

CHAPTER V CANNIBALS

WILL HALLEY and his crew, taking advantage of the darkness of night and the sleep of the passengers, had fled with the only boat.

There could be no doubt about it. The captain, whose duty would have kept him on board to the last, had been the first to quit the ship.

"The cowards are off!" said John Mangles. "Well, my Lord, so much the better. They have spared us some trying scenes."

"No doubt," said Glenarvan; "besides we have a captain of our own, and courageous, if unskillful sailors, your companions, John. Say the word, and we are ready to obey."

The Major, Paganel, Robert, Wilson, Mulrady, Olbinett himself, applauded Glenarvan's speech, and ranged themselves on the deck, ready to execute their captain's orders.

"What is to be done?" asked Glenarvan.

It was evident that raising the MACQUARIE was out of the question, and no less evident that she must be abandoned. Waiting on board for succor that might never come, would have been imprudence and folly. Before the arrival of a chance vessel on the scene, the MACQUARIE would have broken up. The next storm, or even a high tide

raised by the winds from seaward, would roll it on the sands,
break it up into splinters, and scatter them on the shore.
John was anxious to reach the land before this inevitable consummation.

He proposed to construct a raft strong enough to carry the passengers,
and a sufficient quantity of provisions, to the coast of New Zealand.

There was no time for discussion, the work was to be set about
at once, and they had made considerable progress when night came
and interrupted them.

Toward eight o'clock in the evening, after supper, while Lady Helena
and Mary Grant slept in their berths, Paganel and his friends
conversed on serious matters as they walked up and down the deck.
Robert had chosen to stay with them. The brave boy listened
with all his ears, ready to be of use, and willing to enlist
in any perilous adventure.

Paganel asked John Mangles whether the raft could not follow the coast
as far as Auckland, instead of landing its freight on the coast.

John replied that the voyage was impossible with such
an unmanageable craft.

"And what we cannot do on a raft could have been done in the ship's boat?"

"Yes, if necessary," answered John; "but we should have had to sail by day and anchor at night."

"Then those wretches who abandoned us--"

"Oh, as for them," said John, "they were drunk, and in the darkness I have no doubt they paid for their cowardice with their lives."

"So much the worse for them and for us," replied Paganel; "for the boat would have been very useful to us."

"What would you have, Paganel? The raft will bring us to the shore," said Glenarvan.

"The very thing I would fain avoid," exclaimed the geographer.

"What! do you think another twenty miles after crossing the Pampas and Australia, can have any terrors for us, hardened as we are to fatigue?"

"My friend," replied Paganel, "I do not call in question our courage nor the bravery of our friends. Twenty miles would be nothing in any other country than New Zealand. You cannot suspect me of faint-heartedness. I was the first to persuade you to cross America and Australia. But here the case is different. I repeat, anything is better than to venture into this treacherous country."

"Anything is better, in my judgment," said John Mangles,
"than braving certain destruction on a stranded vessel."

"What is there so formidable in New Zealand?" asked Glenarvan.

"The savages," said Paganel.

"The savages!" repeated Glenarvan. "Can we not avoid them
by keeping to the shore? But in any case what have we to fear?
Surely, two resolute and well-armed Europeans need not give
a thought to an attack by a handful of miserable beings."

Paganel shook his head. "In this case there are no miserable
beings to contend with. The New Zealanders are a powerful race,
who are rebelling against English rule, who fight the invaders,
and often beat them, and who always eat them!"

"Cannibals!" exclaimed Robert, "cannibals?" Then they heard him whisper,
"My sister! Lady Helena."

"Don't frighten yourself, my boy," said Glenarvan;
"our friend Paganel exaggerates."

"Far from it," rejoined Paganel. "Robert has shown himself a man,
and I treat him as such, in not concealing the truth from him."

Paganel was right. Cannibalism has become a fixed fact in New Zealand, as it is in the Fijis and in Torres Strait. Superstition is no doubt partly to blame, but cannibalism is certainly owing to the fact that there are moments when game is scarce and hunger great. The savages began by eating human flesh to appease the demands of an appetite rarely satiated; subsequently the priests regulated and satisfied the monstrous custom. What was a meal, was raised to the dignity of a ceremony, that is all.

Besides, in the eyes of the Maories, nothing is more natural than to eat one another. The missionaries often questioned them about cannibalism. They asked them why they devoured their brothers; to which the chiefs made answer that fish eat fish, dogs eat men, men eat dogs, and dogs eat one another. Even the Maori mythology has a legend of a god who ate another god; and with such a precedent, who could resist eating his neighbor?

