

An Arab Pilgrimage

Algernon Blackwood

All day long in the blazing heat the camels have come shuffling and slouching through the sand past Helouan, for the March full moon is here and five thousand Bedouins are making their annual pilgrimage to the tomb in the Desert, where the Sheikh Abu Seria ("Father of Speed") fulfils the function of an Arab Lourdes. From far and near, with their families, their wives and children, their tents and goats, their plaintive piping reeds and their incessant tapping of drums, the procession has been struggling in since sunrise. Hundreds of donkeys trip beside the stately camels, and the separate lines of dust radiate like the spokes of an invisible wheel towards the great encampment just below Helouan, to merge later in the single stream that journeys forty miles southeast to the Tomb itself. To the music of this soft, gay piping the camels come swaying in beneath their enormous loads. Tents spring up over acres of yellow sand; camps are pitched, all separate yet all touching; the donkeys roll in the hot soil; the children laugh and play; the men, grave as the camels, sit round against the walls of berrim and water-jars and baggage that lie in heaps; and the women whisper to one another behind their veils how their little ones shall all be healed presently, and more—that the childless wives among them shall at last become mothers. At the Tomb of Abu Seria these things come to pass at the March full moon. It is a time of great rejoicing.

Shortly after dawn the first stragglers came in—fellahs on tired donkeys; many, too, on foot. They came from villages on the other side of Cairo. For the poor travel slowly, and start first. The wealthy Bedouin sheikhs, swathed in white, with circlets of gold about their turbaned heads, come later on their grand white camels, wives and retainers close behind them. And from dawn, all through the burning heat of noonday and afternoon, the horde of fellahs troop straggling in till the crimson sunset, dying behind the Lybian Desert, falls on an encampment grown wide and deep. The palm groves along the delta cast long shadows. The lizards sing among the dunes. The women start their wild and curious ululating, shrill as an animal cry and hardly human. And suddenly the moon shows her huge yellow disk above the Mokattam Hills and draws a marvelous sweetness out of the desert, sheeting the spread encampment with a silvery veil.

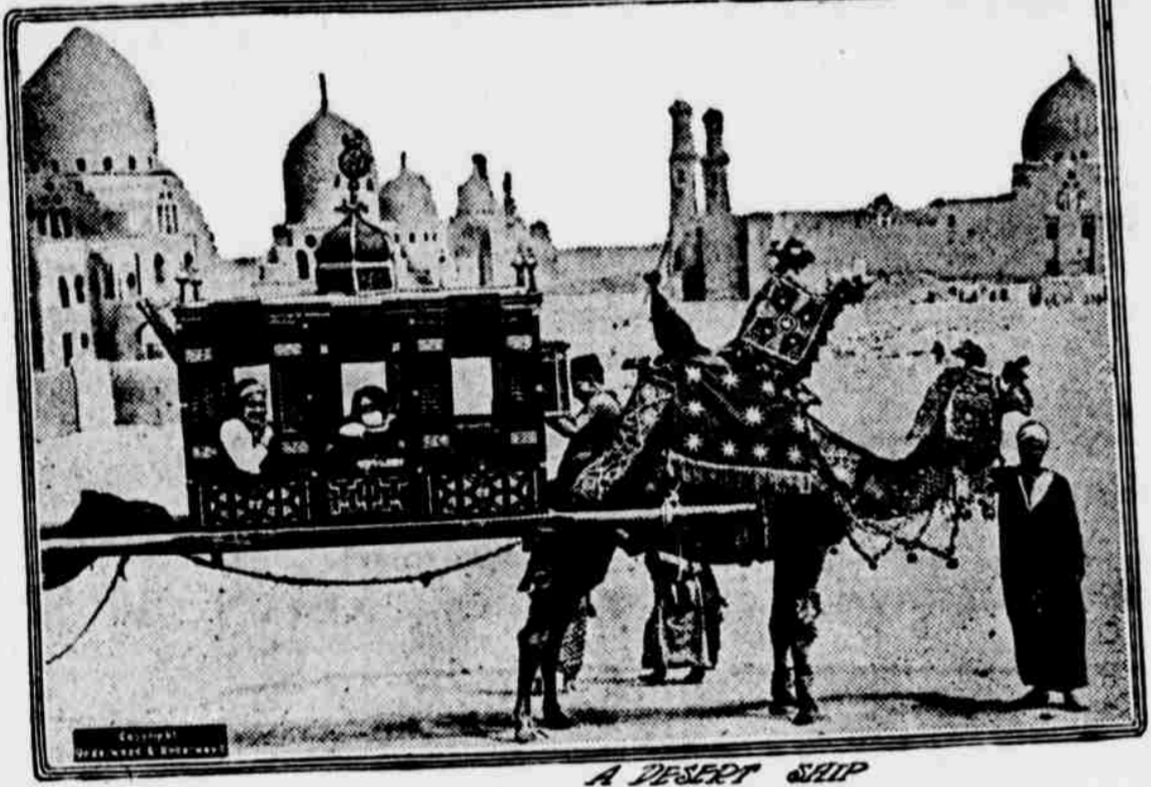
It is a wonderful sight. The camels seem twice their natural size among the piled-up fodder. Little fires spring up, built over stones. Voices are low; noises lie down one by one—braying of donkeys, gurgling grunts of camels, bleating of goats and kids soon to be sacrificed. Groups gather closely round the fires, for the night air nips. Coffee is made in tiny china cups, and the gaunt heads of the camels thrust forward over the very shoulders of their owners. They chew and chew and chew. Those dark bundles in the sand, lying apart by themselves, are men already asleep, wrapped from head to feet in sheets of black and blue and white and yellow. No one treads on them. The bare feet go silently to and fro, picking their way so carefully. And everywhere dark faces gleam in the moonlight, eyes flash like stars and white teeth shine.

