

AN EGYPTIAN ROMANCE.

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

by the Author of "NINA, THE NIHILIST," "THE RED SPIDER," "THE RUSSIAN SPY," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IS ESCAPE IMPOSSIBLE?—PAT CAPTURES AND DISMOUNTS A BATTERY.

Pat Monaghan had not exaggerated matters for the Bedouins really were already in pursuit of them, on horseback, and mounted on fleet dromedaries.

True, they were not yet clear of the oasis, whilst the fugitives had reached the boundless desert sands and were skimming across them as yachts under full sail skim the sea; but for all this their chances in the life and death race that was assuredly about to ensue would be small indeed against the long-legged camels and the swift-footed dromedaries of the wild sons of the desert from whom they were seeking to escape.

"God save all our people!" exclaimed Captain Donnelly presently, with great fervor, as the remembrance suddenly occurred to him, "for Arabi Pasha counts upon sixty thousand of the Bedouin robbers and out-throats to help him to rid Egypt of its Christian population. I have heard so from the best authority."

"I dare say they will be officered by those who will be able to keep them well under control, for I do not even yet believe that the war minister is one-quarter so black as he is painted," replied Nellie, gravely.

"You are welcome to think what you like of him, darling, since you cared for him so little that you preferred risking the perils and hardships of the wilderness with me. I wish, though, that those infernal mountains were a little nearer, for I vow that desert sand is more deceptive to distance than even water. There come the Bedouins out into the open desert at a trot."

'Twas even so; there they were, humped upon their camels and dromedaries, or bestriding their horses like centaurs, with their long beards and the loose ends of their scarlet kuffiah or shawl head coverings fluttering in the air, and the white moonlight glinting on their bright lance points, rifle barrels, drawn swords and the whole armory of lesser weapons that each man carried in his broad leather belt.

One of the camels, too, was surmounted by a small piece of artillery called a ginjal capable of throwing a half pound ball to a great distance and with accurate aim as well.

No sooner did the Bedouins discover the exact position of those of whom they were in search than they waved their tasseled spears and sent up a wild whoop into the moonlit heavens that sounded not unlike a chorus of wolves over an unexpected feast.

Nellie trembled and felt faint at the fierce and barbaric yell, and the young officer could not help exclaiming, "Would to heaven that we had hazarded the railway cars after all." But no sooner had the vain regret escaped his lips than Nellie rejoined, "You acted for the best, Frank, and God can protect us here as perfectly as in the train. We shall have to endure, perhaps, a longer suspense, but that is all."

As for Pat Monaghan, he replied to the Bedouin yells with a cheer that was almost as wild and quite as reckless, and as he also had a spear to wave he did it with a will.

In fact, like the petrel, which is only lively and cheerful in stormy weather, Pat was in his element again, and felt as men are prone to feel after a bottle of champagne.

When the Bedouins presently discharged their firearms and the bullets therefrom all fell short, making scores of little fountains of sand where they dropped, his joyous excitement reached its zenith and he exclaimed:

"Be jabers and if there was but another five of the old corps here to make up a nate half dozen, we'd soon rid yer honor and the young laddy of them scoundrels," and at this point Pat sent up an eldritch shout of defiance.

"It's no use wishing for the impossible, Pat, and we must take comfort from the old saw that he who fights and runs away will live to fight another day."

This from his master; but Monaghan was not so easily pacified.

"Faith its running away without any fighting at all, we are. Half a crust is better than no bread, so on the same principle one bite at a Bedouin would be more satisfying than six snaps at the empty air. But thunder and turf, it may come to that yet, for those ugly bastards and their corporations on their backs are making the running, and no mistake, and the chap with the swivel gun on his shoulder is slowing round to fire."

Frank Donnelly gave utterance to an ejaculation that sounded like one of alarm, for on glancing round in turn he saw that the camel that carried the ginjal headed the chase, and that it had been drawn up motionless to permit of the little piece of artillery being fired.

The match gleamed, and with a puff of white smoke a puff of red flame the ginjal exploded with a shrill report, and the iron ball therefrom hummed over their heads and fell far in advance.

It was a most unpleasant discovery that they were already well within range of this novel kind of "bow-chaser," albeit that there was some ground for congratulation in the first ball having missed them.

Still, it was far from likely that all the rest would follow suit, which was evidently also the opinion of the Bedouins, so frantic was their joy on perceiving it splash up the sand in front of the fugitives.

