

I am very poor, and if anything were to happen to me—and I am far from strong—I can't think what would become of your stepmother and those helpless children. You would have your mother's fortune—it is not much, but still sufficient for you—but it would be a mere pittance I could leave them; so you see, my darling, what a real help you are to me."

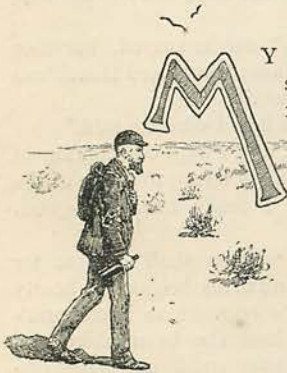
Barbara slipped her arm caressingly through his.

"Dearest father," she said, "do not talk like that.

You are fairly well now, aren't you? and I promise you Mrs. Merivale and the children shall always be my first care. Meanwhile," with a little tender smile, "I am going to make my fortune at Denzilstone. Now I must tell you all I did there this afternoon, and how I enjoyed it;" and forthwith she launched into such an amusing description of her day's pleasure that Mr. Merivale forgot for the moment his cares and anxieties.

END OF CHAPTER THE FOURTH.

THROUGH AN EASTERN DESERT ON FOOT.



Y friends at Port Said were startled when I casually mentioned to them my idea of walking from that wicked little Franco-African city across the desert and up the coast to Jaffa.

"You must not think of such a thing!" they protested. "You may have walked a thousand miles in England and

America and Spain"—so I had—"but those are civilised and Christian countries, and this is neither. The Bedouins are utterly lawless, and you will run the gravest risk of being robbed and murdered, and horribly maltreated beside." The English clergyman assured me that if I persisted in going I must get a safeguard from the government and take a soldier along to read it to the Arabs! The director of the "Sailors' Rest," who had had one or two narrow escapes himself, solemnly declared that it was "tempting Providence" to go on foot, when, for a few francs, I could reach Jaffa with ease and safety by the steamer. And a good-natured American friend who had given me a letter to post for him at Jerusalem, hastened to relieve me of the custody of it when he found I intended travelling in such an unusual and dangerous way.

Now the fact was that I had left London on Boxing Day, 1890, spent my forty-fifth birthday in Liverpool, and, after a sojourn there of several pleasant weeks, had sailed away in the Anchor steamship *Armenia* to Port Said, for the express purpose of making a pedestrian journey, not merely to Jaffa and Jerusalem, but to Nazareth, Tiberias, the top of Mount Hermon, and across the Lebanon to Beyrout. All these prognostications of evil fell, therefore, upon deaf ears, except that I took especial pains to offer as little temptation as possible to robbers. Stout old walking shoes, a very plain and well-worn suit of blue cheviot and a little cap of the same, a small roll of thin magazines, and an old black mackintosh—no watch or jewellery, and no

money—constituted an outfit but little likely, I thought, to excite even a Bedouin's cupidity. Moreover, certain traditions of the marvellous hospitality of the Arabs of the desert lingered in my mind, and I felt a comfortable conviction, alien in race, language, and religion though I was, that I should be treated with fraternal kindness.

The sun was blazing in a sky of cloudless blue on the morning of Saturday, February 7th, when I made my way out of Port Said, and bent my solitary steps southward along the west bank of De Lesseps' famous canal. The many and deep indentations of the sea render it impracticable to follow the coast, and I was compelled to make the first part of my journey in a direction that carried me forty-four kilometres away from my destination. I spent two days traversing these nine monotonous leagues, not wishing to fatigue myself at the outset of an arduous and perilous undertaking.

On Monday morning, about seven o'clock, I reached the fourth *gare*, or station, on the canal, just as the station master's boat was about to cross. Room was quickly and politely made for the unexpected passenger, and in a few minutes I sprang ashore on the verge of an immense waste of yellow-grey sand, barren, desolate, pathless, almost uninhabited. A few dozens of rude little houses, clustered on the east bank of the canal, made up the Arab village of El Kantara, the starting point of my desert pilgrimage, which was to end a hundred miles or more away to the eastward at El Arish, the south-west frontier town of Palestine.

