

## CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHTH.

A Rapid Passage.--Prudent Resolves.--Caravans in Sight.--Incessant Rains.--  
Goa.--The Niger.--Golberry, Geoffroy, and Gray.--Mungo Park.--Laing.--  
Rene Caillie.--Clapperton.--John and Richard Lander.

The 17th of May passed tranquilly, without any remarkable incident; the desert gained upon them once more; a moderate wind bore the Victoria toward the southwest, and she never swerved to the right or to the left, but her shadow traced a perfectly straight line on the sand.

Before starting, the doctor had prudently renewed his stock of water, having feared that he should not be able to touch ground in these regions, infested as they are by the Aouelim-Minian Touaregs. The plateau, at an elevation of eighteen hundred feet above the level of the sea, sloped down toward the south. Our travellers, having crossed the Aghades route at Murzouk--a route often pressed by the feet of camels--arrived that evening, in the sixteenth degree of north latitude, and four degrees fifty-five minutes east longitude, after having passed over one hundred and eighty miles of a long and monotonous day's journey.

During the day Joe dressed the last pieces of game, which had been only hastily prepared, and he served up for supper a mess of snipe, that were greatly relished.

The wind continuing good, the doctor resolved to keep on during the night, the moon, still nearly at the full, illumining it with her radiance. The Victoria ascended to a height of five hundred feet, and, during her nocturnal trip of about sixty miles, the gentle slumbers of an infant would not have been disturbed by her motion.

On Sunday morning, the direction of the wind again changed, and it bore to the northwestward. A few crows were seen sweeping through the air, and, off on the horizon, a flock of vultures which, fortunately, however, kept at a distance.

The sight of these birds led Joe to compliment his master on the idea of having two balloons.

"Where would we be," said he, "with only one balloon? The second balloon is like the life-boat to a ship; in case of wreck we could always take to it and escape."

"You are right, friend Joe," said the doctor, "only that my life-boat gives me some uneasiness. It is not so good as the main craft."

"What do you mean by that, doctor?" asked Kennedy.

"I mean to say that the new Victoria is not so good as

the old one. Whether it be that the stuff it is made of is too much worn, or that the heat of the spiral has melted the gutta-percha, I can observe a certain loss of gas. It don't amount to much thus far, but still it is noticeable. We have a tendency to sink, and, in order to keep our elevation, I am compelled to give greater dilation to the hydrogen."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Kennedy with concern; "I see no remedy for that."

"There is none, Dick, and that is why we must hasten our progress, and even avoid night halts."

"Are we still far from the coast?" asked Joe.

"Which coast, my boy? How are we to know whither chance will carry us? All that I can say is, that Timbuctoo is still about four hundred miles to the westward.

"And how long will it take us to get there?"

"Should the wind not carry us too far out of the way, I hope to reach that city by Tuesday evening."

"Then," remarked Joe, pointing to a long file of animals and men winding across the open desert, "we shall

arrive there sooner than that caravan."

Ferguson and Kennedy leaned over and saw an immense cavalcade. There were at least one hundred and fifty camels of the kind that, for twelve mutkals of gold, or about twenty-five dollars, go from Timbuctoo to Tafilet with a load of five hundred pounds upon their backs. Each animal had dangling to its tail a bag to receive its excrement, the only fuel on which the caravans can depend when crossing the desert.

These Touareg camels are of the very best race. They can go from three to seven days without drinking, and for two without eating. Their speed surpasses that of the horse, and they obey with intelligence the voice of the khabir, or guide of the caravan. They are known in the country under the name of mehari.

Such were the details given by the doctor while his companions continued to gaze upon that multitude of men, women, and children, advancing on foot and with difficulty over a waste of sand half in motion, and scarcely kept in its place by scanty nettles, withered grass, and stunted bushes that grew upon it. The wind obliterated the marks of their feet almost instantly.

Joe inquired how the Arabs managed to guide themselves

across the desert, and come to the few wells scattered far between throughout this vast solitude.

"The Arabs," replied Dr. Ferguson, "are endowed by nature with a wonderful instinct in finding their way. Where a European would be at a loss, they never hesitate for a moment. An insignificant fragment of rock, a pebble, a tuft of grass, a different shade of color in the sand, suffice to guide them with accuracy. During the night they go by the polar star. They never travel more than two miles per hour, and always rest during the noonday heat. You may judge from that how long it takes them to cross Sahara, a desert more than nine hundred miles in breadth."

