CHAPTER XVII

1854

> And if I prosper all shall be as sure
> As if the Turk, the Pope, Afric and Greece
> Came creeping to us with their crowns apiece.
>
> MARLOWE.

BEFORE making any arrangements to return, the doctor told me that he had succeeded in persuading a well-to-do Jew to come with his son to sit for "The Temple" picture. While I was arranging for the canvas, the case, and all materials for my second journey to Oosdoom, I took every opportunity to profit by the new chance of painting from my offered sitter, but again the old troubles began. The father in twenty minutes inquired whether I had not finished, and said he must go but would come later, but did not reappear. Having returned to this picture, I trusted to my chance of getting a red-bearded Jew who had promised to come. I began with the head and felt some encouragement at my first day's work ; but he in turn disappeared, and I almost regretted having been enticed back to the old hope of finishing the Jewish picture. While thus detained in Jerusalem, news came that the whole of southern Syria was in disorder. The troops being withdrawn, the sheiks concluded that they could mass their forces and get rid of the hateful Turk. Hebron itself from some cause (perhaps having an Osmanli garrison in the town) elected to hold out

for the established power. Thus far the struggle was a political one, but the patriotic effort of the insurgents often degenerated into mere lawlessness and gave encouragement to village desperadoes to embark on felonious enterprises of their own, so that native travellers reported that the roads were quite impracticable. I had no intention of giving up the Scapegoat subject, cost what it might. On the 13th November I made my bargain with Omar Beg, the *mukary* master, and left the animals in charge of Nicola Beyrouti, whom I re-engaged, notwithstanding his childish cowardice, for he still had some good points in him. To escape the deceitfulness of Ali Tantish the muleteer, I preferred to trust to the problematic honesty of his rival. The right number of mules and horses being bargained for from him, I arranged to have all the baggage animals dispatched on the road, and for myself and Nicola to overtake them half way on the journey before nightfall. The Consul had put into my charge a present for Abou Daouk, the Jehalin sheik. These trifles delayed me till afternoon, and when I arrived at the starting place I found that my man had taken the *mukary's* orders and gone on. Mounting my horse, I found him the most tired jade I had ever bestridden, but at last he reached the party waiting at the well of the Wise Men. My muleteers were very nervous and would have been glad to get out of the engagement altogether, because of further disturbing news from the south. It seemed that the town of Hebron, and a few surrounding villages, still held out for the government, and all of these were being attacked by the insurgent fellahin, so there was much fighting and bloodshed. Naturally bands of adventurers were taking advantage of the disorder on their own account. The *mukary's* proposal to halt at Bethlehem was nothing but a means of wasting time, so I insisted upon an advance, and treated the news as in no way affecting our course. Owing to the delays and bad condition of our steeds, night came on long before we had made half our journey.

I had brought the goat that had been selected by me several weeks previously to serve as my model on the spot. All the way he was provokingly blatant, he walked and was carried in turns, in either position his object seemed to be to attract attention—the very reverse of our own—doing this whether we were threading our way within ear-shot of villages either along the bottom of a valley or over the saddle of a hill-pass. We could detect by the wild barkings of dogs that the kid's cry for help was heard, but probably the unusually disturbed state of the country, added to the fear of *effreets*, was a protection to us, for we anxiously passed several noisy watch-dogs without molestation.

An hour beyond the Pools of Solomon we were winding between low trees on the slippery road, and I was leading the party, when I noticed the yelling of Nicola, who was behind, mixing itself with the bleatings of the Scapegoat model. His reply to my cheer was very lachrymose, so that I had to ride back. He was in tears like a baby, and ducked his head as though to escape from some attack. He was a well grown man, five years older than myself, and to see him behaving thus made me angry. "What is the matter with you, O madman?" I said. "There are robbers," was his reply. "Where?" "All about us; do shoot, I pray, Khowagha," —bobbing down to the saddle all the while. "I am not such a fool; I will ride behind you and protect you," was my reply. I had already taken up my place of rear-guard over the stair-like rocks, when I was struck with stones in two or three places at once, and my horse swerved from a blow. "Ha, ha! now I see what is the matter," said I. The trees enshrouded men who were following and pelting us. I held up my gun against the sky, cocked the two triggers, brought round my revolver, and shouted, "Now I am ready for the first man who shows his head." Our enemies held their hands, and Nicola grew less terrified, saying aloud, "Now shoot to show you have a gun with two souls, and a pistol with many." "When I see

where to shoot I won't fail," I replied. We went on in silence, except that the muleteer kept stupidly saying, "I told you how it would be"; and I was obliged to reply, "What do you complain of? I'm protecting you"; Nicola joined in with a culminating sob.

We plodded on minute by minute, ever expecting a fresh outbreak as we turned in and out over the worn and wet limestone track. When a good quarter of an hour had passed in freedom from the continually looked for attack, I heard a great clatter ahead. I spurred on fast, and found no robber, but our head mule was down again. It seemed certain that this would bring on our foes at once, so I had to keep on the alert while the men busied themselves in unpacking and raising the poor beast, which was effected without molestation. Our foes had probably been on an opposite journey, and seeing us coming, had put themselves in ambush to follow us back, abandoning us when the chance seemed not a promising one. In starting again, however, until we had got out of the shelter of trees, we could not give up the closest vigilance.

