

CHAPTER XIX A CRY IN THE NIGHT

THE crew soon heard that no light had been thrown on the situation of Captain Grant by the revelations of Ayrton, and it caused profound disappointment among them, for they had counted on the quartermaster, and the quartermaster knew nothing which could put the DUNCAN on the right track.

The yacht therefore continued her course. They had yet to select the island for Ayrton's banishment.

Paganel and John Mangles consulted the charts on board, and exactly on the 37th parallel found a little isle marked by the name of Maria Theresa, a sunken rock in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, 3,500 miles from the American coast, and 1,500 miles from New Zealand. The nearest land on the north was the Archipelago of Pomotou, under the protectorate of France; on the south there was nothing but the eternal ice-belt of the Polar Sea. No ship would come to reconnoiter this solitary isle. No echoes from the world would ever reach it. The storm birds only would rest awhile on it during their long flight, and in many charts the rock was not even marked.

If ever complete isolation was to be found on earth, it was on this

little out-of-the-way island. Ayrton was informed of its situation, and expressed his willingness to live there apart from his fellows. The head of the vessel was in consequence turned toward it immediately.

Two days later, at two o'clock, the man on watch signaled land on the horizon. This was Maria Theresa, a low, elongated island, scarcely raised above the waves, and looking like an enormous whale. It was still thirty miles distant from the yacht, whose stem was rapidly cutting her way over the water at the rate of sixteen knots an hour.

Gradually the form of the island grew more distinct on the horizon. The orb of day sinking in the west, threw up its peculiar outlines in sharp relief. A few peaks of no great elevation stood out here and there, tipped with sunlight. At five o'clock John Mangles could discern a light smoke rising from it.

"Is it a volcano?" he asked of Paganel, who was gazing at this new land through his telescope.

"I don't know what to think," replied the geographer;
"Maria Theresa is a spot little known; nevertheless, it would not be surprising if its origin were due to some submarine upheaval, and consequently it may be volcanic."

"But in that case," said Glenarvan, "is there not reason to fear

that if an eruption produced it, an eruption may carry it away?"

"That is not possible," replied Paganel. "We know of its existence for several centuries, which is our security.

When the Isle Julia emerged from the Mediterranean, it did not remain long above the waves, and disappeared a few months after its birth."

"Very good," said Glenarvan. "Do you think, John, we can get there to-night?"

"No, your honor, I must not risk the DUNCAN in the dark, for I am unacquainted with the coast. I will keep under steam, but go very slowly, and to-morrow, at daybreak, we can send off a boat."

At eight o'clock in the evening, Maria Theresa, though five miles to leeward, appeared only an elongated shadow, scarcely visible. The DUNCAN was always getting nearer.

At nine o'clock, a bright glare became visible, and flames shot up through the darkness. The light was steady and continued.

"That confirms the supposition of a volcano," said Paganel, observing it attentively.

"Yet," replied John Mangles, "at this distance we ought to hear the noise which always accompanies an eruption, and the east wind brings no sound whatever to our ear."

"That's true," said Paganel. "It is a volcano that blazes, but does not speak. The gleam seems intermittent too, sometimes, like that of a lighthouse."

"You are right," said John Mangles, "and yet we are not on a lighted coast."

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "another fire? On the shore this time! Look! It moves! It has changed its place!"

John was not mistaken. A fresh fire had appeared, which seemed to die out now and then, and suddenly flare up again.

"Is the island inhabited then?" said Glenarvan.

"By savages, evidently," replied Paganel.

"But in that case, we cannot leave the quartermaster there."

"No," replied the Major, "he would be too bad a gift even to bestow on savages."

"We must find some other uninhabited island," said Glenarvan, who could not help smiling at the delicacy of McNabbs. "I promised Ayrton his life, and I mean to keep my promise."

"At all events, don't let us trust them," added Paganel.

"The New Zealanders have the barbarous custom of deceiving ships by moving lights, like the wreckers on the Cornish coast in former times. Now the natives of Maria Theresa may have heard of this proceeding."

"Keep her off a point," called out John to the man at the helm.

"To-morrow at sunrise we shall know what we're about."

At eleven o'clock, the passengers and John Mangles retired to their cabins. In the forepart of the yacht the man on watch was pacing the deck, while aft, there was no one but the man at the wheel.

At this moment Mary Grant and Robert came on the poop.

The two children of the captain, leaning over the rail, gazed sadly at the phosphorescent waves and the luminous wake of the DUNCAN. Mary was thinking of her brother's future, and Robert of his sister's. Their father was uppermost in the minds of both. Was this idolized parent still in existence? Must they give him up? But no, for what would life be without him? What would become of them without him? What would have become of them already,

but for Lord Glenarvan and Lady Helena?

