

CHAPTER XII TOLINE OF THE LACHLAN

ABOUT two miles from the railway, the plain terminated in a range of low hills, and it was not long before the wagon entered a succession of narrow gorges and capricious windings, out of which it emerged into a most charming region, where grand trees, not closely planted, but in scattered groups, were growing with absolutely tropical luxuriance. As the party drove on they stumbled upon a little native boy lying fast asleep beneath the shade of a magnificent banksia. He was dressed in European garb, and seemed about eight years of age. There was no mistaking the characteristic features of his race; the crisped hair, the nearly black skin, the flattened nose, the thick lips, the unusual length of the arms, immediately classed him among the aborigines of the interior. But a degree of intelligence appeared in his face that showed some educational influences must have been at work on his savage, untamed nature.

Lady Helena, whose interest was greatly excited by this spectacle, got out of the wagon, followed by Mary, and presently the whole company surrounded the peaceful little sleeper. "Poor child!" said Mary Grant. "Is he lost, I wonder, in this desert?"

"I suppose," said Lady Helena, "he has come a long way to visit this part. No doubt some he loves are here."

"But he can't be left here," added Robert. "We must--"

His compassionate sentence remained unfinished, for, just at that moment the child turned over in his sleep, and, to the extreme surprise of everybody, there was a large label on his shoulders, on which the following was written:

TOLINE.

To be conducted to Echuca.

Care of Jeffries Smith, Railway Porter.

Prepaid.

"That's the English all over!" exclaimed Paganel. "They send off a child just as they would luggage, and book him like a parcel. I heard it was done, certainly; but I could not believe it before."

"Poor child!" said Lady Helena. "Could he have been in the train that got off the line at Camden Bridge? Perhaps his parents are killed, and he is left alone in the world!"

"I don't think so, madam," replied John Mangles. "That card rather goes to prove he was traveling alone."

"He is waking up!" said Mary.

And so he was. His eyes slowly opened and then closed again, pained by the glare of light. But Lady Helena took his hand, and he jumped up at once and looked about him in bewilderment at the sight of so many strangers. He seemed half frightened at first, but the presence of Lady Helena reassured him.

"Do you understand English, my little man?" asked the young lady.

"I understand it and speak it," replied the child in fluent enough English, but with a marked accent. His pronunciation was like a Frenchman's.

"What is your name?" asked Lady Helena.

"Toline," replied the little native.

"Toline!" exclaimed Paganel. "Ah! I think that means 'bark of a tree' in Australian."

Toline nodded, and looked again at the travelers.

"Where do you come from?" inquired Lady Helena.

"From Melbourne, by the railway from Sandhurst."

"Were you in the accident at Camden Bridge?" said Glenarvan.

"Yes, sir," was Toline's reply; "but the God of the Bible protected me."

"Are you traveling alone?"

"Yes, alone; the Reverend Paxton put me in charge of Jeffries Smith; but unfortunately the poor man was killed."

"And you did not know any one else on the train?"

"No one, madam; but God watches over children and never forsakes them."

Toline said this in soft, quiet tones, which went to the heart.

When he mentioned the name of God his voice was grave and his eyes beamed with all the fervor that animated his young soul.

This religious enthusiasm at so tender an age was easily explained.

The child was one of the aborigines baptized by the English missionaries, and trained by them in all the rigid principles of the Methodist Church. His calm replies, proper behavior, and even his somber garb made him look like a little reverend already.

But where was he going all alone in these solitudes and why had he left Camden Bridge? Lady Helena asked him about this.

"I was returning to my tribe in the Lachlan," he replied.

"I wished to see my family again."

"Are they Australians?" inquired John Mangles.

"Yes, Australians of the Lachlan," replied Toline.

"Have you a father and mother?" said Robert Grant.

"Yes, my brother," replied Toline, holding out his hand to little Grant. Robert was so touched by the word brother that he kissed the black child, and they were friends forthwith.

The whole party were so interested in these replies of the little Australian savage that they all sat round him in a listening group. But the sun had meantime sunk behind the tall trees, and as a few miles would not greatly retard their progress, and the spot they were in would be suitable for a halt, Glenarvan gave orders to prepare their camp for the night at once. Ayrton unfastened the bullocks and turned them out to feed at will. The tent was pitched, and Olbinett got the supper ready. Toline consented, after some difficulty, to share it, though he was hungry enough. He took his seat beside Robert, who chose out all the titbits for his new friend. Toline accepted them with a shy grace that was very charming.

The conversation with him, however, was still kept up, for everyone felt an interest in the child, and wanted

to talk to him and hear his history. It was simple enough.

He was one of the poor native children confided to the care of charitable societies by the neighboring tribes.

