Reid Mayne

Afloat in the Forest: or, A Voyage among the Tree-Tops

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Содержание

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Chapter One
The Brothers at Home

Twenty years ago, not twenty miles from the Land's End, there lived a Cornish gentleman named Trevannion. Just twenty years ago he died, leaving to lament him a brace of noble boys, whose mother all three had mourned, with like profound sorrow, but a short while before.

"Squire" Trevannion, as he was called, died in his own house, where his ancestors for hundreds of years before him had dispensed hospitality. None of them, however, had entertained so profusely as he; or rather improvidently, it might be said, since in less than three months after his death the old family mansion, with the broad acres appertaining to it, passed into the hands of an alien, leaving his two sons, Ralph and Richard, landless, houseless, and almost powerless. One thousand pounds apiece was all that remained to them out of the wreck of the patrimonial estates. It was whispered that even this much was not in reality theirs, but had been given to them by the *very respectable* solicitor who had managed their father's affairs, and had furthermore *managed* to succeed him in the ownership of a property worth a rental of three thousand a year.

Any one knowing the conditions under which the young Trevannions received their two thousand pounds must have believed it to be a gift, since it was handed over to them by the family solicitor with the private understanding that they were to use it in pushing their fortunes elsewhere, – anywhere except in Cornwall!

The land-pirate who had plucked them – for in reality had they been plucked – did not wish them to stay at home, divested, as they were, of their valuable plumage. He had appropriated their fine feathers, and cared not for the naked bodies of the birds.

There were those in Cornwall who suspected foul play in the lawyer's dealings with the young Trevannions, among others, the victims themselves. But what could they, do? They were utterly ignorant of their late father's affairs, – indeed, with any affairs that did not partake of the nature of "sports." A solicitor "most respectable," – a phrase that has become almost synonymous with rascality, – a regular church-goer, – accounts kept with scrupulous exactness, – a man of honest face, distinguished for probity of speech and integrity of heart, – what could the Trevannions do? What more than the Smiths and the Browns and the Joneses, who, notwithstanding their presumed greater skill in the ways of a wicked lawyer world, are duped every day in a similar manner. It is an old and oft-repeated story, – a tale too often told, and too often true, – that of the family lawyer and his confiding client, standing in the relationship of robber and robbed.

The two children of Squire Trevannion could do nothing to save or recover their paternal estate. Caught in the net of legal chicanery, they were forced to yield, as other squires' children have had to do, and make the best, of a bad matter, – forced to depart from a home that had been held by Trevannions perhaps since the Phoenicians strayed thitherward in search of their shining tin.

It sore grieved them to separate from the scenes of their youth; but the secret understanding with the solicitor required that sacrifice. By staying at home a still greater might be called for, – subsistence in penury, and, worse than all, in a humiliating position; for, notwithstanding the open house long kept by their father, his friends had disappeared with his guests. Impelled by these thoughts, the brothers resolved to go forth into the wide world, and seek fortune wherever it seemed most likely they should find it.

They were at this period something more than mere children. Ralph had reached within twelve months of being twenty. Richard was his junior by a couple of years. Their book-education had been good; the practice of manly sports had imparted to both of them a physical strength that fitted them for toil, either of the mind or body. They were equal to a tough struggle, either in the intellectual or material world; and to this they determined to resign themselves.

For a time they debated between themselves where they should go, and what do. The army and navy came under their consideration. With such patronage as their father's former friends could command, and might still exert in favour of their fallen fortunes, a commission in either army or navy was not above their ambition. But neither felt much inclined towards a naval or military life; the truth being, that a thought had taken shape in their minds leading them to a different determination.

Their deliberations ended by each of them proclaiming a resolve, – almost sealing it with a vow, – that they would enter into some more profitable, though perhaps less pretentious, employment than that of either soldiering or sailoring; that they would toil – with their hands, if need be – until they should accumulate a sufficient sum to return and recover the ancestral estate from the grasp of the avaricious usurper. They did not know how it was to be done; but, young, strong, and hopeful, they believed it might be done, – with time, patience, and industry to aid them in the execution.

"Where shall we go?" inquired Richard, the younger of the two. "To America, where every poor man appears to prosper? With a thousand each to begin the world with, we might do well there. What say you, Ralph?"

"America is a country where men seem to thrive best who have *nothing* to begin the world with. You mean North America, – the United States, – I suppose?"

"I do."

"I don't much like the United States as a home, – not because it is a republic, for I believe that is the only just form of government, whatever our aristocratic friends may say. I object to it simply because I wish to go south, – to some part of the tropical world, where one may equally be in the way of acquiring a fortune."

"Is there such a place?"

"There is."

"Where, brother?"

"Peru. Anywhere along the Sierra of the Andes from Chili to the Isthmus of Panama. As Cornish men we should adopt the specialty of our province, and become miners. The Andes mountains will give us that opportunity, where, instead of grey tin, we may delve for yellow gold. What say you to South America?"

"I like the thought of South America, – nothing would please me better than going there. But I must confess, brother, I have no inclination for the occupation you speak of. I had rather be a merchant than a miner."

"Don't let that *penchant* prevent you from selecting Peru as the scene of mercantile transactions. There are many Englishmen who have made fortunes in the Peruvian trade. You may hope to follow their example. We may choose different occupations and still be near each other. One thousand pounds each may give both of us a start, – you as a merchant of goods, I as a digger for gold. Peru is the place for either business. Decide, Dick! Shall we sail for the scenes rendered celebrated by Pizarro?"

"If you will it – I'm agreed."

"Thither then let us go."

In a month from that time the two Trevannions might have been seen upon a ship, steering westward from the Land's End, and six months later both disembarked upon the beach of Callao, —*en route* first for Lima, thence up the mountains, to the sterile snow-crested mountains, that tower above the treasures of Cerro Pasco, – vainly guarded within the bosom of adamantine rocks.

Chapter Two
The Brothers Abroad

Ralph and Richard Trevannion. If it were so, a gap of some fifteen years – after the date of their arrival at Cerro Pasco – would have to be filled up. I decline to speak of this interval of their lives, simply because the details might not have any remarkable interest for those before whom they would be laid.

Suffice it to say, that Richard, the younger, soon became wearied of a miner's life; and, parting with his brother, he crossed the Cordilleras, and descended into the great Amazonian forest, – the "montaña," as it is called by the Spanish inhabitants of the Andes. Thence, in company with a party of Portuguese traders, he kept on down the river Amazon, trading along its banks, and upon some of its tributary streams; and finally established himself as a merchant at its mouth, in the thriving "city" of Gran Pará.

Richard was not unsocial in his habits; and soon became the husband of a fair-haired wife, – the daughter of a countryman who, like himself, had established commercial relations at Pará. In a few years after, several sweet children called him "father," – only two of whom survived to prattle in his ears this endearing appellation, alas! no longer to be pronounced in the presence of their mother.

Fifteen years after leaving the Land's End, Richard Trevannion, still under thirty-five years of age, was a widower, with two children, – respected wherever known, prosperous in pecuniary affairs, – rich enough to return home, and spend the remainder of his days in that state so much desired by the Sybarite Roman poet, – "otium cum dignitate."

Did he remember the vow mutually made between him and his brother, that, having enough money, they would one day go back to Cornwall, and recover the ancestral estate? He did remember it. He longed to accomplish this design, he only awaited his brother's answer to a communication he had made to him on this very subject.

He had no doubt that Ralph's desire would be in unison with his own, – that his brother would soon join him, and then both would return to their native land, – perhaps to dwell again under the same roof that had sheltered them as children.

The history of the elder brother during this period of fifteen years, if less eventful, was not less distinguished by success. By steadily following the pursuit which had first attracted him to Peru, he succeeded in becoming a man of considerable means, – independent, if not wealthy.

Like his brother, he got married at an early period, – in fact, within the first year after establishing himself in Cerro Pasco. Unlike the latter, however, he chose for his wife one of the women of the country, – a beautiful Peruvian lady. She too, but a short while before, had gone to a better world, leaving motherless two pretty children, of twelve and fourteen years of age, – the elder of the two being a daughter.

Such was the family of Ralph Trevannion, and such the condition of life in which his brother's epistle reached him, – that epistle containing the proposal that they should wind lip their respective businesses, dispose of both, and carry their gains to the land that had given them birth.

The proposition was at once accepted, as Richard knew it would be. It was far from the first time that the thing had been discussed, epistolary fashion, between them; for letters were exchanged as often as opportunity permitted, – sometimes twice or thrice in the year.

In these letters, during the last few years of their sojourn in South America, the promise made on leaving home was mutually mentioned, and as often renewed on either side. Richard knew that his brother was as eager as himself to keep that well-remembered vow.

So long as the mother of Ralph's children was alive, he had not urged his brother to its fulfilment; but now that she had been dead for more than a year, he had written to say that the time had come for their return to their country and their home.

His proposal was, that Ralph, having settled his affairs in Peru, – which, of course, included the selling out of his share in the mines, – should join him, Richard, at Pará, thence to take ship for England. That instead of going round by Cape Horn, or across the Isthmus, by Panama, Ralph should make the descent of the great Amazon River, which traverse would carry him latitudinally across the continent from west to east.

Richard had two reasons for recommending this route. First, because he wished his brother to see the great river of Orellana, as he himself had done; and secondly, because he was still more desirous that his *own son* should see it.

How this last wish was to be gratified by his brother making the descent of the Amazon, may require explanation; but it will suffice to say that the son of Richard Trevannion was at that time residing with his uncle at the mines of Cerro Pasco.

The boy had gone to Peru the year before, in one of his father's ships, – first, to see the Great Ocean, then the Great Andes, – afterwards to become acquainted with the country of the Incas, and last, though not of least importance, to make the acquaintance of his own uncle and his two interesting cousins, the elder of whom was exactly his own age. He had gone to the Pacific side by *sea*. It was his father's wish he should return to the Atlantic side by land, – or, to speak more accurately, by *river*.

The merchant's wish was to be gratified. The miner had no desire to refuse compliance with his proposal. On the contrary, it chimed in with his own inclinations. Ralph Trevannion possessed a spirit adventurous as his brother's, which fourteen years of mining industry, carried on in the cold mountains of Cerro Pasco, had neither deadened nor chilled. The thought of once more returning to the scenes of his youth quite rejuvenated him; and on the day of receiving his brother's challenge to go, he not only accepted it, but commenced proceedings towards carrying the design into execution.

A month afterwards and he might have been seen descending the eastern slope of the Cordilleras on mule-back, and accompanied by his family and followers; afterwards aboard a *balsa*, – one of those curious crafts used in the descent of the Huallaga; and later still on the *montaria*, upon the bosom of the great river itself.

With the details of his mountain travels, interesting as they may be, we have naught to do. No more with his descent of the Huallaga, nor his long voyage on the Amazon itself, in that up-river portion of the stream where it is called the "Marañon." Only where it becomes the stupendous "Solimoës" do we join Ralph Trevannion on his journey, and remain with him as long as he is "Afloat in the Forest," *or making a voyage among the tree-tops*.

Chapter Three
The Galatea

On an evening in the early part of December, a craft of singular construction might have been seen descending the Solimoës, and apparently making for the little Portuguese port of Coary, that lies on the southern side of the river.

When we say of singular construction, we mean singular to one unaccustomed to the navigation of Amazonian waters. There the craft in question was too common to excite curiosity, since it was nothing more than a *galatea*, or large canoe, furnished with mast and sail, with a palm-thatched cabin, or *toldo*, rising over the quarter, a low-decked locker running from bow to midships, – along each side of which were to be seen, half seated, half standing, some half-dozen dark-skinned men, each plying, instead of an oar, a paddle-blade.

Perhaps the most singular sight on board this embarkation was the group of animated beings who composed its crew and passengers. The former, as already stated, were dark-skinned men scantily clad, – in fact, almost naked, since a single pair of white cotton drawers constituted the complete costume of each.

For passengers there were three men, and a like number of individuals of younger age. Two of the men were white, apparently Europeans; the other was as black as soot could have made him, – unquestionably an African negro. Of the young people two were boys, not much differing in size, and apparently not much in age, while the third was a half-grown girl, of dark complexion, raven-coloured hair, and beautiful features.

One of the white men appeared to be, and was, the proprietor of the montaria, and the employer of its swarthy crew. He was Ralph Trevannion.

The young girl was his daughter, and bore her Peruvian mother's name, Rosa, more often pronounced by its diminutive of endearment, Rosita. The younger of the two boys – also of dark complexion – was his son Ralph; while the older, of true Saxon physiognomy and hue, was the son of his brother, also bearing his father's Christian name, Richard.

