

CHAPTER VI AN UNEXPECTED PASSENGER

THE ladies passed the whole of the first day of the voyage in their berths, for there was a heavy swell in the sea, and toward evening the wind blew pretty fresh, and the DUNCAN tossed and pitched considerably.

But the morning after, the wind changed, and the captain ordered the men to put up the foresail, and brigantine and foretopsail, which greatly lessened the rolling of the vessel.

Lady Helena and Mary Grant were able to come on deck at daybreak, where they found Lord Glenarvan, Major McNabbs and the captain.

"And how do you stand the sea, Miss Mary?" said Lord Glenarvan.

"Pretty well, my Lord. I am not very much inconvenienced by it. Besides I shall get used to it."

"And our young Robert!"

"Oh, as for Robert," said the captain, "whenever he is not poking about down below in the engine-room, he is perched somewhere aloft among the rigging. A youngster like that laughs at sea-sickness. Why, look at him this very moment! Do you see him?"

The captain pointed toward the foremast, and sure enough there was Robert, hanging on the yards of the topgallant mast, a hundred feet above in the air. Mary involuntarily gave a start, but the captain said:

"Oh, don't be afraid, Miss Mary; he is all right, take my word for it; I'll have a capital sailor to present to Captain Grant before long, for we'll find the worthy captain, depend upon it."

"Heaven grant it, Mr. John," replied the young girl.

"My dear child," said Lord Glenarvan, "there is something so providential in the whole affair, that we have every reason to hope. We are not going, we are led; we are not searching, we are guided. And then see all the brave men that have enlisted in the service of the good cause. We shall not only succeed in our enterprise, but there will be little difficulty in it. I promised Lady Helena a pleasure trip, and I am much mistaken if I don't keep my word."

"Edward," said his wife, "you are the best of men."

"Not at all," was the reply; "but I have the best of crews and the best of ships. You don't admire the DUNCAN, I suppose, Miss Mary?"

"On the contrary, my lord, I do admire her, and I'm a connoisseur

in ships," returned the young girl.

"Indeed!"

"Yes. I have played all my life on my father's ships.

He should have made me a sailor, for I dare say, at a push, I could reef a sail or plait a gasket easily enough."

"Do you say so, miss?" exclaimed John Mangles.

"If you talk like that you and John will be great friends, for he can't think any calling is equal to that of a seaman; he can't fancy any other, even for a woman. Isn't it true, John?"

"Quite so," said the captain, "and yet, your Lordship, I must confess that Miss Grant is more in her place on the poop than reefing a topsail. But for all that, I am quite flattered by her remarks."

"And especially when she admires the DUNCAN," replied Glenarvan.

"Well, really," said Lady Glenarvan, "you are so proud of your yacht that you make me wish to look all over it; and I should like to go down and see how our brave men are lodged."

"Their quarters are first-rate," replied John, "they are as comfortable as if they were at home."

"And they really are at home, my dear Helena,"
said Lord Glenarvan. "This yacht is a portion of our old Caledonia,
a fragment of Dumbartonshire, making a voyage by special favor,
so that in a manner we are still in our own country.

The DUNCAN is Malcolm Castle, and the ocean is Loch Lomond."

"Very well, dear Edward, do the honors of the Castle then."

"At your service, madam; but let me tell Olbinett first."

The steward of the yacht was an excellent maitre d'hotel,
and might have been French for his airs of importance, but for all
that he discharged his functions with zeal and intelligence.

"Olbinett," said his master, as he appeared in answer to
his summons, "we are going to have a turn before breakfast.
I hope we shall find it ready when we come back."

He said this just as if it had been a walk to Tarbert or Loch Katrine
they were going, and the steward bowed with perfect gravity in reply.

"Are you coming with us, Major?" asked Lady Helena.

"If you command me," replied McNabbs.

"Oh!" said Lord Glenarvan; "the Major is absorbed in his cigar; you mustn't tear him from it. He is an inveterate smoker, Miss Mary, I can tell you. He is always smoking, even while he sleeps."

The Major gave an assenting nod, and Lord Glenarvan and his party went below.

McNabbs remained alone, talking to himself, as was his habit, and was soon enveloped in still thicker clouds of smoke. He stood motionless, watching the track of the yacht. After some minutes of this silent contemplation he turned round, and suddenly found himself face to face with a new comer. Certainly, if any thing could have surprised him, this RENCONTRE would, for he had never seen the stranger in his life before.

He was a tall, thin, withered-looking man, about forty years of age, and resembled a long nail with a big head. His head was large and massive, his forehead high, his chin very marked. His eyes were concealed by enormous round spectacles, and in his look was that peculiar indecision which is common to nyctalopes, or people who have a peculiar construction of the eye, which makes the sight imperfect in the day and better at night. It was evident from his physiognomy that he was a lively, intelligent man; he had not the crabbed expression of those grave individuals who never laugh on principle, and cover their emptiness with a mask of seriousness. He looked far from that.

His careless, good-humored air, and easy, unceremonious manners, showed plainly that he knew how to take men and things on their bright side. But though he had not yet opened his mouth, he gave one the impression of being a great talker, and moreover, one of those absent folks who neither see though they are looking, nor hear though they are listening. He wore a traveling cap, and strong, low, yellow boots with leather gaiters.

His pantaloons and jacket were of brown velvet, and their innumerable pockets were stuffed with note-books, memorandum-books, account-books, pocket-books, and a thousand other things equally cumbersome and useless, not to mention a telescope in addition, which he carried in a shoulder-belt.

