

## CHAPTER XIV PROVIDENTIALLY RESCUED

THE eastern side of the Cordilleras of the Andes consists of a succession of lengthened declivities, which slope down almost insensibly to the plain. The soil is carpeted with rich herbage, and adorned with magnificent trees, among which, in great numbers, were apple-trees, planted at the time of the conquest, and golden with fruit. There were literally, perfect forests of these. This district was, in fact, just a corner of fertile Normandy.

The sudden transition from a desert to an oasis, from snowy peaks to verdant plains, from Winter to Summer, can not fail to strike the traveler's eye.

The ground, moreover, had recovered its immobility.

The trembling had ceased, though there was little doubt the forces below the surface were carrying on their devastating work further on, for shocks of earthquake are always occurring in some part or other of the Andes. This time the shock had been one of extreme violence. The outline of the mountains was wholly altered, and the Pampas guides would have sought vainly for the accustomed landmarks.

A magnificent day had dawned. The sun was just rising from his ocean bed, and his bright rays streamed already over the Argentine plains, and ran across to the Atlantic. It was about eight o'clock.

Lord Glenarvan and his companions were gradually restored to animation by the Major's efforts. They had been completely stunned, but had sustained no injury whatever. The descent of the Cordilleras was accomplished; and as Dame Nature had conveyed them at her own expense, they could only have praised her method of locomotion if one of their number, and that one the feeblest and youngest, the child of the party, had not been missing at the roll call.

The brave boy was beloved by everybody. Paganel was particularly attached to him, and so was the Major, with all his apparent coldness. As for Glenarvan, he was in absolute despair when he heard of his disappearance, and pictured to himself the child lying in some deep abyss, wildly crying for succor.

"We must go and look for him, and look till we find him," he exclaimed, almost unable to keep back his tears.

"We cannot leave him to his fate. Every valley and precipice and abyss must be searched through and through. I will have a rope fastened round my waist, and go down myself. I insist upon it; you understand; I insist upon it. Heaven grant Robert may be still alive! If we lose the boy, how could we ever dare to meet the father? What right have we to save the captain at the cost of his son's life?"

Glenarvan's companions heard him in silence. He sought to read hope in their eyes, but they did not venture to meet his gaze.

At last he said,

"Well, you hear what I say, but you make no response.

Do you mean to tell me that you have no hope--not the slightest?"

Again there was silence, till McNabbs asked:

"Which of you can recollect when Robert disappeared?"

No one could say.

"Well, then," resumed the Major, "you know this at any rate.

Who was the child beside during our descent of the Cordilleras?"

"Beside me," replied Wilson.

"Very well. Up to what moment did you see him beside you?

Try if you can remember."

"All that I can recollect is that Robert Grant was still by my side, holding fast by a tuft of lichen, less than two minutes before the shock which finished our descent."

"Less than two minutes? Mind what you are saying;  
I dare say a minute seemed a very long time to you.  
Are you sure you are not making a mistake?"

"I don't think I am. No; it was just about two minutes,  
as I tell you."

"Very well, then; and was Robert on your right or left?"

"On my left. I remember that his poncho brushed past my face."

"And with regard to us, how were you placed?"

"On the left also."

"Then Robert must have disappeared on this side," said the Major,  
turning toward the mountain and pointing toward the right:  
"and I should judge," he added, "considering the time that  
has elapsed, that the spot where he fell is about two miles up.  
Between that height and the ground is where we must search,  
dividing the different zones among us, and it is there we  
shall find him."

Not another word was spoken. The six men commenced their explorations,  
keeping constantly to the line they had made in their descent,  
examining closely every fissure, and going into the very depths

of the abysses, choked up though they partly were with fragments of the plateau; and more than one came out again with garments torn to rags, and feet and hands bleeding. For many long hours these brave fellows continued their search without dreaming of taking rest.

But all in vain. The child had not only met his death on the mountain, but found a grave which some enormous rock had sealed forever.

About one o'clock, Glenarvan and his companions met again in the valley. Glenarvan was completely crushed with grief. He scarcely spoke. The only words that escaped his lips amid his sighs were,

"I shall not go away! I shall not go away!"

No one of the party but could enter into his feeling, and respect it.

"Let us wait," said Paganel to the Major and Tom Austin. "We will take a little rest, and recruit our strength. We need it anyway, either to prolong our search or continue our route."

"Yes; and, as Edward wishes it, we will rest. He has still hope, but what is it he hopes?"

"Who knows!" said Tom Austin.

"Poor Robert!" replied Paganel, brushing away a tear.

The valley was thickly wooded, and the Major had no difficulty in finding a suitable place of encampment. He chose a clump of tall carob trees, under which they arranged their few belongings--few indeed, for all they had were sundry wraps and fire-arms, and a little dried meat and rice. Not far off there was a RIO, which supplied them with water, though it was still somewhat muddy after the disturbance of the avalanche. Mulrady soon had a fire lighted on the grass, and a warm refreshing beverage to offer his master. But Glenarvan refused to touch it, and lay stretched on his poncho in a state of absolute prostration.

So the day passed, and night came on, calm and peaceful as the preceding had been. While his companions were lying motionless, though wide awake, Glenarvan betook himself once more to the slopes of the Cordilleras, listening intently in hope that some cry for help would fall upon his ear. He ventured far up in spite of his being alone, straining his ear with painful eagerness to catch the faintest sound, and calling aloud in an agony of despair.