Some of my companions in the boat spoke French, and I was rejoiced to learn from them that the telegraph line ran straight across the desert to El Arish, and I could not lose myself if I kept that in sight. Water, I was also told, could be had at a distance of fifty kilometres—not a very encouraging prospect. In fact, the expression of doubt and astonishment which overspread their faces when I declared my pedestrian intentions was far from re-assuring. The director of the "Sailors' Rest" at Port Said confessed to me afterwards at Jerusalem, that he fully expected my resolution would fail when I came face to face with the desert, and that I should creep meekly back, content to go to Jaffa by water, as others do. Not a bit of it!



THE
SUEZ CANAL,
NEAR
PORT SAID.

On the contrary, my spirits rose, the more so as I had an unexpected cause for jubilation. Fearing I might have to hire a boat expressly to cross the canal, I had brought along five pence for ferriage. This munificent sum I now devoted to the commissary department, and procured from the village baker five round fresh loaves of Arab bread, about seven inches across and one inch thick, and likewise the half of a stale one which the worthy man added out of pure generosity. Coming down the canal a benevolent Frenchman had enriched me with a wine-bottle; the Kantara villagers quickly recognised the utility of this and hastened to fill it for me. Thus equipped, the loaves and the magazine roll slung in the mackintosh over my shoulder, the bottle gripped in my hand, I turned my back on civilisation and plunged gaily into the desert. My rapid and buoyant steps soon carried me out of sight of the hovels of Kantara, and in less than half an hour I was alone in a world of sand and sky.

A taste for botanising has beguiled many an hour of my long walks in divers countries, and I had wondered much whether I should discover flowers in the desert. To my surprise I found many. Hardy shrubs of several sorts and various little herbs were scattered sparsely about over the sand in every direction. Although grass was quite wanting, a green oasis-like expanse, some acres in extent, wonderfully resembled a lawn when viewed at a distance, but, closely inspected, the vegetation proved to be a little succulent-leaved plant, wholly unlike grass. So curiously varied was the herbage that in one place I counted eight different species growing in the space of half a square foot. Little white cross-shaped flowers, on slender stems an inch or two high, spangled the sand here and there as thick as daisies in an English meadow. A small purple geranium, and a yellow blossom like a tiny dandelion were also plentiful. The only fragrant flowers grew in little lemon-coloured clusters on a straggling bush (*Thymelæa hirsuta*), whose slender grey branches were closely thatched at the ends with minute, thick, heart-shaped leaves, lined inside with

white wool. The oddest of all the desert plants is the "pin-cushion wafer" (*Neurada procumbens*). This is a roughish creeping herb, producing a flat, thin, circular, grey fruit, about half an inch across, perfectly smooth below and thickly studded above with numerous short pin-points. This lies in wait on the sand, sticks to the first padded camel's hoof that descends upon it, and is carried for miles, perhaps, before it is detached. I tried walking barefoot occasionally, by way of a change, and many a time I lifted my heel very precipitately to brush off a "wafer" that had mistaken me for a camel. All this various vegetation, be it noticed, grew in the loose dry sand, watered only by the drenching dews.

Of course, all these botanical observations were not made the first day. In truth, my attention was presently diverted by an unpleasant discovery. I found that a wine-bottle was not at all an ideal canteen for desert use, and long before noon-day I had swallowed the last drop of the water it contained, less from thirst than to prevent its becoming too unpalatably warm. The sun poured down his dazzling rays with such intensity that I was glad to walk but slowly and to rest often in the shade of some sheltering bush. About the middle of the afternoon I spied camels and men coming in the distance, a little to the right of my line of march. One of the latter turned aside and sauntered towards me as I drew near the party. Thinking valour the better part of discretion I turned and sauntered towards *him*. We met—we scanned each other inquiringly from head to foot. Then he extended his hand and articulated the one word:

"Backsheesh!"

"La, la, mah fish fluss!" said I. ("No, no, I have no money!") Then I held up my empty bottle, and said in turn: "Moyeh?" ("Water?")

He looked decidedly astonished, then amused, and then he took the bottle, led the way to one of the

camels, and poured me out a scanty pint of the coveted fluid. It must have travelled at least a week in the skin-bag on that camel's back, judging from its suspicious appearance, but thirst made it as delicious a drink as I ever quaffed.

"*Kathar kheirak!*" I exclaimed, emphasising the Arab "Thank you!" with judicious smiles and nods of gratitude. No one made the slightest offer to detain or molest me, and I resumed my journey, well pleased with my first Bedouin encounter.

