

CHAPTER XXIV.

ELEVEN YEARS IN A FEW PAGES.

The heading of the following chapter indicates that the adventures of William Guy and his companions after destruction of the English schooner, and the details of their history subsequent to the departure of Arthur Pym and Dirk Peters, are about to be narrated with all possible brevity.

We carried our treasure-trove to the cavern, and had happiness of restoring all four men to life. In reality, it was hunger, nothing but hunger, which had reduced the poor fellows to the semblance of death.

On the 8th of February, 1828, the crew of the *Jane*, having no reason to doubt the good faith of the population of Tsalal Island, or that of their chief, Too-Wit, disembarked, in order to visit the village of Klock-Klock, having previously put the schooner into a state of defense, leaving six men on board.

The crew, counting William Guy, the captain, Arthur Pym, and Dirk Peters, formed a body of thirty-two men armed with guns, pistols, and knives. The dog Tiger accompanied them.

On reaching the narrow gorge leading to the village preceded and

followed by the numerous warriors of Too Wit, the little company divided, Arthur Pym, Dirk Peters, and Allen (the sailor) entering a cleft in the hill-side with the intention of crossing it to the other side. From that moment their companions were never to see them more.

After a short interval a shock was felt. The opposite hill fell down in a vast heap, burying William Guy and his twenty-eight companions.

Twenty-two of these unfortunate men were crushed to death on the instant, and their bodies would never be found under that mass of earth.

Seven, miraculously sheltered in the depth of a great cleft of the hill, had survived the catastrophe. These were William Guy, Patterson, Roberts, Coyin, Trinkle, also Forbes and Sexton, since dead. As for Tiger, they knew not whether he had perished in the landslip, or whether he had escaped. There existed in the right side of the hill, as well as in the left, on either side of the fissure, certain winding passages, and it was by crawling along these in the darkness that William Guy, Patterson, and the others reached a cavity which let in light and air in abundance. From this shelter they beheld the attack on the *Jane* by sixty pirogues, the defence made by the six men on board; the invasion of the ship by the savages, and finally the explosion which caused the death of a vast number of natives as well as the complete destruction of the ship.

Too-Wit and the Tsalal islanders were at first terrified by the effects of this explosion, but probably still more disappointed. Their instincts of pillage could not be gratified, because some valueless wreckage was all that remained of the ship and her cargo, and they had no reason to suppose that any of the crew had survived the cleverly contrived collapse of the hill. Hence it came about that Arthur Pym and Dirk Peters on the one side, and William Guy and his companions on the other, were enabled to remain undisturbed in the labyrinths of Klock-Klock, where they fed on the flesh of bitterns--these they could catch with their hands--and the fruit of the nut-trees which grow on the hill-sides. They procured fire by rubbing pieces of soft against pieces of hard wood; there was a quantity of both within their reach.

After a whole week of this confinement, Arthur Pym and the half-breed had succeeded, as we know, in leaving their hiding-place, securing a boat, and abandoning Tsalal Island, but William Guy and his companions had not yet found an opportunity to escape.

After they had been shut up in the labyrinth for twentyone days, the birds on which they lived began to fail them, and they recognized that their only means of escaping hunger--(they had not to fear thirst, for there was a spring of fresh water in the interior of the hill)--was to go down again to the coast, lay hands upon a native boat, and get out to sea. Where were the fugitives to go, and what was to become of them without provisions?--these were questions that had to be asked, and which nobody could answer. Nevertheless,

they would not have hesitated to attempt the adventure if they could have a few hours of darkness; but, at that time of year, the sun did not as yet go down behind the horizon of the eighty-fourth parallel.

Death would probably have put an end to their misery had not the situation been changed by the following events.

On the 22nd of February, in the morning, William Guy and Patterson were talking together, in terrible perplexity of mind, at the orifice of the cavity that opened upon the country. They no longer knew how to provide for the wants of seven persons, who were then reduced to eating nuts only, and were suffering in consequence from severe pain in the head and stomach. They could see big turtles crawling on the beach, but how could they venture to go thither, with hundreds of natives coming and going about their several occupations, with their constant cry of *tékéli-li*?