The second white man was unmistakably of European race, – so much so that any one possessing the slightest knowledge of the Hibernian type would at once have pronounced him a "Son of the Sod." A pure pug nose, a shock of curled hair of the clearest carrot colour, an eternal twinkle in the eye, a volume of fun lying open at each angle of the mouth, were all characteristics by which "Tipperary Tom" – for such was his *sobriquet*– might be remembered.

About the negro there was nothing special, more than that he was a pure negro, with enormously thick lips, flattened nose, long protruding heels, teeth white as hippopotamus ivory, and almost always set in a good-humoured grin. The darkey had been a sailor, or rather ship-steward, before landing in Peru. Thither had he strayed, and settled at Cerro Pasco after several years spent aboard ship. He was a native of Mozambique, on the eastern coast of Africa, to which circumstance was he indebted for the only name ever given him, – Mozey.

Both he and the Irishman were the servants of the miner, or rather his retainers, who served him in various ways, and had done so almost ever since his establishing himself among the rocks of Cerro Pasco.

The other creatures of the animated kingdom that found lodgment upon the craft were of various shapes, sizes, and species. There were quadrupeds, quadrumana, and birds, – beasts of the field, monkeys of the forest, and birds of the air, – clustering upon the cabin top, squatted in the hold, perched upon the gangway, the toldo, the yard, and the mast, – forming an epitomised menagerie, such as may be seen on every kind of craft that navigates the mighty Amazon.

It is not our design to give any description of the galatea's crew. There were nine of them, – all Indians, – four on each side acting as rowers, or more properly "paddlers," the ninth being the pilot or steersman, standing abaft the toldo.

Our reason for not describing them is that they were a changing crew, only attached to the craft for a particular stage of the long river voyage, and had succeeded several other similar sets since the embarkation of our voyagers on the waters of the upper Amazon. They had joined the galatea at the port of Ega, and would take leave of her at Coary, where a fresh crew of civilised Indians – "tapuyos" – would be required.

And they *were* required, but not obtained. On the galatea putting into the port of Coary, it was found that nearly every man in the place was off upon a hunting excursion, – turtle and cow-fish being the game that had called them out. Not a canoe-man could be had for love or money.

The owner of the galatea endeavoured to tempt the Ega crew to continue another stage. It was contrary to their habit, and they refused to go. Persuasion and threats were tried in vain. Coaxing and scolding proved equally unavailable; all except one remained firm in their refusal, the exception being an old Indian who did not belong to the Ega tribe, and who could not resist the large bribe offered by Trevannion.

The voyagers must either suspend their journey till the Coary turtle-hunters should return, or proceed without paddlers. The hunters were not expected for a month. To stay a month at Coary was out of the question. The galatea must go on manned by her own people, and the old Indian who was to act as pilot. Such was the determination of Ralph Trevannion. But for that resolve, – rash as it was, and ending unfortunately for him who made it, – we should have no story to tell.

Chapter Four
Drifting with the Current

The craft that carried the ex-miner, his family and following, once more floated on the broad bosom of the Solimoës. Not so swift as before, since, instead of eight paddlers, it was now impelled by only half the number, – these, too, with less than half the experience of the crew who had preceded them.

The owner himself acted as steersman, while the paddles were plied by "Tipperary Tom," Mozey, the old Indian, – who, being of the Mundurucú tribe, passed by the name of "Munday," – and Richard Trevannion.

The last, though by far the youngest, was perhaps the best paddler in the party. Brought up in his native place of Gran Pará, he had been accustomed to spend half his time either in or upon the water; and an oar or paddle was to him no novelty.

Young Ralph, on the contrary, a true mountaineer, knew nothing of either, and therefore counted for nothing among the crew of the galatea. To him and the little Rosa was assigned the keeping of the pets, with such other light duties as they were capable of performing.

For the first day the voyage was uninterrupted by any incident, – at least any that might be called unpleasant. Their slow progress, it is true, was a cause of dissatisfaction; but so long as they were going at all, and going in the right direction, this might be borne with equanimity. Three miles an hour was about their average rate of speed; for half of which they were indebted to the current of the river, and for the other half to the impulsion of their paddles.

Considering that they had still a thousand miles to go before reaching Gran Pará, the prospect of a protracted voyage was very plainly outlined before them.

Could they have calculated on making three miles an hour for every hour of the twenty-four, things would not have been bad. This rate of speed would have carried them to their destination in a dozen days, – a mere bagatelle. But they knew enough of river-navigation to disregard such data. They knew the current of the Solimoës to be extremely slow; they had heard of the strange phenomenon, that, run which way the river might, north, south, east, or west, – and it *does* keep bending and curving in all these directions, – the wind is almost always met with blowing *up stream*!

For this reason they could put no dependence in their sail, and would have to trust altogether to the paddles. These could not be always in the water. Human strength could not stand a perpetual spell, even at paddles; and less so in the hands of a crew of men so little used to them.

Nor could they continue the voyage at night. By doing so, they would be in danger of losing their course, their craft, and themselves!

You may smile at the idea. You will ask – a little scornfully, perhaps – how a canoe, or any other craft, drifting down a deep river to its destination, could possibly go astray. Does not the current point out the path, – the broad waterway not to be mistaken?

So it might appear to one seated in a skiff, and floating down the tranquil Thames, with its well-defined banks. But far different is the aspect of the stupendous Solimoës to the voyager gliding through its *Capo*.

I have made use of a word of strange sound, and still stranger signification. Perhaps it is new to your eye, as your oar. You will become better acquainted with it before the end of our voyage; for into the "Gapo" it is my intention to take you, where ill-luck carried the galatea and her crew.

On leaving Coary, it was not the design of her owner to attempt taking his craft, so indifferently manned, all the way to Pará. He knew there were several civilised settlements between, – as Barra at the mouth of the Rio Negro, Obidos below it, Santarem, and others. At one or other of these places he expected to obtain a supply of *tapuyos*, to replace the crew who had so provokingly forsaken him.

The voyage to the nearest of them, however, would take several days, at the rate of speed the galatea was now making; and the thought of being delayed on their route became each hour more irksome. The ex-miner, who had not seen his beloved brother during half a score of years, was impatient once more to embrace him. He had been, already, several months travelling towards him by land and water; and just as he was beginning to believe that the most difficult half of the journey had been accomplished, he found himself delayed by an obstruction vexatious as unexpected.

The first night after his departure from Coary, he consented that the galatea should lie to, – moored to some bushes that grew upon the banks of the river.

On the second night, however, he acted with less prudence. His impatience to make way prompted him to the resolution to keep on. The night was clear, – a full moon shining conspicuously above, which is not always the case in the skies of the Solimoës.

There was to be no sail set, no use made of the paddles. The crew were fatigued, and wanted rest and repose. The current alone was to favour their progress; and as it appeared to be running nearly two miles an hour, it should advance them between twenty and thirty miles before the morning.

The Mundurucú made an attempt to dissuade his “patron” from the course he designed pursuing; but his advice was disregarded, – perhaps because ill-understood, – and the galatea glided on.

Who could mistake that broad expanse of water – upon which the moon shone so clearly – for aught else than the true channel of the Solimoës? Not Tipperary Tom, who, in the second watch of the night, – the owner himself having kept the first, – acted as steersman of the galatea.

The others had gone to sleep. Trevannion and the three young people under the toldo; Mozey and the Mundurucú along the staging known as the “hold.” The birds and monkeys were at rest on their respective perches, and in their respective cages, – all was silent in the galatea, and around, – all save the rippling of the water, as it parted to the cleaving of her keel.

Chapter Five
The Galatea Aground

Little experienced as he was in the art of navigation, the steersman was not inattentive to his duty. Previously to his taking the rudder, he had been admonished about the importance of keeping the craft in the channel of the stream, and to this had he been giving his attention.

It so chanced, however, that he had arrived at a place where there were two channels, – as if an island was interposed in the middle of the river, causing it to branch at an acute angle. Which of these was the right one? Which should be taken? These were the questions that occurred to Tipperary Tom.

At first he thought of awakening his master, and consulting him, but on once more glancing at the two channels, he became half convinced that the broader one must be the proper route to be followed.

"Bay Japers!" muttered he to himself. "Shure I can't be mistaken. The biggest av the two ought to be the mane sthrame. Anyway, I won't wake the masther. I'll lave it to the ship to choose for hersilf." Saying this he relaxed his hold upon the steering oar, and permitted the galatea to drift with the current.

Sure enough, the little craft inclined towards the branch that appeared the broader one; and in ten minutes' time had made such way that the other opening was no longer visible from her decks. The steersman, confident of being on the right course, gave himself no further uneasiness; but, once more renewing his hold upon the steering oar, guided the galatea in the middle of the channel.

Notwithstanding all absence of suspicion as to having gone astray, he could not help noticing that the banks on each side appeared to be singularly irregular, as if here and there indented by deep bays, or reaches of water. Some of these opened out vistas of shining surface, apparently illimitable, while the dark patches that separated them looked more like clumps of trees half-submerged under water than stretches of solid earth.

As the galatea continued her course, this puzzling phenomenon ceased to be a conjecture; Tipperary Tom saw that he was no longer steering down a river between two boundary banks, but on a broad expanse of water, stretching as far as eye could reach, with no other boundary than that afforded by a *flooded forest.*

There was nothing in all this to excite alarm, – at least in the mind of Tipperary Tom. The Mundurucú, had he been awake, might have shown some uneasiness at the situation. But the Indian was asleep, – perhaps dreaming of some Mura enemy, – whose head he would have been happy to embalm.

Tom simply supposed himself to be in some part of the Solimoës flooded beyond its banks, as he had seen it in more places than one. With this confidence, he stuck faithfully to his steering oar, and allowed the galatea to glide on. It was only when the reach of water – upon which the craft was drifting – began to narrow, or rather after it had narrowed to a surprising degree, that the steersman began to suspect himself of having taken the wrong course.

His suspicions became stronger, at length terminating in a conviction that such was the truth, when the galatea arrived at a part where less than a cable's length lay between her beam-ends and the bushes that stood out of the water on both sides of her. Too surely had he strayed from the "mane sthrame." The craft that carried him could no longer be in the channel of the mighty Solimoës!

The steersman was alarmed, and this very alarm hindered him from following the only prudent course he could have taken under the circumstances. He should have aroused his fellow-voyagers, and proclaimed the error into which he had fallen. He did not do so. A sense of shame at having neglected his duty, or rather at having performed it in an indifferent manner, – a species of regret

not uncommon among his countrymen, – hindered him from disclosing the truth, and taking steps to avert any evil consequences that might spring from it.

He knew nothing of the great river on which they were voyaging. There *might* be such a strait as that through which the galatea was gliding. The channel might widen below; and, after all, he might have steered in the proper direction. With such conjectures, strengthened by such hopes, he permitted the vessel to float on.

The channel *did* widen again; and the galatea once more rode upon open water. The steersman was restored to confidence and contentment. Only for a short while did this state of mind continue. Again the clear water became contracted, this time to a very strip, while on either side extended reaches and estuaries, bordered by half-submerged bushes, – some of them opening apparently to the sky horizon, wider and freer from obstruction than that upon which the galatea was holding her course.

The steersman no longer thought of continuing his course, which he was now convinced must be the wrong one. Bearing with all his strength upon the steering oar, he endeavoured to direct the galatea back into the channel through which he had come; but partly from the drifting of the current, and partly owing to the deceptive light of the moon, he could no longer recognise the latter, and, dropping the rudder in despair, he permitted the vessel to drift whichever way the current might carry her!

Before Tipperary Tom could summon courage to make known to his companions the dilemma into which he had conducted them, the galatea had drifted among the tree-tops of the flooded forest, where she was instantly “brought to anchor.”

The crashing of broken boughs roused her crew from their slumbers. The ex-miner, followed by his children, rushed forth from the toldo. He was not only alarmed, but perplexed, by the unaccountable occurrence. Mozey was equally in a muddle. The only one who appeared to comprehend the situation was the old Indian, who showed sufficient uneasiness as to its consequences by the terrified manner in which he called out: “The Gapo! The Gapo!”

Chapter Six
The Monkey-Pots

"The Gapo?" exclaimed the master of the craft. "What is it, Munday?"

"The Gapo?" repeated Tipperary Tom, fancying by the troubled expression on the face of the Indian that he had conducted his companions toward some terrible disaster. "Phwat is it, Manday?"

