

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SALVAGE SETTLED BY THE ADMIRALTY COURT IN KEY WEST—THE FLYING CLOUD SAILS FROM KEY WEST—SHE COMES TO ANCHOR OFF INDIAN KEY—THE CAPTAIN, GEORGE, AND FRED, GO ASHORE AND SPEND THE EVENING WITH THE FAMILY OF DOCTOR CLUZEL.



T will not interest you to know the particulars of our stay in Key West, so I shall not dwell upon them. At first, our time was taken up in unloading the schooner, and in storing the goods in the warehouses in which the first cargoes had been placed. Then came the decision of the Court in regard to the amount of salvage due, and until that matter was decided, the attendance of Captain Bowers was necessary. The underwriters were in Court to attend to the interests of the Insurance Companies, for the ship had been partially insured. The captain, officers, and crew of the ship, were also

detained for some time to give their testimony. Finally, the cargo was sold, the amount of salvage was awarded, and the whole business closed. Each of the men was paid his share of the money received for salvage, and upon Captain Bowers' representation to our owners that I had performed duty in steering the boats, and in doing whatever else had lain in my power towards saving the cargo, they were so generous as to make me a present of a hundred dollars. This sum I asked that they would allow to remain on deposit with them, so that I might draw upon it in amounts that my necessities might demand. The request was granted, and I found myself the happy possessor of a bank-account made up of a sum won by my own exertions. This money, added to what remained undrawn of the monthly stipend allowed by my father, amounted to nearly one hundred and fifty dollars.

As soon as every thing was settled, and just before our departure from Key West, I wrote a long letter to my father, in which I described the events that have been narrated in the last few chapters. I mentioned the money which I had earned, and told him that he need no longer furnish me with an allowance. Captain Bowers, observing me about to seal my letter, said that he would like to add a postscript. I handed my letter to him, and he scribbled a line or

two. In the next letter that I received from my father, he said: "I am rejoiced to learn from the postscript which the captain added to your last letter, that he thinks well of you." It was not until many years afterwards, that, among my father's papers, I chanced to see the postscript. The captain had written, "Have no fears for your boy. You will be satisfied with him."

While I was in Key West, feeling that I was now quite rich, I purchased an irresistible basket, made of milk-white shells. The framework was constructed of delicate silver wire. The shells were threaded on the body of the basket, so as to form imitations of roses and other flowers; while, on the handle, the most minute of minute shells were used to represent delicate clustering tendrils. Some of these baskets, which are made in the Bahamas, are formed of shells of a uniform color. Others are made of shells of colors so intermingled as to present a most variegated appearance. The handsomest baskets that I ever saw, were those which were either roseate or white; and, of these, the white are the handsomer, owing to the extreme delicacy and pearly lustre of the shells.

After making a few repairs, and taking in a supply of provisions and water, we set sail from

Key West, early on the morning of the 26th of March. Late in the afternoon, we let go our anchor off Indian Key; the same Key near which we had anchored on my first voyage up the Reef, and just north of which we for some time afterwards occupied a wrecking station.

On the former occasion, when we anchored off Indian Key, the captain, it will be recollected, went ashore, but I did not accompany him, and had no opportunity of seeing the place, except what I could distinguish from the deck of the *Flying Cloud*. This time, as soon as every thing was made snug, the captain ordered the men to lower one of the boats, and took George and me ashore with him. We learned with pleasure that we were going to spend the evening with a family named Cluzel, with whom the captain and George were acquainted. The family was composed of Dr. Cluzel, his wife, and three children, two of whom were young girls, and the other was a boy younger than George.

The doctor was an extremely well-educated man, being, in addition to his general attainments, a naturalist of no small learning and repute. His residence on the Florida Keys afforded him an opportunity of pursuing his favorite study, and he indulged in it with all

the ardor which actuates those who have once contracted a love for that science. He had a fine collection of works on Natural History and kindred topics, as well as a very fair library of general reading. In fact, his house on Indian Key was an intellectual oasis. To a man fond of any other branch of study, the isolation of such a residence would have been intolerable; but with his family, his books, his papers, and the world of knowledge that the Reef laid at his feet, the doctor craved no addition to his society, excepting the transient visit of a friend. As for his wife and children, they did not feel the loneliness of their situation; for the latter had never known any thing else, and the world of the former, as may be truly said in praise of most women, was in the affections.

We rowed, I might almost say, up to the doctor's very door. His house was built on the shore of the Key; so near that one end was supported by piles, which formed a secure foundation for the structure, and inclosed a sort of flooded cellar, into which the tide washed through the interstices. This wharf-like cellar was used by the family as a bath-room. Below the contiguous wharf was a large turtle-crawl, from which the family could always draw a supply of turtle, fresh from this little fenced-in bit of ocean.

On landing, the captain and George walked with me a short distance beyond the beach, for the purpose of allowing me to get some idea of the character of the settlement; but fearful lest the doctor's family might happen to perceive us from the windows of the house, and suppose, from our straying past, that we were not eager to see them, we returned to the house and knocked at the door. I had, however, seen enough of the settlement to ascertain that it was very small, that the houses were of an humble character, and chiefly tenanted by fishermen and their families.

On being admitted, we were very kindly received by the doctor and his wife, who devoted themselves to the entertainment of the captain, while George and I were committed to the care of the two young ladies and their brother. It was soon dusk, and tea was served. After tea, Captain Bowers and the doctor and Mrs. Cluzel continued to converse, and we younger folks played checkers and backgammon. Wearying of these, and being at the same time attracted by some of the words which reached us from the other group, we left our games, and collected around the elder people. The doctor was discoursing about some of the many strange things which he had observed during his residence on the Reef; and,

in the course of the evening, he disclosed a store of knowledge so varied and abundant, that he had no more attentive and charmed listeners than the younger members of the party. It was eleven o'clock before we bade the family good-night, and, accompanied by the doctor, walked down to the beach, and hailed the schooner to send the boat ashore.