But the Victoria had already disappeared from the astonished gaze of the Arabs, who must have envied her rapidity. That evening she passed two degrees twenty minutes east longitude, and during the night left another degree behind her.

On Monday the weather changed completely. Rain began to fall with extreme violence, and not only had the balloon to resist the power of this deluge, but also the increase of weight which it caused by wetting the whole machine, car and all. This continuous shower accounted for the swamps and marshes that formed the sole surface

of the country. Vegetation reappeared, however, along with the mimosas, the baobabs, and the tamarind-trees.

Such was the Sonray country, with its villages topped with roofs turned over like Armenian caps. There were few mountains, and only such hills as were enough to form the ravines and pools where the pintadoes and snipes went sailing and diving through. Here and there, an impetuous torrent cut the roads, and had to be crossed by the natives on long vines stretched from tree to tree. The forests gave place to jungles, which alligators, hippopotami, and the rhinoceros, made their haunts.

"It will not be long before we see the Niger," said the doctor. "The face of the country always changes in the vicinity of large rivers. These moving highways, as they are sometimes correctly called, have first brought vegetation with them, as they will at last bring civilization.

Thus, in its course of twenty-five hundred miles, the Niger has scattered along its banks the most important cities of Africa."

"By-the-way," put in Joe, "that reminds me of what was said by an admirer of the goodness of Providence, who praised the foresight with which it had generally caused rivers to flow close to large cities!"

At noon the Victoria was passing over a petty town,  
a mere assemblage of miserable huts, which once was Goa,  
a great capital.

"It was there," said the doctor, "that Barth crossed  
the Niger, on his return from Timbuctoo. This is the  
river so famous in antiquity, the rival of the Nile, to which  
pagan superstition ascribed a celestial origin. Like the  
Nile, it has engaged the attention of geographers in all  
ages; and like it, also, its exploration has cost the lives  
of many victims; yes, even more of them than perished  
on account of the other."

The Niger flowed broadly between its banks, and its  
waters rolled southward with some violence of current;  
but our travellers, borne swiftly by as they were, could  
scarcely catch a glimpse of its curious outline.

"I wanted to talk to you about this river," said Dr.  
Ferguson, "and it is already far from us. Under the  
names of Dhiouleba, Mayo, Egghirreou, Quorra, and other  
titles besides, it traverses an immense extent of country,  
and almost competes in length with the Nile. These  
appellations signify simply 'the River,' according to the  
dialects of the countries through which it passes."

"Did Dr. Barth follow this route?" asked Kennedy.

"No, Dick: in quitting Lake Tchad, he passed through the different towns of Bornou, and intersected the Niger at Say, four degrees below Goa; then he penetrated to the bosom of those unexplored countries which the Niger embraces in its elbow; and, after eight months of fresh fatigues, he arrived at Timbuctoo; all of which we may do in about three days with as swift a wind as this."

"Have the sources of the Niger been discovered?"  
asked Joe.

"Long since," replied the doctor. "The exploration of the Niger and its tributaries was the object of several expeditions, the principal of which I shall mention: Between 1749 and 1758, Adamson made a reconnoissance of the river, and visited Gorea; from 1785 to 1788, Golberry and Geoffroy travelled across the deserts of Senegambia, and ascended as far as the country of the Moors, who assassinated Saugnier, Brisson, Adam, Riley, Cochelet, and so many other unfortunate men. Then came the illustrious Mungo Park, the friend of Sir Walter Scott, and, like him, a Scotchman by birth. Sent out in 1795 by the African Society of London, he got as far as Bambarra, saw the Niger, travelled five hundred miles with a slave-merchant, reconnoitred the Gambia River, and returned to England in 1797. He again set out, on the 30th of



January, 1805, with his brother-in-law Anderson, Scott, the designer, and a gang of workmen; he reached Gorea, there added a detachment of thirty-five soldiers to his party, and saw the Niger again on the 19th of August. But, by that time, in consequence of fatigue, privations, ill-usage, the inclemencies of the weather, and the unhealthiness of the country, only eleven persons remained alive of the forty Europeans in the party. On the 16th of November, the last letters from Mungo Park reached his wife; and, a year later a trader from that country gave information that, having got as far as Boussa, on the Niger, on the 23d of December, the unfortunate traveller's boat was upset by the cataracts in that part of the river, and he was murdered by the natives."

