

UNDER TWO FLAGS

A glance of recognition flashed from him on the soldier who had so often crossed swords with him, and he waved back the scroll with dignified courtesy. "Read it me."

It was read. Bitterly, blackly, shameful, the few brutal words were. They netted him as an eagle is netted in a shepherd's trap.

The moment that he gave a sign of advancing the captive's life would pay the penalty; if he merely remained in arms, without direct attack, she would be made the marquis' mistress and abandoned later to the army. The terms on which he could have her restored were instant submission to the imperial rule and personal homage of himself and all his Djoud to the marquis, as the representative of France—homage in which they should confess themselves dogs and the sons of dogs. So ran the message of peace.

The chasseur read on to the end calmly. Then he lifted his gaze and looked at the emir. He expected 50 words to be buried in his heart.

With a wild, shrill yell the Bedouins whirled their naked sabers above their heads and rushed down on the bearer of this shame to their chief and their tribe. The chasseur did not seek to defend himself. He sat motionless. He thought the vengeance just.

The sheik raised his sword and signed them back as he pointed to the white folds of the flag. Then his voice rolled out like thunder over the stillness of the plains:

"But that you trust yourself to my honor I would read you limb from limb. Go back to the tiger who rules you and tell him that as Allah liveth I will fall on him and smite him as he hath never been smitten. Dead or living, I will have back my own. If he take her life, I will have 10,000 lives to answer it. If he deal her dishonor, I will light such a holy war through the length and breadth of the land that his nation shall be driven backward like choked dogs into the sea and perish from the face of the earth for evermore. And this I swear by the law and the prophet!"

The menace rolled out, imperious as a monarch's, thrilling through the desert hush. The chasseur bent his head as the words closed. His own teeth were tightly clinched, and his face was dark.

"Emir, listen to one word," he said briefly. "Shame has been done to me as to you. Had I been told what words I bore they had never been brought by my hand. You know me. You have had the marks of my steel, as I have had the marks of yours. Trust me in this, sidi—I pledge you my honor that before the sun sets she shall be given back to you unharmed, or I will return here myself, and your tribe shall slay me in what fashion they will. So alone can she be saved uninjured. Answer, will you have faith in me?"

"You are a great warrior. Such men do not lie. Go, and if she be borne to me before the sun is half way sunk toward the west all the branches of the tribes of Ilderim shall be as your brethren and bend as steel to your bidding. If not—as God is mighty—not one man in your host shall live to tell the tale."

The chasseur bowed his head to his horse's mane, then without a word wheeled round and sped back across the plain. When he reached his own cavalry camp, he went straightway to his chief. What passed between them none ever knew. The interview was brief; it was possibly as stormy. Pregnant and decisive it assuredly was, and the squadrons of Africa marveled that the man who dared beard Chateauray in his lair came forth with his life. Whatever the spell he used the result was a marvel.

At the very moment that the sun touched the lower half of the western heavens the Sheik Ilderim, where he sat in his sidesaddle, with all his tribe stretching behind him, full armed, to sweep down like falcons on the spoilers if the hour passed with the pledge unredeemed, saw the form of the chasseur reappear between his sight and the glare of the skies; nor did he ride alone. That night the Pearl of the Desert lay once more in the mighty, sinuous arms of the great emir.

But, with the dawn, his vengeance fell in terrible fashion on the sleeping camp of the Franks, and from that hour dated the passionate, savage, unconcealed hate of Chateauray to the most daring soldier of all his fiery horse, known in his troop as Bel-a-faire-peur.

It was in the tent of Ilderim now that he reclined, looking outward at the night where flames were leaping ruddily under a large caldron, and far beyond was the dark immensity of

the star studded sky. From the hour of the restoration of his treasure the sheik had been true to his oath; his tribe in all its branches had held the French soldier in closest brotherhood. Wherever they were he was honored and welcomed; was he in war, their swords were drawn for him; was he in need, their houses of hair were spread for him; had he want of flight, the swiftest and most precious of their horses was at his service; had he thirst, they would have died themselves, wringing out the last drop from the water skin for him. Through him their alliance, or, more justly to speak, their neutrality, was secured to France, and the Bedouin chief loved him with a great, silent, noble love that was fast rooted in the granite of his nature.

"I wish I had come straight to you, sidi, when I first set foot in Africa," the chasseur said at last, while the fragrant smoke uncured from under the droop of his long, pendent mustaches.

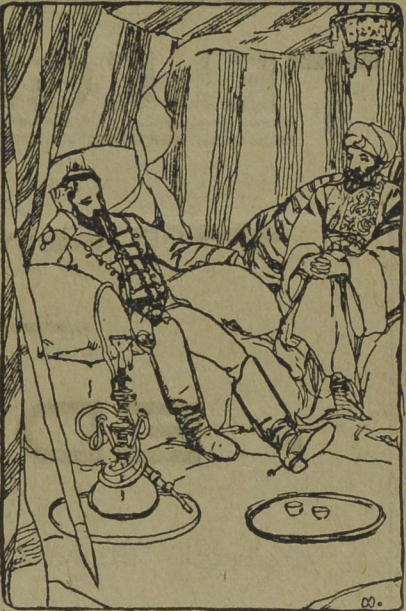
"Truly it had been well," answered the khalifa, who would have given the best stallions in his stud to have had this Frank with him in warfare and in peace. "There is no life like our life."

