

## STRAIGHTFORWARD.

## CHAPTER VII.

**A**LL news travels fast, they say, and probably the same might be said of any news—whether on this side of the globe or the other—for our travellers soon discovered that their reputation had preceded them.

The smoking ship, peopled with white-skins, which was making its way up the Great River, was held in awe by the tribe inhabiting its lower banks. The chiefs on board could kill birds and animals by flying fire; they carried stars of their own which they shot up into the sky at pleasure, and they had endless stores of beads and calico! Moreover, they could cure diseases, and probably had charms to avert death. So they were visitors to be respectfully dealt with and courted; they were, perhaps, gods!

So ran the belief of the ignorant Papuans. In vain poor 'Lisbeth tried hard to instil into their minds some idea of the real God above. Their gods were all revengeful, bloodthirsty personages, who punished, but never rewarded. They could not grasp the idea of a loving Power.

Yet they clung to the believers in this loving God, and trusted them as they would not do their own brethren.

From the first a rule of strict honesty had been observed in all dealings with the natives, and Peter's endeavors to overreach and cheat (a matter in which he somewhat proudly considered himself an adept) were firmly checked.

During the illness of his master, however, Peter had, in a degree, resumed his malpractices, encouraged by 'Lisbeth's look of pleasure when he brought back some new article of food for the sick. How often the treasure had been stolen she never guessed. He always said he had paid for it, and specified the exact quantity of beads and calico given.

Sin-sing and Johnny, too, were born thieves, and went a step further than Peter; he stole for the pleasure of it and as an exercise of talent, while they confiscated to their own use the knives, beads, and so forth, that they declared they had given in exchange for food.

Big Sam, always ready to quarrel with the Chinese, and now lying half stupefied with fever, as they thought, overheard these latter discussing their gains, and told "the Missis" how things lay. Sin-sing bore him a grudge, and the crew were not as united as might be.

Into the midst of this discord came the thunderclap of war. A friendly native gave the warning. A native grave had been robbed; the white-skins had done it; and the wild race, as ready to destroy as to worship, resolved on a night surprise, and the massacre of all on board the *Dart*.

It was past noon when the well-disposed Papuan brought the warning.

Peter firmly denied any share in the ill deed, so did Sin-sing and the boy. But when Captain Mostyn ordered a search among their possessions, there was a hurried movement on the part of the Chinese, and an effort to throw something overboard was frustrated by Peter.

Here were the stolen goods—the grass petticoat, the dog's-tooth necklace, the jar, the baby-net—which had constituted the sole treasures of the young dead wife, and which, after the custom of the country, had been left, poor trophies of her short life, on her grave.

Sin-sing had meant "to sell them to the Missis." He had heard 'Lisbeth innocently wish for some such specimens of native work, and he had knowingly desecrated a grave to obtain them.

The stolen possessions were hastily handed over to the native, with a large store of beads and calico as reparation; but the man almost refused to take these latter. He shook his head, and signified so plainly that the wrong could only be wiped out by blood that there was much anxiety on board the steamer.

Flight was now the only resource, and steam was got up, and all speed made from the dangerous neighborhood. Sin-sing, who had been as troublesome on the voyage as an English under-servant—regarding the helping in services which he conceived it "not his place" to perform—now carried wood, replenished the engine fires, and showed the terrified anxiety of a guilty conscience to hurry on. A faint young moon enabled them to steam on all night; but at daybreak they became aware that they were pursued. Canoes, laden with armed men, shouting and brandishing their formidable clubs, followed them, their numbers reinforced from every backwater and grove of reeds.

Sin-sing and Johnny were crying now like babies, and begging Perran and the Captain to save them; but no one had time to take notice of such tardy repentance.

The party on board the *Dart* were all armed; but, unless absolutely necessary for self-preservation, no shots would be fired. This tribe had heard a discharge of firearms, and would not be alarmed at anything short of the actual wounding of some of their comrades, a matter to be avoided if possible.

Still the angry savages pressed on. It was a critical moment. It looked as if the canoes would soon hem in the little steamer.

All at once the crowding canoes were arrested in their progress—spellbound, as it were—awe was expressed in every dark face; and yet it was only the strains of Perran's concertina which so affected the whimsical savages. He had brought the instrument out with him, and now used it with this happy effect.

The ignorant creatures in their little vessels