"Da Gapoo?" simultaneously interrogated the negro, the whites of his eyeballs shining in the moonlight. "What be dat?"

The Mundurucú made reply only by a wave of his hand, and a glance around him, as if to say, "Yes, the Gapo; you see we're in it."

The three interrogators were as much in the dark as ever. Whether the Gapo was fish, flesh, or fowl, air, fire, or water, they could not even guess. There was but one upon the galatea besides the Indian himself who knew the signification of the word which had created such a sensation among the crew, and this was young Richard Trevannion.

"It's nothing, uncle," said he, hastening to allay the alarm around him; "old Munday means that we've strayed from the true channel of the Solimoës, and got into the flooded forest, – that's all."

"The flooded forest?"

"Yes. What you see around us, looking like low bushes, are the tops of tall trees. We're now aground on the branches of a *sapucaya*, – a species of the Brazil-nut, and among the tallest of Amazonian trees. I'm right, – see! there are the nuts themselves!" As the young Paraense spoke, he pointed to some pericarps, large as cocoa-nuts, that were seen depending from the branches among which the galatea had caught. Grasping one of them in his hand, he wrenched it from the branch; but as he did so, the husk dropped off, and the prism-shaped nuts fell like a shower of huge hailstones on the roof of the *toldo*. "Monkey-pots they're called," continued he, referring to the empty pericarp still in his hand. "That's the name by which the Indians know them; because the monkeys are very fond of these nuts."

"But the Gapo?" interrupted the ex-miner, observing that the expressive look of uneasiness still clouded the brow of the Mundurucú.

"It's the Indian name for the great inundation," replied Richard, in the same tranquil tone. "Or rather I should say, the name for it in the *lingoa-geral*."

"And what is there to fear? Munday has frightened us all, and seems frightened himself. What is the cause?"

"That I can't tell you, uncle. I know there are queer stories about the Gapo, – tales of strange monsters that inhabit it, – huge serpents, enormous apes, and all that sort of thing. I never believed them, though the *tapuyos* do; and from old Munday's actions I suppose he puts full faith in them."

"The young patron is mistaken," interposed the Indian, speaking a patois of the *lingoa-geral*. "The Mundurucú does not believe in monsters. He believes in big serpents and monkeys, – he has seen them."

"But shure yez are not afeerd o' them, Manday?" asked the Irishman.

The Indian only replied by turning on Tipperary Tom a most scornful look.

"What is the use of this alarm?" inquired Trevannion. "The galatea does not appear to have sustained any injury. We can easily get her out of her present predicament, by lopping off the branches that are holding her."

"Patron," said the Indian, still speaking in a serious tone, "it may not be so easy as you think. We may get clear of the tree-top in ten minutes. In as many hours – perhaps days – we may not get clear of the Gapo. That is why the Mundurucú shows signs of apprehension."

"Ho! You think we may have a difficulty in finding our way back to the channel of the river?"

"Think it, patron! I am too sure of it. If not, we shall be in the best of good luck."

"It's of no use trying to-night, at all events," pursued Trevannion, as he glanced uncertainly around him. "The moon is sinking over the tree-tops. Before we could well get adrift, she'll be gone out of sight. We might only drift deeper into the maze. Is that your opinion, Munday?"

"It is, patron. We can do no good by leaving the place to-night. Wiser for us to wait for the light of the sun."

"Let all go to rest, then," commanded the patron, "and be ready for work in the morning. We need keep no lookout, I should think. The galatea is as safe here as if moored in a dry dock. She is *aground*, I take it, upon the limb of a tree! Ha! ha! ha!"

The thought of such a situation for a sailing craft – moored amid the tops of a tall tree – was of so ludicrous a nature as to elicit a peal of laughter from the patron, which was echoed by the rest of the crew, the Mundurucú alone excepted. His countenance still preserved its expression of uneasiness; and long after the others had sunk into unconscious sleep, he sat upon the stem of the galatea, gazing out into the gloom, with glances that betokened serious apprehension.

Chapter Seven
The Gapo

The young Paraense had given a correct, although not sufficiently explicit, account of the sort of place in which the galatea had gone "aground."

That singular phenomenon known as the *Gapo* (or *Ygapo*), and which is one of the most remarkable characteristics of the great Amazonian region, demands a more detailed description. It is worthy of this, as a mere study of physical geography, – perhaps as pleasant a science as any; and furthermore, it is here absolutely necessary to the understanding of our tale. Without some comprehension of the circumstances that surrounded them, the hardships and sufferings endured, the adventures accomplished, and the perils passed by the crew of the strayed galatea, would appear as so many fabulous inventions, set forth to stimulate and gratify a taste for the merely marvellous. Young reader, this is not the aim of your author, nor does he desire it to be the end. On the contrary, he claims to draw Nature with a verisimilitude that will challenge the criticism of the naturalist; though he acknowledges a predilection for Nature in her wildest aspects, – for scenes least exposed to the eye of civilisation, and yet most exposed to its doubting incredulity.

There are few country people who have not witnessed the spectacle of a piece of woodland inundated by the overflow of a neighbouring stream. This flood is temporary; the waters soon subside into their ordinary channel, and the trees once more appear growing out of *terra firma*, with the green mead spreading on all sides around them. But a flooded forest is a very different affair; somewhat similar in character indeed, but far grander. Not a mere spinney of trees along the bank of a small stream; but a region extending beyond the reach of vision, – a vast tract of primeval woods, – the tall trees submerged to their very tops, not for days, nor weeks, but for months, – ay, some of them forever! Picture to your mind an inundation of this kind, and you will have some idea of the Gapo.

Extending for seventeen hundred miles along the banks of the Solimoës, now wider on the northern, now stretching farther back from the southern side, this semi-submerged forest is found, its interior almost as unknown as the crater-like caverns of the moon, or the icy oceans that storm or slumber round the Poles, – unknown to civilised man, but not altogether to the savage. The aboriginal of Amazonia, crouching in his canoe, has pierced this water-land of wonders. He could tell you much about it that is real, and much that is marvellous, – the latter too often pronounced fanciful by lettered *savans*. He could tell you of strange trees that grow there, bearing strange fruits, not to be found elsewhere, – of wonderful quadrupeds, and *quadrumana*, that exist only in the Gapo, – of birds brilliantly beautiful, and reptiles hideously ugly; among the last the dreaded dragon serpent, "Sucuruju." He could tell you, moreover, of creatures of his own kind, – if they deserve the name of man, – who dwell continuously in the flooded forest, making their home on scaffolds among the tree-tops, passing from place to place in floating rafts or canoes, finding their subsistence on fish, on the flesh of the *manatee*, on birds, beasts, reptiles, and insects, on the stalks of huge water-plants and the fruits of undescribed trees, on monkeys, and sometimes upon *man*! Such Indians as have penetrated the vast water-land have brought strange tales out of it. We may give credence to them or refuse it; but they, at least, are firm believers in most of the accounts which they have collected.

It is not to be supposed that the Gapo is impenetrable. On the contrary, there are several well-known waterways leading through it, – well-known, I mean, to the Indians dwelling upon its borders, to the *tapuyos*, whose business it is to supply crews for the galateas of the Portuguese traders, and to many of these traders themselves. These waterways are often indicated by "blazings" on the trees, or broken branches, just as the roads are laid out by pioneer settlers in a North American forest; and but for these marks, they could not be followed. Sometimes, however, large spaces occur in which no trees are to be seen, where, indeed, none grow. There are extensive lakes, always under water,

even at the lowest ebb of the inundation. They are of all sizes and every possible configuration, from the complete circle through all the degrees of the ellipse, and not unfrequently in the form of a belt, like the channel of a river running for scores of miles between what might readily be mistaken for banks covered with a continuous thicket of low bushes, which are nothing more than the “spray” of evergreen trees, whose roots lie forty feet under water!

More frequently these openings are of irregular shape, and of such extent as to merit the title of “inland seas.” When such are to be crossed, the sun has to be consulted by the canoe or galatea gliding near their centre; and when he is not visible, – by no means a rare phenomenon in the Gapo, – then is there great danger of the craft straying from her course.

When within sight of the so-called “shore,” a clump of peculiar form, or a tree topping over its fellows, is used as a landmark, and often guides the navigator of the Gapo to the *igarita* of which he is in search.

It is not all tranquillity on this tree-studded ocean. It has its fogs, its gales, and its storms, – of frequent occurrence. The canoe is oft shattered against the stems of gigantic trees; and the galatea goes down, leaving her crew to perish miserably in the midst of a gloomy wilderness of wood and water. Many strange tales are told of such mishaps; but up to the present hour none have received the permanent record of print and paper.

Be it *our* task to supply this deficiency.

Chapter Eight
The Echente

It would not be true to say that the crew of the galatea were up with the sun. There was no sun to shine upon the gloomy scene that revealed itself next morning. Instead, there was a fog almost thick enough to be grasped with the hand. They were astir, however, by the earliest appearance of day; for the captain of the galatea was too anxious about his "stranded" craft to lie late abed.

They had no difficulty in getting the vessel afloat. A strong pull at the branches of the sapucaya, and then an adroit use of the paddles, carried the craft clear.

But what was the profit of this? Once out in the open water, they were as badly off as ever. Not one of them had the slightest idea of the direction they would take, even supposing they could find a clear course in any direction! A consultation was the result, in which all hands took part, though it was evident that, after the patron, most deference was paid to the Mundurucú. The young Paraense stood next in the scale of respect; while Tipperary Tom, beyond the account which he was called upon to give of his steersmanship, was not permitted to mingle his Hibernian brogue in the discussion.

Where was the river? That was the first problem to be solved, and of this there appeared to be no possible solution. There was no sun to guide them, no visible sky. Even had there been both, it would scarce have mended the matter. The steersman could not tell whether, on straying from the channel, he had drifted to the south or the north, the east or the west; and, indeed, an intellect less obtuse than that of Tipperary Tom might have been puzzled upon the point. It has been already mentioned, that the Solimoës is so tortuous as to turn to every point of the compass in its slow course. The mere fact that the moon was shining at the time could be of little use to Tipperary Tom, whose astronomy had never extended beyond the knowledge that there was a moon.

Where lay the river? The interrogatory was repeated a score of times, without receiving a satisfactory answer; though every one on board – the little Rosita excepted – ventured some sort of reply, most, however, offering their opinion with a doubting diffidence. The Mundurucú, although repeatedly appealed to, had taken small part in the discussion, remaining silent, his eyes moodily wandering over the water, seeking through the fog for some clue to their escape from the spot.

No one plied the paddles; they had impelled her out of sight of the sapucaya, now shrouded in the thick fog; but, as it was useless paddling any farther, all hands had desisted, and were now resting upon their oars. At this moment it was perceived that the galatea was in motion. The Mundurucú was the first to notice it; for his attention had for some time been directed to such discovery. For this reason had he cast his searching glances, now down into the turbid waters, and now out through the murky atmosphere. A thicket was discernible through the fog, but every moment becoming less distinct. Of course it was only a collection of tree-tops; but whatever it was, it soon became evident that the galatea was very slowly receding from it. On discovering this, the Mundurucú displayed signs of fresh animation. He had been for some minutes lying upon his face, craning out over the gangway, and his long withered arms submerged in the water. The others occupied themselves in guessing what he was about; but their guesses had been to no purpose. Equally purposeless had appeared the actions of the Indian; for, after keeping his arm under water for a period of several minutes, he drew it in with a dissatisfied air, and once more arose to his feet. It was just then that he perceived the tree-tops, upon which he kept his eyes sharply fixed, until assured that the galatea was going away from them.

"*Hoola*!" he exclaimed, attempting to imitate the cry he had more than once heard issuing from the lips of Tipperary Tom. "*Hoola*! the river is out there!" As he spoke, he pointed towards the tree-tops.

It was the first confident answer to the all-important question.

"How can you tell that, Munday?" inquired the captain of the craft.

"How tell, patron? How tell day from night, the moon from the sun, fire from water? The Solimoës is there." The Indian spoke with his arm still extended in the direction of the trees.

"We are willing to believe you," rejoined Trevannion, "and will trust to your guidance; but pray explain yourself."

"It's all guess-work," interpolated Tipperary Tom. "Ould Munday knows no more av fwat he's talkin' about than Judy Fitzcummons's mother. I'll warrant ye we come in from the t'other side."

"Silence, Tom!" commanded his master. "Let us hear what Munday has to say. *You* have no right to contradict him."

