

## Literature, &amp;c.

THE BRITISH MAGAZINES,  
FOR NOVEMBER.From Fraser's Magazine.  
SCENE IN THE DESERT.

We were a party of ten, chiefly merchants. Five servants accompanied us; and five camels were loaded with the merchandize and luggage of the party. We were travelling from Orfa to Aleppo; and had been some days on our journey. One of my companions was an old Armenian, who was travelling with some valuable bales of goods, accompanied by his son, a lad of sickly complexion, but beautifully moulded, though pallid features. One would have thought that a long ride of a day, and the scenes and hardships we encountered would have completely overcome him; yet he bore up surprisingly, and was as little fatigued at the end as at the commencement of the day. Three were Englishmen; employed, in some nameless traffic; and one was a tall, raw-boned, cannie Scotchman, but what brought him there I could never find out. The old Armenian soon gained my confidence and esteem. He was an elderly merchant, with a long flowing white beard, that at once commanded respect, and reminded you of the old patriarchs who formerly owned the land.

You in England attach little of romance to the name of merchant. But here the roving adventures of Sinbad the sailor are oftener realised, than the quiet life of the smallest green-grocer or greenest huckster in the vicinity of little Chelsea. The merchant here travels with loaded pistols and armed servants. Instead of his box at Clapham, fat wife, five children, and early dinner, he has the range of the wilderness, a black slave, five camels, and now and then some milk and oatmeal. Such was my Armenian.

We had travelled for many hours in hopes of reaching a well before night, whither our guide, one of the el Beshir tribe, whom we had picked up two or three days before, had promised to conduct us. In truth, we and our horses stood much in need of refreshment. The heat of the sun had been intolerable during the day; and the small supply of water we had thought it necessary to bring was completely exhausted. Still as our jaded beasts plodded on, stumbling over the smoothest part of our route our eyes were in anxious search of the promised resting place for the evening. It seemed, however, that we had at last arrived at the loneliest and most desolate region which had been frowned on by the Creator,—not a blade of grass to feed a locust, or deck its withered barrenness. In the rapidly closing twilight there seemed to be a low range of what appeared sand-hills, the only objects that relieved the sameness of the scene. I called our guide to me, and questioned him closely as to the distance of the well. He seemed somewhat confused; but his answers were prompt, and there was no reason for suspecting him of any thing beyond perhaps some chance mistake in the path he brought us, which we might easily recover by daylight at the worst. Still I could not help suspecting wrong about the villain. He had a peculiar manner of looking from under his turban, and never directly encountering your gaze with honest manliness; while I could see that he was constantly casting hurried glances round our party, and seemed not a little uneasy, as though anticipating every moment the denouement of some expected event. I communicated my suspicions to my Armenian friend; but the old man assured me that he had travelled to Aleppo twenty times before, and that this was his last trip; arguing, therefore, how unlikely it would be that one who had travelled it so often should meet with any accident in this his last journey. "I have made," said the good old man, "more than is sufficient for myself and my son; nay, I am rich. I shall settle down on my return to Damascus, where I trust the evening of my days shall be calm and unclouded, and God will enable me to expend with justice and generosity, untingered with vanity, those stores which the industry of youth and toil of manhood have enabled me to acquire. And then, my son," said he, patting the head of the beautiful boy who rode beside him, "thou shalt be the prop of thy old father; and when thou speakest, he shall fancy at times that he still hears the sweet tones of thy mother's voice." Here my friend seemed overcome by some melancholy recollections, and the big tears chased one another unheeded down the furrowed cheeks of the old man. "Let me look once more upon her picture." His son seemed to under-

stand his wish at once; and took from his breast a small miniature richly set in brilliants, and which was suspended from his neck by a massive gold chain, and handed it to his father. The latter gazed on it fondly for a moment; then kissing it with reverence, returned it to his son. "I let him wear it," said he, turning as though to excuse a weakness he had exhibited before a stranger—"I always let him wear it: he is so like her that I cannot find it in my heart to part them."

