HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

AT ABOUKIR AND ACRE: A STORY OF NAPOLEON'S INVASION OF EGYPT

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Содержание

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PREFACE

With the general knowledge of geography now possessed we may well wonder at the wild notion entertained both by Bonaparte and the French authorities that it would be possible, after conquering Egypt, to march an army through Syria, Persia, and the wild countries of the northern borders of India, and to drive the British altogether from that country. The march, even if unopposed, would have been a stupendous one, and the warlike chiefs of Northern India, who, as yet, were not even threatened by a British advance, would have united against an invading army from the north, and would, had it not been of prodigious strength, have annihilated it. The French had enormously exaggerated the power of Tippoo Sahib, with whom they had opened negotiations, and even had their fantastic designs succeeded, it is certain that the Tiger of Mysore would, in a very short time, have felt as deep a hatred for them as he did for the

British.

But even had such a march been possible, the extreme danger in which an army landed in Egypt would be placed of being cut off, by the superior strength of the British navy, from all communication with France, should alone have deterred them from so wild a project. The fate of the campaign was indeed decided when the first gun was fired in the Bay of Aboukir, and the destruction of the French fleet sealed the fate of Napoleon's army. The noble defence of Acre by Sir Sidney Smith was the final blow to Napoleon's projects, and from that moment it was but a question of time when the French army would be forced to lay down its arms, and be conveyed, in British transports, back to France. The credit of the signal failure of the enterprise must be divided between Nelson, Sir Sidney Smith, and Sir Ralph Abercrombie.

CHAPTER I.
MAKING A FRIEND

Two lads were standing in one of the bastions of a fort looking over the sea. There were neither guards nor sentinels there. The guns stood on their carriages, looking clean and ready for action, but this was not the result of care and attention, but simply because in so dry a climate iron rusts but little. A close examination would have shown that the wooden carriages on which they stood were so cracked and warped by heat that they would have fallen to pieces at the first discharge of the guns they upheld. Piles of cannon-balls stood between the guns, half-covered with the drifting sand, which formed slopes half-way up the walls of the range of barracks behind, and filled up the rooms on the lower floor. Behind rose the city of Alexandria, with its minarets and mosques, its palaces and its low mud-built huts. Seaward lay a fleet of noble ships with their long lines of port-holes, their lofty masts, and network of rigging.

"What do you think of it, Sidi?"

"It is wonderful!" his companion replied. "How huge they are, what lines of cannon, what great masts, as tall and as straight as palm-trees! Truly you Franks know many things of which we in the desert are ignorant. Think you that they could batter these forts to pieces?"

The other laughed as he looked round. "One of them could do that now, Sidi, seeing that there is scarce a gun on the rampart that could be fired in return; but were all in good order, and with British artillerists, the whole fleet would stand but a poor chance against them, for while their shot would do but little injury to these solid walls, these cannon would drill the ships through and through, and if they did not sheer off, would sink them."

"But why British artillerists, brother, why not our own people?"

"Because you have no properly trained gunners. You know how strong Algiers was, and yet it was attacked with success, twice by the French, twice by ourselves, and once by us and the Dutch; but it is a rule that a strongly defended fort cannot be attacked successfully by ships. If these forts were in proper condition and well manned, I don't think that even Nelson would attack them, though he might land somewhere along the coast, attack and capture the town from the land side, and then carry the batteries. Successful as he has been at sea, he has had some experience as to the difficulty of taking forts. He was beaten off at Teneriffe, and although he did succeed in getting the Danes to surrender at Copenhagen, it's well known now that his ships really got the worst of the fight, and that if the Danes had held on, he must have drawn off with the loss of many of his vessels."

"I know nothing of these things, brother, nor where the towns you name are, nor who are the Danes; but it seems to me that those great ships with all their guns would be terrible assailants.

As you say, these forts are not fit for fighting; but this is because no foes have ever come against us by sea for so many years. What could an enemy do if they landed?"

"The Mamelukes are grand horsemen, Sidi, but horsemen alone cannot win a battle; there are the artillery and infantry to be counted with, and it is with these that battles are won in our days, though I say not that cavalry do not bear their share, but alone they are nothing. One infantry square, if it be steady, can repulse a host of them; but you may ere long see the matter put to proof, for I hear that the officers who came on shore this morning asked if aught had been heard of the French fleet, which had, they say, sailed from Toulon to conquer Egypt. It is for this that the English fleet has come here."

"Their bones will whiten the plains should they attempt it," the other said scornfully. "But why should they want to interfere with us, and why should you care to prevent them doing so if they are strong enough?"

"Because, in the first place, we are at war with them, and would prevent them gaining any advantage. In the second place, because Egypt is a step on the way to India. There we are fighting with one of the great native princes, who has, they say, been promised help by the French, who are most jealous of us, since we have destroyed their influence there, and deprived them of their chance of becoming masters of a large portion of the country."

The conversation had been carried on in Arabic. The speakers

were of about the same age, but Edgar Blagrove was half a head taller than his Arab friend. His father was a merchant settled in Alexandria, where Edgar had been born sixteen years before, and except that he had spent some two years and a half at school in England, he had never been out of Egypt. Brought up in a polyglot household, where the nurses were French or Italian, the grooms Arab, the gardeners Egyptians drawn from the fellah class, and the clerks and others engaged in his father's business for the most part Turks, Edgar had from childhood spoken all these languages with equal facility. He had never learned them, but they had come to him naturally as his English had done. His mother, never an energetic woman, had felt the heat of the climate much, and had never been, or declared she had never been—which came to the same thing—capable of taking any exercise, and, save for a drive in her carriage in the cool of the evening, seldom left the house.

Edgar had, from the first, been left greatly to his own devices. His father was a busy man, and, as long as the boy was well and strong, was content that he should spend his time as he chose, insisting only on his taking lessons for two hours a day from the Italian governess, who taught his twin sisters, who were some eighteen months younger than himself; after that he was free to wander about the house or to go into the streets, provided that one of the grooms, either Hammed or Abdul, accompanied him. When at thirteen he was sent to England to stay with an uncle and to go through a couple of years' schooling, he entered a world so

wholly unlike that in which he himself had been brought up, that for a time he seemed completely out of his element.

His father had an excellent library, and during the heat of the day the boy had got through a great deal of reading, and was vastly better acquainted with standard English writers than his cousins or school-fellows, but of ordinary school work he was absolutely ignorant, and at first he was much laughed at for his deficiencies in Latin and Greek. The latter he never attempted, but his knowledge of Italian helped him so greatly with his Latin that in a very few months he went through class after class, until he was fully up to the level of other boys of his age. His uncle lived in the suburbs of London, and he went with his cousins to St. Paul's. At that time prize-fighting was the national sport, and his father had, when he sent him over, particularly requested his uncle to obtain a good teacher for him.

"Whether Edgar will stay out here for good, Tom, I cannot say, but whether he does or not, I should like him to be able to box well. In England every gentleman in our day learns to use his fists, while out here it is of very great advantage that a man should be able to do so. We have a mixed population here, and a very shady one. Maltese, Greeks, Italians, and French, and these probably the very scum of the various seaports of the Mediterranean, therefore to be able to hit quick and straight from the shoulder may well save a man's life. Of course he is young yet, but if he goes regularly for an hour two or three times a week to one of the light-weight men, I have no doubt that when he

returns he will be able to astonish any of these street ruffians who may interfere with him.

"Even if he is never called upon to use his fists, it will do him a great deal of good, for boxing gives a quickness and readiness not only of hands, but of thought, that is of great service; and moreover, the exercise improves the figure, and is, in that respect, I think, fully equal to fencing. Please put this matter in hand as soon as he arrives. As to his studies, I own that I care very little; the boy speaks half-a-dozen languages, any one of which is vastly more useful to a resident here than Latin and Greek together. Naturally he will learn Latin. Of course his Italian will facilitate this, and it is part of a gentleman's education to be able to understand a quotation or turn a phrase in it. Still, it is not for this that I send him to England, but to become an English boy, and that your Bob and Arthur and his school-fellows will teach him."

Edgar was quite as much surprised at his cousins and school-fellows as they were with him. The fact that he could talk half-a-dozen languages was to them amazing, while not less astonishing to him was their ignorance of the affairs of Europe except, indeed, of the French Revolution—their vagueness in geography, and the absolute blank of their minds as to Egypt. It was not until three months after his arrival that he had his first fight, and the instructions he had received during that time sufficed to enable him to win so easy a victory, that it was some months before he had again occasion to use his fists in earnest. This time it was

in the streets. He was returning home with his cousins, when a pert young clerk thought it a good joke to twitch off his cap and throw it into a shop, and was astounded when, before the cap had reached the floor, he himself was prostrate on the pavement.

He was no coward, however, and leapt up, furious, to punish this boy of fourteen, but in spite of his superior strength and weight, he was no match for Edgar, whose quickness on his legs enabled him to avoid his rushes, while he planted his blows so quickly and heavily that in ten minutes the clerk was unable to see out of his eyes, and had to be led away amid the jeers of the crowd. This success increased Edgar's ardour to perfect himself in the art. If he could so easily defeat an English lad of seventeen, he felt sure that after another year's teaching he need not fear an attack by the greatest ruffian in Alexandria. His uncle had taken advice on the subject, and, desirous of carrying out his brother's instructions to the fullest, changed his master every six months; so that during the two years and a half that he was in England Edgar had learned all that the five most skilled light-weight pugilists in England could teach him.

"Yes, he is going in for it thoroughly," his uncle would say to his friends. "Of course, I shall have my own boys taught in another three or four years, for I think that every gentleman should be able to defend himself if assaulted by a street ruffian; but in his case he has to learn when quite young or not at all, and I think that it will be very useful to him, as all these foreign fellows draw their knives on the least occasion."

When Edgar returned to Alexandria, nine months before the time when he and Sidi were watching Nelson's fleet, his father was well pleased with the change that had taken place in him. He had been tall for his age before he left, now he had not only grown considerably, but had widened out. He was still far from being what may be called a squarely-built boy, but he was of a fair width across the shoulders, and was a picture of health and activity. The muscles of his arms, shoulders, and loins were as tough as steel, his complexion was fresh and clear, and he had scarce an ounce of superfluous flesh upon him.

"Save for your complexion, Edgar, you might well pass as a young Bedouin if you were to wrap yourself up in their garb. I see you have profited well by your teachers' instructions. Your uncle wrote to me a year ago that you had administered a sound thrashing to a fellow seventeen years old who had meddled with you, and as, no doubt, you have improved in skill and strength since that time, I should think that you need have no fear of holding your own should you get into trouble with any of these street ruffians."

"I should hope so, father; at any rate I should not mind trying. I know that I could hold my own pretty fairly with young Jackson. They call him the 'Bantam'. He is the champion light-weight now, though he does not fight above nine stone, so there is not much difference between us in weight."

"Good! and how about your school work?"

"Oh, I did pretty well, father! I was good in Latin, but I was

nowhere in figures."

"Not grown quarrelsome, I hope, on the strength of your fighting, Edgar?"

"No, sir, I hope not. I never had a fight at school except the one I had three months after I got there, and I only had that one row you speak of with a clerk. I don't think it would be fair, you see, to get into rows with fellows who have no idea how thoroughly I have been taught."

His father nodded.

"Quite right, Edgar. My ideas are that a man who can box well is much less likely to get into quarrels than one who cannot. He knows what he can do, and that, if forced to use his skill, he is able to render a good account of himself, and therefore he can afford to put up with more, than one who is doubtful as to whether he is likely to come well out of a fight if he begins one."

Edgar found on his arrival at Alexandria that his mother and sisters were about to leave for England. Mrs. Blagrove had become seriously indisposed, the result, as she maintained, of the climate, but which was far more due to her indolent habits, for she never took any exercise whatever. Her general health was greatly impaired, and the two Italian doctors who attended her —there being no English medical men resident there—had most strongly advised that she should return home. They had frankly told Mr. Blagrove that a colder climate was absolutely necessary to her, not only because it would brace her up and act as a tonic, but because she would probably there be induced to take a certain

amount of exercise. The two girls were to accompany her, in order that they should, like Edgar, enjoy the advantage of going to an English school and mixing with English girls of their own age. They, too, had both felt the heat during the preceding summer, and Mr. Blagrove felt that a stay of two or three years in England would be an immense advantage to them.

Mrs. Blagrove was to stay with her father, a clergyman in the west of England, for a few months, when her husband intended himself to go over for a time. The war had much reduced business, the activity of the French privateers rendered communication irregular and precarious, the rates both for freight and insurance were very high, the number of vessels entering the port were but a tithe of those that frequented it before the outbreak of the war, and as no small part of Mr. Blagrove's business consisted in supplying vessels with such stores as they needed, his operations were so restricted that he felt he could, without any great loss, leave the management of his affairs in the hands of his chief assistant, a German, who had been with him for twenty years, and in whom he placed the greatest reliance.

Edgar would be there to assist generally, and his father thought that it would even benefit him to be placed for a time in a responsible position. It was, of course, a great disappointment to Edgar to find that his mother and the girls were on the point of returning. Their departure, indeed, had been decided upon somewhat suddenly owing to a strongly-armed English privateer,

commanded by an old acquaintance of Mr. Blagrove, coming into port. She had been cruising for some time, and had sent home a number of prizes, and was now returning herself to England for another refit and to fill up her crew again. As she was a very fast vessel, and the captain said that he intended to make straight home and to avoid all doubtful sail, Mr. Blagrove at once accepted the offer he made to take his wife and daughters back to England, immediately he heard that his friend was looking for a passage for them. Accordingly for the next week there was much packing and confusion. At the end of that time the three ladies, after a tearful adieu, sailed for England, and things settled down again.

Edgar felt the absence of his sisters keenly. There were but a handful of English traders in the city, and none of these had boys who were near enough to his own age to be companions. However, it had the effect of enabling him, without interruption, to settle down steadily to work with his father, and to make himself acquainted with the details of the business. This he did so industriously that Mr. Blagrove said more than once: "You are getting on so well, Edgar, that I shall be able to go home for my holiday with the comfortable conviction that in yours and Muller's hands matters will go on very well here, especially as business is so slack."