"We must ride farther apart, aye, the length of an arm and sabre apart," said Frank Donnelly, who rightly guessed that if the Bedouins were inclined to spare either of them it would be Nellie, and who therefore wished to give her a chance of life, though it might be denied to himself and Monaghan.

He thought she would not conjecture the reason of the change in formation, nor did she, beyond that it might be in order that a ball should not slay more than one at a time as the aim gradually grew to be more accurate, and this supposition caused the blood to run cold in her veins, for she felt that their peril must be great indeed.

Yet all three still tore on for dear life, heading straight for the mountains that every minute seemed to become vaster and nearer in their front, and which, could they but reach in time, might afford them some hiding place from their savage pursuers, though even that was but a bare hope on their parts, and on the other side of those hills they knew that there was another desert a hundred times more vast and terrible than even the one which they were now traversing.

On, still on, but now the agile dromedaries began to draw ahead of all their other pursuers, of all at least save the one that carried the ginjal, and who seemed to be swifter than any of them, even though every now and then he was drawn sharp up to permit of that quaint but provoking piece of ordnance being discharged from his back.

The worst of it was that at each shot the aim of the swarthy-visaged, red-turbaned cannoner was evidently improving, that is to say, if he hadn't been playing with them all along as a cat does with a mouse.

At last a ball hummed past so close to Pat's ear that he involuntarily raised a hand thereto to still the ringing in it.

Next he uttered a strange national interjection (in naming it after one of the nine parts of speech we are speaking mildly) and the next instant, to the infinite surprise of both his master and Nellie Trezarr, they beheld him turn round and spur furiously toward instead of away from the approaching score of Bedouins, who were now, however, stretched out over fully a quarter of a mile of desert, the gun camel and two dromedaries being well in advance of the others.

"Come back, madman!" shouted Frank Donnelly, at the top of his voice, but Pat Monaghan wasn't as mad as his master deemed him, for though he rode straight at the camel and its rider and with fully as much ardor as that where with Don Quixote

charged the windmill, yet he gained far more by the encounter than did the Knight of La Mancha, for though he made pretense to charge with his spear, yet no sooner did he get close by than quick as lightning he slung that, under the circumstances, useless weapon, and drawing his revolver gave the huge camel and the two dromedaries a couple of charges apiece.

To miss such bulky targets was almost impossible, and the camel immediately toppled over onto its nose dead, whilst one of the dromedaries sank on its side uttering the most plaintive bellows and its companion, maddened with the pain of a less serious wound, tore trumpeting across the plain, at right angles to the course that it had hitherto been pursuing; so having accomplished all that he had desired or intended, Pat came galloping back wild with glee to his companions, yelling at the top of his voice as he drew within earshot: "Faith, an' I've silenced that battery and dismounted it as well, an' sure, now that I've had a rare brush with the enemy I'll run away as fast as ever you like."

"I shouldn't wonder if you had saved all our lives by your courage, and whatever happens we'll consider ourselves indebted to you and it to no small degree, my brave fellow," responded Captain Donnelly, as the three once more sped across the level desert side by side.

And in truth Monaghan had rendered no small service, since the race was now almost one of horse against horse, for the other camels that the Bedouins possessed seemed to be of no great account, two being heavy with foal and the remaining three evidently old and stiff.

Yet, though, thanks to Pat's valor, circumstances had wonderfully improved with them, the three fugitives were far from being out of the wood, for not one of their human foes was much the worse for Monaghan's skilful diversion in their favor, and though they were doubtless not a little disconcerted at the Feringhees being possessed of weapons that could do such a maximum of damage in such a minimum of time, their vastly superior numbers evidently gave them confidence that they must come off triumphant in the end, and so they still kept up the pursuit with ardor and with an increase of savagery.

But the race would now take a longer time in the running (both pursuers and pursued knew that), and the latter were cheered by the very minute nearer and nearer looming of the mountains, those mountains from whose summits Cairo and Alexandria are alike visible, with the blue ocean lapping the latter town and marking the highway to England.

Another ten minutes and the ground began to rise, five more and the desert sands were left behind and the bright blossoms of the prickly pear gleamed from between clefts in the bare and arid rocks, whilst higher up from between the natural columns of pillared basalt the wild fig and plum, the pomegranate, the date and the melon all bloomed together, amidst clustering masses of the pink and yellow wild rose.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE DEFIANCE OF THE SCORPION EATER.

