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Title: In the Mahdi's Grasp

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Release date: March 28, 2008 [eBook #24926]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Nick Hodson of London, England

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK IN THE MAHDI'S GRASP ***

George Manville Fenn

"In the Mahdi's Grasp"

Chapter One.

In Wimpole Street.

Sam—or, as he liked to be called, “Mr Samuel,” or “Mr Downes,” holding as he did the important post of confidential and body-servant to Dr Robert Morris, a position which made it necessary for him to open the door to patients and usher them into the consulting-room, and upon particular occasions be called in to help with a visitor who had turned faint about nothing—“a poor plucked 'un,” as he termed him—

To begin again:—

Sam, who was in his best black and stiffest white tie, consequent upon “the doctor” having company to dinner that evening, had just come out of the dining-room of the dingy house in Wimpole Street, carrying a mahogany tray full of dish covers, when cook opened the glass door at the top of the kitchen stairs, thrust her head into the hall, looked eagerly at Sam, as she stood fanning her superheated face with her apron, and said—

“Well?”



There was a folding pair of trestles standing ready, and Sam placed the tray upon them, raised a white damask napkin from where it hung over his arm, and was about to wipe his perspiring forehead with it, when cook exclaimed sharply—

“Sam!”

“Forgot,” said that gentleman, and he replaced the napkin upon his arm and took out a clean pocket-handkerchief, did what was necessary, and then repeated cook’s word—

“Well?”

“Did they say anything about the veal cutlets?”

“No,” said Sam, shaking his head.

“Nor yet about the curry?”

“No. And they didn’t say a word about the soup, nor half a word about the fish.”

“My chycest gravy soup, *ar lar prin temps*” said cook bitterly, “and *filly de sole mater de hôtel*. One might just as well be cutting chaff for horses. I don’t see any use in toiling and moiling over the things as I do. Mr Landon’s just as bad as master, every bit. I don’t believe either of ’em’s got a bit o’ taste. Hot as everything was, too!”

“Spesherly the plates,” said Sam solemnly. “Burnt one of my fingers when the napkin slipped.”

“Then you should have took care. What’s a dinner unless the plates and dishes are hot?”

“What, indeed?” said Sam; “but they don’t take no notice of anything. My plate looked lovely, you could see your face out o’ shape in every spoon; and I don’t believe they even saw the eighteen-pen’orth o’ flowers on the table.”

“Savages! that’s what they are,” said cook. “But they did eat the things.”

“Yes, they pecked at ’em, but they was talking all the time.”

“About my cooking?”

“Not they! The doctor was talking about a surgical case he had been to see at the hospital. Something about a soldier as had been walking about for three years with a bit of broken spear stuck in him out in the Soudan.”

“Ugh!” grunted cook, with a shudder of disgust. “That was over the veal cutlets,” said Sam thoughtfully.

“And what did Mr Landon say? He ought to have known better than to talk about such ’orrid stuff over his meals.”

“Him?” said Sam, with a grin of contempt; “why, he’s worse than master.”

“He couldn’t be, Sam.”

“Couldn’t? But he is. Master does talk about live people as he does good to. Mr Landon don’t. He began over the

curry."

"Made with best curry paste too, and with scraped cocoanut, a squeeze of lemon, a toemarter, and some slices of apple in, just as old Colonel Cartelow taught me hisself. Talk about throwing pearls! And pray what did Mr Landon talk about?"

"Mummies."

"Ugh!" ejaculated cook. "I saw some of 'em once, at the British Museum; but never no more! The idea of bringing a mummy on to a dinner-table!"

"Ah," said Sam, "it's a good job, old lady, that you don't hear all that I do."

"So I suppose," said cook, with a snort. "And he calls hisself a professor!"

"No, no, he don't, old lady. It's other people calls him a professor, and I suppose he is a very clever man."

"I don't hold with such clever people. I like folks as are clever enough to understand good cooking. Professor, indeed! I should like to professor him!"

"Well, master's no better," said Sam. "Look at the trouble I have with him to keep him decent. If I didn't watch him he'd put on anything. I can't even keep a book out of his hand when I'm cutting his hair. Only yesterday he gives a duck down to cut the leaf of his book just at an awkward moment, and of course in goes the point of the scissors."

"Serve him right!" said cook.

"And what do you think he said?"

"Oh, don't ask me."

"Nothing; and I dabbed the place and put a bit o' black court-plaister on his ear, and I don't hardly believe he even knew of it."

"I'm not surprised," said cook indignantly. "Them two read and read till they're a pair of regular old scribums. Anyone would think they were old ancient men instead of being— How old is master?"

"Six years older than me."

"And you're six-and-twenty."

"Yes."

"And a fine, handsome man too."

"Thankye, cook," said Sam, smiling.

"Get out! I don't mean you. Master. How old's the professor?"

"Oh, he's thirty-five," said Sam, in rather a disappointed tone.

"And looks it," said cook. "Well, I wish he'd go abroad again to his nasty grave-digging in the sands, and then praps master would have decent people to dine with him. Oh! There's the front bell."

Cook dived down into the lower regions, and Sam opened the folding inner doors to go and answer the street door bell, frowning the while.

"Wanted for some patient," he muttered sourly. "I do wish people would have their accidents at decent times."

Chapter Two.

"News! News!"

On the other side of the dining-room door Doctor Morris, a thoughtful-looking man of goodly presence, and the better looking for a calm ignorance of his being handsome, was seated opposite to his thin, yellow-skinned, and rather withered, nervous-looking old college friend, both partaking slowly of the good things the doctor's domestic had prepared for them, as if it came perfectly natural to them to follow out the proverbial words of the old Greek philosopher who bade his pupils, "Live not to eat, but eat to live."

As Sam had truthfully said, they had been talking very learnedly about their investigations in the particular branches of science which they had followed up since their old school and college days when they had begun their friendship, in company with another companion, missing now; and the doctor had said, with a far-off look in his large dark eyes—

"No, Fred, old chap, I don't want to settle down here yet, because I know how it will be. Once I regularly begin, the practice will completely swallow me, as it did the dear old dad. People came from far and wide to be treated by him, and he had hardly an hour to call his own. Of course I shall be glad to do the same, for it's a duty to one's fellow-creatures; but I want to leave it all to old Stanley for another two or three years while I travel and see more of the world. I should like to go with some army if I could."

"Yes," said his guest, "I see; as a volunteer surgeon."

"Exactly; the experience and confidence I should gain would be so great. After that, here is my place, and I could relieve Stanley till he retires, which he says he shall do as soon as I like to take the old practice fully in hand."

"Hah! Yes, Bob," said the visitor. "There's nothing like travel—seeing foreign countries, with some special pursuit to follow. I'm like a fish out of water now, with all this trouble in Egypt. Oh, hang the Khalifa, or Mahdi, or whatever they call him!"

"That's what a good many people would like to do," said the doctor drily.

"Like to? I should like to do it myself," cried Landon, with his yellow face flushing. "The wretch, the impostor, the cruel, heartless brute! Poor Harry Frere! as handsome, manly, true-hearted a gentleman as ever breathed."

"Hah, yes!" said the doctor, sighing. "Don't talk about it, old fellow. It makes me miserable every night as it is."

"Miserable? Yes, for if ever friend was like a brother poor old Harry was. He had only one fault in him, and that was his blind faith and belief in poor Gordon."

"Fault?"

"No, no, not fault. You know what I mean; but it is so pitiful to think of. Only the other day we gave him that dinner on his appointment to his regiment in the Egyptian army, and he is off to Cairo. Then the next thing is that he goes on the expedition to join Gordon up the country."

"And the next news," said the doctor sadly, "is that he and all with him have been massacred, fighting in poor Gordon's defence."

"Horrible! Horrible!" said Landon passionately. "So bright, so brave a lad, with, in the ordinary course, a good manly career of fifty years before him."

"Think there is any possibility of his having escaped after all?" said the doctor, after a pause.

"Not a bit, poor lad. I was red-hot to go up the country somehow or other last year when I was about to investigate those buried tombs of the Ra Sa dynasty. I wanted to give up the search for those mummies and the stores of old incised inscriptions."

"Yes, and you applied for permission," said the doctor.

"Like an idiot," said Landon angrily, "instead of keeping my own counsel and going without saying a word. I might have found poor old Hal a prisoner, or a slave, or something. But what did the authorities say?"

"That they were quite convinced that there were no survivors of the last expedition, and that they must debar your proceeding up the country."

"Debar!" cried Landon, with a peculiar laugh. "Splendid word for it. Bar, indeed! Yes, and they politely bundled me out of the country just when I was on the scent of some of the most wonderful discoveries ever made, connected with the ancient Egyptian civilisation."

"You must wait a few years, and when the country is settled try again."

"I was willing to give up further researches then, but they wouldn't let me go in search of poor Harry."

"Their belief was that the attempt would be fatal."

"But they did not know; I was the best judge of that. See what a knowledge I have of the people and their language. I believe I could have gone anywhere."

"That was young Frank's belief."

"Yes, but that was different. The boy did not know what he was talking about. He'd have been murdered before he had gone fifty miles up the country."

"It was very brave and true of him, though."

"Of course," said Landon, "and I should have risked taking him with me if I could have obtained permission. But perhaps it was better that he should stick to his chemistry."

"Yes," said the doctor, with a sigh, "and that you should have been sent home."

"Nonsense! I say it was a disgraceful thing that a scientist like myself should be so treated."

"But the result is that Harry's brother is safe at home, Fred, and that I have not lost another companion."

The doctor stretched out his hand to his rather excitable friend, who grasped it directly.

"That's very good of you, Bob, old fellow. Thank you; but I felt it bitterly not being allowed to go in search of poor Harry."

"Yes, but so did Frank."

"Of course, poor boy. He would. Ah, well, I tried my best. I feel it, though, and I am very miserable doing my work in the museum instead of in Egypt amongst the sand. I suppose the upper country will become settled again."

"Sure to," said the doctor, "and in the meantime why don't you go and try Nineveh or Babylon?"

"No; I can't take up an entirely fresh rut. I must give years upon years yet to the sand-buried cities and tombs of Egypt. Ah! what an endless mine of wonders it is."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"With everything so preserved by the drifting sand."

"But the ruins of the Tigris and Euphrates must be equally interesting."

"They can't be."

"But look here: you can't go to Egypt now, and you could to Nineveh. Have a trip there, and I'll go with you."

"You will, Bob?" cried Landon excitedly.

"I will, Fred, on my word."

"Then we will, Bob," said the professor enthusiastically. "We'll start and— No, we won't. Egypt is my motto, and much as I should like to have you for a companion, no, sir, no. As the old woman said, 'Wild horses sha'n't drag me from my original plans and unfinished work.' I must get back to the sand. I'd give anything to be there digging."

"Humph!" ejaculated the doctor. "After all, it is a nasty, ghoulish business: moleing in the old tombs and unrolling mummies."

"It may seem so to you, but to me it is intensely interesting. Besides, much as you condemn it, this is the only way to find out the history—the manners and customs of the people two and three thousand years ago."

"The bell!" exclaimed the doctor. "I hope no poor creature wants me to-night."

"So do I," said Landon, "for my own sake as well as for his or hers. I wanted a long chat with you as soon as this tiresome dinner is at an end."

"Hark," said the doctor. "Some one has come in. Yes, I'm wanted, and— Hullo, Frank, my dear boy, how are you?" he cried, as a youthful-looking young man, who appeared flushed and excited, threw open the door without waiting to be announced, and strode in, to nod to first one and then the other.

"Why, there is something the matter!" said the doctor quickly. "You want to see me?"

"To see you? Yes, of course," said the young man shaking hands hurriedly. "No, no, not professionally. I hurried on to Old Bones, but the servant said he had come to dine with you, so I jumped into a cab and made the fellow canter here."

"Then you have come for a snack with us. Wish I'd known, and we'd have waited. Sit down, my lad. Why didn't you come sooner?"

"Dinner?" cried the young man, ignoring the chair, and beginning to stride up and down the room, swinging his arms excitedly; "don't talk to me about dinner!"

"Very well, little man," said the professor, smiling; "but don't jump quite out of your skin."

The newcomer turned upon the speaker sharply, and stopping short stood pointing at him.

"Hark at that fellow, doctor," he cried. "That's Old Bones all over. He's as cool as one of his dry mummies. Why, my news is enough to make any fellow with a heart jump out of his skin!"

"Sit still, Bob," said the professor quietly; "the boy has made a discovery."

"Yes, a discovery," cried the newcomer—"a discovery!" and he brought his hand down so heavily upon the dining table that the glasses jumped.

"That's it," said the professor; "metaphorically speaking, he has been pouring sulphuric acid upon the carbonate of lime of his composition, and all this effervescence is the consequence. He'll be better soon. Now, Frank, boy, what is the discovery—something that will set the Thames on fire?"

"Have you got a good appointment as chemist, Frank?" said the doctor.

"Discovery—appointment!" cried the young man, with his voice breaking from the emotion he felt. "Something a thousand times better than either of those. It's the news of news, I tell you— Hal!"

His two hearers sprang to their feet and rushed at him excitedly, each seizing a hand.

"What about him?" cried the doctor.

"Not dead?" shouted the professor.

"No—no—no!" cried the young man wildly, and then his voice thoroughly broke, becoming almost inaudible as he tried to declare his news.

"I can't bear it," he panted; "I can't bear it. Morris—Landon—don't take any notice of me—I've kept all this in for days, and now—now— Oh, tell me—is it true, or am I going mad?"

The young man sank heavily into the chair to which his friends helped him, and then he lay back quivering, with his hands covering his face, while the doctor made a sign to his companion and went hurriedly into his consulting-room, where he turned up the gas and then opened a cabinet, from which he took down a stoppered bottle and a graduated glass, into which he carefully measured a small portion, half filled the glass from a table filter, and then hurried back into the dining-room.

"Drink this, Frank, my boy," he said.

"No, no; let me be. I shall soon come round."

"Drink this, my lad," said the doctor sternly; "it is for your good."

The young man caught the glass from his friend's hand, tossed down the contents, shuddered, and then drew a deep breath, pulling himself together directly.

"I'm better now," he said. "It has all been such a shock, and I've been travelling night and day."

"Where from?" said the doctor, so as to give the young fellow time for the medicine to produce its effect.

"Berlin," was the reply.

"Berlin? That accounts for it. I was wondering why you had not been here. I thought you were in Paris about some mineral business."

"I was there, but I heard some news about—about poor Hal."

"Indeed?" said the professor, growing excited now.

"Yes, it was from a gentleman who had escaped out of Khartoum."

"Go on, my lad; go on," said Morris.

"Yes, yes, I can go on now," said the young man calmly. "Don't think any more about what I said."

"No, no, of course not, Frank, my lad," said the doctor; "but pray speak out. Landon and I are suffering pain."

"Of course, and I've travelled night and day as I told you, so as to bring you the news myself. This German gentleman has been a prisoner ever since Khartoum was taken by the Mahdi, and only managed to get out of the place in disguise six months ago."

"Yes, yes," said the doctor excitedly, and the professor took up a carafe and made it rattle against a glass as he hurriedly poured out some water and drank it with avidity.

"He knew poor old Hal well by sight, and spoke to him twice, and heard who he was. He was alive, and seemed to be well the last time this gentleman saw him; but he was a miserable slave in irons without the slightest prospect of getting away."

"Hah!" exclaimed the doctor, dropping into a chair and beginning to wipe his forehead.

"Oh!" groaned the professor, sinking back in his chair, but only to become excited directly after, as he turned upon the bearer of the news.

"But he's alive, Frank, boy! he's alive!" he cried, in a peculiarly altered voice.

"Yes, thank Heaven!" said Frank Frere softly; "he is alive."

No one spoke for a few moments. Then the professor began again excitedly—

"Look here," he cried, "both of you; that German sausage is a fool!"

The others turned on him with wondering eyes as if they doubted his sanity, a notion quite pardonable from his manner of speaking and the wild look he had given himself by thrusting both his hands through his rather long, shaggy black hair, and making it stand up on end.

"Well," he said sharply, "what are you two staring at?"

"Well, Fred," said the doctor smiling, "I suppose it was at you."

"And pray why were you staring in that peculiar way at me? Here, you answer—you, Frank."

"I was staring on account of the sausage," said the young man, sinking back in his chair and laughing aloud.

"Here, Bob," said the professor excitedly, "what have you been giving this fellow—ether? It's too strong for him. Got on his nerves."

"Nonsense," said the doctor, joining softly in their young friend's mirth. "What makes you think that?"

"Why, you heard. He doesn't know what he's talking about—staring on account of the sausage!"

"Well, that's why I was looking at you so hard."

The professor stared now in turn, passed one hand across his forehead, stared again, and then said gravely—

"I say, you two, has this glorious news sent you both out of your minds?"

"No," cried both heartily. "It only sounded so comical and so different from your ordinary way," continued the younger man, "when you called my German friend a sausage."

The professor's face was so full of perplexity that in the reaction after the pain of the sudden good news, his friends began to laugh again, making the clever scientist turn his eyes inquiringly upon the doctor.

"Well, it's a fact," said the latter. "You did."

"What!" cried the professor indignantly. "That I didn't! I said that German gentleman was a fool."

"No, no, no," cried Frank, half hysterically. "You said sausage."

"Frank, you don't know what you're talking about."

"Yes, I do," cried the young man. "Sausage, sausage, sausage."

The professor drew lines horizontally across his forehead from his eyebrows to the roots of his hair, and shook his head slowly and piteously at the speaker.

"Well, really, Fred, old fellow," said the doctor, "I must take Frank's part. You certainly did say sausage. I suppose it was suggested by the common association of the two words, German sausage."

"Humph!" ejaculated the professor slowly; "suppose then I must. German silver—German band—German tinder—German sausage. But I meant to say German gentleman, upon my word."

"Nobody doubts you," said Frank; "but why did you call him a fool?"

"Oh! for saying that Harry couldn't escape. Do you both mean to tell me that an Englishman, and such an Englishman as our Harry Frere, couldn't do what a German has done?"

"I don't," said the doctor, bringing his fist down upon the table. "Come, Franky, lad, what have you to say to that?"

"Hah!" sighed the young man sadly, "it is easily accounted for. My German friend managed to gain the confidence of the Khalifa from his knowledge of Arabic, and was freed from the chains he first wore. Poor Harry was wearing heavy irons up to the day when my new friend left."

"Oh!" groaned the professor, "that's bad, that's bad. Frank, boy, I beg your German friend's pardon. He isn't a—"

"Sausage!" put in the doctor quickly.

"A fool," said the professor, shaking his fist playfully at his old school-fellow. "Well, I feel ten years younger than I did half an hour ago, and this settles it at once."

"Settles what?" said the doctor.

"Settles what!" cried the professor, in a tone full of mock disgust. "Hark at him, Frank! Settles this, sir," he continued, flashing his fierce eyes upon the doctor, clenching his fist menacingly, and shaking his shaggy hair. "I'm off back to Egypt as soon as ever I can get a berth in a steamer, and then I'm going right up the country with tools in every pocket on purpose to file off those chains."

"Bravo! bravo!" shouted the other two.

"An Englishman in chains," continued the professor, gesticulating like an orator, though as a rule he was one of the quietest of men, "and of all Englishmen in the world, our Harry, the merriest school-fellow, the heartiest undergrad, and the truest friend!"

"And brother," said Frank softly.

"Yes," cried the professor excitedly, "and brother, that man ever had. The brother we three have mourned as dead for years, but who lives—as a slave."

"Britons never shall be slaves," cried the doctor solemnly.

"Never!" said Frank through his teeth, and with a look of stern determination in his eyes which meant more than words could have expressed.

"Never!" cried the professor, bringing his fist down with such a crash that this time a large goblet leaped off the table, was smashed upon the floor, and the next moment the door was thrown open and Sam, the doctor's butler, as he called himself, looking white with anxiety, rushed into the room, to stand staring wildly from one to the other.

This quelled the professor's excitement at once, and he dropped back in his chair and began mopping his face.

"What's the matter, Samuel?" said the doctor sternly.

"That's what I've come to see, sir," cried the man piteously. "I did stop in the hall, sir, in aggyinies, waiting to know. First in comes Mr Frank when I opens the door to him and hits me in the chest hard, just like a patient as has got rid of the strait w. Into the dining-room he bangs, before I could announce him, and without a bit o' pollergy, slams the door after him. Then master goes into his consulting-room in a hurry and comes back with a something to exhibit, looking as he always do when there's anything serious on; and ever since it's been getting worse and worse, and you never rung for me, sir. Fancy my feelings, sir! First s'posing as it was fits with Mr Frank, sir; then it seemed to be you, sir; and then the professor went on, having it worse than either of you, sir, till it got to the smashing of my glass, and I couldn't bear it no longer."

"No, no, of course you couldn't, Sam," cried Frank; "and you must know at once. It's news, Sam—glorious news—the best of news. My brother is alive after all!"

"What!" cried the man. "Mr Harry, sir?"

"Yes, alive, Sam—alive!"

"What, him as was dead, sir?"

"Yes, alive, I tell you."

"What, him as was killed out in the Soudan—our Mr Harry, sir, as we give the dinner to in this very room, when he made that speech as I stood and heard to the very end?"

"Yes, Sam; yes, yes!" cried Frank, as excited now as the man, who now dashed at him and seized him by the hand and shook it with all his might.

"Then—then—then," he cried. "Oh, Mr Frank—oh, Mr Frank—oh, Mr Frank!"

Dropping the young man's hand, he seized the professor's and shook at that for a few moments, before rushing at his master's, to pump that wildly up and down before dashing to the door, flinging it open, and yelling—

"Here! hi! cook! Mary! everyone! He isn't dead after all. Hooray! hooray! hoo—"

From a tremendous emphasis and sonorous roar over the first hurrah, Sam made a rapid diminuendo to the first syllable of the last, which trailed off and would have died away but for Frank, who, touched by the man's show of devotion, finished it heartily, and led off with another cheer, in which the others joined, the shouts having an accompaniment in the pattering of feet upon the floor-cloth of the hall.

Sam's fit of exaltation was over, and he stood shamefaced and troubled, wiping his damp hands upon the white napkin.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said humbly. "You see, I knowed Mr Harry so well. He was always such a gentleman to me, and it was such an upset when he died that—that now he's come to life again, sir, it seemed like making a man forget himself, sir, and—"

"Show that he felt a genuine attachment to our very dear friend, Samuel," said the doctor quietly. "Thank you. My friends thank you too, for we know it was all perfectly sincere."

"Hah!" said the professor, as the door closed. "I always liked your Sam, though as a bit of a linguist I must say that sometimes his use of the Queen's English does rather jar upon my feelings."

"But his heart's in the right place," said Frank warmly.

"And a good heart too. But as we were saying when he burst into the room, Britons never shall be slaves, and I'm going back to Egypt after all to file off those chains."

"That's right," said the doctor warmly, "and just what I knew you would say. You are a man, Fred, who has found out things that have puzzled a good many—"

"Better ones," said the professor modestly. "Well, I have."

"And you've made out many an Egyptian hieroglyphic in your time."

"Yes, and I hope to find out more," said the professor.

"And will," cried Frank.

"But," said the doctor, "you are forbidden to go up the country—by the English and Egyptian authorities; and the Soudan is in the power of a savage and cruel impostor, who vows death to the white. How are you going up there to use those files?"

"Hah!" said the professor gravely; "whenever I have a difficult problem to solve I always put on my old red fez and have a thorough good think, and then the way seems to come."

"Yes," said the doctor, while Frank listened eagerly to what was said, "but—"

"Yes, but—" said the professor, taking him up sharply. "We've got our news, thank Heaven! and that's enough for to-night."

"And you can't put on your old red fez," said Frank, "because—"

"Exactly," said the professor; "because it is at my rooms in Fountain Court."

Chapter Three.

Perfectly Sane.

"Good morning, Frank, my lad," said Doctor Morris, shaking hands upon the young man entering his study. "Ready for business?"

"Ready, yes," was the reply, made with feverish haste. "Am I late?"

"Late? No," said the doctor, glancing at the clock on the study mantelpiece. "Half an hour before the time."

"Oh, nonsense; that thing's wrong. Ever so much slow."

"Don't you insult my clock, my boy," said the doctor. "It keeps as good time as any one in London. It's you who are too fast. Keep cool, my lad, keep cool."

"Who can keep cool at a time like this?" said Frank impatiently.

"You, if you try. Surgeons have to. Important work requires cool heads."

"I'll try," said Frank briefly.

"Fred Landon was right last night in putting matters off till this morning, so that we could all have a good night's rest."

Frank looked quickly up at his brother's old school-fellow with something like envy, as he sat there softly stroking the great, dark brown beard, which flowed pretty well all over the breast of the heavy blue dressing-gown, tied with thick silk cords about his waist, and thought what a fine-looking specimen of humanity he was; while the doctor at the same time scanned the rather thin, anxious face before him and mused to himself—

"Poor Frank! the boy looks pulled down and careworn, and this has completely upset him. I must take him in hand a bit. He has been working too hard, too, over his chemistry."

Just then their eyes met, and Frank coloured a little, as if self-conscious.

"I was afraid Landon would be here first," he said hurriedly, "and that you would both be waiting for me."

"You ought to have known him better," said the doctor, laughing. "Fred Landon never is first at any meeting. I always allow him an hour's latitude."

"Oh, surely he will not be late this morning?" cried Frank anxiously.

"I hope not; but he may be. Of course he meant to be punctual, and I have no doubt he got up and breakfasted extra early; but anything takes off his attention—a book, a drawing, a note about Egypt—and he forgets everything else. You should have called in the Temple this morning and brought him on."

"Of course! I didn't think of that. Here, I'll go and fetch him at once."

"No, no; give him time. Perhaps he will have been thinking so seriously about poor Harry, that for once he will be punctual."

"Here he is!" cried Frank excitedly, as a thundering knock was heard at the front door, and he sprang up in his anxiety to go and open to their friend himself.

"No, no; don't do that," cried the doctor, smiling. "Sam would be disgusted."

"Oh, I can't stop to think about Sam's feelings now," cried Frank hurriedly.

"But you must keep cool. Look here, Frank, you are eighteen, and pretty well a man grown."

"What has that to do with it?" said the lad impatiently.

"Only this," said the doctor gravely; "we want manly action now, and you are as impatient as a boy of twelve."

At that moment the professor entered the room, hooked stick in hand, and with his hat on, closely followed by the doctor's man, who stood with one hand held out and a puzzled look on his face, staring at the visitor, whose dress

looked shabby and aspect wild, the want of what fashionable young men term "well grooming"—to wit, shaving, hair-cutting, and shampooing—making him appear ten years older than his real age.

"Good morning, dear boys," he said, shaking hands warmly, and without taking off his hat. "Well, what is it?"

He turned sharply upon Sam as he spoke.

"Your hat, sir," said the man hesitatingly.

"Well, what about it? It's mine, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir; of course, sir. I thought you'd like me to take it and hang it up."

"Then you thought wrong," said the professor, and he so thoroughly stared Sam out of countenance, that the man shrank from the fierce frown and backed out of the room.

"Just as if a man can't do as he likes with his own hat," said the professor, with his face relaxing, as he crossed to one of the easy chairs, wheeled it forward, sat down, and then slipped off his hat, thrust his hand inside, whisked something out, and placed hat and stick under the table, before, with a good deal of flourish, he drew a very dingy-looking old scarlet fez over his starting black hair, with the big blue silk tassels hanging down behind, and settled himself comfortably by drawing up first one and then the other leg across and beneath him, *à la turque*.

"There," he said, with a pleasant smile. "This chair isn't so comfortable as the sand of the desert, but I must make it do. Now I'm ready for business. What's the first thing to be done?"

"To make arrangements for your start at once," said Frank sharply. "You will sail for Egypt, and make your preparations for going up the country, and I shall go with you."

"Oh, you've settled that, have you?" said the professor, turning upon the speaker, and pulling the fez a little more tightly on, for his stiff hair had a disposition to thrust it off. "You two have been busy then, eh, Bob?"

"Certainly not," said the doctor; "not a word has been said of this before."

"That's right," said the professor. "Are you aware of what it will cost, Frank?"

"No. A good deal, no doubt; but I have all that money to come when I am of age, and there is Harry's. There ought to be no difficulty about the executors advancing what is required."

"Bob and your humble servant being the said executors," said the professor. "Of course not; but I did not mean money, Frank, I meant life. It would cost yours."

"Well, I am ready to spend it," said the youth warmly, "so long as I can save my brother's."

"Hah!" sighed the doctor.

"That's very nicely spoken, Frank," said the professor, leaning forward to pat the young fellow on the arm, "but it's all sentiment."

"Sentiment?"

"Yes, and we want hard, matter-of-fact stuff. Now look at me."

"Well, I am looking at you," said Frank, half angrily.

"What do I look like?"

"Do you want the truth?"

"Of course, my boy."

"Well, you look like a Turk hard up in London, who has bought a second-hand suit of English clothes that don't fit him."

The doctor threw himself back and roared with laughter, while the professor joined silently in the mirth and then sat wiping his eyes, not in the least offended.

"Well done, Frank!" he said. "You've hit the bull's-eye, boy. That's exactly how I do look; and if I went to Cairo and put on a haïk and burnoose, and a few rolls of muslin round this fez, speaking Arabic as I do, and a couple of the Soudan dialects, I could go anywhere with a camel unquestioned. While as for you, my dear boy, you couldn't go a mile. You'd be a Christian dog that every man would consider it his duty to kill."

"I must risk that," said Frank stubbornly.

"Must you?" said the professor. "What do you say, Bob?"

"I say it would be madness," replied the doctor emphatically.

"Stick—stark—staring madness," said the professor. "I, who have been out there for years, and who can be quite at home with the people, should have hard work to get through by the skin of my teeth."

"And you would not get through, Frank," said the doctor decisively. "This business must be carried out wisely and well."

"What would you do, then," said Frank impatiently.

"Make application to the Foreign Office at once. Diplomacy must be set to work, and failing that, force."

"Oh!" cried Frank, in a despairing tone; "why, it would take years to get that slow machine to work, and all that time wasted in correspondence and question and answer, while poor Hal is slaving away yonder in chains! Oh, Morris, what are you thinking about?"

"Acting in the slower and surer way," replied the doctor firmly. "This can only be done with coolness. We know that Hal is a prisoner out yonder, and we must apply to Government to get him free."

"Humph!" ejaculated the professor.

"Hah!" cried Frank. "You don't agree with this, Landon?"

"Of course not. Bob Morris is as clever a chap as any in London at cutting people to pieces and putting 'em together again; but over Egyptian matters he'd be like a baby. Mine is the plan."

"To get your head cut off," growled the doctor.

"Well, if I did," retorted the professor, "that would beat you. Clever as you are, old chap, you couldn't get that to grow again. Look here, Frank, you side with me. I'll go at once."

"And take me with you?"

"No, my boy, I—will—not," said the professor decisively. "Be sensible, and take what is really the best way. I am not bragging when I say that I am one of the most likely men living to carry this business through."

"Oh, we know that you are not bragging," said the doctor. "You mean right; so does Frank. And now let me say this. The first thing last night that I thought, was that you, Fred, must go, and that I would go with you."

"Impossible," said the professor shortly.

"Yes, I thought it well over, and dearly as I long to go and help poor Hal, I am obliged to confess that it would be impossible."

"Hear, hear," said the professor; "just as impossible as for Frank to insist upon going with me to stick his head into the lion's mouth, get it bitten off, and spoil my plans as well. Once more, it is impossible for either of you two to go; so be sensible and help me to get off, and trust me like a brother to help and save our brother in distress."

"I will," said the doctor firmly. "Now, Frank."

"I won't," cried the youth.

"I ask you as a brother," said the doctor.

"Yes, as a little brother—as a boy whom you look upon as wanting in manliness to help at a time like this. Both of you cry *impossible*. I'm much younger than either of you, but surely I've got some brains. Always up to now, and it was the same when poor old Hal was with us, you three treated me as if I was your equal, and it made me feel older. But now, when there is quite a crisis in my life, and I want to prove to you that young as I am I can be manly and help to save our poor Hal from the clutches of these savage Arab fiends with their cruelty and slavery, you combine to fight against me, and it is impossible—impossible."

"Humph!" grunted the professor, shaking his head at the doctor, who shook his in turn.

"You talk too much, Frank, lad," said the latter, in an injured tone. "Do be cool, and think a little. I'm sure you would see then that you are wrong. What we want in this is calm matter-of-fact planning."

"No, we don't," said Frank impatiently; "we want a good plan, of course, but we want plenty of pluck and good manly dash. Impossible, you both say, because each of you has his own pet plan, one of you for Government interference, the other for going alone in disguise, and consequently you combine against me for one of you to carry out his."

"Well, and if you cannot propose a better ought you not to give way to us?"

"No," said Frank, "because it would be horrible to settle down here at home, thinking of that poor fellow's sufferings. How do you think I could ever get on with any study? I should go out of my mind."

"But look here, Frank," said the doctor.

"I can't look there," said Frank. "I can't reason with you two. I want to act; I want to be up and doing, so as to feel that every day I am a little nearer getting poor Harry free."

"That's quite reasonable, Bob," said the professor, slowly and thoughtfully. "But I say, Franky, my boy, I don't want to be obstinate; I don't want to hinder you if you can suggest a better plan. We only say that so far your ideas are impossible. Come, now have you any other plan?"

"Yes," said the lad excitedly. "Brother Hal is sitting out there in chains, looking longingly year after year for the help that does not come, and eating his poor heart out with despair because those to whom he should look for help do not come."

"That's all true enough," said the doctor sadly.

"But the question is," said the professor, holding out one hand and apparently putting down every word he said with the other: "How—are—we—to—help—the—poor—boy?"

"Let's all three go," said Frank hotly.

"Oh!" ejaculated the doctor.

"That's more and more impossible still," cried the professor.

"No, it isn't," cried Frank. "I have a plan in my head now that would answer if it were properly done. I haven't been out in Egypt like Landon here, but ever since poor Hal got his appointment I've read up the country till I'm regularly soaked with it."

"Can't be," said the professor, smiling grimly. "Moisture's too scarce when you're away from the Nile. You may be gritty with it."

"Never mind about that," said Frank. "I know one or two things about the people, and I know this—there is one man who is always welcome among them and their sufferers from fever and eye complaints and injured, and that is the doctor—the surgeon."

"Eh?" ejaculated the professor sharply, looking up. "Yes, that's true enough, boy."

"Well," said Frank, pointing, "there he is—the Hakim—the learned physician and curer of all ills. Look at him now in that dressing-gown, with his big, long beard, and that handsome, calm appearance. Doesn't he look as if he could cure anything? Just suppose him sitting cross-legged in a tent now, with a big white turban on; what would he look like then?"

"An impostor!" cried the doctor angrily. "Frank, the good news has swollen your head up till it has cracked."

"That it hasn't," cried the professor sharply, "and you would not look like an impostor, sir. Well done, Franky. I say he'd look like what he is—a splendid specimen of a man, and as good a doctor and surgeon as I know of. Impostor, indeed! I should be ready to punch the head of any scoundrel who dared to say so. Bravo, my boy! The great Frankish physician—the learned Hakim travelling through the country to perform his cures."

"Yes," cried Frank; "and performing them too."

"To be sure," said the professor, growing excited. "The news of his cures would spread through the land, and the people would welcome him, and he could go anywhere. Here, I say, Bob, this plant's coming up."

"You're as bad as Frank," said the doctor angrily. "You both take my breath away. What! me go masquerading through the Soudan, dressed up as a mock doctor?"

"Mock doctor be hanged!" cried the professor; "where's the mockery? The people out there suffer by scores and thousands from eye complaints and other evils, and as to the number you meet with who have been chopped and speared and shot—why, the place teems with them. Couldn't you do them good?"

"Well, of course I could," said the doctor thoughtfully. "I should say that with antiseptic treatment one's cures would seem almost marvellous to the poor wretches."

"Of course they would. I doctored scores myself when I was out there," said the professor. "Now, look here; I mean to go out there, of course, and I shall take you with me, Bob."

"What!"

"No whatting. You've got to go; that's settled. You're the great Frankish Hakim, and I'm your interpreter. You can't speak a word of Arabic. There's no imposture in that, is there?"

"Oh, no; I can't speak a word of Arabic, but as to the doctoring—"

"Look here, Bob; you'd be doing these people good, wouldn't you?"

"Of course."

"Well, then, there's no imposture there. We'll go right up to Khartoum, together with our servants, and get the poor boy away. That's settled, so you had better lay in your stock of ointment-pots, bottles, plaisters, and pills."

"Well, I'm beginning to think I'm dreaming," said the doctor.

"But you are not," said the professor, and he turned to Frank, who was excitedly listening to all that was said. "Now then, my boy," he said, "we've settled that; but I can't see that by any possibility you could come with us."

"I can," said the lad eagerly. "You talked about having servants with you."

"Yes, blacks," said the professor. "It would not do to take white ones."

"Very well, then, I'll go as a black."

The doctor and the professor turned upon the speaker sharply, and fixed him with their eyes, as if doubtful about the state of his mind, gazing at him in silence, till he laughed merrily.

"I have not lost a slate or tile," he said. "I am quite what Morris calls *compos mentis*."

"No," said the doctor sharply; "I'll be hanged if you can be, Frank, my lad."

"And so say I," chimed in the professor. "How in the world can you go as a black?"

"Bah!" cried Frank.

"What does *Baa!* mean?" said the professor. "Black sheep?"

"Nonsense! Ask Morris if it would not be as easy as easy to tinge one's skin to any depth, from a soft brown to black."

"Won't do," said the professor. "You'd dye your face, neck, and arms, and some time or other you'd be caught bathing."

"Not much chance for bathing out there when we were away from the Nile, eh?"

"Well, having a sand-bath; and then they'd see that the rest of your skin was white."

"Oh, no, they wouldn't," cried Frank. "I should do as that amateur did who wanted to play Othello properly—black myself all over."

The professor took off his fez, laid it upon his knees, and with both hands gave his shaggy hair a vicious rub, which, however, did not disorder it in the least, seeing that it was as rough as could be before.

"Yes," said the doctor; "he has an answer for all objections, Fred, old fellow."

"Yes, yes, yes," cried the professor, putting on his fez again, and making a vicious dab at the tassel, which was tickling his neck, but subsided quietly between his shoulders after it had done swinging. "He has something to say to everything. Too much talk. It wouldn't do. The Baggara are as keen as their swords: they'd see through it directly."

"Then I'd dye it blacker," said Frank.

"Oh, the colour would be right enough, boy," cried the professor, "but that's what would let the cat out of the bag."

"What do you mean?"

"That tongue of yours, my lad. Your speech would betray you directly."

"Oh, no, it would not," said Frank. "Mutes are common enough in the East, are they not?"

"Oh, yes, but—"

"Well, I would not talk."

"Pooh!" cried the professor contemptuously. "You wouldn't talk? Why, you've got a tongue as long as a girl's. You not talk? Why, you'd be sure to burst out with something in plain English just when our lives were depending upon your silence."

"*Urrr!*" growled the young fellow angrily. "Give me credit for a little more common-sense. Do you think, with the success of our expedition and poor Hal's life and happiness at stake, I couldn't make a vow to preserve silence for so many months, and keep it?"

"I do think so," said the professor, clapping one hand down upon the other. "You would find it impossible. What do you say, Bob?"

"Humph!" grunted the doctor.

"Come, there's no need for you to hold your tongue," cried the professor petulantly. "Say something."

"Very well, I'll say something," replied the doctor: "I don't know."

"Yes, you do. You know it's impossible."

"No," said the doctor thoughtfully; "I know it would be very hard, but seeing what a stubborn, determined fellow Frank is, I should not be surprised if he succeeded."

"Hurrah!" cried Frank. "There, Landon."

"Bob ought to know better," cried the professor. "It's impossible—that's impossible—the whole business is impossible. Can't be done."

"Well, I don't know," said the doctor, taking both hands to his beard and stroking and spreading it out over his breast,

where it lay in crisp curls, glistening with many lights and giving him a very noble and venerable aspect. "I'm beginning to like that idea of going as a learned physician."

"Oh, yes, that's right enough," said the professor. "There's no imposition there. The Arabs would have nothing to find out, and their suspicions would be allayed at once. Then, too, you could humbug them grandly with a few of your modern doctors' tools—one of those double-barrelled stethoscopes, for instance; or a clinical thermometer."

"To be sure," cried Frank. "Modern Magic—good medicine for the unbelieving savages. An electric battery, too; and look here, both of you: the Röntgen rays."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the doctor, and making his beard wag with enjoyment. "Yes, that would startle them. White man's magic. Fancy, Fred, old chap, a wounded man with a bullet in him, and I at work with my black slave, Frank, here, to help me, in a dark tent, while I made the poor wretch transparent to find out where the bullet lay."

"Yes, or broken spear-head," said the professor eagerly. "I say, Bob, there'd be no gammon over that: the savage beggars would believe that they had a real live magician come amongst them then."

"Yes, ha, ha! wouldn't they? I say, old fellow, I'm beginning to think it ought to be worked."

"Worked, yes," cried Frank excitedly. "I could take a few odds and ends from my laboratory, too, so as to show them some beautiful experiments—fire burning under water, throwing potassium on the river to make it blaze; use some phosphorescent oil; and startle them with Lycopodium dust in the air; or a little fulminating mercury or silver."

"H'm, yes, you might," said the professor thoughtfully. "You could both of you astonish them pretty well, and all that would keep up your character."

"But of course it's all impossible, isn't it?" said Frank, smiling.

"H'm! I don't quite know," said the professor slowly.

"Look here," said the doctor rising, to seat himself upon one end of the hearthrug, where he began trying to drag his legs across into a comfortable sitting position, but failed dismally; "I'm afraid I should never manage this part of the business. My joints have grown too stiff."

"Oh, nonsense," said the professor sharply; "it only wants a little practice. Look here."

He plumped himself down upon the other end of the hearthrug quite in the native manner, and seemed perfectly at his ease, while Frank sat watching them both with his eyes twinkling in his delight.

"You can't do it in those tight trousers. You want good loose, baggy breeches, knickerbockery sort of things. Oh, you'd soon do it.—That's better."

"Yes," said the doctor dubiously; "that's a little better; but these trousers are, as you say, too tight. I tell you what I'd do, Frank," he continued, perfectly seriously, "I'd have my head shaved clean, and keep it so."

"Bravo!" cried the professor excitedly. "Splendid! Your bald head over that grand beard and a very large white turban of the finest Eastern muslin, twisted up as I could twist it for you, would give just the finishing touches. Just spread the skirts of that dressing-gown a little."

Frank sprang to the task, and in arranging the folds uncovered one of the yellow Morocco slippers the doctor happened to be wearing.

"That's good," cried the professor excitedly. "Fetch those sofa cushions, Frank, and put them so that he can rest his arm upon them. Good! Now a pipe. Here, fish out my stick from under the table. That's right," he continued, as Frank placed the stick upside down in the doctor's hand, with the ferrule near his lips and the hook resting on the floor, turned up like a bowl.

"Well, I am!" cried the professor, drawing his legs more under him, and nodding at his old school-fellow seated opposite at the other end of the hearthrug. "Franky, boy, he looks the very perfection of a Turkish doctor now, while with the real things on and his head shaved, and the turban— Oh, I haven't a doubt of it, he'd humbug the Mahdi himself if he were alive. I haven't a bit of fear about him. Sit still, old man.—As for myself, I should be all right; when I get out there I feel more of a native than an Englishman. It's you who are the trouble, Franky, for I confess I am coming round."

"I shall get myself up perfectly. You may depend upon that," said the lad confidently, "and all through the voyage out Morris will coach me up about bandaging and helping him in ambulance work, so that I may get to be a bit clever as his assistant."

"Yes, yes, yes, that's all right," said the professor impatiently. "It's not that which bothers me. Look at Bob. I can see him in his part exactly. Nothing could be better; but I can't see you at all."

"Why? Set your imagination to work."

"I am, my dear boy; I am. It's working till my brain's beginning to throb; but I can't see you, as I say."

"But why not?"

"No shape; no form. You're too skinny. A young nigger ought to be plump, and shine like butter."

"Well, I'll oil myself," said Frank, laughing as much at himself as at the doctor seated *à la Turque* so solemnly upon the hearthrug.

"But your hair, Frank, my boy. It's brown and streaky. It ought to curl up more tightly than Bob's beard."

"I'll put it in paper every night, and dye it at the same time as I do my skin."

"H'm! Well, perhaps we might work it that way. If we can't, we must shave your head too."

"Barkis is willin'," said the young man readily. "As to the sitting—look here: won't this do?"

He seized the tongs from the fender, took a live coal from between the bars, dropped down sitting upon his heels halfway between the pair, but outside the hearthrug, and completed the Eastern picture in Wimpole Street by resting upon his left hand and making believe to be holding the live coal to the bowl of the Hakim's pipe.

"Bravo! Splendid!" cried the professor. "A *tableau vivant*, only wanting in colour and clothes to be perfect in all its details, and then—"

And then the group remained speechless in horror and disgust, for they suddenly became aware of the fact that Sam had silently entered with a letter upon a silver waiter, and had stopped short close to the door, to stand staring in astonishment at the living picture spread before his eyes. These seemed starting, while his brow was lined, the rest of his face puckered, and his mouth opened, at the same time his muscles relaxing so that the silver waiter dropped a little and the letter fell upon the soft carpet with a light pat which in the silence sounded loud.

Chapter Four.

The New Recruit.

For a few moments the picture was at its best, actors and spectator looking as rigid as if carved in wood or stone.

Then all was over, the doctor dropping the stick and scrambling up; Frank putting the tongs into the fender, Sam stooping to pick up the letter from the carpet, and the professor tearing his fez off his head, to dash it on the floor.

"Hang it!" he cried angrily; "destroyed the illusion! There, it's all over, Frank. I can't see it now."

"Beg pardon, sir. Letter, sir," said Sam stiffly, and he was as rigid as a drill sergeant, and his face like wood in its absence of all expression, as he stared hard over the waiter at his master, whose fingers trembled and cheeks coloured a little as he took the missive.

"Ahem!" said the doctor uneasily, and Sam, who was about to wheel about and leave the room, stood fast. "A—er—er—a little experiment, Samuel," he continued.

"Yes, sir," said the man quietly.

"Er—errum—Samuel," said the doctor; "the fact is, I—er—we—er—we do not wish this—that you have seen just now—talked about downstairs."

"Suttonly *not!* sir," said the man sharply, though the moment before he had been chuckling to himself about how he would make cook laugh about the games being carried on in the study.

"Thank you, Samuel," said the doctor, clearing his throat and gaining confidence as he went on. "The fact is, Samuel, a confidential servant ought to be trustworthy."

"Suttonly, sir," said Sam.

"And hear, see, and—"

"Say nothing, sir, of course. You may depend upon me, sir."

"Thank you, Samuel. Well, after what you heard last night you will not be surprised that we have decided to go out to Egypt at once in search of Mr Harry Frere."

"Not a bit, sir. Just what I should expect."

"Exactly, Samuel. To go up the country means, you see, the necessity of dressing ourselves like the people out there."

"Yes, sir; much better for the climate."

"And that is why we were, so to speak, going through a little practice."

"Suttonly, sir. Quite right. And about luggage, sir. What shall I get ready?"

"Ah! That requires a little consideration, Samuel. I'll go into that with you by and by."

"Very good, sir. But I should like to ask one question."

"Certainly, Samuel," said the doctor gravely; "what is it?"

"Only this, sir. When do we start?"

"When do we start?" said the doctor, staring. "My good man, I did not propose to take you."

"Not take me, sir?" cried the butler, staring. "Why, whatever do you think you could do without me?"

The doctor stared blankly at his man, and then turned to the professor.

"Ah! No hesitation, Morris," said the latter sharply. "I haven't quite come round yet regarding both of you, though matters have altered me a good deal during the last five minutes; but with regard to this last phase—the idea of taking your servant—that really is quite out of the question."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Sam seriously; "I don't think that it would be right for master to think of going without me."

"Well, Samuel, I must own," said the doctor thoughtfully, "I should miss your services very much."

"You couldn't do it without me, sir," said the man sternly. "I shouldn't like you to attempt it."

"Look here, Doctor Morris," said the professor angrily, "do you allow your servant to dictate to you like this?"

"Well, you see," said the doctor, "Samuel has always been such a good, attentive fellow, and taken so much interest in his work, Landon, that I feel rather puzzled as to whether this is dictation or no."

"It aren't, sir, really," cried Sam appealingly. "Is it, Mr Frank?"

"Well, no, I don't think it is," said the young man. "I take it that Sam is only anxious to go on waiting upon his master."

"That's it, sir. Thankye, Mr Frank. That's it, but it ain't all. If you three gentlemen are going on your travels to find and bring back Mr Harry, it seemed to me that I'm just the sort o' man as would be useful. I don't want to make out as I'm a dabster at any one thing, gentlemen, but there ain't many things I shouldn't be ready to have a try at, from catching one's dinner to cooking it, or from sewing on buttons to making a shoe."

"Look here, Sam, you can shave, I know," said Frank, "for you've shaved me several times."

"Well, sir," said the man, with a queer cock of the eye, "I've soaped and lathered your chin, and I've run a razor over your face, but I don't think I found anything to scrape off."

"I call that mean," cried Frank; "just when I was putting in a word for you. I'm sure there was a little down on my upper lip and chin."

"Oh, yes, sir, just as if you had had a touch with a sooty finger; but down don't count with me in shaving; it's what comes up bristly and strong."

"Well, leave my beard alone," said Frank. "Look here, could you shave a man's head?"

"Ask master, sir," said the butler with a grin, and Frank turned to his brother's old companion.

"Oh, yes, he has shaved the heads of patients for me several times," said the doctor. "He's very clever at that."

"I say, Professor Landon," said Frank, turning to him, "do you hear this? The Hakim ought to have his barber, and you know what important folk they are in the East."

"Humph! Yes," said the professor thoughtfully; "there is something in that. Barbers have become grand viziers, and in such shaving countries a barber is held in high respect. He would be all right there. But no, no, I cannot be weak over so vital a thing as this. Just think, you two, of the consequences if through some inept act on his part he should ruin all our prospects."

"Me, sir?" cried Sam excitedly; "me ruin your prospects by committing that there act as you said! I wouldn't do it for any money. Take a oath before a magistrate or a judge that I wouldn't I don't even know what it is."

"Oh, you'd do your best, I believe, Sam," said the professor.

"I'm glad you do, sir," said the man, who was almost whimpering. "It sounds hard on an old servant to be thought likely to do what you said."

"But look here, my lad; we ought to do all that is wanted for ourselves, excepting such little jobs as we could set the Arabs to do."

"Arabs, sir? The Arabs!" cried Sam. "Oh, I don't think much of them. I've seen 'em. That lot as come over to London seven years ago. Bed-ridden Arabs they call themselves. They could tumble head over heels, and fire off guns when they were in the air; but you gentlemen want a good honest English servant, not a street tumbler and accryback."

"Tut, tut, tut! listen to me," said the professor. "Do you know what the desert is like?"

"Can't say I know much about it, sir, only what I read in Mungo Park's travels. Deal o' sand, ain't there?"

"Yes," said the professor, "there is a deal of sand there, and no houses, no butlers' pantries, no kitchens."

"Well, sir, if I made up a box with half a knifeboard for a lid, and my bottle o' blacking, my brushes, and a leather or two and the rouge for my plate, I daresay I could get on."

"Bah-h-h-h!" snarled the professor. "Why didn't you add a big stone filter, a plate-rack, and a kitchen boiler? My good man, you're impossible."

"I ain't, sir, 'pon my word. You mean I should have to make more of a shift. Well, of course I would."

"Look here, then, I grant that you can shave. You can make a fire, boil water, and cook?"

"Can I, sir?" cried the man scornfully. "I should think I can!"

"Can you cook kabobs?"

"What's them, sir—Egyptian vegetables?"

"Vegetables! Hark at him! Did you ever hear of Kous-kous?"

"Can't say I ever did, sir; but look here, I'll buy 'Cookery for the Million,' and I'll soon learn."

"Oh, you're improving!" said the professor sarcastically. "Here, I'll try you on something else. Could you ride and drive a camel?"

"What, one of them wobbly, humpy things at the Zoo? I never tried, sir, but I've seen the children have rides on them. I could soon manage one o' them, sir. I'd try an elephant if it came to that."

The professor shook his head disparagingly, and Sam gave Frank and his master an imploring look, which made the former take his part. "Look here, professor," he said quietly; "really I think it might be managed," and Sam's long face shortened.

"Managed! Do you think we shall do what we propose if you and Morris take your valets?"

"There is going to be a black slave in the party," said Frank, "and I do not see why the Hakim should not have a barber who is a white slave."

"Humph!" ejaculated the professor, in a regular camel-like grunt, and he set up his back after the manner of that animal.

"Would you mind going as a slave, Sam?" asked Frank—"the Hakim's slave?"

"Not a bit, sir, so long as Mr Hakim's going to be one of the party. Me mind being a slave? Not I. Ain't Mr Harry one pro tempenny? I'm willing, sir, willing for anything. I don't want no wages. I want to go."

"And you shall go, Samuel," said the doctor firmly. "I'll talk the matter over with Mr Landon."

"Thankye, sir, thankye," cried the man joyfully. "And I beg your pardon, Mr Landon, sir; don't you take against me because it's going against you. I'm willing to do any manner of things to make you gentlemen comfortable all the time."

"I believe you, Sam," said the professor. "There, I give way."

"Thankye kindly, sir!" cried the man excitedly.

"But look here. It is only due to him that he should be told that we are going upon a very dangerous expedition. We shall have to travel amongst people who would think it a meritorious action to cut our throats if they had the merest suspicion that we were going to try and rescue Mr Harry Frere. Then we shall have the risks of fever, dying from thirst, perhaps from hunger, and as likely as not being taken prisoners ourselves and made slaves—are you listening, Sam?"

"Hearing every word, sir. But I say, sir, is it as bad as that?"

"Honestly, my man," said the professor solemnly; "it is all that and worse, because we shall have to cut ourselves adrift from all Government protection and trust to our own wits. Now then, my man, do not hesitate for an instant—if you feel that you cannot cheerfully put up with peril and danger, and dare every risk, say so at once, for you will be doing your master a good turn as well as us."

"Are you gentlemen going to chance it all?" said Sam quietly.

"Certainly."

"All right, gentlemen, then so am I, and as soon as ever you like."

"Hah!" ejaculated Frank, who had been watching the play of the man's countenance anxiously, and he crossed to Sam and shook his hand, making the butler's face glow with pride and pleasure combined.

"Now then," said the professor, "one more word, Sam. It is of vital importance that you keep all this a profound secret. From this hour you know nothing except that you are the Hakim's servant till we have left Cairo. After that

you are the Hakim's slave, and you hold him in awe."

"Of course, sir," said Sam, with his face wrinkling with perplexity. "I'll hold him in anything you like. I won't say a word to a soul. I won't know anything, and I hope Mr Hakim will be as satisfied with me as master has always been."

"And you think I have always been satisfied with you, Samuel?" said the doctor, smiling pleasantly.

"I think so, sir," replied the man. "I've been some years in your service, and you're a gentleman as will always have everything done as it should be."

"Of course."

"And you never found fault with me yet. And I *will* say that a better mas—"

"No, you will not," said the doctor quickly. "That will do."

"Certainly, sir," said the man, looking abashed.

"You like the doctor as a master, then?" said Frank, with a twinkle of the eye.

"Like him, sir!" cried Sam.

"Well, I think you will like your new master quite as well."

"I hope so, sir. I'll do my best. Shall I see him soon?"

"Of course," said Frank. "There he is. The Hakim, Doctor Morris—the learned surgeon who is going to practise through the Soudan."

"Oh-h-h!" cried Sam, with his face lighting up. "I see now, gentlemen."

"But remember," said the doctor sternly, "the necessity for silence has begun, so keep your own counsel, which will be keeping ours."

"Yes, sir."

"Now go and begin putting together the few things you will require on our voyage and journey."

"Remembering," said the professor, "that we must take only the simplest necessaries. I shall have to overhaul every man's bag after you have brought it down to the lowest state. There, Sam, I agree to your going fully, for I believe you will not let us repent it."

"Thank you, sir. Shall we go soon?"

"Within forty-eight hours if it can be managed. Give me my hat and stick. I'll go at once and see if berths are to be had on a P. and O. boat. You two will begin getting absolute necessaries together in the way of your professional needs, not forgetting your instruments and chemicals, Frank. Take all you said. They will be heavy and bulky, but they will pay for taking. As for me, as soon as I have settled about the boat I will get my own few things together and see to the arms. I have a pretty good selection of Arabian weapons. What more we require can be obtained in the Cairene bazaar."

Chapter Five.

Sheikh Ibrahim.

Time works wonders, they say; so does money in able and experienced hands.

The professor's were experienced hands, and he had ample funds at his disposition. The result of his inquiries that morning was that he found he could by starting the next night catch the mail which would bear him and his friends, travelling night and day, to Brindisi—for southern Italy, where the mail steamer would be waiting to take them on to Ismailia. Then in a few days from starting they would have changed into the not very efficient Egyptian railway, to be set down within sight of the pyramids on the borders of the mighty desert, with the south open to them, if all went as they had arranged, for their journey in search of the prisoner gazing northward and hoping still that help might come and his captivity and sufferings at last be ended.

It is wonderful what energy will do.

Now that the plans had been decided upon the professor worked like a slave. Long experience had made him an adept. He knew exactly what outfitters to go to, and when there what to select, and it was wonderful how little he deemed necessary.

"You see we hardly want anything here, Frank, lad," he said. "Some things we cannot get out there, but the majority of our necessaries we must buy in Cairo, and quietly too, for if it got wind that we were going upon such an expedition we should be stopped."

"I suppose so."

"But I can manage all that. I have an old friend or two, sheikhs who will do anything I ask, and supply me on the quiet with followers and tents and camels. For they love me as a brother, and you shall hear them say all sorts of sugary flowers of speech. They will bless me, and say that it is like the rising of the sun upon their tents to see my noble visage once again. They will kiss the sand beneath my feet in the warmth of their attachment, and do all I wish for shekels, Franky, all for shekels."

"But can you trust them?" said Frank.

"Certainly. They will keep faith, and be ready even to fight for us if the odds are not too great, and the shekels are duly paid. There, I don't think we need trouble about anything more, after the two leather cases are packed with the conjuring tricks and physic of the learned Hakim and his slaves. The sinews of war will do the rest. Hah! I am glad we are going into the desert once again. We must get to Hal as soon as possible, and somehow scheme to get him free, but you must curb your impatience. It will be all express till we reach Cairo—all the end of the nineteenth century; but once we are there, excepting for the civilisation of that modern city we shall have gone back to the times of the Arabian Nights and find the country and the people's ways unchanged. And do you know what that means?"

"Pretty well," said Frank; "crawling at a foot's pace when one wants to fly."

"That's it; just as fast as a camel will walk."

Those hours of preparation passed more quickly to Frank than any that he could recall during his busy young life, and over and over again he despaired of the party being ready in time, so that he could hardly believe it when the carriage-door was slammed, the whistle sounded, and the train glided out of the London terminus with the question being mentally asked, Shall we ever see the old place again?

Then sleepless nights and drowsy days, as the party sped through France and Switzerland, dived through the great tunnel, to flash out into light in sunny Italy, and then on and on south, with the rattle of the train forming itself into a constant repetition of two words, which had been yelled in the tunnel and echoed from the rocky walls of the deep cutting—always the same: "*Save Harry! Save Harry!*" till Frank's brain throbbed.

Then Brindisi, with the mails being hurried from the train to the noble steamer waiting to plough the Mediterranean and bear the adventurers south and east for the land of mystery with its wonders of a bygone civilisation buried deeply in the ever-preserving sand.

And now for the first time Frank's brain began to be at rest from the hurry of the start, as he lay back half asleep in the hot sunshine, watching the surface of the blue Mediterranean and the soft, silvery clouds overhead, while the doctor and the professor sat in deck-chairs, reading or comparing notes, but all three resting so as to be ready for the work in hand.

It was one glorious evening when Frank was leaning over the side gazing forward towards the land that they were soon to reach, and where they would give up the inert life they were leading for one of wild and stirring adventure, that the young man suddenly started out of his dreamy musings, for a voice behind him said softly—

"Beg pardon, sir." Frank turned sharply round. "Don't mind me speaking, sir, I hope?"

"No, Sam," said Frank, rousing himself and speaking in a tone which plainly suggested, "*Go on.*"

"Thankye, sir. Don't seem to have had a chance to speak to you in all this rumble tumble sort of look-sharp-or-you'll-be-left-behind time."

"No, we haven't seen much of one another, Sam."

"We ain't, sir, and I don't know as I've wanted to talk much, for it's took all my time to think and make out whether it's all true."

"All true?"

"Yes, sir. Seems to me as if I'm going to wake up directly to find I've been having a nap in my pantry in Wimpole Street."

"Hah! It has been a rush, Sam."

"Rush, sir? It's wonderful. Seems only yesterday we were packing up, and now here we are—down here on the map. One of the sailors put his finger—here it is, sir, signed Jack Tar, his mark, for it was one of the English sailors, not one of the Lascar chaps. That's where we are, sir."

Sam held up a conveniently folded map, surely enough marked by the tip of a perspiring finger.

"He says we shall be in port to-morrow, and have to shift on to the rail again, and in a few hours be in Cairo on the River Nile."

"That's quite correct, Sam," said Frank, smiling; "and then our work will begin."

"And a good job too, sir; I want to be at it. But my word! it seems wonderful. Me only the other day in my pantry, Wimpole Street, W., and to-morrow in King Pharaoh's city where there were the plagues and pyramids."

"And now hotels and electric lights, and the telegraph to communicate with home."

"Yes, sir, it's alarming," said Sam. "Pity it don't go right up to Khartoum—that's the place, ain't it, sir?"

"Yes, Sam."

"So as we could send a message to Mr Harry: 'Keep up your spirits; we're on the way.'"

"Ah, if we could, Sam!" said Frank, with a sigh.

"Never mind, sir; we're not losing much time. But who'd ever think it! I used to fancy that foreign abroad would look foreign, but it don't a bit. Here's the sea and the sky looking just as it does off the Isle o' Wight when you're out o' sight o' land; and only when we saw the mountains with a morsel of snow on their tops did the land look different to at home. I suppose it will be a bit strange in Egypt, though, sir, won't it?"

"Oh, yes. Wait a few hours longer," said Frank, "and then you'll see."

Sam came to him the next night when they were settled in the European hotel, where the professor was welcomed as an old friend.

"I've put out all you'll want, sir," said the man. "Is there anything else I can do?"

"No, Sam; I'm just going to bed so as to have a good night's rest ready for work to-morrow. Well, does this seem foreign?"

"Foreign, sir? Hullo! there's another of 'em."—*Slap*.—"Missed him again! Have they been at you yet, sir?"

"What, the mosquitoes? Yes. I just brushed one off."

"They seem to fancy me, sir. I expected they'd be great big things, but they're only just like our gnats at home."

"Indeed! What about their bite!"

"Oh, yes, they bite sharper, sir. I expect it's because they're so precious hungry, sir. But foreign? Oh, yes, this'll do, sir. It's wonderful, what with the camels and the donkeys. My word! they are fine 'uns. I saw one go along cantering like a horse. Yes, sir, this'll do. But I suppose we're not going to stay here long?"

"Only till the professor can make his preparations for the start, and then we're off right away into the desert."

"Right, sir; on donkeys?"

"On camels, Sam."

"H'm! Seems rather high up in the air, sir. Good way to fall on to a hard road."

