

Gilbert.—I never heard half so much about caravans before; and hope that you have got a great deal more yet to describe.

Edmund.—When a single camel passes along the streets here, every one looks upon it with surprise and wonder; but you say that thousands of them cross the desert together.

Traveller.—Yes, many thousands. An account is given by an eastern author, of a caravan which once crossed the desert, consisting of more than one hundred thousand camels.

Edmund.—A hundred thousand camels! where could they find food for so many?

Traveller.—The camel is capable of enduring hunger and thirst to surprising degree; and when travelling in the desert, they are obliged to be satisfied with a very small allowance of food and water. Though the deserts of Asia are great, they are nothing in comparison with those of Africa. The great desert of Sahara is, with very few interruptions between two and three thousand miles long, and as much as seven hundred miles broad. This is one prodigious expanse of red sand and sand-stone rock, interspersed here and there with a few fertile spots.

Gilbert.—I wonder that the people do not dig it, and water it and mix it with other earth, so that it may bear grass, and corn, and trees, like other places.

Traveller.—To mix such a mass of sand with other earth, would be a work far beyond the power of human beings to perform; and as to fertilizing it with water, it would swallow up a river and soon be as thirsty as ever. Nearly in the middle of this dreadful desert stands the celebrated Timbuctoo, the capital of Bembarra, a city which constitutes the great mart for the commerce of all the interior of Africa. To carry on this commerce is the laborious work of the caravans, which cross this extensive desert from almost every part of the African coast. Sometimes, during these journeys, the hot winds, called simoon, are so violent, that they exhale, to a great degree, the water carried in skins for the use of the passengers and drivers. On these occasions, "all that a man hath will he give for his life;" and a great price would gladly be given for a single draught of water.

Mr. Lovel.—We should think of this when we feel thirst, and have the means of quenching it.

Edmund.—Have you ever been at Timbuctoo, the city in the middle of the great desert?

Traveller.—No, I have never ventured so far into the heart of Africa. I have seen enough to deter me from willingly incurring the danger of such an enterprise. Independent of the heat, the fatigue, the hunger, the thirst, and danger of wild beasts and robbers, a white man would have much to contend with from which a native of the country would be free. He would have to pass through the countries of different people at enmity with each other, who would regard him as a spy, and if one of these countries regarded him favourably, that would be a sufficient reason with another to destroy him. When journeying in Morocco and Tripoli, I had quite enough of desert travelling. My face was almost as swarthy as the skin of a creole; but the colder climate of this and other countries has bleached it since then.

Gilbert.—Do tell us of your travels in the desert.

Traveller.—Why, really, if I go on talking about burning sands and camels, and Arabs, you will have no time to look about you, and enjoy our beautiful walk.

Gilbert.—We shall enjoy the walk all the better, if you go on about the hot burning desert.

Traveller.—Well I will give you a short description of one of my journeys. I was travelling with a company of traders in Morocco. Our camels, horses, and mules were much fatigued, when we received information, that a band of Arabs, four hundred in number, was likely to pursue us. Being afraid to keep the common rout, we struck towards the middle of the desert.

Leonard.—What did the four hundred Arabs want?

Traveller.—Oh, nothing more than to murder us; and take away our merchandise, camels, horses, and mules? The country was entirely without water; not a tree was there to be seen around us, or a rock where we might find a temporary shelter. We had to endure an intense sun, darting its fiery beams on our heads, a ground almost white, and sometimes of a concave form, like a burning glass, breezes which scorched as they blew, besides the fatigue of our journey, and the continual fear of being overtaken by the savage horde of Arabs.

Mr. Lovel.—What a situation for a man to be in!

Traveller.—My companions every now and then used ejaculations and sentences from the Koran, the Mohammedan bible, but I found relief in putting up a silent prayer to Him who, of olden

time, "led his people through the wilderness like a flock," and who despises not the Prayer of his earnest servants. Every man we saw in the desert was taken for an enemy, and several were pursued by us, who no doubt were watching an opportunity to plunder us. We travelled all night, and until noon the next day, as rapidly as possible, not having tasted food since nine o'clock the evening before, and soon after noon our water was spent. Both men and animals were almost exhausted, the mules every now and then stumbling and falling, and requiring assistance to support their burdens, while they rose again from the ground.

Edmund.—If the Arabs had come up just then, they would, I dare say, have killed you all.

Traveller.—About two or three o'clock, one of our company dropped down stiff from fatigue and thirst. I ordered two of my attendants to squeeze out what moisture remained in the leather budgets, and thus we were able to put a few drops into the poor man's mouth, but it was all in vain. I began to feel that my strength was fast wasting, and though unwilling to leave a fellow creature in such extremity, I was obliged to do so. The love of life is strong, and I mounted my horse with the view of escaping from death.

Gilbert.—What a dreadful thing, to be left to die alone in the desert!

Traveller.—From this time one after another sank down, without the possibility of our rendering them the least assistance. Each of us thought of saving himself, and we became more and more selfish in proportion as our situation appeared more desperate. When well nigh reduced to extremity, I saw in the distance, what seemed to me to be a large lake of water.

Edmund.—I dare say that you were soon at it, and that you drank as much as ever you could.

Traveller.—Alas! it was all a delusion. Not a drop of water was there. One of our guides pointed in the direction we had travelled, and the same appearance presented itself. It was only the mirage a sort of evaporation rising from the sand which assumes an appearance of water.

Gilbert.—How tantalizing!

Traveller.—The despair which I now felt was rendered darker by the bright hope which I had before encouraged. Many of the caravan parted company, horses and mules were left behind with their burdens on their backs. I well remember passing two or three of my own trunks, as they lay upon the ground, with the most perfect indifference, neither knowing nor caring what had become of the mules which carried them, or their drivers. Soon after this, the legs of the horse which I rode began to tremble. I tried to encourage the drivers to push on, that we might get to a watering place, and not perish in the desert, but they only pointed to their mouths to signify the intense thirst which affected them.

Edmund.—I shall never wish to travel in a desert.

Traveller.—One by one fell, till at last my turn came, when I sunk on the sand. Four or five men were near me, but they had neither water to give, nor strength wherewith to assist me. I was insensible.

Gilbert.—How did you manage? Who was it that carried you out of the desert?

Traveller.—Soon after I fell senseless to the earth, a large caravan was seen in the distance; this account was told me afterwards by one of my people, when the caravan came up; some skins of water were thrown over me and my companions, which had the effect of recalling us back to life. I opened my eyes, but everything was indistinct around me, nor did I know where I was. My senses, however, gradually returned, but I felt such a knot in my throat that I could not speak. More water was thrown over me, and some poured down my throat, till at last I was able to be lifted again on my horse, and slowly to proceed on my journey.

Edmund.—I do think it must be worse to travel in the desert, than to go up a high mountain, to descend into a cavern, or to walk along a precipice.

Traveller.—When a traveller is attacked with this dreadful thirst, his eyes are bloodshot, his tongue and mouth are covered with a dark yellow crust, a dizziness and faintness steal over him, a knot appears to be formed in his throat, a few tears trickle down his cheeks, and he falls senseless on the sand. A man ought to have a better motive than mere curiosity in thus jeopardizing his life in the wilderness.

Leonard.—I do hope, when you go abroad again, that you will never go near one of those ugly deserts. Are there not wild beasts in the deserts?