

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH GODFREY DOES WHAT ANY OTHER SHIPWRECKED MAN
WOULD HAVE DONE

UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES.

The night passed without incident. The two men, quite knocked up with excitement and fatigue, had slept as peacefully as if they had been in the most comfortable room in the mansion in Montgomery Street.

On the morrow, the 27th of June, at the first rays of the rising sun, the crow of the cock awakened them.

Godfrey immediately recognized where he was, but Tartlet had to rub his eyes and stretch his arms for some time before he did so.

"Is breakfast this morning to resemble dinner yesterday?" was his first observation.

"I am afraid so," answered Godfrey. "But I hope we shall dine better this evening."

The professor could not restrain a significant grimace. Where were the tea and sandwiches which had hitherto been brought to him when he awoke? How could he wait till breakfast-time, the bell for which would perhaps never sound, without this preparatory repast?

But it was necessary to make a start. Godfrey felt the responsibility which rested on him, on him alone, for he could in no way depend on his companion. In that empty box which served the professor for a cranium there could be born no practical idea; Godfrey would have to think, contrive, and decide for both.

His first thought was for Phina, his betrothed, whom he had so stupidly refused to make his wife; his second for his Uncle Will, whom he had so imprudently left, and then turning to Tartlet,--

"To vary our ordinary," he said, "here are some shell-fish and half a dozen eggs."

"And nothing to cook them with!"

"Nothing!" said Godfrey. "But if the food itself was missing, what would you say then, Tartlet?"

"I should say that nothing was not enough," said Tartlet drily.

Nevertheless, they had to be content with this repast.

The very natural idea occurred to Godfrey to push forward the reconnaissance commenced the previous evening. Above all it was necessary to know as soon as possible in what part of the Pacific Ocean the Dream had been lost, so as to discover some inhabited place on

the shore, where they could either arrange the way of returning home or await the passing of some ship.

Godfrey observed that if he could cross the second line of hills, whose picturesque outline was visible beyond the first, that he might perhaps be able to do this. He reckoned that they could get there in an hour or two, and it was to this urgent exploration that he resolved to devote the first hours of the day. He looked round him. The cocks and hens were beginning to peck about among the high vegetation. Agouties, goats, sheep, went and came on the skirt of the forest.

Godfrey did not care to drag all this flock of poultry and quadrupeds about with him. But to keep them more safely in this place, it would be necessary to leave Tartlet in charge of them.

Tartlet agreed to remain alone, and for several hours to act as shepherd of the flock.

He made but one observation,--

"If you lose yourself, Godfrey?"

"Have no fear of that," answered the young man, "I have only this forest to cross, and as you will not leave its edge I am certain to find you again."

"Don't forget the telegram to your Uncle Will, and ask him for a good

many hundred dollars."

"The telegram--or the letter! It is all one!" answered Godfrey, who so long as he had not fixed on the position of this land was content to leave Tartlet to his illusions.

Then having shaken hands with the professor, he plunged beneath the trees, whose thick branches scarcely allowed the sun's rays to penetrate. It was their direction, however, which was to guide our young explorer towards the high hill whose curtain hid from his view the whole of the eastern horizon.

Footpath there was none. The ground, however, was not free from all imprint. Godfrey in certain places remarked the tracks of animals. On two or three occasions he even believed he saw some rapid ruminants moving off, either elans, deer, or wapiti, but he recognized no trace of ferocious animals such as tigers or jaguars, whose absence, however, was no cause for regret.

The first floor of the forest, that is to say all that portion of the trees comprised between the first fork and the branches, afforded an asylum to a great number of birds--wild pigeons by the hundred beneath the trees, ospreys, grouse, aracariss with beaks like a lobster's claw, and higher, hovering above the glades, two or three of those lammergeiers whose eye resembles a cockade. But none of the birds were of such special kinds that he could therefrom make out the latitude of this continent.

So it was with the trees of this forest. Almost the same species as those in that part of the United States which comprises Lower California, the Bay of Monterey, and New Mexico.

