

CHAPTER II TRISTAN D'ACUNHA AND THE ISLE OF AMSTERDAM

IF the yacht had followed the line of the equator, the 196 degrees which separate Australia from America, or, more correctly, Cape Bernouilli from Cape Corrientes, would have been equal to 11,760 geographical miles; but along the 37th parallel these same degrees, owing to the form of the earth, only represent 9,480 miles.

From the American coast to Tristan d'Acunha is reckoned 2,100 miles-- a distance which John Mangles hoped to clear in ten days, if east winds did not retard the motion of the yacht.

But he was not long uneasy on that score, for toward evening the breeze sensibly lulled and then changed altogether, giving the DUNCAN a fair field on a calm sea for displaying her incomparable qualities as a sailor.

The passengers had fallen back into their ordinary ship life, and it hardly seemed as if they really could have been absent a whole month. Instead of the Pacific, the Atlantic stretched itself out before them, and there was scarcely a shade of difference in the waves of the two oceans. The elements, after having handled them so roughly, seemed now disposed to favor them to the utmost. The sea was tranquil, and the wind kept in the right quarter, so that the yacht could spread all her canvas, and lend its aid, if needed to the indefatigable steam stored up in the boiler.

Under such conditions, the voyage was safely and rapidly accomplished. Their confidence increased as they found themselves nearer the Australian coast. They began to talk of Captain Grant as if the yacht were going to take him on board at a given port. His cabin was got ready, and berths for the men. This cabin was next to the famous number six, which Paganel had taken possession of instead of the one he had booked on the SCOTIA. It had been till now occupied by M. Olbinett, who vacated it for the expected guest. Mary took great delight in arranging it with her own hands, and adorning it for the reception of the loved inmate.

The learned geographer kept himself closely shut up. He was working away from morning till night at a work entitled "Sublime Impressions of a Geographer in the Argentine Pampas," and they could hear him repeating elegant periods aloud before committing them to the white pages of his day-book; and more than once, unfaithful to Clio, the muse of history, he invoked in his transports the divine Calliope, the muse of epic poetry.

Paganel made no secret of it either. The chaste daughters of Apollo willingly left the slopes of Helicon and Parnassus at his call. Lady Helena paid him sincere compliments on his mythological visitants, and so did the Major, though he could not forbear adding:

"But mind no fits of absence of mind, my dear Paganel;

and if you take a fancy to learn Australian, don't go and study it in a Chinese grammar."

Things went on perfectly smoothly on board. Lady Helena and Lord Glenarvan found leisure to watch John Mangles' growing attachment to Mary Grant. There was nothing to be said against it, and, indeed, since John remained silent, it was best to take no notice of it.

"What will Captain Grant think?" Lord Glenarvan asked his wife one day.

"He'll think John is worthy of Mary, my dear Edward, and he'll think right."

Meanwhile, the yacht was making rapid progress. Five days after losing sight of Cape Corrientes, on the 16th of November, they fell in with fine westerly breezes, and the DUNCAN might almost have dispensed with her screw altogether, for she flew over the water like a bird, spreading all her sails to catch the breeze, as if she were running a race with the Royal Thames Club yachts.

Next day, the ocean appeared covered with immense seaweeds, looking like a great pond choked up with the DEBRIS of trees and plants torn off the neighboring continents. Commander Murray had specially pointed them out to the attention of navigators.

The DUNCAN appeared to glide over a long prairie, which Paganel

justly compared to the Pampas, and her speed slackened a little.

Twenty-four hours after, at break of day, the man on the look-out was heard calling out, "Land ahead!"

"In what direction?" asked Tom Austin, who was on watch.

"Leeward!" was the reply.

This exciting cry brought everyone speedily on deck. Soon a telescope made its appearance, followed by Jacques Paganel. The learned geographer pointed the instrument in the direction indicated, but could see nothing that resembled land.

"Look in the clouds," said John Mangles.

"Ah, now I do see a sort of peak, but very indistinctly."

"It is Tristan d'Acunha," replied John Mangles.

"Then, if my memory serves me right, we must be eighty miles from it, for the peak of Tristan, seven thousand feet high, is visible at that distance."

"That's it, precisely."

Some hours later, the sharp, lofty crags of the group of islands stood out clearly on the horizon. The conical peak of Tristan looked black against the bright sky, which seemed all ablaze with the splendor of the rising sun. Soon the principal island stood out from the rocky mass, at the summit of a triangle inclining toward the northeast.

Tristan d'Acunha is situated in 37 degrees 8' of southern latitude, and 10 degrees 44' of longitude west of the meridian at Greenwich. Inaccessible Island is eighteen miles to the southwest and Nightingale Island is ten miles to the southeast, and this completes the little solitary group of islets in the Atlantic Ocean. Toward noon, the two principal landmarks, by which the group is recognized were sighted, and at 3 P. M. the DUNCAN entered Falmouth Bay in Tristan d'Acunha.

Several whaling vessels were lying quietly at anchor there, for the coast abounds in seals and other marine animals.

John Mangle's first care was to find good anchorage, and then all the passengers, both ladies and gentlemen, got into the long boat and were rowed ashore. They stepped out on a beach covered with fine black sand, the impalpable DEBRIS of the calcined rocks of the island.

Tristan d'Acunha is the capital of the group, and consists

of a little village, lying in the heart of the bay, and watered by a noisy, rapid stream. It contained about fifty houses, tolerably clean, and disposed with geometrical regularity. Behind this miniature town there lay 1,500 hectares of meadow land, bounded by an embankment of lava. Above this embankment, the conical peak rose 7,000 feet high.

Lord Glenarvan was received by a governor supplied from the English colony at the Cape. He inquired at once respecting Harry Grant and the BRITANNIA, and found the names entirely unknown.

The Tristan d'Acunha Isles are out of the route of ships, and consequently little frequented. Since the wreck of the Blendon Hall in 1821, on the rocks of Inaccessible Island, two vessels have stranded on the chief island--the PRIMANGUET in 1845, and the three-mast American, PHILADELPHIA, in 1857. These three events comprise the whole catalogue of maritime disasters in the annals of the Acunhas.

Lord Glenarvan did not expect to glean any information, and only asked by the way of duty. He even sent the boats to make the circuit of the island, the entire extent of which was not more than seventeen miles at most.

In the interim the passengers walked about the village.

The population does not exceed 150 inhabitants, and consists of English and Americans, married to negroes and Cape Hottentots,

who might bear away the palm for ugliness. The children of these heterogeneous households are very disagreeable compounds of Saxon stiffness and African blackness.

It was nearly nightfall before the party returned to the yacht, chattering and admiring the natural riches displayed on all sides, for even close to the streets of the capital, fields of wheat and maize were waving, and crops of vegetables, imported forty years before; and in the environs of the village, herds of cattle and sheep were feeding.

The boats returned to the DUNCAN about the same time as Lord Glenarvan. They had made the circuit of the entire island in a few hours, but without coming across the least trace of the BRITANNIA. The only result of this voyage of circumnavigation was to strike out the name of Isle Tristan from the program of search.