"Road—hard road, Sam?" said Frank laughing. "If you fall it will be on to soft sand. There are no roads in the desert."

"No roads, sir? You mean no well-made roads."

"I mean no roads at all; not even a track, for the drifting sand soon hides the last foot-prints."

Sam stared.

"Why, how do you find your way, sir?" said Sam, staring blankly.

"Either by the compass, as one would at sea, or by trusting to the Arabs, who know the landmarks."

"And sometimes by the camels' bones," said the professor, who had entered the room unheard. "Plenty of them die along the caravan tracks. But I daresay we shall find our way, for there is the big river which marks our course pretty well, if we were at fault."

"Thankye, sir; you'd be sure to know," said Sam hurriedly. "I was only asking Mr Frank like so as to pick up a little about the place."

The man asked no more questions, but made the best of his way to his own room.

"Come down and out into the grounds, my lad," said the professor. "The doctor's sitting in the garden having his cigar."

"I was just going to bed."

"Yes, but come with me for an hour first. I've an old friend waiting to see me, and I thought I'd bring you down."

"I don't want to meet his old friends," thought Frank impatiently. Then aloud, as he followed: "Of course you will say nothing about the object of our visit here?"

"Trust me," said the professor quietly.

"Is your friend staying here?"

"Yes; he comes here regularly at this time of year, expecting to meet old visitors to Egypt."

"I see," said Frank drily. Then to himself, "I wish he was at Jericho. I can't talk about anything now but the desert."

As they descended into the prettily lit-up hall and went out into the garden among the palm trees, the scene was attractive enough to fix any newcomer's eyes; but Frank could see nothing but a long wide stretch of desert country, at the horizon of which were a few palms overshadowing dingy, sun-baked mud buildings, houses formed of the brick made of straw now as in the days when the taskmaster-beaten Israelitish bondmen put up such pitiful plaint.

"Where is the doctor?" said Frank.

"Over yonder on that seat," replied the professor, as they were going down a sandy path towards a group of palms. "Ah, there's my friend."

Frank looked in the indicated direction, but he saw no English visitor. There was a stately looking turbaned figure, draped in white, standing in the dim shadowy light among the palms, and he seemed to catch sight of them at the same moment, and came softly forward, to stop short and make a low obeisance to each in turn.

"Well, Ibrahim, how are you?" said the professor sharply.

"His Excellency's servant is well and happy now, for his soul rejoices to find that the dogs told lies. They said his Excellency would not come to El Caire until the war was over, and the Mahdi's successor—may his fathers' graves be defiled—had gone back to the other dogs of the far desert."

"Oh, yes, I've come again. Frank, this is Sheikh Ibrahim, of the Dhur Tribe. And look here, Ibrahim, this is my friend and brother, Mr Frank Frere."

"And my master," said the Arab, with another grave and dignified reverence, speaking too, in spite of the flowery Eastern ornamentation, in excellent English. "His Excellency has come, then, to continue his search for the remains of the old people?"

"Hah!" cried the professor, "that's right. Now let's understand one another at once. No, Ibrahim, I have not."

"Not come, Excellency?" cried the Sheikh, in a disappointed tone, and his hands flew up to his long flowing grey beard, but he did not tear it, contenting himself with giving two slight tugs.

"No, not come to explore."

"But, your Excellency, I and my people have found a fresh temple with tombs, and deep in the sand where no one has been before."

"Yes, and you know too that the authorities have given strict orders that no expeditions are to be made right out in the desert on account of the danger?"

"It is true, O Excellency," said the Arab, with a sigh, "and I and mine will starve. We had better have been driving our sheep and goats here and there for pasture far away yonder, than waiting for English travellers. All who are here go up the river in boats. There are no journeys into the wilds this year. I have been stopped twice."

Frank glanced at the professor, and saw that his eyes were glittering as he spoke in a low tone.

"Yes, Sheikh," he said; "it is very ill for you, and it is bad for me. There are those stones cut into and painted that we left buried in the sand."

"Yes, Excellency; hidden safely away, waiting for your servants to dig them out. Why not let me gather my people and let us go so many days' journey out into the wilderness and carry them off, before some other learned traveller to whose eyes all the mysteries of the past are like an open book shall come and find them?"

"That would be bad, Ibrahim," said the professor slowly.

"It would break thy servant's heart, Excellency," said the man. "Look here, Excellency. It is forbidden, but my people are away there to the south with the tents and camels, and their Excellencies might come and dwell with us in the tents for days, and then some night the camels would be ready—the poor beasts are sobbing and groaning for burdens to bear and long journeys into the desert—and some moonlight night they might be loaded with their sacks of grain and skins of water, and no one would know when we stole away into the desert to where the old tombs are hidden. Then the treasures could be found and brought away by his Excellency's servants, who would rejoice after and have the wherewithal to buy oil and honey, dhurra and dates, so that their faces might shine and the starving camels grow sleek and fat upon his Excellency's bounty."

"Ah," said the professor slowly and dubiously, as Frank listened with his heart beating fast, while he held his quivering nether lip pressed tightly by his teeth; "you think that would be possible, Sheikh?"

"Possible, your Excellency?" said the man, in an earnest whisper; "why not? Am I a man to boast and say 'I will do this,' and then show that I have a heart of water, and do it not?"

"No," said the professor slowly; "Sheikh Ibrahim has always been a man in whom my soul could trust, in the shadow of whose tent I have always lain down and slept in peace, for I have felt that his young men were ready with their spears to protect me, and that their father looked upon me as his sacred charge."

"Hah!" said the Sheikh, with calm, grave dignity. "They are the words of truth. His Excellency trusts me as he has always done. Will he come, then, into the desert once again? If he says yes, Ibrahim will go away to-night with

gladsome heart to the village close by, and there will be joy in the hearts of his two young men, who are waiting sorrowfully there."

"You know the desert well, Ibrahim," said the professor slowly.

"It is my home, Excellency. My eyes opened upon it first, and when the time comes they will look upon it for the last time, and I shall sleep beneath its sands."

"Yes, as a patriarchal Sheikh should," said the professor. "But you and your young men are quite free from engagements?"

"Ready to be thy servants, to do thy bidding, for no one wants us now; go where you will choose, and work and dig, and find as they have found before."

"It is good," said the professor gravely. "Of course I shall pay you well."

"His Excellency always did pay us well," said the Arab, bending low.

"And my two friends will add to the payment."

The Arab smiled.

"You will keep our departure quite private, Ibrahim—no one is to know."

The man shook his head.

"And I should want you to lead us wherever I chose to go."

"You always did, Excellency."

"But suppose I wanted you to go where some of your people—I mean men of your race—would consider it dangerous?"

"There are Arabs of some tribes, Excellency, who are of low breed—men who are not of the pure blood, who would say the way was dangerous: the men of my tribe, the Dhur, do not know that word. If they said they would take the English learned one, they would take him. They have their spears and their guns and swords, and their camels are swift. Is not that enough, O Excellency?"

"Quite," said the professor; "but there would be danger, perhaps, for the Mahdi's followers range far."

"True, my lord, and they are many. Mine are but as a handful of sand. His Excellency would not go to fight the Khalifa? It would be mad."

"A wise man can fight with cunning, and do more than a strong man with his sword and spear."

The Sheikh was silent, and stood in the semi-darkness with his eyes reflecting the lights of the hotel strangely, as he glanced from one to the other as if trying to read their faces.

"I shall have to tell him all, Frank," said the professor slowly, in Latin.

"The risk is too great," replied Frank hurriedly. "We should be putting ourselves in his power, and if he is not true he would destroy all our hopes."

"We can go no further without his help, Frank," said the professor gravely. "*Tace.*"

"His Excellency's words are dark," said the Sheikh, in a low, deep voice. "He speaks of dangers, and of the Mahdi's men, and of fighting with cunning. Will he not fully trust his servant, and make his words and wishes shine with the light of day? Does his Excellency wish to play the spy upon the new Mahdi's movements?"

"No," said the professor firmly.

The Sheikh drew a long breath which sounded like a sigh of relief.

"I am glad," he said softly, "for their lives are dear to my young men. They have their wives and little ones, and the followers of the Mahdi seek blood. What would the learned Englishman who loves the stone writings of the ancient people do amongst the conquering spearmen of the prophet's chosen one?"

"Answer this, Ibrahim: Do you believe this new Mahdi or Khalifa is the chosen one of the prophet?"

The Sheikh laughed softly.

"Thy servant thought much when he was young, and all his life he has had dealings with the wise men from the west who have come here from many countries to see and seek out what the old people left buried in the sands of time. He could not help, as he saw the wonders they brought to light, and sat in the same tent with them, growing wiser and thinking in their tongue. He has seen, too, again and again, fresh prophets rise to utter the same cry, 'Lo, O people, I am the prophet's chosen, sent to free the country from the heathen Christian dog.' And it has always been the same: the people cry aloud and believe and follow him to the fight always to kill and destroy, to make slaves, and to pass like a flight of locusts across the land, and the new prophet eats and drinks and makes merry till he dies like the thousands he has killed; but he does not carry out his boast, and another arises and cries, 'Lo, I am the chosen of

the prophet. Upon me does the Mahdi's mantle fall.' Excellency, I am a man of the desert, but there is wisdom even amongst the sand, and I have picked up some, enough to know when false prophets come amongst the people. No; I do not believe the new Mahdi is the chosen one. He is only another man of blood. Why does my master ask? Why does he wish to run where there is danger to him and his friends—danger to us who would be his guides?"

"Listen," said the professor, and in a few well-chosen words he told the old Sheikh of Harry Frere's unhappy fate.

"Hah!" ejaculated the old Arab, after hearing the speaker to the end. "Yes; I have heard of this before. With mine own eyes I saw the German who escaped, and it was said that there was a young Englishman out yonder, a slave. And he is your brother, my lord?" he continued, turning quickly upon Frank.

"Yes; my brother, whom I have come here to save."

"It is good," said the Arab slowly. "But I hear that an army is going south to fight the Khalifa."

"Yes," said Frank bitterly; "but it will be months or years before they reach the place, and before then my brother may be dead. Sheikh," said Frank, in a low, hoarse voice that bespoke the emotion from which he suffered "he is a slave, and in chains. I must go to his help at once."

"The young Excellency's words are good, and they make the eyes of his servant dark with sorrow; but it will not be freeing his brother from his chains if he goes as a young man would, to rashly throw away his life. It is so easy away out there. Here there is law, and if a man steals or raises his hand against his brother man, there is the wise judge waiting, and the judgment bar. But out yonder they make their own laws, and it is but a thrust with a spear, a stroke with a sharp sword, and the sand is ever athirst to drink up the blood, the jackals and the unclean birds to leave nothing but a few bones. Has the young Excellency thought of all this?"

"Yes," said Frank hoarsely, "and I have seen in the darkness of the night when I could not sleep, my brother's hands stretched out to me, and have felt that I could hear his voice calling to me to come and save him."

The Sheikh stood silently there beneath the palms, and for some minutes no words came.

At last he repeated his former stereotyped expression.

"It is good. Yes," he said, "it is good, and God will go before you on such an errand as this, my son. I am growing old now."

"And you—"

Frank began to utter his thoughts impulsively, but the professor laid a hand sharply upon his arm.

"Silence," he said, and the Arab paused for a few moments as if to give way, but as Frank checked himself he went on—

"—And old men grow to love money and greater flocks and herds, and more and better camels, as they come nearer to the time when all these things will be as naught. I have been much with the wise men from Europe, and it has been pleasant to my soul to take their piastres to make my tribe richer every year. His Excellency here has paid me much gold in the past times, and I and my people have worked justly for him, so that he has come to us again and again, till his coming has been that of a friend, and my heart was sore when I heard that he was not to be with us this season of the year. And now he has come for this as to a friend to ask the help of me and mine. He has come to me as a brother in suffering, and it is good. Yes, Excellency, you are welcome to the tents of your brethren, and we will do all we can to bring the lost one back. And what I bid my people do they will do, till I am gathered to my fathers and my son takes my place. But when I go to my people to-night and tell them of your words, they will say 'O my father, this is not work for money. Our master must not give us payment for such a thing as this. Of a truth we will go and bring the young man back to those who mourn for him. If we redden the sand with our blood instead, well, we have died as men, and we shall sleep with the just.'"

The professor caught the old Arab's hand, and Frank snatched impulsively at the other, the thin, nervous fingers closing tightly upon the English grip, and they stood in silence for some minutes.

"Tell him what I feel," said Frank at last. "I can't find words."

"Neither can I," said the professor, "but I must try."

"Listen, Sheikh," he said, "you have made our hearts glad within us. For when this news came to England I said to myself that I would seek my old Arab friend and ask him to help me to find our young brother."

"It is good," said the Arab softly. "You remembered the far away."

"How could I forget the man who watched by me in his tent when I was sick unto death, and who rejoiced over me when I was brought back to life? I looked back upon you as a brother and friend, and now I have come; but this must not be only a work of friendship. You and your young men must be paid, and paid well, for all their risks, for we do not come as poor suppliants. I and my friends are fairly rich, and will gladly spend money over this adventure."

"Yes, money is as water that we fling upon the sand at such a time as this," said the Sheikh. "And you are rich. Well, so are we. Our life is simple; we live as we have always lived, in tents, and our riches are in our flocks and herds, our camels and our horses. We have our pride as you have, even if we do work for the rich English for the piastres they pay. But in such a work as this for our wise brother and friend, take money? No; we go to help our brother. It is for love."

“But Sheikh—” began Frank.

“Let your young brother be silent, Excellency; the bargain is made, and we must have much thought about how this is to be done. As you said, the fight must be with cunning; much wisdom must be brought to bear. We must try and find out what the Khalifa desires most. We must go as merchants, and you will need your piastres to buy enough for a little caravan of such things as will be welcome in the enemy’s camp. Powder for the guns of his people for certain he will want. Strong wines and waters too, for he, like those of his kind, loves to break the prophet’s laws. I will leave you now to sleep and muse upon all this. Mayhap you will find some plan or scheme, as you English call it, that will be better than mine; but something of this sort it must be, and we will go.”

“Yes,” said Frank eagerly, “and we will go.”

The Sheikh shook his head slowly.

“No,” he said, “this is no work for such as you. The task is for me and mine. Good-night.”

He turned, and seemed to fade into the darkness at once, just as the doctor, who had been waiting impatiently upon the seat, strode up.

“Well,” he said, “have you secured your man?”

“Yes,” replied the professor; “but there is a battle yet to fight. He does not know our plans.”

Chapter Six.

The Starting Point.

What with the excitement and the change, as it were, into another life such as he had only read of in books, Frank Frere’s was a very poor night’s rest, so that after dozing off and waking again and again, hot, feverish, and uncomfortable, he was not sorry to see the first signs of dawn peering through his blinds.

Getting from beneath the mosquito curtain, he opened the window wider, and then stayed for a few minutes to wonder that the morning air should be so cool to his heated brows.

Returning to bed, he lay thinking for a few minutes, and then all at once thought ceased and he slept soundly for an hour, to start up in horror, full of the impression that he had overslept himself.

But a glance at his watch showed that it was still early, as he began to dress, meaning to have a look round the place before breakfast. Matters, however, shaped themselves differently, for on going to the window and looking out, there to the left lay the hotel garden with its clumps of palms and orange trees, where beneath the former he saw an early visitor in the shape of the tall, dignified-looking Sheikh in his clean white robes and turban, walking slowly to and fro, as if in expectation of seeing the professor.

Frank hurried down, too eager to reach the garden to pause and look about at the Eastern aspect of everything around; but he found that he was not first, for there before him were the professor and the doctor just passing out, and he joined them just as they reached the Sheikh, who greeted them all with solemn dignity.

“I have slept on the matter, O Excellencies,” he said.

“And now you think better of it?” said the doctor sharply.

The Sheikh smiled.

“I have thought much of it, Excellency,” he said gravely, “but the matter was agreed upon last night. All that remained was to find out the best way and the safest. I feel that it must be as I said; we—my people and I—must journey through the desert to avoid the windings of the great river, taking with us such merchandise as the Mahdi’s people will be glad to buy, and once at Khartoum or Omdurman we must trust to our good fortune about finding the prisoner. Once we do find him the merchandise must go, and we shall trust to our fleet camels and knowledge of the desert to escape. What do your Excellencies say?”

The professor turned to Frank.

“Will you tell him?” he said. “It was your idea.”

Frank shrank for the moment, but mastering his hesitancy he turned to the old Sheikh, and rapidly growing earnest and warm, he vividly described his plans, while the old man stood stern and frowning, apparently receiving everything with the greatest disfavour, merely glancing once or twice at the doctor and then at the speaker, as allusions were made to the parts they were to play. When the professor was mentioned the listener remained unmoved, but he frowned more markedly when the servant’s name was mentioned.

Frank worked himself up till in his eagerness his words came fast, as he strove hard to impress the Sheikh with the plausibility of his plans. But the old man remained unmoved, and when at last the speaker had said all that he could say there was a dead and chilling silence, the young man turning from his listener to look despairingly from the doctor to the professor, and back again, “The Sheikh cannot see it,” said the young man despairingly; “but it seems easier to me now than ever.”

"Yes," said the doctor; "I feel that it might be done. The idea grows upon me."

"But you do not like it, Ibrahim," said the professor, looking hard in the solemn, impenetrable face before him.

"There is the servant—the doctor's man," said the Sheikh gravely. "I have not seen him."

"You soon shall," said the professor.

"Tell me," continued the Sheikh; "this young man—can he make cures—can he bind up wounds and attend to an injured or dying man?"

"He has been my servant and has helped me for years," said the doctor.

"Hah!"

Then there was silence again, and Frank gazed at the deeply-lined, calm and impassive face before him with a feeling of resentment.

"He will not do," thought the young man; "he is too slow and plodding. We want a brisk, dashing fellow, full of spirit and recklessness."

He turned to the professor, and spoke a few words in Latin.

The professor smiled.

"You do not know Ibrahim yet," he said quietly. "A young Englishman dashes at a thing without consideration; an Arab looks before he leaps, and examines the starting and the landing place. Hush!"

"Yes," said the Sheikh at last, and he bowed his head again and again as he spoke, evidently calculating every move in the great game of chess with live pieces in which he was about to engage. "Yes; his Excellency here will be the learned Hakim—he *is* a learned Hakim, and the people will crowd to his tent. I could take him and his Excellency the professor, who speaks our tongue like I speak it myself, anywhere, and they would be welcome. The idea is grand and cannot fail, but my heart grows faint when I think of his young Excellency here. Could he bear to act like a slave for all the many weary months in that disguise?"

"Yes," said Frank firmly.

"And hold your peace, no matter what may befall?"

"Yes. I *will*" said Frank, through his set teeth.

"We may come suddenly upon the prisoner in chains; we may see him beaten by his taskmaster. Brothers love brothers," said the Sheikh gravely. "Could the young Excellency hold his peace and stand by looking on at such a time?"

"Yes," said Frank, in a low, harsh voice: "it is to save my brother's life. I would not speak to save my own."

The old Sheikh's face was stern and rugged as ever; not a muscle twitched; but there was a new light in his eyes as they rested upon Frank's, and he uttered a low sigh of satisfaction.

"The English are a great, brave nation," he said gravely. "No wonder they make themselves masters of the world."

"Then you are satisfied, Ibrahim?"

"No, Excellency, not yet," replied the Sheikh. "Take off those clothes and put on those that I will get, and you are the interpreter of the great Frankish Hakim. That is enough. The people will rush to you and call you brother. His Excellency here, clothed as I will clothe him, that great, grand head white from the barber's razor, with that magnificent beard hanging down over his robe in front, and with the wisdom of the physician to cure the sufferers who will come—even the Khalifa and his greatest officers would come and bend to him. Yes, all this is grand."

"Well done," said the professor, with a sigh of relief.

"His Excellency here *is* a great doctor—one who can cure bad wounds?" asked the Sheikh.

"One of the best in London," said the professor enthusiastically. "He can almost perform miracles."

"It is good," said the Sheikh gravely. "He will find much work to do, for the Mahdi's followers die like flocks and herds in time of plague for want of help. Now about his young Excellency here. He will be the Hakim's slave?"

"Yes; his learned slave, Ibrahim. He is skilled in chemistry and science."

"I do not know what chemistry and science mean, Excellency."

"The power to perform natural miracles," said the professor.

"It is enough; but he must do as he said. As he is now he would be watched by suspicious eyes; I could not answer for his life. As the Hakim's black slave who helps his master and is mute, yes, he will be safe too. But this man—this servant? What can he do? Will he be black and mute?"

"H'm, no," said the professor, hesitating.

"Has he a brother in chains and misery whom he would die to save?"

"H'm, no," said the professor again. "Frank, lad," he said, in Latin, "I'm afraid Sam will not pass."

"What will he do, then?" asked the Sheikh.

"Attend on his master, the Hakim."

"One of my young men can do that."

"Hold the wounded when the Hakim bandages their cuts."

"One of my young men would be safer far."

"He knows the Hakim's ways, and will sponge the bullet-wounds and fetch the water bowl."

"The Hakim's black slave should do all that, Excellency."

"I'm afraid you are right," said the professor; "but I want to take him if we can. Come, he is a capital cook."

"A learned Hakim like his Excellency here would live on simple food, such as one of my young men could prepare."

"Well, I don't know what to say, Ibrahim. He is a very useful fellow."

"But his being with us might mean making the Mahdi's followers doubt, and once they doubted it means death to us all."

The professor's face was a study as he turned to Frank.

"He's right, my lad; he's right."

"It may mean ruin to our journey, even as men perish when they make for a water-hole, to find it dry. Can he do anything else?"

"Heaps of things," cried the professor.

"But they are as nothing if they are not suited to our task, Excellency. Does he look to be an Englishman?"

"A thorough-paced Cockney, Ibrahim, I am sorry to say."

"Cockney, Excellency?"

"Well, very English indeed."

"Would he be painted black, Excellency?" said Ibrahim.

"He'd only look like an imitation Christy Minstrel if he were, eh, Frank?" said the professor.

"Would he have his head shaved like his Excellency the Hakim?" said the Sheikh.

"Got him!" cried the professor excitedly. "Here, Ibrahim, you wanted to know what he can do. He's the Hakim's barber, and can shave a head."

"Ah-h-h-h!" said the Sheikh, drawing out the ejaculation to an inordinate length. "He can shave—and well?"

"Splendidly! Can't he, Morris?"

"Oh, yes, excellently well," said the doctor, smiling.

The Sheikh took off his turban and softly passed one hand over a head which was like a very old, deeply-stained billiard ball at the top, but was stubbly at the back and sides, as if it had not been touched by a barber for a week.

"May he shave me, Excellency?" said the old man. "I should like to see the man and whether he is skilful enough to deceive those who will watch him with jealous eyes."

"Of course you can see him," said the doctor. "He will be in my room."

"Let's go, then, at once," said the professor. "I say, Ibrahim, there need be no disguise about him. He is a Frank, and the Hakim's slave."

"Yes, that will do, Excellency," said the Sheikh. "The Hakim's skill as a learned man and curer of the people's ills will cover all. If this man is clever, too, as a barber every Moslem will look upon him as a friend. Barber, surgeon, and the Hakim's slave. Yes, that will do."

Five minutes after the party were in the doctor's room, and upon the bell being answered by a native servant, Sam was fetched from his breakfast, to come up wondering, half expecting that something was wrong.

"Sam," said the doctor gravely, "I wish you to shave this gentleman's head."

"Certainly, sir. I'll ring for some hot water."

"No," said the professor; "we're going where hot water will be scarce—I mean that sort of hot water. Do it with cold."

"Right, sir," said the man, in the most unruffled way, and slipping off his coat he turned up his sleeves, placed a chair for the Sheikh, opened the doctor's dressing-case, brought out shaving-box, strop, and razors, and then made the old chief look a little askance as one of the latter was opened, examined, and laid down, while the brush and shaving-box were brought so vigorously into action, that in a very short time the Arab's head was thoroughly lathered, and left to soak.

"I always prefer hot water, gentlemen," said Sam, confidentially; "it's better for the patient, and better for the razor, for it improves the edge. But these are splendid tools, as I know."

Whipping open one of the choice razors, and drawing the strop as if it were a short Roman sword, Sam made the Sheikh wince a little as the sharp blade was made to play to and fro and from end to end, changing from side to side, and with all the dash and light touch of a clever barbel, being finished off by sharp applications to the palm of the operator's hand.

"There we are, sir," said Sam, who seemed to be quite in his element. "Don't squirm, sir; I won't cut you, nor hurt you either. I was taught shaving by a first-class hand."

"Don't talk so much, Sam," said Frank impatiently. "We want you to shave this Arab gentleman carefully and well."

"Well, ain't I trying my best, Master Frank? Look at that, and look at that, and that. Razor cuts beautifully."

As he spoke he scraped off with long sweeps the white, soapy foam, which came away darkened with tiny swathes of blackish-grey stubble.

"I call this a regular big shave. Don't hurt, do I, sir?"

The Arab uttered a grunt which might have meant yes or no.

Sam took it to mean the latter.

"Thought not, sir. That's fine shaving-soap, sir; he—mollient; softens the stubble and the skin at the same time. My word! this is a prime razor. Only fancy, Mr Frank, being out here, shaving a native!"

"Will you keep your tongue quiet!" whispered Frank angrily. "This is a serious matter. Mind what you're doing, and don't talk."

"Don't ask a man to do impossibilities, sir," said the man appealingly; "did you ever know anyone shaved without the operator talking all the time? It's natural, sir, and seems to make you shave cleaner. I'm a-doing the very best I can. I must talk, or I should get nicking his skin and spoil the job."

"Then for goodness' sake talk," cried Frank petulantly.

"Thankye, sir; now I can get on," and with wonderful celerity Sam scraped away with light hand till the last line of lather was taken off, a touch or two here and there given with the brush, and this fresh soap removed, after which the razor was closed, sponge and water applied, and a clean towel handed to the Sheikh, who received it with a grave smile and nod of the head.

"Good," he said softly. "Clever barber. It is good."

"Then you are satisfied?" said the professor eagerly.

"Quite, Excellency. Now I have no fear."

Sam smiled too with satisfaction as he carefully wiped and re-stropped the razor before placing it in its case. At the same time, though, there was a peculiar, inquisitive look in his eyes. For the whole business seemed to be strange, and he looked longingly at Frank as if hoping that he would follow and explain, when the doctor said—

"That will do, Samuel. Go and have your breakfast."

But Frank did not follow, for he was eager to hear what the Sheikh would say as soon as they were alone.

Little was said, though, the old Arab being anxious to go and rejoin his followers staying in the village half a mile outside the town, promising to be back during the morning to talk over the arrangements for the venturesome journey.

"Will he come back and hold to the promise?" said Frank to the professor.

"For certain," was the reply.

"But do you think he will prove business-like and go to work heart and soul in our service?"

"I can only speak from past experience," replied the professor. "I have always found him thoroughly trustworthy, and I feel sure he will be so now."

"And about the preparations, the dress, provisions, and the many odds and ends we shall require?"

"All that I shall leave to Ibrahim. What you have to get ready is a couple of portmanteaus that can be swung one on either side of a strong camel by means of straps. These must contain all your chemical and electrical apparatus in one, the doctor's instruments and medicines in the other, with an ample supply of lint, bandages, antiseptics, plaisters, and the like. Chloroform, of course. But there must be no superfluities. As to dress, we must place ourselves in Ibrahim's hands."

"What about weapons?" said Frank. "Swords and revolvers, of course. What about rifles?"

"I have brought two or three antiquated weapons for show; that is all. We are not going to fight. Give up all thoughts of that."

Frank stared at the speaker anxiously.

"Surely we ought to carry revolvers," he said.

"Surely we ought not. If we go as men of war we shall fail. If we go as men of peace we may succeed. Leave all that to Ibrahim, and we shall know what is to be done when he comes back this morning. Now then, the first thing to be done is to eat and drink."

Frank sighed.

"Without this we shall do no work."

Frank knew the wisdom there was in these words, and he resigned himself to his fate, accompanying his companions to the hotel coffee-room to take their places at the table set apart for them, to become for the time being a mere group of the many, for the place was full of visitors staying, and others making a temporary sojourn before continuing their steamer's route, these to India or China, those back to Europe; while other tables were occupied by officers awaiting their orders to go up country, or go on making preparations for the advance of the troops already there, and further arrangements for those coming out by the great transports expected; for it was the common talk now that before long a large force was to march against the Mahdi's successor, and Gordon was to be at last avenged.

Chapter Seven.

By Moonlight.

The people at the hotel were too much occupied with their own affairs to pay much heed to three ordinary visitors and their servant. It was rumoured that one of them was a famous Egyptologist, but plenty of scientists came and went in this city of change, so that in a few hours Frank's anxiety as to the risk of their expedition being stopped, died out, and the visits of the Sheikh excited no more notice than those of a dragoman or letter of boats and donkeys who waited upon the tourists and arranged to take them to the pyramids, the river, or other objects of interest within easy reach.

When Ibrahim appeared again about midday, he inquired anxiously about the amount of baggage the party intended to take, and seemed pleased with the narrow compass into which, under the professor's superintendence, it was to be condensed. He then had a long discussion with the doctor, and when this was over it was announced that the Arab was going to be busy in the bazaar for the rest of the day, and that in the evening he would be at the door of the hotel with four camels and attendants to take the baggage that was ready, the rest being placed in the care of the manager ready for them upon their return from an expedition with the Sheikh.

"That's prompt," said the professor. "Are you satisfied, Frank?"

"More than satisfied. But about our disguises, our provisions for the journey, and other preparations? We have done nothing yet."

"There is nothing to do," said the professor quietly.

"But our disguises?" said the doctor anxiously.

"Ibrahim will see to all that. We don't want to draw anyone's attention to the task we have in hand. If we did the news would spread, and run like wildfire amongst the people, perhaps reach the enemy's camp."

"But can we leave everything to this Arab Sheikh?"

"Everything," said the professor, "as I have left things again and again. Here is our position: I am known here, and it is no novelty for me to go upon an expedition with this old guide. So all we have to do is to eat our dinner in peace, and when Ibrahim comes, mount our beasts and go off in the moonlight and silently steal away through the further parts of the city, and in a very short time be swallowed up in the mysterious gloom, travelling onward over the sand."

"All night?" said the doctor.

"Yes, all night, and in good time in the morning we shall have reached the tents of the Sheikh, where we shall have an early meal and sleep. When we shall go on depends upon the preparations there. These will be extremely simple, but they will be sufficient. Make your minds easy, and throw all the arrangement of the journey upon Ibrahim and me. He will do his best, but as he said to me an hour ago, the success of our adventure must be left to fate."

"But our preparations seem so small," said Frank uneasily.

"Preparations for desert journeys are small from an Englishman's point of view. A man here takes his camel, a bag of meal and another of dates, with a waterskin to fill when it is more than a day's journey to the next well. The Sheikh expressed himself satisfied with our baggage, but in his eyes it is very large."

"Well," said the doctor, "I have said very little, but I share Frank's uneasiness. We seem to be making ridiculously small preparations. Surely we ought to go better prepared if we are to get to our journey's end."

"We shall never get to it if we do," said the professor gruffly, "and the sooner you two try to fit yourselves to the necessities of a desert journey the better."

"I'm ready to do anything," said the doctor, "but I do not want to fail from doing too little."

"What more would you do than Ibrahim is doing?"

"I can hardly say on the spur of the moment, but with the exception of my medicines and instruments, and Frank's chemicals and things, we seem as if we are going on the march in the clothes we stand up in."

"Yes," said the professor coolly, "and those we are going to leave behind in Ibrahim's tents."

"Is all this true, Frank?" said the doctor.

"I suppose so," was the reply; "but certainly things are moving far more rapidly than I anticipated."

"It is what you wished," said the professor.

"Then all we have to do now is to be ready?"

"Yes, that is all."

It was in furtherance of this that directly after dinner Frank summoned Sam and told him that they were to start in about an hour.

"So the gov'nor's been telling me, sir; but he says we're to leave nearly everything behind."

"Yes, Sam; it will be safe enough here."

"Well, it caps me, sir, that it do! Mr Landon took pretty well everything away that I thought we wanted, and now he says that we're to leave the miserable little lot he chose himself."

"Yes," said Frank quietly.

"The only thing we're taking plenty of, it seems to me, is physic."

"But you've packed the shaving tackle, Sam?" said Frank hastily.

"Oh, yes; that goes in my pockets, sir; but one can't live on a wash and brush-up, and one wants something else on a journey besides soap. Seems to me, sir, that the doctor thinks a little physic's the best thing to have with us, because it spoils the appetite and keeps people from wanting to eat. He's taken plenty of care of the people out yonder, but I should have liked to see him provide a little more for us."

"Don't be alarmed. I daresay we shall find plenty."

"From what the people here tell me about the desert, sir, I don't think we shall; but there, I'm not going to grumble, sir. An hour's time, eh?"

"Yes, in less now. Then the Sheikh will be here with the camels."

"To take us right away into the desert, sir. Do you think he's safe?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, I hope he is, sir; but if he means mischief and plays any games when he's got us right away from the police, I just hope he won't ask me to shave his head again."

"Why?" said Frank, smiling.

"Why, sir? Well, because it won't be safe."

It was about nine o'clock, the moon past the full, rising, richly golden of hue, in the east, and the air moist and fragrant with the cloying scent of the orange trees, when with a strange feeling of unreality about the whole proceeding, the little English party passed the groups of visitors smoking and chatting in the garden, or listening to the strains of a very excellent band. It almost seemed to the doctor that he ought to go and occupy the seat he had found so pleasant on the previous night; but the professor was by his side talking earnestly of the peculiarities of a night ride in the desert, and Frank was close behind with Sam.

In another minute they were in an open court, where, looking mysterious and strange, were a group of about a dozen camels and their leaders, in front of whom stood the figure of the Sheikh, his white robes and turban looking thoroughly in keeping with the strangely formed animals, four of which were keeping up a peculiar, querulous, discontented whining grunt, and turning their heads from side to side in their disgust at being laden with

portmanteaus and bags, while their fellows had been allowed to go scot-free.

And now all seemed more unreal than ever; and anything less like a start upon so dangerous an expedition it would have been impossible to imagine.

"Ready, Ibrahim?" said the professor.

"Yes, Excellency," replied the Sheikh; "it is past the time, and the camels are loaded."

Frank looked round the court, where a couple of servants were standing beneath an arcade, while the moon was just peering over the house in a one-eyed fashion as if watching what was going on; but no one came from within to see the night start being made, and with the feeling of dreamy unreality increasing, the young man replied to the Sheikh's indication by stepping to the kneeling camel he was to ride.

"Beg pardon, Mr Frank," whispered Sam, coming close to his side. "Am I to ride one of them long-legged things?"

"Yes, of course. You're not afraid?"

"Afraid, sir? Not me. I've rid most everything, and I meant to have gone up to the Zoo for a lesson in camels, only there warn't time. I'm not afraid, and I'm going to do it, but I do begin to feel as if I ought to be tied on."

However, Sam climbed to his strange saddle, as did the rest, and a few minutes later the silent-pacing, long-legged animals were following their leader out of the court and into the lighted road, down which they stole on in the moonlight like strange creatures in a picture, passing people, but taking no one's attention, while more than ever the whole scene appeared to the party like a portion of some dream.

Chapter Eight.

The Desert.

"How are you getting on, Sam?" said Frank, after they had progressed about a mile, during which the outskirts of the city had given place to garden, cultivated field, trees dotted here and there, and then hedges which looked weird, ghastly, and strange in the moonlight, being composed of those fleshy, nightmare-looking plants of cactus growth, the prickly pears, with their horrible thorns, while more and more the way in front began to spread out wild, desolate and strange in the soft, misty, silvery grey of the moonlight, through which the long-legged animals staked, casting weird shadows upon the soft, sandy road, and save for one thing the passing of the little train would have been in an oppressive silence, for the spongy feet of the birdlike animals rose and fell without a sound.

"How'm I getting on, sir?" was the reply. "Well, about as bad as a man can. Look at me, sir; there I am. That's my shadder. I don't know what our servants at home would say to see me going along over the sand this how. Look at my shadder, sir; looks like a monkey a-top of a long-legged shed."

"The shadows do look strange, Sam."

"Strange, sir? They *look* horrid. Just like so many ghosts out for a holiday, and it's us. And look at what makes the shadders. They look creepy in the moonshine. Why, if we was out on a country road now in dear old England, and the police on duty saw us we should give 'em fits."

"Rather startling, certainly," said Frank. "It does look a weird procession."

"Seems a mad sort of a set out altogether, sir: three British gentlemen and a respectable servant going out for a ride in the night in a place like this a-top of these excruciating animals, along with so many silent blacks dressed in long white sheets. It all seems mad to me, sir, and as if we ought to be in bed. I fancy I am sometimes, and having uncomfortable dreams, like one does after cold boiled beef for supper, and keep expecting to wake up with a pain in the chest. But I don't, for there we are sneaking along in this silent way with our tall shadders seeming to watch us. Ugh! It's just as if we were going to do something wicked somewhere."

"It's all so strange, Sam," said Frank quietly. "You are not used to it."

"That's true enough, sir, and I don't feel as if I ever should be. Just look at this thing! It's like an insult to call it a saddle. Saddle! why it's more like—I don't know what; and I've been expecting to have an accident with this stick-up affair here in front. How do you get on with your legs, sir?"

"Pretty well," said Frank, smiling. "I've managed better during the past ten minutes."

"I wish you'd show me how you do it, sir, for I get on awfully, and I'm that sore that I'm beginning to shudder."

"It's a matter of use, Sam. Try and sit a little more upright, like this."

"Like that, sir?" said the man, excitedly. "No, thankye, sir. It's bad enough like this. I suppose I must grin and bear it. Here, I've tried straightforward striddling like one would on a donkey, but this beast don't seem to have no shape in him. Then I've tried like a lady, sitting left-handed with my legs, and then after I've got tired that way for a bit, and it don't work comfortable, I've tried right-handed with my legs. But it's no good. Bit ago I saw one of these niggers shut his legs up like a pocket foot-rule, and I says to myself, 'That's the way, then;' so I began to pull my legs up criss-cross like a Turk in a picture."

"Well, did that do?" said Frank, listening to the man, for the remarks kept away his own troubled thoughts.

"Nearly did for me, sir. I had to claw hold like a kitten to the top of a basket of clothes, or I should have been down in the sand, with this wicked-looking brute dancing a hornpipe in stilts all over me. Ugh, you beast! don't do that."

"What's the matter?" said Frank, as the man shuddered and exclaimed at the animal he rode.

"Oh, I do wish he wouldn't, sir. It's just as if he don't like me, and does it on purpose."

"Does what?"

"Turns his head and neck round to look at me, just like a big giant goose, and he opens and shuts his mouth, and leers and winks at me, sir. It gives me quite a turn. It's bad enough when he goes on steady, but when he does that I feel just as I did when we crossed the Channel, and as if I must go below. I say, sir, can a man be sea-sick with riding on a camel?"

"I don't know about sea-sick, Sam," said Frank, laughing outright, "but I really did feel very uncomfortable at first. The motion is so peculiar."

"Ain't it, sir?" cried Sam eagerly. "Beg your pardon sir, for saying it, but I am glad you felt it too. It upset me so that I got thinking I'd no business to have left my pantry, because I wasn't up to this sort of thing."

"Cheer up, and make the best of it," said Frank quietly. "You'll soon get accustomed to what is very new to us all."

"I will, sir. I'll try, but everything seems to be going against me. Ugh! Look at that now. Ugh! the smell of it!"

"Smell? Why, I only notice the professor's pipe."

"Yes, sir, that's it. It seems horrid now, and there he sits with that long, snaky pipe and his legs twisted in a knot, smoking away as comfortably as the old Guy Fox in the tablecloth that I shaved. He went to sleep and nodded, for I watched him, and he keeps on see-sawing and looking as if he'd tumble off; but he seems to be good friends with his camel, for it kept on balancing him and keeping him up. I wish I could go to sleep too."

"Well, try," said Frank.

"Try, sir? What, to wake up with a bump, and sit in the sand seeing this ridgment of legs and shadows going off in the distance? No, thank you, sir. They tell me there's lions and jackals and hyaenas out here. No, thankye, sir; I'm going to fight it out."

Just then the professor checked his camel and tried to bring it alongside of the pair behind, when a struggle ensued, the quaint-looking creature refusing to obey the rein or to alter its position in the train, whining, groaning, and appealing against force being used to place it where it made up its mind there must be danger.

"That's how those brutes that are carrying the luggage went on, sir," whispered Sam to Frank. "Groaning and moaning and making use of all sorts of bad language. One of 'em kep' it up just like a human being, and it was as if he was threatening to write to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals for them to put a stop to our ill-using him and tying heavy things on his back and making creases with ropes on his front—I mean his underneath, sir."

Just then one of the Sheikh's followers, who had seen the trouble, came from where he was walking beside the baggage camels, and led the obstinate animal to where it was required to go, and it ceased its objections.

"Fine animals for displaying obstinacy, Frank," said the professor.

"Yes; they'd beat donkeys of the worst type."

"I daresay they would; but they have plenty of good qualities to make up for their bad ones. How do you like the riding?"

"I'll tell you when I've had some more experience. At present it would not be fair."

"Perhaps not," said the professor. "How do you get on, Sam?"

The butler groaned.

"Hullo! Is it as bad as that?"

"Worse, sir, ever so much. Couldn't I have a donkey, sir? I saw some fine ones in Cairo well up to my weight."

"I'm afraid not, Sam. But you'll soon get used to the animal you are riding."

"Never, sir, never," said Sam.

"Nonsense, man! Once you get used to the poor creatures you will think it delightful. I could go to sleep on mine, and trust it to keep ambling along."

"Do what, sir?"

"Ambling gently."

"Then yours is a different sort, sir, to mine. Ambling's going like a lady's mare does in the Park, isn't it?"

"Yes, Sam; that's quite correct, I believe."

"This one don't, sir, a bit. If you shut your eyes and hold tight, sir, you forget that he's an animal, but begin thinking he must be what he seems like to me—a sort of giant sea-goose with you on his back and him swimming in rough water and going up and down horrid."

"Oh, that's the peculiarity of the creature's pace. I'm used to it, and I find the elasticity most enjoyable."

"Elastic, sir? Yes, that's just it, sir; elastic. A bit back he was going on like an Indy-rubber ball; one o' that sort, sir, as is all wind and skin. Made me wish he was one, and that I'd got a pin in my hand."

"Oh, never mind, my lad," said the professor good-humouredly; "its rough work to learn riding a horse, but once you've mastered the task it's pleasant enough. What do you think of the desert, Frank?"

"Do you consider that we have reached the desert now?" was the reply, as Sam fell back a little, leaving them to converse.

"Oh, yes; we've left the cultivated ground behind, and right away south and west now, saving a *few* oases, there's nothing but the sand covering all about here the ruins of ancient cities. I believe if we dug anywhere here we should find traces—buildings, temples, or tombs."

"Has there been cultivation, too, here?"

"No doubt. It only wants water, sandy as it is, for it to break out blushing with soft green."

"Where does the Nile lie from here?"

"Away to the left."

"Shall we see its waters when the morning comes?"

"No; we are going farther and farther away to a bit of an oasis where the Sheikh's people are gathered with their flocks. They find pasture there at this time of year, and a little employment with the travellers who come to Cairo. In the summer time, when the city is pretty well empty, they go right away to some high ground where it is rocky and fairly fertile. We shall reach the present camp before the sun gets hot in the morning."

"How is the doctor getting on?" asked Frank, after a pause.

"Pretty well. It makes him a little irritable, so I don't think I'd ask him. He is enjoying the night ride, though."

Sam sighed and said to himself—

"He says that because he wants to make the best of it, but I'm not going to believe my poor gov'nor's enjoying this. He's wishing himself back in Wimpole Street, I know."

"What's that?" said Frank suddenly.

"What? I see nothing."

"No, no. I mean that wild cry."

"Only a jackal. I daresay if you listen you will hear another answer it. Pleasant note, isn't it?"

"Horrible! It sounded like some poor creature in pain."

"Hungry, perhaps," said the professor coolly. "Fine, wild, weird prospect, this, eh?"

"It seems very dream-like and strange."

"Yes, it impressed me like that at first. After a while you begin to think of how delightful it is, and what a change from pacing over the burning sand in the daylight with the sun making the air quiver and glow like a furnace, and your mouth turn dry and lips crack with the parching you have to undergo."

"Shall we have to journey much by night?"

"Oh, yes; we shall do most of our marching then, but we need not trouble about that. Ibrahim will do what is best. I have had a long talk with him, and he proposes to go in a roundabout way for the enemy's camp."

"What! not go straight there?"

"No; it would mean suspicion. We must not go there unasked."

"Landon!" said Frank appealingly.

"It is quite right, and even if it takes time it will be the surest way. Ibrahim says that if the Hakim performs a few cures as we get nearer, the news thereof will reach the Khalifa's camp, where men die off in hundreds, and after a time he will be sure to send for us. Just think of the difference in our reception."

Frank nodded.

"In the one case we should be received with suspicion and most probably turned back, perhaps be made prisoners; while, if at the new Mahdi's wish we are sent for, we go there in triumph, and are respected and well treated by everyone."

"Yes, yes; but the time will be passing away so swiftly, and that poor fellow lying in agony and despair."

"Yes, but the more reason for being cautious. We must not build the castle of our hopes upon the sand, Frank. I know it seems very hard, and no doubt I sound cold-blooded for agreeing so readily to this Arab's proposals, but I speak from ten years' experience of the old fellow. He has thrown himself heart and soul into the adventure, and he is well worthy of our trust; so, even at the expense of going against your own wishes now and then, give way and follow out the old man's advice, even when he would be ready to give way to you."

"I'll do my best," said Frank; "but it seems to me that I have already bound *myself* down to profound obedience in all things by undertaking to go as a slave."

"Well, yes, that does bind you, certainly," said the professor.

"But what about these men that the Sheikh is taking with us? They will be in the secret."

"Of course."

"Suppose they betray what I am."

"That would mean betraying their Sheikh. You need have no fear of that."

"Well, let's talk about something else. We are bound now for the Sheikh's encampment. What is going to be done first when we get there?"

"We put off Europe and put on Africa as far as is necessary."

"Hah!" said Frank, with a sigh.

"What does that mean, my lad?" said the professor sternly. "Are you beginning to repent?"

"Repent!" said Frank between his teeth. "What a question! I am longing to commence, for so far everything has been preparation."

"And a very brief preparation," said the professor, "if you come to think of how short a time it is since you dashed in upon us after dinner that evening with your news."

"Well, don't reproach me, Landon."

"Not I, my lad. I know what you must feel. All I want of you now is for you to play the stoic. Make up your mind that you have done your utmost to set the ball rolling; now let it roll, and only give it a touch when you are asked. Believe me that you will be doing your best then."

"I will try," said Frank firmly. "Only give me time. I am schooling myself as hardy as I can. It is a difficult part to play."

The professor reached out his hand and gripped his young companion's shoulder firmly, riding on for some minutes without relaxing his grasp, the touch conveying more in the way of sympathy than any words would have done, while the discomforts of the novel ride seemed to die away, and the soft dreaminess of the night grew soothing; the vast silvery grey expanse, melting away in its vastness, became lit-up with a faint halo of hope, and with his spirits rising, Frank seemed another man when the professor spoke again—

"Bob Morris will be feeling neglected."

"Go to him, then," said Frank quietly.

"No; you go first. But there's nothing like making a beginning at once."

"In what way?" asked Frank, for his companion paused.

"Begin treating him as what he is to be till our task is done—the learned Hakim; and begin to school yourself into acting as his slave."

"Now?"

"Why not? I spoke of him just now as Bob Morris. That's the last time till we are safely under the British flag again."

"Yes, you are right," said Frank, and urging on his camel the animal stepped out and passed of its own accord alongside that of the doctor, who uttered a sigh of relief as he saw who it was.

"That's better, Frank," he said. "I was beginning to feel a bit lonely, for this ride is not very cheerful, and the bringing of fresh muscles into play is producing aches and pains."

Frank raised his hands to his head, and bowed down.

"Humph!" ejaculated the doctor; "not such a very bad imitation of a salaam. What have you two been talking about?"

Frank raised his hand, and saw that his tall shadow was repeating the action, as he pointed straight ahead.

"About our journey's end, eh?" said the doctor. "That's right. I shall be glad to get there and lie down, if it is only upon the sand. How do you get on with your camel?"

Frank made a despairing gesture.

"Same here," said the doctor. "I wish we could have had some lessons first. But use is second nature, and I suppose this weary, aching sensation of being waved about in the air will soon pass off. But I say, Frank, my lad."

Frank turned to him.

"There, that will do for to-night," said the doctor pettishly. "I haven't cut your tongue out yet, so just talk like a Christian. This vast open place seems to sit upon my spirits, especially now that we're making this night journey instead of lying comfortably in our beds. Talk to me. You've done acting enough for the present."

"Very well," said Frank quietly; "but Landon thinks with me, that the sooner I begin to play my part the sooner I shall make myself perfect."

"Well, yes, of course," grunted the doctor; "but leave it till we put on our costumes. I say, I think this Sheikh is all right."

"Yes; I have perfect faith in him now."

"So have I. He's a fine old fellow; there is no doubt about that. But Frank, my lad, I don't think I could have kept this up much longer if you had gone on with that dumb-motion business. It only wanted that to give me the horrors, for this night ride seems to be about the most mysteriously weird business possible to conceive. Just look at the ghostly appearance of the camels and their leaders, the long, strongly marked shadows, and the mysterious light! I can't get away from the idea that it is all a dream."

"That is how it has been impressing us," replied Frank.

"And no wonder. Everything is terribly unreal, and between ourselves I am beginning to lose heart."

"You?" said Frank reproachfully. "You, the calm, grave surgeon, accustomed to terrible scenes, to awful emergencies where men's lives depend upon your coolness and that calm, firm manner in which you face all difficulties!"

"Yes, at home and in my proper place. But here I seem to be masquerading—playing, as it were."

"Playing!" said Frank reproachfully.

"Well, I hardly mean that, my dear boy," said the doctor softly; "but all this is so strange and—well, yes—risky."

"Yes, it is risky," said Frank sadly, "but—"

"Yes, I know," said the doctor, interrupting; "I do think of why we are doing it, and I can't help shrinking a bit and doubting my nerve to carry it all through. If I break down in any way I shall sacrifice the liberty if not the lives of you all. It is this that makes me feel doubts about my nerve."

"I have none whatever," said Frank quietly. "You know how often you have talked to me about the operations you have performed."

"Well, yes, I have talked to you a good deal both before and after some of them. Harry and I always opened out our hearts to one another, and when he went away he asked me to make you his substitute—to take his place with you."

"So like Hal," said Frank softly. "Well, and so you have."

"Have I, lad? Well, I have tried, and it has been very pleasant to have you come to me to chat over your experiences and successes and failures, and to tell you mine."

"You have made more of a man of me," said Frank softly; "often and often when I have felt that I was only an ignorant, blundering boy."

"I never saw much of the ignorance or blundering," said the doctor quietly. "You were always too enthusiastic over your studies for that."

"Never mind about my qualities," said Frank, with a little laugh; "it is like trying to put me off from talking about you. As I was going to say, don't you remember telling me that whenever you were going to perform an operation upon some poor suffering fellow-creature you always felt a strong sensation of shrinking and want of nerve?"

"Of course. I always do."

"And that you always prayed that your efforts might be rightly guided?"

"Yes," said the doctor, very softly and slowly.

"And that the next day when you went into the operating theatre and stood there with the patient before you, the

students and surgeons with your assistants about you ready for the task, you always felt as calm and cool as possible, and that your nerves were like steel?"

"Yes! It is so."

"Then why should you feel doubt now? I have none."

The doctor was silent for a few minutes as they rode on through the mysterious-looking night, their shadows bowing and undulating on the sand.

"I suppose it is the same," he said at last, "with the soldiers going into some engagement. There is the feeling of nervousness which they suffer from till the stern work begins, and then—well, they act as brave men do act."

"Even if they are generals in the great fight with disease and death," said Frank gravely. "I wish I could feel as sure of our ultimate success as I do of your being perfectly calm and self-contained in all you do."

"I should be, my dear boy," said the doctor, "if I could only get rid of the feeling that I shall be an impostor."

Frank laughed pleasantly.

"That feeling troubling you again?" he said. "How absurd! Are you going to cheat the poor creatures you attend with sham medicines?"

"Am I going to do what?" said the doctor indignantly.

"And play tricks with the wounds they are suffering from?"

"My dear Frank!"

"And make believe to extract bullets and sew up wounds, or set broken bones?"

"My good lad, are you talking in your sleep? Did I ever do anything but my very best for the poor creatures to whom my poor skill was necessary—did I ever give less attention to the humblest patient than I do to the wealthiest or highest in position?"

"Never," said Frank warmly. "That big, generous disposition of yours would never have allowed it."

"Then why did you talk in so absurd a strain?" Frank laughed merrily, and for the time being he was the schoolboy again.

"Please, sir," he said mockingly, "it wasn't me. Answer me first," he cried. "Why do you talk about feeling like an impostor? Why," continued the young man warmly, "I feel as if through my plan I am going to heap blessings upon mine enemy's head. I am taking you through this country, amongst these cruelly savage people, to do nothing but good. Wherever you go your name will be blessed; they will think of the Great Hakim as long as they live."

"Look here, young man," said the doctor playfully, "I've made a mistake to-night. You began to play your part very nicely, and you were as quiet as a dumb waiter—that old black mahogany one in the dining-room at home. Then for company's sake I stopped you, and here is the consequence. You took advantage of the liberty given you, and at once developed into a base flatterer, putting your adulation into all the flowery language you could muster. Now, no more of it, if you please. There, to speak soberly and well: Frank, lad, I am not the great, learned Hakim of your young imagination, but the hard-working student who tries his best to acquire more and more knowledge of our fallen human nature so as to fight against death like an earnest man. I know something of my profession, and I work hard, and always shall, to know more, so as to apply my skill in the best way. Please God, I hope to do a great deal of good during this our journey, and I promise you that I will think only of this application of my knowledge. Yes, I feel now that I can go on and face all that I have to do, for I shall not be such a sorry impostor, after all."

"Isn't it my turn now for a chat?" said the professor. "You two seem to be having a most interesting discussion, and it's very dull back here. The Sheikh is fast asleep on his camel, and poor Sam has become speechless with misery, in spite of all I could say to him about mastering the art of camel-riding. He says he can't get over the feeling that he is at sea. How are you two getting on?"

"Better, I suppose," said the doctor, "for I have not thought so much of the motion lately. I suppose I'm getting used to it."

"And you, Frank?"

"I had forgotten it too till you spoke. But I am utterly tired out. How long will it be before we get to the tents?"

"Oh, hours yet," said the professor cheerfully.

"What!" cried the doctor and Frank in a breath.

"Not till well on in the morning," said the professor; and then, as his companions turned to gaze at one another in dismay, "but we're going to halt soon, to rest the camels and—ourselves."

Chapter Nine.

The Hakim Begins.

The professor had hardly finished speaking when something dark loomed up through the silvery gloom, and the camels began making a peculiar, complaining sound, while they slightly increased their pace and soon after stopped short, craning their necks and muttering and grumbling peevishly.

A water-hole had been reached, where the beasts were refreshed, after they had been relieved of their living burdens—those which were loaded with the travellers' baggage having to be content with a good drink and then folding their legs to crouch in the sand and rest.

"Yes, it's all very well, Mr Frank," said Sam, "but I don't believe that thing which carries me is half so tired as I am. Oh my! See-sawing as I've been backwards and forwards all these hours, till my spinal just across the loins feels as if it had got a big hinge made in it and it wanted oiling."

"Lie flat down upon your back and rest it."

"But won't the grass be damp, sir?"

"Grass?" said Frank, smiling. "Where are you going to find it?"

"I forgot, sir," said the man wearily. "No grass; all sand. That comes of being used to riding in a Christian country."

"That's right," said the professor, joining them, for Frank had set Sam the example and was lying flat on the soft sand. "I've just been telling the Hakim to do so. Don't sit down to rest out here; lie flat whenever you get a chance. It does wonders. Are you thirsty, Frank?"

"Oh no," was the reply.

"That comes of travelling by night. If we had come this distance under the burning sun we should have been parched."

"Better move, hadn't we?" said Frank, a minute or two later, as he glanced significantly towards Sam.

"I think we had," replied the professor, laughing. "I thought it was one of the camels."

The sound that came regularly was not unlike that uttered by one of the grumbling creatures, but it was due to their man's ways of breathing in his sleep, for not many seconds had elapsed before he had forgotten all his weariness, and the troubles of the first lesson in camel-riding, in a deep slumber which lasted through the two hours' halt, during which the Sheikh and his men had sat together and smoked in silence, while Frank and his companions had lain chatting in a low tone about the beauty of the moon-silvered rocks and the soft, transparent light which spread around.

At last the Sheikh rose and stalked softly towards them in his long white garments, looking thoroughly in keeping with the scene, and made his customary obeisance.

"Are their Excellencies rested?" he asked gravely.

"Oh, yes; let us get on," said the professor, looking at his watch. "Four o'clock. I did not know it was so late. How are you, Frank? Stiff?"

"Terribly."

"Yes," said the doctor, stretching himself. "We have been giving some idle muscles work to do that they had never had before."

"Their Excellencies will soon be as much used to it as their friend," said the Sheikh; and he led the way towards where the camels crouched, some moving their under jaws, chewing after their fashion, others with their long necks stretched straight out and their heads nestling in the sand.

"Here, Sam," cried the professor, breaking the silence that reigned around, and his words were echoed from the rocks on the far side of the water-holes.

But the man's reply was only a gurgling, camel-like snore.

"Sound enough," said the professor; and he was stepping towards him, but Frank interposed.

"I'll wake him," he said. "The poor fellow feels fagged and low-spirited. We must not be hard upon him. He hasn't our motive to spur him on."

"No," said the professor, "but he must try and brace himself up a bit."

"Give him time," replied Frank, and he bent down on one knee—pretty stiffly too—and laid his hand upon the sleeper's breast.

"Come, Sam," he said; "we're ready to start."

But there was no reply, and the touch had to be followed up by a shake, and that by one far more vigorous, before there was a loud yawn, and two fists were thrown out in a vigorous stretch.

"What's the matter? Night bell?"

"Wake up, man."

"Eh? Who is it?—Where am I?—You, Mr Frank?"

"Yes. Your camel is waiting for its load. Up with you!"

"Oh, Mr Frank," moaned the poor fellow, "never mind me. I'm about done for."

"Nonsense, man! Don't let the professor see how weak you are."

"But I can't help it, sir. I'm that sore all over that it's just as if I'd been broken. Go on and leave me; I ain't a bit o' good."

"Leave you here in the desert to die?"

"Yes, sir; it don't matter a bit. I'm regularly done for."

"Nonsense! Rouse yourself like a man."

"I couldn't do it, sir. I only want to lie still and die decently. Daresay the next people who come along will cover me over with a bit of sand."

Frank laughed.

"I do call that unfeeling of you, sir," moaned the poor fellow. "It's heartless, that it is!"

"I can't help it, Sam," said Frank merrily; "the idea is so absurd."

"What, me dying out here in the desert?"

"No, what you said about being covered over with the sand."

"I don't see anything absurd, sir. It's very horrible."

"Not a bit," said Frank. "There wouldn't be anything to bury."

"What!" said Sam, rising up on one elbow and staring wildly at the speaker.

"You see, there are the vultures to begin with, and then there would be the jackals."

"Ugh! Don't, Mr Frank," cried the poor fellow, shuddering. "I never thought about them. That's worse than the camel."

"Ever so much," said Frank. "Come, be a man. How do you spell 'pluck'?"

"I dunno, sir," whined the poor fellow. "I suppose it would be with a very small 'p'."

"Try and spell it with a big capital, Sam. Come, don't let the doctor feel ashamed of you."

"But I don't seem to mind anything now, sir."

"Yes, you do, Sam. You came to help us, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir, I did, but—"

"Are you going to break down over the first difficulty?"

"No, I ain't, sir. I—oh dear!—oh my!—I—ugh! what a scrunch!—Hah! Would you mind lending me a hand, sir?"

"Not a bit, Sam," said Frank. "I'll help you in any way, as you will me; but I want to see you master all this."

"That's right, sir. Here goes, then."

The next moment the man had made a brave effort, and he walked at once to his camel and mounted, Frank standing by as the ungainly beast see-sawed to and fro and sprawled out its legs, and grumbled and snarled as it rose upright.

"Don't make that row!" cried Sam. "You ought to be used to it by this time. That's done it, Mr Frank. Don't tell the doctor what I said."

"Not I, Sam. Bravo! You have plenty of pluck, you see."

"Have I, sir?" said the man pitifully. "I began to think I hadn't a bit. It had got to the bottom somewhere."

"Yes," said Frank; "now keep it up at the top."

In another minute the little camel train was steadily pacing on again over the sands, with the air feeling fresher. The moon, too, was beginning to cast the shadows in a different direction, while the whole party had become silent, no

one feeling the slightest inclination to talk.

But it did not seem long now before the silvery radiance of the moon began to grow pale before the soft opalescence in the east, and the far-spreading desert sands took a less mystic tint. Then all at once far on high there was a soft, roseate speck, which grew orange and then golden as if it were the advance guard of the gathering array of dazzling hues which now rapidly advanced till the east blazed with a glory wondrous to behold.

"Your first desert sunrise, Frank," said the professor quietly, as he saw the young man's rapt gaze. "Ah, we have some splendid sky effects here to make up for the want of flower and tree! The desert has glories of its own, as you will see."

For the next half hour Frank forgot his weariness, the want of sleep, and his anxieties in the grandeur of the scene around, as the glories of the day expanded till the sun rose well above the horizon, sending the shadows of the camels long and strange over the yielding sand. Then hour after hour the monotony increased, and the silence grew more oppressive, the heat harder to bear, and but for the calm, contented ease exhibited by the Sheikh and his men, and the example they felt bound to show to their followers, both the Doctor and Frank would have put in a plea for another halt.

As it was they sat firmly as they could, swaying to and fro with the monotonous motion of the camels, and growing more and more faint, while at last Frank spoke to the Sheikh to set one of his young men to keep an eye upon Sam, for he felt at times too much irritated to meet the poor fellow's pleading eyes, and followed close behind the professor, who kept turning in his seat to make some remark to cheer him up.

Then apparently all at once, after he had been straining his eyes vainly over the far-spreading, interminable plain in search of their halting-place, the Sheikh rode alongside, smiling and apparently as fresh as when they had started, to point away in the direction they were going.

"The tents, Excellency," he said.

Frank felt as if he had taken a draught of renewed life, as he raised his hand to his brow and shaded his eyes from the sun.

"I see nothing," he said.

"Look again, Excellency. Your eyes are not used to the desert. There, straight past the Hakim's camel."

"Ah, yes! I can see something like a heap of sand."

"Look again in half an hour," said the Sheikh smiling, "and that which you see will have changed to something more than a heap of sand."

"Can you make out the tents, Landon?" said Frank.

"Oh, no; my eyes are not like Ibrahim's," was the reply; "but I take it for granted, and I shall be very glad to get there. I want my breakfast badly. I say, Ibrahim, there will be some coffee?"

"I sent one of my sons yesterday with two camel-loads of necessaries, Excellency," replied the old Arab. "They can see us coming, for they will have been watching, and there will be all their Excellencies need."

"Come, Frank, that does you good, doesn't it?" said the professor.

"Oh, yes; and I shall, I hope, make a better show of endurance after a day or two."

