

## CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH SOMETHING HAPPENS WHICH CANNOT FAIL TO SURPRISE THE READER.

To Godfrey the blow was serious. Would this unexpected chance which had just escaped him ever offer again? Could he hope so? No! The indifference of the steamer as she passed in sight of the island, without even taking a look at it, was obviously shared in by all the vessels venturing in this deserted portion of the Pacific. Why should they put into port more than she had done? The island did not possess a single harbour.

Godfrey passed a sorrowful night. Every now and then jumping up as if he heard a cannon out at sea, he would ask himself if the steamer had not caught sight of the huge fire which still burnt on the coast, and if she were not endeavouring to answer the signal by a gun-shot?

Godfrey listened. It was only an illusion of his over-excited brain.

When the day came, he had come to look upon the apparition of the ship as but a dream, which had commenced about three o'clock on the previous afternoon.

But no! He was only too certain that a ship had been in sight of Phina Island, maybe within two miles of it, and certainly she had not put in.

Of this deception Godfrey said not a word to Tartlet. What was the good of talking about it? Besides, his frivolous mind could not see more than twenty-four hours ahead. He was no longer thinking of the chances of escaping from the island which might offer. He no longer imagined that the future had great things in store for them. San Francisco was fading out of his recollection. He had no sweetheart waiting for him, no Uncle Will to return to. If at this end of the world he could only commence a course of lessons on dancing, his happiness would be complete--were it only with one pupil.

If the professor dreamt not of immediate danger, such as to compromise his safety in this island--bare, as it was, of wild beasts and savages--he was wrong. This very day his optimism was to be put to a rude test.

About four o'clock in the afternoon Tartlet had gone, according to his custom, to collect some oysters and mussels, on that part of the shore behind Flag Point, when Godfrey saw him coming back as fast as his legs could carry him to Will Tree. His hair stood on end round his temples. He looked like a man in flight, who dared not turn his head to the right or to the left.

"What is the matter?" shouted Godfrey, not without alarm, running to meet his companion.

"There! there!" answered Tartlet, pointing with his finger towards the

narrow strip of sea visible to the north between the trees.

"But what is it?" asked Godfrey, whose first movement was to run to the edge of the sequoias.

"A canoe!"

[Illustration: "A Canoe!" page 181]

"A canoe?"

"Yes! Savages! Quite a fleet of savages! Cannibals, perhaps!"

Godfrey looked in the direction pointed out.

It was not a fleet, as the distracted Tartlet had said; but he was only mistaken about the quantity.

In fact, there was a small vessel gliding through the water, now very calm, about half-a-mile from the coast, so as to double Flag Point.

"And why should they be cannibals?" asked Godfrey, turning towards the professor.

"Because in Crusoe Islands," answered Tartlet, "there are always cannibals, who arrive sooner or later."

"Is it not a boat from some merchant-ship?"

"From a ship?"

"Yes. From a steamer which passed here yesterday afternoon, in sight of our island?"

"And you said nothing to me about it!" exclaimed Tartlet, lifting his hands to the sky.

"What good should I have done?" asked Godfrey. "Besides, I thought that the vessel had disappeared! But that boat might belong to her! Let us go and see!"

Godfrey ran rapidly back to Will Tree, and, seizing his glass, returned to the edge of the trees.

He then examined with extreme attention the little vessel, which would ere then have perceived the flag on Flag Point as it fluttered in the breeze.

The glass fell from his hands.

"Savages! Yes! They are really savages!" he exclaimed.

Tartlet felt his knees knock together, and a tremor of fright ran through his body.

It was a vessel manned by savages which Godfrey saw approaching the island. Built like a Polynesian canoe, she carried a large sail of woven bamboo; an outrigger on the weather side kept her from capsizing as she heeled down to the wind.

Godfrey easily distinguished the build of the vessel. She was a proa, and this would indicate that Phina Island was not far from Malaysia. But they were not Malays on board; they were half-naked blacks, and there were about a dozen of them.

The danger of being found was thus great. Godfrey regretted that he had hoisted the flag, which had not been seen by the ship, but would be by these black fellows. To take it down now would be too late.

It was, in truth, very unfortunate. The savages had probably come to the island thinking it was uninhabited, as indeed it had been before the wreck of the Dream. But there was the flag, indicating the presence of human beings on the coast! How were they to escape them if they landed?

Godfrey knew not what to do. Anyhow his immediate care must be to watch if they set foot on the island. He could think of other things afterwards.

With his glass at his eye he followed the proa; he saw it turn the point of the promontory, then run along the shore and then approach the mouth of the small stream, which, two miles up, flowed past Will Tree.

If the savages intended to paddle up the river, they would soon reach the group of sequoias--and nothing could hinder them. Godfrey and Tartlet ran rapidly back to their dwelling. They first of all set about guarding them selves against surprise, and giving themselves time to prepare their defence.

At least that is what Godfrey thought of. The ideas of the professor took quite a different turn.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "It is destiny! This is as it was written? We could not escape it! You cannot be a Crusoe without a canoe coming to your island, without cannibals appearing one day or another! Here we have been for only three months, and there they are already! Assuredly, neither Defoe, nor De Wyss exaggerated matters! You can make yourself a Crusoe, if you like!"