I felt something very like moisture in my own eyes at this scene, and turning to wipe it away, saw our guide gazing with an expression not to be mistaken at the glittering jewel which the Armenian was handing back to his son. I had little time, however, to think about the matter, for one of the hindmost of our party here called out that his horse could go no farther; and, in sooth, when I looked back the poor beast was stretched upon his side, and his rider hanging helplessly over him. There was nothing for it, but to leave him behind us, or bivouac where we were. The first step which I took was to seize the bridle of our guide, and desire him to dismount—a command which he seemed very unwilling to obey; but the motion of my hand to the holsters soon brought him to his senses, and he got off with a look of dogged and vindictive sullenness. I was determined in case of treachery, to make our guide pay the well merited forfeit, and therefore took from him the means of his escape by depriving him of his horse. We were soon busy with our preparations for passing the night where we were. Our carpets were spread, and I was discoursing with the tall, raw-boned, high cheeked, and curly haired Scotchman, I have mentioned, as to the practicability of getting some refreshment for our tired horses when my practised ear detected at a distance the sound of cavalry advancing at a hand gallop. I shouted, so horse! to horse. The sound I heard drew nigher—every one could detect it now; and in a moment each jumped on the horse nearest him. The guide made an attempt to seize on the bridle of his; but I collared him, if catching hold of a bundle of rags, which gave way in my grasp, can be so called, and immediately desisting, he stood calmly, with his arms folded. In another second those we had heard were upon us. Down they came within a few feet of us at full speed, and suddenly drew up with their lances coched, the points within a few inches of the bodies of the foremost of our little troop, I had lost the opportunity of mounting my horse, owing to the polite attention bestowed on our guide, and had now the satisfaction of seeing my charger quietly led off by one of our new acquaintances from the place where he had stood a little in our rear. We were surrounded; yet each of us presented his gun steadily at the nearest of the apparitions, which had thus risen suddenly from the dark bosom of the desert.

I stood with the Armenian on my right hand, his son on the left; and beyond him again, with his arms still folded, stood our guide, dismounted like myself. For a few moments we remained motionless. I was beginning to flatter myself that our well prepared and steady front would have kept them at bay for ever; for I knew the cowardice of an Arab, and his great horror generally of actual bloodshed. "Nay," thought I, "they may be friends, or at least not foes. There mode of salutation is a little curious, but what of that?" Here I felt the Armenian's son lean heavily over his right hand on my shoulder, and one by one I felt something like the first drops of a thunder shower fall upon my cheek. "My poor—poor father," muttered the unfortunate lad, "don't tell him—pray don't tell him!" I felt his weight increase on my shoulder, when all at once, he, or, as I should more properly say, the body, was chucked back with violence and fell to the ground on the other side of the horse. The hand of our guide was at his breast, and had already grasped the glittering miniature I mentioned above: when the old Armenian, who had overheard the half muttered words of his dying son, wheeled his horse suddenly round, and with the speed of lightning, unsheathed his yataghan, aimed one blow: in another moment the head of our quondam guide literally rolled at his horse's feet. The whole thing was the act of a few seconds. The rascal had evidently stabbed the poor boy, as he stood by his side, for the sake of the gold chain and jeweled picture; but he had little idea of the latent vigor which lurked beneath the snowy hairs of the old Armenian. I never saw anything half so grand in my life, as the flashing eyes and dilated form of the father, when, stooping from his horse, he raised the body of his son from the

