

THE
KNOCKABOUT CLUB IN THE EVERGLADES.

CHAPTER I.

ON BOARD THE "WANDERING WIND."

THE MATE ON DECK.



THE "Wandering Wind" was a handsome schooner, of about two hundred tons; and the second trip she ever made was perhaps the most famous of all, before and after, because it was on this voyage she carried the party whose adventures are to be herewith described. The "party" proper consisted of two individuals. Their fares were paid to Mosquito Inlet, coast of Florida; and their luggage and merchandise — a ton's weight or more — were stowed away in the hold. It was a cold December day on which they left Boston and sailed out of its harbor. That night their vessel managed to double Cape Cod; but the greater part of the following week was passed in various harbors on the south coast of the cape, either wind-bound or rolling at the mercy of the heavy seas.

Even after ten days had passed, they were no farther along than the harbor of Newport; but after that they struck the right wind on the quarter, and put to sea in good earnest. They made such good time

that the "Wandering Wind" was driven in shore near Frying-Pan Shoals by a gale that came along out of season, and narrowly escaped the fate of a government cruiser which foundered almost before their very eyes. The mate said that he thought they "might as well visit every harbor on the Atlantic coast, and done with it;" and if they ever got to Florida, they might thank their lucky stars. But they did reach their destination three weeks from the day they last sighted the Massachusetts coast, though after more misery and sea-sickness than they had ever imagined one life could hold.

The mate of the "Wandering Wind" was the only man on board not gloomy and morose; and he, to cheer them in their "sea-sickest days," as he expressed it, would spin yarns that would tax their credulity and excite their amazement. He had travelled sailor-fashion all over the world; but the place of all places to him seemed to be San Francisco.

"You were n't never there, were ye? Well, I tell you it's a big city. Cost me fifty dollars a day when I went there fust. Cheap place to live in? Of course it is, — cheapest in the world. You can get a square meal for ten cents, all you want to eat, — taters, biled dinner, corned beef; but I had money them days, and went in for a good time.

"And them Chinyemen! They're snug, them Chinyemen; don't spend a dollar a week. They're great on Mexican dollars; bag up all they can get, and send 'em home to Chiny.

"I saw an old Chinyman once, in Singapore, goin' along the streets with a big bag of 'em on his shoulders. He was then in front of the 'Caledonia,' a kind of hotel, in which was about one hundred and fifty English men-o'-war's men; an' they was just a-carryin' on, — they was, you know; an' one on 'em went out, and took his knife and slashed it across the stern of that bag of dollars, and then all them sailors went for 'em. You ought to have seen 'em scrabble! And there was the old Chinyman down on all-fours, and goin' this way



THE "WANDERING WIND" BOUND OUT.

and that, and spittin' and swearin', and they a-passin' him from one to t' other! I'll bet he did n't save five dollars out of the whole lot.

"Then he went and got a lot more Chinymen, and they all come up with clubs and knives, and tackled them sailors. But, bless you! it wa'n't no use at all.

"Them man-o'-war's men would chase 'em, and git 'em by their pig-tails, and cut 'em off chock-a-block. And you ought to see the way them Chinymen run! You see, they wear these wooden shoes, and there ain't nothin' to keep 'em on but a peg that sticks right up between their toes; and them fellers would just travel, and them shoes would fly way up over their heads, and they would n't haul up a bit, but just kept right on till they outsailed the Jacks.

"After that they had a regular riot, the man-o'-war's men and the Chiny fellers and a lot of Rooshun sailors; and they was a-draggin' Chinymen out of the canal for three days afterwards. Oh, they was a-carryin' on awfully!

"But I did n't tell you about my v'yage in the 'Orient.' Oh, that was a trip worth taking! We sailors shipped at ten o'clock one night, and at 'leven a side-wheeler hooked on to us, and did n't let go till it had towed us outside Sandy Hook. Then we set sail for Africa; had a good v'yage; got there all right. But we was on a bad business; for it wa'n't nothin' more nor less than nigger-stealin',—for that was before the war, when the South took all the black men we could smuggle in.

"There was two English men-o'-war steamers off the mouth of the Congo; but we give them the slip in the night, and passed up the river right between 'em.

"It was all right so far; and we 'd got our cargo landed and all our water aboard and about twenty niggers, when we heard there was a couple of barges comin' up the river; for they used to reconnoitre every few weeks. I tell you we just hustled them niggers ashore. It did n't make no difference to them whether they had irons on or not; they

could swim just as well; and so we chucked 'em overboard, and they paddled ashore just like dogs. Of course the barges had hove in sight by that time, and they see some of the niggers runnin' for the woods.

"Well, they put a crew aboard, and sent down the river for the steamer, and that steamer come up and hitched on to us and towed us out of the river and down the coast for two days and nights, and all that time the cap'n of the steamer was closeted with the cap'n of our vessel and tryin' to get him to give up the ship's papers.

"Finally, our cap'n come up, and told us that he had been obliged to give up the papers, and said he thought the best thing we could do was to haul down the flag and give ourselves up, and perhaps we could have the long-boat, and so might reach a settlement and get clear.

"As long as the American flag was flyin' over us the English cap'n did n't dare to overhaul us; but if he could get one of our men to haul it down, then he would take possession and have the ship as a prize.

