MUNROE KIRK

WAKULLA: A STORY OF ADVENTURE IN FLORIDA

Kirk Munroe

Wakulla: a story of adventure in Florida

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=36093877
Wakulla: a story of adventure in Florida:

Содержание

Kirk Munroe
Wakulla: a story of adventure in Florida

CHAPTER I
PREPARING TO LEAVE THE OLD HOME

Over and over again had Mark and Ruth Elmer read this paragraph, which appeared among the "Norton Items" of the weekly paper published in a neighboring town:

"We are sorry to learn that our esteemed fellow-townsman, Mark Elmer, Esq., owing to delicate health, feels compelled to remove to a warmer climate. Having disposed of his property in this place, Mr. Elmer has purchased a plantation in Florida, upon which he will settle immediately. As his family accompany him to this new home in the Land of Flowers, the many school-friends and young playmates of his interesting children will miss them sadly."

"I tell you what, Ruth," said Mark, after they had read this item for a dozen times or more, "we are somebodies after all, and don't you forget it. We own a plantation, we do, and have

disposed of our PROPERTY in this place."

As Mark looked from the horse-block on which he was sitting at the little weather-beaten house, nestling in the shadow of its glorious trees, which, with its tiny grass-plot in front, was all the property Mr. Elmer had ever owned, he flung up his hat in ecstasy at the idea of their being property owners, and tumbled over backward in trying to catch it as it fell.

"What I like," said Ruth, who stood quietly beside him, "is the part about us being interesting children, and to think that the girls and boys at school will miss us."

"Yes, and won't they open their eyes when we write them letters about the alligators, and the orange groves, and palm-trees, and bread-fruit, and monkeys, and Indians, and pirates? Whoop-e-e-e! what fun we are going to have!"

"Bread-fruit, and monkeys, and pirates, and Indians in Florida! what are you thinking of, Mark Elmer?"

"Well, I guess 'Osceola the Seminole' lived in Florida, and it's tropical, and pirates and monkeys are tropical too, ain't they?"

Just then the tea-bell rang, and the children ran in to take the paper which they had been reading to their father, and to eat their last supper in the little old house that had always been their home.

Mr. Elmer had, for fifteen years, been cashier of the Norton Bank; and though his salary was not large, he had, by practising the little economies of a New England village, supported his family comfortably until this time, and laid by a sum of money for a rainy day. And now the "rainy day" had come. For two years

past the steady confinement to his desk had told sadly upon the faithful bank cashier, and the stooping form, hollow cheeks, and hacking cough could no longer be disregarded. For a long time good old Dr. Wing had said,

"You must move South, Elmer; you can't stand it up here much longer."

Both Mr. Elmer and his wife knew that this was true; but how could they move South? where was the money to come from? and how were they to live if they did? Long and anxious had been the consultations after the children were tucked into their beds, and many were the prayers for guidance they had offered up.

At last a way was opened, "and just in time, too," said the doctor, with a grave shake of his head. Mrs. Elmer's uncle, Christopher Bangs, whom the children called "Uncle Christmas," heard of their trouble, and left his saw-mills and lumber camps to come and see "where the jam was," as he expressed it. When it was all explained to him, his good-natured face, which had been in a wrinkle of perplexity, lit up, and with a resounding slap of his great, hard hand on his knee, he exclaimed,

"Sakes alive! why didn't you send for me, Niece Ellen? why didn't you tell me all this long ago, eh? I've got a place down in Florida, that I bought as a speculation just after the war. I hain't never seen it, and might have forgot it long ago but for the tax bills coming in reg'lar every year. It's down on the St. Mark's River, pretty nigh the Gulf coast, and ef you want to go there and farm it, I'll give you a ten years' lease for the taxes, with a chance

to buy at your own rigger when the ten years is up."

"But won't it cost a great deal to get there, uncle?" asked Mrs. Elmer, whose face had lighted up as this new hope entered her heart.

"Sakes alive! no; cost nothin'! Why, it's actually what you might call providential the way things turns out. You can go down, slick as a log through a chute, in the Nancy Bell, of Bangor, which is fitting out in that port this blessed minit. She's bound to Pensacola in ballast, or with just a few notions of hardware sent out as a venture, for a load of pine lumber to fill out a contract I've taken in New York. She can run into the St. Mark's and drop you jest as well as not. But you'll have to pick up and raft your fixin's down to Bangor in a terrible hurry, for she's going to sail next week, Wednesday, and it's Tuesday now."

So it was settled that they should go, and the following week was one of tremendous excitement to the children, who had never been from home in their lives, and were now to become such famous travellers.

Mark Elmer, Jr., as he wrote his name, was as merry, harum-scarum, mischief-loving a boy as ever lived. He was fifteen years old, the leader of the Norton boys in all their games, and the originator of most of their schemes for mischief. But Mark's mischief was never of a kind to injure anybody, and he was as honest as the day is long, as well as loving and loyal to his parents and sister Ruth.

Although a year younger than Mark, Ruth studied the same

books that he did, and was a better scholar. In spite of this she looked up to him in everything, and regarded him with the greatest admiration. Although quiet and studious, she had crinkly brown hair, and a merry twinkle in her eyes that indicated a ready humor and a thorough appreciation of fun.

It was Monday when Mark and Ruth walked home from the post-office together, reading the paper, for which they had gone every Monday evening since they could remember, and they were to leave home and begin their journey on the following morning.

During the past week Mr. Elmer had resigned his position in the bank, sold the dear little house which had been a home to him and his wife ever since they were married, and in which their children had been born, and with a heavy heart made the preparations for departure.

With the willing aid of kind neighbors Mrs. Elmer had packed what furniture they were to take with them, and it had been sent to Bangor. Mark and Ruth had not left school until Friday, and had been made young lions of all the week by the other children. To all of her girl friends Ruth had promised to write every single thing that happened, and Mark had promised so many alligator teeth, and other trophies of the chase, that, if he kept all his promises, there would be a decided advance in the value of Florida curiosities that winter.

As the little house was stripped of all its furniture, except some few things that had been sold with it, they were all to go to Dr. Wing's to sleep that night, and Mrs. Wing had almost

felt hurt that they would not take tea with her; but both Mr. and Mrs. Elmer wanted to take this last meal in their own home, and persuaded her to let them have their way. The good woman must have sent over most of the supper she had intended them to eat with her, and this, together with the good things sent in by other neighbors, so loaded the table that Mark declared it looked like a regular surprise-party supper.