"Och, awance! An Indyen's opinion prefarred before that ov a freeborn Oirishman! I wondher what nixt." And as Tipperary completed his chapter of reproaches, he slank crouchingly under the shadow of the *toldo*.

"So you think the river is there?" said Trevannion, once more addressing himself to the Mundurucú.

"The Mundurucú is sure of it, patron. Sure as that the sky is above us."

"Remember, old man! It won't do for us to make any mistake. No doubt we've already strayed a considerable distance from the channel of the Solimoës. To go again from it will be to endanger our lives."

"The Mundurucú knows that," was the laconic reply.

"Well, then, we must be satisfied of the fact, before we can venture to make a move. What proof can you give us that the river lies in that direction?"

"Patron! You know the month? It is the month of March."

"Certainly it is. What of that?"

"The *echente*."

"The *echente*? What is that?"

"The flood getting bigger. The water on the rise, – the Gapo still growing, – that is the *echente*."

"But how should that enable you to determine the direction of the river?"

"It has done so," replied the Indian. "Not before three months – in June – will come the *vasante*."

"The *vasante*?"

"The *vasante*, patron: the fall. Then the Gapo will begin to grow less; and the current will be *towards* the river, as now it is *from* it."

"Your story appears reasonable enough. I suppose we may trust to it. If so," added Trevannion, "we had better direct our course towards yonder tree-tops, and lose no time in getting beyond them. All of you to your paddles, and pull cheerily. Let us make up for the time we have lost through the negligence of Tipperary Tom. Pull, my lads, pull!"

At this cheering command the four paddlers rushed to their places; and the galatea, impelled by their vigorous strokes, once more glided gayly over the bosom of the waters.

Chapter Nine
An Impassable Barrier

In a few moments the boat's bow was brought within half a cable's length of the boughs of the submerged trees. Her crew could see that to proceed farther, on a direct course, was simply impossible. With equal reason might they have attempted to hoist her into the air, and leap over the obstruction that had presented itself before them.

Not only were the branches of the adjoining trees interlocked, but from one to the other straggled a luxurious growth of creepers, forming a network so strong and compact that a steamer of a hundred horse-power would have been safely brought to a stand among its meshes. Of course no attempt was made to penetrate this impenetrable *chevaux de frise*; and after a while had been spent in reconnoitring it, Trevannion, guided by the counsel of the Mundurucú, ordered the galatea to go about, and proceed along the selvage of the submerged forest. An hour was spent in paddling. No opening. Another hour similarly employed, and with similar results!

The river might be in the direction pointed out by the Indian. No doubt it was; but how were they to reach it? Not a break appeared in all that long traverse wide enough to admit the passage of a canoe. Even an arrow could scarce have penetrated among the trees, that extended their parasite-laden branches beyond the border of the forest! By tacit consent of the patron, the paddlers rested upon their oars; then plied them once more; and once more came to a pause.

No opening among the tree-tops; no chance to reach the channel of the Solimoës. The gloomy day became gloomier, for night was descending over the Gapo. The crew of the galatea, wearied with many hours of exertion, ceased paddling. The patron did not oppose them; for his spirit, as well as theirs, had become subdued by hope long deferred. As upon the previous night, the craft was moored among the tree-tops, where her rigging, caught among the creepers, seemed enough to keep her from drifting away. But very different from that of the preceding night was the slumber enjoyed by her crew. Amidst the boughs of the sapucaya, there had been nothing to disturb their tranquillity, save the occasional shower of nuts, caused by the cracking of the dry shells, and the monkey-pots discharging their contents. Then was the galatea "grounded" upon a solitary tree, which carried only its own fruit. To-night she was moored in the middle of a forest, – at all events upon its edge, – a forest, not of the earth, nor the air, nor the water, but of all three, – a forest whose inhabitants might be expected to partake of a character altogether strange and abnormal. And of such character were they; for scarce had the galatea become settled among the tree-tops, when the ears of her crew were assailed by a chorus of sounds, that with safety might have challenged the choir of Pandemonium. Two alone remained undismayed, – Richard Trevannion and the Mundurucú.

"Bah!" exclaimed the Paraense, "what are you all frightened at? Don't you know what it is, uncle?"

"I know what it resembles, boy, – the Devil and his legions let loose from below. What is it, Dick?"

"Only the howlers. Don't be alarmed, little Rosita!"

The little Peruvian, gaining courage from his words, looked admiringly on the youth who had called her "little Rosita." Any one could have told that, from that time forward, Richard Trevannion might have the power to control the destinies of his cousin.

"The howlers! What are they?" inquired the old miner.

"Monkeys, uncle; nothing more. From the noise they make, one might suppose they were as big as buffaloes. Nothing of the kind. The largest I ever saw was hardly as stout as a deerhound, though he could make as much noise as a whole kennel. They have a sort of a drum in the throat, that acts as a sound-board. That's what enables them to get up such a row. I've often heard their concert more

than two miles across country, especially in prospect of an approaching storm. I don't know if they follow this fashion in the Gapo; but if they do, from the way they're going it now, we may look out for a trifling tornado."

Notwithstanding the apparent unconcern with which young Trevannion declared himself, there was something in his manner that arrested the attention of his uncle. While pronouncing his hypothetical forecast of a storm, he had turned his glance towards the sky, and kept it fixed there, as if making something more than a transient observation. The fog had evaporated, and the moon was now coursing across the heavens, not against a field of cloudy blue, but in the midst of black, cumulus clouds, that every now and then shrouded her effulgence. A dweller in the tropics of the Western hemisphere would have pronounced this sign the certain forerunner of a storm; and so predicted the young Paraense. "We'll have the sky upon us within an hour," said he, addressing himself more especially to his uncle. "We'd better tie the galatea to the trees. If this be a *hurricane*, and she goes adrift, there's no knowing where we may bring up. The likeliest place will be in the bottom of the Gapo."

"The young patron speaks truth," interposed Munday, his eyes all the while reading the signs of the heavens; "The Mundurucú knows by yonder yellow sky."

As he spoke, the Indian pointed to a patch of brimstone-coloured clouds, conspicuous over the tops of the trees. There was no reason why Ralph Trevannion should not give credit to the two weather-prophets, who could have no personal motive in thus warning him. He yielded, therefore, to their solicitation; and in ten minutes more the galatea was secured among the tree-tops, as fast as cords could make her.

Chapter Ten
A Tropical Tornado

Notwithstanding the apparently complete security thus obtained for the craft, the Mundurucú did not seem to be easy in his mind. He had climbed up the mast to the yard, and, having there poised himself, sat gazing over the tops of the trees upon the patch of brimstone sky which was visible in that direction. The others all talked of going to sleep, except the young Paraense, who counselled them to keep awake. He, too, like the Mundurucú, was troubled with forebodings. He understood the weather-signs of the Solimoës, and saw that a storm was portending. Though the sun had not been visible during the whole day, it was now about the hour of his setting; and as if the storm had been waiting for this as a signal, it now boldly broke forth. A few quick puffs, with short intervals between them, were its precursors. These were soon followed by gusts, stronger, as well as noisier, in their advent; and then the wind kept up a continuous roaring among the tops of the trees; while above the thunder rolled incessantly, filling the firmament with its terrible voice. Deep darkness and the vivid glare of the lightning-flashes followed each other in quick succession. At one moment all was obscure around the crew of the galatea, – the sky, the trees, the water, even the vessel herself; in the next, everything was made manifest, to the distance of miles, under a brilliance garish and unearthly. To add to the unnatural appearance of things, there were other sounds than those of the thunder or the storm, – the cries of living creatures, strange and unknown. Birds they might be, or beasts, or reptiles, or all these, commingling their screams, and other accents of affright, with the sharp whistling of the wind, the hoarse rumbling of the thunder, and the continuous crashing of the branches.

The crew of the galatea were on the alert, with awe depicted on every face. Their fear was lest the craft should be blown away from her moorings, and carried out into the open water, which was now agitated by the fury of the storm. Almost under the first lashing of the wind, huge waves had sprung up, with white crests, that under the electric light gleamed fiercely along the yellow swell of the turbid water. Their anxiety was of short continuance; for almost on the instant of its rising, it became reality. Unfortunately, the tree to which the craft had been tied was one whose wood was of a soft and succulent nature, – a species of *melastoma*. Its branches were too brittle to bear the strain thus unexpectedly put upon them; and almost at the first onset of the tornado they began to give way, snapping off one after the other in quick succession. So rapid was the process of detachment, that, before fresh moorings could be made, the last cord had come away; and the galatea, like a greyhound loosed from the leash, shot out from among the tree-tops, and went off in wild career over the waves of the Gapo. Before any control could be gained over her by her terrified crew, she had made several cables' length into the open water, and was still sweeping onward over its seething surface. To turn her head towards the trees was clearly out of the question. The attempt would have been idle. Both wind and waves carried her in the opposite direction, to say nothing of the current, against which she had been already contending. The crew no longer thought of returning to the tree-tops, out of which they had been so unceremoniously swept: Their only chance of safety appeared to be to keep the craft, as well balanced as circumstances would permit, and run before the wind. Even this for a time seemed but a doubtful chance. The wind blew, not in regular, uniform direction, but in short, fitful gusts, as if coming from every point of the compass; and the waves rolled around them as high as houses. In the midst of a chopping, purging sea, the galatea tumbled and pitched, now head, now stern foremost, at times going onward in mad career, and with headlong speed. The parrots and macaws upon the yard had as much as their strong claws could do to keep their perch; and the monkeys, cowering under the shelter of the *toldo*, clung close to its timbers. Both birds and beasts mingled their terrified cries with the creaking of the galatea's timbers and the shouts of her crew. The Gapo threatened to ingulf them. Every moment might be their last! And with this dread belief, scarce for a moment out of

their minds, did our adventurers pass the remainder of that remarkable night, the galatea galloping onward, they could not tell whither. All they knew or could remember of that nocturnal voyage was, that the vessel kept upon her course, piloted only by the winds and waves, – at times tossing within deep troughs of turbulent water, at times poised upon the summits of ridge-like swells, but ever going onward at high speed, seemingly ten knots an hour!

For a long while they saw around them only open water, as of some great lake or inland sea. At a later hour, the lightning revealed the tops of submerged trees, such as those they had left behind; but standing out of the water in clumps or coppices, that appeared like so many islands. Amidst these they were carried, sometimes so close to the trees as to give them hopes of being able to grasp their boughs. Once or twice the rigging of the galatea brushed among the branches; and they used every effort to stay their runaway craft, and bring her to an anchorage. But in vain. The storm was stronger than the united strength of the crew. The twigs clutched with eager hands parted in twain, and the storm-driven vessel swept on amid the surging waters.

Daylight arrived at length, breaking through a red aurora, soon followed by a brilliant sunrise. This somewhat cheered our despairing adventurers. But the tempest was still raging with undiminished fury, the wind as loud and the waves as high as at any period throughout the night. Once more they were in the middle of a waste of waters, neither trees nor land in sight. Another great lake or inland sea? It could not be that over which they had been already carried? No. The wind was now blowing more steadily; and could it not have shifted? Even if it had, they had not returned through the archipelago of tree-top islands. They were in another opening of the Gapo. Munday was of this opinion, and that was proof sufficient to satisfy his companions. As we have said, the returning day did little to restore the confidence of the galatea's crew. The tornado still continued. Despite the sunlit sky, the storm showed no signs of abating; and the crazy craft gave tongue in every timber of her frail frame. The sounds were ominous to the ears of those who listened to them. It was too evident, that, unless there should soon come a lull, the galatea would go to the bottom. She had not been constructed to stand a strain like that to which she had been thus unexpectedly exposed, and an anchorage either to *terra firma* or the tree-tops would soon become necessary to her salvation. Her crew, convinced of this, were one and all upon the lookout, scanning the horizon as closely as the crested billows would admit. The Mundurucú had mounted to the top of the mast, where, with one of the monkeys that had perched itself on his shoulders, he clung with the tenacity of despair. All at once he was heard to cry out, the monkey mocking him in mimic tone.

"What is it, Munday? What do you see?" were the inquiries that reached him from below.

"Land," was the laconic reply.

"Land!" went up the echo from half a score of joyous voices.

"Maybe not land, – I mean the *terra firma*," pursued the observer, in a less confident tone. "It may be only the top of a thick forest like what we tried to penetrate yesterday. Whatever it is, patron, it seems along the whole edge of the sky. We are drifting towards it, straight as the wind can carry us."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Trevannion, "anything is better than this. If we can get once more among the tree-tops, we shall at least be saved from drowning. Thank God, children. We shall be preserved!"

