

CHAPTER XXII.

WHICH CONCLUDES BY EXPLAINING WHAT UP TO NOW HAD APPEARED INEXPLICABLE.

At that instant, and before Godfrey could reply, the report of fire-arms was heard not far from Will Tree.

At the same time one of those rain storms, regular cataracts in their fury, fell in a torrential shower just as the flames devouring the lower branches were threatening to seize upon the trees against which Will Tree was resting.

What was Godfrey to think after this series of inexplicable events? Carefinotu speaking English like a cockney, calling him by his name, announcing the early arrival of Uncle Will, and then the sudden report of the fire-arms?

He asked himself if he had gone mad; but he had no time for insoluble questions, for below him--hardly five minutes after the first sound of the guns--a body of sailors appeared hurrying through the trees.

Godfrey and Carefinotu slipped down along the stem, the interior of which was still burning.

But the moment that Godfrey touched the ground, he heard himself spoken to, and by two voices which even in his trouble it was impossible for him not to recognize.

"Nephew Godfrey, I have the honour to salute you!"

"Godfrey! Dear Godfrey!"

"Uncle Will! Phina! You!" exclaimed Godfrey, astounded.

Three seconds afterwards he was in somebody's arms, and was clasping that somebody in his own.

At the same time two sailors, at the order of Captain Turcott who was in command, climbed up along the sequoia to set Tartlet free, and, with all due respect, pluck him from the branch as if he were a fruit.

And then the questions, the answers, the explanations which passed!

"Uncle Will! You?"

"Yes! me!"

"And how did you discover Phina Island?"

"Phina Island!" answered William W. Kolderup. "You should say Spencer Island! Well, it wasn't very difficult. I bought it six months ago!"

"Spencer Island!"

"And you gave my name to it, you dear Godfrey!" said the young lady.

"The new name is a good one, and we will keep to it," answered the uncle; "but for geographers this is Spencer Island, only three days' journey from San Francisco, on which I thought it would be a good plan for you to serve your apprenticeship to the Crusoe business!"

"Oh! Uncle! Uncle Will! What is it you say?" exclaimed Godfrey. "Well, if you are in earnest, I can only answer that I deserved it! But then, Uncle Will, the wreck of the Dream?"

"Sham!" replied William W. Kolderup, who had never seemed in such a good humour before. "The Dream was quietly sunk by means of her water ballast, according to the instructions I had given Turcott. You thought she sank for good, but when the captain saw that you and Tartlet had got safely to land he brought her up and steamed away. Three days later he got back to San Francisco, and he it is who has brought us to Spencer Island on the date we fixed!"

"Then none of the crew perished in the wreck?"

"None--unless it was the unhappy Chinaman who hid himself away on board and could not be found!"

"But the canoe?"

"Sham! The canoe was of my own make."

"But the savages?"

"Sham! The savages whom luckily you did not shoot!"

"But Carefinotu?"

"Sham! Carefinotu was my faithful Jup Brass, who played his part of Friday marvellously well, as I see."

"Yes," answered Godfrey. "He twice saved my life--once from a bear, once from a tiger--"

"The bear was sham! the tiger was sham!" laughed William W. Kolderup.

"Both of them were stuffed with straw, and landed before you saw them with Jup Brass and his companions!"

"But he moved his head and his paws!"

"By means of a spring which Jup Brass had fixed during the night a few hours before the meetings which were prepared for you."

"What! all of them?" repeated Godfrey, a little ashamed at having been

taken in by these artifices.

"Yes! Things were going too smoothly in your island, and we had to get up a little excitement!"

"Then," answered Godfrey, who had begun to laugh, "if you wished to make matters unpleasant for us, why did you send us the box which contained everything we wanted?"

"A box?" answered William W. Kolderup. "What box? I never sent you a box! Perhaps by chance--"

And as he said so he looked towards Phina, who cast down her eyes and turned away her head.

"Oh! indeed!--a box! but then Phina must have had an accomplice--"

And Uncle Will turned towards Captain Turcott, who laughingly answered,--

"What could I do, Mr. Kolderup? I can sometimes resist you--but Miss Phina--it was too difficult! And four months ago, when you sent me to look round the island, I landed the box from my boat--"

"Dearest Phina!" said Godfrey, seizing the young lady's hand.

"Turcott, you promised to keep the secret!" said Phina with a blush.

And Uncle William W. Kolderup, shaking his big head, tried in vain to hide that he was touched.

