

CHAPTER XII.

THE CHARACTER OF THE SAILOR--LANDING
WILD CATTLE--THE MAD BULL--THE CAP-
TAIN'S INTENTION TO SAIL.



F it is true, as Shakespeare says, that we, meaning men and women generally, are but children of a larger growth, the sailor is always the veriest child.

Doubtless it is the freshness of mind and impulsiveness, which he retains in original purity, that so captivate the popular heart. The strange compound which he presents of diffidence and self-conceit, of superstitious awe and quick intelligence, of sportiveness and pugnacity,—of all, in short, that is ill-regulated and contradictory,—is discovered only in the conduct of the child and of the sailor.

I found our men dancing in glee around the spot where the cattle were being landed. The more the bulls raged and strained to break away, the more the crew shouted with delight.

On the wharf was an open space, on which were congregated some cattle which had been landed. When fairly herded on shore, after being released from the dark and noisome hold of the vessel, and from the fastenings by which they were hoisted to the land, they seemed to find so great solace in companionship, that they stood gazing around them with stupid wonderment, as if striving with their dull perceptions, to take in their situation, and mutely inquiring, "What torture next?" The moment of landing was the fearful period for each beast; and each, in turn, resisted as strenuously as horns and hoofs and bellowing could avail.

The operation of landing the cattle was effected in the following manner: First of all, a block and tackle were rigged aloft on the schooner. The end of the tackle was then fastened around the horns of a bull or cow. Another rope was fastened to the horns, and its end passed through an iron ring in the wharf. When the men hauled away on the tackle, the animal was, of course, gradually elevated through the hatchway, and suspended in mid-air. Hanging thus, it looked as if dislocated in every joint, and stretched entirely out of shape. When its hind hoofs were sufficiently high to clear the rail of the schooner, the men on shore hauled away on the

rope which passed through the iron ring, and as soon as the hind hoofs cleared the rail, the tackle was eased away until they touched the ground. But the men who were in charge of the rope on shore then had to be on the alert; for the very moment that the animal felt ground, a complete transformation took place. The meek, piteous beast of the lengthened carcass, became the well-knit, ponderous brute of flaming eye, distended nostril, foaming mouth, and pawing hoof.

With any scope of line, the infuriated animal would have broken away, and taken vengeance upon its tormentors. To avoid the danger of this occurrence, when its hind hoofs touched ground, the tackle was quickly eased away, and the rope passing through the ring was hauled so suddenly that the animal's head was brought into forcible contact with the ring on the ground. In this position, it fell and rose, foamed and bellowed, until, exhausted with rage, its quietness confessed defeat. It was then released, whereupon it abjectly trotted off to join the troop of animals which had gone through the same process, and now, as spectators, stood with fearful curiosity, gazing at the performance in which they had just ceased to be actors.

Our men enjoyed all this vastly, and three

of them, as volunteers, were manning the rope which passed through the ring. At last came the turn of a particularly savage black bull. There was great trouble to make the tackle fast to his horns; but it was at last accomplished, and he slowly rose above the hatchway. He was, in form, a splendid fellow, and as sleek as if he had been groomed. The usual operation was coming to an end; the hind hoofs touched; the tackle was eased away; and the men at the ring brought the animal's head down with so great violence, that his fore-feet gave way under him, and he fell on his chest. But with a bellow of concentrated rage, he sprang to his feet, and gathering his body into a heap, in which every muscle was brought into play, he made one superlative effort, and broke his bonds. In an instant, all was confusion on the wharf. The bull staggered from the excess of force which he had put into his effort. Then, shaking his head, and glaring around, purpose seemed to settle upon him. His head lowered, and he rushed at the nearest man.

But the man was a sailor, or else he would never have been saved. Dropping instantly, he rolled over and over like a bundle, and just as he fell over the edge of the wharf, he grasped it with both hands, and held on. All this occupied but a few seconds. The bull was

disconcerted at the extraordinary manœuvre of an enemy who had put his body out of sight, but left a head looking at him over the level of the wharf. Drawing a deep breath, expressive of mingled amazement and animosity, he paused, then glanced around to discover his other enemies. They had had time to take refuge in all directions, and, with a snort of defiance, the bull made straight for the town of Key West.

The men came out of their places of security, rushed on the wharf, and shouted, "Mad bull! mad bull!" As our eyes followed him dashing up the street which ranged with the wharf, we could see the people scampering in all directions, and taking refuge in the porches and door-ways of houses, or in any shelter that presented itself. We could see the beast occasionally swerve from his course, as he caught sight of some one, and when disappointed, resume his career. He had not more than a mile to go before he reached the woods, and only a portion of that distance lay through the town. Fortunately, no one was injured, and as we hurried towards the woods with guns, we heard the sharp crack of a couple of rifles which forestalled our intention, for we found the poor bull weltering in his blood, and dead.

When we returned to the *Flying Cloud*, I

met Captain Bowers, who had heard of the disturbance, and had come down to the vessel. He made a few inquiries of me, and then said :

“We are to sail to-morrow, Fred. Are you all ready?”

“Quite, sir,” I replied, “I had nothing to do, but what I did on the day when we arrived. Please, sir, do n’t forget to leave my name with the owners, so that if a letter comes for me, it will be sent up the Reef with your mail.”

“Certainly not, Fred; I will attend to that. Have you any thing else to ask? Make sure, now, for we’ll sail to-morrow, for certain.”

“No, sir,” I answered,—“nothing but that.”

“Good-evening, then,” said the captain, as he left me.

“Good-evening, captain,” I replied, as I walked away and fell into a thoughtful mood,—revoiving in my mind, my father’s letter. my home, and the mysterious Reef, to which, by a strange conjunction of circumstances, I was proceeding as the cabin-boy of a wrecker.