

### CHAPTER III CAPE TOWN AND M. VIOT

As John Mangles intended to put in at the Cape of Good Hope for coals, he was obliged to deviate a little from the 37th parallel, and go two degrees north. In less than six days he cleared the thirteen hundred miles which separate the point of Africa from Tristan d'Acunha, and on the 24th of November, at 3 P. M. the Table Mountain was sighted. At eight o'clock they entered the bay, and cast anchor in the port of Cape Town. They sailed away next morning at daybreak.

Between the Cape and Amsterdam Island there is a distance of 2,900 miles, but with a good sea and favoring breeze, this was only a ten day's voyage. The elements were now no longer at war with the travelers, as on their journey across the Pampas-- air and water seemed in league to help them forward.

"Ah! the sea! the sea!" exclaimed Paganel, "it is the field par excellence for the exercise of human energies, and the ship is the true vehicle of civilization. Think, my friends, if the globe had been only an immense continent, the thousandth part of it would still be unknown to us, even in this nineteenth century. See how it is in the interior of great countries. In the steppes of Siberia, in the plains of Central Asia, in the deserts of Africa, in the prairies of America, in the immense wilds of Australia, in the icy solitudes of the Poles, man scarcely dares to venture;

the most daring shrinks back, the most courageous succumbs. They cannot penetrate them; the means of transport are insufficient, and the heat and disease, and savage disposition of the natives, are impassable obstacles. Twenty miles of desert separate men more than five hundred miles of ocean."

Paganel spoke with such warmth that even the Major had nothing to say against this panegyric of the ocean. Indeed, if the finding of Harry Grant had involved following a parallel across continents instead of oceans, the enterprise could not have been attempted; but the sea was there ready to carry the travelers from one country to another, and on the 6th of December, at the first streak of day, they saw a fresh mountain apparently emerging from the bosom of the waves.

This was Amsterdam Island, situated in 37 degrees 47 minutes latitude and 77 degrees 24 minutes longitude, the high cone of which in clear weather is visible fifty miles off.

At eight o'clock, its form, indistinct though it still was, seemed almost a reproduction of Teneriffe.

"And consequently it must resemble Tristan d'Acunha," observed Glenarvan.

"A very wise conclusion," said Paganel, "according to the geometrographic axiom that two islands resembling a third must have a common likeness.

I will only add that, like Tristan d'Acunha, Amsterdam Island is equally

rich in seals and Robinsons."

"There are Robinsons everywhere, then?" said Lady Helena.

"Indeed, Madam," replied Paganel, "I know few islands without some tale of the kind appertaining to them, and the romance of your immortal countryman, Daniel Defoe, has been often enough realized before his day."

"Monsieur Paganel," said Mary, "may I ask you a question?"

"Two if you like, my dear young lady, and I promise to answer them."

"Well, then, I want to know if you would be very much frightened at the idea of being cast away alone on a desert island."

"I?" exclaimed Paganel.

"Come now, my good fellow," said the Major, "don't go and tell us that it is your most cherished desire."

"I don't pretend it is that, but still, after all, such an adventure would not be very unpleasant to me. I should begin a new life; I should hunt and fish; I should choose a grotto for my domicile in Winter and a tree in Summer. I should make storehouses for my harvests: in one word, I should colonize my island."

"All by yourself?"

"All by myself if I was obliged. Besides, are we ever obliged? Cannot one find friends among the animals, and choose some tame kid or eloquent parrot or amiable monkey? And if a lucky chance should send one a companion like the faithful Friday, what more is needed? Two friends on a rock, there is happiness. Suppose now, the Major and I--"

"Thank you," replied the Major, interrupting him; "I have no inclination in that line, and should make a very poor Robinson Crusoe."

"My dear Monsieur Paganel," said Lady Helena, "you are letting your imagination run away with you, as usual. But the dream is very different from the reality. You are thinking of an imaginary Robinson's life, thrown on a picked island and treated like a spoiled child by nature. You only see the sunny side."

"What, madam! You don't believe a man could be happy on a desert island?"

"I do not. Man is made for society and not for solitude, and solitude can only engender despair. It is a question of time. At the outset it is quite possible that material wants

and the very necessities of existence may engross the poor shipwrecked fellow, just snatched from the waves; but afterward, when he feels himself alone, far from his fellow men, without any hope of seeing country and friends again, what must he think, what must he suffer? His little island is all his world.

The whole human race is shut up in himself, and when death comes, which utter loneliness will make terrible, he will be like the last man on the last day of the world.

Believe me, Monsieur Paganel, such a man is not to be envied."

Paganel gave in, though regretfully, to the arguments of Lady Helena, and still kept up a discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of Isolation, till the very moment the DUNCAN dropped anchor about a mile off Amsterdam Island.

This lonely group in the Indian Ocean consists of two distinct islands, thirty-three miles apart, and situated exactly on the meridian of the Indian peninsula. To the north is Amsterdam Island, and to the south St. Paul; but they have been often confounded by geographers and navigators.

At the time of the DUNCAN'S visit to the island, the population consisted of three people, a Frenchman and two mulattoes, all three employed by the merchant proprietor. Paganel was delighted to shake hands with a countryman in the person of good old Monsieur Viot. He was far advanced in years, but did the honors of the place with much politeness.

It was a happy day for him when these kindly strangers touched at his island, for St. Peter's was only frequented by seal-fishers, and now and then a whaler, the crews of which are usually rough, coarse men.

M. Viot presented his subjects, the two mulattoes.

They composed the whole living population of the island, except a few wild boars in the interior and myriads of penguins.

The little house where the three solitary men lived was in the heart of a natural bay on the southeast, formed by the crumbling away of a portion of the mountain.

Twice over in the early part of the century, Amsterdam Island became the country of deserted sailors, providentially saved from misery and death; but since these events no vessel had been lost on its coast. Had any shipwreck occurred, some fragments must have been thrown on the sandy shore, and any poor sufferers from it would have found their way to M. Viot's fishing-huts. The old man had been long on the island, and had never been called upon to exercise such hospitality.

Of the BRITANNIA and Captain Grant he knew nothing, but he was certain that the disaster had not happened on Amsterdam Island, nor on the islet called St. Paul, for whalers and fishing-vessels went there constantly, and must have heard of it.

Glenarvan was neither surprised nor vexed at the reply; indeed, his object in asking was rather to establish the fact that Captain Grant had not been there than that he had.

This done, they were ready to proceed on their voyage next day.

They rambled about the island till evening, as its appearance was very inviting. Its FAUNA and FLORA, however, were poor in the extreme.

The only specimens of quadrupeds, birds, fish and cetacea were a few wild boars, stormy petrels, albatrosses, perch and seals.

Here and there thermal springs and chalybeate waters escaped from the black lava, and thin dark vapors rose above the volcanic soil.

Some of these springs were very hot. John Mangles held his thermometer in one of them, and found the temperature was 176 degrees Fahrenheit. Fish caught in the sea a few yards off, cooked in five minutes in these all but boiling waters, a fact which made Paganel resolve not to attempt to bathe in them.

Toward evening, after a long promenade, Glenarvan and his party bade adieu to the good old M. Viot, and returned to the yacht, wishing him all the happiness possible on his desert island, and receiving in return the old man's blessing on their expedition.