Another strange notion is, that in eating a dead enemy they consume his spiritual being, and so inherit his soul, his strength and his bravery, which they hold are specially lodged in the brain. This accounts for the fact that the brain figures in their feasts as the choicest delicacy, and is offered to the most honored guest.

But while he acknowledged all this, Paganel maintained, not without a show of reason, that sensuality, and especially hunger, was the first cause of cannibalism among the New Zealanders,

and not only among the Polynesian races, but also among the savages of Europe.

"For," said he, "cannibalism was long prevalent among the ancestors of the most civilized people, and especially (if the Major will not think me personal) among the Scotch."

"Really," said McNabbs.

"Yes, Major," replied Paganel. "If you read certain passages of Saint Jerome, on the Atticoli of Scotland, you will see what he thought of your forefathers. And without going so far back as historic times, under the reign of Elizabeth, when Shakespeare was dreaming out his Shy-lock, a Scotch bandit, Sawney Bean, was executed for the crime of cannibalism.

Was it religion that prompted him to cannibalism?

No! it was hunger."

"Hunger?" said John Mangles.

"Hunger!" repeated Paganel; "but, above all, the necessity of the carnivorous appetite of replacing the bodily waste, by the azote contained in animal tissues. The lungs are satisfied with a provision of vegetable and farinaceous food. But to be strong and active the body must be supplied with those plastic elements that renew the muscles.

Until the Maories become members of the Vegetarian Association they will eat meat, and human flesh as meat."

"Why not animal flesh?" asked Glenarvan.

"Because they have no animals," replied Paganel; "and that ought to be taken into account, not to extenuate, but to explain, their cannibal habits. Quadrupeds, and even birds, are rare on these inhospitable shores, so that the Maories have always eaten human flesh. There are even 'man-eating seasons,' as there are in civilized countries hunting seasons. Then begin the great wars, and whole tribes are served up on the tables of the conquerors."

"Well, then," said Glenarvan, "according to your mode of reasoning, Paganel, cannibalism will not cease in New Zealand until her pastures teem with sheep and oxen."

"Evidently, my dear Lord; and even then it will take years to wean them from Maori flesh, which they prefer to all others; for the children will still have a relish for what their fathers so highly appreciated. According to them it tastes like pork, with even more flavor. As to white men's flesh, they do not like it so well, because the whites eat salt with their food, which gives a peculiar flavor, not to the taste of connoisseurs."

"They are dainty," said the Major. "But, black or white, do they eat it raw, or cook it?"

"Why, what is that to you, Mr. McNabbs?" cried Robert.

"What is that to me!" exclaimed the Major, earnestly. "If I am to make a meal for a cannibal, I should prefer being cooked."

"Why?"

"Because then I should be sure of not being eaten alive!"

"Very good. Major," said Paganel; "but suppose they cooked you alive?"

"The fact is," answered the Major, "I would not give half-a-crown for the choice!"

"Well, McNabbs, if it will comfort you--you may as well be told--the New Zealanders do not eat flesh without cooking or smoking it.

They are very clever and experienced in cookery.

For my part, I very much dislike the idea of being eaten!

The idea of ending one's life in the maw of a savage! bah!"

"The conclusion of all," said John Mangles, "is that we must not fall into their hands. Let us hope that one day Christianity will abolish all these monstrous customs."

"Yes, we must hope so," replied Paganel; "but, believe me, a savage who has tasted human flesh, is not easily persuaded to forego it. I will relate two facts which prove it."

"By all means let us have the facts, Paganel," said Glenarvan.

"The first is narrated in the chronicles of the Jesuit Society in Brazil. A Portuguese missionary was one day visiting an old Brazilian woman who was very ill. She had only a few days to live. The Jesuit inculcated the truths of religion, which the dying woman accepted, without objection. Then having attended to her spiritual wants, he bethought himself of her bodily needs, and offered her some European delicacies. 'Alas,' said she, 'my digestion is too weak to bear any kind of food. There is only one thing I could fancy, and nobody here could get it for me.' 'What is it?' asked the Jesuit. 'Ah! my son,' said she, 'it is the hand of a little boy! I feel as if I should enjoy munching the little bones!'"

"Horrid! but I wonder is it so very nice?" said Robert.

"My second tale will answer you, my boy," said Paganel: "One day a missionary was reproofing a cannibal for the horrible custom, so abhorrent to God's laws, of eating human flesh! 'And beside,' said he, 'it must be so nasty!' 'Oh, father,' said the savage,

looking greedily at the missionary, 'say that God forbids it!
That is a reason for what you tell us. But don't say it is nasty!
If you had only tasted it!"