It was about three months after his return that Edgar had an opportunity of finding the advantage of his skill in boxing. He had, on the day after he came back, had a sack of sawdust hung

up in his room, and every morning he used to pummel this for half an hour before taking his bath, and again before going to bed, so that he kept his muscles in a state of training. Moreover, this exercise had the advantage that it enabled him to stand the heat of the climate much better than he would otherwise have done, and to save him from any of that feeling of lassitude and depression so usual among Englishmen working in hot climates. He was returning one day from a ride; dusk had fallen, and when just beyond the limits of the town he heard shouts and cries, and saw a scuffle going on in the road. Cantering on, he leapt from his horse, dropped the reins on its neck, and ran forward.

Two of the lowest class Maltese or Greeks were dragging a young Arab along, holding his hands to prevent him getting at his knife, and beating him about the head with their disengaged hands. It was evident that he was not one of the dwellers in the city, but an Arab of the desert. His horse stood near, and he had apparently been dragged from it.

"What is the matter? what are you beating him for?" he asked in Italian.

"This Arab dog pushed against us with his horse, and when we cursed him, struck at us."

"Well, if he did, you have punished him enough; but perhaps his story is a different one."

"Go your way, boy," one exclaimed with a Greek oath, "or we will throw you into that fountain, as we are going to do him."

"You will, eh? Unloose that lad at once or it will be worse for

you."

The man uttered a shout of rage. "Hold this young Arab wolf's other hand, Giaccamo, so that he cannot use his knife. I will settle this boy;" and his companion seized the lad's other wrist.

He rushed at Edgar, waving his arms in windmill fashion, thinking to strike him down without the least difficulty, but he was astounded at being met with a terrific blow on the nose, which nigh threw him off his balance, and this was followed an instant later by another on the point of his chin, which hurled him back, half-stunned, to the ground, with a vague impression in his mind that his head was broken into fragments. Before he even thought of rising, Edgar sprang at his companion, who, releasing the Arab boy's hands, grasped his knife, but before he could draw it, a blow, given with all Edgar's strength and the impetus of his bound forward, stretched him also on the ground, his knife flying from his hand.

The Arab boy had drawn his knife also, but Edgar exclaimed to him in his own language, "No, no, pick up the other knife, and then stand over him, but don't stab him." Then he turned to his first assailant, who was rising to his feet, still confused and bewildered. He had instinctively drawn his knife.

"Drop your knife, drop it!" Edgar cried. But with an oath the man sprang at him. His eyes, however, were full of tears, his ears sung, and his head buzzed, partly from the blow on the jaw, partly from the force with which he had come in contact with the ground. Edward lightly sprung aside and avoided the cut aimed

at him, and then delivered a blow with all his force just in front of the ear, and the man dropped again as if shot. In a moment Edgar had wrenched the knife from his hand, then he turned to the young Arab.

"That is enough," he said; "they have both got more than they wanted; they are harmless now, we have their two knives."

The Arab, who was panting from his exertions, and who had evidently restrained himself with difficulty from plunging his knife into his fallen assailant, turned round towards him.

"Who are you, brother, whose blows fell men like strokes of lightning?"

"My name is Edgar Blagrove. I am the son of a merchant, whose place of business is in the great square. Who are you, and how did this business begin?"

"My name is Sidi Ben Ouafy. I am the son of a chief. My father's tribe live in the oasis ten miles east of the old lake. I was riding from the town when these two men, for whom there was, as you see, plenty of room in the road, staggered suddenly against me, whether with evil intent or merely to enjoy the pleasure of seeing me rolling in the dust, I know not. They nearly unseated me from the suddenness of the attack, and as I recovered I certainly struck at them with my whip. One seized me by the foot and threw me off my horse, and then, as you saw, they fell upon me, beat me, and were dragging me to the fountain to throw me in when you came up. Had they not heard your horse coming along they would, I believe, have killed me. Henceforth you are my

brother; my horses and all that I have are yours, and every sword of our tribe would leap from its scabbard in your defence were it needed. To-morrow I will ride in again, and my father himself will assuredly come with me. I cannot speak of my gratitude now, my head is still dizzy with the blows they gave me; even yet I cannot understand how it was that these two men have thus fallen before you, and you with no weapon in your hands. Are they dead?"

"Not they," Edgar said scornfully; "they are wondering what has happened to them, and fear to move, not knowing that their own knives might not be driven into their hearts did they venture to rise. Well, good-bye, Sidi; I will see you off first; and I should advise you, when you ride into the town again, to bring your pistols with you. Like enough these scoundrels will try to get revenge for this defeat."

"I will do so. I know not why I did not carry them to-day. I will not only bring them, but two of my tribesmen shall ride with me. But methinks that you will be in greater danger than I shall, brother."

"I shall be on the look-out, and will, for a time, carry pistols with me; but I do not often go out after dark, and have no occasion ever to enter the streets where rogues of this sort live. As to an open attack, I have no fear of it; but I have no doubt that either of those scoundrels would plant a knife between my shoulders if they had a chance to do so."

Both the lads mounted their horses, and after a few words of

farewell rode off in different directions. Not until the sound of the horses' hoofs died away did the two figures in the road move, then they sat up.

"What has happened, Zeno?"

"I know not, save that my head is ringing. I feel as if my jaws were broken, and my nose is so swelled that it seems as big as my head."

"And I can scarcely see from my eyes," the other said. "Cospetto, never before have I been thus handled!"

"We will kill him!" the other said furiously.

"That of course; I know not who he was, but we shall doubtless find out. I can hardly believe even now that it was with his hand that he struck us—it was done so quickly. He was there—then I struck at him, when—paff!—and it seemed to me that the air was full of stars; then, paff again! my jaws cracked, I fell backwards, there was a crash, and the world seemed to have come to an end. And you, Giaccamo, what did he do to you?"

"It was like that, except that I only had one blow, and there was an end of it. I was drawing my knife when it came—how, I know not. My knife flew from my hand—there was a flash of fire from my eyes, and I was on the ground, and thought it best to lie there, lest that accursed young Arab should take it into his head to sheathe my knife in my body. The next time we will give the young fellow no chance to try those strange tricks upon us."

"You are right, Giaccamo; I would sooner fight against even Thomasso, who is the best knife-player in Alexandria, than face

that fellow again. Who can he be, I wonder?"

Edgar rode home, and after seeing his horse taken into the stable, went into the house.

"I have found my boxing of use, father."

"How is that, Edgar?"

The lad told him what had happened.

"You were quite right to strike, my boy," his father went on when he had heard the story; "'tis likely enough that those ruffians would have killed the lad. There are fellows here who would do murder for the sake of a few copper coins; and, doubtless, those men thought that the young chief would have some trinkets about him that would pay them for their trouble. I am sorry that you did not let the Arab put his knife into them; it would have been a good riddance, for the town abounds with rascals of that kind—the scum of the Mediterranean, men who have made their native towns too hot to hold them, and have committed crimes untold. As it is, you will have to be careful; fellows of this kind are not of a forgiving nature, and will be patient enough to wait for their revenge, but sooner or later they will attempt to take it."

"It was so dark, father, that they can scarcely have seen my face."

"Perhaps not, but no doubt they were able to make out your figure, and there are very few better-class young Europeans here. You will have to be on your guard, lad; you had better always carry pistols with you. Clever as you may be with your

fists, if you were attacked by half-a-dozen fellows with knives, you would stand but little chance with them. Don't be out after dusk; in daylight you are fairly safe. At any rate, you would be, if you avoid the rookeries, where the lower class of European inhabitants live. I have a brace of short-barrelled pistols up-stairs I will give you. I carried them at one time when things were very unsettled here. You have made two bitter enemies, but, on the other hand, you have made a friend who may be useful. These Arabs, when they once form a friendship, are as true as steel, and in the event of any fanatical troubles here, you would find a sure refuge among them. The lad's father, Aboo Ben Ouafy, I know a little of, as he has made purchases of me. His tribe is not a large one, but he himself is a fine fellow. As the lad told you, their head-quarters are in an oasis some eight or ten miles, I believe, east of the old site of Lake Mareotis. They, of course, like all those people, are frequently absent on hunting or plundering expeditions."

The next day Sidi and his father, followed by half a dozen tribesmen, halted in front of Mr. Blagrove's place of business, and the two former dismounted and entered. The Bedouin chief saluted the merchant gravely, while Sidi went up to Edgar, who was sitting at a table, for he now worked for some hours a day in his father's office, and who rose at the lad's approach, and held out his hand in English fashion.

"You are none the worse for our scrimmage last night, Sidi?" he said heartily.

"No harm was done," Sidi replied gravely. "I am glad of what happened, for it has given me a friend, a brother."

"I am glad too," Edgar replied, "for I too am happy to have gained a friend."

In the meantime his father was saying to Mr. Blagrove, "I have come, effendi, to thank you and your son for the assistance he rendered to my boy yesterday. I have no doubt that he saved his life, and that at the peril of his own. It is wonderful what my son tells me, that, with his hands alone he beat to the ground the two men who had attacked him, though they were armed with knives. I know not how it could be done, but since it was done 'tis plain that he must possess skill unknown to us. Sidi has called him brother, and henceforth I shall regard him as a son, and my tribe will be his should he need their services. I doubt not that the attack was made in order to gain the horse my son rode, which is one of famous breed, and would sell at high price at Cairo or any other of the large towns. I feel sure that they would have killed him in order that they might carry the horse away without search being made for it, for before we found that Sidi had been slain the horse would have been a hundred miles away."

"I know that your tribe is famous for having some of the best Arabian blood in the country, sheik, and I think it probable that you are right. The fellows may have seen your son ride into the town and determined to waylay him on his return."

"Your son did wrong not to kill them," the Arab said, "he will be in danger from them. I have called not only to thank him, but

to ask him to come and bide with us for a time; he will assuredly be in danger here. Were I governor of the town I would chop off the heads of all those people who breed disorders and are a curse to it. 'Tis well that Franks like yourself should settle among us, and should trade with us, buying our goods and selling to us those of Europe, but these thieves and cut-throats, these ruffians who neither trade nor work, but live by ill-doing, should be rooted out."

"I should be glad for my son to stay with you for a short time, sheik. I share your opinion that these men will try to avenge themselves, and it were well that he should be away for a time. Doubtless they will watch narrowly to see if they can find the young fellow who interfered with them, but if they meet with no one like him they may well think that he has left the town."

"It is well!" the Arab said. "I am going now to the governor to lay a complaint against these men. My son will go with me to tell him what they are like; the son of a sheik is not to be assaulted by town ruffians with impunity. We may be kept some time, but when we have done we will return hither. Will your son be ready to ride with us?"

"Certainly, sheik; it will not take him five minutes to make his preparations."

"He will not need a horse," the sheik said; "I have brought one with me for him."

Edgar had listened with delight to this conversation (which was in Arabic, which his father spoke fluently). The idea of going

to stay for a time in an Arab encampment was exciting indeed, for he had already begun to find the life monotonous after the two years spent at school and in the lively companionship of his cousins.

"It were well that you should come out and see your horse," the sheik said to him, "and make friends with him while we are away, for he is not accustomed to Europeans, and might give you trouble were you to mount him at once."

Edgar and his father both went out. One of the Arabs was standing at the horse's head, rubbing its nose and talking to it as if it had been a human being.

"That is the horse," the sheik said gravely. "Only to one, whom I regard as a son, would I part with him. On his back you may scoff at pursuit by any foes, for outside my encampment there is not a horse in Egypt which it could not distance. Now it is yours to do with as you like, save to sell it, for I would not that his blood should run in any veins save those of the horses of my tribe."

"This is, indeed, a princely gift, sheik," the merchant said warmly. "'Tis a noble horse, and one that a king might ride. My son is indeed indebted to you, and will value it beyond all price."

Edgar was warm in his expressions of gratitude and admiration, although, indeed, he was unable to appreciate at its full value the points of the animal. It was a gray, and, to English eyes, would have looked light and wanting in bone, and fit rather for a lady's use than for a man's, with its slender limbs and small head; but one accustomed to Arab horses, as Mr. Blagrove was,

could see at once that it was of the purest strain and highest breeding.

"Come with me," the sheik said to Edgar. "At present, you see, he is not accustomed to your white face, but he will soon come to love you, and answer to your call."

The horse, indeed, had laid back his ears, distended his dilated nostrils, and stepped back a foot or two; but as the sheik approached it gave a little whinny of pleasure, and, advancing, laid its muzzle against his cheek.

"This is your new master, Beauty," he said, as he stroked its glossy neck. "He will keep you well, and you will be as one of his children, and you must be a good friend and servant to him."

Edgar now stroked the animal. A quiver as of fear ran through it as he touched it, but as he continued, this died away; and as Edgar spoke quietly to it in Arabic, it was not long before it responded to his caresses, and after taking a good look at him with its soft liquid eyes, it put its head on his shoulder.

"You are friends now," the sheik said, with a tone of pleasure. "It is to few, even of my tribesmen, whom he would give such a greeting. He recognizes you already as his friend. Give him a handful of sweetmeats, and the bargain will be sealed."

The merchant at once sent one of the native boys out to buy a bag of sweetmeats. The sheik waited until he saw the horse taking these out of Edgar's hands and munching them contentedly, then, leaving one of his tribesmen in charge of the horse, he mounted, and rode off with his son and the rest of his followers. Edgar

stood for some time talking to the horse, and then, leaving it to the native, went into the house to make his preparations for the journey.

"You have, indeed, done well for yourself, Edgar," his father said as he came in. "'Tis in every way fortunate. The Turks love us little, and though they put up with us, as they need the goods that we sell, still there may at any moment be a fanatical rising, and it is well, indeed, to have made friends with one of the desert tribes, among whom you can find a safe refuge. You little know the value of the horse he has given you. The breed is a famous one, and the sheik has been offered a fabulous sum for one of his steeds, but nothing could tempt him to part with one. An Arab prizes a valuable horse beyond all his earthly possessions, and, save under the pressure of the direst want, nothing could persuade him to part with it. In presenting it to you, therefore, the chief has shown his friendship in the most striking manner possible, and that he regards you, as he says, as one of his family."