On the heights to our left, when the view opened, we came within sound of villages. No arts could muffle the noise of our animals' hoofs, or keep our other chorus of sound from the ears of the dogs, who seemed to be incessantly on the watch while men slept. We had, with my consent, kept off the harder parts of the track to reduce our noisiness, and were toiling along, knowing that it was long past midnight, and that we had got to the most dubious part of the journey, in which no recognisable difference in its features could be distinguished. I asked the *mukary* if he were sure we were on the right track; his reply was, he had lost the road for some time, and had not been able to recover it. "What do you propose to do?" I asked. "Dismount, spread part of the tent against this slope of the rock, light a fire in a nook where it won't be seen, get coffee, sleep for three hours, and go on again before sunrise. There is nothing else that can be done,"

he said. To this all agreed. I suspected my muleteer, and even my man, of having intentionally misguided us, it was nearly the same spot at which the road had been lost on the former journey. My hope had been to reach Hebron that night and to go on the next day. I had not, however, expressed a determination to complete the whole stage that night at all hazard, and as my dragoman was a poor creature in comparison to my servant on the former occasion, I concluded it was better to rest under the terrace of the hill, and here we lighted a small fire, heated our coffee, and, eating a crust, went to sleep. In the early morning we started for Hebron. In the city several purchases had to be made, and the animals properly shod. Against needless delays all I could do was to threaten withholding of *backshish* ; Jehalin messengers had to be sent for, and I had to be patient. I called on the Prussian doctor at the Quarantine, who told me that fighting had ceased, but that last week fifty men had been killed and buried at Hebron. I slept at the Quarantine, if partial oblivion with many startled awakenings can be called by so sacred a name as sleep. In the morning, with more than the customary dawdling preparation, we at last rode through the town, where it would have been difficult for an uninitiated passer-by to have detected any excitement or alarm in the people of the bazaar as they calmly looked up from their business, neither did the fellahin shepherds as they went out with their flocks show any sense of disturbance.

Beyond the first height I saw an ibex standing against the sky-line in an alert attitude ; as I was admiring him he staggered and fell, and the report of a gun followed. An Arab appeared running towards the creature, and I galloped to the spot. The stricken beast lay with glazed eye and lolling tongue, and the parasites that nestled in his warmth were already seeking their escape.

The wilderness of Ziph was seen from every fresh hill brow, nowhere was there a trace of landmark, road, or any sign of the rule which gregarious man ordains for

common interest or protection. As the sun rose towards the zenith, the shadows of the rocks disappeared, and the want of even their shelter made the wanderer feel more of an outcast ; the bare earth grew wilder as though new from the Creator's hand ; and yet I felt a novel joy in life. I looked around to account for my exhilaration of spirit, and could only discover a sweet purity in the very barrenness of the scene before me ; it was a pleasure to inhale the living breeze wafted from the distant Mediterranean, and perfumed by forty miles of aromatic hillside and plain. Separation of this kind leads man to the understanding of the poet shepherd's aspiration when he sang, "My soul thirsteth after thee, my flesh longeth for thee : in a barren and dry land where no water is."

In the afternoon I arrived at the encampment of Abou Daouk, the sheik of whom I was in search. When my tent was pitched, I sent word that I was expecting a visit from him, and as he came up the slope I stepped out to welcome him. He had a long face with large projecting teeth and a long but retiring chin, and as he neared me, looking his affablest, I could not help thinking how like a mule he was. I had to adopt an English tone of preoccupation with Nicola, to make sure that he should not expect me to fall on his dirty person and in Arab fashion embrace him. When he was seated on a raised mat at my door, I delivered greetings from the Consul, and made Nicola unwrap the parcel containing a *jabbah* of brightest scarlet, which I then placed on his shoulders. The contrast of the vivid colour with his grimy visage made him look dustier than ever, and I wondered whether the good Omar appeared so polluting, when the Patriarch, giving up to him the keys of Jerusalem, muttered, "Surely this is the abomination which maketh desolate."

When we were re-seated I explained that the English Consul, Khowagha Finn, had charged me to bring this coat to him as a mark of his esteem. He, as behoved him in the face of the whole tribe outside, adopted the bearing of utter unconcern, folding the garment under

and about him on the ground, as though he were accustomed to have a new coat every day, and certainly nothing seemed to me more likely than that he would by to-morrow make it but little distinguishable from his other raiments. Meanwhile men formed themselves into a circle about him, and veiled women peered from tent doors to watch their sheik in his new glory.

After due assurance that we were respectively *well and happy*; that Mr. Beamont—who had been with me on the earlier journey—was *well and happy*; that he had gone on to Damascus, that the son was *well and happy*; that the Consul was *well and happy*, with "Allamdillilah" (God be praised) uttered after each assurance; and that they all hoped that he was *well and happy*, he had his pipe refilled royally, and coffee given him to satiety. I ventured then to introduce the business question, my servant helping me with his Arabic, for there was the extra difficulty here of a tribe dialect.

Combating the proposal that the business question should be left till the morrow, I said that I should like to go down to Oosdoom for some weeks, perhaps five or six, to make a picture; that I wanted some of his men with me as guides and caterers, and that two or three would be enough. I left the number to him, what should I pay him? Oh, for his part the whole place was mine. He said he hoped I should always stay; but pressed further he said, "By Allah," what I asked was "no light matter," it filled him with anxiety, he must send down at least a hundred of his most trusted men, for the place was dangerous, being in the road of various tribes, and without a large party how could he guard me if I stayed there day after day. He would do his best to persuade his men to be satisfied with five hundred English pounds. And the men within hearing said, "No, no! Never! never! Impossible!"

The tongues of the rank and file being loosened, all declared eagerly that it was almost out of hope that more than a few could ever return to their families. When they

had talked themselves out, they asked for my reply. I said, "We will talk of it no more. It is, I see, a foolish fancy of mine. I will return to-morrow and go to Masada, En Gedi, Marsaba, or Jericho instead. I can understand that you think me mad to return to a place which few travellers visit and none revisit; it is enough, let us talk no more about the proposal, we will speak of other matters."

