

CHAPTER LVI

NEAR THE COAST OF SOUTH AMERICA

JANUARY 27 continued. -- A change came over me as if by miracle. No longer had I any wish to die, and already Curtis, who had heard my cries, was throwing me a rope. I seized it eagerly, and was hauled up on to the raft.

"Fresh water!" were the first words I uttered.

"Fresh water?" cried Curtis; "why then, my friends, we are not far from land!"

It was not too late: the blow had not been struck, and so the victim had not yet fallen. Curtis and Andre (who had regained his liberty) had fought with the cannibals, and it was just as they were yielding to over-powering numbers that my voice had made itself heard.

The struggle came to an end. As soon as the words "fresh water" had escaped my lips, I leaned over the side of the raft and swallowed the life-giving liquid in greedy draughts. Miss Herbey was the first to follow my example, but soon Curtis, Falsten, and all the rest were on their knees and drinking eagerly. The rough sailors seemed as if by a magic touch transformed back from ravenous beasts to

human beings, and I saw several of them raise their hands to heaven in silent gratitude. Andre and his father were the last to drink.

"But where are we?" I asked at length.

"The land is there," said Curtis, pointing toward the west.

We all stared at the captain as though he were mocking us: no land was in sight, and the raft, just as ever, was the center of a watery waste. Yet our senses had not deceived us; the water we had been drinking was perfectly fresh.

"Yes," repeated the captain, "land is certainly there, not more than twenty miles to leeward."

"What land?" inquired the boatswain.

"South America," answered Curtis, "and near the Amazon; no other river has a current strong enough to freshen the ocean twenty miles from shore!"