"The young Excellency has done well," said the Sheikh, smiling pleasantly. "The way is long; he is not accustomed to travelling like this, and his mind is not at rest. He and the Hakim have borne the ride well."

"Does the Hakim know that we are in sight?" said Frank, who was watching the bent, weary figure in front.

"No, Excellency."

"I'll go and cheer him up with the news," said the professor, urging on his camel, while Frank checked his to let Sam's long-legged steed come abreast, and boldly now met the poor fellow's appealing eyes.

"It's you at last, Mr Frank," said the man faintly. "I've been asking that native chap how long a man could go on like this before he's knocked over by the sun."

"And what does he say?" replied Frank cheerily.

"Only grunted like this beast does. I might just as well have asked it."

"Feel very tired, then?"

"Tired, sir? I feel as if—as if—as if—"

"As if you wanted rest and a good breakfast."

"Rest?—breakfast?" said Sam faintly. "Oh, don't talk about such things, sir! if it's only to keep me lingering on for another hour, sir. Mr Frank, I used to grumble sometimes in Wimpole Street about my pantry being dark and made mizzable by the iron bars and the old, yellowish, wobbly glass; but it seems a sort of place now as I'd give anything to

get back to—parrydicey, and that sort of thing. Rest—breakfast! There can't be either of them out here, only sand. Oh, sir, you're a-laughing. I know what you're going to say. You're going to make jokes about the breakfast, and say we're to have the sand which is there."

"Wrong, Sam," replied Frank laughing; "but I'm glad to see that you can think about jokes. There, sit up, man, and look yonder straight ahead. The tents are in sight."

"Tents? Where?" cried the man, changing his tone. "I can't see 'em."

"They are not very plain yet, but there they are."

"White uns, sir, with flags flying, and that sort of thing? What are they—marquees, or bell-tents like the soldiers have?"

"I don't suppose they are either, but native tents," said Frank, shading his eyes again. "They look very low and small, right away on the horizon, and they seem to be brown."

"On the horizon, sir? Why, that means out at sea, and we sha'n't be there before night."

"Well, right away on the horizon of this sea of sand," said Frank cheerfully; "but I don't think we are above a mile or two away."

"Oh!" groaned Sam. "Say two miles, then, and chuck in another because places are always farther away than you think. Three miles, and we're going a mile an hour. Mr Frank, sir, have you got a pencil and a bit o' paper?"

"Yes, in my pocket-book. Will you have them now?"

"Me, sir," said the man faintly. "I couldn't write, sir; I want you to do it for me."

"A letter? Well, when we get to the tents."

"No, sir, now. I sha'n't live to see no tents. There ain't much, sir; only a silver watch and chain, a bit in the Post Office Savings Bank, and my clothes, as my brother 'll be very glad to have."

"Oh, I see! you want to make your will, Sam," said Frank seriously.

"That's it, sir; and you'd better write it as plain as you can, sir, so as there sha'n't be no mistakes after, and I dessay I can manage to make my cross."

"A will made on a camel in the desert, Sam!" said Frank seriously. "Rather a novelty in wills, eh? Better wait till after breakfast."

"Breakfast, sir?"

"The Sheikh says there'll be coffee."

"Coffee out here, sir?"

"Yes, and these people know what good coffee is."

"Yes, sir; it was very good at the hotel. 'Most as good as ours at home."

"And he said that he sent two camel-loads of necessaries on before us yesterday."

"He did, sir?" said Sam, whose voice sounded stronger.

"Yes, and look now: the tents are getting quite plain. They look peculiar, and there are camels about them, and there are green trees—palms, I think. There must be a water-hole there, I suppose."

"Yes, I can see the trees, sir—toy-shop sort o' trees."

"Here's a man coming to meet us on a camel too—a man all in white."

There was a pause for a few minutes, during which period the camels stepped out more freely, as they blinked and looked from under their eyelids in a supercilious way, drooping their lips and sniffing as if they smelt water.

"Think there's likely to be a pen and ink yonder, sir?"

"There is with the doctor's medicine chest, I know."

"These camels do move about in a dreadful, wobbly way, sir, don't they?"

"Yes; but I'm growing more accustomed to the motion already."

"That's because you're young, sir, and not set like I am. But I was thinking that it would be rather hard to write plain, going as we are."

"Very, Sam."

"And there are so many troubles about wills when the lawyers get hold of 'em, and often just about a word or two."

"Quite true, Sam," said Frank seriously.

"You see, there's a nice bit of money I've saved up, sir—over fifty pound—and I shouldn't rest easy if it all went in law through the will being made hasty like. P'r'aps it would be better if we stopped till we got to the tents. What do you say, sir? Might be a table there for you to write on."

"Well, I feel very doubtful about the table, Sam; but I can't help thinking that I could write a good deal more clearly lying on the sand with the paper on a box or a biscuit-tin."

"Yes, sir, I feel sure it would be better to wait now, and I'll risk it."

"Risk what—the writing?"

"No, sir; holding out till we get to the tents. Seems as if we shall get there a bit sooner than I thought for."

"Oh, yes! we shall be there in less than half an hour."

"Soon as that, sir?"

"Yes."

"Think I can hold out till then?"

"If you try very hard, Sam," said Frank seriously. "You seem terribly knocked up; but I feel in hope that a good breakfast and a few hours' sleep will do you a lot of good, and then if the doctor takes you in hand, you will feel a different man by to-morrow."

"To-morrow, sir? Think I shall ever see to-morrow?"

"I hope so. Ah, here's the man from the tents! What a good-looking young Arab he seems, and what a clean-limbed, swift camel he is on—a beauty!"

"Ugh! Don't say that, sir. They seem to me the most unnatural-looking, big, birdy creatures I ever set eyes on; and oh, Mr Frank! do you think it's possible for a man to get to ride them and like it?"

"Look at that fellow," said Frank; "he seems as if he were part of the beast he rides."

"P'r'aps he is, sir; being a native."

"Oh, come, Sam, you're getting better," cried Frank cheerily. "Look, there's a fire outside that tent—two fires. That means cooking, and cooking means breakfast. I feel as if I shall be ready for some after all. Look at the place here."

Sam began to grow interested, for they were approaching an oasis of some two or three hundred acres in extent, where, consequent upon the welling up of a spring of water at the foot of a clump of rocks, a few dom and date palms rose up gracefully, and the ground was covered pretty liberally with closely nibbled-off herbage, and dotted with sheep and goats, a few camels lying about here and there close to the group of booth-like tents, while for three or four hundred yards the course of the flowing water which rose from the spring could be clearly traced, by the richness of the plants and shrubs which owed their existence to its presence.

The clump of tents proved to be more extensive than they had seemed to be at a distance, and the Sheikh's little patriarchal family greater than the travellers had anticipated. Children could be seen staring curiously at the newcomers; dark-eyed women stole from tent to tent, and quite twenty tall, dark, well-featured men came forward to bid them welcome and relieve the laden camels of their loads; while when the Sheikh led the way to the largest tent, into whose shadowy gloom the party entered with a feeling of relief, it was to find ample traces of the fact at which the old man had hinted in conversation, that he was comparatively wealthy. For the tent boasted divans; handsome carpets were spread over the sand, and upon one there was that European luxury, a white linen cloth, upon which was already prepared, simple and good, all that was necessary for the welcome breakfast, while in a little side tent, greatest luxury of all, there were brass basins, towels, and great earthen vessels full of clear, cool water.

"Hah, Sheikh," said the doctor, with a sigh of relief, "this is grand! I'm coming to life again."

"I am glad the learned Hakim is satisfied with his servant's preparations," said the Sheikh humbly. "There will be breakfast in a very short time. It was hastened by the women as soon as the camels came in sight."

"But of course we cannot travel with tents like this," said the doctor.

"Oh, no, Excellency," replied the Sheikh; "only two that will be smaller; but everything necessary for their Excellencies' comfort will be done. It will be right, and impress the Baggara and others of the Mahdi's followers. For the Hakim is not a poor dervish who tries to cure; he is a great Frankish doctor who travels to do good. He does not treat the sick and wounded to be paid in piastres, or to receive gifts, but because he loves to cure the suffering."

"Quite right," said the doctor gravely.

"Then it is right and fit that he should travel with good tents and camels, and such things as suit his dignity."

"But this will be travelling like an eastern prince," said the doctor, who was beaming with satisfaction, after a refreshing sluice in some cool water.

"A learned Hakim such as his Excellency Landon assures me that you are, is greater than any eastern prince," said

the Sheikh, handing a fresh bath-towel; "and I have a petition to make to his Excellency."

"A petition? What is it, Ibrahim?"

"I have a son here, Excellency; he is my youngest, and the light of my old eyes, but he is weak and sickly, and there are times when I feel that I am fighting against fate, and that it would be better that I should let him die in peace. But I love him, and I would have him live. Will the Hakim see the boy and say whether he is to live or die?"

"Yes. What is his ailment?"

"It was through a fall from a camel. A fierce old bull rushed at the young one he rode, and fell upon him and crushed him."

"Ah, I see," said the doctor. "That is in my way."

"Then the learned Hakim will see the boy?"

"Yes, at once. Where is he?"

"No, no, not at once," said the Sheikh. "Poor Hassan has waited three years; he can wait another hour till the Hakim has eaten and rested. Then his Excellency will be refreshed, his eyes will see more clearly, and may be then he will be able to make an old man's heart rejoice. If it is not to be—well, His will be done."

"Yes," said the doctor gravely, as he laid his hand upon the Sheikh's arm.

"And there are other sufferers here, Excellency, who would pray to you for help, for we are not free from the ills which afflict mankind. A mother would ask you if her little one will live. There is a little girl whose sight is nearly gone, and one of my young men whose broken leg does not grow together again. Shall we be asking too much of the Hakim if we say, look at these sufferers and give them words of comfort if you can give them nothing more, not even hope?"

"I am a learned Hakim, you say, Sheikh, and I have come out here to use my knowledge without fee or reward. Heaven helping me, I hope to do much good, and I place myself in your hands. You will lead us where you think best, and you will bring the people whom I ought to see. That is enough."

"Yes, Excellency, and as soon as your friends are ready the breakfast waits."

Chapter Ten.

An Operation.

The meal prepared by the Sheikh's people astounded the little party—there were crisp cutlets, freshly made cakes, bowls of a porridge made with fresh milk and some kind of finely ground grain, and fruit in abundance, while all pronounced the freshly roasted coffee to be delicious. So appetising did it prove in the pleasant, subdued shadow of the tent, that the weariness of the past night was forgotten by more than one, for before the meal was at an end Sam made his appearance, washed and refreshed, to help attend to his master's wants, and say in answer to Frank's inquiries that he couldn't have believed he could feel so much better in so short a time.

Frank smiled to himself, but he did not allude to the will. It was soon evident, though, that the man had his words upon his conscience, for he kept on giving Frank peculiar, meaning looks, one and all of which were ignored, the only words that passed being later in the afternoon, when Sam suddenly edged up close to his confidant and said—

"It's wonderful what a good rest does for a man, Mr Frank, sir, isn't it?"

"Wonderful, Sam," was the reply. "I feel very little the worse for my night's ride."

"That's just about like I am, sir, and—"

"I can't stop Sam," said Frank, interrupting him; "your master wants me again."

Frank hurried back to the doctor's side to resume his position of assistant, for he had been pretty busy making his first essays at the task which was to be his for many months to come.

For the Sheikh's son had been seen, examined, and an operation performed, one of a very simple nature, but sufficient to give instant relief; while the Hakim's instructions that the lad was to remain lying down for a month were not hard for one who had not stood up, save in acute agony, for three years.

"I am well paid for this operation, Frank, my lad," said the Hakim, when he left the lad's tent; for the old Sheikh had gone down on one knee to touch the hand extended to him.

"It is a miracle, Excellency," he said; "but tell me that he will live."

"It is no miracle, Sheikh," replied the doctor, "only the result of study and practice. Oh, yes, the boy will live and grow strong. Don't kneel to me; I am but a man like yourself, and glad to help one who has come forward so nobly to help us."

The visit to the sick child was not of so happy a nature, for the Hakim took the mother's hand sadly, and the Sheikh interpreted his words, that told how hopeless was the case, and how much better for her that she should cease to

suffer soon.

In another tent, though, the Hakim brought light and hope, for the failing sight, though it would soon have become hopeless, was at a stage when a slight operation and the following treatment of keeping the girl in darkness, were sufficient to ensure recovery.

The next patient was the young Arab suffering from the broken limb, and over this the Hakim's examination, after the poor fellow had limped by the help of a stick to a rough couch in one of the smaller tents, was long and careful.

"The youth is healthy and strong," the doctor said to the Sheikh and the young man's brother, "but the leg will never mend while it is like this. There is diseased bone."

"Then the Hakim cannot cure him?" said the Sheikh sadly, and the sufferer lay watching anxiously, gazing from one to the other, longing intensely to know the meaning of the words spoken in what was, in spite of the people of his tribe being so much in touch with the English who came to Cairo, an unknown tongue.

"Oh, yes, I can certainly cure him if he is willing to bear some pain, which I will alleviate all I can, and will undertake to wait patiently afterwards until the broken bones have knit together."

"Ah, then," cried the Sheikh, "cure him. He must bear the pain."

"Ask his consent first," said the doctor.

"His?" said the Sheikh, looking wonderingly at the doctor; "he is one of my people. I give you my permission."

"Never mind that. Ask him if he is willing. Who is this?"

"His brother, Excellency."

"Ask him too."

The words were interpreted, and the anxious look on the brothers' faces gave place to one of eager hope and pleasure as they heard and replied—

"Yes, Excellency, we beg that you will do what is right, no matter what pain he suffers. He prays you to make him a man instead of the useless cripple he remains—useless to himself, a trouble to his friends."

The Hakim bowed and turned to Frank.

"You will have to help me," he said. "I will not ask you if you have the nerve. There is diseased bone, which must be removed, and he must be kept under an anaesthetic, for he could not bear the pain, and his sufferings would hinder me."

Half an hour later, by the Sheikh's orders, everyone was sent to a distance from the tent, into which the Hakim was watched with looks full of awe, as he disappeared therein, followed by Frank and the Sheikh, the brother sitting by waiting, and both looking reverently at the man whose knowledge was something tremendous in their eyes.

"Are you going to stay, Sheikh?" said the Hakim. "It would be better that you and this young man should go."

"I should like his brother to stay and see what is done, Excellency, while I—I am the father and chief of my tribe; the people look to me, and it is through me that you are going to do this thing. My people would not be contented if I did not stay."

"Very well," said the doctor quietly, and for the next half hour he was busily employed, finishing the securing of the last bandage within that time, while when the patient had fully recovered his consciousness, the calm look of content and satisfaction with which he smiled up in his surgeon's face on being told that all was done, augured well for a quick recovery.

The Hakim's reputation had been planted that day like so much seed thrown into fertile soil; and as they left the tent after the last patient had sunk into a calm sleep, Frank, who had seen the brother steal out before, now noticed how the people of the tribe were standing about waiting to see the Hakim return to his own tent, one and all eager to catch his eye and make obeisance after their fashion to this man, who seemed greater to them than any chief.

Chapter Eleven.

The Nomad Life.

It was settled that a stay of three days was to be made at the encampment, a period that seemed grievously long to Frank; but there were excellent reasons for the delay.

The Sheikh said it would take that time to make all the preparations necessary for the start; and he advocated the wisdom of the three who were not accustomed to camel-riding, going out twice each day with some of the young men, so as to grow more at ease.

On the other hand, the Hakim said that it would be absolutely necessary for him to stay that time with his patients, so as to ensure good following his operations, and this was unanswerable.

"We shall not be losing time, Excellencies," said the Sheikh, "for you must now take at once to the native dress, and assume the characters of those you are to represent."

"But your people here," said Frank quickly; "is it wise for them to know?"

The Sheikh smiled.

"Oh, yes," he said; "why not? They must know. It is to ensure the safety of you all from the wild and savage followers of the Mahdi, I have told them, and they feel that it is good. No harm can come from their knowing all this."

"Forgive me," said Frank quickly. "I feel now that my suspicions were unworthy."

"Only natural, Frank," said the professor quietly. "You do not know Ibrahim and his people as I do."

"That is my misfortune," said the young man, smiling. "I am going to know them as well."

That evening Sam came to the Hakim's tent to ask if he could do anything for his master.

He found him sitting at the tent door talking with Frank and the professor, and the three exchanged glances.

"Well, no, Samuel," said the Hakim quietly. "You are tired out with your long ride."

"Yes, sir; I ache all over, and my hands are quite shaky."

"I shall want nothing more. Go and rest yourself, and go to your bed in good time, so as to get a long night's rest."

"Thankye, sir; I'm much obliged, sir. I think that is about what I want to set me right."

Sam went back to the little tent set apart for him, and lost no time in throwing himself down upon a rug, to lie listening to the bleating of the sheep and goats, mingled with which came at times the moaning and complaining of the camels.

As soon as his back was turned the doctor had laughed softly.

"I meant to have set him to work to-night," he said, "over my head; but I don't think his touch would have been very light after his last night's work."

"Oh, no," said the professor; "besides, you ought to have daylight for that job. Between ourselves, I shall not be sorry to take to the native dress again. It is much more suitable for the climate than ours. I have used it in a modified form ever since I first came out. The sooner we begin the better."

The conversation then turned upon the doctor's patients.

"So you found them patient patients," said the professor, smiling.

"Poor creatures, yes. They seem to have the most unbounded faith in me."

"Of course," said the professor; "and a fine thing for them that they have, Robert my son."

"Yes, Fred, old fellow, I suppose it is, for it means quick recovery. I always like to have to do with a patient who looks relieved as soon as I come into the room. He little knows how he is helping me towards his cure."

"Poor fellow! he doesn't think, then, of what is to come?"

"His sufferings?" said the doctor. "No, only about how I may be able to relieve them."

"Didn't mean that, old fellow," said the professor. "I meant his mental sufferings over the fees; eh, Frank?"

"Don't try to joke, Fred," said the doctor; "this place makes me feel solemn—the gentle calm of the oasis, the trickling of the water in this thirsty land, and the simple, patriarchal life of the people."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the professor softly; "hear this Frank?"

"Hear what?" said the young man, in a tone or voice which suggested that the calm of the desert was influencing him too.

"Bob Morris talking as if it wouldn't take much to make him give up civilisation and take to a nomad life."

"Well," said the doctor quietly, "I confess that already I feel something of its fascination, and I am glad we have come. All this is growing irresistibly attractive."

"And when I've been at home and have vaunted the beauty of the old, simple, patriarchal life, and told of how I enjoyed it during my Egyptian explorations, you laughed at me, and as good as called me a lunatic. What do you say to that?"

"That I spoke in ignorance, old fellow," said the doctor quietly. "Of course I should not like to give up our civilisation, but for a time this has a great charm. I feel, too, that we have done very wisely in following out Frank's plan."

"Thank you," said the young man eagerly.

"I shall get on famously with these simple people, who will all prove excellent patients, and the result will be that we shall get in touch with poor old Harry, and bring him safely away."

"Yes, we're going to do it, Frank, my lad. It looks easier to me every hour."

No more was said for a time, for they all felt the fatigue consequent upon their exertions of the past night, and that it was very delicious to lounge there in the soft sand, watching the fall of evening with the paling glories of the most wonderful sunset two of the party had ever beheld. And this was made the more agreeable by the respect with which they were treated, their part of the encampment being kept, as it were, sacred, and everything sordid hidden from their sight.

Chapter Twelve.

A Fight with a Black.

Now it so happened that Sam soon ceased to congratulate himself upon his good luck. He had thrown himself upon the couch provided for his resting-place. He had discovered by turning it up that sheep-skins were stretched beneath it to make it soft, and that beneath these the sand was yielding and dry. But all the same the couch felt hard, and sleep would not come.

He tried this side and that side, front after back, and returned to the back; but it was no good, for the fact was that he was over-tired; and over-weariness, that is to say, exhaustion, is one of the worst opponents to a calm and satisfying sleep.

The evening came on cool and soft after the ardour of the afternoon, and he began thinking about the proceedings of that time, and felt a little hurt that the doctor had not called upon him to come and act as his assistant, and these thoughts lasted him for about an hour, but did not weary him into dropping off to sleep. They seemed to have the contrary effect, making him irritable; and though he made up his mind to watch the stars peer out through the opalescent sky—he did not call it opalescent, for the simple word dusky took its place—even their soft light had no effect upon him, and to come to the result at once the would-be sleeper gave it up at last for a bad job.

"I'll go and get something to eat and drink, and then try what I can do."

In this spirit he rose from his couch, feeling stiff and awkward, grunted, stretched, and then stood in the tent door looking out upon the glorious, star-spangled sky, noting that it was lighter towards the east, where the moon was about to rise.

"Ought to be able to sleep," he said. "Nice fine night, and it's all quiet and cool."

Then his attention was taken up by the soft light which came from the gentlemen's tent, in which a lamp was burning, while some twenty yards away another was lighting up the opening of the Sheikh's big tent, showing the figures of the chief and his visitors seated comfortably smoking, as they conversed in a low voice.

Sam made up his mind at once. There would be drinking water in a brass vessel in the gentlemen's tent, and perhaps something to eat—something to refresh him and give him the night's rest of which he was so sorely in need.

Walking across the open space, he turned his head for a moment, attracted by a complaining voice as of some one in trouble, and he was about to run off to find out what was the matter. But a repetition of the sound made him jerk himself angrily away.

"One of those beauties!" he muttered. "Talk about a bad-tempered horse, why he's an angel compared to a camel! Of all the disagreeable, whining, sour, vicious things that ever breathed, they seem about the worst. Gritty, that's what they are. Get the sand into their tempers when they're young, I suppose.—Oh, he's quiet now. Well, it is a beautiful night after all, and the cool air seems to do one good. I expect I shall get to like it when I've learnt to ride that brute of a camel, so long as there's no stabbing and spearing and that sort of thing."

Sam shook his head very solemnly as these last thoughts came into his head in company with recollections of scraps he had read in the daily papers about encounters with the dervishes, and the horrible massacres they had perpetrated.

"Seems to me," he said, "that these people ought to be stopped. If I was Government I wouldn't let people go about carrying swords and spears. With things like them fashionable it stands to reason that they're sure to want to stick them into somebody.—Ugh! It's very horrid. There ought never to be any other fighting than what is done with a fist."

Sam had by this time sauntered up to the opening into the gentlemen's tent, and there he paused to look round at the figures by that of the Sheikh, before stepping inside in search of what he required.

The low murmur of conversation came softly to his ears as he looked and then turned back to enter.

"Shouldn't a bit wonder if they've got a nice hot cup of coffee there, and that's just the thing that would suit my complaint exactly. I should be all right if I was at home, but I sha'n't get it here, and—"

By this time he was half across the roomy, booth-like tent, where he stopped short as if turned to stone in his surprise. For dimly seen by the light from the hanging lamp, he could see a figure stooping down—through the opening into the inner tent where the water and brass basins stood ready for washing.

It was within this place that the leather cases containing the travellers' clothes and various necessities had been placed, and over one of these open portmanteaus the dimly seen figure was bending, and from the slight noises he made it was evident that he was ransacking the case in search of something.

"Oh," thought Sam excitedly, "that's why I couldn't sleep—sort o' warning like to do my dooty. Thieves, eh? and not a policeman on the beat!"

Just at that moment the figure straightened itself up, and quick as thought Sam stepped close back to the entrance and behind a hanging rug, which hid him from the figure but enabled him to watch its proceedings.

Sam's first idea was to shout for help to capture the thief, but he checked himself.

"Wouldn't do," he thought. "This sort's too slippery. He'd be off over the sands and gone before anyone came. I've got to catch my gentleman myself. Wonder whether he has a knife."

Sam's heart beat fast, but it was with excitement, for there was no leaven of fear. A marauder was robbing his master or one of his master's friends, and he felt it to be his duty to capture the scoundrel. At the same time he intended to do this without injury to himself.

"Bless him!" he muttered; "if he'll only come close and turn his back I'll have him down on his face in a jiffy, and sit upon him as if he was a camel. It will be time enough to holloa then."

Those were exciting moments, and Sam's heart beat faster still as the man stepped softly out of the inner tent and stood for a few moments where the dim light of the lamp fell upon him, showing him to be a light, active-looking black in white cotton jacket and short drawers, his arms, breast, and legs from mid-thigh being bare, and glistening softly as he moved, while his eyes rolled and the whites stood out clearly against the dark skin.

"He'll be hard to hold," thought Sam, "and I mustn't trust to that thin cotton stuff. He'll tear away in a moment. But he hasn't a knife, as far as I can see. What's he got in his pockets, I wonder."

Sam wondered more the next moment, as he saw the black dart softly back into the inner tent and disappear, his bare feet not making a sound.

"Is there a way out behind there?" the man asked himself, for all was quiet and the minutes glided by till he was just on the point of stepping forward to make sure of the enemy's presence, when the black appeared again, carrying an armful of clothes, which he threw down on the carpet, and to Sam's great delight dropped upon his knees in the very position he would have placed him, while the object of his visit was plainly shown, for he began to rummage the pockets of the garments and transfer their contents, the chink of money being heard, and a faint gleam was apparently given forth by something metallic, evidently a watch.

As Sam saw all this he softly raised his hands to his lips after the fashion of a boy about to moisten them so as to get a good grip. But it was only in form, and as he did so he stepped softly from behind the hanging rug and then onward slowly to within springing distance, when with extended hands he crouched and sprang at the black, landed upon his back, driving him forward, and gripped him tightly.

"Got you!" he muttered to himself, and this was perfectly true, but the black did not lie quiet like the camel Sam had settled himself to ride. For he began to act at once as if made of a combination of steel springs. He swung himself sidewise as he felt Sam upon his back, disorganised the butler's holding, and behaved in a thoroughly eel-like fashion as he struggled hard to get away.

It was many years since Sam had engaged in such a struggle, but he had not quite forgotten old, boyish encounters. The resistance stirred up the latent temper within him, and though his holding was not what he had meant it to be, it was fast, and he made it tighter, locking arms and legs about his captive, and the next minute they were rolling over and over, twisting and twining on the carpet, and panting hard as each strove for the mastery.

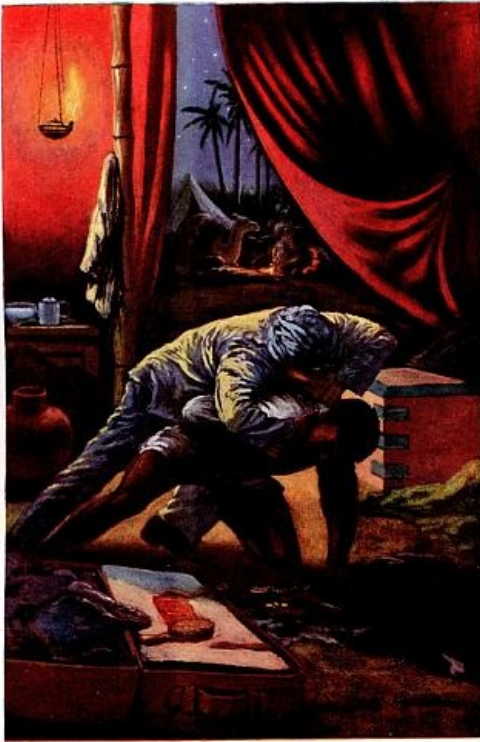
Sam's intention had been to shout for help as soon as he had seized the black, but he was too busy holding him, and all recollection of his plans passed from his memory at once. All he could think of now was that he must keep his prize, while it was perfectly evident that his prize did not mean to be kept, but fought for his liberty with might and main, while at the first encounter the writhing pair had come in contact with one of the poles which supported the tent, the lamp had fallen, and the place now, save for the dim starlight seen through the doorway, was in utter darkness.

It was only working by touch, but Sam made good use of his muscles, forgetting all about his stiffness, and for quite a couple of minutes the panting and scuffling of the wrestling pair went on, till Sam found himself upon his back with the black sitting upon his chest and a pair of hands in close proximity to his throat.

But in spite of his being in the worse position Sam was not beaten. He had fast hold of his enemy with his hands, and had thrown up his legs so as to tighten them round those of his foe, and in this position both held on as if trying to recover breath.

Then all at once Sam felt the grip of one of the black's hands loosen, and a horrible thought flashed through his brain

—
It was his adversary's right hand, and he was about to seek for his knife!



"He crouched and sprang at the black, landed upon his back, and gripped him tightly."

"Look here, you black hound," panted Sam. "If you stab me you'll be hung."

"Sam!" came in a hoarse voice, and the grip slackened.

"Who are you?" panted Sam. "Why!—what I—'Tain't you, is it, Master Frank?"

"Oh, you idiot! you fool!"

"But I don't under— I say, Mr Frank, I took you for a nigger."

"You've dragged me all to pieces, and I'm so hot I—"

"But is it you, Master Frank, dressed up?"

"You knew it was," cried the young man angrily, as the grasp being slackened he struggled up, to stand breathing hard.

"'Strue as goodness, sir, I didn't!" said Sam, rising to his knees. "Oh, just wait till I get my wind again. I say, Mr Frank, you are strong—strong as—as a donkey."

"I? Come, I like that!" panted Frank. "I'm a donkey, am I, sir?"

"'Pon my word, Mr Frank, I beg your pardon. I came into the tent and saw, as I thought, a real nigger robbing the place, and though I felt scared about his having a knife, I went at him, and it was you all the time."

"Yes, it was I all the time," cried Frank angrily. "Why didn't you speak?"

"Never thought about it, sir. Seemed to me that I ought to catch the thief, and I caught a Tartar instead."

"It is most vexatious! Oh, how hot I am! Have you got a match?"

"Yes, I've got a box somewhere."

"Look sharp, then, and light the lamp."

"All right, sir," said Sam, fumbling in his box, and proceeding to strike a light. "I 'spose you've made me in a pretty mess, sir."

"What! Have I made your nose bleed?"

"Oh, no, sir. I meant the lampblack. I suppose I shall be covered with it."

"Wait till you get the light, and see," said Frank sharply.

Scratch! The little wax match flashed, the lamp was picked up uninjured, and after a little trying, burned freely, so that the adversaries could gaze in each other's faces.

But prior to doing this Sam examined his hands twice over, and then passed them over his face. He next took out a pocket-handkerchief and rubbed his face well, bringing away plenty of perspiration, but the linen remained white.

"It hasn't come off, sir," he said, in a tone full of wonder; and then, moistening his handkerchief with his lips, "Beg your pardon, sir, would you mind?"

Frank, whose annoyance was dying out, being driven off by a feeling of amusement caused by the man's looks of wonder, stood fast while Sam passed his handkerchief over the back of one hand and then drew back, laughing softly.

"Well, Sam!" he cried.

"I say, sir, you do look rum! I shouldn't have known you. I don't know you now, and I don't believe your own mother would."

"Then you think the disguise is perfect enough?"

"Disguise, sir? You can't call that a disguise! It's the real thing. Why, you're a downright genuine nigger, that you are!"

"That's right, Sam," said Frank, smiling now.

"And the best of it is, sir, that you're regular fast colours."

"I hope so, Sam."

"Think you could bear to wash yourself, sir?"

"Oh, yes. It will take weeks to make this look lighter."

"Well, I call it amazing, sir. There ain't no need for you to mind where you go. No dervish could take you for a white man, unless he was mad. But am I to be painted that colour?"

"No; you will go as you are—the Hakim's white servant."

"Well, just as you like, sir; I don't mind. I'll be touched up like you are if you think it will be safer for a man. It's wonderful, sir. And no fear of its showing the dirt. But pst! here's some one coming. The doctor and Mr Landon, sir. I thought you were sitting along with them. Have they seen you like this?"

"No, Sam; I was just getting ready for them."

"Did they know it, sir?"

"No."

"Then I'll go in yonder. You stop and let 'em catch you sudden like. Just to try if they'll know you."

Frank nodded, and Sam darted into the inner tent, just having disappeared as the professor sauntered in with the doctor, and both drew up short.

"Hullo, you, sir!" said the professor gruffly, in Arabic; "what business have you here?"

Frank made no reply, but edged a little to one side, while at the same moment the doctor caught sight of the clothes lying on the floor, and uttered an exclamation.

"Yes, see!" cried the professor. "Robbers, eh? Help me, and we'll tie this fellow up."

"Quick, then," said the doctor. "Look out for his knife. Bah! how absurd!" he added the next moment, calming down from the excitability he had displayed.

"What do you mean?" cried the professor sharply.

"Don't hold back. Why!—what!—My dear Frank, what a metamorphosis!"

"Yes," said Frank quietly. "I have passed muster with three of you, so I suppose it will do."

"Do!" cried the professor. "Why, it is simply admirable. Stop a minute, I'll fetch Sam from his tent and try him.—Eh? You here, sir?" he added, as Sam came out of the inner tent.—"You've seen him, then?"

"Yes, sir, and felt him too!" said the man, and the newcomers heard what had taken place.

Chapter Thirteen.

Ben Eddin.

The Hakim was carefully prepared the next morning for his visit to his patients, Sam making the preparations, even to the extent of having a brass pot of boiling water for the razors.

"Seems a pity, sir," he said, as the three gentlemen sat together in the tent, a turned-up case forming the barber's chair, upon which the doctor took his seat; "master's got such a fine, thick head of hair."

"Operate, Sam, operate," said the doctor; and the next minute, comb in one hand, scissors in the other, the man was snipping away, and the doctor's crisp, dark hair fell rapidly over his shoulders and down about him upon the cloth that had been spread.

Sam's cutting was clever enough, and a pretty good transformation was produced even with the scissors, while, when the razor had done its part, and the finishing touches had been given, the doctor passed his hands over his head and then drew them over his long beard.

"Like a looking-glass?" said the professor drily.

"No, thanks. I know my features pretty well," was the reply. "I shall not forget them."

"But don't you want to see the Hakim?"

"No," said the doctor quietly. "How many years older do I look, Frank?" he added quickly.

"Twenty," was the prompt reply.

"Quite," said the professor.

"The clothes the Sheikh sent in, Sam," said the doctor, after giving a nod of satisfaction. "Now then, let me finish the work, so that you may see whether it will pass muster."

"I'll keep you company," said the professor, and he followed his friend into the further tent, leaving Frank walking thoughtfully up and down, passing and repassing the doorway, till his attention was caught by the tall, stately figure of the Sheikh who was coming across from his own place.

Frank hesitated a moment or two, and then he drew himself up and stood waiting with folded arms till the Sheikh reached the entrance, and said quietly—

"May I enter, O Excellency?"

"Yes, come in," cried the doctor from the inner tent, and the old Arab bent a little as he came in, and then raised himself erect as he took a step or two into the half light of the shady place, and stopped short face to face with Frank, at whom for the first few moments he stood staring without the slightest sign of recognition in his countenance, while the youth resembled an ebony carving more than a living being.

"Hah!" said the Sheikh at last. "It is very good, Excellency, very good. It would deceive me. I should not have known. But the dark stain? Will it come off?"

Frank shook his head.

"Not if you used water?"

There was another shake of the head.

"It is good—more than good," said the Sheikh. "I have come over to walk with the Hakim to see his sick people. Is he ready to go?"

Frank shook his head, and raising a hand slowly pointed to his mouth.

"Ah, I forgot that," said the old man, smiling gravely. "It is very good indeed; but can you keep this painful silence?"

Frank bowed his head slowly, and pointed to the divan for the Sheikh to take his seat, the young man preserving his erect position of respect the while.

"It is soon to begin, Excellency," said the Sheikh smiling, "but you must be Excellency no more till our work is done; only in my heart. What name will you bear?"

"Frank!" cried the doctor from the inner tent, and the Sheikh smiled, but the young man shook his head violently. "Tell the Sheikh I shall be with him in a minute."

"I am waiting patiently, Excellency," said the old man aloud. Then turning to Frank, "Suppose we say Ben Eddin?"

Frank nodded and smiled.

"Let it be so, then, Ben Eddin, my son, slave to the learned Hakim, with whom you have been so long that you understand his Frankish tongue. I have lain awake thinking many hours about the Hakim's other slave, and I feel that it would be wise that he should be his Frankish slave. There will be no mistake then. He can wear our burnoose and haik; they will be enough. It is quite right that he should have brought a servant from his own country. What say you, Ben Eddin?"

Frank bowed his head gravely at once, and the Sheikh smiled his satisfaction, before springing up quickly, and forgetting his grave manner he clapped his hands together, applauding, and then bowing low to the grave and reverend Hakim who entered the tent slowly in flowing white garments and voluminous turban, in front of which was fastened a large, dark green scarab, a genuine treasure found by the professor in the tomb of a man who was

supposed to have been physician to one of the Egyptian kings. It had been intended to form a brooch, and the doctor had had it set in gold. This he had taken from among his curios as being most suitable for the purpose in hand, and it took the Sheikh's attention at once.

"Well, Ibrahim," said the doctor, slowly removing his turban as if to place it more comfortably, but holding it long enough for the Arab to see his closely shaven head; "do you think this will do?"

"It is perfect, Excellency," said the old man warmly. "It far exceeds all I could have thought possible."

"So say I," cried the professor, entering now in travel-stained Egyptian garments and muslin-covered fez.

"Excellent, too, Excellency," said the Sheikh. "And now you will keep to this?"

"Of course. The Hakim is ready now to go round and see his sick."

The Sheikh bowed, and feeling a little nervous the party set off at once, leaving Sam watching them from the door.

It was rather an ordeal, for they had not gone many paces towards the first tent they were to visit before they were seen, and word seemed to be passed quickly through the encampment, so that as they reached this first tent several of the Sheikh's people appeared, while when they came out of it again nearly everyone of those occupying the place had hurried forth to stand watching.

But there was no look of wonder, no vestige of a smile, only respectful looks and bending down as the little party passed on.

That first visit was a solemn one, for it was to the tent where they were met by the mother of the little child, who led them to where her little sufferer lay in its last sleep. She reverently pressed the Hakim's extended hand to her forehead, her tear-filled eyes and trembling lips seeming to say that she accepted patiently the blow which had fallen during the night, and that the Great Physician was very wise.

Frank Frere felt more at his ease by the time the next tent was reached, and perfectly satisfied when all was done. For he had played his part of slave and assistant easily and well, holding water vessels, passing bandage and lint, and standing by the sufferers while the Hakim tended his patients with the greatest care.

For there was no wondering gaze. It seemed quite natural and right to the sufferers, who were all doing well. The change in the dress of the Hakim and his friends was only what might have been expected now that their journey there was over, while Frank, the black slave, had the satisfaction of feeling that he was not even recognised by those he tended. He was the Hakim's dumb, black slave. The white assistant who had helped the doctor the previous day was not present—that was all.

A couple of hours were taken up over the invalids, and they were left out of pain and comforted by the Hakim's gentle hand, while when their own tent was reached the Hakim was able to say that nothing could be better than the state of his patients. With a couple more days' attention they might be left to nature, and would soon be well.

That afternoon Sam set aside his English clothes and blossomed forth into a showy-looking Arab, evidently feeling rather proud of his dress, the most conspicuous part of which was a scarlet scarf broadly spread around his waist, one which in an ordinary way would have been pretty well hidden by the loose outer cotton robe, but which the man took ample care should not have its brilliant tint eclipsed more than he could help.

Naturally enough he sought the first opportunity he could find of getting Frank alone in the tent, and began at once in rather a conscious way.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said. "I mean, Ben Eddin. May I say Ben for short?"

There was a short nod, and the man continued—

"I say, sir—Ben. It's very awkward, but the professor says I'm to treat you as if you're my fellow servant. You won't like that?"

There was a quick, eager nod.

"Well, I sha'n't, Mr Ben. I can't help it, but it makes me feel ashamed like, and as if I'd lost all respect for my master's young friend."

Frank held out his hand with a smile, and kept it extended till, in a slow, hesitating way and with a peculiar grimace, Sam took it, and felt it held in a firm, manly, friendly grip.

"Oh, well, Mr Ben, if it's to be like that I can't help it; but please recollect that however disrespectful I seem through this business my 'eart's in its right place, and I think just the same of you as ever I did."

There was a quick, eager nod and a smile, which made the man look more cheerful for a moment; but as he drew back his hand, he raised his white garment involuntarily and began to wipe the fingers, passing the white cotton over them two or three times before he realised what he was doing.

"Oh," he exclaimed hastily, "what a hidiot I am! I beg your pardon, Mr Ben, I do indeed. It seemed to me as if your hand must have come off black. Eh?—Never mind; that's what you look as if you was saying.—Thankye, sir. That's very good of you. Now you look as if you meant that I should soon get used to it.—Ah, you nod again.—Well, I'm blessed, sir, if I don't think it will begin to get easy after a bit of practice.—There's another of your nods. Thankye, sir."

Yes, it will come right after all. I never thought anyone could get through so much business with a few nods and shakes of the head.—Beg pardon, sir.—Hullo, that's a shake! I'm doing wrong. It takes a bit of time.—You nod. So it does, sir—I mean Mr Ben.—What's that wrong? Why, what have I said?—I know: it's the 'mister.' Thought so.—Ben, then, or Ben Eddin. I shall get it soon. Well, I don't want to be a nuisance, but it's very lonely for me, Ben, and if you wouldn't mind, as we are to be a bit together, I should like to come to you when I feel in a bit of a fix."

Frank nodded and Sam's face lit-up with pleasure.

"That's very nice of you, Ben Eddin," he said eagerly. "You see, I wanted to have a word or two with you about these things. I want to do it right and look proper."

Frank nodded.

"'Tain't vanity, mind, sir. I ain't a bit conceited, but I should like to feel that I look decent."

There was a decisive nod.

"Thankye, Ben Eddin. You see, they're so fresh to me. The bit o' scarlet looks right, don't it? Thankye Ben. You don't think it a bit too sojery, do you? No; you don't. Well, I'm glad o' that, for I felt as it took off a bit of the washer-womany, night-gowny idea. Then you think I shall do, Ben—Eddin?"

Frank nodded approval.

"Hah! Makes a man feel a deal better. For between ourselves, Ben Eddin, I got an idea in my head that everyone was a bit on the grin as soon as I came out, and if you could lay your 'and on your 'eart now and say to me with one of your straightforward looks without blinking your eyes that it was all my fancy I could go on as comfortable as could be, for they are out and out nice and cool."

Frank gave his companion the asked-for steady look, and smilingly laid his hand upon his breast.

"Thankye, Ben Eddin. You always were a pleasant gentleman that it was a treat to have staying at Wimpole Street. Wimpole Street!—Ha, ha, ha!" said Sam, laughing softly. "My word! how comic it does seem. What would they say in Wimpole Street if they could—"

Sam stopped short, and a look of pain crossed his face.

"Beg pardon, sir," he whispered. "Well, Ben Eddin," he said aloud. "Mr Landon said I was never to whisper, and I won't do it again. But I wanted to say I was sorry. It isn't comic, or queer, or anything. I know—I know it's all terrible real, and I'm going to try and help like a man through it all. I was a fool and a hidiot to speak as I did—and you'll forgive me, Ben Eddin? Thankye."

For Frank's hand rested lightly on the man's shoulder, and for a few minutes there was silence in the tent. Then Sam's face brightened, and he said eagerly—

"I've had two goes on the camel, Ben, in these things, and somehow it seemed to me as if the grumbling beast took to me more in them. He went easier. I shall do it: I know I shall. I didn't feel half so much like pitching on to my nose as I did before. It's rum work, though, all the same."

Chapter Fourteen.

Frank's First Milestone.

It was just before daybreak on the fifth morning that everyone in the cluster of tents was astir. Much had been done over night to advance the preparations, so that nothing remained but the loading up of the camels.

This last was being rapidly carried out in an orderly way. This one with the water-skins, that with the meal; another bore personal effects; while again another carried two English-made portmanteaus slung pannier-fashion across its back, the carefully packed contents being the Hakim's selected store of medicines, instruments, and surgical appliances, reduced to the smallest compass possible for efficacy. The other leathern receptacle contained instruments and bottles that were heavy and cumbrous, Frank's own selection; and at the last minute, as he saw the extent of the preparations and what a caravan their party made for the long journey, he proposed to the Hakim and the professor when they were alone that the scientific apparatus should be left behind with their clothes, and other articles deemed unnecessary, in charge of the little tribe.

"After all, they are only to play scientific conjuring tricks with," said Frank. "The idea occurred to me at first, but on more thinking the matter over I don't fancy that they will pay for taking."

"I don't agree with you, Frank, lad," said the Hakim. "What you call scientific conjuring tricks are really displays of the wonders of nature, and are likely to impress the ignorant quite as much as any cure I can effect."

"Quite so," said the professor; "they appeal at once to the eye. For my part, I would not on any account leave the apparatus behind."

"As you like," said Frank. "I only thought our load was getting too great."

A few words followed with the Sheikh respecting the extent of their *impedimenta* and the number of camels required,

for others had to bear the gear of two tents, including several handsome rugs, and one way and another, with those devoted to riding, there were fifteen of the beasts of burden, while the party was increased to twelve by sturdy young men of the Sheikh's tribe.

"His Excellency the Hakim thinks the caravan too big?" said the Sheikh, smiling. "Oh, no. It ought to be larger. So great and wise a man must have a good following, or the people will think he is of no importance. The train is very small, but the tents are good and the camels the best we have in the tribe."

"And suppose we are attacked by some wandering tribe or a party of the new Mahdi's ruffianly followers. They may strip us and carry off the camels; what then?"

The Sheikh smiled and shook his head.

"No," he said; "they may come, but they will not rob us. There were plagues in Egypt once, and there are plagues in Egypt still. The wilder the people we meet, the less likely they will be to interfere with a learned Hakim. They will come to him for help. They know that he can take away disease, and they will think he can give disease amongst them like a curse. I know what the people fancy, and what they will do. No, the caravan is not too large, Excellencies. I should have liked it to be larger, for there are many things that would have been useful when we are far away where food and water are scarce; but there are the camels to feed, and the more we are the slower we travel. Like this we can go fast."

"Fast?" said the professor, with a dry look; and the Sheikh smiled.

"Fast for the desert, Excellency," he said. "No one expects to travel here faster than a camel walks when left to itself."

So at daybreak on that morning the last camel was laden, the last necessary attached, and amidst the farewell cries of the tribe assembled to bless and thank and pray for a safe journey to all, the leading camels started off, moaning and complaining, and apparently directing angry cries at those of their kin more fortunate than themselves who, instead of having to tramp over the burning, shifting sand, beneath the scorching desert sun, were to stop and browse around those pleasant water-holes, and tend their young, watched over by the women and children of the tribe the while.

The moaning and grumbling went on for some time, as the long line of ungainly beasts stepped out through the cool grey, and a running conversation seemed to be going on, as if the camels were comparing notes about their loads and the unfairness of the masters, who had given this a load too bulky, that, one too heavy, and another, moist water-skins to carry, instead of a Hakim or chief.

But as the stars paled out and the light increased, the camels settled down and shuffled silently along, while the silence extended to the party, who all had their feelings of sadness to bear.

For doubts arose as to the success of the dangerous adventure. The Sheikh felt that he was an old man, and that this journey, which must inevitably last for many months, might be his last. His followers thought of wife or child, and were ready to sigh as they pondered on the perils and dangers ahead; while Hakim, professor, servant, and Frank, each had his feeling of heart-soreness and doubt as to how the adventure would end.

Frank's greatest suffering was from the thought that time went on so fast while they went on so slowly. Already five days were dying out since they reached the temporary home of the tribe, and now that the start was made at last, how were they moving? In that long line of animals and pacing men advancing like some gigantic, elongated, crawling creature, whose home was the desert sand. Creeping patiently along, step by step, as if time were nothing, while probably the distance might prove to be a thousand miles before they reached, in the neighbourhood of Khartoum, some town or village which might be the prisoner's temporary home.

But there was no thought in any breast there of turning back. The start had been made, and there was to be no looking northward again till the task that had been set was achieved.

"Off at last, Frank," said the professor, who came up to where the young man was riding alone; "we are going splendidly."

"Splendidly?"

"Yes. Everything is beautifully packed; the Sheikh's men are all trained camel-drivers; and I never saw a finer set of animals since I first came to Egypt."

"But hark at them," said Frank.

"What for? It is their nature to, my lad. Your camel is a creature that seems to have been born with a grievance. I was talking about it to Morris just now, and he actually tried to make a joke about them."

"The doctor did?" said Frank, smiling.

"Fact, my dear boy. He says it is on account of their having so many stomachs."

"I always understood it was Nature's blessing to them to enable the poor beasts to exist in these waterless regions."

"That's what I said to him," replied the professor; "but he said that might be a great benefit, but his medical experience of patients was that most of their troubles from early childhood arose from disordered stomachs, and if human beings suffered so much from only having one, what must it be to have a plurality of these necessary organs

like a camel! Enough to make anything ill-tempered, he said. Well, you don't laugh."

"No," said Frank sadly; "my spirits are too low."

"The time of day, my lad. I always feel at my worst about daybreak. You'll be better soon. I say we are getting on capitally, and I feel no fear about our plan."

"I do," said Frank sadly.

"Why, what fresh doubts do you feel?"

"Over this dumb business. There seem to be always fresh difficulties cropping up."

"Seem," said the professor coolly. "Things that seem are generally like clouds: they soon fade away in the sunshine. What is the new 'seem'?"

"About the Sheikh's men. Now, for instance, they must notice that I am talking to you."

"Of course they do, my lad. You may take it for granted that they know quite as much as we do, and that they grasp the fact that we are playing parts to deceive the dervishes."

"And sooner or later, out of no ill-will, but by accident, they will betray us."

"Take it for granted that they will not do anything of the sort. These Arabs are narrow-minded, and there is a good deal of the savage about them in connection with their carelessness regarding human life. But my experience of the Arab is, that he is a gentleman, and I would as soon trust one whom I had made my friend as I would a man of any nation. Now then, I've knocked that difficulty on the head. What is the next?"

"There are no more at present," said Frank, smiling. "I suppose, then, that I need not keep trying to play my part while we are in company with our own party only?"

"Certainly not, my dear boy," said the professor. "Your great difficulty really is to contain yourself fully when strangers are with us."

"I shall try my best," said Frank.

"Yes, my fine fellow, you had better. Now then, we've made our start, and you don't feel so glum, do you?"

"No."

"There's the reason," said the professor cheerily, as he pointed to the sun peering over the edge of the desert. "Nothing like that golden ball for sweeping away clouds of every kind. The only objection to his work is that he is a bit too thorough at times, and treats people out here as if they were meant to cook. Now then, look back as well as forward; the camels march like a line of grenadiers. Just as if they had been drilled."

"But so slowly—so slowly," said Frank, with a sigh.

"Here, look sharp, Sol!" cried the professor. "Get higher; there's another cloud."

"How can you be so light-hearted at a time like this?" said Frank bitterly.

"Because 'A merry heart goes all the day; your sad tires in a mile-a,' as Shakespeare says. Because we should never carry out our plans to success if we went at them with sad hearts. I found that out over many of my searches here. An eager, cheery captain makes an eager, cheery crew who laugh at wreck. Now then, I am going to demolish—with the help of the sun—that great, dense black cloud that has just risen above your mental horizon, my sable friend. Your fresh cloud is the slow one. Now, you must remember that we have given up civilisation, steam, electricity, and the like, to take up the regular and only way of travelling here in the desert. Some day, perhaps, we shall have the railway and wires from north to south; but until we do we must travel by caravan, and to travel by caravan you must travel in caravan fashion, in the old, long proved style. You would like to hurry on and do fifty miles the first day, instead of ten or fifteen."

"Of course," said Frank, "with such things at stake."

"Exactly, my dear boy, and very naturally. Well, we'll say you'd like to go forty miles to-day?"

"Yes."

"Couldn't be done. Men can't walk forty miles over hot sand under a desert sun."

"Then why not have had more camels?"

"Because camels can suffer like men. You would knock up your desert ships, and make them sore-footed the first day, have great difficulty in getting them half the distance the next day, half that the third, and no distance at all the fourth."

"So bad as that?" said Frank.

"Most likely a good deal worse. Now we have old Ibrahim and his men, who know camels exactly, understand their constitutions, how much they can do, and how to get them to do it. You see, we are not going on a week's journey."

"A week's!" said Frank bitterly; "at this rate it will be six months."

"Perhaps a year's," said the professor quietly.

"A year's?"

"Possibly; and if a camel should break down we can't send round to the livery stable in the next street, or order a fresh one from the Stores. No one knows that better than the Sheikh. He is making the caravan travel so that it can go on for a year if necessary, and at the end of that year the camels, which mean life to us, will be fit to go on for another year."

"But Harry—Harry—Harry!" sighed Frank sadly.

"Harry is in Egypt, my dear boy, where things go on as slowly now with the people as they did in the days of the old Pharaohs. Harry must wait, and you must wait, till we can reach him. Try at once to realise where you are, and that this is the only way in which we can achieve our plans."

"I'll try," said Frank sadly.

"That's right, for if left to yourself you would press on, and in less than a month all that would be left of my dear lad would be a few whitening bones in the desert, and Harry still gazing northward and westward for the help that did not come."

"I'm afraid you are right, Landon," said Frank sadly.

"I'm sure I am, my dear lad. Experientia has dosed me. Africa is a problem, solemn and slow as its great deserts, and the people here, much as we look down upon them, have been Nature-taught, educated, as it were, from the failings of those who have gone before, how to live, how to travel, in short, how to exist in such a land."

"Forgive me, Landon," said Frank.

"Of course, my dear boy. I know exactly how you feel. I was just as bad when I first came out here. The men maddened me with their slow movements when some glorious slab covered with hieroglyphics or painted pictures cut in, lay at the bottom of a hole into which the sand kept crumbling and trickling back. I was ready to give up over and over again when tired out at night, but a good rest made me ready to go on again in the morning with fresh patience, and in the end I won."

"There," said Frank, "say no more; I know you are right. This all comes of your talking to me. If you had not spoken I should have gone on in silence, so you have yourself to thank for my display of discontent."

"Then I am very glad I have spoken," said the professor warmly, "because I can feel that you will take the right view of matters."

"Yes, I shall try hard to."

"That's right, and the best thing you can do is to enter into the journey from a keen observer's point of view. Now look before you. What can you see?"

"A wide expanse of sand baking in the sunshine."

"Nothing else?"

"No."

"Ah, that shows how uneducated your eyes are, and how much they have to learn. I'm not very clever over such things, being best when I get scent of a buried temple, tomb, or city. But this waste of nothingness contains plenty to interest an observer, and I can help you a little if you will try to make the best of our journey."

"I have told you I will," said Frank.

"Yes; so we'll begin at once, for you may believe me that we are not going to journey fifteen or twenty miles to-day without seeing something more interesting than sand. Here's my little binocular. Take it, and we'll begin."

"First of all, though," said Frank, "are we bound for some particular place this evening?"

"Of course. For another patch of water-holes. Ibrahim says they are nothing like so good as those by the encampment, but they will do for the night's halt. To-morrow we shall have to halt right in the desert and depend upon the water we take with us. The next day we journey on to fresh wells."

"I see," said Frank; "our journeys are regulated by the supplies of water."

"Exactly. Water means life."

"And Ibrahim can trust to his knowledge of the country to go straight to these places?"

"Yes; I have proved him over and over again. Now then: try the glass."

"Yes," said Frank, opening the case; "but tell me, do you mean to collect birds, insects, fossils, and plants?"

"Certainly, everything we can find; but only to examine at the end of the day. We must keep nothing; only make a few notes. Well, can you see anything?"

"Not yet. It is rather awkward to get a steady look with the camel moving."

"If you catch sight of anything worth looking at you can check your steed."

"Yes, there's something moving yonder—a dog."

"I doubt it," said the professor. "Try again."

"It looks like a dog. What is it then—a fox? Ah, it is gone behind those heaps yonder."

"Then the desert is not quite empty, Frank. Your dog or fox must be a jackal; but I wonder at your seeing him in the daylight. Let me look at your heap of sand."

"One minute; there are two somethings upon it. Two of those jackals sitting on a heap, I suppose, by their holes. No; one of them has stretched out two wings. Why, they're vultures."

"Better still. Now I'll look.—Thanks. Your eyes require a different focus from mine. Yes. What I expected," said the professor, handing back the glass. "Have another look at your sand heap; it will repay observation; it is one of the milestones of the caravan roads, only they are not placed at regular distances. Have you caught it again?"

"I keep catching glimpses," replied Frank, with the glass to his eye; "but the whole thing seems to be dancing about.—Now I've got it.—No; gone again.—That's better. The vultures have hopped off the heap and are spreading their wings. We have scared them away. Yes, there they go—a few hops, and they are rising sluggishly. No, I can't follow them with the glass."

"Can you see anything else?"

"Yes, I've got the heap again, and there are three of the little dog-like creatures scurrying right away. I say, this is a good glass! I can see the dusty sand rise as it is kicked by the jackals. Here, let's stop the camel."

"No," said the professor; "there's nothing worth stopping for."

"But I want to make out something lying by that little heap. It looks like a curved bone."

"It is a curved bone," said the professor.

"You can't see with the naked eye."

"No," said the professor, smiling; "but I have been along such a track as this before."

"But there is no track," said Frank. "We are going over smooth sand, and making a fresh one."

"Which will all be obliterated in a few hours. It is a track, though, as your heap proves."

"I should have liked to examine it, though."

"Well, you will have plenty of chance, for we shall go pretty close to it—but on the windward side."

Frank lowered the glass to look inquiringly at the speaker.

"Look here," he said; "you mean something by the way you just spoke."

"Certainly I did."

"What?"

"Take your glass, and sharpen your powers of observation, my lad. The sooner you learn the desert the better for you."

"I begin to have my suspicions," said Frank sharply.

"If you wait a little longer, and go by there with your eyes shut, my lad, you will have something more than a suspicion."

"Horrible!" said Frank shortly, as he once more raised his glass to his eyes. "You have given me the clue. I can make it out clearly now. Some poor camel that has strayed and lost its way, I suppose. Died from hunger and thirst."

"More likely from old age or overwork," replied the professor; "a milestone, only one of the many that mark the caravan tracks across the desert. Some one must have passed here within forty-eight hours."

"How do you know?"

"By the appearance of that milestone. If we came by here to-morrow there would be nothing visible but some whitening bones. Look yonder without the glass. Look straight past the leading camel, low down at the horizon, and now raise your eyes. What can you see?"

"Glare," said Frank.

“Try again.”

“Nothing but more glare, and the atmosphere quivering as it rises from the sand.”

“Try once more,” said the professor. “I can see one—two—three. Look higher.”

“Ah, I’ve got it now; a mere speck,” said Frank eagerly—“a crow.”

“Make it vulture, and you will be right. I can make out three—four of the loathsome creatures on their way to the feast. They are making a circuit so as to drop down after we have gone by.”

“They fulfil a duty, though, I suppose,” said Frank.

“Yes, and a very necessary one,” replied the professor; and this was evident a short time after, although the leading camel passed to windward of the heap, and it seemed to Frank that the animal he rode turned up the corners of its pendulous lips with a look of the most supreme disgust, as it turned its head slightly in the other direction.

“That’s fancy, Frank,” said the professor, as the young man drew his attention to the camel’s aspect. “I believe the poor beasts are so accustomed to the sight that they take it as a matter of course.”

“Is it so common, then?”

“Horribly common, and I hope we shall encounter nothing worse, but from what has been going on farther south I have my doubts.”

Frank rode on silently, and the professor did not speak for a few minutes. Then—

“Human life has always been held cheap out here. If we were travelling to examine the old records I could show you them cut in stone, as you can see them in the museums in Cairo, or in London when we return, the bragging, boasting blasphemies of this or that conquering king, all to the same tune—‘I came, I saw, I conquered; I slew so many thousands of the people—I took so many thousands into captivity—I built this temple to the gods—I raised this obelisk or that pyramid’—and all by hand labour, with the miserable, belaboured slaves dying by their thousands upon thousands under their taskmasters’ lashes, to be cast afterwards into the Nile, or left to the jackals and vultures. These and the crocodiles have always been wanted here, Frank, and as it has been so it is now. There is always an ‘I’—a very, very big capital ‘I’—who is glorifying himself with slaughter.”

“No conquering king now, though,” said Frank, “to leave his victories cut in the stones.”

“No, the slaughterers here nowadays are more barbarous. Not the city-building monarchs, but the nomadic chiefs who force themselves to the height of power with their horrible religious despotism—your Mahdis. It is a wonder that they find so many followers, but they do.”

“Fanaticism, I suppose,” said Frank.

“Yes, that and the love of conquest, with its additions in the shape of plunder. For years past these vast tracts of fertile land bordering the river have gone back to waste, village after village of industrious people having been massacred or forced to flee for their lives.”

“But—I have read so little about the Khedival rule—why has not the Egyptian Government put a stop to all this frightful persecution?”

“From want of power, my lad. The country has been too big, the army too small, and the invading tribes from the south too warlike a fighting race to be withstood. There is the consequence—a smiling land, irrigated by the mighty river which brings down the rich tropic mud from the highlands of the south, utterly depopulated, and strewn with the wretched people’s bones.”

“And how long is this to last?” said Frank, as he thought of his brother’s fate.

“Till England stretches forth her hand to sweep the blasphemous invader from the land he destroys. It is coming, Frank, but the old lion moves slowly and takes some time to rouse.”

“But when he does make his spring—!”

“Yes, when he does! The Indian tiger learned his power then. But the sun is getting too hot for a political lecture, my lad. Come, use your glass again. There’s another enemy about to cross our track.”

Chapter Fifteen.

Receiving the Enemy.

As Frank was about to raise the glass to his eye, the doctor, who was some little distance in advance, checked his camel for them to come up alongside, and pointed the while away to where in the distance about a dozen column-like clouds were spinning round as if upon pivots, while they advanced as if to cross their course.

“A sand-storm,” said the professor. “Not much, but unpleasant enough if it comes upon us. Hi! Ibrahim; will those pillars cross before we get near them?”

"I cannot say, Excellency," replied the old man. "I fear not. It will be better to halt."

The preparations for the storm were soon made, the camels crouching down with their necks fully outstretched, while their riders knelt down sheltered by the animals and their packs, and held their thin cotton robes ready to veil their faces should the storm come near.

It was a strange sight, the tall, pillar-like clouds sweeping along over the level sand like so many parts of a vast machine preparing warp and weft for spinning a garment to clothe the earth, and there were moments when the pillars were so regular in distance and motion that it seemed impossible not to believe that they were artificial.

All was still where the travellers stood and knelt, the sun pouring down upon them from a clear sky, and as the Sheikh kept scanning the approaching storm Frank watched him to try and read what he thought.

It was pretty plain, for the old man's eyes brightened and he seemed to breathe more freely, since it was evident that if the whirlwind kept its course the dust pillars would pass across the track they were making half a mile away.

"But these storms change about so, Excellency," said the Sheikh. "This may suddenly turn back or rush off right away from us. It will, I think, go onward towards the great river away to our left, and sweep across it. No!" he thundered out. "Be ready; it comes," for suddenly a hot blast of air smote the party, fluttering their robes, and the whirling pillars, so distinct and clear a few minutes before, grew misty as if seen through a dense haze; for by one of its sudden changes the storm had swept round almost at right-angles, and the next minute the sky was obscured, the camels were groaning as they buried their heads in the loose sand, and the storm of hot, suffocating dust, borne on a mighty wind, was upon them, shrieking, tearing at everything loose, and buffeting its victims, who could hardly breathe, the dust choking every tiny crevice in the cotton cloth held over the face.

The roar and rush were horrible, the confusion of intellect strange and peculiar, and Frank, as he cowered down behind his camel with his forehead pressed against the saddle to keep his veil in its place, felt as if he were breathing the scorching air out of some open furnace door, while the choking, irritating sensation in the air-passages seemed as if it must soon terminate in death.

