

## CHAPTER XVII.

AT LAST.

The door of the cottage was open. The visitors entered, and saw at a glance that the single room of which it consisted was empty, although it had been recently occupied. Upon the hearth, which was built of three large stones, lay some extinguished embers upon which the light ashes still lingered, although the lightest breeze would have been sufficient to carry them away. The bed, consisting of a wooden frame, from which was suspended a sailor's hammock, still bore the impress of a human figure.

This hammock, that Erik examined immediately, bore the stamp of the "Vega." On a sort of table formed from the shoulder-blade of some animal and supported by four thigh bones, lay some crumbs of ship's biscuit, a pewter goblet, and a wooden spoon of Swedish workmanship.

They could not doubt that they were in the dwelling-place of Patrick O'Donoghane, and according to all appearances he had only left it a short time ago. Had he quitted the island, or had he only gone to take a walk? The only thing they could do was to make a thorough exploration of the island.

Around the habitation excavations bore witness to the fact that a great

amount of hard work had been done; on a sort of plateau that formed the summit of the hill, a great quantity of ivory had been piled up, and indicated the nature of the work. The voyagers perceived that all the skeletons of elephants and other animals had been despoiled of their ivory, and they arrived at the conclusion that the natives of the Siberian coast had been aware, long before the visit of Patrick O'Donoghane, of the treasure which was to be found upon the island, and had come and carried off large quantities of it. The Irishman, therefore, had not found the quantity of ivory upon the surface of the ground which he had expected, and had been compelled to make excavations and exhume it. The quality of this ivory, which had been buried probably for a long time, appeared to the travelers to be of a very inferior quality.

Now the young doctor of the "Vega" had told them, as had the proprietor of the Red Anchor, in Brooklyn, that laziness was one of the distinguishing characteristics of Patrick O'Donoghane. It therefore seemed to them very improbable that he would be resigned to follow such a laborious and unremunerative life. They therefore felt sure that he would embrace the first opportunity to leave the Island of Ljakow. The only hope that still remained of finding him there was that which the examination of his cabin had furnished them.

A path descended to the shore, opposite to that by which our explorers had climbed up. They followed it, and soon reached the bottom, where the melting snows had formed a sort of little lake, separated from the sea

by a wall of rocks. The path followed the shores of this quiet water, and going around the cliff they found a natural harbor.

They saw a sleigh abandoned on the land, and also traces of a recent fire; Erik examined the shore carefully, but could find no traces of any recent embarkation. He was returning to his companions, when he perceived at the foot of a shrub a red object, which he picked up immediately. It was one of those tin boxes painted outside with carmine which had contained that preserved beef commonly called "endaubage," and which all vessels carry among their provisions. It was not so great a prize, since the captain of the "Vega" had supplied Patrick O'Donoghane with food. But what struck Erik as significant, was the fact that there was printed on the empty box the name of Martinez Domingo, Valparaiso.

"Tudor Brown has been here," he cried. "They told us on board the 'Vega' that his vessel was at Valparaiso when he telegraphed them to wait for him at Vancouver. Besides, this box from Chili could not have been brought here by the 'Vega,' for it is evidently quite fresh. It can not be three days, perhaps not twenty-four hours since it has been opened!"

Dr. Schwaryencrona and Mr. Bredejord shook their heads, as if they hesitated to accept Erik's conclusions, when turning the box in his hands, he descried written in pencil the word "Albatross," which had doubtless been done by the person who had furnished the vessel with the beef. He pointed it out to his friends.

"Tudor Brown has been here," he repeated, "and why should he come except to carry off Patrick O'Donoghhan. Let us go, it is evident they embarked at this creek. His men, while they were waiting for him, have taken breakfast around this fire. He has carried off the Irishman, either willingly or unwillingly. I am as certain of it as if I saw them embark."

Notwithstanding this firm belief, Erik carefully explored the neighborhood, to assure himself that Patrick O'Donoghhan was no longer there. An hour's walk convinced him that the island was uninhabited. There was no trace of a path, nor the least vestige of a human being. On all sides valleys extended as far as his sight could reach, without even a bird to animate its solitude. And above all, the gigantic bones which they beheld lying around in every direction, gave them a feeling of disgust; it seemed as if an army of animals had taken refuge in this solitary island only to die there.

"Let us go!" said Dr. Schwaryencrona. "There is no use in making a more complete search of the island; we have seen sufficient to assure us that Patrick O'Donoghhan would not require much urging to induce him to leave this place!"

Four hours later they were again on board of the "Alaska," and continuing their journey.

Erik did not hide the fact that his hopes had received a severe check.

Tudor Brown had been ahead of him, he had succeeded in reaching the island first, and doubtless had carried off Patrick O'Donoghhan. It was therefore hardly probable that they would succeed in finding him again. A man capable of displaying such ability in his fiendish attack upon the "Alaska," and who could adopt such energetic measures to carry off the Irishman from such a place, would assuredly exert himself to the utmost to prevent them from ever coming in contact with him. The world is large, and its waters were open to the "Albatross." Who could tell to what point of the compass Patrick O'Donoghhan and his secret would be carried?