CHAPTER II.
A BEDOUIN TRIBE

It was two hours before the sheik returned.

"We have been fortunate," he said, as Mr. Blagrove and Edgar came out into the court-yard as he entered. "The men have had their punishment. The governor, after hearing my story, sent to the head of the police, and charged him to take four men down with him into the quarter where men of this sort are generally to be found. When my son described the men to him, and said that he thought that one of them was a Maltese named Giaccamo, and the other was a Greek called Zeno, he spoke to some of his men, and they said they knew two fellows who generally went about together that answered to the description. They were, he said, notorious ruffians, but except for rioting and wounding among their compatriots, with which the police did not concern themselves, they had been able to find nothing against them, though they strongly suspected that they were concerned in many crimes. We went down with them to that quarter, and the police soon found out the place where they lived, but on enquiry were assured that both men were ill, the old woman who came to the door declaring that they had been in bed for some days. However, the police insisted upon entering, and speedily brought them down. Sidi recognized them at once, and indeed they had

scarcely lied in saying that they were ill, for the eyelids of one were so swollen and blackened that he could not see out of them, while the other's nose was well-nigh as big as the rest of his face.

"They were at once taken before the cadi. He heard my son's evidence, and then said that had it been proved they attempted to steal the horse, he would have had their heads smitten off, but that though this was doubtless their intention, they had not done so. He sentenced them to a hundred blows with a stick, and to be expelled from the town and neighbourhood, warning them that should they be found near the town again, they would assuredly be punished with death. I waited and saw the blows administered, and although I felt angry that the cadi had not ordered them to execution, I admit that the punishment was severe enough, and the wretches howled like whipped curs. I trust that there will be no more trouble from them. Still, I hope that this will not prevent your son coming to visit us."

"Certainly not, sheik. He is prepared and ready to go, and he is looking forward to his stay with you with so much pleasure that even did I wish it I could not now deprive him of the enjoyment of it. Still, I am heartily glad that the two fellows have been expelled the town, for I should never have felt easy as to Edgar's safety so long as they were here."

A few minutes later the party set out. Edgar's valise was fastened to the saddle of one of the sheik's followers. The road ran along the sandy dunes that divided the low country, formerly covered by Lake Mareotis, from the sea, and as soon as they

were well out from the town the horses were broke into a gallop. While in point of actual speed even the best Arab horses cannot hold their own against a moderate English race-horse, whose greater height and longer stride gives him an advantage, they are greatly superior in last, and possess extraordinary endurance and stamina. Brought up as if belonging to the family of their owners, their intelligence has been cultivated as has that of dogs. They are exceedingly docile and affectionate. Their pace is a very easy one, and Edgar was delighted indeed at the manner in which his new acquisition flew along without any apparent exertion, continuing the pace without a check until they reached the Arab encampment in an hour and twenty minutes from leaving Alexandria.

Here they leapt from their horses in front of a group of black tents. The oasis was of small extent, extending but two hundred yards across. In the centre was a group of thirty or forty palm-trees. Near these the herbage was thick, gradually dwindling away until it became lost in the sand. In the centre, near the tents, was a well, an irregularly-shaped pit some five-and-twenty feet deep, with a rough path down to it by which the women went to get water both for their own use and for that of the horses. A score of these were tethered on the grass.

"You are welcome to our tents," the sheik said; "may your visit be a fortunate one! Mulick," he called to one of the Arab boys, "take Beauty; but first," he went on to Edgar, "it were best that you talked to him a little, and gave him some sweets. He will

soon get to love you, and it is well that he should hear your voice as often as possible."

"I will lead him out myself," Edgar replied, "and then Mulick can tether him. I shall know another time how to do it myself."

Then he patted the Arab's glossy neck, rubbed its ears, and praised it, giving it a handful of sweets while he did so. Beauty evidently appreciated the attentions, and replied to him by a low whinny. Then he took off its saddle and led it to a spot Mulick pointed out, and then watched the boy tether it, and took off the bridle and carried it back to the tents. A woman came out from the largest of these. She was not veiled, for except when they go into the towns the Bedouin women seldom conceal their faces.

"Ayala," the sheik said, "this is the young white lord who saved Sidi from those who attacked him; henceforth he is as one of our tribe."

"May the blessings of Allah fall upon you!" the woman said. "Sidi is our only child. Had he been taken from us our lives would have been desolate indeed."

"I am very glad that I happened to come along at the time," Edgar said. "It has been a most fortunate occurrence for me, as much indeed as for Sidi. I have no friends of my own age, and it will be great pleasure to me to have him as a sort of brother. I am sure that we shall get on capitally together. Besides which, your husband has given me a grand horse, such as I could never have obtained for money. Sidi will be able to teach me Arab ways, and I daresay I shall be able to show him something of our customs

and life."

Edgar was now shown a tent that had been newly erected for his use. The furniture was simple, consisting only of a handsome Eastern carpet, which covered the ground, and a pile of rugs for sofa and bed. Hanging from one of the sticks that supported the tent was a porous jar of water. When he had hung up his rifle and pistols, powder-horn and bullet-pouch, its furnishing was complete.

"Is this all your tribe?" he asked Sidi, as he came out from his tent.

"Oh, no! our tribe dwells in a large oasis a hundred miles to the south, and fifty miles west of Cairo. There are other portions of the tribe dwelling not far from the same spot, and we can ride five hundred strong when we go to fight the Berbers of Morocco. But my father is only sheik of his section. There are generally but six tents left here to keep possession, and we are often away for months. We find that we can buy such goods as the tribe requires cheaper at Alexandria than at Cairo, where, indeed, we do not often go, for ill-blood exists between us and the authorities there, who ventured on some complaint to send out a party of Mamelukes against us. We beat them back handsomely, but had to leave our oasis for a time, as we could not withstand the force they would be sure to send against us. That was thirty years ago. They filled up our wells and cut down our palm-trees. The wells were soon cleared out again, and the palm groves have grown up. They have not interfered with us again, but even now we care

not to visit Cairo, though it may be that the matter is altogether forgotten there."

Edgar remained a fortnight with his new friends, and enjoyed the life much. He took lessons from Sidi in hurling a lance, and discovered that it would need a long practice indeed to enable him to do so with the accuracy shown by the Arabs. He also practised with his rifles and pistols. When he left he gave a warm invitation to Sidi to come and stay with him. This, however, the Arab lad declined.

"I should not be comfortable in your European dwelling," he said. "I should be miserable, sitting on one of those chairs. Your father is busy, and so are you; I should be altogether out of my element."

"But I might have said the same thing here, Sidi?"

"Oh, no! it is easy to fling off restraint, to throw yourself on the sand, to ride and shoot and hurl the spear. Those are sports that you can enjoy as much as I do. I will come over often and see you, but do not ask me to stay."

Edgar saw that it was better not to press the matter, at any rate for the present. In time, when Sidi became more accustomed to European ways he might perhaps come to stay, but if he came now it would be a penance rather than a pleasure. After that time the young Arab rode over frequently, leaving his camp at daybreak and arriving in time to spend a long day with Edgar. Sometimes they rode together, sometimes walked along the sea-shore, and Sidi soon learned to enjoy as much as his friend a

row or a sail on the water, which to him was at first altogether a novelty. The merchant possessed several boats, which he used in his business, and a pretty gig which carried a sail, in which he himself went off to visit ships which brought goods for him. This was at other times at Edgar's service. He had learned, even before going to school, to manage it, and it therefore was unnecessary to take anyone with them.

Sidi at first did not take kindly to an oar. Trained to hard exercise on horseback and in the sports of the tribe, he had yet a great aversion to anything like steady labour, and was unable even to understand Edgar's willingness to exert himself at an oar when he could have had men to row him about. In time, however, when he had mastered the initial difficulties of the art, he took to the exercise, and they often spent the whole day in the boat, either coasting along Aboukir Bay, or, more often, shooting on the lakes.

The arrival of the British fleet had created quite an excitement in Alexandria, and the news they brought, that a large French fleet had left Toulon, carrying many thousands of troops, destined, it was believed, to operate in Egypt, had caused an intense feeling of dismay among the British merchants settled there, and a corresponding exultation among the French.

"Will the French fleet be stronger than this?" Sidi asked, as he and Edgar leant on the parapet and looked at the long line of British ships.

"There may be more of them—very likely there are," Edgar

said carelessly; "but that makes no matter, we are sure to thrash them. In the first place, we always do so somehow; and in the next, as our fleet is commanded by one of the best admirals we have, there is no fear of their being beaten. The only fear is that the fleet mayn't fall in with the French until they have landed their troops."

"The troops could not stand against our Mamelukes," Sidi said scornfully. "They would soon drive them into the sea."

"I am not so sure of that," Edgar said. "No doubt the Mamelukes are splendid horsemen. I suppose they are as good as any in the world; but horsemen cannot win a battle alone. The French infantry are very fine, and I doubt whether any number of horsemen could break their squares. Then their artillery is immensely superior to that of the Egyptians; that will give them a very great advantage."

"But if your fleet meets theirs and beats it, how could they ever get back again?"

"I expect they mean to stay here and hold the country," Edgar said. "I don't know what good it would do to them; still I suppose they think it would, or they would not take the trouble to come over. But if they should take the country, it would be very bad for men like my father, for they would be sure to put all the English in prison, and it would be the ruin of their business."

"Would they put you in prison?"

"I don't know; I expect so. They would hold all the English as prisoners."

"You would come out to us. You will be quite safe there. If their soldiers came, they would never catch us; we could move about anywhere, we know all the places where water is to be found, and they would only die of thirst if they went after us into the desert."

"Well, I hope that it is not going to be so, Sidi; but if the French should land here I should like it very much. I suppose you would fight against the French."

"If they came to take Egypt, of course we should, and then you could see it all, and fight with us against them."

"It would be very jolly, Sidi, and I should like nothing better; but of course I shall have to do as my father tells me. I expect he would shut up his place, and get all his goods on board a ship and go away till it was all over, if he was able. No doubt he would want me to go with him."

That evening Edgar learned that he had rightly guessed the steps that his father would take in case a French army landed.

"It is an awkward business, lad," he said. "Of course if Nelson comes up with the French fleet, we may hope that it will come out right; but if, before he catches it, they manage to land twenty or thirty thousand troops, our position here would be a most serious one. I intend to charter the *Petrel*, which has just discharged the cargo she brought here. I shall put all my most valuable goods on board at once, especially all the Egyptian carpets and other oriental work, so that within a few hours of hearing that their fleet was off the coast, I should be ready to sail for England. Of

course there would be an end to the business here, so long as the French remained in Egypt; and no doubt any British subjects they could lay their hands on would be thrown into prison, just as was the case when they occupied Holland.

"I should not, however, propose to shut up the house altogether, for although we, as English, would be seized, and thrown into prison, and the place closed, France is not at war with Germany, and Muller could carry on the shipping business without interruption, his own name being substituted for mine. I should instruct him to do no trade with the interior; everything will be turned topsy-turvy, and all trade of that sort would be at an end. On the other hand, with the French masters here, a considerable number of French and Italian ships will be coming in with stores of all kinds, these will often need supplies, repairs, and so on; and as we have men capable of doing anything in the way of refitting, Muller could keep things going, and carry on a business that should pay all expenses, and would probably leave a margin of profit. At any rate, the house would not go to wreck and ruin, and the business be entirely lost.

"I don't think the French occupation would be likely to last very many months. You may be sure that there would be great efforts made at home. A tremendous fleet would be sent out here, and the difficulties of bringing in stores and reinforcements for the army would be enormous. Possibly we too may land an army. Certainly we could nowhere fight the French so advantageously as here; it would be the case of India over again, as long as we

are superior at sea, as we could bring troops here more safely and more expeditiously than they could. However, that seems to me the best arrangement we can make if the French land. To me it would make no great difference, for, as you know, I had arranged to sail in three weeks for England.

"The only alteration would be that you must accompany me instead of staying here. Even putting aside the fact that you would be made a prisoner, you would, if you stayed here, be a hindrance rather than a help to the business. Muller would carry it on as a purely German firm, while if you were here it would be evident that I had merely left temporarily, and that you were my representative. That would be fatal to Muller doing business with the French."

"I see that, father, although I must say that I would rather stop to see the fun."

Mr. Blagrove smiled.

"I don't suppose you would see much of it in any case, Edgar. However, that is out of the question. I daresay my correspondents in London will be able to take you into their office, or get you a situation of the same kind elsewhere, so that if you stop in England a year you will not be wasting your time. However, the French have not come yet, and I can hardly think that they can intend to undertake an expedition, where, even if our fleet is not strong enough to do so at once, it will ere long certainly be raised to a point when it will completely cut them off from France."

"But even if they come, father, they may not succeed in

conquering Egypt. Don't you think that the Mamelukes will be able to make head against them?"

"We don't know how strong the French are, but even if they come in great force, if the Mamelukes were well handled, Edgar, they ought to be able to prevent them from advancing far inland. They ought to hang in clouds round them, driving in their cavalry whenever they ventured to leave the shelter of their infantry fire. They ought to harass them night and day, and prevent them obtaining supplies of any sort. I am afraid that nothing of that kind will be done. The Mamelukes have been spoilt, and they are so puffed up that they believe themselves to be invincible, and that they have only to make a grand charge to sweep the French away.

"However, it will make no great difference to us when we are once fairly away, for of course I shall not think of returning here until matters have settled down again. The French traders have had a bad time of it since the war began, and most of them left long ago, for it was so seldom that a vessel got through our cruisers that they could not rely upon any regular supplies of goods. Of course, there are many small shopkeepers who take their goods of me, and retail them out to the natives, but all the importers left. I am afraid it is going to be our turn now; that is, unless Nelson manages to intercept their fleet—no very easy matter, for they might land anywhere along the coast between this and Syria. But I imagine that their descent will take place near this town, for from it they could follow the fresh-water canal

to the point where it flows from the Nile, and so on to Cairo.

"They may, however, land at either the Damietta or Rosetta mouths of the river; still, I think that they are more likely to come here, seeing that the ships could more closely approach the shore."

