

CHAPTER VII JACQUES PAGANEL IS UNDECEIVED

THE Secretary of the Geographical Society was evidently an amiable personage, for all this was said in a most charming manner. Lord Glenarvan knew quite well who he was now, for he had often heard Paganel spoken of, and was aware of his merits. His geographical works, his papers on modern discoveries, inserted in the reports of the Society, and his world-wide correspondence, gave him a most distinguished place among the LITERATI of France.

Lord Glenarvan could not but welcome such a guest, and shook hands cordially.

"And now that our introductions are over," he added, "you will allow me, Monsieur Paganel, to ask you a question?"

"Twenty, my Lord, " replied Paganel; "it will always be a pleasure to converse with you."

"Was it last evening that you came on board this vessel?"

"Yes, my Lord, about 8 o'clock. I jumped into a cab at the Caledonian Railway, and from the cab into the SCOTIA, where I had booked my cabin before I left Paris. It was a dark night, and I saw no one on board, so I found cabin No. 6, and went

to my berth immediately, for I had heard that the best way to prevent sea-sickness is to go to bed as soon as you start, and not to stir for the first few days; and, moreover, I had been traveling for thirty hours. So I tucked myself in, and slept conscientiously, I assure you, for thirty-six hours."

Paganel's listeners understood the whole mystery, now, of his presence on the DUNCAN. The French traveler had mistaken his vessel, and gone on board while the crew were attending the service at St. Mungo's. All was explained. But what would the learned geographer say, when he heard the name and destination of the ship, in which he had taken passage?

"Then it is Calcutta, M. Paganel, that you have chosen as your point of departure on your travels?"

"Yes, my Lord, to see India has been a cherished purpose with me all my life. It will be the realization of my fondest dreams, to find myself in the country of elephants and Thugs."

"Then it would be by no means a matter of indifference to you, to visit another country instead."

"No, my Lord; indeed it would be very disagreeable, for I have letters from Lord Somerset, the Governor-General, and also a commission to execute for the Geographical Society."

"Ah, you have a commission."

"Yes, I have to attempt a curious and important journey, the plan of which has been drawn up by my learned friend and colleague, M. Vivien de Saint Martin. I am to pursue the track of the Schlaginweit Brothers; and Colonels Waugh and Webb, and Hodgson; and Huc and Gabet, the missionaries; and Moorecroft and M. Jules Remy, and so many celebrated travelers. I mean to try and succeed where Krick, the missionary so unfortunately failed in 1846; in a word, I want to follow the course of the river Yarou-Dzangbo-Tchou, which waters Thibet for a distance of 1500 kilometres, flowing along the northern base of the Himalayas, and to find out at last whether this river does not join itself to the Brahmapoutre in the northeast of As-sam. The gold medal, my Lord, is promised to the traveler who will succeed in ascertaining a fact which is one of the greatest DESIDERATA to the geography of India."

Paganel was magnificent. He spoke with superb animation, soaring away on the wings of imagination. It would have been as impossible to stop him as to stop the Rhine at the Falls of Schaffhausen.

"Monsieur Jacques Paganel," said Lord Glenarvan, after a brief pause, "that would certainly be a grand achievement, and you would confer a great boon on science, but I should not

like to allow you to be laboring under a mistake any longer, and I must tell you, therefore, that for the present at least, you must give up the pleasure of a visit to India."

"Give it up. And why?"

"Because you are turning your back on the Indian peninsula."

"What! Captain Burton."

"I am not Captain Burton," said John Mangles.

"But the SCOTIA."

"This vessel is not the SCOTIA."

It would be impossible to depict the astonishment of Paganel. He stared first at one and then at another in the utmost bewilderment.

Lord Glenarvan was perfectly grave, and Lady Helena and Mary showed their

sympathy for his vexation by their looks. As for John Mangles, he could not suppress a smile; but the Major appeared as unconcerned as usual.

At last the poor fellow shrugged his shoulders, pushed down his spectacles over his nose and said:

"You are joking."

But just at that very moment his eye fell on the wheel of the ship,
and he saw the two words on it:

Duncan.

Glasgow.

"The DUNCAN! the DUNCAN!" he exclaimed, with a cry of despair,
and forthwith rushed down the stairs, and away to his cabin.

As soon as the unfortunate SAVANT had disappeared, every one,
except the Major, broke out into such peals of laughter that
the sound reached the ears of the sailors in the fore-castle.

To mistake a railway or to take the train to Edinburgh when you
want to go to Dumbarton might happen; but to mistake a ship
and be sailing for Chili when you meant to go to India--
that is a blunder indeed!

"However," said Lord Glenarvan, "I am not much astonished
at it in Paganel. He is quite famous for such misadventures.
One day he published a celebrated map of America, and put Japan in it!
But for all that, he is distinguished for his learning,
and he is one of the best geographers in France."