"Will you tell me how many men you have in your tribe?" I asked. He then said, "Why should you be angry? You do not answer me. Why don't you talk of Oosdoom?" "Look," I said, "it is not far away; half a day would bring us there. It is the wretchedest place in the whole world. If I had not already been there, I should know this from books. England is a beautiful country, a garden with wide rivers like that in Egypt, and trees bearing lovely fruits, and there are cattle, sheep, and birds in abundance, and perfect roads; whereas the plain of the Dead Sea which you treat as if it were a paradise, is stricken with a curse. Five hundred pounds! Well, perhaps a lord would give some large sum to stay in a blessed place, but not a *para* to live in a cursed one. I am not a lord. I am more like a monk or a dervish. I would go there just to explain to people in England, accustomed overmuch to blessings, how awful is a place accursed of heaven; but if you and your men do not want me to go there, I shall take it as a sign that Allah wills me to work elsewhere. There are many places where Arabs or others would like to be paid for guiding me, and I would go to their country instead." His impracticable terms had made me remember the enchantment of some landscapes I had seen on my journey to the Jordan. The sheik replied, "But you see I must send so many to guard you; and it is not as though you were passing through like other travellers. The sons of Shaitan will be tempted by your being there for so long, and they can be overawed only by a strong guard." "No," I replied, "I only want to be guided and to have provisions

brought to me. Send few or many, I will guard myself." "Well," he went on to say, "what will you give?" After more fencing my reply was, "I speak with English words; the first is the last; I will give eight hundred piastres" (about seven pounds). A shriek of execration followed; and I said, "I am sorry. I will go back and tell other *Frangat* not to come here and vex you with the wish to visit your district. In the meantime, Nicola, you can bring my dinner." And I got rid of the company.

An hour later the sheik came to smoke a pipe and drink coffee with me again. It was dark. The noises of sheep being folded and of clamorous children had ceased; barking dogs and braying asses alone broke the resonant silence. He had been persuading his men to take one hundred pounds; would I say "finished," he asked. "No! only eight hundred piastres," I said, "and *that* I would pay in paper, writing a note for the money, and if your men return with me to Jerusalem when I go back, gold should be given then in exchange at the Consulate." Before leaving the tent the sheik had come slowly to my terms, and I wrote the cheque, with which he retired.

When I was alone Nicola came to caution me. I had innocently advised that to make it serve the purpose of the tribe better, the provisions wanted for our encampment should be bought from them; and now, finding that we were destitute, without any other chance of providing ourselves, they asked five or ten times the just price. The next morning, rising an hour or two before the sun, I announced my intention of riding back to Hebron to procure supplies, which frightened our hosts into more reasonable demands. Then came our sheik and sat down, asking when I was intending to conclude the business. "What business?" I asked. "What, as sheik, am *I* to have? The eight hundred piastres all go to the men; but for all my trouble in making them friendly to you, surely I ought to have a handsome sum," he whined. Had time been of no value to me it is possible that I might have escaped this ingenious extortion, but after a

long and hot talk I was glad to abate the sheik's demands to three hundred piastres.

While contending thus with him, I saw Nicola putting aside the animals bought for us, on an opposite slope, with their legs tied; around these, men had assembled, while hideous boys, nearly black, naked, and with bare crowns, shaven save for one central tuft of matted hair, forming a tangled tassel, were jumping about and screeching like demons, the fathers standing by approvingly. The little fiends were, with stones and sticks, directing scorpions up to the side of the helpless fowls, and provoking the reptiles to sting! The incident filled me with wrath, and I scattered the small crowd with my *corbash*, whereupon from afar the men asked why I was so angry. The sheik came up assuring me of his indignation with the boys and men, whom he beat in show, but I declared that I would have none of their abettors with me. When I saw this, there recurred to memory passages written in the temper of the French philosophers by men who theorise sitting at home at ease, descanting upon the innocence of the unsophisticated children of Nature.

It was late in the morning when all was prepared, and we mounted and turned towards Oosdoom. It was an amusing comment upon the sheik's estimate of our need of an escort of a hundred men that we found our original company was only increased by five. My irritation of last night and the morning only slowly subsided at sight of the marvels of the scene around us. As I rode ahead a young Arab of about twenty came up and kissed my hand, saying that he hoped I was not angry with him. I could not recognise him as an offender; his appeal, with an affectation of unblemished guilelessness, made me feel favourably towards him, and I asked his name. It was "Soleiman." Would I let him be my son? he asked. I agreed, although I was only seven years his senior. My prejudice did not prevent me from seeing that he had a pleasant face, and I could not retain my scowl

when he asked my name. Hunt he declared to be no name, and Holman he regarded as but very little better, but William, pronounced Wullaum, he found very good; this thawed me entirely. When we got to Wady Zuara Tahteh would I take him alone with me across the plain to the sea, to where I should do my writing each day? he asked. I agreed, for I was glad to practise his dialect, so he walked by my horse's head talking incessantly; after journeying a few miles I dismounted to fire off my double barrel and revolver at chosen marks with the unavowed object of impressing my companions with my means of defence. Farther on, when riding with the sea in view, I asked Soleiman to tell me why it was called "Bahr Lut." He looked ignorant, and asked, "Why was it, ya Wullaum?" and I told him the story of the destruction of the four cities of the plain, and of the escape of Lot and his daughters, and of the death of his wife, with the appeal of Lot that Zoar should be spared because it was *zorieh* (small). He knew of no near ruins except the dilapidated castle in the wady to which we were going; De Saulcy had reported the discovery of the four cities of the plain. But for a few acacia trees growing in the dry course of the storm-stream which we were following, there was no sign of vegetation anywhere. The uplands were gradually declining before us, and to the left we saw only ridges bordering the courses of ravines descending to the bed of the sea. To the right there were other heights with openings through which we could see towards Wady Akabah. In front was the deep ghor, with the bluest of lakes in the hollow, and beyond lay the amethystine mountains of Moab in the afternoon sun. I was too much occupied with the scene to talk. We arrived somewhat abruptly at the precipitous descent, with its ruined fortress below. On the walls of the castle were painted figures like the signs of the Zodiac which seemed of recent date, it was at the foot of this fortress that I was to live with my troop. I dismounted and led the party down the steep descent, while they followed

