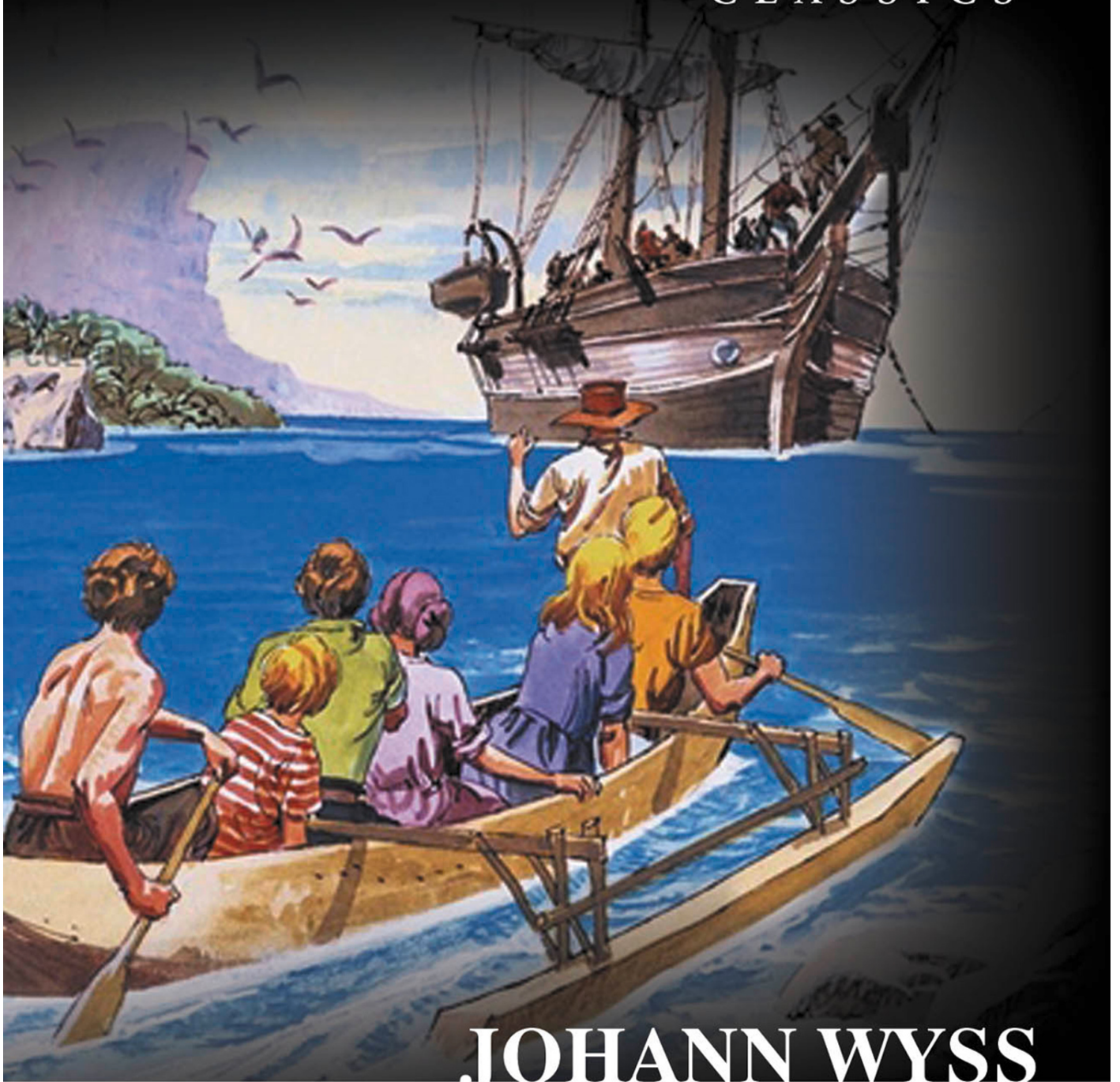


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JOHANN WYSS
**The Swiss
Family Robinson**

Johann Wyss

The Swiss Family Robinson

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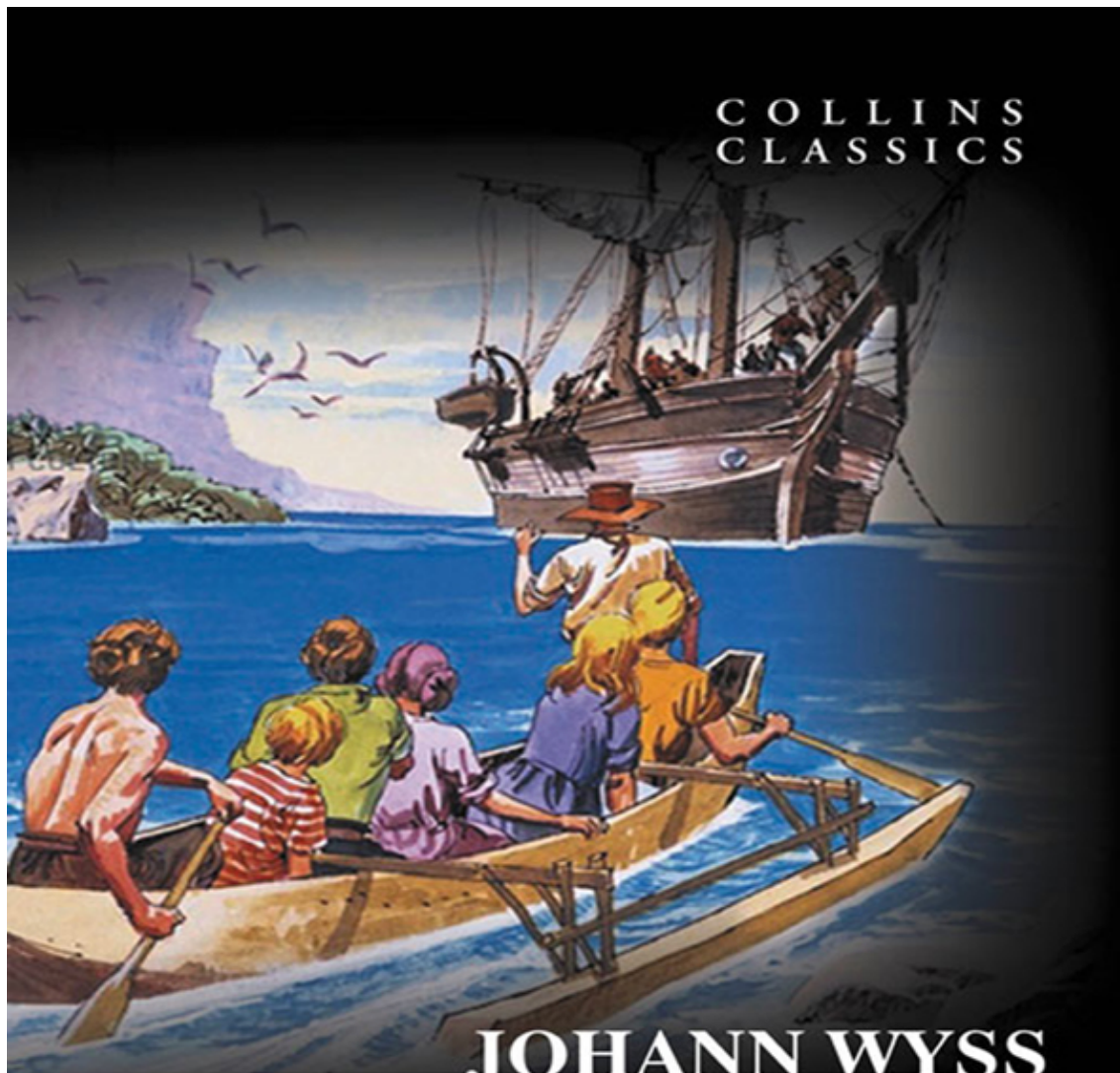
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JOHANN WYSS
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Family Robinson**

THE SWISS FAMILY ROBINSON

Johann Wyss

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CHAPTER 1

For many days we had been tempest-tossed. Six times had the darkness closed over a wild and terrific scene, and returning light as often brought but renewed distress, for the raging storm increased in fury until on the seventh day all hope was lost.

We were driven completely out of our course; no conjecture could be formed as to our whereabouts. The crew had lost heart, and were utterly exhausted by incessant labour.

The riven masts had gone by the board, leaks had been sprung in every direction, and the water, which rushed in, gained upon us rapidly.

Instead of reckless oaths, the seamen now uttered frantic cries to God for mercy, mingled with strange and often ludicrous vows, to be performed should deliverance be granted.

Every man on board alternately commended his soul to his Creator, and strove to bethink himself of some means of saving his life.

My heart sank as I looked round upon my family in the midst of these horrors. Our four young sons were overpowered by terror. 'Dear children,' said I, 'if the Lord will, He can save us even from this fearful peril; if not, let us calmly yield our lives into His hand, and think of the joy and blessedness of finding ourselves for ever and ever united in that happy home above.'

At these words my weeping wife looked bravely up, and, as the boys clustered round her, she began to cheer and encourage them with calm and loving words. I rejoiced to see her fortitude, though my heart was ready to break as I gazed on my dear ones.

We knelt down together, one after another praying with deep earnestness and emotion. Fritz, in particular, besought help and deliverance for his dear parents and brothers, as though quite forgetting himself.

Our hearts were soothed by the never-failing comfort of child-like confiding prayer, and the horrors of our situation seemed less overwhelming. 'Ah,' thought I, 'the Lord will hear our prayer! He will help us.'

Amid the roar of the thundering waves I suddenly heard the cry of 'Land! land!', while at the same instant the ship struck with a frightful shock, which threw everyone to the deck, and seemed to threaten her immediate destruction.

Dreadful sounds betokened the breaking up of the ship, and the roaring waters poured in on all sides.

Then the voice of the captain was heard above the tumult, shouting, 'Lower away the boats! We are lost!'

'Lost!' I exclaimed, and the word went like a dagger to my heart; but seeing my children's terror renewed, I composed myself, calling out cheerfully, 'Take courage, my boys! We are all above water yet. There is the land not far off, let us do our best to reach it. You know God helps those that help themselves!' With that, I left them and went on deck. What was my horror when through the foam and spray I beheld the only remaining boat leave the ship, the last of the seamen spring into her and push off, regardless of my cries and entreaties that we might be allowed to share their slender chance of preserving their lives. My voice was drowned in the howling of the blast, and even had the crew wished it, the return of the boat was impossible.

Casting my eyes despairingly around, I became gradually aware that our position was by no means hopeless, inasmuch as the stern of the ship containing our cabin was jammed between two high rocks, and was partly raised from among the breakers which dashed the forepart to pieces. As the clouds of mist and rain drove past, I could make out, through rents in the vaporous curtain, a line of rocky coast, and, rugged as it was, my heart bounded towards it as a sign of help in the hour of need. Yet the sense of our lonely and forsaken condition weighed heavily upon me as I returned to my family, constraining myself to say with a smile, 'Courage, dear ones! Although our good ship will

never sail more, she is so placed that our cabin will remain above water, and tomorrow, if the wind and waves abate, I see no reason why we should not be able to get ashore.'

These few words had an immediate effect on the spirits of my children, who at once regarded our problematical chance of escaping as a happy certainty, and began to enjoy the relief from the violent pitching and rolling of the vessel.

My wife, however, perceived my distress and anxiety in spite of my forced composure, and I made her comprehend our real situation, greatly fearing the effect of the intelligence on her nerves. Not for a moment did her courage and trust in Providence forsake her, and on seeing this, my fortitude revived.

'We must find some food, and take a good supper,' said she, 'it will never do to grow faint by fasting too long. We shall require our utmost strength tomorrow.'

Night drew on apace, the storm was as fierce as ever, and at intervals we were startled by crashes announcing further damage to our unfortunate ship.

'God will help us soon now, won't He, father?' said my youngest child.

'You silly little thing,' said Fritz, my eldest son, sharply, 'don't you know that we must not settle what God is to do for us? We must have patience and wait His time.'

'Very well said, had it been said kindly, Fritz, my boy. You too often speak harshly to your brothers, although you may not mean to do so.'

A good meal being now ready, my youngsters ate heartily, and retiring to rest were speedily fast asleep. Fritz, who was of an age to be aware of the real danger we were in, kept watch with us. After a long silence, 'Father,' said he, 'don't you think we might contrive swimming-belts for mother and the boys? With those we might all escape to land, for you and I can swim.'

'Your idea is so good,' answered I, 'that I shall arrange something at once, in case of an accident during the night.'

We immediately searched about for what would answer the purpose, and fortunately got hold of a number of empty flasks and tin canisters, which we connected two and two together so as to form floats sufficiently buoyant to support a person in the water, and my wife and young sons each willingly put one on. I then provided myself with matches, knives, cord, and other portable articles, trusting that, should the vessel go to pieces before daylight, we might gain the shore, not wholly destitute.

Fritz, as well as his brothers, now slept soundly. Throughout the night my wife and I maintained our prayerful watch, dreading at every fresh sound some fatal change in the position of the wreck.

At length the faint dawn of day appeared, the long weary night was over, and with thankful hearts we perceived that the gale had begun to moderate; blue sky was seen above us, and the lovely hues of sunrise adorned the eastern horizon.

I aroused the boys, and we assembled on the remaining portion of the deck, when they, to their surprise, discovered that no one else was on board.

'Hallo, papa! What has become of everybody? Are the sailors gone? Have they taken away the boats? Oh, papa! why did they leave us behind? What can we do by ourselves!'

'My good children,' I replied, 'we must not despair, although we seem deserted. See how those on whose skill and good faith we depended have left us cruelly to our fate in the hour of danger. God will never do so. He has not forsaken us, and we will trust Him still. Only let us bestir ourselves, and each cheerily do his best. Who has anything to propose?'

'The sea will soon be calm enough for swimming,' said Fritz.

'And that would be all very fine for you,' exclaimed Ernest, 'but think of mother and the rest of us! Why not build a raft and all get on shore together?'

'We should find it difficult, I think, to make a raft that would carry us safe to shore. However, we must contrive something, and first let each try to procure what will be of most use to us.'

Away we all went to see what was to be found, I myself proceeding to examine, as of greatest consequence, the supplies of provisions and fresh water within our reach.

My wife took her youngest son, Franz, to help her to feed the unfortunate animals on board, who were in a pitiful plight, having been neglected for several days.

Fritz hastened to the arms chest, Ernest to look for tools; and Jack went towards the captain's cabin, the door of which he no sooner opened, than out sprang two splendid large dogs, who testified their extreme delight and gratitude by such tremendous bounds that they knocked their little deliverer completely head over heels, frightening him nearly out of his wits. Jack did not long yield either to fear or anger, he presently recovered himself, the dogs seemed to ask pardon by vehemently licking his face and hands, and so, seizing the larger by the ears, he jumped on his back, and, to my great amusement, coolly rode to meet me as I came up the hatchway.

When we reassembled in the cabin, we all displayed our treasures.

Fritz brought a couple of guns, shot belt, powder-flasks, and plenty of bullets.

Ernest produced a cap full of nails, an axe, and a hammer, while pincers, chisels and augers stuck out of all his pockets.

Little Franz carried a box, and eagerly began to show us the 'nice sharp little hooks' it contained. 'Well done, Franz!' cried I, 'these fish hooks, which you the youngest have found, may contribute more than anything else in the ship to save our lives by procuring food for us. Fritz and Ernest, you have chosen well.'

'Will you praise me too?' said my dear wife. 'I have nothing to show, but I can give you good news. Some useful animals are still alive: a cow, a donkey, two goats, six sheep, a ram and a fine sow. I was but just in time to save their lives by taking food to them.'

'All these things are excellent indeed,' said I, 'but my friend Jack here has presented me with a couple of huge hungry useless dogs, who will eat more than any of us.'

'Oh, papa! They will be of use! Why, they will help us to hunt when we get on shore!'

'No doubt they will, if ever we do get on shore, Jack; but I must say I don't know how it is to be done.'

'Can't we each get into a big tub, and float there?' returned he. 'I have often sailed splendidly like that, round the pond at home.'

'My child, you have hit on a capital idea,' cried I. 'Now, Ernest, let me have your tools, hammers, nails, saws, augers, and all; and then make haste to collect any tubs you can find!'

We very soon found four large casks, made of sound wood, and strongly bound with iron hoops; they were floating with many other things in the water in the hold, but we managed to fish them out, and drag them to a suitable place for launching them. They were exactly what I wanted, and I succeeded in sawing them across the middle. Hard work it was, and we were glad enough to stop and refresh ourselves with wine and biscuits.

My eight tubs now stood ranged in a row near the water's edge, and I looked at them with great satisfaction; to my surprise, my wife did not seem to share my pleasure!

'I shall never,' said she, 'muster courage to get into one of these!'

'Do not be too sure of that, dear wife, when you see my contrivance completed, you will perhaps prefer it to this immovable wreck.'

I next procured a long thin plank on which my tubs could be fixed, and the two ends of this I bent upwards so as to form a keel. Other two planks were nailed along the sides of the tubs; they also being flexible, were brought to a point at each end, and all firmly secured and nailed together. I felt satisfied that in smooth water this craft would be perfectly trustworthy. But when we thought all was ready for the launch, we found, to our dismay, that the grand contrivance was so heavy and clumsy, that even our united efforts could not move it an inch.

'I must have a lever,' cried I. 'Run and fetch the capstan bar!'

Fritz quickly brought one and, having formed rollers by cutting up a long spar, I raised the forepart of my boat with the bar, and my sons placed a roller under it.

‘How is it, father,’ inquired Ernest, ‘that with that thing you alone can do more than all of us together?’

I explained, as well as I could in a hurry, the principle of the lever; and promised to have a long talk on the subject of Mechanics, should we have a future opportunity.

I now made fast a long rope to the stern of our boat, attaching the other end to a beam; then placing a second and third roller under it, we once more began to push, this time with success, and soon our gallant craft was safely launched: so swiftly indeed did she glide into the water that, but for the rope, she would have passed beyond our reach. The boys wished to jump in directly; but, alas, she leaned so much on one side that they could not venture to do so.

Some heavy things being thrown in, however, the boat righted itself by degrees, and the boys were so delighted that they struggled which should first leap in to have the fun of sitting down in the tubs. But it was plain to me at once that something more was required to make her perfectly safe, so I contrived outriggers to preserve the balance, by nailing long poles across at the stem and stern, and fixing at the ends of each empty brandy casks. Then the boat appearing steady, I got in; and turning it towards the most open side of the wreck, I cut and cleared away obstructions, so as to leave a free passage for our departure, and the boys brought oars to be ready for the voyage. This important undertaking we were forced to postpone until the next day, as it was by this time far too late to attempt it. It was not pleasant to have to spend another night in so precarious a situation; but, yielding to necessity, we sat down to enjoy a comfortable supper, for during our exciting and incessant work all day we had taken nothing but an occasional biscuit and a little wine.

We prepared for rest in a much happier frame of mind than on the preceding day, but I did not forget the possibility of a renewed storm, and therefore made every one put on the belts as before. Then retiring to our berths, peaceful sleep prepared us all for the exertions of the coming day.

