

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FLYING CLOUD RIDES OUT A GALE—A DIS-
ASTER ON THE REEF—THE FLYING CLOUD
ARRIVES THE DAY AFTER THE FAIR.



HE month of November passed away amid scenes similar to those last described, alternated by the morning duty of carefully inspecting the whole Reef for several miles in each direction from our station. Towards the latter part of November, there was one terrific storm, whose fury in the open sea we could realize by the stress that it put on our ground-tackle, even as we lay protected, in a measure, behind the huge breakwater formed by the Reef. Experiencing the effects of the wind, without a heavy sea, we managed to hold on by letting go our sheet-anchor in addition to our other bower.

The main violence of the storm expended itself at night, and was disastrous along the whole coast. When day broke, the ocean was

a mass of foam driven by the still raging tempest. We took a double-reef in all the sails, got under way to examine the Reef, and at last sighted the sloop towards the southward, by overhauling her slightly, for she was under sail, and standing away from us. This fact apprised us that she had sighted something to the southward, and we kept on our course, knowing that we could not reach the scene of disaster as soon as the wrecker on the station below, but hoping that we would get there in time to be employed by those who took the wreck in charge, and needed assistance from extra crews.

We were disappointed again; for when we reached the place, quite a little fleet of wreckers was already assembled, and no assistance was needed, in addition to what could be rendered by the first-comer. The vessel which had struck upon the Reef was a small brig that had been so fortunate as not to strike until the storm had been blowing from the northward and eastward for several hours. In consequence, the water had by that time been driven towards shore in so vast a quantity, that it was quite high on the Reef. In addition, the brig struck at a place where there was ordinarily rather more than the average depth on the Reef,—in fact quite a little channel. The vessel did not draw many feet of water, so that every thing

had conspired in her favor. She struck beam on, and, for a few seconds, all hands thought that they were lost. In the darkness, nothing could be ascertained, except that she was on shore, and the heavy shocks of the vessel, as she pounded on the Reef, seemed as if they would break her asunder. All the time she was nearing safety. After thumping violently for half a dozen times, she was found to be in deep and comparatively smooth water. The lead was hove, six fathoms were found, and she cast anchor. The brig had pounded across the narrow Reef, and lay in the Reef-Channel. Had the water not blown in from the ocean; had the brig not happened to run aground in a place where there is a shallow channel; or even, with both these favoring circumstances, had she been a large ship, instead of a small brig, she would have gone to pieces.

Instead of that, she was saved, although leaking badly; and, when morning dawned, the first wrecker that discovered her was engaged, and relieved her crew, who had been all night at the pumps, and were nearly exhausted. When we arrived, the pumps were still manned, but the water did not gain on them. The captain of the wrecker having the brig in charge had just been trying to stop a leak in her bow, and having been partially suc-

cessful, he got her under way for Key West, with one crew at the pumps, and the other navigating the vessel.

Thus ended the first wrecking scene that I witnessed. Subsequently, the *Flying Cloud* was more fortunate.