The British fleet remained but a few hours off Alexandria. The short Peace of Campo-Formio had caused the greater portion of the British fleet to be recalled from the Mediterranean; and it was not until the French preparations were almost complete that the news reached England that a vast number of transports had been collected by the French at various ports, that provisions of all kinds were being put on board, and it was rumoured that an army was about to embark for some unknown destination.

Nelson was at once sent off with a fleet to blockade Toulon, from which port it was evident that the men-of-war intended to guard this great fleet of transports would start. It arrived there on the first of June, only to learn that the French fleet had set out three days previously. The idea that Egypt was its destination had not entered the minds of the British ministers, and although Nelson had been furnished with instructions as to the course to be taken in the case of almost every contingency, this had never been even discussed.

The French fleet consisted of 13 vessels of the line, 9 frigates, and 11 corvettes and despatch-boats. All of these, with the exception of a few of the smaller vessels, were furnished by

Toulon. Here, too, 20,500 men had embarked in 106 transports. They were to be joined by 30 transports from Marseilles, 20 from Corsica, 35 from Genoa, and 41 from Civita Vecchia, bringing up the total to 232 transports, carrying 32,300 men.

In one arm the army was extremely deficient, as only 680 horses could be put on board. Of these 300 were for the cavalry, —all of whom, however, took with them saddles and bridles,— the rest were for the artillery and train.

Nelson started at once in search of the enemy, but having no clue to the direction they had taken he was able to obtain no news of their whereabouts until he heard that they had captured, without resistance, the island of Malta. Then he returned with all speed, imagining for the first time that possibly Egypt was the object of attack, and made for Alexandria. On his arrival there he heard that nothing was known of the French movements, although in fact their fleet was on that day lying at anchor off Cape Harzet, twenty leagues to the west.

Supposing, therefore, that they must after all have sailed for the coast of Syria or Constantinople, he steered for Alexandretta, and learning that, after having captured Malta, the French fleet had sailed to Candia, he left for Rhodes, searched everywhere through the islands of the Archipelago, and it was only when he anchored off Cape Matapan, the southern extremity of the Morea, that he first learned that the French army had landed in Egypt a month before.

The object of the French expedition was a vast one, but the

means with which it was undertaken were insufficient for its execution, and the difficulties in the way were infinitely greater than had been supposed in Paris. Bonaparte had been chosen for its command principally because the directory feared that the great popularity of the victorious general would render him formidable to themselves. They knew already that he was by no means favourably disposed towards them, and they were therefore anxious to remove him from the public eye.

Napoleon, on his part, was perfectly aware of the reason for which he was appointed to the command, but he accepted it under the belief that a vast amount of glory was to be gained, and that, should the plans of the directory be entirely carried out, and India wrested from the English, his name would be placed by the side of Alexander in history. Already negotiations had been carried on for some time with Tippoo Sahib. Commissioners had been despatched to him, and an alliance proposed against the British. His power had been greatly overrated by the French, and but a feeble idea was entertained of the enormous difficulties of the scheme they proposed, which was that, after completely subduing and organizing Egypt, they should march through Syria and Damascus, thence to the head of the Persian Gulf, and thence down through India.

No account had been taken of the enormous difficulties of the journey. There was no thought of the powerful and warlike people of Northern India. The only idea was to revenge the total overthrow of the French power in India by the British, to re-

establish it on a firmer and wider base than ever, and so not only to humiliate the pride of England, but to obtain a monopoly of the trade of the East.

The news that possibly a French fleet might at any moment appear before the port spread the greatest dismay throughout Alexandria; the native population were furious, and foreigners scarcely dared to show themselves in the streets. Mr. Blagrove and Edgar were busy from morning till night on the day after the British fleet had left, in transporting the goods from the store to the ship that had been chartered.

"It is quite possible that all this is needless," the merchant said to Edgar when they sat down to a hasty meal late in the evening. "I think myself that it is almost absurd, although I do not mean to leave anything to chance; but it is purely a surmise that the French expedition is intended to operate against Egypt. It seems to me that either Greece or Syria is much more likely to be its destination. I have just had a letter put into my hand, brought by the captain of a small Maltese trader. It is from a correspondent in Malta. He states that the French fleet has appeared off the island and summoned the knights to surrender, and that it is thought probable that the demand will be acceded to. He said that he sent me a line by a little coaster that intended to sail late that evening, and was taking a cargo of grain for Alexandria.

"That certainly looks as if the expedition is intended to operate farther east, for Malta is altogether out of the way for a fleet coming from Toulon hither. Still it is just as well to continue our

work. There is, naturally enough, a violent ferment among the native population, and this may not improbably find vent in a fanatical attack upon the Christians. At any rate, we will get the rest of our goods of any value on board, and then await events."

By the next evening their preparations were completed. The ferment had now somewhat cooled down, and people were beginning to think that the excitement roused by a mere vague report was absurd. The next morning at breakfast Mr. Blagrove said to his son:

"I think, Edgar, that as things have quieted down, and we are all beginning to hope that the scare was altogether unfounded, it would be just as well that you should ride over to your friends in the desert, stay the night there, and come back to-morrow. They would think it strange and discourteous if we were to leave suddenly without communicating with them; and as I hope our absence will be of short duration, I should be very sorry to give people so well-disposed towards you any ground for offence. But return by to-morrow evening. In the extremely remote possibility of a French fleet being made out before that time, I must embark at once, if only for your mother and sisters' sake. It would be madness to wait here—simple madness. Even putting aside the certainty of captivity for a very long period, it is by no means improbable that there would be a sudden rising on the part of the population, and a massacre of foreigners.

"I consider the contingency so remote, that it is scarcely worth speaking of; but if the French fleet should arrive during the

thirty-six hours that you will be away, and I am obliged to embark and sail off, you must stay with your Arab friends. You see, I have some £8000 worth of goods on board the *Petrel*, and the loss would be an extremely heavy one for me; and I have besides £2000 in cash. I shall leave £1000 in Muller's hands, which will be ample for his needs, as there is a very heavy stock of ships' stores in the warehouse. I shall, of course, instruct him to supply you with any money that you may require. You understand that I regard all this as extremely improbable, but it is just as well to make arrangements for every contingency. And then, should the French fleet come in sight, I can embark on board the *Petrel*, and set sail without any great anxiety on your account. More to relieve my mind than because I think there is any reasonable ground for thinking it necessary, here are fifty pounds in gold; you had best sew them up securely in the band of your trousers to-night; it will be no great trouble, and they will be safer there than if loose in your pocket."

As Edgar rode away the next morning, he could not help thinking that it would be great fun if the French were to arrive before he returned. The thought of a year or two passed in a stuffy office in London was not an agreeable one; while, were he to stay with the Bedouins, he might have a life of excitement and adventure. No doubt they and the other tribes would all fight against the invaders; impelled in the first place by their intense love of independence, and in the second, because the invaders were Christians. The thought of dashing charges, of skirmishing

with the French cavalry, of pursuit, of flight, was very fascinating to a high-spirited lad of seventeen, and after indulging in these fancies for some time, he sighed, as he thought how small was the chance of their becoming reality.

He was heartily welcomed on his arrival at the oasis. The news that Sidi had brought of the visit of the British fleet, and the fact that they were in search of a great French fleet carrying an army that might possibly be intended for the invasion of Egypt, had created great excitement in the camp.

"Do you think it can be true," the sheik asked him, "that so wild an idea can have come to these people, as to think that they could conquer our country?"

"That I cannot say," Edgar replied. "If they did come, they would be very formidable opponents, for they have conquered many countries in Europe; their soldiers are well trained and disciplined, and they will have great numbers of guns; but my father thinks that they can hardly intend to come here, for if they landed we should soon have enough ships-of-war here to prevent their return, and they would be cut off from France altogether. There is no news of their fleet, except that they have arrived at the island of Malta. Whither they sailed thence we know not. Our fleet has gone in search of them, and will fight them when they find them. But if they should escape, and should really come hither, my father and I will embark on board a ship which he has loaded with his most valuable goods, and we shall at once sail for England. It is for this reason that I have ridden over this morning.

If we should go, our departure will be very sudden, for we should get up anchor as soon as the French fleet was made out in the distance, or, at any rate, as soon as it became dark enough to hide our departure; and I should have been sorry indeed to go without saying good-bye to you."

"But for how long will you go, brother?" Sidi asked.

"Until the trouble was over here, which might be only two or three months, but which might be as many years."

"And will you be glad to go back to your own country?" the sheik asked.

"No, indeed. There I should have to work in an office in London, which would be very dull, while here my work is light, I have amusements, and I have my friends here."

"Why not stay behind with us until your father returns? You know that you would be most welcome, and that it would gladden all our hearts to have you with us."

"I should like it above all things, sheik," Edgar said warmly, "and I thank you most heartily for the invitation, but of course I must do as my father wishes, and he thinks it best that we should go to England if the French come, for they would keep us both as prisoners, and would seize all our goods and merchandise. However, it does not seem to him likely that the French will really come here, and it was only because he considered that it was just possible they might do so that he himself suggested that I should come over and stay here until to-morrow afternoon, lest, if we should have to leave suddenly, you might not think that we had

forgotten you in our haste to be off. For myself, I wish that I could stay here. I suppose that if the French came you would fight, and I could fight with your tribe?"

"Assuredly we will fight," the sheik said. "Why should these Franks come here to molest us? I love not the Turkish rule much, but we are in no way molested. Assuredly every Arab through the desert will ride against them and aid the Mamelukes to drive them into the sea. How great an army would they bring against us?"

"We hear from the officers of our fleet that the news received in England said that some 30,000 men were preparing to embark for some unknown destination."

"Thirty thousand!" the sheik said scornfully; "why, there are 10,000 Mameluke cavalry and fully 20,000 infantry, janizaries, and spahis, besides the levy of the whole population, and the desert tribes can put 5000 horsemen into the field. They will never dare to come against us unless with a force very much larger than you speak of. No, it is not against Egypt that the expedition can have sailed."

"That is what my father thinks," Edgar said; "not because of the force you could bring against them, but because they would know that they might be cut off at any time from returning by our fleet, and their position would then become desperate. We have long blockaded them in their own ports, and if they are not strong enough to get out of these, still less would they be able to leave Egypt."

"Let us not talk more of them," the sheik said contemptuously. "They are dogs; if they come hither we shall know how to deal with them."

CHAPTER III.
LEFT BEHIND

The sheik spoke a few words to two of his followers, who at once mounted their horses and rode off.

"They will bring us news if anything happens," he said; "they will go into Alexandria."

It was late in the evening when they returned.

"You have news?" the sheik said, as they came up to the fire by which he was sitting. The moon was shining brightly, lighting up the wide expanse of sand round the grove.

"The Franks have come," one said.

Edgar sprung to his feet with an exclamation of surprise and alarm.

"When did they come?" the sheik asked.

"When we reached the city all was quiet," the man said, "except that soldiers were working at the fortifications. When we asked why this was, they said that some Bedouins had come in two hours before with the news that the sea near Cape Harzet was covered with ships, and that they were sailing this way. Many did not believe the story, but all the people and the soldiers were ordered to work on the fortifications, to bring up shot for the great guns, to carry stones to mend the walls where they were broken, and to prepare for the defence. The sun was nigh

half down when we saw a great many white dots on the edge of the sea. They were still some leagues away, when everyone pointed and cried out, 'It is the enemy!' and worked harder than ever. It was not for two hours that we were sure that they were ships. When we were so, we went, as you bade us, to the English merchant's. He was busy directing men, who were going backwards and forwards to a ship in the harbour. We said to him, 'Master, our sheik has sent us to carry him news should the fleet of the Franks come here. He told us to come to you if it did so, as you might wish to send for your son.'

"'It is too late,' he said; 'too late for my son to come to me. I am on the point of starting now, as you see. Many of the ships have already put to sea, and the captain has sent to say that he cannot risk his vessel by staying longer. The French will be here within two or three hours, and although they will not venture to enter the harbour till daybreak they could capture all vessels going out. Tell my son that I regret much that I let him go away for the day, but had no thought that the enemy would come so soon. Bid him not be uneasy about me, for it will be dark in an hour, and the French will not be up until two hours later, and they will have their hands full without trying to catch the craft that are putting out from here. Here is a letter for him; I was going to leave it here in case he returned.'

"Five minutes afterwards he took his place in a boat and was rowed off to the ship. We saw the men getting up the anchor, and then the sails were spread, and she sailed out of the harbour.

Then, not wishing to be shut up in the town, we went out through the gates and rode to the mound by the sea-shore that is called Marabout. Then we got off our horses to see what would happen. It was dark when the Franks' vessels came along; some of them sailed on towards the harbour, but most of them anchored and let down their sails, and presently one could see vast numbers of boats rowing towards the shore."

When the man had finished, Edgar opened the note that was handed to him. It was written in pencil.

> My dear Edgar,—In face of all probabilities the French fleet is in sight. They will be here soon after it is dark. The city is in a state of mad excitement. The captain of the 'Petrel' has just come in, saying that the French are coming along the coast from the west, and that I must be on board before it is dark. For some reasons I regret that you are not with me, but I believe that you will be quite safe with your Arab friends, and possibly this may be more to your liking than a long stay in London. Take care of yourself, lad. God bless you!—Your affectionate father.

Edgar's first thought at hearing the news had been regret that he could not accompany his father, but this was very speedily succeeded by a feeling of delight that he would be enabled to witness stirring events.

"Are you glad or sorry?" the sheik asked.

"I am much more glad than sorry," he replied. "My father, no doubt, is disappointed that I am not returning home with him. I

should on no account have remained behind had it been possible to join him in time. As it is, it is neither my fault nor his, but, as I think, a stroke of good fortune. And now, chief, I can accept your kind offer of hospitality, and hope that if there is any fighting that I shall ride by the side of Sidi."

The Arab smiled gravely. "That assuredly you shall do. It is, as you say, no one's fault, but the will of Allah, that has left you in my charge, and I doubt not that good fortune will befall us thereby. Now, what think you that is meant by the Franks landing at Marabout instead of sailing on to attack the port?"