I made my plans with Soleiman, and we soon set off, taking the picture case mounted on a donkey to the margin of the sea, that I might choose my place of work and study the sunset effect while drawing in the outline. Glance where we would over the extensive plain and mountains, not a sign of humanity was before us. Getting out of the defile, we turned slightly to the right to reach the spur of Oosdoom, about a mile distant; a furlong beyond that point I made my way to the margin of the sea. There leaving my man to guard the ass, I strode about the hard drifts of the salt-encrusted shallow ridges to find the best site, and wandered to the end of a curve of drift; ten paces away was yet another turn; the salt surface intervening appeared firm enough to trust to with light and rapid steps; I essayed it, but soon found myself sinking into the mire. As I struggled, a story of my mother's cousin told me in childhood came into my mind. He had seen the veritable pillar of salt into which Lot's wife had been turned! and in escaping from some terrible danger he had nearly got swallowed up in a slime pit, but had saved himself by falling prostrate. I threw myself down on the salt surface to secure a wider support, and crawled to the firm ridge. I discovered afterwards there was no danger of sinking much below one's knees. The available spots for painting were now reduced to one or two, when the best had been chosen I employed Soleiman to lead the goat over the surface in order that I might scrutinise its manner of walking on the yielding crust, and the tone of the animal in shadow against the sea and bright distance.

With a few large stones I was able to make a firm foundation for my picture case, and placing another for a seat I proceeded to sketch out the landscape and lines of the composition. Soleiman, when unemployed, upset my gravity by sitting down exactly in front of me in utter bewilderment, staring with open mouth intently into my face.

In an hour I was steadily at work; my man kept

repeating the inquiry whether I had finished, but I could not reply. Every minute the mountains became more gorgeous and solemn, the whole scene more unlike anything ever portrayed. Afar all seemed of the brilliancy and preciousness of jewels, while near, it proved to be only salt and burnt lime, with decayed trees and broken branches brought down by the rivers feeding the lake. Skeletons of animals, which had perished for the most part in crossing the Jordan and the Jabbok, had been swept here and lay salt-covered, so that birds and beasts of prey left them untouched. It was a most appropriate scene for my subject, and each minute I rejoiced more in my work. While thus absorbed, Soleiman touched my arm and said, "My father, the sunset has come," and then he grew quite out of patience, and added, "In the dark how can we escape danger? In the light I can detect men from afar, but when the sun has gone, as we go back I can't see if they hide behind trees and shoot us." I answered, "My son, be obedient and patient till I have done my work. Keep silent until I am ready, and when I tell you we will hurry back to the tent."

When the stars were beginning to appear, I removed the ban of silence from the head of my "son," who was almost in desperation by this time. I tied up the umbrella and shut up my tools, while Soleiman led the donkey. We then together balanced the case on the creature's back, and, securing it, trudged away, not without a trace of ill-humour in my companion. But an Arab soon forgets discontent if you tell him a tale, and by the time we got to the opening in the cliff we were the best of friends. It was a necessary precaution to talk low ourselves, and to prevent our donkey from braying as we approached nearer to the encampment; this my "son" effected by a timely cuff, or sometimes by covering the creature's nostrils with his cloak. On arriving at the tent, water was brought me from a cistern near at hand. It was of the shade of London porter, which may have arisen from some colouring matter in the pit, or from the

tanning of the skin bottles; at any rate it was good enough to wash with, it served the cook's purpose and made excellent coffee. All looked home-like on my return; the light of the grate, where dinner was being prepared, was rivalled by the fire of a dead tree brought up by the Arabs, and set alight for their comfort. While I was having dinner I could hear Soleiman recounting my perplexing proceedings down on the beach, together with

BEDOUIN ROUND CAMP FIRE, WADY ZUARA.

murmuring, which convinced me that I should have to use all my tact to make the men stay a sufficient time for me to do my work.

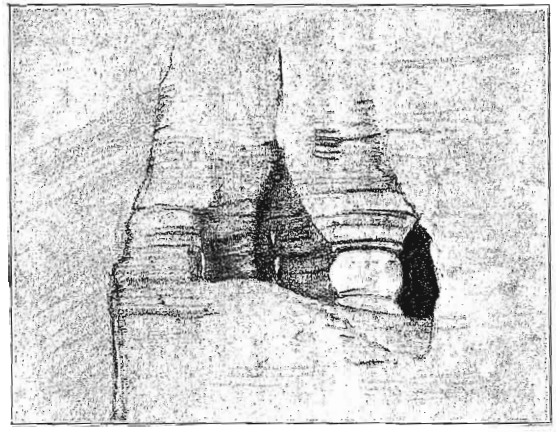
Nicola, when purchasing articles for the canteen in Jerusalem, had asked about tobacco, and I ordered a full supply to serve as presents to Arabs. He had then inquired whether he should buy me any pipe. The question made me wonder if when sitting on the pestilential margin of the sea, smoking would be a preservative of health, but I said, "Your *chibouques* are so long that

I can't smoke while I work." He declared that he could get very short pipes, upon which I commissioned him to find me one. On the journey, when he was riding by my side, I inquired whether he had got my pipe. "Yes," he said, "and as you might want to smoke on the road I did not pack it, but have it with me," then raising his hand to the nape of his neck he drew forth a jasmine tube about two feet long. The Bedouin, when their tobacco is exhausted, cut off a quarter of an inch of the nicotine end of this tube, and, mincing it up very fine, put the chips into the bowl, doing this each day until the flavour becomes mild indeed. I had made a handsome present to the sheik from my store of latakia, and now I portioned out a good quantity each night among the men.