The Australian aborigines are gentle and inoffensive, never exhibiting the fierce hatred toward their conquerors which characterizes the New Zealanders, and possibly a few of the races of Northern Australia. They often go to the large towns, such as Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne, and walk about in very primitive costume. They go to barter their few articles of industry, hunting and fishing implements, weapons, etc., and some of the chiefs, from pecuniary motives, no doubt, willingly leave their children to profit by the advantages of a gratuitous education in English.

This was how Toline's parents had acted. They were true Australian savages living in the Lachlan, a vast region lying beyond the Murray. The child had been in Melbourne five years, and during that time had never once seen any of his own people. And yet the imperishable feeling of kindred was still so strong in his heart that he had dared to brave this journey over the wilds to visit his tribe once more, scattered though perchance it might be, and his family, even should he find it decimated.

"And after you have kissed your parents, are you coming back to Melbourne?" asked Lady Glenarvan.

"Yes, Madam," replied Toline, looking at the lady with a loving expression.

"And what are you going to be some day?" she continued.

"I am going to snatch my brothers from misery and ignorance. I am going to teach them, to bring them to know and love God. I am going to be a missionary."

Words like those, spoken with such animation from a child of only eight years, might have provoked a smile in light, scoffing auditors, but they were understood and appreciated by the grave Scotch, who admired

the courage of this young disciple, already armed for the battle.

Even Paganel was stirred to the depths of his heart, and felt his warmer sympathy awakened for the poor child.

To speak the truth, up to that moment he did not care much for a savage in European attire. He had not come to Australia to see Australians in coats and trousers. He preferred them simply tattooed, and this conventional dress jarred on his preconceived notions.

But the child's genuine religious fervor won him over completely.

Indeed, the wind-up of the conversation converted the worthy geographer into his best friend.

It was in reply to a question Lady Helena had asked, that Toline

said he was studying at the Normal School in Melbourne, and that the principal was the Reverend Mr. Paxton.

"And what do they teach you?" she went on to say.

"They teach me the Bible, and mathematics, and geography."

Paganel pricked up his ears at this, and said, "Indeed, geography!"

"Yes, sir," said Toline; "and I had the first prize for geography before the Christmas holidays."

"You had the first prize for geography, my boy?"

"Yes, sir. Here it is," returned Toline, pulling a book out of his pocket.

It was a bible, 32mo size, and well bound. On the first page was written the words: "Normal School, Melbourne. First Prize for Geography. Toline of the Lachlan."

Paganel was beside himself. An Australian well versed in geography.

This was marvelous, and he could not help kissing Toline on both cheeks, just as if he had been the Reverend Mr. Paxton himself, on the day of the distribution of prizes.

Paganel need not have been so amazed at this circumstance,

however, for it is frequent enough in Australian schools. The little savages are very quick in learning geography. They learn it eagerly, and on the other hand, are perfectly averse to the science of arithmetic.

Toline could not understand this outburst of affection on the part of the Frenchman, and looked so puzzled that Lady Helena thought she had better inform him that Paganel was a celebrated geographer and a distinguished professor on occasion.

"A professor of geography!" cried Toline. "Oh, sir, do question me!"

"Question you? Well, I'd like nothing better. Indeed, I was going to do it without your leave. I should very much like to see how they teach geography in the Normal School of Melbourne."

"And suppose Toline trips you up, Paganel!" said McNabbs.

"What a likely idea!" exclaimed the geographer. "Trip up the Secretary of the Geographical Society of France."

Their examination then commenced, after Paganel had settled his spectacles firmly on his nose, drawn himself up to his full height, and put on a solemn voice becoming to a professor.

"Pupil Toline, stand up."

As Toline was already standing, he could not get any higher, but he waited modestly for the geographer's questions.

"Pupil Toline, what are the five divisions of the globe?"

"Oceanica, Asia, Africa, America, and Europe."

"Perfectly so. Now we'll take Oceanica first; where are we at this moment? What are the principal divisions?"

"Australia, belonging to the English; New Zealand, belonging to the English; Tasmania, belonging to the English. The islands of Chatham, Auckland, Macquarie, Kermadec, Makin, Maraki, are also belonging to the English."

"Very good, and New Caledonia, the Sandwich Islands, the Mendana, the Pomotou?"

"They are islands under the Protectorate of Great Britain."

"What!" cried Paganel, "under the Protectorate of Great Britain. I rather think on the contrary, that France--"

"France," said the child, with an astonished look.

"Well, well," said Paganel; "is that what they teach you in the Melbourne Normal School?"

"Yes, sir. Isn't it right?"

"Oh, yes, yes, perfectly right. All Oceanica belongs to the English. That's an understood thing. Go on."

Paganel's face betrayed both surprise and annoyance, to the great delight of the Major.