A surprise-party it proved to be, sure enough, for early in the evening neighbors and friends began to drop in to say good-bye, until the lower rooms of the little house were filled. As the chairs were all gone, they sat on trunks, boxes, and on the kitchen table, or stood up.

Mark and Ruth had their own party, too, right in among the grown people; for most of the boys and girls of the village had come with their parents to say good-bye, and many of them had brought little gifts that they urged the young Elmers to take with them as keepsakes. Of all these none pleased Ruth so much as the album, filled with the pictures of her school-girl friends, that Edna May brought her.

Edna was the adopted daughter of Captain Bill May, who had brought her home from one of his voyages when she was a little baby, and placed her in his wife's arms, saying that she was a bit of flotsam and jetsam that belonged to him by right of salvage. His ship had been in a Southern port when a woman, with this child in her arms, had fallen from a pier into the river. Springing into the water after them, Captain May had succeeded

in saving the child, but the mother was drowned. As nothing could be learned of its history, and as nobody claimed it, Captain May brought the baby home, and she was baptized Edna May. She was now fourteen years old, and Ruth Elmer's most intimate friend, and the first picture in the album was a good photograph of herself, taken in Bangor. The others were only tin-types taken in the neighboring town of Skowhegan; but Ruth thought them all beautiful.

The next morning was gray and chill, for it was late in November. The first snow of the season was falling in a hesitating sort of a way, as though it hardly knew whether to come or not, and it was still quite dark when Mrs. Wing woke Mark and Ruth, and told them to hurry, for the stage would be along directly. They were soon dressed and down-stairs, where they found breakfast smoking on the table. A moment later they were joined by their parents, neither of whom could eat, so full were they of the sorrow of departure. The children were also very quiet, even Mark's high spirits being dampened by thoughts of leaving old friends, and several tears found their way down Ruth's cheeks during the meal.

After breakfast they said good-bye to the Wings, and went over to their own house to pack a few remaining things into hand-bags, and wait for the Skowhegan stage.

At six o'clock sharp, with a "toot, toot, toot," of the driver's horn, it rattled up to the gate, followed by a wagon for the baggage. A few minutes later, with full hearts and tearful eyes,

the Elmers had bidden farewell to the little old house and grand trees they might never see again, and were on their way down the village street, their long journey fairly begun.

CHAPTER II
THE SCHOONER "NANCY BELL."

It lacked a few minutes of nine o'clock when the stage in which the Elmers had left Norton drew up beside the platform of the railway station in Skowhegan. There was only time to purchase tickets and check the baggage, and then Mark and Ruth stepped, for the first time in their lives, on board a train of cars, and were soon enjoying the novel sensation of being whirled along at what seemed to them a tremendous rate of speed. To them the train-boy, who came through the car with books, papers, apples, and oranges, and wore a cap with a gilt band around it, seemed so much superior to ordinary boys, that, had they not been going on such a wonderful journey, they themselves would have envied him his life of constant travel and excitement.

At Waterville they admired the great mills, which they fancied must be among the largest in the world; and when, shortly after noon, they reached Bangor, and saw real ships, looking very like the pictures in their geographies, only many times more interesting, their cup of happiness was full.

Mark and Ruth called all the vessels they saw "ships;" but their father, who had made several sea-voyages as a young man, said that most of them were schooners, and that he would explain the difference to them when they got to sea and he had plenty of

time.

The children were bewildered by the noise of the railroad station and the cries of the drivers and hotel runners—all of whom made violent efforts to attract the attention of the Elmer party. At length they got themselves and their bags safely into one of the big yellow omnibuses, and were driven to a hotel, where they had dinner. Mark and Ruth did not enjoy this dinner much, on account of its many courses and the constant attentions of the waiters.

It had stopped snowing, and after dinner the party set forth in search of the Nancy Bell. By making a few inquiries they soon found her, and were welcomed on board by her young, pleasant-faced captain, whose name was Eli Drew, but whom all his friends called "Captain Li."

The Nancy Bell was a large three-masted schooner, almost new, and as she was the first vessel "Captain Li" had ever commanded, he was very proud of her. He took them at once into his own cabin, which was roomy and comfortable, and from which opened four state-rooms—two on each side. Of these the captain and his mate, John Somers, occupied those on the starboard, or right-hand side, and those on the other, or port side, had been fitted up, by the thoughtful kindness of Uncle Christopher, for the Elmers—one for Mrs. Elmer and Ruth, and the other for Mark and his father.

"Ain't they perfectly lovely?" exclaimed Ruth. "Did you ever see such cunning little beds? They wouldn't be much too big for

Edna May's largest doll."

"You mustn't call them 'beds,' Ruth; the right name is berths," said Mark, with the air of a boy to whom sea terms were familiar.

"I don't care," answered his sister; "they are beds for all that, and have got pillows and sheets and counterpanes, just like the beds at home."

Mr. Elmer found that his furniture, and the various packages of tools intended for their Southern home, were all safe on board the schooner and stowed down in the hold, and he soon had the trunks from the station and the bags from the hotel brought down in a wagon.

The captain said they had better spend the night on board, as he wanted to be off by daylight, and they might as well get to feeling at home before they started. They thought so too; and so, after a walk through the city, where, among other curious sights, they saw a post-office built on a bridge, they returned to the Nancy Bell for supper.

Poor Mr. Elmer, exhausted by the unusual exertions of the day, lay awake and coughed most of the night, but the children slept like tops. When Mark did wake he forgot where he was, and in trying to sit up and look around, bumped his head against the low ceiling of his berth.

Daylight was streaming in at the round glass dead-eye that served as a window, and to Mark's great surprise he felt that the schooner was moving. Slipping down from his berth, and quietly dressing himself, so as not to disturb his father, he hurried on

deck, where he was greeted by "Captain Li," who told him he had come just in time to see something interesting.

The Nancy Bell was in tow of a little puffing steam-tug, and was already some miles from Bangor down the Penobscot River. The clouds of steam rising into the cold air from the surface of the warmer water were tinged with gold by the newly-risen sun. A heavy frost rested on the spruces and balsams that fringed the banks of the river, and as the sunlight struck one twig after another, it covered them with millions of points like diamonds. Many cakes of ice were floating in the river, showing that its navigation would soon be closed for the winter.

To one of these cakes of ice, towards which a boat from the schooner was making its way, the captain directed Mark's attention. On this cake, which was about as large as a dinner-table, stood a man anxiously watching the approach of the boat.

"What I can't understand," said the captain, "is where he ever found a cake of ice at this time of year strong enough to bear him up."