"It means, no doubt, that they are going to assault the city by land. They probably do not know how weak are the fortifications, and fear that the fleet might suffer much injury from their guns, and may therefore prefer to attack from the land side."

"But can they take the city that way?"

"I have no doubt that they can. Their guns could blow in the gates in a very short time. Moreover, from the high ground near Pompey's Pillar they could harass the defenders of the wall, or, if they chose, make a breach in it. The wall is very old, and in many places in a bad state of repair."

"Could we go into the city and aid in the defence?" the sheik asked.

"There will be no entering from this side, sheik. The French army will be between us and Alexandria, and, moreover, the guns from their war-ships will be able to sweep the sands. We might pass round by the south and enter the city from the other side; but

your forty men would add but little strength to the defence, and would be far more useful as horsemen when the French begin their advance."

"How long will it take them, think you, to capture the town? Help can come down from Cairo in a week."

"I think that the French will lose but little time, sheik. So long as the town holds out, the fleet might be attacked by Nelson, should he come back this way, while as soon as they have captured the town all the light-draught vessels would find shelter in the harbour. You may be sure that they would lose no time in mounting guns from the ships on the forts, and render themselves perfectly safe from attack. They say that Bonaparte is in command of the French. He is their ablest general, and very active and enterprising. I should not be surprised if he captures the place before sunset to-morrow."

The sheik made no reply. It seemed to him that Edgar's opinion that the city which had withstood many sieges could be captured in a few hours was too absurd to need argument.

"There is nothing to be done now," he said; "let us sleep. To-morrow, before sunrise, we will make a detour round the south side of the city and approach the eastern gate, and then decide whether to enter the town or not."

In a few minutes there was silence in the camp, but long before the sun rose everyone was astir. The women were to be left with the boys and old men. The preparations were of the simplest character; each of the thirty-eight men going hung a bag of dates

at his saddle-bow, looked to his firearms, and mounted. As the oasis was situated to the south-west of the city, they did not strike the old bed of Lake Mareotis until half-way along what had been its south shore. At present all was silent in the distant city, and the sheik said shortly, "We will wait till we see what is going to be done." Presently two or three Arabs were seen galloping across the cultivated ground. They belonged to the Henedy tribe, one of the wildest and most savage of the people of the desert. When they saw the group of horses they made their way towards them. As the sheik advanced a few paces, one of them leapt from his saddle and came up to him.

"What has happened, brother?" Ben Ouafy asked.

"Last evening the Franks began to land, and all night they continued to come ashore. At midnight Koraim, the commander of the town, went out to see what they were doing, at the head of twenty Mamelukes, and fell upon a company of their skirmishers, charged them, killed many, and carried the head of their captain in triumph into the town. At five this morning our tribe arrived. We rode up near them, and saw that they had neither horsemen nor cannon. They were divided into three columns, and were marching towards the town. We dashed in between the columns and cut down many of their skirmishers, but we were only five hundred, and dared not attack the column, which opened such a heavy fire that we were forced to draw off. Our sheik ordered us to ride south to carry the news to Ramanieb that the Franks had landed. They may have sent the news from the town, but he

thought it best to make sure."

"'Tis well!" the sheik said, and the Arab threw himself into the saddle again, and with his companions rode south at a gallop. "You see," the sheik went on to Edgar, "the Franks cannot mean to attack the town. What could they do without cannon?"

"It would assuredly be a desperate enterprise, sheik, but I think that they may attempt it, seeing that it is all-important to them to obtain possession of the port before our fleet can return."

The party remained sitting, with the patience of their race, until the sheik should give orders for them to mount. Edgar got up several times, and walked backwards and forwards. He was less accustomed to waiting, and was burning for action. Just at eight o'clock there came suddenly to their ears an outburst of firing, the boom of cannon, and the sound of a crackling roll of musketry.

"The French have lost no time in beginning," he said.

The young Arab nodded. A flush of excitement glowed through the olive skin, his hand tightly grasped his spear, and his eyes were fixed on the distant city. Suddenly the sheik raised the vibrating battle-cry of the Arabs, in which the whole of his followers joined, and then at a wild gallop they dashed forward, the horses seeming to share in the excitement of their riders. After maintaining the pace for a couple of miles they reined in their horses somewhat, and at a canter swept along the neck that divided in old time the lakes of Aboukir and Mareotis, slackened down into a walk as they approached the fresh-water canal, where

they stopped for a few minutes to allow their horses to drink, and then continued at a leisurely pace until they mounted the high ground at Ramleh. From here they obtained a view of the eastern side of Alexandria. They could hear the din of battle on the other side of the town, and could see the great fleet anchored, a mile from shore, some two miles to the west of the town. The wind, which had been blowing strongly the night before, and had seriously hindered the work of disembarkation of the French troops, had now subsided. Some of the men-of-war were engaging the forts, but at so great a distance that it was evident that it was a demonstration to distract the attention of the besieged rather than a serious attack. Four or five ships, under the shortest sail, were cruising backwards and forwards parallel with the shore eastward of the town, and occasionally a white puff of smoke burst out from one or other of them, and a shot was sent in the direction of scattered bands of horsemen near the shore.

After gazing at the scene in silence for some minutes, the sheik turned his horse and rode back to a spot near the canal, where the moisture, permeating through its banks, had given growth to a luxuriant crop of grass. Here all dismounted and tethered their horses. Four of the Arabs were appointed to watch over their safety, and the rest reascended the mound, and squatted down on the sands. Gradually the other parties of horse gathered there, and the sheiks gravely consulted together. All had a conviction that Alexandria would hold out until help came from Cairo. The question of entering the town was discussed. Presently the sound

of cannon ceased, but the rattle of musketry continued unabated.

"Why have the guns ceased firing, think you?" the sheik asked Edgar.

"It is one of two things, sheik. Either the French have got so close up to the walls that the cannon can no longer be brought to fire upon them, or they have stormed the walls and the fighting is now in the streets of the town."

"But there are two walls," the sheik said; "the one known as the Arab wall, and the inner defences. It is impossible that they can have carried both."

"It would seem so," Edgar agreed; "but as the musketry is as hot, or hotter, than ever, it is evident that fighting is going on at close quarters, and that either the guns cannot be fired, or they have been captured. You see the walls were in many places weak, and the attempts that have been made during the past three or four days to repair the breaches that existed were very incompletely done. I am very much afraid that it is as I said, and that the French have gained an entrance."

Half an hour later, a number of horsemen, followed by a crowd of people on foot, poured out from the eastern gate. One of the leading horsemen drew rein for a moment as he passed the group of Arabs.

"The town is lost," he said; "the Franks have won their way into the streets, and Koraim has surrendered."

An exclamation of fury broke from the Arabs.

"It will be our turn next," Ben Ouafy said, shaking his spear

towards the city. "This is but the beginning of the work. They may take a city, but the sands will devour them."

As they knew that the French had no cavalry the Arabs remained quiet; the stream of fugitives continued to pour past them, men, women, and children.

"We will return," Ben Ouafy said at last. "We will move south and join the rest of the tribe, and then see what the government of Cairo are going to do."

The capture of the town had not been effected without loss. Menou's column had attacked on the right, Kleber in the centre, Bon had moved round south of the town. The Arab wall was obstinately defended, Kleber and Menou were both wounded as they led the grenadiers to the assault; Bon, however, had met with less resistance, and had captured the inner wall before the other columns succeeded in doing so. For some time the battle had raged in the streets, but the captain of a Turkish vessel had been sent by Napoleon to the governor, pointing out that further resistance would bring destruction upon the town, while if he yielded, the French troops, who came as friends to deliver them from the tyranny of the Mamelukes, would do no harm to anyone. Koraim thereupon capitulated. He was at once attached to the general staff, and charged with maintaining order in the town and disarming its inhabitants.

Proclamations were at once sent out through the country, declaring that the French had come to destroy the Mameluke domination, and that they were friends of the Sultan of Turkey.

Protection was offered to all the villages that submitted; those that did not do so would be burnt. Seven hundred Turkish slaves, who had been delivered at the capture of Malta, and who had been extremely well treated, were at once sent to their homes in Tripoli, Algiers, Morocco, Syria, Smyrna, and Constantinople, being provided with ample sums of money to support them on their way. These measures had an excellent effect. Koraim sent out messengers to the Arab tribes of the neighbourhood. His influence among them was great, and their sheiks for the most part went at once into Alexandria, and agreed to keep the road open from Alexandria to Damanhour, and to sell and deliver within forty-eight hours 300 horses, 500 dromedaries, and 1000 camels. They were presented with dresses of honour and money. By this time the transports had all entered the old port of Alexandria, and were busy discharging their cargo and the troops they carried, and in a short time the whole French army was on shore.

Scarce a word was spoken among Ben Ouafy's party on their homeward ride. The sheik gave his orders on his arrival.

"We will wait for a day or two," he said to Edgar as they dismounted. "The French have no cavalry, and would not come out here. Let us see what the other tribes are going to do; we are but a small body."

When, two days later, a messenger arrived from Koraim, the sheik, after reading the contents of the proclamation, indignantly tore it in pieces.

"Tell Koraim," he said to the messenger, "that hitherto I have regarded him as an honourable man, now I spit upon him as a traitor. Whatever others may do, I will fight against the Franks till the last."

As soon as the messenger had departed, he gave orders for the tents to be struck.

"We must be going, Sidi," he said; "some of the tribes may be taken in by these promises, and may give aid to the enemy; in that case they would doubtless obey orders to attack those who refuse to do so. Three of them can each put four or five hundred spears into the field. We will move away at once. With fifty men we cannot fight two thousand."

The process of packing-up occupied but a short time. As soon as the tents were made into bundles the thirty camels were brought in and loaded. The women and children took their places on the top of the baggage, and then the men mounted their horses, and the cavalcade started across the desert.

"Which way do we travel, Sidi?"

"We are not going direct. There are but few wells, and the distances are long between. Mounted men alone can do the journey without difficulty, but it is a painful one with women and children, and we never go that way unless in case of great necessity. We shall travel towards the south-east, keeping near the edge of the cultivated country until we reach the Nile, and then follow along the river bank until within a few miles of Cairo, thence it is three days' journey to the south-west. There is a well

half-way."

After proceeding some ten miles, they perceived a party of Arabs galloping in the direction of Alexandria. They changed their course, however, and soon came up with the Ben Ouafy caravan. Two of the sheiks of the party rode forward and exchanged salutations with the chief.

"Whither are you journeying, Ben Ouafy?"

"I am going south to join my tribe; and you—are you going to Alexandria?"

"I am going there at once."

"Hast not the news reached you that the Franks have captured it?"

"Truly we have heard so, and a messenger came to us but this morning, saying that they had come to deliver us from the Turks, and inviting us to go in thither and see them. Have you not received a message also?"

"I received such a message, indeed, but its words were idle. For the Turks and their Mamelukes I have no great love. They prey upon the land, and enrich themselves at our expense; but the Franks would doubtless do the same, and I would rather be fleeced by those of the true faith than by kaffirs."

"But they come as our friends."

Ben Ouafy smiled. "Why should they come as our friends, Chief of Oulad A'Ly; what have we done for them? Why should they cross the sea in their ships at great expense and much danger, to save those whom they know not, from the Turks? You might

as well expect the lion to come to rescue a deer attacked by a jackal. He might, it is true, drive it away, but it would only be that he might himself slay and devour the stag. We have heard of these Franks, how they have taken Italy and other countries; and think you, that if they should overpower the Osmanlis and defeat the Mamelukes, that they will say, 'We have accomplished our purpose, we have freed you from your oppressors, now we will sail back to France and leave you to manage your own affairs'?"

"He promises to respect our religion," the sheik said, "to buy horses and camels from us at fair prices, to give us rich presents, and to treat us with honour."

"No doubt, no doubt. 'Tis easy to speak soft words when one needs aid, but such promises are forgotten when the object is attained. To-day he is the friend of the Arabs, to-morrow he will be their master, and if we aid these kaffirs against the followers of the Prophet, we shall well deserve whatever may befall."

"Then you will not go in to the gathering to which he invites us?"

"Assuredly not. Even were it for no other reason, I would wait and see what comes of the matter. We know not yet that he will conquer the Mamelukes, and if he fails to do so, assuredly their vengeance will afterwards fall upon all who have assisted these people."

The sheik cast his eye over Ben Ouafy's cavalcade, as if estimating its strength. He saw, however, that it contained as many armed men as he had with him, and if the idea had entered

his mind of commencing the campaign by plundering it, he concluded it must be at once abandoned.

"I have no intention," he said, "of taking part with the Franks against the government. I am going to sell horses and camels. Frank money is as good as Turkish, and, moreover, they threaten to attack and destroy those who refuse to aid them. Your tribe lives far away, though, indeed, you may abide here at times, and there is nothing of yours that they can destroy. I have my people to think of, their villages, their flocks and herds and horses; therefore, I shall go and see this great man, and hear what he says, and shall, if I can, keep on terms of peace with him. An army so strong and so fierce that it has captured Alexandria after four hours' fighting is too formidable for an Arab chief to resist; but, assuredly, I have no thought of fighting on his side against my countrymen."

The sheik bowed courteously.

"Every man has his own way of looking at things, and in a matter like this each must do as seems best to him. Go in peace, and may good fortune attend you!"

The formal salutation was returned, and the sheiks rejoined their parties, and each kept on their course as before they met.

"There, my son," Ben Ouafy said to Sidi, "you see how the desire for gain influences men to evil deeds. In order to sell a few hundred horses and as many camels, the Oulad A'Ly are going to assist the Franks against true believers. It is true that they may not be going to fight for them, but the animals that

they sell to them will enable them to fight, which comes to the same thing. Of course he professes that he is thinking of saving his villages from destruction, but he must know well enough that the Franks have other things to think of than to spread over the country here, and give ample time to the Mamelukes to prepare for their coming. Moreover, as it is clear that the French have no cavalry, they could not make excursions, for if they seized all the horses in Alexandria, these would not suffice to mount a party strong enough to assail a tribe like the Oulad A'Ly, who can put nigh a thousand horsemen into the field."