"And his dreadful fate did not check the efforts of others to explore that river?"

"On the contrary, Dick. Since then, there were two objects in view: namely, to recover the lost man's papers, as well as to pursue the exploration. In 1816, an expedition was organized, in which Major Grey took part. It arrived in Senegal, penetrated to the Fonta-Jallon, visited the Foullah and Mandingo populations, and returned to England without further results. In 1822, Major Laing explored all the western part of Africa near to the British possessions; and he it was who got so far as the sources

of the Niger; and, according to his documents, the spring in which that immense river takes its rise is not two feet broad.

"Easy to jump over," said Joe.

"How's that? Easy you think, eh?" retorted the doctor.

"If we are to believe tradition, whoever attempts to pass that spring, by leaping over it, is immediately swallowed up; and whoever tries to draw water from it, feels himself repulsed by an invisible hand."

"I suppose a man has a right not to believe a word of that!" persisted Joe.

"Oh, by all means!--Five years later, it was Major Laing's destiny to force his way across the desert of Sahara, penetrate to Timbuctoo, and perish a few miles above it, by strangling, at the hands of the Ouelad-shiman, who wanted to compel him to turn Mussulman."

"Still another victim!" said the sportsman.

"It was then that a brave young man, with his own feeble resources, undertook and accomplished the most astonishing of modern journeys--I mean the Frenchman Rene Caillie, who, after sundry attempts in 1819 and 1824,

set out again on the 19th of April, 1827, from Rio Nunez. On the 3d of August he arrived at Timbuctoo, so thoroughly exhausted and ill that he could not resume his journey until six months later, in January, 1828. He then joined a caravan, and, protected by his Oriental dress, reached the Niger on the 10th of March, penetrated to the city of Jenne, embarked on the river, and descended it, as far as Timbuctoo, where he arrived on the 30th of April. In 1760, another Frenchman, Imbert by name, and, in 1810, an Englishman, Robert Adams, had seen this curious place; but Rene Caillie was to be the first European who could bring back any authentic data concerning it. On the 4th of May he quitted this 'Queen of the desert;' on the 9th, he surveyed the very spot where Major Laing had been murdered; on the 19th, he arrived at El-Arouan, and left that commercial town to brave a thousand dangers in crossing the vast solitudes comprised between the Soudan and the northern regions of Africa. At length he entered Tangiers, and on the 28th of September sailed for Toulon. In nineteen months, notwithstanding one hundred and eighty days' sickness, he had traversed Africa from west to north. Ah! had Callie been born in England, he would have been honored as the most intrepid traveller of modern times, as was the case with Mungo Park. But in France he was not appreciated according to his worth."

"He was a sturdy fellow!" said Kennedy, "but what

became of him?"

"He died at the age of thirty-nine, from the consequences of his long fatigues. They thought they had done enough in decreeing him the prize of the Geographical Society in 1828; the highest honors would have been paid to him in England.

"While he was accomplishing this remarkable journey, an Englishman had conceived a similar enterprise and was trying to push it through with equal courage, if not with equal good fortune. This was Captain Clapperton, the companion of Denham. In 1829 he reentered Africa by the western coast of the Gulf of Benin; he then followed in the track of Mungo Park and of Laing, recovered at Boussa the documents relative to the death of the former, and arrived on the 20th of August at Sackatoo, where he was seized and held as a prisoner, until he expired in the arms of his faithful attendant Richard Lander."

"And what became of this Lander?" asked Joe, deeply interested.

"He succeeded in regaining the coast and returned to London, bringing with him the captain's papers, and an exact narrative of his own journey. He then offered his services to the government to complete the reconnoissance of the Niger. He took with him his brother John, the

second child of a poor couple in Cornwall, and, together, these men, between 1829 and 1831, redescended the river from Boussa to its mouth, describing it village by village, mile by mile."

"So both the brothers escaped the common fate?" queried Kennedy.

"Yes, on this expedition, at least; but in 1833 Richard undertook a third trip to the Niger, and perished by a bullet, near the mouth of the river. You see, then, my friends, that the country over which we are now passing has witnessed some noble instances of self-sacrifice which, unfortunately, have only too often had death for their reward."