"Who is he? How did he get there, and what is he doing?" asked Mark, greatly excited.

"Who he is, and how he got there, are more than I know," answered "Captain Li." "What he is doing, is waiting to be taken off. The men on the tug sighted him just before you came on deck, and sung out to me to send a boat for him. It's a mercy we didn't come along an hour sooner, or we never would have seen him through the mist."

"You mean we would have missed him," said Mark, who, even upon so serious an occasion, could not resist the temptation to make a pun.

By this time the boat had rescued the man from his unpleasant position, and was returning with him on board. Before it reached the schooner Mark rushed down into the cabin and called to his parents and Ruth to hurry on deck. As they were already up and nearly dressed, they did so, and reached it in time to see the stranger helped from the boat and up the side of the vessel.

He was so exhausted that he was taken into the cabin, rolled in warm blankets, and given restoratives and hot drinks before he was questioned in regard to his adventure.

Meantime the schooner was again slipping rapidly down the broad river, and Mark, who remained on deck with his father, questioned him about the "river's breath," as he called the clouds of steam that arose from it.

"That's exactly what it is, the 'river's breath,'" said Mr. Elmer. "Warm air is lighter than cold, and consequently always rises; and the warm, damp air rising from the surface of the river into the cold air above is condensed into vapor, just as your warm, damp breath is at this very moment."

"But I should think the water would be cold with all that ice floating in it," said Mark.

"It would seem cold if we were surrounded by the air of a hot summer day," answered his father; "but being of a much higher temperature than the air above it, it would seem quite warm to

you now if you should put your bare hand into it. We can only say that a thing is warm by comparing it with something that is colder, or cold by comparison with that which is warmer."

When Mark and his father went down to breakfast they found the rescued man still wrapped in blankets, but talking in a faint voice to the captain; and at the table the latter told the Elmers what he had learned from him.

His name was Jan Jansen, and he was a Swede, but had served for several years in the United States navy. On being discharged from it he had made his way to New Sweden, in the northern part of Maine; but, a week before, he had come to Bangor, hoping to obtain employment for the winter in one of the saw-mills. In this he has been unsuccessful; and the previous night, while returning from the city to the house on its outskirts in which he was staying, he undertook to cross a small creek, in the mouth of which were a number of logs; these were so cemented together by recently formed ice that he fancied they would form a safe bridge, and tried to cross on it. When near the middle of the creek, to his horror the ice gave way with a crash, and in another moment he was floating away in the darkness on the cake from which he had been so recently rescued. That it had supported him was owing to the fact that it still held together two of the logs. He had not dared attempt to swim ashore in the dark, and so had drifted on during the night, keeping his feet from freezing by holding them most of the time in the water.

After breakfast Mr. Elmer and the captain held a consultation,

the result of which was that the former offered Jan Jansen work in Florida, if he chose to go to the St. Mark's with them; and Captain Drew offered to let him work his passage to that place as one of the crew of the Nancy Bell. Without much hesitation the poor Swede accepted both these offers, and as soon as he had recovered from the effects of his experience on the ice raft was provided with a bunk in the forecastle.

CHAPTER III
"CAPTAIN LI'S" STORY

All day the Nancy Bell was towed down the broad river, the glorious scenery along its banks arousing the constant enthusiasm of our travellers. Late in the afternoon they passed the gray walls of Fort Knox on the right, and the pretty little town of Bucksport on the left. They could just see the great hotel at Fort Point through the gathering dusk, and soon afterwards were tossing on the wild, windswept waters of Penobscot Bay.

As they cleared the land, so as to sight Castine Light over the port quarter, the tug cast loose from them and sail was made on the schooner. The last thing Mark Elmer saw as he left the deck, driven below by the bitter cold, was the gleam of the light on Owl's Head, outside which Captain Drew said they should find the sea pretty rough.

The rest of the family had gone below some time before, and Mark found that his mother was already very sea-sick. He felt rather uncomfortable himself, and did not care much for the supper, of which his father and Ruth eat so heartily. He said he thought he would go to bed, before supper was half over, and did so, although it was only six o'clock. Poor Mark! it was a week before he again sat at table or went on deck.

During this week the Nancy Bell sailed along the coasts

of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. She went inside of Martha's Vineyard, through Vineyard Sound, in company with a great fleet of coasters; but when they passed Gay Head, and turned to the westward into Long Island Sound, the Nancy was headed towards the lonely light-house on Montauk Point, the extreme end of Long Island. From here her course was for the Cape May lightship on the New Jersey coast, and for some time she was out of sight of land.

So they sailed, day after day, ever southward, and towards the warmth which was to make Mr. Elmer well again.

Although Mark was very ill all this time, Ruth was as bright and well as though she were on land. This was very mortifying to her brother; but "Captain Li," who went in to see him every day, comforted him by telling him of old sailors he had known who were always sea-sick for the first few days of every voyage they undertook.

The schooner was off Cape Hatteras before Mark felt able to leave his berth. At last, one evening when the sea was very quiet, "Captain Li" said, "Come, Mark, I want you to turn out and go on deck to see the last of Hatteras Light. You know Cape Hatteras is one of the worst capes along our entire Atlantic coast, and is probably the one most dreaded by sailors. When coming home from the West Indies, they sing an old song which begins:

"'Now if the Bermudas let you pass,

Then look for Cape Hatteras.'"

Slowly dressing, with the captain's aid, Mark, feeling very weak, but free from the horrible sickness from which he had suffered so long, managed to get out on deck. He was astonished at the change that one week's sailing southward had made in the general appearance of things. When he was last on deck, it and the rigging were covered with snow and ice. Now not a particle of either was to be seen, and the air was mild and pleasant. A new moon hung low in the western sky, and over the smooth sea the schooner was rippling along merrily, under every stitch of canvas that she could spread.

Mark received a warm welcome from his father, mother, and Ruth, who were all on deck, but had not expected to see him there that evening.

"Quick, Mark! Look! Hatteras is 'most gone," said Ruth, pointing, as she spoke, to a little twinkle of light so far astern that it seemed to rest on the very waters. Half an hour later the captain said, "Now let's go below, where it is warmer; and if you care to hear it, I will spin you a yarn of Hatteras Light."

"Yes, indeed," said Ruth and Mark together.

"By all means; a story is just the thing," said Mr. and Mrs. Elmer, also together, at which they all laughed, hooked little fingers, and wished.

