

Miss Cayley's Adventures.

BY GRANT ALLEN.

VII.—THE ADVENTURE OF THE UNOBTRUSIVE OASIS.



I WILL not attempt to describe to you the minor episodes of our next twelve months—the manuscripts we type-wrote and the Manitous we sold. 'Tis one of my aims in a world so rich in bores to avoid being tedious. I will merely say, therefore, that we spent the greater part of the year in Florence, where we were building up a connection, but rode back for the summer months to Switzerland, as being a livelier place for the trade in bicycles. The net result was not only that we covered our expenses, but that, as chancellor of the exchequer, I found myself with a surplus in hand at the end of the season.

When we returned to Florence for the winter, however, I confess I began to chafe. "This is slow work, Elsie!" I said. "I started out to go round the world; it has taken me eighteen months to travel no further than Italy! At this rate, I shall reach New York a grey-haired old lady, in a nice lace cap, and totter back into London a venerable crone on the verge of ninety."

However, those invaluable doctors came to my rescue unexpectedly. I do love doctors; they are always sending you off at a moment's notice to delightful places you never dreamt of. Elsie was better, but still far from strong. I took it upon me to consult our medical attendant; and his verdict was decisive. He did just what a doctor ought to do. "She is getting on very well in Florence," he said; "but if you want to restore her health completely, I should advise you to take her for a winter to Egypt. After six months of the dry, warm desert air, I don't doubt she might return to her work in London."

That last point I used as a lever with Elsie. She positively revels in teaching mathematics. At first, to be sure, she objected that we had only just money enough to pay our way to Cairo, and that when we got there we might starve—her favourite programme. I have not this extraordinary taste for starving; *my* idea is, to go where you like, and find something decent to eat when you get there. However, to humour her, I began to cast about me for a source of income. There is no absolute harm in seeing your way clear before you for a twelvemonth,

though, of course, it deprives you of the plot-interest of poverty.

"Elsie," I said, in my best didactic style—I excel in didactics—"you do not learn from the lessons that life sets before you. Look at the stage, for example; the stage is universally acknowledged at the present day to be a great teacher of morals. Does not Irving say so?—and he ought to know. There is that splendid model for imitation, for instance, the Clown in the pantomime. How does Clown regulate his life? Does he take heed for the morrow? Not a bit of it! 'I wish I had a goose,' he says, at some critical juncture; and just as he says it—pat—a super strolls upon the stage with a property goose on a wooden tray; and Clown cries, 'Oh, look here, Joey; *here's* a goose!' and proceeds to appropriate it. Then he puts his fingers in his mouth and observes, 'I wish I had a few apples to make the sauce with'; and as the words escape him—pat again—a small boy with a very squeaky voice runs on, carrying a basket of apples. Clown trips him up, and bolts with the basket. *There's* a model for imitation! The stage sets these great moral lessons before you regularly every Christmas; yet you fail to profit by them. Govern your life on the principles exemplified by Clown; expect to find that whatever you want will turn up with punctuality and dispatch at the proper moment. Be adventurous, and you will be happy. Take that as a new maxim to put in your copy-book!"

"I wish I could think so, dear," Elsie answered. "But your confidence staggers me."

That evening at our *table-d'hôte*, however, it was amply justified. A smooth-faced young man of ample girth and most prosperous exterior happened to sit next us. He had his wife with him, so I judged it safe to launch on conversation. We soon found out he was the millionaire editor-proprietor of a great London daily, with many more strings to his journalistic bow; his honoured name was Elworthy. I mentioned casually that we thought of going for the winter to Egypt. He pricked his ears up. But at the time he said nothing. After dinner, we adjourned to the cosy *salon*. I talked to him and his wife; and somehow, that evening, the devil entered

into me. I am subject to devils. I hasten to add, they are mild ones. I had one of my reckless moods just then, however, and I reeled off rattling stories of our various adventures. Mr. Elworthy believed in youth and audacity; I could see I interested him. The more he was amused, the more reckless I became. "That's bright," he said at last, when I told him the tale of our amateur exploits in the sale of Manitous. "That would make a good article!"

"Yes," I answered, with bravado, determined to strike while the iron was hot. "What the *Daily Telephone* lacks is just one enlivening touch of feminine brightness."

He smiled. "What is your forte?" he inquired.

"My forte," I answered, "is—to go where I choose, and write what I like about it."

He smiled again. "And a very good new departure in journalism, too! A roving commission! Have you ever tried your hand at writing?"

Had I ever tried! It was the ambition of my life to see myself in print; though, hitherto, it had been ineffectual. "I have written a few sketches," I answered, with becoming modesty. As a matter of fact, our office bulged with my unpublished manuscripts.

"Could you let me see them?" he asked.

I assented, with inner joy, but outer reluctance. "If you wish it," I murmured; "but—you must be *very* lenient!"

Though I had not told Elsie, the truth of the matter was, I had just then conceived an idea for a novel—my *magnum opus*—the setting of which compelled Egyptian local colour; and I was, therefore, dying to get to Egypt, if chance so willed it. I submitted a few of my picked manuscripts, accordingly, to Mr. Elworthy, in fear and trembling. He read them, cruel man, before my very eyes; I sat and waited, twiddling my thumbs, demure but apprehensive.

