

CHAPTER XXII.

AT VAL-FERAY.

A month later at Val-Féray, an old homestead of the family, situated half a league from Brest, Erik's adopted family were assembled, together with his mother and grandfather. Mrs. Durrien had, with the delicacy of feeling habitual to her, desired that the good, simple-hearted beings who had saved her son's life should share her profound and inexpressible joy. She had insisted that Dame Katrina, and Vanda, Mr. Hersebom, and Otto should accompany Doctor Schwaryencrona, Kajsa, Mr. Bredejord, and Mr. Malarius, and they held a great festival together.

Amidst the rugged natural scenery of Breton and near the sea, her Norwegian guests felt more at their ease than they could have done in Varennes Street. They took long walks in the woods together, and told each other all they knew about Erik's still somewhat obscure history, and little by little many hitherto inexplicable points became clear. Their long talks and discussions cast light upon many obscure circumstances.

The first question they asked each other was, Who was Tudor Brown? What great interest did he have in preventing Patrick O'Donoghhan from telling who Erik's relations were? The words of that unfortunate man had established one fact, viz., that Tudor Brown's real name was Jones, as

it was the only one that the Irishman had known him by. Now, a Mr. Noah Jones had been associated with Erik's father in working a petroleum mine, that the young engineer had discovered in Pennsylvania. The simple announcement of this fact gave a sinister aspect to many events which had so long appeared mysterious: the suspicious wreck of the "Cynthia," the fall of the infant into the sea, perhaps the death of Erik's father. A document that Mr. Durrien found among his papers elucidated many of these perplexing questions.

"Several months before his marriage," he said to Erik's friends, "my son-in-law had discovered, near Harrisburg, a petroleum well. He lacked the capital necessary to purchase it, and he saw that he was in danger of losing all the advantages which the possession of it would secure to him. Chance made him acquainted with Mr. Noah Jones, who represented himself as a cattle dealer from the far West. But in reality, as he found out afterward, he was a slave-trader.

"This individual agreed to advance the sum necessary to purchase and work the petroleum mine, which was called the Vandalia. He made my son-in-law sign, in exchange for this assistance, an agreement which was very profitable to himself. I was ignorant of the terms of this contract at the time of his marriage to my daughter, and according to all appearances he thought but little of it. Unusually gifted, and understanding chemistry and mechanics, yet he was entirely ignorant of business matters, and already had to pay dearly for his inexperience. No doubt he had trusted all the arrangements to Noah Jones, according to

his usual habit. Probably he signed with closed eyes the contract which was laid before him. These are the principle articles agreed upon:

"Art. III. The Vandalia shall remain the sole property of Mr. George Durrien, the discoverer, and Mr. Noah Jones, his silent partner.

"Art. IV. Mr. Noah Jones will take charge of moneys, and pay out what is necessary for the exploration of the mine, he will also sell the product, take charge of the receipts, and have a settlement with his partner every year, when they will divide the net profits.

"Art. V. If either of the partners should wish to sell his share, the other would have the first right to purchase it, and he should have three months in which to make arrangements to do so. He might then become sole proprietor by paying the capital and three per cent. on the net revenue, according to what it had been proved to be at the last inventory.

"Art. VI. Only the children of the two partners could become inheritors of these rights. In case one of the partners should die childless, or his children should not live until they were twenty-one years of age, the entire property to revert to the survivor, to the exclusion of all other heirs of the dead partner.

"N.B. The last article is on account of the different nationalities of the two partners, and because of the complications that could not fail to arise in case of the death of either of them without issue."

"Such," continued Mr. Durrien, "was the contract which my future son-in-law had signed at the time, when he had no thought of marrying, and when everybody, except, perhaps, Mr. Noah Jones, was ignorant of what immense value the Vandalia mine would become in the course of time. They had then hardly commenced operations, and they met with the usual discouragements incident to all new undertakings. Perhaps Noah Jones hoped that his associate would become disgusted with the whole business and retire, leaving him sole proprietor. The marriage of George with my daughter, the birth of his son, and the well becoming suddenly prodigiously fruitful, must have modified his plans by degrees. He could no longer hope to purchase for a trifling sum this splendid property; but before it came into the possession of Noah Jones, first George himself, and then his only child, must disappear from the world. Two years after his marriage and six months after the birth of my grandson, George was found dead near one of the wells--asphyxiated, the doctors said, by gas. I had left the United States upon my nomination as consul to Riga. The business relating to the partnership was left to an attorney to settle. Noah Jones behaved very well, and agreed to all the arrangements that were made for the benefit of my daughter. He agreed to continue the work, and pay every six months into the Central Bank of New York that part of the net profits which belonged to the infant.