ground with as much ease as though it were an every day feat of horsemanship; and, placing him before him across the saddle, rose in his stirrups and stretching forth his sabre, awaited calmly the coming shock. Nor did he wait long. The death of our guide, who had evidently betrayed us, sealed our doom. A loud cry from the cannie Scotchman, who had thought to escape without striking a blow for his comrades, announced to us that he had the points of six or seven lances in his body; but no one had either time or curiosity to look round. The work of destruction had begun. My left shoulder soon felt the point of a lance, but a well aimed ball from my pistol rolled him who wielded it in the dust. I had given up all hopes of saving my life; and having little care for what might happen, consequently fought cool and desperately. Flinging the discharged pistol with all my force, and with good effect, at another of my assailants, I drew forth my second and last; but there seemed some pause in the fight. Our foes, though they might have numbered perhaps a hundred, seemed almost to hang back for an instant, struck with superstitious awe at the desperate valor of the Armenian. When my eye caught his, he stood like a rock, with his dead son at his feet. His horse had fallen; but on foot or on horseback, the old man still fought on. He was covered with blood, evidently very feeble; but his face was calm, and dale as a statue's. Our line had been broken; swords, pistols and dead bodies lay around me. I and the Armenian were the sole survivors.

Just as the clearing smoke and momentary pause enabled me to catch the coup d'œil I have described, an Arab, dressed in a more costly garb than ordinary, and probably the leader of the attack, made a dash past me, and lifted his yataghan to strike the Armenian from behind. "It's my last bullet," thought I, "but it cannot be helped." I raised my arm quickly. There was but a flash in the pan, and the sword of the Arab sunk deep into the skull of the Armenian, who fell forward without a groan, upon the body of his son. With the speed of lightning I recoiled my pistol and bounding to the side of the Arab leader, fired with my pistol almost touching his temple. His skull seemed literally blown to atoms, and the mingled brain and blood were spirted into my face. In a moment I was seated in his saddle; but the gallant steed refused to stir, and pawing the ground stooped his nostrils towards the lifeless trunk of his fallen master. The delay of an instant would be fatal. I felt, when again mounted, as though I still had a chance, and unsheathing my poinard, buried it to the hilt in the haunch of the noble animal I bestrode. One furious plunge forward carried me into the midst of my astonished assailants, and waving round my head my sabre, which I had rapidly exchanged for the poinard, I found myself in a few more seconds full twenty yards distant from the murderous robbers.

A loud cry from my rear soon announced that I was not to be permitted to escape un molested; and when I had ridden at full speed about a mile, I turned in my saddle to count my pursuers. I knew well that none but those whose horses were freshest and fleetest would be sent on such an errand; and after a long and steady gaze through the gathering darkness, I thought that I could just count six, and noted with pleasure, that each moment widened the distance between us. Accident had probably enabled me to possess myself of the best steed in the whole troop. She was a beautiful mare, of powerful bone and muscle, black as the raven's wing, and fleet as the wind. The caparisons she wore were of the richest description, and it was with pleasure that I noticed the handle of two pistols protruding from the holsters of the saddle. I felt a renovated vigor, and suddenly, from a total disregard of life became filled with a nervous desire to cling to it. A few minutes previously I was powerless, and in the hands of a foe, whose unrelenting nature when once blood was shed I well knew. But now—what a change! I was mounted on one of the fleetest and hardest animals in the world, completely armed and equipped; whilst every moment widened the distance between me and my pursuers. At first I had allowed the mare to take what direction she pleased,—my only care being to keep her at the top of her speed. I now saw that she was making for what I had taken at first for a low range of sand hills, and which now began to loom larger as I drew nigher. Then for the first time it flashed across me, that the mare was only carrying me, in all probability, to some encampment of those who had recently attacked us;

where doubtless, my appearance on horse and the accoutrements of their charge would be the certain signs to seal our fate. What was to be done? Already I fancied that I discerned through the distance the watchfires of the encampment, and that dusky figures were occasionally flitting between me and the light. I strove to divert the mare from the course which she was so steadily pursuing, but in vain; and found to my mortification, that my efforts were impeding her progress, whilst I was sensible that she was gradually losing the use of the hind leg on the side which I had pierced with my dirk. My hopes extended to reaching the range of hills before me, where I purposed mounting, and seeking for some place where I might lie concealed, till my pursuers had abandoned their chase. In the darkness of the night favored my object, and as soon as I approached the first even ground, I reined in my steed, well as I could, though she acted as if she seemed endowed with a wish to carry me on in spite of myself, as though desirous to avenge the death of her former master, by bearing his destroyer to doom not less deplorable.