When they had made themselves comfortable in the cabin, Mark being allowed to occupy the lounge on account of his recent

illness, the captain began as follows:

"Ten years ago this winter I made my first voyage of any length, though before that I had made some short runs on a little coaster between New York and down-East ports. Getting tired of this, and wanting to see something more of the world, I shipped in New York, early in December, on board the very prettiest craft I ever set eyes on, for a voyage to the West Indies. She was the hundred-ton schooner-yacht Mirage, and her owner had determined to try and make her pay him something during the winter by running her as a fruiter. She carried a crew of five men, besides the captain, mate, and steward—all young and able seamen. I was the youngest and least experienced, but was large for my age, and passed muster with the rest.

"We had a pleasant run down to Havana, passing Moro Castle and dropping anchor on the seventh day out from New York, but found some trouble there in getting a cargo for the home voyage. The delay worried our skipper considerably, for he had calculated on being home with his wife and baby at Christmas; but we of the crew enjoyed the city, and I for one got leave to go ashore whenever I could, and made the most of my opportunity to see the sights.

"We had laid there about ten days, when one morning, as the old man came up the after companion-way from the cabin, a big gray rat rushed out on deck ahead of him, scampered to the side, and plumped overboard. We all saw it in the water, swimming for the quay, which was but a short distance from us, and, quick

as a thought, the skipper had jumped back into the cabin for his pistol, and before the beast had got more than half-way he had fired several shots at it. The bullets struck all around the rat, but didn't hit it, and we saw him disappear through a crevice between the stones of the quay.

"Our captain was a very superstitious man, and this incident troubled him, for I heard him say to the mate that he never knew any ship to have good luck when once the rats began to leave her.

"Soon after this we took in our cargo of pineapples and bananas and started for home. Our first three days' run was as pretty as ever was made, and with the Gulf Stream to help us, it seemed as though we might make New York in time for Christmas, after all. Then there came a change—first a gale that drove us to the westward, and then light head-winds, or no winds at all; and so we knocked round for three days more, and on the day before Christmas we hadn't rounded Hatteras, let alone made Sandy Hook, as we had hoped to do.

"It was a curious sort of a day, mild and hazy, with the sun showing round and yellow as an orange. The skipper was uneasy, and kept squinting at the weather, first on one side and then the other. We heard him say to the mate that something was coming, for the mercury was falling faster than he had ever seen it. Things stood so until sunset, when the haze settled down thicker than ever. I was at the wheel, when the skipper came on deck and ordered all canvas to be stripped from her except the double-reefed main-sail and a corner of the jib. He sung out to me to

keep a sharp lookout for Hatteras Light, and then went below again.

"When I caught sight of the light, about an hour later, and reported it, it wasn't any brighter than it looked when you came on deck, a while ago, Mark, and we were heading directly for it. When the skipper came up and looked at it he told me to 'keep her so' while he took a squint at the chart.

"He hadn't more than gone below again when there came such a gust of wind and rain, with thunder and lightning close after, as to hide the light and keep me busy for a few minutes holding the schooner up to it.

"The squall passed as suddenly as it came, and there was the light, right over the end of the flying-jib-boom, burning as steady as ever, but looking mighty blue, somehow. I thought it was the effect of the mist, and tried to keep her headed for it. As I was getting terribly puzzled and fussed up by what I thought was the strange action of the compass, and by the way the little spiteful gusts of wind seemed to come from every quarter at once, the skipper came on deck. Before he had cleared the companion-way he asked,

"'How does Hatteras Light bear?'

"'Dead ahead, sir,' said I.

"As he stepped on deck he turned to look at it, and I saw him start as though he saw something awful. He looked for half a minute, and then in a half-choked sort of voice he gasped out, 'The Death-Light!'

"At the same moment the light, that I had took to be Hatteras, rolled slowly, like a ball of fire, along the jib-top-sail stay to the top-mast head, and then I knew it was a St. Elmo's fire, a thing I'd heard of but never seen before.

"As we all looked at it, afraid almost to say a word, there came a sound like a moan over the sea, and in another minute a cyclone, such as I hope never to see again, laid us, first on our beam ends, and then drove us at a fearful rate directly towards the coast.

"We drove this way for an hour or more, unable to do a thing to help ourselves, and then she struck on Hatteras sands. Her masts went as she struck, and as they fell a huge sea, rushing over the poor craft, swept overboard the captain and two men. It was some time before we knew they were gone, for we could see nothing nor hear anything but the howl of the tempest.

"At last we got rid of the floating wreck of spars by clearing the tangled rigging with our knives, and, thus relieved, the schooner was driven a good bit farther over the sands. Finally she struck solid, and began to break up. One of her boats was stove and worthless, and in trying to clear away the other, a metallic life-boat, another man was swept overboard and lost.

"The mate and two of the crew besides myself finally got away from the wreck in this boat, and were driven in to the beach, on which we were at last flung more dead than alive.

"The next morning we made our way to the light-house, where we were kindly cared for, but where our Christmas dinner was a pretty sad affair.

"The captain's body was washed up on the beach, and a week from that day we took it and the news of his death together to his wife in New York.

"Since then I have always felt easier when I have left Hatteras Light well astern, as we have for this time, at any rate. Well, there's eight bells, and I must be on deck, so good-night to you all, and pleasant dreams."

"Is there any such thing as a 'death-light' that warns people of coming disaster?" asked Ruth of her father, when the captain had left them.

"No, my dear," he answered, "there is not. The St. Elmo's light, or St. Elmo's fire, is frequently seen in tropical seas, though rarely as far north as Cape Hatteras; and as it is generally accompanied by cyclones or hurricanes, sailors have come to regard it as an omen of evil. It is not always followed by evil consequences, however, and to believe that it foretells death is as idle and foolish as superstitions of all kinds always are."

CHAPTER IV
A WRECK ON THE FLORIDA REEF

After leaving Hatteras not another evidence of land was seen by the passengers of the Nancy Bell for three days. At last one afternoon "Captain Li" pointed out and called their attention to a slender shaft rising apparently from the sea itself, far to the westward. He told them that it was the light-house at Jupiter Inlet, well down on the coast of Florida, and they regarded it with great interest, as giving them their first glimpse of the land that was so soon to be their home.

The weather had by this time become very warm and instead of wearing the thick clothing with which they had started, the Elmers found the very thinnest of their last summer's things all that they could bear.

Mark had almost forgotten his sea-sickness, and spent much of his time with Jan Jansen, who taught him to make knots and splices, to box the compass and to steer. Both Mark and Ruth were tanned brown by the hot sun, and Mr. Elmer said the warmth of the air had already made a new man of him.

