CAPTAIN DARREL'S WARD.

[CONTINUED.]

Powerless, as I regarded any effort I could make for safety against the storm, I waited the moment when the ship should be engulfed, with little Jessie and myself. But as if the demon of wrath had been satisated, she now appeared to make better weather of it than she had done for hours before. Hope again revived, and I hastened to explain our position to the orphaned girl.

I knew not how to begin, rough seaman that I was, to break the sad intelligence to her. But I found it unnecessary to speak; she had already guessed the truth, in part, and a single look in my face was sufficient for her quick comprehension to take in the rest.

After the first burst of grief, which I suffered her to indulge unchecked, she became calm, wonderfully so, and was prepared to look the matter squarely in the face with a coolness and resolution far beyond her year.

"Do you think we shall be drowned, Mr. Darrell!" she asked.

"No," I answered. "At least I have strong hopes that we may be saved. I think the worst of the gale is over, and if we only don't happen to ship an unfortunate sea like that which—"

"My dear father! He was all that I had!" she moaned, and once more her miraculous fortitude gave way, and she broke down again.

The gale abated at midnight, and though the ship labored terribly in the tumbling swell, for want of canvas to steady her we shipped no more heavy seas. I staid near my young charge all through the night, for, of course, neither of us could sleep. I promised her that I would ever be as a father to her, and that, come what would, she should share my fortunes, and be to me as a sacred legacy.

Of course no such idea as marriage with her had anything to do with what I said or felt at that time. I was twenty-five years old, and Jessie a child. Besides, I was under promise of marriage to a young lady of suitable age. She jilted me for another during my absence—but that has nothing to do with my story.

With the morning light came the necessity for effort and a sense of responsibility, new and strange to me. I sounded the well, and found only too feet of water in the ship, this having worked down from above. I did not attempt alone to pump her out but rejoiced in the assurance that I still had a tight vessel under me; for had she sunk I should have had no dependence beyond such a raft as I could have extemporized, every boat having been swept away.

I loosed and let fall the foresail, and succeeded in setting it, with the child's assistance and the power of the windlass. The spanker I could easily manage with the brads; and these, with the lower staysails, were all the canvas I intended to make use off. I could do nothing with the loftier sails without more help.

The sun had come out brightly after the storm, and the aspect of the skies indicated a continuance of fine weather. I took observations and shaped my course toward the Harvey Islands, hoping to make Mangea or Raratonga. I had a good general knowledge of navigation, though I had little practice, and was unused to anything like responsible control of that department.

Of course, I was obliged to be at the helm the most of the time. But I soon taught Jessie, so that she could steer well enough in fair weather, which gave me time to attend to many other matters. But as we could not steer every day and all night, the ship was necessarily left to her own guidance some part of the time.

I soon discovered that my knowledge of navigation, though it might tell me where I was, would not enable me to go where I wished. The winds and currents headed me on, so that we were making a drift to the westward; and it was impossible to remedy this, unless the ship was manned so as to be well steered and enabled to carry all sail. Spite of all that the child and I could do, she must go nearly where the elements might carry her. We should be more likely to make land some where among the Tongas or Fejees than in the direction I had hoped at first.

There was no fear of our running short of provisions or water, as we had more on board than we could consume for years. The weather continued fine, and we were daily drifting into milder latitudes; but no sail could be seen. A dozen times every day I climbed to the mast-head, in the vain hope of descrying a ship; and as often descended with the hope of seeing one to-morrow. Thus week after week wore way monotonously, while Jessie and I were all the world to each other, and every day served to fasten the tendrils more firmly about my heart, as she leaned in her childish dependence upon me. I thought how miserable I might have been if entirely alone in a similar situation; and in return clung to her, and gave thanks as for a blessing, heaven-sent, to become a part of my whole future life and being. I do not think I could have entertained the thought of ever parting with her.

My observations satisfied me that we had passed beyond the latitude of the Tonga and Fejee groups without having seen them. This knowledge was rather a relief to me; for we should, most likely, have fallen into the power of savage cannibals, who would have shown us no mercy. We could hardly fare worse by drifting on toward the equator, while there was still the possibility of meeting a ship with civilized men on board.

At length, on going aloft, as usual, one beautiful morning, the horizon line along under our lee presented the irregular, broken appearance which I had often seen before, and known so well. Bunches or tufts of cocoanut trees were the first objects that came into view; so that, as we neared them, the slender stems seemed to be rooted in the ocean, and to shoot up from its watery bed.

We were sailing, by the force of a current, directly towards the island and there was no possibility of propelling the ship away from it. But there was a chance that it might be uninhabited. If so we could not land upon it, for we had no boat, and it was out of the question to think of managing a raft in the intricate channels of a coral reef.

But we had been seen, as it appeared, even before we had discovered the land, for within an hour the triangular sails of half a dozen large canoes rose into view, coming rapidly up towards us. To escape with the ship was simply impossible. But it occurred to me that the savages could know nothing of our defenceless condition though the appearance of the ship, under so little canvas in fine weather, must be strange and suspicious to them. They would not attempt any foul play with us, if they believed the vessel to be fully manned and armed. They had come off to drive a barter with the white men, as was their usual custom.

To be continued.

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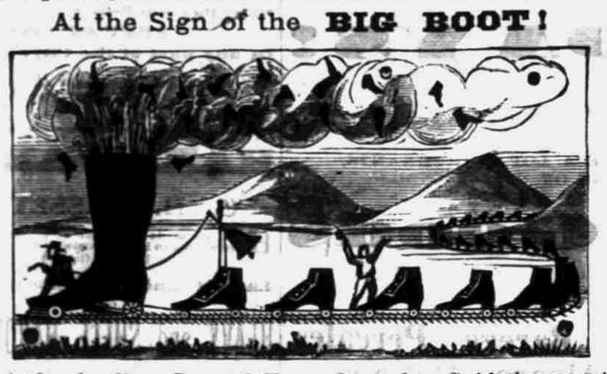

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