

CHAPTER V.

CAPTAIN EDSON'S MISSION CROWNED WITH SUCCESS—THE CAPTAIN OF THE WRECKER AN OLD FRIEND—CAPTAIN EDSON OBTAINS A SITUATION AS CABIN-BOY FOR HIS PROTÉGÉ, WHO, IN MENTIONING HIS NAME TO HIS EMPLOYER, NECESSARILY ANNOUNCES IT TO THE READER.



AN hour passed before I saw the captain's boat quit the side of the wrecker and row for our vessel. The length of the captain's absence had created in my mind a misgiving that his mission had been unsuccessful. Now that I saw him leaving the wrecker, I rejoiced; for to know the worst was better than to be in suspense. As my gaze was directed towards the boat, I saw the captain rise up in the stern-sheets and wave his hat. I was instantly relieved—he had succeeded. In a few minutes he was aboard, and, shaking me by the shoulders, clapped me on the back, as he exclaimed, "I told you so. I felt in my bones that the vessel had arrived 'specially

for you. Why, the captain turns out to be an old friend of mine, although I had not seen him for these fifteen years. That's what kept me so long. Meeting an old friend that way, made me forget, for a few minutes, the business I went on. Then, when I came to talk of you, it took a few minutes longer. But there is no trouble about your shipping. He's glad enough to get a boy. He says he's wanted one for some time. The place is only a cabin-boy's, mind you, but I don't see that you can better yourself, for you're not a sailor, and not even a man."

I professed myself delighted, as you can very well imagine. Then the captain told me that the wrecker would not sail for two or three days, and that his own vessel must leave early the next morning, but that I should stay with him until just before sailing, when he would put me aboard of the *Flying Cloud*. He then left me, as he had to go ashore on business, and, by his advice, I went down into the cabin, and added a long postscript to my letter to my father. I told him to address his reply to Key West, Florida. That is the port in which the wreckers "fit out", and receive letters, papers, and supplies of every kind.

The captain, his son, and I, spent the evening together, and I felt as if I was about to leave friends whom I had known all my life; so

entirely do constant companionship, intercourse and kindly offices disregard time as a measure of the length of friendship.

My letter had been posted, and it would probably leave Havana in the course of a day or two. At the time of which I am speaking, no regular line of steam-ships plied between New York and New Orleans, touching at Havana on both trips; so it might be a month before my letter to my father would reach him, and another month before a letter could reach Key West. And then, if I were off on a wrecking cruise, as I expected to be, it might be three months before I should hear from New York. This was supposing the most unfavorable case,—that each letter would be a month in reaching its destination; but, then, both vessels carrying the mails, in which the letters were to go, might make short passages, and, instead of each being a month on the voyage, the time consumed might be less than two weeks for each. This, on the other hand, was too favorable a supposition, so I concluded to take the mean,—to allow three weeks for each trip. That would bring a reply to Key West in the course of six weeks. Allowing three weeks more before my letter reached me, at the unfrequented point where we would probably be stationed, I concluded two months to be the time by which I

might reasonably expect to hear from home. Before I turned in for the night, I had gone through my calculation many times, as people in such circumstances always do; and by dint of reasoning to myself, that, at the worst, it would not be very long before I should hear from my father, I felt more ease of mind than I had yet experienced.

Matters appeared to be taking a satisfactory turn, and the captain's view of my father's action in my regard had had so happy an effect, that I resolved to give way no longer to despondency.

When day dawned, our deck was at once astir with preparation for departure. The captain seemed grieved to be obliged to let me go, although he tried to be cheerful, and to give me courage. I was very loth to leave; so much so, that I verily believe, had the choice of going or staying been mine, I would not have had resolution to put in practice the plan which had been so well matured. I was scarcely able to eat a morsel at breakfast, and, after that meal, I silently followed the captain out of the cabin. While he was ordering the boat to be lowered, I bade good-bye to Charley, and then took my seat in the boat, by the captain's side. In six or seven minutes, we were along-side of the wrecker. I clambered up the side, after the

captain, who gave me a shove by way of introduction to a jolly-looking person who was standing on the quarter-deck to receive us, and whom he accosted as Bowers. "Mind you do well by this boy, Bowers," he said, "or else we two'll fall out. He's my property. He's a sort of a sea-waif that I picked up." Capt. Bowers' appearance was so very good-natured, that I at once felt relieved of the only doubt that I had had about my change of commanders.

"And now," said Captain Edson, "I have not a moment to spare; I must take advantage of this wind. Good-bye, Bowers." He shook the captain's hand heartily, and then taking mine in both of his hands, he gave it a wring, and just as he released it, clasped it over a hard little package, which I mechanically clutched. "Good-bye, boy," he said, as he turned to go. "It will all come right. So far, so good." By the time that he had finished his last sentence, he was in the boat, and pulling rapidly away.

I made a faint attempt at twirling my hat around my head, in token of farewell, but I failed miserably. I felt that I had lost a dear friend; as in truth I had, for I never saw him again. A few months afterwards he died of yellow fever.

"What did Captain Edson say your name was," inquired a voice at my ear?

"Fred Ransom, sir," I replied, starting and letting fall the paper which Captain Edson had left in my hand.

"You've dropped something," said Captain Bowers; "your money, I reckon, by the ring."

"I have n't got any money, sir," I said, "unless"—I paused, stooped, and recovered the paper, and hastily tore it open. Out rolled fifteen dollars in gold coin.