We rose up betimes, for sleep weighs lightly on the hopeful, as well as on the anxious. After kneeling together in prayer, ‘Now my beloved ones,’ said I, ‘with God’s help we are about to effect our escape. Let the poor animals we must leave behind be well fed, and put plenty of fodder within their reach: in a few days we may be able to return, and save them likewise. After that, collect everything you can think of which may be of use to us.’

The boys joyfully obeyed me, and I selected from the large quantity of stores they got together, canvas to make a tent, a chest of carpenter’s tools, guns, pistols, powder, shot, and bullets, rods and fishing tackle, an iron pot, a case of portable soup and another of biscuit. These useful articles of course took the place of the ballast I had hastily thrown in the day before.

With a hearty prayer for God’s blessing, we now began to take our seats, each in his tub. Just then we heard the cocks begin to crow, as though to reproach us for deserting them. ‘Why should not the fowls go with us!’ exclaimed I. ‘If we find no food for *them*, they can be food for *us*!’ Ten hens and a couple of cocks were accordingly placed in one of the tubs, and secured with some wire-netting over them.

The ducks and geese were set at liberty, and took to the water at once, while the pigeons, rejoicing to find themselves on the wing, swiftly made for the shore. My wife, who managed all this for me, kept us waiting for her some little time, and came at last with a bag as big as a pillow in her arms. ‘This is *my* contribution,’ said she, throwing the bag to little Franz, to be, as I thought, a cushion for him to sit upon.

All being ready, we cast off, and moved away from the wreck. My good, brave wife sat in the first compartment of the boat; next her was Franz, a pretty little boy, nearly eight years old. Then came Fritz, a handsome, spirited young fellow of fifteen; the two centre tubs contained the valuable cargo; then came our bold, thoughtless Jack; next him Ernest, my second son, intelligent, well-informed, and rather indolent. I myself, the anxious, loving father, stood in the stern, endeavouring to guide the raft with its precious burden to a safe landing-place.

The elder boys took the oars, everyone wore a float belt, and had something useful close to him in case of being thrown into the water.

The tide was flowing, which was a great help to the young oarsmen. We emerged from the wreck and glided into the open sea. All eyes were strained to get a full view of the land, and the boys pulled with a will; but for some time we made no progress, as the boat kept turning round and round, until I hit upon the right way to steer it, after which we merrily made for the shore.

We had left the two dogs, Turk and Juno, on the wreck, as being both large mastiffs we did not care to have their additional weight on board our craft; but when they saw us apparently deserting them, they set up a piteous howl, and sprang into the sea. I was sorry to see this, for the distance to the land was so great that I scarcely expected them to be able to accomplish it. They followed us, however, and, occasionally resting their fore-paws on the outriggers, kept up with us well. Jack was inclined to deny them this their only chance of safety. 'Stop,' said I, 'that would be unkind as well as foolish; remember, the merciful man regardeth the life of his beast.'

Our passage though tedious was safe; but the nearer we approached the shore the less inviting it appeared; the barren rocks seemed to threaten us with misery and want.

Many casks, boxes and bales of goods floated on the water around us. Fritz and I managed to secure a couple of hogsheads, so as to tow them alongside. With the prospect of famine before us, it was desirable to lay hold of anything likely to contain provisions.

By and by we began to perceive that, between and beyond the cliffs, green grass and trees were discernible. Fritz could distinguish many tall palms, and Ernest hoped they would prove to be coconut trees, and enjoyed the thoughts of drinking the refreshing milk.

'I am very sorry I never thought of bringing away the Captain's telescope,' said I.

'Oh, look here, father!' cried Jack, drawing a little spy-glass joyfully out of his pocket.

By means of this glass, I made out that at some distance to the left the coast was much more inviting; a strong current however carried us directly towards the frowning rocks, but I presently observed an opening, where a stream flowed into the sea, and saw that our geese and ducks were swimming towards this place. I steered after them into the creek, and we found ourselves in a small bay or inlet where the water was perfectly smooth and of moderate depth. The ground sloped gently upwards from the low banks to the cliffs which here retired inland, leaving a small plain, on which it was easy for us to land. Everyone sprang gladly out of the boat but little Franz, who, lying packed in his tub like a potted shrimp, had to be lifted out by his mother.

The dogs had scrambled on shore before us; they received us with loud barking and the wildest demonstrations of delight. The geese and ducks kept up an incessant din, added to which was the screaming and croaking of flamingoes and penguins, whose dominion we were invading. The noise was deafening, but far from unwelcome to me, as I thought of the good dinners the birds might furnish.

As soon as we could gather our children around us on dry land, we knelt to offer thanks and praise for our merciful escape, and with full hearts we commended ourselves to God's good keeping for the time to come.

All hands then briskly fell to the work of unloading, and, oh, how rich we felt ourselves as we did so! The poultry we left at liberty to forage for themselves, and set about finding a suitable place to erect a tent in which to pass the night. This we speedily did; thrusting a long spar into a hole in the rock, and supporting the other end by a pole firmly planted in the ground, we formed a framework over which we stretched the sailcloth we had brought; besides fastening this down with pegs, we placed our heavy chests and boxes on the border of the canvas, and arranged hooks so as to be able to close up the entrance during the night.

When this was accomplished, the boys ran to collect moss and grass, to spread in the tent for our beds, while I arranged a fireplace with some large flat stones, near the brook which flowed close by. Dry twigs and seaweed were soon in a blaze on the hearth, I filled the iron pot with water, and

giving my wife several cakes of the portable soup, she established herself as our cook, with little Franz to help her.

He, thinking his mother was melting some glue for carpentry, was eager to know ‘what papa was going to make next?’

‘This is to be soup for your dinner, my child. Do you think these cakes look like glue?’

‘Yes, indeed I do!’ replied Franz. ‘And I should not much like to taste glue soup! Don’t you want some beef or mutton, mamma?’

‘Where can I get it, dear?’ said she, ‘we are a long way from a butcher’s shop! But these cakes are made of the juice of good meat, boiled till it becomes a strong stiff jelly – people take them when they go to sea, because on a long voyage they can only have salt meat, which will not make nice soup.’

Fritz meanwhile leaving a loaded gun with me, took another himself, and went along the rough coast to see what lay beyond the stream; this fatiguing sort of walk not suiting Ernest’s fancy, he sauntered down to the beach, and Jack scrambled among the rocks searching for shellfish.

I was anxious to land the two casks which were floating alongside our boat, but on attempting to do so, I found that I could not get them up the bank on which we had landed, and was therefore obliged to look for a more convenient spot. As I did so, I was startled by hearing Jack shouting for help, as though in great danger. He was at some distance, and I hurried towards him with a hatchet in my hand. The little fellow stood screaming in a deep pool, and as I approached, I saw that a huge lobster had caught his leg in its powerful claw. Poor Jack was in a terrible fright; kick as he would, his enemy still clung on. I waded into the water, and seizing the lobster firmly by the back, managed to make it loosen its hold, and we brought it safe to land. Jack, having speedily recovered his spirits, and anxious to take such a prize to his mother, caught the lobster in both hands, but instantly received such a severe blow from its tail, that he flung it down, and passionately hit the creature with a large stone. This display of temper vexed me. ‘You are acting in a very childish way, my son,’ said I. ‘Never strike an enemy in a revengeful spirit.’ Once more lifting the lobster, Jack ran triumphantly towards the tent.

‘Mother, mother! A lobster! A lobster, Ernest! Look here, Franz! Mind, he’ll bite you! Where’s Fritz?’ All came crowding round Jack and his prize, wondering at its unusual size, and Ernest wanted his mother to make lobster soup directly, by adding it to what she was now boiling.

She, however, begged to decline making any such experiment, and said she preferred cooking one dish at a time. Having remarked that the scene of Jack’s adventure afforded a convenient place for getting my casks on shore, I returned thither and succeeded in drawing them up on the beach, where I set them on end, and for the present left them.

On my return I resumed the subject of Jack’s lobster, and told him he should have the offending claw all to himself when it was ready to be eaten, congratulating him on being the first to discover anything useful.

‘As to that,’ said Ernest, ‘I found something very good to eat, as well as Jack, only I could not get at them without wetting my feet.’

‘Pooh!’ cried Jack, ‘I know what he saw – nothing but some nasty mussels – I saw them too. Who wants to eat trash like that! Lobster for me!’

‘I believe them to be oysters, not mussels,’ returned Ernest calmly.

‘Be good enough, my philosophical young friend, to fetch a few specimens of these oysters in time for our next meal,’ said I. ‘We must all exert ourselves, Ernest, for the common good, and pray never let me hear you object to wetting your feet. See how quickly the sun has dried Jack and me.’

‘I can bring some salt at the same time,’ said Ernest, ‘I remarked a good deal lying in the crevices of the rocks; it tasted very pure and good, and I concluded it was produced by the evaporation of sea water in the sun.’

‘Extremely probable, learned sir,’ cried I, ‘but if you had brought a bag full of this good salt instead of merely speculating so profoundly on the subject, it would have been more to the purpose. Run and fetch some directly.’

It proved to be salt sure enough, although so impure that it seemed useless, till my wife dissolved and strained it, when it became fit to put in the soup.

‘Why not use the sea-water itself?’ asked Jack.

‘Because,’ said Ernest, ‘it is not only salt, but bitter too. Just try it.’

‘Now,’ said my wife, tasting the soup with the stick with which she had been stirring it, ‘dinner is ready, but where can Fritz be?’ she continued, a little anxiously.

‘How are we to eat our soup when he does come?’ I asked. ‘We have neither plates nor spoons, and we can scarcely lift the boiling pot to our mouths. We are in as uncomfortable a position as was the fox to whom the stork served up a dinner in a jug with a long neck.’

‘Oh, for a few coconut shells!’ sighed Ernest.

‘Oh, for half a dozen plates and as many silver spoons!’ rejoined I, smiling.

‘Really though, oyster-shells would do,’ said he, after a moment’s thought.

‘True, that is an idea worth having! Off with you, my boys, get the oysters and clean out a few shells. What though our spoons have no handles, and we do burn our fingers a little in baling the soup out.’

Jack was away and up to his knees in the water in a moment detaching the oysters. Ernest followed more leisurely, and still unwilling to wet his feet, stood by the margin of the pool and gathered in his handkerchief the oysters his brother threw him; as he thus stood he picked up and pocketed a large mussel shell for his own use. As they returned with a good supply we heard a shout from Fritz in the distance; we returned it joyfully, and he presently appeared before us, his hands behind his back, and a look of disappointment upon his countenance.

‘Unsuccessful!’ said he.

‘Really!’ I replied. ‘Never mind, my boy, better luck next time.’

‘Oh, Fritz!’ exclaimed his brothers who had looked behind him. ‘A sucking-pig, a little sucking-pig. Where did you get it? How did you shoot it? Do let us see it!’

Fritz then with sparkling eyes exhibited his prize.

‘I am glad to see the result of your prowess, my boy,’ said I; ‘but I cannot approve of deceit, even as a joke; stick to the truth in jest and earnest.’

Fritz then told us how he had been to the other side of the stream. ‘So different from this,’ he said, ‘it is really a beautiful country, and the shore, which runs down to the sea in a gentle slope, is covered with all sorts of useful things from the wreck. Do let us go and collect them. And, father, why should we not return to the wreck and bring off some of the animals? Just think of what value the cow would be to us, and what a pity it would be to lose her. Let us get her on shore, and we will move over the stream, where she will have good pasturage, and we shall be in the shade instead of on this desert, and, father, I do wish –’

‘Stop, stop, my boy!’ cried I. ‘All will be done in good time. Tomorrow and the day after will bring work of their own. And tell me, did you see no traces of our ship-mates?’

‘Not a sign of them, either on land or sea, living or dead,’ he replied.

‘But the sucking-pig,’ said Jack, ‘where did you get it?’

‘It was one of several,’ said Fritz, ‘which I found on the shore; most curious animals they are, they hopped rather than walked, and every now and then would squat down on their hind legs and rub their snouts with their fore-paws. Had not I been afraid of losing them all, I would have tried to catch one alive, they seemed so tame.’

Meanwhile, Ernest had been carefully examining the animal in question.

‘This is no pig,’ he said, ‘and except for its bristly skin, does not look like one. See its teeth are not like those of a pig, but rather those of a squirrel. In fact,’ he continued, looking at Fritz, ‘your sucking-pig is an agouti.’

‘Dear me,’ said Fritz, ‘listen to the great professor lecturing! He is going to prove that a pig is not a pig!’

‘You need not be so quick to laugh at your brother,’ said I, in my turn, ‘he is quite right. I, too, know the agouti by descriptions and pictures, and there is little doubt that this is a specimen. The little animal is a native of North America, where it makes its nest under the roots of trees, and lives upon fruit. But, Ernest, the agouti not only looks something like a pig, but most decidedly grunts like a porker.’

While we were thus talking, Jack had been vainly endeavouring to open an oyster with his large knife. ‘Here is a simpler way,’ said I, placing an oyster on the fire; it immediately opened. ‘Now,’ I continued, ‘who will try this delicacy?’ All at first hesitated to partake of them, so unattractive did they appear. Jack, however, tightly closing his eyes and making a face as though about to take medicine, gulped one down. We followed his example, one after the other, each doing so rather to provide himself with a spoon than with any hope of cultivating a taste for oysters.

Our spoons were now ready, and gathering round the pot we dipped them in, not, however, without sundry scalded fingers. Ernest then drew from his pocket the large shell he had procured for his own use, and scooping up a good quantity of soup he put it down to cool, smiling at his own foresight.

‘Prudence should be exercised for others,’ I remarked, ‘your cool soup will do capitally for the dogs, my boy; take it to them, and then come and eat like the rest of us.’

Ernest winced at this, but silently taking up his shell he placed it on the ground before the hungry dogs, who lapped up its contents in a moment; he then returned, and we all went merrily on with our dinner. While we were thus busily employed, we suddenly discovered that our dogs, not satisfied with their mouthful of soup, had espied the agouti, and were rapidly devouring it. Fritz seizing his gun flew to rescue it from their hungry jaws, and before I could prevent him, struck one of them with such force that his gun was bent. The poor beasts ran off howling, followed by a shower of stones from Fritz, who shouted and yelled at them so fiercely, that his mother was actually terrified. I followed him, and as soon as he would listen to me, represented to him how despicable as well as wicked was such an outbreak of temper. ‘For,’ said I, ‘you have hurt, if not actually wounded, the dogs; you have distressed and terrified your mother, and spoiled your gun.’

Though Fritz’s passion was easily aroused it never lasted long, and speedily recovering himself, immediately he entreated his mother’s pardon, and expressed his sorrow for his fault.

By this time the sun was sinking beneath the horizon, and the poultry, which had been straying to some little distance, gathered round us, and began to pick up the crumbs of biscuit which had fallen during our repast. My wife hereupon drew from her mysterious bag some handfuls of oats, peas, and other grain, and with them began to feed the poultry. She at the same time showed me several other seeds of various vegetables. ‘That was indeed thoughtful,’ said I, ‘but pray be careful of what will be of such value to us; we can bring plenty of damaged biscuits from the wreck, which though of no use as food for us, will suit the fowls very well indeed.’

The pigeons now flew up to crevices in the rocks, the fowls perched themselves on our tent pole, and the ducks and geese waddled off cackling and quacking to the marshy margin of the river. We too were ready for repose, and having loaded our guns, and offered up our prayers to God, thanking him for his many mercies to us, we commended ourselves to his protecting care, and as the last ray of light departed, closed our tent and lay down to rest.

The children remarked the suddenness of nightfall, for indeed there had been little or no twilight. This convinced me that we must be not far from the equator, for twilight results from the refraction of the sun’s rays; the more obliquely these rays fall, the further does the partial light extend, while the more perpendicularly they strike the earth the longer do they continue their undiminished force, until when the sun sinks, they totally disappear, thus producing sudden darkness.

CHAPTER 2

We should have been badly off without the shelter of our tent, for the night proved as cold as the day had been hot, but we managed to sleep comfortably, every one being thoroughly fatigued by the labours of the day. The voice of our vigilant cock, which as he loudly saluted the rising moon, was the last sound I heard at night, roused me at daybreak, and I then awoke my wife, that in the quiet interval while yet our children slept, we might take counsel together on our situation and prospects. It was plain to both of us that in the first place, we should ascertain if possible the fate of our late companions, and then examine into the nature and resources of the country on which we were stranded.

We therefore came to the resolution that, as soon as we had breakfasted, Fritz and I should start on an expedition with these objects in view, while my wife remained near our landing-place with the three younger boys.

‘Rouse up, rouse up, my boys,’ cried I, awakening the children cheerfully. ‘Come and help your mother to get breakfast ready.’

‘As to that,’ said she, smiling, ‘we can but set on the pot, and boil some more soup!’

‘Why! You forget Jack’s fine lobster!’ replied I. ‘What has become of it, Jack?’

‘It has been safe in this hole in the rock all night, father. You see, I thought as the dogs seem to like good things, they might take a fancy to that as well as to the agouti.’

‘A very sensible precaution,’ remarked I, ‘I believe even my heedless Jack will learn wisdom in time. It is well the lobster is so large, for we shall want to take part with us on our excursion today.’

At the mention of an excursion, the four children were wild with delight, and, capering around me, clapped their hands for joy.

‘Steady there, steady!’ said I, ‘you cannot expect all to go. Such an expedition as this would be too dangerous and fatiguing for you younger ones. Fritz and I will go alone this time, with one of the dogs, leaving the other to defend you.’

We then armed ourselves, each taking a gun and a game-bag; Fritz, in addition, sticking a pair of pistols in his belt, and I a small hatchet in mine; breakfast being over, we stowed away the remainder of the lobster and some biscuits, with a flask of water, and were ready for a start.

We now found that the banks of the stream were on both sides so rocky that we could get down to the water by only one narrow passage, and there was no corresponding path on the other side. I was glad to see this however, for I now knew that my wife and children were on a comparatively inaccessible spot, the other side of the tent being protected by steep and precipitous cliffs. Fritz and I pursued our way up the stream until we reached a point where the waters fell from a considerable height in a cascade, and where several large rocks lay half covered by the water; by means of these we succeeded in crossing the stream in safety. We thus had the sea on our left, and a long line of rocky heights, here and there adorned with clumps of trees, stretching away inland to the right. We had forced our way scarcely fifty yards through the long rank grass, which was here partly withered by the sun and much tangled, when we heard behind us a rustling, and on looking round saw the grass waving to and fro, as if some animal were passing through it. Fritz instantly turned and brought his gun to his shoulder, ready to fire the moment the beast should appear. I was much pleased with my son’s coolness and presence of mind, for it showed me that I might thoroughly rely upon him on any future occasion when real danger might occur; this time, however, no savage beast rushed out, but our trusty dog Turk, whom, in our anxiety at parting, we had forgotten, and who had been sent after us doubtless by my thoughtful wife.