When he had finished, he laid them down.

"Racy!" he said. "Racy! You're quite right, Miss Cayley. That's just what we want on the *Daily Telephone*. I should like to print these three," selecting them out, "at our usual rate of pay per thousand."

Vol. xvi.—42.

"You are very kind." But the room reeled with me.

"Not at all. I am a man of business. And these are good copy. Now, about this Egypt. I will put the matter in the shape of a business proposition. Will you undertake, if I pay your passage, and your friend's, with all travelling expenses, to let me have three descriptive articles a week, on Cairo, the Nile, Syria, and India, running to about two thousand words apiece, at three guineas a thousand?"

My breath came and went. It was positive opulence. The super with the goose couldn't approach it for patness. My editor had brought me the apple sauce as well, without even giving me the trouble of cooking it.

The very next day everything was arranged. Elsie tried to protest, on the foolish ground that she had no money: but the faculty had ordered the apex of her right lung to go to Egypt, and I couldn't let her fly in the face of the faculty. We secured our berths in a P. and O. steamer from Brindisi; and within a week we were tossing upon the bosom of the blue Mediterranean.

People who haven't crossed the blue Mediterranean cherish an absurd idea that it is always calm and warm and sunny. I am sorry to take away any sea's character; but



"HE READ THEM, CRUEL MAN, BEFORE MY VERY EYES."

I speak of it as I find it (to borrow a phrase from my charwoman at Girton); and I am bound to admit that the Mediterranean did not treat me as a lady expects to be treated. It behaved disgracefully. People may rhapsodize as long as they choose about a life on the ocean wave; for my own part, I wouldn't give a pin for sea-sickness. We glided down the Adriatic from Brindisi to Corfu with a reckless profusion of lateral motion which suggested the idea that the ship must have been drinking.

I tried to rouse Elsie when we came abreast of the Ionian Islands, and to remind her that "Here was the home of Nausicaa in the Odyssey." Elsie failed to respond; she was otherwise occupied. At last, I succumbed and gave it up. I remember nothing further till a day and a half later, when we got under lee of Crete, and the ship showed a tendency to resume the perpendicular. Then I began once more to take a languid interest in the dinner question.

I may add parenthetically that the Mediterranean is a mere bit of a sea, when you look at it on the map—a pocket sea, to be regarded with mingled contempt and affection; but you learn to respect it when you find that it takes four clear days and nights of abject misery merely to run across its eastern basin from Brindisi to Alexandria. I respected the Mediterranean immensely while we lay off the Peloponnesus in the trough of the waves with a north wind blowing; I only began to temper my respect with a distant liking when we passed under the welcome shelter of Crete on a calm, star-lit evening.

It was deadly cold. We had not counted upon such weather in the sunny south. I recollected now that the Greeks were wont to represent Boreas as a chilly deity, and spoke of the Thracian breeze with the same deferentially deprecating adjectives which we ourselves apply to the east wind of our fatherland; but that apt classical memory somehow failed to console or warm me. A good-natured male passenger, however, volunteered to ask us, "Will I get ye a rug, ladies?" The form of his courteous

question suggested the probability of his Irish origin.

"You are very kind," I answered. "If you don't want it for yourself, I'm sure my friend would be glad to have the use of it."

"Is it meself? Sure, I've got me big ulster, and I'm as warrum as a toast in it. But ye're not provided for this weather. Ye've thrusted too much to those rascals the po-uts. 'Where breaks the blue Sicilian say,' the rogues write. *I'd* like to set them down in it, wid a nor'-easter blowing!"

He fetched up his rug. It was ample and soft, a smooth brown camel-hair. He wrapped us both up in it. We sat late on deck that night, as warm as a toast ourselves, thanks to our genial Irishman.



"'TIS DOCTOR MACLOGHLEN," HE ANSWERED."

We asked his name. "'Tis Dr. Macloghlen," he answered. "I'm from County Clare, ye see; and I'm on me way to Egypt for thraavel and exploration. Me fader whisht me to see the worruld a bit before I'd settle down to practise me profession at Liscannor. Have ye ever been in County Clare? Sure, 'tis the pick of Oireland."

"We have that pleasure still in store," I answered, smiling. "It spreads gold-leaf

over the future, as George Meredith puts it."

"Is it Meredith? Ah, there's the foine writer! 'Tis jaynius the man has: I can't undtherstand a word of him. But he's half Oirish, ye know. What proof have I got of it? An' would he write like that if there wasn't a dhrop of the blood of the Celt in him?"

Next day and next night, Dr. Macloghlen was our devoted slave. I had won his heart by admitting frankly that his countrywomen had the finest and liveliest eyes in Europe—eyes with a deep twinkle, half fun, half passion. He took to us at once, and talked to us incessantly. He was a red-haired, raw-boned Munster-man, but a real good fellow. We forgot the aggressive inequalities of the Mediterranean while he talked to us of "the pizantry." Late the second evening he propounded a confidence. It was a lovely night; Orion overhead, and the plashing phosphorescence on the water below conspired with the hour to make him specially confidential. "Now, Miss Cayley," he said, leaning forward on his deck chair, and gazing earnestly into my eyes, "there's wan question I'd like to ask ye. The ambition of me life is to get into Parliment. And I want to know from ye, as a frind—if I accomplish me heart's wish—is there annything, in me apparence, ar in me voice, ar in me accent, ar in me manner, that would lade annybody to suppose I was an Oirishman?"