The stranger's excitement was a strong contrast to the Major's placidity. He walked round McNabbs, looking at him and questioning him with his eyes without eliciting one remark from the imperturbable Scotchman, or awakening his curiosity in the least, to know where he came from, and where he was going, and how he had got on board the DUNCAN.

Finding all his efforts baffled by the Major's indifference, the mysterious passenger seized his telescope, drew it out to its fullest extent, about four feet, and began gazing at the horizon, standing motionless with his legs wide apart. His examination lasted some few minutes, and then he lowered the glass, set it up on deck, and leaned on it as if it had been a walking-stick. Of course, his weight shut up the instrument

immediately by pushing the different parts one into the other, and so suddenly, that he fell full length on deck, and lay sprawling at the foot of the mainmast.

Any one else but the Major would have smiled, at least, at such a ludicrous sight; but McNabbs never moved a muscle of his face.

This was too much for the stranger, and he called out, with an unmistakably foreign accent:

"Steward!"

He waited a minute, but nobody appeared, and he called again, still louder, "Steward!"

Mr. Olbinett chanced to be passing that minute on his way from the galley, and what was his astonishment at hearing himself addressed like this by a lanky individual of whom he had no knowledge whatever.

"Where can he have come from? Who is he?" he thought to himself.

"He can not possibly be one of Lord Glenarvan's friends?"

However, he went up on the poop, and approached the unknown personage, who accosted him with the inquiry, "Are you the steward of this vessel? "

"Yes, sir," replied Olbinett; "but I have not the honor of--"

"I am the passenger in cabin Number 6."

"Number 6!" repeated the steward.

"Certainly; and your name, what is it?"

"Olbinett."

"Well, Olbinett, my friend, we must think of breakfast, and that pretty quickly. It is thirty-six hours since I have had anything to eat, or rather thirty-six hours that I have been asleep-- pardonable enough in a man who came all the way, without stopping, from Paris to Glasgow. What is the breakfast hour?"

"Nine o'clock," replied Olbinett, mechanically.

The stranger tried to pull out his watch to see the time; but it was not till he had rummaged through the ninth pocket that he found it.

"Ah, well," he said, "it is only eight o'clock at present.

Fetch me a glass of sherry and a biscuit while I am waiting, for I am actually falling through sheer inanition."

Olbinett heard him without understanding what he meant for the voluble stranger kept on talking incessantly, flying from one subject to another.

"The captain? Isn't the captain up yet? And the chief officer? What is he doing? Is he asleep still? It is fine weather, fortunately, and the wind is favorable, and the ship goes all alone."

Just at that moment John Mangles appeared at the top of the stairs.

"Here is the captain!" said Olbinett.

"Ah! delighted, Captain Burton, delighted to make your acquaintance," exclaimed the unknown.

John Mangles stood stupefied, as much at seeing the stranger on board as at hearing himself called "Captain Burton."

But the new comer went on in the most affable manner.

"Allow me to shake hands with you, sir; and if I did not do so yesterday evening, it was only because I did not wish to be troublesome when you were starting. But to-day, captain, it gives me great pleasure to begin my intercourse with you."

John Mangles opened his eyes as wide as possible, and stood staring at Olbinett and the stranger alternately.

But without waiting for a reply, the rattling fellow continued:

"Now the introduction is made, my dear captain, we are old friends. Let's have a little talk, and tell me how you like the SCOTIA?"

"What do you mean by the SCOTIA?" put in John Mangles at last.

"By the SCOTIA? Why, the ship we're on, of course--a good ship that has been commended to me, not only for its physical qualities, but also for the moral qualities of its commander, the brave Captain Burton. You will be some relation of the famous African traveler of that name. A daring man he was, sir. I offer you my congratulations."

"Sir," interrupted John. "I am not only no relation of Burton the great traveler, but I am not even Captain Burton."

"Ah, is that so? It is Mr. Burdness, the chief officer, that I am talking to at present."

"Mr. Burdness!" repeated John Mangles, beginning to suspect how the matter stood. Only he asked himself whether the man was mad, or some heedless rattle pate? He was beginning to explain the case in a categorical manner, when Lord Glenarvan and his party came up on the poop.

The stranger caught sight of them directly, and exclaimed:

"Ah! the passengers, the passengers! I hope you are going to introduce me to them, Mr. Burdness!"

But he could not wait for any one's intervention, and going up to them with perfect ease and grace, said, bowing to Miss Grant, "Madame;" then to Lady Helena, with another bow, "Miss;" and to Lord Glenarvan, "Sir."

Here John Mangles interrupted him, and said, "Lord Glenarvan."

"My Lord," continued the unknown, "I beg pardon for presenting myself to you, but at sea it is well to relax the strict rules of etiquette a little. I hope we shall soon become acquainted with each other, and that the company of these ladies will make our voyage in the SCOTIA appear as short as agreeable."

Lady Helena and Miss Grant were too astonished to be able to utter a single word. The presence of this intruder on the poop of the DUNCAN was perfectly inexplicable.

Lord Glenarvan was more collected, and said, "Sir, to whom have I the honor of speaking?"

"To Jacques Eliacin Francois Marie Paganel, Secretary of the Geographical Society of Paris, Corresponding Member of the Societies

of Berlin, Bombay, Darmstadt, Leipsic, London, St. Petersburg, Vienna, and New York; Honorary Member of the Royal Geographical and Ethnographical Institute of the East Indies; who, after having spent twenty years of his life in geographical work in the study, wishes to see active service, and is on his way to India to gain for the science what information he can by following up the footsteps of great travelers."