

CHAPTER XV

THE BUSH DESERT

"But my heart will be with you
Wherever you may go
Can you look me in the face
And say the same, Jeannot?"

"RAKHAN . . . marched twenty-eight miles on Tuesday and forty-two on Wednesday, horses twenty-four hours without water . . ." wrote Louis, in a letter which Jeanne received at the end of March, and which had been scribbled in blue pencil on pages of his pocket-book torn out, and enclosed in a "soldier's and seaman's" envelope.

" . . . We got off the track once, and were faced pretty suddenly with the real meaning of waterless desert; when a few hours may put an end to a whole party, big or small . . . pretty well cooked when we arrived, but somebody luckily had a flask of brandy which was mixed with some stinking water and devoured, and we slept as we could in a hastily constructed zareba . . . This is a burning rocky bush desert . . . when we are all collected I expect some of us will be sent to Berbera, about a hundred and twenty miles through dense bush, and it is believed no water. But think of me slowly, slowly trekking towards you, and when I get home, my Jeannie dear, meet me, oh, meet me with a brimming bucket of fresh sparkling ice-cold water from the mountain stream at Coed-Ithel; for here it is sometimes green and sometimes grey, but always loathsome to taste and smell. I am very well, my darling little Jeannette, and only just miss enjoying myself; but of course it's rather a bore to be always fighting the water-trouble instead of the Mullah. . . . Moved our pitch yesterday. The camping-ground is a stony glaring tree-less place, and the heat by day is very great. The ground gets red hot. The wall of our zareba is made out of cut thorn bush, and branches laced with barbed wire. I have a jolly