I succeeded, by good luck, in avoiding Elsie's eye. What on earth could I answer? Then a happy thought struck me. "Dr. Macloghlen," I said, "it would not be the slightest use your trying to conceal it; for even if nobody ever detected a faint Irish intonation in your words or phrases—how could your eloquence fail to betray you for a countryman of Sheridan and Burke and Grattan?"

He seized my hand with such warmth that I thought it best to hurry down to my state-room at once, under cover of my compliment.

At Alexandria and Cairo we found him invaluable. He looked after our luggage, which he gallantly rescued from the lean hands of fifteen Arab porters, all eagerly struggling to gain possession of our effects; he saw us safe into the train; and he never quitted us till he had safely enconced us in our rooms at Shepheard's. For himself, he said, with subdued melancholy, 'twas to some cheaper hotel he must go; Shepheard's wasn't for the likes of him; though if land in County Clare was wort' what it ought to be, there

wasn't a finer estate in all Oireland than his fader's.

Our Mr. Elworthy was a modern proprietor, who knew how to do things on the lordly scale. Having commissioned me to write this series of articles, he intended them to be written in the first style of art, and he had instructed me accordingly to hire one of Cook's little steam dahabeeahs, where I could work at leisure. Dr. Macloghlen was in his element arranging for the trip. "Sure the only thing I mind," he said, "is—that I'll not be going wid ye." I think he was half inclined to invite himself; but there again I drew a line. I will not sell salt fish; and I will not go up the Nile, unchaperoned, with a casual man acquaintance.

He did the next best thing, however: he took a place in a sailing dahabeeah; and as we steamed up slowly, stopping often on the way, to give me time to write my articles, he managed to arrive almost always at every town or ruin exactly when we did.

I will not describe the voyage. The Nile is the Nile. Just at first, before we got used to it, we conscientiously looked up the name of every village we passed on the bank in our Murray and our Baedeker. After a couple of days' Niling, however, we found that formality quite unnecessary. They were all the same village, under a number of aliases. They did not even take the trouble to disguise themselves anew, like Dr. Fortescue-Langley, on each fresh appearance. They had every one of them a small white-washed mosque, with a couple of tall minarets; and around it spread a number of mud-built cottages, looking more like beehives than human habitations. They had also every one of them a group of date-palms, overhanging a cluster of mean bare houses; and they all alike had a picturesque and even imposing air from a distance, but faded away into indescribable squalor as one got abreast of them. Our progress was monotonous. At twelve, noon, we would pass Aboo-Teeg, with its mosque, its palms, its mud-huts, and its camels; then for a couple of hours we would go on through the midst of a green field on either side, studded by more mud-huts, and backed up by a range of grey desert mountains; only to come at 2 p.m., twenty miles higher up, upon Aboo-Teeg once more, with the same mosque, the same mud-huts, and the same haughty camels, placidly chewing the same aristocratic cud, but under the alias of Koos-kam. After a wild hubbub at the quay, we would leave Koos-kam behind, with its camels still

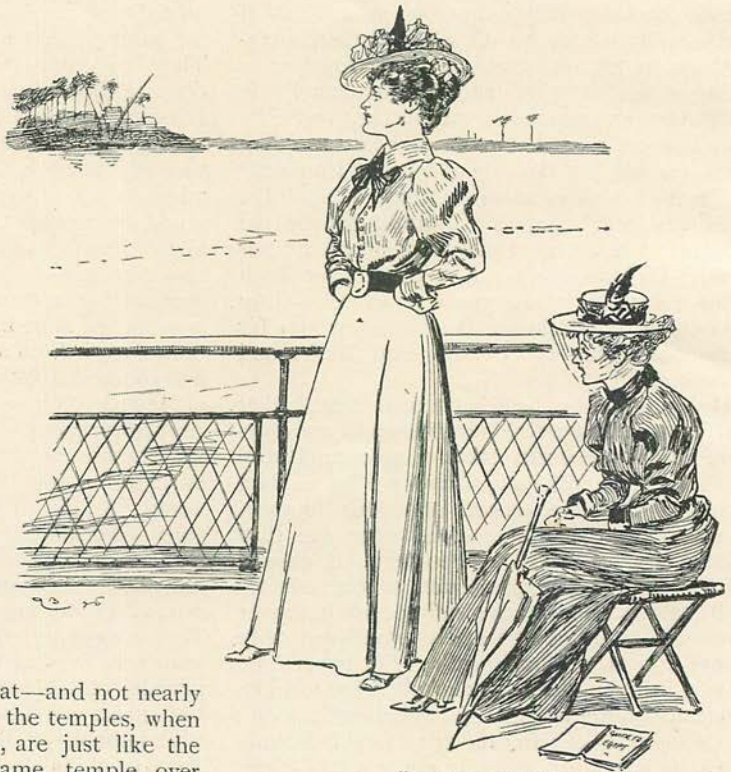
serenely munching day before yesterday's dinner; and twenty miles further on, again, having passed through the same green plain, backed by the same grey mountains, we would stop once more at the identical Koos-kam, which this time absurdly described itself as Tahtah. But whether it was Aboo-Teeg or Koos-kam or Tahtah or anything else, only the name differed: it was always the same town, and had always the same camels at precisely the same stage of the digestive process. It seemed to us immaterial whether you saw all the Nile or only five miles of it. It was just like wall-paper. A sample sufficed; the whole was the sample infinitely repeated.