Doubtless that would have been their fate if the storm had lasted; but as quickly as it had come upon them it passed over, and in a few minutes the air about them was clear again, the sky blue, and the sun beating down, while the dust-cloud pillars were careering along, distinctly seen a quarter of a mile away.

"Yes," said the Sheikh calmly, "they are terrible, these hot whirlwinds. Their Excellencies would be glad to bathe and clear their faces and hair from the thick dust, but there is no water save for drinking. We have never had a worse one than this, Excellency, in our travels."

"Never," said the professor, who knelt in the sand trying to clear his eyes from the impalpable brownish dust, "and I don't want to meet another. This is one of the experiences of a desert journey, Frank. Why, lad, you are turned from black to brown."

"And you the same, but from white," replied Frank, smiling.

"I suppose so. It's bad for the Hakim's white robes, too. I say, Ibrahim, when shall we strike the river?"

"Not for many days, Excellency; but we shall halt at fountains among the rocks."

Five days' monotonous journeying across the sandy plains, and then five nights of travelling, with the days devoted to rest, had passed before the river was approached at a bend which brought it near the line of travel which the Sheikh had traced out for himself by the stars. The way had been marked by the bones of camels, and in two places other bones scattered here and there told their horrible tale of suffering or attack, one skull displaying a frightful fracture that was unmistakable; fountain after fountain had been reached, and refreshing halts had been made where the waters gushed from some patch of rocks, to fertilise a small extent around, supporting a few palms and prickly, stunted bushes of acacia-like growth, before they started away again into the sand; and in cases where the next water-hole was too far, one, two, or three camels bore away water-skins well filled, to carry the party over the next halting-place.

The necessity of keeping up the supply forced their guide to adopt a zigzag mode of progression, and to make his little caravan traverse nearly double the distance that would have been necessary could they have taken a bee-line towards the south. But experience had taught all travellers who journey by the desert, instead of by the great waterway with its vast cataracts, where the pressure of the earth forced the water springs to the surface, and naturally these were the goals for which all tired travellers made.

There were but few incidents during a fortnight's travel, and more than once Frank's heart sank as he pondered upon the little advance they had made; but as the professor said, they were two weeks nearer their journey's end, and all was well.

But it was sadly monotonous. The morning and evening skies were glorious, but their beauties soon began to pale, while on the hot days the journeys were most exhausting, and the travellers welcomed the clear nights when the stars blazed on high, for these were the times the Sheikh selected for progressing.

"There is no fear then of going far astray," he said; for he knew nothing of the use of the compass, and the adventurers had never thought of bringing such an aid.

In company with the doctor and professor such natural history objects as presented themselves were examined—lizards among the rocks, a few snakes, harmless, and the poison-bearing cobra; but away from the river, birds were

rare, save those of prey, and as to animals they were heard more than seen. A gazelle or two, little and graceful, bounded across the track, but it was at night that the howling of the jackals and the long, hideous snarling of hyaenas taught the travellers that there were plenty of these loathsome creatures hungrily waiting for the weaklings of such caravans as crossed the sandy plains.

Twice over irregularities were pointed out by the Sheikh—places where the dead level was broken—as being the sites of former occupancy of that part of the country, the professor discoursing learnedly about the possibility of changes in the surface having taken place and rendered the country barren, while he talked eagerly of how interesting it would have been to encamp at such spots, gather together a score of the fellaheen with shovel and basket, and explore.

“But there could never have been cities there,” said the doctor.

“But there were,” replied the professor. “Egypt *is* not half explored as yet. Out yonder where we passed to-day the land lay lower, and there was the trace of a wady, one of those irregular valleys which doubtless ran towards the Nile. That was once filled with water, but the encroaching sand has filled up and covered everything. Ah, I should like nothing better than to begin digging there. It would not be long before I began to learn who the people were who formed that colony.”

At last, on the morning of the fifteenth day, when, after a longer night’s journey than usual, a halt was made, the faint dawn began to show that the face of the country had undergone a change. Sand there was in plenty, but it was diversified with patches of rocks, some of which were of great elevation, while where the camels began to increase their ordinary rate of speed, a ridge crossed their path, and as it grew lighter the travellers’ eyes were greeted by the relief of green bushes, patches of trees, and various traces of this being a place frequented by man.

As the sun rose, right across the east there were clouds, which seemed to be very different from those to which they were accustomed, and the reason was soon made plain by a remark from the Sheikh, who explained that the river ran from north to south, about a day’s journey eastward, and that if they continued their march a few miles in that direction they would soon come upon signs of cultivation, and a scattered village or two.

“And shall we go that way?” asked Frank.

“Only as far as the first village, where we can buy grain—corn, and dhurra. Then we strike away again into the desert, along whose borders we must keep. It is safer, and we are less likely to meet with wandering dervish bands. We only come near the river when it is necessary to refill the sacks and give the camels better feed than they can get near the water-holes and fountains.”

“I see,” said Frank, as he glanced at the professor. “To get to the neighbourhood of the Mahdi’s people quickly we must go slowly.”

“Yes, Excellency, it is better so. We stay here two days while three of the young men and three camels go out to buy corn in the villages yonder. There is generally food to be purchased there, for the Nile floods run out widely a little way beyond, and the Khalifa’s people have not reached so far as yet.”

“Is there not the ruin of a great temple somewhere in this direction?”

“And of a city too, Excellency—El Gaebor,” replied the Sheikh. “Few people have gone there, for it is half a day’s journey from the river bank. But his Excellency will not stay to visit it now?”

“No, Ibrahim; not now,” said the professor. “It is very tempting, but duty first. We must come and see the ruins after we have fetched my friend out of the new Mahdi’s grasp. Not before.”

“Yes, not before,” said the doctor quietly; for he spoke little on the way, passing long hours in a thoughtful silence, as if dreaming over the duties he had to perform, and acting always as if he felt that he really was the learned Hakim he assumed to be.

There was a great charm about the wild, rocky place they had reached, the first rays of the sun as it rose lighting up a most picturesque scene made glorious by that which was so rare. For at the foot of a perpendicular mass of grey, grand, sun-scorched rock, there was a pool of limpid water quite fifty yards across, and below it another into which the surplus ran, forming a place easily accessible for the camels and leaving the upper water unsullied for the use of man.

The tent was soon pitched and a fire made for the coffee and rough cakes that were soon in progress of being made, while after drinking heartily, the camels were left browsing quietly upon the abundant foliage of the low-growing bushes, their burdens being stacked against the rocks which formed the back of their little encampment.

“We ought to find some specimens here, Frank,” said the professor, at the end of an hour, as they sat dallying over the last drops of their coffee.

“Yes; the place looks delightful after the bare sand,” replied Frank. “I am ready. Shall we have a wander round at once?”

“By all means,” said the professor. “We’ll take the guns. By the way, do you keep that revolver of yours loaded?”

“Oh, no,” said Frank.

“But you carry it under your jacket.”

"Yes, I do as you suggested that I should. But I thought we were to trust to cunning and not to force?"

"Of course; but the fact that we are getting nearer to human beings sets me thinking that there's no harm in being prepared. Load up. You have cartridges in your pocket?"

"No," said Frank, smiling. "What should a black slave be doing with cartridges?"

"Be ready to stand upon his defence in a case of emergency. Here, take some of mine and fill the chambers."

As he spoke the professor handed six of the little central-fire cartridges, while Frank drew the small revolver he carried out of a pocket within the breast of his cotton jacket, and began to thrust them in.

"Going shooting?" said the doctor, looking up.

"Yes," said the professor; "we may get a few birds worth eating, as there is water and growth here."

"Better lie down and have a good rest," said the doctor. "You both require it. We must be careful about our health."

"Time for that too," said the professor. "We have to stay till the men have been and fetched the grain, and they must have a good rest afterward."

Just at that moment one of the Sheikh's men, who had been to fetch a couple of camels which had strayed farther from the camp than seemed necessary, came hurriedly, driving them before him, to leave them with their fellows, and turn towards the Sheikh, making signs.

"What does that mean?" said the doctor, springing up. "Is something wrong?"

The others followed the doctor's act the next moment, for some communication, evidently of great importance, was made to the Sheikh by his follower, with the result that the old man came quickly to where they stood, while all the men went quietly to their camels.

"What is it, Ibrahim?" cried the professor.

"A strong party of the Baggara are coming to the fountain, Excellency. The Hakim must take his seat at the door of the tent. Put away those guns and be in attendance upon him, as we have arranged. Ben Eddin, be waiting upon the Hakim with his pipe. Be calm, everyone, and show no appearance of trouble at their coming. You must leave all to me."

Chapter Sixteen.

A Bad Wound.

Those were startling minutes, and though the incident was nothing more than had been anticipated as one of possibly many, it had taken them by surprise, being long before it was expected.

It was hard work too, for everyone was startled; but the advancing enemy were hidden somewhere beyond the piled-up rocks, and with what, under the circumstances, was marvellous rapidity, the Hakim, berobed and turbaned, seated himself in Eastern fashion upon one of the rugs laid for him at the tent door, while Frank brought him his long pipe, filled it, and was ready with a light. Then the professor and Sam began to put together the breakfast things, Ibrahim stood respectfully by as if awaiting the wise man's orders, and the Sheikh's followers stood about, feeding and watering the camels.

It was a picturesque group, but ready none too soon, for hardly were they prepared before the head of a mounted party of fierce-looking armed men rode into sight, and pulled up short in surprise, while their numbers were quadrupled before an effort was made to advance.

Then, with fully a hundred in sight, a shout was uttered and with a rush they galloped up, spear and sword in hand, to form a semicircle about the halting party, shutting them in from all chance of escape, and then seemed about to charge home, but they were checked by another shout and reins were drawn, the fiery horses they rode champing their cruel bits and tossing the foam in all directions.

It was a critical minute, and the slightest display of resistance would have meant indiscriminate slaughter, its hopelessness being shown by the rapid increase of the savage force, more and more riding into sight till fully two hundred were making for the water pools.

But no one stirred save Frank, who calmly held the glowing piece of fuel to the Hakim's pipe, while the latter sat unmoved, calm, and grand of aspect, slowly inhaling and exhaling the fragrant smoke and gazing at the warlike crowd which surrounded his little tent.

By this time horse, foot, and camel men, the whole party, had pressed close up to the advance, and a burst of eager talking arose, the aspect of the savage warriors indicating that they believed they had come suddenly upon a prize. But they were evidently under the strong hand of some form of discipline, for they waited while a couple of fierce-looking leaders, whose shaggy black hair stood straight up and outward like some kind of cap, pressed the sides of their horses and walked them forward, to be met by Ibrahim, who advanced with great dignity, and in response to a fierce question as to who and what they were, saluted them gravely and announced that they were in the presence of a great Frankish Hakim travelling through the land upon his great mission to heal the sick and wounded.

To this, the younger of the two burst into a mocking laugh and said something to his fellow leader, who responded by laying a hand upon his companion's rein as he spoke haughtily in his own tongue to Ibrahim, his words having a threatening sound.

The Sheikh's voice sounded as haughty and as firm, and he waved his hand around, while to Frank it seemed that the old man was repelling some accusation and saying—

"If we were enemies to you and yours should we come unarmed and in peace like this?" Then his voice grew sterner and his eyes flashed, as, uncomprehended by those for whom he was spokesman, he cried—

"Retire your men ere you disturb the great Hakim's repose. Has he not journeyed through the night on his way to the south to heal and cure, and as you see, he is resting before he takes his sleep. Beware how you anger him, for as he can heal so can he bring down upon all the disease and death he has removed from others."

The younger man made a scornful gesture, but his elder was evidently impressed, and Ibrahim continued—

"You have come for water for your horses and camels; take it silently, and leave the great Hakim in peace. Anger him not, lest at a word and a wave of the hand he turn the sweet water into bitterness that shall wither all who drink. Horse, camel, or man shall perish if he speak the word."

The Sheikh's words were heard and understood by many; and a low, angry murmur arose, which ran right to the rear.

"Is it peace?" said the Sheikh calmly, as he noted the impression he had made; "if so the pool of water is sweet for all; and if you have sick or wounded men among you, bring them to the Hakim that he may make them whole."

They were veritable words of wisdom that Ibrahim boldly spoke, and full of force, for though it was extremely doubtful whether, in case of an inimical display, the doctor would have either been able or willing to make use of his power, he had with him that which would, if deftly distributed, have poisoned the water so that it would have been dangerous to man or beast.

They were words of wisdom, though, for they went direct to the understanding and interests of the superstitious tribe, whose readiness to believe in any so-called prophet or learned doctor was easily awakened, while as it happened, Ibrahim's last command had gone home to its mark at once.

For by a fortunate accident, the chief who seemed of the greater importance, turned sharply to his companion and handed to him the shield and two leaf-bladed spears he carried, and then threw himself from the beautiful Arab horse he rode, giving the bridle to one of his followers.

And now for the first time it was evident that his left arm, which had been covered by the shield, was injured, for it was supported by a broad scarf passed round his neck.

He strode forward haughtily, taking his steps slowly with head thrown back, and as Frank gazed at him with heart throbbing painfully and heavily under the stress of his emotion, he could not help thinking how noble and fierce a warrior the Baggara looked, with his simple white robe, and how dangerous an enemy with the curved dagger in his girdle, and long, keen, crusader-like sword hanging from a kind of baldric from his right shoulder.

As he approached Morris, Frank turned his eyes for a moment upon his brother's friend, and a pang shot through him, for the doctor sat cross-legged holding the pipe, in his studied pose, slowly exhaling a little smoke, but his face looked fixed and strange, his eyes were half closed, and he seemed to be unconscious of all that was going on.

"He has lost his nerve!" thought Frank in agony, and he drew his breath hard. "What shall I do?"

The next glance, though, was at the Baggara chief, who in a contemptuous way snatched the sling from his left arm, and as if to display his scorn of wounds to his followers he lightly threw back the loose cotton sleeve of his robe to his shoulder, and held out the roughly bandaged arm before the seated surgeon, saying scoffingly in his own tongue—

"There, if you are a learned Hakim, cure that."

There was utter silence now, and necks were craning forward and flashing eyes eagerly gazing all around, but to Frank's horror, Morris did not pay the slightest heed, merely raised the amber mouth-piece of his pipe to his lips and inhaled more smoke, his eyes still half-closed, while he looked as if he were about to sink into a trance.

The words were on Frank's lips to say quickly, "Pray, pray rouse yourself, or we are lost!" but he had presence of mind enough left to press his teeth firmly together and gaze fixedly at the Baggara, whose dark eyes flashed angrily as he stamped one foot and advanced a little more, to repeat his words. Still Morris did not stir, and it was only by the most determined effort that Frank kept himself from turning sharply to dart a look of horror at Landon and Sam.

But it was the thought of his brother that gave him the strength, and the next moment he breathed a sigh of relief, for the Sheikh stepped close up to the doctor, raising a hand warningly to the Baggara.

"The learned Hakim," he said, "is deep in thought upon the wisdom with which he heals;" and then, bending towards the doctor's ear, he said in a low, distinct voice, in English—

"A great chief is here, O learned one. He is wounded and in pain, and asks your aid."

As Ibrahim spoke the doctor slowly raised his eyelids and gazed at the speaker, turning to him the while as if ignorant of the presence of the chief and the crowd around.

Then bending his head slowly as if in assent, he turned to gaze full in the Baggara's scornful eyes, his face lighting up with keen intelligence, and continuing his fixed look till the chief made an angry gesture and for a moment lowered his eyes.

It was only for a moment, though, and then he looked fixedly at the doctor again, the scornful smile upon his lip growing more marked as he keenly watched all that was done.

"Splendid bit of acting," said the professor to himself, as he stood with folded arms a little behind his friend's left hand, and he too drew a breath of relief as with calm dignity Morris handed his pipe to Frank, whose black face glistened as he took it with a solemn bow and handed it to Sam with a sign that he should take it into the tent, noting how the man's hand trembled, but avoiding his eyes, and turning sharply to the scene being enacted behind him.

As he turned, it was to see the Hakim raise his strong, white hands to spread his great dark beard over his chest, and then sign to the chief to kneel.

This was met by an angry look of resentment, and the younger chief uttered a sharp ejaculation, which was followed by a murmur behind him.

It was a critical moment, but the natural superstition in the Baggara proved too strong. He yielded to the powerful gaze which completely mastered his, and went slowly down on one knee, still holding out his injured arm.

As this was done the doctor threw back the sleeves of his robes, turned up his beautifully clean shirt-sleeves, and displayed his strong white arms. Then raising his hands he removed his jewelled turban and passed it to the professor, who was ready to take it in his hands, to hold it with reverent care.

Once more a low murmur ran round the crowd, as with increased curiosity they stared at the noble white head of the grand-looking man seated before them, while their curiosity was raised to the highest pitch.

The Hakim's movements were rapid now; he took the chief's swarthy hand in his, and his fingers were cool and soft to the burning skin he touched. Then raising his right he laid it upon the biceps, to find all tensely swollen and fevered.

The next minute he had taken a glittering little knife from the satchel he wore at his waist, and passed the keen point beneath the coarse cotton bandage, dividing it twice, so that the edges sprang apart, for the cloth was cutting deeply into the swollen flesh.

With deft fingers then he quickly unrolled the bandage, letting the foul, badly stained cotton fall upon the sand at his feet, laying bare to the sunlight a terrible cut running up from just above the wrist to the elbow joint, evidently caused by the thrust of one of the leaf-bladed spears, and now from long neglect horribly inflamed, and threatening danger, while the suffering it must have caused had doubtless been extreme.

The Hakim's examination was quick, and as he ran his eyes over the wound and touched it here and there, he spoke without turning his head.

"Basin, sponges, plenty of water. Lint, bandages, dressings, antiseptics, and my instruments."

Frank bowed, and hurried into the tent, while the Hakim supported the injured arm and raised his eyes to the Baggara chief, whose gaze was fixed upon him searchingly, and gave him a calm, reassuring smile, as if saying, "Wait, and you shall be cured."

There was another low murmur now, and the crowd was pressing closer in, but Ibrahim's lips parted as he raised his hands in protest, and at a harsh command from the second chief the men stood fast.

The next minute Frank came out, followed by Sam bearing the doctor's surgical case and the necessaries he had ordered to be brought, every eye watching as these were opened out.

"Come and help, Landon," said the doctor quickly, and the great turban was handed to Sam to bear into the tent, while the professor took up the brass basin and held it ready for Frank to fill, the latter then placing his hands ready to support the patient's arm.

During the next quarter of an hour the Baggara looked curiously on while his festering wound was manipulated by the light touches of one of London's most skilful surgeons, armed with the newest discoveries of science. And formidable as the task was, and severe the treatment, those firm white hands, and the cleansing, cooling applications gave more relief than pain, so that the stoical patient, when the touches from glittering knife and keen needle had ceased and given way to medicated cotton wool, lint, and tenderly applied supporting bandages, uttered a sigh of relief, and the scornful look of contempt gave way to one of perfect satisfaction, for to him this was a miracle indeed.

A few minutes later the scarf was retied from the shoulder so that the wounded arm rested comfortably and free from pain, the Baggara smiling at his leech as he rose, and in an instant a tremendous shout rent the air.

Chapter Seventeen.

The Surgeon's Fee.

The Hakim's patient was evidently a man of stern determination—of iron will; but he was only human after all, and he turned slowly to his brother chief, to lay his uninjured hand upon his shoulder to support himself, evidently making a

brave effort to master the almost inevitable consequences of the long operation.

But Morris was watching him keenly, and quite prepared. A few words to Frank resulted in a small glass of water being placed in his hand in company with a bottle and graduated measure; a small quantity of a colourless fluid was transferred to the glass, and the Hakim rose and walked with dignified pace to where the two chiefs stood, the younger scowling fiercely now as he saw that his companion was beginning to totter upon his legs and swaying slightly as if to fall.

But the Hakim paid no heed to his fierce glances, and held the glass to his patient.

"*Bibe*," he said, in a tone of command, using medical Latin in preference to English.

At the sound of his voice the Baggara, whose countenance had turned of a peculiar, muddy hue, revived and turned to him sharply, saw, and stretched out his hand eagerly for the glass, but shrank back directly with a look of suspicion.

The Hakim smiled, raised the glass to his lips, and looking frankly in his patient's eyes drank about a third of the liquid slowly, and would have gone on, but the Baggara signed to him to desist, took the glass, and swallowed the remainder, to stand for a few minutes with his eyes half-closed and his hand clutching his brother chief's arm desperately.

"Why doesn't he make him lie down?" said the professor in a low tone to Frank, who was standing by his companion's side as if waiting for the Hakim's next command, but watching everything keenly the while.

"Afraid it would have a bad effect upon the people," said Frank in the same low tone. "He has given him a dose of ammonia."

"If he goes down, my lad, I'm afraid that it will be bad for us."

"Afraid?" replied Frank. "We have made our plunge, and nothing must make us afraid."

"That's right," said the professor; "but I wish that stuff would begin to act."

"It is beginning to act," said Frank. "Look!"

He was right, for the chief drew a deep breath, his muscles seemed to be growing more firm, and he stepped back from his companion, then signed for his shield to be handed to him, placed the loops over the bandaged arm, took his two spears, beckoned to the follower who held his horse, and stood for a minute or two making believe to pat its beautiful, arching neck and arrange its mane before placing a foot in the stirrup and springing into the saddle, when another shout arose from his followers, and Frank breathed more freely.

"That's about as savage, bloodthirsty a brute as his younger companion," said the professor softly; "but he's a brave man."

"Yes," said Frank laconically, as he kept his eyes fixed nervously upon the chief. "Think he'll be able to keep his seat?"

"I hope so."

"So do I, for if he comes off with a thud I won't give much for our lives. Hah! he has mastered it."

"Yes, he has mastered it all," said Frank. "He must have been horribly sick and faint."

"And that ammonia is not a very exhilarating draught to take. I know the abomination pretty well. Soap and water is delicious in comparison, especially if it is scented."

All this time the Hakim stood motionless, watching his patient gravely, and waiting for the result which soon came. For the peril had passed, the Baggara chief drawing himself up in his saddle, making his beautiful Arab charger rear up, and then letting him gallop for a hundred yards or so in full sight of his men, who began to shout frantically. Then pulling the horse down upon its haunches, he turned, galloped back, and checked the graceful creature again in front of the Hakim, to bend over and say a few words before rejoining his brother chief.

"What said he, Ibrahim?" asked the doctor in a whisper, without moving his head or seeming to speak.

"That the Hakim is a great prophet, and that it is peace. Excellency, they will not hurt us now."

This was soon made evident, for the younger chief began to give orders, and the men dismounted and formed themselves into a camp about a hundred yards away from the Hakim's tent. Then in fairly regular order the horses and camels were led up to the water, allowed to drink, and then led away, all being done so as not to interfere with Ibrahim's train of camels, which were now pastured on the other side of the tent, to which the Hakim had returned, and where Frank, the professor, and Sam were busy replacing the various articles that had been brought out.

Here a little conference was held around the doctor, who had resumed his calm and thoughtful attitude, but who, beneath his solemn aspect, was as excited as the rest.

"Well, Frank, lad," he said, "did it go satisfactorily?"

"Of course," replied the young man; "how could it be otherwise. It was real."

"Splendid," said the professor. "Robert, old fellow, I was proud of you."

"I don't think you would have been, Fred, if you could have seen inside."

"What do you mean—not nervous?"

"I was never worse in my life. I wonder I got through it as I did. You both noticed how my hands shook."

"That I did not," said Frank warmly. "You seemed to me as firm as a rock."

"Appearances are very deceitful," said the doctor with a quaint look. "Well, I did my best for him. He was in a terrible state."

At that moment the Sheikh, who had been giving orders to his young men not to let the camels stray, rejoined them, and he gave the doctor a look full of reverence.

"It was a great, a noble cure, O Hakim," he said. "That wound was dangerous, was it not?"

"He would have been delirious by this time to-morrow, Ibrahim," said the doctor.

"Delirious?" said the Sheikh, hesitating. "Oh, yes, I know—mad."

"And blood-poisoning would have set in. Without attention he would have been a dead man before a week had passed."

"But now, O Hakim—now?"

"With care and attention to his wound he will soon recover."

"Hah! It is good. His people would have slain us if he had fallen."

"But what about now, Ibrahim?" said the professor. "He said it was peace, but will he keep his word and let us go?"

"Hah!" said the Sheikh quietly; "I think not yet. If their Excellencies look around without seeming to notice they will see that men have been placed in five places at a distance like sentries of the Khedival guard."

"To keep a look out for the approach of enemies," said Frank quickly. "Well, it is soldierly."

"It might be to keep us from stealing away," said the Sheikh drily.

"Yes, of course," said the professor. "But look here, Ibrahim, who are these likely to be?"

"One of the wandering bands of the desert, Excellency, who rob and murder all they come across."

"Pleasant neighbours!" said the doctor quietly.

"But are they likely to be connected with the Khalifa—the Mahdi, or any of that party?" said the professor.

"I think so, Excellency," replied the Sheikh. "These people travel far and wide. Perhaps this is one of the Khalifa's chiefs."

"Well, then—listen, all of you," said the professor. "If these sentries are to keep us in bounds we are prisoners, Ibrahim?"

"Yes, Excellency."

"And we shall have to go where they go, for they will never stay here."

"It is right, Excellencies."

"And you think it possible that this may be one of the new Mahdi's wandering bands?"

"Yes, Excellency; sent forth to see if the English and Egyptian forces are advancing, as well as to gather plunder."

"Then by and by they will rejoin their leader far away yonder at Omdurman or Khartoum?"

"It is most likely, Excellency."

"Then so long as they treat us decently it seems to me that nothing could have happened better," continued the professor; "they will lead us exactly where we want to go, and see that no other party takes a fancy to our heads."

"That is exactly what I thought, Excellency," said the Sheikh; "but I was afraid to speak."

"Why?" said the doctor sharply.

The old man shrugged his shoulders.

"Their Excellencies took me to be their guide, and placed themselves in my hands. They said, 'We have faith in you and your young men, who will protect us.'"

"Yes," said the doctor. "Go on."

"Well, Excellency, I have failed."

"How failed?" said the professor sharply.

"I have brought you into danger—into the hands of the enemy at once."

"Then you feel that we are prisoners?" said the doctor sternly.

"I must be truthful with those who have trusted me, Excellency. I fear that these sons of evil will not let us go."

"I'm afraid you are right, Ibrahim. No, I promised you, Frank, that I would not be afraid of anything now. I feel, then, that you are right. But look here, so long as they treat us well nothing could have happened better for us."

"Nothing, Excellency, for at some time or another we shall be brought to the heads of the invading tribes."

"And sooner or later if we tried we might escape."

"Yes, Excellency."

"Then where is the cause for fear?"

"I feared that their Excellencies would not look upon it like this," said the Sheikh humbly. "I knew that they must find out before many hours that we were prisoners, and then I felt that they would turn and reproach me for what I had done."

"When you know us better, Ibrahim," said the doctor quietly, "you will find that we are not unreasonable. Then as I see it now, *if*—I say *if* these ruffians treat us well we are on the high road to the place we seek to reach."

"Yes, O Hakim."

"But on the other hand, as we have found out this morning, everything depends upon my treatment of my patients."

"Yes, O Hakim, it is so," replied the Sheikh sadly.

"Pleasant for a weak man," said the doctor drily. "If I cure I am a prophet; if I fail—"

"You'll be a Hakim without a head, old fellow," said the professor. "Ergo, as Shakespeare says, you must not fail. It was rather a close shave, too, this morning—there, I wasn't alluding to you, Sam," he continued, turning to the man, who was looking ghastly, as he stood close by hearing every word. "There, pluck up, my lad; your master did cure this time. Well, Frank, you are silent. How do matters strike you?"

"It seems to me that we have thoroughly fallen upon our feet, and have nothing to mind."

"So long as these people use us well," said the doctor.

"Well, if they do not we have still our old plan to fall back upon. We must take to the camels and flee for our lives, even if we leave everything else behind."

"And with our task undone, Landon," said Frank bitterly.

"Who said anything about leaving our task undone? Nothing of the kind. It will only mean starting afresh, and from right up the country instead of from Cairo."

"Well," said the doctor, "as everything depends upon their treating us well, and I occupy so critical a position, I must do my best."

"Which we know you will," said the professor, "of course. But they are not likely to keep us long, are they, Ibrahim—only while their chiefs wound is bad?"

"It is impossible to say, Excellency. It is a dangerous position."

"Then if we get a chance of leaving it we must seize it. They don't seem very grateful or friendly even now."

"Your Excellency is not quite right," said the Sheikh gravely. "Behold!"

He pointed to four of the Baggara coming towards the tent, and all well laden. One bore a fine young kid, another half a dozen chickens in an open basket in one hand, while slung over his shoulder were a large bunch of bananas and a bunch of dates. The others bore each a large bag of meal.

These they set down at once at the Hakim's feet, bowing solemnly and low the while, and went off without a word.

"Come, doctor," said the professor merrily, as soon as the men were out of hearing, "you never had such a fee as that before!"

"And look at its value as a token of friendliness on our captors' behalf!" cried Frank eagerly.

"It's splendid!" said the professor. "All that payment in kind, far better than guineas out here, for medicine and attendance to one man."

"If his Excellency looks yonder," said the old Sheikh drily, "he will find that it is not for curing one wounded man. The great Hakim's fame is spreading fast."

"One, two, three, four—why, there must be over twenty patients coming, Bob!" cried the professor, looking quite aghast. "You've got to do your best now, old fellow, and no mistake. But they can't be all chiefs."

The professor was well within bounds in saying twenty, for coming slowly on, for the most part walking, but several on horse or camel, and in more than one case supported by companions, came the whole of the sick and injured of the tribe, the Hakim's treatment of their chief having brought those who had suffered during their wandering raid in the desert; and the calmness for a few moments deserted the Hakim's countenance.

But he was soon himself again, and ready for what he saw at a glance must be a long and heavy task—one that would call forth all his energies.

"It is fortunate that I am a surgeon, and not a doctor pure and simple," he said quietly, "for these seem to be all injuries received in fight. Come, Frank, Landon, our work is waiting."

"Yes," said the professor. "You, Sam, look after the commissariat department."

"The which, sir?" said the man, staring.

"Well, the provisions, and clear away—for action, eh, Frank?"

"Yes, and it's fortunate that the Hakim has had his breakfast."

Chapter Eighteen.

Stolen Food.

The Hakim, even if looked upon by the semi-savages of the desert as a prophet, was human enough to require a second meal before he had finished what to ordinary people would have been a loathsome task; but fortunately for suffering humanity the great profession of the surgeon becomes to him of such intense interest, and so full of grand problems in the fight against death, that he forgets the horrors and sees comparatively little of that which makes the unused turn half fainting away.

In this instance the Baggara chief and his followers had been for many weeks away from the main body of the invading tribes, fighting, plundering, destroying, and leaving devastation plainly marked in their locust-like track. But all this had not been accomplished without suffering and loss to the tribe. Many had perished from disease; others had been cut down in some onslaught. More had been sick or wounded and had recovered, but there was a numerous remnant of sufferers, active men who had once been strong, but now, weakened by suffering, retained just enough force to enable them to keep in their places, held up to a great extent by the cruel knowledge that if they failed ever so little more they would be left behind in a region where people, the wild beast, and Nature herself, were all combined against them. For the wounded man if found by the suffering villagers was remorselessly slaughtered; the beasts and birds soon spied out the weakling and followed him night and day till the morning when he was too much chilled by the cold night dews to rise again to tramp on in search of water or solid food; and then first one and then another rushed in from the sands, or stooped from above, to rend and tear, and soon enough all was over, and the carrion seekers had had their fill.

It was a knot of these—sick and wounded—that were led or tramped up to the front of the Hakim's tent, and there paused or were set down, a dreadful row, horrible of aspect, bandaged, unkempt, vilely dirty, feeble, and hopeless. They made no complaint, sent up no appeal, but sat or lay there gazing at the handsome, polished gentleman seated blandly before them, the mark of all those pleading, imploring eyes, silently asking him to give them back their lost health and strength.

"Look at them," said the doctor sadly; "one is bound to pity and to help, when hard, matter-of-fact self says, Why should they be helped—why should they be made strong again, to go on indulging in destruction and dealing death?"

"It's our way of doing things," said the professor.

"Yes, Heaven be praised!" replied the doctor. "No one would change it if he could."

"But," said Frank, "there is not a wounded or suffering man here who has not brought all his trouble upon himself. If he had given up the sword and spear and stayed in his own country to cultivate his own lands he would have been healthy and well."

"Of course," said the professor; "and therefore you would let the miserable wretches die out of the way?"

"Nothing of the kind," cried Frank indignantly. "They are human beings, suffering terribly, and I would do all I could to help them."

"Don't get excited," said the doctor smiling, "or you will have some of them noticing that you are not the Hakim's dumb slave. Come, our work is waiting."

It was, and they worked on hour after hour at the terrible task; but it was impossible not to see the impression the doctor made upon his savage-looking patients, who for the most part hesitated doubting and half resenting his acts; but in a few minutes to a man they resigned themselves to his influence, and when at last they crawled or were

borne away by companions, there was not one who was not ready to sing the praises of the Hakim, not from being cured, but from the change wrought by a skilful surgeon upon neglected wounds, and the sensations of rest and relief afforded by a doctor who looked upon the ailments from which the patients suffered as the simplest forms of disease, caused by neglect, and treated them accordingly.

In the Baggara camp that night there was but one theme of conversation. It was not with regard to the plunder taken in the last village that had been sacked, and the great amount of corn that it was impossible to bring away, and consequently had to be destroyed, but of the wondrous holy man—this prophet—this inspired Hakim, whose touch to the fiery, throbbing wound was softer than that of a woman, and who caused a gentle sleep to fall upon him in whose flesh that ragged bullet lay deep, or in whom the broken spear-top was rankling and stabbing at every movement, while it refused to give way to the cutting and poulticing of their own wise men.

It was wonderful, the Baggara said, and they declared that they did not care whether he was a follower of the Prophet or of any other belief; all they knew was that he was inspired; otherwise how could he make men breathe against their will and then fall into that deep sleep, suffering pain before, and then waking up how long after who could tell, with the bullet taken away, the rankling spear-point no longer imbedded in the muscle, the fever gone, and instead a cool, soft bandage and a feeling of rest.

Oh, the Hakim was a great, an inspired prophet, they said; and had one told them that this inspiration was that of science and patient search to win a knowledge of the wonders of our great creation, they would have laughed him to scorn.

On the other hand, in the Hakim's little camp of a couple of tents, there was the knowledge of some five-and-twenty men lying down to rest as they had not lain for many weary days, and that the chief was like another man, for he had been to the Hakim's tent himself, to bend low to the man of wisdom, and tell him, through the lips of Ibrahim, that the calm that had come over his spirit was marvellous, and that the wound only throbbed now and ached, but in a way that he was man enough to bear.

At this the Hakim had looked grave, and bidden him recline upon the rug outside the tent door, taking the arm in hand once more and gently unfastening the bandages before bathing and applying a soothing antiseptic application upon fresh lint to the wound, and bandaging less tightly once again.

After this the savage warrior arose, to bend with more reverence than ever over the Hakim's hand, bidding Ibrahim tell him that now he was at peace, and ask him if there was anything he needed for himself and followers.

It was after the chief had returned to his own rough tent that the discourse took a strange turn.

Naturally enough further gifts for the present had been declined on the ground that they had an ample supply of their own, to which he had made so thoughtful an addition. But now that the last sufferer had left the neighbourhood of the tent, and the Hakim and his aides had prepared themselves for their well-earned evening meal. Sam and one of the Sheikh's young men had been busy over a fire, and there was ready for the Hakim's repast one portion of the roasted kid, the other being handed over to the Sheikh's party.

The cleverly cooked and browned meat sent forth an appetising odour, the evening was cool, and the sky of a delicious hue; and spread upon a cloth upon the level sand all was ready, including the newly baked cakes, with the additional luxury of fruit—rich, golden-yellow, buttery bananas such as are not known in Europe, and the cloying but wholesome honey-flavoured date.

All looked tempting, for the cool draughts of clear water from the spring and the restful bathe had taken away the weary sensation of nauseating distaste for food consequent upon the ordeal through which the doctor and his companions had passed.

But then just as the party had taken their seats, the professor, in a grimly malicious way, proceeded to spoil the feast.

"Such a shame," he said solemnly; "that kid and the luscious fruit we are going to eat must have been plundered by these savage ruffians from some village. I don't think we shall either of us have the heart to touch a bit."

A blank silence seemed to fall upon the group, the Hakim thrusting away his knife, Frank, who half knelt behind him, as a slave should, waiting for such morsels as the Hakim might condescend to pass, darted a fierce look at the speaker, and the Sheikh, who shared their table now and was in the act of behaving, in spite of his intercourse with Europeans, in a very ungentlemanly way—for he was trying the edge of his knife—dropped it as if he had cut his thumb, and stared as angrily as Frank.

"But, Landon, old friend," said the Hakim at last, "I am hungry! Surely it is not our fault that the food was stolen—if it was."

"No, but we should be encouraging the Baggara to go on plundering if we ate these things."

"Do you think so really?" said the doctor; and then a change came over the professor's face which made Morris shake his head and attack the much needed food at once.

Chapter Nineteen.

The Emir's Son.

It was a strange experience to sit outside the tent door that night, breathing the soft moist air which seemed so different from the dry, harsh, parching wind of the desert. There was the pleasant scent of growing plants, too, rising from wherever the overflow from the fountains permeated the sand, quite unseen in the broad sunshine, but showing its effect in a blush of green which gradually grew less and less, till at a few hundred yards from the rocks and pools it died right away and all was arid barrenness once more.

Now and then a wailing howl came from a distance, to be answered here and there by the prowling animals which scented the food of the camp, and hung about waiting till the caravans had passed on to make a rush in safety for the scraps that were left, with the result that the neighbourhood of the pools and wells was found free from all refuse by the next comers.

The Hakim's party was too weary with the nervous excitement and hard labour of the past day to talk much, finding it pleasanter to sit or recline and listen to the various sounds that reached their ears from the Baggara camp or far out in the desert, till after being absent for some little time the Sheikh came softly up to the tent and waited to be questioned. He did not have to wait long, for the professor attacked him at once.

"Well, Ibrahim," he said, "what news?"

"Little, Excellency. The Baggara have sentries out all round the camp."

"And ours?"

"Yes, Excellency; we are prisoners."

"But in no danger?"

"No, Excellency. It is peace between us and the fighting men. But if they are attacked in the night or just before daybreak we are in bad company, as you would say, and we shall perish with these tribesmen if they are beaten."

"That sounds bad," said the professor. "But look here, who is likely to attack their camp?"

"Who can say, Excellency? Like the people of old, their hand is against every man, and every man's hand is against them. They are wandering about harassing villages, plundering, and making slaves. Some of the village people may take heart and join together to slay them; or the Khedive's men may hear of their being in the neighbourhood, and come from boats upon the river. There may be soldiers of your own journeying south, who, hearing from spies that a party of the Khalifa's men have come so far north, would be sure to try and scatter them like the sand before the storm."

"But, on the other hand," said the doctor quietly, "none of these things may happen, and we may sleep in peace and trust that all will be well."

"Yes, Excellency; that is what we must do always."

"Then let us sleep while we can," said the doctor. "I am very weary, and there is sure to be plenty more hard work to-morrow."

The Hakim's words were taken as law, and as there were very few preparations to make, a short time only elapsed before all were sleeping soundly, it being deemed superfluous to attempt to watch, since they were utterly helpless in the enemy's hands.

At such a time restless wakefulness might have been expected, but sleep came, deep and refreshing, out in the desert whenever they were in the neighbourhood of water. Frank lay thinking of the day's work with its risks and chances, and then of his brother far away to the south; but in about a quarter of an hour he was sleeping soundly as the rest, till hours had passed, when, as if conscious of something being near, he awoke suddenly, to find that all was dark and so still that, setting down his feelings to imagination, he sank back, with a sigh, and was dropping off to sleep again when from far away out in the desert there was the shrill neigh of a horse, and he started up again, to hear the challenge answered from where the Baggara horses and camels were picketed or lying about.

This was startling, suggesting as it did the approach of other horsemen, who might be inimical and about to attack. On the other hand, though, he reasoned that a single horse might have broken away from where it was tethered. He recalled, too, what the Sheikh had said about sentries being scattered about so that no danger could approach without an alarm being given, and he was settling down once more when, plainly enough and increasing in loudness, there came through the darkness of the night the dull, rustling trampling of horses coming at a sharp canter over the sand.

But for a minute or so there was no warning uttered—no cry of alarm. Then all at once there was a shout and a reply. Silence again, and Frank lay wondering whether this was a good or evil sign, since a sentry might have been cut down at once.

Then voices were plainly heard as of people talking loudly, and it seemed to be impossible that this could mean danger. So he lay still, making out by degrees that a large body of horsemen had ridden up, and from the talking that went on there seemed to be no doubt that earlier in the night this party must have gone out upon a reconnaissance while the Sheikh's party slept, and that this was their return.

Certainly there was no danger, for by degrees the various sounds died out, and all was still.

Frank's eyes closed once more, and his next awakening was at broad day, to find that a fire was burning and that Sam and his help from the camel-drivers were busy preparing for the morning meal, while the Sheikh and his men

were as busy seeing to the camels, after being in doubt as to whether they would be there.

But there had been no interference with anything belonging to the Hakim's party, and the old man was evidently fairly contented in mind as he made his report about what he knew of the night's proceedings.

His first and most important announcement was that the Baggara chiefs force had been nearly doubled during the night, it seeming probable that the water-holes had been made the place of meeting for a divided force. The question that troubled the party now was whether the newcomers would prove well disposed; but they were not long left in doubt, for quite early in the morning the Baggara chief made his appearance for his wound to be dressed, and smiled with satisfaction at the change in its state.

"Tell the Hakim," he said, "that he is great, and that he can stay here to rest his camels till to-morrow, and then he shall come with us."

This was as he was about to leave the Hakim's presence, with his injured arm resting comfortably in its sling, and he turned away at once.

"*Nolens volens*, Frank," said the professor; "but so far nothing could be better for us. Look here, another present."

For three men were approaching with a kid, dates, and bananas, and in addition one of them bore a handsome large rug, evidently intended for the Hakim's use.

The men approached with the same deference that they had displayed on the previous day, and then departed; but before they were half over the space which divided the two camps, a party of five men were seen approaching, one of whom was mounted upon a cream-coloured horse, two others supporting him as he swayed to and fro, apparently quite unable to retain his seat.

It was the *avant-garde* of the patients the Hakim was to treat that day, and coming as it did on the Baggara chiefs announcement that they were to accompany him the next morning, quite settled what, for at all events the present, was to be their position in connection with the force.

"You are to be surgeon in chief to the tribe, Robert," said the professor merrily, "so you had better make the best of it."

The doctor did not pause to reply, but gravely prepared to receive the fresh patient, shaking his head solemnly at Frank the while.

"It looks bad," he said. "The poor fellow seems to be beyond help."

The Baggara appeared to be a finely built, manly young fellow as he was allowed to subside into his followers' arms, and then borne to where the Hakim waited. There they laid him upon a rug which Frank dragged ready for his reception, to leave their burden lying flat upon his back, while the bearers drew back, but the horse advanced, to lower its soft muzzle and sniff at its rider's face, before raising its head and uttering a shrill neigh.

The four men stood looking at the Hakim, as much as to say, "He is dead, but you must bring him to life."

The doctor's broad white brow was as a rule wonderfully free from lines, but as Frank glanced at him it was to see them gather now as straight and regular almost as if they had been ruled, from his eyebrows high up to where the hair had been shorn away.

But no time was wasted, and no search was needed. The young chief—for such he seemed to be—had received a terrible thrust from a spear just below the collar-bone, and to all appearance he had bled to death.

But as the doctor busily did what was necessary to the frightful wound, a slight quivering about the eyelids announced that life still lingered, and as the busy hands checked all further effusion and administered a restorative, the failing spirit's flight was for the time being stayed, though whether this would be permanent was more than the Hakim dared to say.

"He must have been bleeding all the night," the doctor said, "and jolting about on a horse. The man's constitution is wonderful, or he would have died long before now."

"Can you save him?" asked the professor.

"I fear not, but I'll do all I can. Ask the men how this happened, Ibrahim."

The information was soon obtained.

"It was in a skirmish, Hakim, a day's journey from here. The men who joined us last night came in contact with a body of mounted men armed with spears, and from their description they seem to have been English troops. Many of the Baggara were killed, others wounded, and this man, their leader, was as you see. He will die, Excellency, will he not?"

"It all depends on the way in which he is treated," replied the doctor. "He is in a dying state, but no dangerous part is touched. I may save his life."

"It would be a miracle, Excellency," said the Sheikh slowly. "Look: there is a dark cloud coming over his face."

"No," said the doctor gravely; "that is because the spirit in him is so low. He is falling into a sleep that is almost

death, but he still lives. Tell these men that he is not to be moved, and that their chief must send a tent here to place over him. Let two of your men come now to spread a cloth above him to keep off the sun until the tent is set up."

The message was given, and the men hurried away to rejoin their people, while in a very few minutes the Baggara chief and his companion appeared, walking hurriedly, and made their way to the side of the wounded man, to look at him anxiously and as if his condition was a great trouble to them, the elder going down on one knee to lay a hand upon the sufferer's brow.

The next minute he was up again, and the two chiefs were chatting hurriedly together, before the elder turned to Ibrahim and spoke earnestly, his voice sounding hoarse and changed.

"O Hakim," said the Sheikh, "he says that this is his son, whom he loves, and it will be like robbing him of his own life if the boy dies. He says that you must not let him sink. Sooner let all the wounded men who are coming to you die than this one. You must make him live, and all that the chief has is thine."

"How can I make the man live?" said the Hakim sternly, and frowning at the chief as he spoke to the interpreter. "Has not all his life-blood been spilled upon the sand as they brought him here? Tell him at once that I am not a prophet, only a simple surgeon; that I have done all that is possible, and that the rest is with God."

The Sheikh reverently translated the Hakim's words to the Baggara chief, and those who heard him fully expected to hear some angry outburst; but the chief bent humbly before the Hakim and touched his hand.

In a short time, under the Baggara chief's supervision, a tent was set up over the wounded man, and by then two large groups of patients were waiting patiently for the Hakim's ministrations—those whom he had tended on the previous day, and about a dozen wounded men who had come in during the night.

It was a new class of practice for the London practitioner, however familiar it might have been to the surgeon of a regiment on active service; but wounds are wounds, whether received in the everyday life of a mechanic who has injured himself with his tools or been crushed by machinery, or caused by shot, sword, and spear. So the Hakim toiled away hour after hour till his last patient had left the space in front of his tent and he had leisure to re-examine the chief's son, the father looking anxiously on in spite of an assumed sternness, and waiting till the keen-eyed surgeon rose from one knee.

"Tell him," said the Hakim gravely, "that it will be days before the young chief can be moved."

The words were interpreted, and the chief seemed to forget his own injury as he said in an angry tone that the little force must start at daybreak the next morning.

"Then the young man will die," said the Hakim coldly.

Ibrahim again interpreted, and the chief suggested that a camel litter should be prepared.

But the Hakim shook his head.

"Can't you give way?" said the professor softly. "A fairly easy couch could be made."

"The man will certainly die if he is moved to-morrow," replied Morris sternly, "and if I lose a patient now a great deal of my prestige goes with him."

"Yes, I know," said the professor; "but we are making an enemy instead of a friend; this man is not in the habit of having his will crossed."

"We shall lose his friendship all the same," said the doctor, "if his son dies in my hands. I can save his life if he is left to me."

"Dare you say that for certain?"

The doctor was silent for a few minutes, during which he bent over his patient again, took his temperature, and examined the pupils of his eyes, and at last rose up and stepped from beneath the shade of the rough little tent.

"Yes," he said; "I can say, I think for certain, that I will save his life if he is left to me."

"What does the wise Hakim say?" asked the Baggara of Ibrahim; and the question was interpreted to the doctor.

"Tell him, No! That his son must not stir if he is to live. If he is left for say a week all may be well."

There was no outburst of anger upon the interpretation of these words, the Baggara hearing them to the end and then walking away, frowning and stern, without once looking back.

About an hour later some half-dozen men came up leading a couple of camels laden with a larger tent and other gear. This was set up a short distance from the small one in which the young chief lay, and soon after it was done the chief rode up once more to see his son, looking anxious and careworn upon seeing the young man lying apparently unchanged.

The Baggara went away without a word to the Hakim, but signed to the Sheikh to follow him.

Meanwhile the rest of the sufferers came or were carried to take their turn before their surgeon, who was busy with his two aides, easing bandages, and where necessary redressing the wounds; while to the professor's surprise two of them, instead of being carried or supported away by their comrades were helped into the large tent.

In all seven were placed there, and just as the long line of sufferers had been gone through, the Sheikh returned and said that the chief's orders were that the worst sufferers were to stay at the tent so as to be under the Hakim's eye.

The doctor's was evidently to be no sinecure appointment, but he took it quite complacently, giving a few orders for the comfort of his staying patients, and without further incident the night fell, when a small hand-lamp was placed in the little tent, and the doctor announced that he was going to watch beside the young chief for the night.

Accordingly a rug was placed for him, as well as such requisites as might be needed for his patient, and saying good-night, and refusing all offers to share his vigil, the doctor glanced inside the larger tent to see that all was going on right there, and then stood in the open for a few minutes to breathe the cool night air and listen to the low murmur going on in the camp, before entering the smaller tent and starting slightly.

"You here, Frank?" he said quickly.

"Yes, I am going to share your watch."

"There is no need, my dear boy," said the doctor warmly. "Go and get a good night's rest. You must be tired."

"I have not done half the work you have," was the reply, and after a little further argument the doctor gave way, and the watch was commenced, first one and then the other taking the lamp to bend over the insensible man, and make sure that he was breathing still.

It was about an hour after midnight that Frank's turn had come, and as he had done some three times before, he took the lamp from where it stood, shaded from the sufferer's eyes, and went behind him, to kneel down and watch for the feeble pulsation, breathing deeply himself with satisfaction as he found that the respiration still went on, when as he rose, lamp in hand he nearly let it fall on finding himself face to face with a tall figure in white robes, who looked at him sternly, took the lamp from his hand, and bent over in turn.

Frank neither spoke nor moved, but drew back a little, watching the face of the Baggara chief as the light struck full upon the swarthy, aquiline features for a few minutes, before the visitor rose and handed back the lamp, gazing full in the young man's eyes. Then, thrusting his hand into his waist scarf, he freed the sheath of a handsome dagger from the folds, and without a word handed it to Frank, motioning him to place it in his own belt, after which he went silently out of the tent, vanishing like a shadow.

Frank stood motionless for a few minutes before setting down the lamp, and he was about to return to his place when the doctor's voice said softly—

"Well, Frank, how is he?"

"Just the same," replied Frank. "You heard the chief come in, of course?"

"The Baggara? No; surely he has not been again?"

"Yes; looked at his son, and went away a few minutes ago. Were you asleep?"

"No, I think not—I am sure not," said the doctor. "I turned my face away from the light when I lay down; but I heard you rise, and saw the movement of the lamp over the tent side when you took it up, and again when you set it down. Well, I am not sorry that he has been. It shows that even such a savage chief as this—one who lives by rapine and violence—has his natural feelings hidden somewhere in his heart."

The pair were silent for some little time, and then the doctor rose to look at his patient in turn.

"These are the anxious hours, Frank," he said, "before daylight comes. Much depends on our getting well through the next two. If the poor fellow is alive at sunrise I shall feel quite satisfied that he will recover; but if he does it will be by a very narrow way."

The pair sat then and listened and watched, with the patient still breathing slowly and softly, seeming very calm at last when the first faint dawn appeared; and soon after the doorway was shaded by the Sheikh.

"How is he, Excellencies?" he said in a whisper.

"He will live, Ibrahim," replied the doctor. "Come and watch now while we go to my tent and snatch a few hours' rest."

"I have some coffee ready for you, Excellency," whispered the old man. "You will take that first?"

"Yes, it will be very welcome," said the doctor.

"I suppose you heard them go?" said the Sheikh, as they stepped out into the soft grey light. "Go? Heard whom go?" said Frank quickly.

"The Baggara," replied the Sheikh. "About two hours ago."

"No!" said the doctor. "Not a sound."

"They have all gone, Excellency, excepting the wounded in the next tent and twelve mounted men who are stationed round to act, I suppose, as a guard."

"But they will come back?"

"I cannot say, Excellency," replied the old man; "I only know that they have gone."

"And fold their tents like the Arabs," said Frank softly to himself, "'and as silently steal away.'"

Chapter Twenty.

Prisoners Indeed.

Before the sun rose Frank's rescue party fully realised their position—that they were prisoners, guarded by about twenty of the Baggara chief's followers, and in charge of a temporary hospital, with the leader's son as the principal patient.

"We must look our trouble, if trouble it is, straight in the face, Frank, my lad," said the professor, "and hope all will turn out for the best."

"Yes," replied Frank, with a sigh; "but of course we cannot stir from here, and the time is going so fast."

"But we reckoned upon meeting with obstacles, and this one may prove to be a help in the end."

"I hope so," said the young man despondently, his manner seeming to belie his words. "But what about the future—I mean when these men need no more attention?"

"My idea of the future is that the chief has gone with his men upon some raid already arranged, and that we shall have them back before long."

"Yes," said Frank, "he is sure to return on account of his son. Then we must wait."

"Yes, and as patiently as we can, my lad."

"And have as good an account to give the father as we can on his return," said the doctor, who had been listening in silence. "It is very trying, Frank, to be checked like this, and so soon; but one thing is certain, the Baggara chief means to keep us to attend to his wounded, and this being a warlike excursion it will sooner or later come to an end, and we shall be taken pretty swiftly in the direction we want to go."

"I'll try to think as you do," said Frank sadly, "and murmur as little as I can."

"Fortunately we shall have very little time for brooding over our troubles," said the doctor, "for I can see nothing but hard work for days to come."

"Yes," said the professor grimly; "you are getting far more professional duty, though, than we bargained for."

As the day wore on there was little change visible in the young chief, who seemed to be alive, and that was all; but the Hakim was satisfied, and the other patients had certainly improved.

The Sheikh reported having talked to the head of their guard, but he was far from communicative. He would not say anything about his chief's proceedings, nor even allow that he would return, but told the Arab sternly that no one must stir from the little camp; at the same time, though, he showed Ibrahim that he was left with a supply of provisions for many days to come, and that he was ready to furnish the Hakim's party with meat and corn.

"Then we must wait, Ibrahim," said Frank wearily.

"Yes, Excellency," replied the old man, "and have patience. These people have it in their power to turn us back, or make slaves and prisoners of us; while if we resist—well, Excellency, I need not tell you what would come. They are masters, and if a servant does not do their bidding, the sand drinks up his blood, and he is no more. They look upon us now, though, as their friends, and sooner or later the Baggara chief will return, if he does not encounter some of the English troops and have his people scattered."

"Which is hardly likely yet," said the professor decisively.

"No, Excellency, not yet; and I feel sure that after he has swept the country round of everything worth taking he will retreat south."

"Where?" said Frank quickly.

"There are but two places at all likely, Excellency," replied the old man; "Omdurman and Khartoum, one of which will be the headquarters of the new Mahdi's force, and that is where you wish to be."

As had been said, there was too much to do for the English party to have much time for brooding. The Hakim was deeply interested in his patients, forgetting everything in the brave fight he made to save every life; and Frank strove manfully to hide the heart-sickness and despair which attacked him as he worked away over what soon settled down into field hospital work, being conscious all the while that he and his friends were carefully watched, but not in a troublesome way, for the Baggara guard had formed a little camp of their own and kept rigorously to themselves, their duty being to mount guard night and day and see that the prisoners and patients were supplied with all that was needed.

And so the time glided by, with Frank daily growing more careworn and silent. He did not even revert to the object of their journey unless it was mentioned by his companions, but worked away, helping the doctor, and having the satisfaction of seeing first one poor helpless wreck become convalescent and then another. For there was no shirking or making the worst of wounds or sickness, the men being only too ready to leave the hospital tent with its occupants, so as to join the guard in their little camp.

Consequently as the days sped quickly by the number of patients rapidly decreased, while the principal sufferer, after lying as if between life and death for a week, began to mend, his terrible wound healing rapidly, and signs of returning strength gradually appearing.

At first he lay quiet and sullen, submitting to all that was done for him, watching the Hakim with what appeared to be a suspicious dread, for his mind did not seem to grasp the possibility of this Frankish physician wishing to save his life. He scowled, too, at the professor, and at first gave the dumb, black slave Frank fierce looks whenever in his ministrations he approached and touched him. But during the course of the second week, as his strength began to return, he appeared more grateful, and once or twice smiled and nodded after being lifted or fed, or having his position changed.

One day when the Sheikh came to the tent the patient began to speak, and asked him questions about the Hakim—why he was there, and what payment he would require for all he had done; and looked surprised when told that the learned Frankish physician did everything for the sake of doing good.

It was a problem that lasted him till the next day, when he signed for something, and the professor found that they could make one another comprehend after a fashion, enough for the Englishman to grasp that the wounded man wanted Ibrahim, who was summoned.

It was for a mere trifle. He wanted to question him about Frank—how he came to be the Hakim's slave, and why he could not speak, the old Arab making up the best explanation he could over the first, and referring to the professor for an explanation as to the latter, the young chief being evidently under the impression, and bluntly expressing the belief, that the Hakim had cut out the young slave's tongue so that he should not reveal any of the secrets of the magic by whose means he performed his cures.

There being visible proof afforded, to Frank's disgust, that the Hakim had not treated his slave in this barbarous way, the young chief felt certain that the silence was the result of some magic spell, and he began to display a certain amount of pity for the young man, and lay and watched him curiously.

From that day Frank found that he was an object of interest to the young chief, who noted every movement with a sort of pitying contempt, while at the same time, in spite of the result of the Hakim's ministrations, he displayed an unconcealed dislike for him that was manifested in morose looks and more than one angry scowl.

This was talked over when the friends were alone, and the doctor smiled.

"It does not matter," he said. "I shall not be jealous, Frank. It is all plain enough to read. The poor fellow is weak as a child mentally as well as bodily, and I expect that as soon as he gets better he will be offering you your freedom from the cruel slavery to which you have been reduced."

"Yes, that's it," said the professor, laughing; "but don't you listen to the voice of the charmer, my boy. There is an old proverb about jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire."

"It may all work for good," said the doctor, "and there is no harm in making a friend; but it is of no use to try and foresee what will happen. A sick man's fancies are very evanescent. Go on as you have done all through. One thing is very evident: he is mending fast, and can be moved when his father returns."

"If he ever does," said the professor drily. "The lives of these fighting men are rather precarious, and if we never see him again I shall not be surprised."

Another week glided by, and the large tent was taken down by the Baggara guard and set up again in their own camp, for the last of the Hakim's patients had expressed a wish to join his fellows, though far from being in a condition to leave, so that the young chief was the only sufferer left, while he was now sufficiently recovered to watch what went on around. But for the most part his eyes were fixed upon the desert, his gaze bespeaking the expectation of his father's return, though he never suggested it in his brief conversations with the Sheikh—brief from their difficulty, the old Arab confessing his inability to understand much that was said.

But if the young chief was watching in that expectation he fixed his eyes upon the distant horizon in vain. The clouds appeared every morning, to hang for hours in the east along the course of the far-off river, and then die away in the glowing sunshine, while to north and south and west there was the shimmering haze of heat playing above the sand, till Frank began to be in despair.

Chapter Twenty One.

For a Fresh Start.

One evening after the young chief had lain watching the desert in vain he signed for the Sheikh to come to him, and in a stronger voice bade him fetch the leader of the men left on guard.

The man came, and a conversation ensued, the result of which was that the Baggara went away to join his companions, with whom a long consultation was held, followed by certain unmistakable movements which brought

the Sheikh to his friends.

"They are going to march," he said. "Their tents are being struck, and everyone is preparing. I saw four men seeing to the water-skins; others are packing, and soon after midnight they will leave."

"And what about the young chief? He is not fit to go, eh, doctor?"

"Unless he is carried," was the reply.

The Sheikh smiled.

"They are preparing a camel for him so that he can share it with one of the wounded men—a litter such as they use for the women. They can almost lie, one on either side, Excellencies. I expect that they will say nothing, but that we shall wake in the morning and find that we are alone."

The Sheikh had hardly spoken when the party saw the head of the Baggara guard approaching.

As the man came within reach he signed to the Sheikh to join him, and his words were very few before he turned upon his heel and strode away.

"What does this mean, Ibrahim?" said Frank. "Did he tell you that they are going?"

"Our tents are to be struck, Excellency, and everything loaded upon our camels before daylight."

"Ah!" said Frank eagerly; "to march to the south?"

"Yes, Excellency. His orders from the chief were that if he did not return in the number of days now passed we were to be taken south."

"Whereto?"

"Omdurman, Excellency. He has been waiting for the young chiefs speaking to say that he was strong enough to go. The time was past the day before yesterday. The young man told him an hour ago that he could bear it now."

"Then the suspense is over!" cried Frank eagerly.

"Mind, Excellency!" said the Sheikh, laying his hand upon the young man's arm; "the young man is trying to look round this way. He must not see your lips moving, nor hear you speak."

It was a slip on Frank's part, but the young chief did not seem to have noticed anything, and mentally resolving to be more careful the speaker drew back a little as if waiting for orders.

"Yes," said the professor; "the suspense is over, and we are once more about to start. This time it will be direct to our goal."

"But how is it the Baggara chief has not returned, Ibrahim?" said the doctor gravely.

"Who can say, Excellency?" replied the old Sheikh, with a shrug of the shoulders. "He took his young men on what you English people call a raid—to kill and plunder, and perhaps, as his son did, he has met with a stronger force. Instead of sweeping away he has perhaps been with his people swept from the face of the earth. He may have been only driven aside from his path, but there must have been some serious encounter, or he would have returned, for he showed us that he loved his son."

"Going?" said the professor, for the Sheikh drew back.

"Yes, Excellency; I must see that our preparations are made. My young men must be ready. You will give orders for your baggage to be packed, and before the time for starting my people shall bring up the camels and load them. The tent can stand till an hour before the time, and you will all doubtless lie down and rest."

"No," said the professor; "it would be driving things too close. Send your young men to strike the tent, and we will have everything ready for the camels. We should none of us sleep, and if we have any time to spare it will be pleasant enough to lie down on the sand. One minute: have you any idea which way we shall go?"

"I do not quite know," said the old Arab. "I asked the men, but they shook their heads. It will not be by the regular caravan track."

"How do you know that?" asked the doctor.

"Because, Excellency, there is water nearly as good as this at the end of the day's journey."

"Well? What of that?"

"These men must know the tracks as well as I do, Excellencies—perhaps better. If they were going by the regular road they would know that we should reach the wells."

"I see," said the professor, nodding his head; "and they are filling water-skins?"

"Yes, Excellency, and I am told to do the same."

"Then we are going to strike right out into the desert, of course."

"Yes, Excellency, to take the shortest ways; and it looks like flight."

That evening the Hakim visited his one patient, and found him making excellent progress; but the young chief made no attempt to communicate the change that was to take place, contenting himself with bowing his head slowly by way of thanks, and then closing his eyes and turning away his head. He made signs to Frank, though, soon after, to bring him water, and the latter noted at once that the young man's eyes looked pained and anxious, and that his brow was a good deal lined. And it was plain enough to read the meaning of the anxious glances northward which he kept on giving, as if hoping against hope that the delay was not serious.

