

AN EGYPTIAN ROMANCE.

A Story of Love and Wild Adventure, founded upon Startling Revelations in the Career of Arabia Pasha.

By the Author of "NINA, THE NIHILIST," "THE RED SPOT," "THE RUSSIAN SPY," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BLACK FLAG OF DEATH ALMOST RUN TO EARTH.

Frank Donnelly spoke but the truth when he declared that they had no child's play before them, indeed, he might have expressed himself stronger still, but for fear of alarming his lovely girl companion needlessly.

So on they sped with the fleetness of the wind across the great brown waste, whilst the Bedouin horsemen again raised their terrible scabbard of "Allah Akbar," and then handling their long rifles sent a shower of leaden rain after the fugitives, whom they knew well enough to be Europeans by their dress.

But, happily, the aim of a horseman when in motion is seldom true, and though the young officer trembled lest a chance ball should strike the darling of his heart, or lame one of their horses, he did not suffer the keen anxiety that he felt to show itself on his countenance, but instead kept an artificial smile, stereotyped thereon, and affected to make light of the danger.

Fortunately, there were neither camels nor dromedaries among their pursuers, and, fortunately, also, their horses had gone through as much fatigue as their own, so that the chances of the race seemed about equal.

But then what if they reached the railway station at Et Tarranoh and no train was there! The European officials at such a place would certainly not be more than half a dozen in number at the very most, while their pursuers numbered at least three score, and would not scruple to shed their blood on the very platform or in the ticket office or waiting room.

But, this thought was more terrible than all that had preceded it, because it brought the extremes of barbarism and civilization into such close juxtaposition; but with an effort Frank Donnelly banished the horrid nightmare from his mind, for now, if ever, sufficient for the hour was the evil thereof.

Ah, a lining of silver even to this leaden cloud, for on the fierce desert warriors, discharging a second volley after them the bullets, instead of humming and buzzing past their ears, plinged into the sand close behind, which was a sure proof that they were gaining ground on their pursuers, at all events for the present, and even that was something to be thankful for.

On, on swept the mingled fight and chase, and to Nellie it seemed as though the ridgy sands of the desert swept under her horse's dull-thudding hoofs like waves of the sea. She felt terror no longer, but instead a kind of daze and stupor, as though the action of her brain had been stilled by a narcotic.

Their pursuers had by now divided themselves into two bodies, each trying its best to outflank and to head them, whilst at some little distance in their front rose a somewhat large village, such as are often met with in Egypt just on the confines of the desert, a village of one storied mud huts, thatched with straw, with a tumble down mosque and a bazaar as the only conspicuous buildings.

Such an everyday affair was the hamlet which they were so rapidly approaching under the white moonlight, and which it seemed to be the object of their pursuers to drive them right through.

But why this attempt? Had it anything to do with the great black flag that they now for the first time perceived, drooping heavily around a staff which appeared itself from the onion shaped dome of the mosque?

Frank Donnelly understood its grim significance in a single instant. The plague was there. That black flag was hung out as a warning to all people against entering the place, and their pursuers had divided in order to drive them right through the long single street whilst they themselves swept along on either side outside the town, and so comparatively secure from the infection.

Well they must have known that to seek shelter or hiding there not even the bravest would have dared, for the Egyptian plague of the present day is almost identical with that which almost desolated London in the sixteenth century, and is usually generated in the filth and crowding of the tens of thousands of pilgrims who annually resort to the Prophet's tomb at Mecca, and the germs of which they carry home to their native villages on their return.

To escape the death trap into which they were being driven was beyond the range of practicability, for to attempt to make a detour was to be overtaken and destroyed; and besides, that street lay right in their course, pointing as it did, straight as an arrow, toward Et Tarranoh which with its railway station Frank Donnelly guessed to be a little more than a league on the other side.

Well, as they had no choice at it they must go, and the Captain was fain to hope that at such an hour all the horrors that it contained would be hidden behind closed doors and drawn shutters, but it was not to be so.

The dead were in the streets, lying in every conceivable attitude in seething heaps of corruption.

The dead, too, were seated in open doorways, bound to the backs of chairs, with bows squeezed in between their stiffened legs, thus silently begging for offerings to defray the expenses of their own interments.

