

There remains one very pleasant duty for me to perform before I resume for a few moments, and for the last time, the Chair which I have occupied at each one of our meetings during the past three years.

Let me first thank my fellow-members—each and every one of them—for the kindness and consideration which they have invariably shown to me personally, and for the constant and invaluable support which they have always been ready to afford me officially. Next let me express my warmest thanks to the Officers of the Club, both past as well as present, who have been ever ready to assist me with their wise counsel and their welcome help.

Of the special debt of gratitude which I owe to our Honorary Secretary, my old friend Charles Wollaston, I find it difficult to speak; fortunate indeed is the President who has such a tower of strength to lean upon for his support, and such a wise guide to direct his footsteps in the right path when they are prone to stray therefrom.

In receiving, three years ago, from my predecessor in this Chair the trust which I am about to relinquish I promised, so far as in me lay, to walk in those traditions which he had himself so fully and firmly maintained, and expressed the earnest hope that when the time came I might in turn hand that trust on, equally unsullied and unimpaired, to my successor.

I have tried at any rate to keep my promise, and if only I may be thought to have achieved, at least to some extent, that hope, my fondest wish has been fulfilled.

SCRAMBLES IN SINAI.

By GEOFFREY E. HOWARD.

† (Read before the Alpine Club, June 10, 1913.)

WHEN I tell people I have been to Sinai, I find they divide themselves for the most part into three classes. The first wax dreadfully facetious and ask if I went to look for the Ark; the second make intelligent inquiries about the sacred spots in the Holy Land, where they vaguely suppose every place mentioned in the Bible to be situated; and the third confuse and terrify me with searching scientific questions about the

conformation of the ranges in the Peninsula, the plant life and the technical difficulties—whatever that may precisely mean—of the climbing. Now as a matter of fact I am afraid that I was not drawn to that strange corner of the East by any praiseworthy thirst for an increase of theological or scientific knowledge. I am merely a disorderly person subject to periodical seizures of 'Wanderlust.'

To some mountain travellers it is given to cling in ecstasy like barnacles upon the overhangs of *aiguilles*, while others, steeped in geological or botanical lore, store their gifted intellects with accumulations of accurate scientific data. Alas, I am not of these elect! My head is of an inferior quality; indeed, I am not wholly unafflicted with nerves. My geology consists roughly in the knowledge born of painful experience, that whereas some kinds of rock come off piecemeal in your hands, upon others pieces of your hands come off. Flowers are delicious but strictly anonymous splashes of colour which as I leave timberline cause me to look forward longingly to the off-day—the off-day being to my unenlightened mind much the most attractive part of an expedition.

As I say, I am merely a vague, unprincipled wanderer, and yet I sometimes hope that sheer instinctive love of the mountains may give one some humble claim to be enrolled in the Book of our Tutelary Deity. I am tempted to apply to myself a rather beautiful mixed metaphor which an old member of the Club once heard from the lips of a perfervid preacher, at the close of a sermon on Jacob's Ladder. With deep emotion, he exclaimed: 'My friends, even a dead worm such as I can climb that ladder.' Merely to be among the mountains is, even for an ungifted traveller like myself, a joy too deep for words; to wander in the waste places of the earth; to lie in a bag under the stars; to wear unseemly raiment; to stuff strange agglomerations of nourishment between cracked lips, and perhaps above all to enjoy the strange thrill of treading where no one has trodden before. These concomitants of mountain travel combine to form the most glorious of all the joys of life, and somehow the very inspiration of that glory often serves to confirm the feeble knees and strengthen the weak head in a manner which upon subsequent retrospection from an armchair appears almost miraculous.

It was an idea that the Sinai Peninsula would prove a cornucopia of exactly those attractions I have mentioned that caused me to jump at an offer by Mr. R. H. Mackenzie of the Cairo Syndicate of an outfit of camels from their oil-boring

works on the shore of the Gulf of Suez; and when Eaton promised to accompany me I asked no more of Fortune.

