

## CHAPTER VI A DREADED COUNTRY

PAGANEL'S facts were indisputable. The cruelty of the New Zealanders was beyond a doubt, therefore it was dangerous to land.

But had the danger been a hundredfold greater, it had to be faced.

John Mangles felt the necessity of leaving without delay a vessel doomed to certain and speedy destruction.

There were two dangers, one certain and the other probable, but no one could hesitate between them.

As to their chance of being picked up by a passing vessel, they could not reasonably hope for it. The MACQUARIE was not in the track of ships bound to New Zealand. They kept further north for Auckland, further south for New Plymouth, and the ship had struck just between these two points, on the desert region of the shores of Ika-na-Mani, a dangerous, difficult coast, and infested by desperate characters.

"When shall we get away?" asked Glenarvan.

"To-morrow morning at ten o'clock," replied John Mangles. "The tide will then turn and carry us to land."

Next day, February 5, at eight o'clock, the raft was finished.

John had given all his attention to the building of this structure.

The foreyard, which did very well for mooring the anchors,

was quite inadequate to the transport of passengers and provisions. What was needed was a strong, manageable raft, that would resist the force of the waves during a passage of nine miles. Nothing but the masts could supply suitable materials.

Wilson and Mulrady set to work; the rigging was cut clear, and the mainmast, chopped away at the base, fell over the starboard rail, which crashed under its weight. The MACQUARIE was thus razed like a pontoon.

When the lower mast, the topmasts, and the royals were sawn and split, the principal pieces of the raft were ready. They were then joined to the fragments of the foremast and the whole was fastened securely together. John took the precaution to place in the interstices half a dozen empty barrels, which would raise the structure above the level of the water. On this strong foundation, Wilson laid a kind of floor in open work, made of the gratings off the hatches. The spray could then dash on the raft without staying there, and the passengers would be kept dry. In addition to this, the hose-pipes firmly lashed together formed a kind of circular barrier which protected the deck from the waves.

That morning, John seeing that the wind was in their favor, rigged up the royal-yard in the middle of the raft as a mast. It was stayed with shrouds, and carried a makeshift sail. A large broad-bladed oar was fixed behind to act as a rudder in case the wind was sufficient to require it. The greatest

pains had been expended on strengthening the raft to resist the force of the waves, but the question remained whether, in the event of a change of wind, they could steer, or indeed, whether they could hope ever to reach the land.

At nine o'clock they began to load. First came the provisions, in quantity sufficient to last till they should reach Auckland, for they could not count on the productions of this barren region.

Olbinett's stores furnished some preserved meat which remained of the purchase made for their voyage in the MACQUARIE. This was but a scanty resource. They had to fall back on the coarse viands of the ship; sea biscuits of inferior quality, and two casks of salt fish.

The steward was quite crestfallen.

These provisions were put in hermetically sealed cases, staunch and safe from sea water, and then lowered on to the raft and strongly lashed to the foot of the mast. The arms and ammunition were piled in a dry corner. Fortunately the travelers were well armed with carbines and revolvers.

A holding anchor was also put on board in case John should be unable to make the land in one tide, and would have to seek moorings.

At ten o'clock the tide turned. The breeze blew gently from the northwest, and a slight swell rocked the frail craft.

"Are we ready?" asked John.

"All ready, captain," answered Wilson.

"All aboard!" cried John.

Lady Helena and Mary Grant descended by a rope ladder, and took their station at the foot of the mast on the cases of provisions, their companions near them. Wilson took the helm. John stood by the tackle, and Mulrady cut the line which held the raft to the ship's side.

The sail was spread, and the frail structure commenced its progress toward the land, aided by wind and tide. The coast was about nine miles off, a distance that a boat with good oars would have accomplished in three hours. But with a raft allowance must be made. If the wind held, they might reach the land in one tide. But if the breeze died away, the ebb would carry them away from the shore, and they would be compelled to anchor and wait for the next tide, a serious consideration, and one that filled John Mangles with anxiety.

Still he hoped to succeed. The wind freshened. The tide had turned at ten o'clock, and by three they must either make the land or anchor to save themselves from being carried out to sea. They made a good start. Little by little the black line of the reefs

and the yellow banks of sand disappeared under the swelling tide. Extreme watchfulness and perfect skill were necessary to avoid these submerged rocks, and steer a bark that did not readily answer to the helm, and that constantly broke off.

At noon they were still five miles from shore. A tolerably clear sky allowed them to make out the principal features of the land. In the northeast rose a mountain about 2,300 feet high, whose sharply defined outline was exactly like the grinning face of a monkey turned toward the sky. It was Pirongia, which the map gave as exactly on the 38th parallel.

At half-past twelve, Paganel remarked that all the rocks had disappeared under the rising tide.

"All but one," answered Lady Helena.

"Which, Madam?" asked Paganel.

"There," replied she, pointing to a black speck a mile off.

"Yes, indeed," said Paganel. "Let us try to ascertain its position, so as not to get too near it, for the sea will soon conceal it."

"It is exactly in a line with the northern slope of the mountain," said John Mangles. "Wilson, mind you give it a wide berth."

"Yes, captain," answered the sailor, throwing his whole weight on the great oar that steered the raft.

In half an hour they had made half a mile. But, strange to say, the black point still rose above the waves.

John looked attentively, and in order to make it out, borrowed Paganel's telescope.

"That is no reef," said he, after a moment; "it is something floating, which rises and falls with the swell."

"Is it part of the mast of the MACQUARIE?" asked Lady Helena.

"No," said Glenarvan, "none of her timbers could have come so far."

"Stay!" said John Mangles; "I know it! It is the boat."

"The ship's boat?" exclaimed Glenarvan.

"Yes, my lord. The ship's boat, keel up."

