CHAPTER XI THE CHIEF'S FUNERAL

KAI-KOUMOU, as frequently happens among the Maories,
joined the title of ariki to that of tribal chief.
He was invested with the dignity of priest, and, as such,
he had the power to throw over persons or things the superstitious
protection of the "taboo."

The "taboo," which is common to all the Polynesian races,
has the primary effect of isolating the "tabooed" person and preventing
the use of "tabooed" things. According to the Maori doctrine,
anyone who laid sacrilegious hands on what had been declared
"taboo," would be punished with death by the insulted deity,
and even if the god delayed the vindication of his power,
the priests took care to accelerate his vengeance.

By the chiefs, the "taboo" is made a political engine,
except in some cases, for domestic reasons. For instance,
a native is tabooed for several days when his hair is cut;
when he is tattooed; when he is building a canoe,
or a house; when he is seriously ill, and when he is dead.
If excessive consumption threatens to exterminate the fish
of a river, or ruin the early crop of sweet potatoes,
these things are put under the protection of the taboo.
If a chief wishes to clear his house of hangers-on, he taboos it;

if an English trader displeases him he is tabooed.
His interdict has the effect of the old royal "veto."

If an object is tabooed, no one can touch it with impunity.
When a native is under the interdict, certain aliments
are denied him for a prescribed period. If he is relieved,
as regards the severe diet, his slaves feed him with the viands
he is forbidden to touch with his hands; if he is poor
and has no slaves, he has to take up the food with his mouth,
like an animal.

In short, the most trifling acts of the Maories are directed and modified
by this singular custom, the deity is brought into constant contact
with their daily life. The taboo has the same weight as a law;
or rather, the code of the Maories, indisputable and undisputed,
is comprised in the frequent applications of the taboo.

As to the prisoners confined in the Ware-Atoua, it was an
arbitrary taboo which had saved them from the fury of the tribe.
Some of the natives, friends and partisans of Kai-Koumou,
desisted at once on hearing their chief's voice, and protected
the captives from the rest.

Glenarvan cherished no illusive hopes as to his own fate;
nothing but his death could atone for the murder of a chief,
and among these people death was only the concluding act of a

martyrdom of torture. Glenarvan, therefore, was fully prepared to pay the penalty of the righteous indignation that nerved his arm, but he hoped that the wrath of Kai-Koumou would not extend beyond himself.

What a night he and his companions passed! Who could picture their agonies or measure their sufferings? Robert and Paganel had not been restored to them, but their fate was no doubtful matter. They were too surely the first victims of the frenzied natives. Even McNabbs, who was always sanguine, had abandoned hope. John Mangles was nearly frantic at the sight of Mary Grant's despair at being separated from her brother. Glenarvan pondered over the terrible request of Lady Helena, who preferred dying by his hand to submitting to torture and slavery. How was he to summon the terrible courage!

"And Mary? who has a right to strike her dead?" thought John, whose heart was broken.

Escape was clearly impossible. Ten warriors, armed to the teeth, kept watch at the door of Ware-Atoua.

The morning of February 13th arrived. No communication had taken place between the natives and the "tabooed" prisoners. A limited supply of provisions was in the house, which the unhappy inmates scarcely touched. Misery deadened the pangs of hunger.

The day passed without change, and without hope; the funeral ceremonies of the dead chief would doubtless be the signal for their execution.

Although Glenarvan did not conceal from himself the probability that Kai-Koumou had given up all idea of exchange, the Major still cherished a spark of hope.

"Who knows," said he, as he reminded Glenarvan of the effect produced on the chief by the death of Kara-Tete--"who knows but that Kai-Koumou, in his heart, is very much obliged to you?"

But even McNabbs' remarks failed to awaken hope in Glenarvan's mind. The next day passed without any appearance of preparation for their punishment; and this was the reason of the delay.

The Maories believe that for three days after death the soul inhabits the body, and therefore, for three times twenty-four hours, the corpse remains unburied. This custom was rigorously observed. Till February 15th the "pah" was deserted.

John Mangles, hoisted on Wilson's shoulders, frequently reconnoitered the outer defences. Not a single native was visible; only the watchful sentinels relieving guard at the door of the Ware-Atoua.

But on the third day the huts opened; all the savages, men, women,

and children, in all several hundred Maories, assembled in the "pah," silent and calm.