But there was not a sign upon the distant horizon, though the air was cool and clear, so that the sky-line where the sandy sea joined the air was perfectly distinct, till night closed in over a busy scene, for the men of both parties were working hard packing and preparing. The two rows of camels crouched munching away contentedly after being watered, and as their loads were finished each was placed near the camel which was to be its bearer, and glanced at by the animals as if they quite understood.

This took the attention of Sam, who seized the instant when he was making the final arrangement with Frank over the Hakim's leather cases, once more carefully packed, to whisper a few remarks.

"They seem rum things, don't they, sir? Just look at that one how he keeps turning and rolling his eyes at these two long portmanteaus! Don't you tell me that they don't understand, because I feel sure that they do. That big, strong fellow's saying as plainly as he can, 'For two pins I'd bolt off into the desert and strike against that load, only it would be no good; they'd fetch me back; and I don't like leaving my mates.'"

"Well, there is a peculiarly intelligent look about the beast certainly, Sam," said Frank, smiling.

"Telligent, sir? I should think there is! Look how he keeps on licking his lips and leering at us now and then. Beautiful and patient, too. Why, he's quite smiling at us, and as soon as they begin to hang his load upon his beautiful humpy back he'll begin moaning and groaning and sighing as if there never was such an ill-used animal before. Oh, they're queer beasts, and no mistake. I'd like to drive that fellow; that's what I should like to do. He'd taste the whip more than once."

"Why?" asked Frank, for Sam stopped short and looked at him as much as to say, "Ask me."

"Because, as the people say, I've got my knife into him, and I want to pay him."

"Well, go on," said Frank. "I am waiting to hear your reasons."

"Because he's an ugly, supercilious, contemptuous, sneering, ill-behaved brute, sir. Last time I went near him he called me names—a dog of a white nigger, or something of that kind. I can't say exactly what."

"Absurd!"

"Oh, but he did, sir, in his language, which of course I could not understand; but he did something insulting which I could. For there was no doubt about that—he spat at me, sir—regularly spat at me, and then snarled as much as to say, 'Take that! You come within reach, and I'll bite you!'"

"They're not pleasant creatures," said Frank quietly, glancing round.

"No, sir, they're not, indeed; and that isn't the worst of it."

"Then what is?"

"Why, this, sir: instead of going comfortably to one's night's rest, I've got to mount one of the ugly, sneering brutes, and he'll play at see-saw with me and make me as miserable as he can, turning my poor back into a sort of hinge. Ugh! I haven't forgotten my last dose."

"Don't talk to me any more," said Frank, in a low tone of voice; "here are some of the other men coming."

"To take down the patients' tent, I suppose, sir."

Frank made no reply, but Sam was right, for they quickly and quietly lowered and folded the young chiefs tent, leaving him only a rug to lie upon, after placing the tent ready to be fetched by one of their camels.

Seeing this, Frank went to where the weak, helpless man lay exposed to the cool night air and turned one side of the rich rug gently over him, receiving for thanks a gentle tap or two upon the arm.

"I was going across to do that, Frank," said the doctor, as the young man returned to his own party. "It is not good for him to be exposed like this, but these people are so accustomed to the desert life that they bear with impunity what would kill an ordinary Englishman."

"How much longer have we to wait, Ibrahim?" asked the professor.

"We shall begin loading in less than an hour, Excellency," replied the Sheikh, "so as to have plenty of time."

"Is everything packed?"

"Yes, Excellency."

“Nothing forgotten?”

“I have been over the baggage twice, Excellency, and nothing has been left; the camels are all in beautiful condition, and there is an ample supply of water, for I have had four extra skins filled. We may want it, for the journey tomorrow will be over the hot, fine sand. I daresay, though, we shall halt for a few hours in the middle of the day.”

Soon after there was the busy sound of loading going on, the soft silence of the night being broken by the querulous moaning and complaining of the camels as burden after burden was balanced across their backs, the uncanny noise sounding weird and strange, the weirdness applying, too, to the dimly seen, long-necked creatures, which rapidly grew into shapeless monsters writhing their long necks and snaky heads as seen in the darkness, till they looked like nothing so much as the strange fancies indistinctly seen in some feverish dream.

So well had the preparations been made that an hour amply sufficed for the loading up, and at the end of that time the two troops of camels were standing, each with its own drivers, a short distance apart, and nothing remained but for those who rode to mount and the order to be given for the start.

It was just then that a tall, dark object, the one for which the doctor had been anxiously looking, loomed up from the Baggara camp and stalked silently up to where the Baggara chief's son lay waiting upon his rug.

As it reached his side, attended by two men, the great camel was stopped, and its load was more plainly to be seen, shaping itself into a couple of rudely made, elongated panniers, out of one of which, while it was held, a man leapt lightly out, the other being occupied by one of the weakest of the wounded.

The doctor and Frank then superintended the lifting in of the chief's son, who bore the movement without a sigh, and the great camel, after the rug had been laid across like a form of housing, was led back to its fellows, some twenty yards away.

Then from out of the darkness an order rang out, and the waiting camels were mounted, after which there was the snorting of horses, and half a dozen graceful creatures trotted by to take the lead as advance guard, the troop waiting till they were a little distance ahead. At last the shadowy looking line of camels, horses, and men were awaiting the order to start, for some reason unaccountably delayed, when suddenly the Sheikh laid his hand upon Frank's arm.

“Hark!” he whispered excitedly. “Listen! Do you not hear?”

Frank shook his head.

“It is quite plain,” continued the Sheikh. “Horses—the trampling of many men. Keep close together, Excellencies, while I warn my people.”

“Warn them of what?” said the doctor calmly.

“Danger, Excellency. These may be friends coming, but it may mean an attack or the coming of strangers. If it is either of the latter I shall try to lead you all into safety. So at a word follow me at once straight away into the desert. We may be able to escape.”

The Sheikh's camel glided silently away into the darkness, and the party sat straining their sense of hearing to the utmost, making out plainly enough now the dull sound of trampling hoofs, the jingling of trappings, and every now and then an angry snort or squeal as some ill-tempered beast resented the too near approach of one of its own kind.

Then all at once, as the sounds came nearer, there was heard plainly enough the muttering, whining cry of a camel, followed by more and more proofs than that the coming party was one of greater strength than it had seemed to be at first.

Just then the Sheikh came back out of the darkness, to halt his camel close up by the professor's.

“It is not English cavalry, Excellencies,” he said, “but a native force. I think it must be the Baggara chief and his men returned.”

At that moment a peculiar cry rang out from a couple of hundred yards or so away—a weird, strange whoop that might have come from some night bird sweeping through the darkness overhead.

But it was human, and answered directly by the Baggara train close at hand, and directly after there was a loud shout, and a crowd of horsemen galloped up out of the mysterious-looking gloom, to mingle with the party about to start on their desert ride.

Chapter Twenty Two.

Nearing the Goal.

It was more from hearing than seeing that Frank Frere gathered the fact that the Baggara chief had returned, for after a short pause the camel train was once more in motion, and they were ordered to keep steadily in line in the advance to the desert in the opposite direction to that by which the newcomers had arrived.

At first the two parties formed the train alone, for the fresh arrivals had halted to water their horses and camels, quite an hour passing before the sound of approaching horsemen announced that the whole force was in motion,

overtaking them at a sharp canter, but only to subside directly into the regular, slow camel pace, which was kept on hour after hour till the dawn, when, looking back, Frank made out that the train extended for nearly half a mile to the rear, being made up of a long line of camels, followed by a troop of many horsemen.

It was nearly all surmise, but judging from the number of camels, which were certainly double those that the Baggara had before during their stay by the fountains, they had been engaged in some successful foray, for as the light grew stronger the baggage animals seemed to be very heavily laden.

This idea naturally suggested that the wild horsemen had been engaged in some desperate encounter, and half laughingly the professor bantered his friends about their prospects.

"It means a revival of professional practice for you," he said, "and that looks prosperous. You only lost your last patient a few hours ago—that is, if you have lost him—and now a score or two will come tumbling in."

"Very well," said the doctor coolly; "it shows that they approve of my treatment. I suppose we shall know at the first halt."

This was many hours in coming, for a long, monotonous march was made right away to the south-west, with the pile of rocks they had left gradually sinking till quite out of sight, and then, with the sun growing hotter and hotter, there was nothing visible on any side but the long, level stretch of sand.

The halt was not made till near midday, when the heat had become unbearable, and horses and camels were growing sluggish, and showed plenty of indications of the need of whip and spur.

Then, apparently without orders, the little knot of horsemen, led by the Baggara who had had charge of the prisoners, drew up short and faced round, when taking them as the extreme limit the rest of the train formed themselves up into a well ordered group as they came on, till, with the Sheikh's party and their guards as a kind of centre, and the camels with their loads behind, the horsemen closed them in as if for strategic reasons, and for the next half hour there was a busy scene, the camels being relieved of their loads as if the stay were to be of some hours' length.

This was evidently intended, for fires were lit and food was prepared, many of the horsemen after picketing their horses settling down at once to coffee and pipes.

It was while Frank and his friends were partaking of an *al fresco* lunch, hastily prepared by Sam, that they had their first intimation of the Baggara chief being with the horsemen, for he cantered up to their temporary camp in company with his fierce-looking companion, leaped from his horse, and walked up to the Hakim at once, to give him a smile of recognition and hold out his left arm, which he tapped vigorously as if saying: "Look! Quite well again." Then turning round to the Sheikh he signed to him to approach, and said a few words hastily, before nodding to the Hakim again, returning to his horse, mounting, and cantering away.

"Well, Ibrahim," said the professor; "what does it mean?"

"That the chief's arm will soon be well; that the young chief his son will soon be well; and that the great Hakim and his slaves are to have no fear, for the Baggara are their friends."

"Yes, and mean to keep the Hakim and his slaves as prisoners as long as there are any cripples to cure," said the professor merrily.

"I suppose that is what it means," said the doctor quietly.

"That's it, sure enough," said the professor; "and we shall reach Khartoum, Frank, in half the time we should have managed it in if we had been left to ourselves."

Frank shook his head sadly.

"What! you doubt?" cried the professor. "Here, Ibrahim, what do you say to that?"

"His Excellency is quite right," replied the Sheikh. "We should have had to wander here and there, and have met with many hindrances by having to stay to perform cures of the sick people. Yes, it would have been a journey of many weary months."

"It will take much time now," said the professor, "but it looks as if we were really bound due south."

"I suppose there is a party of wounded men on the way?" said the doctor.

"Yes, they follow the chief's visits," said the professor. "My word! learned one, your post is going to be no sinecure. Hah! here comes the first instalment."

For a roughly contrived litter was seen approaching, and directly after the chief's son was borne up to them by four of his followers and set down in front of the doctor, who attended to his patient, finding him no worse for his journey.

He was carried away again as soon as the Hakim had seen that his wound was healing well, and the arrival of the newly injured was expected; but none appeared, for the simple reason that the fresh tale of wounded was only imaginary, the Baggara chief, as was afterwards learned, having been successful in obtaining a large amount of plunder and many camels in his first raid after leaving the prisoners at the wells. These he had despatched under a small escort while he made for another village which had been marked down. Here, however, he met with a severe reverse, his men having to gallop for their lives, leaving their dead and wounded behind.

Hence it was, then, that the Hakim's burden became light for the rest of the march, which was continued day after day, week after week, till so slow was the progress that months had passed and the despair in Frank's soul grew deeper.

The party were well treated, and won the respect of the whole force from the many kindly acts they were able to perform. For sickness was more than once a deadly foe which had to be fought, while help was often required after occasional raids made during the journey, in which the desperate dwellers in village or camp fought hard and mostly in vain for their lives and property, as well as to save those whom they held dear from being carried off as slaves.

"It is horrible!" Frank used to say. "These tribes are like a pestilence passing through the land. The atrocities of which they are guilty are a hundred times worse than I could have believed. There can never be rest for the unfortunate inhabitants till they are swept away."

"Never," said the professor gravely. "The land will soon be one wide desolation, for the smiling oases where irrigation could do its part will soon be gone back to a waste of sand."

"And by the irony of fate," continued Frank bitterly, "here are we—so many English people, whose hearts bleed for the horrors we are forced to see—doing our best afterwards to restore to health and strength the wretches who have robbed and murdered in every peaceful village they have passed."

He looked, and spoke, at the Hakim, as these utterances passed his lips, and his brother's old school-fellow shook his head at him reproachfully.

"Don't blame me, Frank, my lad," he said. "I often think as you do, and it is only by looking upon the wounded men brought in as patients that I can get on with my task. Then the interest in my profession helps me, and I forget all about what they may have done. But I get very weary of it all sometimes."

"Weary, yes!" cried Frank; "but you must forgive me. It was all my doing, and I must be half mad to speak to you as I did."

"You are both forgetting why we came," said the professor quietly; "and between ourselves, you two, isn't it rather childish to talk as you do?"

"I don't know," said Frank impatiently; "all I can feel is that we seem as far from helping poor Hal as ever."

"Oh, no, we are not," said the professor. "We must be getting very near to the Khalifa's strongholds now, and we are going to enter with pass-keys, my lad. Once there, it will be hard if we don't find poor old Hal."

"Hard indeed," said the doctor, with energy; "but we must and will."

"Well said!" continued the professor. "I think we have done wonders. Such good fortune can never have fallen to anyone before."

"Good fortune!" said Frank bitterly.

"Ah, you want your pulse felt, young fellow. You've got a sour instead of a thankful fit upon you. Give him something to-night, doctor."

Morris bowed his head solemnly, as if he were playing Hakim still to his friends, and Frank made an angry gesture.

"Look here," continued the professor; "you can ask old Ibrahim again if you are in doubt. He'll tell you that it would have been impossible to have got on at such a rate as we have come, and that the difficulties over supplies would have been insurmountable at times. While here, though we have often been scarce of water, we have never wanted once for food."

"And how has it been obtained?" said Frank bitterly.

"I don't know—I don't want to know."

"You do know!" cried Frank angrily.

"I tell you I won't know!" said the professor, almost as shortly. "I know that we have done nothing but good all the way—that we could not have done it without food—and that it was given to us in payment for what we have done. Be sensible, my lad. We did not let loose these murderous human beasts who have made us prisoners, and whether we eat or starve ourselves it will make no difference to their actions. Go on eating, then? Why, of course we do. You talk as if it were our mission as Christians when we came upon a wounded man to put him out of his misery."

"No, no!" cried Frank.

"But you and Bob Morris seem to think so. You can't take one of his bottles of hydrocyanic acid and pour it into one of the desert wells, and then call the whole band up to drink, can you?"

"Don't talk nonsense, Landon!" said Frank angrily.

"Then don't you, my dear boy. Can't you see that this is all outside of our plans?"

"Yes, of course," said the doctor.

"We never meant to be taken prisoners and to be forced to be chief surgeon-physician to a band of murderous cut-

throats.”

“No,” said Frank, “but we are.”

“Granted; but is it our fault?”

“No,” said the doctor firmly.

“Can we escape from them, Frank?”

There was no reply, and the professor repeated his question.

“I do not see how.”

“Neither do I, and if I did I wouldn’t try it now that we are so near the brave old lad we came to save.—Oh, here’s Ibrahim.”

“Your Excellency wanted me?” said the Sheikh.

“Yes. How far do you think we are now from Omdurman?”

“As far as I can make out, Excellency, by asking some of the camel-drivers, about four days’ journey.”

“Hah! That is getting near. But have you found out yet whether we are really going there or farther on to Khartoum?”

“No, Excellency, and I have tried hard. No one really does know except the chief. Some say we are going to Omdurman, while others say for certain that we shall make a sweep round into the desert and then aim for Khartoum. While others—”

“Opinions are various,” said the professor drily. “*Tot homines—tot sententiae*, which being interpreted, my dear Frank, you being a lad who always hated your Latin accident, means, some think a tot of one thing is good; some think a tot of another is better. Well, Ibrahim, what does the other set think?”

“That the chief is going straight to Omdurman before passing on to Khartoum to dispose of his plunder.”

“Then let’s hope the last are right, and then we shall have the chance of searching two places. There, cheer up, Frank, and try and think of nothing else but our own important mission.”

“Of course,” said the doctor. “We did not come for the purpose of punishing these predatory hordes.”

“No,” said Frank sadly; “I know. But have a little compassion upon me, and forgive my irritable ways. Look at me,” he said, holding out his blackened hands, and then pointing with them to his face. “Can’t you think how great an effort it is to keep up this miserable masquerade—what agony it is to go about feeling that at any moment I may forget myself when in the presence of our masters, and speak?”

“Yes, yes, I know, Frank, my dear boy,” replied the professor; “and whenever I think of it I begin to wonder. I used to be in a constant state of fidget. ‘He’ll let the cat out of the bag as sure as eggs are eggs,’ I used to say to myself; and then I lay awake at night and tried to think out the best way of helping you till the idea came, and it has acted beautifully.”

“What idea?” said the doctor sternly. “You never mentioned any idea to me.”

“Of course not; that would have spoiled the charm. Even Frank does not know.”

“Then it’s all nonsense,” said the doctor.

“Is it? Well, we’ll see. I did help you, didn’t I, Frank?”

“You have always helped me in every way you could, and been like an elder brother towards me, and I can never be sufficiently grateful.”

“Bother! Nonsense!” said the professor curtly. “But you mean to say I did not specially help you over the dummy business?”

“Well, I really cannot recollect any special way.”

“Ingrate! And you talk about being grateful.”

“Well, out with it, Fred,” said the doctor. “What was your plan?”

“One of my own invention,” said the professor, smiling proudly. “You, Frank, haven’t I always lain down beside you every night when all was still?”

“Oh, yes, of course.”

“And didn’t I always say that I had come for a quiet chat?”

“To be sure,” said Frank.

“And did I ever have it?”

"Yes, we had one every night, carried on in a whisper."

"False!" cried the professor.

"True!" said Frank.

"False!" cried the professor.

"No, true!" said Frank.

"I say false, sir, for from the time I lay down every night till you, being tired with your hard day's work, dropped off to sleep, I never hardly said a word."

"Well, now you mention it," said Frank, "I don't think you did, for I often used to think you had gone to sleep."

"Yes, and you used to ask me if I had. But I never had, eh?"

"Never once," said Frank quickly; "and I often used to feel ashamed of myself for being so drowsy and going off as I did."

"But look here," said the doctor, "what has this got to do with your patent plan for keeping Frank from betraying himself?"

"Everything," said the professor triumphantly. "That was my patent plan. I said to myself that sooner or later Frank would be letting—"

"Yes, yes, of course, betraying himself," said the doctor impatiently. "But the plan, man—the plan?"

"Well, that's it, my dear Hakim," cried the professor, "I said to myself, that poor fellow cannot exist without talking; the words will swell up in him like so much gas. He must have a safety valve. Well, I provided it. I lay down beside him every night and let him talk till he fell asleep."

"I never thought it meant anything more than a friendly feeling," said Frank wonderingly. "Well, perhaps there is something in what you say."

Chapter Twenty Three.

A Triumphal Entry.

It was one bright evening, just about dusk, that, utterly exhausted by a long day's march, the head of the long line of horses, camels heavily laden, and marching men, came within sight of the city that was their goal, and in the glimpse the English party had of the place before night closed in it seemed to be one of the most desolate looking spots they had ever seen.

"But it is not fair to judge it," said the professor quietly. "We can see next to nothing; it is fully two miles away; and we are all weary and low-spirited with our long march. Wait till morning."

It had been expected that they would march in that night, but a halt was called in the midst of a great, dusty plain, and preparations for camping were at once begun.

Frank lay wakeful and restless for long enough. In his excited state sleep refused to come. Now that the goal had been reached it was hard to believe that they were there, and had succeeded in making their way to the neighbourhood of the far-famed cities of the Soudan with so little difficulty. Of physical effort there had been plenty, but he had anticipated bitter struggles and disappointments; attempts to reach the prison of his brother in one direction, and being turned back, to attempt it again and again in others. Instead all had been straightforward, and their ruse had succeeded beyond all expectation.

But now that they were at one of the late Mahdi's strongholds on the Nile the question was, Would Harry Frere be there after all, or taken far to the south to the home of someone who held him as a slave?

Now for about the first time the adventurer fully realised the magnitude of the task he had taken in hand. The desert journey had impressed him by the vastness of the sandy plains and the utter desolation they had traversed; but that only appeared now to be the threshold of the place he had come to search. All the vast continent of Africa seemed to be before him, dim, shadowy, and mysterious, and as he sank at last into a feverish sleep, it was with his brother's despairing face gazing at him, the reproachful eyes sunken and strained and looking farewell before all was dark with the obscurity of the to-come.

"Hadn't you better rouse up now, sir?" said a familiar voice; but Frank, after his long and painful vigil, was unable to grasp the meaning of the words, far more to move.

"Mr Frank, sir—I mean, Ben—Ben Eddin. Humph! what an idiot I am!" came softly out of the gloom. "It was bad enough to make such a slip out in the desert, where there were no next door neighbours; but to go and shout it out here, just beside this what-do-they-call-him's city was about the maddest thing I could have done. S'pose some one had heard me; it would have taken a great deal of lathering and scraping, more than ever a 'Rabian Night's barber ever got through, to make people believe I was the Hakim's slave.

"Mr—Bother! What's the matter with me this morning? I believe I'm half asleep, or else my brains are all shook up

into a muddle by that brute of a camel. Here, Ben Eddin, rouse up and put on your best white soot. Here's the Sheikh been with a message to say that we're all going to form a procession and march through the town to camp in the groves on the other side. It's to be a triumphal what-do-they-call-it? and the Baggara chief is going to show off all his prisoners and plunder, and we're to make the principal part of the show. I say, Ben, do wake up; the coffee's nearly ready, and you ought to do a bit o' blacking, for the back of your neck where the jacket doesn't reach is getting quite grey with the sun burning it so much."

Procession—show—triumph—coffee—and the rest of it, made not the slightest impression upon Frank's torpid brain; but those words about the black stain and the bleaching caused by the scorching sun somehow suggested the risk he might run of being discovered, and that meant the frustration of his plans to rescue his brother. In a moment now his brain began to work.

"Is that you, Sam?" he cried hastily.

"I suppose so, sir, but there are times when I get pinching my leg to wake myself, expecting that I shall start up to find myself back in my pantry. But I don't, even when I make a bruise which turns blacker than your arms, and with a bit of blue touched up with yellow outside. I say, are you awake now?"

"Yes, yes, of course; but the sun is not up yet."

"No, he ain't as industrious as we are out in these parts, and doesn't get up so early. Now you understand about looking your best?"

"Yes, yes, I understand, Sam."

"But do you really, Ben? Don't deceive me, and go to sleep again. If you do I know how it will be."

"How it will be?" said Frank impatiently.

"You'll say that I didn't call you. Come, now, recollect where you are, and what we've got to do. Mr Abraham—"

"Ibrahim, man! I've told you so half a dozen times before."

"Then it's all right, Ben Eddin. You are wide awake."

"Yes, yes, of course. But what about the Sheikh?"

"He says we are to go to the Emir's palace."

"Emir's palace? What Emir—what palace?"

"That fierce old chap as had such a bad arm. He's an Emir. Mr Imbrahim says he's just heard, and that an Emir's a great gun out here. Sort of prince and general all in one, I suppose. He told me his name, but I forget what it is. It's very foreign, though, and there's a good lot of it. He's a great friend, and a sort of half brother of the other fellow."

"Other fellow? What other fellow?" said Frank, half angrily.

"Oh, you know, sir, the other big man that followed the Mahdi in taking the Soudan."

"You mean the Khalifa?"

"That's right, sir. I'm not good at all over these Egyptian chaps. I've one name for them all—the bad lot, and that's enough for me. Now, sir—bah! Ben Eddin, I mean; breakfast will be ready in ten minutes, so look sharp. I like to see you have a good meal in the morning, just as I like one for myself. It's something to keep you going all day. It makes a deal of difference if you start fair."

"I'll be there," said Frank.

"Recollect you're to put on your clean white cotton jacket. Mr Ibbrahim says his chaps have been seeing to the camels so that they shall look their best, and that it's very important that the Hakim should be dressed out well, and he will."

Frank's toilet in those days was very simple, and within the time he was at the door of the Hakim's tent, to find him dressed and waiting to begin his morning meal, the professor coming from the tent directly after, ready to greet both and enjoy the excellent repast that was waiting, the Emir having kept up his attentions in that direction to the doctor who had saved his arm from mortification, and consequently himself from death.

There was the loud hum of voices right away through the camp, from which the fragrant smoke of many fires arose through the grey dawn, and an unwonted stir indicating great excitement prevailed and rapidly increased with the coming light, for the orange and gold streamers announcing the rising of the sun were beginning to flush in the eastern sky, illumining the far-spreading city, and turning the sands where it was built into sparkling gold.

As the sun rose higher the three Englishmen gazed wonderingly at the city which lay stretching to right and left—the place into which they were to make their triumphal entry that morning, as soon as the Emir's little force, which seemed to have grown unaccountably during the night, was marshalled; and the professor pretty well expressed the feelings of his two friends as he stood and gazed at the place, their eyes dwelling longest upon a white dome-like structure that towered up, and which they learned was the Mahdi's tomb.

"And so this is Omdurman, is it?" he said. "Then I suppose Khartoum will be just such a city of mosques and palaces."

Why, there isn't a redeeming feature in the whole spot! It's just a squalid collection of mud-houses and hovels, built anyhow by people accustomed to live in a tent or nothing at all. Why, if you took the trees away—and it wouldn't take long to do that—it would be fit for nothing but to be washed away as so much mud, if the Nile would flood as far."

"But surely poor old Harry can't be here!" said the doctor, in a low, troubled voice.

"Who knows?" said the professor softly, after glancing at Frank's pained features. "We must see, and—cheer up, everybody—we will, for we shall have splendid chances. Do you hear, O Chief Surgeon and Special Physician to the Emir?"

"But look," said the doctor; "I thought the place miserable enough yesterday evening, while now, though the sun does give it a sort of golden glaze, the miserable huddle of shabby huts looks ten times worse, for the light exposes its ruinous state."

"Go on," said the professor. "You can't speak evil enough of it, say what you will. But I say, both of you—I won't bother you much with my hobby—what a falling off there is everywhere; what a difference between the cities of the rule of the past, with their magnificent palaces and temples, or even the simple, majestic grandeur of the pyramids, and the buildings of the modern inhabitants! The glory has departed indeed. Ah, here comes Ibrahim again. Well, Sheikh, how goes the world?"

"I have seen the Emir this morning, Excellencies, and he sends you greeting. He desires that you ride directly after the mounted men. You are to occupy a place of honour before the camels laden with the spoil taken by his warriors."

"As his principal prisoners," said the doctor coldly. "Well, we will try not to disgrace the man who has treated us as his friends. But what about his son? Am I to see and treat him before we start?"

"No, Excellency. He will ride in a litter borne by two led camels, and the Emir asks that you will see his son when you reach the rooms he has ordered to be ready for you beside his own palace."

"And for my friends as well, Ibrahim?" said the doctor quickly.

"Yes, Excellency; the house is large, and there are gardens and grounds with ample room for your servants and slaves as well as for your picked supply of camels. For they are picked, O Hakim. I have been round the camp this morning and seen the many beasts of burden being loaded ready for leading to the city. The horses too, and these are splendid beasts. But the camels! Yours, O Hakim, are well fed, young, and healthy, full of strength."

"Mine, Ibrahim? Yours."

"No, Excellency; speak of them as yours, for yours they are. Your name protects them. If they were mine they would be taken before the day was past. If we get safely back to Cairo, as Heaven willing we shall, if it pleases you and you are satisfied with your servant's works you may give them back to him when their work is really done."

"We shall see, Ibrahim," said Frank, smiling, and then turning serious and resuming his part, for the Emir's men were approaching them, evidently with some message.

The sun was now well up, and this being the time arranged for, so as to give *éclat* to the proceedings, trumpets and uncouth sounding horns began to blare out, the excitement in the camp increased, and soon after, with a certain amount of order prevailing over the barbarous confusion, the procession was started, a dense crowd pouring out from the city into the plain to meet them; when the faint answering sound of trumpets arose like an echo, accompanied by the dull, soft, thunderous boom of many drums.

At the first glance it seemed to be a grey-looking mob, all a mixture of black and white, debouching upon the plain; but soon after there was the glint of steel, and through the crowd a dense mass of horsemen could be seen approaching.

This was the signal for a wild shout from the returning raiders, trumpets were blown and drums beaten with all the force their bearers could command, and the Emir's horsemen rode proudly onward, following the trumpeters and drummers; and now several standards made their appearance in various parts of the procession, around which horsemen clustered, each looking as if he felt himself to be the hero of the day—the triumphant warrior returning clothed with honour from the slaughter of the enemies of the Prophet; and to a man they would have been prepared to deal out ignominy and death to the daring teller of the simple truth that they were nothing better than so many bloodthirsty murderers and despoilers of the industrious builders of the villages of the river banks.

Minute by minute the excitement grew, and the plain in front changed from tawny golden drab to grey, black, and white, for Omdurman seemed to be emptying itself in the desire to give the returning band a welcome. Even the horses appeared to take part in the general feeling, for they curvetted and pranced, encouraged by their riders, whose flowing white headgear and robes added with the flashing of their spears to the picturesque aspect of the scene.

In an almost incredibly short space of time the procession was formed, or rather formed itself. The slight camping arrangements had disappeared as if by magic, and that which one hour had been a swarming ant-hill of humanity, apparently all in confusion, was the next a long, trailing line of men, horses, and camels, headed by a barbaric band, moving steadily towards the entrance to the city, while the scene of the night's encampment was the barren plain once more, dotted with the grey ashes of so many fires.

Onward they went in a course which meant a meeting with the horsemen coming from the city, and a passage

through the increasing crowd, the Emir's warriors passing on till the head of the guard galloped up as if in a state of wild excitement, shouting "The Hakim!—the Hakim!"

The Hakim was already mounted upon his sleek camel, in the whitest and most voluminous of turbans and robes, and sat with his followers, waiting till the last of the main body of horsemen had passed.

Then came a little knot surrounding the camel litter in which lay the Emir's son, and at a sign from the officer, the Hakim's camel was led close behind the litter; Frank and the professor on their camels next; Sam, looking as dignified as his master, followed; with him the Sheikh, leading his men with the Hakim's sleek camels, of which he looked as proud as any member of the procession.

Following close behind came the Emir himself, a swarthy, noble-looking savage warrior, his brother chief by his side; and then in a long line were the trophies of their swords and spears, the heavily laden camels for the most part carrying a heterogeneous collection of objects dear to the hearts of the raiding band, but many bearing dull, heavy-eyed women, several with their children, slaves of their new masters, torn from their homes, and for the most part seeming apathetic and taking it all as a matter of course—kismet (fate)—which they must patiently bear till the next change in their condition came to pass; one which they knew might be at any hour, for their careers had taught them that a stronger force might at any moment appear in the mysterious desert and come down like a tempest, to reverse their state, the conquerors of to-day becoming the fugitives of to-morrow.

The last of the heavily laden, murmuring and groaning camels was followed by another troop of some fifty mounted men, whose horses pranced and caracoled to the faintly heard blaring of trumpet and beating of drum in front, while like a gigantic, ungainly serpent the returning force glided on over the sandy plain, till the musical (?) head disappeared between two long lines of horsemen who formed an avenue which kept back the crowd, and were ready when the last camel and the rear guard had passed through to fall in behind and follow their more fortunate plunder-laden comrades into the city.

The Hakim's countenance was dignified and impressive enough to thoroughly keep up his character, and he listened in silence to the remarks made in a low tone from time to time by the professor, who was eagerly noting the crowd in front that they were approaching; but Frank sat his camel as if turned into stone, his eyes fixed upon the wilderness of mud-brick buildings, while he wondered which contained the prisoner they had come to save.

The Hakim's air of dignity was of course assumed; but one of his followers, in spite of his long intercourse with Europeans, took to his position proudly and as if to the manner born, and this was the Sheikh, whose handsome old grey-bearded face seemed to shine with a moon-like radiance reflected from the principal, the Hakim being his sun.

So manifest was this that after glancing at him several times in a half-amused, half-contemptuous way, Sam suddenly burst out with—

"You seem to like it, Mr Abrahams!"

The Sheikh started, and looked at the man riding the camel at his side in surprise.

"Yes," he said; "it is old-fashioned, and not new and civilised like things in Cairo, but it is grand, and I am proud of the Hakim and my camels; are not you?"

"Not a bit of it!" said Sam contemptuously. "It's all very well for you, Mr Abrahams, being a native and used to it. But me, an Englishman—a Londoner—proud of it! Why, I wonder at you."

"But," said the old man, "look at the camel you are riding; how soft, how sleek, how graceful, and how easily it moves! Ah! I see you are getting proud."

"Me? Proud? What, of being here?" cried Sam.

"Yes; you have learned to ride the camel, and you sit it easily and well. You ride as if, as you Englishmen say, you were born upon it."

"Oh, do we? Well, I won't say I can't ride it now, nor I won't say it don't come easy. You see, Mr Abrahams, there ain't many things an Englishman can't do if he gives his mind to it."

"You look well, Mr Samuel," said the old man, smiling.

"Now, no chaff!" said Sam suspiciously. "No gammon! You mean it?"

"Of course."

"Well, I'm glad I do. You think these savages will think so too, and that I am the real thing?"

"Oh, yes. Look at the Hakim."

"Sha'n't! I've been looking till I feel ashamed of him."

"Ashamed?" said the Sheikh. "Why?"

"Dressed up like that! Him a first-class London surgeon and M.D., with Palladium Club and Wimpole Street on his card. I tell you I'm ashamed of him, and I'm ashamed of myself, and I ain't sure now that it isn't all a dream."

"I do not understand," said the Sheikh coldly.

"You can't, Mr Abrahams. You're a very nice, civil old gentleman, and I like you, and I'm much obliged for lots of good turns you've done me; but you see you've never been to London, and don't know what's what."

"No," said the Sheikh; "I have never been to London yet, but I have often thought of going with some family, for I have been asked twice. But if I do come I shall try to see you, Mr Samuel."

"Glad to see you, old chap, any time," said Sam warmly; "and if you do come I'll show you what our country's like."

"Thank you, Mr Samuel," said the Sheikh, smiling pleasantly; "and if I do come I shall dress as you English do; but I will not be ashamed of it."

"Here, you're going on the wrong road, old gentleman," said Sam. "I'm not ashamed of the nightgown and nightcap. They're cool and comfortable. It's seeing the gov'nor dressed up, and him and me and Mr Frank and Mr Landon in this procession. Do you know how I feel just now?"

"Thirsty?" said the Sheikh, smiling.

"Well, pretty tidy. I shall be worse soon. But if you come to that, I've been thirsty ever since I came to Egypt. I mean I feel as if I'd come down to a cheap circus, and we were going into a country town where the big tent had been set up, and that by and by we should be all riding round the ring doing Mazeppa and the Wild Horse, or Timour the Tartar; stalls a shilling covered with red cloth; gallery thruppence."

The Sheikh stared wonderingly, and then shook his head.

"I do not understand, Mr Samuel," he said.

"Of course you don't, sir. How can you, seeing that you've picked up what you know by accident like, and not had a regular English education? There, it's all right. It was only a growl, and I'm better now."

"But you said you were ashamed of the Hakim."

"I said so, but I ain't, Mr Abrahams. He's splendid ain't he?"

"He is grand," said the Sheikh earnestly. "His power, his knowledge—it is wonderful!"

"That's right, old man, so it is."

"And I hope when all the work is done, and we have taken Mr Frank's—"

"Steady there: Ben Eddin's."

"Yes, Ben Eddin's brother safely back to Cairo, that I may have an accident."

"An accident?" said Sam, staring.

"Or a bad illness, so that the great Hakim may cure me. Hah! what a physician! It is noble—it is grand!"

"I say, do you mean all that?" said Sam.

"Mean it?" said the Sheikh wonderingly. "I have been seventy years in the world, and for forty of those years I have been taking travellers to see the wonders of my land; but I have never met another man like the Hakim, whom I could look up to as I do to him."

"You do mean it?" said Sam, whose eyes glistened and looked moist. "Thank you, Mr Abrahams. You and me's the best of friends for saying that. He is what you say—grand. You like him, and don't half know him."

"I know him to have a great heart, Mr Samuel," said the old man warmly.

"Great heart, yes, and a big, broad chest; but it ain't half big enough to hold it. Why, when my poor old mother was bad—dying of old age she was—I made bold to ask the doctor to go down to see her, meaning to pay him out of my savings, and feeling as I'd like the dear old girl to have the best advice. Down in the country she was, forty miles away."

"How sad!" said the old Sheikh. "Two very long days' journey."

"Get out!" cried Sam, laughing. "England ain't the Soudan. Forty miles by the express means under one hour's ride, Mr Abrahams."

The Sheikh looked at him gravely.

"Mr Samuel," he said, "the barbers in Egypt and Turkey and Persia always have been famous for telling wonderful stories. I thought now you were speaking seriously."

"So I was, and about the doctor being so good to my poor old mother. Twice a week he kept on going to see her till she died, and when I wanted to pay something, he laughed at me and said he had done it all for a faithful servant and friend who was a good son. That's why I'm out here to look after him, Mr Abrahams. He's splendid, and you're right. Just you tumble off your camel and break a leg or a wing, or crack your nut, and let him put you right. I'll nurse you, and so will Mr Frrrr—Ben Eddin."

"Hah! I think I will," said the Sheikh, "when we have done; only I must not break too much for I am growing old. But two long days' journey in an hour, Mr Samuel? The Cairo railway never does anything like that."

"The Cairo railway!" said Sam scornfully. "Don't talk about it. Why, I went down into the country with the Hakim once, and we rode part of the way nearly twice as fast as I said. Not eighty miles an hour, but seventy; that's a fact. Hullo! what's going on now? They look as if they're going to eat us."

"It is only their way of showing joy, Mr Samuel."

"But they're a-shouting, 'Hay—keem! Hay—keem!'"

"They have heard how the Hakim saved the Emir's and his son's lives and cured so many more. Hark they are saying that a great prophet is come, and they are crying aloud for joy."

"Prophet!" said Sam grimly, as he made an atrocious joke; "not much profit for him, poor chap. Why, they'll bring all the sore places out of the town for him to cure."

"Yes, he will be a great man here."

"And him sitting so cool and quiet there on his camel in his robes and turban, looking like one of Madame Tussaud's wax figures out for the day."

For the excitement had been rapidly increasing, as the returning party were met and passed through the crowd, who had shouted themselves hoarse by way of welcome to the warriors, their chiefs, and to their plunder. The wild music, the sight of the fighting men and the spoil, had done much; but the news, which had spread like fire through town, of the Hakim and his powers seemed to drive the excitable, wonder-loving people almost wild. It was another prophet come into their midst, and had the procession lasted much longer the Hakim's career in Omdurman would have commenced with a long task of healing the injured who had been crushed by the crowd.

Fortunately for all, the English party and the people themselves, the two lines of mounted men helped to keep back the rush of the crowd who pressed forward to see the great man of whose deeds they had just heard, and the length, the intricacy, and narrowness of the streets played their part in lessening the gathering; but it was a weary journey—one which grew slower and slower, till the city was completely traversed, and the mounted men rode off to one side, leaving the Hakim's followers to pass through the rough gateway of a high mud wall, over which were seen the pleasantest objects of the morning's ride.

For over the wall rose the broad leaves of palms, and as the party rode into and under the greenery of a large enclosure, they found themselves in sight of the Emir's palace, with the camel litter just in front—a palace of sun-baked mud, at whose entrance-gate a dozen mounted men were placed to keep back the crowd, among whom were already several applicants for help from the Hakim. But these were driven away at once, for the doctor's attention was required for the Emir's son.

Chapter Twenty Four.

Freedom of Action?

The doctor's patient needed his help badly, for the exertion of the journey and triumphant entry had taxed his strength too much, and once more he was fully under the Hakim's charge, and was carried by his orders to the quarters assigned to the party and their following, on one side of the low, rambling place, and quite distinct.

It was while the doctor was busily tending the sufferer in the shady room looking out on the greenery of the court, that the Emir himself, freshly dismounted after seeing to the bestowal of the trophies of the incursion, came in, to stand gravely aside, *waiting* patiently till the Hakim, satisfied that he could do no more, left the coarse divan upon which the patient lay, and signed to the father that he might approach.

The doctor and his assistants drew back with the Sheikh, who stayed in the rough chamber to act as interpreter, the professor's Arabic being only an unsatisfactory mode of conversation, and all save the Hakim looked away.

But there was no need for the latter's watchfulness, the Emir seeming to have a perfect knowledge of what was necessary, and full confidence in the great man's power. Hence it was that he contented himself with going down on one knee by his son's side and laying a hand upon the insensible man's brow for a few minutes before rising, and turning to the Sheikh—

"Ask the Hakim if he will live," he said stoically.

The answer was given directly. "Yes, but the recovery has been thrown back."

The Emir uttered a low, deep sigh, and bowed his head. Then turning to the Hakim he took a great, clumsy-looking ring from one finger, and, bending low, he offered it to his prisoner.

To his surprise it was declined, but in a grave and smiling way, accompanied too with gestures which seemed to say, "I need no payment; I am beyond such trifles as these."

The effect was striking, for the Emir stood for a few moments gazing at his captive with something like awe. Then, catching at the Hakim's hand, he pressed it for a moment against his forehead, and strode out of the room.

"Humph!" ejaculated the professor, as soon as they were alone. "I almost wish you had taken that ring, old fellow. It was curiously antique."

"I thought it better not, Fred," said the doctor quietly. "Let's keep up my character of one who seeks only to do good and heal."

"Yes, you're right, old fellow; but an ancient gem like that is tempting. It may be a thousand years old."

"And now about obtaining news of Hal," said Frank, looking from one to the other. "They surely are not going to keep us shut up here?"

"A little patience, Frank, lad," said the professor; "here we are, within the walls of Omdurman, and received as friends; it cannot be long before we find out whether there are other prisoners here."

"Whether there are other prisoners here!" cried Frank excitedly. "Why, we know."

"That poor Hal was either here or at Khartoum months ago. We must not be too sanguine. He may be many miles away."

"You may be right," said Frank wearily, "and I will not be sanguine; but if you begin dealing with probabilities and improbabilities, I may reply that it is quite possible that Hal is here in Omdurman—that he may even be in this very house. We know that he was a prisoner, do we not?"

"Of course," said the professor.

"Then he would be the slave of some important man?"

"Certainly, my dear boy."

"Well, this Emir seems to be one of the most important men here; why may not fate have brought us to the very place?"

"Ah, why not, Frank, lad? But it is too improbable."

"Yes," said the doctor, in his quiet, grave way; "far too improbable. Still, it is wonderful that we should have reached the very centre of the enemy's stronghold, and, what is more, that we should stand so well with this Emir. Be patient, Frank, and let us see what a few days bring forth. The Sheikh will begin at once, and he is a hundred times more likely to gain information than we are."

"And the first thing to learn is how we stand."

They began to find that out directly, for the coming and going of their guard, and a few questions from the Sheikh, supplied the information that this man had them in charge and was answerable to his chief for their safety, the Emir having quite made up his mind that the Hakim should form a part of his household so that he would have medical and surgical help when it was needed, and also that he might enjoy the credit of possessing so wonderful a physician, and share that of his cures.

The arrangements made were perfectly simple; in fact, they were such as they would have met with in a tent; the only difference was that there were solid walls and a roof overhead.

The Hakim learned, too, as the days glided by, that he was expected to see as many sick and wounded people as he conveniently could each morning, from the time of the first meal till noonday. After that the guard turned everyone away, and as time passed on the friends found that the rule was never transgressed.

"The people have been taught so, O Hakim," said the Sheikh.

"Then we are to be at liberty for the rest of the day?" said the doctor.

"Yes, O Hakim, and you are to have everything you desire. You only have to speak. It is the Emir's orders. But if at any time you are wanted for the Emir's people or his friends, you are to see them in the after part of the day. What is there that the Hakim would desire now? The camels are well supplied, thy servants have good sleeping and resting-places, and supplies are sent in every morning while you are busy with the sick and wounded. What shall I tell the guard you require?"

"Our liberty," said the Hakim sternly. "My people have been stopped three times when they tried to leave the gate."

"Yes, O Hakim; it was the order given by the Emir to his servant, the guard."

"Then tell the guard what I say. The confinement here is too great."

"There is the garden beneath the trees, Excellency," said the Sheikh.

"Yes, but we wish to see the town—to go where we will."

"I will go to the guard and tell him, Excellency," said the Sheikh humbly, and he went away.

Within an hour—a long and weary one to Frank—he was back.

"I have seen the chief guard, Excellency, and he has taken your message to the Emir, who sent for me at once."

"Well?" said the doctor; and Frank and the professor came close to hear the reply.

"The Emir Prince sends greeting to your Excellency," said the old Sheikh, who seemed greatly impressed at being made the medium of communication between two such great men, "and he thanks you humbly for the great change you have made in his dear son, who seems to be hourly gaining strength."

"Yes, yes," said the doctor, rather impatiently; "go on."

"The Emir Prince says that he is aggrieved because you make so few demands for yourself and your people, for he desires that you should treat his home as yours, and have all that you desire."

"Then he gives us our liberty to go where we please?" said the doctor eagerly, and Frank and the professor gave vent to sighs of satisfaction which made the Sheikh's brow wrinkle.

"The Emir desires me to say that your servants are at liberty to go where they please in the city or out into the country round; and that as he has noticed that the great Hakim has beautiful camels but no horses, he has only to speak and horses will be brought for his servants' use."

"I shall keep to my camel, Ibrahim," said the doctor. "I think it will seem best, more in character. What do you think?"

The old man was silent.

"What does this mean?" said Frank, for he was first to notice the Sheikh's troubled look.

"The Emir Prince bade me say to his Excellency that he could not allow the great Hakim to go about among the people, for his life would be made a burden to him—he could not go a step without having a crowd of sufferers following him and throwing themselves beneath his camel's feet."

The doctor frowned.

"He said that the great Hakim's health and comfort were dear to him, and he felt that it would be better that so great a man should live as retired a life as the Khalifa himself."

"Then I am to be kept regularly as a prisoner?" said the doctor, in dismay.

"But if sometimes the noble Hakim desires greatly to ride through the city and out into the country, if he will send word by the guard, the Emir will summon the horsemen and attend upon his friend and preserver as a guard of honour, and protect him from the crowds that would stop his way."

"Oh, who wants to be paraded in a show?" said the doctor petulantly. "I would rather stop in prison than be led out like that, eh, Fred?"

"Certainly," said the professor.

"Well, never mind," said the doctor cheerfully, the next minute. "I will not complain. I have my part to play, and I mean to go on playing it contentedly while you and Frank play yours, and find out where poor old Hal is kept a prisoner. That done, we must begin to make our plans to escape either back to Cairo or to the nearest post of the Anglo-Egyptian army."

"Or the river," said Frank. "But I don't like this, for us to be free and you a prisoner."

"It is the penalty for being so great a man," said the doctor merrily. "And really there is a large amount of common-sense in what our friend says. I should be regularly hunted through the streets, and I could not go in Eastern fashion and turn a deaf ear to the poor wretches who cast themselves at my feet."

"But it seems so hard for you," said Frank.

"And it takes all the satisfaction out of our perfect freedom," said the professor.

"But your Excellencies are not to have perfect freedom," said Ibrahim slowly.

"What do you mean?" cried Frank.

"When you go out I and three or four of my young men are to attend you with the camels."

"So much the better, Ibrahim. You will be invaluable to us."

"Your Excellency is very good to say so," replied the old man sadly; "but that is not all."

"Not all?" cried the professor.

"No, Excellency. The Emir Prince says that he feels answerable to the great Hakim for your safety; that you are well known to be the Hakim's followers, and that there are wise men, Hakims of the people here in Omdurman and Khartoum, who are dogs, he said—fools and pretenders who can do nothing but work ill. These people, he says, hate the great Hakim with a jealous hate, and would gladly injure his servants. Therefore he gives the head of his bodyguard, the Baggara who has charge of us here, orders to attend you everywhere you go."

"Alone?" said Frank, after a few moments' display of blank surprise and annoyance.

"No, Excellency; always with eight or ten men; and he is to answer for your safety abroad and here with his head."

The Sheikh's words seemed to have robbed the little party of the power of speech. But at last Frank exclaimed—

"Then we have journeyed all this way for naught?"

"To be as badly off as if we had stayed in Cairo and waited for the British and Egyptian advance."

"No," said the doctor quietly; "disappointment is making you both go to extremes. We are here on the spot, and we must work by other hands."

"Whose?" said Frank bitterly.

The doctor pointed gravely to Ibrahim, who drew himself up with a look at the speaker full of gratitude and pride.

"Yes, O Hakim," he said quietly; "it seems that I and my young men are at liberty to come and go with the camels, and we can mix with the people as we please. If, then, their Excellencies will trust their servant and give him time he will do all he can to search out tidings of their friend and brother. Shall it be so?"

"Yes," said the doctor firmly.

The old Sheikh bowed, and then turned to Frank.

"Ben Eddin is black," he said, with a smile, "and the day or night may come when I shall say to him, 'I have glad tidings for you. Come as one of my camel-drivers, and maybe I can get you past the guard.'"

"Ibrahim!" cried the young man wildly, "don't promise me too much."

"I promise nothing, Ben Eddin," said the old man smiling; "but an Arab Sheikh and the black slave with him can go far unnoticed. Wait and see. Till then go on and be a patient servant to the sick man here, the Emir's son. He likes you in his way. Maybe he will be better soon, and want you to bear him company here and there."

"Yes, it is possible," cried Frank excitedly.

"And it would give you time to search the place or learn by chance where the prisoner may be. It is not wise to let the heart sink in sorrow as the sun goes down amongst the mists of night. Does it not rise again and bring the light? Surely it is better that you are here."

"Yes," said Frank eagerly. "I spoke in haste."

Chapter Twenty Five.

Sam's Tongue.

As soon as the first disappointment had passed off it was decided to make the best of their position—one whose advantages soon grew upon the adventurers. So the Hakim settled down steadily to his task of healing, and the Emir's son not only rapidly improved, but grew more friendly as he gained strength.

This friendliness was not displayed in his behaviour towards his doctor but in his dealings with Frank, who in his efforts to help Morris devoted himself heart and soul to their principal patient.

The young Emir had from the first seemed to be attracted by Frank, while he was morose to his white attendants, the very fact of the young man being a black and a slave to a white seeming to form a bond of sympathy; and finding that the Hakim would take no gifts, he often showed his satisfaction by making some present or another to his dumb attendant.

A greater one was to come.

Advantage was soon taken of the Emir's concession. Notice was given to the Baggara guard, and one afternoon, guarded by six mounted men, Frank, the professor, and Sam, attended by the Sheikh, mounted their camels and rode out of the palace gates to inspect the city and a part of its surroundings, with which, from the freedom he had already enjoyed, Ibrahim was becoming pretty well acquainted.

As soon as they started, the guard fell back to the rear, contenting themselves with following, and leaving the Sheikh to take whatever course he chose, so that he led, with Frank at his side, talking to him in a low voice as if describing all they saw to his dumb companion, who questioned him from time to time with his eager eyes.

Long experience as dragoman and guide had made the old man wonderfully intelligent and apt to comprehend his employer's desires, and that he did so now was shown at the first start.

"Which way am I going, Ben Eddin?" he said quietly. "Through the better parts of the city, where the wealthier people are, who keep slaves," and in a few minutes Frank was gazing about him with horror as he asked himself what must the worst parts of the place be if these were the best. For eyes and nostrils were disgusted at every turn. The heat was intense, and wherever any creature died or the offal of the inhabitants' food was cast out into the narrow ways, there it festered and rotted beneath the torrid rays of the sun, while myriads of loathsome flies, really a blessing to the place in their natural duty of scavengers, rose in clouds, and to hurry from one plague was only to rush into another.

Misery, neglect, and wretchedness appeared on every hand; but the population swarmed, and habit seemed to have hardened them to the power of existing where it appeared to be a certainty that some pestilence must rise and sweep them off.

Frank was not long in discriminating between the free and the enslaved. Those swarthy, black often and shining, sauntering about well-armed, and with a haughty, insolent bearing and stare at the mounted party; these dull of eye and skin, cringing, dejected, half naked, and often displaying the marks of the brutality of their conquerors, as they bent under heavy loads or passed on with the roughest of agricultural implements to and from the outskirts of the town.

"Plenty of slaves, Ben Eddin," said the Sheikh gravely. "Poor wretches, swept in from the villages to grow the Baggara's corn and draw and carry their water. They spare their camels to make these people bear the loads. Plenty of slaves. Look!"

Frank's eyes were already noting that to which the Sheikh drew his attention, for a party of about a dozen unhappy fellaheen, joined together by a long chain, which in several cases had fretted their black skins into open sores, were being driven along by a Baggara mounted upon a slight, swift-looking camel, from whose high back he wielded a long-lashed whip, and flicked with it from time to time at the bare skin of one of the slaves who cringed along looking ready to drop.

They were on in front, stopping the way in the narrow street between two rows of mud-brick houses, and consequently Frank's party had to slacken their pace, the driver having glanced insolently back at them and then fixed his eyes half-wonderingly upon Frank, before turning again and continuing his way, quite ignoring the fact that those behind were waiting to pass.

When he stopped he had turned his camel across the narrow road, completely blocking the way, and when he went on again, after gazing his full, he hurried his camel a little so as to overtake the last of the ironed slaves, and lashed at him sharply, making the poor wretch wince and take a quick step or two which brought him into collision with his fellow-sufferer in front, causing him to stumble and driving him against the next, so that fully half of the gang were in confusion.

The result was a savage outburst from their driver, who pressed on, making his whip sing through the air and crack loudly, as he lashed at the unfortunates, treating them far worse than the beasts that perish; but not a murmur arose as they stumbled on through the foul sand of the narrow way.

But there was one sound, a low, harsh, menacing grating together of teeth, and the Sheikh, who had long been inured to such scenes, turned sharply, to see that Frank's eyes were blazing with the rage within him.

"Yes," he whispered warningly, "it is horrible; but they are the conquering race from the south. We must bear it. Yes."

"Hah!" sighed Frank, and he shuddered at the bare idea of his brother being a victim to such a fate.

Just at that moment the roadway widened out a little, and the Sheikh took advantage of this to press on, so as to get his party past the depressing scene.

The camel he rode protested a little, and at the moaning growl it uttered the Baggara turned a little, and his eyes met those of Frank, looking dark and menacing.

"Hasten, Ben Eddin," whispered the Sheikh, and the young man's camel made step for step with that of the Sheikh; but before Frank's eyes quitted those of the slave-driver the man said something fiercely, raised his whip, and was in the act of striking at the young Englishman when there was a plunge, a bound, and the leader of the Emir's guard had driven his beautiful Arab horse against the flank of the driver's camel, sending the poor beast staggering against the mud house to the left and nearly dismounting the rider.

In an instant the savage turned with raised whip upon his aggressor, but the guard's keen, straight sword flashed out of the scabbard, and the sight of the rest of the party cowed him, while pointing forward, the guard sat watching him sternly till the party had passed the gang, when, with a quick sweep of his sharp blade he caught the whip close to the shaft, sheared it off, and then pressing his horse's sides he bounded on, leaving the brute scowling in his rear.

"We are to be saved from all insult, Ben Eddin," said the Sheikh gravely; "but you must not resent anything you see, and this shows you how careful we must be."

"Yes, but it makes my blood boil," said Frank to himself, as he gave the old Arab a meaning look full of promise as regards care.

They rode on and on and in and out through what at times was a teeming hive of misery and degradation, where filth and disorder seemed to be rampant. At times there were houses of larger build, and here and there attempts had been made to enclose a garden, in which there was the refreshing sight of a few trees; but the monotony of the place was terrible, and the absence of all trace of a busy, thriving, industrious population was depressing in the extreme.

"We must ride out from the city another time, Ben Eddin," said the Sheikh gravely, after they had gone on through the crowded ways for fully a couple of hours, their guard following patiently in the rear, and their presence ensuring a way being made through some of the well-armed, truculent-looking groups.

"Yes," said the professor, who overheard his words; "and I am afraid that we shall do no good hunting among these narrow streets. Can't you take us amongst the houses of the better-class folk, Ibrahim?"

"That is what I am trying to do, Excellency," said the old man; "but you see—wherever there is a big house it is shut

in with walls, and there are so few—so few. It is like one of our worst villages near Cairo made big—so big, and so much more dirty and bad.”

“The place is a horror, Frank,” said the professor. “I wonder the people do not die off like flies.”

“Doubtless they do, Excellency,” said the old Sheikh gravely.

“They must, Frank,” continued the professor. “The dry sand saves the place from being one vast pest-house. Look at the foul dogs, and yonder at the filthy vultures seated on the top of that mud house.”

“There’s lot’s more coming, sir,” said Sam, putting in a word, as he looked upward in a disgusted way. “I do hate those great, bald-headed crows.”

“Hideous brutes!” said the professor, watching the easy flight of about half a dozen that were sailing round as if waiting to swoop down upon some prey.

“There is a dead body near,” said the Sheikh calmly.

“What, on in front?” said the professor quickly; “for goodness’ sake, then, let’s go another way!”

The Sheikh looked at him half-protestingly, and shrugged his shoulders a little.

“Does his Excellency mean to go back the way we came?” he said. “It is very bad, and if we go by here we shall soon be outside upon the wide plain where we can ride round to the gate near the Emir’s palace.”

“Then by all means let’s go on,” said the professor.

“There may be nothing dead,” said the Sheikh. “I think not, for the birds are waiting.”

There was evidently, though, some attraction, for the numbers of the birds were increasing as they pushed on, to ride out into an opening all at once—a place which had probably been a garden surrounded by buildings, now fast crumbling into dust, and here upon one side, not a dozen yards away, lay the attraction which had drawn the scavenger birds together, at least a hundred more that they had not previously seen dotting the ruins in all directions.

“What a place!” said the professor, halting the beast he rode, which, like its fellows, instead of paying the slightest heed seemed to welcome the rest; and they all stood bowing their heads gently as if it were a mere matter of course, and no broad hint of their fate in the to-come.

For there, crouched down with its legs doubled beneath, was a large camel, evidently in the last stage of weakness and disease, its ragged coat and flaccid hump hanging over to one side, bowing its head slowly at the waiting vultures, that calm, bald-headed and silent, sat about with their weird heads apparently down between their shoulders—a great gathering, waiting for the banquet that was to be theirs.

Frank had hard work to repress the words which rose to his lips, and he signed to the Sheikh as he urged his beast forward.

“Hold hard a minute,” said the professor; “it is not nice, but I want to see in the cause of natural history. I never saw a camel die.”

Frank knit his brows, and in the cause of natural history felt glad that the loathsome birds refrained from attacking the wretched beast until it was dead.

The poor animal had, however, nearly reached what was for it that happy state of release, for as the professor watched, the camel slowly raised its head, throwing it back until its ears rested against its hump, gazed upwards towards the sky, shivered, and was at rest.

“Poor brute!” said the professor; “and what a release. Why, Ibrahim, I thought the Arab of the desert was tender to his beast, whether it was camel or horse?”

“Well, Excellency,” said the old man proudly, “look at the camel you ride; look at these. I am an Arab:



"The savage turned with a raised whip upon the aggressor, but the guard's keen sword flashed out of the scabbard."

have you ever seen me otherwise than merciful to my beasts?"

"No," said the professor; "but look at that wretched creature! Ugh! how horrible! Let's ride on."

It was time, for nearly heedless of the presence of man, the vultures were dropping down from the ruins, and those in the air were making a final sweep round before darting upon their carrion prey. The party rode on in silence for a few minutes, the Sheikh waiting for the professor to continue; but he remained silent, and the old man began in protest—

"An Arab does not leave his beast like that, Excellency. These men here are not Arabs, but the fierce, half-savage people from high up the country, who have descended the river, killing and destroying, till wherever they stop the land is turned into a waste. Time back, when the great general was sent up to Khartoum, we said 'Now there will be peace, and the savage followers of the Mahdi will be driven back into the wilds; people will dare to live again and grow their corn and pasture their flocks and herds;' but, alas! it was not to be. The great Gordon was murdered, his people slaughtered, and the country that has been watered with the blood of the just still cries aloud for help. Is it ever to come?"

"Yes, Ibrahim, and soon," said the professor. "Who knows of the preparations being made better than you?"

"Yes, Excellency, I know," said the Sheikh slowly; "but it is so long in coming, and while they are waiting to be freed from the horrible tyranny of the Mahdi and his successor, the people wither away and die."

The old man looked at Frank as he spoke, and the young man gave him an approving nod, after which they rode on through the squalor and horrors of the place till the road grew more straight and wide, the hovels fewer. Then the filth and misery grew scarcer, patches of cultivated land appeared, from which weary-eyed faces looked up, half wondering, here and there, but only to sink listlessly again as their owners toiled on, with taskmasters ready to urge them on with their labour, as they tortured their sluggish oxen toiling at water-wheel or grinding at a mill.

But for the most part the Baggaras' slaves allowed the passers-by to go unnoticed, never once lifting their eyes from the ground.

As the party rode slowly on, their eyes carefully searched the buildings they passed in these outskirts of the town, till they reached the entrance where they first arrived, and soon after were winding their way in and out of the narrow streets till they came to their portion of the Emir's palace, and passed the guarded gate, to thankfully throw themselves upon the rugs of their shadowy room, hot, weary, and choked with dust.

"Well," said the Hakim, as soon as their guards were out of hearing, "good news?"

"No," said Frank, "the worst. We might go wandering in and out of this desolation of sordid hovels and crumbling huts for years, and see no sign of the poor fellow."

"And perhaps pass the place again and again," added the professor. "We are going the wrong way to work. What do you say, Ibrahim?"

"Thy servant fears that it is useless to go searching in such a way as this," replied the old Sheikh. "The city is so big—there are so many thousands crowding the place."

"Then what can we do?" said Frank wearily.

"Only try to get news of a white slave who was taken at Khartoum, Excellency," said the old man calmly. "I am working, but I fear to ask too much, for fear that I might do harm."

"Have we gone the wrong way to work, after all?"

"No," said the doctor decisively. "We are here, and Khartoum is so far away. You are hot and weary now, Frank; rest and refresh, my lad; they are grand remedies for despair."

"Yes," said the professor; "I feel as much out of heart as you, my boy, but common-sense says that we have only tried once."

Frank nodded, and rose to go into the room he shared with Sam, too weary and disheartened to notice that his old friend's servant had followed him, till he was startled by feeling the man's cool hands busy about him with a brass basin of cool water and a sponge, when he sat up quickly.

"Why, Sam," he cried, "are you going mad?"

"Hope not, sir," said the man, "though that hot sun and the dust can't be good."

"But what are you doing?"

"What'll set you right, sir, and ready for your meal."

"But you forget that I am the Hakim's slave."

"Not I, sir. Keep still, the black won't come off."

"But I can't let you be waiting upon me. Suppose one of the Emir's men came in."

"Well, that would be awkward, sir; but I'd chance it this time."

"No," said Frank stoically. "There, I feel a little rested now. Go on and bathe yourself. You want it as badly as I."

"But let me tend you a bit, sir—Ben."

"Sir Ben!" cried Frank angrily. "You mean to betray us, then?"

"It's just like me, Ben Eddin; but you will let me give you a cool sponge down? It's quite right, sir, as a barber."