The Indian descended from the mast, close followed by the monkey, whose serio-comic countenance seemed to say that he too was satisfied by the observation just made. Still careering madly onward before the tempest, the boat soon brought the tree-tops within view, and, after a brief debate, the conclusion was reached that it was only a submerged forest. But even this was better than buffeting about on the open billows, – every moment in danger of being swamped; and with a universal feeling of joy our adventurers perceived that their craft was drifting toward that dark line. They were powerless to control her course. Her rudder had been unshipped during the night, and they could trust only to the tempest still raging to carry them to the confines of the forest. In full hope that this would be the result, they took no measures either to promote or frustrate the steering of the storm.

Chapter Eleven
The Galatea Treed

Tossed by the tempest, the galatea preserved her course towards the tree-tops, thus keeping up the spirits and confidence of her crew. Despite some divergences caused by an occasional contrary gust of wind, she kept an onward course, in due time arriving within such distance of the forest, that it was no longer doubtful about her drifting among the trees. In this there was a prospect of temporary safety at the least, and our adventurers had begun to congratulate themselves on the proximity of the event. Just then, a gigantic tree – it must have been gigantic to stand so high over its fellows, though it could scarce be fifty feet above the surface of the water – presented itself to their eyes. It stood solitary and alone, about a quarter of a mile from the edge of the forest, and as much nearer to the craft, still struggling through the wind-lashed water. Like that in the top of which they had first gone aground, it was a sapucaya, – as testified by the huge pericarps conspicuously suspended from its branches. High as may have been the inundation, its stem rose still higher, by at least ten feet; but half-way between the water's surface and the branches, the colossal trunk forked in twain, – each of the twin scions appearing a trunk of itself. Through the fork was the water washing at each heave of the agitated Gapo, – the waves with foaming crests mounting far up towards the top of the tree, as if aspiring to pluck the ripe fruit depending from its branches.

Towards this tree the galatea was now going as straight as if she had been steered by the finger of Destiny itself. There was no other power to control her, – at least none that was human. The wind, or destiny, – one of the two, – must determine her fate. The waves perhaps had something to do with it; since the next that followed lifted the galatea upon its curling crest, and lodged her in the sapucaya in such a fashion that her keel, just amidships, rested within the forking of the twin stems.

"Thank God!" exclaimed her owner, "we are safe now. Moored between two stanchions like these, neither the winds of heaven nor the waves of the great ocean itself could prevail against us. Make fast there! Make fast to the limbs of the tree! Tie her on both sides. These are no twigs to be snapped asunder. Hurrah! we are anchored at last!"

The gigantic stems of the sapucaya, rising on both sides above the beam-ends of the galatea, looked like the supporters of a graving-dock. It is true the craft still floated upon the bosom of a troubled water; but what of that? Once made fast to the tree, she could not be carried farther; therefore was she secure against wind and wave. The tornado might continue, but no longer to be a terror to the crew. These, partly relieved from their fears, hastened to obey the master's commands. Ropes were grasped, and, with hands still trembling, were looped around the stems of the sapucaya. All at once action was suspended by a loud crash, which was followed by a cry that issued simultaneously from the lips of all the crew; who, before its echoes could die away among the branches of the sapucaya, had become separated into two distinct groups!

The crash had been caused by the parting of the galatea's keel, which, resting in the fork of the tree, had broken amidships, on the subsidence of the wave that had heaved her into this peculiar position. For a few seconds the two sections of the partly dissevered craft hung balanced between the air and the water, the fore-deck with its stores balancing the quarter with its *toldo*. But long before the beam was kicked, the occupants of both had forsaken them, and were to be seen, some of them clinging to the branches of the sapucaya, some struggling beneath against the storm and the current of the Gapo. By noble devotion on the part of those who could swim, the whole crew were placed beyond the reach of the waves upon the branches of the sapucaya, where, from their elevated position, they beheld the craft that had so long safely carried them parting in two and sinking out of sight.

Chapter Twelve
A Dangerous Ducking

Before the dismembered vessel quite disappeared under the storm-lashed waves, every individual of her crew had found a foothold upon the branches of the sapucaya. The tree, while causing the wreck of their vessel, had saved them from going with her to the bottom of the Gapo. For some time, however, they were far from feeling secure. They were in different parts of the tree, scattered all over it, just as they had been able to lay hold of the limbs and lift themselves above the reach of the swelling waves. Scarce two of them were in the same attitude. One stood erect upon a branch with arms around an upright stem; another sat astride; a third lay along a limb, with one leg dangling downwards. The young Paraense had taken post upon a stout *lliana*, that threaded through the branches of the trees, and, with one arm around this and the other encircling the waist of his cousin, Rosita, he kept both the girl and himself in a position of perfect security. Young Ralph found footing on a large limb, while his father stood upon a still larger one immediately below. The pets, both birds and beasts, had distributed themselves in their affright, and were seen perched on all parts of the tree.

For a time there was no attempt made by any one to change his position. The tornado still continued, and it was just as much as any of them could do to keep the place already gained. There was one who did not even succeed in keeping his place, and this was Tipperary Tom. The Irishman had selected one of the lowest limbs, that stretched horizontally outward, only a few feet above the surface of the water. He had not exactly made choice of his perch, but had been flung upon it by the swelling wave, and, clutching instinctively, had held fast. The weight of his body, however, had bent the branch downward, and, after making several fruitless efforts to ascend to the stem, he had discovered that the feat was too much for him. There was no choice but to hold on to the bent branch or drop back into the boiling Gapo, that threatened from below to ingulf him; terrified by the latter alternative, Tom exerted all his strength, and held on with mouth agape and eyes astare. Soon the tension would have proved too much for him, and he must have dropped down into the water. But he was not permitted to reach this point of exhaustion. A wave similar to that which had landed him on the limb lifted him off again, launching him out into the open water.

A cry of consternation came from the tree. All knew that Tipperary Tom was no swimmer; and with this knowledge they expected to see him sink like a stone. He did go down, and was for some moments lost to view; but his carrot-coloured head once more made its appearance above the surface, and, guided by his loud cries, his situation was easily discovered. He could only sink a second time to rise no more. Sad were the anticipations of his companions, – all except one, who had made up his mind that Tipperary Tom was not yet to die. This was the Mundurucú, who at the moment was seen precipitating himself from the tree, and then swimming out in the direction of the drowning man. In less than a score of seconds he was in the clutch of the Indian, who grasping him with one hand, with the other struck out for the tree.

By good fortune the swell that had swept Tipperary from his perch, or one wonderfully like it, came balancing back towards the sapucaya, bearing both Indian and Irishman upon its crest, landing them in the great fork where the galatea had gone to pieces, and then retiring without them! It seemed a piece of sheer good fortune, though no doubt it was a destiny more than half directed by the arm of the Indian, whose broad palm appeared to propel them through the water with the power of a paddle.

To whatever indebted, chance or the prowess of the Mundurucú, certain it is that Tipperary Tom was rescued from a watery grave in the Gapo; and on seeing him along with his preserver safe in the fork of the tree, a general shout of congratulation, in which even the animals took part, pealed up through the branches, loud enough to be heard above the swishing of the leaves, the whistling of

the wind, and the surging of the angry waters, that seemed to hiss spitefully at being disappointed of their prey.

Tom's senses had become somewhat confused by the ducking. Not so much, however, as to hinder him from perceiving that in the fork, where the wave had deposited him and his preserver, he was still within reach of the swelling waters; seeing this, he was not slow to follow the example of the Mundurucú, who, "swarming" up the stem of the tree, placed himself in a safe and more elevated position.

Chapter Thirteen
A Consultation in the Tree-Top

It would scarce be possible to conceive a situation more forlorn than that of the castaway crew of the galatea. Seated, standing, or astride upon the limbs of the sapucaya, their position was painful, and far from secure. The tempest continued, and it was with difficulty they could keep their places, every gust threatening to blow them out of the tree-top. Each clung to some convenient bough; and thus only were they enabled to maintain their balance. The branches, swept by the furious storm, creaked and crackled around them, – bending as if about to break under their feet, or in the hands that apprehensively grasped them. Sometimes a huge pericarp, big as a cannon-ball, filled with heavy fruits, was detached from the pendulous peduncles, and went *swizzing* diagonally through the air before the wind, threatening a cracked crown to any who should be struck by it. One of the castaways met with this bit of ill-luck, – Mozey the Mozambique. It was well, however, that he was thus distinguished, since no other skull but his could have withstood the shock. As it was, the ball rebounded from the close woolly fleece that covered the negro's crown, as from a cushion, causing him no further trouble than a considerable fright. Mozey's looks and exclamations were ludicrous enough, had his companions been inclined for laughter. But they were not; their situation was too serious, and all remained silent, fully occupied in clinging to the tree, and moodily contemplating the scene of cheerless desolation that surrounded them.

Till now, no one had speculated on anything beyond immediate safety. To escape drowning had been sufficient for their thoughts, and engrossed them for more than an hour after the galatea had gone down. Then a change began to creep over their spirits, – brought about by one observable in the spirit of the storm. It was, you remember, one of those tropical tempests, that spring up with unexpected celerity, and fall with equal abruptness. Now the tempest began to show signs of having spent itself. The tornado – a species of *cyclone*, usually of limited extent – had passed on, carrying destruction to some other part of the great Amazonian plain. The wind lulled into short, powerless puffs, and the comparatively shallow waters of the Gapo soon ceased to swell. By this time noon had come, and the sun looked down from a zenith of cloudless blue, upon an expanse of water no more disturbed, and on branches no longer agitated by the stormy wind.

This transformation, sudden and benign, exerted an influence on the minds of our adventurers perched upon the sapucaya. No longer in immediate danger, their thoughts naturally turned to the future; and they began to speculate upon a plan for extricating themselves from their unfortunate dilemma.

On all sides save one, as far as the eye could scan, nothing could be seen but open water, – the horizon not even broken by the branch of a tree. On the excepted side trees were visible, not in clumps, or standing solitary, but in a continuous grove, with here and there some taller ones rising many feet above their fellows. There could be no doubt that it was a forest. It would have gratified them to have believed it a thicket, for then would they have been within sight and reach of land. But they could not think so consistently with their experience. It resembled too exactly that to which they had tied the galatea on the eve of the tempest, and they conjectured that what they saw was but the "spray" of a forest submerged. For all that, the design of reaching it as soon as the waters were calm was first in their minds.

This was not so easy as might be supposed. Although the border of the verdant peninsula was scarce a quarter of a mile distant, there were but two in the party who could swim across to it. Had there existed the materials for making a raft, their anxiety need not have lasted long. But nothing of the kind was within reach. The branches of the sapucaya, even if they could be broken off, were too heavy, in their green growing state, to do more than to buoy up their own ponderous weight. So

a sapucaya raft was not to be thought of, although it was possible that, among the tree-tops which they were planning to reach, dead timber might be found sufficient to construct one. But this could be determined only after a reconnoissance of the submerged forest by Richard Trevannion and the Mundurucú, who alone could make it.

To this the patron hardly consented, – indeed, he was not asked. There seemed to be a tacit understanding that it was the only course that could be adopted; and without further ado, the young Paraense, throwing off such of his garments as might impede him, sprang from the tree, and struck boldly out for the flooded forest. The Mundurucú, not being delayed by the necessity of stripping, had already taken to the water, and was fast cleaving his way across the open expanse that separated the solitary sapucaya from its more social companions.

Chapter Fourteen
A Fracas Heard from Afar

The castaways watched the explorers until they disappeared within the shadowy selvage. Then, having nothing else to do, they proceeded to make themselves as comfortable as circumstances would permit, by selecting for their seats the softest branches of the sapucaya. To be sure there was not much choice between the limbs, but the great fork, across which the galatea had broken, appeared to offer a position rather better than any other. As the swell was no longer to be dreaded, Trevannion descended into the fork, taking little Rosa along with him, while the others sat on higher limbs, holding by the branches or stout llianas growing above them. At best their situation was irksome, but physical inconvenience was hardly felt in their mental sufferings. Their reflections could not be other than painful as they contemplated the future. Their shelter in the sapucaya could be only temporary, and yet it might continue to the end of their lives. They had no assurance that they might be able to get out of it at all; and even if they should succeed in reaching the other trees, it might be only to find them forty feet deep in water. The prospect was deplorable and their forebodings gloomy.