But they who, doubtless, just at the outbreak of the pestilence which had claimed them as its first victims, had placed them there, were dead within doors, and all probable contributors to such funeral funds had either fled far away or had themselves fallen a prey to the awful epidemic, for though, as a rule, the doors were wide open, not a living thing was to be seen, save here and there a jackal, that after a single sniff at some festering body or other would utter a lugubrious howl and trot away with his appetite completely gone, and it takes more than a trifle to turn a hungry jackal's stomach.

And yet the pure fragrant desert air, that swept around this village of death would prevent the contagion from being carried farther, except by human transmission, that is to say, the winds themselves would not bare it as they would assuredly have done in other countries.

Frank Donnelly both hoped and finally believed that their own flight therethrough would be far to rapid too make their contingency perilous to others if Providence willed it that they should gain the train in safety.

He did not tell either Nellie or Pat the nature of the grim visitor which, through the medium perhaps of a single returned Pilgrim, had brought down destruction upon the entire village, but he spoke to the darling of his heart such words of comfort and encouragement as he could think of amongst such horrible surroundings, and perceiving that, notwithstanding these, she was almost sufficiently overcome to fall from her saddle in a swoon, he urgently besought her to close her eyes whilst he guided her horse.

Those words restored her, for she felt that the safety and lives of others depended on her courage, so she said "No, no, I am all right," and gazing straight ahead between her horse's pricked ears, with reins as taut as the rigging of a ship she kept a as true to his course as ever such ship could be kept.

Her face was as white as marble, but it was equally as rigid and firm, until mosque, bazaar, and even the best houses of the straggling sheet were left behind, when she gasped:

"Thank God that is over. But how near are our pursuers?"

"No nearer than they were before, dear," exclaimed Captain Donnelly, cheerfully, after he had just glanced around. "They have united again and are following us in a com-

pact body but we have only three miles more running to do now."

"Is that the smoke of another train over there beyond the palm trees, Frank?"

"Yes, darling, and it is coming toward St. Tarranoh, I declare. It is yet many miles away on the Cairo side, and that we may arrive at the station just as soon, pray to God that we may, Nellie, dear, and that the cars may either have a goodly proportion of armed male passengers in them, or that the train may be able to steam away before the Bedouins come up."

"Amen, Frank, I will," and not another word was uttered between them.

On, still on. Their horses were almost exhausted now, whilst the three score Bedouins who had commenced the chase, barely one score were now in it.

But these hung perseveringly on their track, and what if a single one of their horses gave in, for the rest could not abandon its rider, who ever he or she might be.

And now there came another trial. The desert vanished beneath their horses' hoofs, and in its place the exhausted steeds had to reel rather than gallop over the soft brown heavy ground, where the stubble of last year's crops of d'hourra, maise and safra stuck up like so many bayonets.

By the mercy of heaven they still kept their feet, though their starting eyeballs were all bloodshot, whilst blood also mingled with the foam that they scattered in showers of seeming snowflakes over their moist, dark coats.

Now they sweep in turn through the tufts of sugar cane, under the low spreading branches of date trees, and past great tufts of balm shrubs, whilst half a mile in their front, gleaming like molten silver in the moonlight, they see the Nile, rushing by the feathery palm, and the flowering cawb trees, and nearer to them yet stands the little wooden railway station with its long extension platforms, both of which appear to be quite empty.

But ah! a shrill whistle and a vast levitation spitting fire as he comes racing with a roar along the iron road. God! the station is still more than a quarter of a mile away. Which will arrive there first?

The train slackened speed; that is something, for they tear along, if possible, at a greater rate than ever since they can't shake the Bedouins off or distance them in any degree materially, and may they not be guiding them on to the slaughter of all who are in the train?

Ah, down goes a horse.

It is Nellie's.

She on her back on the ground to all appearances stunned.

But in an instant Frank Donnelly is also on the ground, lifts her on his own horse, for her's will never gallop more, and mounting behind her the flight is resumed. Pat resolved that he will escape or die with his master.

Has that minute's loss of time sacrificed their lives?

The train is in the station, whilst they are still a couple of hundred yards therefrom, and the foremost of the Bedouins about twice as many in the rear.

But whilst Frank had been lifting up Nellie, his man had been fastening a cheap, cotton, gaudy Union Jack pocket handkerchief that he happily had about him, on to the head of his lance, and now he flurried it madly on high, at the same time shouting with the full force of his lungs.