Whilst ascending the mountain side Captain Donnelly began vaguely to wonder what was to be done next. During their flight towards these hills his only thought had been of reaching them as the only possible place of safety, but now that they were reached, the question arose, wherein was their safety?

True, he had both read and been told that at a certain height they were perfectly riddled with caverns, which had been bored into their sides to form sepulchres so long ago that the race who had made them were forgotten even in those ancient days when Pharaoh reigned in Egypt and Joseph was his Vakil. But then, suppose that they could not find those caves, or worse still, that their pursuers saw them enter one of them, or even tracked them thither by the hoof prints of their horses, for in either of these cases would it not in all probability form a perfect death trap for them, no matter whether their foes had the temerity to rush in and dispatch them at once or take the more prudent course of blockading the entrance and so starving them to death?

These were disturbing thoughts enough, and almost, indeed, too much for one man to bear, for the young officer could perceive that his faithful attendant, Pat Monaghan, placed the most perfect trust in his ingenu-

ity for getting them all out of the scrape and that Nellie Trezarr reposed an equal degree of confidence in him.

How he wished that he could only believe that he deserved it, but he neither could nor dared so believe.

He was quite alive, however, to the vital importance of now or never getting well ahead of their pursuers, so that whatever ruses they endeavored to put in practice should be at all events unseen by them.

So in half a dozen words he expressed his views to his companions, and all three urged their horses up the now steep incline with what speed they were able, though never could they get beyond sound of the hoof-strokes of their pursuers.

Rough and rugged every now and then was the zigzag ascent, whilst sometimes the fugitives would have to ride in Indian file along the edge of a precipice of dizzy depth and where a single false step or stumble on the part of a horse would have launched both itself and rider into space, to be caught after many a gyration in mid air amongst the topmost branches whose leaves were stirred by the desert air hundreds of feet below.

On one occasion on looking down they descried their pursuers at least a hundred feet beneath them on the same winding path, and so situated that had they had any loose rocks at their command they could have rolled them over and crushed the Bedouins, or have hurled them from their narrow perch into mid-air, but their were no sufficiently heavy masses of stone about, capable of being rendered serviceable in this manner with a less silent instrument than a lever or a crowbar, so that the flight had to be continued without pause and with no knowledge of where and how it would end; but anyhow, to attempt to cross the mountain, to descend on the other side and then to renew their flight across a second desert as vast and level and trackless as many a sea was not to be thought of.

Frank Donnelly was still racking his brains and encouraging Nellie by turns, whilst Pat Monaghan brought up the rear whistling in subdued tones one popular Irish song after another, when all at once the soft cadence of some reed instrument became clearly audible at a little distance in the front.

The air was monotonous yet not unpleasant, but as much could not be said of the player, who at the next turn in the ascent was suddenly revealed to their view standing in the centre of the narrow mountain track and intently regarding the steep mossy banks on the right whilst he played.

So intent was he on what he was about that he neither heard nor saw those who were approaching him as fast as ever the steepness and roughness of the road permitted.

Then all at once he dropped his instrument and darted out his arm, and as it was withdrawn Captain Donnelly perceived that it grasped a serpent which was writhing and twisting in a futile attempt to escape.

Whilst thus engaged the utter and unredeeming hideousness of the man became apparent.

He was clad in a mass of fluttering rags, and wherever his skin was bare (which it must have been in a hundred places at least) it was covered with coarse hair like a gorilla.

His naked and emaciated arms and legs were in the same condition, whilst a curly iron gray beard and whiskers reached upwards to his eyes and downwards to his waist, his long matted all-looks streaming over his broad shoulders in the same filthy and unkempt condition.

To complete this appalling looking being's description his huge broad nose was almost blood red, his leaden lipped mouth showed through a volume of champed-up foam ranges of jagged yellow teeth that would have done credit to the jaws of a wolf, his ears were tremendous and almost as red as his nose, and his eyes gleamed beneath joined bushy brows with a dull red luminous glow that told either of madness or something more fearful still.

To add, if it were possible, to the horror of this seeming ghoul's appearance, he carried a big but somewhat dilapidated basket on his back, through every fissure in which a serpent's head was thrust forth, whilst over his shoulders, across his brawny breast and in and out through the filth of his hair and beard crawled a perfect colony of huge scorpions, their scales rattling and their death-dealing tails sometimes lashing the air.

Captain Donnelly had by this time recognized in the strange and repulsive looking being who stood directly in their upward