

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY OF THE PRECEDING CHAPTER EXPLAINED—OUR HERO'S PAINFUL REFLECTIONS—HIS POSITION ON THE SCHOONER—FLYING FISH, PORPOISES, DOLPHINS, WHALES—DIVERSIONS OF THE CREW—SOUTHERN CROSS—GULF STREAM—WATER-SPOUTS—ARRIVAL OFF THE PORT OF HAVANA—GLOOMY FOREBODINGS AGAIN OVERWHELM OUR HERO—HIS LETTER HOME—CAPTAIN EDSON'S SYMPATHY AND ADVICE.



PLUNGED, as I said, on deck, and into the arms of the steersman, who staggered against the wheel as I lurched over to leeward, and, steadying myself by a strong effort, glanced around just in time to see the captain and my friend rushing aft with blank amazement written on their faces. Blank as they looked, my expression must have out-rivalled theirs, as I stood supporting myself by the rail of the vessel, and swaying to and fro with every roll of the sea—sea-sickness and dismay blended in my countenance.

"*How* did you get here?" breathlessly ejaculated the captain, as soon as he and his son reached my side. My friend uttered not a word. I saw, at a glance, that he thought I was a regular stow-a-way.

At this point, the poetical unities of time, place, and action, suggest that I should introduce a thrilling passage consisting of a pathetic appeal to be put ashore. The soberness of truth, however, induces me to tell the fact, that, at the moment when the captain greeted me with the words, "*How* did you get here," a spasmodic effort contracted my body, I turned from him, and falling heavily on the rail, and hanging over it like a limp bolster, I poured forth those libations which man offers alike to Bacchus and to Neptune.

I dwell not upon the ensuing scene, in which I made a fruitless attempt to explain the fact of my presence. I was assisted to the cabin, and induced to lie down until a more favorable opportunity for talking should arise. They would have left me on deck, for the benefit of fresh air, had not the sea been running so high, that the schooner was constantly wet from stem to stern by spray, and occasionally shipped some water.

Although I was not in a condition to explain matters, I was not so far overcome that I

could not think; and the misery of the ensuing hours, during which, perfectly realizing my situation, I turned over in my mind the occurrences of the preceding day, was almost intolerable. The thought of what my father must imagine, made me wretched, when, in addition, I recollected that I was absolutely powerless to control the course of events.

Two days elapsed before I was able to crawl from the berth which my boy-friend kindly relinquished for my benefit. But long before that, mutual explanations had been made of the occurrence which appeared so extraordinary; and which, nevertheless, happened in so simple a manner, that that is the point which is really extraordinary.

It seems that the cook of the vessel had correctly informed me, when he told me that the captain and his son had gone to the city on business, and that the men were also off on leave, in anticipation of sailing in the morning. It happened that the captain and his son, when on their return, came across the sailors, who were engaged in carousing, and making a disturbance in one of the streets adjacent to the vessel. Perceiving, at a glance, that if he was to carry out his purpose of sailing in the morning, he must ensure the presence of his crew, who might be commencing

one of those sprees which sailors sometimes prolong for two or three days, the captain halted, and, after a long altercation, in which promises and threats were mingled in about equal proportions, he managed to prevail upon his men to accompany him to the schooner, where they arrived in a very lurching and seamen's last-day-on-shore fashion.

After getting them aboard and below, the captain was puzzled to know what to do next, for the men were in that rickety condition of moral perception, when they would have readily made the most solemn promise not to go ashore again, and would have broken it the next minute without the slightest compunction. In this dilemma, he chanced to look at the river, and perceived that the tide was still ebb. In a moment, he made up his mind to secure his crew, by taking advantage of the last of that ebb, instead of waiting for six hours, and then taking the first of the morning's ebb. No sooner said than done. A schooner does not require many men to handle her. The captain, his son, and the cook, soon cast off the hawsers by which she was made fast to the wharf, and by putting her jib aback, forced her out of the slip. In a few minutes all sail was set, and we were under way, with a fair wind.