However, I had my letters to write, and I wrote them valiantly. I described the various episodes of the complicated digestive process in the camel in the minutest detail. I gloated over the date-palms, which I knew in three days as if I had been brought up upon dates. I gave word-pictures of every individual child, veiled woman, Arab sheikh, and Coptic priest whom we encountered on the voyage. And I am open to reprint those conscientious studies of mud-huts and minarets with any enterprising publisher who will make me an offer.

Another disillusion weighed upon my soul. Before I went up the Nile, I had a fancy of my own that the bank was studded with endless ruined temples, whose vast red colonnades were reflected in the water at every turn. I think Macaulay's Lays were primarily answerable for that particular misapprehension. As a matter of fact, it surprised me to find that we often went for two whole days' hard steaming without ever a temple breaking the monotony of those eternal date-palms, those calm and superciliously irresponsive camels. In my humble opinion, Egypt is a fraud; there is too much Nile—very dirty Nile at that—and not nearly enough temple. Besides, the temples, when you *do* come up with them, are just like the villages; they are the same temple over

again, under a different name each time, and they have the same gods, the same kings, the same wearisome bas-reliefs, except that the gentleman in a chariot, ten feet high, who is mowing down enemies a quarter his own size, with unsportsmanlike recklessness, is called *Rameses* in this place, and *Sethi* in that, and *Amen-hotep* in the other. With this trifling variation, when you have seen one temple, one obelisk, one hieroglyphic table, you have seen the whole of Ancient Egypt.

At last, after many days' voyage through the same scenery daily—rising in the morning off a village with a mosque, ten palms, and two minarets, and retiring late at night off the same village once more, with mosque, palms, and minarets, as before, *da capo*—we arrived one evening at a place called *Geergeh*. In itself, I believe, *Geergeh* did not differ materially from all the other places we had passed on our voyage: it had its mosque, its ten palms, and its two minarets as usual. But I remember its name, because something mysterious went wrong there with our machinery; and the engineer informed us we must wait at least three days to mend



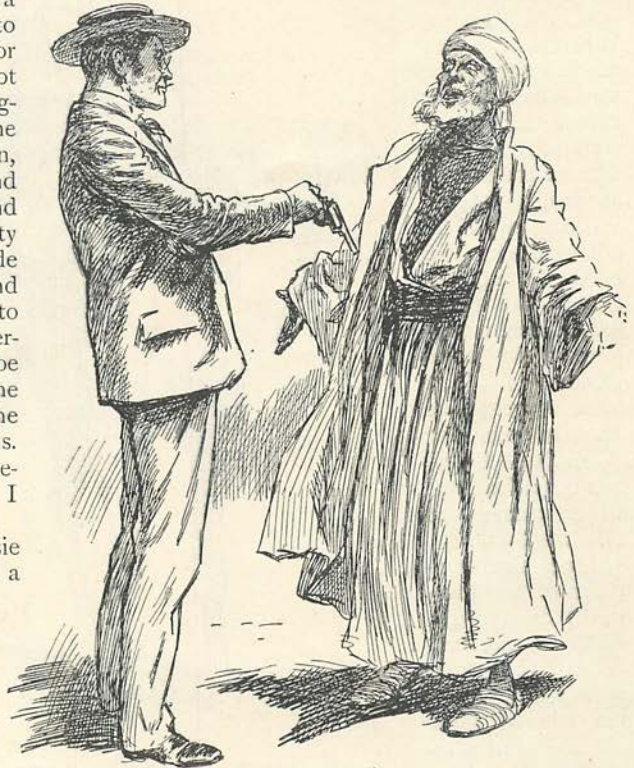
"TOO MUCH NILE."

it. Dr. Macloghlen's dahabeeah happened opportunely to arrive at the same spot on the same day; and he declared with fervour he would "see us through our troubles." But what on earth were we to do with ourselves through three long days and nights at Geergeh? There were the ruins of Abydus close at hand, to be sure; though I defy anybody not a professed Egyptologist to give more than one day to the ruins of Abydus. In this emergency, Dr. Macloghlen came gallantly to our aid. He discovered by inquiring from an English-speaking guide that there was an unobtrusive oasis, never visited by Europeans, one long day's journey off, across the desert. As a rule, it takes at least three days to get camels and guides together for such an expedition: for Egypt is not a land to hurry in. But the indefatigable Doctor further unearthed the fact that a sheikh had just come in, who (for a consideration) would lend us camels for a two days' trip; and we seized the chance to do our duty by Mr. Elworthy and the world-wide circulation. An unvisited oasis—and two Christian ladies to be the first to explore it: there's journalistic enterprise for you! If we happened to be killed, so much the better for the *Daily Telephone*. I pictured the excitement at Piccadilly Circus. "Extra Special, Our Own Correspondent brutally murdered!" I rejoiced at the opportunity.

