

CHAPTER VIII ON THE ROAD TO AUCKLAND

ON the 7th of February, at six o'clock in the morning, the signal for departure was given by Glenarvan. During the night the rain had ceased. The sky was veiled with light gray clouds, which moderated the heat of the sun, and allowed the travelers to venture on a journey by day.

Paganel had measured on the map a distance of eighty miles between Point Kawhia and Auckland; it was an eight days' journey if they made ten miles a day. But instead of following the windings of the coast, he thought it better to make for a point thirty miles off, at the confluence of the Waikato and the Waipa, at the village of Ngarnavahia. The "overland track" passes that point, and is rather a path than a road, practicable for the vehicles which go almost across the island, from Napier, in Hawke's Bay, to Auckland. From this village it would be easy to reach Drury, and there they could rest in an excellent hotel, highly recommended by Dr. Hochstetter.

The travelers, each carrying a share of the provisions, commenced to follow the shore of Aotea Bay. From prudential motives they did not allow themselves to straggle, and by instinct they kept a look-out over the undulating plains to the eastward, ready with their loaded carbines. Paganel, map in hand, took a professional pleasure in verifying the minutest details.

The country looked like an immense prairie which faded into distance, and promised an easy walk. But the travelers were undeceived when they came to the edge of this verdant plain. The grass gave way to a low scrub of small bushes bearing little white flowers, mixed with those innumerable tall ferns with which the lands of New Zealand abound. They had to cut a path across the plain, through these woody stems, and this was a matter of some difficulty, but at eight o'clock in the evening the first slopes of the Hakarihoata Ranges were turned, and the party camped immediately. After a fourteen miles' march, they might well think of resting.

Neither wagon or tent being available, they sought repose beneath some magnificent Norfolk Island pines. They had plenty of rugs which make good beds. Glenarvan took every possible precaution for the night. His companions and he, well armed, were to watch in turns, two and two, till daybreak. No fires were lighted. Barriers of fire are a potent preservation from wild beasts, but New Zealand has neither tiger, nor lion, nor bear, nor any wild animal, but the Maori adequately fills their place, and a fire would only have served to attract this two-footed jaguar.

The night passed pleasantly with the exception of the attack of the sand-flies, called by the natives, "ngamu," and the visit of the audacious family of rats, who exercised their teeth on the provisions.

Next day, on the 8th of February, Paganel rose more sanguine, and almost reconciled to the country. The Maories, whom he particularly dreaded, had not yet appeared, and these ferocious cannibals had not molested him even in his dreams.

"I begin to think that our little journey will end favorably.

This evening we shall reach the confluence of the Waipa and Waikato, and after that there is not much chance of meeting natives on the way to Auckland."

"How far is it now," said Glenarvan, "to the confluence of the Waipa and Waikato?"

"Fifteen miles; just about what we did yesterday."

"But we shall be terribly delayed if this interminable scrub continues to obstruct our path."

"No," said Paganel, "we shall follow the banks of the Waipa, and then we shall have no obstacle, but on the contrary, a very easy road."

"Well, then," said Glenarvan, seeing the ladies ready, "let us make a start."

During the early part of the day, the thick brushwood seriously

impeded their progress. Neither wagon nor horses could have passed where travelers passed, so that their Australian vehicle was but slightly regretted. Until practicable wagon roads are cut through these forests of scrub, New Zealand will only be accessible to foot passengers. The ferns, whose name is legion, concur with the Maories in keeping strangers off the lands.

The little party overcame many obstacles in crossing the plains in which the Hakarihoata Ranges rise. But before noon they reached the banks of the Waipa, and followed the northward course of the river.

The Major and Robert, without leaving their companions, shot some snipe and partridge under the low shrubs of the plain. Olbinett, to save time, plucked the birds as he went along.

Paganel was less absorbed by the culinary importance of the game than by the desire of obtaining some bird peculiar to New Zealand. His curiosity as a naturalist overcame his hunger as a traveler. He called to mind the peculiarities of the "tui" of the natives, sometimes called the mocking-bird from its incessant chuckle, and sometimes "the parson," in allusion to the white cravat it wears over its black, cassock-like plumage.

"The tui," said Paganel to the Major, "grows so fat during the Winter that it makes him ill, and prevents him from flying.

Then he tears his breast with his beak, to relieve himself of his fat, and so becomes lighter. Does not that seem to you singular, McNabbs?"

"So singular that I don't believe a word of it," replied the Major.

Paganel, to his great regret, could not find a single specimen, or he might have shown the incredulous Major the bloody scars on the breast. But he was more fortunate with a strange animal which, hunted by men, cats and dogs, has fled toward the unoccupied country, and is fast disappearing from the fauna of New Zealand. Robert, searching like a ferret, came upon a nest made of interwoven roots, and in it a pair of birds destitute of wings and tail, with four toes, a long snipe-like beak, and a covering of white feathers over the whole body, singular creatures, which seemed to connect the oviparous tribes with the mam-mifers.