From this little incident, however, we saw how dangerous was our position, and how difficult escape would be should any fierce beast steal upon us unawares: we therefore hastened to make our way to the open sea-shore. Here the scene which presented itself was indeed delightful. A background of hills, the green waving grass, the pleasant groups of trees stretching here and there to the very

water's edge, formed a lovely prospect. On the smooth sand we searched carefully for any trace of our hapless companions, but not the mark of a footstep could we find.

'Shall I fire a shot or two?' said Fritz. 'That would bring our companions, if they are within hearing.'

'It would indeed,' I replied, 'or any savages that may be here. No, no; let us search diligently, but as quietly as possible.'

'But why, father, should we trouble ourselves about them at all? They left us to shift for ourselves, and I for one don't care to set eyes on them again.'

'You are wrong, my boy,' said I. 'In the first place, we should not return evil for evil; then, again, they might be of great assistance to us in building a house of some sort; and lastly, you must remember that they took nothing with them from the vessel, and may be perishing of hunger.'

Thus talking, we pushed on until we came to a pleasant grove which stretched down to the water's edge; here we halted to rest, seating ourselves under a large tree, by a rivulet which murmured and splashed along its pebbly bed into the great ocean before us. A thousand gaily plumaged birds flew twittering above us, and Fritz and I gazed up at them.

My son suddenly started up.

'A monkey,' he exclaimed, 'I am nearly sure I saw a monkey.'

As he spoke he sprang round to the other side of the tree, and in doing so stumbled over a round substance, which he handed to me, remarking, as he did so, that it was a round bird's nest, of which he had often heard.

'You may have done so,' said I, laughing, 'but you need not necessarily conclude that every round hairy thing is a bird's nest; this, for instance, is not one, but a coconut.'

We split open the nut, but, to our disgust, found the kernel dry and uneatable.

'Hullo,' cried Fritz, 'I always thought a coconut was full of delicious sweet liquid, like almond milk.'

'So it is,' I replied, 'when young and fresh, but as it ripens the milk becomes congealed, and in course of time is solidified into a kernel. This kernel then dries as you see here, but when the nut falls on favourable soil, the germ within the kernel swells until it bursts through the shell, and, taking root, springs up a new tree.'

'I do not understand,' said Fritz, 'how the little germ manages to get through this great thick shell, which is not like an almond or hazel-nut shell, that is divided down the middle already.'

'Nature provides for all things,' I answered, taking up the pieces. 'Look here, do you see these three round holes near the stalk; it is through them that the germ obtains egress. Now let us find a good nut if we can.'

As coconuts must be over-ripe before they fall naturally from the tree, it was not without difficulty that we obtained one in which the kernel was not dried up. When we succeeded, however, we were so refreshed by the fruit that we could defer the repast we called our dinner until later in the day, and so spare our stock of provisions.

Continuing our way through a thicket, which was so densely overgrown with lianas that we had to clear a passage with our hatchets, we again emerged on the sea-shore beyond, and found an open view, the forest sweeping inland, while on the space before us stood at intervals single trees of remarkable appearance.

These at once attracted Fritz's observant eye, and he pointed to them, exclaiming, 'Oh, what absurd-looking trees, father! See what strange bumps there are on the trunks.'

We approached to examine them, and I recognized them as calabash trees, the fruit of which grows in this curious way on the stems, and is a species of gourd, from the hard rind of which bowls, spoons, and bottles can be made. 'The savages,' I remarked, 'are said to form these things most ingeniously, using them to contain liquids: indeed, they actually cook food in them.'

‘Oh, but that is impossible,’ returned Fritz. ‘I am quite sure this rind would be burnt through directly it was set on the fire.’

‘I did not say it was set on the fire at all. When the gourd has been divided in two, and the shell or rind emptied of its contents, it is filled with water, into which the fish, or whatever is to be cooked, is put; red-hot stones are added until the water boils; the food becomes fit to eat, and the gourd-rind remains uninjured.’

‘That is a very clever plan: very simple too. I daresay I should have hit on it, if I had tried,’ said Fritz.

‘The friends of Columbus thought it very easy to make an egg stand upon its end when he had shown them how to do it. But now suppose we prepare some of these calabashes, that they may be ready for use when we take them home.’

Fritz instantly took up one of the gourds, and tried to split it equally with his knife, but in vain: the blade slipped, and the calabash was cut jaggedly. ‘What a nuisance!’ said Fritz, flinging it down, ‘The thing is spoiled; and yet it seemed so simple to divide it properly.’

‘Stay,’ said I, ‘you are too impatient, those pieces are not useless. Do you try to fashion from them a spoon or two while I provide a dish.’

I then took from my pocket a piece of string, which I tied tightly round a gourd, as near one end of it as I could; then tapping the string with the back of my knife, it penetrated the outer shell. When this was accomplished, I tied the string yet tighter; and drawing the ends with all my might, the gourd fell, divided exactly as I wished.

‘That is clever!’ cried Fritz. ‘What in the world put that plan into your head?’

‘It is a plan,’ I replied, ‘which the negroes adopt, as I have learned from reading books of travel.’

Well, it certainly makes a capital soup-tureen, and a soup-plate too,’ said Fritz, examining the gourd. ‘But supposing you had wanted to make a bottle, how would you have set to work?’

‘It would be an easier operation than this, if possible. All that is necessary, is to cut a round hole at one end, then to scoop out the interior, and to drop in several shot or stones; when these are shaken, any remaining portions of the fruit are detached, and the gourd is thoroughly cleaned, and the bottle completed.’

‘That would not make a very convenient bottle though, father; it would be more like a barrel.’

‘True, my boy; if you want a more shapely vessel, you must take it in hand when it is younger. To give it a neck, for instance, you must tie a bandage round the young gourd while it is still on the tree, and then all will swell but that part which you have checked.’

As I spoke, I filled the gourds with sand, and left them to dry; marking the spot that we might return for them on our way back.

For three hours or more we pushed forward, keeping a sharp look-out on either side for any trace of our companions, till we reached a bold promontory, stretching some way into the sea, from whose rocky summit I knew that we should obtain a good and comprehensive view of the surrounding country. With little difficulty we reached the top, but the most careful survey of the beautiful landscape failed to show us the slightest sign or trace of human beings. Before us stretched a wide and lovely bay, fringed with yellow sands, either side extending into the distance, and almost lost to view in two shadowy promontories; enclosed by these two arms lay a sheet of rippling water, which reflected in its depths the glorious sun above. The scene inland was no less beautiful; and yet Fritz and I both felt a shade of loneliness stealing over us as we gazed on its utter solitude.

‘Cheer up, Fritz, my boy,’ said I, presently. ‘Remember that we chose a settler’s life long ago, before we left our own dear country; we certainly did not expect to be so entirely alone – but what matters a few people, more or less. With God’s help, let us endeavour to live here contentedly, thankful that we were not cast upon some bare and inhospitable island. But come, the heat here is getting unbearable; let us find some shady place before we are completely broiled away.’

We descended the hill and made for a clump of palm trees, which we saw at a little distance. To reach this, we had to pass through a dense thicket of reeds, no pleasant or easy task; for, besides the difficulty of forcing our way through, I feared at every step that we might tread on some venomous snake. Sending Turk in advance, I cut one of the reeds, thinking it would be a more useful weapon against a reptile than my gun. I had carried it but a little way, when I noticed a thick juice exuding from one end. I tasted it, and to my delight, found it sweet and pleasant. I at once knew that I was standing amongst sugar-canes. Wishing Fritz to make the same discovery, I advised him to cut a cane for his defence; he did so, and as he beat the ground before him, the reed split, and his hand was covered with the juice. He carefully touched the cane with the tip of his tongue, then, finding the juice sweet, he did so again with less hesitation; and a moment afterwards sprang back to me, exclaiming, 'Oh, father, sugar-canes, sugar-canes! Taste it. Oh, how delicious, how delightful! Do let us take a lot home to mother,' he continued, sucking eagerly at the cane!

'Gently there,' said I, 'take breath a moment, moderation in all things, remember. Cut some to take home if you like, only don't take more than you can conveniently carry.'

In spite of my warning, my son cut a dozen or more of the largest canes, and stripping them of their leaves, carried them under his arm. We then pushed through the cane-brake, and reached the clump of palms for which we had been making; as we entered it a troop of monkeys, who had been disporting themselves on the ground, sprang up, chattering and grimacing, and before we could clearly distinguish them, were at the very top of the trees.

Fritz was so provoked by their impertinent gestures that he raised his gun, and would have shot one of the poor beasts.

'Stay,' cried I, 'never take the life of any animal needlessly. A live monkey up in that tree is of more use to us than a dozen dead ones at our feet, as I will show you.'

Saying this, I gathered a handful of small stones, and threw them up towards the apes. The stones did not go near them, but influenced by their instinctive mania for imitation, they instantly seized all the coconuts within their reach, and sent a perfect hail of them down upon us.

Fritz was delighted with my stratagem, and rushing forward picked up some of the finest of the nuts. We drank the milk they contained, drawing it through the holes which I pierced, and then, splitting the nuts open with the hatchet, ate the cream which lined their shells. After this delicious meal, we thoroughly despised the lobster we had been carrying, and threw it to Turk, who ate it gratefully: but far from being satisfied, the poor beast began to gnaw the ends of the sugar-canes, and to beg for coconut. I slung a couple of the nuts over my shoulder, fastening them together by their stalks, and Fritz having resumed his burden, we began our homeward march.

I soon discovered that Fritz found the weight of his canes considerably more than he expected: he shifted them from shoulder to shoulder, then for a while carried them under his arm, and finally stopped short with a sigh. 'I had no idea,' he said, 'that a few reeds would be so heavy.'

'Never mind, my boy,' I said, 'Patience and courage! Do you not remember the story of Aesop and his bread-basket, how heavy he found it when he started, and how light at the end of his journey? Let us each take a fresh staff, and then fasten the bundle crosswise with your gun.'

We did so, and once more stepped forward. Fritz presently noticed that I from time to time sucked the end of my cane.

'Oh, come,' said he, 'that's a capital plan of yours, father, I'll do that too.'

So saying, he began to suck most vigorously, but not a drop of the juice could he extract. 'How is this?' he asked. 'How do you get the juice out, father?'

'Think a little,' I replied, 'you are quite as capable as I am of finding out the way, even if you do not know the real reason of your failure.'

'Oh, of course,' said he, 'it is like trying to suck marrow from a marrow bone, without making a hole at the other end.'

‘Quite right,’ I said, ‘you form a vacuum in your mouth and the end of your tube, and expect the air to force down the liquid from the other end which it cannot possibly enter.’

Fritz was speedily perfect in the accomplishment of sucking sugar-cane, discovering by experience the necessity for a fresh cut at each joint or knot in the cane, through which the juice could not flow; he talked of the pleasure of initiating his brothers in the art, and of how Ernest would enjoy the coconut milk, with which he had filled his flask.

‘My dear boy,’ said I, ‘you need not have added that to your load; the chances are it is vinegar by the time we get home. In the heat of the sun, it will ferment soon after being drawn from the nut.’

‘Vinegar! Oh, that would be a horrid bore! I must look directly, and see how it is getting on,’ cried Fritz, hastily swinging the flask from his shoulder, and tugging out the cork. With a loud ‘pop’ the contents came forth, foaming like champagne.

‘There now!’ said I, laughing as he tasted this new luxury. ‘You will have to exercise moderation again, friend Fritz! I daresay it is delicious, but it will go to your head, if you venture deep into your flask.’

‘My dear father, you cannot think how good it is! Do take some. Vinegar, indeed! This is like excellent wine.’

We were both invigorated by this unexpected draught, and went on so merrily after it, that the distance to the place where we had left our gourd dishes seemed less than we expected. We found them quite dry, and very light and easy to carry.

Just as we had passed through the grove in which we breakfasted, Turk suddenly darted away from us, and sprang furiously among a troop of monkeys, which were gambolling playfully on the turf at a little distance from the trees. They were taken by surprise completely, and the dog, now really ravenous from hunger, had seized, and was fiercely tearing one to pieces before we could approach the spot.

His luckless victim was the mother of a tiny little monkey, which being on her back when the dog flew at her, had hindered her flight; the little creature attempted to hide among the grass, and in trembling fear watched the tragic fate of its mother. On perceiving Turk’s blood-thirsty design, Fritz had eagerly rushed to the rescue, flinging away all he was carrying, and losing his hat in his haste. All to no purpose as far as the poor mother ape was concerned, and a laughable scene ensued, for no sooner did the young monkey catch sight of him than at one bound it was on his shoulders, and, holding fast by his thick curly hair, it firmly kept its seat in spite of all he could do to dislodge it. He screamed and plunged about as he endeavoured to shake or pull the creature off, but all in vain, it only clung the closer to his neck, making the most absurd grimaces.

I laughed so much at this ridiculous scene, that I could scarcely assist my terrified boy out of his awkward predicament.

At last, by coaxing the monkey, offering it a bit of biscuit, and gradually disentangling its small sinewy paws from the curls it grasped so tightly, I managed to relieve poor Fritz, who then looked with interest at the baby ape, no bigger than a kitten, as it lay in my arms.

‘What a jolly little fellow it is!’ exclaimed he. ‘Do let me try to rear it, father. I daresay coconut milk would do until we can bring the cow and the goats from the wreck. If he lives he might be useful to us. I believe monkeys instinctively know what fruits are wholesome and what are poisonous.’

‘Well,’ said I, ‘let the little orphan be yours. You bravely and kindly exerted yourself to save the mother’s life, now you must train her child carefully, for unless you do so its natural instinct will prove mischievous instead of useful to us.’

Turk was meanwhile devouring with great satisfaction the little animal’s unfortunate mother. I could not grudge it him, and continued hunger might have made him dangerous to ourselves. We did not think it necessary to wait until he had dined, so we prepared to resume our march.

The tiny ape seated itself in the coolest way imaginable on Fritz's shoulder, I helped to carry his canes, and we were on some distance before Turk overtook us, looking uncommonly well pleased, and licking his chops as though recalling the memory of his feast.

He took no notice of the monkey, but it was very uneasy at sight of him, and scrambled down into Fritz's arms, which was so inconvenient to him that he devised a plan to relieve himself of his burden. Calling Turk, and seriously enjoining obedience, he seated the monkey on his back, securing it there with a cord, and then putting a second string round the dog's neck that he might lead him, he put a loop of the knot into the comical rider's hand, saying gravely, 'Having slain the parent, Mr Turk, you will please to carry the son.'

At first this arrangement mightily displeased them both, but by and by they yielded to it quietly; the monkey especially amused us by riding along with the air of a person perfectly at his ease.

'We look just like a couple of mountebanks on their way to a fair with animals to exhibit,' said I. 'What an outcry the children will make when we appear!'

My son inquired to what species of the monkey tribe I thought his protégé belonged, which led to a good deal of talk on the subject, and conversation beguiling the way, we found ourselves ere long on the rocky margin of the stream and close to the rest of our party.

Juno was the first to be aware of our approach, and gave notice of it by loud barking, to which Turk replied with such hearty goodwill, that his little rider, terrified at the noise his steed was making, slipped from under the cord and fled to his refuge on Fritz's shoulder, where he regained his composure and settled himself comfortably.

Turk, who by this time knew where he was, finding himself free, dashed forward to rejoin his friend, and announce our coming.

One after another our dear ones came running to the opposite bank, testifying in various ways their delight at our return, and hastening up on their side of the river, as we on ours, to the ford at which we had crossed in the morning. We were quickly on the other side, and, full of joy and affection, our happy party was once more united.

The boys suddenly perceiving the little animal which was clinging close to their brother, in alarm at the tumult of voices, shouted in ecstasy.

'A monkey! A monkey! Oh, how splendid! Where did Fritz find him? What may we give him to eat? Oh, what a bundle of sticks! Look at those curious great nuts father has got!'

We could neither check this confused torrent of questions, nor get in a word in answer to them.

At length when the excitement subsided a little, I was able to say a few words with a chance of being listened to. 'I am truly thankful to see you all safe and well, and, thank God, our expedition has been very satisfactory, except that we have entirely failed to discover any trace of our shipmates.'

'If it be the will of God,' said my wife, 'to leave us alone on this solitary place, let us be content, and rejoice that we are all together in safety.'

'Now we want to hear all your adventures, and let us relieve you of your burdens,' added she, taking my game-bag.

Jack shouldered my gun, Ernest took the coconuts, and little Franz carried the gourds, Fritz distributed the sugar-canes amongst his brothers, and handing Ernest his gun replaced the monkey on Turk's back. Ernest soon found the burden with which Fritz had laden him too heavy to his taste. His mother perceiving this, offered to relieve him of part of the load. He gave up willingly the coconuts, but no sooner had he done so than his elder brother exclaimed, 'Hullo, Ernest, you surely do not know what you are parting with; did you really intend to hand over those good coconuts without so much as tasting them?'

'What ho?! Are they really coconuts?' cried Ernest. 'Do let me take them again, mother, do let me look at them.' 'No, thank you,' replied my wife with a smile. 'I have no wish to see you again overburdened.' 'Oh but I have only to throw away these sticks, which are of no use, and then I can easily carry them.'

‘Worse and worse,’ said Fritz, ‘I have a particular regard for those heavy useless sticks. Did you ever hear of sugar-canes?’

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when Ernest began to suck vigorously at the end of the cane with no better result, however, than Fritz had obtained as we were on the march.

‘Here,’ said Fritz, ‘let me show you the trick of it,’ and he speedily set all the youngsters to work extracting the luscious juice.

My wife, as a prudent housekeeper, was no less delighted than the children with this discovery; the sight of the dishes also pleased her greatly, for she longed to see us eat once more like civilized beings. We went into the kitchen and there found preparations for a truly sumptuous meal. Two forked sticks were planted in the ground on either side of the fire, on these rested a rod from which hung several tempting-looking fish, opposite them hung a goose from a similar contrivance, slowly roasting while the gravy dropped into a large shell placed beneath it. In the centre sat the great pot from which issued the smell of a most delicious soup. To crown this splendid array, stood an open hogshead full of Dutch cheeses. All this was very pleasant to two hungry travellers, but I was about to beg my wife to spare the poultry until our stock should have increased, when she, perceiving my thought, quickly relieved my anxiety. ‘This is not one of our geese,’ she said, ‘but a wild bird Ernest killed.’

‘Yes,’ said Ernest, ‘it is a penguin, I think, it let me get quite close, so that I knocked it on the head with a stick. Here are its head and feet which I preserved to show you; the bill is, you see, narrow and curved downwards, and the feet are webbed. It had funny little bits of useless wings, and its eyes looked so solemnly and sedately at me, that I was almost ashamed to kill it. Do you not think it must have been a penguin?’

‘I have little doubt on the matter, my boy,’ and I was about to make a few remarks on the habits of this bird, when my wife interrupted me and begged us to come to dinner and continue our natural history conversation at some future time. We then sat down before the appetizing meal prepared for us, our gourds coming for the first time into use, and having done it full justice, produced the coconuts by way of dessert. ‘Here is better food for your little friend,’ said I to Fritz, who had been vainly endeavouring to persuade the monkey to taste dainty morsels of the food we had been eating. ‘The poor little animal has been accustomed to nothing but its mother’s milk; fetch me a saw, one of you.’

