

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN THAT CRUSOES DO NOT HAVE EVERYTHING AS THEY WISH.

That done, the professor and his pupil rushed into one another's arms.

"My dear Godfrey!" exclaimed Tartlet.

"My good Tartlet!" replied Godfrey.

"At last we are arrived in port!" observed the professor in the tone of a man who had had enough of navigation and its accidents.

He called it arriving in port!

Godfrey had no desire to contradict him.

"Take off your life-belt," he said. "It suffocates you and hampers your movements."

"Do you think I can do so without inconvenience?" asked Tartlet.

"Without any inconvenience," answered Godfrey. "Now put up your fiddle, and let us take a look round."

"Come on," replied the professor; "but if you don't mind, Godfrey, let us go to the first restaurant we see. I am dying of hunger, and a dozen sandwiches washed down with a glass or two of wine will soon set me on my legs again."

"Yes! to the first restaurant!" answered Godfrey, nodding his head; "and even to the last, if the first does not suit us."

"And," continued Tartlet, "we can ask some fellow as we go along the road to the telegraph office so as to send a message off to your Uncle Kolderup. That excellent man will hardly refuse to send on some necessary cash for us to get back to Montgomery Street, for I have not got a cent with me!"

"Agreed, to the first telegraph office," answered Godfrey, "or if there isn't one in this country, to the first post office. Come on, Tartlet."

The professor took off his swimming apparatus, and passed it over his shoulder like a hunting-horn, and then both stepped out for the edge of the dunes which bordered the shore.

What more particularly interested Godfrey, whom the encounter with Tartlet had imbued with some hope, was to see if they too were the only survivors of the Dream.

A quarter of an hour after the explorers had left the edge of the reef they had climbed a dune about sixty or eighty feet high, and stood on

its crest. Thence they looked on a large extent of coast, and examined the horizon in the east, which till then had been hidden by the hills on the shore.

Two or three miles away in that direction a second line of hills formed the background, and beyond them nothing was seen of the horizon.

Towards the north the coast trended off to a point, but it could not be seen if there was a corresponding cape behind. On the south a creek ran some distance into the shore, and on this side it looked as though the ocean closed the view. Whence this land in the Pacific was probably a peninsula, and the isthmus which joined it to the continent would have to be sought for towards the north or north-east.

The country, however, far from being barren, was hidden beneath an agreeable mantle of verdure; long prairies, amid which meandered many limpid streams, and high and thick forests, whose trees rose above one another to the very background of hills. It was a charming landscape.

But of houses forming town, village, or hamlet, not one was in sight! Of buildings grouped and arranged as a farm of any sort, not a sign! Of smoke in the sky, betraying some dwelling hidden among the trees, not a trace. Not a steeple above the branches, not a windmill on an isolated hill. Not even in default of houses a cabin, a hut, an ajoupa, or a wigwam? No! nothing. If human beings inhabited this unknown land, they must live like troglodytes, below, and not above the ground. Not a road was visible, not a footpath, not even a track. It seemed that the foot

of man had never trod either a rock of the beach or a blade of the grass on the prairies.

"I don't see the town," remarked Tartlet, who, however, remained on tiptoe.

"That is perhaps because it is not in this part of the province!" answered Godfrey.

"But a village?"

"There's nothing here."

"Where are we then?"

"I know nothing about it."

"What! You don't know! But Godfrey, we had better make haste and find out."

"Who is to tell us?"

"What will become of us then?" exclaimed Tartlet, rounding his arms and lifting them to the sky.

"Become a couple of Crusoes!"

At this answer the professor gave a bound such as no clown had ever equalled.

Crusoes! They! A Crusoe! He! Descendants of that Selkirk who had lived for long years on the island of Juan Fernandez! Imitators of the imaginary heroes of Daniel Defoe and De Wyss whose adventures they had so often read! Abandoned, far from their relatives, their friends; separated from their fellow-men by thousands of miles, destined to defend their lives perhaps against wild beasts, perhaps against savages who would land there, wretches without resources, suffering from hunger, suffering from thirst, without weapons, without tools, almost without clothes, left to themselves. No, it was impossible!

