

CHAPTER VIII.

WHICH LEADS GODFREY TO BITTER REFLECTIONS ON THE MANIA FOR TRAVELLING.

Three long hours had still to pass before the sun reappeared above the horizon. These were such hours that they might rather be called centuries.

The trial was a rough one to begin with, but, we repeat, Godfrey had not come out for a simple promenade. He himself put it very well when he said he had left behind him quite a lifetime of happiness and repose, which he would never find again in his search for adventures. He tried his utmost therefore to rise to the situation.

He was, temporarily, under shelter. The sea after all could not drive him off the rock which lay anchored alone amid the spray of the surf. Was there any fear of the incoming tide soon reaching him? No, for on reflection he concluded that the wreck had taken place at the highest tide of the new moon.

But was the rock isolated? Did it command a line of breakers scattered on this portion of the sea? What was this coast which Captain Turcott had thought he saw in the darkness? To which continent did it belong? It was only too certain that the Dream had been driven out of her route during the storm of the preceding days. The position of the ship could

not have been exactly fixed. How could there be a doubt of this when the captain had two hours before affirmed that his charts bore no indication of breakers in these parts! He had even done better and had gone himself to reconnoitre these imaginary reefs which his look-outs had reported they had seen in the east.

It nevertheless had been only too true, and Captain Turcott's reconnaissance would have certainly prevented the catastrophe if it had only been pushed far enough. But what was the good of returning to the past?

The important question in face of what had happened--a question of life or death--was for Godfrey to know if he was near to some land. In what part of the Pacific there would be time later on to determine. Before everything he must think as soon as the day came of how to leave the rock, which in its biggest part could not measure more than twenty yards square. But people do not leave one place except to go to another. And if this other did not exist, if the captain had been deceived in the fog, if around the breakers there stretched a boundless sea, if at the extreme point of view the sky and the water seemed to meet all round the horizon?

The thoughts of the young man were thus concentrated on this point. All his powers of vision did he employ to discover through the black night if any confused mass, any heap of rocks or cliffs, would reveal the neighbourhood of land to the eastward of the reef.

Godfrey saw nothing. Not a smell of earth reached his nose, not a sensation of light reached his eyes, not a sound reached his ears. Not a bird traversed the darkness. It seemed that around him there was nothing but a vast desert of water.

Godfrey did not hide from himself that the chances were a thousand to one that he was lost. He no longer thought of making the tour of the world, but of facing death, and calmly and bravely his thoughts rose to that Providence which can do all things for the feeblest of its creatures, though the creatures can do nothing of themselves. And so Godfrey had to wait for the day to resign himself to his fate, if safety was impossible; and, on the contrary, to try everything, if there was any chance of life.

Calmed by the very gravity of his reflections, Godfrey had seated himself on the rock. He had stripped off some of his clothes which had been saturated by the sea-water, his woollen waistcoat and his heavy boots, so as to be ready to jump into the sea if necessary.

However, was it possible that no one had survived the wreck? What! not one of the men of the Dream carried to shore? Had they all been sucked in by the terrible whirlpool which the ship had drawn round herself as she sank? The last to whom Godfrey had spoken was Captain Turcott, resolved not to quit his ship while one of his sailors was still there! It was the captain himself who had hurled him into the sea at the moment the Dream was disappearing.

But the others, the unfortunate Tartlet, and the unhappy Chinese, surprised without doubt, and swallowed up, the one in the poop, the other in the depths of the hold, what had become of them? Of all those on board the Dream, was he the only one saved? And had the steam launch remained at the stern of the steamer? Could not a few passengers or sailors have saved themselves therein, and found time to flee from the wreck? But was it not rather to be feared that the launch had been dragged down by the ship under several fathoms of water?

Godfrey then said to himself, that if in this dark night he could not see, he could at least make himself heard. There was nothing to prevent his shouting and hailing in the deep silence. Perhaps the voice of one of his companions would respond to his.

Over and over again then did he call, giving forth a prolonged shout which should have been heard for a considerable distance round. Not a cry answered to his.

He began again, many times, turning successively to every point of the horizon.

Absolute silence.

"Alone! alone!" he murmured.

Not only had no cry answered to his, but no echo had sent him back the sound of his own voice. Had he been near a cliff, not far from a group

of rocks, such as generally border the shore, it was certain that his shouts, repelled by the obstacles, would have returned to him. Either eastwards of the reef, therefore, stretched a low-lying shore ill-adapted for the production of an echo, or there was no land in his vicinity, the bed of breakers on which he had found refuge was isolated.

