

THE GREAT SAHARA.

There Have Been Many Erroneous Ideas Concerning It.

One-fifth of the whole African continent is desert, the area being estimated by Mr. Ravenstein at over two and a quarter million square miles, of which all but a small fraction is contained in the track of land popularly known as the Sahara. Except for some school children who knew better, and school teachers who were instrumental in that being so, the misconception of the Sahara, which is widespread, would be practically universal. The average man pictures the Sahara as a vast sea of sand, for the most part below sea level, across which the camel speeds before the poison blast of the simoon from oasis to oasis. Schemes for flooding the Sahara have come before the public, occasionally, and we have read accounts of the vast inland sea which might be formed, rivalling the Mediterranean in size, giving a southern seacoast to Morocco and Algeria and admitting steamers directly to the wealthy states of the Sudan. The Sahara, is known to the geographer, corresponds badly with the conception; for, in fact, there is no risk of the "ship of the desert" ever being supplanted by the ships of the sea. Few parts are below sea level, and they are small and scattered. In the interior the desert is a plain high above sea level, covered with vast dunes of red sand in many parts; in others it is an elevated plateau with lofty mountain ranges of bare rocks intersected by stone valleys. It is arid, save where a spring bubbles up and gives rise to a small oasis of grass and palm-trees. The Sahara proper is unknown, except for a few trade routes regularly traversed by Arabs, and occasionally by adventurous Europeans. There utilize the cases as resting places, stepping-stones as it were, and keep up communication between the wealthy Mohammedan states round Lake Chad in the south, and Tripoli, Tunis, Algiers, or Morocco on the Mediterranean. Between the trades routes all is a bank of sand or barren rock. Exploration is only possible when water as well as food can be carried, and this condition has practically stopped all attempts at discovery for the present, on account of the great expense and the purely scientific nature of the possible return. A railway running from the French possessions on the Mediterranean across the desert to Timbuktu, the scarcely-known trade-centre near the Niger, is talked of. Such a line may be constructed in the future, but the difficulties are enormous, much greater than those overcome by the Russians in the Transcaspian line through the deserts of Central Asia.

Armour's Impetuous Kinsman.

It has been a matter of current report for years among Board of Trade men that Phil Armour has no poor relations. "He will not allow any of them to remain poor," a veteran of the Board remarked, by way of explanation of this unusual good fortune of a rich man. "He makes them all rich." "I have heard this story before," Mr. Armour remarked with a smile, when one of his friends asked him about it the other day. "But it's a mistake. I have enough of them." Then the big packer burst out in a laugh and his friend knew that a good story was coming. "One of the poor kind—he lives down in Illinois—is one of the most persistent men I ever knew. He keeps writing and writing for money all the time. He is not a bad fellow, only impudent, and if he displayed the same energy in attending to business that he does in writing to me he would have been rich a long time ago. Well, he kept sending one letter after another, saying that he only had \$500 he would be all right. He repeated this so often that one day I told my secretary to write that he wouldn't bother me for a year I would send him \$500." "Well, sir," and Mr. Armour's sides shook with laughter, "As soon as the mails could bring a reply I got it. He said, make it \$1,000 and two years," and I thought it was such a clever turn that I sent the money." "What happened next?" "In about three months he wrote again, saying the agreement was off because his wife hadn't been included."

Where the Living are Buried.

From evidence difficult to dispute, it appears that in the Chinese Empire, old, incurably diseased, and hopelessly depraved persons are frequently buried alive to rid the community of the burden and responsibility of their care-taking. This arrangement is the result of a mutual understanding, the victims assenting to and at times assisting in the preliminary ceremonies. The usage seems to have been recognised by the highest authorities, and the burials have certainly been conducted with the sanction of the ruling power. Great preparations are made, and there is much ado, and sometimes a show of grief, but a great deal of the latter is evidently perfunctory, as there is all-round feeling of satisfaction on the part of the spectators, and more or less complacency in the mind of the victim, who is comforted by the assurance that he is fulfilling a tradition, and will earn the respect of his descendants.

Mice Made to Work.

A Scotsman has invented a thread-spinning apparatus, and is said to have trained two mice to work it. The mechanical principle of the contrivance is a small mill which is operated by the paws of the mice. They can each wind on and off from 100 to 120 pieces of thread per day, and to do this they must supply a motor power by which a course of 10 1/2 miles could be traversed. It is asserted that the mice perform this task daily without apparent fatigue, and that a halfpennyworth of flour furnishes them with food enough for five weeks. During that time the little animals spun about 3,850 threads each, a yard and a half in length.

Unfair Discrimination.

"Are you a salesman here?" asked the man who wanted to buy something. "Sir," said the youth, drawing himself up with dignity, "there are over 100 young women employed in this establishment, and every one of them is known as a sales-lady. I object to the discrimination. I insist upon being referred to as a sales-gentleman."

In times of war the armies of the European nations could be raised to 9,366,000 men, and the daily expenses would be nearly £4,000,000.

