CHAPTER XIII THE SACRED MOUNTAIN

THE summit of the mountain was still a hundred feet above them. The fugitives were anxious to reach it that they might continue their flight on the eastern slope out of the view of their pursuers. They hoped then to find some practicable ridge that would allow of a passage to the neighboring peaks that were thrown together in an orographic maze, to which poor Paganel's genius would doubtless have found the clew.

They hastened up the slope, spurred on by the loud cries that drew nearer and nearer. The avenging crowd had already reached the foot of the mountain.

"Courage! my friends," cried Glenarvan, urging his companions by voice and look.

In less than five minutes they were at the top of the mountain, and then they turned to judge of their position, and decide on a route that would baffle their pursuers.

From their elevated position they could see over Lake Taupo, which stretched toward the west in its setting of picturesque mountains. On the north the peaks of Pirongia; on the south the burning crater of Tongariro. But eastward nothing but the rocky barrier of peaks

and ridges that formed the Wahiti ranges, the great chain whose unbroken links stretch from the East Cape to Cook's Straits. They had no alternative but to descend the opposite slope and enter the narrow gorges, uncertain whether any outlet existed.

Glenarvan could not prolong the halt for a moment.
Wearied as they might be, they must fly or be discovered.

"Let us go down!" cried he, "before our passage is cut off."

But just as the ladies had risen with a despairing effort,
McNabbs stopped them and said:

"Glenarvan, it is useless. Look!"

And then they all perceived the inexplicable change that had taken place in the movements of the Maories.

Their pursuit had suddenly stopped. The ascent of the mountain had ceased by an imperious command. The natives had paused in their career, and surged like the sea waves against an opposing rock. All the crowd, thirsting for blood, stood at the foot of the mountain yelling and gesticulating, brandishing guns and hatchets, but not advancing a foot. Their dogs, rooted to the spot like themselves, barked with rage.

What stayed them? What occult power controlled these savages? The fugitives looked without understanding, fearing lest the charm that enchained Kai-Koumou's tribe should be broken.

Suddenly John Mangles uttered an exclamation which attracted the attention of his companions. He pointed to a little inclosure on the summit of the cone.

"The tomb of Kara-Tete!" said Robert.

"Are you sure, Robert?" said Glenarvan.

"Yes, my Lord, it is the tomb; I recognize it."

Robert was right. Fifty feet above, at the extreme peak of the mountain, freshly painted posts formed a small palisaded inclosure, and Glenarvan too was convinced that it was the chief's burial place. The chances of their flight had led them to the crest of Maunganamu.

Glenarvan, followed by the rest, climbed to the foot of the tomb. A large opening, covered with mats, led into it. Glenarvan was about to invade the sanctity of the "oudoupa," when he reeled backward.

"A savage!" said he.

"In the tomb?" inquired the Major.

"Yes, McNabbs."

"No matter; go in."

Glenarvan, the Major, Robert and John Mangles entered.
There sat a Maori, wrapped in a large flax mat; the darkness
of the "oudoupa" preventing them from distinguishing his features.
He was very quiet, and was eating his breakfast quite coolly.

Glenarvan was about to speak to him when the native forestalled
him by saying gayly and in good English:

"Sit down, my Lord; breakfast is ready."

It was Paganel. At the sound of his voice they all rushed
into the "oudoupa," and he was cordially embraced all round.
Paganel was found again. He was their salvation. They wanted
to question him; to know how and why he was here on the summit
of Maunganamu; but Glenarvan stopped this misplaced curiosity.

"The savages?" said he.

"The savages," said Paganel, shrugging his shoulders.
"I have a contempt for those people! Come and look at them."

They all followed Paganel out of the "oudoupa." The Maories were still in the same position round the base of the mountain, uttering fearful cries.

"Shout! yell! till your lungs are gone, stupid wretches!" said Paganel. "I dare you to come here!"

"But why?" said Glenarvan.

"Because the chief is buried here, and the tomb protects us, because the mountain is tabooed."

"Tabooed?"

"Yes, my friends! and that is why I took refuge here, as the malefactors used to flee to the sanctuaries in the middle ages."

"God be praised!" said Lady Helena, lifting her hands to heaven.

The fugitives were not yet out of danger, but they had a moment's respite, which was very welcome in their exhausted state.

Glenarvan was too much overcome to speak, and the Major nodded his head with an air of perfect content.