The party travelled without haste. Before arriving on the Nile, Edgar suggested to the sheik that it would be as well were he to discard his European dress for an Arab one.

"When we were at Damanhour," he said, "I marked how the people scowled at me as I rode through the streets; and as no doubt you will ride into Cairo ere long, it would save trouble were I to be so attired that I should escape notice."

"It would be a good plan," the sheik agreed. "I daresay Sidi can supply you with a suit."

"I can purchase what is needed at the next place we come to," Edgar said, "I have money for any necessity that may arise. Even putting aside the trouble of being constantly questioned, I should prefer the Arab dress, for under this baking sun I think it would be a good deal more comfortable than these English clothes."

Accordingly, at the next town they passed through, Sidi and Edgar went together to the bazaar, and the latter purchased, after

the usual amount of bargaining, clothes similar to those worn by his friend. The expense was but small, for the costume of an Arab chief differed but little from those of his followers, except that his burnoose was of finer cotton, and his silken sash of brilliant colours, richer and more showy. With this exception the whole costume was white, and although some of the Arab sheiks wore coloured burnooses, Edgar chose a white one, as both his friend and his father wore that colour. He bought two or three changes of clothes, for he knew that water was often scarce, and that washing of garments could not be indulged in frequently. That night when the camp was pitched he donned his new costume, and placed his pistols in his sash in Arab fashion. Sidi wound his turban for him, and gave him instructions how the clothes were to be worn. Those he had taken off were made into a bundle so that they could be resumed if necessary. He felt rather awkward as with his friend he sallied out from the tent which they now shared between them.

"You look well, Edgar," the sheik said approvingly, "but you will need to stain your arms and legs, and it will be better for you to stain your face and neck also, for you would attract quite as much attention as a white Arab as you would in your European dress."

"I was thinking so myself, sheik; it will be much pleasanter for me to be able to pass anywhere without comment."

"You are taller than I thought," the sheik said; "it had not struck me that you were much taller than Sidi, but I see now that

you are as tall as I am."

"I suppose the flowing garments make one look taller," Edgar said. "I have often been surprised, when standing near a native who looked to me a good deal taller than myself, to find that he was really not above my own height."

"My wife shall make a stain for you as soon as she can get the material. There will be no difficulty about that, for we often dye our burnooses brown, especially when we are starting on a long journey."

The sheik's wife and the other women were voluble in their expressions of satisfaction at the change in Edgar. They had been but little in the towns, and the comparatively tight-fitting European garments were, in their eyes, ugly and unbecoming. Seen in the more graceful dress of the Arabs they recognized for the first time that their guest was a good-looking young fellow, tall, active, and not ungraceful in figure, and that he could even compare not unfavourably with Sidi, who was a favourite with the whole camp. Even the men, impassive as they usually were, uttered a few words of satisfaction at Edgar having adopted an Arab costume, and at his appearance in it. On the following day the sheik, taking his son, Edgar, and two of his followers, left the caravan and rode on to Cairo, leaving the others to travel by easy stages to join the rest of the tribe.

"Doubtless we shall find many other sheiks assembled there," he said as they rode along; "the government is sure to have sent orders already for all the Bedouin tribes to hold themselves in

readiness to gather there to oppose the advance of the French. The levies of the city and the neighbourhood will also be called out, not so much perhaps to fight as to labour at the fortifications. That they will not ask of the Arabs, for no Arab would work like a fellah. We will fight, but we will leave it to the peasants to work. The Mamelukes will, however, in the first place oppose the Franks. I love them not. They are the oppressors of Egypt, but the lions of the desert are not more courageous. They are proud of themselves, and believe themselves to be invincible. They will not believe that the Franks can stand for a moment against them, and you know that the night that the Franks landed, twenty Mamelukes rode out against them, killed many, and brought in their heads in triumph. They would not ask us to charge with them, but would deem it shame to ask for aid in such an encounter, but they will be willing enough to accept our help in cutting off the fugitives and in preventing others who may land from spreading over the country."

"Then you still feel sure that the Mamelukes will defeat the French?" Edgar said.

"If it be the will of Allah, my son. The Mamelukes are not like the people who defended Alexandria; they are warriors. We Arabs are brave, we do not fear death; but when, from time to time, a tribe refuses to pay its annual tribute, and a band of Mamelukes is sent against them, truly the sons of the desert cannot withstand them in combat, even when much more numerous, and are either destroyed or forced to make their

submission. These men regard themselves not as simple soldiers; it is an army of emirs. Each has his two or three slaves to wait upon him, to groom his horse and polish his arms. Their dresses are superb; their arms and trappings are encrusted with gold and gems. Each carries his wealth on his person, and there are few who cannot show a hundred pieces of gold, while many can exceed that by ten times. It is true that they are the oppressors of the people, and that Egypt has been drained of its wealth for their support, yet we, who suffer from them, cannot but feel proud of them. Are they not followers of the Prophet? They are men like those whom the great Sultan Saladin led against the Christian hosts who strove to capture Syria. We have tales how brave these were, and how they rode, clad in steel from head to foot; and yet their bones whitened the sands, and the true believers remained in possession of their lands. The Mamelukes are men such as those were, and until I see the contrary I shall not believe that they can be defeated by these Franks."

"I hope that it may be so, sheik, and I doubt in no way their valour; but it is the guns and the discipline of the French that will, I fear, decide the conflict."

CHAPTER IV.
THE BATTLE OF THE PYRAMIDS

The little party had ridden but a few miles when they saw a party of five or six hundred Arab horse approaching. The sheik rode to meet them, and after a short conversation with their leaders, returned.

"We need go no farther for orders," he said. "Mourad Bey, with 3000 Mamelukes and as many Janizaries, is within a few miles. Orders have been sent to all the Arab tribes to hasten to oppose the march of the enemy, and from all parts they are riding hither. Doubtless my brother, who is the great sheik of the tribe of which we are a branch, is already on his way to join him. We will at once ride and bring back all our fighting men. The caravan can proceed without guard. Even a hostile tribe would respect it at the present time, when all are engaged with the enemy. We shall speedily overtake them. They would not have started for an hour after we mounted, and cannot have gone many miles before we come up with them."

Riding at full gallop, they soon overtook the caravan. The Arabs received with shouts of satisfaction the orders their leader gave them to retrace their steps. The old men, who were to proceed with the caravan, were told that in the event of meeting with any parties hastening towards Ramanieh, to tell them that

the orders were to harass the French as they advanced, and to say that all the sheik's fighting men were already engaged in the work. Then, after a brief adieu to the women, the Arabs rode at full gallop towards the river.

It was on the morning of the 29th of June that the French had taken Alexandria, and on the 6th of July that they commenced their march. General Dugua, with Kleber's division, had been taken by water to Rosetta, which they occupied without difficulty, and with a large flotilla of boats carrying provisions and stores, proceeded up the Nile as far as Damanhour, at which town the main portion of the army arrived after two days' painful march.

The French met with no resistance, owing to the fact that almost all Bedouins near the coast had accepted Napoleon's tempting offers. Nevertheless the troops were already discouraged. They had expected to find a rich and fertile country, with palm-trees, lovely towns, and an abundance of supplies of all kinds; but the Nile was now at its lowest, and during the previous season it had not, as usual, overflowed its banks and fertilized the country, consequently their march lay through a sandy waste. The dust rose in clouds under their feet, the sun beat down upon them; they suffered agonies of thirst, and many dropped from exhaustion. And their disappointment was great when they found that, instead of a rich and prosperous town, Damanhour was but a collection of huts, affording neither means of subsistence nor booty of any kind. Beyond the town large bands of Arabs had

gathered, and the French army were obliged to keep their ranks as they marched, to maintain a constant watchfulness, and to travel at a slow pace in order that they might not be separated from their baggage. General Muireur was seized with a serious fever, the result of heat, thirst, and disappointment. He mounted his horse on the morning after his arrival there, and rode out beyond the outposts. He had gone but a short distance when a party of Arabs, hiding among some bushes, sprang to their feet and poured in a volley. He fell dead, and his body was stripped, and the Arabs, mounting their horses, rode off before the outposts could arrive on the spot.

From this time the French dared not straggle. Every man who left the ranks or lagged behind was killed. The Arabs were seldom seen, but they lay concealed behind every inequality of the ground, every clump of bushes. Occasionally, when there seemed to be an opening, a horde of Arabs would sweep down, but these always recoiled from the steady fire of the French infantry, and on the 10th of July the leading French division, that commanded by Desaix, reached Ramanieh, on the Nile. Here, after their terrible march, the French troops were seized with a delirium of pleasure at seeing the verdure on the banks of the river, and the water.

Disregarding all orders, they broke their ranks and rushed wildly to the stream, into which thousands of them plunged in their uniforms. In the cultivated fields great quantities of melons were found, affording a delightful food, for since they had left

Alexandria there had been nothing to eat but the biscuits they had brought with them. Many paid dearly for over-indulgence in the fruit, numbers being prostrated with colic, while not a few died. Next day the army rested, the horses needing the halt even more than the men, for they had not recovered from the long confinement of the voyage when they started from Alexandria, and the scanty supply of water, the clouds of dust, and the heaviness of the passage across the deep sand had caused the death of a large number, and had rendered the rest all but unserviceable.

They had learnt from the natives that Mourad, with a large number of Mamelukes, was in front of them; and, indeed, on the day of their arrival there they appeared in such force that the French formed in order of battle outside the town. The Mamelukes rode backwards and forwards in front of the line brandishing their weapons and threatening a charge. A few rounds of artillery, however, speedily taught them the power of the French guns, and they retired to Chebreisse, and the French were not disturbed the next day. Here the army had the satisfaction of being rejoined both by Dugua's division, with its flotilla, and by another fleet of boats from Alexandria.

The Bedouins under the sheik had taken no part in the irregular skirmishes. There were already as many Arabs as sufficed for cutting off stragglers and compelling the French to march in military order, and the sheik determined to hold his small party together until some opportunity for a general

encounter presented itself. Sometimes from the crest of the sand-hills he and his followers watched the progress of the dark masses of infantry.

"They march very slowly," he said to Edgar. "Why do they not go on quicker?"

"I fancy that they are keeping pace with the baggage-train. Their animals must be completely exhausted; and last night as we followed them we came upon many dead horses. They know that their only safety is to keep together, and I doubt not that the men are well-nigh as exhausted as the animals. Even on horseback the heat is terrible, and although we have our water-skins well-filled, I feel it very much, and of course men on foot carrying their muskets and ammunition and knapsacks must feel it very much more. I think they will go on faster after they have left Ramanieh. They will have the Nile by their side, and will have no want of water. The sand is firmer, too, and moreover they will be able to obtain what they require from the boats."

On the evening of the 12th the French arrived at a village near Chebreisse. At sunrise the next morning a battle began between the flotilla and some Egyptian gun-boats that had come down from Cairo, together with some batteries that had been established on the banks. The Mamelukes sallied out from Chebreisse and charged down with such ardour that it seemed as if they were about to hurl themselves on the French infantry. When within a short distance, however, they suddenly stopped their horses, checking them almost instantaneously, then they

discharged their carbines, and retired as rapidly as they had come. This they repeated several times, but the shells of the French batteries played havoc among them.

Never before had the Mamelukes encountered a shell-fire, and the destruction wrought by these novel missiles bursting among them caused them to retire at full speed, leaving three or four hundred dead behind them, and abandoning some of the guns they had placed in position before Chebreisse. A large Arab force had been drawn up in front of the town when the Mamelukes charged, in readiness to follow the latter as soon as they had broken the French ranks. This was the first opportunity that Edgar had had of seeing any considerable body of this famous cavalry, and he acknowledged that nothing could be more superb than their appearance. The splendour of their dress, the beauty of their horses, and magnificence of their arms and trappings excited his admiration to the highest.

"Now you will see," the sheik said exultingly, "how they will gallop over the Franks!"

Edgar said nothing, but sat watching the splendid array as they swept down upon the French line. Each of the French divisions was formed up in square, with the artillery and dismounted cavalry in the intervals. The volleys of musketry that received the charging Mamelukes was sufficient to quell the ardour of the boldest horsemen in the world. In vain, before drawing off, they circled round and round the French formation, seeking for some weak spot upon which they could hurl themselves, and when at

length they drew off, the French soldiers ran out from their ranks to plunder the fallen.

In silence the Arabs followed the Mamelukes, and the chief did not say a word until they had ridden, at a leisurely pace, some distance beyond the town.

"You were right," he said at last to Edgar. "I did not think that any men on foot could have resisted that charge, but the Franks stood as steadily as if it were a flock of sheep that was approaching them. The cannon are terrible. Who would have thought that the balls they shoot would explode and fly into pieces when they reach their mark! How is it done?"

Edgar explained as well as he was able the nature of shells, and how, when they were fired, a fuse was lighted of a length just sufficient to burn down to the powder within the ball at the time it reached the object at which it was fired.

The fight on the river had been more severe, and had been maintained with great obstinacy. At one time two gun-boats were taken by the Egyptians. These, however, were recaptured, and the admiral's ship burnt. Admiral Perrè, who commanded the first flotilla, was wounded by a cannon-ball, and the loss on both sides was severe.

For eight days the French continued to march forward. They suffered terrible hardships, and at times were almost in a state of mutiny. The interminable extent of sand utterly dispirited them, and they came to believe that all that they had heard of Egypt was false, and that they had been deliberately sent there

by the directory to die. They doubted even the existence of Cairo. Some, in their despair, threw themselves into the river and were drowned. Many died on the march, less from sunstroke and exhaustion than from despair. At last the Pyramids came in sight, and their spirits rose again, for here, they were told, the whole army of Mamelukes, Janizaries, and Arabs were assembled to give battle, and they hoped therefore to terminate the campaign at a blow.