But he heard nothing save the beatings of his own heart, though he wandered all night on the mountain. Sometimes the Major followed him, and sometimes Paganel, ready to lend a helping hand among the slippery peaks and dangerous precipices among which he was dragged by his rash and useless imprudence. All his efforts were in vain, however, and to his repeated cries of "Robert, Robert!" echo was the only response.

Day dawned, and it now became a matter of necessity to go and bring back the poor Lord from the distant plateau, even against his will. His despair was terrible. Who could dare to speak of quitting this fatal valley? Yet provisions were done, and Argentine guides and horses were not far off to lead them to the Pampas. To go back would be more difficult than to go forward. Besides, the Atlantic Ocean was the appointed meeting place with the DUNCAN. These were strong reasons against any long delay; indeed it was best for all parties to continue the route as soon as possible.

McNabbs undertook the task of rousing Lord Glenarvan from his grief. For a long time his cousin seemed not to hear him. At last he shook his head, and said, almost in-audibly:

"Did you say we must start?"

"Yes, we must start."

"Wait one hour longer."

"Yes, we'll wait another," replied the Major.

The hour slipped away, and again Glenarvan begged for longer grace. To hear his imploring tones, one might have thought him a criminal begging a respite. So the day passed on till it was almost noon.

McNabbs hesitated now no longer, but, acting on the advice of the rest, told his cousin that start they must, for all their lives depended on prompt action.

"Yes, yes!" replied Glenarvan. "Let us start, let us start!"

But he spoke without looking at McNabbs. His gaze was fixed intently on a certain dark speck in the heavens.

Suddenly he exclaimed, extending his arm, and keeping it motionless, as if petrified:

"There! there! Look! look!"

All eyes turned immediately in the direction indicated so imperiously.

The dark speck was increasing visibly. It was evidently some bird hovering above them.

"A condor," said Paganel.

"Yes, a condor," replied Glenarvan. "Who knows? He is coming down-- he is gradually getting lower! Let us wait."

Paganel was not mistaken, it was assuredly a condor.

This magnificent bird is the king of the Southern Andes, and was formerly worshiped by the Incas. It attains an extraordinary development in those regions. Its strength is prodigious.



It has frequently driven oxen over the edge of precipices down into the depths of abysses. It seizes sheep, and kids, and young calves, browsing on the plains, and carries them off to inaccessible heights. It hovers in the air far beyond the utmost limits of human sight, and its powers of vision are so great that it can discern the smallest objects on the earth beneath.

What had this condor discovered then? Could it be the corpse of Robert Grant? "Who knows?" repeated Glenarvan, keeping his eye immovably fixed on the bird. The enormous creature was fast approaching, sometimes hovering for awhile with outspread wings, and sometimes falling with the swiftness of inert bodies in space. Presently he began to wheel round in wide circles. They could see him distinctly. He measured more than fifteen feet, and his powerful wings bore him along with scarcely the slightest effort, for it is the prerogative of large birds to fly with calm majesty, while insects have to beat their wings a thousand times a second.

The Major and Wilson had seized their carbines, but Glenarvan stopped them by a gesture. The condor was encircling in his flight a sort of inaccessible plateau about a quarter of a mile up the side of the mountain. He wheeled round and round with dazzling rapidity, opening and shutting his formidable claws, and shaking his cartilaginous carbuncle, or comb.

"It is there, there!" exclaimed Glenarvan.

A sudden thought flashed across his mind, and with a terrible cry, he called out, "Fire! fire! Oh, suppose Robert were still alive! That bird."

But it was too late. The condor had dropped out of sight behind the crags. Only a second passed, a second that seemed an age, and the enormous bird reappeared, carrying a heavy load and flying at a slow rate.

A cry of horror rose on all sides. It was a human body the condor had in his claws, dangling in the air, and apparently lifeless-- it was Robert Grant. The bird had seized him by his clothes, and had him hanging already at least one hundred and fifty feet in the air. He had caught sight of the travelers, and was flapping his wings violently, endeavoring to escape with his heavy prey.

"Oh! would that Robert were dashed to pieces against the rocks, rather than be a--"

He did not finish his sentence, but seizing Wilson's carbine, took aim at the condor. His arm was too trembling, however, to keep the weapon steady.

"Let me do it," said the Major. And with a calm eye, and sure hands and motionless body, he aimed at the bird,

now three hundred feet above him in the air.

But before he had pulled the trigger the report of a gun resounded from the bottom of the valley. A white smoke rose from between two masses of basalt, and the condor, shot in the head, gradually turned over and began to fall, supported by his great wings spread out like a parachute. He had not let go his prey, but gently sank down with it on the ground, about ten paces from the stream.

"We've got him, we've got him," shouted Glenarvan; and without waiting to see where the shot so providentially came from, he rushed toward the condor, followed by his companions.

When they reached the spot the bird was dead, and the body of Robert was quite concealed beneath his mighty wings. Glenarvan flung himself on the corpse, and dragging it from the condor's grasp, placed it flat on the grass, and knelt down and put his ear to the heart.

But a wilder cry of joy never broke from human lips, than Glenarvan uttered the next moment, as he started to his feet and exclaimed:

"He is alive! He is still alive!"

The boy's clothes were stripped off in an instant, and his face bathed with cold water. He moved slightly, opened his eyes,

looked round and murmured, "Oh, my Lord! Is it you!"  
he said; "my father!"

Glenarvan could not reply. He was speechless with emotion,  
and kneeling down by the side of the child so miraculously saved,  
burst into tears.