"Let us go on to Asia," said the geographer.

"Asia," replied Toline, "is an immense country.

Capital--Calcutta. Chief Towns--Bombay, Madras, Calicut, Aden, Malacca, Singapore, Pegu, Colombo. The Lacca-dive Islands, the Maldives, the Chagos, etc., belonging to the English."

"Very good, pupil Toline. And now for Africa."

"Africa comprises two chief colonies--the Cape on the south, capital Capetown; and on the west the English settlements, chief city, Sierra Leone."

"Capital!" said Paganel, beginning to enter into this perfectly taught but Anglo-colored fanciful geography.

"As to Algeria, Morocco, Egypt--they are all struck out of the Britannic cities."

"Let us pass on, pray, to America."

"It is divided," said Toline, promptly, "into North and South America. The former belongs to the English in Canada, New Brunswick, New Scotland, and the United States, under the government of President Johnson."

"President Johnson," cried Paganel, "the successor of the great and good Lincoln, assassinated by a mad fanatic of the slave party. Capital; nothing could be better. And as to South America, with its Guiana, its archipelago of South Shetland, its Georgia, Jamaica, Trinidad, etc., that belongs to the English, too! Well, I'll not be the one to dispute that point! But, Toline, I should like to know your opinion of Europe, or rather your professor's."

"Europe?" said Toline not at all understanding Paganel's excitement.

"Yes, Europe! Who does Europe belong to?"

"Why, to the English," replied Toline, as if the fact was quite settled.

"I much doubt it," returned Paganel. "But how's that, Toline, for I

want to know that?"

"England, Ireland, Scotland, Malta, Jersey and Guern-sey,
the Ionian Islands, the Hebrides, the Shetlands, and the Orkneys."

"Yes, yes, my lad; but there are other states you forgot to mention."

"What are they?" replied the child, not the least disconcerted.

"Spain, Russia, Austria, Prussia, France," answered Paganel.

"They are provinces, not states," said Toline.

"Well, that beats all!" exclaimed Paganel, tearing off his spectacles.

"Yes," continued the child. "Spain--capital, Gibraltar."

"Admirable! perfect! sublime! And France, for I am French,
and I should like to know to whom I belong."

"France," said Toline, quietly, "is an English province;
chief city, Calais."

"Calais!" cried Paganel. "So you think Calais still belongs
to the English?"

"Certainly."

"And that it is the capital of France?"

"Yes, sir; and it is there that the Governor, Lord Napo-leon, lives."

This was too much for Paganel's risible faculties.

He burst out laughing. Toline did not know what to make of him.

He had done his best to answer every question put to him.

But the singularity of the answers were not his blame; indeed, he never imagined anything singular about them. However, he took it all quietly, and waited for the professor to recover himself.

These peals of laughter were quite incomprehensible to him.

"You see," said Major McNabbs, laughing, "I was right.

The pupil could enlighten you after all."

"Most assuredly, friend Major," replied the geographer. "So that's the way they teach geography in Melbourne! They do it well, these professors in the Normal School! Europe, Asia, Africa, America, Oceanica, the whole world belongs to the English. My conscience! with such an ingenious education it is no wonder the natives submit. Ah, well, Toline, my boy, does the moon belong to England, too?"

"She will, some day," replied the young savage, gravely.

This was the climax. Paganel could not stand any more.

He was obliged to go away and take his laugh out, for he was actually exploding with mirth, and he went fully a quarter of a mile from the encampment before his equilibrium was restored.

Meanwhile, Glenarvan looked up a geography they had brought among their books. It was "Richardson's Compendium," a work in great repute in England, and more in agreement with modern science than the manual in use in the Normal School in Melbourne.

"Here, my child," he said to Toline, "take this book and keep it. You have a few wrong ideas about geography, which it would be well for you to rectify. I will give you this as a keepsake from me."

Toline took the book silently; but, after examining it attentively, he shook his head with an air of incredulity, and could not even make up his mind to put it in his pocket.

By this time night had closed in; it was 10 P. M. and time to think of rest, if they were to start betimes next day. Robert offered his friend Toline half his bed, and the little fellow accepted it. Lady Helena and Mary Grant withdrew to the wagon, and the others lay down in the tent, Paganel's merry peals still mingling with the low, sweet song of the wild magpie.

But in the morning at six o'clock, when the sunshine wakened the sleepers,

they looked in vain for the little Australian. Toline had disappeared. Was he in haste to get to the Lachlan district? or was he hurt by Paganel's laughter? No one could say.

But when Lady Helena opened her eyes she discovered a fresh branch of mimosa leaves lying across her, and Paganel found a book in his vest pocket, which turned out to be "Richardson's Geography."