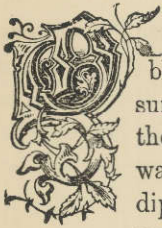


CHAPTER VII

THE FLYING CLOUD SAILS FROM HAVANA—THE VESSEL—THE CREW—THE COOK—THE NEW-FOUNDLAND DOG, JACK.



UT into the waters of the deep blue Gulf we sailed, as the rising sun threw a golden pathway over the expanse of sea. The morning was beautiful, and as the schooner dipped merrily into the waves, and sped away on her course, the buoyant movement, balmy air, clear sky, and lovely scene, dissipated the last vestige of melancholy with which I had been oppressed. I felt that I had done all that lay in my power. The full consciousness of this renewed my determination of the previous evening, to cast away all vain misgivings, and put my trust in Providence. From that hour forward, I was myself again.

The shores near Havana are very abrupt; for within a few yards of the stagnant-looking wa-

ter of the harbor, the schooner was dancing amid the deep blue waves.

I was not disappointed in the *Flying Cloud*. She was a trim-looking craft, rather long for her beam, and with quite low bulwarks. She had that easy movement which one accustomed to vessels can recognize as indicating a good sea-boat, as readily as an accomplished rider can judge, by the first few paces of his horse, whether it possesses the elasticity fitting it for the saddle, or the jolting gait that should consign it to the cart.

Our crew consisted of eight men. One was an Englishman, one an Irishman, and another a Norwegian. The five others were Conchs from Key West. In reference to the Conchs of Key West, I shall, hereafter, have something to say.

I must not forget to mention our black cook, Hannibal. A most important personage everywhere is a cook, white or black, and in no place more important than on board ship. Even in the worst pro-slavery times, I never saw a black sea-cook that was not thought to have rights which white men were bound to respect, and, in truth, which they were very anxious to respect.

A cook at sea has it in his power to make the men very comfortable, or very uncomfort-

able. In either case, whether too favorably disposed to them, for the interest of the ship's stores, or inclined to annoy them, by bad cookery or short allowance, he can safely follow his own devices in a thousand ways so covert as to escape detection, while the effect of the whole is clearly apparent. For instance, how can the fact be fixed that the "doctor" deliberately burned the coffee, instead of its condition being owing, as he states, to the men's calling him at an inopportune moment to lend a hand somewhere. Or, how can it be proved that the salty and nauseous flavor of the pea-soup was not caused by some one's meddling with his bucket of fresh water, and leaving it filled with salt water; when, while all hands were engaged, the "doctor" had secretly dipped the water out of the sea, and filled the soup-kettle to the brim.

We had another blackey on board, but he belonged aft, although he did not confine himself to that portion of the vessel. He was a fine Newfoundland dog, the finest that I ever saw. He was not one of those unwieldy beasts which pass their existence in acquiring excessive fat, but a great rollicking fellow, all animation and playfulness. He was a noble brute—no, not a brute!

“—— the poor dog, in life the firmest friend,
The first to welcome, foremost to defend,
Whose honest heart is still his master's own,
Who labors, fights, lives, breathes for him alone,
Unhonored falls, unnoticed all his worth,
Denied in heaven the soul he had on earth:
While man, vain insect! hopes to be forgiven,
And claims himself a sole, exclusive heaven.”*

Although Jack, as I said, belonged aft, he was not allowed to make use of the cabin, unless in case of storm. So, even at night, he remained on deck, taking up his station by lying across the door which was at the head of the companion-way, as it is called, that is the staircase leading to the cabin. The sagacious animal knew the occasion upon which he was not to be considered an intruder, and when it rained, he tumbled down the steep stairway, and ensconced himself in a corner, with an air of much self-possession and of being quite at home.

The captain was as kind as possible to me, but his manner, after our first interview, and my day's liberty on shore, was less demonstrative: as if he felt that the discipline of the vessel required me to know and keep my place.

* Byron's "Inscription on the monument of a Newfoundland dog." The dog "Boatswain" died, and was buried at Newstead Abbey, at which place the monument may still be seen.

As I was not destitute of tact, I took the hint, and kept aloof. Boy as I was, I saw quite clearly that my position was a very strange one, and on observing the captain's manner to me, I determined to avoid all that might savor of presumption. I was therefore careful not to approach him, unless he addressed me.

Of course, I did not eat with the captain, for, being the cabin-boy, I was obliged to serve his meals. I was not required to wait, but to be within call, and after the captain had finished, I sat down at the same table. It was considerate in him not to send me forward to eat with the men, as well as to allow me to sleep elsewhere.

It was the 20th day of October when we left Havana. We had sailed from New York on the 26th of September, and although, during part of the voyage to Havana, we were favored with a fair wind, the light, baffling winds of the first few days had prevented our making much way, so that the voyage to Havana was not a quick one.

The wind was now ahead, but we had so short a trip to make, that unless we were becalmed, it could not, even with a head-wind, consume more than two days.