One glorious day towards the end of February 1912, we found ourselves rolling and staggering down the Gulf of Suez in a small and somewhat antiquated launch. The following breeze was fresh and the sparkling sea was frisky, and as we settled down upon the deck and lazily watched the picturesque Arab crew grouped in the bows, and the fine-looking, coal-black captain at the wheel we resigned ourselves with the philosophy of true landmen to the prospect of finding a plunge into the small dark cabin for meals beyond our powers of endurance, but comforted each other with mutual assurances that it was excellent practice for camel riding. However, blessed is he who expecteth nothing, for as the day went on, we found we could make several plunges below and absorb several particularly hearty meals, and when evening drew near and we learned that we could not make our landing point that night, but must anchor till dawn, we faced the prospect with unexpected equanimity. As the sun went down, the strange sterile shore blazed with every varying hue of rose and orange, and being within a few hundred yards of the beach we realised the extraordinary barrenness of the wilderness where we were to spend the next three weeks.

With the first glint of dawn we were off again, and rounding the bold bluff of Jebel Hammam were very soon on land, where a kindly welcome awaited us at the oil borings of the Cairo Syndicate. Here we obtained our 'outfit'—six Bedouins, six gaunt, lean camels, and a priceless treasure in the shape of Abdul, an Arab boy with some knowledge of English and, as it proved, a marvellous power of converting the unlikeliest ingredients into the most succulent dishes at incredibly short notice.

Our Bedouins were true sons of the desert, uncontaminated by any association with civilisation, lean and wiry, in flowing rags and armed with enormously long gas-pipe rifles of vast antiquity, bound with brass rings and ornamented with lumps of turquoise matrix nailed into the short stocks. Their dignity was a thing to marvel at, and their childlike ignorance of all else was only equalled by their astounding knowledge of the Book of Nature. They could read the ground as we read a large type advertisement. To them a human footprint was as identifying as a face, and their knowledge of the haunts and ways of game passed belief.

Starting the same afternoon, we left the coast and turned

up the Wady Taiyibeh, and then into the Wady Homra, where we camped under a cliff. The moon came up and we climbed a low, crumbling hill and gazed on the desolate undulations around us. The complete absence of life of any sort, the perfect silence, the sense of the incongruity of our presence at all, sent us to our sleeping-bags in chastened mood.

To lie-abeds who wish to be cured of their sluggard habits I recommend Sinai; for if your camp is within reach of the early morning sun I will guarantee you will not lie there long after dawn. Certainly we did not; the glare became intolerable a few minutes after sunrise and we were soon moving on. It did not take us long to discover that riding a camel all day was very soporific and made the heat seem unbearable, so we made it a practice whenever we were trekking to walk for at least three or four hours every day. This habit was a source of abiding wonder to the Bedouins. To have a camel and not to ride seemed to them the height of lunacy; but they found our madness very convenient, as we allowed them to ride our growling beasts whenever we went afoot.

After a while we turned North up the Wady Ibn Sakkar, and passed a fine-looking hill, Sarbut el Jemel, on our right. Late in the afternoon we fixed on a camp under a low bank of sand where a few flowering shrubs grew here and there, providing fodder for the camels. We climbed Jebel Abu Ademat in the hope of a shot at an ibex, but beyond several of the largest marmots I have ever seen, we caught sight of nothing.

Next morning the Bedouins showed us some tracks round the camp which they evidently regarded with excitement. After infinite trouble we at last gathered that they were leopards and that one was a well-known man-eater. We felt we were getting our money's worth! Then followed a long day climbing all over Jebel Ibn Sakkar, a long flat-topped mountain with extraordinarily broken sides, scored by a maze of gullies, the sandstone worn into fantastic shapes by the driving sand. Towards evening a lucky running shot at 200 yards brought joy to our hearts and a bountiful supply of fresh ibex meat to the camp. Great was the jubilation of the Bedouins, in whose estimation we immediately rose appreciably. Our camp was always a threefold affair. First our sleeping-bags laid out under a rock on the soft sand, with camel saddles for pillows; next Abdul and the kitchen—a flat iron pot which seemed equally potent for every branch of the culinary art; and lastly, at a little distance, the Bedouins' fire, round which they squatted and chattered half the night.

