

## CHAPTER XXIX.

## MID-ATLANTIC.

THOSE glad days!—each one a new wonder as our tremendous speed drove us into successive and totally different worlds of light and color. The weather prophets were all at fault. Each morning was a surprise. There might have been, for example, a plunging and roaring during the night, that told us there was a bit of sea on; but who could have imagined beforehand the brilliant and magnificent beauty of this westerly gale—the sea rolling along in mountainous waves, the wild masses of spray springing high into the air from the bows of the ship, the rapid rainbows formed by the sunlight striking on those towering clouds, when a rattle as of musketry fire as they fell on the sun-lit and streaming decks? And if there were two obstinate young creatures who would not at all consent to stand in the huddled companion-way—if they would insist on having their morning march up and down the plunging decks, with the salt-water running down their reddened faces—had they not their reward? They were the discoverers of the fact that we were running a race. What were those black objects that leaped clear into the sunlight, and went head-foremost again into the rushing waves? One after the other the merry dolphins sprung into the air and vanished again, and we were grateful to them for this friendly escort. They were sociable fellows, those dolphins—not like the whales, which generally kept away somewhere near the horizon, where they could only be made out by the recurrent jet of white foam.

And then, again, it might have been the very next morning that we found the world of water and sky grown still and dreamlike, pervaded by a mystic calm. The sea, like vast folds of silk, dull, smooth, and lustreless, a waste of tender and delicate grays, broken only by the faintest shadows where the low waves rolled; the sky lightly clouded over and also gray, with lines of yellowish light that grew narrower and narrower as they neared the horizon; and here the only bit of color in the vague and shadowy picture—a sharp, bold, clear line of blue all round the edge of the world, where the pale sea and the pale sky met.

And so we went on day after day, and

the bells tolled the half hours, and the gong sounded for meals, and the monotonous chorus of the sailors—

'So now farewell,  
My bonnie young girl,  
For I'm bound for the Rio Gran'—

told us of the holy-stoning of the decks. There was rather more card-playing than reading; there was a good deal of perfunctory walking; sometimes there was a song or two in the long saloon of an evening. And by this time, too, people had got to know each other, and each other's names and circumstances, in a most surprising manner. The formal 'Good-morning' of the first day or two had developed into 'And how are you this morning, Mr.—?' The smallest civility was sufficient warranty for the opening of an acquaintanceship. Ladies freely took any proffered arm for that inevitable promenade before dinner—all except one, and she the most remarked of all. What was it, then, that seemed to surround her, that seemed to keep her apart? A certain look in her face?—she was not a widow. Her manner?—she was almost anxiously courteous to every one around her. All sorts and conditions of men were eager to bring her chair, or pick up her dropped book, or bid other passengers stand aside to let her pass through the companion-way; and all the elder women—to judge by their looks—seemed to bless her in their hearts for her sweet face, and all the young women appeared to be considerably interested in her various costumes; but somehow she made no familiar acquaintances. They might challenge our bright-faced Bell to make up a side of rope-quoits; and that brave lass, though she seldom landed more than two out of the dozen of quoits on the peg, would set to work with a will, her eyes bluer than ever with the blue light from the sea, the sunlight touching the constant gladness of her face. But when our beautiful, pale, sad guest came near to look on, they only moderated their wild laughter somewhat. They did not challenge her. It was not she whom they expected to pencil down the score on the white paint of the ventilation shaft. But there was not one of these brisk and active commercial gentlemen (who were the most expert performers) who would not instantly stop the game in order to dart away and get