Suddenly, this crowd of people became violently agitated. Men, women, and children ran wildly about on every side. Some of the savages even took to their boats as though a great danger were at hand. What was happening?

William Guy and his companions were very soon informed. The cause of the tumult was the appearance of an unknown animal, a terrible quadruped, which dashed into the midst of the islanders, snapping at and biting them indiscriminately, as it sprang at their throats with a hoarse growling.

And yet the infuriated animal was alone, and might easily have been killed by stones or arrows. Why then did a crowd of savages manifest such abject terror? Why did they take to flight? Why did they appear incapable of defending themselves against this one beast?

The animal was white, and the sight of it had produced the phenomenon previously observed, that inexplicable terror of whiteness common to all the natives of Tsalal.

To their extreme surprise, William Guy and his companions recognized the strange animal as the dog Tiger.

Yes! Tiger had escaped from the crumbling mass of the hill and betaken himself to the interior of the island, whence he had returned to Klock-Klock, to spread terror among the natives. But Tiger was no mere phantom foe; he was the most dangerous and deadly of enemies, for the poor animal was mad, and his fangs were fatal!

This was the reason why the greater part of the Tsalal islanders took to flight, headed by their chief, Too-Wit, and the Wamos, who are the leading personages of Klock-Klock. It was under these extraordinary circumstances that they abandoned their island, whither they were destined never to return.

Although the boats carried off the bulk of the population, a considerable number still remained on Tsalal, having no means of

escape, and their fate accomplished itself quickly. Several natives who were bitten by Tiger developed hydrophobia rapidly, and attacked the others. Fearful scenes ensued, and are briefly to be summed up in one dismal statement. The bones we had seen in or near Klock-Klock were those of the poor savages, which had lain there bleaching for eleven years!

The poor dog had died after he had done his fell work, in a corner on the beach, where Dirk Peters found his skeleton and the collar bearing the name of Arthur Pym.

Then, after those natives who could not escape from the island had all perished in the manner described, William Guy, Patterson, Trinkle, Covin, Forbes, and Sexton ventured to come out of the labyrinth, where they were on the verge of death by starvation.

What sort of existence was that of the seven survivors of the expedition during the eleven ensuing years?

On the whole, it was more endurable than might have been supposed. The natural products of an extremely fertile soil and the presence of a certain number of domestic animals secured them against want of food; they had only to make out the best shelter for themselves they could contrive, and wait for an opportunity of getting away from the island with as much patience as might be granted to them. And from whence could such an opportunity come? Only from one of the chances within the resources of Providence.

Captain William Guy, Patterson, and their five companions descended the ravine, which was half filled with the fallen masses of the hill-face, amid heaps of scoria and blocks of black granite. Before they left this gorge, it occurred to William Guy to explore the fissure on the right into which Arthur Pym, Dirk Peters, and Allen had turned, but he found it blocked up; it was impossible for him to get into the pass. Thus he remained in ignorance of the existence of the natural or artificial labyrinth which corresponded with the one he had just left, and probably communicated with it under the dry bed of the torrent. The little company, having passed the chaotic barrier that intercepted the northern route, proceeded rapidly towards the north-west. There, on the coast, at about three miles from Klock-Klock, they established themselves in a grotto very like that in our own occupation on the coast of Halbrane Land.

And it was in this place that, during long, hopeless years, the seven survivors of the fane lived, as we were about to do ourselves, but under better conditions, for the fertility of the soil of Tsalal furnished them with resources unknown in Halbrane Land. In reality, we were condemned to perish when our provisions should be exhausted, but they could have waited indefinitely--and they did wait.

They had never entertained any doubt that Arthur Pym, Dirk Peters, and Allen had perished, and this was only too true in Allen's case. How, indeed, could they ever have imagined that Pyro and the half-breed had got hold of a boat and made their escape from Tsalal

Island?