When resting I was impressed by the solemn silence reigning around, broken only by the cries of wild creatures scared by our fires. Before retiring to sleep I sallied out with my gun to scale the nearer heights. The moon was still low, but bright, and as I looked down on my abode, the scene was the wildest that could be conceived. Salvator Rosa's retreat in the Abruzzi must have been tame in comparison. Down below, the illuminated tent stood at the foot of the high crag, on which was perched the castle turret. Our fires flickered upon its walls, while the moonlight modelled the greater heights of the gorge into pearl and ebony. My impulse was to begin a drawing, but spending time and energy thus might have hazarded the completion of my picture, so I returned to the tent and slept, notwithstanding the chattering of the party, who were still comparing the events of the day.

I took my breakfast before dawn, and made preparations for the day. Soleiman and I started with a mule to carry the picture, having a boy with us to take care of my horse, and I set to work with great eagerness. After painting about two hours, both my attendants came demanding of me that I should leave off and return. I charged them not to be foolish, and I treated with apparent unconcern the boy's assurance that the

animals would die for want of water. My work that day consisted in outlining the whole landscape and modelling one portion; thus when the sunset glow came I was prepared to commit myself to the full colouring of it. Making my observations and studies for the next day's painting, I left off just as dusk was at hand. The next day was Sunday, and I should have enjoyed a day of rest, had there been choice, to wander about the wild cliffs of Muhauwat and the mountains in the neighbourhood



NATURAL ARCHITECTURE, WADY ZUARA TAHTEH.

further to test the truth of De Saulcy's theory, but time was too precious.

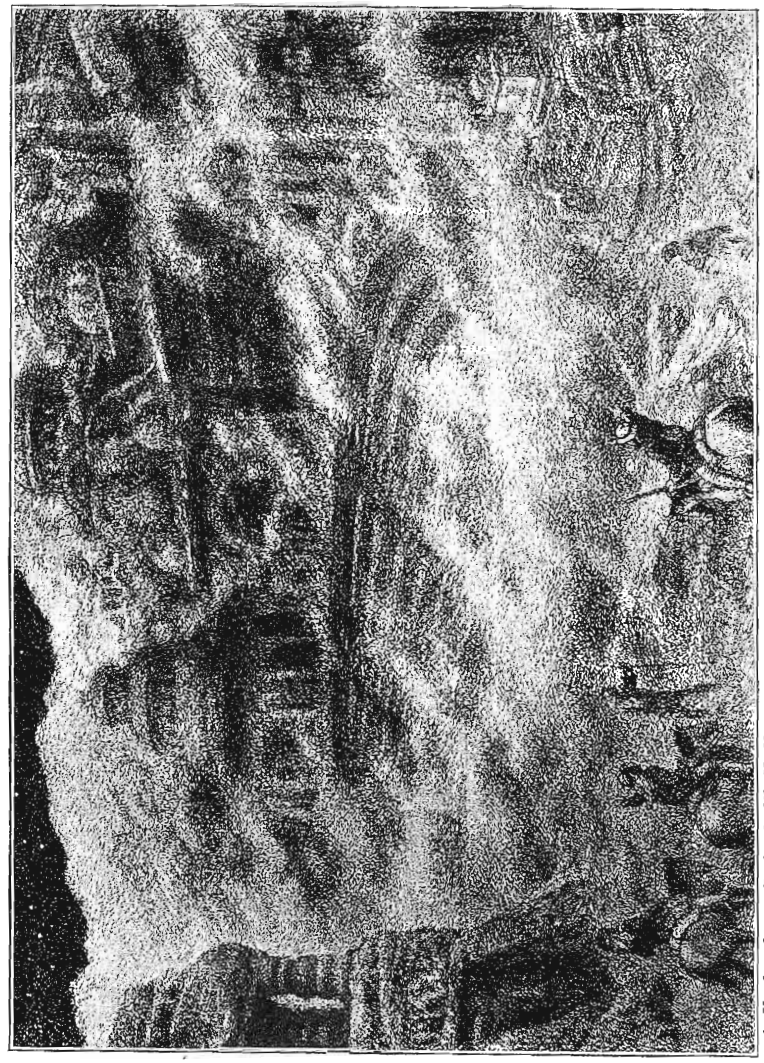
On the right of my encampment was a bluff of alluvial soil, evidently deposited in successive layers. The winter winds and water had disported themselves around this mass, and carried away the loose soil deposit wherever the superincumbent weight had not pressed this into columns and walls of strength; the outer mass fell into fairly perpendicular form, in which open galleries of perfect architectural character had been hollowed out. On the eastern cliffs of the Nile, above Luxor, I have since noticed apparently the same formation set up by

Nature, by which primitive builders have been inspired. So like to the manner of an Indian temple was this formation, that it was difficult at first not to regard the structure, simple as it was, as the work of man. Such examples of natural design led me to conclude that the Hindoos had derived their type of architecture from similar layers of alluvial deposit, shaped into form by the laws of gravity and the attrition of the elements.

While on this architectural question, a digression is not out of place concerning observations on similar but more complicated strata below Masada, encountered on my previous journey along the Dead Sea coast. The Beamonts and I had encamped not far from the margin of the sea, and made ready for our day's expedition while it was yet dark. Mounting our horses and looking round on the awful solitude with the heavy mist blanketing the uprising shore and the Dantesque desolation about us, the words of the English poet arose in my mind, and I uttered them aloud :—

> And then I looked up towards a mountain tract,
> That girt the region with high cliff and lawn ;
> I saw that every morning, far withdrawn
> Beyond the darkness and the cataract,
> God made Himself an awful rose of dawn,
> Unheeded ; and detaching, fold by fold,
> From those still heights and slowly drawing near,
> A vapour heavy, hueless, formless, cold,
> Came floating on for many a month and year.

