

## CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TWO QUARTER-BOATS ARE SENT TO THE MAIN-LAND TO PROCURE WATER AT THE PUNCH BOWL—A STORM—A SHIP IN SIGHT—CAPTAIN BOWERS SAILS TO GIVE HIS ADVICE AND RENDER ASSISTANCE—THE SHIP GOES ASHORE ON THE REEF.



DECEMBER ended, January came and passed away, and February was verging to its close. I had again heard from home and written in reply, and George and I continued our studies and sports, and we were the best friends and happiest boys.

On the 20th of February, the schooner being short of water, the captain ordered both quarter-boats to go to the main-land and procure a supply. We took all the water-casks, and set off from the vessel, as soon as she came to anchor after her morning cruise. No one but the captain and Hannibal remained on board. George steered one boat, and I took the helm

of the other. After rowing about seven miles, we landed on the shore of the main-land, at a place called the Punch-Bowl, not far south of Miami River. This was the place from which we were accustomed to procure water for the schooner's casks and water-tank. It required four boat-loads of casks to fill the tank, and after it was filled, the casks were usually replenished. A full supply of water used to last from three to four weeks, as, excepting for the purpose of drinking, in which the men were not restricted, a very small amount of fresh water was allowed.

The Punch-Bowl is worthy of description. On the straight and wooded shore of the main-land is a little bluff which has been described as the remains of an ancient line of Keys which were once an ancient line of Reef. In the face of this bluff, which is separated from the water by a beach not exceeding two yards in width, is an excavation like a little cave, and in this excavation is a deep hole, called the Punch Bowl. It is filled with pure water that filters through the ground from the Everglades, which lie a few miles to the westward. It is an exhaustless spring, so close to the ocean that a high tide washes into its basin.

We ran the bows of the boats close to the Punch-Bowl, and, taking the bungs out of the

casks, stationed two men with buckets at the spring. Each man dipped his bucket and passed it along a file of men reaching to his boat. In this way, the buckets constantly going to and fro, in the course of an hour the casks were filled.

We started off immediately with our deeply-laden boats, and put up sail to aid our progress, as the casks so obstructed the thwarts that the men could not pull all the oars. The boats had for some time labored along through the water, when the breeze began to freshen and they became almost as unmanageable as logs. I saw Ruggles and Linden glance several times at the sky, and at last Ruggles said:

“It looks kind of squally.”

“Worse than squally,” replied Linden, “we’re going to have heavy weather.”

“Think so?” said Ruggles.

“I do,” rejoined Linden. “Did you ever see the clouds bank up that way without meaning something? Look out for a storm, I say. I wish we were aboard. If it comes on afore we make the schooner, we’ll have to heave the casks overboard, if we don’t intend to lose casks, boats, and ourselves too.”

The day began to darken, and the wind to come in blasts. There is certainly language in a storm. Even before the wind commences to

blow heavily, it has an angry tone, and the gentlest sounds seem to articulate in fierce whispers. Perhaps it is because the seafaring man knows many signs which mutually throw light upon each other, that each has a significance, which, singly, it would not possess.

The boats began to plunge and to roll almost gunwale under, until I began to fear that they would fill; but we were now only about a mile distant from the schooner, so I hoped that we should be able to accomplish the remaining distance in safety. I observed the captain walking rapidly up and down the quarter-deck, by which action, as I knew him so well, I perceived that he was uneasy.

At the distance of a few yards from our boat, the other boat sailed and rowed along in no better plight. Brady, after putting some seizings around a couple of casks, hallooed to us:

"I'm thinkin' ach one of uz will soon be tendin' a buoy widout any pay."

"We'll weather it, Brady, never fear!" shouted Ruggles; "but, boys, we'll have to douse our sail now; the wind's hauling so much that we're not standing within ten points of the schooner."

Both boats took in sail, and, in each, the men managed to get out an additional oar. Although the oars were not equivalent to the sails,

yet, as the boats were now able to head directly for the schooner, their actual progress was about the same, although their speed through the water was not so great. They wallowed through the sea as if they had no buoyancy, and every moment a wave broke over the gunwales, so that in each boat a man had to bail constantly. What a relief it was when we reached the schooner! There was no need of orders. The men leaped aboard, lowered tackles, and quickly hoisted the casks on board. The falls were then hooked to the boats, and in a few seconds they were triced up to the davits. While the men were engaged in these operations, the captain, George, Hannibal, and I, all lent a hand, by rolling the casks on the skids placed along the schooner's rail; so that by the time the men had hoisted the boats to the davits, the deck was all clear. The captain, who had been violently exerting himself, at last stood up. He at once glanced seaward. Following the direction of his eyes, I saw a large ship, which, when approaching the schooner, we had observed about a mile outside of the Reef.

"Heave up the anchor!" shouted the captain, "double reef the main-sail; unlace the bonnet of the jib! Here you, Ruggles, take the helm!"

Although Ruggles lived forward, he was a sort of sub-officer, and, in any emergency, he was selected for the post of responsibility. In the course of five minutes, the anchor was tripped, the *Flying Cloud's* head paid off, and we were under way, with the falls of the windlass still clicking, as the men hove away to get the anchor to the cathead. For a few seconds, the captain shook the schooner up in the wind, to clear the anchor-flukes when they were awash under our bow; and then, as the men put a stopper on the anchor, he kept her off again. Before they could accomplish that, the schooner was heeled over and rushing through the water. I had never been under way in the *Flying Cloud*, in a gale, when she was close-hauled. When we sailed for the wreck south of Indian Key, we had had a fair breeze. Now the vessel had a chance of showing her sailing qualities, and well did she maintain her reputation on the Reef. The water swashed over her deck, and the gale was so heavy that her lee scuppers were always beneath the surface; yet while she thrilled in every timber, she tore through the water, gracefully riding the seas, laying her course close in the wind's eye, and holding it in one unswerving line.