Three hours were passed in these anxieties. Godfrey, quite chilled, walked about the top of the rock, trying to battle with the cold. At last a few pale beams of light tinged the clouds in the zenith. It was the reflection of the first colouring of the horizon.

Godfrey turned to this side--the only one towards which there could be land--to see if any cliff outlined itself in the shadow. With its early rays the rising sun might disclose its features more distinctly.

But nothing appeared through the misty dawn. A light fog was rising over the sea, which did not even admit of his discovering the extent of the breakers.

[Illustration: Nothing appeared through the mist. page 82]

He had, therefore, to satisfy himself with illusions. If Godfrey were really cast on an isolated rock in the Pacific, it was death to him after a brief delay, death by hunger, by thirst, or if necessary, death at the bottom of the sea as a last resource!

However, he kept constantly looking, and it seemed as though the

intensity of his gaze increased enormously, for all his will was concentrated therein.

At length the morning mist began to fade away. Godfrey saw the rocks which formed the reef successively defined in relief on the sea, like a troop of marine monsters. It was a long and irregular assemblage of dark boulders, strangely worn, of all sizes and forms, whose direction was almost west and east. The enormous block on the top of which Godfrey found himself emerged from the sea on the western edge of the bank scarcely thirty fathoms from the spot where the Dream had gone down. The sea hereabouts appeared to be very deep, for of the steamer nothing was to be seen, not even the ends of her masts. Perhaps by some under-current she had been drawn away from the reefs.

A glance was enough for Godfrey to take in this state of affairs. There was no safety on that side. All his attention was directed towards the other side of the breakers, which the lifting fog was gradually disclosing. The sea, now that the tide had retired, allowed the rocks to stand out very distinctly. They could be seen to lengthen as their humid bases widened. Here were vast intervals of water, there a few shallow pools. If they joined on to any coast, it would not be difficult to reach it.

Up to the present, however, there was no sign of any shore. Nothing yet indicated the proximity of dry land, even in this direction.

The fog continued to lift, and the field of view persistently watched by

Godfrey continued to grow. Its wreaths had now rolled off for about half a mile or so. Already a few sandy flats appeared among the rocks, carpeted with their slimy sea-weed.

Did not this sand indicate more or less the presence of a beach, and if the beach existed, could there be a doubt but what it belonged to the coast of a more important land? At length a long profile of low hills, buttressed with huge granitic rocks, became clearly outlined and seemed to shut in the horizon on the east. The sun had drunk up all the morning vapours, and his disc broke forth in all its glory.

"Land! land!" exclaimed Godfrey.

And he stretched his hands towards the shore-line, as he knelt on the reef and offered his thanks to Heaven.

It was really land. The breakers only formed a projecting ridge, something like the southern cape of a bay, which curved round for about two miles or more. The bottom of the curve seemed to be a level beach, bordered by trifling hills, contoured here and there with lines of vegetation, but of no great size.

From the place which Godfrey occupied, his view was able to grasp the whole of this side.

Bordered north and south by two unequal promontories, it stretched away for, at the most, five or six miles. It was possible, however, that it

formed part of a large district. Whatever it was, it offered at the least temporary safety. Godfrey, at the sight, could not conceive a doubt but that he had not been thrown on to a solitary reef, and that this morsel of ground would satisfy his earliest wants.

"To land! to land!" he said to himself.

But before he left the reef, he gave a look round for the last time. His eyes again interrogated the sea away up to the horizon. Would some raft appear on the surface of the waves, some fragment of the Dream, some survivor, perhaps?

Nothing. The launch even was not there, and had probably been dragged into the common abyss.

Then the idea occurred to Godfrey that among the breakers some of his companions might have found a refuge, and were, like him, waiting for the day to try and reach the shore.

There was nobody, neither on the rocks, nor on the beach! The reef was as deserted as the ocean!

But in default of survivors, had not the sea thrown up some of the corpses? Could not Godfrey find among the rocks, along to the utmost boundary of the surf, the inanimate bodies of some of his companions?

No! Nothing along the whole length of the breakers, which the last

ripples of the ebb had now left bare.

Godfrey was alone! He could only count on himself to battle with the dangers of every sort which environed him!

Before this reality, however, Godfrey, let it be said to his credit, did not quail. But as before everything it was best for him to ascertain the nature of the ground from which he was separated by so short a distance, he left the summit of the rock and began to approach the shore.