"Don't say such things, Godfrey," exclaimed Tartlet. "No! Don't joke about such things! The mere supposition will kill me! You are laughing at me, are you not?"

"Yes, my gallant Tartlet," answered Godfrey. "Reassure yourself. But in the first place, let us think about matters that are pressing."

In fact, they had to try and find some cavern, a grotto or hole, in which to pass the night, and then to collect some edible mollusks so as to satisfy the cravings of their stomachs.

Godfrey and Tartlet then commenced to descend the talus of the dunes in the direction of the reef. Godfrey showed himself very ardent in his researches, and Tartlet considerably stupefied by his shipwreck

experiences. The first looked before him, behind him, and all around him; the second hardly saw ten paces in front of him.

"If there are no inhabitants on this land, are there any animals?" asked Godfrey.

He meant to say domestic animals, such as furred and feathered game, not wild animals which abound in tropical regions, and with which they were not likely to have to do.

Several flocks of birds were visible on the shore, bitterns, curlews, bernicle geese, and teal, which hovered and chirped and filled the air with their flutterings and cries, doubtless protesting against the invasion of their domain.

Godfrey was justified in concluding that where there were birds there were nests, and where there were nests there were eggs. The birds congregated here in such numbers, because rocks provided them with thousands of cavities for their dwelling-places. In the distance a few herons and some flocks of snipe indicated the neighbourhood of a marsh.

Birds then were not wanting, the only difficulty was to get at them without fire-arms. The best thing to do now was to make use of them in the egg state, and consume them under that elementary but nourishing form.

But if the dinner was there, how were they to cook it? How were they to

set about lighting a fire? An important question, the solution of which was postponed.

Godfrey and Tartlet returned straight towards the reef, over which some sea-birds were circling. An agreeable surprise there awaited them.

Among the indigenous fowl which ran along the sand of the beach and pecked about among the sea-weed and under the tufts of aquatic plants, was it a dozen hens and two or three cocks of the American breed that they beheld? No! There was no mistake, for at their approach did not a resounding cock-a-doodle-do-oo-oo rend the air like the sound of a trumpet?

And farther off, what were those quadrupeds which were gliding in and out of the rocks, and making their way towards the first slopes of the hills, or grubbing beneath some of the green shrubs? Godfrey could not be mistaken. There were a dozen agouties, five or six sheep, and as many goats, who were quietly browsing on the first vegetation on the very edge of the prairie.

"Look there, Tartlet!" he exclaimed.

And the professor looked, but saw nothing, so much was he absorbed with the thought of this unexpected situation.

A thought flashed across the mind of Godfrey, and it was correct: it was that these hens, agouties, goats, and sheep had belonged to the Dream.

At the moment she went down, the fowls had easily been able to reach the reef and then the beach. As for the quadrupeds, they could easily have swum ashore.

"And so," remarked Godfrey, "what none of our unfortunate companions have been able to do, these simple animals, guided by their instinct, have done! And of all those on board the Dream, none have been saved but a few beasts!"

"Including ourselves!" answered Tartlet naively.

As far as he was concerned, he had come ashore unconsciously, very much like one of the animals. It mattered little. It was a very fortunate thing for the two shipwrecked men that a certain number of these animals had reached the shore. They would collect them, fold them, and with the special fecundity of their species, if their stay on this land was a lengthy one, it would be easy to have quite a flock of quadrupeds, and a yard full of poultry.

But on this occasion, Godfrey wished to keep to such alimentary resources as the coast could furnish, either in eggs or shell-fish. Professor Tartlet and he set to work to forage among the interstices of the stones, and beneath the carpet of sea-weeds, and not without success. They soon collected quite a notable quantity of mussels and periwinkles, which they could eat raw. A few dozen eggs of the bernicle geese were also found among the higher rocks which shut in the bay on the north. They had enough to satisfy a good many; and, hunger pressing,

Godfrey and Tartlet hardly thought of making difficulties about their first repast.

"And the fire?" said the professor.

"Yes! The fire!" said Godfrey.