There had been so much to attend to on the *Flying Cloud*, that we had all paid compara-

tively little attention to the ship; but now that every thing was snug on our decks, and the vessel fairly under way, all hands stood at their stations, and speculated upon the fate of the ship on that lee shore.

George and I were standing near the captain, who had remained near the wheel, and had not spoken, except to give his orders to the crew, when he said half-musingly, and half as if addressing us,

“There’s scarcely a chance for her.”

“Is n’t there?” said George, glad to avail himself of an opportunity to gratify his curiosity. “What are you going to do, father?”

“I’m going to try to get out to her by one of the channels across the Reef,” said the captain, “but nothing can save her unless the wind shifts. It’ll be close sailing for the schooner to get through the channel, with a head wind, but I’ll try it. If we go on the Reef, some one will have to wreck us. Ready, about!” added the captain, in a stentorian voice.

“Ready!” shouted the men at the jib-sheet.

“Helm’s a-lee!” sang out the captain. Ruggles put the helm hard a-lee, and the schooner turned around like a top, with the blocks rattling, and the sails flapping as if they would split.

"Draw away!" added the captain, almost in the same breath, so rapidly did the schooner go about.

Over we heeled on the other tack, and went whizzing through the water, with the spray flying all over the schooner.

Once more we went about, and steered a little to windward of the entrance to the channel across the Reef, so as to be certain of fetching it, in case the wind should veer a little; but without that, we were almost certain to do it, for the wind blew so hard that Ruggles was constantly obliged to ease the schooner by running her up slightly into the wind, by which process, with the tremendous way that she had, we were always shooting up to windward.

"Keep her off," said the captain, as we neared the channel, and the vessel, being now brought with the wind full on her sails, careened so much that I thought she would either capsize or carry away her main-mast.

"Steady, at that!" said the captain, to Ruggles. "Here, one of you men, lend him a hand. It's pretty hard steering now, boys," said the captain, addressing us.

"Linden and Deal!" sang out the captain again, "stand by the peak-halliards!"

The schooner entered the channel, and we



could see, by the roll of the waves, that the water was very shoal.

"Now, men!" shouted the captain, looking astern, to get a range that he knew on shore, "stand by; a moment's time may lose the schooner!"

Every man was at his post, and we flashed through the channel, while, combing up astern of us, came a wave that proved the shallowness of the water through which we were passing.

"Ready, about!" roared the captain, as we almost struck the edge of the channel; and about the schooner went on her heel. In a few seconds more we were in the Gulf. The captain drew a long breath, as if infinitely relieved, and said to us:

"I would n't want to try that again for any thing you could offer me."

While we had been passing through the narrow channel, our attention had been once more distracted from the ship, but now that it was again plain sailing, every gaze was riveted upon her. She was a large ship and evidently a good sailer, but she was tasked to her utmost. She had not apparently gained much to windward since we first sighted her. She was sailing under close canvas, with double-reefed topsails. The captain kept his glass constantly

directed towards her, but we could see her distinctly with the naked eye.

All at once her topsails split, part of them blew out of the bolt-ropes, the ship's head paid off towards the Reef, and her crew let the jib go by the run.

"Lower away the peak!" shouted the captain to Linden, "lower,—lower away! Mind your helm," said he to Ruggles, "and run the schooner up into the wind, if I sing out! We'll catch that squall presently. That ship's as good as lost," said he, addressing us boys, as he saw the sailors climbing aloft and trying to bend a new storm-sail, while the ship swept rapidly to leeward. "There's no time to bend a sail, before she'll be on the Reef. They see it now, for the captain's trying to get up the jib and a piece of the spanker; there they go, torn to ribbons! It's all up! Ease the schooner," said he quickly to Ruggles, "here comes a snorter."

The blast struck us, and made every thing hum; but Ruggles had put the helm hard a-lee, and that, with our lowered peak, saved us from destruction.

The ship came drifting down towards us. We went about again, and as we came up with her, we backed our jib and laid the schooner

to, so that she drifted to leeward side by side with the ship.

"Where am I?" shouted the captain of the ship through his speaking trumpet.

"Abreast of Cape Florida," Captain Bowers replied through his trumpet.

"What's best to be done?" said the captain of the ship.

"Let go both anchors," replied Captain Bowers, "and give them all the scope of chain you've got. You're almost on the Reef."

We heard the trumpet on the ship speak in a lower tone, and then one anchor after the other was let go, and the cables ran rapidly out of the hawse-holes; but it was some time before the men could manage to give them a turn around the windlass, and then one of them parted, and the ship commenced dragging slowly to leeward.

Meanwhile, we had been lying to and slowly drifting towards the Reef, but, seeing the ship dragging, Captain Bowers ordered the men to ease away the jib and lower the main-sail. The *Flying Cloud* went off before the wind, under her jib and in a few minutes darted through the channel across the Reef. When she came into the Reef-channel, we hoisted a piece of the main-sail by the throat-halliards, and ran along the inside edge of the Reef, until

we were opposite to the place where the great ship was slowly drifting down upon the outside of it, just where there was one of those spots of sand found at rare intervals on its crest.

In a moment, our sails were let go by the run, and we came to anchor. Without any delay, the men furled the jib and the main-sail, and, as the last gaskets were being made fast, we saw the ship strike.