"No, no, I'm better now," said Frank sharply, and he busied himself in getting rid of the unpleasant traces of their ride, feeling the better for the effort he was forced to make, and listening in silence to Sam, who, after so long an interval from conversation was eager to make use of his tongue.

"Hah!" he said; "water is a blessing in a country like this; but oh, Ben Eddin, did you ever see such a place and such a people?"

"No," said Frank shortly. "Horrible!"

"Why, our Arabs, sir, with their bit of a tent are princes and kings to 'em. Ugh! the horrible filth and smells and sights, and then the slaves!"

"Horrible!" said Frank again.

"I've read a deal about slavery, sir, and the—what do they call it?—atrocities; but what they put in print isn't half bad enough."

"Not half," assented Frank.

"After what I have seen to-day, not being at all a killing and slaughtering sort of man, I feel as if it's a sort of duty for our soldiers to come up here with fixed bayonets, and drive the black ruffians right away back into the hot deserts they came from. Did you see inside one of those huts we passed?"

"I saw inside many, Sam," replied Frank.

"I meant that one where the two miserable-looking women came to the door to see us pass."

"What, where a man came back to them just before we reached the dying camel?"

"Yes; that was the place."

"I just caught a glimpse of him as we passed."

"Was that all, Ben Eddin?"

"Yes, that was all. Why?"

"Ah, you were on first, and I was a bit behind the professor, sir, and I saw it all."

"What did you see?"

"Saw him go up to first one and then the other, knocking them down with a big blow of his fist; and the poor things crouched with their faces in the sand and never said a word."

"The savage!"

"That's right," said Sam viciously. "I was talking to Mr Abraham about it afterwards, and he said he saw it too, and that they were slaves, like hundreds upon hundreds more, who had been taken in some village the wretches had looted, and that he hadn't a doubt that their husbands had been cut down and killed in one of the raids. What's a raid, sir?"

"A plundering expedition, Sam," said Frank wearily, "such as that the Emir was upon when we were captured."

"Oh, I see, sir. Big sort o' savage kind o' murder and burglary, wholesale, retail, and for exportation, as you may say. When they want anything they go out and take it?"

"Exactly."

"Hah! That's what old Mr Abraham meant when he said that these Soudan tribes didn't care about settling down and doing any gardening or farming, because they could go and help themselves whenever they wanted. He said they were black locusts who came out of the south."

"He was quite right, Sam," replied Frank, "and you have seen the effect of their visits; every place is devastated, and the poorer, industrious people get perfectly disheartened."

"I see, sir. Feel it's no use to get together a bit of a farm and some pigs, because as soon as the corn's ripe and the pigs are fat these locusts come and eat the lot."

"You are right as far as the corn is concerned, Sam," said Frank, smiling; "but I don't think you have seen many pigs since you have been out here."

"Well, now you come to mention it, sir, I haven't. I was thinking about it when I saw some of those bits of farm places outside where the slaves were at work, and it made me think of an uncle of mine who was in that line of business away in the country—he's a rich farmer now out in Noo Zealand. I used to go for a holiday to see him sometimes down in Surrey, and he would say that there was nothing like having a good sow and a lot of young pigs coming on, different sizes, in your styes, for they ate up all the refuse and got fat, and you'd always something to fall back on for your rent, besides having a nice bit of bacon in the rack for home use. He said he never saw a small farm get on without pigs. Some one ought to show 'em how to do it out here. But I don't know what would be the use of fattening up your pigs for the Mahdi chaps to come and drive them away."

"There is no fear of either, Sam," said Frank, smiling. "These Mohammedan people look upon the pig as an unclean beast."

"Well, that's true enough, sir; but it is his nature to. He's nasty in his habits, but he's nice."

"I mean unclean—not fit to eat—a Mohammedan would be considered defiled by even touching a pig."

"Ho!" said Sam scornfully, "and I suppose killing and murdering and getting themselves covered with blood makes 'em clean! Unde—what do you call it?—undefiled. Well, all I can say is that the sooner this holy man and his followers are chivied out of the country the better."

"Yes—yes—yes, Sam," said Frank, more wearily; "but don't talk to me. I want to think."

"I know, sir, about Mr Harry, sir; but don't think, sir. You think too much about him."

"What!" cried Frank angrily.

"It's true, sir. You're fretting yourself into a sick bed, and though I'd sit up o' nights, and do anything in the way of nursing you, sir, we can't afford to have you ill."

"Why not, Sam?" said the young man bitterly. "It is all hopeless. Poor Harry is dead, and the sooner I follow him the better."

"Mr Frank—Ben Eddin, I mean—I do wonder at you! It don't seem like you speaking. Never say die, sir! What, talk about giving up when we've got to the place we were trying for! There, I know. You're done up with being out in the sun. But cheer up, sir. You come and have something to eat, and then have a good night's rest. You'll feel different in the morning. Why, we've hardly begun yet. You knew before you started that Mr Harry's up here somewhere. Well, we've got to find him, and we will."

"If I could only think so," groaned Frank.

"Think so, then, sir," said Sam earnestly. "Why look at me, sir. 'Bout a month ago I used to groan to myself and think what a fool I was to leave my comfortable pantry in Wimpole Street to come on what I called a wild-goose chase; but I came round and made up my mind as it was a sort o' duty to the gov'nor and you gents, and though I can't say I like it, for the smells are horrid, and the way the people live and how they treat other people disgusting, I'm getting regular used to it. Why, if you gentlemen were to call me to-morrow and to say that the job seemed what you called it just now, hopeless, and you were going back, I should feel ashamed of you all. You take my advice, sir, and stick to it like a man. It's like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay, I know; but the needle's there, and you've got to pick out the hay bit by bit till there's nothing left but dust—it's sand here—then you've got to blow the dust away, and

there's the needle."

"That's good philosophy, Sam," said Frank, smiling.

"Is it, sir? Well, I am glad of it. I only meant it for good advice."

Chapter Twenty Six.

A Fight among Friends.

As is generally the case when one's heart feels most sick, a good rest brings light and hope back from behind the clouds, and Frank Frere awoke the next morning feeling ready for any amount more effort, as he carefully applied more of the water to his skin, after dissolving a few crystals, with the result that when the solution was dry he was ready to compare with the blackest slave in the city, while after breakfast he was in the best of spirits as he helped the Hakim over his patients—poor creatures half blind from the horrible ophthalmia produced by the desert dust and sand; wounded men, sufferers from the terrible fevers of the country; and as he saw them go away relieved a pleasant sensation of what French people call *bien être* stole over him.

Then the Emir's son came in his litter and was attended to, the Hakim saying, when his task was done and Ibrahim had been summoned, that the patient need come no more, at which he frowned and looked displeased, and the next day he came again, contenting himself with seeing Frank only, and on leaving presenting him with a new white robe.

The following morning he was back again to see Frank, and when he left, the professor laughingly made the remark that the Emir's son was evidently a young man of very low tastes, he being a prince among his people and taking to the society of a slave.

Another excursion was made through the city, with the guard following patiently, and evidently feeling something like contempt for these strange people who preferred wearying themselves in wandering through the filthy lanes of the city to sitting comfortably in the Emir's grounds, smoking a long pipe in the shade of the trees. But they were silent and watchful all the same saving the travellers more than once from insult and attack.

Then days followed days with always the same result: weary hopelessness; and a long conversation ensued, the result of which was that as the number of important cases had diminished and the complaints of the poor patients were for the most part of a kind that their own Hakims could very well attend, a petition should be taken to the Emir, asking him to send the Hakim on to Khartoum with his people to do good there.

This was announced to Ibrahim, who shook his head.

"Why do you do that?" said Frank quickly.

"For reasons, Excellency. I have been much about the city lately."

"I know," said Frank, "and supposed that you were still searching now."

"I was, Excellency."

"So have we been, as you know, but without result. You have found out nothing?"

"Not yet, Excellency, but I am still hopeful."

"We are still hopeful," said Frank, "but we feel that it is time to journey on to Khartoum and search there. We can come back here if we fail."

"But the Emir will not let you go, Excellency."

"How do you know that?"

"I feel sure, Excellency, and then there is the young Emir; he spoke to me yesterday about having you in his household."

"Having me?" said Frank, aghast.

"Yes, Excellency; he has taken a fancy to you. Did he not make you another present yesterday?"

"Yes," said Frank; "a handsome sword and knife. Of course, I did not want them, but you know his disposition."

"Yes," said the professor; "he would have looked black as thunder and flown in a passion if you had refused them."

"He did because I hesitated. But we must try if the Emir will consent."

"We might propose going for a time," said the doctor, "and promise to come back, as there is so little to do here for the people."

The Sheikh shook his head.

"I daresay you are right, Ibrahim," said Frank; "but we are doing no good at all here, and you must try."

"I am your Excellencies' servant," said the old man quietly, "and I will do my best; but I would rather we stayed here for a while longer."

"Hah!" exclaimed Frank excitedly; "then you have some clue!"

"No, no; not yet, Ben Eddin," said the old man, who looked startled by the speaker's manner; "but I have hopes. I have been trying so hard, making friends with several of the better people, and as your English Excellencies would say, feeling my way. When we find your Excellency's brother it will be through my meeting some one who knows what slaves have been kept. But it is very hard. I dare not say much, for fear of making the people doubt that I am a friend."

"Yes, that is true, Ibrahim," said the doctor gravely; "and I like your caution. But make one appeal to the Emir to let us go to Khartoum for a few weeks. Ask him to send us with an escort—say with our present guard."

The old Sheikh shook his head.

"The great Hakim does not understand," he said. "The Khalifa has many followers, Emirs and chiefs of tribes who are banded with him to conquer and hold the Soudan. But they are all chiefs in their own right who have brought their followers, and the jealousy and hate among them is great. The Emir, our friend, is one of the greatest, but he has enemies here."

"Ah, you know that?" said Frank eagerly.

"Yes, Excellency, chiefs who hate him, but his son more, for he is rude and scornful to them."

"I can understand that," said the professor. "Go on."

"These other chiefs hate our Emir for his power and strength, and would be glad to drive him back into his own country, and he knows it. But at Khartoum I hear that he has greater enemies. The Khalifa and one of his generals both dislike him and fear that he is trying to become a greater ruler than they; and knowing this he would not send you with a part of his own guard, neither would the Khalifa let him do this; but I will see him to-morrow, Excellencies, and tell him your wishes. If he gives you his leave to go he will send messengers to the Khalifa, asking him to receive the great Hakim and send guards to fetch you. But I fear. He will think that you will never return. Shall I go to him now?"

"No," said the doctor; "wait till the morning, and do your best, for I feel that we may do more good at Khartoum. We will return if we find no better fortune than here."

"It is good, great Hakim," said the old man; "thy servant is always ready to obey."

That day passed quietly on, with the friends eagerly discussing their plans of action regarding the proposed change, Frank being the most hopeful and displaying intense eagerness.

"Ibrahim is a fatalist," he said. "He has taken it into his head that we shall find Harry here, but I feel convinced now that he is a prisoner in Khartoum or the neighbourhood, and I do not think, after all we have done, that the Emir will refuse us."

"I don't know," said the professor dubiously.

"Oh, don't, don't you take old Ibrahim's views, Landon," cried Frank. "I doubt whether there is so much jealousy amongst men who are bound together for one special object. There is a little, no doubt. Look here, let's ask the Emir and his son—or his son alone—to take us there himself. They may be glad to go, as they seem so proud of Morris and all his cures. For my part, I think he will."

"And I believe Ibrahim," said the doctor gravely. "If it is as he thinks, our Emir would not trust himself in Khartoum without all his following, and—"

"What's the matter?" cried the professor sharply, for just then their head guard rushed to the door, sword in hand, followed by three of his men armed with spears, while for the moment it struck Frank that the present he had received was about to prove useful, and he took a step towards his room where it was hanging in its sheath against the wall.

The officer said something excitedly as he waved his sword, and the man's manner suggested that he had come with his followers to massacre the party.

But at that moment Ibrahim entered, looking wild and strange, and a few words passed between him and the guard, while from outside the walls there was shouting, the trampling of horses, and hurried rush of feet.

"For heaven's sake speak, Ibrahim!" cried the professor in Arabic. "What does this man mean?"

"He has come to see that you are all safe, Excellency," said the old man. "The Emir sends orders that you are to bar yourselves in the room farthest from the wall, for the palace is about to be attacked. You are not to venture outside in the garden, for fear the enemy may be within throwing distance with their spears."

The Emir's officer only stayed till he was satisfied that his prisoners fully understood the message, and then hurried out, followed by his men, for the noise and excitement outside were increasing fast. Trumpets were being blown, drums beaten, and there were all the sounds of a gathering force.

"What does all this mean?" asked the doctor.

"I hardly know, O Hakim," replied the Sheikh, who was gradually recovering his breath, "It is some jealous quarrel between the Emirs, and they will mount and ride out to the nearest part of the desert to gallop wildly here and there, firing guns, throwing spears, and shouting defiance at one another, till their horses and camels are tired out. Then they will ride back, blowing trumpets and beating drums again, with each chief riding by his standard, looking proud, and behaving as if he had gained a great victory."

"Then it will be a kind of sham fight?" said Frank.

"No, Ben Eddin; it will be quite real, but they will not do each other much mischief, because there is nothing to gain. There is no spoil, and besides, they are all bound to obey the new Mahdi, who has bidden them to be at peace till the Egyptian forces are driven into the Nile."

"We are too late," said the Hakim grimly.

"What! Do you think our Emir will be conquered?" said the professor eagerly.

"No, but there will be work for us to-night or to-morrow morning with the wounded. Then how can we ask the Emir to let us go?"

"The great Hakim is right," said the Sheikh. "Hark!"

He held up his hand, and plainly enough the reports of guns and the shouting of combatants reached their ears, the fighting having already commenced, and evidently within the city, though as they waited the sounds grew more distant. But the dull trampling of unshod horses told of the passing of mounted men, and Ibrahim went out to join the guard at the gate, for he was in an intense state of excitement for fear there should be any demand made upon his camels, which were peaceably munching in the enclosure at the end of the house.

Then came a couple of hours excited waiting for that which did not happen. For at every rush of horsemen along the road outside, the prisoners felt that the expected attack had come, and again and again the Sheikh came in to reassure them by announcing that it was only a party of the Emir's own men, for the chief had driven his enemies out of the city to the plain where the engagement was going on, but had left a strong troop of mounted men to ride to and fro to guard his house in support of the little party who had charge of the guests.

"The men think it will not be much, Excellencies, for another Emir is fighting for their chief, and they are too strong. It is like a rising against those chosen by the Khalifa, but I cannot tell much as yet."

But distant as the scene of the conflict was, the firing reached their ears till it was turning dusk, when it suddenly ceased, as if either one side was conquered or a mutually agreed cessation of hostilities had taken place.

The first definite news of the state of affairs reached the Emir's palace just when a considerable lapse of time had occurred without news, the last being of a kind to create anxiety, the Sheikh coming in from the gate to announce that a messenger had arrived at a gallop to summon the troop of horse, who had gone off leaving their guard looking careworn and anxious, while he forbore to speak.

And now the messenger who had suddenly galloped up to the entry, dashed in at once, flung his bridle to the Sheikh as he leapt down, and strode in to where the friends were anxiously waiting. All started and glanced at the open window, where a glimpse could be obtained of Ibrahim, to whom and his camels every thought was turned, as, without intercommunication, the same thought prevailed—flight, and would there be time to obtain their camels and make for the open desert before the victorious enemy arrived?

For the messenger, who came looking wild and excited, his flowing white garment covered with blood and dust, was the Hakim's last patient—the Emir's son.

Chapter Twenty Seven.

Another Patient.

The young Baggara chief was evidently in a wild state of excitement, and turned at once to the professor, saying something in his own tongue, which the Englishman struggled hard but failed, in spite of his slight knowledge of the Baggara dialect, fully to grasp.

"I can't make him out," said the professor excitedly. "It is something about a terrible battle and defeat."

"He means us to escape for our lives," said the doctor excitedly. "Yes, look," he continued, for the young chief pointed to the window, nodded to the speaker, and hurried away.

"Quick!" said the professor; "stop for nothing. We must get to the camels, and take our chances."

As he spoke the young chief dashed in again, followed by the Sheikh, the panting horse having been handed over to one of the guard; and this time the young man crossed to Frank, laid his left hand upon the young man's shoulder, smiling proudly, and waving his right hand in the air as if cutting with his sword.

"The Emir's son bears the news, Excellencies, that there has been a great battle, and that his father and his friends have routed the rebellious ones, who have taken to flight, leaving many killed and wounded, and among these there

is the Emir's greatest friend. He has been shot by a gun and is dying, but the Emir bids you be ready to bring him back to life, for he is like a brother and saved him from his treacherous foes."

"That's a modest demand for one evening, Robert, my son," said the professor, with a quaintly humorous look. "How do you feel?"

"As if I had been raising the expectations of these people till the time had come for their hopes to be dashed."

While he was speaking the triumphant blowing of trumpets and discordant beating of drums, heard faintly upon the evening air, announced the return of the victorious forces from what had doubtless been nothing much more serious than a slight skirmish. But it was serious enough for the friends.

"What is to be done?" said the professor. "We shall have to go to the dying man's place."

The Sheikh heard what was said, and turned to question the young chief at once.

"No, Excellencies," he said; "the Emir is having his brother chief borne to his own house. He will be brought to the palace here, and will not be long."

"Very well," said the Hakim gravely; "I will do my best. The instruments, Ben Eddin," he continued, "and what is necessary."

Sam was already at the door, and Frank joined him, to prepare all that would be required, while the young chief looked on, eager and smiling, but standing aloof from the Hakim as if in perfect confidence as to the result, but feeling a superstitious dread of his power.

There was an interval of waiting then, with the sound of the instruments preceding the triumphant warriors coming nearer and nearer, till all at once the young chief nodded smilingly to Frank, said a few words to the Sheikh, and hurried out.

"What does that mean?" said the professor.

"He has gone to see how the chief is and will come to see you as soon as they have brought him in. He says—"

The Sheikh stopped short, and looked from one to the other as if perplexed.

"What does he say?" asked the doctor sternly.

"He said, O Hakim," replied the Sheikh humbly, "that he hoped his father's friend and brother was dead."

"He said that! Why? Is this an enemy?"

"No, Excellency; it is because others of the chief men and their doctors do not believe in you, and he wants to show them how great you are."

The professor uttered a groan and glanced in a horrified way at his old friend, who sat now on a rug, looking perfectly calm in what seemed to be an emergency.

"There is nothing to mind," he said. "The young man is superstitious and ignorant, but his father is wise and our friend. Let us hope that the chief is not dead; but gun-shot wounds are more to be dreaded than a gash from a knife or spear. Be perfectly calm, both of you; there is nothing to mind."

"Of course not," said the professor, recovering himself now. "I was startled for the moment by that false alarm. No, there is nothing to mind, even if the other chiefs are sceptical. You have knowledge enough to win their respect."

Further conversation was put an end to by the coming of the Emir himself, with his son, who entered, hot and covered with dust, to say a few words to the Sheikh, who bowed humbly to hear them.

"The Emir bids me ask you to come and save his friend, O Hakim, but he fears that it is too late."

The doctor rose at once, signed to his followers, and then motioned to the Emir to lead on.

He drew back, however, and said a few words to his son, who led off at once, while the father walked quite humbly behind the great man to whom he owed his life.

Frank glanced wonderingly round as the little procession passed out into a kind of hall whose floor was covered with Eastern rugs, and in which were grouped about some fifty armed men, who showed plenty of grim signs of having been in a serious fray. Then onward through a couple of rooms handsomely draped with curtains which gave them the appearance of tents, and into a much larger apartment, upon a broad divan in which, dimly shown by a couple of brass lamps, lay the insensible figure of a stalwart Baggara, the blackest they had yet seen, his glistening skin showing strangely in contrast with the white folds turned back from his broad chest, and hideously stained with blood.

As the party entered several women held their head-cloths to their faces and stole silently out, leaving none there but three grim-looking Mullahs, who had evidently been playing the parts of surgeons to the injured Emir, and who scowled angrily at the little party that now entered the room. Standing silently afterwards with their hands upon their breasts they gazed through their half-closed eyes as if contemptuously waiting to hear what this infidel Hakim would say.

It was a crucial position for the doctor, but he played his part with the greatest dignity, while the Emir stood near as if in perfect confidence as to his friend's powers, and the son glanced at Frank with a malicious look in his dark eyes, which he turned directly half-mockingly at the Mullahs.

The Hakim bowed haughtily to his Soudanese *confrères*, and then turned to the Sheikh.

"Stand on my left hand, a little back," he said, "ready to interpret."

The Sheikh bowed reverently and took his place, while to Frank the scene in the gloomy, tent-like room resembled some great picture of Eastern life that he had once seen.

Then throwing back the long white sleeves of his robe the Hakim bent down over the patient, and with rapid touches of his white hands as if he were performing some incantation—so it struck the lookers-on, though it was only the *tactus eruditus* of the skilled surgeon—he soon satisfied himself that his patient lived, and of the injury which had laid the strong man low.

Frank was ready with all he required, water, sponge, towels, lint, and probe, while the professor carried bottle, graduated glass, and a pocket filter slung at his side, furnished with a syphon-like tap.

The silence was strangely oppressive during those few minutes, and as he examined his patient the Hakim gave aloud the results of his examination, as if speaking expressly for the professor's ear alone.

"Not dead," he said, "and he has not lost much blood. A very serious wound, and the bullet without doubt there. Quite beyond my reach. No: it has not passed through. I dare probe no more to-night. I must wait for the daylight, and give him some hours to recover a little from the shock."

Meanwhile the Emir was anxiously watching the Hakim's actions, and when at last he saw him plug the wound with medicated lint, and then take the bandage offered by Frank, he drew a sigh of relief, grasping the fact that the Hakim would not bind up the injury of one who had passed away.

The Hakim then raised his head a little and turned to the Sheikh.

"Tell the Emir," he said, "that his friend has received a very dangerous wound, but that I hope he will live."

These words were translated to the chief, but in his interpretation the old Arab omitted the hopeful clause, and said definitely that the wounded man would recover.

In an instant one of the Mullahs said scornfully—

"The infidel Frank lies unto you, Emir. Thy friend is wounded unto death. See, even now he dies."

"The great Hakim never lies," said the Sheikh proudly. "The Emir will wait and see that the Hakim's words are true."

"Yes," said the Emir sternly. "We will wait."

Frank was standing back with his head humbly now in the shadow, holding some of the Hakim's paraphernalia, but with watchful eyes fixed upon the three Mullahs, and as the Emir spoke he noticed a quick, meaning glance pass from one to the other which struck him as full of malice and cunning. A thought instantly shot through him which chilled him for a moment. That look meant evil, he was sure. Something malevolent against the Frankish doctor who dared to intrude upon the ignorance and superstition of a trio of Mahometan priests. What would they do?

Frank's thoughts came like flashes of mental light, and in an instant he felt that they dared not interfere with the Hakim who was so strongly in favour with the great Emir, but in an underhanded way they might bring all he had done to naught and contrive that the wounded, helpless man's last chance of life should fail.

The idea was horrible, but he knew for certain that in their vile bigotry the followers of Mahomet would stop at nothing in their efforts to destroy the so-called infidel, and with his pulses beginning to beat fast in his excitement he planned how he could counteract any of the machinations these people might set going.

For the more he thought the more convinced he felt that he was not misjudging these people. His memory brought up things that the old Sheikh had said about the jealousy the great Hakim had excited, and naturally enough; but what was to be done?

The first thing, he felt, must be to warn the doctor. But how? He could not speak till they were alone. Even if he attempted to whisper to the professor, who was close at hand, it would be observed, for he would betray himself as an impostor, and in betraying himself he would raise suspicion against his companions.

Those were painful moments, and he shivered and longed for the scene to come to an end, for his utter helplessness seemed to overwhelm him, and he felt ready to ask why he had placed himself in so terrible a position.

Then he uttered a faint sigh of relief, for the professor reverently approached his friend and whispered a question, to which the Hakim, who stood over his patient, watch in one hand, the fingers of the other holding the insensible man's wrist, carefully counting the pulsations, replied by a grave bend of the head.

The professor drew back and whispered to his fellow-assistant to prepare to go, while for his own part he took the bottle, water, and glasses to the Hakim, and once more stood waiting, while Frank carefully folded up lint and bandage, and replaced the instruments in their cases.

But the Hakim did not stir, and in the midst of the impressive silence he stood there bare-headed with the light of the lamps above falling upon the deep lines in his broad, white forehead and knit brows, carefully marking the pulsations, the three Mullahs still standing with folded arms, as motionless as statues, and their eyes nearly closed; but there was a keen flash now and then through the lids as they kept an eager watch upon everything that was going on.

At last the Hakim softly lowered the wounded chief's hand and replaced his watch, turning slightly to the professor, who took a step towards him and held out bottle and glass, when a few drops from the former were carefully measured out, a little water from the filter added, and then the clear limpid medicament was slowly and carefully trickled between the sufferer's lips till all had passed.

At that moment there was a faint rustling behind a great curtain which draped an opening in the darkest part of the sombre room, and directly after a small, dark hand appeared and was waved to and fro.

Frank, in his watchfulness, saw everything. It was evidently the hand of one of the women who had glided out when his party entered—in all probability that of the favourite wife.

The young Emir saw it too, for he turned a questioning face to his father, who bowed his head, and the young man stepped silently across to the curtain, drew it a little aside, and stood whispering answers to the eager questions which were asked.

"The women!" thought Frank, who was ready to snatch at any straw. If he could only speak to Morris he would order that they should stay and keep watch by the sufferer's side all night, and so baffle any nefarious attempt that might be made.

Then with a hopeful feeling arising in his breast Frank went slowly on with his task, which he could have finished at any moment, and waited for his opportunity, while, as if satisfied with the report, the inquirer drew back, a weary sigh sounding plainly out of the darkness, the curtain fell back into its former folds, and the young Emir returned to his father's side.

By this time the administering of the sedative was ended, the professor had withdrawn with the bottle and glass, and the Hakim once more took hold of the sufferer's swarthy wrist, to remain counting the pulsations for many minutes, before laying the hand gently down and rising to stand, with folded arms, gazing at the stern, dark, immovable face.

"Waiting. How long will he wait?" thought Frank, and his mental question was being asked by the three Mullahs who still stood like so many statues.

Quite a quarter of an hour passed, and then the Hakim slowly turned his head and looked at the Sheikh, who bent his head to attention, and a thrill ran through Frank as he heard that all his anxieties were certainly for the moment at an end, for the doctor said quietly, "Tell his Highness the Emir that his friend is in too dangerous a state to be left."

The Sheikh interpreted the words, and received in reply the Emir's words that the women of his household and the wounded man's own wife would watch by his side all night.

"That is good, Ibrahim," replied the Hakim, "but their time is not yet. Tell the Emir that I and my people will keep watch till it is safe to leave him."

The Emir drew a deep breath indicative of his satisfaction as he heard the Hakim's words, and then crossing to him he reverently took his hand, bent over it, and drew back, said a word or two to his son, who went to the three Mullahs and repeated his father's message, with the result that they whispered together for a few moments and then raised their heads haughtily and stalked slowly out of the tent-like room.

The Emir then nodded shortly to his son, who, as he followed the Mullah's example, turned out of his way to go close to Frank and pat his shoulder warmly, as if to commend him for all that had been done.

The next minute the Emir whispered again to Ibrahim, speaking earnestly, and bending reverently once more to the Hakim, he crossed to the curtain and passed behind it, the low sobbing of a woman being heard directly after. Then all was silent as the grave.

"Yes, Ibrahim, what is it?" said the doctor, for the Sheikh was waiting to speak.

"The Emir bids me say, O Hakim, that you will please consider his house your own, and order his servants to bring everything you desire. That he will have refreshing foods and drinks placed in the room through which we came, and divans and rugs are there for those who would rest. That three women of the household will be waiting all night with his friend's wife in the room beyond the curtains there. That if you find the danger increases and his friend the Emir is about to die, you will send me to the women with the sad tidings, that he and they may come to the wounded man's side. That he thanks, and prays for your success in bringing his friend back to life. That is all."

"Then he does not expect me to perform miracles—to do impossibilities, Ibrahim?" said the doctor quietly.

"No, Excellency," replied the Sheikh. "The Emir is a half-savage chief, but if he had been born in Cairo and lived amongst the English and the French he would have been great. He is wise. He says little, but he laughs in his heart at the fables of the Mullahs."

"Then he is too sensible to take me for a prophet."

"Oh, yes, Excellency; he thinks as I do, that you are a great physician, learned in all the wisdom of the Franks. He is a wise man, but his son is what you English call a fool. But will the Emir's friend live? His Excellency can trust me."

"It is very doubtful, Ibrahim," said the doctor gravely. "There is a bullet lodged in a very dangerous part, and I fear that everything depends upon its being extracted before bad symptoms arise."

"But the learned Hakim can do all those wonders I have seen, and cuts and sews, and the people grow well and strong."

"Yes, Ibrahim, sometimes," said the doctor, with a sad smile; "but not when the bullet, sword, or spear has done too much. The Emir's friend is very bad, and if we had left to-night and these native doctors had stayed, he would never have seen the light of another day; for his life hangs upon a thread that I am going to watch and strengthen lest it should break."

"Your Excellency is wiser in my eyes everyday I live," said the old man softly. "Yes, he is right; if you had left here to-night the chief would have died."

"What do you mean, Ibrahim?" whispered the professor.

"Your Excellency knows," replied the old man quietly. "For one thing, they would not have the wisdom to do what is right. For another thing, Excellency, they are jealous with the jealousy of ignorant, superstitious believers in false doctrines."

The professor looked at the Sheikh searchingly.

"I thought I knew you thoroughly, Ibrahim," he said at last; "but I find you are a wiser man than I thought."

"No, Excellency," said the old man sadly; "I have only tried to be wise; and in a long life mixing a great deal with the people from the West I have learned far more than my people could ever know; but what is it?" he said, holding out his hollowed hand as if it contained something. "So little; and there is so much to know."

"Yes," said the doctor slowly, "so much to know, Ibrahim, and life seems so short. I would give even some of that for the greater power of healing that would enable me to say, This man will live."

Chapter Twenty Eight.

A Scientific Marvel.

The day broke at last, after a long and watchful night of silence, during which the Hakim had never left his patient's side, but he had insisted upon his companions taking watch and watch.

The patient had not stirred, but lain as motionless as if already dead, apparently free from all suffering, and displaying symptoms which made the lines grow deeper in the doctor's brow.

Twice over during the night a slight rustling of a curtain had startled the watchers, and thoughts of treachery had arisen; but in each case the rustling was succeeded by a weary sigh, and there was silence once more.

The daylight which turned the lamp-rays pale was stealing in at the narrow window, when there was a louder rustle of the curtain, and the Emir entered, to find the Hakim bending over his friend, with Frank kneeling a short distance away.

The chief glanced round for the interpreter, and then went to the door leading into the next room, to draw back directly, for the Sheikh and Landon were lying upon divans, asleep.

The Emir nodded, and went straight to the Hakim, pointing down at the patient, questioning him with his eyes.

"Yes," said the doctor, bowing his head; "he lives still, but I am afraid."

The Emir seemed to grasp his meaning, and to enforce it Morris took the chief's hand and separating his fingers, placed two upon the wounded man's pulse.

There was a faint beating going on, and without another sign the Emir crossed to the curtain and passed out.

The sun rose soon after, and filled the gloomy room with cheery light; but the hard, drawn countenance of the wounded man suggested that dissolution could not be far distant; and when a few minutes later the professor and the Sheikh came in, refreshed by a couple of hours' rest, the doctor, spoke in a low voice—

"Help me," he said; "I must make another examination at all risks;" and busy minutes followed, during which the probe was used, and used in vain.

"He will sink in a few hours in spite of all I can do," said the doctor. "If I could trace that bullet there might be a chance, and I will try; but everything is against him here."

"What do you mean to do?" asked the professor.

The Hakim was silent, standing leaning over his patient, deep in thought, while his friends waited patiently for him to speak.

It was no longer the calm, easy-going companion now, but the earnest student of the human frame, straining every mental fibre to the encounter in this emergency.

A minute later he had turned to Frank, and spoke to him earnestly, with the result that the young man shook his head.

"Yes, I know," said the doctor; "you are unprepared; the difficulties seem out here insuperable; but a man's life is at stake, so is our reputation amongst these people, for one failure will balance a hundred cures, just as at home one evil deed stands out strongly against so many good which pass unnoticed. It is barely possible, but we must try."

Frank stood for a few moments thinking, and then turned his eyes upon those of his friend.

"Think, my dear boy," said the latter; "it may be a step nearer to finding Hal."

Frank still remained silent. He needed no such stimulus as that, though; he was only shrinking for fear that he would fail in his part of the experiment that was to be tried.

At last his face lit-up, and signing to the professor and the Sheikh to follow him he hurried back to their part of the palace, where a leathern case that had travelled so far on the big camel, and remained unopened, was rapidly unstrapped, and one by one the carefully packed portions of some new scientific apparatus were undone and arranged upon one of the rugs placed for the purpose.

Frank worked hard, and the professor aided him with all the energy he could throw into the task, first one and then the other uttering a word or two of satisfaction to find that everything was intact.

"Is this the apparatus with which you experimented at your place?" said the professor.

They were alone, and Frank answered in a low tone full of excitement—

"Yes," he said; "again and again with perfect success."

"But you are nervous about it now?"

"Yes, there seems to be so much at stake. Suppose we fail?"

"The best thing Lytton ever wrote, Frank, lad," said the professor: "'In the bright Lexicon of youth, there is no such word as fail.'"

"Then you would try?" whispered Frank.

"Try? Yes, and succeed, my lad. Why should you not?"

"I don't know," sighed the young man, "unless I dread that anything should go wrong, for Morris's sake."

"And he would be sorry for yours. There, work. Everything seems right: battery, wires, vacuum tubes—all looking new and perfect."

"Yes," said Frank, whose voice trembled a little; "but if we could put the experiment off for a while, so as to test it first."

"It might be wiser, but while we are trying the apparatus that man's life may ebb away."

"Then you would not wait?"

"No. Test it upon the patient. It may save him."

Taking heart as he fully grasped the need for immediate action, Frank toiled away till he was able to say that he was ready, the Sheikh looking on in silent wonder and admiration the while.

Before the manipulator of the wondrous adaptation was ready he said a word or two to the Sheikh, who hurried out and returned with a couple of his young men, and then in solemn silence and with great care the apparatus was carried as if in procession to the great tent-like sick-chamber, where at the first glance Frank's eyes rested upon the three Mullahs, who had returned during his absence, and once more stood together silent and scornful, gazing down at the Emir's friend, the pulsations of whose arteries the Hakim was still feeling, while the Emir and his son stood hard by watching and waiting for the end.

No word was spoken. The Hakim turned and ran his eyes over the apparatus that was brought in and rapidly placed in position, wires connected to the battery, and after rapid preparation everything was at last announced by the professor as being ready, while Frank's black face glistened with perspiration as he looked firmly now at his brother's old friend, who questioned him with a look, and received a quick nod in reply.

All this while the three Mullahs looked on as such men would—old practitioners in fraud and deceit, dealing with the ignorant superstitions of their tribes—their swarthy faces darkening in contempt, treating it all as a piece of jugglery on the part of a Frankish pretender to infinite power.

But on the other hand the faces of the Emir and his son were full of wonder as well as faith, knowing so well as they did the great wisdom and skill of the man who had saved their lives.

"Now," said the Hakim slowly and gravely, "help me, Frederick, my son. I have probed again for the bullet, and know where it must lie. You and Ibrahim must carefully turn him half upon his face."

This was quickly done, and a thrill ran quivering through the Emir as he saw the Hakim take out a keen knife from the

case that hung from his girdle, and with a quick movement divide the white garment the patient wore from neck to waist, laying bare the muscular back and side, and as quickly laying the soft white cotton fabric apart. "Now," said the Hakim, "tell the Emir that the thick curtains must be lowered over that window and all the light shut out. That done, whatever takes place no one must move or speak."

The words were firmly and solemnly uttered, and the place lending itself well to the purpose, the heavy rug-like curtains were allowed to fall over the window, the Emir and his son both helping, and then stopping in amaze by the drapery as for a few moments the chamber was in total darkness.

Then a strange, hissing noise arose, and heavy, startled breathing was heard, while the faces of all present were illumined by the dazzling flashes of light which began to play in a cylinder of glass.

Nothing could have been more startling to one strange to the wonders of science, for the scene was horrible and weird, suggestive to the Baggara—chiefs and Mullahs—of magic in its most awful guise. For as they stood spellbound there by the strange light which played about as if some hissing, fiery dragon were flickering its lambent tongue in and out of its glistening jaws, not only were the faces and busy hands of the Hakim and his assistants seen moving rapidly, but directly after there, in a faint glare, was the bare torso of the dying Emir.

Then, heard above the hissing of the electricity the Hakim's voice was heard, and all eyes were turned to him as the flashes of light brightened his stern, firm face.

"Ibrahim," he said, "bid the Emir come here to my side."

The order was interpreted, and firmly and without a moment's hesitation, the swarthy chief walked close up to the divan, noting as he did so that the flashes of light in the cylinder glanced from the keen knife which the Hakim held.

"Now," said the latter calmly, "tell him that as a last effort I am about to try and find where the bullet which is slaying his friend is lying."

The Sheikh's voice trembled a little as he spoke, but he interpreted the words clearly, and the Emir said softly—

"The Hakim is wise and great."

"*Now!*" said the doctor sharply, and wonder of wonders! the upper portion of the wounded man's flank was seen to become transparent, the muscular portions to dissolve in a soft, dull light, leaving the bones weirdly plain as if he had long passed away, and the awe-stricken beholders were gazing upon the skeleton remains; while most horrible of all, amidst the low murmur of dread which arose from the Mullahs and Ibrahim, a skeleton hand suddenly darted out, holding a knife and pointed to a small, round, black spot close to the dark backbone.

"Enough!" said the Hakim loudly. "Quick, the light!"

No legendary Eastern magic ever expressed one-half the marvels of that scene. One moment the electricity was hissing and the bright flashes playing about, giving ghastly effects to the faces of all, as, wild with horror, they gazed at the dull, black skeleton and the horrible pointing hand; the next the hissing had ceased, the vision had died out, and then there was a rustling noise as the curtain was torn away and the Hakim was seen in the bright sunlight, bending over the prostrate man.

A quick movement or two followed, the knife was thrown down and instruments used, and the Hakim said shortly—

"Water—sponge."

The professor had only to take a step, and then with a rapidity that was almost marvellous the marks of blood had been removed, a little lint and a bandage applied, and the Hakim was pointing to a large bullet, that which had nearly passed through the wounded man without touching a vital place.

"It is great," said the Emir simply, as he took up the globe of lead, and then turned to the Sheikh.

"Ask the great Hakim if now my friend will live. No, ask not," he said. "I know."

Then a peculiar smile of contempt played about his stern face as he stood watching the three Mullahs, who, with bended heads, were slowly passing to the door and leaving the room without a word.

The Hakim did not even turn his head to look after them, but glanced at Frank and the professor, who were rapidly disconnecting wires and placing the apparatus ready for sending back to their quarters. Then feeling what the Emir must have said, he looked him full in the eyes and said in plain English—

"I think your friend will recover now, Emir. Go and tell those who love him what I say."

Then turning to the Sheikh the old man gravely interpreted the words, and the Emir caught at and kissed the Hakim's hand, before hurrying out, followed by his son.

"Bravo, Ben Eddin!" said the professor excitedly. "Here, Ibrahim, fetch in your men to carry these things back to our rooms."

"Yes, Excellency," said the old man quietly; "but truly the Hakim is great. Tell me, is this magic—I have long thought all that we have been taught was childish tales, but after what I have seen—"

"Believe as you did before, Ibrahim," said the doctor gravely, as he laid his hand upon the old man's shoulder; "there

is no magic, but the wonders of Nature are greater far. This is only another of the discoveries of science. You have heard at Cairo the voices come along the wire?"

"Yes, Excellency, and the machine that speaks."

"Yes, and this is another of the marvels we have learned."

"But they will believe it is magic," said the old man.

"Well, let them," said the Hakim calmly. "Now, quick, and get all this away. My patient must have perfect quiet if he is to live."

"Thank you, Frank, boy," said the doctor, as soon as the Sheikh had left the room. "You managed everything to perfection. I little thought I should have to operate out here with the Röntgen rays."

Chapter Twenty Nine.

Frank's Friend.

"The young Emir wants you to go out with him, Excellency," said Ibrahim the same day, towards evening.

Frank stared, and not feeling safe, remained silent, but the professor spoke for him.

"Wants him to go out? What for?"

"It is out of friendly feeling, Excellency," replied the Sheikh. "They are much of an age, and the young Emir says that Ben Eddin is wonderful."

"But it is so strange," said the professor; "the one is a chief, and the other a slave."

"Yes, Excellency, but Ben Eddin is not a white, and he can be friends with him."

"I suppose it means friendliness, Frank, and if you refuse it will give offence. Ah, here's the Hakim. How is your patient?"

"Calming down into a natural sleep, and certainly better."

The professor told him of the young Emir's message, and the Hakim looked grave.

"We cannot refuse," he said, "and it may mean a fresh opportunity for getting new. You must go, Frank."

After the first surprise the latter felt all eagerness, for the reason expressed by his friend, and going out into the garden he found the young Emir impatiently waiting for him, and ready to greet him with a warmth which showed that the object was friendly in the extreme, but he stopped short, frowning and pointing to the young man's side.

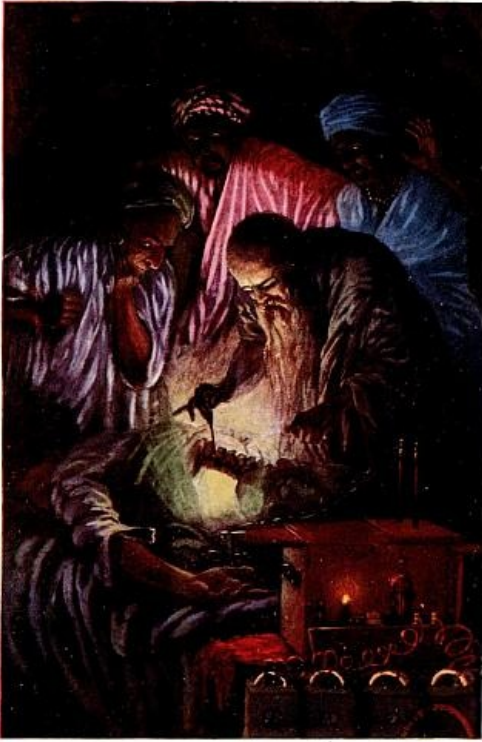
For a few minutes Frank looked at him in a puzzled way, for his words were perfectly unintelligible, till signs were made, the young Emir touching his belt, sword, and dagger, and then pointing to the house.

After the gift that had been made a short time before there could be no mistaking the meaning, and Frank went back to his room, took down the sword, dagger, and belt from the wall, and walked back fastening them on.

The young Emir's face lit-up with a boyish look of pleasure, and he stood looking at the young Englishman for a few moments before making a sign to him and hurrying off into the building, to return with a fine white cotton robe, which he threw over Frank's shoulders, and then stepped back to look at him with satisfaction, before catching him by the arm and leading him to the gate, where Frank fully expected to see camels waiting for them.

To his surprise two of the Baggara were standing there with the guards holding a couple of fiery Arabian horses, and the young Emir signed to Frank to mount, setting the example by springing up with all the activity of one used from childhood to the saddle.

"Takes it for granted that I can ride," said Frank to himself, and he stepped up to the beautiful animal, glanced at bit and reins, and then examined the stirrups, which were after the fashion of those used by Arab horsemen, far too short for an Englishman's style of riding.



"A skeleton hand suddenly darted out, holding a knife, and pointed to a small spot close to the backbone."

He made signs to the man who held the horse, pointing to the stirrup leathers, but in vain, till he began to alter them himself, when the second man grasped what was wanted, and smiling rather contemptuously, made the alteration.

Frank was modest enough in his self-estimation, and as he saw the restless movements of the beautiful little highly bred creature his first thought was, "I hope I shall not be thrown." For his experience of riding was connected with ordinary, tamely disposed English hacks and cobs, and his opportunities had been infrequent. Still he had been taught, and as soon as the stirrups were properly adjusted he took the reins, checked with a touch on the off side the horse's disposition to edge away, and mounted, the beautiful animal making a quick bound as soon as its new rider was in the saddle.

But Frank was not unseated, and to his great delight he found his steed's motions easy in the extreme, as it ambled along by its companion's side, while to the young man's profound satisfaction his new friend led him in quite a fresh direction to any in which he had previously been.

They were in a far more important part of the city, passing better houses, some with fair gardens; palm and mimosa trees overtopped walls. Here and there the houses had rough balconies, and he caught a glimpse of the Mahdi's tomb, a white-topped domed building looking like a gigantic egg set on end, with four small ones to form corners, some attempt at ornamentation, and for apex what appeared to be a great gilded spear thrust through a couple of brass balls.

To his great surprise they passed a busy marketplace and rough-looking shops, the dwellings of traders and makers of horse trappings and camel saddles; others displayed cotton fabrics, some even with ornamentations of silk; then makers of brass work, swords, and spears with the round shields carried by so many of the fighting men; and as they rode on through crowds of busy people he found that his companion was evidently noting his surprise and ready to smile with satisfaction at the interest he displayed.

In his other excursions he and his companions had been the observed of all, and at every turn those they passed had turned to gaze, generally with scowls, at them and their protecting guard, and he had often felt that it was to the latter that they owed their safety. But now it was different: his black face and the company he was in made him seem one of the people, so that his appearance caused no surprise, and he was able to ride on perfectly unnoticed by the common folk and the many armed, overbearing, mounted and pacing warriors they passed.

It was a novel and a wonderfully interesting scene as he hastily noticed how plain it was that he was riding through a conquered city in which the tribes from far south were displaying at every turn their contempt for and insolence to the humbled people they had mastered, and over whom they ruled by the sword and spear. He noted, too, the difference in type of feature, darkness of skin, and dress, between the various tribes, all of whom, however, were at one in their bullying aspect and overbearing way towards the humbled natives among whom they had taken up their residence; and hence it was that for the time being Frank had it forced upon him by the servile actions and harried ways of the men who stepped aside to let him and his companion pass, that he was looked upon as a member of one of the conquering race—one of the feared, instead of the contemned.

Frank's spirits rose as they rode on past rough bazaar and well built house, and the disappointment he had felt at the sudden check to their plans of obtaining permission to proceed to Khartoum died quite away. For he learned in this change of position that the city had not half been searched, and as his eyes wandered here and there it was with the

feeling that at any minute he might come upon the face he so eagerly sought, while in spite of a feeling of shrinking repugnance to his companion he began to realise how valuable a kind of friendship between them might prove, especially if their intercourse meant a freedom in traversing the city unencumbered by their guards.

It became more and more evident as they rode on, and his manifest pleasure and excited interest in all he saw about the place was noted, that the young Emir was perfectly satisfied, and grasping how he examined the better homes, paused from time to time for him to notice the houses and gardens they passed, and the servants and slaves of their occupants.

"It is just out of friendliness," thought Frank, "a return for my nursing when he was in a dying state. Everyone has some form of gratitude in him. Would it be possible to find poor Hal, and then appeal to the Emir and his son to let us buy the prisoner and take him away?"

Frank's heart sank again directly, for he felt that it was improbable in the extreme. They were nothing better than prisoners themselves, and the most to be expected would be that his brother's slavery might be ameliorated by a change of masters.

"Better that than how he is," thought the young man at last, "for the Emir undoubtedly respects us, and that last experiment must have raised us all wonderfully in his eyes."

He was thinking of this as he passed one of the best houses he had seen—a place where, in a rough courtyard, armed men were grouped with their camels and horses. There was a great covered well in the centre, with dejected-looking men busy drawing water, and through the open windows of the low terraced house he had glimpses of the turbaned, white-robed occupants.

The place interested Frank for reasons he could not have explained, and he would gladly have sat watching what was going on; but it was evidently the dwelling of some powerful dervish Emir, and his companion rode up to one of the armed men seated upon a slightly built, swift-looking camel. Their colloquy was very brief, and the young Emir turned to him, said something, and pressing his horse's sides galloped onwards towards a wide opening, the steed Frank rode keeping close to its fellow's side.

A minute later the young Baggara drew bridle again in the middle of the opening, about which were several low buildings, and the place being without interest, save that there were several groups of fighting men about, and some slight scaffold-like suggestions of building being commenced, Frank's thoughts went back to the house they had passed, as he felt again that it must be the palace of some powerful chief among the conquerors, while the open space where they stood was the Soudanese idea of a yard for his followers.

Then a sudden thought occurred to him, that it was the home of the Emir's wounded friend, and at once it had a fresh interest; but he had no time for further thought, for the young Baggara gave his hand a wave round, laughing the while in a peculiar way, and then pointed forward, urging his horse into a gallop, for there was an open, unencumbered road before them.

Frank's beautiful steed needed no urging, but sprang forward on the instant, and their gallop was not checked till they were right out of the city and upon the open plain beyond, where their horses stretched out together like a leash of greyhounds, the young chief whooping and shouting with delight as he found that his companion rode easily and well, while he evidently enjoyed the invigorating rush through the air.

At the end of three or four miles the horses were turned, and they ambled back then towards the widespreading, drab-looking city, the white dome of the tomb Frank had before noted standing up glistening and clear in the bright sunshine.

And now Frank fully grasped how much more important a place Omdurman was than he had before imagined, and a feeling of satisfaction came over him at the thought that his ride out had not been for naught, and that it would have been unwise to have left the place even if they could have obtained permission.

"If I could only understand what he says," thought Frank, for his companion was bright and excited now by the ride. His ordinary sombre, half-sulky manner had passed off, and he chattered away volubly as they rode on, perfectly contented that his companion was silent, as he seemed to be explaining something and pointing away to their left over the plain.

Frank was puzzled, but it did not seem to matter to the young Emir, who went on, evidently giving a vivid description of something, till Frank grasped all he meant like a flash, and rising in his stirrups he gazed hard in the pointed-out direction, to find endorsement of the idea that had flashed upon his brain. For there, plainly enough seen through the clear air, and not half a mile away, were dots of white and grey and cream colour, with overhead scores and scores of birds sailing slowly here and there, and occasionally dipping down and disturbing others, which rose on sluggish wing.

It was evidently the scene of the previous night's engagement, and with a look of fascinated horror in his eyes Frank gazed hard at his companion, who nodded eagerly, threw up his right hand to shake the flowing white robe clear, leaned a little on one side, and flashed out his keen sword. Then drawing back his lips from his white teeth he uttered a fierce yell of "Allah!—Allah hu!" and increased their pace to a gallop, cutting and thrusting savagely the while at an imaginary enemy for a few minutes, before checking his horse again and bursting into a savage laugh of delight, as he let the reins fall upon his beautiful animal's neck, and taking up the skirt of his white robe made believe to wipe the blood from his glistening sword before returning it to its sheath.

"And I'm to look at you in a friendly way and applaud you as a brave warrior, when I feel all the time that you are only a cruel butcher of your fellow-creatures," thought Frank. "But I must not show it, for through you I may find poor

old Hal, for he must be here after all, and I shall find him yet: I know I shall. Why, who can say but what I may have ridden past the very house to-day where he is kept as a slave?"

He meant something far different by the bright look of satisfaction which sparkled from his eyes, but the young Emir in his egotism took it to himself, and smiled and nodded as they rode gently on, Frank finding that they were retracing their steps towards the opening through which they had reached the plain, and a very short time after they were approaching the open, barrack-yard-like place, which now to his surprise was crowded with armed men, among whom were groups who could be nothing else but captives, for to his horror he saw that they were bound.

Chapter Thirty.

Wild Warriors.

Frank was puzzled for a few minutes; then he was convinced that the men he saw were prisoners taken in the previous night's encounter, for there was no doubt about their being members of a similar tribe. The manner, too, of his companion endorsed the idea, as he spoke to him eagerly and pointed at first one and then another with a scowl of hatred and contempt, one of the nearest, to whom a few angry words were spoken, turning upon him with a haughty look full of proud disdain and contempt, which made the young Emir clap his hand to his sword and draw it from its sheath, as he urged his horse forward as if to cut down the prisoner, whose hands were securely tied behind him.

The dervish, whose garments were stained with blood, did not so much as wince, but stood smiling at him with the same look of contempt, as if quite ready to meet his fate at the hands of his cowardly enemy, and in another minute the blow would have fallen, had not one of the mounted spectators shouted something which Frank, whose blood felt chilled, could not understand, and making his horse give a bound, interposed and laughingly warned the young chief back.

It was quite enough; the young man nodded, lowered his sword, and thrusting it into its sheath, rode back to Frank.

"And this is my new friend," thought the latter, as he strove hard to conceal the repugnance he felt by gazing straight before him; so that the change in his countenance passed unnoticed, the young Emir saying something merrily and laughing in a peculiar manner, as he gave his head a sidewise jerk in the direction of the prisoners.

"Why am I brought here?" said Frank to himself, "and what are they going to do to these unfortunate wretches?"

But he already knew, and a terrible feeling of dread made his heart contract as if it stood still; there was a strangling sensation at his throat which checked his breathing, and the crowd in the open space swam slowly round him, making him feel that in his giddiness he would the next minute fall off his horse.

Then his heart began to throb violently, and an intense desire attacked him to press the beautiful creature he rode with his heels and gallop right away so as to hide the scene from his eyes. But directly after the knowledge that he had so much at stake came in reaction, and he felt that happen what might he must sit there, not showing the slightest emotion, bearing everything, for no effort upon his part could alter the fate of prisoners taken in what was no doubt a revolt against superior authority, that authority being one of the most cruel and bloodthirsty rulers of a cruel and bloodthirsty race.

"It is inevitable," he thought, and the words he had said rose to his mind, as he felt and knew from all he had heard about the new Mahdi's followers that if the fight had gone otherwise on the previous night the Emir's people who were prisoners would have met with a similar fate.

"All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword," he muttered, and then the power to stir seemed to have left him, as he sat cold and stony in his saddle to witness whatever might come.

He was not long left in doubt.

The prisoners were in three bodies, strongly guarded, each group by a couple of score or so of fierce-looking, well-armed men, some bearing round shields in one hand, three spears of different lengths in the other, while others wore swords only, hanging from a broad baldric, and looking with their cross hilts and long, straight blades very similar to those seen in illuminations and on effigies of the old crusaders, saving that the blade widened out a little towards the point, and narrowed again.

The prisoners were all fine-looking young men, fierce and savage of aspect, and doubtless accustomed to deal out slaughter, torture, and horrible cruelties amongst the conquered people of the Soudan; but to Frank as he sat there the idea of their being slain before his eyes in cold blood half maddened him, filling him with an intense desire to be one of a retributive army whose task it would be to sweep their conquerors from the land and back into the wild districts from which they had flocked in response to the hoisting of the Mahdi's standard of war with its promise of blood, treasure, and slaves.

"They are savages—savages," he muttered. "Why do such wretches cumber the earth?"

At that moment he felt the young Emir's hand upon his arm, and he started as if from some horrible nightmare to see the young man's smiling face before him, and followed the direction of his pointing hand.

For the horrible scene which he had been brought to see as a pleasant sight, was the execution of some of the men who had risen against the Emir and his friend.

It was a scene that, but for its truth and that it was but one of the many horrors of its kind which stained the domination of the Khalifa and his people, were better left unpenned—one of those which show the need for retributive justice and the strong hand of a power whose strength should at once crush down the vile rule of cruelty and crime against modern civilisation and peace.

For as Frank's eyes followed the pointing hand it was to see that the wholesale murder of the prisoners had begun, and that the preparations he had supposed to be scaffolding for some fresh buildings were but part of the horror he was to witness. Already ropes had been fastened round the necks of three of the miserable prisoners, who were drawn up hanging from a crossbeam; and as the crowds shouted in their triumph more and more were drawn up, till quite twenty were suspended, quivering for a brief time and then swinging slowly, becoming motionless and dead.

Fascinated and helpless, Frank gazed, till a loud shouting drew his eyes to another group nearer to him, and there, bound and kneeling, with a spear-armed man in front and a dozen more behind, were some thirty of those who were never to look again upon the glory of the fast-sinking sun.

But there was no struggling—no sign of resistance. The prisoners knelt bare-headed, their faces proud and calm, and for the most part silent, save where here and there one turned smiling to his companion to right or left, as if to say a few words of encouragement, though for the most part they gazed straight before them at their guards, and in imagination it seemed to the young Englishman that they were bidding their enemies see how brave men dared to die.

It was the hideous rule of the Mahdi and the sword, for as Frank looked, one who seemed to be an officer, in flowing white garments, rode forward from the young man's left, and, checking his horse close by the kneeling line, shouted an order.

In an instant the swords of the men behind the prisoners gleamed in the afternoon sunshine, they drew back the white sleeves from their dark arms, and one by one, and in nearly every case at a single blow, following what seemed like a lightning flash, head after head dropped upon the sand, and the quivering bodies fell forward amidst the triumphant shouts of the crowds around.

As the last head fell, the last body lay giving out the remnants of its life, Frank drew a hoarse breath of thankfulness and relief that all was over.

It was too soon, for his companion touched him again, to point to the right, where a fresh horror was about to begin, and after watching once more the riding forward of the officer, and hearing him shout his order, the young Englishman closed his eyes, with the sickening sensation coming back, as he asked himself whether it was not some frightful dream; and with this thought he opened his eyes again that he might be sure.

But it was too true, for there was another score of prisoners who were mercifully spared from death, but were to suffer the new Mahdi's judgment against them for revolt against the officers appointed by him to be his vice-gerents in the city while he was away.

The mercy meted out was that of the tiger, not of the man. For swords were busy, keen and trenchant blades hewing and hacking at the unfortunate wretches, till all was over, and those who might recover would pass to the end of their miserable days crippled and helpless, each with his right hand and left foot shorn from the limbs.

Frank sat there motionless, for the power of action was completely gone, and like one absolutely stunned and dead to mental and bodily feeling, he looked and looked till there arose a wild, wailing outburst which thrilled him to the core. It was as if the sound were two-edged, Frank feeling that it was not uttered by the prostrate, partially butchered prisoners, who lay as they had been thrown, giving forth no moan, not so much as watching, with agonised eyes, their life-blood trickling into the sand; the cry came from the trembling crowd of women and friends of the victims, who had been waiting till they might dare to run forward in a body to bear away husband or brother, and see if his life could be saved.

It was now that a spasm of energy and excitement shot through Frank, as he gazed for a few moments, and then thought of the Hakim and the need for his ministrations there.

He turned quickly to his companion, who seemed to be reading his thoughts, for he nodded, and together they touched the flanks of their horses and cantered and then galloped off the field of blood, eager to leave the quivering bodies and headless corpses far behind.

The young Emir was perfectly silent now, and Frank had ceased to suffer from the repugnance he felt, for he could only think of what he had seen, so that it seemed but a matter of minutes before they had reached the gateway of the Emir's palace, though a good half hour had passed away.

A minute later he had given the young Emir a quick nod, leaped from his horse, thrown the rein to one of the guards who followed him in, and run to their quarters at the garden end, where the camels were browsing contentedly and their keepers looking on, when, finding the rooms empty, the young man looked out.

Frank felt that the Hakim must be with the Emir's friend, and hurrying through the passages and intervening rooms, he found Morris with the professor, Sam, and the Sheikh near to an angareb, or bedstead, on to which the wounded man had been carefully lifted a few minutes before.

Better still for the young man's mission, the Emir himself was standing there as if he had been looking on, and he raised his head at the young Englishman's entrance and gave him a friendly smile.

It was very near. Frank almost betrayed himself by bursting out passionately with his news; but he recalled his

position just in time, signed to the Hakim for his tablets, and in a few brief words wrote of the mutilated prisoners, and urged that the Hakim should ask for leave to try and save the sufferers' lives.

Seeing that something terrible was wrong, Morris leaned over his young companion's shoulder and read off the words he hastily wrote upon the china tablets he carried in a folding book.

Then, nodding gravely, he glanced at the Emir, who was gazing at him intently, and told the Sheikh to ask for permission to attend the prisoners.

The Emir's countenance became very stern and hard as he listened to the Sheikh's interpretation, and then replied—

"Tell the great Hakim that his mission is to heal the sick and wounded, and that I know his heart and that of his young black slave are as tender and compassionate as those of the angels of light. But I cannot do this thing. These men rose against the great Mahdi as well as against me and my friend whom you have saved. News of the revolt was sent to Khartoum in the night; the Mahdi's chief officer rode over here this day and gave the orders himself that these prisoners should die. He was there to order each punishment himself. The great Hakim asks me to let him save these men. If I send him there the Mahdi's officer will take back the news, and my head will fall. Does the great Hakim wish this, and can he give me back my life?"

The stern-looking chief smiled sadly as he spoke, and his eyes seemed to speak as the words were interpreted to the end.

"You hear, Ben Eddin?" said the Hakim gravely, and turning to the Emir he gravely bent his head in acceptance of his words, and the next minute those two had grasped hands.

Chapter Thirty One.

A Ride for Life.

"No, my lad," said the Hakim, as the position was discussed, for the twentieth time perhaps; "it is horrible, but we have the choice of being friends with these people or their foes. As friends they treat us admirably; as foes it means cruel slavery."

"And perhaps death," said the professor. "You must bear it, Frank, though I know it is hard."

"It is terrible," said Frank bitterly, "for I have hard work to conceal my dislike to this man."

"But it has brought about what we so earnestly prayed for," said the doctor. "You have won for yourself the permission to go almost wherever you wish."

"Yes," said Frank bitterly; "but I get no farther, and I am once more beginning to feel that we have come to the wrong place. We must go to Khartoum."

"Ibrahim has, I know, worked hard for us; but he gets no tidings," said the doctor.

"None," said the professor; "but still we must not give up hope. We shall have to petition the Emir after all. How long will it be before your patient can be left, Robert, my son? Let's see, it is nearly a month since you performed the operation."

"Four weeks to-morrow," replied the doctor; "and he is rapidly getting strong."

"But does not seem very grateful."

"No," said the doctor, smiling. "He is ten times as civil to Frank here as he is to me."

"You ought to have tried Frank's black dye," said the professor, laughing.

"Well," said the doctor, quite seriously, "if I had known as much as I know now I certainly should have followed his example. You see, the best of us at home look down upon a black skin as being worn by a lower type of man."

"Yes," replied the professor, "while here a white skin is the mark of the beast. Fortunately, I am getting of a good, wholesome tan colour."

"You are as dark now as Ibrahim," said the doctor, looking at his companion searchingly.

"Am I? Well, I suppose I am. So much the better. I want to be as free to come and go as Frank here. I'd say that it is terribly weary work being kept in as I am if it were not that the poor Hakim here is ten times worse off."

"And bears it all without a murmur," said Frank, turning to his friend with a look full of the gratitude he felt.

"I don't mind at all," said the doctor, smiling. "You two need not fidget about me. I pity you."

"Why so?" said Frank wonderingly.

"Because I am so busy with my profession that the time goes quickly, and I am always gaining fresh experience in surgery; while you two can do nothing but fret and think."

"Don't speak, Frank," whispered the professor warningly; "someone coming."

It was not the Emir or his son, nor anyone to summon the Hakim to his patient's side, but the Sheikh returning from one of his rambles about the place, and the professor turned to him eagerly, for the old man's face suggested that he had something to tell.

"News, Excellencies; it is the common report that the Egyptian army is coming up the river. I hear it on all sides."

Frank shrugged his shoulders and glanced at the professor, who spoke.

"We have heard that report so often," he said.