I then, after extracting the milk of the nuts from their natural holes, carefully cut the shells in half, thus providing several more useful basins. The monkey was perfectly satisfied with the milk, and eagerly sucked the corner of a handkerchief dipped in it. Fritz now suddenly recollected his delicious wine, and producing his flask, begged his mother to taste it. ‘Try it first yourself,’ said I; Fritz did so, and I instantly saw by his countenance that the liquor had passed through the first stage of fermentation and had become vinegar.

‘Never mind, my boy,’ said my prudent wife, when she learned the cause of his wry faces, ‘we have wine already but no vinegar; I am really pleased at the transformation.’

The sun was now rapidly sinking behind the horizon, and the poultry retiring for the night warned us that we must follow their example. Having offered up our prayers, we lay down on our beds, the monkey crouched down between Jack and Fritz, and we were all soon fast asleep.

We did not, however, long enjoy this repose; a loud barking from our dogs, who were on guard outside the tent, awakened us, and the fluttering and cackling of our poultry warned us that a foe was approaching. Fritz and I sprang up, and seizing our guns rushed out. There we found a desperate combat going on, our gallant dogs, surrounded by a dozen or more large jackals, were fighting bravely, four of their opponents lay dead, but the others were in no way deterred by the fate of their comrades. Fritz and I, however, sent bullets through the heads of a couple more, and the rest galloped off. Turk and Juno did not intend that they should escape so cheaply, and pursuing them, they caught, killed, and devoured another of the animals, regardless of their near relationship. Fritz wished to save one of the jackals that he might be able to show it to his brothers in the morning; dragging therefore the one that he had shot near the tent, he concealed it, and we once more returned to our beds.

Soundly and peacefully we slept until cock-crow next morning, when my wife and I awoke, and began to discuss the business of the day.

‘It seems absolutely necessary, my dear wife,’ I began, ‘to return at once to the wreck while it is yet calm, that we may save the poor animals left there, and bring on shore many articles of infinite value to us, which, if we do not now recover, we may finally lose entirely. On the other hand, I feel that there is an immense deal to be done on shore, and that I ought not to leave you in such an insecure shelter as this tent.’

‘Return to the wreck by all means,’ replied my wife, cheerfully. ‘Patience, order and perseverance will help us through all our work, and I agree with you that a visit to the wreck is without doubt our first duty. Come, let us wake the children, and set to work without delay.’

They were soon roused, and Fritz overcoming his drowsiness before the others, ran out for his jackal; it was cold and stiff from the night air, and he placed it on its legs before the tent, in a most life-like attitude, and stood by to watch the effect upon the family. The dogs were the first to perceive their enemy, and growling, seemed inclined to dispose of the animal as they had disposed of its brethren in the night, but Fritz called them off. The noise the dogs made, however, had the effect of bringing out the younger children, and many were the exclamations they made at the sight of the strange animal.

‘A yellow dog!’ cried Franz.

‘A wolf!’ exclaimed Jack.

‘It is a striped fox,’ said Ernest.

‘Hullo,’ said Fritz. ‘The greatest men may make mistakes. Our professor does not know a jackal when he sees one.’

‘But really,’ continued Ernest, examining the animal, ‘I think it is a fox.’

‘Very well, very well,’ retorted Fritz, ‘no doubt you know better than your father! He thinks it is a jackal.’

‘Come, boys,’ said I, ‘no more of this quarrelling; you are none of you very far wrong, for the jackal partakes of the nature of all three, dog, wolf, and fox.’

The monkey had come out on Jack’s shoulder, but no sooner did it catch sight of the jackal, than it fled precipitately back into the tent, and hid itself in a heap of moss until nothing was visible but the tip of its little nose. Jack soothed and comforted the frightened little animal, and I then summoned them all to prayers, soon after which we began our breakfast. So severely had we dealt with our supper the previous night, that we had little to eat but the biscuits, which were so dry and hard, that, hungry as we were, we could not swallow much. Fritz and I took some cheese to help them down, while my wife and younger sons soaked theirs in water. Ernest roamed down to the shore, and looked about for shellfish. Presently he returned with a few whelks. ‘Ah,’ said he, ‘if we had but some butter.’ ‘My good boy,’ I replied, ‘your perpetual “if, if”, quite annoys me, why do you not sit down and eat cheese like the rest of us?’ ‘Not while I can get butter,’ he said; ‘see here, father,’ and he pointed to a large cask, ‘that barrel contains butter of some sort or another, for it is oozing out at the end.’

‘Really, Ernest,’ I said, ‘we are indebted to you. I will open the cask.’ So saying, I took a knife and carefully cut a small hole, so that I could extract the butter without exposing the mass of it to the effects of the air and heat. Filling a coconut shell, we once more sat down, and toasting our biscuits before the fire, spread them with the good Dutch butter. We found this vastly better than the dry biscuit, and while we were thus employed, I noticed that the two dogs were lying unusually quietly by my side. I at first attributed this drowsiness to their large meal during the night, but I soon discovered that it arose from a different cause; the faithful animals had not escaped unhurt from their late combat, but had received several deep and painful wounds, especially about the neck. The dogs began to lick each other on the places which they could not reach with their own tongues, and my wife carefully dressed the wounds with butter from which she had extracted the salt by washing.

A sudden thought now struck Ernest, and he wisely remarked, that if we were to make spiked collars for the dogs, they would in future escape such dangerous wounds. 'Oh yes,' exclaimed Jack, 'and I will make them, may I not, father?'

'Try by all means, my little fellow,' said I, 'and persuade your mother to assist you; and now, Fritz,' I continued, 'we must be starting, for you and I are to make a trip to the wreck.' I begged the party who were to remain on shore, to keep together as much as possible, and having arranged a set of signals with my wife, that we might exchange communications, asked a blessing on our enterprise. I erected a signal-post, and while Fritz was making preparations for our departure, hoisted a strip of sailcloth as a flag; this flag was to remain hoisted so long as all was well on shore, but should our return be desired, three shots were to be fired and the flag lowered.

All was now ready, and warning my wife that we might find it necessary to remain all night on the vessel, we tenderly bade adieu and embarked. Except our guns and ammunition we were taking nothing, that we might leave as much space as possible for the stowage of a large cargo. Fritz, however, had resolved to bring his little monkey, that he might obtain milk for it as soon as possible. We had not got far from the shore, when I perceived that a current from the river set in directly for the vessel, and though my nautical knowledge was not great, I succeeded in steering the boat into the favourable stream, which carried us nearly three-fourths of our passage with little or no trouble to ourselves; then, by dint of hard pulling, we accomplished the whole distance, and, entering through the breach, gladly made fast our boat and stepped on board. Our first care was to see to the animals, who greeted us with joy – lowing, bellowing, and bleating as we approached; not that the poor beasts were hungry, for they were all still well supplied with food, but they were apparently pleased by the mere sight of human beings. Fritz then placed his monkey by one of the goats, and the little animal immediately sucked the milk with evident relish, chattering and grinning all the while; the monkey provided for, we refreshed ourselves with some wine and biscuits. 'Now,' said I, 'we have plenty to do; where shall we begin?'

'Let us fix a mast and sail to our boat,' answered Fritz, 'for the current which brought us out will not take us back; whereas the fresh breeze we met would help us immensely had we but a sail.'

'Capital thought,' I replied, 'let us set to work at once.'

I chose a stout spar to serve as a mast, and having made a hole in a plank nailed across one of the tubs we, with the help of a rope and a couple of blocks, stepped it and secured it with stays. We then discovered a lug-sail, which had belonged to one of the ship's boats; this we hoisted; and our craft was ready to sail. Fritz begged me to decorate the mast-head with a red streamer, to give our vessel a more finished appearance. Smiling at this childish but natural vanity, I complied with his request. I then contrived a rudder, that I might be able to steer the boat; for though I knew that an oar would serve the purpose, it was cumbrous and inconvenient. While I was thus employed, Fritz examined the shore with his glass, and soon announced that the flag was flying and all was well.

So much time had now slipped away, that we found we could not return that night, as I had wished. We signalled our intention of remaining on board, and then spent the rest of our time in taking out the stones we had placed in the boat for ballast, and stowed in their place heavy articles, of value to us. The ship had sailed for the purpose of supplying a young colony, she had therefore on board every conceivable article we could desire in our present situation, our only difficulty indeed was to make a wise selection. A large quantity of powder and shot we first secured, and as Fritz considered that we could not have too many weapons, we added three excellent guns, and a whole armful of swords, daggers and knives. We remembered that knives and forks were necessary, we therefore laid in a large stock of them, and kitchen utensils of all sorts. Exploring the captain's cabin, we discovered a service of silver-plate and a cellaret of good old wine; we then went over the stores, and supplied ourselves with potted meats, portable soups, Westphalian hams, sausages, a bag of maize and wheat, and a quantity of other seeds and vegetables. I then added a barrel of sulphur for matches, and as much

cordage as I could find. All this – with nails, tools and agricultural implements – completed our cargo, and sank our boat so low, that I should have been obliged to lighten her had not the sea been calm.

Night drew on and a large fire, lighted by those on shore, showed us that all was well. We replied by hoisting four ship's lanterns, and two shots announced us that our signal was perceived; then, with a heartfelt prayer for the safety of our dear ones on shore, we retired to our boat, and Fritz at all events was soon sound asleep. For a while I could not sleep, the thought of my wife and children – alone and unprotected, save by the great dogs – disturbed my rest.

The night at length passed away. At daybreak Fritz and I arose, and went on deck. I brought the telescope to bear upon the shore, and with pleasure saw the flag still waving in the morning breeze; while I kept the glass directed to the land, I saw the door of the tent open, and my wife appear and look steadfastly towards us.

I at once hoisted a white flag, and in reply, the flag on shore was thrice dipped. Oh, what a weight seemed lifted from my heart as I saw the signal!

'Fritz,' I said, 'I am not now in such haste to get back, and begin to feel compassion for all these poor beasts. I wish we could devise some means for getting them on shore.'

'We might make a raft,' suggested Fritz, 'and take off one or two at a time.'

'True,' I replied; 'it is easy enough to say, "make a raft", but to do it is quite another thing.'

'Well,' said Fritz, 'I can think of nothing else, unless indeed we make them such swimming-belts as you made for the children.'

'Really, my boy, that idea is worth having. I am not joking, indeed,' I continued, as I saw him smile, 'we may get every one of the animals ashore in that way.'

So saying, I caught a fine sheep, and proceeded to put our plan into execution. I first fastened a broad piece of linen round its belly, and to this attached some corks and empty tins; then with Fritz's help, I flung the animal into the sea – it sank, but a moment afterwards rose and floated famously.

'Hurrah!' exclaimed Fritz, 'we will treat them all like that.' We then rapidly caught the other animals and provided them one after the other with a similar contrivance. The cow and ass gave us more trouble than did the others, for, for them we required something more buoyant than the mere cork; we at last found some empty casks and fastened two to each animal by thongs passed under its belly. This done the whole herd were ready to start, and we brought the ass to one of the ports to be the first to be launched. After some manoeuvring we got him in a convenient position, and then a sudden heave sent him plunging into the sea. He sank, and then, buoyed up by the casks, emerged head and back from the water. The cow, sheep and goats followed him one after the other, and then the sow alone remained. She seemed, however, determined not to leave the ship; she kicked, struggled, and squealed so violently, that I really thought we should be obliged to abandon her; at length, after much trouble, we succeeded in sending her out of the port after the others, and when once in the water, such was the old lady's energy that she quickly distanced them, and was the first to reach the shore.

We had fastened to the horns or neck of each animal a cord with a float attached to the end, and now embarking, we gathered up these floats, set sail, and steered for shore, drawing our herd after us.

Delighted with the successful accomplishment of our task, we got out some biscuits and enjoyed a midday meal; then, while Fritz amused himself with his monkey, I took up my glass and tried to make out how our dear ones on shore were employing themselves. As I was thus engaged, a sudden shout from Fritz surprised me. I glanced up; there stood Fritz with his gun to his shoulder, pointing it at a huge shark; the monster was making for one of the finest sheep; he turned on his side to seize his prey; as the white of his belly appeared Fritz fired. The shot took effect, and our enemy disappeared, leaving a trace of blood on the calm water.

'Well done, my boy,' I cried, 'you will become a crack shot one of these days; but I trust you will not often have such dangerous game to shoot.' Fritz's eyes sparkled at his success and my praise, and reloading his gun, carefully watched the water. But the shark did not again appear, and borne

onwards by the breeze, we quickly neared the shore. Steering the boat to a convenient landing place, I cast off the ropes which secured the animals, and let them get ashore as best they might.

There was no sign of my wife or children when we stepped on land, but a few moments afterwards they appeared, and with a shout of joy ran towards us. We were thankful to be once more united, and after asking and replying to a few preliminary questions, proceeded to release our herd from their swimming belts, which, though so useful in the water, were exceedingly inconvenient on shore. My wife was astonished at the apparatus.

‘How clever you are,’ said she.

‘I am not the inventor,’ I replied, ‘the honour is due to Fritz. He not only thought of this plan for bringing off the animals, but saved one at least of them from a most fearful death.’ And I then told them how bravely he had encountered the shark.

My wife was delighted with her son’s success, but declared that she would dread our trips to the vessel more than ever, knowing that such savage fish inhabited the waters.

Fritz, Ernest and I began the work of unloading our craft, while Jack, seeing that the poor donkey was still encumbered with his swimming-belt, tried to free him from it. But the donkey would not stand quiet, and the child’s fingers were not strong enough to loosen the cordage; finally, therefore, he scrambled upon the animal’s back, and urging him on with hand and foot, trotted towards us.

‘Come, my boy,’ I said, ‘no one must be idle here, even for a moment; you will have riding practice enough hereafter; dismount and come and help us.’

Jack was soon on his feet. ‘But I have not been idle all day,’ he said, ‘look here!’ and he pointed to a belt round his waist. It was a broad belt of yellow hair in which he had stuck a couple of pistols and a knife. ‘And see,’ he added, ‘what I have made for the dogs. Here, Juno, Turk,’ the dogs came bounding up at his call, and I saw that they were each supplied with a collar of the same skin, in which were fastened nails, which bristled round their necks in a most formidable manner.

‘Capital, capital! my boy,’ said I, ‘but where did you get your materials, and who helped you?’

‘Except in cutting the skin,’ said my wife, ‘he had no assistance, and as for the materials, Fritz’s jackal supplied us with the skin, and the needles and thread came out of my wonderful bag.’

Fritz evidently did not approve of the use to which his jackal’s hide had been devoted, and holding his nose, begged his little brother to keep at a distance. ‘Really, Jack,’ he said, ‘you should have cured the hide before you used it, the smell is disgusting, don’t come near me.’

‘It’s not the hide that smells at all,’ retorted Jack, ‘it is your nasty jackal itself that you left in the sun.’

‘Now, boys,’ said I, ‘no quarrelling here; do you, Jack, help your brother to drag the carcass to the sea, and if your belt smells after that you must take it off and dry it better.’

The jackal was dragged off, and we then finished our work of unloading our boat. When this was accomplished we started for our tent, and finding there no preparation for supper, I said, ‘Fritz, let us have a Westphalian ham.’

‘Ernest,’ said my wife, smiling, ‘let us see if we cannot conjure up some eggs.’

Fritz got out a splendid ham and carried it to his mother triumphantly, while Ernest set before me a dozen white balls with parchment-like coverings.

‘Turtles’ eggs!’ said I. ‘Well done, Ernest, where did you get them?’

‘That,’ replied my wife, ‘shall be told in due course when we relate our adventures; now we will see what they will do towards making a supper for you; with these and your ham I do not think we shall starve.’

Leaving my wife to prepare supper, we returned to the shore and brought up what of the cargo we had left there; then, having collected our herd of animals, we returned to the tent.

The meal which awaited us was as unlike the first supper we had there enjoyed as possible. My wife had improvised a table of a board laid on two casks, on this was spread a white damask tablecloth, on which were placed knives, forks, spoons and plates for each person. A tureen of good

soup first appeared, followed by a capital omelette, then slices of the ham; and finally some Dutch cheese, butter and biscuits, with a bottle of the captain's canary wine, completed the repast.

While we thus regaled ourselves, I related to my wife our adventures, and then begged she would remember her promise and tell me all that had happened in my absence.

CHAPTER 3

‘I will spare you a description,’ said my wife, ‘of our first day’s occupations; truth to tell, I spent the time chiefly in anxious thought and watching your progress and signals. I rose very early this morning, and with the utmost joy perceiving your signal that all was right, hastened to reply to it, and then while my sons yet slumbered, I sat down and began to consider how our position could be improved. “For it is perfectly impossible,” said I to myself, “to live much longer where we are now. The sun beats burningly the livelong day on this bare rocky spot, our only shelter is this poor tent, beneath the canvas of which the heat is even more oppressive than on the open shore. Why should not I and my little boys exert ourselves as well as my husband and Fritz? Why should not we too try to accomplish something useful? If we could but exchange this melancholy and unwholesome abode for a pleasant shady dwelling-place, we should all improve in health and spirits. Among those delightful woods and groves where Fritz and his father saw so many charming things, I feel sure there must be some little retreat where we could establish ourselves comfortably; there must be, and I will find it.”

‘By this time the boys were up, and I observed Jack very quietly and busily occupied with his knife about the spot where Fritz’s jackal lay. Watching his proceedings, I saw that he had cut two long narrow strips of the animal’s skin, which he cleaned and scraped very carefully, and then taking a handful of great nails out of his pocket, he stuck them through the skin points outwards, after which he cut strips of canvas sailcloth twice as broad as the thongs, doubled them, and laid them on the raw side of the skin so as to cover the broad flat nail heads. At this point of the performance, Master Jack came to me with the agreeable request that I would kindly stitch the canvas and (moist) skin together for him. I gave him needles and thread, but could not think of depriving him of the pleasure of doing it himself.

‘However, when I saw how good-humouredly he persevered in the work with his awkward unskilful fingers, I took pity upon him, and conquering the disgust I felt, finished lining the skin dog-collars he had so ingeniously contrived. After this I was called upon to complete in the same way a fine belt of skin he had made for himself. I advised him to think of some means by which the skin might be kept from shrinking.

‘Ernest, although rather treating Jack’s manufacture with ridicule, proposed a sensible-enough plan, which Jack forthwith put in execution. He nailed the skin, stretched flat, on a board, and put it in the sun to dry.

‘My scheme of a journey was agreed to joyously by my young companions. Preparations were instantly set on foot: weapons and provisions provided: the two elder boys carrying guns, while they gave me charge of the water flask, and a small hatchet.

‘Leaving everything in as good order as we could at the tent, we proceeded towards the stream, accompanied by the dogs. Turk, who had accompanied you on your first expedition, seemed immediately to understand that we wished to pursue the same route, and proudly led the way.

‘As I looked at my two young sons, each with his gun, and considered how much the safety of the party depended on these little fellows, I felt grateful to you, dear husband, for having acquainted them in childhood with the use of firearms.

