

## CHAPTER XIX HELPLESS AND HOPELESS

IT was not a time for despair, but action. The bridge at Kemple Pier was destroyed, but the Snowy River must be crossed, come what might, and they must reach Twofold Bay before Ben Joyce and his gang, so, instead of wasting time in empty words, the next day (the 16th of January) John Mangles and Glenarvan went down to examine the river, and arrange for the passage over.

The swollen and tumultuous waters had not gone down the least. They rushed on with indescribable fury. It would be risking life to battle with them. Glenarvan stood gazing with folded arms and downcast face.

"Would you like me to try and swim across?" said John Mangles.

"No, John, no!" said Lord Glenarvan, holding back the bold, daring young fellow, "let us wait."

And they both returned to the camp. The day passed in the most intense anxiety. Ten times Lord Glenarvan went to look at the river, trying to invent some bold way of getting over; but in vain.

Had a torrent of lava rushed between the shores, it could not have been more impassable.

During these long wasted hours, Lady Helena, under the Major's advice, was nursing Mulrady with the utmost skill. The sailor felt a throb of returning life. McNabbs ventured to affirm that no vital part was injured. Loss of blood accounted for the patient's extreme exhaustion. The wound once closed and the hemorrhage stopped, time and rest would be all that was needed to complete his cure. Lady Helena had insisted on giving up the first compartment of the wagon to him, which greatly tried his modesty. The poor fellow's greatest trouble was the delay his condition might cause Glenarvan, and he made him promise that they should leave him in the camp under Wilson's care, should the passage of the river become practicable.

But, unfortunately, no passage was practicable, either that day or the next (January 17); Glenarvan was in despair. Lady Helena and the Major vainly tried to calm him, and preached patience.

Patience, indeed, when perhaps at this very moment Ben Joyce was boarding the yacht; when the DUNCAN, loosing from her moorings, was getting up steam to reach the fatal coast, and each hour was bringing her nearer.

John Mangles felt in his own breast all that Glenarvan was suffering. He determined to conquer the difficulty at any price,

and constructed a canoe in the Australian manner, with large sheets of bark of the gum-trees. These sheets were kept together by bars of wood, and formed a very fragile boat.

The captain and the sailor made a trial trip in it during the day.

All that skill, and strength, and tact, and courage could do they did; but they were scarcely in the current before they were upside down, and nearly paid with their lives for the dangerous experiment.

The boat disappeared, dragged down by the eddy. John Mangles and Wilson had not gone ten fathoms, and the river was a mile broad, and swollen by the heavy rains and melted snows.

Thus passed the 19th and 20th of January. The Major and Glenarvan went five miles up the river in search of a favorable passage, but everywhere they found the same roaring, rushing, impetuous torrent. The whole southern slope of the Australian Alps poured its liquid masses into this single bed.

All hope of saving the DUNCAN was now at an end. Five days had elapsed since the departure of Ben Joyce. The yacht must be at this moment at the coast, and in the hands of the convicts.

However, it was impossible that this state of things could last.

The temporary influx would soon be exhausted, and the violence also.

Indeed, on the morning of the 21st, Paganel announced that the water was already lower. "What does it matter now?"

said Glenarvan. "It is too late!"

"That is no reason for our staying longer here," said the Major.

"Certainly not," replied John Mangles. "Perhaps tomorrow the river may be practicable."

"And will that save my unhappy men?" cried Glenarvan.

"Will your Lordship listen to me?" returned John Mangles. "I know Tom Austin. He would execute your orders, and set out as soon as departure was possible. But who knows whether the DUNCAN was ready and her injury repaired on the arrival of Ben Joyce. And suppose the yacht could not go to sea; suppose there was a delay of a day, or two days."

"You are right, John," replied Glenarvan. "We must get to Twofold Bay; we are only thirty-five miles from Delegete."

"Yes," added Paganel, "and that's a town where we shall find rapid means of conveyance. Who knows whether we shan't arrive in time to prevent a catastrophe."

"Let us start," cried Glenarvan.

John Mangles and Wilson instantly set to work to construct a canoe of larger dimensions. Experience had proved that the bark was powerless

against the violence of the torrent, and John accordingly felled some of the gum-trees, and made a rude but solid raft with the trunks. It was a long task, and the day had gone before the work was ended. It was completed next morning.

By this time the waters had visibly diminished; the torrent had once more become a river, though a very rapid one, it is true. However, by pursuing a zigzag course, and overcoming it to a certain extent, John hoped to reach the opposite shore. At half-past twelve, they embarked provisions enough for a couple of days. The remainder was left with the wagon and the tent. Mulrady was doing well enough to be carried over; his convalescence was rapid.

At one o'clock, they all seated themselves on the raft, still moored to the shore. John Mangles had installed himself at the starboard, and entrusted to Wilson a sort of oar to steady the raft against the current, and lessen the leeway. He took his own stand at the back, to steer by means of a large scull; but, notwithstanding their efforts, Wilson and John Mangles soon found themselves in an inverse position, which made the action of the oars impossible.