Little visits are paid from group to group. A bearded fellow with a face of night enters a circle where all are seated round the fire and coffee-pot. "Are you happy?" "I am happy because of your existence." "Coffee?" handing him a cup "Coffee for ever," as he sips it slowly. We outsiders watch and stare and question, yet get no nearer to them. Centuries lie between. Their courtesy is perfect. They accept a cigarette, lighting it with flint and steel, offering the latter as a present that may not be refused. The young man, playing his reeds so softly to a group of listeners, hands them over to an admirer who has praised them, with "Please accept them from me." Behind, in the sand, men are praying on their knees towards Mecca. "Sing to us, kindly," asks an Englishman, who knows Arabic, of another man. The singer is shy, but only requires coaxing, and when the Englishman suggests a certain song, the other hesitates. "It is not pleasing that I should sing such a song before gentlemen and ladies." "They don't understand a word." "But I cannot do it. Whether they understand or no, I find it not pleasing." And, after this lesson in sweet delicacy, between the verses of a song he finally chants, always this question: "Does my voice please you, O gentleman?" Yet these are merely fellahs, the peasant toilers of the delta, who accompany the great Bedouin pilgrimage to the Desert Tomb of Abu Seria, Father of Speed, one of Mahomet's generals. . . . And after midnight one or two of them rise quietly and resume their journey. "Our camels travel better in the night-time." Off they go, with their donkeys, goats and children, carrying all they possess in this world with them. The unmeasured desert swallows them. No sound comes back. They vanish in the moonlight as softly as they came. One thinks of that Bedouin who loved an Englishman, and paid him the great honor of taking him home. "I will show you my home," he said, and they traveled three days and nights across the desert. Beneath a limestone boulder he pointed to the ground. "Now you are in my home," he said, proudly, and with the stately dignity of a great prince of the desert. And the Englishman saw a little pile of ashes at his feet. It was summer, a tent unnecessary; the wife and flocks were away. This square foot of sand in the enormous wilderness was home.