"And now, my friends," said Paganel, "if these brutes think
to exercise their patience on us, they are mistaken.
In two days we shall be out of their reach."

"By flight!" said Glenarvan. "But how?"

"That I do not know," answered Paganel, "but we shall manage it."

And now everybody wanted to know about their friend's adventures.
They were puzzled by the reserve of a man generally so talkative;
on this occasion they had to drag the words out of his mouth;
usually he was a ready story-teller, now he gave only evasive
answers to the questions of the rest.

"Paganel is another man!" thought McNabbs.

His face was really altered. He wrapped himself closely
in his great flax mat and seemed to deprecate observation.
Everyone noticed his embarrassment, when he was the subject
of conversation, though nobody appeared to remark it;
when other topics were under discussion, Paganel resumed
his usual gayety.

Of his adventures all that could be extracted from him at this time
was as follows:

After the murder of Kara-Tete, Paganel took advantage, like Robert,
of the commotion among the natives, and got out of the inclosure.
But less fortunate than young Grant, he walked straight into
a Maori camp, where he met a tall, intelligent-looking chief,
evidently of higher rank than all the warriors of his tribe.
The chief spoke excellent English, and he saluted the new-comer by
rubbing the end of his nose against the end of the geographer's nose.

Paganel wondered whether he was to consider himself a prisoner or not.
But perceiving that he could not stir without the polite escort
of the chief, he soon made up his mind on that point.

This chief, Hihi, or Sunbeam, was not a bad fellow.
Paganel's spectacles and telescope seemed to give him a great
idea of Paganel's importance, and he manifested great attachment
to him, not only by kindness, but by a strong flax rope,
especially at night.

This lasted for three days; to the inquiry whether he was well treated,
he said "Yes and no!" without further answer; he was a prisoner,
and except that he expected immediate execution, his state seemed to him
no better than that in which he had left his unfortunate friends.

One night, however, he managed to break his rope and escape.
He had seen from afar the burial of the chief, and knew that he was
buried on the top of Maunganamu, and he was well acquainted

with the fact that the mountain would be therefore tabooed. He resolved to take refuge there, being unwilling to leave the region where his companions were in durance. He succeeded in his dangerous attempt, and had arrived the previous night at the tomb of Kara-Tete, and there proposed to recruit his strength while he waited in the hope that his friends might, by Divine mercy, find the means of escape.

Such was Paganel's story. Did he designedly conceal some incident of his captivity? More than once his embarrassment led them to that conclusion. But however that might be, he was heartily congratulated on all sides. And then the present emergency came on for serious discussion. The natives dare not climb Maunganamu, but they, of course, calculated that hunger and thirst would restore them their prey. It was only a question of time, and patience is one of the virtues of all savages. Glenarvan was fully alive to the difficulty, but made up his mind to watch for an opportunity, or make one. First of all he made a thorough survey of Maunganamu, their present fortress; not for the purpose of defence, but of escape. The Major, John, Robert, Paganel, and himself, made an exact map of the mountain. They noted the direction, outlet and inclination of the paths. The ridge, a mile in length, which united Maunganamu to the Wahiti chain had a downward inclination. Its slope, narrow and jagged though it was, appeared the only practicable route, if they made good their escape at all.

If they could do this without observation, under cover of night, they might possibly reach the deep valleys of the Range and put the Maories off the scent.

But there were dangers in this route; the last part of it was within pistol shot of natives posted on the lower slopes. Already when they ventured on the exposed part of the crest, they were saluted with a hail of shot which did not reach them. Some gun wads, carried by the wind, fell beside them; they were made of printed paper, which Paganel picked up out of curiosity, and with some trouble deciphered.

"That is a good idea! My friends, do you know what those creatures use for wads?"

"No, Paganel!" said Glenarvan.

"Pages of the Bible! If that is the use they make of the Holy Book, I pity the missionaries! It will be rather difficult to establish a Maori library."

"And what text of scripture did they aim at us?"

"A message from God Himself!" exclaimed John Mangles, who was in the act of reading the scorched fragment of paper. "It bids us hope in Him," added the young captain, firm in

the faith of his Scotch convictions.

"Read it, John!" said Glenarvan.

And John read what the powder had left visible: "I will deliver him, for he hath trusted in me."

"My friends," said Glenarvan, "we must carry these words of hope to our dear, brave ladies. The sound will bring comfort to their hearts."