Arbutus-trees, large-flowered cornels, maples, birches, oaks, four or five varieties of magnolias and sea-pines, such as are met with in South Carolina, then in the centre of vast clearances, olive-trees, chestnuts, and small shrubs. Tufts of tamarinds, myrtles, and mastic-trees, such as are produced in the temperate zone. Generally, there was enough space between the trees to allow him to pass without being obliged to call on fire or the axe. The sea breeze circulated freely amid the higher branches, and here and there great patches of light shone on the ground.

And so Godfrey went along striking an oblique line beneath these large trees. To take any precautions never occurred to him. The desire to reach the heights which bordered the forest on the east entirely absorbed him. He sought among the foliage for the direction of the solar rays so as to march straight on his goal. He did not even see the guide-birds, so named because they fly before the steps of the traveller, stopping, returning, and darting on ahead as if they were showing the way. Nothing could distract him.

His state of mind was intelligible. Before an hour had elapsed his fate would be settled! Before an hour he would know if it were possible to reach some inhabited portion of the continent.

Already Godfrey, reasoning on what had been the route followed and the way made by the Dream during a navigation of seventeen days, had concluded that it could only be on the Japanese or Chinese coast that the ship had gone down.

Besides the position of the sun, always in the south, rendered it quite certain that the Dream had not crossed the line.

Two hours after he had started Godfrey reckoned the distance he had travelled at about five miles, considering several circuits which he had had to make owing to the density of the forest. The second group of hills could not be far away.

Already the trees were getting farther apart from each other, forming isolated groups, and the rays of light penetrated more easily through the lofty branches. The ground began slightly to slope, and then abruptly to rise.

Although he was somewhat fatigued, Godfrey had enough will not to slacken his pace. He would doubtless have run had it not been for the steepness of the earlier ascents.

He had soon got high enough to overlook the general mass of the verdant dome which stretched away behind him, and whence several heads of trees here and there emerged.

But Godfrey did not dream of looking back. His eyes never quitted the

line of the denuded ridge, which showed itself about 400 or 500 feet before and above him. That was the barrier which all the time hid him from the eastern horizon.

A tiny cone, obliquely truncated, overlooked this rugged line and joined on with its gentle slope to the sinuous crest of the hills.

"There! there!" said Godfrey, "that is the point I must reach! The top of that cone! And from there what shall I see?--A town?--A village?--A desert?"

Highly excited, Godfrey mounted the hill, keeping his elbows at his chest to restrain the beating of his heart. His panting tired him, but he had not the patience to stop so as to recover himself. Were he to have fallen half fainting on the summit of the cone which shot up about 100 feet above his head, he would not have lost a minute in hastening towards it.

A few minutes more and he would be there. The ascent seemed to him steep enough on his side, an angle perhaps of thirty or thirty-five degrees. He helped himself up with hands and feet; he seized on the tufts of slender herbs on the hill-side, and on a few meagre shrubs, mastics and myrtles, which stretched away up to the top.

A last effort was made! His head rose above the platform of the cone, and then, lying on his stomach, his eyes gazed at the eastern horizon.

It was the sea which formed it. Twenty miles off it united with the line of the sky!

He turned round.

Still sea--west of him, south of him, north of him! The immense ocean surrounding him on all sides!

"An island!"

[Illustration: "An Island!" page 111]

As he uttered the word Godfrey felt his heart shrink. The thought had not occurred to him that he was on an island. And yet such was the case! The terrestrial chain which should have attached him to the continent was abruptly broken. He felt as though he had been a sleeping man in a drifted boat, who awoke with neither oar nor sail to help him back to shore.

But Godfrey was soon himself again. His part was taken, to accept the situation. If the chances of safety did not come from without, it was for him to contrive them.

He set to work at first then as exactly as possible to ascertain the disposition of this island which his view embraced over its whole length. He estimated that it ought to measure about sixty miles round, being, as far as he could see, about twenty miles long from south to

north, and twelve miles wide from east to west.

Its central part was screened by the green depths of forest which extended up to the ridge dominated by the cone, whose slope died away on the shore.

All the rest was prairie, with clumps of trees, or beach with rocks, whose outer ring was capriciously tapered off in the form of capes and promontories. A few creeks cut out the coast, but could only afford refuge for two or three fishing-boats.