Kai-Koumou came out of his house, and surrounded by the principal chiefs of his tribe, he took his stand on a mound some feet above the level, in the center of the enclosure. The crowd of natives formed in a half circle some distance off, in dead silence.

At a sign from Kai-Koumou, a warrior bent his steps toward Ware-Atoua.

"Remember," said Lady Helena to her husband. Glenarvan pressed her to his heart, and Mary Grant went closer to John Mangles, and said hurriedly:

"Lord and Lady Glenarvan cannot but think if a wife may claim death at her husband's hands, to escape a shameful life, a betrothed wife may claim death at the hands of her betrothed husband, to escape the same fate. John! at this last moment I ask you, have we not long been betrothed to each other in our secret hearts? May I rely on you, as Lady Helena relies on Lord Glenarvan?"

"Mary!" cried the young captain in his despair. "Ah! dear Mary--"

The mat was lifted, and the captives led to Kai-Koumou; the two women were resigned to their fate; the men dissembled

their sufferings with superhuman effort.

They arrived in the presence of the Maori chief.

"You killed Kara-Tete," said he to Glenarvan.

"I did," answered Glenarvan.

"You die to-morrow at sunrise."

"Alone?" asked Glenarvan, with a beating heart.

"Oh! if our Tohonga's life was not more precious than yours!" exclaimed Kai-Koumou, with a ferocious expression of regret.

At this moment there was a commotion among the natives. Glenarvan looked quickly around; the crowd made way, and a warrior appeared heated by running, and sinking with fatigue.

Kai-Koumou, as soon as he saw him, said in English, evidently for the benefit of the captives:

"You come from the camp of the Pakekas?"

"Yes," answered the Maori.

"You have seen the prisoner, our Tohonga?"

"I have seen him."

"Alive?"

"Dead! English have shot him."

It was all over with Glenarvan and his companions.

"All!" cried Kai-Koumou; "you all die to-morrow at daybreak."

Punishment fell on all indiscriminately. Lady Helena and Mary Grant were grateful to Heaven for the boon.

The captives were not taken back to Ware-Atoua. They were destined to attend the obsequies of the chief and the bloody rites that accompanied them. A guard of natives conducted them to the foot of an immense kauri, and then stood on guard without taking their eyes off the prisoners.

The three prescribed days had elapsed since the death of Kara-Tete, and the soul of the dead warrior had finally departed; so the ceremonies commenced.

The body was laid on a small mound in the central enclosure.

It was clothed in a rich dress, and wrapped in a magnificent flax mat. His head, adorned with feathers, was encircled with a crown of green leaves. His face, arms, and chest had been rubbed with oil, and did not show any sign of decay.

The parents and friends arrived at the foot of the mound, and at a certain moment, as if the leader of an orchestra were leading a funeral chant, there arose a great wail of tears, sighs, and sobs. They lamented the deceased with a plaintive rhythm and doleful cadence. The kinsmen beat their heads; the kinswomen tore their faces with their nails and lavished more blood than tears.
But these demonstrations were not sufficient to propitiate the soul of the deceased, whose wrath might strike the survivors of his tribe; and his warriors, as they could not recall him to life, were anxious that he should have nothing to wish for in the other world.
The wife of Kara-Tete was not to be parted from him; indeed, she would have refused to survive him. It was a custom, as well as a duty, and Maori history has no lack of such sacrifices.

This woman came on the scene; she was still young. Her disheveled hair flowed over her shoulders. Her sobs and cries filled the air. Incoherent words, regrets, sobs, broken phrases in which she extolled the virtues of the dead, alternated with her moans, and in a crowning paroxysm of sorrow, she threw herself at the foot of the mound and beat her head on the earth.

The Kai-Koumou drew near; suddenly the wretched victim rose; but a violent blow from a "MERE," a kind of club brandished by the chief, struck her to the ground; she fell senseless.

Horrible yells followed; a hundred arms threatened the terror-stricken captives. But no one moved, for the funeral ceremonies were not yet over.

The wife of Kara-Tete had joined her husband. The two bodies lay stretched side by side. But in the future life, even the presence of his faithful companion was not enough. Who would attend on them in the realm of Noui-Atoua, if their slaves did not follow them into the other world.

Six unfortunate fellows were brought to the mound. They were attendants whom the pitiless usages of war had reduced to slavery. During the chief's lifetime they had borne the severest privations, and been subjected to all kinds of ill-usage; they had been scantily fed, and incessantly occupied like beasts of burden, and now, according to Maori ideas, they were to resume to all eternity this life of bondage.