It was the most serious of questions, and it led to an inventory being made of the contents of their pockets. Those of the professor were empty or nearly so. They contained a few spare strings for his kit, and a piece of rosin for his bow. How would you get a light from that, I should like to know? Godfrey was hardly better provided. However, it was with extreme satisfaction that he discovered in his pocket an excellent knife, whose leather case had kept it from the sea-water. This knife, with blade, gimlet, hook, and saw, was a valuable instrument under the circumstances. But besides this tool, Godfrey and his companion had only their two hands; and as the hands of the professor had never been used except in playing his fiddle, and making his gestures, Godfrey concluded that he would have to trust to his own.

He thought, however, of utilizing those of Tartlet for procuring a fire by means of rubbing two sticks of wood rapidly together. A few eggs cooked in the embers would be greatly appreciated at their second meal at noon.

While Godfrey then was occupied in robbing the nests in spite of the proprietors, who tried to defend their progeny in the shell, the

professor went off to collect some pieces of wood which had been dried by the sun at the foot of the dunes. These were taken behind a rock sheltered from the wind from the sea. Tartlet then chose two very dry pieces, with the intention of gradually obtaining sufficient heat by rubbing them vigorously and continuously together. What simple Polynesian savages commonly did, why should not the professor, so much their superior in his own opinion, be able to do?

Behold him then, rubbing and rubbing, in a way to dislocate the muscles of his arm and shoulder. He worked himself into quite a rage, poor man! But whether it was that the wood was not right, or its dryness was not sufficient, or the professor held it wrongly, or had not got the peculiar turn of hand necessary for operations of this kind, if he did not get much heat out of the wood, he succeeded in getting a good deal out of himself. In short, it was his own forehead alone which smoked under the vapours of his own perspiration.

When Godfrey returned with his collection of eggs, he found Tartlet in a rage, in a state to which his choregraphic exercises had never doubtless provoked him.

"Doesn't it do?" he asked.

"No, Godfrey, it does not do," replied the professor. "And I begin to think that these inventions of the savages are only imaginations to deceive the world."

"No," answered Godfrey. "But in that, as in all things, you must know how to do it."

"These eggs, then?"

"There is another way. If you attach one of these eggs to the end of a string and whirl it round rapidly, and suddenly arrest the movement of rotation, the movement may perhaps transform itself into heat, and then--"

"And then the egg will be cooked?"

"Yes, if the rotation has been swift enough and the stoppage sudden enough. But how do you produce the stoppage without breaking the egg? Now, there is a simpler way, dear Tartlet. Behold!"

And carefully taking one of the eggs of the bernicle goose, he broke the shell at its end, and adroitly swallowed the inside without any further formalities.

Tartlet could not make up his mind to imitate him, and contented himself with the shell-fish.

It now remained to look for a grotto or some shelter in which to pass the night.

"It is an unheard-of thing," observed the professor, "that Crusoes

cannot at the least find a cavern, which, later on, they can make their home!"

"Let us look," said Godfrey.

It was unheard of. We must avow, however, that on this occasion the tradition was broken. In vain did they search along the rocky shore on the southern part of the bay. Not a cavern, not a grotto, not a hole was there that would serve as a shelter. They had to give up the idea.

Godfrey resolved to reconnoitre up to the first trees in the background beyond the sandy coast.

Tartlet and he then remounted the first line of sandhills and crossed the verdant prairies which they had seen a few hours before.

A very odd circumstance, and a very fortunate one at the time, that the other survivors of the wreck voluntarily followed them. Evidently, cocks and hens, and sheep, goats and agouties, driven by instinct, had resolved to go with them. Doubtless they felt too lonely on the beach, which did not yield sufficient food.

Three-quarters of an hour later Godfrey and Tartlet--they had scarcely spoken during the exploration--arrived at the outskirts of the trees. Not a trace was there of habitation or inhabitant. Complete solitude. It might even be doubted if this part of the country had ever been trodden by human feet.

In this place were a few handsome trees, in isolated groups, and others more crowded about a quarter of a mile in the rear formed a veritable forest of different species.

Godfrey looked out for some old trunk, hollowed by age, which could offer a shelter among its branches, but his researches were in vain, although he continued them till night was falling.

Hunger made itself sharply felt, and the two contented themselves with mussels, of which they had thoughtfully brought an ample supply from the beach. Then, quite tired out, they lay down at the foot of a tree, and trusting to Providence, slept through the night.