

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHICH TREATS OF THE MORAL AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION OF A SIMPLE NATIVE OF THE PACIFIC.

Godfrey at once raised the poor fellow, who lay prostrate before him. He looked in his face.

He was a man of thirty-five or more, wearing only a rag round his loins. In his features, as in the shape of his head, there could be recognized the type of the African negro. It was not possible to confound him with the debased wretches of the Polynesian islands, who, with their depressed crania and elongated arms, approach so strangely to the monkey.

Now, as he was a negro from Soudan or Abyssinia who had fallen into the hands of the natives of an archipelago of the Pacific, it might be that he could speak English or one or two words of the European languages which Godfrey understood. But it was soon apparent that the unhappy man only used an idiom that was absolutely incomprehensible--probably the language of the aborigines among whom he had doubtless arrived when very young. In fact, Godfrey had immediately interrogated him in English, and had obtained no reply. He then made him understand by signs, not without difficulty, that he would like to know his name.

After many fruitless essays, the negro, who had a very intelligent and even honest face, replied to the demand which was made of him in a single word,--

"Carefinotu."

"Carefinotu!" exclaimed Tartlet. "Do you hear the name? I propose that we call him 'Wednesday,' for to-day is Wednesday, and that is what they always do in these Crusoe islands! Is he to be allowed to call himself Carefinotu?"

"If that is his name," said Godfrey; "why should he not keep it?"

And at the moment he felt a hand placed on his chest, while all the black's physiognomy seemed to ask him what his name was.

"Godfrey!" answered he.

The black endeavoured to say the word, but although Godfrey repeated it several times, he could not succeed in pronouncing it in an intelligible fashion. Then he turned towards the professor, as if to know his name.

"Tartlet," was the reply of that individual in a most amiable tone.

"Tartlet!" repeated Carefinotu.

And it seemed as though this assemblage of syllables was more agreeable

to his vocal chords, for he pronounced it distinctly.

The professor appeared to be extremely flattered. In truth he had reason to be.

Then Godfrey, wishing to put the intelligence of the black to some profit, tried to make him understand that he wished to know the name of the island. He pointed with his hand to the woods and prairies and hills, and then the shore which bound them, and then the horizon of the sea, and he interrogated him with a look.

Carefinotu did not at first understand what was meant, and imitating the gesture of Godfrey he also turned and ran his eyes over the space.

"Arneka," said he at length.

"Arneka?" replied Godfrey, striking the soil with his foot so as to accentuate his demand.

"Arneka!" repeated the negro.

This told Godfrey nothing, neither the geographical name borne by the island, nor its position in the Pacific. He could not remember such a name; it was probably a native one, little known to geographers.

However, Carefinotu did not cease from looking at the two white men, not without some stupor, going from one to the other as if he wished to fix

in his mind the differences which characterized them. The smile on his mouth disclosed abundant teeth of magnificent whiteness which Tartlet did not examine without a certain reserve.

"If those teeth," he said, "have never eaten human flesh may my fiddle burst up in my hand."

"Anyhow, Tartlet," answered Godfrey; "our new companion no longer looks like the poor beggar they were going to cook and feed on! That is the main point!"

What particularly attracted the attention of Carefinotu were the weapons carried by Godfrey and Tartlet--as much the musket in the hand as the revolver in the belt.

Godfrey easily understood this sentiment of curiosity. It was evident that the savage had never seen a fire-arm. He said to himself that this was one of those iron tubes which had launched the thunder-bolt that had delivered him? There could be no doubt of it.

Godfrey, wishing to give him, not without reason, a high idea of the power of the whites, loaded his gun, and then, showing to Carefinotu a red-legged partridge that was flying across the prairie about a hundred yards away, he shouldered it quickly, and fired. The bird fell.

At the report the black gave a prodigious leap, which Tartlet could not but admire from a choregraphic point of view. Then repressing his fear,

and seeing the bird with broken wing running through the grass, he started off and swift as a greyhound ran towards it, and with many a caper, half of joy, half of stupefaction, brought it back to his master.

Tartlet then thought of displaying to Carefinotu that the Great Spirit had also favoured him with the power of the lightning; and perceiving a kingfisher tranquilly seated on an old stump near the river was bringing the stock up to his cheek, when Godfrey stopped him with,--

"No! Don't fire, Tartlet!"