This is what the captain of the "Alaska" said to himself, as he walked the deck of his vessel, after giving orders to steer to the westward. And to these doleful thoughts was added a feeling of remorse that he had permitted his friends to share the dangers and fatigue of his useless expedition. It was doubly useless, since Tudor Brown had found Nordenskiold before the "Alaska," and also preceded them to the Island of Ljakow. They must then return to Stockholm, if they ever succeeded in reaching it, without having accomplished one of the objects of the expedition. It was indeed a great disappointment. But at least their returning in a contrary direction to the "Vega" would prove the feasibility of the northeast passage. At any risk he must reach Cape Tchelynskin, and double it from east to west. At any risk he must return to Sweden by way of the Sea of Kara. It was this redoubtable Cape Tchelynskin, formerly considered impassable, that the "Alaska" crowded on steam to reach. They did not follow the exact route of the "Vega,"

for Erik had no occasion to descend the Siberian coast.

Leaving to starboard the islands of Stolbovvi and Semenoffski, which they sighted on the 4th of August, they sailed due west, following closely the 76th degree of latitude, and made such good speed that in eight days they had made 35 degrees of longitude, from the 140th to the 105th degree east of Greenwich. It is true that they had to burn a great deal of coal to accomplish this, for the "Alaska" had had contrary winds almost all the time. But Erik thought rightly that everything was subordinate to the necessity of making their way out of these dangerous passes as speedily as possible. If they could once reach the mouth of the Yenisei, they could always procure the necessary fuel.

On the 14th of August, at midday they were unable to make a solar observation on account of a thick fog, which covered the whole sky. But they knew that they were approaching a great Asiatic promontory, therefore Erik advanced with extreme caution, while at the same time he had the speed of the vessel slackened.

Toward night he gave orders to have the vessel stopped. These precautions were not useless. The following morning at daylight they made soundings and found that they were in only thirty fathoms of water, and an hour afterward they came in sight of land; and the "Alaska" soon reached a bay in which she could cast anchor. They resolved to wait until the fog dispersed before going on land, but as the 15th and 16th of August passed without bringing about this desired result, Erik

determined to start accompanied by Mr. Bredejord, Mr. Malarius, and the doctor. A short examination showed them that the "Alaska" was at the extreme north of the two points of Cape Tchelynskin; on two sides the land lay low toward the sea, but it rose gradually toward the south, and they perceived that it was about two or three hundred feet in height. No snow or ice was to be seen in any direction, except along the borders of the sea where there was a little band, such as is commonly seen in all arctic regions. The clayey soil was covered with abundant vegetation, consisting of mossy grasses and lichens. The coast was enlivened by great numbers of wild geese and walruses. A white bear displayed himself on top of a rock. If it had not been for the fog which cast a gray mantle over everything, the general aspect of this famous Cape Tchelynskin was not particularly disagreeable; certainly there was nothing to justify the name of Cape Severe, which it had borne for three centuries.

As they advanced to the extreme point at the west of the bay, the travelers perceived a sort of monument that crowned a height, and naturally pressed forward to visit it. They saw, as they approached, that it was a sort of "cairn," or mass of stones supporting a wooden column made out of a post. This column bore two inscriptions; the first read as follows:

"On the 19th of August, 1878, the 'Vega' left the Atlantic to double Cape Tchelynskin, en route for Behring's Straits."

The second read:

"On the 12th of August, 1879, the 'Albatross,' coming from Behring's Straits, doubled Cape Tchelynskin, en route for the Atlantic."

Once again Tudor Brown had preceded the "Alaska." It was now the 16th of August.

He had written this inscription only four days previously.

In Erik's eyes it appeared cruel and ironical; it seemed to him to say:

"I will defeat you at every turn. All your efforts will be useless.

Nordenskiold has solved the problem. Tudor Brown, the counter proof."

As for himself he would return humiliated and ashamed, without having demonstrated, found or proved anything. He was going without adding a single word to the inscriptions on the column. But Dr. Schwaryencrona would not listen to him, and taking out his knife from his pocket he wrote on the bottom of the post these words:

"On the 16th of August, 1879, the 'Alaska' left Stockholm, and came here across the Atlantic and the Siberian Sea, and has doubled Cape Tchelynskin, en route to accomplish the first circumpolar periplus."



There is a strange power in words. This simple phrase recalled to Erik what a geographical feat he was in hopes of accomplishing, and without his being conscious of it restored him to good humor. It was true, after all, that the "Alaska" would be the first vessel to accomplish this voyage. Other navigators before him had sailed through the arctic-American seas, and accomplished the northwest passage. Nordenskiöld and Tudor Brown had doubled Cape Tchelynskin; but no person had as yet gone from one to the other, completely around the pole, completing the three hundred and sixty degrees.

This prospect restored every one's ardor, and they were eager to depart. Erik thought it best, however, to wait until the next day and see if the fog would lift; but fogs appeared to be the chronic malady of Cape Tchelynskin, and when next morning the sun rose without dissipating it, he gave orders to hoist the anchor.