It was the New Zealand "kiwi," the *Apteryx australis* of naturalists, which lives with equal satisfaction on larvae, insects, worms or seeds. This bird is peculiar to the country. It has been introduced into very few of the zoological collections of Europe. Its graceless shape and comical motions have always attracted the notice of travelers, and during the great exploration of the Astrolabe and the Zelee, Dumont d'Urville was principally charged by the Academy of Sciences to bring back a specimen of these singular birds. But in spite of rewards offered to the natives, he could not obtain

a single specimen.

Paganel, who was elated at such a piece of luck, tied the two birds together, and carried them along with the intention of presenting them to the Jardin des Plantes, in Paris. "Presented by M. Jacques Paganel." He mentally saw the flattering inscription on the handsomest cage in the gardens. Sanguine geographer!

The party pursued their way without fatigue along the banks of the Waipa. The country was quite deserted; not a trace of natives, nor any track that could betray the existence of man.

The stream was fringed with tall bushes, or glided along sloping banks, so that nothing obstructed the view of the low range of hills which closed the eastern end of the valley.

With their grotesque shapes, and their outlines lost in a deceptive haze, they brought to mind giant animals, worthy of antediluvian times. They might have been a herd of enormous whales, suddenly turned to stone. These disrupted masses proclaimed their essentially volcanic character.

New Zealand is, in fact, a formation of recent plutonic origin.

Its emergence from the sea is constantly increasing.

Some points are known to have risen six feet in twenty years.

Fire still runs across its center, shakes it, convulses it, and finds an outlet in many places by the mouths of geysers and the craters of volcanoes.

At four in the afternoon, nine miles had been easily accomplished. According to the map which Paganel constantly referred to, the confluence of the Waipa and Waikato ought to be reached about five miles further on, and there the night halt could be made. Two or three days would then suffice for the fifty miles which lay between them and the capital; and if Glenarvan happened to fall in with the mail coach that plies between Hawkes' Bay and Auckland twice a month, eight hours would be sufficient.

"Therefore," said Glenarvan, "we shall be obliged to camp during the night once more."

"Yes," said Paganel, "but I hope for the last time."

"I am very glad to think so, for it is very trying for Lady Helena and Mary Grant."

"And they never utter a murmur," added John Mangles. "But I think I heard you mention a village at the confluence of these rivers."

"Yes," said the geographer, "here it is, marked on Johnston's map. It is Ngarnavahia, two miles below the junction."

"Well, could we not stay there for the night? Lady Helena and Miss Grant would not grudge two miles more to find a hotel even of a humble character."

"A hotel!" cried Paganel, "a hotel in a Maori village! you would not find an inn, not a tavern! This village will be a mere cluster of huts, and so far from seeking rest there, my advice is that you give it a wide berth."

"Your old fears, Paganel!" retorted Glenarvan.

"My dear Lord, where Maories are concerned, distrust is safer than confidence. I do not know on what terms they are with the English, whether the insurrection is suppressed or successful, or whether indeed the war may not be going on with full vigor. Modesty apart, people like us would be a prize, and I must say, I would rather forego a taste of Maori hospitality. I think it certainly more prudent to avoid this village of Ngarnavahia, to skirt it at a distance, so as to avoid all encounters with the natives. When we reach Drury it will be another thing, and there our brave ladies will be able to recruit their strength at their leisure."

This advice prevailed. Lady Helena preferred to pass another night in the open air, and not to expose her companions to danger. Neither Mary Grant or she wished to halt, and they continued their march along the river.

Two hours later, the first shades of evening began to fall. The sun, before disappearing below the western horizon,

darted some bright rays through an opening in the clouds. The distant eastern summits were empurpled with the parting glories of the day. It was like a flying salute addressed to the way-worn travelers.

Glenarvan and his friends hastened their steps, they knew how short the twilight is in this high latitude, and how quickly the night follows it. They were very anxious to reach the confluence of the two rivers before the darkness overtook them. But a thick fog rose from the ground, and made it very difficult to see the way.

Fortunately hearing stood them in the stead of sight; shortly a nearer sound of water indicated that the confluence was at hand. At eight o'clock the little troop arrived at the point where the Waipa loses itself in the Waikato, with a moaning sound of meeting waves.

"There is the Waikato!" cried Paganel, "and the road to Auckland is along its right bank."

"We shall see that to-morrow," said the Major, "Let us camp here. It seems to me that that dark shadow is that of a little clump of trees grown expressly to shelter us. Let us have supper and then get some sleep."

"Supper by all means," said Paganel, "but no fire; nothing but biscuit and dried meat. We have reached this

spot incognito, let us try and get away in the same manner.
By good luck, the fog is in our favor."

The clump of trees was reached and all concurred in the wish of the geographer. The cold supper was eaten without a sound, and presently a profound sleep overcame the travelers, who were tolerably fatigued with their fifteen miles' march.