

## CHAPTER XIII A WARNING

ON the 2d of January, at sunrise, the travelers forded the Colban and the Caupespe rivers. The half of their journey was now accomplished. In fifteen days more, should their journey continue to be prosperous, the little party would reach Twofold Bay.

They were all in good health. All that Paganel said of the hygienic qualities of the climate was realized. There was little or no humidity, and the heat was quite bearable. Neither horses nor bullocks could complain of it any more than human beings. The order of the march had been changed in one respect since the affair of Camden Bridge. That criminal catastrophe on the railway made Ayrton take sundry precautions, which had hitherto been unnecessary. The hunters never lost sight of the wagon, and whenever they camped, one was always placed on watch. Morning and evening the firearms were primed afresh. It was certain that a gang of ruffians was prowling about the country, and though there was no cause for actual fear, it was well to be ready for whatever might happen.

It need hardly be said these precautions were adopted without the knowledge of Lady Helena and Mary Grant, as Lord Glenarvan did not wish to alarm them.

They were by no means unnecessary, however, for any imprudence or carelessness might have cost the travelers dear.

Others beside Glenarvan were on their guard. In lonely settlements and on stations, the inhabitants and the squatters prepared carefully against any attack or surprise. Houses are closed at nightfall; the dogs let loose inside the fences, barked at the slightest sound. Not a single shepherd on horseback gathered his numerous flocks together at close of day, without having a carbine slung from his saddle.

The outrage at Camden Bridge was the reason for all this, and many a colonist fastened himself in with bolts and bars now at dusk, who used to sleep with open doors and windows.

The Government itself displayed zeal and prudence, especially in the Post-office department. On this very day, just as Glenarvan and his party were on their way from Kilmore to Heathcote, the mail dashed by at full speed; but though the horses were at a gallop, Glenarvan caught sight of the glittering weapons of the mounted police that rode by its side, as they swept past in a cloud of dust. The travelers might have fancied themselves back in those lawless times when the discovery of the first gold-fields deluged the Australian continent with the scum of Europe.

A mile beyond the road to Kilmore, the wagon, for the first time since leaving Cape Bernouilli, struck into one of those forests

of gigantic trees which extend over a superficies of several degrees. A cry of admiration escaped the travelers at the sight of the eucalyptus trees, two hundred feet high, with tough bark five inches thick. The trunks, measuring twenty feet round, and furrowed with foamy streaks of an odorous resin, rose one hundred and fifty feet above the soil. Not a branch, not a twig, not a stray shoot, not even a knot, spoiled the regularity of their outline. They could not have come out smoother from the hands of a turner. They stood like pillars all molded exactly alike, and could be counted by hundreds. At an enormous height they spread out in chaplets of branches, rounded and adorned at their extremity with alternate leaves. At the axle of these leaves solitary flowers drooped down, the calyx of which resembles an inverted urn.

Under this leafy dome, which never lost its greenness, the air circulated freely, and dried up the dampness of the ground. Horses, cattle, and wagon could easily pass between the trees, for they were standing in wide rows, and parceled out like a wood that was being felled. This was neither like the densely-packed woods choked up with brambles, nor the virgin forest barricaded with the trunks of fallen trees, and overgrown with inextricable tangles of creepers, where only iron and fire could open up a track. A grassy carpet at the foot of the trees, and a canopy of verdure above, long perspectives of bold colors, little shade, little freshness at all, a peculiar light, as if the rays came through a thin veil, dappled lights and shades sharply reflected on the ground, made up

a whole, and constituted a peculiar spectacle rich in novel effects. The forests of the Oceanic continent do not in the least resemble the forests of the New World; and the Eucalyptus, the "Tara" of the aborigines, belonging to the family of MYRTACEA, the different varieties of which can hardly be enumerated, is the tree par excellence of the Australian flora.

The reason of the shade not being deep, nor the darkness profound, under these domes of verdure, was that these trees presented a curious anomaly in the disposition of the leaves. Instead of presenting their broad surface to the sunlight, only the side is turned. Only the profile of the leaves is seen in this singular foliage. Consequently the sun's rays slant down them to the earth, as if through the open slants of a Venetian blind.