But if Godfrey could not restrain his smiles as he listened to the explanations of Uncle Will, Professor Tartlet did not laugh in the least! He was excessively mortified at what he heard! To have been the object of such a mystification, he, a professor of dancing and deportment! And so advancing with much dignity he observed,--

"Mr. William Kolderup will hardly assert, I imagine, that the enormous crocodile, of which I was nearly the unhappy victim, was made of pasteboard and wound up with a spring?"

"A crocodile?" replied the uncle.

"Yes, Mr. Kolderup," said Carefinotu, to whom we had better return his proper name of Jup Brass. "Yes, a real live crocodile, which went for Mr. Tartlet, and which I did not have in my collection!"

Godfrey then related what had happened, the sudden appearance of the wild beasts in such numbers, real lions, real tigers, real panthers, and then the invasion of the snakes, of which during four months they had not seen a single specimen in the island!

William W. Kolderup at this was quite disconcerted. He knew nothing about it. Spencer Island--it had been known for a long time--never had

any wild beasts, did not possess even a single noxious animal; it was so stated in the deeds of sale.

Neither did he understand what Godfrey told him of the attempts he had made to discover the origin of the smoke which had appeared at different points on the island. And he seemed very much troubled to find that all had not passed on the island according to his instructions, and that the programme had been seriously interfered with.

As for Tartlet, he was not the sort of man to be humbugged. For his part he would admit nothing, neither the sham shipwreck, nor the sham savages, nor the sham animals, and above all he would never give up the glory which he had gained in shooting with the first shot from his gun the chief of the Polynesian tribe--one of the servants of the Kolderup establishment, who turned out to be as well as he was.

All was described, all was explained, except the serious matter of the real wild beasts and the unknown smoke. Uncle Will became very thoughtful about this. But, like a practical man, he put off, by an effort of the will, the solution of the problems, and addressing his nephew,--

"Godfrey," said he, "you have always been so fond of islands, that I am sure it will please you to hear that this is yours--wholly yours! I make you a present of it! You can do what you like with it! I never dreamt of bringing you away by force; and I would not take you away from it! Be then a Crusoe for the rest of your life, if your heart tells you to--"

"I!" answered Godfrey. "I! All my life!"

Phina stepped forward.

"Godfrey," she asked, "would you like to remain on your island?"

"I would rather die!" he exclaimed.

But immediately he added, as he took the young lady's hand,--

"Well, yes, I will remain; but on three conditions. The first is, you stay with me, dearest Phina; the second is, that Uncle Will lives with us; and the third is, that the chaplain of the Dream marries us this very day!"

"There is no chaplain on board the Dream, Godfrey!" replied Uncle Will. "You know that very well. But I think there is still one left in San Francisco, and that we can find some worthy minister to perform the service! I believe I read your thoughts when I say that before to-morrow we shall put to sea again!"

Then Phina and Uncle Will asked Godfrey to do the honours of his island. Behold them then walking under the group of sequoias, along the stream up to the little bridge.

Alas! of the habitation at Will Tree nothing remained. The fire had

completely devoured the dwelling in the base of the tree! Without the arrival of William W. Kolderup, what with the approaching winter, the destruction of their stores, and the genuine wild beasts in the island, our Crusoes would have deserved to be pitied.

"Uncle Will!" said Godfrey. "If I gave the island the name of Phina, let me add that I gave our dwelling the name of Will Tree!"

"Well," answered the uncle, "we will take away some of the seed, and plant it in my garden at 'Frisco!"

During the walk they noticed some wild animals in the distance; but they dared not attack so formidable a party as the sailors of the Dream. But none the less was their presence absolutely incomprehensible.

Then they returned on board, not without Tartlet asking permission to bring off "his crocodile"--a permission which was granted.

That evening the party were united in the saloon of the Dream, and there was quite a cheerful dinner to celebrate the end of the adventures of Godfrey Morgan and his marriage with Phina Hollaney.

On the morrow, the 20th of January, the Dream set sail under the command of Captain Turcott. At eight o'clock in the morning Godfrey, not without emotion, saw the horizon in the west wipe out, as if it were a shadow, the island on which he had been to school for six months--a school of which he never forgot the lessons.

The passage was rapid; the sea magnificent; the wind favourable. This time the Dream went straight to her destination! There was no one to be mystified! She made no tackings without number as on the first voyage! She did not lose during the night what she had gained during the day!

