


STRAIGHTFORWARD.

CHAPTER X.

APTAIN MOSTYN'S life hung in the balance for many days, however. It was doubtful whether the remedy had not come too late, and the lack of all proper comforts, all variety of food suitable to an invalid, was enough in itself to make his friends very anxious about him.

Verily these were troublous times. The women waited on the sick man all day, George and Perran taking alternate nights of watching. Peter and Joe were relied upon for supplies, which happily were plentiful, as far as wild birds and kangaroo met the want.

There was a native village at a short distance, and many a sympathetic dark figure slipped into the hut, with offerings of fruit for the pale face. This was genuine kindness, as early in the day a rule had to be made that no traffic should be carried on in the quarters of the travellers. What was needed was procured by George or Perran, who, supplied with a sufficiency of goods, occasionally visited the village.

One night Captain Mostyn, who had lain in a state of stupor for many nights and days, suddenly roused himself and asked, "Are we going on to-morrow?"

Molly was so startled she ran to call her mistress, who, with infinite joy, perceived that the patient was quite calm and sensible, though weak.

"I have been ill, and made you lose time," said the sick man; "but I am better now; I shall soon be well."

'Lisbeth felt the strongest desire to burst into tears, so great was her thankfulness; but she controlled herself, and answered soothingly.

It was not alone Captain Mostyn's illness that detained the party, but the want of porters. Peter and Joe had been for some time trying to induce many of the friendly villagers near to volunteer as guides and burden-bearers into the mountains. But all shook their heads; they were too much afraid of the fierce tribe into whose stronghold these strange visitors desired to penetrate.

With Captain Mostyn in this feeble state, it would be worse than useless to try to proceed without obtaining the services of, at least, two strong men. What was to be done? Perran had spoken already to 'Lisbeth about a possible return to the *Dart*, to place the Captain in comparative security before proceeding with the expedition.

"In that case, 'Lisbeth, it would be your duty to remain in charge of him." "I spoke almost sternly, to hide his feelings. To part with 'Lisbeth in this wild land—to have her out of sight for a moment—the bare idea gave him an awful pang.

What was it then to 'Lisbeth? She neither spoke, nor argued, nor wept; but she felt like one turned to stone. Oh! such a terrible thing. God would surely have pity on her.

At this juncture the neighboring Papuans did the strangers a good turn. Through Joe they made them aware of a warm spring, bubbling up in the forest hard by, of which the bitter waters were an excellent tonic; moreover, their sick often bathed in them with great benefit. They signified that Captain Mostyn should try the remedy. This he willingly did, with marked and instantaneous good result.

The simple people were delighted, and indicated, by pointing widely round the horizon, that the sick came from far and near to this primitive but much-famed cure. A stone trough had even been connected with the spring for the use of bathers, and charms were hung on the tall trees near to assist the cure!

Still, thankful as the other two men were to see the progress made to health by their companion, they were doubtful as to his ever being able to support a further journey. Perhaps he might be left in charge of the villagers when a little stronger. But all these anxious considerations were suddenly put an end to, one morning, by fresh and important news.

Joe had found the village completely emptied of its inhabitants, the last flying occupant hastily informing him that the enemy was upon them, and though a messenger had come bearing an ensign of peace, the villagers had little confidence in it. "Every Patira a liar" was the general belief. So all fled into the forest.

Was this good news or bad? The Patira tribe was everywhere spoken of as fierce and domineering. They chiefly kept to the high range of mountains in the interior, but now and again they swept down on this region, especially when a chief, or any person of high rank, was troubled with a malady that the famous warm spring might be hoped to benefit.

Then they forced themselves on the neighboring village, ate their pigs and fowls, lived in their huts, and too often returned with enlarged numbers, having carried off any likely young people they fancied as slaves.

No wonder the gentle and peaceable natives fled at their approach.

But Perran's face looked glad at the announcement of these visitors.

"It is our tribe—the one that is said to harbour our Jesse!"

His voice was one of triumph. 'Lisbeth shared his feelings. Now, indeed, they were coming near to Jesse; for her part, she would as soon be killed by the Patiras as forced to part from Perran. Oh, it would come all right now!

Then they called a council, and laid their plans.

There was one of those pretty little houses