Glenarvan expressed his surprise at this circumstance, and wondered what could be the cause of it. Paganel, who was never at a loss for an answer, immediately replied:

"What astonishes me is not the caprice of nature. She knows what she is about, but botanists don't always know what they are saying. Nature made no mistake in giving this peculiar foliage to the tree, but men have erred in calling them EUCALYPTUS."

"What does the word mean?" asked Mary Grant.

"It comes from a Greek word, meaning I cover well. They took care to commit the mistake in Greek, that it might not be so self-evident, for anyone can see that the eucalyptus covers badly."

"I agree with you there," said Glenarvan; "but now tell us, Paganel, how it is that the leaves grow in this fashion?"

"From a purely physical cause, friends," said Paganel, "and one that you will easily understand. In this country where the air is dry and rain seldom falls, and the ground is parched, the trees have no need of wind or sun. Moisture lacking, sap is lacking also. Hence these narrow leaves, which seek to defend themselves against the light, and prevent too great evaporation. This is why they present the profile and not the face to the sun's rays. There is nothing more intelligent than a leaf."

"And nothing more selfish," added the Major. "These only thought of themselves, and not at all of travelers."

Everyone inclined to the opinion of McNabbs except Paganel, who congratulated himself on walking under shadeless trees, though all the time he was wiping the perspiration from his forehead. However, this disposition of foliage was certainly to be regretted, for the journey through the forest was often long and painful, as the traveler had no protection whatever against the sun's fierce rays.

The whole of this day the wagon continued to roll along through interminable rows of eucalyptus, without meeting either quadruped or native. A few cockatoos lived in the tops of the trees, but at such a height they could scarcely be distinguished, and their noisy chatter was changed into an imperceptible murmur. Occasionally a swarm of par-roquets flew along a distant path, and lighted it up for an instant with gay colors; but otherwise, solemn silence reigned in this vast green temple, and the tramp of the horses, a few words exchanged with each other by the riders, the grinding noise of the wheels, and from time to time a cry from Ayrton to stir up his lazy team, were the only sounds which disturbed this immense solitude.

When night came they camped at the foot of some eucalyptus, which bore marks of a comparatively recent fire. They looked like tall factory chimneys, for the flame had completely hollowed them out their whole length. With the thick bark still covering them, they looked none the worse. However, this bad habit of squatters or natives will end in the destruction of these magnificent trees, and they will disappear like the cedars of Lebanon, those world monuments burnt by unlucky camp fires.

Olbinett, acting on Paganet's advice, lighted his fire to prepare supper in one of these tubular trunks. He found it drew capitally, and the smoke was lost in the dark foliage above. The requisite precautions were taken for the night,

and Ayrton, Mulrady, Wilson and John Mangles undertook in turn to keep watch until sunrise.

On the 3d of January, all day long, they came to nothing but the same symmetrical avenues of trees; it seemed as if they never were going to end. However, toward evening the ranks of trees began to thin, and on a little plain a few miles off an assemblage of regular houses.

"Seymour!" cried Paganel; "that is the last town we come to in the province of Victoria."

"Is it an important one?" asked Lady Helena.

"It is a mere village, madam, but on the way to become a municipality."

"Shall we find a respectable hotel there?" asked Glenarvan.

"I hope so," replied Paganel.

"Very well; let us get on to the town, for our fair travelers, with all their courage, will not be sorry, I fancy, to have a good night's rest."

"My dear Edward, Mary and I will accept it gladly, but only on the condition that it will cause no delay, or take us the least out of the road."

"It will do neither," replied Lord Glenarvan. "Besides, our bullocks are fatigued, and we will start to-morrow at daybreak."

It was now nine o'clock; the moon was just beginning to rise, but her rays were only slanting yet, and lost in the mist.

It was gradually getting dark when the little party entered the wide streets of Seymour, under Paganel's guidance, who seemed always to know what he had never seen; but his instinct led him right, and he walked straight to Campbell's North British Hotel.

The Major without even leaving the hotel, was soon aware that fear absorbed the inhabitants of the little town.