To-night after supper they began by ones and twos to steal into the little circle of light thrown by our lantern, and after a dignified salute sat down and accepted coffee and tobacco, and partly by signs, partly by drawing in the sand, and partly by the interpretation of Abdul a long conversation took place. After that, this was a nightly proceeding, and we were soon on terms of the greatest friendship with our picturesque companions.

It was very cold that night, with a biting N. wind, the contrast with the fearful heat of the day making it all the more piercing, but we had not come out for luxuries, so we slept in peace.

Every morning Abdul roused us with a cup of tea. This refinement of civilisation in such a place bordered on the ludicrous, but we certainly had no objection to it! I was reminded of a lady of my acquaintance, daughter of one of our oldest members, who once travelled in the same part of the world and who demanded that her early morning tea should be brought into her tent. Her Arab boy, filled with a sense of the gross impropriety of entering a lady's apartment while she was in bed, insisted on keeping his eyes tightly closed in the sacred precincts. The resulting havoc proved an effective 'call,' but the tea usually reached the rudely awakened sleeper in the form of a shower bath!

We spent several days exploring the wild and desolate basin round this camp. This region does not seem to have been visited by white men for very many years, probably not since Sir Henry James made his map, which, with all due respect to that remarkable pioneer, is exceedingly sketchy and inaccurate in this particular section. We found great difficulty in learning the local names of the various mountains and very often were convinced that the Bedouins' guiding principle in answering topographical questions was 'We only do it to oblige, because we know it pleases!' Roughly speaking, however, a sharp peak, *Jebel Ras Thal*, closes in the N. of the valley, while the long, flat *Jebel Ibn Sakkar* flanks the E. and *Jebel Widmat* and a mountain we named *Jebel Shajā't* at the W. From the top of *Jebel Ibn Sakkar* one looks down a grand precipice into the cañon-like *Wady Wutah* and across to the long, flat *Jebel Wutah* beyond. The maps apparently err here, as they mark the latter range as being to the W. of the *Wady* of the same name.

After climbing all the peaks within reach of our camp we next moved south across a long stretch of gently undulating

desert, past Hadhbat Suleiman, where are some inscriptions, and camped in the Wady Omarëat, a gorge surrounded by fine broken crags. Water was of course the first consideration in choosing our camps, but even when we found it, it was often of the filthiest description: stagnant pools bearing the traces of use by many animals. We found a pocket filter invaluable at all times and we put the long rubber tube attached to ours to a very practical use. Sometimes in the narrow granite gullies we came across extraordinarily deep and often almost perfectly cylindrical pot-holes containing water, and into these we would lower the filter and suck the water straight out. These pot-holes were by far the most remarkable I have ever seen: the granite was polished quite smooth, and sometimes the holes, though only a foot or eighteen inches wide, would be six to ten feet deep. When we consider that the annual rainfall seldom exceeds an inch, the length of time required to form these holes simply baffles imagination.

From this camp we explored several of the neighbouring mountains.* These were all sandstone, with precipitous sides affording good climbing and flat tops, several of which had crater-like depressions on the summit. Finally, we made our way over Jebel Dhafari and down Wady Dhafari, a really magnificent gorge, narrowing to a granite gully in the centre. Here, as everywhere else, we found rubber soles absolutely essential. The rocks are naturally bone dry and often exceedingly smooth; our rubber boots enabled us to climb, with extraordinary ease and a sense of security I have never previously experienced. Indeed one could walk with comfort on slabs which would have been impracticable with nails, and of course the silence was invaluable in stalking game. A scramble up Jebel Ras Dhafari rewarded us with a very fine view of the S., where Jebel Serbal towered above its smaller neighbours and whetted our appetites for the following week. I was particularly impressed by the curious appearance of the ranges from this point. The Wadies or valleys to the S. were fairly broad and perfectly flat; from these flat surfaces the mountains sprang sheerly, brown, pink and red pyramids and ridges placed as it were on a flat white table of sand. That day we lost each other, and when Eaton rejoined me in camp,

* None of the mountains either here or round our previous base showed evidence in the shape of cairns of previous ascents by Europeans, but they are no doubt fairly frequently climbed by hunting Bedouins.



L. E. Howard, photo.

Swan Electric Engraving Co. Ltd.