"Yes, Excellency, but there is a great deal of stir and preparation. Two more Emirs have come into the city with their followers, and the people are in despair with the treatment they receive."

The Hakim looked at him inquiringly.

"They are being turned out of their houses in every direction to make room for the fighting men, and a word or look is enough to bring down a blow from a spear shaft or a thrust. I have seen five wounded men and women since I have been out."

"If ever our troops do get up here," said the professor, "the common people will bless their coming."

"Yes, Excellency, for it will mean punishment for their oppressors, and then peace. Everyone now who is not a fighting man and follower of the new Mahdi is a slave at the mercy of the invader. Ah, it is horrible what one has to see!"

"But have you no news for me, Ibrahim?" said Frank, looking at him appealingly.

"None, Ben Eddin, though I have not ceased to search and question where I can. Will your Excellencies get permission for me to go to Khartoum to search?"

"No," said the Hakim quietly. "We may want you at any hour to help us with the camels."

The Sheikh shook his head, with a look which suggested that any attempt to escape would be hopeless, and Frank was quick to read his thoughts.

"You think we should be stopped?" he said.

"Yes, Ben Eddin, perhaps before we had gone a quarter of a day's journey. We should certainly be pursued and brought back, or perhaps," he added solemnly, "not brought back—only the Hakim."

There was a few minutes' silence, and then the old man turned to Frank.

"I hurried back, Ben Eddin," he said, "because I feared that you would go out."

"Yes, I am going," said Frank quietly.

"No," said the old man; "you must stay. The followers of the Emirs who have come in have left their fighting men to roam about the city as they please. They are fresh from far away in the south, and hungry for spoil. Everyone who cannot lift sword or spear is to them one who may be plundered, and four men were in one house torturing a poor wretch to make him show where his money was hidden, after they had stripped his place of everything that took their fancy. I hurried away, for one cast hungry eyes upon my garments, and there was no help near. The young Excellency must not go out."

"No one heeds me now," said Frank bitterly. "Besides, I had made up my mind to go to-day. You know what the Emir said."

"Yes, Excellency, that you might go about the city if you liked to take the risk. But that was before the fresh fighting men had come—fierce-looking dervishes these from the southern desert, I think, far down towards the Abyssinian lands."

"I shall take the risk," said Frank. "My face will shelter me again."

"Why run unnecessary risks?" said the Hakim gravely.

"Because I am always haunted by the thought that at any time while I am sitting idling here I may be missing an opportunity for seeing Hal. For aught we know he may be prisoner to one of these newly come Emirs. There, don't try to stop me. The more I am out about the city the less likely am I to come to grief."

"Will your Excellency let me ride with you? I will get the camels ready."

"No," said Frank; "I want to be off out. Ah! there is some fresh horror on the way," whispered the young man excitedly, for the Emir's son passed the window and glanced up, entering directly after, and making Frank a sign he said a few words to the Sheikh.

"The young Emir wishes you to go out riding with him, Excellency," said Ibrahim.

"Yes," said Frank eagerly; "I will go. There, you see, I shall be mounted now and safe."

No obstacle was thrown in the way, and shortly after the two young men were riding through the streets of the city together; but there was no special horror on the way. They passed, however, scores of fierce, dark warriors with closely shaven heads and pointed beards, and wearing large rings in their ears. They were simply dressed in closely fitting white cotton garbs which left arms and legs bare, looking in their strong contrast of black and white, mounted as they were upon small, active horses, wild of mane and tail, and as savage of aspect as their riders, effective looking troops for a desert campaign; and as they rode through the streets, loath to give way to anyone, their eyes wandered over every person, place, or thing, as if, as the Sheikh had said, in search of spoil.

On that particular day, wearied with his ineffective search, irritable, and hot, the young Englishman felt a strange sense of dislike pervade him as he rode on with his companion, who seemed to share his resentment on encountering party after party of the desert warriors, fine modern Ishmaelites; and before they had gone far there seemed to be every prospect of an encounter, for the rich robe and turban of the young Emir attracted the attention of one thin, wiry-looking black, while his companion fixed his eyes upon the handsome sword and dagger worn by Frank.

These two were taking up the centre of the narrow street through which the young men passed, and seemed disposed to bar their way; but fear was not one of the failings of the Emir's son, and their attitude aroused his wrath.

Turning to Frank, he bade him ride faster, the words being familiar now, and knee to knee they pressed on, making the strangers give way by opening out; but they returned fierce look for look, and before the strangely assorted couple had gone many yards they found that the black warriors had turned and were following them.

The Emir's son turned to Frank, laughed, and touched the hilt of his sword, with a meaning look which the young Englishman interpreted to mean—

“Will you help me if I have to fight?”

The dervish warriors had come upon them at an unlucky time, and their insolent, threatening air had roused the quiet British blood in Frank's veins. The feeling of hatred that had been growing against these people consequent upon the horrors he had seen and heard, and the irritation produced by inactivity and his disappointments, drove away all thought of the risk he might run, and the feeling grew strong that if attacked he must defend himself.

A whirl of such thoughts rushed through the young man's brain, and at his companion's question and sign his eyes flashed, he nodded assent, and sharply grasped his own sword.

The young Emir laughed again, and laid his dark hand firmly upon his companion's arm, disdainingly to look back to see if they were followed, but riding forward at a walk towards where the narrow street opened into a wider part, upon reaching which they saw upon their left a party of ten or a dozen more of the dark horsemen riding slowly along as if in search of plunder, for several had various objects thrown across their saddlebows, which looked like spoil, and their wandering looks at once turned to the approaching pair.

It struck Frank as strange in those exciting moments that the allies of the new Mahdi, the followers of friendly emirs, should be parading the streets as if they were new conquerors of the city, looking upon all whom they encountered as enemies; but so it was, and he began now to wonder what his companion would do, then why it was that he did not feel alarmed, for the time for prompt action had come.

Neither of the young men saw what took place behind them, but a sign was made by one of the two dervishes in the rear, which was answered by the party in front opening out a little as if to check the advance of Frank and his companion.

That was sufficient for the latter, who turned to give Frank a rapid glance, as he drew his sword.

The example was contagious, and for the first time in anger the young Englishman snatched his blade from its sheath, hardly knowing in his excitement what he was doing, everything being comprehended in the one great thought that his life was in peril, and that he must be ready to strike.

The rest followed as a matter of course, for his steed, trained and thoroughly accustomed to such encounters, bounded off at the same moment as its fellow, stride for stride, and with the hot wind surging in his ears Frank found himself borne swiftly straight at the party who barred their way.

It was all a matter of a few seconds. He heard a fierce war-cry, saw one of the savage dervishes rising in his saddle with a spear poised to deliver a thrust, which he felt that he must in some way parry, and almost simultaneously the dervish's horse swerved to avoid the coming shock, the consequence being that the fierce thrust was delivered wildly in the air, as the chest of Frank's Arab struck just behind the black's saddle. The next moment horse and rider were rolling in the sandy dust, while after delivering a fierce cut which took effect upon his adversary, the young Emir uttered a fiercely defiant cry, and the two companions were tearing across the opening, making for a street in front, followed by half a dozen yelling dervishes who had wheeled round their horses and started in pursuit.

Before, however, they could get their active little mounts into their stride Frank and the young Emir were twenty yards ahead, the former resettling himself in his saddle after being nearly thrown, and the latter half turned, shaking his sword defiantly, seeing with malicious joy that his adversary was *hors de combat*, half lying upon the ground, while Frank's was limping after his horse, which stood shaking itself after recovering its feet.

The young Emir shouted something to Frank, who answered it with a nod, taking it for granted that as the enemy were still somewhere about four to one, their duty was to gallop for their lives, while he, moment by moment, became more confident as he found that all he had to do was to keep his seat and leave the future movements to his companion and his horse. As to escaping, of that there seemed to be no doubt, for they two were far better mounted

than their enemies, and could easily outstrip them unless some unforeseen accident occurred.

But unforeseen accidents generally do occur at the most awkward moments, and it was so here.

The streets were encumbered as usual in that teeming hive of misery, and at the sound of the shouting and the dull thud of horses' hoofs, the occupants of the crowded streets they passed through pressed closely to the walls of the low houses on either side, but there *were* some very close shaves. One of these was caused by a loaded donkey which was being driven slowly along and partially blocked the way; but at a yell from the young Emir the driver threw himself against his beast to force it close to a wall, leaving just enough room for the fleeing pair to pass, though so narrow was the space left that Frank felt his loose white robe brush against the house upon his right as they passed the ass, their horses taking the centre directly after. Then away they tore again, but only to see amongst the people in front, towering above them, the figure of a black mounted upon a camel, whose burden projected far on either side.

There was no riding together past this, so the young Emir drew rein, shouting to Frank to go on singly, the horse comprehending the order and tearing along, passing the camel the next instant, while when his turn came, the young Emir raised himself in his saddle and delivered a quick, cutting blow, whose effect was to divide one of the most important ropes of the camel's harness, wounding the poor beast slightly, and making it fling itself wildly across the roadway, while its burden, and with it the rider, fell in confusion from the ungainly creature's back.

The young Soudanese uttered a malicious laugh as he rode on side by side with Frank, again turning in his saddle to watch and see whether their pursuers were checked by the accident. They were for the moment, but four rushed at the load and leaped their horses over it, while the others forced their way by the side, and the pursuit was taken up again with undiminished vigour.

Frank was accustomed enough by now to the roads to know that his companion was making for the open plain, where they could have a free gallop, so as to leave the enemy well behind before making for one of the other entrances and reaching their own part of the city where they would be safe. And still gaining ground, they galloped on, turning into a wider way, sending the people flying to right and left, some into houses or gardens, others to press into doorways, but all turning to watch the exciting chase, for it promised to end in blood.

The young Emir turned to Frank again, uttering a merry laugh as if the process of being hunted was a delightful sensation; but as he did so Frank pointed ahead, and his companion drew rein a little, while his countenance lowered, for there, a couple of hundred yards away, was a strong body of the newly come mounted dervishes, slowly riding into view.

Frank fully expected him to turn face round to make a dash at the smaller party who were chasing them, and try to cut their way back, and with his blood regularly up the young Englishman tightened his grip of his sword, ready for everything; but the Emir's son rode right on, straight for the coming band, their pursuers yelling behind, and unconsciously doing the pursued good service, for it warned the people in the street as much as the trampling hoofs, drawing their attention to the flying pair, who waved their swords to them to clear the way.

The wave of a hand from a galloping horseman has a wonderful effect in this direction, people darting out of the roadway to right and left in search of safety; but it is nothing to the wave of a keen sword, flashing in the sunshine, and this being a broader thoroughfare, the flying pair had on the whole a clear course, which kept on opening up more and more towards the coming body of horse, who so far had seen nothing, and in their interested staring about the great city, so new to these dwellers of the desert, paid no heed.

In his excitement as the young men rode on knee to knee, their beautiful Arab steeds keeping as close as a pair of well-broken carriage horses in a western city, Frank pointed ahead again in the direction of the dervish band; but the young Emir only nodded and laughed, as he gave his sword a wave and rode on.

"He is mad with excitement," thought Frank. "We can never do that again. They nearly fill the street from house to house."

Then a wild, strange thought flashed through his brain, as he gazed in those brief moments straight at the dervishes, and saw their wild eyes clearer and clearer at every bound made by his steed—a thought telling plainly of the fate he expected, and which he took to be unavoidable now.

"Will poor old Hal ever know that I came to save him, and that I died like this?"

As this thought came and seemed to make him feel more ready for the coming shock delivered by those two against the dense body of horsemen ahead, the cause of the excitement before them began to dawn upon the dervish band. There was a display of excitement, men rising in their stirrups and waving their spears, as they saw men of their own tribe in pursuit of the pair, though far behind, and the next minute one who seemed to be the leader drew and waved his sword, the result of the movement being that the band opened out a little more, so that their front extended from house to house, and they began to drive back all the people who were in the street.

The fugitives were now not fifty paces from the walking dervish front, and in less than a minute they would have been right upon them; but in a flash Frank saw the meaning of his comrade's movement, for he turned towards him, laughing, waved his sword to the right, and the next moment the two horses swerved round and darted down a narrow way little wider than a court, and tore on in obedience to the urging from their riders' heels, chased too now by fresh pursuers, whose yells rang out as if they were a vast pack of human hounds—as indeed they were, and as bloodthirsty; but they were at this disadvantage: everything about them was new, while to the fugitives, especially to one, the maze of streets was familiar, and their horses were quite at home.

So much so was this the case that after tearing along two or three streets, at every corner of which as they swung

round it seemed as if they would come down upon their flanks, the beautiful creatures snorted as they tore on with expanded nostrils and streaming manes and tails, galloping with stretched-out necks as if they knew their goal. It was so, for at the end of a few minutes' more wild dash they bounded across a wide way familiar to Frank, whose heart leaped as the swift animals dashed into an open court, plunging a group of mounted and foot men into a frantic state of excitement as the horses stopped by one impulse, and the young Emir shouted his war-cry, waving his sword above his head and pointing to his pursuers, who came streaming in through the open gate.

Chapter Thirty Two.

"Burning."

The wandering tribes of the desert, who exist by their sword and spear, live the life of the wild beast of prey whose eyes are ever on the look out for the furtive blow or stroke that shall lay them low. Their swords are ever ready; their spears are constantly in hand; while as an additional safeguard the majority of them carry a dagger bound to the left wrist. Danger is to them always lurking and tracking their steps as closely as their shadow. It is the shadow of their existence, so that a warning cry, the wave of sword or spear by a flying man, is taken as an alarm at once; and hence it was that the dash into their midst of two mounted men, one of whom they knew as the son of a friendly Emir, and the sight of the pursuers was enough. Before the flying horses were checked, a score of mounted spearmen were to the front to screen them, and in answer to a warning cry a couple of score more were untethering their horses; others were mounting, and a stream of foot, spear and shield armed, came running out of the houses, huts, and tents which surrounded the court. And now a slave went running up to a door in front, leading a splendid white horse, just in time for the Emir, his master, one whom Frank had only seen at a distance. He stepped out, sprang on his horse, drew his sword, and uttering a hoarse shout to his followers, rode with flashing eyes to their head.

There was no pause for parleying; an enemy had invaded his place; his men were gathering round him, eager for the fray; and as the young Emir rode up to his side the dervishes came dashing up to range themselves by their leader, and in another minute the fight would have begun had the newly arrived strangers displayed the same daring in face of the Emir's rapidly increasing force that they had in pursuit of two fugitives.

As it was, Frank sat upon his panting horse watching while a couple of the dervish party rode forward to temporise, and as far as he could make out by their gestures one of the two explained that they were peaceably riding through the city, strangers though they were, when they were attacked by the young Emir and his followers.

At this the young chief to whom he pointed burst into a mocking laugh of disdain, and it seemed to Frank that as he turned to the Emir in whose court he had taken sanctuary with his companion, that he pointed to the young Englishman and then to himself, holding up two fingers, and then making gesture after gesture as if counting, but giving it up at the end of ten, and holding up his ten fingers over and over again, the Emir's men bursting into a scornful laugh, which seemed to be the echo of the young chief's mirth.

There was a low, muttering growl amongst the strange dervishes at this, and their leader said something to which Frank's companion replied by riding up to them, sword in hand, and mockingly pointing with it at the various articles of plunder hung from the bows and cantrils of their saddles, and once again there was a roar of laughter from the Emir's men.

Their leader held up his hand for silence, and then turned to the dervish leader as if asking him haughtily a question with the very gesture and air of a schoolboy at home; and exciting though the scene was, and doubtful whether the next minute the court would not be full of cutting, slashing, and stabbing combatants, it appeared to the looker-on just like old times when a school-fellow asked another whether he wanted to fight or no.

It was something common to human nature, no doubt, for the dervish chief followed suit on the same old plan, and seemed to growl out sullenly that he did not want to fight, but he could.

The response to this needed no thought or striving to comprehend, for the Emir waved his sword scornfully towards the entrance and half turned his back, while the strangers began to move off slowly and sulkily, amidst the mocking laughter of his men.

But Frank saw no more as he sat upon his horse, which had begun to fidget about and suddenly turned to inflict a playful bite at its companion's mane, making the latter retaliate, when Frank's mount swung half round, reared a little, and began to fence and paw at the other.

The young Emir said something, but even if Frank could have comprehended his companion's words he would not have heard, for a strange feeling of giddiness had attacked him, there was a singing in his ears, and his heart beat with slow, heavy throbs which seemed to send the blood gushing up in painful floods to his throat, as he felt that at any moment he might fall from his horse.

Over exertion? The reaction after the excitement of the pursuit? The hot fit of wild desire to kill the savage enemies who sought his life, causing him to sink back into a state of feebleness that was extreme?

Nothing of the kind. It was the emotion caused by a strange doubt of his sanity, for at that critical minute his horse's movements had brought him facing the door from which the Emir had hurriedly rushed out directly after the alarm was given.

It was by the merest accident that he turned his eyes in that direction, and when he did it was to notice a camel that had been led out from a side building since the chief came upon the scene, and it struck the young Englishman that it was one of the most attractive of the curious animals that he had seen. It was of a rich creamy tint and free from the

ragged aspect so common among its kind, long and clean-limbed, muscular, and looking as if it possessed great speed, while its saddle and trappings, which were of crimson leather, ornamented with gold and silken fringe, indicated that it was the property of some man of rank, in all probability the Emir himself, and brought out ready for him in case he should choose to ride it in place of the horse.

The excitement was over, and a peculiar feeling of inertia had come over Frank. He was wearied by what he had gone through, and the self-imposed task of playing his dumb part troubled him. All he cared for now was to get back to his quarters in the Emir's palace, to rest and think. He had come out in the faint hope of passing through some new part of the city with the friend whose companionship he seemed forced to bear; and he had not been disappointed in this, for many of the streets he had traversed were quite fresh to him; but he said to himself bitterly that he might just as well have passed the time in the comparatively cool, shaded garden where their camels browsed, for he was no nearer to the object of his quest than before.

"How long is this weary, unhappy quest to last?" he thought, and then with a faint smile he pondered upon the wild thought that had come upon him when he believed that they were about to charge the dervishes, and a strange, fierce determination had come to him that he would strike one blow for his brother's sake, as he wondered whether he would ever know of his quest.

"And I'm not to be buried under the hot sand here yet," he said, as his eyes wandered over the proportions of the camel, which struck him as one thoroughly adapted for flight across the desert.

"Just such a one as I should like to see Harry mounted upon, and all of us making for the north, or for the English advanced posts."

It was then that the strange attack came on, dulling his faculties and making him ask himself whether he was sane or dreaming.

For as he thought of his brother, the heat of the sun seemed to strike down upon his head, bringing on a sudden attack of that form of apoplexy known as sunstroke, and in it he saw his brother step slowly forward holding the camel's rein and changing from one side of the animal to the other, acting the while as a groom would with a favourite steed that he had brought out for his master's use, patting and smoothing its coat, examining girth, buckle, and band, and arranging and rearranging the fine material which covered the saddle, before at last standing upright leaning his head back against the camel, gazing from a few yards away full in Frank's eyes.

A vision—a waking vision, consequent upon the attack from which he suffered! There he was, Harry, the brother he loved, upright and military of carriage as ever, but so changed. Thin and wasted, his eyes sunken and full of a deep, weary, sorrowful longing, arms bare to the shoulder, legs naked to mid-thigh, and all burned of a dull brick-red by the torrid African sun, and the high forehead deeply marked by the lines of suffering and care. It was Harry as he had pictured him night after night when he had lain awake thinking of the time when they would meet; clothed, too, just the same as any other camel driver, with thin cotton garments tightened diagonally across the body, and about the thighs, looking more like bandages than ordinary clothes, confined by another broad band about the waist.

Yes: just as he had so often pictured what he must be like, even to the changes wrought by suffering and age. But not Harry, for his brother would surely have known him at a glance, as he leaned back against his camel looking him full in the face, and have acted as he had been about to do, till the bitter feeling came home to him that this was all a waking dream brought on by exertion and excitement, and he felt that if he gazed long and fixedly the imaginary picture would fade, leaving only the ordinary slave camel driver of the desert looking in his direction.

But the change did not come, and they gazed one at the other still, Frank waiting impatiently for the imaginary resemblance to die out.

"So like him," he thought; "but he would have rushed to my arms as I was about to rush to his at all hazards, thinking of nothing but our meeting out here in this savage place. I am wild and dreaming from what I have gone through to-day, but he is cool and calm as he stands there. Yes: he would have known me at once."

A shiver of misery ran through the thinker at that moment, as he grasped the truth.

For how should his brother know him? He was a mere youth when they parted at Southampton, when he saw him last upon the troop-ship—a boy who had just finished school—and what was Harry looking at now? The companion of a Baggara Emir, a black slave, dressed in white, armed with sword and dagger, and mounted upon a splendid Arab horse. One of the pair who had been pursued by the wild dervish band which was committing so many fresh excesses in the city, and looking no better in his wild costume, and grasping a keen-edged sword, than one of them.

Another giddy sensation came over Frank Frere, and he gasped for breath, as with his left hand he snatched at his horse's mane and so accidentally jerked the rein that the horse reared and he nearly fell.

The demand upon him for action, though, sent a shock through his nerves, and gripping his saddle firmly he sat erect and patted and calmed down his startled mount, the young Emir pressing up to him and nodding and smiling as much as to say, "Well done! you ride like a Baggara."

Frank was himself again, and as soon as he could rein back a little, for his comrade had come between him and the vision, he looked wildly once more at the spot where he had seen, or believed he had seen, his brother; but the camel had been led away, and its attendant was no longer there.

Was it imagination, or was it not? He felt sick with emotion, and he could hardly restrain himself from leaping off his horse to go in search of leader and camel that he might speak and learn the truth at once; but at that moment the young Emir grasped him by the arm, their horses sidled up together, and he was no longer his own master, yielding

at once to the touch and being led away out of the open court, while when he wrenched himself round in the saddle to get one wildly eager look back his view was cut off by a party of some thirty horsemen whose spears glittered in the late afternoon sun as they followed close behind. For the young Emir had been furnished with a bodyguard by his friend, and though Frank turned again and again there was not another chance.

They rode on for a few hundred yards with the young Emir talking loudly and volubly, his theme evidently being their adventures, and quite content with a nod from time to time. For he was in high glee at his success, and the looks, smiles, and pats on the shoulder he gave to his companion from time to time plainly told he was proud of his gallantry that day.

Then in an instant all was excitement again, for at a turn they came once more in sight of a party of the dervishes, evidently those they had met before, and all ready to encounter them with scowling looks.

It showed the necessity for the escort, and the young Emir laughed, for no attempt to hinder them was made; but the party followed slowly as if to see where they went, and when at last the escort was dismissed and the two young men rode through the gates, received by their own guards, the dervishes were still in sight; but they at once turned and rode away, for the escort was advancing upon them and seemed as if it drove them back the way they came.

Chapter Thirty Three.

So Near—So Far.

"Frank, my dear boy!" cried the Hakim, when, alone with his friends, the young man made his announcement.

He could say no more, but sat holding Frank's hand, his lip trembling, and moved as neither of them had seen him before. For in all things he had been the calm, stern doctor, self-contained, and prepared for all emergencies. But now they heard him whisper to himself two or three times, as if uttering words of thankfulness.

As for the professor, he sat listening to the end, and then leaped up.

"Fancy? Imagination? Nonsense, boy, nonsense; it was as real as anything could be.—What? It must be fancy, or you would have run to his side and spoken? It would have been fancy if you had. Madness! Folly! Bedlam-ish lunacy. Why, you would have spoiled everything. Poor old Hal—poor old Hal! Thank Heaven! At last—at last!"

He set off then walking up and down the tent-like room they were in, wiping the great drops of dew from his forehead openly as he passed his two friends; but the moment his back was to them the handkerchief glided to his eyes, where other salt drops kept on gathering, to be swept carefully away each time before he turned.

"But who is this chief, Emir, or whatever he is?" said the professor, stopping before the doctor and Frank suddenly. "I've never heard of him before."

"I know nothing about him whatever, only what I have told you. He is some friend of the Emir's son, and of course belongs to their party."

"I suppose so," said the professor excitedly. "Well, it all seems simple enough now, Robert, my son. You must set Ibrahim to work the first time the Emir comes in, and tell him we have discovered that this other Emir's slave— Tut-tut-tut! reduced to camel driving! Poor old Hal! But better that than having his head cut off, eh? Let's see; what was I saying? I remember: that this other Emir's slave is a very dear old friend of ours, and that he must get him set free—or buy him—or let us buy him to come and help us. Oh dear! oh dear! Only fancy coming out to the Soudan to buy our old school-fellow! Then when we have got him we must make our plans and be off some dark night, and—I say, though," he said piteously, after a pause, "that won't do. Sounds childish, doesn't it?"

"It would not do," said Frank firmly.

"And it does sound childish, my dear Fred," said the doctor; "don't you think so?"

"Of course it does," replied the professor. "It would upset everything; but I'm so completely knocked off my balance that I don't know what to propose. Yes, I do. Look here: I know. The poor fellow has been a prisoner for years, and looks old and thin, Frank says. Then we must send Ibrahim at once to tell him help is at hand, and put him out of his misery. No, no, no; that sounds like putting him out of his misery altogether. What do you think, Frank?"

"That we have been *very* careful so far, and have at last been thoroughly successful."

"Yes, yes; of course," cried the professor excitedly.

"Now we must be more cautious than ever."

"Exactly; we must tell Ibrahim not to do the slightest thing to excite suspicion."

"I am not going to trust Ibrahim to communicate with Hal," said Frank decisively. "I must do this myself."

"You?" cried the doctor in surprise; and the professor looked at him wonderingly.

"Why do you both stare at me like that?" said Frank warmly. "How is Ibrahim to get leave to speak to my brother?"

"For the matter of that," cried the professor testily, "how are you to manage?"

"I don't know yet, but in a way I have been introduced there, and have stood close to the poor fellow. Why may I not manage to go there again? The Emir's son would take me anywhere I wished."

"That is true, Fred," said the doctor quietly.

"We cannot set anyone else to do this," cried Frank warmly. "This must be my task."

"Well, I daresay you are right," said the professor; "your black skin is a passport anywhere. But you must act at once."

"If I can," said Frank gravely. "There must be no undue haste."

"There I don't agree with you, my dear boy," said the professor, "for these Emirs, even if they have homes in the city, are here to-day and gone to-morrow, in these warlike times. They are wandering people, and it would be horrible to awaken some morning and find that poor Hal was gone."

"But we could trace him now," said the doctor warmly. "Hah! One begins to breathe freely now that there is a bit of blue sky among the clouds."

"Well, perhaps you are right, Frank," said the professor, in a more satisfied tone. "The lead belongs to you too after this discovery, but you must be careful, lad."

"Try and trust me," was the reply; "but even now I am ready to think it was all a dream."

"Here," cried the professor, "let us tell the Sheikh and poor Sam," and hurrying to the window he beckoned both in from the grounds, where the Sheikh was seeing to his treasured camels and Sam was looking on.

"Then hadn't I better begin to pack up at once, gentlemen?" said the latter eagerly, after he had been twice checked in his exuberant joy.

"Begin to pack up?" said the professor wonderingly. "What for?"

"To get back into a Christian country, sir," said Sam warmly. "We've found Mr Harry, and he's alive. Let's be off at once, I say. I haven't grumbled, gentlemen, and I ain't never said a word, but I've gone to bed every night—if you can say that thing they calls a anger reb is a bed—every night feeling wondering like that I've got a head left to put on the pillow. Ugh! It's a horrible place, where no one's safe for ten minutes together. Hadn't I better begin to pack?"

"When we have my brother safe," said Frank, smiling. "I'm afraid, Sam," he added sadly, "that we have a good deal to do yet before we start."

"Yes," said the Sheikh gravely, "and the young Excellency must take more care than ever. If there was the slightest suspicion that we were here to take his brother away all our heads would fall."

Chapter Thirty Four.

Fresh Gifts.

Fortunately for Frank's plans the Emirs who led the late arrivals of forces took up their residence right at the other end of the city, outside which their savage followers were for the most part encamped, and in the various rides about the place which the young man had with his companion none of them were encountered, though men of another tribe were. For it was evident that forces were being mustered largely with Omdurman as a centre—a fact which gave strength to the rumours the Sheikh brought in daily that the combined English and Egyptian forces were steadily coming up the Nile.

But to Frank these rumours regarding the army were as if they did not exist. His whole being was concentrated upon the one aim—to obtain an interview with his brother; and a week had passed with this apparently as far off as ever.

The friends obtained a little information through Ibrahim, and, briefly condensed, it amounted to this: That Harry Frere—no longer kept in irons—was rather a favoured slave of the Emir he was with, but he was always jealously guarded, and constantly in close attendance upon his owner, having in charge the Emir's horses and camels. But though Frank had seen him once more during a call which the Emir's son had made upon the chief who had protected him on that special day, he had not been able to get half so near as before, and, to add to his misery, his brother had not once turned towards where Frank with throbbing breast strove for a glance.

Accident, however, often does more than the most carefully devised plans, and it was so here.

Pending the arrival of more savage troops, the Emir and his son spent a good deal of time in a kind of rough drilling of the powerful body of men who followed their standard, and it became quite a matter of course for Frank to accompany the young chief, who made him more and more a companion; but there were days when they rode about together, and as Frank grew more familiar with the city his Baggara companion willingly enough allowed him to select the way they went, and naturally enough Frank arranged that either in going or coming they should pass the friendly chiefs house.

It was easily managed, for Frank, who had naturally enough been pleased with the beautiful Arabian horse he rode, made this the excuse in a dumb way of displaying a deep interest in horses and camels, taking the young Emir about among their own, examining the Emir's stud in his company, and finally contriving to make him understand that he

wanted to see those belonging to his friend.

All happened more favourably than he could have anticipated, and as Frank's companion readily joined in anything that seemed to please his friend, it came about that one day Frank found himself in the Emir's place, inspecting the beautiful horses and camels which formed the chief's principal wealth.

They were shown readily enough, the chief looking proud and pleased with the eager examination and satisfaction expressed by his visitors, having first one and then another saddled for the friends to try, though, while showing a smiling face and making much of the various noble-looking brutes, there was a weary sickness about the young man's heart as he sought in vain for an opportunity to make himself known to the Emir's slave. Meanwhile Harry led up horse after horse, saddled and unsaddled, even holding his brother's stirrup, but never displaying the slightest emotion, when Frank was thrilling in every fibre as he made use of Harry's hand and shoulder unnecessarily while mounting the kneeling camel which he had been holding when they first met.

It was something, that touch, and to be so near to his brother. A word would have been sufficient to make his presence known, but Frank dared not utter that word, for the Emir was there giving orders to his slave, and his companion was always close by, so that it was impossible to slip that tightly folded scrap of paper into the young officer's hand. It only contained a few words, but they would have been enough if he could have given them with a word of warning to Harry not to look at the paper till they were gone.

"Cheer up! Friends are near.—Frank."

That was all; and those words lay all through the visit ready to Frank's hand, while with patient endurance his brother toiled away, coming and going with horse and camel, till the young Emir began to grow impatient and Frank dared not express a desire to see more, nor yet turn to look after the slave leading away the last horse.

But Frank felt that the visit was not in vain. He had gained something, and he said to himself if he could get to the Emir's place some day alone and under some pretence about the horses, he might manage to have a word or two with the prisoner.

But what was the excuse to be?—Could he contrive to get there alone some day when the young Emir was away with his followers?

That seemed very doubtful, for twice of late when he had taken his men out upon the sandy plain away from the river he had invited and taken Frank with him, and the rides had been startling, for the young chief's manner suggested that since their encounter with the dervishes he had some thought of making him one of his followers, a member of a wild troop of desert warriors.

Still Frank thought that there must be some way of compassing a meeting with his brother, one that would excite no suspicion, and one evening when he had been talking the matter over with his friends, and a score of ideas had been proposed, each of which possessed some failing spot and caused it to be thrown aside, the right thought came.

They were sitting together feeling rather despondent, and the Hakim as a last resource began to talk of the possibility of an appeal to the Emir to gain the liberty of the young English slave, but only to make Frank shake his head sadly.

"He would not do it," said the young man, "and he will never part with us. See how the sufferers have been coming in these last three days."

"Yes," said the Hakim, with a droll look of perplexity in his countenance; "no sooner is one cured than another appears."

"Yes, two," said the professor; "we did not think you were coming out into the Soudan to find a tremendous practice waiting, and no pay."

"But board and lodging, my dear Fred," replied the doctor, smiling.

"Exactly, and certainly that is of the best. But by the way, have you quite done with Emir Röntgen?"

"Quite," said the doctor. "Ibrahim told him that he was well off my hands this morning, and he scowled at me—well, I'll be fair—he looked at me as seriously as he could, made me a stately bow, and went away."

"These noble cut-throats pay their doctors' bills very cheaply," said the professor. "Hullo, Ibrahim, what is it?"

"The Emir, Excellency, to see the Hakim."

"Advice gratis only in the morning," said the professor gruffly. "Can't send him back, I suppose. What's the matter with him now?"

The explanation soon came, for their friend entered at once, followed by three of his men laden with something, and the next minute Ibrahim was busy at work interpreting the great chief's speech, which was to the effect that his brother Emir thanked the Hakim for saving him from death by his skill, and begged that the great and wise doctor would accept the trifles that he sent by the hand of his friend. In addition, he said that if at any time the Hakim would change his home, there was one for him in his patient's tribe, where all his people would live longer and be happier if they had so wise and learned a man in their midst.

"But tell the great Hakim," continued the Emir, "that he must not think of leaving me and mine. That I look upon him as a young man might look upon his noble, learned brother, for he has saved my life and my son's life, and given

health and strength to hundreds who have come to ask his help.”

The fierce, rugged face of the Emir grew softer as he spoke these last words, and then drawing back he signed to two of the men to lay their loads at the Hakim’s feet, which they did, and then left the room.

“Tell the Hakim that this is from me for all that he has done for me and my son.”

At a sign the third man laid his burden upon the rug in front of the doctor, and passed out in turn, while bending down to take the latter’s hand the great chief held it for a few moments in silence, and then moved toward the door.

“Stop!” cried the doctor quickly. “Tell the Emir to stay that I may thank him, Ibrahim.”

The chief turned and shook his head.

“It is enough that the great Hakim will take my little gifts,” he said, and he gravely passed out of the room.

“Then they are grateful,” said the professor, “and I beg their pardon, both of them. What have they sent for you? Rich rugs and silk and muslins, I suppose, and—”

“Never mind them,” cried Frank in an excited whisper. “I have it now!”

“What?” said the doctor earnestly.

“The idea for getting near poor Hal.”

“Ah!” cried the professor, as excited as the speaker, for Frank’s manner carried conviction. “What is it?”

“A present to the young Emir’s friend for saving our lives.”

“But how’s that going to bring you into contact with poor Harry?”

“Like this,” whispered Frank eagerly. “He is proud of his horses and camels—this chief. I will give him the finest and most costly bit and bridle Ibrahim can buy in the bazaar.”

“But are such things to be bought in the city?”

“Oh, yes, plenty of them. Fine red or brown morocco, ornamented with silver or gold. You could get such a one, Ibrahim?”

“Oh, yes, Excellency, or a saddle either.”

“Yes,” said the professor, after a few moments’ thought. “Such a present would appeal to a man like that. Yes, Frank, I like that idea. You could stop and watch while the bridle was put on. Ibrahim must see about the gift at once.”

“Yes, Excellencies,” said the old man; “the words are good. To-morrow, then, I shall bring plenty for them to choose. But will not your Excellencies see now what the great Emir has brought?”

“No—yes,” said the Hakim. “We must not slight his gifts. Open them out.”

Sam was summoned, and costly rugs, pieces of richly woven stuffs, the finest cotton haïks and burnouses, were spread out before the friends, and they noticed that their Emir’s gift was far more costly than his friend’s. But one and all had another present in their vision, one that seemed to stand out real before Frank Frere all the time—a rich, well-stitched, red morocco head-stall and reins, ornamented with thick bosses and buckles of gold, and fitted with a silver bit; and that night when he slept the present was the main feature of one long-continued dream.

Chapter Thirty Five.

Frank’s Venture.

As Ibrahim had said, the task was easy, for the next morning, before the Hakim had commenced with his sick and wounded, one of the Soudanese harness-makers was at the palace gate with his men and a great white donkey heavily laden with admirable specimens of leather work, barbaric in style, but for the most part such as would have delighted anyone of artistic taste.

The various objects were brought in and spread before the Hakim; but Frank was disappointed, for there was no such bridle as he had designed in his mind’s eye—nothing so costly; and not one head-stall that was ornamented with gold. But in the end one was bought profusely decorated with heavy buckles and bosses of silver; the steel bit, too, had cheek pieces of the more precious metal, while to hang from beneath the neck of the steed that was to wear it, there was a large glistening ball of silver, from which streamed a great tuft of scarlet horsehair.

The maker asked many piastres for his work, but it was well worth the price, and his face shone with pleasure as Ibrahim stood solemnly, bag in hand, to count them out; and then the black cleared away his stock-in-trade and went off rejoicing.

“So far so good, Frank, my boy,” said the professor; “but how do you mean to get the present delivered?”

“By sheer daring,” said Frank quietly, “and this very day if the young Emir will only let me be at rest.”

"And how then?" asked the Hakim anxiously.

"The simplest way possible. I shall order through the guard the horse I ride to be brought round, and Ibrahim will saddle one of his camels to bear the bridle. Then I shall ride straight to the chief's place, Ibrahim will interpret my signs, and I shall give the present myself. After that I shall ask to be allowed to harness the Emir's favourite horse with my present. He is sure to consent, and it will go hard if I do not contrive to slip something into poor Harry's hand or a few words into his ear."

"Yes," said the doctor, with energy; "and the simplicity of the business ought to ensure its success."

"I begin to think it will," said the professor, "if some of our Emir's people do not stop you as you are going out."

"I do not think they will," said Frank quietly; "and I have a feeling of confidence upon me which makes me ready to say I shall succeed."

The professor said nothing, but he looked very grave and glanced at Ibrahim, whose countenance was solemn in the extreme, while the Hakim seemed plunged in thought.

But they had to think of other things soon after, for there had been a fierce encounter at daybreak that morning, some miles from the city, for what reason the party did not know; but its results were the bringing of about a dozen wounded men on horse, donkey, and camel, to be carried into the tent-like booth in the grounds, where of late the Hakim had attended to his patients, and he and his assistants were as hard at work as they could be for hours.

"You have thought no more about that plan of yours," said the professor anxiously, as the last wounded man was carried out after he had shown his thankfulness by kissing the Hakim's hand.

"On the contrary," said Frank, smiling, "I have thought of nothing else, seen nothing else but that bridle all the morning, and now I feel that I must have made plenty of mistakes."

"But it will be too late to make arrangements now," said the Hakim anxiously.

"There are none to make," replied Frank. "Look here: there has been some serious fighting, of course, and I believe both the Emir and his son are away, or we should have seen them here."

"It's of no use to argue with you, Frank," cried the professor pettishly. "You have an answer for everything. I'm sure you will be stopped."

"Never mind," said Frank. "I am going to try what a bold stroke will do. If I am turned back I must get leave through our young chief another day, and chance dropping a word in Harry's ear."

"I have done," said the professor. "Try."

Frank nodded, and signed to the old Sheikh to come to them.

He came, looking extra solemn and quiet.

"You will go to the head guard, Ibrahim, and tell him I want my horse as soon as it can be brought to the door."

"Yes, Excellency."

"You will then saddle your best camel and spread upon it, so that they can be seen, this bit and bridle and trappings. If the guard asks where I am going you can tell him that I am going to take a present to the young chiefs friend."

"Yes, Excellency. He will be sure to ask."

"Good," said Frank, and the old man went out without another word, while Frank coolly prepared for his short journey by putting on the rich robe that had been given to him, and buckling on his sword and knife, finishing off with a handsome turban of the kind the desert warriors wore.

"Here is Ibrahim back," said the professor, as he saw the old man reappear before Frank was ready. "He is coming to say that you cannot have a horse."

"But he has gone to get his camel ready all the same," said Frank, smiling, and about a quarter of an hour later the Arab that Frank rode was led ambling up to the door of their quarters by one of the guard.

The young man turned to give his friends a calm, smiling look of triumph, as he walked towards the window to glance at his steed. The next moment his countenance fell. For he had seen the gate from where he stood, and there, as if ready to accompany him wherever he went alone, was the chief guard, already mounted, and behind them, ready too and well-armed, were half a dozen men.

"Ah!" said the doctor, with a sigh. "I feared there would be something like this."

"Yes," said the professor; "they have us safely, and do not mean to let us go."

"The young chief must have left word," said Frank bitterly, as he ground his teeth.

"Of course, then, you give it up now?" said the professor quickly.

"No," said Frank firmly, "I am going to start—at once."

The lips of both his friends parted as if to utter a protest, but there was something so determined in Frank's eyes, so stern and set about the lines of his mouth, that they forbore, and the doctor spoke gently—

"Very well, Frank, lad," he said gravely; "you have had far more experience among these people in the city than I have, and you know the need of caution. Take care; a slip may mean destruction now we have climbed so near the pinnacle of our hopes. I will say no more than this—Go, and Heaven protect you."

"Yes," said the professor earnestly, and he held out his hand.

Frank grasped it firmly, and that of the doctor, who took his left, all three standing silently for a few minutes.

Then Frank turned to go, but hesitated for a moment or two, for the professor was running his eye over him critically.

"What is it?" said the younger man.

"I was looking to see if there is anything about you that might raise suspicion."

"Well?"

"Nothing, my lad. I have had years of dealings with the people, and I should never take you for anything but a native of the desert."

Frank nodded, and was mute again, as he walked out and across the path to where his horse was waiting the beautiful animal whinnying softly in token of recognition, and stretching out its velvety muzzle for the caress that was always given and enjoyed. The next minute the rider was in the saddle, with the Arab tossing its head and ambling gently beneath him.

Chapter Thirty Six.

The Reaction.

Out by the gate in the dazzling sunshine sat Ibrahim upon his tall camel, the headgear for the present carefully arranged so as to make a brave show, and the seven mounted guards waiting for the Hakim's learned slave, who bore the reputation now of being deeply versed in magic to such an extent that he could call down lightning from the skies and make it do his will. A horror this to the ignorant Soudanese, and something to make them tremble, but no exaggeration. For to us of this century who can send our messages to the other side of the earth and receive back answers in a few hours; talk with friends at a distance, and recognise their voices; receive their speeches, their songs, or the melodies of instruments impressed on wax, to reproduce whenever we please; these and scores of other such scientific marvels are but everyday matters of business, common trifles, though they dwarf many of the magic legends of the Arabian Nights.

Consequently the Hakim's black slave was greeted with profound reverence by the Emir's bodyguard as he rode out, stern and thoughtful, upon the mission which he felt to be the greatest of his life, and barely noted that his beautiful horse ambled along as if proud of this rider in the flowing white robes, and whose richly ornamented sword beat softly upon its flank.

Frank gave one glance back, however, to see that the Sheikh's camel was pacing along a few yards behind, the thick, long, scarlet horsetail plume waving beneath the ungainly animal's neck, while the seven horsemen rode, fiercely important, a few yards behind the Sheikh, each with his round bossed target and gleaming spears.

For one moment Frank thought of self, and how strange it all was that he, the young Englishman, accustomed to London and its ways, the student of chemistry, full of experimental lore, should be riding there in disguise, the Hakim's slave and assistant—the favourite of a powerful Baggara Emir and his son—riding through the teeming crowds of that hive of horror, bloodshed, and misery, and those familiar with his appearance making way at once. It was all like a dream for a few moments, or as if he were reading with strong imagination some romantic work descriptive of a scene in the south and east. Then it was all real again—horribly real—and he rode gently on, thinking of the part he had to play, and wondering wildly whether he would have the nerve to go through all he had mentally planned, and whether if he were successful in getting alone with his brother, Harry would bear the announcement of there being help at hand.

"It all depends on me," thought the adventurer, as he rode on, stern, and gazing straight before him, hardly conscious of the crowd through which he passed, or the whispers of the people who recognised the Hakim's follower; for he was busy working out his plans and picturing the scene in which he was to play that critical part.

It might be that the lives of all would be at stake if he failed in carrying out what he had devised, and no wonder that his face grew more set, his eyes darker with thought, till, as it seemed to him, he found himself at the entrance to the chiefs enclosure and home, with the court dotted with horse and foot, camels tethered here and there, some standing dreamily munching, others crouched down with their long necks outstretched upon the sand, and their leaders and riders idling about, talking, playing games, or smoking, waiting till their masters needed them for some mission, perhaps to raid and plunder, or to join other bands upon some great movement instigated by Mahdi or Khalifa, whose steps would be marked in blood.

There was no hesitation. Frank rode boldly in, unquestioned, and not one of the many men scattered about ran to horse or camel, or grasped his weapons. It did not seem strange to them that the Hakim's follower should ride in to see their chief, followed by a camel and seven of a friendly Emir's bodyguard. What took their attention at once—they being men whose lives had been spent in company with the swift horses of the desert—were the bright, gaily

ornamented trappings spread on the neck of Ibrahim's fine camel, and a low murmur of satisfaction arose as they gazed at what was evidently a present for their lord.

Frank rode slowly across the wide, open court, with his eyes wandering wildly in search of his brother; but he was not visible, and he let them rest for a few moments upon the long, low, shed-like building into which he had seen him go at a former visit, that evidently being the place where the chiefs horses were stabled when he was in the city, the open heavens being their roof when halting among the wind-swept sands.

Frank drew rein close to the entrance, his guard halted a dozen yards in the rear, and Ibrahim, after urging his tall camel close behind, made the beast kneel down, and then dismounted, leaving the scarlet trappings full in view upon the animal's back, before going forward to his master's side, fully conscious that every movement was closely watched, and standing respectfully attent while the Hakim's black follower made a few quick signs.

Ibrahim bowed low, and went up to the house, where a knot of armed men received him and listened to the message he delivered, one going in at once, and the old Sheikh waiting ceremoniously till his messenger came back and spoke. Then the old man returned as he came, to whisper to Frank, who nodded shortly and then sat motionless and stern, gazing straight at the door as if deep in thought and ignoring everything around.

He played his part well, knowing what a battery of keen eyes were directed at him, while horsemen, foot, and camel riders whispered and told those who did not know, of how this dumb black follower of the Hakim was nearly as great a prophet and doctor as his master, and how they had cured hundreds, from great chiefs dying of their wounds down to children going blind from the ophthalmic curse of the desert lands.

The murmur of this whispering and the loud, ceaseless buzz of the myriads of flies darting here and there over the sand and lighting again and again upon the superheated walls, when they were not torturing horse, camel and man, fell strangely upon Frank's ears as he grew more calm, and his doubts and fears died out now that the step had been made, and he felt ready to wonder at the calmness and confidence he displayed.

The great trouble he had now was to master the intense desire to look round to see if the face he sought was gazing at him from some window or doorway, as curiously as were the rest, and he would have given anything to turn in his saddle and bring his eyes to bear in the search. But he had well determined upon his course of action: he sat rigidly in his place with his eyes fixed upon the doorway about which the chief's followers were grouped, till there was a slight stir and the stern-looking warrior appeared, looking fierce and imperious, as he strode slowly out and acknowledged Frank's haughty bow, when his countenance relaxed a little, but assuming ignorance of the present upon the camel, he advanced with open hand to greet his visitor, saying a few words of meaningless welcome.

Frank bowed again and turned slowly to the Sheikh, who bent low, and then in a few well-chosen words spoke of the intense grief felt by his master, the great help and chosen friend of the wonderful Hakim, of whose miraculous cures the noble Baggara chief must have heard.

There was a bow from that individual, and Ibrahim went on about his master and lord feeling now, of all times in his life, how painful it was that he, the learned young Hakim, could not thank his highness in words for the protection given to him when he was pursued by those degenerate sons of Shaitan. He would have liked to thank the Emir verbally, but as he could not do this he had come himself to ask his noble friend to accept a trifling gift, because he knew how great a lover he was of horses, and if he would condescend to accept the little present and place it upon his favourite steed it might bring his grateful friend sometimes before his eyes.

There was a piece of pantomime here. The Baggara chief looked puzzled, and when Ibrahim paused he looked up. Then he looked down, and had to ask the old Sheikh what he meant, being quite unable to notice what everyone else in the courtyard could see plainly, till it was almost touched.

Then, and then only, did he cast aside all his formal Arabic, Eastern stateliness and assume a rapturous expression, seizing one of the reins, examining it closely, raising the scarlet-dyed, drooping plume, touching the bit and broad band with its silver ornamentation, and uttering exclamations of delight the more impressive from their being to a great extent real, for the gift was a worthy one and such as any lover of a horse would appreciate.

Then followed a warm burst of thanks, and a request that the Hakim's friend would descend and enter the house for refreshment.

The critical time was approaching, and Ibrahim, in answer to a grave nod of acquiescence from Frank, turned to the chief to say that nothing could please his master more, but he had a request to make. He, too, loved horses; he nearly worshipped the steed he rode.

The Emir smiled and nodded as if to say no wonder, as he patted and stroked the glossy satin skin of the beautiful little creature. Then he listened attentively for the explanation of the petition that he was to grant.

Ibrahim enlightened him at once.

It would give the Hakim's friend as great joy as he had felt when by his help the Hakim had brought light back to the glazing eyes of one of the wounded Baggara chiefs, for his great desire was to see the bit and bridle upon the head and neck of one of his great friend's noble chargers, so that he might note whether it suited the horse and looked as well as he wished.

The Baggara chief smiled pleasantly, and felt highly satisfied that he was not to give something more valuable in exchange. Then clapping his hands, a follower rode up and was despatched to the side building with a message; while Frank's heart beat in a way which seemed to threaten suffocation.

It was hard work, but he sat unmoved, the chief talking, and the recipient of his words congratulating himself that he was not called upon to speak.

Finding that he was not understood, the Emir turned to Ibrahim to bid him say that the Hakim's friend should have the finest barb in his stable bitted and bridled, and if he would descend and then mount and try the present himself in a ride round the enclosure, the gift would be rendered doubly valuable to its recipient.

The words had hardly been repeated in English to Frank when a film crossed his eyes like a yellow cloud, through which he saw his brother approaching, leading the chief's magnificent, ready saddled charger by a leathern thong so that he had no need to touch the bridle which lay upon the beautiful arched neck.

For a moment or two Frank felt that his heart was sinking and that he would break down, while as he turned away his head he saw that the Sheikh had noted the change in his countenance, for he was gazing at him in horror.

Frank felt that all was over, when in an instant something happened which made a call upon him in another direction and gave him time to recover himself; for as his brother led out the chief's charger, it caught sight of the strange horses gathered in the court and broke out with a loud neighing challenge, which Frank's answered on the instant, reared up, and then made a bound open-mouthed to savage the challenging barb.

Here was the necessary call upon Frank's nerve, and tightening his reins to retain the mastery over his steed, the beautiful Arab resented the check and began to kick and plunge furiously, calling forth all its rider's skill to retain his seat; and it was not until after a couple of minutes' hard fight, during which the horse seemed to have been smitten with a notion that the proper equine mode of progression was upon its hind legs, and the use of the fore was to strike out and fence, that it condescended to go on all fours, while even then it was only to gain impetus for a series of stag-like bounds and attempts to dash off in any direction that seemed open.

Frank had ridden fairly well at home, while during his stay with the Emir he had had plenty of opportunity for improvement, his companion having mounted him upon a splendid steed, and, being a wild and reckless rider himself, had gradually led Frank into thinking little of many a mad gallop out into the desert plain.

Hence it was that instead of feeling startled at this new development of vice on the part of his steed, the rider, as he grasped the fact that everyone was watching him as if in expectation of seeing him thrown, felt the blood flush to his cheeks in an angry fit of annoyance which made him grip his saddle with all his force, and set to work to regain the mastery over the excited beast.

For the next five minutes the latter darted here and there, seeming to grow more and more infuriated as it found its efforts vain, for it was bitted with a powerful curb, the sharp use of which checked it again and again, till finding its rider ready to meet it at every turn, it gave up the struggle as quickly as it had begun, settled down at once into a gentle amble in the extreme corner of the court, into which it had dashed, scattering half a dozen camels and looking as if it intended to attempt to leap a low tent and gain its liberty there.

The next minute Frank was riding quietly back, hot and flushed, but mentally composed, listening to a loud outburst of admiration as he passed group after group of the Emir's horsemen, men who had, to use a common term, been almost born in the saddle.

As Frank reined up close to where the Sheikh and the Emir were standing, he saw that the old man's face looked strangely mottled; but he had no chance of giving him an encouraging look, for the Emir advanced smilingly, and patted and made much of the Arab, turning directly to speak to Ibrahim.

"Tell the Hakim's friend," he said, "that he is mounted upon a horse as full of speed as the wind, and that he rides it as a brave man should."

The words were interpreted, and Frank replied to them with a calm bending of his body, turning directly after to where his brother stood holding the chief's horse, and finding that he could dare to look at him without being attacked by that horrible sense of emotion.

The chief then gave a haughty command or two, and the horse was led close up to Ibrahim's camel, where it stood as if it were some beautiful piece of statuary, while its bit and bridle were removed and the present quickly adjusted to its head, Harry Frere taking up a hole or two here and there till a perfect adaptation was made, when as if proud of its new finery the noble charger tossed up its head, making the scarlet hanging plume float about in the glowing air, and then stood motionless with head erect. Once more there was a loud outburst from the chief's assembled followers, and he stood looking as proud as the horse. Then he walked round it, giving it a caress or two, and finally signed to his slave to lead it nearer to Frank, whose heart once more began to beat hard as his brother obeyed, and the next minute stood so near that he could have leaned from his saddle and laid his hot hand upon the poor fellow's shoulder.

Fortunately he was given no time to think, for the chief came alongside and signed to him to dismount.

Feeling as if it were all a dream from which he must awake the next moment, Frank threw himself lightly from his horse, handed the rein to the Sheikh, and then stood while the chief's barb was led up to him, striving successfully not even to glance at the leader; but taking up the reins he thrust a foot into one stirrup, and sprang up, fully expecting a repetition of the battle through which he had already passed. But the beautiful creature stood perfectly still until the slave dropped back, and then, in response to the slight pressure of its strange rider's heel, started off at a slow walk, Frank sitting up proudly, but breathing hard, for he was panting with excitement on finding that something which he had foreseen would be the case was just as he wished, for it had everything to do with the *ruse* he had planned.

A fresh burst of cries arose as the beautiful barb paced along past its master, then at a touch began to amble and curvet, tossing its beautiful head, while Frank gave and bent to its various motions, feeling perfectly at his ease, for the springy movements were delightful.

He passed the chief twice, and he could see that the Baggara looked as proud as a boy of his splendidly caparisoned horse. He saw, too, in one quick glance that his brother had gone back towards the shed-like place from which he had brought the mount, while the Emir's followers had gathered to one side of the court, everyone taking the most profound interest in the equestrian display, while the other side of the court, opposite to the house near which the chief stood, was vacant.

Now was the time if the *ruse* was to be attempted, and Frank drew a deep breath as he advanced towards the Emir, while as he passed him he made a quick, hurried gesture to the assembled followers, waving his hand to them to give way and leave him room to have a gallop round the court, at the same moment pressing the barb's sides so that it broke into a canter at once, careering along with the scarlet plume sweeping out, and once again there was a loud, eager cry.

Frank felt that he was riding well, and the horse sped along till the last of the mounted men were passed, and directly after he was riding along the vacant side of the court, on and on till he was about fifty yards from where his brother stood, and in full view of the Emir and his men, when in obedience to a light check the horse stopped short, falling back almost upon its haunches, and as all gazed wonderingly across at where the rider sat they saw him gesticulate angrily at the waiting slave, as if ordering him to approach.

Harry Frere ran to him at once, and Frank threw one leg out of the stirrup, pointing downward, and in dumb show bade him lengthen the stirrup leather, pointing out that he had been riding with his knees up towards his chin.

The Emir laughed to himself, and his followers smiled at the absurd way in which these strangers loved to ride, while one of the many officers laughingly pointed to the long stirrup of the visitor's horse, but no one stirred; they only watched what was going on some thirty or forty yards away.

For it was simple in the extreme: Frank sat looking down haughtily, and his brother with deft fingers rapidly unbuckled and readjusted the stirrup leather, looking up once at the masterful black who could not speak but signified his commands with haughty looks and impatient signs.

It was all commonplace, and the spectators waited patiently, seeing the glance up of the slave, the trying of the left stirrup, and the impatient, imperious gesture to the man to adjust the other leather, the rider swinging himself round with his back to the Emir as the white slave darted under the horse's neck and seized the right stirrup, his face hidden by the horse from every one in the court, while it was perfectly natural that the rider with his back to the Emir should bend down as if watching the alteration being made.

The next moment the obedient slave disobeyed, for a low, soft, impassioned voice said in English—

"For Heaven's sake don't start!"

He started violently, and began to tremble in every limb.

"Help is near at hand. Do what I say. Fall, have some accident, and be very bad. Do you understand?"

"Yes, yes," came in a hoarse, trembling voice.

"Then ask for the Hakim to save your life."

"Yes, yes, but—but—who are you?"

"Hush! Quick! Alter that stirrup for your life!"

Harry Frere uttered a low groan, and his brother felt that he was about to swoon and fall. But he dared speak no more. The time had come to act, and with an angry gesture he rose up in his seat and threw his arm over as if to draw his sword and strike with the flat of the blade at the dilatory attendant who was so long. Then all was over, for the slave jumped back now the stirrup was lengthened, and stood with bent head and extended hands as the horse bounded off along the empty side of the court, Frank passing the chief at full gallop, pointing to the lengthened stirrups as he went, and then on and on at full speed to pass round the court again, seeing that his brother was standing near the opening of his shed, and as he passed he had ready and jerked towards him three or four bright piastres, without so much as turning his head.

The next minute he pulled up short by the Emir's side, sprang from the horse, and threw the bridle to the nearest man, not daring to stay while his brother ran up to take the rein.

So it was that when the slave took charge of the horse Frank was with the Sheikh, mounting his own a dozen yards away, but was stopped by the Emir, who hurried up to him and seized upon Ibrahim to interpret his words of thanks for the present and for the admirable way in which he had taught his people how to ride. "But," he said, with a peculiar, mocking smile, "they will be obstinate; they will not ride with long stirrups like the Hakim's friend."

And the next minute—

"Tell the Hakim's friend that if he would learn to ride as we do, with the stirrups short, so that he could get a better hold of the saddle, he would be as fine a horseman as ever lived."

Frank nodded and smiled, and signed that he was about to mount.

"Ask the Hakim's friend to enter and partake of such poor fare as I can give," protested the Emir; and upon the words being interpreted Frank shook his head, but pointed to his lips, signifying that he would drink.

The Emir clapped his hands, and as Frank turned he saw his brother passing out of sight, while from the house a couple of slaves came quickly, bearing brass vessels and cups.

The long, cool draught of some refreshing beverage was welcome to Frank's parched throat, but he kept up the set smile upon his countenance, in spite of the agonising mental torture from which he suffered, and it was with a sigh of relief that at last he rode away, followed by a friendly shout from the party in the court, and reached the cool, darkened rooms of the Emir's place feeling more dead than alive.

"Well," asked his friends in a breath, as he threw himself upon the rug-covered angareb in his room, "did you succeed?"

"Ask Ibrahim," he said. "I hardly dare to hope."

They turned to the old Sheikh, who made a gesture with his hands.

"Excellencies," he said, "I stood there with a knife as it were held at my throat all that dreadful time; but it was wonderful. How could he do it—how could he act like that?"

"Who can say?" said Frank, as his friends turned questioning eyes towards him. "I can't talk now; I feel weak as a child. I only know I could not do it again to save my life."

"But we are in agony to know," said the doctor. "Pray try and tell us something of your plans."

The appeal gave the young man strength, and he told all that had passed.

"But what will follow?" said the professor, whose voice trembled from the excitement he suffered. "Will Harry—can he carry out your plan?"

"Yes," said the doctor. "He is as firm when put to the test as Frank here."

"Ah!" groaned Frank; "firm? I am as weak as water now. I am trembling with the horrible thought that the chief saw through the subterfuge, for he smiled cruelly; and if he did—what of poor Harry's life? I shall have slain him by what I did, for they have no mercy on an escaping slave."

Chapter Thirty Seven.

The Breakdown.

There was a fresh patient for the Hakim in the morning.

He was awakened by Sam, whose face was full of consternation.

"Do get up and come to Mr Frank, sir," he said in a hurried whisper.

Morris sat up at once.

"What is it?" he said in the calm, matter-of-fact way of a doctor who always feels that a sudden awakening means a call upon him for aid.

"I went to tell him it was time to rouse up, sir, and he began talking nonsense."

"What do you mean?" said the doctor, dressing hurriedly.

"Called me a white-faced dog; and then 'The stirrup,' he says, 'the stirrup: can't you see it's too short?'"

"Ah?" ejaculated the doctor.

"'Stirrup?' I says, 'what stirrup, sir?' and then he went on: 'You English are not fit even for slaves. Be quick! Can't you see that your lord and his friends are waiting to see me ride?' he says, 'and don't defile those red reins with your dirty white hands!' Of course I knew he was dreaming, and I shook him, but only made him burst out into a lot more stuff—telling me I was to fall ill and ask for the Hakim to cure me, and then we should be all together again. But that ain't the worst of it, sir."

"No? Then what is?" said the doctor, fastening up his long robe calmly.

"He's quite off his head, sir, and his tongue's running nineteen to the dozen. If you can't stop it we shall have all the Emir's people noticing it. Hadn't you better pretend as you've cured him, sir, and made him speak? If you don't we shall be having the cat let out of the bag, and all be scratched to death."

"Let's see, Samuel," said the doctor quietly, and he followed his man into the next room, to find Frank talking wildly.

He seemed to recognise his friend directly, and caught him by the arm.

"Look here," he said, "I have no time to advise you, Hal. Be thrown from a horse; cut your forehead, or your leg. Do

something that they can see looks bad—something that will stain your white things with blood. They will believe it then, and beg that you may be taken to the Hakim.—Ah, what are you doing here? Why are you not curing the Baggara's white slave?"

The doctor had taken his young friend's wrist and laid a cool hand upon his burning, throbbing brow, with excellent effect, for Frank's loud talking grew broken, then indistinct, and rapidly sank into a low, incoherent babbling, as he closed his eyes.

"Hah!" said Sam softly; "it's wonderful, sir. To do that with just a touch of your hands. But what is it, sir? One of those horrible African fevers? 'Tain't catching, is it?" he added excitedly.

"If you feel alarmed," replied the doctor coldly, "keep away from the room. Mr Landon and I will nurse him."

Sam turned upon him with a reproachful look.

"Likely, sir!" he said scornfully, and he bent over the angareb and began giving little touches to the pillow, making a point of passing his hand over Frank's face and leaning quite close so as to feel his breath play upon his cheek, before laying a hand upon the sufferer's. "I don't care if it is ketching," he said; "I'm not going to leave Master Frank in a hole like that. If I get it he'll get better and help me. Breath's hot, sir, but it don't smell nasty and fevery. P'r'aps it's only being too much in the sun, after all."

"Thank you, Samuel," said the doctor, in his quiet, grave way, and he patted the man gently on the shoulder.

"Thank me, sir?—Oh, here's Mr Landon, sir."

"Hullo, there!" said the professor, hurriedly entering; "what's the matter? Don't say Frank's ill!"

"He is saying it for himself, my dear Fred," replied the doctor. "You have had some experience of this sort of thing out here. Look at him. He is calmer now, but he was talking wildly at random a few minutes ago."