Before the light but steady trade-wind, that kept the air deliciously cool, the Nancy Bell ran rapidly down the coast and along the great Florida Reef, which, for two hundred miles,

bounds that coast on the south.

Captain Drew stood far out from the reef, being well aware of the strong currents that set towards it from all directions, and which have enticed many a good ship to her destruction. Others, however, were not so wise as he, and at daylight one morning the watch on deck sang out,

"Wreck off the starboard bow!"

This brought all hands quickly on deck, and, sure enough, about five miles from them they saw the wreck looming high out of the water, and evidently stranded. As her masts, with their crossed yards, were still standing, "Captain Li" said she must have struck very easily, and stood a good chance of being saved if she could only be lightened before a blow came that would roll a sea in on her.

"Are you going to her assistance?" asked Mr. Elmer.

"Certainly I am," answered the captain. "I consider that one of the first duties of a sailor is to give aid to his fellows in distress. Besides, if we succeed in saving her and her cargo, we stand a chance of making several thousand dollars salvage money, which I for one do not care to throw away."

"You are quite right," said Mr. Elmer. "It is seldom that we are offered an opportunity of doing good and being well paid for it at the same time, and it would be foolish, as well as heartless, not to render what assistance lies in our power."

The schooner was already headed towards the wreck, but approached it very slowly, owing to the light breeze that barely

filled her sails. As the sun rose, and cast a broad flood of light over the tranquil scene, the captain anxiously scanned the line of the reef in both directions through his glass.

"Ah, I thought so!" he exclaimed; "there they come, and there, and there. I can count six already. Now we shall have a race for it."

"Who? what?" asked Mark, not understanding the captain's exclamations.

"Wreckers!" answered the captain. "Take the glass, and you can see their sails coming from every direction; and they have seen us long ago too. I actually believe those fellows can smell a wreck a hundred miles off. Halloo there, forward! Stand by to lower the gig."

"What are you going to do?" asked Mr. Elmer.

"I am going to try and reach that wreck before any of the boats whose sails you can see slipping out from behind those low keys. The first man aboard that ship is 'wreck-master,' and gets the largest share of salvage money."

So saying, "Captain Li" swung himself over the side and into the light gig, which, with its crew of four lusty young Maine sailors, had already been got overboard and now awaited him. As he seized the tiller ropes he shouted, "Now, then, give way! and a hundred dollars extra salvage to you four if this gig is the first boat to lay alongside of that wreck."

At these words the long ash oars bent like willow wands in the grasp of the young Northern giants, and the gig sprang away

like a startled bonito, leaving a long line of bubbles to mark her course.

The wreck was still three miles off; and, with the glass, small boats could be seen shooting away from several of the approaching wrecking vessels.

"It's a race between Conchs and Yankees," said Jan Jansen to Mark.

"What are Conchs?" asked the boy.

"Why, those fellows in the other boats. Most of them come from the Bahama Islands, and all Bahamians are called 'Conchs,' because they eat so many of the shell-fish of that name."

"Well, I'll bet on the Yankees!" cried Mark.

"So will I," said the Swede. "Yankee baked beans and brown bread make better muscle than fish, which is about all the fellows down this way get to live on."

As seen from the deck of the schooner, the race had by this time become very exciting; for, as their boat approached the wreck on one side, another, manned by red-shirted wreckers, who were exhibiting a wonderful amount of pluck and endurance for "Conchs," as Jan called them, was rapidly coming up on the other. It was hard to tell which was the nearer; and while Mark shouted in his excitement, Mrs. Elmer and Ruth waved their handkerchiefs, though their friends were too far away to be encouraged by either the shouts or wavings.

At last "Captain Li's" boat dashed up alongside the wreck, and almost at the same instant the wrecker's boat disappeared from

view on the opposite side.

With their glasses, those on the schooner saw their captain go up the side of the ship, hand over hand, along a rope that had been thrown him, and disappear over the bulwarks. They afterwards learned that he reached the deck of the ship, and thus made himself master of the wreck, just as the head of his rival appeared above the opposite side.

The wreck proved to be the ship Goodspeed, Captain Gillis, of and for Liverpool, with cotton from New Orleans. During the calm of the preceding night she had been caught by one of the powerful coast currents, and stealthily but surely drawn into the toils. Shortly before daylight she had struck on Pickle Reef, but so lightly and so unexpectedly that her crew could hardly believe the slight jar they felt was anything more than the shock of striking some large fish. They soon found, however, that they were hard and fast aground, and had struck on the very top of the flood tide, so that, as it ebbed, the ship became more and more firmly fixed in her position. As the ship settled with the ebbing tide she began to leak badly, and Captain Gillis was greatly relieved when daylight disclosed to him the presence of the Nancy Bell, and he greeted her captain most cordially as the latter gained the deck of his ship.

By the time the schooner had approached the wreck, as nearly as her own safety permitted, and dropped anchor for the first time since leaving Bangor, a dozen little wrecking craft, manned by crews of swarthy spongers and fishermen, had also reached

the spot, and active preparations for lightening the stranded ship were being made. Her carefully battened hatches were uncovered, whips were rove to her lower yards, and soon the tightly pressed bales of cotton began to appear over her sides, and find their way into the light draught wrecking vessels waiting to receive them. As soon as one of these was loaded, she transferred her cargo to the Nancy Bell and returned for another.

While the wreckers were busily discharging the ship's cargo, her own crew were overhauling long lines of chain cable, and lowering two large anchors and two smaller ones into one of the wrecking boats that had remained empty on purpose to receive them. The cables were paid out over the stern of the ship, and made fast to the great anchors, which were carried far out into the deep water beyond the reef. Each big anchor was backed by a smaller one, to which it was attached by a cable, and which was carried some distance beyond it before being dropped overboard.

When the anchors were thus placed in position, the ends of the cables still remaining on board the ship were passed around capstans, and by means of the donkey-engine drawn taut.

At high tide that night a heavy strain was brought to bear on the cables, in hopes that the ship might be pulled off the reef; but she did not move, and the work of lightening her and searching for the leak continued all the next day.

While all this work was going on the Elmers spent most of their time in exploring the reef in the captain's gig, which was so light that Mr. Elmer and Mark could easily row it.

As the clear water was without a ripple, they could look far down into its depths, and see the bottom of branching coral, as beautiful as frosted silver. From among its branches sprang great sea-fans, delicate as lace-work, and showing, in striking contrast to the pure white of the coral, the most vivid reds, greens, and royal purple. These, and masses of feathery seaweeds, waved to and fro in the water as though stirred by a light breeze, and among them darted and played fish as brilliant in coloring as tropical birds. The boat seemed suspended in midair above fairy-land, and even the children gazed down over its sides in silence, for fear lest by speaking they should break the charm, and cause the wonderful picture to vanish.