I cannot honestly say that Elsie rejoiced with me. She cherished a prejudice against camels, massacres, and the new journalism. She didn't like being murdered: though this was premature, for she had never tried it. She objected that the fanatical Mohammedans of the Senoosi sect, who were said to inhabit the oasis in question, might cut our throats for dogs of infidels. I pointed out to her at some length that it was just that chance which added zest to our expedition as a journalistic venture: fancy the glory of being the first lady journalists martyred in the cause! But she failed to grasp this aspect of the question. However, if I went, she would go too, she said, like a dear girl that she is: she would not desert me when I was getting my throat cut.

Dr. Macloghlen made the bargain for us, and insisted on accompanying us across the

desert. He told us his method of negotiation with the Arabs with extreme gusto. "Is it pay in advance ye want?" says I to the dirty beggars: 'divvil a penny will ye get till ye bring these ladies safe back to Geergeh. And remimber, Mr. Sheikh,' says I, fingering me pistol so, by way of emphasis, 'we take no money wid us; so if yer friends at Wadi Bou choose to cut our throats, 'tis for the pleasure of it they'll be cutting them, not for anything they'll gain by it.' 'Provisions, effendi?' says he, salaaming. 'Provisions is it?' says I. 'Take everything ye'll want wid you; I suppose ye can buy



"EMPHASIS."

food fit for a Crischun in the bazaar in Geergeh; and never wan penny do ye touch for it all till ye've landed us on the bank again, as safe as ye took us. So if the religious sintiments of the faithful at Wadi Bou should lade them to hack us to pieces,' says I, just waving me revolver, 'thin 'tis yerself that will be out of pocket by it.' And the ould divvil cringed as if he took me for the Prince of Wales. Faix, 'tis the purse that's the best argumint to catch these haythen Arabs upon."

When we set out for the desert in the early dawn next day, it looked as if we were starting for a few months' voyage. We had a company of camels that might have befitted a caravan. We had two large tents, one for ourselves and one for Dr. Macloghlen, with a third to dine in. We had bedding, and cushions, and drinking water tied up in swollen pig-skins, which were really goat-skins, looking far from tempting. We had bread and meat, and a

supply of presents to soften the hearts and weaken the religious scruples of the sheikhs at Wadi Bou. "We travel *en prince*," said the Doctor.

When all was ready, we got under way solemnly, our camels rising and sniffing the breeze with a superior air, as who should say, "I happen to be going where you happen to be going; but don't for a moment suppose I do it to please you. It is mere coincidence. You are bound for Wadi Bou: I have business of my own which chances to take me there."

Over the incidents of the journey I draw a veil. Riding a camel, I find, does not greatly differ from sea-sickness. They are the same phenomenon under altered circumstances. We had been assured beforehand on excellent authority that "much of the comfort on a desert journey depends upon having a good camel." On this matter, I am no authority. I do not set up as a judge of camel-flesh. But I did not notice *any* of the comfort; so I venture to believe my camel must have been an exceptionally bad one.

We expected trouble from the fanatical natives; I am bound to admit, we had most trouble with Elsie. She was not insubordinate, but she did not care for camel-riding.

And her beast took advantage of her youth and innocence. A well-behaved camel should go almost as fast as a child can walk, and should not sit down plump on the burning sand without due reason. Elsie's brute crawled, and called halts for prayer at frequent intervals; it tried to kneel like a good Mussulman many times a day; and it showed an intolerant disposition to crush the infidel by rolling over on top of Elsie.

Dr. Macloghlen admonished it with Irish eloquence, not always in language intended for publication; but it only turned up its supercilious lip, and inquired in its own unspoken tongue what *he* knew about the desert.

"I feel like a wurrum before the baste," the Doctor said, nonplussed.

If the Nile was monotonous, the road to Wadi Bou was nothing short of dreary. We crossed a great ridge of bare, grey rock, and followed a rolling valley of sand, scored by dry ravines, and baking in the sun. It was ghastly to look upon. All day long, save at the midday rest by some brackish wells, we rode on and on, the brutes stepping forward with slow, outstretched legs; though sometimes we walked by the camels' sides to vary the monotony; but ever

through that dreary upland plain, sand in the centre, rocky mountain at the edge, and not a thing to look at. We were relieved towards evening to stumble against stunted tamarisks, half buried in sand, and to feel we were approaching the edge of the oasis.

When at last our arrogant brutes condescended to stop, in their patronizing way, we saw by the dim light of the moon a sort of uneven basin or hollow, studded with date-palms, and in the midst of the depression a crumbling walled town, with a whitewashed



"RIDING A CAMEL DOES NOT GREATLY DIFFER FROM SEA-SICKNESS."

mosque, two minarets by its side, and a crowd of mud-houses. It was strangely familiar. We had come all this way just to see Aboo-Teeg or Koos-kam over again!

