

THE SHIPWRECK.



At the time of the beginning of my narrative our trim bark, the "Blue Wing," lay becalmed on the Atlantic, twenty-three degrees north of the equator, and sixty degrees west longitude.

Two weeks before, we had set sail from New York for Hayti, for a cargo of sugar, with a light steady wind from the eastward.

We carried every yard of canvass that could be set, and for a whole week we scarcely had to furl a sail or change a sheet.

We were congratulating ourselves on the prospects of a prosperous and pleasant voyage; but on the morning of the tenth day the wind shifted to the north and west, and by noon had completely fallen. The calm continued four days. It seemed as if all nature had fallen asleep; not a breath of wind ruffled the slumbering sea; not a speck of land was in sight, nothing but a shining sheet of water as far as the strained eyes could see. The sea was as smooth as a mirror, save, when ruffled by sharks and shoals of small fish which kept in near distance, to catch whatever might be thrown overboard.

On the evening of the thirteenth day, the sun sank into the sea like a blazing mass of fire, shedding flames of golden light upon the heavens and the placid sea. Soon, however, the sky in the west changed from golden to a peculiar copper color. The captain appeared anxious, and after a time, ordered all the canvass to be furled with the exception of the spanker, and fore-top-gallant-sail, and everything put in order for a gale.

Next morning, contrary to our expectation, the sea was as smooth as ever; but as the sun arose from the water, it cast a dead leaden color upon the deck and rigging of the ship. The air was burning hot and apparently laden with sulphur, so that it seemed as if we would suffocate. At three o'clock, a strange haze arose from the sea, so dense as to hide the sun. Long even swells, like silent spies, came out of the mists in the distance, and passed out of sight on the other side.

About six o'clock, the sky in the east assumed a threatening aspect, and the blackness began rapidly to spread over the heavens, like a thousand evil spirits hanging a cloud of doom over our devoted ship. Occasionally, from the westward came the rumbling of thunder, sounding in the distance like the discharge of cannon. Every man was at his post, and the gallant "Blue Wing," like some animate being, waited the attack of the storm. She had not long to wait. Swifter than eagles it swept down upon her; its march was no longer with faint mutterings, but with a continuous roar, as the advance of a thousand cavalry. Flames of light-

ning burst from the inky skies, until heaven and water seemed a sea of fire, followed by peals of thunder that seemed to rend the very heavens from their foundation. By the glare of the lightning we could see at a distance, an angry wall of foam, seething, boiling, whirling, and like an evil, unconquerable spirit, sweeping upon us. We felt a sheet of wind-blown spray in our faces, and the next moment the storm was upon us. For a moment, the noble ship trembled as a wounded bird, then a mountainous sea swept her deck, laying her upon her beam ends, and with the report of a cannon, the fore-top-gallant-sail burst from its ropes. It seemed as if all the fiends from the lower pit had assaulted us. The air was full of shrieking, whistling, howling spirits, and streams of lightning like brazen, fiery serpents, seemed almost to be twining round and through the bow and anchor-chains. The seas were rolling in mountains over our ship, sweeping off everything that was not securely fastened. A huge sea had stove in a part of the main hatch, through which torrents of water was pouring into the hold. Our ship lay like a log, upon her beam ends, and fearing she would fill, the captain gave the command to cut away the masts. A few strokes of the sharp axe were all that was needed. There was a sharp report, a breaking and snapping of spars, yards and ropes. Slowly and heavily she began to right, the water pouring in sheets from her decks, and again crowding in mountains upon her as if determined to swallow her up forever. She triumphed however, and in a few minutes she was upon her keel and being driven like a kite before the tempests.

We realized that for the present we were out of imminent danger, for our ship was strong and well calculated to ride out a storm. As long as we kept at sea we were all right; but herein came the trouble. The wind was blowing from the north-east, and if it continued to blow thus all night, by daylight we would be upon one of the West India islands. Everything in the shape of a spar had been carried away, so we could get no sail on her, and therefore our bark was unmanageable, and at the mercy of the winds.

We had only to wait. Two men stood at the wheel and endeavored to prevent her falling into the trough of the seas. How slowly the hours crept. Each minute seemed an hour, and each hour an age. All night the storm raged without intermission or pause. All night the thunders rolled and crashed above us, and the lightning sent its awful bolts of fire through the heavens. Cold and weary and wet we stood upon the deck, straining our eyes for some trace of land, and yet breathing an inward prayer that we might not see any. To strike a rock or island meant shipwreck, and perhaps death, for it would be almost impossible to