There was no help for it; they could do nothing to arrest the gyratory movement of the raft; it turned round with dizzying rapidity, and drifted out of its course. John Mangles stood with pale face and set teeth, gazing at the whirling current.

However, the raft had reached the middle of the river, about half a mile from the starting point. Here the current was extremely strong, and this broke the whirling eddy, and gave the raft some stability. John and Wilson seized their oars again, and managed to push it in an oblique direction. This brought them nearer to the left shore. They were not more than fifty fathoms from it, when Wilson's oar snapped short off, and the raft, no longer supported, was dragged away. John tried to resist at the risk of breaking his own oar, too, and Wilson, with bleeding hands, seconded his efforts with all his might.

At last they succeeded, and the raft, after a passage of more than half an hour, struck against the steep bank of the opposite shore. The shock was so violent that the logs became disunited, the cords broke, and the water bubbled up between. The travelers had barely time to catch hold of the steep bank. They dragged out Mulrady and the two dripping ladies. Everyone was safe; but the provisions and firearms, except the carbine of the Major, went drifting down with the DEBRIS of the raft.

The river was crossed. The little company found themselves almost without provisions, thirty-five miles from Delegete, in the midst of the unknown deserts of the Victoria frontier. Neither settlers nor squatters were to be met with; it was entirely uninhabited, unless by ferocious bushrangers and bandits.

They resolved to set off without delay. Mulrady saw clearly that he would be a great drag on them, and he begged to be allowed to remain, and even to remain alone, till assistance could be sent from Delegete.

Glenarvan refused. It would be three days before he could reach Delegete, and five the shore--that is to say, the 26th of January. Now, as the DUNCAN had left Melbourne on the 16th, what difference would a few days' delay make?

"No, my friend," he said, "I will not leave anyone behind. We will make a litter and carry you in turn."

The litter was made of boughs of eucalyptus covered with branches; and, whether he would or not, Mulrady was obliged to take his place on it. Glenarvan would be the first to carry his sailor. He took hold of one end and Wilson of the other, and all set off.

What a sad spectacle, and how lamentably was this expedition to end which had commenced so well. They were no longer in search of Harry Grant. This continent, where he was not, and never had been, threatened to prove fatal to those who sought him. And when these intrepid countrymen of his should reach the shore, they would find the DUNCAN waiting to take them home again. The first day passed silently and painfully. Every ten minutes the litter changed bearers. All the sailor's comrades took their share in this task without murmuring, though the fatigue

was augmented by the great heat.

In the evening, after a journey of only five miles, they camped under the gum-trees. The small store of provisions saved from the raft composed the evening meal. But all they had to depend upon now was the Major's carbine.

It was a dark, rainy night, and morning seemed as if it would never dawn. They set off again, but the Major could not find a chance of firing a shot. This fatal region was only a desert, unfrequented even by animals. Fortunately, Robert discovered a bustard's nest with a dozen of large eggs in it, which Olbinett cooked on hot cinders. These, with a few roots of purslain which were growing at the bottom of a ravine, were all the breakfast of the 22d.

The route now became extremely difficult. The sandy plains were bristling with SPINIFEX, a prickly plant, which is called in Melbourne the porcupine. It tears the clothing to rags, and makes the legs bleed. The courageous ladies never complained, but footed it bravely, setting an example, and encouraging one and another by word or look.

They stopped in the evening at Mount Bulla Bulla, on the edge of the Jungalla Creek. The supper would have been very scant, if McNabbs had not killed a large rat, the mus conditor, which is highly spoken of as an article of diet.

Olbinett roasted it, and it would have been pronounced even



superior to its reputation had it equaled the sheep in size. They were obliged to be content with it, however, and it was devoured to the bones.

On the 23d the weary but still energetic travelers started off again. After having gone round the foot of the mountain, they crossed the long prairies where the grass seemed made of whalebone. It was a tangle of darts, a medley of sharp little sticks, and a path had to be cut through either with the hatchet or fire.

That morning there was not even a question of breakfast. Nothing could be more barren than this region strewn with pieces of quartz. Not only hunger, but thirst began to assail the travelers. A burning atmosphere heightened their discomfort. Glenarvan and his friends could only go half a mile an hour. Should this lack of food and water continue till evening, they would all sink on the road, never to rise again.

But when everything fails a man, and he finds himself without resources, at the very moment when he feels he must give up, then Providence steps in. Water presented itself in the CEPHALOTES, a species of cup-shaped flower, filled with refreshing liquid, which hung from the branches of coralliform-shaped bushes. They all quenched their thirst with these, and felt new life returning.