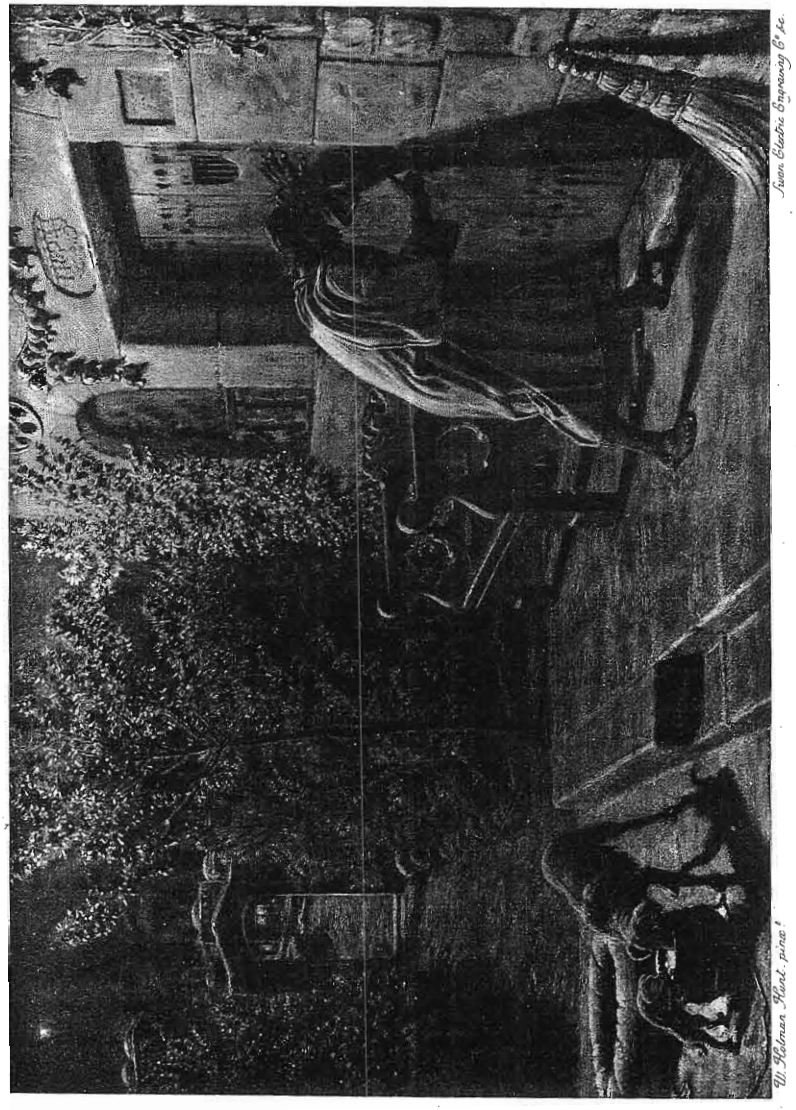
As we approached nearer, dark massive forms towered above the vapour, and through intervals of the grey clouding below which was dreamily raising itself. On longer and closer observation we discarded the notion that this background was merely a blacker cloud, or indeed of any stuff that could not brave the wind for seasons and for years. Pressing beyond the outer cloud curtain, it proved to be a mass of stratified rock fantastically shaped so that it appeared like edifices of a vast city. Close at hand, crenellated buttressed walls, bastioned by towers, appeared.



THE VISION CITY.

A. Hughes, from a Design by W. H. H.

These we had to skirt until we found a passage which allowed us to enter an inner circle, in which it needed little straining of the fancy to conceive that we stood before buildings of human architecture, for domes, topes, high-storeyed palaces, and temple pediments all reared themselves aloft, representing a many-platformed regal city. It was a new wonderland; in due order we ascended the successive slopes on which was based the superstructure. The ringing of our horses' hoofs on the broken shingle, and the resistance of solid walls to our slashing whips increased the illusion and awakened a chilly awe. We continued our way through the inner labyrinth of roads as we surveyed the dream city that wanted nothing but sign of life. No water lay in the hollows, no lights glimmered in the buildings, no voices but our own broke the silence. Feeling this want, we affected to be wizard awakeners of the slumbering guardians of the place and shouted out, "O Seneschal, come forth and take our message of peace to the prince." The only answer was our words returned by the echoing walls. As we were amusing our minds with somewhat mocking comparisons and speculations, the vapour showed signs of movement, the stars grew faint, and the dim glow of dawn warmed the heights of the great cliffs. As a dream is broken, so came the destroyer of night's dissemblings. The vision dissolved, and we saw only large and uncouth blocks of alluvial soil which had been cut through and worn away by floods and winds in the softer and less compressed and protected parts, just as it was in the gallery opposite my encampment, twenty miles to the south of the shore at Sebbeah. In the daylight it became evident that in successive floods the drift had been brought down into the chasm in which the Dead Sea lies, and that it must have originally formed a mass of rock of more than a hundred feet in height. Eddies had complicated the formations; but wherever the friable mass was moved away at the base, the upper surface was disturbed and fell, forming vertical lines, except where large stones



The Importunate Neighbour

and boulders were sufficiently supported to remain in layers, which formed beadings, mouldings, and sometimes extended friezes or ornamental cornices. Can it be possible that De Saulcy's Cities of the Plain were of this nature? But it would be a long digression to pursue this question.

My friends the Beamonts were equally enchanted with myself at this illusive city. The elder in his book refers to it as follows:—

> For more than a mile, as we proceeded up the ravine, with no light but the stars, its appearance struck us with wonder and surprise. Its lower stratum of rocks was of the dark ironstone we had seen yesterday; its upper layer was invariably the white chalky clay which we had noticed in the Wady Zuara; and Nature, who, in her playful moods, creates objects which man may imitate but cannot surpass, had carved this friable and plastic material into the resemblance of a great city. As we rode through its silent and apparently deserted streets there were detached altars, spacious squares, domed temples, battlemented forts, palaces decorated with friezes, cornices, and pilasters, and theatres with tiers of seats and rows of columns, but no spectators. There reigned the most profound silence, and the city appeared wrapped in slumber, or, like the court of King Arthur and Guinevere, fast bound in the enchanted cave waiting in a trance for the enchanter, and presently He came, for as we passed the last portal the first rays of the sun struck it, and the magic city, without a rustle, a whisper, or a sound, then vanished and was gone.