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CIMARRON'S HISTORIC BARROOM.

The Landlord Proud that Twenty-five Men Have Been Slain There.

"Cimarron was a lively town in the seventies," said a land surveyor from New Mexico. "I have seen Clay Allison ride into the place with a following of cowboys and start in to make a night of it. He would buy out Lambert's barroom to begin with, turn everybody out of the room except his own crowd, and then their fun would be fast and furious. On such an occasion I glanced through the window and saw a cowboy dancing naked on the counter to the accompaniment of yells and pistol shots from his comrades."

"Through this little adobe town among the foothills, three-quarters Mexican in its population, came and went the various bad men of the region. Many of them went no further, dying there with their boots on in quarrels over land and stock transactions, politics, women, cards, or in the ambitious attempt to assert their supremacy as desperadoes."

"When I last visited Cimarron, in 1878, the town was quiet, the cowboys being all out on the ranges gathering beef cattle in the fall round-up. It was the same old place, with its flat-roofed adobe buildings straggling along the banks of the ravine through which the Cimarron River flows, its few pitch-roofed, whitewashed residences of the wealthier people, and Lambert's. At that excellent hostelry of sanguinary record I was welcomed by the host, the most genial and pacific of Frenchmen, who, as we chatted together over a glass of native wine, spoke with evident pride of the tragic events connected with his historic barroom."

"Twenty-five men have been killed in this room," he said, "seven in one year. Look at this," and he led me to one corner and pointed to two great splashes, dull red in color, upon the wall, one above the other. "These are the blood stains made when Pancho was killed."

"Pancho was a Mexican desperado, and between him and Clay Allison enmity had long existed. Allison rode into town one day and fell to drinking, quickly enough, as he usually did in the beginning. As soon as Pancho heard that Allison was in town he likewise began to drink, and then the townspeople looked for difficulty between the two. They did not meet until late in the evening, when, as Allison stood in Lambert's barroom, his elbow resting on the counter, Pancho came in and walked over to the further corner of the room. Two other Mexicans entered with him, one of whom took a position a little in the rear of Allison, while the other threw himself in a lounging attitude upon a corner of the billiard table in the centre of the room, and taking a revolver from his pocket laid it on the cloth."

"To these manoeuvres to distract his attention Allison gave no apparent heed, but kept his eye on Pancho, who began to talk to him, proposing that they adjust their differences in a friendly way. As he talked thus plausibly the Mexican held his sombrero before him in his left hand, concealing a weapon in his right hand all the time slipping down toward the hat. As Pancho passed his hand beneath the brim, Allison's pistol came out like a flash, and its two quick reports sounded like one. Pancho, shot through the forehead and the heart, staggered against the wall and sank in a sitting posture into a chair that stood in the corner. The other two Mexicans made themselves scarce at Allison's first motion, and Lambert, running in from the kitchen, blew out the lights and closed up the barroom without perceiving the slain man in the corner."

"Allison at once took horse for his ranch, saying nothing to any one of the shooting, and that night the friends of Pancho hunted far and wide for him, not knowing where or in what condition he was. The next morning, when Lambert opened up his bar room he saw Pancho sitting asleep, as he thought, in the corner, and, going to wake him, discovered that the man was dead."

Fish-Fights in Siam.

The favorite sport in Siam is fish-fighting. Betting on fish-fights is such a passion with the Siamese that they will stake, not only all their money and their goods, but even their wives and children. The right to keep fighting-fish is bestowed only by the king, and is so highly paid for that the royal coffers derive a large revenue from granting the requisite licenses. The fighting-fish are little things, not thicker than a child's finger, but they are full of "fight," and fly at each other with the utmost ferocity as soon as they are let into the same water. In Annam, too, the same amusement prevails. There the fish are kept in large clear glass bottles of water, and if one of the bottles is placed before a mirror the vicious little fish, taking his own reflection to be the enemy, goes nearly mad with excitement at his inability to get at the adversary."

The Merciless Interviewer.

Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson is the latest notability to fall foul of the "interview." He has been complaining of the way in which he is caricatured in the Press. "The pictures they publish of me," he says, "represent every type, from the most godlike creatures to the criminal classes." This, however, is a lesser evil compared with the descriptive writing of the irrepressible newspaper man. When one interviewer (an American) writes thus: "A tall, willowy column supported his classic head, from which proceeded a hacking cough," Mr. Stevenson feels justified in protesting.

Where Sunflowers Grow.

The sunflower crop is one of the best paying in Russia. A good crop is worth, as it stands in the field, £5 an acre. The seeds are sold by the farmer for 4s. to 6s. a pound; then the merchants salt them and retail them for 12s. a pound, and at every street crossing in Russian provincial cities are stands and pedlars with baskets, selling to the passers-by the salted product of the big sunflower, which is eaten."

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A JAPANESE HOME.

A Native of Japan Tells of Their Exquisite Taste in Decorations.