We camped outside the fortified town that night. Next morning we essayed to make our entry.

At first, the servants of the Prophet on watch at the gate raised serious objections. No infidel might enter. But we had a pass from Cairo, exhorting the faithful in the name of the Khedive to give us food and shelter; and after much examination and many loud discussions, the gatemen passed us. We entered the town, and stood alone, three Christian Europeans, in the midst of three thousand fanatical Mohammedans.

I confess it was weird. Elsie shrank by my side. "Suppose they were to attack us, Brownie?"

"Thin the sheikh here would never get paid," Dr. Macloghlen put in with true Irish recklessness. "Faix, he'll whistle for his money on the whistle I gave him." That touch of humour saved us. We laughed; and the people about saw we could laugh. They left off scowling, and pressed around

trying to sell us pottery and native brooches. In the intervals of fanaticism, the Arab has an eye to business.

We passed up the chief street of the bazaar. The inhabitants told us in pantomime the chief of the town was away at Asiout, whither he had gone two days ago on business. If he were here, our interpreter gave us to understand, things might have been different; for the chief had determined that, whatever came, no infidel dog should settle in *his* oasis.

The women with their veiled faces attracted us strangely. They were wilder than on the river. They ran when one looked at them. Suddenly, as we passed one, we saw her give a little start. She was veiled like the rest, but her agitation was evident even through her thick covering.

"She is afraid of Christians," Elsie cried, nestling towards me.

The woman passed close to us. She never looked in our direction, but in a very low voice she murmured, as she passed, "Then you are English!"

I had presence of mind enough to conceal my surprise at this unexpected utterance.

"Don't seem to notice her, Elsie," I said, looking away. "Yes, we are English."

She stopped and pretended to examine some jewellery on a stall. "So am I," she went on, in the same suppressed, low voice. "For Heaven's sake, help me!"

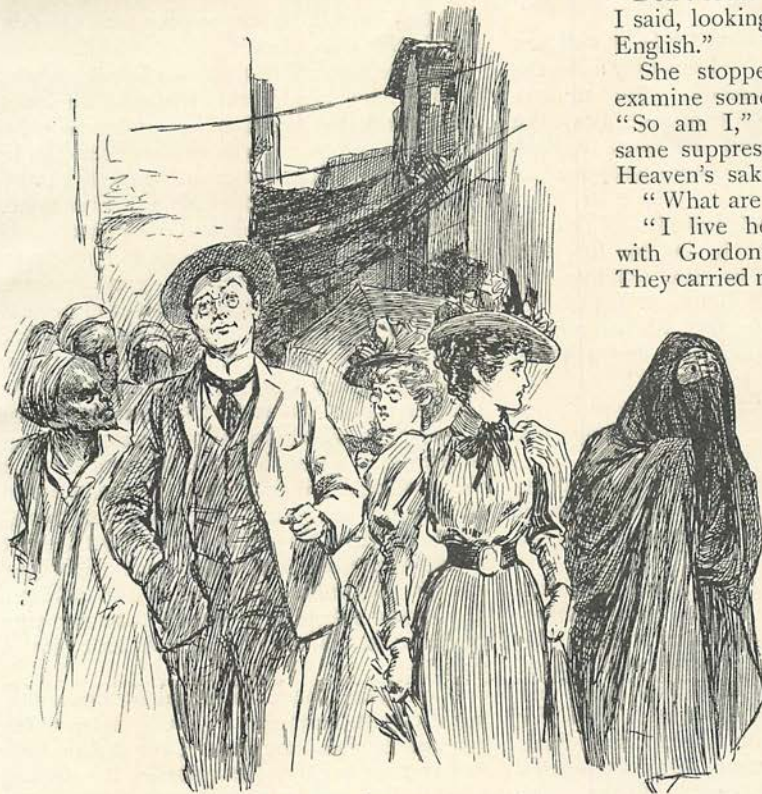
"What are you doing here?"

"I live here—married. I was with Gordon's force at Khartoum. They carried me off. A mere girl then.

Now I am thirty."

"And you have been here ever since?"

She turned away and walked off, but kept whispering behind her veil. We followed, unobtrusively. "Yes; I was sold to a man at Dongola. He passed me on again to the chief of this oasis. I don't know where it is; but I have been here ever since. I hate this life. Is there any chance of a rescue?"



"HER AGITATION WAS EVIDENT."

"Anny chance of a rescue, is it?" the Doctor broke in, a trifle too ostensibly. "If it costs us a whole British Army, me dear lady, we'll fetch you away and save you."

"But now—to-day? You won't go away and leave me? You are the first Europeans I have seen since Khartoum fell. They may sell me again. You will not desert me?"

"No," I said. "We will not." Then I reflected a moment.

What on earth could we do? This was a painful dilemma. If we once lost sight of her, we might not see her again. Yet if we walked with her openly, and talked like friends, we would betray ourselves, and her, to those fanatical Senoosis.

I made my mind up promptly. I may not have much of a mind; but, such as it is, I flatter myself I can make it up at a moment's notice.

"Can you come to us outside the gate at sunset?" I asked, as if speaking to Elsie.