For nearly an hour they exchanged no word. The only sound heard was an occasional scream from one of the pet birds, or the jabbering of the monkeys, of which there had been five or six, of different kinds, on the galatea. Two only had found refuge on the tree, – a beautiful little *Ouistiti*, and a larger one, of the genus *Ateles*, the black Coaita. The others, chained or otherwise confined, had gone down with the galatea. So, too, with the feathered favourites, of many rare and beautiful kinds, collected during the long voyage on the Upper Amazon, some of which had been bought at large prices from their Indian owners, to carry across the Atlantic. The caged had perished with the wreck, others by the tornado, and, like the *quadrumana*, only two of the birds had found an asylum on the tree. One was a splendid hyacinthine macaw, the *Araruna* of the Indians (*Macrocercus hyacinthinus*); the other a small paroquet, the very tiniest of its tribe, which had long divided with the little ouistiti the affections of Rosa.

About an hour had elapsed since the departure of the swimming scouts, with no signs of their return. The party cast anxious glances towards the place where they had last been seen, listening for any sounds from the thicket that concealed them. Once or twice they fancied they heard their voices, and then they were all sure they heard shouts, but mingling with some mysterious sounds in a loud, confused chorus. The coaita heard, and chattered in reply; so, too, did the ouistiti and paroquet; but the macaw seemed most disturbed, and once or twice, spreading its hyacinthine wings, rose into the air, and appeared determined to part from its *ci-devant* protectors. The call of Ralph, whose especial pet it was, allured it back to its perch, where, however, it only stayed in a state of screaming uncertainty. There was something strange in this behaviour, though in the anxiety of the hour but little heed was paid to it; and as the voices soon after ceased, the araruna became tranquillised, and sat quietly on the roost it had selected.

Once more, however, the shouting and strange cries came pealing across the water, and again the araruna gave evidence of excitement. This time the noise was of shorter duration, and soon terminated in complete tranquillity. Nearly two hours had now expired, and the countenances of all began to wear an expression of the most sombre character. Certainly they had heard the voices of Richard and the Mundurucú mingling with those unearthly sounds. There was time enough for them to have gone far into the unknown forest, and return. What could detain them? Their voices had been heard only in shouts and sharp exclamations, that proclaimed them to be in some critical, perhaps perilous situation. And now they were silent! Had they succumbed to some sad fate? Were they dead?

Chapter Fifteen
The Jararáca

There are bodily sensations stronger than many mental emotions. Such are hunger and thirst. The castaways in the tree-top began to experience both in an extreme degree. By good fortune, the means of satisfying them were within reach. With a "monkey-cup" emptied of its triangular kernels they could draw up water at will, and with its contents conquer the cravings of hunger. At his father's request, and stimulated by his own sensations, Ralph began climbing higher, to procure some of the huge fruit-capsules suspended – as is the case with most South American forest-trees – from the extremities of the branches. The boy was a bold and skilful climber among the crags and cliffs of his native Cordilleras. Still a tree did not come amiss to him, and in a twinkling he had ascended to the top branches of the sapucaya, the macaw making the ascent with him, perched upon his crown. All at once the bird began to scream, as if startled by some terrible apparition; and without losing an instant, it forsook its familiar place, and commenced fluttering around the top of the tree, still continuing its cries. What could be the cause? The boy looked above and about him, but could discover nothing. The screams of the araruna were instantly answered by the little paroquet in a tiny treble, but equally in accents of terror, while both the coaita and ouistiti, chattering in alarm, came bounding up the tree. The paroquet had already joined the macaw, and, as if in imitation of its great congener, flew fluttering among the top branches, in a state of the wildest excitement! Guided by the birds, that kept circling around one particular spot, the boy at length discovered the cause of the alarm; and the sight was one calculated to stir terror.

It was a serpent coiled around a lliana that stretched diagonally between two branches. It was of a yellowish-brown colour, near to that of the lliana itself; and but for its smooth, shining skin, and the elegant convolutions of its body, might have been mistaken for one parasite entwining another. Its head, however, was in motion, its long neck stretched out, apparently in readiness to seize upon one of the birds as soon as it should come within striking distance.

Ralph was not so much alarmed. A snake was no uncommon sight, and the one in question was not so monstrous as to appear very formidable. The first thought was to call off the birds, or in some way get them out of reach of the snake; for the imprudent creatures, instead of retreating from such a dangerous enemy, seemed determined to fling themselves upon its fangs, which Ralph could see erect and glistening, as at intervals it extended its jaws. The little paroquet was especially imprudent, recklessly approaching within a few inches of the serpent, and even alighting on the lliana around which it had warped itself. Ralph was ascending still higher, to take the bird in his hand, and carry it clear of the danger, when his climbing was suddenly arrested by a shout from Mozey, the Mozambique, that proclaimed both caution and terror. "Fo' you life doant, Mass'r Raff!" cried the negro, following up his exclamation of warning. "Fo' you life doant go near um! You no know what am dat ar snake? It am de *Jararáca*!"

"Jararáca!" mechanically rejoined Ralph.

"Ya – ya – de moas pisenous sarpin in all de valley ob de Amazon. I'se hear de Injine say so a score ob times. Come down, Mass'r! come down!"

Attracted by the screaming of the birds and the chattering of the monkeys, the others listened attentively below. But upon the negro's quick cry of warning, and the dialogue that ensued, Trevannion ascended higher, followed by Tipperary Tom, – Rosa remained alone below, in the fork where her father had left her. Trevannion, on coming in sight of the snake, at once recognised it as all that Mozey had alleged, – the most poisonous of the Amazon valley, – a species of *Craspedocephalus*. He knew it from having seen one before, which the Mundurucú had killed near Coary, and had described in similar terms, – adding that its bite was almost instantly fatal, that it will attack man or beast without

any provocation, that it can spring upon its enemy from a distance, and, finally, that it was more feared than any other creature in the country, not excepting the jaguar and jacaré!

The appearance of the reptile itself was sufficient to confirm this account. Its flat triangular head, connected with the body by a long thin neck, its glittering eyes and red forking tongue, projected at intervals more than an inch beyond its snout, gave the creature a monstrous and hideous aspect. It looked as if specially designed to cause death and destruction. It was not of great size, – scarcely six feet long, and not thicker than a girl's wrist; but it needed not bulk to make it dangerous. No one knew exactly what to do. All were without arms, or weapons of any kind. These had long since gone to the bottom of the Gapo; and for some minutes no movement was made except by young Ralph, who on being warned of his danger, had hastened to descend the tree. The birds were left to themselves, and still continued screaming and fluttering above. Up to this time the snake had remained motionless, except his oscillating head and neck. Its body now began to move, and the glittering folds slowly to relax their hold upon the lliana.

"Great God! he is coming down the tree!" The words had hardly left Trevannion's lips before the snake was seen crawling along the lliana, and the next moment transferring its body to a branch which grew slantingly from the main trunk. This was soon reached; and then, by means of another lliana lying parallel to it, the reptile continued its descent. All those who stood by the trunk hastily forsook the perilous place, and retreated outward along the branches. The jararáca seemed to take no note either of their presence or flight, but continued down the limb towards the fork of the main stem, where stood little Rosa. "O heavens!" cried Trevannion, in a voice of anguish, "my child is lost!"

The girl had risen to her feet, being already fearful of the danger threatening her friends above; but on looking up, she beheld the hideous reptile coming straight towards her. Her situation was most perilous. The lliana by which the snake was descending rose right up from the fork of the sapucaya. The child was even clasping it in her hand, to keep herself erect. The reptile could not pass without touching her. In fact, it must pass over her person to get down from the tree. There was no likelihood of its gliding on without striking her. Its well-known character – as the most malicious of venomous serpents – forbade the supposition. The snake was scarce ten feet above her head, still gliding onward and downward! It was at this crisis that her father had given voice to that despairing exclamation. He was about to scramble down to the trunk, with the design of launching himself upon the serpent, and grappling it with his naked hands, reckless of consequences, when a sign from Mozey, accompanied by some words quickly spoken, caused him to hesitate.

"No use, Mass'r!" cried the negro, "no use, – you be too late. Jump, lilly Rosy!" he continued, calling to the child in a loud, commanding voice. "It's you only chance. Jump into de water, an ole Mozey he come down sabe you. Jump!" To stimulate the child by his example, the negro, with his last word, sprang out from his branch and plunged into the water. In an instant he was upon the surface again, continuing his cries of encouragement. Rosa Trevannion was a girl of spirit; and, in this fearful alternative, hesitated not a moment to obey. Short as was the time, however, it would have proved too long had the snake continued its descent without interruption. Fortunately it did not. When its hideous head was close to the child's hand, where the latter grasped the lliana, it suddenly stopped, – not to prepare itself for the fatal dart, but because the negro's heavy fall had splashed much water against the tree, sprinkling child and jararáca too. It was the momentary surprise of this unexpected shower-bath that had checked the serpent, while Rosa dropped down into the Gapo, and was caught by her sable preserver.

Chapter Sixteen
Hold On!

Mozey's noble conduct elicited a cry of admiration. It was the more noble as the negro was a poor swimmer, and therefore risked his own life. But this produced another effect, and in the shout there was no tone of triumph. The child was perhaps only rescued from the reptile to be swallowed with her preserver by a monster far more; voracious, the ingulfing Gapo. Nor was it yet certain that she had been saved from the serpent. The jararáca is a snake eminently amphibious, alike at home on land or at sea. It might follow, and attack them in the water. Then, too, it would have a double advantage; for while it could swim like a fish, Mozey could just keep himself afloat, weighted as he was with his powerless burden. In view of this, Trevannion's heart was filled with most painful anxiety, and for some time neither he nor any beside him could think what course to pursue. It was some slight relief to them to perceive that the snake did not continue the pursuit into the water; for on reaching the fork of the tree it had thrown itself into a coil, as if determined to remain there.

At first there appeared no great advantage in this. In its position, the monster could prevent the swimmers from returning to the tree; and as it craned its long neck outward, and looked maliciously at the two forms struggling below, one could have fancied that it had set itself to carry out this exact design. For a short time only Trevannion was speechless, and then thought, speech, and action came together. "Swim round to the other side!" he shouted to the negro. "Get under the great branch. Ho, Tom! You and Ralph climb aloft to the one above. Tear off the lliana you see there, and let it down to me. Quick, quick!"

As he delivered these instructions, he moved out along the limb with as much rapidity as was consistent with safety, while Tipperary and Ralph climbed up to carry out his commands. The branch taken by Trevannion himself was that to which he had directed the negro to swim, and was the same by which Tipperary Tom had made his first ascent into the tree, and from which he had been washed off again. It extended horizontally outward, at its extremity dipping slightly towards the water. Though in the swell caused by the tornado it had been at intervals submerged, it was now too far above the surface to have been grasped by any one from below. The weight of Trevannion's body, as he crept outward upon it, brought it nearer to the water, but not near enough for a swimmer to lay hold. He saw that, by going too far out, the branch would not bear his own weight, and might snap short off, thus leaving the swimmers in a worse position than ever. It was for this reason he had ordered the untwining of the creeper that was clinging above. His orders were obeyed with the utmost alacrity by Tom and Ralph, as if their own lives depended on the speed. Almost before he was ready to receive it, the long lliana was wrenched from its tendril fastenings, and came straggling down over the branch on which he sat, like the stay of a ship loosened from her mast-head.

Meanwhile Mozey, – making as much noise as a young whale, blowing like a porpoise, spurting and spitting like an angry cat, – still carrying the child safe on his shoulders, had arrived under the limb, and, with strokes somewhat irregularly given and quickly repeated, was doing his very best to keep himself and her above water. It was evident to all, that the over-weighted swimmer was wellnigh exhausted; and had not the end of the long lliana plumped down in the nick of time, the Mozambique must indubitably have gone to the bottom, taking his charge with him. Just in time, however, the tree-cable came within his clutch, and, seizing it with all his remaining strength, Rosa relieved him of her weight by laying hold herself, and the two were drawn up into the tree amidst cries of "Hold on! hold on!" ending in general congratulation.

Chapter Seventeen
The Paroquet

Alas! there was one circumstance that hindered their triumph from being complete. The jararáca was still in the tree. So long as this terrible tenant shared their abode, there could be neither confidence nor comfort. There it lay coiled upon its scaly self, snugly ensconced in the fork below, with skin glittering brightly, and eyes gleaming fiercely in the golden sunlight that now fell slantingly against the tree. How long would the monster remain in this tranquil attitude, was the question that presented itself to the minds of all, as soon as the first transport of their joy had subsided. It was evident it had no intention of taking to the water, though it could have done so without fear. No doubt the sapucaya was its habitual haunt; and it was not likely to forsake it just to accommodate some half-score of strange creatures who had chosen to intrude. Surely some time or other it would re-ascend the tree, and then – ?