‘Filling our water-jar, we crossed the stream, and went on to the height from whence, as you described, a lovely prospect is obtained, at the sight of which a pleasurable sensation of buoyant hope, to which I had long been a stranger, awoke within my breast.

‘A pretty little wood in the distance attracted my notice particularly, and thither we directed our course. But soon finding it impossible to force our way through the tall strong grass which grew in dense luxuriance higher than the children’s heads, we turned towards the open beach on our left, and following it we reached a point much nearer the little wood, when, quitting the strand, we made towards it.

‘We had not entirely escaped the tall grass, however, and with the utmost fatigue and difficulty were struggling through the reeds, when suddenly a great rushing noise terrified us all dreadfully. A very large and powerful bird sprang upward on the wing. Both boys attempted to take aim, but the bird was far away before they were ready to fire.

“Oh dear, what a pity!” exclaimed Ernest; “now if I had only had my light gun, and if the bird had not flown quite so fast, I should have brought him down directly!”

“Oh yes,” said I, “no doubt you would be a capital sportsman if only your game would always give you time to make ready comfortably.”

“But I had no notion that anything was going to fly up just at our feet like that,” cried he.

“A good shot,” I replied, “must be prepared for surprises: neither wild birds nor wild beasts will send you notice that they are about to fly or to run.”

“What sort of bird can it have been?” inquired Jack.

“Oh, it certainly must have been an eagle,” answered little Franz, “it was so very big!”

“Just as if every big bird must be an eagle!” replied Ernest, in a tone of derision.

“Let’s see where he was sitting, at all events!” said I.

‘Jack sprang towards the place, and instantly a second bird, rather larger than the first, rushed upward into the air, with a most startling noise.

‘The boys stood staring upwards, perfectly stupefied, while I laughed heartily, saying, “Well, you are first-rate sportsmen, to be sure! You certainly will keep my larder famously well supplied!”

‘At this, Ernest coloured up, and looked inclined to cry, while Jack put on a comical face, pulled off his cap, and with a low bow, called after the fugitive, “Adieu for the present, sir! I live in hopes of another meeting!”

‘On searching the ground carefully, we discovered a rude sort of nest made untidily of dry grass. It was empty, although we perceived broken egg-shells at no great distance, and concluded that the young brood had escaped among the grass, which, in fact, we could see was waving at a little distance, as the little birds ran through it.

“Now look here, Franz,” said Ernest, presently, “just consider how this bird could by any possibility have been an eagle. Eagles never build on the ground, neither can their young leave the nest and run as soon as they are out of the egg. That is a peculiarity of the gallinaceous tribe of birds alone, to which then these must belong. The species, I think, is indicated by the white belly and dull red colour of the wing coverts which I observed in these specimens, and I believe them to be bustards, especially as I noticed in the largest the fine moustache-like feathers over the beak, peculiar to the Great Bustard.”

“My dear boy!” I said, “your eyes were actively employed, I must confess, if your fingers were unready with the gun. And after all, it is just as well, perhaps, that we have not thrown the bustard’s family into mourning.”

‘Thus chatting, we at length approached my pretty wood. Numbers of birds fluttered and sang among the high branches, but I did not encourage the boys in their wish to try to shoot any of the happy little creatures. We were lost in admiration of the trees of this grove, and I cannot describe to you how wonderful they are, nor can you form the least idea of their enormous size without seeing them yourself. What we had been calling a wood proved to be a group of about a dozen trees only, and, what was strange, the roots sustained the massive trunks exalted in the air, forming strong arches, and props and stays all around each individual stem, which was firmly rooted in the centre.

‘I gave Jack some twine, and scrambling up one of the curious open-air roots, he succeeded in measuring round the trunk itself, and made it out to be about eighteen yards. I saw no sort of fruit, but the foliage is thick and abundant, throwing delicious shade on the ground beneath, which is carpeted with soft green herbage, and entirely free from thorns, briars, or bushes of any kind. It is the most charming resting-place that ever was seen, and I and the boys enjoyed our midday meal immensely in this glorious palace of the woods, so grateful to our senses after the glare and heat of

our journey thither. The dogs joined us after a while. They had lingered behind on the sea-shore, and I was surprised to see them lie down and go comfortably to sleep without begging for food, as they do usually when we eat.

‘The longer we remained in this enchanting place, the more did it charm my fancy; and if we could but manage to live in some sort of dwelling up among the branches of those grand, noble trees, I should feel perfectly safe and happy. It seemed to me absurd to suppose we should ever find another place half so lovely, so I determined to search no further, but return to the beach and see if anything from the wreck had been cast up by the waves, which we could carry away with us.

‘Before starting, Jack persuaded me to sit quietly a little longer, and finish making his belt and the spike-collars for the dogs, for you must know that the child had actually been carrying the board on which these were stretched all this time, so that they should get the full benefit of the sun. As they were now quite dry, I completed them easily, and Jack girded on the belt with great pride, placing his pistols in it, and marching about in a most self-important style, while Ernest fitted the collars on the two dogs.

‘On reaching the shore, we found it strewed with many articles, doubtless of value, but all too heavy for us to lift. We rolled some casks, however, beyond high-water mark, and dragged a chest or two also higher on the beach; and, while doing so, observed that our dogs were busy among the rocks. They were carefully watching the crevices and pools, and every now and then would pounce downwards and seize something which they swallowed with apparent relish.

“‘They are eating crabs,” said Jack. “No wonder they have not seemed hungry lately.”

‘And, sure enough, they were catching the little green crabs with which the water abounded. These, however, did not apparently entirely satisfy them.

‘Some time afterwards, just as we were about to turn inland towards the ford, we noticed that Juno was scraping in the sand, and turning up some round substances, which she hastily devoured. Ernest went to see what these were, and reported in his calm way that the dog had found turtles’ eggs.

“‘Oh,” cried I, “then let us by all means share in the booty!” Mrs Juno, however, did not at all approve of this, and it was with some difficulty that we drove her aside while we gathered a couple of dozen of the eggs, stowing them in our provision bags.

‘While thus employed, we caught sight of a sail which appeared to be merrily approaching the shore beyond the cliffs. Ernest declared it must be our raft. Little Franz, always having the fear of savages before his eyes, began to look frightened, and for a moment I myself was doubtful what to think.

‘However, we hastened to the stream; and, crossing it by the stepping-stones, came in sight of the landing-place, where we joyfully met you.

‘Now I hope you approve of the proceedings of your exploring party, and that tomorrow you will do me the favour of packing everything up, and taking us away to live amongst my splendid trees.’

‘Aye, little wife,’ said I, ‘so that is your idea of comfort and security, is it! A tree, I do not know how many feet high, on which we are to perch and roost like the birds? If we had but wings or a balloon, it would, I own, be a capital plan.’

‘Laugh as much as you like,’ returned my wife, ‘my idea is not so absurd as you make it out. We should be safe up there from jackals’ visits during the night. And I know I have seen at home in Switzerland, quite a pretty arbour, with a strong floor, up among the branches of a lime tree, and we went up a staircase to reach it. Why could not we contrive a place like that, where we could sleep safely at night?’

‘I will consider the idea seriously, my wife,’ said I, ‘perhaps something may come of it, after all! Meantime, as we have finished supper, and night is coming on, let us commend ourselves to Almighty protection and retire to rest.’

Beneath the shelter of our tent, we all slept soundly, like marmots, until break of day; when, my wife and I awaking, took counsel together as to future proceedings.

Referring to the task she had the previous evening proposed for me, I remarked that to undertake it would involve so many difficulties that it was highly necessary to look closely into the subject.

‘In the first place,’ said I, ‘I am unwilling hastily to quit a spot to which I am convinced we were providentially led as a landing-place. See how secure it is; guarded on all sides by these high cliffs, and accessible only by the narrow passage to the ford, while from this point it is so easy to reach the ship that the whole of its valuable cargo is at our disposal. Suppose we decide to stay patiently here for the present – until, at least, we have brought on shore everything we possibly can?’

‘I agree with you to a certain extent, dear husband,’ replied she, ‘but you do not know how dreadfully the heat among the rocks tries me. It is almost intolerable to us who remain here all day while you and Fritz are away out at sea, or wandering among the shady woods, where cool fruits refresh, and fair scenes delight you. As to the contents of the ship, an immense deal has been cast ashore, and I would much rather give up all the remainder, and be spared the painful anxiety it gives me when you even talk of venturing again on the faithless deep.’

‘Well, I must admit that there is much right on your side,’ I continued; ‘suppose we were to remove to your chosen abode, and make this rocky fastness our magazine and place of retreat in case of danger. I could easily render it still more secure, by blasting portions of the rock with gunpowder. But a bridge must be constructed in the first place, to enable us to cross bag and baggage.’

‘Oh, I shall be parched to death before we can leave this place, if a bridge has to be made,’ cried my wife impatiently. ‘Why not just take our things on our backs and wade across as we have done already? The cow and the donkey could carry a great deal.’

‘That they will have to do, in whatever fashion we make the move,’ said I; ‘but bags and baskets we must have, to put things in, and if you will turn your attention to providing those, I will set about the bridge at once. It will be wanted not once, but continually; the stream will probably swell and be impassable at times, and even as it is, an accident might happen.’

‘Well, well!’ cried my wife, ‘I submit to your opinion; only pray set about it without delay, for I long to be off. It is an excellent idea to make a strong place among the cliffs here; the gunpowder especially, I shall be delighted to see stored here when we go away, for it is frightfully dangerous to keep so much as we have close to our habitation.’

‘Gunpowder is indeed the most dangerous and at the same time the most useful thing we have,’ said I, ‘and for both these reasons we must be especially careful of it. In time I will hollow out a place in the rock where we can store it safe from either fire or damp.’

By this morning’s consultation we had settled the weighty question of our change of abode, and also chalked out work for the day.

When the children heard of the proposed move their joy was boundless; they began at once to talk of it as our ‘journey to the Promised Land’, and only regretted that time must be ‘wasted’, as they said, in bridge-building before it could be undertaken.

Everyone being impatient for breakfast that work might be begun at once, the cow and goats were milked, and, having enjoyed a comfortable meal of biscuit boiled in milk, I prepared to start for the wreck, in order to obtain planks for the proposed bridge. Ernest as well as Fritz accompanied me, and we were soon within the influence of the current, and were carried swiftly out to sea. Fritz was steering, and we had no sooner passed beyond the islet at the entrance of the bay, so as to come in sight of its seaward beach, than we were astonished to see a countless multitude of sea-birds, gulls and others, which rose like a cloud into the air, disturbed by our approach, and deafened us by their wild and screaming cries. Fritz caught up his gun, and would have sent a shot among them had I permitted it. I was very curious to find out what could be the great attraction for all this swarm of feathered fowl; and, availing myself of a fresh breeze from the sea, I set the sail and directed our course towards the island.

The swelling sail and flying pennant charmed Ernest, while Fritz bent his keen eyes eagerly towards the sandy shore, where the flocks of birds were again settling.

Presently he shouted, 'Aha, now I see what they are after! They have got a huge monster of a fish there, and a proper feast they are making! Let's have a nearer look at it, father!'

We could not take our boat very close in, but we managed to effect a landing at a short distance from the festive scene; and, securing the raft by casting a rope round a large stone, we cautiously drew near the object of interest.

It proved to be a monstrous fish, on whose flesh these multitudes of birds were ravenously feeding; and it was extraordinary to watch the ferocity, the envy, the gluttony, and all manner of evil passions, exhibited among the guests at this banquet.

'There was nothing on this sandy beach when we passed yesterday, I am certain, father,' said Fritz. 'It seems strange to see this creature stranded here.'

'Why, Fritz!' cried Ernest, 'it must be the shark! Your shark, you know! I believe I can see where you hit him in the head.'

'You are right, I do believe, Ernest,' said I, 'though I think your imagination only can distinguish the gunshot wounds among all the pecking and tearing of the voracious birds there. Just look, boys, at those terrific jaws, beneath the strangely projecting snout. See the rows upon rows of murderous teeth, and thank God we were delivered from them! Let us try if we can induce these greedy birds to spare us a bit of the shark's skin; it is extremely rough, and when dry may be used like a file.'

Ernest drew the ramrod from his gun, and charged so manfully into the crowd, that striking right and left he speedily killed several, whilst most of the others took to flight. Fritz detached some broad strips of skin with his knife, and we returned towards the boat. Perceiving with satisfaction that the shore was strewn with just the sort of boards and planks I wanted, I lost no time in collecting them; and, forming a raft to tow after us, we were in a short time able to direct our course homeward, without visiting the wreck at all. As we sailed along, extremely well pleased with our good fortune, Fritz, by my direction, nailed part of the shark's skin flat on boards to dry in the sun and the rest on the rounded mast.

By this time we were close in shore; and, lowering the sail, we soon had our craft with the raft in tow, safely moored to the bank.

No one was in sight, not a sound to be heard, so with united voice we gave a loud cheery halloo, which after a while was answered in shrill tones, and my wife with her two boys came running from behind the high rocks between us and the stream, each carrying a small bundle in a handkerchief, while little Franz held aloft a landing-net.

Our return so soon was quite unexpected, and they anxiously inquired the reason, which we soon explained; and then the mysterious bundles were opened, and a great number of fine crawfish displayed; whose efforts to escape by scuttling away in every direction, directly they were placed in a heap on the ground, caused immense fun and laughter as the boys pursued and brought them back, only to find others scrambling off in a dozen different ways.

'Now, father, have we not done well, today!' cried Jack, 'did you ever see such a splendid crawfish? Oh, there were thousands of them, and I am sure we have got two hundred here at least. Just look at their claws!'

'No doubt you were the discoverer of these fine crabs, eh, Jack?' said I.

'No! Fancy young Franz being the lucky man!' answered he. 'He and I went towards the stream while mother was busy, just to look for a good place for the bridge. Franz was picking up pebbles and alabasters, some because they were so pretty, some to strike sparks with in the dark, and some he insisted were "gold". "Jack! Jack!" cried he presently, "come and see the crabs on Fritz's Jackal!" You know we threw it away there, and to be sure it was swarming with these creatures. Are you glad we have found them, father? Will they be good to eat?'

‘Very excellent, my boy, and we may be thankful that food for our wants is thus provided day by day.’

When each party had related the day’s adventures, and while my wife was cooking the crawfish, we went to bring our store of planks to land. Even this apparently simple operation required thought, and I had to improvise rope-harness for the cow and the donkey, by which we could make them drag each board separately from the water’s edge to the margin of the stream.

Jack showed me where he thought the bridge should be, and I certainly saw no better place, as the banks were at that point tolerably close to one another, steep, and of about equal height.

‘How shall we find out if our planks are long enough to reach across?’ said I. ‘A surveyor’s table would be useful now.’

‘What do you say to a ball of string, father?’ said Ernest. ‘Tie one end to a stone, throw it across, then draw it back, and measure the line!’

Adopting my son’s idea, we speedily ascertained the distance across to be eighteen feet. Then allowing three feet more at each side, I calculated twenty-four feet as the necessary length of the boards.

The question as to how the planks were to be laid across was a difficult one. We resolved to discuss it during dinner, to which we were now summoned. And my wife, as we sat resting, displayed to me her needle-work. With hard labour had she made two large canvas bags for the ass to carry. Having no suitable needle, she had been obliged to bore the hole for each stitch with a nail, and gained great praise for her ingenuity and patience. Dinner was quickly dispatched, as we were all eager to continue our engineering work. A scheme had occurred to me for conveying one end of a plank across the water, and I set about it in this way. There fortunately were one or two trees close to the stream on either side; I attached a rope pretty near one end of a beam, and slung it loosely to the tree beside us; then, fastening a long rope to the other end, I crossed with it by means of broken rocks and stones, and having a pulley and block, I soon arranged the rope on a strong limb of the opposite tree, again returning with the end to our own side.

Now putting my idea to the proof, I brought the ass and the cow, and fastening this rope to the harness I had previously contrived for them, I drove them steadily away from the bank. To my great satisfaction, and the surprise and delight of the boys, the end of the plank which had been laid alongside the stream began gently to move, rose higher, turned, and soon projecting over the water continued to advance, until, having described the segment of a circle, it reached the opposite bank; I stopped my team, the plank rested on the ground, the bridge was made! So at least thought Fritz and Jack, who in a moment were lightly running across the narrow way, shouting joyfully as they sprang to the other side.

Our work was now comparatively easy. A second and third plank were laid beside the first; and when these were carefully secured at each end to the ground and to the trees, we very quickly laid short boards side by side across the beams, the boys nailing them lightly down as I sawed them in lengths; and when this was done, our bridge was pronounced complete. Nothing could exceed the excitement of the children. They danced to and fro on the wonderful structure, singing, shouting and cutting the wildest capers.

I must confess I heartily sympathized with their triumphant feelings.

Now that the work was done, we began to feel how much we were fatigued, and gladly returned to our tent for refreshment and repose.

Next morning, while we breakfasted, I made a little speech to my sons on the subject of the important move we were about to make, wishing to impress them with a sense of the absolute necessity of great caution.

‘Remember,’ said I, ‘that, although you all begin to feel very much at your ease here, we are yet complete strangers to a variety of dangers which may surprise us unawares. I charge you, therefore,

to maintain good order, and keep together on the march. No darting off into bye-ways, Jack. No lingering behind to philosophize, Ernest. And now all hands to work.'

The greatest activity instantly prevailed in our camp. Some collected provisions, others packed kitchen utensils, tools, ropes, and hammocks, arranging them as burdens for the cow and ass. My wife pleaded for a seat on the latter for her little Franz, and assuring me likewise that she could not possibly leave the poultry, even for a night, nor exist an hour without her magic bag, I agreed to do my best to please her, without downright cruelty to animals.

Away ran the children to catch the cocks and hens. Great chasing, fluttering and cackling ensued; but with no success whatever, until my wife recalled her panting sons, and, scattering some handfuls of grain within the open tent, soon decoyed the fowls and pigeons into the enclosure; where, when the curtain was dropped, they were easily caught, tied together, and placed on the cow. This amiable and phlegmatic animal had stood calmly chewing the cud, while package after package was disposed on her broad back, nor did she now object even to this noisy addition to her load. I placed a couple of half-hoops over all; and, spreading sailcloth on them, put the fowls in darkness, and they rapidly became quiet; and the cow, with the appearance of having a small waggon on her back, was ready to start.

Franz was firmly seated on the ass, amidst bags and bundles of all sorts and sizes; they rose about him like cushions and pillows, and his curly head rested on the precious magic bag, which surmounted all the rest.

Having filled the tent with the things we left behind, closing it carefully, and ranging chests and casks around it, we were finally ready to be off, each well equipped and in the highest spirits.

Fritz and his mother led the van.

Franz (the young cavalier) and the sober-minded cow followed them closely.

Jack conducted the goats; one of these had also a rider, for Knips* the monkey was seated on his foster-mother, whose patience was sorely tried by his restlessness and playful tricks.

The sheep were under Ernest's care, and I brought up the rear of this patriarchal band, while the two dogs kept constantly running backwards and forwards in the character of aides-de-camp.