The train had begun to move on, but happily both guard and engine driver at the same instant saw all and comprehended all.

Knowing that there were some revolver-armed Europeans and Americans within the long line of cars, they ventured on their own responsibility to stop the train.

CHAPTER XXXII.

STREAM AGAINST HORSEFLESH—ALEXANDRIA.

No sooner were the cars again at a standstill than the stationmaster and the two European porters dashed into them, declaring that they weren't going to remain there to be massacred, for by now the fugitives were spurring their horses on to the platform, and the wild Bedouins were in full view, coming crashing through the sugar cane with oath and yell, a rolling of eyes, a gnashing of teeth and a wild brandishing of lance and rifle.

"Allah Akbar! Dour! Dour!" they shrieked, rather than shouted, fully believing that they were yet in time.

Brave as any of the dauntless three who in olden times held the bridge at Rome

against Lars Porsena and his countless hosts, was the gullant English railroad guard or conductor, who stood alone on that empty platform, with the door of his van open behind him, and the whistle in his hand one blow on which would have sent his train whirling along the iron rails to certain safety and almost as brave was the grimy engine driver, who in such a terrible moment did not urge his great steam horse forward even without orders.

But, instead of yielding to craven fears, he just said quietly to his stoker, "Shovel in more coals, Bill. I think I'll have time to light my pipe," and light his pipe this remarkable cool chap did, while at that juncture the guard shouted out:

"Women and children crouch down in the cars. Men who have firearms stand to the window and use them if you see occasion."

Then he ran forward, laid hold of Nellie Trezzar, lugged her off the saddle in front of her lover, and whilst running with her towards his car and shouting "Quelck!" he itched or rather launched the still unconscious girl into his van, (for there was no time to lay her down tenderly.)

Then he blew his whistle shrilly as Captain Donnelly and Pat Monaghan rushed in after her, and dropped it with a shriek as a Bedouin rifle rang out and a bullet passed through his arm at the elbow.

Another instant, however, and Pat and his master both had hold of him by the collar, and lugging him into the car between them, Frank closed and fastened the door as the train went puffing and panting on alongside the platform.

The Bedouins were mad with chagrin and rage.

They had missed their prey by not more than half a minute at the most, and the capture of their horses seemed to afford them very inconsiderable satisfaction.

With yells and howls they tore along the platform, some thrusting their long lances in at the windows and others firing their rifles into the carriages, but the greater number trying their utmost with those same rifles to shoot the men on the engine, who, however, squatted as much as possible beneath the stout iron work, and so effectually cheated bullets of their intended billets.

You would have thought that those swarthy warriors of the desert were devils instead of human beings, so truly demonic were their faces and their actions, but that they were mortal was evidenced by the manner in which some of them were knocked over by the few bullets that were now discharged at them from the train window, for the general disarming of Europeans at Cairo in the morning had prevented firearms from being very plentiful amongst the passengers, whilst Captain Donnelly and Pat Monaghan made the discovery at the same moment that all their ammunition was gone, which would have been most awkward under other circumstances.

The train, however, had now taken up the running, and was clear away, rapidly increasing its speed from twelve to fifteen, from fifteen to twenty and from twenty to twenty miles an hour, and with no further hurt than a slight splintering of wood and a wholesale shattering of glass bade its Bedouin assailant's a snoring, rumbling, steam-blowing, fire-spilling: all together scornful good-night.

Out into the dim and silent night. What a change of scene!

The desert had been as completely left behind as the desert warriors, and the moon shone down on the silvery waters of the Nile, flowing between verdant banks, where an almost continuous fringe of sycamores, acacias and tall feathery palms nodded towards the rippling on murmuring waves.

Now and then a village of mud walls and straw roofs would appear on the right or the left of the line, with the dome and minarets of its mosque rising from the centre of a grove of date trees, or the tomb of some saint would flash whitely for an instant on one side or the other and disappear.

But neither Captain Donnelly nor Pat Monaghan cared ought for the passing scenery, for the latter was fretting over the death of one horse and the loss of another, since a good soldier loves his horse as he loves his mistress, while the young officer's whole attention and anxiety was centered in Nellie, who seemed as though she never intended to come out of her swoon, and who looked deathly pale by the light of the little smoky paraffine lamp that was hung up in the car.

As for the brave guard himself, Captain Donnelly and his men had seen to his wound between them had skilfully got the bullet