

## CHAPTER XIII.

### GOD BE WITH IT.

From August 29 to September 10.--Thirteen days have gone by and the Ebba has not returned. Did she then not make straight for the American coast? Has she been delayed by a buccaneering cruise in the neighborhood of Back Cup? It seems to me that Ker Karraje's only desire would be to get back with the sections of Roch's engines as soon as possible. Maybe the Virginian foundry had not quite finished them.

Engineer Serko does not display the least anxiety or impatience. He continues to greet me with his accustomed ironical cordiality, and with a kindly air that I distrust--with good reason. He affects to be solicitous as to my health, urges me to make the best of a bad job, calls me Ali Baba, assures me that there is not, in the whole world, such an enchanting spot as this Arabian Nights cavern, observes that I am fed, warmed, lodged, and clothed, that I have no taxes to pay, and that even the inhabitants of the favored principality of Monaco do not enjoy an existence more free from care.

Sometimes this ironical verbiage brings the blood to my face, and I am tempted to seize this cynical banterer by the throat and choke the life out of him. They would kill me afterwards. Still, what would that matter! Would it not be better to end in this way than to spend years

and years amid these infernal and infamous surroundings? However, while there is life there is hope, I reflect, and this thought restrains me.

I have scarcely set eyes upon Thomas Roch since the Ebba went away. He shuts himself up in his laboratory and works unceasingly. If he utilizes all the substances placed at his disposition there will be enough to blow up Back Cup and the whole Bermudan archipelago with it!

I cling to the hope that he will never consent to give up the secret of his deflagrator, and that Engineer Serko's efforts to acquire it will remain futile.

September 3.--To-day I have been able to witness with my own eyes the power of Roch's explosive, and also the manner in which the fulgurator is employed.

During the morning the men began to pierce the passage through the wall of the cavern at the spot fixed upon by Engineer Serko, who superintended the work in person. The work began at the base, where the rock is as hard as granite. To have continued it with pickaxes would have entailed long and arduous labor, inasmuch as the wall at this place is not less than from twenty to thirty yards in thickness, but thanks to Roch's fulgurator the passage will be completed easily and rapidly.

I may well be astonished at what I have seen. The pickaxes hardly made

any impression on the rock, but its disaggregation was effected with really remarkable facility by means of the fulgurator.

A few grains of this explosive shattered the rocky mass and reduced it to almost impalpable powder that one's breath could disperse as easily as vapor. The explosion produced an excavation measuring fully a cubic yard. It was accompanied by a sharp detonation that may be compared to the report of a cannon.

The first charge used, although a very small one, a mere pinch, blew the men in every direction, and two of them were seriously injured. Engineer Serko himself was projected several yards, and sustained some rather severe contusions.

Here is how this substance, whose bursting force surpasses anything hitherto conceived, is employed.

A small hole about an inch and a half in length is pierced obliquely in the rock. A few grains of the explosive are then inserted, but no wad is used.

Then Thomas Roch steps forward. In his hand is a little glass phial containing a bluish, oily liquid that congeals almost as soon as it comes in contact with the air. He pours one drop on the entrance of the hole, and draws back, but not with undue haste. It takes a certain time--about thirty-five seconds, I reckon--before the combination of the fulgurator and deflagrator is effected. But when the explosion

does take place its power of disaggregation is such--I repeat--that it may be regarded as unlimited. It is at any rate a thousand times superior to that of any known explosive.

Under these circumstances it will probably not take more than a week to complete the tunnel.

September 19.--For some time past I have observed that the tide rises and falls twice every twenty-four hours, and that the ebb and flow produce a rather swift current through the submarine tunnel. It is pretty certain therefore that a floating object thrown into the lagoon when the top of the orifice is uncovered would be carried out by the receding tide. It is just possible that during the lowest equinoctial tides the top of the orifice is uncovered. This I shall be able to ascertain, as this is precisely the time they occur. To-day, September 19, I could almost distinguish the summit of the hole under the water. The day after to-morrow, if ever, it will be uncovered.

Very well then, if I cannot myself attempt to get through, may be a bottle thrown into the lagoon might be carried out during the last few minutes of the ebb. And might not this bottle by chance--an ultra-providential chance, I must avow--be picked up by a ship passing near Back Cup? Perhaps even it might be borne away by a friendly current and cast upon one of the Bermudan beaches. What if that bottle contained a letter?

I cannot get this thought out of my mind, and it works me up into a

great state of excitement. Then objections crop up--this one among others: the bottle might be swept against the rocks and smashed ere ever it could get out of the tunnel. Very true, but what if, instead of a bottle a diminutive, tightly closed keg were used? It would not run any danger of being smashed and would besides stand a much better chance of reaching the open sea.