With honest pride I introduced my wife to my bridge, and after receiving from her what I considered well-merited praise for my skill in its construction, we passed over it in grand procession, reinforced unexpectedly on the opposite side by the arrival of our cross-grained old sow. The perverse creature had obstinately resisted our attempts to bring her with us, but finding herself deserted, had followed of her own accord, testifying in the most unmistakable manner, by angry grunts and squeals, her entire disapproval of our proceedings.

I soon found we must, as before, turn down to the sea beach, for not only did the rank grass impede our progress, but it also tempted the animals to break away from us, and, but for our watchful dogs, we might have lost several of them.

On the firm, open sands we were making good way, when to my annoyance, both our dogs suddenly left us, and springing into the thick cover to our right, commenced a furious barking, following by howling as if in fear and violent pain.

Not for a moment doubting that some dangerous animal was at hand, I hastened to the spot, remarking as I went the characteristic behaviour of my three sons.

Fritz cocked his gun and advanced boldly, but with caution.

Ernest looked disconcerted, and drew back, but got ready to fire.

While Jack hurried after Fritz without so much as unslinging his gun from his shoulders.

Before I could come up with them, I heard Jack shouting excitedly,

'Father! Father! Come quickly! A huge porcupine! A most enormous porcupine!'

Sure enough, the dogs were rushing round and round a porcupine, and having attempted to seize it, were already severely wounded by its quills. Each time they came near, the creature, with a rattling noise, bristled up its spines.

Somewhat to my amusement, while we were looking at the curious defence this creature was making, little Jack stepped close up to it, with a pocket pistol in his hand, and shot it dead, making sure of it by a couple of hearty raps on the head, and then giving way to a burst of boyish exultation, he called upon us to help to convey his prize to his mother. This it was not by any means easy to do. Sundry attempts resulted in bloody fingers, till Jack, taking his pocket-handkerchief, and fastening one corner round its neck, ran off, dragging it after him to where his mother awaited us.

‘Hullo, mother! Here’s a jolly beast, isn’t it? I shot it, and it’s good to eat! Father says so! I only wish you had seen how it terrified the dogs, and heard the rattling and rustling of its spines. Oh, it is a fearful creature!’

Ernest, examining it carefully, pronounced its incisor teeth, its ears and feet, to resemble those of the human race, and pointed out the curious crest of stiff hairs on its head and neck.

‘I have read of another species,’ said he, ‘called the tuft-tailed porcupine, which must be even more curious-looking than this is. It has short flat quills, and a scaly tail ending in an extraordinary tuft, like a bunch of narrow strips of parchment. It cannot be such a disagreeable enemy to encounter as this fellow.’

‘Were you not afraid, Jack,’ asked I, ‘lest the porcupine should cast some of his quills like darts at you?’

‘Of course not,’ returned he, ‘I know well enough that is nothing but a fable!’

‘A fable!’ said I, ‘why look at your mother! She is drawing five or six spines out of each of the dogs!’

‘Ah, those stuck into them when they so fiercely fell upon it in their attack. Those are the shortest quills, and seem very slightly fixed in its skin. The long quills bent aside when Juno pressed against them.’

‘You are perfectly right, my boy,’ said I, ‘there is no truth in the old idea of shooting out the spines. But now, shall we leave this prickly booty of yours, or attempt to take it with us?’

‘Oh, please, father, let us take it! Why, it is good to eat!’

Smiling at the child’s eagerness, and willing to please him, I made a somewhat awkward bundle of the porcupine, wrapping it in several folds of cloth, and added it to the donkey’s load.

Our party then resumed the march, which, with little interruption, was continued steadily, until we came in sight of our future place of residence.

The wonderful appearance of the enormous trees, and the calm beauty of the spot altogether, fully came up to the enthusiastic description which had been given to me. And my wife gladly heard me say that if an abode could be contrived among the branches, it would be the safest and most charming home in the world.

We hastily unloaded the ass and cow, securing them, as well as the sheep and goats, by tying their fore-feet loosely together. The doves and poultry were set at liberty, and we sat down to rest among the soft herbage while we laid our plans for the night.

Fritz soon left us, but presently two shots were fired, and he appeared holding a fine tiger-cat by the hind legs, which, with the intensest delight, he exhibited to each in turn.

‘Well done, Fritz!’ cried I. ‘Our cocks and hens would have had an unfortunate night of it but for this lucky shot of yours. It is to be hoped he has left no companion near at hand. You must be on the look-out. But now, Fritz, tell us how you obtained your prize.’

‘Observing that something moved among the branches,’ said he, ‘I went softly round the tree with my gun, and making sure the creature was a wild cat I fired and brought it down. It was severely wounded, but, rising in a fury, it attempted to climb the tree, when I, luckily having a loaded pistol, gave it a quietus. And do tell me, father, what sort of cat it is.’

‘It is a mercy the brute did not fly at your throat instead of attempting to escape,’ said I. ‘It belongs to a fierce and blood-thirsty race – that of the ocelots or tiger-cats, natives of the tropical

parts of America. I should say this was a margay, and as it would have proved a cruel foe, not only of our poultry, but also of our sheep and goats, I am well pleased that you have rid us of it.'

'May I have the beautiful skin, father? And will you tell me what will be the best use to make of it?'

'I advise you to skin the animal very carefully, and of the handsome black and yellow tail, make a hunting-belt for yourself. The paws – let me see – why, I fancy the paws might be made famous cases for knife, fork and spoon, and look well hanging from the belt. The skin of the body you had better preserve until you find some suitable use for it.'

'Oh, father, what a splendid plan!' cried Jack. 'Do tell me some good use for my porcupine.'

'I think its feet may make cases also; at least, you may try. The quills, I am sure, may be used for packing needles, and for tipping arrows, and I should try to make defensive armour for the dogs out of the rest. They may fall in with foes more dangerous than any we have yet seen.'

'To be sure, father, the very thing!' shouted Jack in high glee. 'I have seen pictures of boar-hunts, in which the dogs were protected by a sort of leather coat of mail. That will be grand!'

After giving this advice, I got no peace until I had shown my boys how to act upon it, and in a short time each had his prize fastened up by the hind legs, and carefully slitting the skin, was stripping it from the carcass.

Ernest, meanwhile, was fetching large flat stones in order to form a fire-place, while Franz gathered sticks, as his mother was anxious to prepare some food.

'What sort of tree do you suppose this to be, father?' inquired Ernest, seeing me examining that under which we were encamping. 'Is not the leaf something like a walnut?'

'There is a resemblance, but in my opinion these gigantic trees must be mangroves or wild figs. I have heard their enormous height described, and also the peculiarity of the arching roots supporting the main trunk raised above the soil.'

Just then little Franz came up with a large bundle of sticks, and his mouth full of something he was eating with evident satisfaction.

'Oh, mother!' cried he, 'this is so good! So delicious!'

'Greedy little boy!' exclaimed she in a fright. 'What have you got there? Don't swallow it, whatever you do. Very likely it is poisonous! Spit it all out this minute!' And his anxious mother quickly extracted from the rosy little mouth the remains of a small fig.

'Where did you find this?' said I.

'There are thousands lying among the grass yonder,' replied the little boy. 'They taste very nice. I thought poison was nasty. Do you think they will hurt me? The pigeons and the hens are gobbling them up with all their might and main, papa!'

'I think you have no cause for alarm, dear wife,' I said. 'The trees seem to be the fig-bearing mangrove of the Antilles. But remember, Franz, you must never eat anything without first showing it to me, never mind how good it seems. If birds and monkeys eat a fruit or vegetable, it is usually safe to believe it wholesome,' added I, turning to the other boys, who instantly taking the hint, coaxed Franz to give them the figs he still had in his pocket, and ran to offer them to Knips, who was closely watching the skinning of the tiger-cat and porcupine, apparently giving his opinion on the subject with much chattering and gesticulation.

'Here, Knips, allow me to present you with a fig!' cried Jack, holding one out to the funny little creature.

Knips took it readily, and after turning it about, and sniffing and smelling it, he popped it into his mouth, with such a droll grimace of delight and satisfaction that the boys all laughed and clapped their hands, crying 'Bravo, Knips! You know a good thing when you see it, don't you, old fellow! Hurrah!'

My wife, with her mind set at rest on the question of the figs, now continued her preparations for dinner.

The flesh of the margay was given to the dogs, but part of the porcupine was put on the fire to boil, while we reserved the rest for roasting.

I employed myself in contriving needles for my wife's work, by boring holes at one end of the quills, which I did by means of a red hot nail, and I soon had a nice packet of various sizes, which pleased her immensely. I also laid plans for making proper harness for our beasts of burden, but could not attempt to begin that while so many wants more pressing demanded attention.

We examined the different trees, and chose one which seemed most suited to our purpose. The branches spread at a great height above us, and I made the boys try if it were possible to throw sticks or stones over one of these, my intention being to construct a rope ladder if we could once succeed in getting a string across a strong bough.

Finding we could not succeed in that way, I resolved other schemes in my mind, and meantime went with Jack and Fritz to a small brook close by, where I showed them how to place the skins to steep and soften in the water, with stones placed on them to keep them beneath the surface.

When dinner was over, I prepared our night quarters. I first slung our hammocks from the roots of the tree, which, meeting above us, formed an arched roof, then covering the whole with sailcloth, we made a temporary tent, which would at least keep off the night damps and noxious insects.

Leaving my wife engaged in making a set of harness for the ass and cow, whose strength I intended to employ the following day in drawing the beams up to our tree, I walked down with Fritz and Ernest to the beach to look for wood suitable for building our new abode and also to discover, if possible, some light rods to form a ladder. For some time we hunted in vain, nothing but rough driftwood was to be seen, utterly unfit for our purpose. Ernest at length pointed out a quantity of bamboos half buried in the sand. These were exactly what I wanted, and stripping them of their leaves I cut them into lengths of about five feet each; these I bound in bundles to carry to the tree, and then began to look about for some slight reeds to serve as arrows.

I presently saw what I required in a copse at a little distance. We advanced cautiously lest the thicket should contain some wild beast or venomous serpent. Juno rushed ahead; as she did so a flock of flamingos, which had been quietly feeding, rose in the air. Fritz instantly firing brought a couple of the birds to the ground, the rest of the squadron sailing away in perfect order, their plumage continually changing, as they flew, from beautiful rose to pure white, as alternately their snowy wings and rosy breasts were visible. One of those which fell was perfectly dead, but the other appeared only slightly wounded in the wing, for it made off across the swampy ground. I attempted to follow, but soon found that progress was impossible on the marsh; Juno, however, chased the bird and, seizing it, speedily brought it to my feet. Fritz and Ernest were delighted at the sight of our prize.

'What a handsome bird!' exclaimed they. 'Is it much hurt? Let us tame it and let it run about with the fowls.'

'Its plumage is much more brilliant than that of the dead one,' remarked Fritz.

'Yes,' said Ernest, 'this is a full-grown bird, while yours is younger; it is some years before they reach perfection. See what long active legs it has, like those of a stork, while with its great webbed feet it can swim faster than a goose. Earth, air, or water is all the same to the flamingo, it is equally at home in any one of the three.'

'Well,' said Fritz, 'let us take the dead one to mother and get her to introduce it to the other element and see what it will make of that; if it is young and tender, as you say, it should make a delicious roast.'

Fritz and Ernest then carried the birds and bamboos to the tree, while I proceeded to cut my reeds. I chose those which had flowered, knowing that they were harder, and having cut a sufficient quantity of these, I selected one or two of the tallest canes I could find to assist me in measuring the height of the tree. I then bound them together and returned to my family.

'Do you mean to keep this great hungry bird Fritz has brought?' said my wife. 'It is another mouth to feed, remember, and provisions are still scarce.'

‘Luckily,’ I replied, ‘the flamingo will not eat grain like our poultry, but will be quite satisfied with insects, fish, and little crabs, which it will pick up for itself. Pray reassure yourself, therefore, and let me see to the poor bird’s wound.’

So saying, I procured some wine and butter and anointing the wing, which though hurt was not broken, I bound it up, and then took the bird to the stream where I fastened it by a long cord to a stake and left it to shift for itself. In a few days the wound was healed, and the bird, subdued by kind treatment, became rapidly tame.

While I was thus employed my sons were endeavouring to ascertain the height of the lowest branch of the tree from the ground. They had fastened together the long reeds I had brought with them, and were trying to measure the distance, but in vain; they soon found that were the rods ten times their length they could not touch the branch.

‘Hullo, my boys,’ I said, when I discovered what they were about, ‘that is not the way to set to work. Geometry will simplify the operation considerably; with its help the altitude of the highest mountains are ascertained; we may, therefore, easily find the height of that branch.’

So saying, I measured out a certain distance from the base of the tree and marked the spot, and then by means of a rod, whose length I knew, and imaginary lines, I calculated the angle subtended by the trunk of the tree from the ground to the root of the branch. This done, I was able to discover the height required, and, to the astonishment of the younger children, announced that we should henceforth live thirty feet above the ground. This I wanted to know, that I might construct a ladder of the necessary length.

Telling Fritz to collect all our cord, and the others to roll all the twine into a ball, I sat down and taking the reeds, speedily manufactured half a dozen arrows and feathered them from the dead flamingo. I then took a strong bamboo, bent it and strung it so as to form a bow. When the boys saw what I had done they were delighted, and begged to have the pleasure of firing the first shot.

‘No, no!’ said I, ‘I did not make this for mere pleasure, nor is it even intended as a weapon, the arrows are pointless. Elizabeth,’ I continued to my wife, ‘can you supply me with a ball of stout thread from your wonderful bag?’

‘Certainly,’ replied she, ‘I think that a ball of thread was the first thing to enter the bag,’ and diving her hand deep in, she drew out the very thing I wanted.

‘Now, boys,’ I said, ‘I am going to fire the first shot,’ and I fastened one end of the thread to one of my arrows and aimed at a large branch above me. The arrow flew upwards and bore the thread over the branch and fell at our feet. Thus was the first step in our undertaking accomplished. Now for the rope ladder!

Fritz had obtained two coils of cord each about forty feet in length; these we stretched on the ground side by side; then Fritz cut the bamboos into pieces of two feet for the steps of the ladder, and as he handed them to me, I passed them through knots which I had prepared in the ropes, while Jack fixed each end with a nail driven through the wood. When the ladder was finished, I carried over the bough a rope by which it might be hauled up. This done, I fixed the lower end of the ladder firmly to the ground by means of stakes, and all was ready for an ascent. The boys who had been watching me with intense interest were each eager to be first.

‘Jack shall have the honour,’ said I, ‘as he is the lightest, so up with you, my boy, and do not break your neck.’

Jack, who was as active as a monkey, sprang up the ladder and quickly gained the top.

‘Three cheers for the nest!’ he exclaimed, waving his cap. ‘Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah for our jolly nest! What a grand house we will have up here; come along, Fritz!’

His brother was soon by his side, and with a hammer and nails secured the ladder yet more securely. I followed with an axe, and took a survey of the tree. It was admirably suited to our purpose; the branches were very strong and so closely interwoven that no beams would be required to form a

flooring, but when some of the boughs were lopped and cleared away, a few planks would be quite sufficient.

I now called for a pulley, which my wife fastened to the cord hanging beside the ladder, I hauled it up, and finding the boys rather in my way, told them to go down while I proceeded to fasten the pulley to a stout branch above me, that we might be able to haul up the beams we should require the next day. I then made other preparations that there might be no delay on the morrow, and a bright moon having arisen, I by its light continued working until I was quite worn out, and then at length descended. I reached the ground, but to my surprise found that the two boys were not there. They had not been seen. A moment afterwards, however, all anxiety was dispelled, for amongst the topmost boughs I heard their young voices raised in the evening hymn. Instead of descending, they had, while I was busy, climbed upwards, and had been sitting in silent admiration of the moonlight scene, high above me. They now joined us, and my wife showed me the results of her labour. She had made two complete sets of harness. I congratulated her upon her success, and we then sat down to supper. On a cloth spread out upon the grass were arranged a roast shoulder of porcupine, a delicious bowl of soup made from a piece of the same animal, cheese, butter, and biscuits, forming a most tempting repast. Having done this ample justice, we collected our cattle, and the pigeons and fowls having retired to roost on the neighbouring trees, and on the steps of our ladder, we made up a glorious fire to keep off any prowling wild beasts, and ourselves lay down. The children, in spite of the novelty of the hammocks, were quickly asleep. In vain I tried to follow their example; a thousand anxious thoughts presented themselves, and as quickly as I dispelled them others rose in their place. The night wore on, and I was still awake; the fire burned low, and I rose and replenished it with dry fuel. Then again I climbed into my hammock, and towards morning fell asleep.

Early next morning we were astir, and dispersed to our various occupations. My wife milked the goats and cow, while we gave the animals their food, after which we went down to the beach, to collect more wood for our building operations. To the larger beams we harnessed the cow and ass, while we ourselves dragged up the remainder. Fritz and I then ascended the tree, and finished the preparations I had begun the night before; all useless boughs we lopped off, leaving a few about six feet from the floor, from which we might sling our hammocks, and others still higher, to support a temporary roof of sailcloth. My wife made fast the planks to a rope passed through the block I had fixed to the bough above us, and by this means Fritz and I hauled them up. These we arranged side by side on the foundation of boughs, so as to form a smooth solid floor, and round this platform built a bulwark of planks, and then throwing the sailcloth over the higher branches, we drew it down and firmly nailed it. Our house was thus enclosed on three sides, for behind the great trunk protected us, while the front was left open to admit the fresh sea breeze which blew directly in. We then hauled up our hammocks and bedding and slung them from the branches we had left for that purpose. A few hours of daylight still remaining, we cleared the floor from leaves and chips, and then descended to fashion a table and a few benches from the remainder of the wood. After working like slaves all day, Fritz and I flung ourselves on the grass, while my wife arranged supper on the table we had made.

‘Come,’ said she at length, ‘come and taste flamingo stew, and tell me how you like it. Ernest assured me that it would be much better stewed than roasted, and I have been following his directions.’

Laughing at the idea of Ernest turning scientific cook we sat down. The fowls gathered round us to pick up the crumbs, and the tame flamingo joined them, while master Knips skipped about from one to the other, chattering and mimicking our gestures continually. To my wife’s joy, the sow appeared shortly after, and was presented with all the milk that remained from the day’s stock that she might be persuaded to return every night.

‘For,’ said my wife, ‘this surplus milk is really of no use to us, as it will be sour before the morning in this hot climate.’

‘You are quite right,’ I replied, ‘but we must contrive to make it of use. The next time Fritz and I return to the wreck we will bring off a churn amongst the other things we require.’

‘Must you really go again to that dreadful wreck?’ said my wife shuddering. ‘You have no idea how anxious I am when you are away there.’

‘Go we must, I am afraid,’ I replied, ‘but not for a day or two yet. Come, it is getting late. We and the chickens must go to roost.’