The only food they could find was the same as the natives were forced

to subsist upon, when they could find neither game, nor serpents, nor insects. Paganel discovered in the dry bed of a creek, a plant whose excellent properties had been frequently described by one of his colleagues in the Geographical Society.

It was the NARDOU, a cryptogamous plant of the family Marsilacea, and the same which kept Burke and King alive in the deserts of the interior. Under its leaves, which resembled those of the trefoil, there were dried sporules as large as a lentil, and these sporules, when crushed between two stones, made a sort of flour. This was converted into coarse bread, which stilled the pangs of hunger at least. There was a great abundance of this plant growing in the district, and Olbinett gathered a large supply, so that they were sure of food for several days.

The next day, the 24th, Mulrady was able to walk part of the way. His wound was entirely cicatrized. The town of Delegete was not more than ten miles off, and that evening they camped in longitude 140 degrees, on the very frontier of New South Wales.

For some hours, a fine but penetrating rain had been falling. There would have been no shelter from this, if by chance John Mangles had not discovered a sawyer's hut, deserted and dilapidated to a degree. But with this miserable cabin they were obliged to be content. Wilson wanted to kindle a fire to prepare the NARDOU bread, and he went out to pick up the dead wood scattered all over

the ground. But he found it would not light, the great quantity of albuminous matter which it contained prevented all combustion. This is the incombustible wood put down by Paganel in his list of Australian products.

They had to dispense with fire, and consequently with food too, and sleep in their wet clothes, while the laughing jackasses, concealed in the high branches, seemed to ridicule the poor unfortunates. However, Glenarvan was nearly at the end of his sufferings. It was time. The two young ladies were making heroic efforts, but their strength was hourly decreasing. They dragged themselves along, almost unable to walk.

Next morning they started at daybreak. At 11 A. M. Delegete came in sight in the county of Wellesley, and fifty miles from Twofold Bay.

Means of conveyance were quickly procured here.

Hope returned to Glenarvan as they approached the coast. Perhaps there might have been some slight delay, and after all they might get there before the arrival of the DUNCAN. In twenty-four hours they would reach the bay.

At noon, after a comfortable meal, all the travelers installed in a mail-coach, drawn by five strong horses, left Delegete at a gallop. The postilions, stimulated by a promise of a princely DOUCEUR,

drove rapidly along over a well-kept road. They did not lose a minute in changing horses, which took place every ten miles. It seemed as if they were infected with Glenarvan's zeal. All that day, and night, too, they traveled on at the rate of six miles an hour.

In the morning at sunrise, a dull murmur fell on their ears, and announced their approach to the Indian Ocean. They required to go round the bay to gain the coast at the 37th parallel, the exact point where Tom Austin was to wait their arrival.

When the sea appeared, all eyes anxiously gazed at the offing. Was the DUNCAN, by a miracle of Providence, there running close to the shore, as a month ago, when they crossed Cape Corrientes, they had found her on the Argentine coast? They saw nothing. Sky and earth mingled in the same horizon. Not a sail enlivened the vast stretch of ocean.

One hope still remained. Perhaps Tom Austin had thought it his duty to cast anchor in Twofold Bay, for the sea was heavy, and a ship would not dare to venture near the shore. "To Eden!" cried Glenarvan. Immediately the mail-coach resumed the route round the bay, toward the little town of Eden, five miles distant. The postilions stopped not far from the lighthouse, which marks the entrance of the port. Several vessels were moored in the roadstead, but none of them bore the flag of Malcolm.

Glenarvan, John Mangles, and Paganel got out of the coach, and rushed to the custom-house, to inquire about the arrival of vessels within the last few days.

No ship had touched the bay for a week.

"Perhaps the yacht has not started," Glenarvan said, a sudden revulsion of feeling lifting him from despair.

"Perhaps we have arrived first."

John Mangles shook his head. He knew Tom Austin. His first mate would not delay the execution of an order for ten days.

"I must know at all events how they stand," said Glenarvan.

"Better certainty than doubt."

A quarter of an hour afterward a telegram was sent to the syndicate of shipbrokers in Melbourne. The whole party then repaired to the Victoria Hotel.

At 2 P.M. the following telegraphic reply was received:

"LORD GLENARVAN, Eden.

"Twofold Bay.

"The DUNCAN left on the 16th current. Destination unknown.  
J. ANDREWS, S. B."

The telegram dropped from Glenarvan's hands.

There was no doubt now. The good, honest Scotch yacht was now a pirate ship in the hands of Ben Joyce!

So ended this journey across Australia, which had commenced under circumstances so favorable. All trace of Captain Grant and his shipwrecked men seemed to be irrevocably lost.

This ill success had cost the loss of a ship's crew.

Lord Glenarvan had been vanquished in the strife; and the courageous searchers, whom the unfriendly elements of the Pampas had been unable to check, had been conquered on the Australian shore by the perversity of man.

END OF BOOK TWO

In Search of the Castaways or The Children of Captain Grant

New Zealand