

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEREIN GODFREY FINDS SOME WRECKAGE, TO WHICH HE AND HIS COMPANION GIVE

A HEARTY WELCOME.

To put up with what you cannot avoid is a philosophical principle, that may not perhaps lead you to the accomplishment of great deeds, but is assuredly eminently practical. On this principle Godfrey had resolved to act for the future. If he had to live in this island, the wisest thing for him to do was to live there as comfortably as possible until an opportunity offered for him to leave it.

And so, without delay, he set to work to get the interior of Will Tree into some order. Cleanliness was of the first importance. The beds of dried grass were frequently renewed. The plates and dishes were only scallop shells, it is true, but no American kitchen could show cleaner ones. It should be said to his praise that Professor Tartlet was a capital washer. With the help of his knife Godfrey, by flattening out a large piece of bark, and sticking four uprights into the ground, had contrived a table in the middle of the room. Some large stumps served for stools. The comrades were no longer reduced to eating on their knees, when the weather prevented their dining in the open air.

There was still the question of clothing, which was of great interest to them, and they did the best they could. In that climate, and under that

latitude, there was no reason why they should not go about half naked; but, at length, trousers, waistcoat, and linen shirt were all worn out. How could they replace them? Were the sheep and the goats to provide them with skins for clothing, after furnishing them with flesh for food? It looked like it. Meanwhile, Godfrey had the few garments he possessed frequently washed. It was on Tartlet, transformed into a laundress, that this task fell, and he acquitted himself of it to the general satisfaction.

Godfrey busied himself specially in providing food, and in arranging matters generally. He was, in fact, the caterer. Collecting the edible roots and the manzanilla fruit occupied him some hours every day; and so did fishing with plaited rushes, sometimes in the waters of the stream, and sometimes in the hollows of the rocks on the beach when the tide had gone out. The means were primitive, no doubt, but from time to time a fine crustacean or a succulent fish figured on the table of Will Tree, to say nothing of the mollusks, which were easily caught by hand.

But we must confess that the pot--of all the pieces in the battery of the cook undoubtedly the most essential--the simple iron pot, was wanting. Its absence could not but be deeply felt. Godfrey knew not how to replace the vulgar pipkin, whose use is universal. No hash, no stew, no boiled meat, no fish, nothing but roasts and grills. No soup appeared at the beginning of a meal. Constantly and bitterly did Tartlet complain--but how to satisfy the poor man?

Godfrey was busied with other cares. In visiting the different trees of

the group he had found a second sequoia of great height, of which the lower part, hollowed out by the weather, was very rugged and uneven.

Here he devised his poultry-house, and in it the fowls took up their abode. The hens soon became accustomed to their home, and settled themselves to set on eggs placed in the dried grass, and chickens began to multiply. Every evening the broods were driven in and shut up, so as to keep them from birds of prey, who, aloft in the branches, watched their easy victims, and would, if they could, have ended by destroying them.

As for the agoutis, the sheep, and the goats, it would have been useless then to have looked out a stable or a shelter for them. When the bad weather came, there would be time enough to see to that. Meanwhile they prospered on the luxuriant pasturage of the prairie, with its abundance of sainfoin and edible roots, of which the porcine representatives showed genuine appreciation. A few kids had been dropped since the arrival in the island, and as much milk as possible was left to the goats with which to nourish their little ones.

From all this it resulted that the surroundings of Will Tree were quite lively. The well-fed domestic animals came during the warm hours of the day to find there a refuge from the heat of the sun. No fear was there of their wandering abroad, or of their falling a prey to wild beasts, of which Phina Island seemed to contain not a single specimen.

And so things went on, with a present fairly comfortable perhaps, but a

future very disquieting, when an unexpected incident occurred which bettered the position considerably.

It was on the 29th of July.