We lit our watch fires, and, leaving the dogs on guard below, ascended the ladder. Fritz, Ernest and Jack were up in a moment. Their mother followed very cautiously, for though she had originated the idea of building a nest, she yet hesitated to entrust herself at such a terrific height from the ground. When she was safely landed in the house, taking little Franz on my back, I let go the fastenings which secured the lower end of the ladder to the ground, and swinging to and fro, slowly ascended.

Then for the first time we stood all together in our new home. I drew up the ladder, and, with a greater sense of security than I had enjoyed since we landed on the island, offered up our evening prayer, and retired for the night.

*German, ‘*Knipps*’, a manikin.

CHAPTER 4

Next morning all were early awake, and the children sprang about the tree like young monkeys.

‘What shall we begin to do, father?’ they cried. ‘What do you want us to do, today?’

‘Rest, my boys,’ I replied, ‘rest.’

‘Rest?’ repeated they. ‘Why should we rest?’

“‘Six days shalt thou labour and do all that thou hast to do, but on the seventh, thou shalt do no manner of work.’ This is the seventh day,” I replied, ‘on it, therefore, let us rest.’

‘What, is it really Sunday?’ said Jack. ‘How jolly! Oh, I won’t do any work; but I’ll take a bow and arrow and shoot, and we’ll climb about the tree and have fun all day.’

‘That is not resting,’ said I, ‘that is not the way you are accustomed to spend the Lord’s day.’

‘No! But then we can’t go to church here, and there is nothing else to do.’

‘We can worship here as well as at home,’ said I.

‘But there is no church, no clergyman and no organ,’ said Franz.

‘The leafy shade of this great tree is far more beautiful than any church,’ I said, ‘there will we worship our Creator.’

Having breakfasted, the family assembled round me, as we sat in the pleasant shade on the fresh, soft grass. After singing some hymns and offering heartfelt prayers to the Almighty Giver of all good, I related a parable instead of preaching a sermon, and then, leaving allegory, pressed simply and earnestly home to each young heart the truths I sought to teach; and, with a short prayer for a blessing on my words, brought the service to a close.

After a thoughtful pause, we separated, and each employed himself as he felt disposed.

I took some arrows, and endeavoured to point them with porcupine quills.

Franz came to beg me make a little bow and arrow for him to shoot with, while Fritz asked my advice about the tiger-cat skin and the cases he was to contrive from it. Jack assisted with the arrow-making, and inserting a sharp spine at one end of each reed made it fast with pack-thread, and began to wish for glue to ensure its remaining firm.

‘Oh, Jack! Mamma’s soup is as sticky as anything!’ cried Franz. ‘Shall I run and ask for a cake of it?’

‘No, no, little goose! Better look for some real glue in the tool-box.’

‘There he will find glue, to be sure,’ said I, ‘and the soup would scarcely have answered your purpose. But, Jack, my boy, I do not like to hear you ridicule your little brother’s idea. Some of the most valuable discoveries have been the result of thoughts which originally appeared no wiser than his.’

While thus directing and assisting my sons, we were surprised by hearing a shot just over heads; at the same moment two small birds fell dead at our feet, and looking up, we beheld Ernest among the branches, as bending his face joyfully towards us, he cried, ‘Well hit! Well hit! A good shot, wasn’t it?’

Then slipping down the ladder, and picking up the birds, he brought them to me. One was a kind of thrush, the other a small dove called the ortolan, and esteemed a very great delicacy on account of its exquisite flavour. As the figs on which these birds came to feed were only just beginning to ripen, it was probable that they would soon flock in numbers to our trees; and by waiting until we could procure them in large quantities, we might provide ourselves with valuable food for the rainy season, by placing them, when half cooked, in cases with melted lard or butter poured over them.

By this time Jack had pointed a good supply of arrows, and industriously practised archery. I finished the bow and arrows for Franz, and expected to be left in peace; but the young man next demanded a quiver, and I had to invent that also, to complete his equipment. It was easily done by stripping a piece of bark from a small tree, fitting a flat side and a bottom to it, and then a string.

Attaching it to his shoulders, the youthful hunter filled it with arrows and went off; looking, as his mother said, like an innocent little Cupid, bent on conquest.

Not long after this, we were summoned to dinner, and all right willingly obeyed the call.

During the meal I interested the boys very much by proposing to decide on suitable names for the different spots we had visited on this coast.

‘For,’ said I, ‘it will become more and more troublesome to explain what we mean, unless we do so. Besides which, we shall feel much more at home if we can talk as people do in inhabited countries: instead of saying, for instance, “the little island at the mouth of our bay, where we found the dead shark”, “the large stream near our tent, across which we made the bridge”, “that wood where we found coconuts, and caught the monkey”, and so on. Let us begin by naming the bay in which we landed. What shall we call it?’

‘Oyster Bay,’ said Fritz.

‘No, no! – Lobster Bay,’ cried Jack, ‘in memory of the old fellow who took a fancy to my leg!’

‘I think,’ observed his mother, ‘that, in token of gratitude for our escape, we should call it Safety Bay.’

This name met with general approbation, and was forthwith fixed upon.

Other names were quickly chosen. Our first place of abode we called Tentholm; the islet in the bay, Shark’s Island; and the reedy swamp, Flamingo Marsh. It was some time before the serious question of a name for our leafy castle could be decided. But finally it was entitled Falconhurst;* and we then rapidly named the few remaining points: Prospect Hill, the eminence we first ascended; Cape Disappointment, from whose rocky heights we had strained our eyes in vain search for our ship’s company; and Jackal River, as a name for the large stream at our landing place, concluded our geographical nomenclature.

In the afternoon the boys went on with their various employments. Fritz finished his cases, and Jack asked my assistance in carrying out his plan of making a cuirass for Turk, out of the porcupine skin. After thoroughly cleansing the inside, we cut and fitted it round the body of the patient dog; then when strings were sewn on, and it became tolerably dry, he was armed with this ingenious coat of mail, and a most singular figure he cut!

Juno strongly objected to his friendly approaches, and got out of his way so fast as she could; and it was clear that he would easily put to flight the fiercest animal he might encounter, while protected by armour at once defensive and offensive.

I determined to make also a helmet for Jack out of the remainder of the skin, which to his infinite delight I speedily did.

Amid these interesting occupations the evening drew on, and after a pleasant walk among the sweet glades near our abode, we closed our Sabbath day with prayer and a glad hymn of praise, retiring to rest with peaceful hearts.

Next morning, I proposed an expedition to Tentholm, saying I wished to make my way thither by a different route. We left the tree well armed; I and my three elder sons each carrying a gun and game-bag, while little Franz was equipped with his bow and quiver full of arrows. A most curious party we formed: Fritz adorned with his belt of margay skin, and Jack, with his extraordinary headdress, looked like a couple of young savages. Their mother and I walked together; she, of the whole party, being the only one unarmed, carried a jar in which to get butter from Tentholm; we were preceded by the dogs – Turk armed most effectually with his cuirass of porcupine skin, and Juno keeping at a respectful distance from so formidable a companion. Master Knips fully intended to mount his charger as usual; but when he saw him arrayed apparently in a new skin, he approached him carefully, and touching him with one paw, discovered that such a hide would make anything but an agreeable seat; the grimace he made was most comical, and chattering vociferously he bounded towards Juno, skipped on her back, seated himself, and soon appeared perfectly reconciled to the change of steed. The flamingo saw us starting, and, having been much petted during the last day

or two, considered himself entitled to accompany us; for some time he kept beside the children, following first one and then another as they explored the wood on either side; their irregular course, however, at length disgusted him, and, abandoning them, he walked sedately by my side. We strolled on in the cool evening air, following the course of the stream. The boys roamed ahead of me, intent on exploration. Presently I heard a joyful shout, and saw Ernest running at full speed towards me, followed by his brothers. In his hand he held a plant, and, panting for breath, and with sparkling eyes, he held it up to me.

‘Potatoes! Potatoes, father,’ he gasped out.

‘Yes,’ said Jack, ‘acres and acres of potatoes!’

‘My dear Ernest,’ said I, for there was no mistaking the flower and leaf, and the light clear-green bulbous roots, ‘you have indeed made a discovery; with the potato we shall never starve.’

‘But come and look at them,’ said Jack, ‘come and feast your eyes on thousands of potatoes.’

We hurried to the spot: there, spread out before us, was a great tract of ground, covered with the precious plant.

‘It would have been rather difficult,’ remarked Jack, ‘not to have discovered such a great field.’

‘Very likely,’ replied Ernest, smiling, ‘but I doubt if you would have discovered that it was a potato field.’

‘Perhaps not,’ said Jack, ‘you are quite welcome, at all events, to the honour of the discovery; I’ll have the honour of being the first to get a supply of them.’ So saying, he dug up, with hands and knife, a number of plants, and filled his game-bag with the roots. The monkey followed his example, and scratching away with his paws most cleverly, soon had a heap beside him. So delighted were we with the discovery, and so eager were we to possess a large supply of the roots, that we stopped not digging until every bag, pouch and pocket was filled. Some wished to return at once to Falconhurst, to cook and taste our new acquisition; but this I overruled, and we continued our march, heavily laden, but delighted.

We soon reached the head of our streamlet, where it fell from the rocks above in a beautiful, sparkling, splashing cascade. We crossed and entered the tall grass on the other side. We forced our way through with difficulty, so thick and tangled were the reeds. Beyond this, the landscape was most lovely. Rich tropical vegetation flourished on every side: the tall stately palms, surrounded by luxuriant ferns; brilliant flowers and graceful creepers; the prickly cactus, shooting up amidst them; aloe, jasmine and sweet-scented vanilla; the Indian pea and, above all, the regal pineapple, loaded the breath of the evening breeze with their rich perfume. The boys were delighted with the pineapple, and so eagerly did they fall to, that my wife had to caution them that there were no doctors on our territory, and that if they became ill, they would have to cure themselves as best they might.

This advice, however, seemed to have small effect on my sons, and showing Knips what they wanted, they sent him after the ripest and best fruit.

While they were thus employed, I examined the other shrubs and bushes. Among these I presently noticed one which I knew well from description to be the karatas.

‘Come here, boys,’ I said, ‘here is something of far more value than your pineapples. Do you see that plant with long pointed leaves and beautiful red flower? That is the karatas. The filaments of the leaves make capital thread, while the leaves themselves, bruised, form an invaluable salve. The pith of this wonderful plant may be used either for tinder or bait for fish. Suppose, Ernest, you had been wrecked here, how would you have made a fire without matches, or flint and steel?’

‘As the savages do,’ replied he, ‘I would rub two pieces of wood together until they kindled.’

‘Try it,’ I said, ‘but, if you please, try it when you have a whole day before you, and no other work to be done, for I am certain it would be night before you accomplished the feat. But see here,’ and I broke a dry twig from the karatas, and peeling off the bark, laid the pith upon a stone. I struck a couple of pebbles over it, and they emitting a spark, the pitch caught fire.

The boys were delighted with the experiment. I then drew some of the threads from the leaves, and presented them to my wife.

‘But what,’ said Fritz, ‘is the use of all these other prickly plants, except to annoy one? Here, for instance, is a disagreeable little tree.’

‘That is an Indian fig,’ said I. ‘It grows best on dry, rocky ground; for most of its nourishment is derived from the air. Its juice is used, I believe, medicinally, while its fruit is pleasant and wholesome.’

Master Jack was off in a moment when he heard of a new delicacy, and attempted to gather some of the fruit, but in vain; the sharp thorns defied his efforts, and with bleeding hands and rueful countenance, he returned. I removed the thorns from his hands, and making a sharp wooden skewer, I thrust it into a fig, and quickly twisted it from its branch and split it open with a knife, still holding it upon the skewer. The rest followed my example, and we regaled ourselves upon the fruit, which we found excellent. Ernest carefully examined the fig he was eating. ‘What are these’, he exclaimed, presently, ‘little red insects? They cling all over the fruit, and I cannot shake them off. Can they be cochineal?’

He handed me the fig, and I examined it attentively.

‘You are quite right, my boy,’ I said, ‘there is no doubt this is the real cochineal. However, though it is worth its weight in gold to European traders, it is of little use to us, I am afraid, unless any of you care to appear in gay colours. The cochineal, you know, forms the most lovely scarlet dye.’

‘No, thank you,’ said Jack, ‘but we will take a lot of it when we go home again. Now let us find something more useful to us.’ And they thereupon plied me incessantly with questions concerning every plant and shrub we passed.

‘Stop, stop,’ I said at length. ‘The most learned naturalist would be much puzzled with many of these trees; and I, who have never seen any of them before, and know them merely by description, cannot pretend to tell you the names, or explain to you the use of one quarter of them.’

Discussing, however, the properties of such shrubs as I did know, we at length reached Tentholm. Everything was safe, and we set to work to collect what we wanted. I opened the butter cask from which my wife filled her pot. Fritz saw after the ammunition, and Jack and Ernest ran down to the beach to capture the geese and ducks. This they found no easy matter, for the birds, left so long alone, were shy, and nothing would induce them to come on shore and be caught. Ernest at length hit upon an ingenious plan. He took some pieces of cheese, and tied them to long strings. This bait he threw into the water, and the hungry ducks instantly made a grab at it; then with a little skilful manoeuvring he drew them on shore. While Jack and he were thus busily employed catching and tying the rebels together by the feet, we procured a fresh supply of salt, which we packed upon Turk’s back, first relieving him of his coat of mail. The birds we fastened to our game-bags, and carefully closing the door of our tent, started homewards by the sea-shore. After a cheerful and pleasant walk, we once more reached our woodland abode. I released the birds, and, clipping their wings to prevent their leaving us, established them on the stream. Then, after a delicious supper of potatoes, milk and butter, we ascended our tree and turned in.

Having remarked a great deal of driftwood on the sands the preceding evening, it occurred to me that it would be well to get some of it, and make a kind of sledge, so that the labour of fetching what we wanted from our stores at Tentholm might not fall so heavily on ourselves.

I awoke early and roused Ernest as my assistant, wishing to encourage him to overcome his natural fault of indolence. After a little stretching and yawning, he got up cheerfully, pleased with the idea of an expedition while the others still slept, and we made our way to the beach, taking with us the donkey, who drew a large broad bough, which I expected to find useful in bringing back our load.

As we went along, I remarked to Ernest that I supposed he was rather sorry for himself, and grudged leaving his cosy hammock and pleasant dreams at this untimely hour.

‘Oh, father, do not laugh at my laziness! Indeed I mean to cure myself of it. I am very glad to go with you. I intended to shoot some more of the ortolans this morning, but there will be plenty

of time afterwards. The boys will be shooting at them, I daresay, but I don't expect they will have any great luck.'

'Why not, pray?' inquired I.

'I don't believe they will know what shot to use at first, and, besides, they will most likely shoot upwards at the birds and be sure to miss them, on account of the great height and thickness of the branches and foliage.'

'Well, Ernest, you certainly possess the gifts of prudence and reflection, as well as observation. These are valuable; but sudden action is so often necessary in life, that I advise you to cultivate the power of instantly perceiving and deciding what must be done in cases of emergency.'

Once on the sea-shore, our work was quickly accomplished, for selecting the wood I thought fit for my purpose, we laid it across the broad leafy branch, and, with some help from us, the donkey dragged a very fair load of it homewards, with the addition of a small chest which I raised from among the sand which nearly covered it.

We heard the boys popping away at the birds as we drew near. They hastened to meet us, and inquired where we had been, looking curiously at the chest, which I allowed them to open, while I asked my wife to excuse our 'absence without leave'; and after submitting to her gentle reprimand, I explained my plan for a sledge, which pleased her greatly, and she already imagined it loaded with her hogshead of butter, and on its way from Tentholm to Falconhurst.

The chest proved to be merely that of a common sailor, containing his clothes, very much wetted by the sea water.

The boys exhibited an array of several dozen birds, and related, during breakfast, the various incidents of failure and success which had attended their guns. Ernest had rightly guessed the mistakes they would make, but practice was making them perfect, and they seemed disposed to continue their sport, when their mother, assuring them that she could not use more birds than those already killed, asked if I did not think some means of snaring them might be contrived, as much powder and shot would be expended if they fired on at this rate.

Entirely agreeing with this view of the subject, I desired the lads to lay aside their guns for the present, and the younger ones readily applied themselves to making snares of the long threads drawn from the leaves of the karatas in a simple way I taught them, while Fritz and Ernest gave me substantial assistance in the manufacture of the new sledge.

We were busily at work, when a tremendous disturbance among our fowls led us to suppose that a fox or wild cat had got into their midst.

The cocks crowed defiantly, the hens fluttered and cackled in a state of the wildest excitement. We hastened towards them, but Ernest remarking Master Knips slipping away, as though conscious of some misdemeanour, went to watch him, and presently caught him in the act of eating a new-laid egg, which he had carried off and hidden among the grass and roots. Ernest found several others. These were very welcome to my wife, for hitherto the hens had not presented us with any eggs. Hereafter she determined to imprison the monkey every morning until the eggs had been collected.

Soon after this, as Jack was setting the newly made snares among the branches, he discovered that a pair of our own pigeons were building in the tree. It was very desirable to increase our stock of these pretty birds, and I cautioned the boys against shooting near our tree while they had nests there, and also with regard to the snares, which were meant only to entrap the wild-fig-eaters.

Although my sons were interested in setting the snares, they by no means approved of the new order to economize on ammunition. No doubt they had been discussing this hardship, for little Franz came to me with a brilliant proposal of his own.

'Papa,' said he, 'why should not we begin to plant some powder and shot immediately? It would be so much more useful than bare grain for the fowls.'

His brothers burst into a roar of laughter, and I must confess I found it no easy matter to keep my countenance.

‘Come, Ernest,’ said I, ‘now we have had our amusement, tell the little fellow what gunpowder really is.’

‘It is not seed at all, Franz,’ Ernest explained. ‘Gunpowder is made of charcoal, sulphur and saltpetre, mixed cleverly together; so you see it cannot be sown like corn, any more than shot can be planted like peas and beans.’

My carpentering meantime went on apace. In order to shape my sledge with ends properly turned up in front, I had chosen wood which had been part of the bow of the vessel, and was curved in the necessary way for my purpose. Two pieces, perfectly similar, formed the sides of my sleigh, or sledge, and I simply united these strongly by fixing short bars across them. Then, when the ropes of the donkey’s harness were attached to the raised points in front, the equipage was complete and ready for use.

Early in the afternoon Ernest and I were ready to be off. Fritz presented us each with a neat case of margay skin to hang at our girdles.

We harnessed both cow and ass to the sledge and, accompanied by Juno, cheerfully took our departure, choosing the way by the sands, and reaching Tentholm without accident or adventure.

There, unharnessing the animals, we began at once to load the sledge, not only with the butter-cask, but with a powder-chest, a barrel of cheese, and a variety of other articles – ball, shot, tools and Turk’s armour, which had been left behind on our last visit.

Our work had so closely engaged our attention, that when we were ready to leave it and go in search of a good bathing-place, we discovered that our two animals had wandered quite out of sight, having crossed the bridge to reach the good pasture beyond the river.