By noon the heat of the sun was so great that they sought shelter from it on a little island, or key, of about an acre in extent, that was covered with a luxuriant vegetation, and shaded by a group of stately cocoa-nut palms. Mr. Elmer showed Mark how to climb one of these by means of a bit of rope fastened loosely around his body and the smooth trunk of the tree, and the boy succeeded in cutting off several bunches of the great nuts that hung just below the wide-spreading crown of leaves. They came to the ground with a crash, but the thick husk in which each was enveloped saved them from breaking. The nuts were quite green, and Mr. Elmer with a hatchet cut several of them open and handed them to his wife and children. None of them contained any meat, for that had not yet formed, but they were filled with a white, milky fluid, which, as all of the party were very thirsty,

proved a most acceptable beverage.

After eating the luncheon they had brought with them, and satisfying their thirst with the cocoa-nut milk, Mark and Ruth explored the beach of the little island in search of shells, which they found in countless numbers, of strange forms and most beautiful colors, while their parents remained seated in the shade of the palms.

"Wouldn't it be gay if we could stay here always?" said Mark.

"No," answered the more practical Ruth; "I don't think it would be at all. I would rather be where there are people and houses; besides, I heard father say that these little islands are often entirely covered with water during great storms, and I'm sure I wouldn't want to be here then."

It was nearly sunset when they returned to the schooner, with their boat well loaded with the shells and other curiosities that the children had gathered.

At high tide that night the strain on the cables proved sufficient to move the stranded ship, and, foot by foot, she was pulled off into deep water, much to the joy of Captain Gillis and those who had worked with him.

The next morning the entire fleet—ship, schooner, and wrecking boats—set sail for Key West, which port they reached during the afternoon, and where they found they would be obliged to spend a week or more while an Admiralty Court settled the claims for salvage.

CHAPTER V
MARK AND RUTH ATTEND AN AUCTION

Although Mr. and Mrs. Elmer regretted the delay in Key West, being anxious to get settled in their new home as soon as possible, the children did not mind it a bit; indeed, they were rather glad of it. In the novelty of everything they saw in this queerest of American cities, they found plenty to occupy and amuse them.

The captain and their father were busy in the court-room nearly every day, and Mrs. Elmer did not care to go ashore except for a walk in the afternoon with her husband. So the children went off on long exploring expeditions by themselves, and the following letter, written during this time by Ruth to her dearest friend, Edna May, will give an idea of some of the things they saw:

> "KEY WEST, FLA., December 15, 188-.
>
> "MY DEAREST EDNA,—It seems almost a year since I left you in dear old Norton, so much has happened since then. This is the very first chance I have had since I left to send you a letter, so I will make it a real long one, and try to tell you everything.
>
> "I was not sea-sick a bit, but Mark was.
>
> "In the Penobscot River we rescued a man from a

floating cake of ice, and brought him with us. His name is Jan Jansen, but Mark calls him Jack Jackson. A few days before we got here we found a wreck, and helped get it off, and brought it here to Key West. Now we are waiting for a court to say how much it was worth to do it. I shouldn't wonder if they allowed as much as a thousand dollars, for the wreck was a big ship, and it was real hard work.

"This is an awfully funny place, and I just wish you were here to walk round with Mark and me and see it. It is on an island, and that is the reason it is named 'Key,' because all the islands down here are called keys. The Spaniards call it 'Cayo Hueso,' which means bone key, or bone island; but I'm sure I don't know why, for I haven't seen any bones here. The island is all made of coral, and the streets are just hard white coral worn down. The island is almost flat, and 'Captain Li'—he's our captain—says that the highest part is only sixteen feet above the ocean.

"Oh, Edna! you ought to see the palm-trees. They grow everywhere, great cocoa-nut and date palms, and we drink the milk out of the cocoa-nuts when we go on picnics and get thirsty. And the roses are perfectly lovely, and they have great oleanders and cactuses, and hundreds of flowers that I don't know the names of, and they are all in full bloom now, though it is nearly Christmas. I don't suppose I shall hang up my stocking this Christmas; they don't seem to do it down here.

"The other day we went out to the soldiers' barracks, and saw a banyan-tree that 'Captain Li' says is the only one in the United States, but we didn't see any monkeys or elephants.

Mark says he don't think this is very tropical, because we haven't seen any bread-fruit-trees nor a single pirate; but they used to have them here—I mean pirates. Anyhow, we have custard apples, and they sound tropical, don't they? And we have sapadilloes that look like potatoes, and taste like—well, I think they taste horrid, but most people seem to like them.

"It is real hot here, and I am wearing my last summer's best straw hat and my thinnest linen dresses—you know, those I had last vacation. The thermometer got up to 85 degrees yesterday.

"Do write, and tell me all about yourself and the girls. Has Susie Rand got well enough to go to school yet? and who's head in the algebra class? Mark wants to know how's the skating, and if the boys have built a snow fort yet? Most all the people here are black, and everybody talks Spanish: it is SO funny to hear them.

"Now I must say good-bye, because Mark is calling me to go to the fruit auction. I will tell you about it some other time.

"With love to everybody, I am your own lovingest friend,

"RUTH ELMER.

"P.S.—Don't forget that you are coming down here to see me next winter."

Before Ruth finished this letter Mark began calling to her to hurry up, for the bell had stopped ringing, and the auction would be all over before they got there. She hurriedly directed it, and put it in her pocket to mail on the way to the auction, just as her

brother called out that he "did think girls were the very slowest."

They had got nearly to the end of the wharf at which the schooner lay, when Ruth asked Mark if he had any money.

"No," said he, "not a cent. I forgot all about it. Just wait here a minute while I run back and get some from mother."

"Well," said Ruth, "if boys ain't the very carelessest!" But Mark was out of hearing before she finished.

While she waited for him, Ruth looked in at the open door of a very little house, where several colored women were making beautiful flowers out of tiny shells and glistening fish-scales. She became so much interested in their work that she was almost sorry when Mark came running back, quite out of breath, and gasped, "I've got it! Now let's hurry up!"