Leaving to the south the Gulf of Taymis--which is also the name of the great Siberian peninsula of which Cape Tchelynskin forms the extreme point--the "Alaska," directing her course westward, sailed uninterruptedly during the day and night of the 17th of August.

On the eighteenth, at day-break, the fog disappeared at last and the atmosphere was pure and enlivened by the sunshine. By midday they had rounded the point, and immediately descried a distant sail to the south-west.

The presence of a sailing-vessel in these unfrequented seas was too extraordinary a phenomenon not to attract special attention. Erik, with his glass in his hand, ascended to the lookout and examined the vessel carefully for a long time. It appeared to lie low in the water, was rigged like a schooner and had a smoke-stack, although he could not perceive any smoke. When he descended from the bridge the young captain said to the doctor:

"It looks exactly like the 'Albatross!'" Then he gave orders to put on all steam possible. In less than a quarter of an hour he saw that they were gaining on the vessel, whose appointments they were now able to discern with the naked eye. They could see that the breeze had slackened, and that her course was at right angles with that of the "Alaska."

But suddenly a change took place in the distant vessel; Clouds of smoke issued from her smoke-stack, and formed behind her a long black cloud. She was now going by steam and in the same direction as the "Alaska."

"There is now no doubt of it. It is the 'Albatross,'" said Erik.

He gave orders to the engineer to increase the speed of the "Alaska," if possible. They were then making fourteen knots, and in a quarter of an hour they were making sixteen knots. The vessel that they were pursuing had not been able to attain a like rate of speed, for the "Alaska" continued to gain upon her. In thirty minutes they were near enough to

her to distinguish all her men who were maneuvering her. At last they could see the moldings and letters forming her name, "Albatross."

Erik gave orders to hoist the Swedish flag. The "Albatross" immediately hoisted the stars and stripes of the United States of America.

In a few minutes the two vessels were only separated by a few hundred yards. Then the captain of the "Alaska" took his speaking-trumpet and hailed the vessel in English:

"Ship ahoy! I wish to speak with your captain!"

In a few moments some one made his appearance on the bridge of the "Albatross." It was Tudor Brown.

"I am the proprietor and captain of this yacht," he said. "What do you want?"

"I wish to know whether Patrick O'Donoghane is on board!"

"Patrick O'Donoghane is on board and can speak for himself," answered Tudor Brown.

He made a sign, and a man joined him on the bridge.

"This is Patrick O'Donoghane," said Tudor Brown. "What do you want with

him?"

Erik was desirous of this interview so long, he had come so far in search of this man, that when he found himself unexpectedly in his presence and recognized him by his red hair and broken nose, he was at first taken aback and scarcely knew what to say to him. But gathering his ideas together, he at last made an attempt.

"I have been wishing to talk to you confidentially for several years," he said. "I have been seeking for you, and it was to find you that I came into these seas. Will you come on board of my vessel?"

"I do not know you, and I am very well satisfied to stay where I am," answered the man.

"But I know you. I have heard through Mr. Bowles that you were on board when the 'Cynthia' was wrecked, and that you had spoken to him about the infant who was tied to a buoy. I am that infant, and it is about this matter that I wish you to give me all the information in your power."

"You must question somebody else, for I am not in the humor to give any."

"Do you wish me to suppose that the information is not to your credit?"

"You can think what you like; it is a matter of perfect indifference to

me," said the man.

Erik resolved to betray no irritation.

"It would be better for you to tell me what I wish to know of your own free will than to be compelled to do so before a court of justice," he said, coolly.

"A court of justice! They will have to catch me first," answered the other, mockingly.

Here Tudor Brown interposed.

"You see it is not my fault if you have not obtained the information that you desired," said he to Erik. "The best thing is now for us both to resume our course and go where we desire."

"Why should we each go our way?" answered the young captain. "Would it not be better for us to keep together until we reach some civilized country where we can settle these matters."

"I have no business with you, and do not want any one's company," answered Tudor Brown, moving as if he was about to leave the bridge.

Erik stopped him by a sign.

"Proprietor of the 'Albatross,'" he said, "I bear a regular commission from my government, and am besides an officer of the maritime police. I therefore ask you to show me your papers immediately!"

Tudor Brown did not make the slightest answer, but descended the bridge with the man whom he had called. Erik waited a couple of minutes, and then he spoke again:

"Commander of the 'Albatross,' I accuse you of having attempted to shipwreck my vessel on the rocks of Sein, and I now summon you to come and answer this accusation before a marine tribunal. If you refuse to answer this summons it will be my duty to compel you to do so!"

"Try it if you like," cried Tudor Brown, and gave orders to resume his journey.

During this colloquy his vessel had insensibly tacked, and now stood at right angles with the "Alaska." Suddenly the wheel commenced to revolve and beat the water which boiled and foamed around it. A prolonged whistle was heard, and the "Albatross" carrying all the steam she could raise sped over the waters in the direction of the North Pole.

Two minutes later, the "Alaska" was rushing after her.