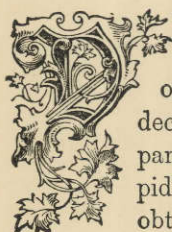


CHAPTER IV.

SUNRISE OFF HAVANA—THE HARBOR—THE WRECKER FLYING CLOUD—CAPTAIN EDSON'S PROMISE—HIS VISIT TO THE WRECKER—MINGLED DESPONDENCY AND HOPE.



AINLY did I essay to sleep. The bustle and the swash of water overhead, as the crew sluiced the decks, the noise made by my companions while dressing, and the rapidly increasing light prevented my obtaining the rest which I courted.

I dressed myself and joined the groups on deck. We were about three miles from land. As I looked towards shore, I could distinctly perceive the light-house and some of the dwellings near Havana. The wind was ahead, and we were beating towards the harbor. The only thing on the water was a schooner, which, by her evolutions, appeared to be making for the same destination.

There is something inexpressibly lovely in a fair weather sunrise at sea in a tropical climate.

The air which, later in the day, becomes too fervid, is then tempered with a pleasant coolness. Gliding through the dark blue waters that encroach upon the very shores of Cuba, surrounded by the peaceful-looking sky, and inhaling the sea-breeze, just scented with fragrance from the land, one may travel far without finding a lovelier scene than a clear sunrise off Havana.

The schooner which I had noticed, was sailing on the opposite tack, and we rapidly increased our distance from each other. Just as we went about, I observed that the other vessel was also in stays. We then rapidly approached each other, and I could distinguish a long, low, fast-sailing vessel, flying at her peak what I took to be the American flag.

I ran forward to find the captain, who was seeing that the chain was all clear, preparatory to letting the anchor go in the harbor. I pointed out the flag to him.

"Yes," said he, glancing up, and answering, as if he understood my thoughts, "if I don't mistake, you are in luck." After another look at her, he resumed, "If things can be arranged, as I guess we can manage, this vessel will suit you to a T. You see, according to your plan, as you did n't want to return immediately to the North, I was puzzled; for, said I to myself, of

course, he cannot very well find employment in Havana, for he don't speak Spanish, and, likewise, if he ships, of course he won't want to ship aboard of any but an English or American craft, where they speak his own language. Then I thought to myself, he don't want to go a long voyage to England, and perhaps some other cruise before he is free, nor yet to the North, until he hears from his father. The short of it is just this here. If that vessel turns out to be what I think she is,—a Florida wrecker,—and her captain is not a most uncommon obstinate man, you're suited at the first go off. You can ship aboard of her, and there you'll be until you can get word from New York. I don't believe there'll be a mite of trouble; for you see the wreckers take a crew on shares. If they get any salvage, every man has his portion; but if they are not lucky, the owners only lose the grub they provide."

While the captain was engaged in this unusually long speech, the two vessels were rapidly nearing each other upon opposite tacks, which seemed as if they would bring them into collision if they maintained the same course. But as we approached still closer to each other, I perceived that the other schooner, being a fast sailer, would cross athwart our hawsc. Sure enough, a few minutes afterwards, she

ran past us, cleaving the water as if she had been instinct with life, and triumphed in her speed.

As she weathered us, our captain shouted through his trumpet: "What schooner's that, —bound in?" Another trumpet answered from the stranger's deck, "Wrecker, *Flying Cloud*; Key West, for Havana; who are you?" Our captain bellowed in reply, "*Cygnets*, from New York." Then plash, plash, plash, went the water from our bow, as the voices ceased, and the noise of the rush of the other vessel subsided, and we once more clove our way alone through the sea.

The captain's apparent certainty that I would find no difficulty in shipping aboard of the trim-looking wrecker, raised my spirits, and when, a few minutes afterwards, we were entering the harbor, I felt sufficiently relieved in mind to be able to enjoy the scene.