"But what shall we do with the poor gentleman?" said Lady Helena;
"we can't take him with us to Patagonia."

"Why not?" replied McNabbs, gravely. "We are not responsible for his heedless mistakes. Suppose he were in a railway train, would they stop it for him?"

"No, but he would get out at the first station."

"Well, that is just what he can do here, too, if he likes; he can disembark at the first place where we touch."

While they were talking, Paganel came up again on the poop, looking very woebegone and crestfallen. He had been making inquiry about his luggage, to assure himself that it was all on board, and kept repeating incessantly the unlucky words, "The DUNCAN! the DUNCAN!"

He could find no others in his vocabulary. He paced restlessly up and down; sometimes stopping to examine the sails, or gaze inquiringly over the wide ocean, at the far horizon. At length he accosted Lord Glenarvan once more, and said--

"And this DUNCAN--where is she going?"

"To America, Monsieur Paganel," was the reply.

"And to what particular part?"

"To Concepcion."

"To Chili! to Chili!" cried the unfortunate geographer.

"And my mission to India. But what will M. de Quatre-fages, the President of the Central Commission, say?

And M. d' Avezac? And M. Cortanbert? And M. Vivien de Saint Martin? How shall I show my face at the SEANCES of the Society?"

"Come, Monsieur Paganel, don't despair. It can all be managed; you will only have to put up with a little delay, which is relatively of not much importance. The Yarou-Dzangbo-Tchou will wait for you still in the mountains of Thibet. We shall soon put in at Madeira, and you will get a ship there to take you back to Europe."

"Thanks, my Lord. I suppose I must resign myself to it; but people will say it is a most extraordinary adventure, and it is only to me such things happen. And then, too, there is a cabin taken for me on board the SCOTIA."

"Oh, as to the SCOTIA, you'll have to give that up meantime."

"But the DUNCAN is a pleasure yacht, is it not?" began Paganel again, after a fresh examination of the vessel.

"Yes, sir," said John Mangles, "and belongs to Lord Glenarvan."

"Who begs you will draw freely on his hospitality," said Lord Glenarvan.

"A thousand thanks, my Lord! I deeply feel your courtesy, but allow me to make one observation: India is a fine country, and can offer many a surprising marvel to travelers. These ladies, I suppose, have never seen it. Well now, the man at the helm has only to give a turn at the wheel, and the DUNCAN will sail as easily to Calcutta as to Concepcion; and since it is only a pleasure trip that you are--"

His proposal was met by such grave, disapproving shakes of the head, that he stopped short before the sentence was completed; and Lady Helena said:

"Monsieur Paganel, if we were only on a pleasure trip, I should reply, 'Let us all go to India together,' and I am sure Lord Glenarvan would not object; but the DUNCAN is going to bring back shipwrecked mariners who were cast away on the shores of Patagonia, and we could not alter such a destination."

The Frenchman was soon put in possession of all the circumstances of the case. He was no unmoved auditor, and when he heard of Lady Helena's generous proposition, he could not help saying,

"Madame, permit me to express my admiration of your conduct throughout-- my unreserved admiration. Let your yacht continue her course. I should reproach myself were I to cause a single day's delay."

"Will you join us in our search, then?" asked Lady Helena.

"It is impossible, madame. I must fulfill my mission. I shall disembark at the first place you touch at, wherever it may be."

"That will be Madeira," said John Mangles.

"Madeira be it then. I shall only be 180 leagues from Lisbon, and I shall wait there for some means of transport."

"Very well, Monsieur Paganel, it shall be as you wish; and, for my own part, I am very glad to be able to offer you, meantime, a few days' hospitality. I only hope you will not find our company too dull."

"Oh, my Lord," exclaimed Paganel, "I am but too happy to have made a mistake which has turned out so agreeably. Still, it is a very ridiculous plight for a man to be in, to find himself sailing to America when he set out to go to the East Indies!"

But in spite of this melancholy reflection, the Frenchman submitted gracefully to the compulsory delay. He made himself amiable and merry, and even diverting, and enchanted the ladies with his good humor.

Before the end of the day he was friends with everybody.

At his request, the famous document was brought out.

He studied it carefully and minutely for a long time, and finally declared his opinion that no other interpretation of it was possible.

Mary Grant and her brother inspired him with the most lively interest.

He gave them great hope; indeed, the young girl could not help smiling at his sanguine prediction of success, and this odd way of foreseeing future events. But for his mission he would have made one of the search party for Captain Grant, undoubtedly.

As for Lady Helena, when he heard that she was a daughter of William Tuffnell, there was a perfect explosion of admiring epithets.

He had known her father, and what letters had passed between them when William Tuffnell was a corresponding member of the Society! It was he himself that had introduced him and M. Malte Brun. What a rencontre this was, and what a pleasure to travel with the daughter of Tuffnell.

He wound up by asking permission to kiss her, which Lady Helena granted, though it was, perhaps, a little improper.