September 20.--This evening, I, unperceived, entered one of the store houses containing the booty pillaged from various ships and procured a keg very suitable for my experiment.

I hid the keg under my coat, and returned to the Beehive and my cell. Then without losing an instant I set to work. Paper, pen, ink, nothing was wanting, as will be supposed from the fact that for three months I have been making notes and dotting down my impressions daily.

I indite the following message:

"On June 15 last Thomas Roch and his keeper Gaydon, or rather Simon Hart, the French engineer who occupied Pavilion No. 17, at Healthful House, near New-Berne, North Carolina, United States of America, were kidnapped and carried on board the schooner Ebba, belonging to the Count d'Artigas. Both are now confined in the interior of a cavern which serves as a lair for the said Count d'Artigas--who is really Ker Karraje, the pirate who some time ago carried on his depredations in the West Pacific--and for about a hundred men of which his band is composed.

"When he has obtained possession of Roch's fulgurator whose power is, so to speak, without limit, Ker Karraje will be in a position to carry on his crimes with complete impunity.

"It is therefore urgent that the states interested should destroy his lair without delay.

"The cavern in which the pirate Ker Karraje has taken refuge is in the interior of the islet of Back Cup, which is wrongly regarded as an active volcano. It is situated at the western extremity of the archipelago of Bermuda, and on the east is bounded by a range of reefs, but on the north, south, and west is open.

"Communication with the inside of the mountain is only possible through a tunnel a few yards under water in a narrow pass on the west. A submarine apparatus therefore is necessary to effect an entrance, at any rate until a tunnel they are boring through the northwestern wall of the cavern is completed.

"The pirate Ker Karraje employs an apparatus of this kind--the submarine boat that the Count d'Artigas ordered of the Cramps and which was supposed to have been lost during the public experiment with it in Charleston Bay. This boat is used not only for the purpose of entering and issuing from Back Cup, but also to tow the schooner and attack merchant vessels in Bermudan waters.

"This schooner Ebba, so well known on the American coast, is kept in a small creek on the western side of the island, behind a mass of rocks, and is invisible from the sea.

"The best place to land is on the west coast formerly occupied by the colony of Bermudan fishers; but it would first be advisable to effect a breach in the side of the cavern by means of the most powerful melinite shells.

"The fact that Ker Karraje may be in the position to use Roch's fulgurator for the defence of the island must also be taken into consideration. Let it be well borne in mind that if its destructive power surpasses anything ever conceived or dreamed of, it extends over a zone not exceeding a mile in extent. The distance of this dangerous zone is variable, but once the engines have been set, the modification of the distance occupies some time, and a warship that succeeds in passing the zone has nothing further to fear.

"This document is written on the twentieth day of September at eight o'clock in the evening and is signed with my name

"THOMAS HART, Engineer."

The above is the text of the statement I have just drawn up. It says all that is necessary about the island, whose exact situation is marked on all modern charts and maps, and points out the expediency of acting without delay, and what to do in case Ker Karraje is in the

position to employ Roch's fulgurator.

I add a plan of the cavern showing its internal configuration, the situation of the lagoon, the lay of the Beehive, Ker Karraje's habitation, my cell, and Thomas Roch's laboratory.

I wrap the document in a piece of tarpaulin and insert the package in the little keg, which measures six inches by three and a half. It is perfectly watertight and will stand any amount of knocking about against the rocks.

There is one danger, however, and that is, that it may be swept back by the returning tide, cast up on the island, and fall into the hands of the crew of the Ebba when the schooner is hauled into her creek. If Ker Karraje ever gets hold of it, it will be all up with me.

It will be readily conceived with what anxiety I have awaited the moment to make the attempt: I am in a perfect fever of excitement, for it is a matter of life or death to me. I calculate from previous observations that the tide will be very low at about a quarter to nine. The top of the tunnel ought then to be a foot and a half above water, which is more than enough to permit of the keg passing through it. It will be another half hour at least before the flow sets in again, and by that time the keg may be far enough away to escape being thrown back on the coast.

I peer out of my cell. There is no one about, and I advance to the



side of the lagoon, where by the light of a nearby lamp, I perceive the arch of the tunnel, towards which the current seems to be setting pretty swiftly.

I go down to the very edge, and cast in the keg which contains the precious document and all my hopes.

"God be with it!" I fervently exclaim. "God be with it!"

For a minute or two the little barrel remains stationary, and then floats back to the side again. I throw it out once more with all my strength.

This time it is in the track of the current, which to my great joy sweeps it along and in twenty seconds, it has disappeared in the tunnel.

Yes, God be with it! May Heaven guide thee, little barrel! May it protect all those whom Ker Karraje menaces and grant that this band of pirates may not escape from the justice of man!