

CHAPTER IX.

THE DISCOURSE OF BILL RUGGLES—THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE NORWEGIAN'S FATE TO THE CAPTAIN AND CREW—THEIR HORROR—THE CAPTAIN'S SERMON—THE BURIAL SERVICE—THE SCHOONER SAILS.



WILL I be henceforth spared the horror of a sight like that! Yet we saw nothing but a disappearance, save, as the boat presently swung within the influence of the current flowing into the inlet, and swept near us, we noted, with a shudder, that the water on which she floated was tinged with crimson.

We scarcely spoke for some minutes. Mechanically, Bill Ruggles grappled the boat with a stick, as she passed close to the beach on our side of the inlet, and then sat down on the ground, and Linden and I sat down beside him.

At last Ruggles spoke:

"Well, shipmates," said he, "I've been following the sea this many-a-day, but I don't

know as I ever felt quite so cut up as I do this here minute. I've seen men drowned, and some smashed by falling from aloft, and mummoxed up all sorts of ways, but dash me if this don't go ahead." Here he wiped away a tear with the cuff of his coat. "I say," he resumed, "any thing but *that*. You can't pound a man's life out any way that he's afeard of, if he's a lad of spirit, but, dash me, this's enough to scare any one. I'm not much at prayers, but I feel as if we ought to do something that way. Here's a poor fellow gone to his last account, and not a soul to say something comfortable over him, with an Amen to the end of it."

If Ruggles had not used the most chaste language in his discourse, he had at least spoken to the hearts of both of his hearers.

"I feel jest so," replied Linden. "Why, Bill, I've lived, boy and man, on the Reef, these twenty year, and I never see that sight afore, and I pray God I never may again. It don't often happen, for all sharks is so thick in some places. Then I've knowed *him* ever so long, and who'd have thought that was to be the way he was to go."

We were all so absorbed in our thoughts, that we had not observed the wind, which had come up and begun to blow quite freshly. As Ruggles was about to rejoin something in

answer to Linden, he happened to glance towards the schooner, from which he observed that signals were being made for the boat to return.

"There!" said Ruggles, "they're hailing us, and there's a breeze stirring that must have been up this half hour! I didn't know it. I forgot all about the wind, and everything else. Come! aboard with you! The captain does n't know what's happened yet. I'm thinking he'll take it as hard as any of us."

In a few minutes we were along-side of the schooner, and jumped aboard of her, just as the captain, who had been walking impatiently up and down the quarter-deck, strode forward and commenced with, "Where have you men"—Suddenly observing the expression of our faces, and the absence of one of the party, he said quickly,—“What's happened? Is the other man hurt?”

"No, captain," said Ruggles, "he's out of pain. He's took."

"Took! Taken! how taken?—not by a shark? Heavens! you do n't mean that!

"Yes, I do, captain," replied Ruggles, dejectedly. "He was took by a shark afore our eyes, and we could n't do nothing to save him, not one of us."

The crew drew around the group on deck,

and echoed the words of Ruggles,—“Took by a shark!” The captain grasped me by the arm, and led me away to the cabin. “My boy,” said he, when he had made me sit down, “this is too horrible for belief. You can tell me how this happened, better than one of the men. Let me hear.”

I narrated to the captain, as clearly as I could, how the catastrophe took place, and how powerless we were to prevent it, as the man had suddenly jumped into the water, before any one divined his intention. I concluded by mentioning how we were all overwhelmed, and what Ruggles had said to us of the horror of such a death, when compared with any other.

“Yes,” said the captain, when I came to this part, “Ruggles is a rough, but a good-hearted fellow. What he said, suggests something to me. It would be well to take advantage of this opportunity to say a word to the men. Go, Fred, and call them aft. I will meet them on the quarter-deck.”

The men quickly assembled, and the captain approaching the group, addressed them as follows:

“Men: I cannot let this occasion pass without saying a word or two to you. We sailors—you, I, and all of us—are apt to trust too much

in ourselves. Here's a lesson of how little strength, skill, and courage, may avail. You now feel how utterly dependent we are on a higher power. Think seriously over this dreadful fate, and your thoughts will be better than any thing I can say—better than the best sermon. And now, although we cannot bury your shipmate with the funeral rites which usually attend the dead, we can at least read a portion of the religious service."

With these words, the captain drew a small prayer-book from his coat-pocket, and opening it at a place which he had marked, he solemnly read the burial service, omitting only those portions which were not applicable to surrounding circumstances.

By the time that the beautiful epistle of St. Paul was finished, the auditors were much affected, and when the captain, reading beyond, reached the words of the service: "In the midst of life we are in death: of whom may we seek for succor, but of thee, O Lord!" two of the sailors fairly gave way, and sobbed aloud. Since then, I have often heard the service read at the grave, but I never heard it read with so great effect as then, when the sudden removal of a companion, by a fate so horrible, disposed all hearts to bow in submission before the Almighty.

"Now, men," added the captain, in a quiet voice, after he had given the concluding supplication, to which all fervently responded, "heave up the anchor, and let's get under way and leave this place."