

CHAPTER IX INTRODUCTION TO THE CANNIBALS

THE next morning at daybreak a thick fog was clinging to the surface of the river. A portion of the vapors that saturated the air were condensed by the cold, and lay as a dense cloud on the water. But the rays of the sun soon broke through the watery mass and melted it away.

A tongue of land, sharply pointed and bristling with bushes, projected into the uniting streams. The swifter waters of the Waipa rushed against the current of the Waikato for a quarter of a mile before they mingled with it; but the calm and majestic river soon quieted the noisy stream and carried it off quietly in its course to the Pacific Ocean.

When the vapor disappeared, a boat was seen ascending the current of the Waikato. It was a canoe seventy feet long, five broad, and three deep; the prow raised like that of a Venetian gondola, and the whole hollowed out of a trunk of a kahikatea. A bed of dry fern was laid at the bottom. It was swiftly rowed by eight oars, and steered with a paddle by a man seated in the stern.

This man was a tall Maori, about forty-five years of age, broad-chested, muscular, with powerfully developed hands and feet.

His prominent and deeply-furrowed brow, his fierce look, and sinister expression, gave him a formidable aspect.

Tattooing, or "moko," as the New Zealanders call it, is a mark of great distinction. None is worthy of these honorary lines, who has not distinguished himself in repeated fights.

The slaves and the lower class can not obtain this decoration.

Chiefs of high position may be known by the finish and precision and truth of the design, which sometimes covers their whole bodies with the figures of animals. Some are found to undergo the painful operation of "moko" five times. The more illustrious, the more illustrated, is the ruler of New Zealand.

Dumont D'Urville has given some curious details as to this custom.

He justly observes that "moko" is the counterpart of the armorial bearings of which many families in Europe are so vain.

But he remarks that there is this difference: the armorial bearings of Europe are frequently a proof only of the merits of the first who bore them, and are no certificate of the merits of his descendants; while the individual coat-of-arms of the Maori is an irrefragible proof that it was earned by the display of extraordinary personal courage.

The practice of tattooing, independently of the consideration it procures, has also a useful aspect. It gives the cutaneous system an increased thickness, enabling it to resist the inclemency of the season and the incessant attacks of the mosquito.

As to the chief who was steering the canoe, there could be no mistake. The sharpened albatross bone used by the Maori tattooer, had five times scored his countenance. He was in his fifth edition, and betrayed it in his haughty bearing.

His figure, draped in a large mat woven of "phormium" trimmed with dogskins, was clothed with a pair of cotton drawers, blood-stained from recent combats. From the pendant lobe of his ears hung earrings of green jade, and round his neck a quivering necklace of "pounamous," a kind of jade stone sacred among the New Zealanders. At his side lay an English rifle, and a "patou-patou," a kind of two-headed ax of an emerald color, and eighteen inches long. Beside him sat nine armed warriors of inferior rank, ferocious-looking fellows, some of them suffering from recent wounds. They sat quite motionless, wrapped in their flax mantles. Three savage-looking dogs lay at their feet. The eight rowers in the prow seemed to be servants or slaves of the chief. They rowed vigorously, and propelled the boat against the not very rapid current of the Waikato, with extraordinary velocity.

In the center of this long canoe, with their feet tied together, sat ten European prisoners closely packed together.

It was Glenarvan and Lady Helena, Mary Grant, Robert, Paganel, the Major, John Mangles, the steward, and the two sailors.

The night before, the little band had unwittingly, owing to the mist, encamped in the midst of a numerous party of natives. Toward the middle of the night they were surprised in their sleep, were made prisoners, and carried on board the canoe. They had not been ill-treated, so far, but all attempts at resistance had been vain. Their arms and ammunition were in the hands of the savages, and they would soon have been targets for their own balls.

