

CHAPTER XVI,  
TSALAL ISLAND.

The night passed without alarm. No boat had put off from the island, nor had a native shown himself upon the beach. The Halbrane, then, had not been observed on her arrival; this was all the better.

We had cast anchor in ten fathoms, at three miles from the coast.

When the Jane appeared in these waters, the people of Tsalal beheld a ship for the first time, and they took it for an enormous animal, regarding its masts as limbs, and its sails as garments. Now, they ought to be better informed on this subject, and if they did not attempt to visit us, to what motive were we to assign such conduct?

Captain Len Guy gave orders for the lowering of the ship's largest boat, in a voice which betrayed his impatience.

The order was executed, and the captain, addressing West, said--

“Send eight men down with Martin Holt; send Hunt to the helm. Remain yourself at the moorings, and keep a look-out landwards as well as to sea.”

“Aye, aye, sir; don't be uneasy.”

“We are going ashore, and we shall try to gain the village of Klock-Klock. If any difficulty should arise on sea, give us warning by firing three shots.”

“All right,” replied West--“at a minute’s interval.”

“If we should not return before evening, send the second boat with ten armed men under the boatswain’s orders, and let them station themselves within a cable’s length of the shore, so as to escort us back. You understand?”

“Perfectly, captain.”

“If we are not to be found, after you have done all in your power, you will take command of the schooner, and bring her back to the Falklands.”

“I will do so.”

The large boat was rapidly got ready. Eight men embarked in it, including Martin Holt and Hunt, all armed with rifles, pistols, and knives; the latter weapons were slung in their belts. They also carried cartridge-pouches. I stepped forward and said,--

“Will you not allow me to accompany you, captain?”

“If you wish to do so, Mr. Jeorling.”

I went to my cabin, took my gun--a repeating rifle--with ball and powder, and rejoined Captain Len Guy, who had kept a place in the stern of the boat for me. Our object was to discover the passage through which Arthur Pym and Dirk Peters had crossed the reef on the 19th of January, 1828, in the Jane's boat. For twenty minutes we rowed along the reef, and then Hunt discovered the pass, which was through a narrow cut in the rocks. Leaving two men in the boat, we landed, and having gone through the winding gorge which gave access to the crest of the coast, our little force, headed by Hunt, pushed on towards the centre of the island. Captain Len Guy and myself exchanged observations, as we walked, on the subject of this country, which, as Arthur Pym declared, differed essentially from every other land hitherto visited by human beings. We soon found that Pym's description was trustworthy. The general colour of the plains was black, as though the clay were made of lava-dust; nowhere was anything white to be seen. At a hundred paces distance Hunt began to run towards an enormous mass of rock, climbed on it with great agility, and looked out over a wide extent of space like a man who ought to recognize the place he is in, but does not.

“What is the matter with him?” asked Captain Len Guy, who was observing Hunt attentively.

“I don't know what is the matter with him, captain. But, as you are aware, everything about this man is odd: his ways are

inexplicable, and on certain sides of him he seems to belong to those strange beings whom Arthur Pym asserts that he found on this island. One would even say that--”

“That--” repeated the captain.

And then, without finishing my sentence, I said,--

“Captain, are you sure that you made a good observation when you took the altitude yesterday?”

“Certainly.”

“So that your point--”

“Gave 83° 20’ of latitude and 43° 5’ of longitude.”

“Exactly?”

“Exactly.”

“There is, then, no doubt that we are on Tsalal Island?”

“None, Mr. Jeorling, if Tsalal Island lies where Arthur Pym places it.”

This was quite true, there could be no doubt on the point, and yet

of all that Arthur Pym described nothing existed, or rather, nothing was any longer to be seen. Not a tree, not a shrub, not a plant was visible in the landscape. There was no sign of the wooded hills between which the village of Klock-Klock ought to lie, or of the streams from which the crew of the fane had not ventured to drink. There was no water anywhere; but everywhere absolute, awful drought.

Nevertheless, Hunt walked on rapidly, without showing any hesitation. It seemed as though he was led by a natural instinct, "a bee's flight," as we say in America. I know not what presentiment induced us to follow him as the best of guides, a Chingachgook, a Renard-Subtil. And why not? Was not he the fellow-countryman of Fenimore Coopet's heroes?