On the left of the entrance of the harbor, stands a magnificent light-house, placed on the comparatively low rocks which form the base of some great hills on which Morro Castle is situated. The entrance itself is extremely narrow, and so uniform in breadth, before it expands into the harbor, that it seems almost like a canal. Morro Castle runs along the lofty hills, its walls dipping into the ravines, and so

adapting themselves to the peculiarities of the surface, that they look as if they had become molten at their base, and had run into the slopes.

The tall, smooth shaft of the light-house, rising out of dark, rugged rocks, and contrasting with the undulating lines of Morro Castle, completes the outline on the left of the entrance. The reader must add to the masonry a tint of dark yellow, in vivid relief amidst tropical green. Under these southern skies, nature blends colors, and adds shades of her own. Man can scarcely devise any thing so hideous, that, in time, she will not beautify it with vegetation, and paint it with a master hand.

On the right of the entrance, the ground is low, and there, houses are numerous, but the city does not fairly commence until just beyond the narrow gut which leads from the sea. As the wind was ahead and very light and the passage narrow; short as it was, we would have had to make many tacks before getting inside of the main harbor, had we not lowered our sails, put some men in the jolly-boat, and towed the schooner through.

The wrecker had preceded us by half an hour, and we could see her lying at anchor in the harbor.

When the men had pulled about four or five hundred yards, we came in plain view of Havana, which is situated on the right of the harbor,—a land-locked bay, whose only communication with the sea is through the narrow passage described. The unhealthiness of Havana can, in part, be properly attributed to its situation on the bay, which, filled with numerous shipping, from which filth of all kinds is constantly discharged, lies under a tropical sun that must breed disease from its almost stagnant waters. The tides in this portion of the Gulf of Mexico rise and fall only between one and two feet; so that in Havana there is no influx and reflux of vast quantities of water which would cleanse the harbor of its impurities.

We were soon swinging at anchor. Now that the excitement caused by our arrival and the novel scenes which presented themselves, had ceased to distract my thoughts from the uneasy reflections which had beset me, I relapsed into the gloomy train of reflection which my unhappy situation engendered. I was looking disconsolately at the shore, and completely lost in my thoughts of home, when I started at being touched on the shoulder. Turning around, I saw the captain, who smiled pleasantly. and said:

"Now, my lad, cheer up. Don't be down-hearted. All will come right. You have explained every thing in your letter to your father. He'll believe you, I know. You see I'm a father myself, and I know how one feels."

This was balm indeed to me, for my doubts of my ability to take care of myself weighed lightly in the balance, compared with the heart-ache which I experienced when I allowed myself, for an instant, to dwell upon the thought that my father might perchance refuse to believe my story, repudiate me, spurn my love, and, perhaps, even declare that I should never have his forgiveness. Loving, I had always known him to be, but then I was about to call upon him to credit what appeared to be an impossibility.

"Captain," I said, turning towards my kind friend, "you have said the very word I needed. It is n't the thought of how I'm to get along, that distresses me, but just what you said."

"Well, then, cheer up," said the captain, in reply. "I tell you again, it will all come right—my word for it. For the present, I'll help you out of one part of your trouble. I did n't intend to stay very long in this port, but I'll settle your affairs before I sail, or else I'll never leave it. I'm bound for that wrecker

now. You wait here. I can get along without you better than if you were with me. Keep up your courage. Hollo," he shouted, to the men in the jolly-boat, which was now lying along-side, "drop a little astern."

He threw his leg over the schooner's rail, caught hold of the man-ropes at the side, and, in a jiffy, he was steering for the schooner; and I was left on deck wistfully looking after him, until Charley came up, and began to chaff me in regular boy-fashion, as to whether I had n't had about enough adventure. At a certain age, boys are apt to possess so little sensibility, that they are often brutal without meaning to be. However, on this occasion, I was not hurt. The captain's certainty that with my father all would come right, coupled with my strong hope that I should be able to get a place aboard of the wrecker, had revived my spirits. I felt as if I had quaffed some subtle elixir that quickened my pulses and made my heart beat high with hope.