"Why not?"

"Suppose that by some mishap you were not to hit the bird, think how we would fall in the estimation of the nigger!"

"And why should I not hit him?" replied Tartlet with some acerbity. "Did I not, during the battle, at more than a hundred paces, the very first time I handled a gun, hit one of the cannibals full in the chest?"

"You touched him evidently," said Godfrey; "for he fell. But take my advice, Tartlet, and in the common interest do not tempt fortune twice!"

The professor, slightly annoyed, allowed himself to be convinced; he threw the gun on to his shoulder with a swagger, and both our heroes, followed by Carefinotu, returned to Will Tree.

There the new guest of Phina Island met with quite a surprise in the habitation so happily contrived in the lower part of the sequoia. First he had to be shown, by using them while he looked on, the use of the tools, instruments, and utensils. It was obvious that Carefinotu belonged to, or had lived amongst savages in the lowest rank of the human scale, for fire itself seemed to be unknown to him. He could not understand why the pot did not take fire when they put it on the blazing wood; he would have hurried away from it, to the great displeasure of Tartlet, who was watching the different phases of the cooking of the soup. At a mirror, which was held out to him, he betrayed consummate astonishment; he turned round, and turned it round to see if he himself were not behind it.

"The fellow is hardly a monkey!" exclaimed the professor with a disdainful grimace.

"No, Tartlet," answered Godfrey; "he is more than a monkey, for his looks behind the mirror show good reasoning power."

"Well, I will admit that he is not a monkey," said Tartlet, shaking his head as if only half convinced; "but we shall see if such a being can be of any good to us."

"I am sure he will be!" replied Godfrey.

In any case Carefinotu showed himself quite at home with the food placed before him. He first tore it apart, and then tasted it; and then I

believe that the whole breakfast of which they partook the--agouti soup, the partridge killed by Godfrey, and the shoulder of mutton with camas and yamph roots--would hardly have sufficed to calm the hunger which devoured him.

"The poor fellow has got a good appetite!" said Godfrey.

"Yes," responded Tartlet; "and we shall have to keep a watch on his cannibal instinct."

"Well, Tartlet! We shall make him get over the taste of human flesh if he ever had it!"

"I would not swear that," replied the professor. "It appears that once they have acquired this taste--"

While they were talking, Carefinotu was listening with extreme attention. His eyes sparkled with intelligence. One could see that he understood what was being said in his presence. He then spoke with extreme volubility, but it was only a succession of onomatopoeias devoid of sense, of harsh interjections with a and ou predominant, as in the majority of Polynesian idioms.

Whatever the negro was, he was a new companion; he might become a devoted servant, which the most unexpected chance had sent to the hosts of Will Tree.

He was powerful, adroit, active; no work came amiss to him. He showed a real aptitude to imitate what he saw being done. It was in this way that Godfrey proceeded with his education. The care of the domestic animals, the collection of the roots and fruits, the cutting up of the sheep or agouties, which were to serve for food for the day, the fabrication of a sort of cider they extracted from the wild manzanilla apples,--he acquitted himself well in all these tasks, after having seen them done.

Whatever Tartlet thought, Godfrey felt no distrust in the savage, and never seemed to regret having come across him. What disquieted him was the possible return of the cannibals who now knew the situation of Phina Island.

From the first, a bed had been reserved for Carefinotu in the room at Will Tree, but generally, unless it was raining, he preferred to sleep outside in some hole in the tree, as though he were on guard over the house.

During the fortnight which followed his arrival on the island, Carefinotu many times accompanied Godfrey on his shooting excursions. His surprise was always extreme when he saw the game fall hit at such a distance; but in his character of retriever, he showed a dash and daring which no obstacles, hedge or bush, or stream, could stop.

Gradually, Godfrey became greatly attached to this negro. There was only one part of his progress in which Carefinotu showed refractoriness; that

was in learning the English language. Do what he might he could not be prevailed upon to pronounce the most ordinary words which Godfrey, and particularly Professor Tartlet tried to teach him.

So the time passed. But if the present was fairly supportable, thanks to a happy accident, if no immediate danger menaced them, Godfrey could not help asking himself, if they were ever to leave this island, by what means they were to rejoin their country! Not a day passed but he thought of Uncle Will and his betrothed. It was not without secret apprehension that he saw the bad season approaching, which would put between his friends and him a barrier still more impassable.