The woman hesitated. "I think so."

"Then keep us in sight all day, and when evening comes, stroll out behind us."

She turned over some embroidered slippers on a booth, and seemed to be inspecting them. "But my children?" she murmured, anxiously.

The Doctor interposed. "Is it childern she has?" he asked. "Thin they'll be the Mohammedan gentleman's. We mustn't interfere wid *them*. We can take away the lady—she's English, and detained against her will: but we can't deprive anny man of his own childern."

I was firm, and categorical. "Yes, we can," I said, stoutly; "if he has forced a woman to bear them to him whether she would or not. That's common justice. I have no respect for the Mohammedan gentleman's rights. Let her bring them with her. How many are there?"

"Two—a boy and girl; not very old; the eldest is seven." She spoke wistfully. A mother is a mother.

"Then say no more now, but keep us always in sight, and we will keep *you*. Come to us at the gate about sundown. We will carry you off with us."

She clasped her hands and moved off with the peculiar gliding air of the veiled Mohammedan woman. Our eyes followed her. We walked on through the bazaar, thinking of nothing else now. It was strange how this episode made us forget our selfish fears for our own safety. Even dear, timid Elsie remembered only that an Englishwoman's life and liberty were at stake. We kept her

more or less in view all day. She glided in and out among the people in the alleys. When we went back to the camels at lunch-time, she followed us unobtrusively through the open gate, and sat watching us from a little way off, among a crowd of gazers; for all Wadi Bou was of course agog at this unwonted invasion.

We discussed the circumstance loudly, so that she might hear our plans. Dr. Macloghlen advised that we should tell our sheikh we meant to return part of the way to Geergeh that evening by moonlight. I quite agreed with him. It was the only way out. Besides, I didn't like the looks of the people. They eyed us askance. This was getting exciting now. I felt a professional journalistic interest. Whether we escaped or got killed, what splendid business for the *Daily Telephone*!

The sheikh, of course, declared it was impossible to start that evening. The men wouldn't move—the camels needed rest. But Dr. Macloghlen was inexorable. "Very well, thin, Mr. Sheikh," he answered, philosophically. "Ye'll plaze yerself about whether ye come on wid us or whether ye shtop. That's yer own business. But *we* set out at sundown; and whin ye return by yerself on foot to Geergeh, ye can ask for yer camels at the British Consulate."

All through that anxious afternoon we sat in our tents, under the shade of the mud wall, wondering whether we could carry out our plan or not. About an hour before sunset the veiled woman strolled out of the gate with her two children. She joined the crowd of sight-seers once more, for never through the day were we left alone for a second. The excitement grew intense. Elsie and I moved up carelessly towards the group, talking as if to one another. I looked hard at Elsie: then I said, as though I were speaking about one of the children, "Go straight along the road to Geergeh till you are past the big clump of palms at the edge of the oasis. Just beyond it comes a sharp ridge of rock. Wait behind the ridge where no one can see you. When we get there," I patted the little girl's head, "don't say a word, but jump on my camel. My two friends will each take one of the children. If you understand and consent, stroke your boy's curls. We will accept that for a signal."

She stroked the child's head at once without the least hesitation. Even through her veil and behind her dress, I could somehow feel and see her trembling nerves, her beating heart. But she gave no overt token. She

merely turned and muttered something carelessly in Arabic to a woman beside her.

We waited once more, in long-drawn suspense. Would she manage to escape them? Would they suspect her motives?

After ten minutes, when we had returned to our crouching-place under the shadow of the wall, the woman detached herself slowly from the group, and began strolling with almost overdone nonchalance along the road to Geergeh. We could see the little girl was frightened and seemed to expostulate with her mother: fortunately, the Arabs about were too much occupied in watching the suspicious strangers to notice this episode of their own people. Presently, our new friend disappeared; and, with beating hearts, we awaited the sunset.

Then came the usual scene of hubbub with the sheikh, the camels, the porters, and the drivers. It was eagerness against apathy. With difficulty we made them understand we meant to get under way at all hazards. I stormed in bad Arabic. The Doctor inveighed in very choice Irish. At last they yielded, and set out. One

by one the camels rose, bent their slow knees, and began to stalk in their lordly way with outstretched necks along the road to the river.

We moved through the palm groves, a crowd of boys following us and shouting for backsheesh. We began to be afraid they would accompany us too far and discover our fugitive; but fortunately they all turned back with one accord at a little whitewashed shrine near the edge of the oasis. We reached the clump of palms;

we turned the corner of the ridge. Had we missed one another? No! There, crouching by the rocks, with her children by her side, sat our mysterious stranger.

The Doctor was equal to the emergency. "Make those bastes kneel!" he cried authoritatively to the sheikh.

The sheikh was taken aback. This was a new exploit burst upon him. He flung his arms up, gesticulating wildly. The Doctor, unmoved, made the drivers understand by some strange pantomime what he wanted.

They nodded, half terrified. In a second, the stranger was by my side, Elsie had taken the girl, the Doctor the boy, and the camels were passively beginning to rise again. That is the best of your camel. Once set him on his road, and he goes mechanically.