Alas! he never made the first payment. My daughter took passage in the 'Cynthia' in order to join me. The 'Cynthia' was lost with her crew and freight under such suspicious circumstances that the insurance company refused to pay; and in this shipwreck the sole heir of my son-in-law disappeared.

"Noah Jones remained the sole proprietor of the Vandalia, which has yielded him at the least since that event an annual income of one hundred and eighty thousand dollars a year."

"Did you never suspect that he had had some hand in these successive catastrophies?" asked Mr. Bredejord.

"I have certainly suspected him; it was only too natural. Such an accumulation of misfortunes, and all tending to his private enrichment, seemed to point him out as the author only too clearly. But how could I prove my suspicions, particularly in a court of justice? They were only vague, and I knew too well that they would have but little weight in an international contest. And then, besides I had my daughter to console, or at least to try and draw away her thoughts from this tragedy, and a lawsuit would only have revived her grief. Briefly I resigned myself to silence. Did I do wrong? Is it to be regretted?"

"I think not, for I feel convinced that it would have produced no results. You see how difficult it is even today, after we have related all the facts in our possession, to arrive at any definite conclusion!"

"But how can you explain the part which Patrick O'Donoghhan has taken in this matter?" asked Dr. Schwaryencrona.

"On this point, as on many others, we are reduced to conjectures, but it seems to me that there is one which is plausible enough. This O'Donoghhan was cabin-boy on board of the 'Cynthia,' in the personal service of the captain, and consequently in constant communication with the first-class passengers, who always eat at the captain's table. He therefore certainly knew the name of my daughter, and her French origin, and he could easily have found her again.

"Had he been commissioned by Noah Jones to perform some dark mission? Had he a hand in causing the shipwreck of the 'Cynthia,' or simply in pushing the infant into the sea? this they could never know for a certainty since he was dead. One thing was evident, he was aware how important the knowledge of this fact was for Noah Jones. But did this lazy drunken man know that the infant was living? Had he any hand in saving it? Had he rescued it from the sea to leave it floating near Noroe?

"This was a doubtful point. In any case he must have assured Noah Jones that the infant had survived. He was doubtless proud of knowing the country which had received him, and he had probably taken precautions to know all about the child, so that if any misfortune happened to him--O'Donoghhan--Noah Jones would be obliged to pay him well for his

silence. He was doubtless the person from whom he received money every time he landed in New York."

"All this appears to me to be very probable," said Mr. Bredejord, "and I think that subsequent events confirm it. The first advertisements of Doctor Schwaryencrona disturbed Noah Jones, and he believed it to be an imperative necessity to get rid of Patrick O'Donoghlan, but he was obliged to act prudently. He therefore contented himself with frightening the Irishman, by making him believe that he would be brought before a criminal court. The result of this we know from Mr. and Mrs. Bowles, of the Red Anchor, who told us of the haste with which Patrick O'Donoghlan had taken flight. He evidently believed that he was in danger of being arrested, or he would not have gone so far, to live among the Samoyedes, and under an assumed name, which Noah Jones had doubtless advised him to do.

"But the announcement in the newspapers about Patrick O'Donoghlan must have been a severe blow to him. He had made a journey to Stockholm expressly to assure us that the Irishman was dead, and doubtless to discover if possible how far we had pushed our inquiries. The publication of the correspondence of the 'Vega, and the departure of the 'Alaska,' must have made Noah Jones, or Tudor Brown, as he called himself, feel that he was in imminent peril, for his confidence in Patrick O'Donoghlan could be only very limited, and he would have revealed his secret to any one who would have assured him that he would not be punished. Happily as affairs have turned out, we may congratulate

ourselves upon having escaped pretty well."

"Who knows?" said the doctor, "perhaps all the danger we have encountered has only helped to bring us to the knowledge of the truth. But for running on the rocks of the Basse-Froide, we would probably have pursued the route through the Suez Canal, and then we should have reached Behring's Strait too late to meet the 'Vega.' It is at least doubtful whether we would have undertaken the voyage to the Island of Ljakow, and more doubtful still whether we would have been able to extract any information from Patrick O'Donoghane if we had met him in company with Tudor Brown.

"So, although our entire voyage has been marked by tragical events, it is due to the fact of our having accomplished the periplus in the 'Alaska, and the consequent celebrity which has been the result for Erik, that he has at last found his family."

"Yes," said Mrs. Durrien, laying her hand proudly on the head of her son, "it is his glory which has restored him to me."

And immediately she added:

"It was a crime that deprived me of you, but your own goodness which has restored you to me!"

"And the rascality of Noah Jones has resulted in making our Erik one of

the richest men in America," cried Mr. Bredejord.

Every one looked at him with surprise.

"Doubtless," answered the eminent lawyer. "Erik is his father's heir, and has a share in the income, derived from the Vandalia mine. Has he not been unjustly deprived of this for the last twenty-two years?"

