

## CHAPTER XVI.

THE FLYING CLOUD WEIGHS ANCHOR—THE  
KING-FISH—WE COME TO ANCHOR AT OUR  
WRECKING STATION—THE WRECKER'S LIFE.



HE next morning I was aroused by the voices of the crew, as they cheerily sang while heaving up the anchor. In a few moments I was on deck and engaged at my duties. The first one always consisted in providing the captain with a cup of coffee. The cook had already given one apiece to the men. This coffee drinking I found to be a regular custom on the Reef. With a good cup of the exhilarating beverage, the men can better perform their duty before breakfast.

Before I could get on deck, the crew had the sails set, and the anchor apeak; and just as I put my head above the companion-way, I saw the jib run up, and the schooner's head fall off, as the quick clicking of the windlass told me

that the anchor was clear of the bottom, and the schooner under way.

The morning gave promise of as clear a day as the preceding one had been. We had a spanking breeze, but it was dead ahead. However, as we had only about ten miles to go before reaching our station, the direction of the wind did not trouble us.

We had hardly sailed five miles, when, in a vessel bearing down for us, the captain recognized the schooner which occupied the station to the northward of ours. She was now on her morning sail along the Reef, to sight the next wrecker to the southward. Lately she had had double duty to perform, on account of our absence. As she had a fair wind, she soon neared us and luffed up, whereupon, we threw her mail aboard of her, and she kept away, and resumed her course down the Reef.

Our black cook, Hannibal, suggested to me, that it would be a good plan to troll for some fish, so I got out my tackle, with which I had provided myself at Key West, procured a chunk of pork at the galley, baited one of my biggest hooks, and let it float out well astern of the schooner. It had not been in the water more than five minutes, when I saw a large fish dart at the bait, and, at the same time, the line slackened, and then jerked violently. I gave a

shout, and hauled away with all my might and main, but I could not go hand over hand more than twice. I was just able to hold the fish.

"You're got 'um," said Hannibal, running quickly aft, and chuckling at my success. "He too much for you alone, massa, let me lend you a hand."

"He will be too much for both of you," said the captain, emerging from the cabin, "for he'll part the line if you try to haul it in while the vessel has so much way on her. "Here (to the man at the helm), luff the schooner up in the wind's eye."

The schooner ran up into the wind, until her sails were all shaking.

"Now," said the captain, as the vessel began to lose her head-way, "haul in as fast as you can, Fred. Hannibal you help him."

Hannibal and I hauled away as directed, and soon got the fish on deck. It was a splendid king-fish, a species of pike quite numerous in the waters of the Reef.

"There, Hannibal," said the captain, "take him forward and make him into a chowder. There'll be enough for the cabin, and all hands forward."

I followed my prize forward, perfectly delighted at my success, as, before that occasion,

I had never caught any thing larger than a river perch. I suppose that if I had then been called upon to estimate the weight of the fish, I would have set it down at several hundred pounds.

In about an hour, we came to our appointed station off the Reef. The sails were soon furled, and the captain took breakfast. The men had had theirs while we were under way.

Here we were, at last, on our destined station, to remain how long, I had not the slightest idea, for the intentions of owners and captains are not communicated to cabin-boys and crews. Shrewd guesses, however, are often made as to matters which are not mentioned. Nice calculations of the probabilities of a vessel's stay are often gathered by the men from mere trifles.

The crew were set to work at scraping and slushing down the masts, and at resetting and tarring down the standing-rigging. The day passed in this and other work needed to put the schooner in perfect condition. Aboard of a ship at sea, the work is ceaseless. On a schooner, like ours, of less than a hundred tons burden, the work, of course, bears no comparison with that aboard of a ship. Besides, it is less in proportion; for as a wrecker lies much at anchor, she is not subjected to the wear and tear incidental to a vessel constantly under way.

Still, there is always something to be done on the smallest vessel.

The experience of the following few days instructed me in the whole business of wrecking, but it was not until I reached a more mature age, that I was enabled to realize the feature to which I once alluded as objectionable in the life of the wrecker. Not being employed at regular wages, he is paid his proportion of salvage. His profession is that of taking a share in a lottery. He may draw a prize, but he is more likely to receive a blank. The case of the whaler, who also goes on shares, is different, for he is sure of something. But the wrecker may serve a long time, and earn absolutely nothing. Meanwhile, where is he? On board of a small vessel with a large crew, and without sufficient work to employ his body or mind. He has high hopes for the future, sustained by some crumbs of comfort from the past.