The young boy, old above his years through trouble, divined the thoughts that troubled his sister, and taking her hand in his own, said, "Mary, we must never despair. Remember the lessons our father gave us.

Keep your courage up and no matter what befalls you, let us show this obstinate courage which can rise above everything.

Up to this time, sister, you have been working for me, it is my turn now, and I will work for you."

"Dear Robert!" replied the young girl.

"I must tell you something," resumed Robert. "You mustn't be vexed, Mary!"

"Why should I be vexed, my child?"

"And you will let me do it?"

"What do you mean?" said Mary, getting uneasy.

"Sister, I am going to be a sailor!"

"You are going to leave me!" cried the young girl, pressing her brother's hand.

"Yes, sister; I want to be a sailor, like my father and Captain John. Mary, dear Mary, Captain John has not lost all hope, he says. You have confidence in his devotion to us, and so have I. He is going to make a grand sailor out of me some day, he has promised me he will; and then we are going to look for our father together. Tell me you are willing, sister mine. What our father would have done for us it is our duty, mine, at least, to do for him. My life has one purpose to which it should be entirely consecrated-- that is to search, and never cease searching for my father, who would never have given us up. Ah, Mary, how good our father was!"

"And so noble, so generous!" added Mary. "Do you know, Robert, he was already a glory to our country, and that he would have been numbered among our great men if fate had not arrested his course."

"Yes, I know it," said Robert.

Mary put her arm around the boy, and hugged him fondly as he felt her tears fall on his forehead.

"Mary, Mary!" he cried, "it doesn't matter what our friends say, I still hope, and will always hope. A man like my father doesn't die till he has finished his work."

Mary Grant could not reply. Sobs choked her voice.

A thousand feelings struggled in her breast at the news that

fresh attempts were about to be made to recover Harry Grant, and that the devotion of the captain was so unbounded.

"And does Mr. John still hope?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Robert. "He is a brother that will never forsake us, never! I will be a sailor, you'll say yes, won't you, sister? And let me join him in looking for my father. I am sure you are willing."

"Yes, I am willing," said Mary. "But the separation!" she murmured.

"You will not be alone, Mary, I know that. My friend John told me so. Lady Helena will not let you leave her. You are a woman; you can and should accept her kindness. To refuse would be ungrateful, but a man, my father has said a hundred times, must make his own way."

"But what will become of our own dear home in Dundee, so full of memories?"

"We will keep it, little sister! All that is settled, and settled so well, by our friend John, and also by Lord Glenarvan. He is to keep you at Malcolm Castle as if you were his daughter. My Lord told my friend John so, and he told me. You will be at home there, and have someone to speak to about our father,

while you are waiting till John and I bring him back to you some day.

Ah! what a grand day that will be!" exclaimed Robert, his face glowing with enthusiasm.

"My boy, my brother," replied Mary, "how happy my father would be if he could hear you. How much you are like him, dear Robert, like our dear, dear father. When you grow up you'll be just himself."

"I hope I may," said Robert, blushing with filial and sacred pride.

"But how shall we requite Lord and Lady Glenarvan?" said Mary Grant.

"Oh, that will not be difficult," replied Robert, with boyish confidence.

"We will love and revere them, and we will tell them so; and we will give them plenty of kisses, and some day, when we can get the chance, we will die for them."

"We'll live for them, on the contrary," replied the young girl, covering her brother's forehead with kisses. "They will like that better, and so shall I."

The two children then relapsed into silence, gazing out into the dark night, and giving way to long reveries, interrupted occasionally by a question or remark from one to the other.

A long swell undulated the surface of the calm sea, and the screw

turned up a luminous furrow in the darkness.

A strange and altogether supernatural incident now occurred. The brother and sister, by some of those magnetic communications which link souls mysteriously together, were the subjects at the same time and the same instant of the same hallucination.

Out of the midst of these waves, with their alternations of light and shadow, a deep plaintive voice sent up a cry, the tones of which thrilled through every fiber of their being.

"Come! come!" were the words which fell on their ears.

They both started up and leaned over the railing, and peered into the gloom with questioning eyes.

"Mary, you heard that? You heard that?" cried Robert.

But they saw nothing but the long shadow that stretched before them.

"Robert," said Mary, pale with emotion, "I thought--yes, I thought as you did, that--We must both be ill with fever, Robert."

A second time the cry reached them, and this time the illusion was so great, that they both exclaimed simultaneously, "My father! My father!"

It was too much for Mary. Overcome with emotion, she fell fainting into Robert's arms.