Godfrey was strolling in the morning along that part of the shore which formed the beach of the large bight to which he had given the name of Dream Bay. He was exploring it to see if it was as rich in shell-fish as the coast on the north. Perhaps he still hoped that he might yet come across some of the wreck, of which it seemed to him so strange that the tide had as yet brought in not a single fragment.

On this occasion he had advanced to the northern point which terminated in a sandy spit, when his attention was attracted by a rock of curious shape, rising near the last group of algæ and sea-weeds.

A strange presentiment made him hasten his steps. What was his surprise, and his joy, when he saw that what he had taken for a rock was a box, half buried in the sand.

Was it one of the packages of the Dream? Had it been here ever since the wreck? Was it not rather all that remained of another and more recent catastrophe? It was difficult to say. In any case no matter whence it came or what it held, the box was a valuable prize.

Godfrey examined it outwardly. There was no trace of an address not even a name, not even one of those huge initials cut out of thin sheet metal

which ornament the boxes of the Americans. Perhaps he would find inside it some paper which would indicate the origin, or nationality, or name of the proprietor? Any how it was apparently hermetically sealed, and there was hope that its contents had not been spoiled by their sojourn in the sea-water. It was a very strong wooden box, covered with thick leather, with copper corner plates at the angles, and large straps all over it.

Impatient as he was to view the contents of the box, Godfrey did not think of damaging it, but of opening it after destroying the lock; as to transporting it from the bottom of Dream Bay to Will Tree, its weight forbade it, and he never gave that a thought.

"Well," said Godfrey to himself, "we must empty it where it is, and make as many journeys as may be necessary to take away all that is inside."

It was about four miles from the end of the promontory to the group of sequoias. It would therefore take some time to do this, and occasion considerable fatigue. Time did not press, however. As for the fatigue, it was hardly worth thinking about.

What did the box contain? Before returning to Will Tree, Godfrey had a try at opening it.

He began by unbuckling the straps, and once they were off he very carefully lifted the leather shield which protected the lock. But how was he to force it?

It was a difficult job. Godfrey had no lever with which to bring his strength to bear. He had to guard against the risk of breaking his knife, and so he looked about for a heavy stone with which he could start the staple.

The beach was strewn with lumps of hard silex in every form which could do for a hammer.

Godfrey picked out one as thick as his wrist, and with it he gave a tremendous whack on the plate of copper.

To his extreme surprise the bolt shot through the staple immediately gave way.

Either the staple was broken by the blow, or the lock was not turned.

Godfrey's heart beat high as he stooped to lift up the box lid.

It rose unchecked, and in truth had Godfrey had to get it to pieces he would not have done so without trouble. The trunk was a regular strong-box. The interior was lined with sheet zinc, so that the sea-water had failed to penetrate. The objects it contained, however delicate they might be, would be found in a perfect state of preservation.

And what objects! As he took them out Godfrey could not restrain

exclamations of joy! Most assuredly the box must have belonged to some highly practical traveller, who had reckoned on getting into a country where he would have to trust to his own resources.

In the first place there was linen--shirts, table-cloths, sheets, counterpanes; then clothes--woollen jerseys, woollen socks, cotton socks, cloth trousers, velveteen trousers, knitted waistcoats, waistcoats of good heavy stuffs; then two pairs of strong boots, and hunting-shoes and felt hats.

Then came a few kitchen and toilet utensils; and an iron pot--the famous pot which was wanted so badly--a kettle, a coffee-pot, a tea-pot, some spoons, some forks, some knives, a looking-glass, and brushes of all kinds, and, what was by no means to be despised, three cans, containing about fifteen pints of brandy and tafia, and several pounds of tea and coffee.

Then, in the third place, came some tools--an auger, a gimlet, a handsaw, an assortment of nails and brads, a spade, a shovel, a pickaxe, a hatchet, an adze, &c., &c.