On the 27th of September a circumstance occurred deserving of note.

If it gave more work to Godfrey and his two companions, it at least assured them of an abundant reserve of food.

Godfrey and Carefinotu were busied in collecting the mollusks, at the extreme end of Dream Bay, when they perceived out at sea an innumerable quantity of small moving islets which the rising tide was bringing gently to shore. It was a sort of floating archipelago, on the surface of which there walked, or flew, a few of those sea-birds, with great expanse of wing, known as sea-hawks.

What then were these masses which floated landwards, rising and falling with the undulations of the waves?

Godfrey did not know what to think, when Carefinotu threw himself down on his stomach, and then drawing his head back into his shoulders, folded beneath him his arms and legs, and began to imitate the movements of an animal crawling slowly along the ground.

Godfrey looked at him without understanding these extraordinary gymnastics. Then suddenly--

"Turtles!" he exclaimed.

Carefinotu was right. There was quite a square mile of myriads of turtles, swimming on the surface of the water.

About a hundred fathoms from the shore the greater part of them dived and disappeared, and the sea-hawks, finding their footing gone, flew up into the air in large spirals. But luckily about a hundred of the amphibians came on to the beach.

Godfrey and the negro had quickly run down in front of these creatures, each of which measured at the least from three to four feet in diameter. Now the only way of preventing turtles from regaining the sea is to turn them on their backs; and it was in this rough work that Godfrey and Carefinotu employed themselves, not without great fatigue.

The following days were spent in collecting the booty. The flesh of the turtle, which is excellent either fresh or preserved, could perhaps be kept for a time in both forms. In preparation for the winter, Godfrey

had the greater part salted in such a way as to serve for the needs of each day. But for some time the table was supplied with turtle soup, on which Tartlet was not the only one to regale himself.

Barring this incident, the monotony of existence was in no way ruffled. Every day the same hours were devoted to the same work. Would not the life become still more depressing when the winter season would oblige Godfrey and his companions to shut themselves up in Will Tree? Godfrey could not think of it without anxiety. But what could he do?

Meanwhile, he continued the exploration of the island, and all the time not occupied with more pressing tasks he spent in roaming about with his gun. Generally Carefinotu accompanied him, Tartlet remaining behind at the dwelling. Decidedly he was no hunter, although his first shot had been a master-stroke!

Now on one of these occasions an unexpected incident happened, of a nature to gravely compromise the future safety of the inmates of Will Tree.

Godfrey and the black had gone out hunting in the central forest, at the foot of the hill which formed the principal ridge of Phina Island. Since the morning they had seen nothing pass but two or three antelopes through the high underwood, but at too great a distance for them to fire with any chance of hitting them.

As Godfrey was not in search of game for dinner, and did not seek to

destroy for destruction's sake, he resigned himself to return empty-handed. If he regretted doing so it was not so much for the meat of the antelope, as for the skin, of which he intended to make good use.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon. He and his companion after lunch were no more fortunate than before. They were preparing to return to Will Tree for dinner, when, just as they cleared the edge of the wood, Carefinotu made a bound; then precipitating himself on Godfrey, he seized him by the shoulders, and dragged him along with such vigour that resistance was impossible.

After going about twenty yards they stopped. Godfrey took breath, and, turning towards Carefinotu, interrogated him with a look.

The black, exceedingly frightened, stretched out his hand towards an animal which was standing motionless about fifty yards off.

It was a grizzly bear, whose paws held the trunk of a tree, and who was swaying his big head up and down, as if he were going to rush at the two hunters.

Immediately, without pausing to think, Godfrey loaded his gun, and fired before Carefinotu could hinder him.

Was the enormous plantigrade hit by the bullet? Probably. Was he killed? They could not be sure, but his paws unclasped, and he rolled at the foot of the tree. Delay was dangerous. A struggle with so formidable an

animal might have the worst results. In the forests of California the pursuit of the grizzly is fraught with the greatest danger, even to professional hunters of the beast.

And so the black seized Godfrey by the arms to drag him away in the direction of Will Tree, and Godfrey, understanding that he could not be too cautious, made no resistance.