

CHAPTER XX.

THE RECONCILIATION.

FORTUNATELY for Dare's plan, the helm of the *Pearl* was still hard down, and the slight impetus given her by the wheels caused her to circle directly around the two in the water. Dare was thus enabled to swing the bight of the rope to Tommy, and in an instant after it was placed under the little man's arms.

"Now climb up on the rope, and then we'll all pull him in," said Dare to Tommy.

"That won't do," replied the little fellow, as he renewed his efforts at splashing, "for, you see, when I was out of the water they'd take his legs off quicker 'n a wink. Haul him in, and when you pass the rope to me be ready to snake me in sudden, or it'll be all up with me."

Surely Tommy was showing himself to be a hero, and neither of the boys thought of his past misdeeds as they admired his courage.

It did not take long to pull Captain Sammy on board when all hands had hold of the rope, and, exhausted as he was, he managed to walk

unaided into the forward cabin, where he applied his own restoratives.

Then came the more difficult work of rescuing Tommy; for, since the boy had spoken, all now knew the danger with which it would be attended.

The fins of the sharks as they circled around and around their expected prey, which they did not dare to touch, could be seen in dangerous proximity to the brave little pirate, and at times the ugly noses of the alligators seemed almost to touch him.

He was making as much noise as possible, but the exertion was telling on him, and when at last Dare succeeded in getting the rope around his shoulders it was quite time, for he was as nearly exhausted as Captain Sammy.

Bobby at this moment thought of what should have been done before, and, taking an oar, he reached out as far as possible, striking the flat of the blade on the water. By this means they succeeded in getting Tommy on board safe and whole; and the moment he was landed on the deck he scurried to his old hiding-place, as if he expected Captain Sammy would give immediate pursuit.

Dare tried to urge him to come into the cabin, in order to get some dry clothes; but Tommy displayed quite as much terror now at facing the little man as he did before he had made such

heroic attempts to save his life, and he crawled under the berth, without regard to the water that ran from him in little streams.

Tommy had hardly hidden himself, when Captain Sammy came on deck, apparently none the worse for his involuntary bath.

He looked at the three boys in silence for a moment, and then, in a voice not wholly free from traces of emotion, but still gruff, he asked,

“Who was it jumped in to help me?”

“It was Tommy Tucker,” replied Dare, and before Captain Sammy fully understood that assertion he related the story of Tommy’s being on the boat, speaking very rapidly, as if fearing that he should be interrupted.

For fully a moment Captain Sammy stood in perfect silence, and then he asked, in a voice which, the boys were almost certain, trembled,

“Where is he now?”

Charley told him of Tommy’s fear at meeting him, and where he had hidden himself.

“Go and fetch him out;” and from the tones of the little man’s voice it was hard to tell whether he intended to meet his late enemy in friendship or with the long feud still open.

It was one thing to order Tommy to be brought, and quite another to bring him. Charley had coaxed and entreated, all to no purpose, and it was not until he threatened to go and tell Captain Sammy to come himself that the pirate

could be induced to roll out from under the berth.

Then, when he went aft to where the little man was waiting for him, he appeared like a boy who expects to be knocked down each minute, and fears some harder fate is reserved for him because the blow is not dealt.

But the reception was far different from what he had imagined it would be.

Captain Sammy went to him as he came up, and, taking both the dirty hands in his, he said, in a voice that was husky with emotion,

"You have saved my life, lad, and that's something I can't repay by thanks. But for you this shattered old hulk would have been food for the sharks, and I standing before the great Captain. I never believed there was any good in you, Tommy, but you have shown that you are braver than most men would be. I'm going to take you home with me, lad—for if it hadn't been for you I should never go there again—and so long as I've got a timber to float on you shall be at the other end of it. Now get one of the boys to give you a dry suit of clothes till I can fix you up something to wear that looks more trim than what you've got now, and take hold and have a good time with the rest."

