

CHAPTER III THE MARTYR-ROLL OF NAVIGATORS

ON the 31st of January, four days after starting, the MACQUARIE had not done two-thirds of the distance between Australia and New Zealand. Will Halley took very little heed to the working of the ship; he let things take their chance. He seldom showed himself, for which no one was sorry. No one would have complained if he had passed all his time in his cabin, but for the fact that the brutal captain was every day under the influence of gin or brandy. His sailors willingly followed his example, and no ship ever sailed more entirely depending on Providence than the MACQUARIE did from Twofold Bay.

This unpardonable carelessness obliged John Mangles to keep a watchful eye ever open. Mulrady and Wilson more than once brought round the helm when some careless steering threatened to throw the ship on her beam-ends. Often Will Halley would interfere and abuse the two sailors with a volley of oaths. The latter, in their impatience, would have liked nothing better than to bind this drunken captain, and lower him into the hold, for the rest of the voyage. But John Mangles succeeded, after some persuasion, in calming their well-grounded indignation.

Still, the position of things filled him with anxiety;

but, for fear of alarming Glenarvan, he spoke only to Paganel or the Major. McNabbs recommended the same course as Mulrady and Wilson.

"If you think it would be for the general good, John," said McNabbs, "you should not hesitate to take the command of the vessel. When we get to Auckland the drunken imbecile can resume his command, and then he is at liberty to wreck himself, if that is his fancy."

"All that is very true, Mr. McNabbs, and if it is absolutely necessary I will do it. As long as we are on open sea, a careful lookout is enough; my sailors and I are watching on the poop; but when we get near the coast, I confess I shall be uneasy if Halley does not come to his senses."

"Could not you direct the course?" asked Paganel.

"That would be difficult," replied John. "Would you believe it that there is not a chart on board?"

"Is that so?"

"It is indeed. The MACQUARIE only does a coasting trade between Eden and Auckland, and Halley is so at home in these waters that he takes no observations."

"I suppose he thinks the ship knows the way, and steers herself."

"Ha! ha!" laughed John Mangles; "I do not believe in ships that steer themselves; and if Halley is drunk when we get among soundings, he will get us all into trouble."

"Let us hope," said Paganel, "that the neighborhood of land will bring him to his senses."

"Well, then," said McNabbs, "if needs were, you could not sail the MACQUARIE into Auckland?"

"Without a chart of the coast, certainly not.

The coast is very dangerous. It is a series of shallow fiords as irregular and capricious as the fiords of Norway. There are many reefs, and it requires great experience to avoid them.

The strongest ship would be lost if her keel struck one of those rocks that are submerged but a few feet below the water."

"In that case those on board would have to take refuge on the coast."

"If there was time."

"A terrible extremity," said Paganel, "for they are not hospitable shores, and the dangers of the land are not less appalling than the dangers of the sea."

"You refer to the Maories, Monsieur Paganel?" asked John Mangles.

"Yes, my friend. They have a bad name in these waters.

It is not a matter of timid or brutish Australians, but of an intelligent and sanguinary race, cannibals greedy of human flesh, man-eaters to whom we should look in vain for pity."

"Well, then," exclaimed the Major, "if Captain Grant had been wrecked on the coast of New Zealand, you would dissuade us from looking for him."

"Oh, you might search on the coasts," replied the geographer, "because you might find traces of the BRITANNIA, but not in the interior, for it would be perfectly useless. Every European who ventures into these fatal districts falls into the hands of the Maories, and a prisoner in the hands of the Maories is a lost man. I have urged my friends to cross the Pampas, to toil over the plains of Australia, but I will never lure them into the mazes of the New Zealand forest. May heaven be our guide, and keep us from ever being thrown within the power of those fierce natives!"