During the whole march they were harassed by the Arabs, and many were cut off and killed. Marches were always performed at night, and at ten o'clock in the morning they halted for the day, preparing themselves for slumber by a dip in the Nile. On the 21st of July they advanced from Omdinar, and at ten o'clock made out the enemy drawn up in line of battle. They had constructed a large entrenched camp, with forty pieces of ancient cannon incapable of movement. In this camp were 20,000 infantry, Janizaries, Spahis, and militia from Cairo. On the right were the Mameluke cavalry, some 10,000 strong, with one or two foot-soldiers to each horseman. To the left of the Mamelukes, and between them and the Pyramids, were some 3000 Arab horse.

The French army was drawn up in the same order as in their last fight, in great squares of divisions, the left resting on the Nile, and the right on a large village. Napoleon, with his staff, reconnoitered the enemy's entrenched camp, and by means of telescopes discovered that the cannon were not upon field-carriages, but were simply heavy ship guns that had been

taken from their flotilla, and were served by the sailors. They, therefore, could not be moved, and it was evident that if the infantry left the camp they must do so without guns. The entrenchment itself was not formidable; it had been begun but three days before, and although it might be impracticable for cavalry, it would offer no serious obstacle to an attack by infantry.

The discovery that the cannon were immovable, decided Napoleon in his dispositions for the battle, and he gave orders that his army should move across to his right, and should thus be concentrated for the attack upon the Mamelukes and Arabs. Mourad Bey, seeing Napoleon's object, at once ordered two-thirds of his cavalry to charge the French while they were in motion, while the others were to remain near the entrenched camp. So rapidly did they sweep down, that the French squares fell into some confusion, and Desaix, with his division, which formed the head of the column, had difficulty in maintaining themselves, their ranks being somewhat broken by a grove of palm-trees through which they were passing. They, however, received the Mamelukes with so terrible a fire of musketry and grape-shot that the charge was not pressed home. The Mamelukes, however, fought with desperate courage, sweeping round the French squares, and even endeavouring to back their horses into the line of bayonets, in hopes of breaking the wall of steel.

At length, however, they could do no more, and Mourad, with 2000 men, rode off towards Gizeh, while the rest, not noticing

the way that he had taken, owing to the cloud of dust and smoke, rode back to the entrenchment. The French now pressed forward with all speed, and a division was thrown across the plain, so as to prevent the horsemen from retreating by the line that Mourad had taken. The latter, seeing what had happened, charged again and again with his Mamelukes, to endeavour to break an opening through the French, by which the rest of his forces could join him. The divisions of Generals Bon and Menon advanced to the attack of the entrenchments; but the infantry, panic-stricken at the defeat of the cavalry, did not await the attack, and after but two or three rounds of shot had been fired by their cannon, deserted the position, and fled in wild confusion to the river.

Here some succeeded in making their way across by boats, while many swam over. The Mamelukes also attempted to swim their horses; a few succeeded, but more were drowned. The total loss on the Egyptian side amounted to some 10,000 men, including infantry, cavalry, and the slaves of the Mamelukes. 1000 prisoners were taken, and some 2000 camels and horses fell into the victors' hands. Great booty was captured by the French soldiers, and for days they occupied themselves in recovering the bodies of the drowned Mamelukes, which amply repaid their trouble, as four or five hundred pieces of gold were often found upon them, besides jewels and other valuables. The great bulk of their less portable property they had, however, placed on board sixty boats, and these, when the battle was seen to be lost, were set on fire, and their contents destroyed.

The Arabs had taken little share in the battle. When the Mamelukes charged, they had been ordered to remain in reserve, and only to charge when the latter had broken the French squares. Burning with impatience they watched the mighty torrent of horse sweep across the plain, then came the roar of artillery and the incessant rattle of musketry. Then they saw with astonishment the cavalry recoil; they witnessed charge after charge, and then saw them sweeping round the squares, while the plain, where they had first attacked, was strewn thickly with the bodies of men and horses right up to the bayonets of the French line. The Arabs burst into cries of dismay.

"Nothing can stand such a fire as that," Edgar said to Sidi; "the musketry and grape from the cannon are mowing them down like grass—it is terrible!"

For a time the Mamelukes were hidden from sight by the cloud of smoke and by the dust raised by their horses' hoofs, then they were seen to emerge.

"There is Mourad's banner!" the sheik exclaimed; "they are making for Gizeh, but surely all cannot be there—there are not more than 2000 with him."

Then another body of about equal strength broke out from the dust of the battle, and went towards the entrenchments.

"Let us join them there," the Arab shouted; and at full gallop they rode across and joined the Mamelukes. Then, heralded by a tremendous artillery fire, the French line advanced, pouring heavy volleys of musketry into the cavalry, and upon the

defenders of the entrenchments. In two or three minutes the infantry were seen to be throwing away their guns, leaping from the entrenchments, and flying in a disordered crowd towards the river. Had the French possessed any cavalry, not one of the fugitives could have escaped. The Mamelukes, seeing that all was lost, had ascertained that Mourad had ridden towards Gizeh, and now started to endeavour to rejoin him; while among the Arabs the cry rose, "To the desert!" and, turning their horses, they galloped away, passed the foot of the Pyramids, and out into the desert, where they halted, seeing that once out of reach of the fire of the French guns, there was no fear whatever of their being pursued.

"It is the will of Allah," the sheik said, as he and his party dismounted. "Truly you were right, friend Edgar; we know not how to fight. Who could have dreamt that men on foot could have withstood the charge of five thousand horsemen? And yet the Mamelukes fought, as always, bravely."

"They did indeed, sheik," Edgar agreed. "They did all that was possible for men to do, but against such a fire of infantry and artillery horsemen are powerless. Had our infantry been as well trained as those of the French, and instead of remaining in the entrenchments, where they could render no assistance whatever, marched against the French infantry and broken their squares, the Mamelukes would then have been able to dash down upon them, and not a French soldier would ever have reached their ships again; but without infantry the horsemen could do nothing."

"Then you think that all is lost, Edgar?"

"Assuredly all is lost for the present, sheik. Mourad Bey and the party with him may get away, but the rest are penned in between the French and the river, and few of them will escape. As for the infantry, they are a mere mob, and even if they get away they will never venture to stand against the French. Napoleon will enter Cairo to-morrow, and there he will remain. Numbers of horses will fall into the hands of the French. They will take many more in Cairo, and before long they will have cavalry as well as infantry, and then no part of the country will be safe from them."

"Then is Egypt to fall altogether under the rule of the French?"

"Only for a time. Our fleet will soon return, and their troops here will be cut off from their country. They may remain here for some time, but at last they will have to go. I think that we shall send an army out to fight against them. We shall know what their strength is, and that they cannot be reinforced; and they will find in the long run that although they may have captured Egypt, they are themselves but prisoners."

"And what would you advise?" the sheik asked. "You understand the ways and customs of the Franks, while I know no more than a little child. Thus, you see, in this matter you are the graybeard and I but a boy. Therefore speak freely what you think will be best."

"Then I should say, sheik, that your best course would be to return at once to your oasis. The French army will doubtless

remain near Cairo. They will send cavalry and light artillery over the country, to search out their enemies, and to reduce all to obedience. Around Alexandria all will be quiet, and so long as French convoys are not attacked, the force there is not likely to interfere with peaceable people. If you return there you will live unmolested. You can wait and see how matters go. If there is any great rising against the French, it will be open to you to take part in it, but at present hostilities against the French would only bring down their vengeance. It may be that the Arabs in the great oasis to the west will continue the war, but in the end they will be sure to suffer by so doing."

"I think that your advice is good," the sheik said. "Sidi and you shall return home at once with half my followers. I will ride at daybreak with the other half. In one long day's ride I shall reach the spot where the women and baggage have gone, and I will escort them back. The road will certainly be safe from the Franks, who will, for some time, be occupied with Cairo, though it is hardly likely that the town will resist. Ibrahim, after the destruction of the Mamelukes and the defeat of the army, cannot hope to resist a great attack; for the fortifications, like those of Alexandria, have been suffered to decay, and the French would assuredly soon force an entrance. However, after the march that they have made they will need rest, and for a time the roads will be safe. But this is not so with regard to the Arabs. The whole country will be in confusion, and an unarmed caravan might well be plundered by any party of Arabs who met it, though they

would not interfere with it were it headed by a sheik with armed followers. Therefore I will go to fetch them. My son will ride fast, and take possession again of our home, lest some of our neighbours, finding it deserted, should occupy it, and then trouble would follow."

Accordingly, the next morning at daybreak the troop divided and rode off in different directions. The greater part of the gathering had scattered the evening before, and determined to return home and wait events. Four days' rapid travelling took Sidi and his companions back to the oasis, which they found exactly as they had left it, the tribes in the neighbourhood having been all too busy in following the French army, and picking up baggage left behind by the break-down of the horses, to attend to other matters.

The next day Sidi and Edgar rode into Alexandria. Everything there was going on as peacefully as usual; French soldiers lounging about the streets, a number of labourers, under the direction of French officers, were at work restoring the fortifications on the sea face of the town, the shops were all open, the markets were as well supplied as usual. To Edgar's surprise a good many French sailors were to be seen in the streets.

"Their fleet cannot have sailed," he said to Sidi. "Let us ride out through the East gate to Ramleh. It may be, of course, that there is a despatch-boat lying in the port, though I did not see one. I can hardly fancy that the French admiral would have kept his fleet here, for Nelson must sooner or later get the news of

what has taken place, and it is certain that when he does he will hurry back at full speed."

From the elevation of Ramleh, however, the French fleet could be made out, lying in Aboukir Bay in a long line.

"Hurrah!" Edgar exclaimed; "there they are. I mean to see this battle, Sidi, if I have to stop here a month. It cannot be long before Nelson arrives. I cannot think why the French admiral should have risked being caught in a trap like this, when a defeat would cut the French army off from Europe altogether."

"But what will you do?"

"I shall go into the town, and buy three or four of your Arab blankets, and put up a little tent here."

"I will share it with you," Sidi replied. "I will send one of our two men back and tell him to return with two more. There will be four of them to look after the horses, and to fetch things out from the town as we may require them. I should like to see the battle too; it must be something terrible to hear the noise of so many great cannon."

The inaction of the French has never been satisfactorily explained. Admiral Brueys bore a high reputation as a sailor. He was a personal friend and possessed the complete confidence of Bonaparte. The latter had given him the strictest injunctions to sail for Toulon as soon as he had completed the discharge of the stores that he had on board. Instead of doing this, however, he anchored in Aboukir Bay, and there waited. It may have been that he feared that Napoleon might never reach Cairo, or that

he might be defeated in a great battle there, and that it might be necessary for him to return to the port and to re-embark his army. No other explanation is possible of his delay in carrying out the imperative orders that he had received.

After the despatch of the messenger the two friends rode along the shore until they could not only make out the exact position of the French fleet, but count the guns in the broadsides of each vessel. It consisted of thirteen line-of-battle ships, comprising the flag-ship the *Orient*, of 120 guns, three of 80, and nine of 74, together with four frigates, four mortar vessels, and a number of gun-boats, while on an island ahead of the line was a battery of guns and mortars. Many parties of Arabs were riding about on the shore, and there were several of their encampments. Some had been attracted to the spot from a considerable distance in order to view the great vessels of which reports had reached them, others again were simply there from the spirit of restlessness that pervaded the population.

The news of the battle of the Pyramids had not yet arrived, and all were in suspense. The belief that the Mamelukes would defeat the French was all but universal. Had this taken place the whole of the Arab tribes would at once have harassed the retreat of the defeated army, and with the Mamelukes pressing upon them it is probable that not a single Frenchman would have reached the sea. As Edgar and his friend were watching the French fleet a vessel was seen over the spit of sand. She was some three miles out at sea.

"There is another of their ships of war, Sidi. I wonder whether she has been scouting along the coast to gather news as to where our fleet may be at present?"

When she came abreast of the extremity of the bay she changed her course and bore closer in.

"She is coming in to join the others. I wonder what news she brings?"

When, however, she approached within two miles of the French fleet she again changed her course, and bore along parallel with the coast.

"I suppose she is going into Alexandria. She hasn't got any colours flying. That is curious, too; all the ships here are flying theirs. Look! there are men at the mast-heads of several of the ships examining her with telescopes. That is curious, too, for she is not signalling. There she is, turning again and making out to sea. Perhaps she is a British ship sent on ahead by Nelson to discover the position of the French. If it is so we shall most likely have the fleet here to-morrow. Then we shall see a big battle; at least we shall if the French don't run away. See! there is a twelve-oared boat starting from the admiral's ship and rowing right away. They must be going to Alexandria. They are rowing hard, too."

They watched it for some time, and then returned to their tent. Two hours later a number of ships' boats were seen coming out from Alexandria.

"They are men-of-war boats," Edgar said. "I think I must have

been right, and that that vessel we saw must have been an English frigate. That boat has been sent to order all the sailors we saw in the streets of the town to return at once."

For some hours boats continued to pass, all filled with men, but there were no signs of movement on the part of the ships.

"If it was one of our frigates the French admiral must have made up his mind to fight them. They have got a great advantage, covered as they are by those two land batteries. Besides, I know that there is a spit of sand running out there which will make it very awkward for an enemy, not knowing its position, to attack them. There is one thing, the French will find it difficult to sail out if they want to. You see the wind is on shore, and they are all riding head to it. There can't be much water inside them. No doubt they could get out all right if they had plenty of time and no one to interfere with them, but it would be a difficult business to manage if the British fleet were upon them."

At ten o'clock the next morning a number of large vessels were seen in the distance. They bore down towards Alexandria, but the wind was light and they made but slow way, and it was five in the afternoon before, having changed their course, they formed into line of battle and headed for the French fleet. The scene from the shore was intensely exciting. In each fleet there were thirteen battle-ships, but the French ships were the larger and more heavily armed. They carried forty-six more guns, and the weight of their broadside was 14,029 pounds to 10,695 pounds, while they carried 2300 more men, and were 5000 tons heavier.