So, then, as William Guy told us, not an incident occurred to break the monotony of that existence of eleven years--not even the reappearance of the islanders, who were kept away from Tsalal by superstitious terror. No danger had threatened them during all that time; but, of course, as it became more and more prolonged, they lost the hope of ever being rescued. At first, with the return of the fine season, when the sea was once more open, they had thought it possible that a ship would be sent in search of the Jane. But after four or five years they relinquished all hope.

There is no need for dwelling on this period, which extends from the year 1828 to the year 1839. The winters were hard. The summer did indeed extend its beneficent influence to the islands of the Tsalal group, but the cold season, with its attendant snows, rains, and tempests, spared them none of its severity.

During seven months Captain William Guy had not lost one of those who had come with him safe and sound out of the trap set for them at Klock-Klock, and this was due, no doubt, to their robust constitutions, remarkable power of endurance, and great strength of character. Alas! misfortune was making ready to fall on them.

The month of May had come--it corresponds in those regions to the month of November in northern lands--and the ice-packs which the current carried towards the north were beginning to drift past

Tsalal. One day, one of the seven men failed to return to the cavern. They called, they waited, they searched for him. All was in vain. He did not reappear; no doubt he had been drowned. He was never more seen by his fellow-exiles.

This man was Patterson, the faithful companion of William Guy.

Now, what William Guy did not know, but we told him, was that Patterson--under what circumstances none would ever learn--had been carried away on the surface of an iceblock, where he died of hunger. And on that ice-block, which had travelled so far as Prince Edward Island, the boatswain had discovered the corpse of the unfortunate man almost decomposed by the action of the warmer waters.

When Captain Len Guy told his brother of the finding of the body of Patterson, and how it was owing to the notes in his pocket-book that the Halbrane had been enabled to proceed towards the antarctic seas, William Guy hid his face in his hands and wept.

Other misfortunes followed upon this one.

Five months after the disappearance of Patterson, in the middle of October, Tsalal Island was laid waste from coast to coast by an earthquake, which destroyed the southwestern group almost entirely. William Guy and his companions must soon have perished on the barren land, which no longer could give them food, had not the means of leaving its coast, now merely an expanse of tumbled rocks, been

afforded them in an almost miraculous manner. Two days after the earthquake, the current carried ashore within a few hundred yards of their cavern a boat which had drifted from the island group on the south-west.

Without the delay of even one day, the boat was laden with as much of the remaining provisions as it could contain, and the six men embarked in it, bidding adieu for ever to the now uninhabitable island.

Unfortunately a very strong breeze was blowing; it was impossible to resist it, and the boat was driven southwards by that very same current which had caused our iceberg to drift to the coast of Halbrane Land.

For two months and a half these poor fellows were borne across the open sea, with no control over their course. It was not until the 2nd of January in the present year (1840) that they sighted land--east of the Jane Sound.

Now, we already knew this land was not more than fifty miles from Halbrane Land. Yes! so small, relatively, was the distance that separated us from those whom we had sought for in the antarctic regions far and wide, and concerning whom we had lost hope.

Their boat had gone ashore far to the south-east of us. But on how different a coast from that of Tsalal Island, or, rather, on one how

like that of Halbrane Land! Nothing was to be seen but sand and stones; neither trees, shrubs, nor plants of any kind. Their provisions were almost exhausted; William Guy and his companions were soon reduced to extreme want, and two of the little company, Forbes and Sexton, died.

The remaining four resolved not to remain a single day longer in the place where they were doomed to die of hunger. They embarked in the boat with the small supply of food still remaining, and once more abandoned themselves to the current, without having been able to verify their position, for want of instruments.

Thus had they been borne upon the unknown deep for twenty-five days, their resources were completely exhausted, and they had not eaten for forty-eight hours, when the boat, with its occupants lying inanimate at the bottom of it, was sighted from Halbrane Land. The rest is already known to the reader of this strange eventful history.

And now the two brothers were at length reunited in that remote corner of the big world which we had dubbed Halbrane Land.