But, I must repeat that we had not before our eyes that fabulous land which Arthur Pym described. The soil we were treading had been ravaged, wrecked, torn by convulsion. It was black, a cindery black, as though it had been vomited from the earth under the action of Plutonian forces; it suggested that some appalling and irresistible cataclysm had overturned the whole of its surface.

Not one of the animals mentioned in the narrative was to be seen, and even the penguins which abound in the Antarctic regions had fled from this uninhabitable land. Its stern silence and solitude made it a hideous desert. No human being was to be seen either on the coast or in the interior. Did any chance of finding William Guy and the survivors of the fane exist in the midst of this scene of desolation?

I looked at Captain Len Guy. His pale face, dim eyes, and knit brow told too plainly that hope was beginning to die within his breast.

And then the population of Tsalal Island, the almost naked men, armed with clubs and lances, the tall, well-made, upstanding women, endowed with grace and freedom of bearing not to be found in a civilized society--those are the expressions of Arthur Pym--and the crowd of children accompanying them, what had become of all these? Where were the multitude of natives, with black skins, black hair, black teeth, who regarded white colour with deadly terror?

All of a sudden a light flashed upon me. "An earthquake!" I exclaimed. "Yes, two or three of those terrible shocks, so common in these regions where the sea penetrates by infiltration, and a day comes when the quantity of accumulated vapour makes its way out and destroys everything on the surface."

"Could an earthquake have changed Tsalal Island to such an extent?" asked Len Guy, musingly.

"Yes, captain, an earthquake has done this thing; it has destroyed every trace of all that Arthur Pym saw here."

Hunt, who had drawn nigh to us, and was listening, nodded his head in approval of my words.

“Are not these countries of the southern seas volcanic?” I resumed; “If the Halbrane were to transport us to Victoria Land, we might find the Erebus and the Terror in the midst of an eruption.”

“And yet,” observed Martin Holt, “if there had been an eruption here, we should find lava beds.”

“I do not say that there has been an eruption,” I replied, “but I do say the soil has been convulsed by an earthquake.”

On reflection it will be seen that the explanation given by me deserved to be admitted. And then it came to my remembrance that according to Arthur Pym’s narrative, Tsalal belonged to a group of islands which extended towards the west. Unless the people of Tsalal had been destroyed, it was possible that they might have fled into one of the neighbouring islands. We should do well, then, to go and reconnoitre that archipelago, for Tsalal clearly had no resources whatever to offer after the cataclysm. I spoke of this to the captain.

“Yes,” he replied, and tears stood in his eyes, “yes, it may be so. And yet, how could my brother and his unfortunate companions have found the means of escaping? Is it not far more probable that they all perished in the earthquake?”

Here Hunt made us a signal to follow him, and we did so.

After he had pushed across the valley for a considerable distance, he stopped.

What a spectacle was before our eyes!

There, lying in heaps, were human bones, all the fragments of that framework of humanity which we call the skeleton, hundreds of them, without a particle of flesh, clusters of skulls still bearing some tufts of hair--a vast bone heap, dried and whitened in this place! We were struck dumb and motionless by this spectacle. When Captain Len Guy could speak, he murmured,--

“My brother, my poor brother!”

On a little reflection, however, my mind refused to admit certain things. How was this catastrophe to be reconciled with Patterson’s memoranda? The entries in his note-book stated explicitly that the mate of the Jane had left his companions on Tsalal Island seven months previously. They could not then have perished in this earthquake, for the state of the bones proved that it had taken place several years earlier, and must have occurred after the departure of Arthur Pym and Dirk Peters, since no mention of it was made in the narrative of the former.

These facts were, then, irreconcilable. If the earthquake was of recent date, the presence of those time-bleached skeletons could not be attributed to its action. In any case, the survivors of the Jane

were not among them. But then, where were they?

The valley of Klock-Klock extended no farther; we had to retrace our steps in order to regain the coast. We had hardly gone half a mile on the cliff's edge when Hunt again stopped, on perceiving some fragments of bones which were turning to dust, and did not seem to be those of a human being.