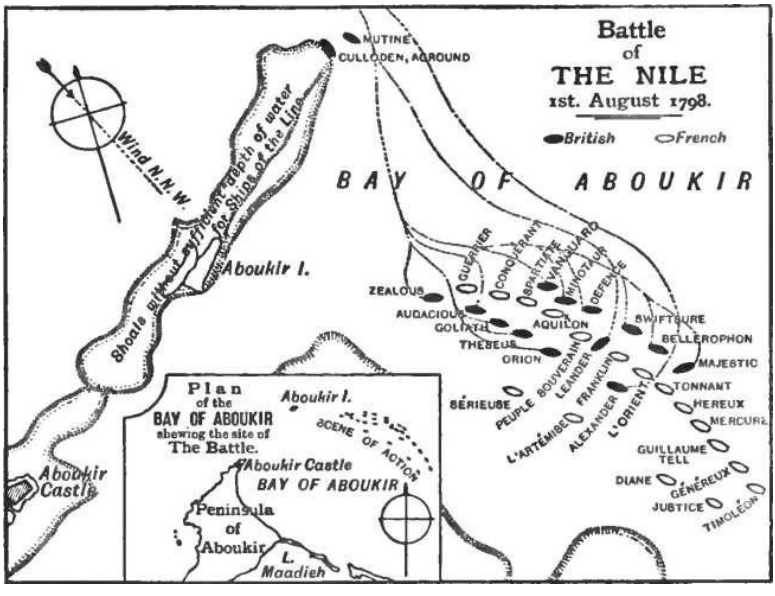
They had, too, in addition, four frigates, besides the mortar vessels, gun-boats, and the battery on the island of Aboukir. Soon after six o'clock, the two leading vessels of the British fleet being within range, the French opened fire, as did the guns of the battery. Edgar uttered an exclamation of disgust as one of the largest of the English ships was seen to stop suddenly in her course.

"She has run on the shoal!" he exclaimed. "Look, our ships are steering for the head of the French line; they mean to go inside them."

As the British vessels reached the head of the French ships they anchored one after another, each laying itself broadside to broadside against an opponent, and the battle commenced with terrible energy, the tremendous roar of the guns astounding the Arabs who were gathered on the sand-hills. At first the French reply was feeble. They were taken entirely by surprise by Nelson's manœuvre. Believing that he could only attack them from outside, they had prepared only on that hand for the fight, and in clearing the decks for action all the useless gear and fittings had been piled over on the other side, and it was some little time before this could be cleared away and the guns got ready for action. Then for a time their fire was as heavy as that of the British. Nevertheless some of them had suffered terribly before they were able to return a shot, and this contributed in no small degree to the British victory.

The loss of the *Culloden*, which was the vessel which struck

on the sands, and of the *Leander*, which went to her assistance, was serious, and had the French rear-admiral, Villeneuve, who commanded the five vessels at the rear of the French line, cut his cables and come to the assistance of his comrades, the eight British ships, engaged with as many French, would have been in a serious position. He did not do so, however, possibly fearing to run his ships aground. Consequently the *Alexandria* and the *Swiftsure* came in to the assistance of the British ships, some of which were being terribly damaged by the greatly superior weight of the French fire. The *Bellerophon*, dismasted and disabled by the enemy's fire, dropped out of the line, and the *Alexandria* took her place, while the *Swiftsure* attacked the *Franklin*. The *Leander*, seeing how hard was the fight, relinquished her attempt to get the *Culloden* afloat, and, sailing in, engaged in the battle.



Battle of THE NILE
1st. August 1798.

For a time the issue was doubtful. The three English seventy-four-gun ships were matched against one of a hundred and twenty and two of eighty-four. Darkness did not put a stop to the engagement, which continued to rage with unabated fury, the battle being practically between twelve British ships and eight French ships of the line and their four frigates and gun-boats. By ten o'clock five of the French van had surrendered, and the great hundred-and-twenty-gun ship, the *Orient*, was in

flames. The excitement of the Arabs as the battle continued was unbounded. It seemed to them that mortal men could not sustain so terrible a conflict, and exclamations of wonder and admiration rose constantly among them.

The light of the burning vessel enabled the whole of the terrible scene to be clearly witnessed. Half the ships were partly or wholly dismasted, the rigging was cut to pieces, and the sails were riddled with balls. The splintered sides, bulwarks shot away, and port-holes blown into one, showed how terrible was the damage inflicted on both sides. Higher and higher rose the flames on board the *Orient*. Men could be seen leaping overboard into the water from the burning ship, and soon after ten she blew up with a tremendous explosion, the concussion of which was so great that many of the Arabs were thrown to the ground. For ten minutes a dead silence succeeded the roar of battle, not a gun was fired on either side. The British vessels near the spot where the *Orient* had lately floated lowered what boats there were uninjured and set to work to rescue the survivors, who were either clinging to spars or were swimming. Several of these, too, were hauled in at the lower port-holes of the ships.

The French ship *Franklin* was the first to recommence firing, but after a few more broadsides from the *Swiftsure* she hauled down her colours. The firing continued without any abatement until three o'clock in the morning. It then died away for a time, but recommenced at six o'clock with fresh fury, and it was not until two in the afternoon that it came to an end. Villeneuve,

seeing that all was lost, now woke up and cut his cables. Three of his ships ran aground, but with the *Guillaume Tell* and the *Genereux* and two frigates he made off, there being only one British ship that was in condition to make sail in pursuit. The two line-of-battle ships and one of the frigates were afterwards captured by a British squadron.

Thus of the thirteen French ships of the line eight had surrendered, one had blown up, two had escaped, and two were on shore. If the *Culloden* could have got into action, it is probable that not one of the French fleet would have left Aboukir Bay. The British loss in killed and wounded was 895. 3105 of the French, including the wounded, were captured, and 5225 perished in the fight. The victory was the most decisive that was ever won at sea.

CHAPTER V.
A STREET ATTACK

Not until the last gun was fired did Edgar and his Arab friend return to their tent, utterly worn out by excitement and watching.

"I told you what it would be, Sidi," Edgar said as they went along. "I was certain that we should thrash them. It is a tremendous victory, and you see it is as important for you as it is for us, for the French army is now cut off. It will be a long time indeed before the French can fit out another fleet strong enough to have even a chance of fighting ours, and, as far as I can see, the only possible escape for their army is to march all the way round by Syria to Constantinople, and I should think that after this the Sultan will at once declare war with them, for by conquering Egypt they have taken one of his provinces."

This turned out to be the case. The news of the capture of Egypt had filled the Sultan with indignation and rage, but the fear excited by the success of the French arms in Europe deterred him from declaring war against so formidable a foe until the report of the destruction of their fleet reached Constantinople, when he at once plucked up courage, declared war against France, and ordered two armies to be gathered for the reconquest of Egypt. The news of the destruction of the French fleet caused intense excitement throughout Egypt. It showed that the French were

not, as many had been inclined to consider them, invincible, and that it was improbable they would be able to receive any reinforcements from beyond the sea.

A week previously the Arabs had felt completely crushed, now the feeling of independence and hope sprang up again, and the whole situation was at once changed. Sidi had, directly the fight came to an end, sent off one of his followers to meet his father, and to inform him of what had taken place. Four days later the man returned; he had met the chief and his party just as they had reached the river. The latter had resolved at once to rejoin the desert tribesmen, and to escort the caravan back to their oasis; his wife, the women, and the animals were to remain there. The party now at the encampment with Sidi were to join him at once.

"The sheik bids me say," the messenger went on to Sidi, "that he would that you should not wait until the others are ready to start, but, if he is willing, should at once ride with your white friend to Cairo, if he is disposed to go with you; there, from his knowledge of the language of the Franks, he would be able to gain much information as to their designs.

"He bids you regard him as your leader, and to act as he may advise. Two of us are to go with you to look after your horses. He begs that one of you will come to the base of the Great Pyramid on the twelfth day after I left him, that is in ten days from now, to tell him what news you have gathered and to consult with him. He is convinced that the news you sent him will call all the Arabs to arms again."

"That is just what I should wish," Edgar said. "I have been thinking for the last four days that I should like to be at Cairo. That is the place of interest now."

He and his friend talked the matter over. "It will be better," Edgar said, "that we should go as simple Arabs, and that we should take two horses of less value than those which we now ride. You could send them up by the party that will rejoin your father. As two young Arabs on ordinary horses, we should attract no attention. We could encamp with our two men just outside the town, and go in and out as we pleased; no one would be likely to notice or question us. Or we might even wear the dress of the fellaheen, which would be safer still, for if the Arabs begin to make attacks upon French parties, as they are likely to do, any of them wandering in the streets of Cairo might be regarded with suspicion by the soldiers."

"I will do just as you advise, Edgar. I suppose that we had better start at once."

"Certainly, as soon as we have eaten a meal. Will the man who brought the news in be fresh enough to start again at once?"

"Certainly he would," Sidi said in a tone of surprise; "an Arab never feels fatigue on horseback. Of course he must have a fresh horse. I will pick out another man to accompany us, and two horses for ourselves. There are two that would suit us well, for they are both sound and fast, though but poor animals to look at, and no one will cast an eye of envy upon them."

"That is just what we want, Sidi."

In less than an hour they were galloping across the plain. The journey of 110 miles was accomplished in two days, and the party, without entering the town, encamped on some waste ground outside the walls. Here were many small huts belonging to the poorest class of the population, together with many small shelter tents of black cloth erected by parties of wandering Arabs like themselves. They had, on the previous night, changed their attire, and had nothing to distinguish them from the poorer classes of Arabs, who, having given up the desert life, earned a precarious existence in the towns. The two men with them looked with disdain at their surroundings, and Edgar felt obliged to warn them.

"You must remember," he said, "that the lion couches before he springs, and crawls and conceals himself until he is within reach of his prey, so is it needful also for us to bear ourselves humbly. We are come to see what the French are doing; how they comport themselves, and what is the feeling among the population. We are as spies who come to examine a country before it is attacked, and to carry out our object we must bear ourselves so that suspicion may not fall upon us. If you are questioned, remember that we are four men ready to act as guards to a caravan or on any such service that may present itself."

Leaving the two men to look after the horses, Edgar and Sidi entered the city. The scene was intensely interesting, Cairo being vastly more oriental in its appearance than Alexandria. The narrow streets were crowded; strict orders had been issued

against plundering, Napoleon being anxious to win the good-will of the population, and merchandise of all sorts was displayed in the shops. Each trade had its special bazaar, the gold and silversmiths, the dealers in silks, in carpets, richly embroidered garments, tobacco, long pipes with jewelled mouthpieces, narghiles with their long twisted stems; workers in iron, vendors of the yellow shoes used by the women in walking, the dainty gold-embroidered velvet slippers for indoors, or the pointed upturned shoes of the men, had each its own bazaars scattered throughout the streets.

Women, in their long dark blue garments, and the hideous white linen yakmash covering the whole face below the eyes, and falling to the breast, moved through the crowd, others of higher rank, seated on donkeys and attended by eunuchs, made their way back from the baths, or from visits to their friends. Stout Turkish merchants or functionaries rode along perched on high saddles, looking as if they would bear to the ground the little donkeys, that nevertheless went lightly along with their burden. French soldiers abounded, gazing into the shops, and occasionally making small purchases, chattering and laughing, the fatigues and sufferings of the march being now forgotten.

There were comparatively few of the richer class in the streets, many of these having left the city at the approach of the French, while on the night before the latter entered there had been serious tumults in the city, and the houses of many of the beys had been broken into and sacked. Through all this crowd Edgar and Sidi

wandered unnoticed.

"It does not look as if there were any strong feeling against the Franks," Sidi remarked, as they issued into a large square which was comparatively deserted, and seated themselves on a bench in the shade of the trees near a fountain.

"No; but it is not here that one would expect to find any signs of disaffection. No doubt the traders are doing a good business, for every officer and soldier will be sure to spend all his pay in presents for those at home, or in mementoes of his stay here, and I am sure the things are pretty enough to tempt anyone. It is in the poorer quarters that trouble will be brewing."

Presently a group of French officers came along and seated themselves at a short distance from the two young Arabs. Having not the slightest idea that these could understand what they said, they talked loudly and unrestrainedly.

"The thing is serious, gentlemen," one of them, who was clearly of superior rank to the rest, said. "Since the news of this most unfortunate affair arrived, there has been a great change in the situation. For the last two days there has not been a single horse brought into the horse-market, and the number of bullocks has fallen off so greatly that the commissariat had difficulty this morning in buying sufficient for the day's rations for the army, but the worst of it is, that assassinations are becoming terribly common, and in the last three days fifty-two men have been killed. There will be a general order out to-morrow that men are not to go beyond certain limits, unless at least four are together,

and that they are not, under any pretext whatever, to enter a native house.

"Besides those known to have been killed, there are twenty-three missing, and there is no doubt they too have been murdered, and their bodies buried. The Egyptian head of the police has warned us that there are gatherings in the lower quarters, and that he believes that some of Mourad's emissaries are stirring the people up to revolt. A good many parties of Arabs are reported as having been seen near the city. Altogether I fear that we are going to have serious trouble; not that there is any fear of revolt, we can put that down without difficulty, but this system of assassination is alarming, and if it goes on, the men will never be safe outside their barracks, except in the main thoroughfares. One does not see how to put it down. An open enemy one can fight, but there is no discovering who these fellows are in a large population like this, and it would be of no use inflicting a fine on the city for every French soldier killed; that would affect only the richer class and the traders. There is no doubt, too, that the news that our fleet has been completely destroyed has dispirited the soldiers, who feel that for the present, an any rate, they are completely cut off from France."

"That is certainly serious, general," one of the officers said, "and there seems only the project of the invasion of India or a march to Constantinople. After our march here, though it was but little over a hundred miles, and the greater portion of the way along the bank of the river, with our flotilla with stores abreast

of us, neither of these alternatives look as easy as they seemed to us before we set foot in this country."

"No, indeed, colonel; our campaign at home gave us no idea of what the march of our army would be across these deserts, and it certainly seems to me that the idea of twenty thousand men marching from here to India is altogether out of the question. If our fleet had beaten the English, gone back and brought us twenty thousand more men, and had then sailed round the Cape, and come up to Suez to fetch us and land us in India, the thing would have been feasible enough, and in alliance with the Sultan of Mysore we might have cleared the English out altogether, but the land march seems to be impossible; a small body of men could never fight their way there, a large body could not find subsistence."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.