As soon as I had somewhat checked her progress, drawing the pistols from the holsters, I threw them on the ground, and then immediately flung myself from the saddle, and landed fortunately without any material injury. Away dashed the mare down a dark glen near which had dismounted, and I heard with pleasure the sound of her hoofs against the shingles which covered the ground in the direction she had taken, as I guessed that the noise would probably mislead my pursuers; nor was I mistaken, for about a minute I heard them advancing. Luckily, the ground about me was over run with low, thorny bushes, and into the nearest of these I crept. Presently I rushed past at full speed; one grazed a bush in which I had taken shelter. The excitement of that moment was worth a million. Presently, every sound of hoof departed, and a horrid stillness succeeded, which recalled me to a sense of my helpless situation. I was in a country unknown to me; a price set on my head, as it were; and it seemed as though I had exchanged a brief death for one of starvation, and was doomed to die some time and oft, ere I should be released from my sufferings. In addition to other annoyances, I found the shoulder where I had been wounded growing sore, and my left arm perfectly useless, at least for any protracted or violent exertion. Yet the love of life grows strong with the chances of losing it are greatest; knowing that those who were hunting me down would soon turn, when they found the cheat I played them, I lost no time hurrying on, it mattered not whether provided it was in some direction to the side of the route we had followed in the chase.

How lifeless—how still the palpable darkness of that night, which had its black pall over those wild regions! I was faint and thirsty; but the love of life still urged me on, and when daylight broke I was many a mile from the scene of the recent butchery. Up rose the golden sun! how beautiful! how glorious! A mist was before my eyes, and I knew that I was dying; yet believe me that never was I so happy in my life. I danced, I sung, and threw my arms up in a wild delirium of joy; in other words, all that I had gone through, combined with the heat of the sun on my bare head, had driven me into a high fever. It was the world to me, or I to the world. I was about to quit it in a delirious, insane mirth. It is horrible—horrible when I call to mind the frantic exclamations and blasphemies which I then uttered. I forgot what happened after that; had thrown myself, in a state of exhaustion, on the ground; but recovered sensibility found me stretched in the tent of an humble fellah, whose wife was leaning over me, wiping my mouth with a greasy fragment of a sponge. But to make my tale a long one, or detail a number of interesting situations through which I had to pass to my final recovery, suffice it to say that I did recover, and was saved. I had been found by the Arab, brought to his tent, and there treated with an hospitality that would have put many a civilized savage to the blush. The obscurity of my retreat preserved me from the vengeance of those to whom I had so narrowly escaped; and the increasing heat of the summer drove up their pasturage, drove them to other regions in search of maintenance, and here I am, to conclude sitting by the banks of the Nile, whilst, like a fool, I have suffered my pipe to go out during the narration.

ADVERTISEMENTS  
We do pages more an advert Mr. Thor it from hi in a few n a pension services. be relied v of strict v corroborat afford an sufferings Tom is a nat best exa backwood the age of Rangers, expressly frontiers. he was on der the co who were stockade, present v thing mo dalia. T istence; a one vast last ment about hal at night near the On the moved o the India a corn a struck a proceede when i was cov full view ambusca deny ro party o Lieuten wounded gins. It was had fall was hur hung in Under c ving co sing tha events it rescue t force. through and rose the anim dismount had not nued to confiden retreat, before h a tree. and he n from bel cloud of him, dis Indians. One of t loading a delibe fell. M smoke, t turned o hailed h me? On l speaker named I on the s 'no, I'll take I can leg is st Hig picking bone w ceeded him to f own w fright a Higgin foot. S was su setting 'now, you an —instr the hig the gre ed his The ly open enemy, as he p gether thicket of the served stances treated tion, he