

## CHAPTER X THE COURSE DECIDED

A WEEK after they had doubled the Cape Pilares, the DUNCAN steamed into the bay of Talcahuano, a magnificent estuary, twelve miles long and nine broad. The weather was splendid. From November to March the sky is always cloudless, and a constant south wind prevails, as the coast is sheltered by the mountain range of the Andes. In obedience to Lord Glenarvan's order, John Mangles had sailed as near the archipelago of Chiloe as possible, and examined all the creeks and windings of the coast, hoping to discover some traces of the shipwreck. A broken spar, or any fragment of the vessel, would have put them in the right track; but nothing whatever was visible, and the yacht continued her route, till she dropped anchor at the port of Talcahuano, forty-two days from the time she had sailed out of the fogs of the Clyde.

Glenarvan had a boat lowered immediately, and went on shore, accompanied by Paganel. The learned geographer gladly availed himself of the opportunity of making use of the language he had been studying so conscientiously, but to his great amazement, found he could not make himself understood by the people.

"It is the accent I've not got," he said.

"Let us go to the Custom-house," replied Glenarvan.

They were informed on arriving there, by means of a few English words, aided by expressive gestures, that the British Consul lived at Concepcion, an hour's ride distant. Glenarvan found no difficulty in procuring two fleet horses, and he and Paganel were soon within the walls of the great city, due to the enterprising genius of Valdivia, the valiant comrade of the Pizarros.

How it was shorn of its ancient splendor! Often pillaged by the natives, burned in 1819, it lay in desolation and ruins, its walls still blackened by the flames, scarcely numbering 8,000 inhabitants, and already eclipsed by Talcahuano. The grass was growing in the streets, beneath the lazy feet of the citizens, and all trade and business, indeed any description of activity, was impossible. The notes of the mandolin resounded from every balcony, and languishing songs floated on the breeze. Concepcion, the ancient city of brave men, had become a village of women and children. Lord Glenarvan felt no great desire to inquire into the causes of this decay, though Paganel tried to draw him into a discussion on the subject. He would not delay an instant, but went straight on to the house of Mr. Bentic, her Majesty's Consul, who received them very courteously, and, on learning their errand, undertook to make inquiries all along the coast.

But to the question whether a three-mast vessel, called the BRITANNIA,

had gone ashore either on the Chilian or Araucanian coast, he gave a decided negative. No report of such an event had been made to him, or any of the other consuls. Glenarvan, however, would not allow himself to be disheartened; he went back to Talcahuano, and spared neither pains nor expense to make a thorough investigation of the whole seaboard. But it was all in vain. The most minute inquiries were fruitless, and Lord Glenarvan returned to the yacht to report his ill success. Mary Grant and her brother could not restrain their grief. Lady Helena did her best to comfort them by loving caresses, while Jacques Paganel took up the document and began studying it again. He had been poring over it for more than an hour when Glenarvan interrupted him and said:

"Paganel! I appeal to your sagacity. Have we made an erroneous interpretation of the document? Is there anything illogical about the meaning?"

Paganel was silent, absorbed in reflection.

"Have we mistaken the place where the catastrophe occurred?" continued Glenarvan. "Does not the name Patagonia seem apparent even to the least clear-sighted individual?"

Paganel was still silent.

"Besides," said Glenarvan, "does not the word INDIEN prove

we are right?"

"Perfectly so," replied McNabbs.

"And is it not evident, then, that at the moment of writing the words, the shipwrecked men were expecting to be made prisoners by the Indians?"

"I take exception to that, my Lord," said Paganel;  
"and even if your other conclusions are right, this, at least, seemed to me irrational."

"What do you mean?" asked Lady Helena, while all eyes were fixed on the geographer.

"I mean this," replied Paganel, "that Captain Grant is now a prisoner among the Indians, and I further add that the document states it unmistakably."

"Explain yourself, sir," said Mary Grant.

"Nothing is plainer, dear Mary. Instead of reading the document seront prisonniers, read sont prisonniers, and the whole thing is clear."

"But that is impossible," replied Lord Glenarvan.

"Impossible! and why, my noble friend?" asked Paganel, smiling.

