

CHAPTER IX THROUGH THE STRAITS OF MAGELLAN

THE joy on board was universal when Paganel's resolution was made known.

Little Robert flung himself on his neck in such tumultuous delight that he nearly threw the worthy secretary down, and made him say, "Rude petit bonhomme. I'll teach him geography."

Robert bade fair to be an accomplished gentleman some day, for John Mangles was to make a sailor of him, and the Major was to teach him sang-froid, and Glenarvan and Lady Helena were to instil into him courage and goodness and generosity, while Mary was to inspire him with gratitude toward such instructors.

The DUNCAN soon finished taking in coal, and turned her back on the dismal region. She fell in before long with the current from the coast of Brazil, and on the 7th of September entered the Southern hemisphere.

So far, then, the voyage had been made without difficulty.

Everybody was full of hope, for in this search for Captain Grant, each day seemed to increase the probability of finding him.

The captain was among the most confident on board, but his confidence mainly arose from the longing desire he had to see Miss Mary happy.

He was smitten with quite a peculiar interest for this young girl, and managed to conceal his sentiments so well that everyone on board saw it except himself and Mary Grant.

As for the learned geographer, he was probably the happiest man in all the southern hemisphere. He spent the whole day in studying maps, which were spread out on the saloon table, to the great annoyance of M. Olbinett, who could never get the cloth laid for meals, without disputes on the subject.

But all the passengers took his part except the Major, who was perfectly indifferent about geographical questions, especially at dinner-time. Paganel also came across a regular cargo of old books in the chief officer's chest.

They were in a very damaged condition, but among them he raked out a few Spanish volumes, and determined forthwith to set to work to master the language of Cervantes, as no one on board understood it, and it would be helpful in their search along the Chilian coast. Thanks to his taste for languages, he did not despair of being able to speak the language fluently when they arrived at Concepcion. He studied it furiously, and kept constantly muttering heterogeneous syllables.

He spent his leisure hours in teaching young Robert, and instructed him in the history of the country they were so rapidly approaching.

On the 25th of September, the yacht arrived off

the Straits of Magellan, and entered them without delay.

This route is generally preferred by steamers on their way to the Pacific Ocean. The exact length of the straits is 372 miles.

Ships of the largest tonnage find, throughout, sufficient depth of water, even close to the shore, and there is a good bottom everywhere, and abundance of fresh water, and rivers abounding in fish, and forests in game, and plenty of safe and accessible harbors; in fact a thousand things which are lacking in Strait Lemaire and Cape Horn, with its terrible rocks, incessantly visited by hurricane and tempest.

For the first three or four hours--that is to say, for about sixty to eighty miles, as far as Cape Gregory--the coast on either side was low and sandy. Jacques Paganel would not lose a single point of view, nor a single detail of the straits.

It would scarcely take thirty-six hours to go through them, and the moving panorama on both sides, seen in all the clearness and glory of the light of a southern sun, was well worth the trouble of looking at and admiring. On the Terra del Fuego side, a few wretched-looking creatures were wandering about on the rocks, but on the other side not a solitary inhabitant was visible.

Paganel was so vexed at not being able to catch a glimpse of any Patagonians, that his companions were quite amused at him. He would insist that Patagonia without Patagonians was not Patagonia at all.

But Glenarvan replied:

"Patience, my worthy geographer. We shall see the Patagonians yet."

"I am not sure of it."

"But there is such a people, anyhow," said Lady Helena.

"I doubt it much, madam, since I don't see them."

"But surely the very name Patagonia, which means 'great feet' in Spanish, would not have been given to imaginary beings."

"Oh, the name is nothing," said Paganel, who was arguing simply for the sake of arguing. "And besides, to speak the truth, we are not sure if that is their name."

"What an idea!" exclaimed Glenarvan. "Did you know that, Major?"

"No," replied McNabbs, "and wouldn't give a Scotch pound-note for the information."

"You shall hear it, however, Major Indifferent. Though Magellan called the natives Patagonians, the Fuegians called them Tiremenen, the Chilians Caucahues, the colonists of Carmen Tehuelches, the Araucans Huiliches; Bougainville gives them the name of Chauha,

and Falkner that of Tehuelhets. The name they give themselves is Inaken. Now, tell me then, how would you recognize them? Indeed, is it likely that a people with so many names has any actual existence?"

