

CHAPTER VIII.

BOUND FOR THE FALKLANDS.

On the 8th of September, in the evening, I had taken leave of His Excellency the Governor-General of the Archipelago of Tristan d'Acunha--for such is the official title bestowed upon himself by that excellent fellow, Glass, ex-corporal of artillery in the British Army. On the following day, before dawn, the Halbrane sailed.

After we had rounded Herald Point, the few houses of Ansiedlung disappeared behind the extremity of Falmouth Bay. A fine breeze from the east carried us along gaily.

During the morning we left behind us in succession Elephant Bay, Hardy Rock, West Point, Cotton Bay, and Daly's Promontory; but it took the entire day to lose sight of the volcano of Tristan d'Acunha, which is eight thousand feet high; its snow-clad bulk was at last veiled by the shades of evening.

During that week our voyage proceeded under the most favourable conditions; if these were maintained, the end of the month of September ought to bring us within sight of the first peaks of the Falkland Group; and so, very sensibly towards the south; the schooner having descended from the thirty-eighth parallel to the fifty-fifth degree of latitude.

The most daring, or, perhaps I ought to say, the most lucky of those discoverers who had preceded the Halbrane, under the command of Captain Len Guy, in the Antarctic seas, had not gone beyond--Kemp, the sixty-sixth parallel; Ballery, the sixty-seventh; Biscoe, the sixty-eighth; Bellinghausen and Morrell, the seventieth; Cook, the seventy-first; Weddell, the seventy-fourth. And it was beyond the eighty-third, nearly five hundred and fifty miles farther, that we must go to the succour of the survivors of the Jane!

I confess that for a practical man of unimaginative temperament, I felt strangely excited; a nervous restlessness had taken possession of me. I was haunted by the figures of Arthur Pym and his companions, lost in Antarctic ice-deserts. I began to feel a desire to take part in the proposed undertaking of Captain Len Guy. I thought about it incessantly. As a fact there was nothing to recall me to America. It is true that whether I should get the consent of the commander of the Halbrane remained to be seen; but, after all, why should he refuse to keep me as a passenger? Would it not be a very "human" satisfaction to him to give me material proof that he was in the right, by taking me to the very scene of a catastrophe that I had regarded as fictitious, showing me the remains of the Jane at Tsalal, and landing me on that selfsame island which I had declared to be a myth?

Nevertheless, I resolved to wait, before I came to any definite determination, until an opportunity of speaking to the captain

should arise.

After an interval of unfavourable weather, during which the Halbrane made but slow progress, on the 4th of October, in the morning, the aspect of the sky and the sea underwent a marked change. The wind became calm, the waves abated, and the next day the breeze veered to the north-west. This was very favourable to us, and in ten days, with a continuance of such fortunate conditions, we might hope to reach the Falklands.

It was on the 11th that the opportunity of an explanation with Captain Len Guy was presented to me, and by himself, for he came out of his cabin, advanced to the side of the ship where I was seated, and took his place at my side.

Evidently he wished to talk to me, and of what, if not the subject which entirely absorbed him? He began by saying:

“I have not yet had the pleasure of a chat with you, Mr. Jeorling, since our departure from Tristan d’Acunha!”

“To my regret, captain,” I replied, but with reserve, for I wanted him to make the running.

“I beg you to excuse me,” he resumed, “I have so many things to occupy me and make me anxious. A plan of campaign to organize, in which nothing must be unforeseen or unprovided for. I beg you not to

be displeased with me--”

“I am not, I assure you.”

“That is all right, Mr. Jeorling; and now that I know you, that I am able to appreciate you, I congratulate myself upon having you for a passenger until our arrival at the Falklands.”

“I am very grateful, captain, for what you have done for me, and I feel encouraged to--”

The moment seemed propitious to my making my proposal, when Captain Len Guy interrupted me.

“Well, Mr. Jeorling,” he asked, “are you now convinced of the reality of the voyage of the Jane, or do you still regard Edgar Poe’s book as a work of pure imagination?”

“I do not so regard it, captain.”

“You no longer doubt that Arthur Pym and Dirk Peters have really existed, or that my brother William Guy and five of his companions are living?”