And so on the 23rd of January, after passing at noon through the Golden Gate, she entered the vast bay of San Francisco, and came alongside the wharf in Merchant Street.

And what did they then see?

They saw issue from the hold a man who, having swum to the Dream during the night while she was anchored at Phina Island, had succeeded in stowing himself away for the second time!

And who was this man?

It was the Chinaman, Seng Vou, who had made the passage back as he had made the passage out!

Seng Vou advanced towards William W. Kolderup.

"I hope Mr. Kolderup will pardon me," said he very politely. "When I took my passage in the Dream, I thought she was going direct to Shanghai, and then I should have reached my country, but I leave her

now, and return to San Francisco."

Every one, astounded at the apparition, knew not what to answer, and laughingly gazed at the intruder.

"But," said William W. Kolderup at last, "you have not remained six months in the hold, I suppose?"

"No!" answered Seng Vou.

"Where have you been, then?"

"On the island!"

"You!" exclaimed Godfrey.

"Yes."

"Then the smoke?"

"A man must have a fire!"

"And you did not attempt to come to us, to share our living?"

"A Chinaman likes to live alone," quietly replied Seng Vou. "He is sufficient for himself, and he wants no one!"

And thereupon this eccentric individual bowed to William W. Kolderup, landed, and disappeared.

"That is the stuff they make real Crusoes of!" observed Uncle Will.

"Look at him and see if you are like him! It does not matter, the English race would do no good by absorbing fellows of that stamp!"

"Good!" said Godfrey, "the smoke is explained by the presence of Seng Vou; but the beasts?"

"And my crocodile!" added Tartlet; "I should like some one to explain my crocodile!"

William W. Kolderup seemed much embarrassed, and feeling in turn quite mystified, passed his hand over his forehead as if to clear the clouds away.

"We shall know later on," he said. "Everything is found by him who knows how to seek!"

A few days afterwards there was celebrated with great pomp the wedding of the nephew and pupil of William W. Kolderup. That the young couple were made much of by all the friends of the wealthy merchant can easily be imagined.

At the ceremony Tartlet was perfect in bearing, in everything, and the pupil did honour to the celebrated professor of dancing and deportment.

Now Tartlet had an idea. Not being able to mount his crocodile on a scarf-pin--and much he regretted it--he resolved to have it stuffed. The animal prepared in this fashion--hung from the ceiling, with the jaws half open, and the paws outspread--would make a fine ornament for his room. The crocodile was consequently sent to a famous taxidermist, and he brought it back to Tartlet a few days afterwards. Every one came to admire the monster who had almost made a meal of Tartlet.

"You know, Mr. Kolderup, where the animal came from?" said the celebrated taxidermist, presenting his bill.

"No, I do not," answered Uncle Will.

"But it had a label underneath its carapace."

"A label!" exclaimed Godfrey.

"Here it is," said the celebrated taxidermist.

And he held out a piece of leather on which, in indelible ink, were written these words,--

"From Hagenbeck, Hamburg,

"To J. R. Taskinar, Stockton, U.S.A."

When William W. Kolderup had read these words he burst into a shout of laughter. He understood all.

It was his enemy, J. R. Taskinar, his conquered competitor, who, to be revenged, had bought a cargo of wild beasts, reptiles, and other objectionable creatures from a well-known purveyor to the menageries of both hemispheres, and had landed them at night in several voyages to Spencer Island. It had cost him a good deal, no doubt, to do so; but he had succeeded in infesting the property of his rival, as the English did Martinique, if we are to believe the legend, before it was handed over to France.

There was thus no more to explain of the remarkable occurrences on Phina Island.

"Well done!" exclaimed William W. Kolderup. "I could not have done better myself!"

"But with those terrible creatures," said Phina, "Spencer Island--"

"Phina Island--" interrupted Godfrey.

"Phina Island," continued the bride, with a smile, "is quite uninhabitable."

"Bah!" answered Uncle Will; "we can wait till the last lion has eaten up

the last tiger!"

"And then, dearest Phina," said Godfrey, "you will not be afraid to pass a season there with me?"

"With you, my dear husband, I fear nothing from anywhere," answered Phina, "and as you have not had your voyage round the world--"

"We will have it together," said Godfrey, "and if an unlucky chance should ever make me a real Crusoe--"

"You will ever have near you the most devoted of Crusoe-esses!"

THE END.