Ten minutes' conversation with Dickson, the loquacious landlord, made him completely acquainted with the actual state of affairs; but he never breathed a word to any one.

When supper was over, though, and Lady Glenarvan, and Mary, and Robert had retired, the Major detained his companions a little, and said, "They have found out the perpetrators of the crime on the Sandhurst railroad."

"And are they arrested?" asked Ayrton, eagerly.

"No," replied McNabbs, without apparently noticing the EMPRESSMENT of the quartermaster--an EMPRESSMENT which, moreover, was reasonable



enough under the circumstances.

"So much the worse," replied Ayrton.

"Well," said Glenarvan, "who are the authors of the crime?"

"Read," replied the Major, offering Glenarvan a copy of the Australian and New Zealand Gazette, "and you will see that the inspector of the police was not mistaken."

Glenarvan read aloud the following message:

SYDNEY, Jan. 2, 1866.

It will be remembered that on the night of the 29th or 30th of last December there was an accident at Camden Bridge, five miles beyond the station at Castlemaine, on the railway from Melbourne to Sandhurst. The night express, 11.45, dashing along at full speed, was precipitated into the Loddon River.

Camden Bridge had been left open. The numerous robberies committed after the accident, the body of the guard picked up about half a mile from Camden Bridge, proved that this catastrophe was the result of a crime.

Indeed, the coroner's inquest decided that the crime must be attributed to the band of convicts which escaped six months ago from the Penitentiary at Perth, Western Australia, just as they were about to be transferred to Norfolk Island.

The gang numbers twenty-nine men; they are under the command of a certain Ben Joyce, a criminal of the most dangerous class, who arrived in Australia a few months ago, by what ship is not known, and who has hitherto succeeded in evading the hands of justice.

The inhabitants of towns, colonists and squatters at stations, are hereby cautioned to be on their guard, and to communicate to the Surveyor-General any information that may aid his search.

J. P. MITCHELL, S. G.

When Glenarvan had finished reading this article, McNabbs turned to the geographer and said, "You see, Paganel, there can be convicts in Australia."

"Escaped convicts, that is evident," replied Paganel, "but not regularly transported criminals. Those fellows have no business here."

"Well, they are here, at any rate," said Glenarvan; "but I don't suppose the fact need materially alter our arrangements. What do you think, John?"

John Mangles did not reply immediately; he hesitated between the sorrow it would cause the two children to give up the search, and the fear of compromising the expedition.

"If Lady Glenarvan, and Miss Grant were not with us," he said, "I should not give myself much concern about these wretches."

Glenarvan understood him and added, "Of course I need not say that it is not a question of giving up our task; but would it perhaps be prudent, for the sake of our companions, to rejoin the DUNCAN at Melbourne, and proceed with our search for traces of Harry Grant on the eastern side.

What do you think of it, McNabbs?"

"Before I give my opinion," replied the Major, "I should like to hear Ayrton's."

At this direct appeal, the quartermaster looked at Glenarvan, and said, "I think we are two hundred miles from Melbourne, and that the danger, if it exists, is as great on the route to the south as on the route to the east. Both are little frequented, and both will serve us. Besides, I do not think that thirty scoundrels can frighten eight well-armed, determined men. My advice, then, is to go forward."

"And good advice too, Ayrton," replied Paganel. "By going on we may come across the traces of Captain Grant. In returning south, on the contrary, we turn our backs to them. I think with you, then, and I don't care a snap for these escaped fellows.

A brave man wouldn't care a bit for them!"

Upon this they agreed with the one voice to follow their original programme.

"Just one thing, my Lord," said Ayrton, when they were about to separate.

"Say on, Ayrton."

"Wouldn't it be advisable to send orders to the DUNCAN to be at the coast?"

"What good would that be," replied John Mangles. "When we reach Twofold Bay it will be time enough for that. If any unexpected event should oblige us to go to Melbourne, we might be sorry not to find the DUNCAN there. Besides, her injuries can not be repaired yet. For these reasons, then, I think it would be better to wait."

"All right," said Ayrton, and forbore to press the matter further.