"Help!" shouted Robert. "My sister! my father! Help! Help!"

The man at the wheel darted forward to lift up the girl.

The sailors on watch ran to assist, and John Mangles, Lady Helena, and Glenarvan were hastily roused from sleep.

"My sister is dying, and my father is there!" exclaimed Robert, pointing to the waves.

They were wholly at a loss to understand him.

"Yes!" he repeated, "my father is there! I heard my father's voice; Mary heard it too!"

Just at this moment, Mary Grant recovering consciousness, but wandering and excited, called out, "My father! my father is there!"

And the poor girl started up, and leaning over the side of the yacht, wanted to throw herself into the sea.

"My Lord--Lady Helena!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands,

"I tell you my father is there! I can declare that I heard

his voice come out of the waves like a wail, as if it were a last adieu."

The young girl went off again into convulsions and spasms, which became so violent that she had to be carried to her cabin, where Lady Helena lavished every care on her. Robert kept on repeating, "My father! my father is there! I am sure of it, my Lord!"

The spectators of this painful scene saw that the captain's children were laboring under an hallucination. But how were they to be undeceived?

Glenarvan made an attempt, however. He took Robert's hand, and said, "You say you heard your father's voice, my dear boy?"

"Yes, my Lord; there, in the middle of the waves. He cried out, 'Come! come!'"

"And did you recognize his voice?"

"Yes, I recognized it immediately. Yes, yes; I can swear to it! My sister heard it, and recognized it as well. How could we both be deceived? My Lord, do let us go to my father's help. A boat! a boat!"

Glenarvan saw it was impossible to undeceive the poor boy,
but he tried once more by saying to the man at the wheel:

"Hawkins, you were at the wheel, were you not, when Miss Mary
was so strangely attacked?"

"Yes, your Honor," replied Hawkins.

"And you heard nothing, and saw nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Now Robert, see?"

"If it had been Hawkins's father," returned the boy,
with indomitable energy, "Hawkins would not say he had heard nothing.
It was my father, my lord! my father."

Sobs choked his voice; he became pale and silent, and presently
fell down insensible, like his sister.

Glenarvan had him carried to his bed, where he lay in a deep swoon.

"Poor orphans," said John Mangles. "It is a terrible trial they
have to bear!"

"Yes," said Glenarvan; "excessive grief has produced the same hallucination in both of them, and at the same time."

"In both of them!" muttered Paganel; "that's strange, and pure science would say inadmissible."

He leaned over the side of the vessel, and listened attentively, making a sign to the rest to keep still.

But profound silence reigned around. Paganel shouted his loudest. No response came.

"It is strange," repeated the geographer, going back to his cabin.

"Close sympathy in thought and grief does not suffice to explain this phenomenon."

Next day, March 4, at 5 A. M., at dawn, the passengers, including Mary and Robert, who would not stay behind, were all assembled on the poop, each one eager to examine the land they had only caught a glimpse of the night before.

The yacht was coasting along the island at the distance of about a mile, and its smallest details could be seen by the eye.

Suddenly Robert gave a loud cry, and exclaimed he could see two men running about and gesticulating, and a third was waving a flag.

"The Union Jack," said John Mangles, who had caught up a spy-glass.

"True enough," said Paganel, turning sharply round toward Robert.

"My Lord," said Robert, trembling with emotion, "if you don't want me to swim to the shore, let a boat be lowered. Oh, my Lord, I implore you to let me be the first to land."

No one dared to speak. What! on this little isle, crossed by the 37th parallel, there were three men, shipwrecked Englishmen! Instantaneously everyone thought of the voice heard by Robert and Mary the preceding night.

The children were right, perhaps, in the affirmation.

The sound of a voice might have reached them, but this voice-- was it their father's? No, alas, most assuredly no.

And as they thought of the dreadful disappointment that awaited them, they trembled lest this new trial should crush them completely.

But who could stop them from going on shore? Lord Glenarvan had not the heart to do it.

"Lower a boat," he called out.

Another minute and the boat was ready. The two children of Captain Grant, Glenarvan, John Mangles, and Paganel, rushed into it, and six sailors, who rowed so vigorously that they were presently

almost close to the shore.

At ten fathoms' distance a piercing cry broke from Mary's lips.

"My father!" she exclaimed.

A man was standing on the beach, between two others.

His tall, powerful form, and his physiognomy, with its mingled expression of boldness and gentleness, bore a resemblance both to Mary and Robert. This was indeed the man the children had so often described. Their hearts had not deceived them. This was their father, Captain Grant!

The captain had heard Mary's cry, for he held out his arms, and fell flat on the sand, as if struck by a thunderbolt.