The cook, it appeared, had seen me sitting on the taffrail, where I had taken my station to await my friend's arrival; but soon missing me, he concluded that I had gone home. At that very moment, however, I was sleeping with a boy's heavy slumber, and with the lethargy entailed by a long and hot day's excursion, and a previously agitated condition of mind. The sea, at first, was comparatively smooth, and the motion had been violent only for a short period preceding the time when I arrived on deck. The men, having been ascertained to be incapable of duty, the sole remaining chance which I would have had of being discovered by the captain or his son, failed, as they, with the cook, were obliged to remain all night on deck, and navigate the vessel.

The affair is now explained. Morning dawned, and found us far out of sight of land, the men just returning to their duties, one having already been stationed at the wheel; and the captain and his son would, within a few minutes, have found me in the cabin, had I not at last awakened, owing to the violent rolling of the vessel, and rushing up on deck, discovered myself to their astonished eyes.

The question soon arose as to what was to be

done. What could *not* be done was very plain—at least to the captain. If I had ever had the slightest notion that he would touch at some point on the coast and land me, I was soon disabused of that impression. Every sea-captain, even the most amiable, has the idea that the laws of his vessel, be she never so small, are as immutable as those of the universe. Nothing renders the human mind so despotic, as the command of a few planks at the mercy of the elements.

It was clear that I could not land anywhere short of the place where it had been decided that the schooner was to make a port; unless, indeed, we were to be shipwrecked, an event not likely to befall a vessel possessed of a captain accustomed to the coast along which we sailed.

After much debate, it was finally settled, that as the vessel was not to return to New York before three or four months, I should be left at Havana, at which place she was to stop for a few hours on her way to one or two ports in the islands to the southward of Cuba.

Idleness at sea is an abomination in the eyes of every good skipper, and I was soon set at work to earn my right to the passage which I was taking very much against my will. I was very anxious to do what I could, to render my

title good to my board and lodging, and to ingratiate myself with the captain, who, all things considered, treated me very kindly. Not that I was really so much indebted to him, if I faithfully performed the tasks allotted to me, for there is always so much to do about a vessel, that any supernumerary can fairly earn his salt. But my introduction had been so unceremonious, that notwithstanding its being unintentional, the affair was very likely to try the patience of many a man. Here was I, neither officer nor common seaman,—a passenger without money or clothes, and, on account of many circumstances, to be got rid of at the first opportunity that offered, and yet to be got rid of with decency, and as the friend of the captain's son, although an uninvited guest, occupying a place in a cabin where there was little room to spare even to one most welcome.

As to my own feelings, I had settled into a frame of mind in which, although still distressed at the late event, I had summoned up my fortitude, in order to make the best of every thing and to be guided by circumstances. I resolved that I would write to my father the very moment we arrived at Havana. As for returning to his house before I received some intimation of his pleasure, reflection showed me that such would not be the most prudent course; for

I now felt to the full extent, how almost impossible it must be for him to credit the statement which I had to make, that the occurrence which followed the conversation on my birthday had no connection with it, but was a mere coincidence. I made up my mind to write to him, to explain every thing, and to await his reply before going home. If he told me to return, I would return immediately. Whether he believed me or not, I resolved that my course should be equally obedient. I must wait, however, to learn his decision. I had no doubt that, in the meantime, I, a great, strong, healthy lad, could successfully measure myself with the world, and earn my own livelihood.

For a few days after sailing, the wind proved light and baffling, and we did not make much progress. My sea-sickness wore off, and I began, in a measure, to relish the novelty of the life and scenes by which I was surrounded. At last, a whole-sail breeze from the north-west set in, and the vessel careened with every stitch of canvas set, and steered due south.

As we sailed farther and farther south, we began to find our clothes oppressive. I had no change, and my friend no change to spare, so I suffered at first from what after all was a very petty inconvenience.

