleep."

Bobby had the berth directly above Captain Sammy, and Charley slept in the one above Dare; therefore the latter put his hand up to his brother's berth, in order to learn if it was he who had disturbed the little man's repose.

But Charley was not the one who had broken

the quiet of the cabin, for as Dare touched his face he cried out, loudly,

"Don't fool; let a fellow alone, can't you?"

"Don't fool!" echoed Captain Sammy, unable to see what was going on, and supposing Charley was the culprit who had awakened him. "It's no foolin' matter to kick up such a row in the night, and I'll let you know that I'm not foolin'."

"What—what—what's the matter?" asked Charley, in surprise.

"What's the matter?" roared Captain Sammy, growing so angry that he tried to sit upright in his berth, and hit his head against the boards above him with a thump that startled Bobby. "I want to know what you're skylarkin' round for at this time of night?"

"I ain't skylarking," said Bobby, roused from his sleep by the thumping of the little man's head against the berth, and thinking, of course, that he was spoken to. "Was I snoring, sir?"

"Hold your tongue until you are spoken to. Now answer my question."

Of course he intended the latter portion of his remark for one of the other boys; but how could Bobby know this, having just awakened? and he asked, innocently,

"What question, sir?"

"*Will* you hold your tongue?" shrieked the little captain; and Bobby answered, meekly,

"Yes, sir."

All three of the boys now began to think that some dreadful thing had happened, and that one of the others was responsible for it, while Captain Sammy, in such a towering rage that he could not explain himself, made matters worse by asking the question, without calling any one by name.

"Now, see if you have got sense enough left to tell me what you were parading around the cabin for at this time of night."

Fearing to offend by answering when they were not spoken to, and each knowing that he was and had been quietly remaining in his berth, no one replied.

"Why don't you answer me?" shouted Captain Sammy, as he sprang out of his berth, with a great deal of unnecessary noise, and proceeded to light the lamp.

"Who are you speaking to?" asked Dare, almost beginning to think the captain had lost his senses.

"Why, you, of course; who else should I speak to?" cried the little man, as he tried in vain to ignite the match.

"I haven't been out of bed since I got into it," replied Dare, gravely.

There was perfect silence in the cabin for a moment, during which Captain Sammy succeeded in lighting the lamp, and then he angrily surveyed the cabin.

Each one of the boys was in bed, and there were no evidences of their having been up since they first went to sleep.

Captain Sammy had hopped out of bed on one leg; and now, after seeing what seemed to be proof that the boys had been doing nothing worse than sleeping soundly, he hopped back to his berth, strapped on his wooden stick, and stumped out to the engine-room, where the boys could hear him accusing Rogers of having come in to disturb the sleep of the occupants of the cabin.

Rogers stoutly denied having done anything of the kind, but scolded at the little man for having awakened him, when he had probably been dreaming of a disturbance.

Captain Sammy growled out some inaudible reply, and came back into the cabin looking less angry and more mystified than when he left it.

"I may have been dreaming," he said, in a half explanatory way; "but it don't seem as if a dream could be so real. I was certain that one of you boys was creeping along by the side of my berth, and I made sure you was up to some mischief."

Each of the boys insisted that they had been awakened by Captain Sammy, and had had no idea of anything but sleeping, which assertion the little man was forced to believe.

He extinguished the lamp and got into bed, insisting that he did hear some one, although the

proof he had should have convinced him that he was mistaken.

It was some time after this before any of the occupants of the cabin could get to sleep; but after a while they dropped off into slumber, until Dare was the only one awake. He could hear the regular breathing of the boys, and Captain Sammy's vigorous snoring, all of which caused him to feel like joining them in their slumber.

Just as his eyes were closing, and he had nearly yielded to the influence, he was conscious of a rustling sound, as if some one was moving near him.

He turned over quickly in alarm, and was about to cry out, when a hand was laid over his mouth, and the intruder whispered softly in his ear,

"It's me—Tommy Tucker—an' I'm awful hungry."

Dare was so surprised that he could not have spoken even if Tommy's hand had not been over his mouth. He understood now that Captain Sammy had really heard some one in the cabin, but how it could possibly be Tommy Tucker was more than he could make out. He was trying to understand it all, when the boy whispered again,

"I'm awful hungry."

"But how did you get here?" Dare asked, in

a cautious whisper, as soon as he could remove Tommy's hand from his mouth.

"I hid under Captain Sammy's berth this morning when you was all eatin' your breakfast. I didn't know he was comin' with you, an' I knew he wouldn't let me come if he knew it, so I thought I'd hide there till you started. I've been in that little mite of a place since mornin', and I'm most dead."

Even in his whispered conversation it was easy to tell that Master Tucker was thoroughly disheartened; but how to aid him was an entirely different matter.

"We shall have to tell him you are here," said Dare, after a long pause.

"No, no, don't do that; he'd just about kill me. I'd rather starve than have him know it. Can't you get me a cracker or something, and shove it under the berth?"

"I don't dare to now; but I will the first thing in the morning."

"Be as early as you can," whispered the hungry pirate, and then he crept cautiously back to his hiding-place; while Dare lay and wondered how it would be possible to keep Tommy's presence a secret until he could be landed.