They were soon aware, from a few English words used by the natives, that they were a retreating party of the tribe who had been beaten and decimated by the English troops, and were on their way back to the Upper Waikato. The Maori chief, whose principal warriors had been picked off by the soldiers of the 42nd Regiment, was returning to make a final appeal to the tribes of the Waikato district, so that he might go to the aid of the indomitable William Thompson, who was still holding his own against the conquerors.

The chief's name was "Kai-Koumou," a name of evil boding in the native language, meaning "He who eats the limbs of his enemy." He was bold and brave, but his cruelty was equally remarkable. No pity was to be expected at his hands. His name was well known to the English soldiers, and a price had been set on his head by the governor of New Zealand.

This terrible blow befell Glenarvan at the very moment when he was about to reach the long-desired haven of Auckland,

and so regain his own country; but no one who looked at his cool, calm features, could have guessed the anguish he endured.

Glenarvan always rose to his misfortunes. He felt that his part was to be the strength and the example of his wife and companions; that he was the head and chief; ready to die for the rest if circumstances required it. He was of a deeply religious turn of mind, and never lost his trust in Providence nor his belief in the sacred character of his enterprise.

In the midst of this crowning peril he did not give way to any feeling of regret at having been induced to venture into this country of savages.

His companions were worthy of him; they entered into his lofty views; and judging by their haughty demeanor, it would scarcely have been supposed that they were hurrying to the final catastrophe.

With one accord, and by Glenarvan's advice, they resolved to affect utter indifference before the natives.

It was the only way to impress these ferocious natures.

Savages in general, and particularly the Maories, have a notion of dignity from which they never derogate.

They respect, above all things, coolness and courage.

Glenarvan was aware that by this mode of procedure, he and his companions would spare themselves needless humiliation.

From the moment of embarking, the natives, who were very taciturn, like all savages, had scarcely exchanged a word,

but from the few sentences they did utter, Glenarvan felt certain that the English language was familiar to them. He therefore made up his mind to question the chief on the fate that awaited them. Addressing himself to Kai-Koumou, he said in a perfectly unconcerned voice:

"Where are we going, chief?"

Kai-Koumou looked coolly at him and made no answer.

"What are you going to do with us?" pursued Glenarvan.

A sudden gleam flashed into the eyes of Kai-Koumou, and he said in a deep voice:

"Exchange you, if your own people care to have you; eat you if they don't."

Glenarvan asked no further questions; but hope revived in his heart. He concluded that some Maori chiefs had fallen into the hands of the English, and that the natives would try to get them exchanged. So they had a chance of salvation, and the case was not quite so desperate.

The canoe was speeding rapidly up the river.

Paganel, whose excitable temperament always rebounded from

one extreme to the other, had quite regained his spirits.

He consoled himself that the natives were saving them the trouble of the journey to the English outposts, and that was so much gain.

So he took it quite quietly and followed on the map the course of the Waikato across the plains and valleys of the province.

Lady Helena and Mary Grant, concealing their alarm, conversed in a low voice with Glenarvan, and the keenest physiognomists would have failed to see any anxiety in their faces.

The Waikato is the national river in New Zealand. It is to the Maories what the Rhine is to the Germans, and the Danube to the Slavs. In its course of 200 miles it waters the finest lands of the North Island, from the province of Wellington to the province of Auckland. It gave its name to all those indomitable tribes of the river district, which rose en masse against the invaders.

The waters of this river are still almost strangers to any craft but the native canoe. The most audacious tourist will scarcely venture to invade these sacred shores; in fact, the Upper Waikato is sealed against profane Europeans.

Paganel was aware of the feelings of veneration with which the natives regard this great arterial stream. He knew that the English and German naturalists had never penetrated further than its junction with the Waipa. He wondered how far the good pleasure of Kai-Koumou would carry his captives? He could not have guessed, but for hearing

the word "Taupo" repeatedly uttered between the chief and his warriors. He consulted his map and saw that "Taupo" was the name of a lake celebrated in geographical annals, and lying in the most mountainous part of the island, at the southern extremity of Auckland province. The Waikato passes through this lake and then flows on for 120 miles.