The vessel's track often lay through water

alive with schools of flying-fish. These, when alarmed at our approach, or at that of some voracious fish in search of prey, often leaped by hundreds from the water, and skimmed along just above the surface of the waves, on which they occasionally struck and with a ricochet prolonged their flight. They make no movement with their wings, which they merely extend upon leaping from the water with the impetus of their previous speed through that medium. On rising above its surface, the wind propels them, and judging by the manner in which they sometimes slant their wings, and diverge from their original course, the probability is that they possess the power adroitly to take advantage of the different currents of wind; or, with the same current, to modify, in some measure, the direction of their flight. The wings of this fish are its long pectoral fins. They are slight, translucent, and supported by delicate spines. To show you that, beyond a very limited degree, the flying-fish cannot control the direction of its flight, you only need be informed that it often flies over the bulwarks of a vessel and falls on her deck. It frequently comes aboard at night, and, in that way, we sometimes found a mess of fish all ready for the pan.

Porpoises we saw by thousands. They dis-

ported themselves about the vessel, seemingly without the slightest fear. They are much quicker than the fastest steamship under way. They often indulge in queer freaks. As I watched them under the bow of the schooner, I often saw one swim with its tail almost grazing the cut-water. In that position it would adopt the same course as that of the schooner, without deviating so much as half a point, and swim thus for a minute or two, then dart off, and return almost immediately to its station.

We once saw a school of whales; but they were too far off to be distinctly visible. Of course, there were many other fish which we saw, and many sea-birds were often in sight. We were ceaselessly followed by the inevitable Mother Carey's chickens.

I must not omit that wonder of wonders, the dolphin. The men harpooned one of these fish, and all hands were soon collected to see a sight which is always fascinating. My satisfaction was marred by knowing that what gratified our curiosity was agony to the poor creature.

If you expect, from my description, to receive any thing like an adequate idea of the beauty of the dolphin, you will be astonished when you see one. No painter that ever lived, could paint a dolphin, for he would have to paint fifty dolphins, in colors of a brilliancy which the art of

man has not yet produced. I can but give you a faint impression of what I saw.

Recall the colors of rich changeable silks, or all that ever charmed you in a soap-bubble, and then imagine a great fish with these gorgeous hues covering the glossy surface of its body. On emerging from the water, it looks as if it had come from a bath of rainbow. The prismatic colors blend, dissolve, renew, and fade away. With convulsive throes the fish approaches its death agony, and then slowly the colors pass away, and a cold, ashen, lead-like hue steals over the body. The dolphin is then dead.

The weather was so fine that no one spent much time below. As there was not much distinction between quarter-deck and forward, we boys generally found ourselves grouped with the sailors, under shelter of the bulwark to windward. There I was for the first time instructed in all those mysteries of tying intricate knots, splicing, plaiting, carving, sewing, and the thousand and one knickknackeries with which the sailor beguiles his moments of leisure. As the wind was now fair, there was scarcely any thing to be done from morning till evening, except to wash the decks down at daylight, and to take an occasional turn at the wheel.

We had so much leisure, that at last even the amusement of making knots, etc., began to fail, from sheer exhaustion of all the various devices; and symptoms of a desire to tattoo every body within reach, took possession of one of the sailors, who was an adept in that branch of the fine arts. As I had not the slightest mark upon my person, I was looked upon as a very desirable subject upon which to practise a little etching, but I resisted all overtures, and he was forced to content himself with adding a few dolphins to the waters which surrounded a ship under full sail, that decorated the arm of one of the old salts. Although I have been a good deal at sea since that time, I have never changed my mind about this kind of ornamentation, which many a boy has been silly enough to adopt and heartily repented.

The Southern Cross was now visible. I must say that I was much disappointed in this constellation. Like most others, it has no very marked figure. It can be recognized as a cross, but it is a very misshapen and lopsided one.

Grand, mysterious, awful, I thought the waste of waters, but they were not blue. I could not distinguish blue, or else the sea was not blue, but a dull green in bright light, varying in shadow to a slaty tint. I found that the seamen did not trouble themselves much

about such investigations. I inquired of Captain Edson, who briefly replied that the sea was blue in some places and green in others. This answer made me hope that we should come to one of the places where it was blue. As he had not volunteered to tell me more than I mention, I did not press him, for a captain of a small vessel is a very great dignitary, not to be approached, when at sea, except with much awe and circumspection.

