

CHAPTER XX

THE MEN ARE SENT ASHORE AGAIN—THEY RESUME THE WOODING OF THE SCHOONER—HANNIBAL PROVIDES THEM WITH A TREAT FOR SUPPER.



HE next day, after making our usual cruise, the captain ordered a boat's crew to go ashore to procure more wood. The men sent were the same as those of the preceding day, excepting Brady, who was convinced that his wounds were mortal, and persisted in declaring that his days were numbered.

I did not join the party until they had brought several loads of wood aboard the schooner, when, as my duties were finished, and I found myself at leisure, I received liberty to go wooding with the rest. More than that, the captain gave me a general permission to accompany the men whenever I desired to do so,

only stipulating that I should be certain that my work was finished.

When we returned to the schooner, it was time for supper, and Hannibal hurried the men to eat it, ostensibly that he might get his pots and pans cleaned before dark. There was not much deliberation on the part of the men. The wood was soon unloaded, and the boat hoisted up to the davits. Two or three of the crew seated themselves on the coamings of the hatchway, and a couple on water casks, while one or two stood or walked around. Hannibal brought supper, and the men commenced to eat heartily. The meal was fairly earned by the hard labor of wood-chopping.

"Here's you' comorant, Bill," said Hannibal, bringing his last dish from the caboose. "He's nice, I tell you, sah. I save him for a treat."

Ruggles received the dish, which had a very savory look, but the smell of it was any thing but appetizing, being decidedly fishy. He looked at it rather dubiously, and then asked Hannibal whether he had skinned the bird.

"Yes, sah; ebery bit of skin is off him," replied Hannibal. "He's mighty good bird, sah; plump as patridge."

"Here, Hannibal," said Ruggles, after giving

a sniff at the dish; "I reckon I'll let you eat it: there's hardly enough for all."

"After you's manners, sah," said Hannibal. "I fix him up beautiful, sah. You must take jest small bit, 'cause I cook him 'special for you."

"Cook, I do n't like the smell," said Ruggles. "If all hands 'll try a piece at the same time, I won't object. What say, boys? I've heerd tell they're first-rate without the skin."

The men assenting to the trial, each one was provided with a small piece of the cormorant, and held it between finger and thumb; and it was agreed that, upon counting three, each man should put his piece into his mouth. I happened to glance towards Hannibal, and saw him quaking all over in a fit of chuckles.

"One,—two,—thr-ee," counted Ruggles, and each man smilingly placed his morsel of cormorant in his mouth. Each chewed once or twice, then stopped abruptly, and gazed at the rest with rigid gravity. Human nature could not stand it. Every one's gorge had risen at the revolting dish, and, without one word, the whole party scrambled to their feet, and spat and sputtered over the side of the schooner.

"Yah! yah! yah! yah!" screamed Hannibal, dancing a frantic jubah, in the excess of his

delight. "I spect I put too much pepper in him. Yah! yah! yah!"

The men rinsed out their mouths, then swallowed some water, and gradually joined in the mirth of Hannibal.

"That's my last trial of cormorant," said Ruggles. I think it's rather worse *without* the skin: it tastes like rancid fish-oil. I say, Hannibal, how's Brady, this evening?"

"He's ruther better," replied Hannibal. "I reckon he's giv' up the notion he was gwine to die."

"I say," resumed Ruggles, winking around the group, "let's offer Brady some." "Brady, my boy," he continued, leaning back, and holloing down the hatchway, "here's a treat we've got. Hannibal understands fixing cormorant so it tastes as sweet as sucking-pig."

"As you've only one burrid," said a voice from below, "I couldn't think o' deprivin' ye of it."

"We've plenty to spare," said Ruggles, wink-around again at the group of men, who were nearly suffocated with laughter. "I've heerd tell it's good for the blood, when a man's been stung by a scorpion."

"Arrah, go 'lang wid ye!" replied the voice, "I'll not tech a bit of it! I prefare, like the

gintry, to take me mate and me fush on two siparate plates."

"He's getting well," observed Ruggles. "When a doctor prescribes for an Irishman, he needn't never examine any thing but his tongue."