These poor creatures appeared quite resigned to their destiny. They were not taken by surprise. Their unbound hands showed that they met their fate without resistance.

Their death was speedy and not aggravated by tedious suffering;
torture was reserved for the authors of the murder, who, only twenty
paces off, averted their eyes from the horrible scene which was
to grow yet more horrible.

Six blows of the MERE, delivered by the hands of six powerful warriors,
felled the victims in the midst of a sea of blood.

This was the signal for a fearful scene of cannibalism. The bodies
of slaves are not protected by taboo like those of their masters.
They belong to the tribe; they were a sort of small change thrown among
the mourners, and the moment the sacrifice was over, the whole crowd,
chiefs, warriors, old men, women, children, without distinction of age,
or sex, fell upon the senseless remains with brutal appetite.
Faster than a rapid pen could describe it, the bodies, still reeking,
were dismembered, divided, cut up, not into morsels, but into crumbs.
Of the two hundred Maories present everyone obtained a share.
They fought, they struggled, they quarreled over the smallest fragment.
The drops of hot blood splashed over these festive monsters,
and the whole of this detestable crew groveled under a rain of blood.
It was like the delirious fury of tigers fighting over their prey,
or like a circus where the wild beasts devour the deer.
This scene ended, a score of fires were lit at various points
of the "pah"; the smell of charred flesh polluted the air;
and but for the fearful tumult of the festival, but for the cries
that emanated from these flesh-sated throats, the captives might

have heard the bones crunching under the teeth of the cannibals.

Glenarvan and his companions, breathless with horror, tried to conceal this fearful scene from the eyes of the two poor ladies. They understood then what fate awaited them next day at dawn, and also with what cruel torture this death would be preceded. They were dumb with horror.

The funeral dances commenced. Strong liquors distilled from the "piper excelsum" animated the intoxication of the natives. They had nothing human left. It seemed possible that the "taboo" might be forgotten, and they might rush upon the prisoners, who were already terrified at their delirious gestures.

But Kai-Koumou had kept his own senses amidst the general delirium. He allowed an hour for this orgy of blood to attain its maximum and then cease, and the final scene of the obsequies was performed with the accustomed ceremonial.

The corpses of Kara-Tete and his wife were raised, the limbs were bent, and laid against the stomach according to the Maori usage; then came the funeral, not the final interment, but a burial until the moment when the earth had destroyed the flesh and nothing remained but the skeleton.

The place of "oudoupa," or the tomb, had been chosen

outside the fortress, about two miles off at the top
of a low hill called Maunganamu, situated on the right bank
of the lake, and to this spot the body was to be taken.
Two palanquins of a very primitive kind, hand-barrows, in fact,
were brought to the foot of the mound, and the corpses doubled
up so that they were sitting rather than lying, and their
garments kept in place by a band of hanes, were placed on them.
Four warriors took up the litters on their shoulders,
and the whole tribe, repeating their funeral chant, followed in
procession to the place of sepulture.

The captives, still strictly guarded, saw the funeral cortege leave
the inner inclosure of the "pah"; then the chants and cries grew fainter.
For about half an hour the funeral procession remained out of sight,
in the hollow valley, and then came in sight again winding up the
mountain side; the distance gave a fantastic effect to the undulating
movement of this long serpentine column.

The tribe stopped at an elevation of about 800 feet, on the summit
of Maunganamu, where the burial place of Kara-Tete had been prepared.
An ordinary Maori would have had nothing but a hole and a heap of earth.
But a powerful and formidable chief destined to speedy deification,
was honored with a tomb worthy of his exploits.

The "oudoupa" had been fenced round, and posts, surmounted with faces
painted in red ochre, stood near the grave where the bodies were to lie.

The relatives had not forgotten that the "Waidoua," the spirit
of the dead, lives on mortal food, as the body did in this life.
Therefore, food was deposited in the inclosure as well as the arms
and clothing of the deceased. Nothing was omitted for comfort.
The husband and wife were laid side by side, then covered with earth
and grass, after another series of laments.

Then the procession wound slowly down the mountain, and henceforth
none dare ascend the slope of Maunganamu on pain of death,
for it was "tabooed," like Tongariro, where lie the ashes
of a chief killed by an earthquake in 1846.