"What! Oh! Saint George and the Dragon! he mustn't begin to talk," cried the professor excitedly. "That would spoil all."

There was a pause while the professor bent over and examined the sufferer.

"Well," he said, "I'm not a doctor, but my journeys out here made me dabble a bit, and quack over my own ailments and those of my followers when there was no medical man to be had. I don't know, Robert, old friend, but I should say it was a touch of brain fever, consequent upon yesterday's excitement in the sun."

"Ah-h-h!" ejaculated Sam, with a sigh of relief.

"You be quiet," said the professor sharply. Then turning to the doctor, "Well, what do you think?"

"The same as you do. Poor lad! His anxiety was horrible, and what he went through was enough to prostrate a man twice as strong."

"But you don't think he is going to be seriously ill?"

"I hope not. Stay here while I mix him a sedative. He must have sleep; and Sam, get ready cold water compresses for his head."

"Cold water, sir?" said the man gravely.

"Well, a bowl of water, my man. I'll bring in something to make it evaporate more quickly."

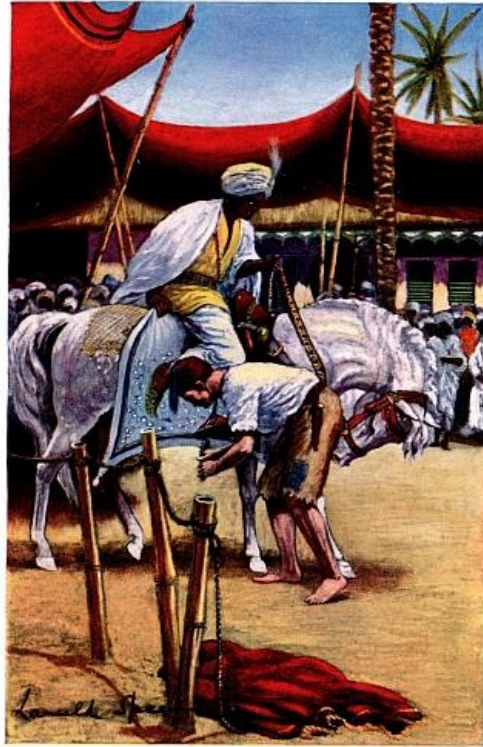
The doctor went to where his case lay in a corner of his room, and rapidly prepared a sedative draught, took up a bottle, and returned to the professor, to find Sam waiting with bowl of water and cloths.

"He's babbling about Harry and that plan of his," said the professor.

"No wonder, poor fellow! Raise him up a little. I daresay he will drink this quietly enough."

"One moment, sir," said Sam hurriedly. "Me, please," and with an eagerness evidently intended to fully disabuse the doctor's mind of all doubts regarding his fear of infection, Sam went behind the head of the couch and carefully raised the sick man's head and shoulders so that he could drink easily; and this he did with avidity.

The next minute the doctor had half emptied a bottle into the water, which gave forth a peculiar, pungent odour on Sam wringing out a handkerchief; and this was spread across the poor fellow's temples and afterwards kept moist.



“The next moment a low, impassioned voice said in English, ‘For Heaven’s sake don’t start!’”

“Just at the most unlucky time,” said the professor, with a sigh, as they sat near, watching the patient, who had sunk into the desired sleep; “but we must make the best of it. Here, Sam, we must eat and drink whatever happens.”

“Breakfast is quite ready, sir,” was the reply; “but I haven’t seen anything of Mr Abrahams this morning.”

“Look here,” said the professor angrily, “if you call the Sheikh Abraham again I shall throw something at you. Ibrahim, once more,” he continued, spelling the name letter by letter.

“But that’s only his ignorant way of spelling it, sir,” protested Sam. “He told me himself it’s the same name as we read of. It’s Abra—ham, as I told him myself; but he only smiled at me as if he knew better.”

“Well, what about him?”

“He hasn’t been near, sir, and his young men—and one of them’s ten years older than me—say that he hasn’t been back since he went out last night.”

“Tut—tut—tut—tut!” said the doctor. “I hope he has not fallen into any trouble now.”

But before the breakfast was over—a meal that was interrupted twice by the doctor’s visits to the patient—Ibrahim came to the door, and was told to enter.

He looked sharply at the two gentlemen, and then at the door leading into Frank’s room, and back inquiringly at the doctor.

“Yes,” said the latter gravely; “he is ill, Ibrahim.”

“The heat of the sun and the dreadful trouble yesterday, Excellency,” said the old man excitedly. “I feared it. The heat made even me feel ill. But he will soon be better?”

“I hope so,” said the doctor; and the professor broke in—

“But what of yourself, Ibrahim? You have news?”

“Yes, Excellency. If you listen you can hear them coming.”

“Not the Egyptian Army?”

“No, no, Excellency, not yet. But spies keep coming in, all bringing the same news, that British forces are slowly and surely coming up the river to Khartoum, and the Khalifa is sending out his people to gather in more and more of the wild troops. They are crowding into the city and camping about outside. There will be war before long.”

“There must not be till we have escaped, Ibrahim,” said the professor. “We being respectable singing birds must not be caught in the net along with the black dervish daws.”

“If the British and Egyptians win the battle, Excellency,” said the Sheikh gravely. “We must not shut our eyes to the fact that these wild tribes are very brave, while the Egyptians—well, Excellency, we know that they have not made a

very brave stand in the past.”

“But our British force will be up here in strength?”

“Yes, Excellency, and if it depended entirely upon them I should not fear.”

“Then you do fear?” said the doctor gravely.

“Hardly fear, Excellency, but I have my doubts, and I am troubled about our position in any case.”

“Why?” said the professor.

“I have been out all night gathering news from such of the people as I have made my friends. The city is being filled with wild and lawless tribes who have come to fight for the new Mahdi, and whose pay is the plunder that they can gather from anywhere. They are their own friends only, and think of nothing else but what your English officers call loot. Even so soon as this past night there has been murder and outrage with plundering in the lower parts of the city, and the better people here would take flight at once, for their lives are not safe, and their wives and daughters seem marked out at once for the slaves of these savage men. I tremble for our own fate, and would gladly call my men together and risk an escape this very night, before the country round is swarming with the new Mahdi’s people and we could not stir.”

“But you will not do this, Ibrahim? You will not forsake us when we are so near success?”

“Alas! Excellency, we have not won success as yet, though we have found the young Excellency’s brother.”

“Does that mean that you mean to escape and leave us?”

“His Excellency the great Hakim knows that I have sworn to be faithful even unto death,” said the old man proudly. “No, I will not leave you. I only speak out and tell you of our peril. If the prisoner we are trying to save were here I would say, Go this night. But he is not here, and our position is very bad.”

“What, with the doctor’s reputation spread as it is, and such friends about us as the Emirs?”

“The Emirs are but men, Excellency,” said the Sheikh, looking the professor full in the eyes. “They can do much with their own followers, but nothing with the wild beasts of murdering dervishes who would slay anyone for the handsome robe he wears, or to carry off his wife and children for slaves. The great Emir and his people are our friends, but alas! our Emir here, his son, and his son’s friend left Omdurman with all their forces last night for the north, to stay the British advance. We are here with only the twenty men of the Emir’s guard, while we shall soon be surrounded by thousands who have never heard of the Hakim’s name.”

“This is bad news indeed, O Sheikh,” said the professor, frowning.

“Bad tidings of the worst, Excellency, but it is true. These are the gleanings of the past night that I come with sorrowful heart to tell you. We have had much good of late, and my heart was glad last night as I saw that the young Excellency, Ben Eddin, would soon scheme that his brother should join us, and that then we would flee across the desert to the British camp; but now—”

“Well, Ibrahim; but now?” said the doctor sternly.

“Now, O Hakim, another sorrow meets me here: the young Excellency, Ben Eddin, is stricken down, and we have not rescued the prisoner slave as yet.”

“But you have some plans,” said the professor excitedly. “What do you propose to do?”

“Nothing as yet, Excellency. We must wait till the young Ben Eddin is well and we can bring his brother here. Till then we must be patient, and trust in God.”

Chapter Thirty Eight.

For Freedom.

The English party had ample proof of Ibrahim’s words, for the narrow ways of the city were thronged that day with the wild troops that had ridden in from the desert, many too from Khartoum, and the wild blasts and throbbings of barbaric trumpet and drum resounded through the place; but the Emir’s house remained undisturbed, though more than once the professor noticed that there was an uneasy look in the eyes of the head guard when he came near them, and appeared to be especially devoted to the care of all in the place.

That day there were no calls upon the Hakim for help, and he was able to devote himself entirely to Frank, upon whom his ministrations had the best effect.

In fact, he woke that night as if out of a long sleep looked wonderingly at Sam, and seemed puzzled by the bandages laid across his head. Then as if realising that he had been ill, he lay perfectly still, thinking, till the doctor came to his side a short time later, when he took and pressed the hand which felt his pulse and head, nodded gently, and proved at once that the fit of delirium had quite passed away, for he said in a whisper—

“Don’t say anything. I know I have been ill. But tell me: any news of Harry?”

"Not yet, my dear boy. We must have patience."

"Yes, Frank, lad," said the professor cheerily, "patience."

Frank bowed his head softly and let his eyelids drop, lying perfectly still for some little time.

"Drowsy, Frank?" said the doctor at last. But there was no reply. All was silent but the distant sound of shouting and uproar, as if the newcomers to the city were quarrelling with their friends.

The silence startled the professor, who looked from their new patient to the doctor, and back again searchingly; but the latter paid no heed.

"Is this right?" he said at last, anxiously.

"Yes, perfectly right. What I have given him has checked the fever, and he will sleep from exhaustion for many hours to come. But we must watch by him through the night, in case there should be any relapse. I do not think there will be, but we will be upon our guard."

"Of course," said the professor. "I was going to propose that I should sit up with him."

"Thanks, my dear Fred," said the doctor gravely; "but I have already made my plans. We will take three hours each. Which watch will you have?"

"The first," said the professor.

"Best so. Watch by him till midnight; then wake up Samuel, and he shall call me at three."

The Hakim was master of the position, and everything was carried out as he proposed, the doctor coming on duty to receive the same report as the professor had given to Sam, to wit, that the patient had not stirred.

It was about six, and the doctor was congratulating himself upon the long, restful night his patient had enjoyed, when the face of the old Sheikh appeared at the open window, to which the doctor stepped softly and satisfied the old man as to the sick one's state.

Ibrahim nodded his satisfaction, and set to work at once upon Sam's duties, preparing the morning meal quite as a matter of course, but receiving orders to hurry nothing, so that no one should be disturbed.

"The young Excellency will be better soon?" whispered the old man.

"If we could give him good tidings to-day, Ibrahim, he would be nearly well," replied the doctor. "Have you anything to tell?"

"Nothing, Excellency, only that the city is full of dervishes, and the wretched people are lamenting that they have not fled to the north. They pray that the Egyptian army may soon be here. One said last night, 'If the Khedive's people do not soon come they will find none of us left. These our masters will either slay or carry us away for slaves.'"

An hour of patient watching ensued, and then there was the sound of many voices at the gate, and Ibrahim's grave face looked full of anxiety as he hurried out, while the doctor aroused his friend and Sam.

He had just time to return to the side of Frank's couch, to find him sleeping still, when Ibrahim came back to the door with the officer of the guard, and their manner set his heart at rest, for they had evidently no danger to announce.

The old Sheikh set his face hard, as he spoke in a whisper.

"One of the chiefs—a friend of our master the great Emir, and friend of the new Mahdi," he said, "sends you one of his slaves, O Hakim, and bids you for the sake of your young friend, whom he saved from a dervish band, to heal his hurt."

The doctor felt as if something had clutched his breast, and he looked up, fighting hard to be composed, to see that the professor had come to the inner door and was hearing every word.

His voice sounded husky as he spoke, but he mastered his emotion and said gravely—

"My knowledge is at the service of all who suffer, and I will try and heal the slave of the great Emir's friend. Let the injured man be brought to the door. What is his hurt?"

"Thy servant cannot tell," said the old man, and he interpreted the Hakim's words to the officer, who retired, and in a few minutes returned, ushering to the outer door a white figure lying with fast-closed eyes upon a hand litter, which was set down outside.

The Hakim drew a deep breath, and again had to fight hard to maintain his composure, for he felt that the critical time had come, just, too, when he who had toiled so hard to bring all this about was lying insensible to the success of his plot.

It was only a temporary fit of nervous agitation, and then the Hakim was walking gravely and full of dignity of mien to where the injured man lay, the professor following him, trembling with excitement.

There were about a dozen of the chiefs followers standing about the litter, all eager to catch a glimpse of the great Hakim, but ready to shrink back reverently when he appeared, leaving only the chief of the guards and one who was

their leader.

These, too, drew back a little, and all seemed to accept as a matter of course that the great Hakim should pass gravely out of the door, walk round the litter, and then stand by its side with his back to them, the professor and Ibrahim taking their positions close by.

“Let the Emir’s people say why this man has been brought,” said the Hakim slowly, and as he looked down he saw the occupant of the bier start and tremble; but did not raise his eyelids.

The Sheikh interpreted the words, and the head man, who had superintended the bringing of the slave, said quickly—

“Tell the great wise Hakim that our master’s slave is broken. We know not how, and he has not spoken since. But he waits upon the horses, and one must have kicked him in the side.”

It was hard work to be calm at such a time, the man’s words when interpreted by the Sheikh seeming to stab and give the hearers intense pain.

But the Hakim remained firm, and bending down he laid his left hand softly upon the sufferer’s eyes and the right upon the breast, remaining perfectly motionless for a minute; then raising himself he said in his deepest tones—

“Let the young man be taken within.”

The Hakim’s orders were interpreted again, and there was a little excitement for a few minutes, during which the doctor gravely walked back to the inner room, leaving the professor and Ibrahim to superintend the moving, and waiting till the bearers had passed out again and the window was closed.

A deep silence fell upon the group, while the Sheikh drew back respectfully, to stand on guard by the door of the partially darkened room.

Then the doctor spoke in his low, deep tones.

“There must be no emotion, no outburst of excitement, Hal. Our work is all to do yet, and our lives depend upon our being calm. Just a word or two in the lowest tone.”

“Morris, old friend,” was whispered, in faltering accents, and the thin, careworn object of their mission gazed up wildly in his old school-fellow’s eyes. “You have dared to come here—for me?”

“Yes, and please God we will take you back in safety.”

“We?” whispered the prisoner. “Who is that brave young black who ventured so much?”

“Your brother Frank,” said the doctor slowly, and he laid his hand quickly upon his new patient’s burning brow, for as he anticipated, there was a violent start.

But the prisoner with a great effort mastered his emotion, and said softly—

“I did not know him. And you two have risked your lives like this?”

“We and Fred Landon,” said the doctor softly.

“Fred Landon!” cried the patient, with a hysterical gasp. “Dear old Fred! How like him!—Tell him—”

“Tell me yourself, Hal,” whispered a voice at the back of his head. “Some time, but not now. I am the Hakim’s assistant; there, I may grip your hand, dear old lad. Anyone might see me do that.”

He reached over to seize the prisoner’s left hand, for the right was in the doctor’s, when in spite of a brave effort there was a violent start, the right hand contracted spasmodically upon the doctor’s, but the left lay inert, while they saw the great drops of agony gathering upon the thin, sunburnt face.

“Hal!” cried the doctor, dropping his practised calm. “Great heavens! you are not really hurt?”

“I could not help wincing,” was the faltering reply. “Not hurt? How was I to have been brought here without?”

“We expected some pretence.”

“Pretence!” said Harry Frere bitterly. “You do not know the Baggaras. They are keenness itself. It is real enough, but I am well paid for the pain.”

“But your hurt?” said the doctor eagerly.

“My left arm.”

“What, kicked?”

“No,” said the sufferer, perfectly calm now. “I broke it myself.”

A deep silence fell upon the group, save that the old Sheikh uttered a low groan, and then the doctor was himself again. This was real—real suffering to allay, and a word brought the professor to his side, just as Sam came hurriedly to the inner door, fresh from Frank’s angareb.

"Hush! Not a word," said the doctor sternly; "only help me here. Quick! my case, lint, bandages, and splints."

But Sam did not move. He stood as if turned to stone, gazing where the light shone upon Harry Frere's thin, worn face, and reading recognition in the eyes fixed full upon his.

"Oh!" he cried, with a sob, and forgetting everything he sprang to the side of the litter and dropped upon his knees. "Mr Harry at last!"

The doctor could not speak, as he saw his old companion raise his right hand and lay it upon the servant's shoulder, while the professor uttered a strange sound, which, if it had escaped a woman's breast would have been termed a sob. Then the doctor spoke.

"That will do," he said sternly. "Obey my orders at once. The rest must wait till we are safe."

Sam sprang up to fetch what was required, and the professor made an effort to recover his composure, the demand made upon him by his old school-fellow's condition rousing him to action.

"One word only," said the prisoner faintly. "You said my brother—"

"He is yonder," said the doctor quietly; "ill, but not seriously. You must not see him now. His *ruse* has succeeded, and we have you here. Now I must see to your arm."

"No, no, not now," said Harry excitedly; "we must make some plan or another about escaping. You must not stay here—you will be discovered."

"Leave that to us," said the doctor sternly.

"No, no," cried his new patient. "I have nearly been driven mad during my long imprisonment, but if aught happens to you all I shall go quite out of my mind in my despair."

"Silence!" said the doctor sternly. "You are badly hurt, and your injury is telling upon your brain. I will not have you dwell upon our position. Look here, you can trust us. We have found our way here, found you, and had you brought to us. Give up to us at once, and trust to our doing what is best."

"Yes, yes," said the poor fellow passionately; "but you do not understand. Never mind my arm. I will keep still, and the fracture will mend of itself."

"Will it?" said the doctor grimly.

"Yes, yes; but look here," whispered the sufferer; "we must talk; we must decide upon some action."

"No," said the doctor, "not now. You do not understand our position."

"I can guess it," said the poor fellow wildly. "Think then of mine. I am brought here for you to set my arm; in half an hour at the outside I shall be taken back to my owner. We may not have another opportunity to speak—we may never meet again."

"Now I insist," said the doctor firmly. "You will have plenty of time to talk to us by and by."

"No, no; you do not understand, Morris."

"But the Hakim does," said the doctor grimly. "Now I order you to trust to me and wait."

The poor fellow's head fell back, as he uttered a groan of despair, and the next minute, with eyes half-closed, he lay perfectly still, suffering acute pain, but making no sign, while the great surgeon's deft fingers felt the injury, commenting upon it from time to time, so that Landon could hear, and while splint and bandage were handed to him as required, by the professor or Sam.

"A simple fracture of the ulna," said the doctor calmly; "no splinters, and as far as I can make out, very little laceration of the muscle—easy to set, and it ought to be rapid in the healing. There!" he said at last, "the broken ends will begin to secrete fresh bone matter almost directly, and with care your arm will be as strong as the other. Cup, glass, and number four bottle, Frederick, my son."

The professor hurried away to the doctor's case, and the latter took hold of his patient's hand to feel the pulse.

"A little feverish, Hal, old fellow," he said calmly. "Did I hurt you very much?"

"Oh, no. But Rob, old lad!"

"Silence!" was the uncompromising command.—"Ah, that's right, Fred. Bottle, glass, water! Now, Hal, drink that."

"No," said the patient angrily. "It is a narcotic. You want to send me to sleep so that I shall not know what you are planning. Is it fair to me after I have broken a limb so as to get myself brought here?"

"Perfectly fair. Listen; it is not a strong narcotic, only something to soothe the pain you must be in.—There, that's better. Hal, my dear old boy, you always did trust me; trust me now."

"Well, I will," said the sufferer hoarsely.

"That's right. Now I will set your mind at rest. The great Hakim has more power here than you think for."

Harry Frere suppressed a groan, and his eyes wandered from one to the other, noting how the others present seemed waiting eagerly to obey their chiefs slightest gesture or word; while now at a sign he saw the Sheikh close up and stand waiting with bended head.

"Go to the officer who brought our friend, and tell him to come here."

The Sheikh turned to go, but the professor interposed.

"One moment," he said earnestly; "Frank is in there—you know how. Suppose he begins to speak as he did last night."

"It is not probable," said the doctor quietly. "Go, Ibrahim."

The Sheikh passed out of the room and through the door, to where the two officers stood waiting patiently, with their men a short distance away; and as a curtain was drawn aside a burst of barbaric music and loud cries of "Allah! Allah!" were borne into the room.

As the curtain dropped back into its place the doctor took a cushion, and carefully raising the splinted and bandaged arm placed the soft pillow beneath.

"Now," he said, "lie still and close your eyes. Don't stir while these men are here. I need not tell you to try and look bad, for Nature is helping you there, my dear old fellow. Hal, lad, your arm will soon knit together, but make your mind easy: you are too bad to move."

"No, no, Rob, you are wrong. I feel a little drowsy, but so free from pain. I could get up and walk."

"The Hakim thinks differently. Silence! They are coming. Samuel, stand there! Fred, my son, bend over him with those bandages and that scalpel.—Hist! Close your eyes."

His orders were obeyed, and as Harry Frere closed his sunken eyes, old cares and sufferings, combined with the mental and bodily agony he was passing through, gave his face, in the shadowy, dim, curtained room, a look that was absolutely ghastly.

Directly after the curtain was drawn aside by the Sheikh for the two officers to pass in, both looking awed as they gave a sharp look round at the strange scene.

The next moment the Baggara who had brought the injured man started forward a step to look down at his charge, and then recoiled, to say a few hurried words to the Sheikh, who turned gravely to the doctor and interpreted.

"The Emir's servant says, Excellency, that the white slave is dead, and that he dare not go back with the tidings, lest his head should fall."

The Hakim turned slowly to the officer and smiled, as he laid a hand upon his patient's forehead.

"Tell him," he said, "to bear the tidings to his master that the white slave will live, and his broken arm will soon be well."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Baggara. "The Hakim is great. Then we may carry him back at once?"

The words were interpreted to the doctor, who made his reply.

"No; if the slave is taken away he may die. Bid him tell his master that the Hakim will keep the injured slave here and make him whole, as he has the Emirs, his master's friends."

The Baggara officer looked troubled and perplexed.

"Tell the great Hakim that his servant was bidden to bring the slave here and take him back. There is nothing for him but to obey."

"Yes," said the doctor, drawing himself up proudly and fixing the man with his eyes, pausing at times to give Ibrahim ample time to interpret his words, "it is his duty to obey till a greater man than his master bids him do this or that."

The doctor's words sounded loud and imperious, and he had got so far when an impatient voice was heard from the room where Frank was lying, calling first one and then another, and a cold chill ran through all present, for the voice sounded as it were the knell of all their hopes. Even the doctor was silenced for the moment, but recalling directly that only the Sheikh could understand his words, he called angrily in a voice of thunder, looking hard at the Sheikh the while.

"Lie still, Frank, till I come!" Then: "Tell thy master that the Hakim will keep the white slave here. Take him this from me as my pledge that I will cure his slave. Enough! Now go."

As he spoke he raised his hand to his white turban, detached the large Egyptian jewel he wore, and then gave it to the Sheikh, who took it reverently, and as he interpreted humbly the Hakim's words ended by placing the rare token in the officer's hands.

The Baggara bowed his head over the pledge, as he wrapped it carefully in his fine linen scarf, and saying humbly, "The Hakim is great," he gave a final glance at the patient and backed slowly out of the room, followed by the officer

of the Emir's guard, while the curtain was quivering still where it had fallen back when Frank appeared in the opening leading to his room.

"What does all this mean?" he said. Then, catching sight of the ghastly figure lying upon the couch, he uttered a cry of joy, and rushing forward fell upon his knees by his brother's side.

Chapter Thirty Nine.

Tightened Chains.

Those were minutes of agony to all concerned, for there was the trouble of Frank's calls while the doctor was speaking. It was nothing that the strange officer had heard them, but the fact that they must have been heard by the guard, familiar with them all was startling, and the position was excitedly discussed. The Sheikh said that the officer had made no allusion to it since, and the doctor recalled to them the fact that the man could not have recognised the voice, for he had never heard Frank speak. Besides he did not know that Frank was lying there ill.

"Let him think that there was a mystery about it all, Excellencies," said the Sheikh; "and when he sees Ben Eddin again going about his business as of old, making his desires known by signs, he will never think that it was he who spoke."

"But who will he think it was then?" said the professor.

"Who can say, Excellency? They are superstitious children, these strong fighting men of the desert, and believe in demons, genii, and afreets. He will say to himself that it was the voice of the Hakim's familiar, that he heard the invisible spirit by whose help he works his cures, and be glad of heart that the djin, or whatever it might be, did not strike him dead for being there."

A couple of hours or so later they were startled by the appearance of the very man of whom the Sheikh had been speaking, and all fancied afterwards that he looked very hard at Frank, who was sufficiently recovered by the success of his plan to be able to keep about, and hence was present in the room.

The chief of the guard had come to announce the return of the Emir's officer with a message to the Hakim, and when the Baggara was ushered in it was to announce that his master thankfully accepted the Hakim's pledge, but felt that it was not right for so great a sage, mullah, and prophet, to be asked to waste his time over a dog of a white slave. In conclusion he prayed that the great Hakim, whose very touch bore healing to the sons of men, would deign to accept the gift he sent him by his servant—the offering being a costly emerald ring, roughly and clumsily set in gold.

One difficulty was at an end, for all felt that the doctor might insist upon the prisoner staying till such time as they could ripen their plans for escape, while in addition that night, the Sheikh learned from their guard that Harry Frere's master had marched with all his force to join the Emir and his son, who were camping out waiting the arrival of other bands before joining forces with the Khalifa.

"Many have left the city, Excellency," he said, "but more have come in, and the streets are filled with strangers who know us not."

"Then now ought to be the time for us to escape."

"Yes, Excellency," said the old man sadly, "but we are watched and guarded here. I fear that our chief guard has begun to doubt us, and he will watch us more closely still."

"That is awkward," said the professor.

"Yes, Excellency, and it is impossible to journey now with all these strangers here ready to stop us, to plunder if not to slay."

"More awkward still, Ibrahim."

"Yes, Excellency, for if we started some night, instead of all being of good courage, light and rejoicing in our strength and in having saved the young Excellency's brother, we have two sick men."

"Most awkward of all, Ibrahim," said the professor. "But never mind; we have mastered all difficulties so far, and it will go hard if we do not conquer after all."

"Yes, Excellency, and we will try."

The professor went and talked over all he had heard with the Hakim, and as he did so he felt that there was a compensation for it all in the sight of Harry Frere lying upon the angareb, peaceful and at rest, with his brother grasping his uninjured hand.

"The sight of Harry did more good," he muttered, "than all the doctor's stuff."

During the next few days the dread of the guard's suspicions died out and was pretty well forgotten in the wild excitements which followed one upon another. For the Khalifa's troops came pouring into the place and camping around in all directions, till the poorer inhabitants, and those who lived by trade, began to long for a deliverance from their so-called friends, feeling truthfully that the occupation of the place by the enemy—British and Egyptian—from the north, would be a welcome blessing.

Meanwhile fresh news was always being brought in by spies and scouts. The enemy was approaching fast; he was devastating all before him and covering the banks of the river with the slain, who were being swept down the rapid streams by thousands.

The enemy had come by boat, by camel, by horse, and by means of the strange litters which ran on rails of iron. They had advanced in all their proud strength, with standards flying and their men playing savage, barbarous strains upon hideous instruments; and as they came on they shouted in their pride and folly, little thinking what was to come. For the new Mahdi had come down from Khartoum mounted upon a jet black horse whose eyes blazed fire, whose mane and tail streamed out like the wind-swept sand in a storm; and he had with his chosen joined all his Emirs and wisest generals—a mighty host greater than the desert sands—and then with standards flying and drums beating he had, in the name of the Prophet, joined battle with the infidel. He had opened out the fore-front of his host as the Christian dogs cowered back in fear, forming his attack in the shape of the crescent moon, and then to the war-cry of “Allah il Allah!” they had swept down upon their enemies as the sand of the desert sweeps down in a storm. The spears and swords flashed as they drank the infidels’ blood and rode on, crushing them into the sand, till the Mahdi’s conquering host stood breathless upon the banks of the river Nile, into which the Christian and the Egyptian armies had been driven, and not one was left to tell the tale.

The Emir’s chief of the guard bore the first account to Ibrahim, and told it stolidly, his forehead in lines; but within two hours he came again and told him the second tale.

But his face bore no trace of elation. He merely told the tale as it had been brought to him, finishing by saying—

“If the battle is won, my master, the Emir, will soon be back.”

“Then he did not believe the account?” said the professor coolly.

“I thought not at the time, Excellency. Perhaps he knows what his people can say. But what does his Excellency think? The camels are all healthy and strong; my young men are ready; and the great Hakim has but to give the word. Then we could lift the two brothers upon the swiftest camels, taking nothing but the few poor things we need, and fly as soon as it is dark, for there is no moon now.”

“Let us hear what my brother says,” said Frank, who was listening to all that had been said. “What do you think, Hal—could we escape?”

“No,” was the decisive answer. “The country round swarms with armed men—bloodthirsty savages, panting like the jackal and hyaena for blood and spoil. We could not go a mile without being stopped, and if we were the next hour we should all be slaves, or the camels would be driven off while the sand was soaking up our blood.”

“You hear, Ibrahim?” said Frank.

“Yes, Excellency, I hear, and the Excellency your brother speaks the words of truth. The risk would be too great unless the Khalifa’s army had been put to flight.”

“But you have heard these two accounts.”

“Yes, Excellency. What does your brother think?”

“I think,” said Harry Frere, “that the first was invented by some Emir, jealous of the Khalifa; the second by the Khalifa himself. All false as the people themselves. We shall have more such tales.”

“Then you think you would still defer our start, Hal?” said the Hakim, who had sat listening in silence.

“Certainly, for we should only be riding to our death. We must accept our position of prisoners until the Khalifa’s men have suffered some real reverse. Then strike off at once for the desert and make a long *détour* upon the camels before trying to reach one of the British positions on the river.”

“Not make for our army at once?” said the Hakim quietly.

“No, for we should come upon them in the first flush of victory, and the chances are that we should encounter Egyptian regiments, who would take us for—what do we look like, Frank?”

“So much like the enemy that we have deceived them so far. Look at us, Morris, Hal and I are as if we were native born; Landon is little better; then there are Ibrahim and his men; while there is not enough of the Englishman about you now to save our lives.”

“You are right,” said the doctor. “Ibrahim, we must wait.”

“I think you are right, Excellency; but you bade me be quite prepared, and I am ready to start at a moment’s notice.”

“We will wait,” said the doctor; “and meantime go on bringing us news.”

The old Sheikh bowed and left the place, to return in an hour with another completely different account of the state of affairs, and by nightfall he had brought in eight more circumstantial reports, every one of which was a tissue of fables, invented to support or weaken the new Mahdi’s power.

And so the days wore on in a continuous state of excitement, the prisoners—for such they were now more than ever, with the exception of Ibrahim—being fully prepared to start upon their return journey at any moment when the opportunity should offer, the madness of any attempt as matters were being only too evident; and finding that the

Emir's officer and the guards were rigorously faithful to the trust placed in their hands by their master. For as soon as Frank had recovered from his attack, he determined to have a ride round the city and its suburbs to judge for himself how matters stood, and gave orders through the Sheikh for his horse to be brought round; but upon their guardian being summoned they were met by a point-blank, though respectful, refusal.

"I am answerable with my head for the safety of the Hakim and his people," said the guard; "and for the Hakim's friend, Ben Eddin, to ride out now means an attack by some one or other of the wandering bands. I and my men will defend him to the last, but what are we against so many? I have been left with the twenty men to defend the Emir's house and those he has left behind, and if the Hakim's friend rides out I and half my men must go with him; then what are ten to protect all that is here from danger?"

Frank angrily bade Ibrahim to tell the man he exaggerated matters, and that he was sure that both the Emir and his son desired that their friend should be free to go about the city.

The officer bowed respectfully, but he was immovable.

The Hakim and his people must stay within, he said. If the Emir or the young Emir were angry when they returned he must bear it, but they could not blame him much, for he had done his duty, and that he felt he would neglect if he let the Hakim's young friend go into danger.

Frank, feeling how much there was at stake, became more importunate, and then the officer turned to Ibrahim, after listening to the Sheikh's interpretation of Frank's signs, most of which took the form of angry pointings towards the camels.

"Speak for yourself," said the officer, "and make the Hakim's friend know the truth. Tell him whether you think it is safe for him to go out of this place, and whether it is just for him to order me to neglect my charge by leaving the house unguarded."

"The man is right, Excellencies," said Ibrahim at once. "It would be like riding out to tempt death for us all."

There was nothing for it but to resign themselves to circumstances, and the expedition was given up, the party being now the closest of prisoners; but as if to make up for it their guards were more respectful than ever, and their head was indefatigable in his endeavours to forestall all their wants.

As Frank said when they were alone, it seemed as if they were neglecting their opportunities by not making their attempt while the Emirs were absent, for at any moment they might return and Harry's owner be sending a party of his men to fetch the injured slave back to his duties.

But this did not happen, and though much of the information which Ibrahim brought in was simply rumour, he was able to supply facts, and among these were the announcements that the house of Harry's master was closely shut up and guarded by a few men, and that the whole city was thronged with savage-looking dervishes who plundered as they chose slaying and destroying where there was any resistance, while the whole place was in a state of siege.

"The time has not come yet, Excellencies," the old man said, "but it may arrive at any moment, and we will be ready to start."

"Where for?" said the doctor sternly.

"Who can say, Excellency? That must depend on fate. If we can, our place of refuge must be with the British troops; if we cannot reach them there is the desert."

"But why not try for the desert now, striking right away for the open parts, far away from the ordinary caravan routes?" said the professor.

"Because we should be cut off by some of the wandering bands before we could reach those distant parts, Excellency; and yonder there are other enemies: the sun to strike us down, and the dry sand. How can we journey on through the burning desert where there are not springs or wells?"

"Could we not keep to the river?" said the doctor.

"If there were none of the dervishes there we could, Excellency," said the Sheikh; "but it is certain now that the British force is steadily coming on to reach Khartoum, and the Khalifa's men are gathered all along the river banks, increasing daily like the desert sands. There is nothing open to us but to wait."

"And the Emir and his friends will return, and we shall be worse off than ever."

"Can the young Excellency say for certain that the Emir and his friends will return?" continued the Sheikh. "Surely it is more likely that the dervish army will be scattered like dust before the desert wind. Think of the long preparations that have been made, of the steady, slow advance of the English army. Every step of the way has been made sure with road and station, where are supplies for the fighting men. This will be the great blow struck at the new Mahdi's power, to put an end for ever to the bloodshed, pillage, and outrage of his savage bands, and I dare prophesy that this time he and his will be driven back into the desert from whence they came—a plague of locusts that they are; while if this great blow is struck—"

"It will be here in this city first, and at Khartoum later on?"

"No, Excellency," replied the Sheikh; "the men of the desert are men of tents. They do not, like you of the West, make great cities with walls and cannon; they come from the desert, and they will fight in the desert. When the time

comes they will advance from the city, to strike their blow in the plain. We must try and make our effort then, for Omdurman will be deserted whichever way the fight may go. Till the time comes be watchful; help the Excellency Harry to grow strong; it will make the journey easier for us all."

"I am ready now, Sheikh," said Harry gravely; "the strength is coming fast, and as to my arm, it grows less painful day by day. You need not stop for me."

"That is good news, Excellency," said the old man, smiling. "We have only to be patient, for I have great hopes. We have conquered in everything up to now, in spite of all, and we shall go on to the end. Only have faith, and trust to me."

Chapter Forty.

In Suspense.

It was one bright evening after an exciting day, during which the prisoners, shut up as they were within the walls of the Emir's so-called palace, had gone through hours of feverish impatience, listening to the trumpeting and drumming outside accompanying the marching of the troops, but knowing nothing of what was going on save that the Egyptian army was approaching. That they had learned through Ibrahim, and it was endorsed by the officer of the guard.

From him, too, they learned that the new Mahdi had reached the neighbourhood with a force of the finest fighting men led by Emirs of great repute; and he added through Ibrahim that there could be no doubt of the result, for the Egyptian army, the scouts declared, were weak and trembling, ready to desert or throw down their arms, while the white men had half perished by disease, and the other half were unfit to fight.

"But," said the Hakim through his interpreter, "we have had such reports as these before, and they were not true."

"No, they were lies—all lies; but these words are true."

"And you think the Khalifa will conquer?"

"Oh, yes," said the man, with a look of calm satisfaction; "he cannot fail."

"How do you know all this?"

"From the Emir my master," said the man proudly.

"Ah! You have seen him?"

"Yes: he rode in last night to see if all was well."

"What! The Emir came here?"

"Yes, and praised thy servant for all that he had done. He gave him, too, other commands. That the Hakim and his people were to be protected at all costs, for they were friends; and that if there was danger from the wild and fierce dervishes who might attack the palace because it was not strongly enough guarded, the Hakim and his people were to be mounted upon camels and were to be taken away."

"Where to?" said the doctor.

"To Khartoum, with the Emir's wives and slaves."

The officer returned to his duties, and soon after Ibrahim announced that he was making preparations, two score of camels being got in readiness for instant flight if the danger should come.

"Can we escape in the confusion?" said the professor.

"We will try, Excellency. I have, as you know, everything ready, and now I will go and learn all I can about the Egyptian army's advance up the river, for there is no doubt about its being near. Whether sick or not I cannot say."

"Sick or well, they will fight," said Harry, with a warlike flash of the eyes.

"I pray so, Excellency," said the Sheikh, and he too left.

But the day glided by and the night had come, a day and night of wild turmoil and anxiety; and in this great emergency the Sheikh did not return.

His absence at this extremely critical time came upon the party like a shock, for it was only now that they fully realised the full value of the services he had rendered, and surmises as to the cause of his absence were discussed one after the other.

One of the first things proposed when night closed in was to consult the officer of the guard. But here a difficulty arose at once—their interpreter was missing. The professor's knowledge of Arabic was extensive and he had picked up a few words of the dialect used by the Baggara; but he got on with the guard with the greatest difficulty, and the Sheikh's young men were completely wanting in the lingual powers of their chief.

"You must let me question him," said Harry. "He seems to have no suspicion of our having been friends."

"I don't know that," said Frank and the professor, almost in a breath.

"But we have been most careful over keeping up my character of the Hakim's patient."

"Yes," said Frank, "but this man is wonderfully quiet and observant. I half fancy that he is suspicious, after all."

"He cannot be," said Harry. "He knows that I was sent here, and can by no means have the most remote idea of why you came."

"I don't know," said the professor, shaking his head.

"I feel satisfied," said the doctor. "We did not come here of our own accord, but were brought. We had better have him in, and as if by our orders Hal can question him."

There was no opposition to this, and one of the camel-drivers was fetched and sent down to the gate, while Harry lay down with his bandaged arm exposed, on an angareb close to the door, where he lay looking ghastly and feeble by the light of the lamp.

The officer came at once, and the professor made him understand what was required, when he turned to the injured prisoner, who soon proved that he could speak the desert Arabic tongue pretty well.

"The great doctor," he said, "is thinking about his servant the Sheikh. Where is he?"

"I fear that he is dead," was the reply. "I told him when he went out that he carried his life in his hand."

"But why should he be slain?" asked Harry. "He was no fighting man."

"Because no man's life is safe," was the reply. "He went out upon one of the Hakim's camels, and any dervish who wanted one of the beasts would have followed him. Hundreds in the town want camels and horses now, and if the Sheikh gave his up quietly to the man who asked, it would be well. If he refused, a thrust from a spear or a blow from a knife would be sufficient."

"Then I am to tell the Hakim he will not return?"

"No. Tell him that he may return, but that I fear he will not. Tell him, too, that he is to be ready, for we may have to leave here soon after it is light."

Harry signified that he would, and then started, for the officer said suddenly—

"How is it that you can speak the Hakim's tongue?"

"Because I was once among the Franks. It is a tongue that is known far and wide. He is a great man, and my arm will soon be well. Is it not time that my master fetched me back?"

"Thy master has gone to fight the enemies of Allah," said the officer scornfully, "and has no time to think of thee."

There was no more information to be obtained of the man, whose whole manner seemed to have changed, and the sound of the tapping of a war-drum drew him away directly after, leaving the party undecided what to do.

One thing was evident, that with the strict guard kept over the place any attempt at evasion would have been useless, and it was decided that if they were to escape it must be during their journey to Khartoum.

"But we must not give up all hope of seeing Ibrahim return," said the doctor. "Go to the men, Landon, and find out what they think about their chief."

The professor left the room at once, leaving his friends listening to every sound that came through the open windows of the soft night; and there were many, all going to prove that something extraordinary was afloat, the little party having no difficulty in making out that a large body of men were on the move, while when this had ceased and a peculiar stillness began to reign, the distant tap, tap, tap of another drum was heard, followed in due time by the dull tramp of men.

"I had no idea," said the doctor, "that these Baggara were in such a state of discipline. Why, they seem to march like European troops."

"You have not seen so much of them as I have," said Harry sadly. "During my imprisonment I have had plenty of time to study them, and have seen pretty well why this is. Of course their leader's position depends upon his army more than upon his reputation of being the prophet upon whom the last Mahdi's garment has fallen."

"I suppose so," said Frank. "Mahomet's great power came from the sword."

"Of course," replied Harry. "No wonder that, with an army to back him, he made so many converts. It was, 'Which will you have, the Koran or the sword?' And it is so now with this man, only it is worse. Brutal violence of the most horrible description wherever he and his followers go, and there is more stress laid upon the sword than upon the Koran."

"And the spear added," said Frank.

"Exactly. I don't want to harrow you with the horrors I have been compelled to witness, and what I have seen and known to occur is but a drop of blood in an ocean. The country has been laid waste for the gratification of this human fiend and his vile followers."

As he spoke the tramp, tramp of men came through the window once more, and Harry nodded.

"As so much depends upon the army's efficiency, this Mahdi, like his predecessor, whose paltry tomb you have seen, has done his best to bring the tribes up into as perfect a state of discipline as can be managed with such wild beasts. They have plenty of modern rifles, and they know how to use them, and they have been drilled sufficiently to make them dangerous. Of course you know how."

"By imitating what they have seen in the troops sent against them," said the doctor, as he sat listening intently to the sounds from without.

"By the help of renegades," said Harry bitterly. "I might have been one of the Mahdi's generals—an Emir, by now, if I would have taken some of the troops in hand. I had offers enough, and of course it meant becoming a follower of Mahomet."

"But you resisted the temptations," said Frank proudly.

"And became a groom," said Harry, smiling bitterly. "I suppose if it had not been for my love for horses and camels I should have lost my head like my poor leader. Oh, if it is only true, and the British forces are close up! Surely the day of retribution has come at last."

"I want the day of escape for us to have come, Hal," said the doctor, reaching over to lay his hand upon his old school-fellow's arm. "Our work is done when we have got you away. Let's leave the punishment of the dervishes to— Ah, here's Landon back. Well, have they any news for us?"

"None of Ibrahim, and the men want to know what they are to do."

"Nothing," said the doctor sadly. "We are prisoners, and resistance to the Emir's guard would be madness."

"So I have told them, but they don't want to go in search of him."

"What, then?" said Frank impatiently. "You mean something else?"

"Yes," said the professor sadly; "we are to shift our quarters. Our guard has given them orders to load up their camels with fodder, provisions, and water, in case we have to take to the desert, and to fill the water-skins so as to have an ample supply. They are to be ready to start at a moment's notice, and asked me if they are to obey."

"And you told them yes, of course?" said Frank eagerly.

"I told them yes, of course," said the professor sadly; "but I don't like going. It is leaving poor old Ibrahim in the lurch."

"But I suppose we have no option?" said the doctor.

"None unless we make up our minds to resist."

"And that would be throwing away our lives," said Harry gloomily. "This chief of the guard has his orders, and he is evidently a man who will serve his master faithfully and well. I suppose he will be taking the Emir's household with us?"

"Yes; the other part of the palace is in a busy state of preparation, and the court next to the garden here is full of horses and camels."

"It is our opportunity," said Frank, "and if we start before daylight we may be able to separate from the rest of the party. What are we going to take with us?"

"I should go away as we came. The Hakim's cures have helped us well, and they may do so again, for who knows how far we may have to travel through the desert, or what tribes we may encounter? So let's be prepared."

Their baggage was so light and so well arranged that there was little to do beyond strapping up a few cases, and at the end of a busy hour they were quite prepared, while they had hardly finished before the officer came in, cast an eye over the leathern cases lying ready, and then gave a nod of satisfaction.

"Tell the Hakim," he said, turning to Harry and speaking sharply, "that there are no tidings of his Arab servant and guide. He must have been cut down by some robber for the sake of his camel. Tell him, too, that he has done wisely in being prepared. I cannot say how soon we start; it may be in an hour, it may be after sunrise, or not at all. But when I give the order, what he wishes to take must be placed upon the camels directly. You will stay here."

"No," said Harry coldly; "the Hakim has not done with me yet."

"Well," said the guard, with a grim laugh, "it will be better for you than staying here. Your white skin may be an invitation to the sword if the Khalifa does not win the day."

The man turned sharply and left the room without another word.

"Poor old Ibrahim!" said the professor sadly. "I'd give something to see him walk in safe and sound."

"And I,"—"And I," said Frank and the doctor.

"And I say the same. Heaven help him!" said Harry, "for I owe it to him that I am with you, and I would say let us hold out here if I thought it was of any use. But it would be utter folly to resist, and I should not like to fight against a man who is doing his duty and has proved himself our friend."

Frank rose and went into the next room, where Sam had been in pretty good spirits so long as the packing up took his attention, for he was eager to get away; but now everything was done and he was left alone, waiting and watchful, his spirits had sunk below zero.

He jumped up from where he was seated upon a portmanteau as Frank entered.

"Orders to start, sir?" he said eagerly.

"No, Sam, not yet. We must wait."

"Oh dear!" groaned the man. "I did think we were going at last, sir. Got Mr Harry, the camels all waiting, and the town empty of fighting men. I say, sir, hadn't we better start, and chance it? Mr Abrams has got a camel, and he'll find out which way we're gone. This waiting is the worst of all."

Frank explained to him the position, and the man shook his head dismally.

"Then we're only going to chop one prison for another, Ben Eddin? But you surely don't think Mr Abrams has been killed?"

"I only know he has not returned, Sam."

"Oh, but look at him. Such a fine, long-bearded old Arab as he is. Oh, they wouldn't kill him. He's gone a bit further, sir, to get some news. There, I've been red-hot to start and get away from here, but I don't want to go now. I say, let's stop till he comes back. We can't go and leave him behind."

Frank sighed.

"We are under the Emir's guard," he said, "and when the order to start is given we shall have to obey."

"And about now, sir. It's of no use to pretend to lie down and sleep," said Sam; "I couldn't get a wink."

"No, nor anyone else," replied Frank; "there is nothing to be done but watch and wait."

Chapter Forty One.

The Last Struggle.

The night glided slowly on, seeming to be as long as several to the weary watchers, and during the latter part, when the bustle of preparation had long ceased in the women's part of the palace, even the horses and camels beyond the dividing wall had grown perfectly quiet.

From time to time, watchful and silent, the officer of the guard had been to visit them, looking sharply round and then leaving without a word; while after one of his visits Frank and the professor stepped out into the open to visit the Sheikh's men, who were seated smoking patiently by their crouching camels, waiting for their chief's return.

In this look round and another which followed, Frank found that the men of the bodyguard were fully on the alert, and that twice as many sentries as usual were about the place. But all was silent save a low murmur from the far-spreading city—a low, strange buzzing burr as if from some vast hive, suggesting that the whole place was awake and in expectation of something about to happen.

At last there were the faint indications of the coming day, but to the watchers even they seemed cold and strange, differing from the early dawns they were accustomed to in their journeys across the vast stretch of sand.

The light increased, and a strange restlessness, which they could not explain attacked the watchers. The drowsiness that had been felt from time to time had completely passed away, and while the Hakim sat looking stern and anxious, Sam relieved his feelings by making coffee, feeling sure all the time that no one would touch it, and Frank and the professor fidgeted about in and out to look at the camel-drivers seated as calmly as the quaint animals they tended, and then to see if the guard were still at their posts.

But there was no further sign of preparation for a start, and the chief of the guard was nowhere to be seen.

Sunrise came, and with it the hurrying of feet, which proved to be a large body of men making for the vast expanse of mud-houses nearest to the river, where the rough forts, of which Frank had never obtained a glimpse, lay. When the men had passed, the silence became oppressive once more, and Frank and his companion went in to find Harry nursing his arm, which had taken to throbbing violently.

Just then Sam was ready with the coffee, borne in a steaming brass pot in company with a brass tray and so many brass cups.

"You'll have some coffee, gentlemen?" he said respectfully; "it will be so refreshing," and setting down the tray he began, though no one answered, to fill the little cups.

At that moment there came from far away the dull, short report of a gun, and Sam nearly dropped the coffee pot.

"What's that?" he cried, with his eyes starting widely open.

"A heavy gun," said Harry, starting up. "Then this is what all this gathering meant."

He had hardly spoken before in rapid succession two more reports were heard, followed by crash after crash, distinct and peculiar, but unmistakable.

"Bullets," said Harry, who began to pant with excitement, as he made for the door. "Hark at that, and that! Oh, it has come at last, and I am a prisoner here!"

At that moment a camel was seen passing the window. One of the Sheikh's men was leading it, and directly after Frank uttered a cry of joy, and, followed by the professor, ran to the door, just in time to encounter Ibrahim, who hurried in, looking haggard and bent.

The next minute he was shaking hands with all, and eagerly took the coffee Sam offered to him. He drank it with avidity, after adding to it some cold water from a jug close by.

"Hah!" he ejaculated, and then quickly—

"I went out, Excellencies, to make a long round so as to find out all that was to be known. It has been hard work to avoid being cut off. But I have seen much."

"Yes, yes; pray speak out," cried Frank.

"The Khalifa has gathered his forces together, and yesterday evening they made their advance away from the town—an enormous army, seeming to drive their enemies back."

"Their enemies!" cried Harry excitedly. "The English and Egyptian armies?"

"Yes, Excellency; they are many miles away, by the river side, and there are gunboats coming on nearly opposite here."

"At last!" cried Harry. "Oh, but it has been long, long! This time they will not be too late."

"It seemed last night that the great battle was to take place; but at dusk the Khalifa halted his army, thousands upon thousands; their white garments seemed to spread for three or four miles, and I felt that at last the great time had come."

"Yes, yes?" cried Frank, and the old Sheikh's voice sounded dull and strange now, overborne by the distant muttering thunder of the firing, which seemed to be on the increase.

"But I would not come back till I could be sure of the tidings I had to bring, and I lay out with my camel among the hills over yonder, till just at daybreak I could see that the dervish army was in motion, and I mounted my camel, keeping to the highest parts I could find. I made a circuit, after seeing the British and Egyptian forces far back by the river, and the dervishes in one long, white wave sweeping steadily along as if to lap round and drive their foes into the stream."

"And that they will never do!" said Harry proudly.

"I don't know, Excellency. The dervishes looked so many. Your friends seemed so few. But I had learned all I wanted, for I could see that the great fight was about to begin, and I came with the tidings. What will your Excellencies do?"

He looked at the doctor as he spoke, and the latter replied, "We can do nothing while we are here, Ibrahim. Our orders are to wait till our guard gives the word for us to start."

"And then we hope to make for the desert if we can shake our guardians off," said the professor.

The old Sheikh was silent, as if deep in thought.

"I know not how to advise," he said. "If the English are beaten—"

"They will not be!" cried Harry excitedly.

"I pray not, Excellency, but if the day goes against them it would be madness to take to the desert, for the dervishes will be swarming everywhere, athirst for blood. We could not escape, and we should be safer here. Even if the Khalifa's army is routed it will be as bad, for we should have to mingle with the flying Baggara, while the pursuing Egyptians would be as dangerous as the dervishes themselves. I feel that we ought to stay."

"But our orders are, to be ready to start at any time," said the doctor gravely.

"Then, Excellency, we must accept our fate. We shall be taken to Khartoum, where the beaten force will rally and defend it to the last."

"Not rally here, Ibrahim?" said Frank eagerly.

"No, Excellency. This is no place to defend. The well-drilled troops would sweep through it after their heavy guns and scatter the mud-houses into heaps. No, the dervishes will hoist their standards at Khartoum. But we must make a

brave effort to avoid being shut in there."

He said no more, for there seemed to be no more to say, and the desire of all was to listen to the distant thunder, which had been increasing as he spoke, telling plainly enough of the terrible battle going on, while suddenly, and as if close at hand, there came the heavy reports of guns away to the east.

"The gunboats," said Ibrahim quietly, "and the forts answering back. This is the day that the fate of the Soudan must be known."

How the time went no one could tell in that wildly exciting, agonising time of doubt. The firing from miles away to the north continued, and the cannonading from the river was maintained, but there was no news of how the fight progressed, and a feeling of despair was attacking the prisoners when all at once the firing ceased.

What did it mean? That the collected army of the Khalifa was immense they were well aware. Had it swept on and on in the great white wave the Sheikh had described, vastly overlapping the Anglo-Egyptian force, and, curling round its flanks, achieved the Baggara Emir's threat of sweeping the infidels into the river, now cumbered with the slain?

For the silence was ominous; even the gunboats had ceased firing, and their guard had made no sign.

In the hurried discussion which ensued, the professor drew attention to this; but it was repelled with contempt by Harry.

"What of that?" he said. "The forts were so much mud, with a few poorly served guns. They have been silenced, and there is nothing more to fire at. Even now the boats may have landed men who are marching into the town."

"But the firing on the field!" said Frank excitedly. "Oh, if we only knew!"

Almost as he spoke the Emir's officer came in, and there was a look of triumph in his eyes as he said to the Sheikh—

"There will be no journey to-day, O Sheikh, for the enemies of Allah are being swept away. The Emir my master will be back before night, and all my prisoners are safe."

He left them, and they saw that he went in the direction of the women's part of the palace, evidently to give his good news there and set the poor creatures at rest; but he could hardly have reached their quarters before the firing broke out again, certainly nearer and fiercer than before.

"He spoke too soon!" cried Harry excitedly. "We shall beat the savage wretches yet!"

The firing rose and fell, and rose again, and to the hearers the suspense grew unbearable, Frank and his brother feeling that at all risks they must try by some means to get tidings of how the battle fared.

Again there was a cessation and a long interval of silence.

Once more the dull thudding of the artillery was heard above the roar of rifle volleys and the snarling rattle of the machine guns; and when this ceased there was a hurried sound, mingled with wailing, within the walls of the Emir's house; two of the guards passed quickly by the windows of the Hakim's quarters, and the Sheikh's men were seen hurrying towards the door, where they were met by the chief of the guard, who rushed by them, to shout in a stern voice to Ibrahim—

"Quick! to your camels! We leave here now."

That was enough. No trumpet-blast could have announced in clearer tones that the fight was won, and as he passed out a strange murmurous roar arose from the streets of the great mud city, a mingling of excited voices, those of the fugitives and those of the more resolute who elected to stay.

There was a stern look in the officer's eyes as he stood, drawn sword in hand, looking on while the final preparations were made, and within ten minutes the prisoners were mounted on horse and camel and assembled in the well-guarded court, where the women and slaves of the Emir's household were already waiting.

Directly after the long train moved out through the gateway with their watchful guards; and it was none too soon, for before they had passed down a couple of streets, a yelling mob of savage-looking armed men made for the Emir's palace, spreading through to loot and carry off everything that took their eye.

It was the same throughout, for the first deed of about three thousand of the dervish army which had fled, routed from the field, was to make for the palaces of the Khalifa, and those of his chief Emirs, on plunder bent, while, where they dared, the ordinary dwellers of the city joined in to bear off the garnered stores of corn.

Frank and his companions knew nothing of this as they were hurried along through the tortuous ways of the vast stretch of hovels, tents, and mud huts, till they reached the outskirts, and then the wide-stretching plain, where they had ample opportunity of learning the truth. For on every side, streaming towards Khartoum, where it lay whitened in the distance, were the routed dervishes, some in troops, displaying military order, but the greater part scattered and flying for their lives on horses, camels, and on foot.

They had need—for the Emir's officer had stayed too long in his blind belief in the success of the Khalifa's troops—the avenging forces were close behind, and the dervishes were falling fast, dotting the plain with their white garments, while riderless horses and camels careered wildly here and there.

The race was for Khartoum—the efforts of the Sirdar's troops, horse, foot, and artillery, to cut them off, and it was not

long before the English party grasped the fact that it would be a marvel if they reached the distant city alive in the midst of the hurrying crowd.

But the Emir's bodyguard worked well, keeping their charge together, hurrying on the camels, encouraging the women, and twice over forming up and attacking bands of their fellow fighting men who approached menacingly, seeing in the flying party of the Emir's household ample opportunities for securing plunder, but only to be beaten off.

Any attempt at escape would only have been to invite recapture. Frank and his brother, well mounted as they were, like the guard, on a couple of the Emir's magnificent Arabs, could have galloped off with ease, but the slower going camels on which their friends rode could not have kept up with them, and even if an attempt had been made where were they to go? It was to run the gauntlet amongst the relics of the flying army, to risk being cut down by their friends before they had time to explain that they were not what they seemed.

Harry seemed to have forgotten his injured arm, and he and Frank rode together, helping the officer of the guard, though it was only in keeping their own party together, and encouraging the followers of the Sheikh, who were losing their calmness in the wild rout, with the guns of the horse artillery sending forth grape wherever a knot of the enemy hung together, and the cavalry, white and black, charging here and there.

It was while Frank was cheering on Sam, and then helping a dismounted man to a seat on a baggage camel, that the officer rode up, meeting Harry, who turned to him at once, to address him in the keen, commanding tones of the British officer, as he pointed towards the open plains and hills.

"You can never get to Khartoum," he said. "Make for the desert."

"Yes," said the officer calmly, as he fully grasped the position; for rapidly passing their left flank, and gradually cutting off their way, they saw a regiment of the Egyptian cavalry tearing along, riding down scores of the dervishes as they went.

It seemed to be their only chance, and the two young men joined with their leader in heart and soul to hurry the camel train along.

Turning then at right-angles, the leading man made for the shelter of some hills a couple of miles to the west, and as the camels were hurried along, there seemed for a few minutes a prospect of getting right away.

"From Scylla into Charybdis," cried Harry bitterly.

"But can we do better?" said Frank excitedly.

"There is no better," said Harry sadly, "in a rout. It is every man for himself now. No one has a friend."

They rode on as fast as they could get the groaning and complaining camels along, and were rapidly nearing the hills, when a warning cry came from their leader, in answer to which the guard turned back, leaving the camels to proceed alone, for the Emir's officer had suddenly become aware of the fact that a band of at least a hundred of the mounted dervishes in full retreat had swooped round, and were dashing at them, certainly with no peaceful intent.

"It's all over, Frank, lad," cried Harry. "Let's get alongside Morris and Landon. They may make us prisoners, but the wretches' blood is up, and their only thoughts are to plunder and slay. Try and save them; here the wretches come."

"Look, look!" cried Frank, for from their right front some four hundred yards away there was a gleam of steel, a glimpse of white helmets, and an opening outline of galloping horses racing out of a hollow.

The evolution was brilliant, and before it seemed possible, the line of horsemen with lowered spears were upon the advancing dervish band, which had already got amongst the Emir's guard, fighting and dying in defence of their charge.

A minute? More likely half a minute, and a couple of squadrons of British cavalry had ridden through the dervishes, leaving the earth cumbered with dead and wounded men, whose horses galloped wildly here and there.

On went the cavalry, wheeled, and came back, cutting down all who resisted, the major portion of the enemy flying for their lives to east and north, for from the west a second squadron of the British horse was coming up at a gallop, a detachment checking and capturing the whole camel train.

How it came about Frank hardly knew, but somehow, mounted as he was, he found himself with his brother close to where the Emir's officer, with a dozen of his men, had hacked their way from among a crowd of dervishes, just as the British cavalry had wheeled and come back, cutting up the assailants of the Emir's guards, and the next minute had nearly been Frank's last, for an English lancer rode in the *mêlée* at the Emir's officer, who must have fallen had not a quick blow from Frank's sword turned the lance aside.

The man passed on, but an officer dashed in, sword in hand, and Frank would have been laid low but for his brother's act.

For Harry turned his horse and rode full at the advancing officer, their chargers coming together as he shouted wildly

"Halt! Halt! English—English!"

The officer turned upon him fiercely.

"What?—Who are you?"

"Frere, of Gordon's," shouted Harry.

"But that black?"

"My brother!"

"Yes," cried Frank, in honest old English. "I was trying to save this brave man's life."

"Then don't black your face first, youngster, next time," cried the officer, with a laugh, as he turned to find fresh food for his steel.

But the enemy were flying fast, scattered, and leaving half their force upon the field. The recall was ringing out, and shortly after the English squadrons were making for Khartoum, with their prisoners and prizes, the former including the remains of the Emir's bodyguard, their captain and six of his followers, wounded to a man.

That night Frank and his companions rested in Khartoum.

It was the day of the oft-told scene when the Sirdar and his staff were gathered around with all the thrilling pomp of a military funeral, to pay the long-deferred honour at their hero's grave.

The chaplain had read the solemn words, the volleys had been fired, to waken the echoes from where they had slumbered among the ruins of Khartoum, and the victorious general and his brave staff had paid their last duties of respect.

As the combined flags floated and waved together with a soft rustle in the desert wind, the general and his officers drew back from the hero's grave and then stood fast, as a thin, worn-looking, sun-burned man in tattered white cotton garments, and bearing his left arm in a sling, stepped forward—a dervish slave in dress, but with the bearing of a British officer, and closely followed by a black.

For the moment it seemed like an intrusion, and there was a movement amongst the Sirdar's guard as if to force them back. But an officer raised his hand, and then whispered to another at his side—

"Gordon's friend; a prisoner with him at his death."

"Yes, but the black fellow?" said the other, in the same low tone.

"Pst! Tell you after—brother—came in disguise—to seek him out."

Then all stood watching in the midst of a painful silence as they saw the rescued victim of the Mahdi's reign of terror sink softly upon his knees by his leader's grave and lay upon it a leaf freshly taken from a neighbouring palm, while his companion stood reverently close behind.

A minute had elapsed, and then those present drew back, and a hand was laid upon the kneeling man's shoulder.

The latter rose slowly, and he who had silently warned him that it was time to go heard him murmur—

"Goodbye, brave soldier and truest friend. I did my best. But it is not Goodbye: for you will be always with us—one of Britain's greatest sons—your name will never die."

Then turning to his companion with a faint, sad smile, he said softly—

"Our country was slow to move, but at last it has done its duty well. Mine was a bitter time of waiting, but it is as nothing now, for I have been here to see."

He turned and looked up quickly, for there was a sharp fluttering sound as of wings.

"The British flag!" he said, with a look of pride lighting up his deeply bronzed face. "There, Frank, lad, our work is done, and the way is open. Now for rest—for the home I never hoped to see again."

A low murmur of admiration ran along the ranks of the British soldiers, officers and men, as the brothers walked slowly back to where a group was standing, one of whom was a good-looking, sun-browned Hakim in snowy turban and flowing robes, attended by a swarthy man in a *fez*—a man in white garb with a very English face, and just behind him a venerable Sheikh. For all who were present now had learned the facts, and as the brothers passed, one of the officers of the Sirdar's guard exclaimed—

"By George! and yet there are people who say we have no heroes now!"

The End.

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