If a man of taste should enter a Japanese parlor, he would not fail to be surprised at the display of marvellous and exquisite taste. Yet I have often heard the saying of foreigners that "the Japanese house has no furniture, and is absolutely cheerless and empty." This is quite wrong. I must say that they have no taste in the Japanese art; for the men of taste are agreed in saying that the art of decoration in Japan is excellent. If anyone has some taste in the art, he will perceive that the hanging picture on the toko wall, elaborate arrangement of flowers, pictures on the framed partitions, and all decoration, however trifling, reveal infinite taste. The tastes of the Western people differ so much from ours that the decoration in their chambers seems almost childish to the Japanese eye. The gorgeous display of colors in their rooms would please our children to look at. Drawing-rooms piled up from corner to corner with toys, shells, stoves, dishes, spoons, and different novel things always remind us of our curio shops. A bunch of flowers is stuck in a vase without form and without order! The pictures in the rooms hang perpetually, though the face of nature and feeling of man change from time to time! All these sights which we are accustomed to see in the European house excite in us nothing but wonder. Yet this is the taste of the Western people. We have no right to criticize it. In Japan the family never gathers around one table as the European or her Asiatic peoples do, but each person has his or her own separate small table, a foot square and a foot high, and always highly decorated. When they take their meals they kneel upon a mat, each taking his table before him. The little lacquered table generally contains a small porcelain bowl, heaped up with deliciously cooked rice, and several lacquered wooden bowls containing soup or meat, and numbers of little porcelain plates with fish, radishes and the like. The way of cooking, of course, is entirely different from the European. Two pretty chopsticks, made of lacquered bamboo or wood, silver or ivory, are used, instead of knife, fork and spoon, and all people use them with great skill. All foods are prepared in the kitchen, so as to avoid any trouble to use knife and fork. Soup is to be drunk from the bowl by carrying it to the mouth by hand, in the same way as people drink tea or coffee. Table etiquette has elaborate rules, which high-bred ladies and gentlemen must strictly follow. A maid-servant always waits, kneeling, at a short distance, before a clean pan of boiled rice, with lacquered tray, on which she receives and delivers the bowls for replenishing them. Fragrant green tea is always used at the end of the meal, but sugar and cream never.

ANCIENT AZTEC RUINS. Little Known Remains in the Mountain Regions of Arizona. An old-time prospector lately arrived in Prescott, O. T., after three months' sojourn in one of the most interesting and least-known portions of the territory, says the St. Louis Globe-Democrat. The wonderland from which he has returned is the country lying between the Mazatlan Verde ranges of mountains. Mr. Court thinks that section contains more Aztec ruins than any other portion of America, evidences of human habitation being found from the highest peak to the lowest valleys. In one place he found a road or street of three miles in length, perfectly smooth and straight and sixty feet in width. On either side of the street, the entire distance, are ruins. The road was evidently built prior to some mighty earthquake, as it ends abruptly at the brink of a yawning chasm. He dug up and found lying about a great number of skeletons, which were in a fair state of preservation, the heads of all being alike, very large over the eyes and receding and almost flat toward the back of the head; jaws well developed, but front upper and lower teeth short and sharp. The ruins show the people to have been workers in stone, some fragments of work in turquoise being found. Every available foot of land had once been cultivated. The region, although little heretofore has been known about it, is very accessible, and will no doubt become an interesting resort for travelers.

When We Lived in the Sea. We are not, it seems, descended from the monkeys, after all, but from the fishes. Professor Drummond tells us (and all professors claim an intallibility equal to, if not surpassing, that of the Roman Pontiff) that "when man left the water, or what was to develop into man, he took very much more ashore with him than a shell. Instead of crawling ashore at the worm stage, he remained in the water until he evolved into something like a fish, so that when, after an amphibian interlude, he finally left it, many ancient and fish-like characters remained in his body to tell the tale." One of these characteristics of the fish still to remain to man is the trace of gills in the neck, and the professor lays great stress upon this point. He instances cases in which children have been born not only with external traces of gills, but with gill slits open through and through, so that fluids taken in at the mouth, could pass through and trickle out at the neck.

An Exciting Buffalo Hunt. The most exciting and by far the most interesting hunting expeditions I ever went on, said Captain M. P. Wallace, an ex-army officer, to the St. Louis Globe-Democrat, "were those with the Indians while I was stationed on the plains. The consummate grace and skill of the men and the speed and agility of their ponies were well displayed on such occasions as these. Frequently the hunt would be signaled by some daring feat of bravado. On one occasion I saw an athletic young Indian ride his horse up close to the side of a big buffalo bull and spring from the horse on to the back of the buffalo, ride the savage creature several hundred yards, and then with his knife give it its death stroke."

A Chameleon Suit. Inate Customer—"Look here Mr. Cohen; I bought this blue suit of you yesterday, and paid twelve fifty for it; and as soon as I came out in the sunshine it turned red." Mr. Cohen—"Mine trent, you haf got der wrong suit; you haf got von of dose fashionable fifteen-dollar chameleon suits. You must pay me two dollars undt a halful extra."

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