Glenarvan and his companions hastened up the steep path to the cone, and went toward the tomb. As they climbed they were astonished to perceive every few moments a kind of vibration in the soil. It was not a movement like earthquake, but that peculiar tremor that affects the metal of a boiler under high pressure. It was clear the mountain was the outer covering of a body of vapor, the product of subterranean fires.

This phenomenon of course excited no surprise in those that had just traveled among the hot springs of the Waikato. They knew that the central region of the Ika-na-Mani is essentially volcanic. It is a sieve, whose interstices furnish a passage for the earth's vapors in the shape of boiling geysers and solfataras.

Paganel, who had already noticed this, called the attention

of his friends to the volcanic nature of the mountain.
The peak of Maunganamu was only one of the many cones which bristle on this part of the island. It was a volcano of the future.
A slight mechanical change would produce a crater of eruption in these slopes, which consisted merely of whitish silicious tufa.

"That may be," said Glenarvan, "but we are in no more danger here than standing by the boiler of the DUNCAN; this solid crust is like sheet iron."

"I agree with you," added the Major, "but however good a boiler may be, it bursts at last after too long service."

"McNabbs," said Paganel, "I have no fancy for staying on the cone. When Providence points out a way, I will go at once."

"I wish," remarked John, "that Maunganamu could carry us himself, with all the motive power that he has inside. It is too bad that millions of horse-power should lie under our feet unavailable for our needs. Our DUNCAN would carry us to the end of the world with the thousandth part of it."

The recollections of the DUNCAN evoked by John Mangles turned Glenarvan's thoughts into their saddest channel; for desperate as his own case was he often forgot it, in vain regret at the fate of his crew.

His mind still dwelt on it when he reached the summit of Maunganamu and met his companions in misfortune.

Lady Helena, when she saw Glenarvan, came forward to meet him.

"Dear Edward," said she, "you have made up your mind? Are we to hope or fear?"

"Hope, my dear Helena," replied Glenarvan. "The natives will never set foot on the mountain, and we shall have time to devise a plan of escape."

"More than that, madam, God himself has encouraged us to hope."

And so saying, John Mangles handed to Lady Helena the fragment of paper on which was legible the sacred words; and these young women, whose trusting hearts were always open to observe Providential interpositions, read in these words an indisputable sign of salvation.

"And now let us go to the 'oudoupa!'" cried Paganel, in his gayest mood. "It is our castle, our dining-room, our study! None can meddle with us there! Ladies! allow me to do the honors of this charming abode."

They followed Paganel, and when the savages saw them profaning
anew the tabooed burial place, they renewed their fire
and their fearful yells, the one as loud as the other.
But fortunately the balls fell short of our friends,
though the cries reached them.

Lady Helena, Mary Grant, and their companions were quite relieved to find
that the Maories were more dominated by superstition than by anger,
and they entered the monument.

It was a palisade made of red-painted posts. Symbolic figures,
tattooed on the wood, set forth the rank and achievements
of the deceased. Strings of amulets, made of shells or
cut stones, hung from one part to another. In the interior,
the ground was carpeted with green leaves, and in the middle,
a slight mound betokened the place of the newly made grave.
There lay the chief's weapons, his guns loaded and capped,
his spear, his splendid ax of green jade, with a supply of powder
and ball for the happy hunting grounds.

"Quite an arsenal!" said Paganel, "of which we shall make a better use.
What ideas they have! Fancy carrying arms in the other world!"

"Well!" said the Major, "but these are English firearms."

"No doubt," replied Glenarvan, "and it is a very unwise practice

to give firearms to savages! They turn them against the invaders, naturally enough. But at any rate, they will be very valuable to us."

"Yes," said Paganel, "but what is more useful still is the food and water provided for Kara-Tete."

Things had been handsomely done for the deceased chief; the amount of provisions denoted their esteem for the departed. There was food enough to sustain ten persons for fifteen days, or the dead man forever.

The vegetable aliments consisted of edible ferns, sweet potatoes, the "convolvulus batatas," which was indigenous, and the potato which had been imported long before by the Europeans. Large jars contained pure water, and a dozen baskets artistically plaited contained tablets of an unknown green gum.