We soon stood in further to the westward. As we had been steering south, we had kept well away from the coast, to avoid the current of the Gulf Stream, which, you remember, leaves the Gulf of Mexico, and after running parallel with the coast of the United States for some distance, gradually recedes from it until off the Banks of Newfoundland, whence it is deflected in the direction of Europe. The weather was so clear, and the wind so favorable, that Captain Edson determined to run toward the westward until he neared the edge of the Gulf Stream, and then lay a new course for Havana. He altered the direction of the vessel by a few points, and we then felt as if we had almost reached our destination. The slightest incident at sea, looking to a prospective arrival, no matter how distant, gives zest to life aboard ship. We changed our course about daylight,

and before eleven o'clock, I saw plainly, by the great number of birds, that we must have greatly reduced our distance from the land. Very far from the coast, even at the greatest distance at which we had sailed, sea-birds had followed in the wake of the vessel, but now they were ten times as numerous.

About 11 A. M., I was standing near the captain, when he turned suddenly to me, and, pointing over the vessel's bow, said, "There, my boy, you said you wanted to see blue water, I hope you will find that blue enough for your taste. That is the Gulf Stream."

I looked ahead, and saw at about two or three cables' lengths off, that the color of the water was entirely different. But it looked dark; I could not detect the slightest bluish tint. I had barely time to say so timidly, when the vessel clove her way into the dark liquid, and, in the schooner's length, we passed from the faint green sea into the deepest indigo that you can conceive. I almost shouted with delight. The water in which we were sailing seemed to be a different medium from that which we had left. It was so dark that it looked as if it could not be so thin as the other—so *watery*. When the shadows of the clouds rested on it, it was as black as night, but when the sun shone out, it lighted up with every tint of blue, from

dark indigo in the trough of the wave, to light, brilliant blue, just before the feathery crest broke into diamond spray. I could have stood for hours on deck, gazing at this phenomenon, had we continued in the stream; but the captain had no idea of stemming a strong current of several miles an hour, and he kept away by changing his direction to the southward and eastward, and, in a few minutes, during which we ran on the edge of the stream, we gradually left it, and in an hour or two shaped our course afresh for Havana.

The next day I saw another sight,—a water-spout, or, I should say, many water-spouts. The weather was extremely hot, and great clouds, which, to my inexperienced eye, seemed to betoken immediate rain, gathered in huge masses, like mountains in the sky. As I was watching these form and dissolve, and change unceasingly, I suddenly observed a tiny cone protrude from one. I knew in a moment what it was. Then, a similarly shaped object arose from the sea. The upper cone gradually grew longer and longer, all the time approaching the other, and waving gently to and fro with the action of the wind.

Little is known of the cause of this phenomenon, which occurs on land as well as at sea. In the former place, there is not sufficient

moisture to produce the lower cone. At sea, sometimes the upper cone is the first to form, and, at other times, the lower one precedes it. There are many variations, too numerous to describe in this place.

The water-spout is supposed to be similar in character to the dust-storms which prevail in portions of Asia, Africa, and in the interior of South America. The best authorities on the subject ascribe the phenomenon to the action of the wind, but confess that it is marked by a highly electrical condition. There are other theories, but I have told you enough of what relates to the scientific part of the phenomenon, and I now return to the description of the way in which it generally looks at sea.

There is no appearance to which the upper cone in motion can be so well compared, as to the gently waving, hesitating manner with which an elephant approaches its proboscis to an object on the ground. No sooner do the cones meet, than an agitation seems to take place, and the column, reaching from sea to heaven, commences to reel and whirl rapidly off, until broken and dissipated in its frantic waltz. Sometimes I saw three or four water-spouts at the same time, either formed, or in various stages of formation. Occasionally, a cloud would let down its trunk for some dis-

tance, and then withdraw it, as if it had concluded not to take a drink at that place.