In the fourth place, there were some weapons, two hunting-knives in their leather sheaths, a carbine and two muskets, three six-shooter revolvers, a dozen pounds of powder, many thousand caps, and an important stock of lead and bullets, all the arms seeming to be of English make. There was also a small medicine-chest, a telescope, a compass, and a chronometer. There were also a few English books, several

quires of blank paper, pencils, pens, and ink, an almanac, a Bible with a New York imprint, and a "Complete Cook's Manual."

Verily this is an inventory of what under the circumstances was an inestimable prize.

Godfrey could not contain himself for joy. Had he expressly ordered the trousseau for the use of shipwrecked folks in difficulties, he could not have made it more complete.

Abundant thanks were due for it to Providence. And Providence had the thanks, and from an overflowing heart.

Godfrey indulged himself in the pleasure of spreading out all his treasure on the beach. Every object was looked over, but not a scrap of paper was there in the box to indicate to whom it belonged, or the ship on which it had been embarked.

Around, the sea showed no signs of a recent wreck.

Nothing was there on the rocks, nothing on the sands. The box must have been brought in by the flood, after being afloat for perhaps many days.

In fact, its size in proportion to its weight had assured for it sufficient buoyancy.

The two inhabitants of Phina Island would for some time be kept provided in a large measure with the material wants of life,--tools, arms,

instruments, utensils, clothes--due to the luckiest of chances.

Godfrey did not dream of taking all the things to Will Tree at once.

Their transport would necessitate several journeys but he would have to make haste for fear of bad weather.

Godfrey then put back most of the things in the box. A gun, a revolver, a certain quantity of powder and lead, a hunting-knife, the telescope, and the iron pot, he took as his first load.

The box was carefully closed and strapped up, and with a rapid step Godfrey strode back along the shore.

Ah! What a reception he had from Tartlet, an hour later! And the delight of the Professor when his pupil ran over the list of their new riches! The pot--that pot above everything--threw him into transports of joy, culminating in a series of "hornpipes" and "cellar-flaps," wound up by a triumphant "six-eight breakdown."

It was only noon as yet. Godfrey wished after the meal to get back at once to Dream Bay. He would never rest until the whole was in safety at Will Tree.

Tartlet made no objection, and declared himself ready to start. It was no longer necessary to watch the fire. With the powder they could always get a light. But the Professor was desirous that during their absence the soup which he was thinking about might be kept gently on the simmer.

The wonderful pot was soon filled with water from the stream, a whole quarter of a goat was thrown in, accompanied by a dozen yamph roots, to take the place of vegetables, and then a pinch or two of salt found in the crevices of the rocks gave seasoning to the mixture.

"It must skim itself," exclaimed Tartlet, who seemed highly satisfied at his performance.

And off they started for Dream Bay by the shortest road. The box had not been disturbed. Godfrey opened it with care. Amid a storm of admiring exclamations from Tartlet, he began to pick out the things.

In this first journey Godfrey and his companion, transformed into beasts of burden, carried away to Will Tree the arms, the ammunition, and a part of the wearing apparel.

Then they rested from their fatigue beside the table, on which there smoked the stewed agouti, which they pronounced most excellent. As for the meat, to listen to the Professor it would have been difficult even to imagine anything more exquisite! Oh! the marvellous effect of privation!

On the 30th, the next day, Godfrey and Tartlet set forth at dawn, and in three other journeys succeeded in emptying and carrying away all that the box contained. Before the evening, tools, weapons, instruments, utensils, were all brought, arranged, and stowed away in Will Tree.

On the 1st of August, the box itself, dragged along the beach not without difficulty, found a place in the tree, and was transformed into a linen-closet.

Tartlet, with the fickleness of his mind, now looked upon the future through none but rosy glasses. We can hardly feel astonished then that on this day, with his kit in his hand, he went out to find his pupil, and said to him in all seriousness, as if he were in the drawing-room of Kolderup's mansion,--

"Well, Godfrey, my boy, don't you think it is time to resume our dancing lessons?"