When the interval which separated the rocks was too great to be cleared at a bound, he got down into the water, and sometimes walking and sometimes swimming he easily gained the one next in order. When there was but a yard or two between, he jumped from one rock to the other.

His progress over these slimy stones, carpeted with glistening sea-weeds, was not easy, and it was long. Nearly a quarter of a mile had thus to be traversed.

But Godfrey was active and handy, and at length he set foot on the land where there probably awaited him, if not early death, at least a miserable life worse than death. Hunger, thirst, cold, and nakedness, and perils of all kinds; without a weapon of defence, without a gun to shoot with, without a change of clothes--such the extremities to which he was reduced.

How imprudent he had been! He had been desirous of knowing if he was capable of making his way in the world under difficult circumstances! He

had put himself to the proof! He had envied the lot of a Crusoe! Well, he would see if the lot were an enviable one!

And then there returned to his mind the thought of his happy existence, that easy life in San Francisco, in the midst of a rich and loving family, which he had abandoned to throw himself into adventures. He thought of his Uncle Will, of his betrothed Phina, of his friends who would doubtless never see him again.

As he called up these remembrances his heart swelled, and in spite of his resolution a tear rose to his eyes.

And again, if he was not alone, if some other survivor of the shipwreck had managed, like him, to reach the shore, and even in default of the captain or the mate, this proved to be Professor Tartlet, how little he could depend on that frivolous being, and how slightly improved the chances of the future appeared! At this point, however, he still had hope. If he had found no trace among the breakers, would he meet with any on the beach?

Who else but he had already touched the shore, seeking a companion who was seeking him?

Godfrey took another long look from north to south. He did not notice a single human being. Evidently this portion of the earth was uninhabited. In any case there was no sign, not a trace of smoke in the air, not a vestige.

"Let us get on!" said Godfrey to himself.

And he walked along the beach towards the north, before venturing to climb the sand dunes, which would allow him to reconnoitre the country over a larger extent.

The silence was absolute. The sand had received no other footmark. A few sea-birds, gulls or guillemots, were skimming along the edge of the rocks, the only living things in the solitude.

Godfrey continued his walk for a quarter of an hour. At last he was about to turn on to the talus of the most elevated of the dunes, dotted with rushes and brushwood, when he suddenly stopped.

A shapeless object, extraordinarily distended, something like the corpse of a sea monster, thrown there, doubtless, by the late storm, was lying about thirty paces off on the edge of the reef.

Godfrey hastened to run towards it.

The nearer he approached the more rapidly did his heart beat. In truth, in this stranded animal he seemed to recognize a human form.

Godfrey was not ten paces away from it, when he stopped as if rooted to the soil, and exclaimed,--

"Tartlet!"

It was the professor of dancing and deportment.

Godfrey rushed towards his companion, who perhaps still breathed.

A moment afterwards he saw that it was the life-belt which produced this extraordinary distension, and gave the aspect of a monster of the sea to the unfortunate professor.

But although Tartlet was motionless, was he dead? Perhaps this natatory clothing had kept him above water, while the surf had borne him to shore?

Godfrey set to work. He knelt down by Tartlet; he unloosed the life-belt and rubbed him vigorously. He noticed at last a light breath on the half-opened lips! He put his hand on his heart! The heart still beat.

Godfrey spoke to him.

Tartlet shook his head, then he gave utterance to a hoarse exclamation, followed by incoherent words.

Godfrey shook him violently.

Tartlet then opened his eyes, passed his left hand over his brow, lifted his right hand and assured himself that his precious kit and bow, which

he tightly held, had not abandoned him.

"Tartlet! My dear Tartlet!" shouted Godfrey, lightly raising his head.

The head with his mass of tumbled hair gave an affirmative nod.

"It is I! I! Godfrey!"

"Godfrey?" asked the professor.

And then he turned over, and rose on to his knees, and looked about, and smiled, and rose to his feet! He had discovered that at last he was on a solid base! He had gathered that he was no longer on the ship's deck, exposed to all the uncertainties of its pitches and its rolls! The sea had ceased to carry him! He stood on firm ground!

And then Professor Tartlet recovered the aplomb which he had lost since his departure; his feet placed themselves naturally, with their toes turned out, in the regulation position; his left hand seized his kit, his right hand grasped his bow.

Then, while the strings, vigorously attacked, gave forth a humid sound of melancholy sonorousness, these words escaped his smiling lips,--

"In place, miss!"

The good man was thinking of Phina.