My apparent knowledge of Arabic was in reality quite delusive, being limited to a few words and phrases which I had craftily picked up at Port Said the morning of my departure, and the "Thank you!" which I had learned from one of my boat companions crossing the canal.

I jogged along, utterly content, until sunset. The heat had made me resolve to walk by night and sleep during the day, but as darkness came on I was disconcerted to find that I could not see the telegraph poles six yards away, or even distinguish the wire against the black and starry, but moonless sky. So, without more ado, I stretched myself on the sand, spread the mackintosh over me, and in a few minutes was sound asleep. Sand is a soft bed to lie down upon, but it gets amazingly hard after a while, and with the first blush of dawn I was up and away to meet the sun. About seven o'clock I came suddenly upon three Arabs sitting about a little fire made of the desert bushes, most of which burn freely. They gave me water at the sound of the talismanic "*Moyeh,*" and hospitably motioned to me to sit down. The early morning was chill and damp with dew, and I was well pleased to warm myself. My hosts were

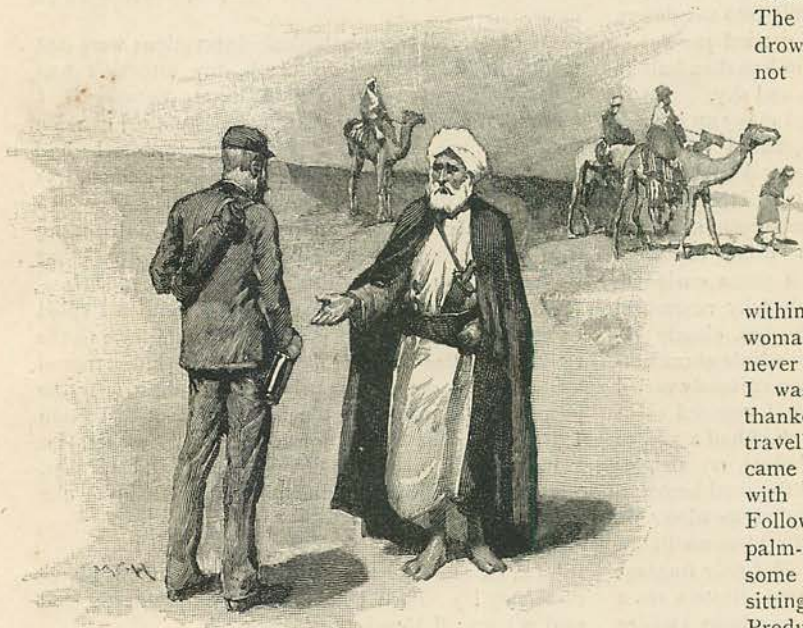
just beginning their breakfast of thin, dry cakes, which they warmed and softened on the embers, and then tore in pieces, and dipped into some kind of appetising condiment. Half a cake and a pinch of the condiment were politely offered to me. The first I found very good, but the other was such a fiery compound of coarse salt and red pepper that I did not venture upon it for fear of future thirst.

This unexpected wayside breakfast gave me new courage, and I pushed on briskly. As the day advanced, the aqueous problem began to demand a fresh solution, and I kept a sharp look-out for the promised water "fifty kilometres from El Kantara." Some time in the afternoon I spied, in a kind of valley on my left hand, a man digging a hole, with intent, as I suppose, to set out a young date-palm. But for this man, who showed me the place, I should surely have missed the spring I sought, for it was quite unnoticeable till you were close upon it, being merely a cavity in the sand about three feet deep and wide, walled up triangularly with palm-tree logs. I drank my fill, replenished my bottle, and went on rejoicing. By sunset, however, it was empty again. So was my larder, the last of my loaves having been duly munched out of existence, and I lay down that night on the sand in a palm-grove without food, water, or money, and yet slept as tranquilly as ever I did.

The next morning life had a special interest for me. Breakfast was a mystery, and as I trudged along I was naturally curious about its unravelment. By and by I felt an unaccountable impulse to sit down, though it was still early, and I was not at all fatigued. Down I sat on the instant, and fell to studying a bush.