HURRYING TO THE ENCAMPMENT

AN EGYPTIAN DANCING GIRL WITH THE PILGRIMS



A DESERT SHIP

In the morning, with the rising sun, the Bedouin arrive. Before Helouan is awake their white head-dress was visible far down the sandy waste that meets the fringe of Delta towards Cairo. But Helouan soon comes down to see. Few of them tarry here; they go straight through; the Bedouin do not like the people, houses, tourists. They resent the cameras, flourish their whips of buffalo-hide and trot past almost fiercely. There is scorn in their eyes, as they circle about their wives. High on their splendid camels, they have a regal air, making the great brutes turn and double as easily as horses, and shouting angrily if anyone goes near the water-sellers. This is their last watering-place before the tomb is reached, and to trifle with a Bedouin's water is like trifling with his wives. And no wonder they wear this princely mien, for the whole Imperial desert is their home. Upon the slower camels in their lordly train, sometimes four abreast, their women, all carefully veiled, sit with the little children. Some are hidden from sight in tent-like canvas, gorgeously striped and colored. It sways to and fro with the enormous knee-stroke of the camels like a boat at sea. Solemnly the Moslem world files past across the sands. And we outsiders get no nearer, ask, stare, and follow as we may. The gulf it not bridged that lies between our minds and theirs. In vain we try, wondering what they think and feel, and what emotions hide behind those fine bronze faces: their politeness veils it all, their own deep world; their courtesy screens revelation. They move, like the camels, at the pace of a thousand years, unchanging. We watch them across barriers, that is all. Note that old man praying alone there, behind the munching camel. He has washed his hands and feet; his carpet is spread on the sand, and his shoes are off. Mind, heart and soul are concentrated. He is oblivious to the world about him as he bows towards the east and his forehead taps the ground.

As the moon rises higher and night becomes all white, the fun begins in earnest—Fantasia, as they call it, borrowing a foreign word. A couple of mounted police from Helouan come down to keep order and see that the few inquisitive tourists from the hotels are not molested. But their services are not once required. Only the little children trot around with their incessant demand for baksheesh. The Arabs take no notice of us outsiders, beyond making way when we approach, offering here and there a word of explanation or inviting us to drink coffee with them when we draw near to their fire-circles. The Fantasia grows fast and furious, while the crouching camels munch and the cries of goats and donkeys mingle with the women's weird ululating. In one corner a ring is formed and the band begins to play—two pipes and a tomtom. To the endless repetition of a single phrase, half melody, half chant, enters a Sheikh upon his Arab horse. The gold and silver trappings gleam in the moonlight. His head-dress shines; the horse's metal neck-lace chinks and rattles. Holding the reins in one hand, the other grips a staff with its point in the sand; round this he circles in and out, making a figure of eight, the animal taking its small steps proudly, neck arched, tail flying, head held gracefully erect. Suddenly the rider swings a gun

round from his back, and fires it off into the sand with one hand; the people watch in silence; the horse prances out; another Sheikh enters the ring and goes through a similar performance.

In another direction a circle several hundred strong, packed close as herrings, sit round upon the sand, and a story-teller stands in the center, reciting wonderful adventures with many wild generalizations. He carries a waving stick, and his voice falls and rises with a wailing note. All those faces in the moonlight watch and listen with rapt attention. A burst of laughter comes, then exclamations of delight, then long-drawn "ohs!" Tales of Arabian Nights go floating across the desert air—towards another group, where the dancing girls, who accompany the pilgrimage from Cairo, are performing to yet another circle of onlookers.

Further off, upon the outskirts of the camp, rows of tall, shapely men stand waving their arms, swaying to and fro, bending their thin and graceful necks as they recite their songs, of a semi-religious, semi-erotic character, towards the east. They suddenly kneel and bow, then rise again; the singing goes on and on for hours, and from the distance the chanting of other groups comes in upon the breeze. It is a mournful sound. A few hundred yards outside the encampment these various chanting groups combine in a single tone that holds the monotony of wind blowing among the boulders of the desert.

And the Fantasia continues far into the night, while the moon climbs higher, the old Nile flows slowly by and the desert listens solemnly all round. Numbers sleep through it; here and there some rise up and disappear across the sand; everywhere are the outlines of the humped and pointed little tents, the grotesque heads and necks of camels and sheeted human figures passing softly to and fro through the moonlight. All know that strangers stand and watch them, but, while aware of it, they are utterly indifferent. The rejoicing is among themselves, no question of display or showing off for others. They simply do what they have done for centuries, and will do for centuries to come. A sense of something eternal, and infinite as the desert itself, rises from the camp. It stirs the blood. Somewhere in it there is a touch of awe.