"Our mate he was an old man, but full of pluck; and when the cap'n had gone below, he said to us: 'Well, men, how is it? Are we goin' to haul down the flag?'

"And we vowed we would n't; for we knew just how the Britisher would serve us. Then the old mate went below, and when he come up he had two revolvers in his belt.

"'Now,' said he, 'the first man that gits into them ratlines to haul down that flag gits a bullet in his head!'

"Next day, the English officer come aboard, and asked us if we'd haul down the flag. The first mate said, 'No!'

"'Don't you think,' said Johnny Bull, 'that I can send a man up there and haul it down?'

"'Yes, you can; but you won't,' said the mate. 'When you do that you overstep your authority; the commodore is the only man can do that, and he does it at his own risk.' And says he, 'The first man that tries that on will die, as sure as I've got twelve charges in these revolvers!'

"Johnny Bull glared at him, and then he said, 'I'll string you up to the yard-arm as soon as I do get possession!'

"All right! when you do, you can,' said the mate. Well, they kept us there seven months, right between two men-o'-war, until our man-o'-war come down; then we were delivered up to her.

"We were struck by lightnin', I remember, while we was layin' there. The bolt come down and rattled round our chain-box till the chains were twisted into all the kinds of kinks and half-hitches you ever see. I saw it travel for'ard, a great ball of fire as big as my head, and then come back and rattle round in that chain-box again, and carry on like a train of cars on a dock. Then all at once it stopped, and I s'pose it went out the hawse-hole into the water.

"And there were them Jack-o-lanterns, will-o'-the-wisps, or Saint Elmo's fires, or whatever-you-call-'em; we used to have them almost every night. I've seen 'em at the end of a yard-arm, and have crawled out to within six feet of 'em, when they'd disappear; I could n't ever reach one.

"When the commodore of our man-o'-war was overhaulin' us, the English cap'n he would come aboard, and watch all proceedin's; and his sailors would steal all they could git their hands on. Our mate he saw all there was goin' on, but he didn't say nothin' till the cap'n had stepped aboard his gig; then the mate told the commodore he did n't want them Englishmen carryin' off all our stores. The commodore says to the cap'n, says he, 'The mate says your men are carryin' off his stores.' Well, they had the stern of the gig stowed full of canned meats and such. The English cap'n he turned red and glared at the mate, but didn't say nothin'; but next mornin' he strung them sailors up and whipped 'em so two of 'em died. We could hear every blow of the cat. That was at eight o'clock, and at 'leven two of 'em was carried ashore and buried.

"Well, young men, they sent us home, put a prize crew aboard, and sailed for New York. When they got there, they chucked us into

jail and ironed us with them same nigger manacles; and when we went from the jail to the court-room, every nigger in New York was a-follerin' us, hootin' and yellin'.

"When I got into court I felt kind of blue, and thinks I, this 'ere is carryin' on awful; and when I see them big-wigs a-writin' and scribblin' 'round, I thought 't was all up with us.

"But a feller behind touched me on the arm and says, says he, 'Don't git down in the mouth, hearty; it's goin' to be all right with you fellers;' and sure enough, so 't was, after a few days. They marched us back to jail; and next day old Gomez, a Portuguese, who owned most of the 'Orient,' come down and told the keeper to let us have anything we wanted from outside, — wine, cigars, or anything. And I tell you, we kept our skins full. In a few days we were all out on bail. The old keeper, he says, when he saw us goin', 'I'm mighty sorry you're goin', boys, mighty sorry!'

"We stayed there on bail a month, a-gettin' our ten dollars a day, — to keep us there, you know; for they was afraid we'd go off, and they'd lose our bail money. But there wa'n't no fear of that; for all we had to do was to go down from the hotel to the court-house at ten o'clock, report, make a round turn up through the park and back again to the hotel.

"Oh, they was gay times, and we all carried on awfully!

"After they had cleared us from the charge of nigger-stealin' I shipped aboard a government vessel that supplied the light-houses along the coast. We had a good cap'n, Cap'n Colman, but he was the fussiest old chap you ever see. Whenever he spied a sail anywhere he always gave chase, even if 't was goin' in another direction from what we was.

"One day, after chasin' a brig for nigh half a day, he finally come up with her, and propounded his long string of questions that he always asked. Then, as usual, he leaned over the rail, and told 'em

That his vessel was the 'Cynthia;' been to Galveston, supplyin' light-houses along the coast, and now goin' back to New Bedford. Then he told 'em his name was Colman, — C-o-l-m-a-n, Colman. The other cap'n listened patiently, and then bellowed back, 'What do I care for all that, you old fool!' Cap'n Colman was silent a minute; then he turned to the man at the wheel and said, 'Keep her off, Timothy, keep her off; he's a brute!'"

Thus did the mate spin out his yarns, day after day; but with these as a sample of his sailor lingo, we will now let him drop out of sight.



FLORIDA COAST.

As soon as land was announced all thought of other things faded out of mind. It was on the first day of January that they saw the Florida coast,—a long, low, hazy line to westward. At night they

could see the trees on shore, and just at sunset caught a glimpse of two vessels at anchor inside the inlet, or break in the beach, through which they must sail to the great lagoons beyond.

The captain of the "Wandering Wind" dropped anchor till morning, as the breeze had died away and the inlet was too narrow to be entered at night.