Suddenly I heard a faint far-away voice—the unmistakable cry of a goat. The crunching of my shoes on the sand drowned all slight noises, and if I had not been sitting perfectly silent I should not have heard this auspicious sound. Without delay I marched towards it till a frisking flock and a young crook-bearing shepherd came in sight. The youth directed me to an enclosure of date-palm leaves,

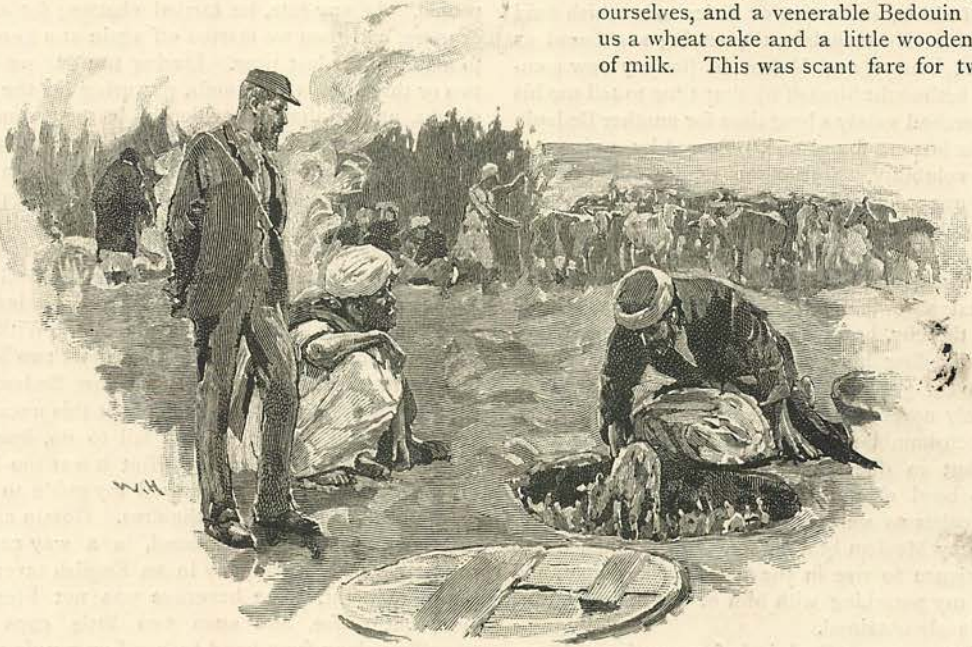
within which was a good-natured Arab woman, who gave me to drink, but never mentioned breakfast! However, I was not really hungry yet, so I thanked her heartily for the water and travelled on. An hour or so later I came upon a man digging up bushes with a clumsy hoe, perhaps for fuel. Following his signs, I found another palm-leaf enclosure, containing a woman, some children, and three or four men sitting placidly about a little blaze. Producing from my pocket a bright red cotton handkerchief, I soon made the woman understand, by dint of pantomime,



that I would like to exchange it for something to eat. She was in no way averse to the proposed barter, and offered me in turn a great handful of brown, sugary, delicious dates. I took them straightway, charmed with my bargain, bowed myself out, and under the next convenient bush I enjoyed a feast rather than a breakfast.

Twice or thrice more during the day I obtained water at similar palm-leaf houses, mere roofless fences against the wind, but quite sufficient in that hot

harmless, we started on in single file, I at a respectful distance behind, but resolved to keep him in sight till he found water. For a long time he seemed wholly indifferent to such trivial things as thirst and hunger; but finally, as the sun was on the point of setting, he began to shade his eyes with his hand, and look in various directions as if seeking something. At last he seemed to see what he wanted, and, beckoning me to follow, started briskly off. Follow I did, and he conducted me straight to a long-sworded, handsome young shepherd, who guided us in turn into a camp, where we had a fire to ourselves, and a venerable Bedouin brought us a wheat cake and a little wooden trough of milk. This was scant fare for two such



"WHICH HE KEPT IN A HOLE IN THE GROUND" (p. 402).

Egyptian climate. The last of the dates made a toothsome supper, and I slept in peace for the third time on the sand. For the sake of warmth, I edged myself under a heap of dry palm leaves, and I can unreservedly testify that they were the prickliest bed-clothes I ever slept under.