But all speculations on this point were soon interrupted. The little paroquet, which had shown such excitement on first discovering the snake, had been quiet while all were engaged in the salvage of Mozey and the child. Now that a certain quietness had been restored, the bird was seen returning to the jararáca for the supposed purpose of renewing its impotent attack. For some minutes it kept fluttering over the serpent, now alighting upon a branch, anon springing off again, and descending to one lower and nearer to the jararáca, until it had almost reached its head. Strange to say, there appeared no hostility in the bird's movements; its actions betrayed rather the semblance of fear, confirmed by the tremulous quivering of its frame whenever it came to rest upon a perch. The spectators' suspicion was further strengthened by the little creature's continued cries. It was not the angry chattering by which these birds usually convey their hostility, but a sort of plaintive screaming that betokened terror. At each flight it approached closer to the serpent's forked tongue, and then retreated, as if vacillating and irresolute.

The reptile meanwhile exhibited itself in a hideous attitude; yet a deep interest enchained the spectators. Its head had broadened, or flattened out to twice the natural dimensions; the eyes seemed to shoot forth twin jets of fire, while the extensile tongue, projected from a double row of white, angular teeth, appeared to shine with phosphorescent flame. The bird was being *charmed*, and was already under the serpent's fascination.

How could the pretty pet be saved? Young Ralph, noticing the despair upon his sister's face, was half inclined to rush down the tree, and give battle to the jararáca; and Tipperary Tom – whose general hostility to snakes and reptiles had a national and hereditary origin – purposed doing something to avert the paroquet's fast-approaching fate. Trevannion, however, was too prudent to permit any interference, while the negro appeared only anxious that the magic spectacle should reach its termination. It was not cruelty on his part. Mozey had his motives, which were soon after revealed, proving that the brain of the African is at times capable of conception equal, if not superior, to his boasted Caucasian brother. There was no interruption. The end was not far off. By slow degrees, the bird appeared to grow exhausted, until its wings could no longer sustain it. Then, as if paralysed by a final despair, it pitched itself right into the mouth of the reptile, whose jaws had been suddenly extended to receive it! There was a slight flutter of the wings, a tremulous motion of the body, and the self-immolated creature appeared to be dead. The serpent, half uncoiling itself, turned its head towards the tree, and, once more opening its jaws, permitted the now lifeless paroquet to escape from their clasp, and drop quietly into the crotch formed by the forking of the stem.

Chapter Eighteen
The Lliana Unloosed

The spectators of this little tragedy of animal life had hitherto prudently refrained from taking part in it. Curiosity now exerted an equal effect in preventing their interference; and without speech or motion they sat on their respective perches to observe the *finale* of the drama, which evidently had not ended with the death of the paroquet. That was but the beginning of the end, for the prey was yet to be devoured. Though provided with a double row of teeth, it is well-known that animals of the reptile kind do not masticate their food. These teeth, set trenchantly, as is commonly the case, are intended only to capture the living prey, which enters the stomach afterwards by a process termed deglutition. At the spectacle of just such a process, with all its preliminary preparations, were the group in the sapucaya now to be present, – the principal performer being apparently unconscious of, or at all events unconcerned at, their presence.

Having deposited the dead bird in the fork of the tree, the serpent changed its coiled attitude into one that would give it a chance of filling its belly with less inconvenience. There was not room for it to extend itself fully; and, in default of this, the tail was allowed to drop down along the stem of the tree, at least two thirds of the body remaining in a horizontal position. Having arranged itself apparently to its satisfaction, it now directed its attention to the paroquet. Once more taking the dead bird between its teeth, it turned it over and over until the head lay opposite to its own, the body aligned in a longitudinal direction. The jaws of the snake were now widely extended, while the tongue, loaded with saliva, was protruded and retracted with great rapidity. The serpent continued this licking process until the short feathers covering the head of the bird, as also its neck and shoulders, seemed to be saturated with a substance resembling soap or starch. When a sufficient coating had been laid on to satisfy the instincts of the serpent, the creature once more opened its jaws, and, making a sudden gulp, took in the head of the paroquet, with the neck and shoulders. For a time no further action was perceptible. Yet a movement was going on: and it was to assure himself of this that the Mozambique was so attentive.

We have said that he had a motive for permitting the pet to be sacrificed, which was now on the eve of being revealed to his companions. They all saw that there was something upon his mind, and eagerly anticipated the revelation. Just as the jararáca had succeeded in bolting the anterior portion of the paroquet, – that is, the head, neck, and shoulders, – Mozey rose from his seat, stole towards the stem of the tree, and let himself down toward the fork, without saying a word. His purpose, however, was manifest the moment after, for he stretched out his right hand, clutched the jararáca around the small of the neck, and flung the serpent – no longer capable of defending itself – far out into the waters of the Gapo! The monster, with its feathered morsel still in its mouth, sank instantly, to be seen no more; so thought Mozey and his associates in the sapucaya.

But, as the event proved, they had hastened to an erroneous conclusion. Scarce had their triumphant cheer echoed across the silent bosom of the Gapo, when the paroquet was observed floating upon the water; and the snake, having ejected the half-swallowed pill, was once more upon the surface, swimming with sinuous but brisk rendings of its body in rapid return to the tree. The situation seemed more alarming than ever. The fiend himself could hardly have shown a more implacable determination.

To all appearance the jararáca was now returning to take revenge for the insult and disappointment to which it had been subjected. Mozey, losing confidence in his own cunning, retreated up the tree. He perceived, now that it was too late, the imprudence of which he had been guilty. He should have permitted the snake to proceed a step further in the process of deglutition, until the disgorging of the paroquet, against the grain of its feathers, should have become impossible.

He had been too hasty, and must now answer the consequences. Sure enough, the serpent returned to the sapucaya and commenced reascending, availing itself of the lliana, by which all of its enemies had effected their ascent. In a few seconds it had mounted into the fork, and, still adhering to the parasite, was continuing its upward way.

"O heavens!" ejaculated Trevannion, "one of us must become the prey of this pitiless monster! What can be done to destroy it?"

"Dar's a chance yet, Mass'r," cried Mozey, who had suddenly conceived a splendid thought. "Dar's a chance yet. All ob you lay hold on de creepin' vine, an' pull um out from de tree. We chuck de varmint back into the water. Now den, – all togedder! Pull like good uns!"

As the negro spoke, he seized the lliana, by which the serpent was making its spiral ascent, and put out all his strength to detach it from the trunk of the sapucaya. The others instantly understood his design, and grasping the parasite, with a simultaneous effort tried to tear it off. A quick jerk broke the lliana loose; and the jararáca, shaken from its hold, was sent whirling and writhing through the air, till it fell with a plunging noise upon the water below. Once more a triumphant cheer went up through the sapucaya branches, once more to be stifled ere it had received the answer of its own echoes; for the jararáca was again seen upon the surface, as before, determinedly approaching the tree.

It was a sight for despair. There was something supernatural in the behaviour of the snake. It was a monster not to be conquered by human strength, nor circumvented by human cunning. Was there any use in continuing the attempt to subdue it? Mozey, a fatalist, felt half disposed to submit to a destiny that could not be averted; and even Tipperary Tom began to despair of the power of his prayers to Saint Patrick. The ex-miner, however, as well acquainted with the subterraneous regions as with upper earth, had no superstition to hinder him from action, and, instead of desponding he at once adopted the proper course. Catching hold of the creeper, that had already been loosened from the trunk, and calling upon the others to assist him, he tore the creeper entirely from the tree, flinging its severed stem far out upon the water. In a moment after, the snake came up, intending to climb into the sapucaya, as no doubt it had often done before. We wonder what were its feelings on finding that the ladder had been removed, and that an ascent of the smooth trunk of the sapucaya was no longer possible, even to a tree snake! After swimming round and round, and trying a variety of places, the discomfited jararáca turned away in apparent disgust; and, launching out on the bosom of the Gapo, swam off in the direction of the thicket, – on the identical track that had been taken by Richard and the Mundurucú.

Chapter Nineteen
Serpent Fascination

It was some time before Trevannion and his companions in misfortune could recover from the excitement and awe of their adventure. They began to believe that the strange tales told them of the Gapo and its denizens had more than a substratum of truth; for the protracted and implacable hostility shown by the snake, and its mysterious power over the bird, seemed surely supernatural. Trevannion reflected on the singular behaviour of the jararáca. That a reptile of such contemptible dimensions should exhibit so much cunning and courage as to return to the attack after being repeatedly foiled, and by an enemy so far its superior in strength and numbers, together with its hideous aspect, could not fail to impress him with a feeling akin to horror, in which all those around him shared. The very monkeys and birds must have felt it; for when in the presence of snakes, they had never before exhibited such trepidation and excitement. Long after the serpent had been pitched for the second time into the water, the coaita kept up its terrified gibbering, the macaw screamed, and the tiny ouistiti, returning to Rosa's protection, – no longer to be shared with its late rival, – sat trembling in her lap, as if the dreaded reptile were still within dangerous proximity.

This feeling was but temporary, however. Trevannion was a man of strong intellect, trained and cultivated by experience and education; and after a rational review of the circumstances, he became convinced that there was nothing very extraordinary, certainly nothing supernatural, in what transpired. The jararáca – as he had heard, and as everybody living on the Amazon knew – was one of the most venomous of serpents, if not the most venomous of all. Even the birds and beasts were acquainted with this common fact, and dreaded the reptile accordingly, not from mere *instinct*, but from actual knowledge possessed and communicated in some mysterious way to one another. This would account for the wild terror just exhibited, which in the case of the paroquet had come to a fatal end. There was a mystery about this for which Trevannion could not account. The power which the serpent appeared to have obtained over the bird, controlling its movements without any apparent action of its own, was beyond comprehension. Whether or not it be entitled to the name given it, —*fascination*, certainly it is a fact, – one that has been repeatedly observed, and to which not only birds, but quadrupeds, have been the victims; and not only by ordinary observers, but by men skilled in the knowledge of nature, who have been equally at a loss to account for it by natural causes. But this link in the chain of incidents, though mysterious, was not new nor peculiar to this situation. It had been known to occur in all countries and climes, and so soon ceased to excite any weird influence on the mind of Trevannion.

For the other circumstances that had occurred there was an explanation still more natural. The jararáca, peculiarly an inhabitant of the Gapo lands, had simply been sunning itself upon the sapucaya. It may have been prowling about in the water when overtaken by the tornado; and, not wishing to be carried away from its haunt, had sought a temporary shelter in the tree, to which an unlucky chance had guided the galatea. Its descent was due to the behaviour of the birds, which, after having for a time tantalised it, – provoking its spite, and in all likelihood its hungry appetite, – had temporarily suspended their attack, returning down the tree with Ralph and the negro. It was in pursuit of them, therefore, it had forsaken its original perch. The commotion caused by its descent, but more especially the ducking it had received, and the presence of the two human forms in the water below, had induced it to halt in the forking of the tree, where shortly after its natural prey again presented itself, – ending in an episode that was to it an ordinary occurrence. The choking it had received in the hands of the negro, and its unexpected immersion, had caused the involuntary rejection of the half-swallowed morsel. In the opaque water it had lost sight of the bird, and was returning to the sapucaya either in search of its food, or to reoccupy its resting-place.

It is well-known that the jararáca has no fear of man, but will attack him whenever he intrudes upon its domain. The Indians assert that it will even go out of its way for this purpose, unlike the rattlesnake and other venomous reptiles, which rarely exert their dangerous power except in self-defence. So this jararáca reascended the sapucaya undismayed by the human enemies it saw there, one or more of whom might have become its victims but for the timely removal of the lliana ladder.

On this review of facts and fancies, the equanimity of our adventurers was nearly restored. At all events, they were relieved from the horrible thoughts of the supernatural, that for a time held ascendancy over them. Their hunger and thirst again manifested themselves, though little Rosa and her preserver no longer suffered from the last. In their short excursion both had been repeatedly under water, and had swallowed enough to last them for that day at least. Yet they were in want of food, and Ralph once more climbed the tree to obtain it. He soon possessed himself of half a dozen of the huge nut capsules, which were tossed into the hands of those below, and, water being drawn up in one of the emptied shells, a meal was made, which if not hearty, was satisfactory. The group could do no more than await the return of their absent companions; and with eyes fixed intently and anxiously upon the dark water, and beneath the close-growing trees, they watched for the first ripple that might betoken their coming.