I sent Ernest after them, and went alone to the extremity of the bay. It terminated in bold and precipitous cliffs, which extended into the deep water, and rose abruptly so as to form an inaccessible wall of rock and crag. Swampy ground, overgrown with large canes, intervened between me and these cliffs. I cut a large bundle of the reeds, and returned to Ernest. It was some time before I found him, comfortably extended full length on the ground near the tent, and sleeping as sound as a top, while the cow and the ass, grazing at will, were again making for the bridge.

‘Get up, Ernest, you lazy fellow!’ exclaimed I, much annoyed. ‘Why don’t you mind your business? Look at the animals! They will be over the river again!’

‘No fear of that, father,’ returned he, with the utmost composure. ‘I have taken a couple of boards off the bridge. They won’t pass the gap.’

I could not help laughing at the ingenious device by which the boy had spared himself all trouble; at the same time I observed that it is wrong to waste the precious moments in sleep when duty has to be performed. I then bid him go and collect some salt, which was wanted at home, while I went to bathe.

On coming back, much refreshed, I again missed Ernest, and began to wonder whether he was still gathering salt, or whether he had lain down somewhere to finish his nap, when I heard him loudly calling, ‘Father, father! I’ve caught a fish! An immense fellow he is. I can scarcely hold him, he drags the line so!’

Hastening towards the spot, I saw the boy lying in the grass, on a point of land close to the mouth of the stream, and with all his might keeping hold of a rod. The line was strained to the utmost by the frantic efforts of a very large fish, which was attempting to free itself from the hook.

I quickly took the rod from him, and giving the fish more line, led him by degrees into shallow water. Ernest ran in with his hatchet and killed him.

It proved to be a salmon of full fifteen pounds weight, and I was delighted to think of taking such a valuable prize to them.

‘This is capital, Ernest!’ cried I. ‘You have cleared yourself for once of the charge of laziness! Let us now carry this splendid salmon to the sledge. I will clean and pack it for the journey, that it may arrive in good condition, while you go and take a bath in the sea.’

All this being accomplished, we harnessed our beasts to the well-laden vehicle, and replacing the boards on the bridge, commenced the journey home.

We kept inland this time, and were skirting the borders of a grassy thicket, when Juno suddenly left us, and plunging into the bushes, with fierce barking hunted out, right in front of us, the most singular-looking creature I ever beheld. It was taking wonderful flying leaps, apparently in a sitting posture, and got over the ground at an astonishing rate. I attempted to shoot it as it passed, but missed. Ernest, who was behind me, observed its movements very coolly, and seeing that the dog was puzzled, and that the animal, having paused, was crouching among the grass, went cautiously nearer, fired at the spot he had marked, and shot it dead.

The extraordinary appearance of this creature surprised us very much. It was as large as a sheep, its head was shaped like that of a mouse; its skin also was of a mouse-colour, it had long ears like a hare, and a tail like a tiger's. The fore-paws resembled those of a squirrel, but they seemed only half-grown while the hind legs were enormous, and so long, that when upright on them the animal would look as if mounted on stilts.

For some time we stood silently wondering at the remarkable creature before us. I could not recollect to have seen or heard of any such.

'Well, father,' said Ernest at last, 'I should say this was about the queerest beast to be met with anywhere. I am glad I knocked it over. How they will all stare when I carry it home!'

'You have had a lucky day altogether, certainly,' said I, 'but I cannot think what this animal can be. Examine its teeth, and let us see to what class of mammalia it belongs. We may be led to guess at its name in that way.'

'I see four sharp incisor teeth, father – two upper, and two under, as a squirrel has.'

'Ah! Then he is a rodent. What rodents can you remember, Ernest?'

'I do not know them all, but there are the mouse, the marmot, the squirrel, the hare, the beaver, the jerboa –'

'The jerboa!' I exclaimed, 'The jerboa! Now we shall have it. This is really very like a jerboa, only far larger. It must be a kangaroo, one of the class of animals which has a pouch or purse beneath the body, in which its young can take refuge. They were discovered in New Holland, by the great Captain Cook, and I congratulate you on being the first to obtain a specimen in New Switzerland!' I added, laughing, as I extemporized the name.

The kangaroo was added to the already heavy load on our sledge, and we proceeded slowly, arriving late at Falconhurst, but meeting with the usual bright welcome.

Very eager and inquisitive were the glances turned towards the sledge, for the load piled on it surpassed all expectation: we on our part staring in equal surprise at the extraordinary rig of the young folks who came to meet us.

One wore a long night-shirt, which, with a belt, was a convenient length in front, but trailed behind in orthodox ghost fashion.

Another had on a very wide pair of trousers, braced up so short that each little leg looked like the clapper in a bell.

The third, buttoned up in a pea-jacket which came down to his ankles, looked for all the world like a walking portmanteau.

Amid much joking and laughter, my wife explained that she had been washing all day, and while their clothes were drying, the boys amused themselves by dressing up in things they found while rummaging through the sailor's chest, and had kept them on, that Ernest and I might see the masquerade. It certainly amused us, but made me regret that so little belonging to ourselves had been saved from the wreck, in consequence of which the children had scarcely a change of linen.

Turning now to our new acquisitions, we excited great interest by exhibiting each in turn; the large salmon, but more especially the kangaroo, surprised and delighted everyone.

Fritz alone wore a look expressive of dissatisfaction, and I saw that he was envious of his younger brother's success. Vexed that so noble a prize had fallen to Ernest's gun, instead of his own, he treated it rather slightly; but I could see that he was struggling against his jealous feelings, and he, after a while, succeeded in recovering his good humour, and joined pleasantly in the conversation.

'What a famous day's sport you have had altogether!' said he, coming close up to me. 'It will be my turn to go out with you next, will it not, father? Just about here there is nothing to shoot, and I have found it very dull.'

'Still you have been doing your duty, my dear boy; you were entrusted with the care of the family, and a youth of manly character will not depend for happiness on mere excitement.'

As the shades of night approached, we made haste to conclude the day's work, by preparing the kangaroo, part for immediate use, and part for salting. The animals were fed, and a plentiful allowance of salt made to them. Our own supper of broiled salmon and potatoes was dispatched with great appetite, and we retired, with thankful hearts, to sound and well-earned repose.

* '*Horst*', in German, means 'nest' or 'eyrie'.

CHAPTER 5

Next morning, while the breakfast was getting ready, I attended to the beautiful skin of the kangaroo, which I was anxious to preserve entire; and afterwards, when Fritz had prepared everything in readiness for our trip to the wreck, I called Ernest and Jack in order to give them some parting injunctions. They, however, had disappeared directly after breakfast, and their mother could only guess that, as we required potatoes, they might have gone to fetch a supply. I desired her to reprove them, on their return, for starting away without leave; but, as it appeared they had taken Turk, I satisfied myself that no harm was likely to befall them, although it was not without reluctance that I left my dear wife alone with little Franz, cheering her with hopes of our speedy return with new treasures from the wreck.

Advancing steadily on our way, we crossed the bridge at Jackal River, when suddenly, to our no small astonishment, Jack and Ernest burst out of a hiding-place where they had lain in wait for us, and were enchanted with the startling effect of their unexpected appearance upon their unsuspecting father and brother. It was evident that they fully believed they might now go with us to the wreck.

To this notion I at once put a decided stop, although I could not find it in my heart to scold the two merry rogues for their thoughtless frolic, more especially as I particularly wished to send back a message to my wife. I told them they must hurry home, so as not to leave their mother in suspense, although, as they were already so far, they might collect some salt. And I instructed them to explain that, as my work on board would take up a long time, she must try to bear with our absence for a night. This I had meant to say when we parted, but my courage had failed, knowing how much she would object to such a plan, and I had resolved to return in the evening.

On consideration, however, of the importance of constructing a raft, which was my intention in going, and finishing it without a second trip, I determined to remain on board for the night, as the boys had, unintentionally, given me the chance of sending a message to that effect.

‘Goodbye, boys, take care of yourselves! We’re off,’ shouted Fritz, as I joined him in the tub-boat, and we shoved off.

The current carried us briskly out of the bay; we were very soon moored safely alongside the wreck, and scrambling up her shattered sides, stood on what remained of the deck, and began at once to lay our plans.

I wanted to make a raft fit to carry on shore a great variety of articles far too large and heavy for our present boat. A number of empty water-casks seemed just what was required for a foundation: we closed them tightly, pushed them overboard, and arranging twelve of them side by side in rows of three, we firmly secured them together by means of spars, and then proceeded to lay a good substantial floor of planks, which was defended by a low bulwark. In this way we soon had a first-rate raft, exactly suited to our purpose.

It would have been impossible to return to land that same evening, for we were thoroughly fatigued by our labours, and had eaten only the light refreshment we had brought in our wallets, scarcely desisting a moment from our work.

Rejoicing that we were not expected home, we now made an excellent supper from the ship’s provisions, and then rested for the night on spring mattresses, a perfect luxury to us, after our hard and narrow hammocks.

Next morning we actively set about loading the raft and boat: first carrying off the entire contents of our own cabins; and, passing on to the captain’s room, we removed the furniture, as well as the doors and window-frames, with their bolts, bars and locks. We next took the officers’ chests, and those belonging to the carpenter and gunsmith; the contents of these latter we had to remove in portions, as their weight was far beyond our strength.

One large chest was filled with an assortment of fancy goods, and reminded us of a jeweller's shop, so glittering was the display of gold and silver watches, snuff-boxes, buckles, studs, chains, rings and all manner of trinkets; these, and a box of money, drew our attention for a time; but more useful to us at present was a case of common knives and forks, which I was glad to find, as more suited to us than the smart silver ones we had previously taken on shore. To my delight we found, most carefully packed, a number of young fruit trees; and we read on the tickets attached to them the names, so pleasant to European ears, of the apple, pear, chestnut, orange, almond, peach, apricot, plum, cherry and vine.

The cargo, which had been destined for the supply of a distant colony, proved, in fact, a rich and almost inexhaustible treasure to us. Ironmongery, plumber's tools, lead, paint, grind-stones, cart wheels, and all that was necessary for the work of a smith's forge, spades and plough-shares, sacks of maize, peas, oats, and wheat, a hand-mill, and also the parts of a sawmill so carefully numbered that, were we strong enough, it would be easy to put it up, had been stowed away.

So bewildered were we by the wealth around us that for some time we were at a loss as to what to remove to the raft. It would be impossible to take everything; yet the first storm would complete the destruction of the ship, and we should lose all we left behind. Selecting a number of the most useful articles, however, including of course the grain and the fruit trees, we gradually loaded our raft. Fishing lines, reels, cordage, and a couple of harpoons were put on board, as well as a mariner's compass.

Fritz, recollecting our encounter with the shark, placed the harpoons in readiness; and amused me by seeming to picture himself a whaler, flourishing his harpoon in most approved fashion.

Early in the afternoon, both our craft were heavily laden, and we were ready to make for the shore. The voyage was begun with considerable anxiety, as, with the raft in tow, there was some danger of an accident.

But the sea being calm and the wind favourable, we found we could spread the sail, and our progress was very satisfactory.

Presently, Fritz asked me for the telescope, as he had observed something curious floating at a distance. Then handing it back, he begged me to examine the object; which I soon discovered to be a turtle asleep on the water, and of course unconscious of our approach.

'Do, father, steer towards it!' exclaimed he.

I accordingly did so, that he might have a nearer look at the creature. Little did I suspect what was to follow. The lad's back was turned to me, and the broad sail was between us, so that I could not perceive his actions; when, all of a sudden, I experienced a shock, and the thrill as of line running through a reel. Before I had time to call out, a second shock, and the sensation of the boat being rapidly drawn through the water, alarmed me.

'Fritz, what are you about?' cried I. 'You are sending us to the bottom.'

'I have him, hurrah! I have him safe!' shouted he, in eager excitement.

To my amazement, I perceived that he really had struck the tortoise with a harpoon; a rope was attached to it, and the creature was running away with us.

Lowering the sail and seizing my hatchet, I hastened forward, in order to cut the line, and cast adrift at once turtle and harpoon.

'Father! Do wait!' pleaded the boy. 'There is no danger just yet! I promise to cut the line myself the instant it is necessary! Let us catch this turtle if we possibly can.'

'My dear boy, the turtle will be a very dear bargain, if he upsets all our goods into the sea, even if he does not drown us too. For heaven's sake, be careful! I will wait a few minutes, but the instant there is danger, cut the line.'

As the turtle began to make for the open sea, I hoisted the sail again; and, finding the opposition too much for it, the creature again directed its course landward, drawing us rapidly after it. The part of the shore, for which the turtle was making, was considerably to the left of our usual landing-place.

The beach there shelved very gradually, and at some distance from land we grounded with a sharp shock, but fortunately without a capsize.

The turtle was evidently greatly exhausted, and no wonder, since it had been acting the part of a steam tug, and had been dragging, at full speed, a couple of heavily laden vessels. Its intention was to escape to land; but I leaped into the water, and wading up to it, dispatched it with my axe. Such was its tenacity of life, however, that it did not cease its struggles, until I had actually severed its head from its body.

As we were by no means far from Falconhurst, Fritz gave notice of our approach by firing off his gun, as well as shouting loudly in his glee; and, while we were yet engaged in securing our boats and getting the turtle on shore, the whole family appeared in the distance hastening eagerly towards us; and our new prize, together with the well-laden boat and raft, excited the liveliest interest; my wife's chief pleasure, however, consisted in seeing us safely back, as our night's absence had disturbed her, and she was horrified by the description of our dangerous run in the wake of the fugitive turtle.

Being anxious to remove some of our goods before night, the boys ran off to fetch the sledge; while I, having no anchor, contrived to moor the boats by means of some of the heavy blocks of iron we had brought.

It required our united strength to get the turtle hoisted on to the sledge, its weight being prodigious; we found it, indeed, with the addition of the sapling fruit-trees, quite a sufficient load.

We then made the best of our way home, chatting merrily about our various adventures. The first thing to be done on arriving was to obtain some of the turtle's flesh to cook for supper. To my wife this appeared necessarily a work of time, as well as of difficulty; but I turned the beast on its back, and soon detached a portion of the meat from the breast with a hatchet, by breaking the lower shell; and I then directed that it should be cooked, with a little salt, shell and all.

'The handsome shell!' cried Fritz. 'I should like to make a water-trough of that, to stand near the brook, and be kept always full of clear water. How useful it would be!'

'That is a capital idea,' I replied, 'and we may manage it easily, if we can find clay so as to make a firm foundation on which to place it.'

'Oh, as to clay,' said Jack, 'I have a grand lump of clay there under that root.'

'Well done, my lad! When did you find it?'

'He found a bed of clay near the river this morning,' said his mother, 'and came home in such a mess, I had regularly to scrape his clothes and wash him thoroughly!'

'Well, mother, I can only tell you I should never in all my days have found the clay, if I had not slipped and fallen amongst it.'

'That I can well believe,' returned his mother, 'only, to hear your talk this morning, one would have thought your discovery of clay the result of very arduous search indeed.'

'When you have ended the question of the clay and the turtle-shell,' said Ernest, 'I should like to show you some roots I found today; they are getting rather dry now. They look something like radishes, although the plant itself was almost a bush; but I have not ventured to taste them, although our old sow was devouring them at a great rate.'

'In that you did wisely, my boy. Swine eat many things injurious to men. Let me see your roots. How did you discover them?'

'I was rambling in the wood this morning, and came upon the sow, very busy grubbing under a small bush, and eating something ravenously; so I drove her away, and found a number of these roots, which I brought for you to see.'

'Indeed, Ernest,' I exclaimed, after taking the roots in my hand and considering them attentively, 'I am inclined to believe that you have really made a brilliant discovery! If this proves to be, as I expect, the manioc root, we might lose every other eatable we possess, and yet not starve. In the West Indies, cakes called cassava bread are made from it; and, already having potatoes, we shall be very

independent if we can succeed in preparing flour from these roots. Great care must be taken in the manufacture to express the juice, otherwise the flour may be injurious and even poisonous.

‘If we can collect a sufficient quantity, we will attempt bread-making. I think I know how to set about it.’

Finding there was still time to make another trip with the sledge, I went off with the elder boys, leaving Franz with his mother; and we all looked forward with satisfaction to the prospect of the princely supper they were to have ready for us, for our day’s work had been none of the lightest.

‘I have been thinking about my turtle, father,’ said Fritz, as we went along, ‘is not the shell very valuable? Surely beautiful combs, boxes, and a number of ornamental things are made of tortoise-shell, and if so, it seems a pity to use it for a water-trough.’

‘Your turtle, Fritz, is only fit for eating, its shell is worthless as regards ornament; whereas the species whose shell is prized so much is unfit for food. Tortoise-shell is subjected to the action of heat, the outer layer peels off, leaving a beautifully marked, semi-transparent surface, which is susceptible of a very high polish.’

The sledge quickly received its second load from the raft. Chests, four cart-wheels and the hand-mill were placed on it, with all manner of smaller articles, and we lost no time in returning to Falconhurst.

My wife welcomed us joyfully, for she said we had been regularly overworked during the last two days. ‘However, now you are come home to rest,’ said she, ‘and you little think what refreshment awaits you here in the shade. Come and see my cellar!’ and she smilingly exhibited a small cask, half sunk in the ground, and well sheltered with leaves and branches.

‘Ah! You wonder where this came from,’ continued my wife; ‘well, I found it myself on the sands, today, while you were all absent; and fancying it was wine of some sort, I got it up here on purpose to be ready for you. The boys are most anxious to know what sort of wine it will prove to be.’

As the simplest method of ascertaining this, I inserted a straw at the vent-hole, and presently announced that in all my life I had never enjoyed a more delicious draught of canary sack. My wife was immensely pleased to find that her exertions in my behalf had not been thrown away, and the boys pressed round me, armed with straws, and begging for a taste.

After so strongly expressing my own enjoyment of the wine, it seemed unreasonable to deny them this, and I let them come in turns, but was speedily obliged to call a halt; for the rogues got so eager and excited that I had to reprove them for their greediness, and warn them of the risk they ran of being intoxicated. Supper was more to the purpose; and, as the turtle proved delicious, it was heartily enjoyed, and gave us strength to haul the mattresses we had brought from the ship, up into our sleeping-rooms, so that very refreshing slumbers closed the day.

Early next morning, I got up without rousing any of the others, intending to pay a visit to the beach; for I had my doubts about the safety of my vessels on the open shore. The dogs were delighted when I descended the ladder, and bounded to meet me; the cocks crowed and flapped their wings; two pretty kids gambolled around; all was life and energy: the ass alone seemed disinclined to begin the day, and, as I especially required his services, this was unfortunate. I put his morning dreams to flight, however, and harnessed him to the sledge; the cow, as she had not been milked, enjoyed the privilege of further repose, and with the rest of the family, I left her dozing.

My fears as to the safety of the boats were soon dispelled, for they were all right; and, being in haste to return, the load I collected from their freight was but a light one, and the donkey willingly trotted home with it, he, as well as I, being uncommonly ready for breakfast. Approaching the tree, not a sound was to be heard, not a soul was to be seen, although it was broad day; and great was my good wife’s surprise, when, roused by the clatter and hullabaloo I made, she started up, and became aware of the late hour!

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