The next forenoon was singularly eventless. About mid-day I became so engrossed in botanising that I moved about on all fours spying among the tiny herbs. Rising to my feet at last, I was astonished to find a spectator of my rather undignified proceedings. Evidently an Arab, about fifty years old, blue-eyed, sun-tanned, with a short, full beard, and a serious, but not unkindly, countenance; clothed in dingy white robes, with a cloth of the same colour wound turbanwise about his head, a torn square of coarse sack-cloth in lieu of a cloak, a small blue bag slung by a cord over his shoulder, and a stout stick in his hand, the stranger was a quaint, as well as mysterious, figure. He was following the telegraph line like myself, and after a brief mutual reconnaissance, which satisfied each that the other was

famished individuals as we were, and when it was gone, my companion opened his blue bag, and gave me a generous handful of crumbs—thin bread-chips—dry, but most delicious to a hungry man! He took the same himself, and when we had finished our frugal repast we composed ourselves to sleep. A long line of silent-footed camels came filing past us through the darkness into camp; a new moon hung its silver horn in the evening sky; sounds of laughter and singing came from the black hair-cloth tent near us; my strange and picturesque surroundings filled me with a sense of curious delight as I slowly sank into unconsciousness.

The next morning we were stirring betimes, and my new companion motioned me to follow, without a word of thanks or adieu to our not over-generous host. I thought this rather churlish, but I afterwards found that it was desert etiquette to steal away thus in silence. The remainder of the crumbs served us for breakfast, and then we marched contentedly along, as cheerful and care-free as two sparrows waiting to be divinely fed. I was, I may say, a truster in

Jehovah, and he was evidently a servant of Allah, for he had twice scrupulously washed his hands in the sand, faced towards Mecca, and said his prayers with all the devout bowings and prostrations of a faithful Moslem.

"My Arab," as I learned to call him, for we journeyed together to Jaffa like two brothers, had a desert-sharpened perception of water, and used now and then to thrust his stick deep into the sand, and if the end came up moist, he thereupon burrowed into the ground with his two hands with singular dexterity. Once he obtained good water in drinkable quantity in this odd fashion, and twice or thrice a brackish fluid unfit for use. Nevertheless, the setting sun found us thirsty and hungry, and Mahomed (for my new comrade had bethought himself by that time to tell me his name) searched vainly a long time for another Bedouin camp. At last we found one, officered by a virago of alarming volubility. Soft answers quite failed to turn away her unaccountable wrath; and finally Mahomed calmly sat himself down under the edge of the tent, and so did I. A little later the goat-herd came home with his flock, and she spent her tongue upon him with equal shrewishness. He seemed to be quite unruffled thereby, however, and calmly occupied himself with feeding his young kids, which he kept in a hole in the ground, packed together like sardines, and closely covered with a round wooden lid. This was a much humbler place than the camp of the night before; but in due time the virago brought us a generous bowl of milk, and as many round thick wheaten cakes as we could eat. I slept soundly after that, but my Moslem brother somehow reconciled it to his conscience to rise in the night, milk a goat, and insist on my partaking with him of the beverage thus surreptitiously obtained.

Next day we were off again before sunrise and soon came to another tent. Mahomed swung his stick at

the dog, marched calmly up to the fire, ejaculated "*Salaam ahlaiikum!*" ("Peace be with you!"), sat down on his heels before the blaze as composedly as possible, and motioned to me to do the same. This time our hosts were sociably inclined, and much Arabic chatter went on while the breakfast cake was baking in the ashes. When it was done, broken into bits in a bowl of milk, stirred up with a dexterous Bedouin forefinger, and set before us, Mahomed and I partook of it as gravely as if we were two sheikhs waited on by loyal tribesmen.

I hope my comrade thanked these good-natured people. At any rate, he tarried chatting for an hour or more, and then we started off again at a good pace to make up for lost time. During the day we passed two or three herds of camels, pasturing on the desert shrubs, and Mahomed evidently learned something from their keepers, for he pushed on till after dusk without stopping, till at last we came to a whole village of scattered tents. After some inquiries he got a boy to guide us, for it was now quite dark except for the faint light of the slender crescent moon, and presently we came upon a thick hedge-like wall of dry bushes with two short end walls, the three including an oblong space open towards the east. Within this rude enclosure, in an elongated ring about two brightly blazing fires, sat nearly twenty stalwart Bedouins. I confess I was startled for a moment at this unexpected array, realising, as I could not fail to do, how completely I was at their mercy. But it was too late to draw back, and I coolly followed my guide to a seat on my heels beside one of the fires. Gossip and jest and laughter were going round, in a way curiously suggestive of the company in an English tavern on a Saturday night. The beverage was not beer, however, but coffee, and soon two little cups came travelling along from hand to hand on a rude wooden tray, for the benefit of the new-comers. It was plain