At sunrise the tents are struck, and the entire mass moves on across the sand in single file, a procession stretching for miles. At the tomb itself, two days later, to the light of a thousand camp fires, the Fantasia is renewed in full earnest. The animals are sacrificed. There is endless praying, dancing, singing, acting and the rest. Then all return the way they went. The Bedouin scatter again to their various resting-places in the desert home. The camels come slouching and shuffling through the sands past Helouan.

What remains with me, however, is not so much the memory of their Fantasia and wild rejoicing, as the moonlit picture of the little families who left the camp to continue their journey beneath the stars. For the sight stirred old deep yearnings that every Nature-lover knows too well. So quietly they stole away into the immeasurable desert! All their possessions in this world they carried easily with them, and in their hearts this ancient faith the ages cannot change. The camels padded off, veiled women in the swaying tents upon their backs. The silhouettes were strange and mysterious against the brilliant stars. Like dreams of a forgotten world they melted into the distance swiftly. Moonlight, sand and desert took them home.

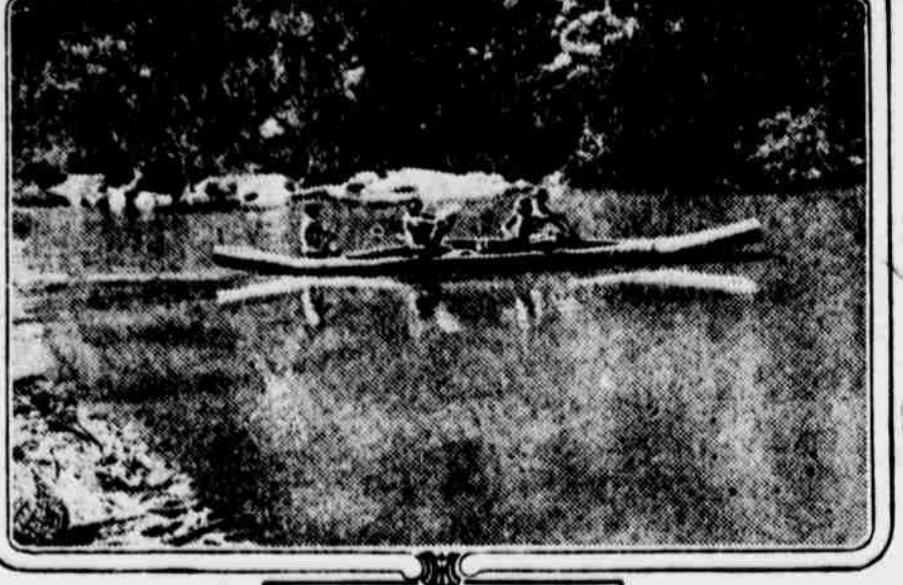
Quite Commonplace.
"I know a man whom every one respected, and it was found out he had married no fewer than six women in one month, yet he wasn't even arrested, and no one thought the less of him for it."
"Great Scott! Who was he?"
"Our minister."

Uncle Jed Again.
A huge touring car had just whizzed by, leaving a terrific wave of gasoline behind it.
"That goes another one o' them odormobiles," said Uncle Jed.—Judge.

In Literature.
Author's Friend—Our baby enjoys your new book more than any of us.
Author—How can the baby enjoy it?
Author's Friend—He stands on it to look out of the window.

Our Drama.
She (after the proposal)—What! Marry you—a drunkard, gambler, and impostor? Ha! ha! Begone, sir, before I ring and have you ejected!
He—Isabelle, am I to take this as a refusal?—London Opinion.

To Explore the Amazon Valley



A TRIBUTARY OF THE AMAZON

PREPARATIONS are being made by the University of Pennsylvania to send an expedition to the Amazon valley for the purpose of collecting information relative to the aboriginal inhabitants and to explore the forests where these primitive peoples still roam untouched by civilization. It is expected that the expedition will be one of the best equipped that has ever left the United States for scientific purposes. A steam yacht has been provided and furnished with all the apparatus which can contribute either to the comfort and safety of the members of the expedition or to the prosecution of the scientific inquiries for which the expedition was organized. This steamer is 132 feet in length and, drawing only six and one-half feet of water, is designed to navigate even the smaller tributaries of the great main basin of the Amazon for many thousand of miles.