Returning to the story of the third day of my sojourn at Wady Zuara, after being detained an hour in the tent I set out with Soleiman to the place of work as usual, seeing no one in all the great range before us. Descending at the foot of the gorge into the plain, it was curious that at as distinct a level as that of water, but perfectly unseen and recognised only by the scent, we met with a thick atmosphere smelling of fir, juniper, pitch, and who knows what beside. At this point I walked backwards and forwards to test the fact, which was invariable day after day. Below were flies like house-flies, but dwarfish, against which one was instinctively on guard, but so

innumerable were they that, on opening one's lips to speak a crowd would enter. And when partridges amongst the underwood offered themselves for my larder, Beelzebub's creatures disturbed by the raising of the gun, made the birds invisible at the critical moment. At first I apprehended great hindrance during my painting from these pests, but for some reason no fly ever bothered me when once I was seated under my umbrella.

Each evening I put the sunset glow upon the portion of my day's work, and blocked out the shadows and forms of my painting for the morrow, so that although the effect was, till past mid-day, quite different to what I sought for, I was able counting with certainty upon a cloudless sunset, to lay in my work, for it was important with the quickly drying paint to complete every atom that I had undertaken, and to make necessary notes for the morrow. My "son" left the leather water bottle in the shade within reach and wandered about, coming back at lunch time, when we ate together of bread and fruit and conversed. He was a Moslem who would have died for the prophet, but he knew nothing of Mahomet's history, and when I told stories of the prophet's life and the establishment of his religion he gazed into my face with a breathless attention. I condemned the jealousies and wars between tribes of Arabs which kept the country in barbarism, but he justified these from the example of European nations and the Crimean War then raging; the knowledge of current events was strikingly general among otherwise ignorant Arabs. Lunch finished, I resumed my silent work. I scarcely ever left the spot, even for a few yards knowing how precious time was—more so than I professed to believe—for it was certain that my men, although engaged to stay longer than would be needful, would only by great luck be kept as patient as would be absolutely necessary.

As the sun was going down one night Soleiman fervently urged my departure but I was unyielding. At dusk, when grudgingly I gave the sign and we lifted the case on to the ass's back, the animal proved to be full of

fun, and when he found both our hands engaged he slipped out of the way, leaving us with our burden in the air. It was trying to be thus foiled repeatedly, and when at last the packing had been done and my paint-box fixed on to the load, I felt the dews of evening menacingly chilly. It was not a place to disregard such admonitions, so I put no restraint on my impulse but, making my gun my partner, I waltzed about fifty yards or more onwards. When I halted and regarded Soleiman he seemed disturbed and like one possessed of a terrible secret. I became concerned; he stalked forward with arms uplifted and when close to me he flung them around my neck, saying, "Until now you were my father, henceforth let me be your brother. You are indeed inspired, you dance like a dervish; you *are* one. Can you do it again?" "Yes, my 'brother,'" I said and away I went a second and a third time, indeed often on the way back until I felt no more chill. We arrived at our cheerful tent which soon became more lively than usual, for during my dinner I could hear Soleiman recounting my exploits as a dervish, and there were frequent yells of delight. When coffee was brought Nicola told me that the Arabs desired to have an interview with me, and I invited them in. Sitting down at the door with the customary salutations finished, and after I had given them tobacco, the elder whose name was Saleh, repeated what Soleiman had said and then asked me if I would do them the favour to come out and dance. I felt obliged to decline, pointing out however that if any wished to see me dance they might come down the next evening at sunset, but they pleaded that the tent could not be left without danger and I could see they retired greatly disappointed.

Some of these men had the most perfect crania, one was worthy of Melanchthon, another equalled Bacon, but after careful watch and inquiry of Nicola I found that the only manner in which they had exhibited superior intelligence during their fortnight's stay with us was in stealing the sugar from our canteen. I sometimes provided these

men with ammunition that they might go out and shoot game for me and themselves, but they preferred starvation to personal exertion.

The next day my "brother" was full of excitement about the simple event of last evening. "Ya Wullaum," he said, "the sheik has no son, I am his nephew, and on his death I am to be sheik. Let Nicola go back to Jerusalem, he is not good, we don't want him, but you stay with us always. The sheik has a daughter of right age, you shall marry her, and you shall be sheik before me. You shall lead us in our raids and battles, and when we are in peace and encamped you shall be our dervish and dance to us. We have arranged it; so let it be." I wished to avoid wounding the poor fellow's feelings, and my reply was, "My 'brother,' I have a father and a mother in England, and I have promised them, if God wills, that I will return and take the picture of this place with me. How can I make their hearts sad by staying here?" "But," he returned, "you can make the paper speak; write to say that we want you to be our sheik and let Nicola take the picture to England, he is no good." Feeling perhaps that by giving me time to think over the proposal my obstinacy would give way, he inquired where I was born, and then what was London, was it a mountain or a plain? In return to my explanation he exclaimed in disdain, "Not a city, not like Jerusalem with walls and gates and shops? Never, my 'brother,' I will never believe that you are a *belladi*—a citizen—never! I know you are an English bedawee, and you were born in a tent." I lost considerably in his estimation by refusing this honourable origin. I think he disbelieved me for he still harped upon his project. All his stately proposals with the secret dreams thereby excited in my wandering brain of overcoming neighbouring tribes, dislodging the Turks from Judea, restoring the Jews to their long-lost kingdom, and the general settlement of the Eastern question, would have been tempting even to a peaceful P.R.B.; but there were two terrible marplots in

the way of the romance who would have had to be reckoned with, the one being Louis Napoleon, the other the English Foreign Minister; so I slept in peace, leaving the work of bringing back Israel to some one richer in meekness and otherwise more equal than myself to the task of establishing the Kingdom of Peace on earth.