café noir, scarcely more than two mouthfuls in quantity, but nectar could not have been more welcome, especially as I took it as conclusive evidence of a friendly spirit on the part of my unknown and formidable hosts. I say "hosts" advisedly, for, before long, a handsome young Arab came marching up with a huge bowl on his head which he deposited on the ground. It was full to the brim of a thick, steaming hot porridge. Nine of the party quickly sat around it, plunged their fingers into the mass, and fed themselves in Nature's simple fashion with a skill quite astonishing to a man



"FED THEMSELVES IN NATURE'S SIMPLE FASHION."

accustomed to think spoons indispensable for such work. I was hospitably forced to make one of the nine, and found the porridge and the fragments of thin wheat-cake stirred up in it most satisfactory to a hungry person. One after another took his turn at the bowl until all were satisfied, and it was then borne away in a sadly depleted state.

After supper the Bedouins were all in high good humour, and Mahomed was called on to give an account of himself and his "*Howadja*." He told them the little he knew, and, apparently, a good deal that he guessed, and the "*Howadja*" himself, by dint of pantomime, diagrams on the sand, and his few words of Arabic, added what he could to the story. Then the two strangers were left in peace, and a one-stringed fiddle was plaintively twangled for a while by a desert minstrel. This musical after-piece concluded the evening, and the village fathers and sons departed to their families. The guests stretched themselves on the sand beside the fire, and slumbered peacefully till the morning light aroused them for their Sabbath day's journey to El Arish.

The distant roar of the sea, audible in the stillness of the night, had given warning that the coast was near. Nevertheless, a long and tedious forenoon's trudge lay before us, and it was nearly mid-day before we climbed the hill to the quaint old Arab town. Parched with thirst, I hastened to the well only to

find that it was deep, and I had nothing wherewith to draw. The blue-robed women who came with huge jars upon their heads had a rope for their own use. One of them, perceiving my plight, graciously filled my bottle, and thereupon, having quenched our thirst, Mahomed and I delayed not to enter the town.

Strictly speaking, my desert pilgrimage ended at El Arish, and I have no space to tell how I was haled before the Turkish governor, and, being found without a passport, was condemned to go back whence I came; how I mustered all my French, persuaded him that the Ottoman Empire would suffer no harm from my invasion of it, and finally got leave to go on; how I sold at auction an alligator-leather purse for two Egyptian piastres (five farthings each), wherewith Mahomed and I bought a luxurious Sunday dinner of dates and figs, which we ate under a castor-oil tree; how we journeyed together for a week up the coast, and how he insisted on carrying me on his back across the first stream we reached; how he piloted me night and morning to Arab tents, wherein we enjoyed un-failing Moslem hospitality; how he tarried with me at the house of Rolla Floyd, the Jaffa dragoman, who discovered that he was a pilgrim returning to Bagdad from a five months' journey to Mecca; and how he got up at day-break the next morning and vanished without a word of farewell, after we had travelled fraternally together for ten halcyon days!

E. A. STERNS.

NAILING UP THE ROSE-TREE.

WHERE the rose-tree flaunted tall
 On the southern garden wall
 Of a mansion old and grey,
 It fell out one summer's day,
 Will and Bessie, strolling round
 This domain of beauty, found
 Some few branches, here and there,
 Needed nailing up with care.

What avails the sweetest rhyme
 To describe that golden time?
 Or those roses, creamy, faint,
 Red, and white, what words shall paint?
 We, from summers past, may know
 Something of the sunny glow
 Smiling brightly round the pair
 Busy with the branches there.

At the first glance, who would ask
 Or desire a simpler task?
 Yet, while light and shadow played,
 Guessing from the time they stayed—
 One long hour, in that one place—
 It would seem to be the case
 That a hundred branches there
 Needed nailing up with care!

With his noisy hammer still,
 Leaning from his ladder, Will
 Gave the maid a rose whose hue
 Pale beside her blushes grew!
 Thus it chanced that happy day,
 Where the rose-tree blossomed gay,
 Love surprised the youthful pair
 Busy with the branches there!

J. R. EASTWOOD.