Turning to the left from the head of the wharf, they walked quickly through the narrow streets until they came to a square, on one corner of which quite a crowd of people were collected. They were all listening attentively to a little man with a big voice, who stood on a box in front of them and who was saying as fast as he could,

"Forty, forty, forty. Shall I have the five? Yes, sir; thank you. Forty-five, five, five—who says fifty? Fifty, fifty, forty-five—going, going, gone! and sold at forty-five to Mr.—Beg pardon; the name, sir? Of course, certainly! And now comes the finest lot of oranges ever offered for sale in Key West. What am I bid per hundred for them? Who makes me an offer? I am a perfect Job for patience, gentlemen, and willing to wait all day, if necessary,

to hear what you have to say."

Of course he was an auctioneer, and this was the regular fruit auction that is held on this same corner every morning of the year. Many other things besides fruit are sold at these auctions; in fact, almost everything in Key West is bought or sold at auction; certainly all fruit is. For an hour before the time set for the auction a man goes through the streets ringing a bell and announcing what is to be sold. This morning he had announced a fine lot of oranges, among other things, and as Mrs. Elmer was anxious to get some, she had sent Mark and Ruth to attend the auction, with a commission to buy a hundred if the bids did not run too high.

The children had already attended several auctions as spectators, and Mark knew enough not to bid on the first lot offered. He waited until somebody who knew more about the value of oranges than he should fix the price. He and Ruth pushed their way as close as possible to the auctioneer, and watched him attentively.

"Come, gentlemen," said the little man, "give me a starter. What am I to have for the first lot of these prime oranges?"

"Two dollars!" called a voice from the crowd.

"Two," cried the auctioneer. "Two, two, two and a half. Who says three? Shall I hear it? And three. Who bids three? That's right. Do I hear the quarter? They are well worth it, gentlemen. Will no one give me the quarter? Well, time is money, and tempus fugit. Going at three—at three; going, going, and sold at three dollars."

Several more lots sold so rapidly at three dollars that Mark had no opportunity of making himself heard or of catching the auctioneer's eye, until, finally, in a sort of despair he called out "Quarter," just as another lot was about to be knocked down to a dealer at three dollars.

"Ah!" said the auctioneer, "that is something like. It takes a gentleman from the North to appreciate oranges at their true value. A quarter is bid. Shall I have a half? Do I hear it? Half, half, half; and sold at three dollars and a quarter to Mr.–what name, please? Elder. Oh yes; good old name, and one you can live up to more and more every day of your life. John, pick out a hundred of the best for Mr. Elder."

The oranges selected by John were such beauties that neither Mark nor his mother regretted the extra quarter paid for them. After that, during the rest of their stay in Key West, whenever Mark went near a fruit auction he was addressed politely by the auctioneer as "Mr. Elder," and invited to examine the goods offered for sale that day.

One day Mark and Ruth rowed out among the vessels of the sponging fleet that had just come in from up the coast. Here they scraped acquaintance with a weather-beaten old sponger, who sat in the stern of one of the smallest of the boats, smoking a short pipe and overhauling some rigging; and from him they gained much new information concerning sponges.

"We gets them all along the reef as far as Key Biscayne," said the old sponger; "but the best comes from Rock Island, up the

coast nigh to St. Mark's."

"Why, that's where we're going!" interrupted Ruth.

"Be you, sissy? Wal, you'll see a plenty raked up there, I reckon. Did you ever hear tell of a water-glass?"

"No," said Ruth, "I never did."

"Wal," said the old man, "here's one; maybe you'd like to look through it." And he showed them what looked like a wooden bucket with a glass bottom. "Jest take an' hold it a leetle ways down into the water and see what you can see."

Taking the bucket which was held out to her, Ruth did as the old man directed, and uttered an exclamation of delight. "Why, I can see the bottom just as plain as looking through a window."

"To be sure," said the old sponger; "an' that's the way we sees the sponges lying on the bottom. An' when we sees 'em we takes those long-handled rakes there an' hauls 'em up to the top. When they fust comes up they's plumb black, and about the nastiest things you ever did see, I reckon. We throws 'em into crawls built in shallow water, an' lets 'em rot till all the animal matter is dead, an' we stirs 'em up an beats 'em with sticks to get it out. Then they has to be washed an' dried an' trimmed, an' handled consider'ble, afore they's ready for market. Then they's sold at auction."

The sponge crawls of which the old man spoke are square pens make of stakes driven into the sand side by side, and as close as possible together. In some of them at Key West Mark and Ruth saw little negro boys diving to bring up stray sponges that the rakes had missed. They did not seem to enjoy this half as much

as Mark and his boy friends used to enjoy diving in the river at Norton, and they shivered as though they were cold, in spite of the heat of the day.

When the children told Mr. Elmer about these little, unhappy-looking divers that night, he said,

"That shows how what some persons regard as play, may become hard and unpleasant work to those who are compelled to do it."

Several days after this Mr. Elmer engaged a carriage, and took his wife and the children on a long drive over the island. During this drive the most interesting things they saw were old Fort Taylor, which stands just outside the city, and commands the harbor, the abandoned salt-works, about five miles from the city, and the Martello towers, built along the southern coast of the island. These are small but very strong forts, built by the government, but as yet never occupied by soldiers.

In one of them the Elmers were shown a large, jagged hole, broken through the brick floor of one of the upper stories. This, the sergeant in charge told them, had been made by a party of sailors who deserted from a man-of-war lying in the harbor, and hid themselves in this Martello tower. They made it so that through it they could point their muskets and shoot anybody sent to capture them as soon as he entered the lower rooms. They did not have a chance to use it for this purpose, however, for the officer sent after them just camped outside the tower and waited patiently until hunger compelled the runaways to surrender, when

he quietly marched them back to the ship.

In all of the forts, as well as in all the houses of Key West, are great cisterns for storing rain-water, for there are no wells on the island, and the only fresh-water to be had is what can be caught and stored during the rainy season.

It was a week after the orange auction that Mr. Elmer came into the cabin of the schooner one afternoon and announced that the court had given its decision, and that they would sail the next day.

This decision of the court gave to the schooner Nancy Bell five thousand dollars, and this, "Captain Li" said, must, according to wrecker's law, be divided among all who were on board the schooner at the time of the wreck. Accordingly, he insisted upon giving Mr. and Mrs. Elmer each two hundred dollars, and Mark, Ruth, and Jan each one hundred dollars. As neither of the children had ever before owned more than five dollars at one time, they now felt wealthy enough to buy the State of Florida, and regarded each other with vastly increased respect. While their father took charge of this money for them, he told them they might invest it as they saw fit, provided he and their mother thought the investment a good one.