The fugitives were therefore provided for some days against hunger and thirst, and they needed no persuasion to begin their attack on the deceased chief's stores. Glenarvan brought out the necessary quantity and put them into Olbinett's hands. The steward, who never could forget his routine ideas, even in the most exceptional circumstances, thought the meal a slender one. He did not know how to prepare the roots, and, besides, had no fire.

But Paganel soon solved the difficulty by recommending him

to bury his fern roots and sweet potatoes in the soil.
The temperature of the surface stratum was very high,
and a thermometer plunged into the soil would have marked
from 160 to 170 degrees; in fact, Olbinett narrowly missed
being scalded, for just as he had scooped a hole for the roots,
a jet of vapor sprang up and with a whistling sound rose six
feet above the ground.

The steward fell back in terror.

"Shut off steam!" cried the Major, running to close the hole
with the loose drift, while Paganel pondering on the singular
phenomenon muttered to himself:

"Let me see! ha! ha! Why not?"

"Are you hurt?" inquired McNabbs of Olbinett.

"No, Major," said the steward, "but I did not expect--"

"That Providence would send you fire," interrupted Paganel
in a jovial tone. "First the larder of Kara-Tete and then fire
out of the ground! Upon my word, this mountain is a paradise!
I propose that we found a colony, and cultivate the soil and settle
here for life! We shall be the Robinsons of Maunganamu. We should
want for nothing."

"If it is solid ground," said John Mangles.

"Well! it is not a thing of yesterday," said Paganel. "It has stood against the internal fire for many a day, and will do so till we leave it, at any rate."

"Breakfast is ready," announced Olbinett with as much dignity as if he was in Malcolm Castle.

Without delay, the fugitives sat down near the palisade, and began one of the many meals with which Providence had supplied them in critical circumstances. Nobody was inclined to be fastidious, but opinions were divided as regarded the edible fern.
Some thought the flavor sweet and agreeable, others pronounced it leathery, insipid, and resembling the taste of gum.
The sweet potatoes, cooked in the burning soil, were excellent.
The geographer remarked that Kara-Tete was not badly off after all.

And now that their hunger was appeased, it was time to decide on their plan of escape.

"So soon!" exclaimed Paganel in a piteous tone. "Would you quit the home of delight so soon?"

"But, Monsieur Paganel," interposed Lady Helena, "if this be Capua,

you dare not intend to imitate Hannibal!"

"Madam, I dare not contradict you, and if discussion is the order of the day, let it proceed."

"First," said Glenarvan, "I think we ought to start before we are driven to it by hunger. We are revived now, and ought to take advantage of it. To-night we will try to reach the eastern valleys by crossing the cordon of natives under cover of the darkness."

"Excellent," answered Paganel, "if the Maories allow us to pass."

"And if not?" asked John Mangles.

"Then we will use our great resources," said Paganel.

"But have we great resources?" inquired the Major.

"More than we can use!" replied Paganel, without any further explanation.

And then they waited for the night.

The natives had not stirred. Their numbers seemed even greater, perhaps owing to the influx of the stragglers of the tribe. Fires lighted at intervals formed a girdle of flame round the base of the mountain, so that when darkness fell, Maunganamu appeared to rise

out of a great brasier, and to hide its head in the thick darkness.
Five hundred feet below they could hear the hum and the cries
of the enemy's camp.

At nine o'clock the darkness being very intense,
Glenarvan and John Mangles went out to reconnoiter before
embarking the whole party on this critical journey.
They made the descent noiselessly, and after about ten minutes,
arrived on the narrow ridge that crossed the native lines,
fifty feet above the camp.

All went well so far. The Maories, stretched beside the fires,
did not appear to observe the two fugitives. But in an instant
a double fusillade burst forth from both sides of the ridge.

"Back," exclaimed Glenarvan; "those wretches have the eyes of cats
and the guns of riflemen!"

And they turned, and once more climbed the steep slope of the mountain,
and then hastened to their friends who had been alarmed at the firing.
Glenarvan's hat was pierced by two balls, and they concluded that it
was out of the question to venture again on the ridge between two
lines of marksmen.

"Wait till to-morrow," said Paganel, "and as we cannot elude
their vigilance, let me try my hand on them."

The night was cold; but happily Kara-Tete had been furnished
with his best night gear, and the party wrapped themselves each
in a warm flax mantle, and protected by native superstition,
slept quietly inside the inclosure, on the warm ground,
still violating with the violence of the internal ebullition.