The plain to the north of Oosdoom was broadened by the narrowing of the sea at this point; the beach to within a short distance of the sea margin had a thick growth of juniper. It was only on the northern bend of the shore that the water was pressing down the level on which the trees grew and submerging them. My daily route with Soleiman lay through the south-western fringe of this wood. One morning on my way to the place of work we traversed a new path, and in this track I was surprised at finding a circular aperture in the earth about eight feet in diameter, this brought me to a standstill; had the hole been perfectly vertical I should have concluded that it had been made for a well, but then there would have been the puzzle who could have expected to find sweet water within half a mile of the pestilential lake. The aperture was remarkable in being oblique at an angle of about forty-five from west to east. My guide declared that a star had made it, and that some bedouin on the height had seen it fall. His explanation obtained little attention from me, but on further examination the astounding fact was made evident that the alluvium, on which we were walking, which had been penetrated, was only a crust of about twelve feet thick, and below it was a cavity of some forty feet in depth. Vertically under the aperture the débris was lying scattered at its bottom. The sides of the cutting were singularly clean. I made my road along this line at other times, but looked at in any available light I could not discover the hole on the surface of the lower level which an aerolite must have made. The Oosdoom Mount rising up to the south-west of our wady accounted, in its extension towards the east, for the narrowing of the sea,

to a mile in width opposite its cliffs, but the constriction continued along the west shore for another mile or two northward; beyond this the sea was about seven miles in maximum width, and the intervening shore line formed the bay with the submerged forest.[1] As I stood now examining the depth of the opening below the upper crust, on which dwarf trees were thick between me and the margin of this bay, I recalled my previous observations of the sinking of the land, and the height of the trees fairly corresponded with the depth of the cave spreading out below. The mystery of the engulfment of the forest was now explained: the surface had been upraised by volcanic action, and had so existed long enough for a thicket to grow upon it, and now the weight of the water and the strength of the currents from the Jabbok and the Jordan were gradually pressing it with its trees down to its original level. It was impossible for me to find time or means to descend, or I might have discovered whether the sea came through the soil in this cavern of Dis; if so, where could the margin of this Stygian lake be found? and one's mind faltered to consider what fresh marvels might reveal themselves if one could have descended. Had I done so I might have brought back a record that would have fulfilled all the dreams of the poets; and felt a tremor greater than that experienced before, when I had entered the cave at Oosdoom.

E l' occhio riposato intorno mossi,
Dritto levato, e fiso riguardai,
Per conoscer lo loco dove io fossi.
Vero è, che in su la proda mi trovai
Della valle d' abisso dolorosa,
Che tuono accoglie d' infiniti guai.
Oscura, profonda era e nebulosa

Tanto, che, per ficcar lo viso al fondo,
Io non vi discernea veruna cosa.
Or discendiam quaggiù nel cieco mondo,
Incominciò il Poeta tutto smorto:
Io sarò primo, e tu sarai secondo.

[1] See Map, Chapter xvi.

With well-nigh the whole of my small reserve of cash I had sent a muleteer one morning to some Arabs settled a little distance beyond the extreme end of the sea, for the purpose of getting food for the animals, and he had to return by the way of the sea. While I was at work I heard Soleiman intercepting him and claiming part of his perquisites, the muleteer then went on with his provender to the camp.

To secure peace from Soleiman was still a difficulty when I was making notes of the effect of the setting sun, and when afterwards we were packing up, he still betrayed impatience and anxiety. This possibly arose as much from danger of *ghouls* and *afreets* as from robbers. On the way home, by dancing and talking in turns I could be certain of restoring his good-humour, although occasionally he would be seized with a fright, and then he would complain bitterly of our delay. On one occasion when we had entered the wady and looked at the glow of flames on the cliffs, he motioned silence and walked on with the greatest stealthiness, we thus got so close to the camp that we could see the shadows of men above the fires and hear the chatter; then Soleiman turned and gravely whispered to me to take his *abbia* and hold the ass's halter, and immediately smother any cry that the beast might raise his head to make. When I was prepared he went along crouching, and as he got forward I could just see him taking to hands and knees. The ass frequently raised his head to bray, but I as often stifled him. There was a pause during which the talking was more audible. My suspense was broken by the sudden salutation of Soleiman when he reappeared at the ridge and by his call to me that all was right. This reconnaissance was made because he heard strange voices in the camp, and he had to ascertain that it had not been taken by a hostile force during our absence, in which case escape for ourselves by another way would have been necessary. The strangers proved to be of a friendly tribe.

Next morning, to my surprise, I beheld a man in the

shallows scraping up salt, and he astonished me when he calmly maintained that he had an established right to take it from the spot, but we persuaded him to accept a few piastres and go elsewhere, which he did quietly, we never saw him again.

It had been said in Jerusalem that there was a ford across the sea in this part, but I never saw wading beyond the near shallows, and all denied knowledge of any way across.

My man entertained me with a story of how, with a Frank traveller at Petra, at a critical moment when the Arabs there were about to rob and maltreat him, my "brother" had rescued him, using his drawn sword freely, and so saved the khowagha's life, his story was told with great storm and fury of action, and as the Edomites have a very bad character and are not a bit ashamed of it, it was a pleasure to be assured that for once some of them had been punished.

Before starting in the morning, I used with content to observe my goat searching out the dry grass and stalks in the water-courses and clefts of the rock. At this point I found myself becoming seriously unwell. The doctor had provided me with medicine against fever but not against other ills. I could not leave off work and must eat what there was. I determined therefore to rely upon my stock of arrack, the only strong drink we had, I took it with hot water as a night potion when in bed and slept profoundly ; I usually made a trap with the tent door to prevent any one entering without disturbing me ; on awakening one morning the door was down and all inside was in disorder. I was quite restored in health and jumped up to search about, I found by the marks in the sand that the intruder had been the greedy goat, who was not disposed to do his fair share of the fasting.