"Faith, I think not," murmured the chasseur rather to himself than to the Bedouin. "The desert keeps you and your horse, and you can let all the rest of the world go."

"But we are murderers and pillagers, say your nations," resumed the emir, with the shadow of a sardonic smile flickering an instant over the sternness and composure of his features. "To rifle a caravan is a crime, though to steal a continent is glory."

Bel-a-faire-peur laughed slightly. "Do not tempt me to rebel against my adopted flag. I never thought at all when I came to Africa. Had I thought twice I should not have gone to your enemies."

His thoughts drifted back over many varied scenes and changing memories



"I wish I had come straight to you, sidi," of his service in Algiers as he lay there at the entrance of the sheik's tent, with the night of looming shadow and reddened firelight and picturesque movement before him. Hours of reckless, headlong delight, when men grew drunk with bloodshed as with wine; hours of horrible, unsuccored suffering, when the desert thirst had burned in his throat and the jagged lances been broken off at the hilt in his flesh, while above head the carrion birds wheeled, waiting their meal; hours of severe discipline, of relentless routine, of bitter deprivation, of campaigns hard as steel in the endurance they needed, in the miseries they entailed; of military subjection, stern and unbending, a yoke of iron that a personal and pitiless tyranny weighted with persecution that was scarce less than hatred; of an implicit obedience that required every instinct of liberty, every habit of early life, every impulse of pride and manhood and freedom to be choked down like crimes and buried as though they had never been; hours of all the chance-fortunes of a soldier's life in hill wars and desert raids passed in memory through his thoughts now where he was stretched, looking dreamily through the film of his chibouque smoke at the city of tents and the couchant forms of camels and the tall, white, slowly moving shapes of the lawless marauders of the sand plains.

"Is my life worth more under the French flag than it was under the English?" thought the chasseur, with a certain careless, indifferent irony on himself natural to him. "There I killed time—here I kill men. Which is the better pursuit, I wonder?"

He was more silent and more meditative than seemed in keeping with a wild lion of the chasseurs, whose daring outdared all the fire eaters and whose negligent devilry had become a

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password all over Africa till "What special exploit has he done today?" became the question put after every skirmish or expedition. But he was much more of a soldier than a thinker at any time, and, instead of following out the problem of the world's uses of its two raw materials, time and men, he found a subject more congenial in the discussion of stable science with the emir.

The night was some way spent when the talk of wild pigeon blue mares and sorrel stallions closed between the Djed and his guest, and the French soldier, who had been sent hither from the Bureau Arabe with another of his comrades, took his way to the black and white tent prepared for him.

As he opened the folds and entered, his fellow soldier, who was lying on his back with his heels much higher than his head and a short pipe in his teeth, tumbled himself up with a rapid somersault and stood bolt upright. "Beg pardon, sir! I was half asleep."

The chasseur laughed a little.

"Don't talk English. Somebody will hear you one day."

"What's the odds if they do, sir?" responded the other. "It relieves one's feelings a little. All of 'em know I'm English, but never a one of 'em knows what you are. The name you was enrolled by won't really tell 'em nothing. They guess it ain't yours. That cute little chap, Tata, he says to me yesterday, 'You're always a-treating of your corporal like as if he was a prince.' 'Hang me,' says I, 'I'd like to see the prince as would hold a candle to him.' 'You're right there,' says the little un. 'There ain't his equal for taking off a beggar's head with a back sweep.'"

The corporal laughed a little again as he tossed himself down on the carpet.

"Well, it's something to have one virtue. But have a care what those chatterboxes get out of you."

"Lord, sir, ain't I been a-taking care these ten years? I've told 'em such a lot of amazing stories about where we kem from that they've got half a million different styles to choose out of. Bless you, sir, you may let me alone for bamboozling of anybody!"

With which the speaker dropped on his knees and began to take off the trappings of his fellow soldier with as reverential service as though he were a lord of the bedchamber serving a Louis Quatorze. The other motioned him gently away.

"No, no; I have told you a thousand times, sir, that we aren't and never will be and don't oughtn't to be," replied the soldier doggedly, drawing off the spurred and dust covered boots. "A gentleman's a gentleman, let alone what straits he falls into, but ceases to be one as he takes a service he cannot requite or claims a superiority he does not possess. We have been fellow soldiers for 12 years."

"So we have, sir, but we are what we always was and always will be—one a gentleman, t'other a scamp. If you think so be as I've done a good thing side by side with you now and then in the fighting, give me my own way and let me wait on you when I can. I can't do much on it when those other fellows' eyes is on us, but here I can and I will—begging your pardon—so there's an end of it. One may speak plain in this place, with nothing but them Arabs about, and all the army knows well enough, sir, that if it weren't for that black devil, Chateauray, you'd have had your officer's commission and your troop, too, long before now."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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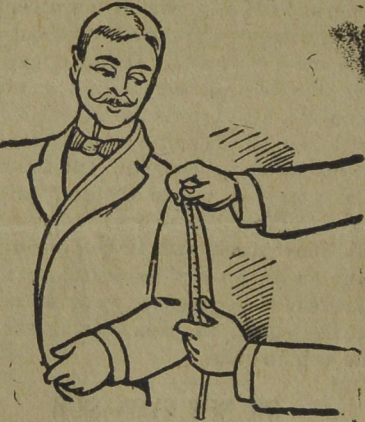
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