Chapter Twenty
The Water Arcade

We must leave for a time the castaways in the tree-top, and follow the fortunes of the two swimmers on their exploring expedition.

On reaching the edge of the submerged forest, their first thought was to clutch the nearest branch, and rest themselves by clinging to it. They were no longer in doubt as to the character of the scene that surrounded them, for their experience enabled them to comprehend it.

"The Gapo!" muttered Munday, as they glided in under the shadows. "No dry land here, young master," he added, clutching hold of a lliana. "We may as well look out for a roost, and rest ourselves. It's full ten fathoms deep. The Mundurucú can tell that by the sort of trees rising over it."

"I didn't expect anything else," rejoined young Trevannion, imitating his companion by taking hold of a branch and climbing up. "My only hope is that we may find some float timber to ferry the others across. Not that there's much in it if we do. How we're to find our way out of this mess is more than either you or I can tell."

"The Mundurucú never despairs, – not even in the middle of the Gapo," was the Indian's proud reply.

"You have hope, then? You think we shall find timber enough for a raft to carry us clear of the inundation."

"No!" answered the Indian. "We have got too far from the channel of the big river. We shall see no floating trees here, – nothing to make a raft that would carry us."

"Why then did we come here, if not for the purpose of finding dead timber for that object?"

"Dead timber? No! If that was our errand, we might go back as we've come, – empty-handed. We shall float all the people over here without that. Follow me, young master. We must go farther into the Gapo. Let old Munday show you how to construct a raft without trees, only making use of their fruit."

"Lead on!" cried the Paraense. "I'm ready to assist you; though I haven't the slightest conception of what you mean to do."

"You shall see presently, young master," rejoined Munday, once more spreading himself to swim. "Come on! follow me! If I'm not mistaken, we'll soon find the materials for a raft, – or something that will answer as well for the present. Come along, there! Come!" – and he launched himself into the water.

Trevannion followed his example, and, once more consigning himself to the flood, he swam on in the Indian's wake. Through aisles dimmed with a twilight like that of approaching night, along arcades covered with foliage so luxuriant as to be scarce penetrable by the rays of a tropic sun, the two swimmers, the Indian ever in advance, held their way.

To Richard Trevannion the Mundurucú was comparatively a stranger, known only as a *tapuyo* employed by his uncle in the management of the galatea. He knew the tribe by rumours even more than sinister. They were reputed in Pará to be the most bloodthirsty of savages, who took delight not only in the destruction of their enemies, but in keeping up a ghastly souvenir of hostility by preserving their heads. In the company of a Mundurucú, especially in such a place, – swimming under the sombre shadows of a submerged forest, – it can scarce be wondered at that the youth felt suspicion, if not actual fear. But Richard Trevannion was a boy of bold heart, and bravely awaited the *dénouement* of the dismal journey.

Their swim terminated at length, and the Indian, pointing to a tree, cried out: "Yonder – yonder is the very thing of which I was in search. Hoo-hoo! Covered with sipos too, – another thing we stand in need of, – cord and pitch both growing together. The Great Spirit is kind to us, young master."

"What is it?" demanded Richard. "I see a great tree, loaded with climbers as you say. But what of that? It is green, and growing. The wood is full of sap, and would scarce float itself; you can't construct a raft out of that. The sipos might serve well enough for rope; but the timber won't do, even if we had an axe to cut it down."

"The Mundurucú needs no axe, nor yet timber to construct his raft. All he wants here is the sap of that tree, and some of the sipos clinging to its branches. The timber we shall find on the sapucaya, after we go back. Look at the tree, young master! Do you not know it?"

The Paraense, thus appealed to, turned his eyes toward the tree, and scanned it more carefully. Festooned by many kinds of climbing plants, it was not so easy to distinguish its foliage from that of the parasites it upheld; enough of the leaves, however, appeared conspicuous to enable him to recognise the tree as one of the best known and most valuable to the inhabitants, not only of his native Pará, but of all the Amazonian region, "Certainly," he replied, "I see what sort of tree it is. It's the *Seringa*, – the tree from which they obtain caoutchouc. But what do you want with that? You can't make a raft out of India-rubber, can you?"

"You shall see, young master; you shall see!"

During this conversation the Mundurucú had mounted among the branches of the seringa, calling upon his companion to come after him, who hastily responded to the call.

Chapter Twenty One
The Syringe-Tree

The tree into whose top the swimmers had ascended was, as Richard had rightly stated, that from which the caoutchouc, or India-rubber, is obtained. It was the *Siphonia elastica*, of the order *Euphorbiaceae*, of the Amazonian valley. Not that the *Siphonia* is the only tree which produces the world-renowned substance, which has of late years effected almost a revolution in many arts, manufactures, and domestic economies of civilised life. There are numerous other trees, both in the Old and New World, most of them belonging to the famed family of the figs, which in some degree afford the caoutchouc of commerce. Of all, however, that yielded by the *Siphonia elastica* is the best, and commands the highest price among dealers. The young Paraense called it *Seringa*, and this is the name he had been accustomed to hear given to it. *Seringa* is simply the Portuguese for syringe, and the name has attached itself to the tree, because the use which the aborigines were first observed to make of the elastic tubes of the caoutchouc was that of squirts or syringes, the idea being suggested by their noticing the natural tubes formed by the sap around twigs, when flowing spontaneously from the tree. For syringes it is employed extensively to this day by Brazilians of all classes, who construct them by moulding the sap, while in its fluid state, into pear-shaped bottles, and inserting a piece of cane in the long neck.

The caoutchouc is collected in the simplest way, which affords a regular business to many Amazonians, chiefly native Indians, who dispose of it to the Portuguese or Brazilian traders. The time is in August, when the subsidence of the annual inundation permits approach to the trees; for the *Seringa* is one of those species that prefer the low flooded lands, though it is not altogether peculiar to the Gapo. It grows throughout the whole region of the Amazon, wherever the soil is alluvial and marshy. The India-rubber harvest, if we may use the term, continues throughout the dry months, during which time very large quantities of the sap are collected, and carried over to the export market of Pará. A number of trees growing within a prescribed circle are allotted to each individual, whose business it is – man, woman, or boy – to attend to the assigned set of trees; and this is the routine of their day's duty.

In the evening the trees are tapped; that is, a gash or incision is made in the bark, – each evening in a fresh place, – and under each is carefully placed a little clay cup, or else the shell of an *Ampullasia*, to catch the milky sap that oozes from the wound. After sunrise in the morning, the "milkers" again revisit the scene of operations, and empty all the cups into a large vessel, which is carried to one common receptacle. By this time the sap, which is still of a white colour, is of the consistency of cream, and ready for moulding. The collectors have already provided themselves with moulds of many kinds, according to the shape they wish the caoutchouc to assume, such as shoes, round balls, bottles with long necks, and the like. These are dipped into the liquid, a thin stratum of which adheres to them, to be made thicker by repeated immersions, until the proper dimensions are obtained. After the last coat has been laid on, lines and ornamental tracings are made upon the surface, while still in a soft state; and a rich brown colour is obtained by passing the articles repeatedly through a thick black smoke, given out by a fire of palm-wood, – several species of these trees being specially employed for this purpose. As the moulds are usually solid substances, and the shoes, balls, and bottles are cast *on*, and not *in* them, it may be wondered how the latter can be taken off, or the former got out. King George would have been as badly puzzled about this, as he was in regard to the apples in the pudding. The idea of the Amazonian aboriginal, though far more ingenious, is equally easy of explanation. His bottle-moulds are no better than balls of dried mud, or clay; and so too, the lasts upon which he fashions the India-rubber shoes. Half an hour's immersion in water is sufficient

to restore them to their original condition of soft mud; when a little scraping and washing completes the manufacture, and leaves the commodity in readiness for the merchant and the market.

The *Seringa* is not a tree of very distinguished appearance, and but for its valuable sap might be passed in a forest of Amazonia, where so many magnificent trees meet the eye, without eliciting a remark. Both in the colour of its bark and the outline of its leaves it bears a considerable resemblance to the European ash, – only that it grows to a far greater size, and with a stem that is branchless, often to the height of thirty or forty feet above the ground. The trunk of that on which the Mundurucú and his companion had climbed was under water to that depth, else they could not so easily have ascended. It was growing in its favourite situation, – the Gapo, – its top festooned, as we have said, with scores of parasitical plants, of many different species, forming a complete labyrinth of limbs, leaves, fruits, and flowers.

Chapter Twenty Two
A Battle with Birds

Scarce had the Paraense succeeded in establishing himself on the tree, when an exclamation from his companion, higher up among the branches, caused him to look aloft. “Hoo-hoo!” was the cry that came from the lips of the Mundurucú, in a tone of gratification.

“What is it, Munday?”

“Something good to eat, master?”

“I’m glad to hear it. I feel hungry enough in all conscience; and these sapucaya nuts don’t quite satisfy me. I’d like a little fish or flesh meat along with them.”

“It’s neither,” rejoined the Indian. “Something as good, though. It’s fowl! I’ve found an arara’s nest.”

“O, a macaw! But where is the bird? You haven’t caught it yet?”

“Haven’t I?” responded the Mundurucú, plunging his arm elbow-deep into a cavity in the tree-trunk; and dragging forth a half-fledged bird, nearly as big as a chicken. “Ah, a nest! young ones! Fat as butter too!”

“All right. We must take them back with us. Our friends in the sapucaya are hungry as we, and will be right glad to see such an addition to the larder.”

But Richard’s reply was unheard; for, from the moment that the Mundurucú had pulled the young macaw out of its nest, the creature set up such a screaming and flopping of its half-fledged wings, as to fill all the woods around. The discordant ululation was taken up and repeated by a companion within the cavity; and then, to the astonishment of the twain, half a score of similar screaming voices were heard issuing from different places higher up in the tree, where it was evident there were several other cavities, each containing a nest full of young araras.

“A regular breeding-place, a macaw-cot,” cried Richard, laughing as he spoke. “We’ll get squabs enough to keep us all for a week!”

The words had scarce passed his lips, when a loud clangour reverberated upon the air. It was a confused mixture of noises, – a screaming and chattering, – that bore some resemblance to the human voice; as if half a score of Punches were quarrelling with as many Judys at the same time. The sounds, when first heard, were at some distance; but before twenty could have been counted, they were uttered close to the ears of the Mundurucú, who was highest up, while the sun became partially obscured by the outspread wings of a score of great birds, hovering in hurried flight around the top of the seringa. There was no mystery about the matter. The new-comers were the parents of the young macaws – the owners of the nests – returning from a search for provender for their pets, whose piercing cries had summoned them in all haste to their home. As yet, neither the Indian nor his young companion conceived any cause for alarm. Foolish indeed to be frightened by a flock of birds! They were not allowed to indulge long in this comfortable equanimity; for, almost on the moment of their arrival above the tree, the united parentage of araras plunged down among the branches, and, with wing, beak, and talons, began an instant and simultaneous attack upon the intruders. The Indian was the first to receive their onset. Made in such a united and irresistible manner, it had the effect of causing him to let go the chick, which fell with a plunge into the water below. In its descent it was accompanied by half a dozen of the other birds, – its own parents, perhaps, and their more immediate friends, – and these, for the first time espying a second enemy farther down, directed their attack upon him. The force of the assailants was thus divided; the larger number continued their onslaught upon the Indian, though the young Paraense at the same time found his hands quite full enough in defending himself, considering that he carried nothing in the shape of a weapon, and that his body, like that of his comrade, was altogether unprotected by vestments. To be sure, the Mundurucú was

armed with a sharp knife, which he had brought along with him in his girdle; but this was of very little use against his winged enemies; and although he succeeded in striking down one or two of them, it was done rather by a blow of the fist than by the blade.

In a dozen seconds both had received almost as many scratches from the beaks and talons of the birds, which still continued the combat with a fury that showed no signs of relaxation or abatement. The Paraense did not stay either to take counsel or imitate the example of his more sage companion, but, hastily bending down upon the limb whereon he had been maintaining the unequal contest, he plunged headforemost into the water. Of course a “header” from such a height carried him under the surface; and his assailants, for the moment missing him, flew back into the tree-top, and joined in the assault on Munday. The latter, who had by this become rather sick of the contest, thinking of no better plan, followed his comrade’s example. Hastily he flung himself into the flood, and, first diving below the surface, came up beside the Paraense, and the two swam away side by side in silence, each leaving behind him a tiny string of red; for the blood was flowing freely from the scratches received in their strange encounter.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.