Worthy Tartlet, folks do not make themselves Crusoes, they become Crusoes, and you are not sure that you are wise in comparing your position with that of the heroes of the two English and Swiss romances!

The precautions taken by Godfrey as soon as he returned to Will Tree were as follows. The fire burning among the roots of the sequoia was extinguished, and the embers scattered broadcast, so as to leave no trace; cocks, hens, and chickens were already in their house for the night, and the entrance was hidden with shrubs and twigs as much as possible; the other animals, the goats, agoutis, and sheep, were driven

on to the prairie, but it was unlucky that there was no stable to shut them up in; all the instruments and tools were taken into the tree. Nothing was left outside that could indicate the presence or the passage of human beings.

Then the door was closely shut, after Godfrey and Tartlet had gone in. The door made of the sequoia bark was indistinguishable from the bark of the trunk, and might perhaps escape the eyes of the savages, who would not look at it very closely. It was the same with the two windows, in which the lower boards were shut. Then all light was extinguished in the dwelling, and our friends remained in total darkness. How long that night was! Godfrey and Tartlet heard the slightest sounds outside. The creaking of a dry branch, even a puff of wind, made them start. They thought they heard some one walking under the trees. It seemed that they were prowling round Will Tree. Then Godfrey climbed up to one of the windows, opened one of the boards, and anxiously peered into the gloom.

Nothing!

However, Godfrey at last heard footsteps on the ground. His ear could not deceive him this time. He still looked, but could only see one of the goats come for shelter beneath the trees.

Had any of the savages happened to discover the house hidden in the enormous sequoia, Godfrey had made up his mind what to do: he would drag

up Tartlet with him by the chimney inside, and take refuge in the higher

branches, where he would be better able to resist. With guns and revolvers in his possession, and ammunition in abundance, he would there have some chance against a dozen savages devoid of fire-arms.

If in the event of their being armed with bows and arrows they attacked from below, it was not likely that they would have the best of it against fire-arms aimed from above. If on the other hand they forced the door of the dwelling and tried to reach the branches from the inside, they would find it very difficult to get there, owing to the narrow opening, which the besieged could easily defend.

Godfrey said nothing about this to Tartlet. The poor man had been almost out of his mind with fright since he had seen the proa. The thought that he might be obliged to take refuge in the upper part of a tree, as if in an eagle's nest, would not have soothed him in the least. If it became necessary, Godfrey decided to drag him up before he had time to think about it.

The night passed amid these alternations of fear and hope. No attack occurred. The savages had not yet come to the sequoia group. Perhaps they would wait for the day before venturing to cross the island.

"That is probably what they will do," said Godfrey, "since our flag shows that it is inhabited! But there are only a dozen of them, and they will have to be cautious! How are they to know that they have only to deal with a couple of shipwrecked men? No! They will risk nothing except by daylight--at least, if they are going to stop."



"Supposing they go away when the daylight comes?" answered Tartlet.

"Go away? Why should they have come to Phina Island for one night?"

"I do not know," replied the professor, who in his terror could only explain the arrival of the blacks by supposing that they had come to feed on human flesh.

"Anyhow," continued Godfrey; "to-morrow morning, if they have not come to Will Tree, we will go out and reconnoitre."

"We?"

"Yes! we! Nothing would be more imprudent than for us to separate! Who knows whether we may not have to run to the forest in the centre of the island and hide there for some days--until the departure of the proa! No! We will keep together, Tartlet!"

"Hush!" said the professor in a low voice; "I think I hear something outside."

Godfrey climbed up again to the window, and got down again almost immediately.

"No!" he said. "Nothing suspicious! It is only our cattle coming back to the wood."

"Hunted perhaps!" exclaimed Tartlet.

"They seem very quiet then," replied Godfrey; "I fancy they have only come in search of shelter against the morning dew."

"Ah!" murmured Tartlet in so piteous a tone that Godfrey could hardly help laughing, "these things could not happen at your uncle's place in Montgomery Street!"

"Day will soon break," said Godfrey, after a pause. "In an hour's time, if the savages have not appeared, we will leave Will Tree and reconnoitre towards the north of the island. You are able to carry a gun, Tartlet?"

"Carry? Yes!"

"And to fire it in a stated direction?"

"I do not know! I have never tried such a thing, and you may be sure, Godfrey, that my bullet will not go--"

"Who knows if the report alone might not frighten the savages?"

An hour later, it was light enough to see beyond the sequoias.

Godfrey then cautiously reopened the shutters.

From that looking to the south he saw nothing extraordinary. The domestic animals wandered peacefully under the trees, and did not appear in the least alarmed. The survey completed, Godfrey carefully shut this window. Through the opening to the north there was a view up to the shore. Two miles off even the end of Flag Point could be seen; but the mouth of the river at the place where the savages had landed the evening before was not visible. Godfrey at first looked around without using his glass, so as to examine the environs of Will Tree on this side of Phina Island.

All was quite peaceful.

Godfrey then taking his glass swept round the coast to the promontory at Flag Point. Perhaps, as Tartlet had said, though it was difficult to find the reason, the savages had embarked, after a night spent on shore, without attempting to see if the island were inhabited.