From certain indications, it is known that the column is not composed solely of vapor, but that a great body of water is actually suspended in the air. It is possible, therefore, that as the column is continuous, water from the sea may be carried up and enter the vapor of the clouds. We know that the clouds, by the reverse process, discharge their vapor in the form of water. Some observers state that the column in breaking invariably discharges fresh water.

On the morning of the day following the last of which I have spoken, the captain announced to us boys that we would probably arrive off Havana by evening, but that he was afraid he could not reach there before sundown, in which case, we would not be able to enter the port before daylight the next morning. It seems that a regulation of the port of Havana forbids vessels to enter after sundown. The reason assigned for this rule is, that the shipping is so crowded in the harbor, that vessels entering at night endanger those lying at anchor.

As the captain had surmised, we arrived too late,—just in time to see the first glimmer from the light-house which stands at the en-

trance of the harbor. However, we had known for an hour that we would not be able to get into the harbor that night. The captain, after some orthodox grumbling and knocking around every thing within reach, steered away and got a good offing, still within sight of the light, and here we lay off and on, as they say at sea, all night. The captain and Charley soon turned in, after the former had given some directions as to the sailing of the vessel. They were soon sound asleep, and I was left alone with my meditations.

These were not of the pleasantest kind. In a few hours I was to lose the only friends I had in those parts, and be put ashore in a country where I did not even speak the language of the people. However bravely youngsters may frequently talk, — and they do often indulge in that way, — when it comes to such a pinch, they are not apt to consider themselves more than a match for any difficulty, as they would lead people to suppose when the difficulty is imaginary. I confess that I felt my courage quite abated now, when I was in sight of the spot where my self-reliance was to be put to the test. As I sat at the cabin table, with my face buried in my hands, the better to exclude external objects, and bring my thoughts to a focus, I did not feel myself to be such an intel-

lectual and physical giant as I had deemed myself when I purposed grappling with the world. I felt that I was a boy, and not a very big one either, nor a very wise one for his years, few as they were. In fact, I felt very miserable, and I,—the cabin was very dark, and the captain and Charley were fast asleep,—well! I blubbered. You must not mention it. Of course, it was very babyish. You would have done very differently, you think. Pooh! that is just what I would have said, had I been told of such a scrape as the one in which I found myself, but—I blubbered. How long I continued to cry I do not know, but I was suddenly startled by a gruff voice from the captain's berth.

"Hollo, my fine fellow," said the voice, as a tumbled-looking head protruded from the curtains, "have you taken so much to the sea that you are brimming over with salt water?"

The head nodded at me in a kindly way, and I saw that it meant its words to cause me to cheer up.

"Captain," I stammered in reply, "if I had only known you took a little interest in me, this would not have happened; but I did n't like to speak to you, and ask your advice."

"Speak away," said he, bringing his legs outside of the berth, and sitting bent forward

on the edge of it, "you must n't suppose because I'm not inclined to lay much out on words, that I haven't got some heart for other people's troubles. I knew you'd have to speak to me afore you went ashore, and I just waited till you raised a signal of distress."

Upon this I opened my heart freely, and, in the course of half an hour's talk, found that I had mistaken the captain's nature, as boys are very apt to do in the case of their elders. He told me that he would be obliged to land me,—that was certain,—but that he would do every thing in his power to aid me in getting shipped aboard of some vessel. In reply, I mentioned my projected letter to my father, and my intention not to return to New York until I received news from him. After cogitating awhile, he approved of this; and added, that as I might to-morrow ship aboard of some vessel which might be on the eve of sailing, I had better write my letter at once. So he got out his ink-bottle, and a few dilapidated pens, which looked as if they had been used for cleaning bedsteads; and I was once more left alone, as the captain rolled over into his berth with a last kind word and a cheery good-night.

So, by the light of a miserable lamp, and with the aid of a miserable pen, and my own thoughts, more miserable than both, I wrote to

my father, and narrated all that the reader knows. And, meanwhile, we tacked to and fro, and the night waned, and day had almost broken before I threw myself exhausted and feverish into the berth by the side of Charley.