"The unfortunate creatures," cried Lady Helena, "they have perished!"

"Yes, Madam," replied John Mangles, "they must have perished,

for in the midst of these breakers in a heavy swell on that pitchy night, they ran to certain death."

For a few minutes the passengers were silent.

They gazed at the frail craft as they drew near it.

It must evidently have capsized about four miles from the shore, and not one of the crew could have escaped.

"But this boat may be of use to us," said Glenarvan.

"That is true," answered John Mangles. "Keep her up, Wilson."

The direction was slightly changed, but the breeze fell gradually, and it was two hours before they reached the boat.

Mulrady, stationed forward, fended off the blow, and the yawl was drawn alongside.

"Empty?" asked John Mangles.

"Yes, captain," answered the sailor, "the boat is empty. and all its seams are open. It is of no use to us."

"No use at all?" said McNabbs.

"None at all," said John Mangles.

"It is good for nothing but to burn."

"I regret it," said Paganel, "for the yawl might have taken us to Auckland."

"We must bear our fate, Monsieur Paganel," replied John Mangles.

"But, for my part, in such a stormy sea I prefer our raft to that crazy boat. A very slight shock would be enough to break her up. Therefore, my lord, we have nothing to detain us further."

"As you think best, John."

"On then, Wilson," said John, "and bear straight for the land."

There was still an hour before the turn of the tide.

In that time they might make two miles. But the wind soon fell almost entirely, and the raft became nearly motionless, and soon began to drift to seaward under the influence of the ebb-tide.

John did not hesitate a moment.

"Let go the anchor," said he.

Mulrady, who stood to execute this order, let go the anchor in five fathoms water. The raft backed about two fathoms on the line,

which was then at full stretch. The sail was taken in, and everything made snug for a tedious period of inaction.

The returning tide would not occur till nine o'clock in the evening; and as John Mangles did not care to go on in the dark, the anchorage was for the night, or at least till five o'clock in the morning, land being in sight at a distance of less than three miles.

A considerable swell raised the waves, and seemed to set in continuously toward the coast, and perceiving this, Glenarvan asked John why he did not take advantage of this swell to get nearer to the land.

"Your Lordship is deceived by an optical illusion," said the young captain. "Although the swell seems to carry the waves landward, it does not really move at all.

It is mere undulating molecular motion, nothing more.

Throw a piece of wood overboard and you will see that it will remain quite stationary except as the tide affects it.

There is nothing for it but patience."

"And dinner," said the Major.

Olbinett unpacked some dried meat and a dozen biscuits.

The steward blushed as he proffered the meager bill of fare.

But it was received with a good grace, even by the ladies,

who, however, had not much appetite, owing to the violent motion.

This motion, produced by the jerking of the raft on the cable, while she lay head on to the sea, was very severe and fatiguing. The blows of the short, tumbling seas were as severe as if she had been striking on a submerged rock. Sometimes it was hard to believe that she was not aground. The cable strained violently, and every half hour John had to take in a fathom to ease it. Without this precaution it would certainly have given way, and the raft must have drifted to destruction.

John's anxiety may easily be understood. His cable might break, or his anchor lose its hold, and in either case the danger was imminent.

Night drew on; the sun's disc, enlarged by refraction, was dipping blood-red below the horizon. The distant waves glittered in the west, and sparkled like sheets of liquid silver. Nothing was to be seen in that direction but sky and water, except one sharply-defined object, the hull of the MACQUARIE motionless on her rocky bed.

The short twilight postponed the darkness only by a few minutes, and soon the coast outline, which bounded the view on the east and north, was lost in darkness.

The shipwrecked party were in an agonizing situation on their narrow raft, and overtaken by the shades of night.

Some of the party fell into a troubled sleep, a prey to evil dreams; others could not close an eye. When the day dawned, the whole party were worn out with fatigue.

With the rising tide the wind blew again toward the land. It was six o'clock in the morning, and there was no time to lose. John arranged everything for resuming their voyage, and then he ordered the anchor to be weighed. But the anchor flukes had been so imbedded in the sand by the repeated jerks of the cable, that without a windlass it was impossible to detach it, even with the tackle which Wilson had improvised.

Half an hour was lost in vain efforts. John, impatient of delay, cut the rope, thus sacrificing his anchor, and also the possibility of anchoring again if this tide failed to carry them to land. But he decided that further delay was not to be thought of, and an ax-blow committed the raft to the mercy of the wind, assisted by a current of two knots an hour.

The sail was spread. They drifted slowly toward the land, which rose in gray, hazy masses, on a background of sky illumined by the rising sun. The reef was dexterously avoided and doubled, but with the fitful breeze the raft could not get near the shore. What toil and pain to reach a coast so full of danger when attained.

At nine o'clock, the land was less than a mile off.  
It was a steeply-shelving shore, fringed with breakers;  
a practicable landing-place had to be discovered.

Gradually the breeze grew fainter, and then ceased entirely.  
The sail flapped idly against the mast,  
and John had it furled. The tide alone carried the raft to the shore,  
but steering had become impossible, and its passage was impeded  
by immense bands of FUCUS.

At ten o'clock John found himself almost at a stand-still, not  
three cables' lengths from the shore. Having lost their anchor,  
they were at the mercy of the ebb-tide.

John clenched his hands; he was racked with anxiety, and cast  
frenzied glances toward this inaccessible shore.

In the midst of his perplexities, a shock was felt.  
The raft stood still. It had landed on a sand-bank, twenty-five  
fathoms from the coast.

Glenarvan, Robert, Wilson, and Mulrady, jumped into the water.  
The raft was firmly moored to the nearest rocks. The ladies  
were carried to land without wetting a fold of their dresses,  
and soon the whole party, with their arms and provisions,  
were finally landed on these much dreaded New Zealand shores.