“I should be the most incredulous of men, captain, to doubt either fact, and my earnest desire is that the favour of Heaven may attend you and secure the safety of the shipwrecked mariners of the Jane.”

“I will do all in my power, Mr. Jeorling, and by the blessing of God I shall succeed.”

“I hope so, captain. Indeed, I am certain it will be so, and if you consent--”

“Is it not the case that you talked of this matter with one Glass, an English ex-corporal, who sets up to be Governor of Tristan d’Acunha?” inquired the captain, without allowing me to finish my sentence.

“That is so,” I replied, “and what I learned from Glass has contributed not a little to change my doubts into certainty.”

“Ah I he has satisfied you?”

“Yes. He perfectly remembers to have seen the Jane, eleven years ago, when she had put in at Tristan d’Acunha.”

“The Jane--and my brother?”

“He told me that he had personal dealings with Captain William Guy.”

“And he traded with the Jane?”

“Yes, as he has just been trading with the Halbrane.”

“She was moored in this bay?”

“In the same place as your schooner.”

“And--Arthur Pym--Dirk Peters?”

“He was with them frequently.”

“Did he ask what had become of them?”

“Oh yes, and I informed him of the death of Arthur Pym, whom he regarded as a foolhardy adventurer, capable of any daring folly.”

“Say a madman, and a dangerous madman, Mr. Jeorling. Was it not he who led my unfortunate brother into that fatal enterprise?”

“There is, indeed, reason to believe so from his narrative.”

“And never to forget it! added the captain in a tone of agitation.

“This man, Glass,” I resumed, “also knew Patterson, the mate of the Jane.”

“He was a fine, brave, faithful fellow, Mr. Jeorling, and devoted, body and soul, to my brother.”

“As West is to you, captain.”

“Does Glass know where the shipwrecked men from the Jane are now?”

“I told him, captain, and also all that you have resolved to do to save them.”

I did not think proper to add that Glass had been much surprised at Captain Guy’s abstaining from visiting him, as, in his absurd vanity, he held the commander of the Halbrane bound to do, nor that he did not consider the Governor of Tristan d’Acunha bound to take the initiative.

“I wish to ask you, Mr. Jeorling, whether you think everything in Arthur Pym’s journal, which has been published by Edgar Poe, is exactly true?”

“I think there is some need for doubt,” I answered “the singular character of the hero of those adventures being taken into consideration--at least concerning the phenomena of the island of Tsalal. And we know that Arthur Pym was mistaken in asserting that Captain William Guy and several of his companions perished in the landslip of the hill at Klock-Klock.”

“Ah! but he does not assert this, Mr. Jeorling! He says only that,

when he and Dirk Peters had reached the opening through which they could discern the surrounding country, the seat of the artificial earthquake was revealed to them. Now, as the whole face of the hill was rushing into the ravine, the fate of my brother and twenty-nine of his men could not be doubtful to his mind. He was, most naturally, led to believe that Dirk Peters and himself were the only white men remaining alive on the island. He said nothing but this--nothing more. These were only suppositions--very reasonable, are they not?"

"I admit that, fully, captain."

"But now, thanks to Patterson's note-book, we are certain that my brother and five of his companions escaped from the landslip contrived by the natives."

"That is quite clear, captain. But, as to what became of the survivors of the Jane, whether they were taken by the natives of Tsalal and kept in captivity, or remained free, Patterson's note-book says nothing, nor does it relate under what circumstances he himself was carried far away from them."

"All that we shall learn, Mr. Jeorling. Yes, we shall know all. The main point is that we are quite sure my brother and five of his sailors were living less than four months ago on some part of Tsalal Island. There is now no question of a romance signed 'Edgar Poe,' but of a veracious narrative signed 'Patterson.'"

“Captain,” said I, “will you let me be one of your company until the end of the campaign of the Halbrane in the Antarctic seas?”

Captain Len Guy looked at me with a glance as penetrating as a keen blade. Otherwise he did not appear surprised by the proposal I had made; perhaps he had been expecting it--and he uttered only the single word:

“Willingly.”