The bay at the bottom of which the Dream lay shipwrecked was the only one of any size, and that extended over some seven or eight miles. An open roadstead, no vessel would have found it a safe shelter, at least unless the wind was blowing from the east.

But what was this island? To what geographical group did it belong? Did it form part of an archipelago, or was it alone in this portion of the Pacific?

In any case, no other island, large or small, high or low, appeared within the range of vision.

Godfrey rose and gazed round the horizon. Nothing was to be seen along the circular line where sea and sky ran into each other. If, then, there existed to windward or to leeward any island or coast of a continent, it could only be at a considerable distance.

Godfrey called up all his geographical reminiscences, in order to discover what island of the Pacific this could be. In reasoning it out he came to this conclusion.

The Dream for seventeen days had steered very nearly south-west. Now with a speed of from 150 to 180 miles every four-and-twenty hours, she ought to have covered nearly fifty degrees. Now it was obvious that she had not crossed the equator.

The situation of the island, or of the group to which it belonged, would therefore have to be looked for in that part of the ocean comprised between the 160th and 170th degrees of west longitude.

In this portion of the Pacific it seemed to Godfrey that the map showed no other archipelago than that of the Sandwich Islands, but outside this archipelago were there not any isolated islands whose names escaped him and which were dotted here and there over the sea up to the coast of the Celestial Empire?

It was not of much consequence. There existed no means of his going in search of another spot on the ocean which might prove more hospitable.

"Well," said Godfrey to himself, "if I don't know the name of this island, I'll call it Phina Island, in memory of her I ought never to have left to run about the world, and perhaps the name will bring us some luck."

Godfrey then occupied himself in trying to ascertain if the island was inhabited in the part which he had not yet been able to visit.

From the top of the cone he saw nothing which betrayed the presence of aborigines, neither habitations on the prairie nor houses on the skirt of the trees, not even a fisherman's hut on the shore.

But if the island was deserted, the sea which surrounded it was none the less so, for not a ship showed itself within the limits of what, from the height of the cone, was a considerable circuit.

Godfrey having finished his exploration had now only to get down to the foot of the hill and retake the road through the forest so as to rejoin Tartlet. But before he did so his eyes were attracted by a sort of cluster of trees of huge stature, which rose on the boundary of the prairie towards the north. It was a gigantic group, it exceeded by a head all those which Godfrey had previously seen.

"Perhaps," he said, "it would be better to take up our quarters over there, more especially as if I am not mistaken I can see a stream which should rise in the central chain and flow across the prairie."

This was to be looked into on the morrow.

Towards the south the aspect of the island was slightly different. Forests and prairies rapidly gave place to the yellow carpet of the

beach, and in places the shore was bounded with picturesque rocks.

But what was Godfrey's surprise, when he thought he saw a light smoke, which rose in the air beyond this rocky barrier.

"Are there any of our companions?" he exclaimed. "But no, it is not possible! Why should they have got so far from the bay since yesterday, and round so many miles of reef? Is it a village of fishermen, or the encampment of some indigenous tribe?"

Godfrey watched it with the closest attention. Was this gentle vapour which the breeze softly blew towards the west a smoke? Could he be mistaken? Anyhow it quickly vanished, a few minutes afterwards nothing could be seen of it.

It was a false hope.

Godfrey took a last look in its direction, and then seeing nothing, glided down the slope, and again plunged beneath the trees.

An hour later he had traversed the forest and found himself on its skirt.

There Tartlet awaited him with his two-footed and four-footed flock. And how was the obstinate professor occupying himself? In the same way. A bit of wood was in his right hand another piece in his left, and he still continued his efforts to set them alight. He rubbed and rubbed

with a constancy worthy of a better fate.

"Well," he shouted as he perceived Godfrey some distance off--"and the telegraph office?"

"It is not open!" answered Godfrey, who dared not yet tell him anything of the situation.

"And the post?"

"It is shut! But let us have something to eat!--I am dying with hunger! We can talk presently."

And this morning Godfrey and his companion had again to content themselves with a too meagre repast of raw eggs and shell-fish.

"Wholesome diet!" repeated Godfrey to Tartlet, who was hardly of that opinion and picked his food with considerable care.