Explore Tributaries First.
A definite plan of campaign has been mapped out for the expedition and the itinerary of the steamer has been determined up to a certain point. Leaving Philadelphia in January, the steamer will proceed to Para and there make final preparations for an extended cruise on the great river system. It is proposed, first, to explore the tributaries which flow from the north and which have their sources in the mountains on the borders of Brazil and the Guianas. In these almost unknown regions live representatives of the great Carib stock, of whom practically nothing is known, as well as representatives of the equally important Arak stock. The next region to be explored is that which is drained by the Rio Negro with its affluents, the Rio Branco and

time as the collections can be conveniently embarked at Manaus for shipment to New York and Philadelphia.

Brazil to Co-Operate.
It is proposed that while the exploring parties are engaged with the natives in their distant haunts, the party in charge of the steamer will conduct hydrographic surveys of the rivers and their tributaries. In this way a great deal of geographical information will be obtained which will be useful from a scientific standpoint, as well as from practical considerations.

The government of Brazil, always interested in whatever pertains to scientific investigation, has indicated its readiness to co-operate with the University of Pennsylvania in order to secure the success of the expedition and to make its labors most effective. The important results which may be expected from this undertaking will bring as much credit to Brazil as to the University of Pennsylvania, and will secure for both scientific and practical results of the very greatest permanent value.

The valley of the Amazon is one vast forest where modern civilization has never penetrated and where the only industry connected with modern life that has taken root is the extraction of rubber from the native forests. Neither agriculture nor mineral wealth has attracted the white man's enterprise.

HAS NO CHANCE TO ESCAPE
Seal Once Harpooned by Eskimo Hunter Cannot Fail to Become His Prey.

When once he has gone to the trouble of splicing a fine spear handle the Eskimo does not wish to break it, so the point is put on with a toggle or joint. When a seal or walrus is harpooned the sudden struggle of the animal does not break the spear, but merely unjoins the point, and the more the animal struggles the more the point turns crosswise in the wound and the firmer the barbs take hold. But the animal cannot escape, for with thongs of skin the point is connected with the spear shaft. The animal merely swims away or dives deep into the sea, carrying with him the spear. The long leather thong which is attached to it uncoils from the deck of the kayak and plays out. It carries with it a drag like a kite, which retards the animal and exhausts him, but does not pull hard enough to break the line. Even this drag is made of skin stretched over a spliced framework. When the line is all played out it is seen to be attached to a float which is also carried on the deck of the boat. This is made of an inflated skin. It has plugs and attachments cleverly carved from ivory, for wood is far too precious to be used in this land of ivory so far from the forests. The float serves as a buoy so that the Eskimo can follow the animal and find it after it gives up its struggle and dies. Then, too, the float keeps the catch from sinking and being lost in the ocean's depths.—Southern Workman.

Prepared for Peril.
"Have you made your will, John?"
"Yes, mother."
"Have you oiled and loaded your revolver?"
"Yes."
"And put on your bullet-proof jacket?"
"Yes."
"Is your prayer-book in the pocket over your heart?"
"Yes."
"Then go where duty calls you, dear."
There were no tears in that brave mother's eyes as she watched her son march away on his business trip to New York city. The women of the suburbs learn Spartan sternness in these wild, murderous days.—Newark News.

What He Would Do.
"What would you do," asked the lieutenant who was instructing the class in aviation, "if you were up a thousand feet in the air and the steering gear should go wrong or the engine should fall?"
"I'd hit the earth in about twenty seconds, I'm thinkin'," replied Sergeant McManus.



Yabahana Indian.

the Uaupes. Finally, an effort will be made to reach the isolated tribes that inhabit the vast unexplored forests between the Rio Madeira, the Rio Tapajós and the Rio Purus. In each case the steamer will proceed as far as possible up the affluents and canoes will be used to reach the less accessible headwaters. Since the tribes, as a rule, live some distance from the rivers, it will be necessary for the members of the expedition to penetrate into the forests and to remain in the native villages long enough to make the necessary observations and to make collections to illustrate the condition of the native arts. These collections will then be carried by whatever means of conveyance the natives can provide, to the steamer, which will thus become a storehouse of ethnological material until such