

then taking with him a few chosen men, he rode round to the opposite side to commence the work of destruction.

"Some dried leaves and branches having been collected, a light was struck, and the conflagration commenced. At first a small column of smoke curled up in the air; it was soon followed by a volume of flame towering to the height of the tallest trees, and withering with its great heat every green bush, ere it reduced it to dust and charcoal. The fire strided on: and what was lately an impenetrable thicket, became a waste of smoking ashes.

"The kaid with his attendants, continued busy firing the wood, wherever the wind would favour the progress of the flame. Success seemed to attend the stratagem: and all were waiting though not without fear, to discover which outlet the terrible, and until now unvanquished Alee would choose for his ally.

"Then it was that a flame rose suddenly from the very centre of the wood, at a spot some three hundred yards distant from the advancing fire. It blazed, it crackled, it rolled on, with a headlong vigour of destruction; and at intervals was heard the rending crash of some giant tree, that had for ages braved all the other elements, but now lowered its noble head.

"'Who,' cried the kaid in wild despair, 'who but this accursed fiend would have thought of such a scheme? See! he has fired the wood in the centre, and when all around shall be burnt he will choose his point of escape.'

"To prevent this the kaid had now to change his plan: and posted his men all around the wood in parties of three. They had commenced their attack early in the morning: it was now about noon. The fire they had first kindled had just reached the yet smoking embers of the conflagration in the centre, and that in its turn, had carried its ravages to the opposite border. One small path still remained green; all around was a mass of flame and smoke. The kaid had stationed himself in a watercourse, with three men. Birds and animals were flying with terror all around; heedless of man's presence; and ever and anon a frantic boar would gallop down the watercourse.

"'Allah!' said one of the party, as an 'abou snau'* passed with bristles half singed from his back, and smoking from the fire; 'if he tastes as well as he smells, I could make up my mind to sell myself to the devil and dine on his carcase. God forgive me for saying so.'

"'Hush!' said the kaid in a low voice; 'he comes; and, O merciful God! he comes our way. Be steady and resolute.'

"A mounted figure could now be seen moving rapidly over the burning embers. His pace increased as he neared the ambuscade; and the slight figure of a female, her garments blackened with the fire and smoke, and her long hair streaming in the breeze, was clinging to the waist of the robber. Mounted on a jet-black steed, that, with blood-red extended nostrils, and foaming mouth, bounded as a deer over the huge rocks, Alee with levelled gun dashed straight towards the party. The kaid had now made sure aim, and raising a shout to bring together the line of valiants posted along the wood, was about to pull the trigger, when a deadly shot brought him a corpse to the ground. His three attendants stood firm, waiting with levelled guns their adversary's nearer approach, to give him a warm reception, and avenge the death of their chief.

"Alee in an instant had given the gun to Rahmanna, and, drawing his sword, now flew like lightning on his opponents. The black mare as if she knew her owner's danger, redoubled her speed; and in an instant the robber was on them, and received their fires unhurt. Man after man rolled on the ground; all fell who came within his reach, whilst he eluded every blow of his enemies.

"The whole body of troops had now approached. The balls flew thickly; but, still unharmed, the hero and his well beloved pursued their course. Nay, some declared that the balls were heard to rebound from his body back upon his assailants; and it must have been so, for there was a second man of the party killed by a shot-wound besides the kaid—upon whose soul be mercy!

"Alee having distanced his pursuers, slackened his pace; he sheathed his sword, and reloaded his gun. One horseman yet pursued him boldly. Alee descended a steep ravine, and turning close round the side of the opposite hill, reined in the mare. The well mounted pursuer was not many yards in the rear. Alee awaited him, and soon with drawn sword and shouts of vengeance, he turned the corner.

"'Fire!' cried Rahmanna, 'or we are lost!'

"'Let him come,' said her husband; and as the enemy approached, Alee recognised in him one of the Bokhary blacks who had vowed vengeance on him the day of his feat at Morocco in presence of the Sultan.

"'Join the Blow-Giver!' shouted Alee, as he shot him through the brains.

"'And now,' said he to his wife, 'jump into my saddle, while I mount yon horse of the swarthy black, which seems to be a good one. Hark! the troops are again in pursuit of us. On—on! for we must ride till the morrow dawns on us in the wood of Sahel.'

* Abou snau, 'father of tusks.'