Were these the remains of one of the strange animals described by Arthur Pym, of which we had not hitherto seen any specimens?

Hunt suddenly uttered a cry, or rather a sort of savage growl, and held out his enormous hand, holding a metal collar. Yes I a brass collar, a collar eaten by rust, but bearing letters which might still be deciphered. These letters formed the three following words:--

“Tiger--Arthur Pym.”

Tiger!--the name of the dog which had saved Arthur Pym's life in the hold of the *Grampus*, and, during the revolt of the crew, had sprung at the throat of Jones, the sailor, who was immediately “finished” by Dirk Peters.

So, then, that faithful animal had not perished in the shipwreck of the *Grampus*. He had been taken on board the *Jane* at the same time as Arthur Pym and the half-breed. And yet the narrative did not allude

to this, and after the meeting with the schooner there was no longer any mention of the dog. All these contradictions occurred to me. I could not reconcile the facts. Nevertheless, there could be no doubt that Tiger had been saved from the shipwreck like Arthur Pym, had escaped the landslip of the Klock-Klock hill, and had come to his death at last in the catastrophe which had destroyed a portion of the population of Tsalal.

But, again, William Guy and his five sailors could not be among those skeletons which were strewn upon the earth, since they were living at the time of Patterson's departure, seven months ago, and the catastrophe already dated several years back!

Three hours later we had returned on board the Halbrane, without having made any other discovery. Captain Len Guy went direct to his cabin, shut himself up there, and did not reappear even at dinner hour.

The following day, as I wished to return to the island in order to resume its exploration from one coast to the other, I requested West to have me rowed ashore.

He consented, after he had been authorized by Captain Len Guy, who did not come with us.

Hung the boatswain, Martin Holt, four men, and myself took our places in the boat without arms; for there was no longer anything

to fear.

We disembarked at our yesterday's landing-place, and Hunt again led the way towards the hill of Klock-Klock. Nothing remained of the eminence that had been carried away in the artificial landslip, from which the captain of the *Jane*, Patterson, his second officer, and five of his men had happily escaped. The village of Klock-Klock had thus disappeared; and doubtless the mystery of the strange discoveries narrated in Edgar Poe's work was now and ever would remain beyond solution.

We had only to regain our ship, returning by the east side of the coast. Hunt brought us through the space where sheds had been erected for the preparation of the *bêche-de mer*, and we saw the remains of them. On all sides silence and abandonment reigned.

We made a brief pause at the place where Arthur Pym and Dirk Peters seized upon the boat which bore them towards higher latitudes, even to that horizon of dark vapour whose rents permitted them to discern the huge human figure, the white giant.

Hunt stood with crossed arms, his eyes devouring the vast extent of the sea.

"Well, Hunt?" said I, tentatively.

Hunt did not appear to hear me; he did not turn his head in my

direction.

“What are we doing here?” I asked him, and touched him on the shoulder.

He started, and cast a glance upon me which went to my heart.

“Come along, Hunt,” cried Hurliguerly. “Are you going to take root on this rock? Don’t you see the Halbrane waiting for us at her moorings? Come along. We shall be off to-morrow. There is nothing more to do here.”

It seemed to me that Hunt’s trembling lips repeated the word “nothing,” while his whole bearing protested against what the boatswain said.

The boat brought us back to the ship. Captain Len Guy had not left his cabin. West, having received no orders, was pacing the deck aft. I seated myself at the foot of the mainmast, observing the sea which lay open and free before us.

At this moment the captain came on deck; he was very pale, and his features looked pinched and weary.

“Mr. Jeorling,” said he, “I can affirm conscientiously that I have done all it was possible to do. Can I hope henceforth that my brother William and his companions--No! No! We must go

away--before winter--”

He drew himself up, and cast a last glance towards Tsalal Island.

“To-morrow, Jim,” he said to West, “to morrow we will make sail as early as possible.”

At this moment a rough voice uttered the words:

“And Pym--poor Pym!”

I recognized this voice.

It was the voice I had heard in my dream.