"Because the bottle could only have been thrown into the sea just when the vessel went to pieces on the rocks, and consequently the latitude and longitude given refer to the actual place of the shipwreck."

"There is no proof of that," replied Paganel, "and I see nothing to preclude the supposition that the poor fellows were dragged into the interior by the Indians, and sought to make known the place of their captivity by means of this bottle."

"Except this fact, my dear Paganel, that there was no sea, and therefore they could not have flung the bottle into it."

"Unless they flung it into rivers which ran into the sea," returned Paganel.

This reply was so unexpected, and yet so admissible, that it made them all completely silent for a minute, though their beaming eyes betrayed the rekindling of hope in their hearts. Lady Helena was the first to speak.

"What an idea!" she exclaimed.

"And what a good idea," was Paganel's naive rejoinder to her exclamation.

"What would you advise, then?" said Glenarvan.

"My advice is to follow the 37th parallel from the point where it touches the American continent to where it dips into the Atlantic, without deviating from it half a degree, and possibly in some part of its course we shall fall in with the shipwrecked party."

"There is a poor chance of that," said the Major.

"Poor as it is," returned Paganel, "we ought not to lose it.

If I am right in my conjecture, that the bottle has been carried into the sea on the bosom of some river, we cannot fail to find the track of the prisoners. You can easily convince yourselves of this by looking at this map of the country."

He unrolled a map of Chili and the Argentine provinces as he spoke, and spread it out on the table.

"Just follow me for a moment," he said, "across the American continent.

Let us make a stride across the narrow strip of Chili,

and over the Cordilleras of the Andes, and get into the heart of

the Pampas. Shall we find any lack of rivers and streams and currents?

No, for here are the Rio Negro and Rio Colorado, and their tributaries

intersected by the 37th parallel, and any of them might have carried

the bottle on its waters. Then, perhaps, in the midst of a tribe

in some Indian settlement on the shores of these almost unknown rivers,

those whom I may call my friends await some providential intervention. Ought we to disappoint their hopes? Do you not all agree with me that it is our duty to go along the line my finger is pointing out at this moment on the map, and if after all we find I have been mistaken, still to keep straight on and follow the 37th parallel till we find those we seek, if even we go right round the world?"

His generous enthusiasm so touched his auditors that, involuntarily, they rose to their feet and grasped his hands, while Robert exclaimed as he devoured the map with his eyes:

"Yes, my father is there!"

"And where he is," replied Glenarvan, "we'll manage to go, my boy, and find him. Nothing can be more logical than Paganel's theory, and we must follow the course he points out without the least hesitation. Captain Grant may have fallen into the hands of a numerous tribe, or his captors may be but a handful. In the latter case we shall carry him off at once, but in the event of the former, after we have reconnoitered the situation, we must go back to the DUNCAN on the eastern coast and get to Buenos Ayres, where we can soon organize a detachment of men, with Major McNabbs at their head, strong enough to tackle all the Indians in the Argentine provinces."

"That's capital, my Lord," said John Mangles, "and I may add, that there is no danger whatever crossing the continent."

"Monsieur Paganel," asked Lady Helena, "you have no fear then that if the poor fellows have fallen into the hands of the Indians their lives at least have been spared."

"What a question? Why, madam, the Indians are not anthropophagi! Far from it. One of my own countrymen, M. Guinnard, associated with me in the Geographical Society, was three years a prisoner among the Indians in the Pampas. He had to endure sufferings and ill-treatment, but came off victorious at last. A European is a useful being in these countries. The Indians know his value, and take care of him as if he were some costly animal."

"There is not the least room then for hesitation," said Lord Glenarvan. "Go we must, and as soon as possible. What route must we take?"

"One that is both easy and agreeable," replied Paganel.

"Rather mountainous at first, and then sloping gently down the eastern side of the Andes into a smooth plain, turfed and graveled quite like a garden."

"Let us see the map?" said the Major.

"Here it is, my dear McNabbs. We shall go through the capital



of Araucania, and cut the Cordilleras by the pass of Antuco, leaving the volcano on the south, and gliding gently down the mountain sides, past the Neuquem and the Rio Colorado on to the Pampas, till we reach the Sierra Tapalquen, from whence we shall see the frontier of the province of Buenos Ayres. These we shall pass by, and cross over the Sierra Tandil, pursuing our search to the very shores of the Atlantic, as far as Point Medano."