At daylight next morning the Nancy Bell again spread her sails, and soon Key West was but a low-lying cloud left far behind. For three days they sailed northward, with light winds, over the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico. On the evening of the third day a bright light flashed across the waters ahead of them, and

"Captain Li" said it was at the mouth of the St. Mark's River. As the tide was low, and no pilot was to be had that night, they had to stand off and on, and wait for daylight before crossing the bar and sailing up the river beyond it.

CHAPTER VI
A QUEER CHRISTMAS-DAY

All night long the Nancy Bell sailed back and forth within sight of the light that marked the mouth of the river. Soon after day-light a pilot-boat was seen approaching her in answer to the signal which was flying from the main rigging. As the boat ran alongside, a colored pilot clambered to the deck and declared it did him good to see a big schooner waiting to come into the St. Mark's once more.

"Uster be a plenty of 'em," said he to "Captain Li," "but dey's scurcer'n gole dollars now-adays, an' I'se proud to see 'em comin' ag'in."

By the time breakfast was over and the Elmers came on deck, they found the schooner running rapidly up a broad river, between wide expanses of low salt-marshes, bounded by distant pine forests, and studded here and there with groups of cabbage palms. The channel was a regular zig-zag, and they ran now to one side and then far over to the other to escape the coral reefs and oyster bars with which it is filled. This occupied much time; but the breeze was fresh, and within an hour they had run eight miles up the river, and were passing the ruins of the old Spanish Fort of St. Mark's. A few minutes later sails were lowered, and the schooner was moored to one of the rotten old wharves that

still remain to tell of St. Mark's former glory.

"And is this St. Mark's?" asked Mrs. Elmer, looking with a feeling of keen disappointment at the dozen or so tumble-down frame buildings that, perched on piles above the low, wet land, looked like dilapidated old men with shaky legs, and formed all that was to be seen of the town.

"Yes, miss," answered the colored pilot, who seemed to consider her question addressed to him. "Dis yere's St. Mark's, or what de gales has lef' of hit. 'Pears like dey's been mighty hard on de ole town, sence trade fell off, an' mos' of de folkses moved away. Uster be wharves all along yere, an' cotton-presses, an' big war'houses, an' plenty ships in de ribber; but now dey's all gone. Dem times we uster hab fo' trains of kyars a day; but now dere's only one train comes tree times in de week, an' hit's only got one kyar. Ole St. Mark's a-seein' bad times now, for sho."

As soon as he could get ashore, Mr. Elmer, accompanied by Mark and the captain, went up into the village to find out what he could regarding their destination and future movements. In about an hour he returned, bringing a package of letters from the post-office, and the information that Uncle Christopher Bangs's place was at Wakulla, some six miles farther up the river. As the river above St. Mark's is quite crooked, and bordered on both sides by dense forests, and as no steam-tug could be had, the captain did not care to attempt to carry the schooner any farther up. Mr. Elmer had therefore chartered a large, flat-bottomed lighter, or scow, to carry to Wakulla the cargo of household goods, tools,

building material, etc., that they had brought with them.

As "Captain Li" was anxious to proceed on his voyage to Pensacola as quickly as possible, the lighter was at once brought alongside the schooner, and the work of discharging the Elmers' goods into her was begun.

"By-the-way, Mark," said Mr. Elmer, as the schooner's hatches were removed, "I am just reminded that this is Christmas-day, and that there is a present down in the hold for you from your Uncle Christmas. It will be one of the first things taken out, so see if you can recognize it."

He had hardly spoken before the sailors, who had gone down into the hold, passed carefully up to those on deck a beautiful birch-bark canoe, with the name Ruth painted on its bows.

"That's it, father! that's it! I'm sure it is. Oh! isn't she a beauty?" shouted Mark, wild with delight. "Oh! father, how did he know just exactly what I wanted most?" and the excited boy rushed down into the cabin to beg his mother and Ruth to come on deck and see his Christmas present.

The canoe was followed by two paddles painted a bright vermilion, and as they were placed in her, and she was laid to one side of the deck, she was indeed as pretty a little craft as can be imagined, and one that would delight any boy's heart.

"I knew we were going to live near a river, my dear," said Mr. Elmer, in answer to his wife's anxious expression as she looked at the canoe, "and as Mark is a good swimmer and very careful in boats, I thought a canoe would afford him great pleasure,

and probably prove very useful to all of us. So when Uncle Christopher asked me what I thought the boy would like most for a Christmas present, I told him a canoe."

"Well, I hope it will prove safe," sighed Mrs. Elmer; "but I wish it were flat-bottomed, and built of thick boards instead of that thin bark."

"Oh, mother!" said Mark, "you might as well wish it were a canal-boat at once."

"Yes, I believe canal-boats are generally considered safer than canoes," answered his mother with a smile. "By-the-way, Mark"—and she turned to her husband—"one of the letters you brought was from Uncle Christopher, and he says he thinks he forgot to tell us that there is a house on his place, which he hopes we will find in a fit condition to occupy."

Mr. Elmer had expected to have to build a house, and had accordingly brought with him sashes, doors, blinds, the necessary hardware, and in fact everything except lumber for that purpose. This material was now being transferred from the schooner to the lighter, and now it seemed almost a pity to have brought it; still they were very glad to learn that they were likely to find a house all ready to move into.

It wanted but two hours of sundown when the last of the Elmers' goods were stowed in the lighter, and as there was nothing to detain him any longer, "Captain Li" said he should take advantage of the ebb tide that night to drop down the river and get started for Pensacola. As rowing and poling the heavy

lighter up the river would at best prove but slow work, and as there was no hotel or place for them to stay in St. Mark's, Mr. Elmer thought they too had better make a start, and take advantage of the last of the flood tide and what daylight still remained.

So good-byes were exchanged, and feeling very much as though they were leaving home for the second time, the Elmers left the comfortable cabin that had sheltered them for nearly a month. Followed by Jan, they went on board their new craft, and the lines were cast off. The crew of four strong colored men bent over the long sweeps, and followed by a hearty cheer from the crew of the schooner, the scow moved slowly up the river. In a few minutes a bend hid St. Mark's and the tall masts of the Nancy Bell from sight, and on either side of them appeared nothing but unbroken forest.

The river seemed narrow and dark after the open sea to which the Elmers had been so long accustomed, and from its banks the dense growth of oak, cedar, magnolia, palm, bay, cypress, elm, and sweet gum trees, festooned with moss, and bound together with a net-work of vines, rose like walls, shutting out the sunlight. Strange water-fowl, long-legged and long-billed, flew screaming away as they advanced, and quick splashes in the water ahead of them told of the presence of other animal life.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.