"We have only to give proofs of his identity, and we have plenty of witnesses, Mr. Hersebom, Dame Katrina and Mr. Malarius, besides ourselves. If Noah Jones has left any children, they are responsible for the enormous arrears which will probably consume all their share of the capital stock.

"If the rascal has left no children, by the terms of the contract which Mr. Durrien has just read, Erik is the sole inheritor of the entire property; and according to all accounts he ought to have in Pennsylvania an income of one hundred and fifty to two hundred thousand dollars a year!"

"Ah, ah," said the doctor, laughing. "Behold the little fisherman of Noroe become an eligible parti! Laureate of the Geographical Society, author of the first circumpolar periplus, and afflicted with the modest income of two hundred thousand dollars. There are not many such husbands to be met with in Stockholm. What do you say Kajsa?"

The young girl blushed painfully at being thus addressed, but her uncle had no suspicion that he had made a cruel speech.

Kajsa had felt that she had not acted wisely in treating Erik as she had done, and she resolved for the future to show him more attention.

But it was a singular fact that Erik no longer cared for her, since he felt himself elevated above her unjust disdain. Perhaps it was absence, or the lonely hours which he had spent walking the deck at night, which had revealed to him the poverty of Kajsa's heart; or it might be the satisfaction he felt that she could no longer regard him as "a waif"; he only treated her now with the most perfect courtesy, to which she was entitled as a young lady and Dr. Schwaryencrona's niece.

All his preference now was for Vanda, who indeed grew every day more and more charming, and was losing all her little village awkwardness under the roof of an amiable and cultivated lady. Her exquisite goodness, her native grace, and perfect simplicity, made her beloved by all who approached her. She had not been eight days at Val-Fray, when Mrs. Durrien declared positively that it would be impossible for her ever to part with her.

Erik undertook to arrange with Mr. Hersebom and Dame Katrina that they should leave Vanda behind them, with the express condition that he would bring her himself every year to see them. He had tried to keep all his adopted family with him, even offering to transport from Noroe the house

with all its furniture where he had passed his infancy. But this project of emigration was generally regarded as impracticable. Mr. Hersebom and Katrina were too old to change their habits. They would not have been perfectly happy in a country of whose language and habits they were ignorant. He was obliged, therefore, to permit them to depart, but not before making such provision for them as would enable them to spend the remainder of their days in ease and comfort, which, notwithstanding their honest, laborious lives, they had been unable to accomplish.

Erik would have liked to have kept Otto at least, but he preferred his fiord, and thought that there was no life preferable to that of a fisherman. It must also be confessed that the golden-haired and blue-eyed daughter of the overseer of the oil-works had something to do with the attractions which Noroe had for him. At least we must conclude so, since it was soon made known that he expected to marry her at the next "Yule," or Christmas.

Mr. Malarius counted upon educating their children as he had educated Erik and Vanda. He modestly resumed his position in the village school, after sharing in the honor of the decorations bestowed by the Geographical Society of France upon the captain of the "Alaska." He was also busily occupied in correcting the proofs of his magnificent work on the "Flora of the Arctic Regions." As for Dr. Schwaryencrona, he has not quite finished his "Treatise on Iconography," which will transmit his name to posterity.

The latest legal business of Mr. Bredejord has been to establish Erik's claim as sole proprietor of the Vandalia mine. He gained his case in the first instance, and also on appeal, which was no small success.

Erik took advantage of this, and of the enormous fortune thus accruing to him, to purchase the "Alaska," which he converted into a pleasure yacht. He uses it every year to go to Noroe in company with Mme. Durrien and Vanda, to visit his adopted family. Although his civil rights have been accorded to him, and his legal name is Emile Durrien, he has added that of Hersebom, and among his relatives he is still called only Erik.

The secret desire of his mother is to see him some day married to Vanda, whom she already loves as a daughter, and, as Erik evidently shares this desire, we may suppose that it will be realized one of these days.

Kajsa still remains single, with the knowledge that she has lost her opportunity.

Dr. Schwaryencrona, Mr. Bredejord, and Professor Hochstedt still play innumerable games of whist.

One evening the doctor, having played worse than usual, Mr. Bredejord, as he tapped his snuff-box, had the pleasure of recalling to his mind a circumstance which had too long been forgotten.

"When do you intend to send me your Pliny?" he asked, with a wicked

gleam in his eye. "Certainly you can no longer think that Erik is of Irish origin?"

The doctor was thunder-struck for a moment by this speech, but he soon recovered himself.

"Bah! an ex-president of the French Republic was a direct descendant of one of the Irish kings," he said, seriously. "I should not be at all surprised if Mr. Durrien belongs to the same family!"

"Evidently," replied Mr. Bredejord. "In fact it is so extremely probable that out of sport I will send you my Quintilian!"

THE END.