

## CHAPTER XL

### DEATH OF LIEUTENANT WALTER

JANUARY 7. -- During the last few days, since the wind has freshened, the salt water constantly dashing over the raft has terribly punished the feet and legs of some of the sailors. Owen, whom the boatswain ever since the revolt has kept bound to the mast, is in a deplorable state, and, at our request, has been released from his restraint. Sandon and Burke are also suffering from the severe smarting caused in this way, and it is only owing to our more sheltered position on the aft-part of the raft, that we have not all shared the same inconvenience.

To-day the boatswain, maddened by starvation, laid hands upon everything that met his voracious eyes, and I could hear the grating of his teeth as he gnawed at fragments of sails and bits of wood, instinctively endeavoring to fill his stomach by putting the mucus into circulation. At length, by dint of an eager search, he came upon a piece of leather hanging to one of the spars that supported the platform. He snatched it off and devoured it greedily; and, as it was animal matter, it really seemed as though the absorption of the substance afforded him some temporary relief. Instantly we all followed his example; a leather hat, the rims of caps, in short, anything that contained any animal matter

at all, were gnawed and sucked with the utmost avidity. Never shall I forget the scene. We were no longer human -- the impulses and instincts of brute beasts seemed to actuate our every movement.

For a moment the pangs of hunger were somewhat allayed; but some of us revolted against the loathsome food, and were seized either with violent nausea or absolute sickness. I must be pardoned for giving these distressing details; but how otherwise can I depict the misery, moral and physical, which we are enduring? And with it all, I dare not venture to hope that we have reached the climax of our sufferings.

The conduct of Hobart, during the scene that I have just described, has only served to confirm my previous suspicions of him. He took no part in the almost fiendish energy with which we gnawed at our scraps of leather; and, although by his conduct of perpetual groanings, he might be considered to be dying of inanition, yet to me he has the appearance of being singularly exempt from the tortures which we are all enduring. But whether the hypocrite is being sustained by some secret store of food, I have been unable to discover.

Whenever the breeze drops the heat is overpowering; but although our allowance of water is very meager, at present

the pangs of hunger far exceed the pain of thirst. It has often been remarked that extreme thirst is far less endurable than extreme hunger. Is it possible that still greater agonies are in store for us? I cannot, dare not, believe it. Fortunately, the broken barrel still contains a few pints of water, and the other one has not yet been opened. But I am glad to say that notwithstanding our diminished numbers, and in spite of some opposition, the captain has thought right to reduce the daily allowance to half a pint for each person. As for the brandy, of which there is only a quart now left, it has been stowed away safely in the stern of the raft.

This evening has ended the sufferings of another of our companions, making our number now only fourteen. My attentions and Miss Herbey's nursing could do nothing for Lieutenant Walter, and about half-past seven he expired in my arms.

Before he died, in a few broken words, he thanked Miss Herbey and myself for the kindness we had shown him. A crumpled letter fell from his hand, and in a voice that was scarcely audible from weakness, he said :

"It is my mother's letter; the last I had from her -- she was expecting me home; but she will never see me more. Oh, put it to my lips -- let me kiss it before I die. Mother!

mother! Oh, my God!"

I placed the letter in his cold hand, and raised it to his  
lips; his eye lighted for a moment; we heard the faint sound  
of a kiss; and all was over!