The sheikh broke out with several loud remarks in Arabic, which we did not understand, but whose hostile character could not easily escape us. He was beside himself with anger. Then I was suddenly aware of the splendid advantage of having an Irishman on our side. Dr. Macloghlen drew his revolver, like one well used to such episodes, and pointed it full at the angry Arab. "Look here, Mr. Sheikh," he said, calmly, yet with a fine touch of bravado; "do ye see this revolver? Well, unless ye make yer camels thravel straight to Geergeh widout wan other wurrud, 'tis yer own brains will be spattered, sor, on the sand of this desert! And if ye touch wan hair of our heads, ye'll answer for it wid yer life to the British Government."



"CROUCHING BY THE ROCKS SAT OUR MYSTERIOUS STRANGER."

I do not feel sure that the sheikh comprehended the exact nature of each word in this comprehensive threat, but I am certain he took in its general meaning, punctuated as it was with some flourishes of the revolver. He turned to the drivers and made a gesture of despair. It meant, apparently, that this infidel was too much for him. Then he called out a few sharp directions in Arabic. Next minute, our camels' legs were stepping out briskly along the road to Geergeh with a promptitude which

I'm sure must have astonished their owners. We rode on and on through the gloom in a fever of suspense. Had any of the Senoosis noticed our presence? Would they miss the chief's wife before long, and follow us under arms? Would our own sheikh betray us? I am no coward, as women go, but I confess, if it had not been for our fiery Irishman, I should have felt my heart sink. We were grateful to him for the reckless and good-humoured courage of the untamed Celt. It kept us from giving way. "Ye'll take notice, Mr. Sheikh," he said, as we threaded our way among the moon-lit rocks, "that I have twinty-wan cartridges in me case for me revolver; and that if there's trouble to-night 'tis twinty of them there'll be for your frinds the Senoosis, and wan for yerself; but for fear of disappointing a gintleman, 'tis yer own special bullet I'll disthribute first, if it comes to fighting."

The sheikh's English was a vanishing quantity, but to judge by the way he nodded and salaamed at this playful remark, I am convinced he understood the Doctor's Irish quite as well as I did.

We spoke little by the way; we were all far too frightened, except the Doctor, who kept our hearts up by a running fire of wild Celtic humour. But I found time meanwhile to learn by a few questions from our veiled friend something of her captivity. She had seen her father massacred before her eyes at Khartoum, and had then been sold away to a merchant, who conveyed her by degrees and by various exchanges across the desert through lonely spots to the Senoosi oasis. There she had lived all those years with the chief to whom her last purchaser had trafficked her. She did not even know that her husband's village was an integral part of the Khedive's territory; far less that the English were now in practical occupation of Egypt. She had heard nothing and learnt nothing since that fateful day; she had waited in vain for the off-chance of a deliverer.

"But did you never try to run away to the Nile?" I cried, astonished.

"Run away? How could I? I did not even know which way the river lay; and was it possible for me to cross the desert on foot, or find a chance of a camel? The Senoosis would have killed me. Even with you to help me, see what dangers surround me; alone, I should have perished, like Hagar in the wilderness, with no angel to save me."

"An' ye've got the angel now," Dr. Macglohlen exclaimed, glancing at me. "Steady, there, Mr. Sheikh. What's this that's coming?"

It was another caravan, going the opposite way, on its road to the oasis! A voice halloaed from it.

Our new friend clung tight to me. "My husband!" she whispered, gasping.

They were still far off on the desert, and the moon shone bright. A few hurried words to the Doctor, and with a wild resolve we faced the emergency. He made the camels halt, and all of us, springing off, crouched down behind their shadows in such a way that the coming caravan must pass on the far side of us. At the same moment the Doctor turned resolutely to the sheikh. "Look here, Mr. Arab," he said in a quiet voice, with one more appeal to the simple Volapuk of the pointed revolver; "I cover ye wid this. Let these frinds of yours go by. If there's anny unnecessary talking betwixt ye, or anny trouble of anny kind, remimber, the first bullet goes sthraight as an arrow t'rough that haythen head of yours!"

The sheikh salaamed more submissively than ever.

The caravan drew abreast of us. We could hear them cry aloud on either side the customary salutes: "In Allah's name, peace!" answered by "Allah is great; there is no god but Allah."

Would anything more happen? Would our sheikh play us false? It was a moment of breathlessness. We crouched and covered in the shade, holding our hearts with fear, while the Arab drivers pretended to be unsaddling the camels. A minute or two of anxious suspense; then, peering over our beasts' backs, we saw their long line filing off towards the oasis. We watched their turbaned heads, silhouetted against the sky, disappear slowly. One by one they faded away. The danger was past. With beating hearts we rose up again.

The Doctor sprang into his place and seated himself on his camel. "Now ride on, Mr. Sheikh," he said, "wid all yer men, as if grim death was ather ye. Camels or no camels, ye've got to march all night, for ye'll never draw rein till we're safe back at Geergeh!"

And sure enough we never halted, under the persuasive influence of that loaded revolver, till we dismounted once more in the early dawn upon the Nile bank, under British protection.

Then Elsie and I and our rescued country-woman broke down together in an orgy of relief. We hugged one another and cried like so many children.