"That's a queer argument, certainly," said Lady Helena.

"Well, let us admit it," said her husband, "but our friend Paganel must own that even if there are doubts about the name of the race there is none about their size."

"Indeed, I will never own anything so outrageous as that," replied Paganel.

"They are tall," said Glenarvan.

"I don't know that."

"Are they little, then?" asked Lady Helena.

"No one can affirm that they are."

"About the average, then?" said McNabbs.

"I don't know that either."

"That's going a little too far," said Glenarvan. "Travelers who have seen them tell us."

"Travelers who have seen them," interrupted Paganel, "don't agree at all in their accounts. Magellan said that his head scarcely reached to their waist."

"Well, then, that proves."

"Yes, but Drake declares that the English are taller than the tallest Patagonian?"

"Oh, the English--that may be," replied the Major, disdainfully, "but we are talking of the Scotch."

"Cavendish assures us that they are tall and robust," continued Paganel. "Hawkins makes out they are giants. Lemaire and Shouten declare that they are eleven feet high."

"These are all credible witnesses," said Glenarvan.

"Yes, quite as much as Wood, Narborough, and Falkner, who say they are of medium stature. Again, Byron, Giraudais, Bougainville, Wallis, and Carteret, declared that the Patagonians are six feet six inches tall."

"But what is the truth, then, among all these contradictions?"

asked Lady Helena.

"Just this, madame; the Patagonians have short legs, and a large bust; or by way of a joke we might say that these natives are six feet high when they are sitting, and only five when they are standing."

"Bravo! my dear geographer," said Glenarvan. "That is very well put."

"Unless the race has no existence, that would reconcile all statements," returned Paganel. "But here is one consolation, at all events: the Straits of Magellan are very magnificent, even without Patagonians."

Just at this moment the DUNCAN was rounding the peninsula of Brunswick between splendid panoramas.

Seventy miles after doubling Cape Gregory, she left on her starboard the penitentiary of Punta Arena. The church steeple and the Chilian flag gleamed for an instant among the trees, and then the strait wound on between huge granitic masses which had an imposing effect. Cloud-capped mountains appeared, their heads white with eternal snows, and their feet hid in immense forests. Toward the southwest, Mount Tarn rose 6,500 feet high. Night came on after a long lingering twilight, the light insensibly melting away into soft shades. These brilliant constellations began to bestud the sky, and the Southern Cross shone out. There were numerous bays along the shore, easy of access, but the yacht

did not drop anchor in any; she continued her course fearlessly through the luminous darkness. Presently ruins came in sight, crumbling buildings, which the night invested with grandeur, the sad remains of a deserted settlement, whose name will be an eternal protest against these fertile shores and forests full of game.

The DUNCAN was passing Fort Famine.

It was in that very spot that Sarmiento, a Spaniard, came in 1581, with four hundred emigrants, to establish a colony.

He founded the city of St. Philip, but the extreme severity of winter decimated the inhabitants, and those who had struggled through the cold died subsequently of starvation.

Cavendish the Corsair discovered the last survivor dying of hunger in the ruins.

After sailing along these deserted shores, the DUNCAN went through a series of narrow passes, between forests of beech and ash and birch, and at length doubled Cape Froward, still bristling with the ice of the last winter. On the other side of the strait, in Terra del Fuego, stood Mount Sarmiento, towering to a height of 6,000 feet, an enormous accumulation of rocks, separated by bands of cloud, forming a sort of aerial archipelago in the sky.

It is at Cape Froward that the American continent actually terminates, for Cape Horn is nothing but a rock sunk in the sea in latitude 52 degrees. At Cape Momax the straits widened,

and she was able to get round Narborough Isles and advance
in a more southerly direction, till at length the rock
of Cape Pilaes, the extreme point of Desolation Island,
came in sight, thirty-six hours after entering the straits.
Before her stem lay a broad, open, sparkling ocean,
which Jacques Paganel greeted with enthusiastic gestures,
feeling kindred emotions with those which stirred the bosom
of Ferdinand de Magellan himself, when the sails of his ship,
the TRINIDAD, first bent before the breeze from the great Pacific.