Paganel went through this programme of the expedition without so much as a glance at the map. He was so posted up in the travels of Frezier, Molina, Humboldt, Miers, and Orbigny, that he had the geographical nomenclature at his fingers' ends, and could trust implicitly to his never-failing memory.

"You see then, friend," he added, "that it is a straight course. In thirty days we shall have gone over it, and gained the eastern side before the DUNCAN, however little she may be delayed by the westerly winds."

"Then the DUNCAN is to cruise between Corrientes and Cape Saint Antonie," said John Mangles.

"Just so."

"And how is the expedition to be organized?" asked Glenarvan.

"As simply as possible. All there is to be done is to reconnoiter the situation of Captain Grant and not to come to gunshot with the Indians. I think that Lord Glenarvan, our natural leader; the Major, who would not yield his place to anybody; and your humble servant, Jacques Paganel."

"And me," interrupted Robert.

"Robert, Robert!" exclaimed Mary.

"And why not?" returned Paganel. "Travels form the youthful mind. Yes, Robert, we four and three of the sailors."

"And does your Lordship mean to pass me by?" said John Mangles, addressing his master.

"My dear John," replied Glenarvan, "we leave passengers on board, those dearer to us than life, and who is to watch over them but the devoted captain?"

"Then we can't accompany you?" said Lady Helena, while a shade of sadness beclouded her eyes.

"My dear Helena, the journey will so soon be accomplished that it will be but a brief separation, and--"

"Yes, dear, I understand, it is all right; and I do hope you may succeed."

"Besides, you can hardly call it a journey," added Paganel.

"What is it, then?"

"It is just making a flying passage across the continent, the way a good man goes through the world, doing all the good he can. *Transire beneficiendo*--that is our motto."

This ended the discussion, if a conversation can be so called, where all who take part in it are of the same opinion. Preparations commenced the same day, but as secretly as possible to prevent the Indians getting scent of it.

The day of departure was fixed for the 14th of October. The sailors were all so eager to join the expedition that Glenarvan found the only way to prevent jealousy among them was to draw lots who should go. This was accordingly done, and fortune favored the chief officer, Tom Austin, Wilson, a strong, jovial young fellow, and Mulrady, so good a boxer that he might have entered the lists with Tom Sayers himself.

Glenarvan displayed the greatest activity about the preparations, for he was anxious to be ready by the appointed day.

John Mangles was equally busy in coaling the vessel, that she

might weigh anchor at the same time. There was quite a rivalry between Glenarvan and the young captain about getting first to the Argentine coast.

Both were ready on the 14th. The whole search party assembled in the saloon to bid farewell to those who remained behind.

The DUNCAN was just about to get under way, and already the vibration of the screw began to agitate the limpid waters of Talcahuano, Glenarvan, Paganel, McNabbs, Robert Grant, Tom Austin, Wilson,

and Mulrady, stood armed with carbines and Colt's revolvers.

Guides and mules awaited them at the landing stairs of the harbor.

"It is time," said Lord Glenarvan at last.

"Go then, dear Edward," said Lady Helena, restraining her emotion.

Lord Glenarvan clasped her closely to his breast for an instant, and then turned away, while Robert flung his arms round Mary's neck.

"And now, friends," said Paganel, "let's have one good hearty shake of the hand all round, to last us till we get to the shores of the Atlantic."

This was not much to ask, but he certainly got strong enough grips to go some way towards satisfying his desire.

All went on deck now, and the seven explorers left the vessel. They were soon on the quay, and as the yacht turned round to pursue her course, she came so near where they stood, that Lady Helena could exchange farewells once more.

"God help you!" she called out.

"Heaven will help us, madam," shouted Paganel, in reply, "for you may be sure we'll help ourselves."

"Go on," sung out the captain to his engineer.

At the same moment Lord Glenarvan gave the signal to start, and away went the mules along the coast, while the DUNCAN steamed out at full speed toward the broad ocean.