And thus it was that Dare's troubles were over, and the not over-bold pirate made one of the crew of the yacht *Pearl*.

As soon as Tommy was clad in one of Bobby's suits of clothes the *Pearl* was started on her voyage again; and the trip seemed to have just begun for Dare, who had hardly had a moment's peace since he knew of the stowaway.

Despite his previous calling, Tommy proved a most valuable acquisition to the company; he was both willing and anxious to do everything in his power, and Captain Sammy soon began to like him as heartily as he had once disliked him.

Owing to the delay of the first day on the Caloosahatchee, Lake Kackpochee, through which they must pass, was not reached until noon of the second day after leaving Punta Rassa; and three hours later, when the *Pearl* glided out upon that large, lonely-looking body of water, the boys felt a sense of awe and isolation creep over them.

Lake Okechobee, as Dare had read when the idea that he might visit it had first come to him, is from forty to fifty miles long, about twenty-five wide, and with a depth of from five to twenty feet.

This was to be their abiding-place while they remained in the Everglades, and Captain Sammy at once looked around for a good anchorage, which he fortunately found not far from the mouth of the river, where a piece of hard, shelving beach ran down into the water.

"Now, boys," said the little man, after every-

thing had been made snug for a protracted stay, "I suppose you are aching to get on shore to try your hand at shooting? You can all take the afternoon off, and I'll stay here to keep ship. Keep your weather eyes open, for you'll find bears, panthers, and wild-cats hereabouts, as well as small game, and it wouldn't do to let any of them catch you napping."

Hastily promising to be careful not to allow any animals to get the best of them, the boys rowed ashore, and it was not many moments before they learned that on the shores of Lake Okechobee it is not necessary to hunt very long for game, for the woods appeared to be literally teeming with life.

Dare's greatest ambition in the hunting line had been to shoot a deer, and from the time his parents had first spoken about the trip to Florida up to that moment he had resolved that he would undertake any labor, however excessive, for the purpose of seeing one of those noble animals fall before his rifle.

Therefore it was that, while the other boys were growing excited at the abundance of feathered game near them, and were discharging their weapons whenever a bird with particularly brilliant plumage would rise, Dare stood by, a silent spectator of the wholesale slaughter, as if waiting until his companions' exuberance of spirits should have worn itself out, as it were.

It was not long before the boys did tire of this wanton sport, for it was hardly anything else, since one could remain at a standstill and shoot right and left without disturbing the numerous flocks save for a few moments at a time; and when Charley suddenly discovered that it was too bad to bring the birds down simply for the sake of killing, Dare was ready with his proposition:

"Let's divide into two parties, Charley and Bobby in one, and Tommy and I in the other; then one party can take a long hunt for big game while the other stays nearer the steamer, in case Captain Sammy should need us. By that means we shall get on without trouble, and by changing around each day all hands will have an equal chance of getting a deer or a bear. Now, Charley, do you want to take a long tramp to-day?"

Charley, who had slaughtered a quantity of birds, had no desire for such violent exercise just then; and, with the understanding that he and Bobby should remain within sound of a signal from the *Pearl*, Dare and Tommy set out in search of game more worthy the hunter.

Tommy had not the slightest idea of how deer should be hunted, but since the taint of his piratical calling had been removed from him he was ready for anything, and he accompanied Dare in high glee.

After settling the points of the compass in his

mind as well as he was able, Dare started into the woods in such a direction as would keep the sun on his left side, and in a very short time they were where the forest was as dense as though they were in the very heart of the Everglades.

Still Dare pushed on until the cover was more open, and just as he caught sight of a small space which was nearly free from trees he saw that for which he sought.

Three deer and a buck were feeding in the open, and the wind was blowing directly from them to the hunters.

Under such circumstances it was not a difficult matter for the hunter to creep quite near them, and, with hands trembling from the excitement of seeing the game he had so long desired to encounter, Dare took as good aim as was possible and discharged his weapon.