Camels resting.

which had meanwhile been shifted to the Wady Shellal, it was dark and he was glad of the beacon light of a lantern which I had set out in the middle of the broad valley to guide him.

At first we were puzzled at the meticulous care with which we were never allowed to move without a Bedouin shakari at our heels; but we presently learned that the Sheik in command of our party was personally answerable for our safety, and woe betide him if anything befell us. We were also considerably amused by our companions' evident anxiety as to our climbing capabilities. Every now and then we would come to a pitch which would be pronounced 'Good for Arab; not good for English!' Then Eaton would stoutly murmur that the prestige of the white man must be maintained, and up we would go, though it may be not with the catlike agility of our barefooted cicerones, who would nevertheless nod grave approval and mutter 'Quaiss' to our gratification. It was quaint to watch our two familiars at the noonday halt absorbing their tobacco. Through the stock of their guns they have a hole bored, and into one end they stuff the weed; then holding the stock to their lips they suck the smoke through and pass the gun back and forth to each other. These must, I should think, be the largest and heaviest pipes in the world!

Next morning we climbed an imposing-looking mountain to the N.E. which was apparently nameless, so we christened it *Jebel Ilizabat*, and then rejoining the camels farther on pursued our hot and dusty way along a fairly frequented caravan track which is the main route from Suez to *Jebel Musa*. Here as everywhere we constantly caught sight of stray camels, generally with young ones at foot. They are turned loose for considerable periods and picked up again by their owners when wanted. It was very startling at first suddenly to come round a corner and find oneself face to face with two or three equally astonished ships of the desert, who snarled at us and ambled off in pained surprise.

A long trek over a curious pass (*Nakb el Buderah*) brought us into the *Wady Magharah*, which abounds in hairpin turns and is hemmed in by fine crags 500 or 600 feet high. Here are the famous old turquoise mines of the Pharaohs, but, alas! a scramble up to them showed that the Arabs have recently blasted away the hieroglyphics which used to adorn them. A prolonged search was rewarded by the discovery of a few rough and valueless stones. A long afternoon's ride up the *Wady Mukatteb* failed to bring us to water, but at sunset we

unlimbered opposite Jebel Mukatteb, on which we turned our backs to gaze with interest at a grand peak opposite forming part of the Genaiyeh range, where must also be the points named Atairtir ed D'hanie and Jebel Meilihah on the map. These names, however, the Bedouins stoutly declared to be non-existent.* Resolving to climb the peak on our return, we snuggled into our bags after supping off a hare which one of the Bedouins had caught by the simple but exertive process of running it down!

Next day we determined to reach Jebel Serbal, and a very tedious process it proved to be. An hour's march brought us into the bottom of the Wady Feiran, and all day we turned and wound, expecting that each corner would prove the last. The fact that the Bedouins have no expressions for any sub-divisions of time smaller than half a day and none at all for distance made it, as we knew from experience, a totally futile procedure to inquire how far it was or how long it would take. Still, though there was no question as to our long lane having a turning, for it had some dozens, we knew it must also have an end, and at last in the afternoon a sharp bend to the right brought us face to face with the magnificent pile of Serbal, and a few yards farther on our eyes, so long accustomed to absolute sterility, were feasting on the sight of a running stream—the only one in the Peninsula—and green grass. What a sight, too, it was to see men and beasts rush to the clear, pure water and absorb it like so many sponges! Soon we were in the heart of the famous oasis; thousands of palm trees, little squares of green wheat, and numbers of curious, tumble-down stone dwellings, inhabited during the date harvest, and here and there a human figure looking strange and unreal after our ten days of rock and sand and loneliness. Every palm here has its owner whose rights are scrupulously respected. Often a family will own one, which is passed down as an heirloom, and here every year two or three thousand nomads gather from all over the Peninsula to harvest their dates.

We thought it would be delightful to bivouac by a bubbling stream among the trees, but after all the desert has its advantages. Mosquitoes, centipedes, and everything that creepeth upon the earth welcomed us jubilantly, and even our ardour for a long and necessarily delayed bath was entirely

* James' map appears to be somewhat confused here. On subsequently climbing this prominent mountain we gave it a definite name to distinguish it from its less imposing neighbours in what is locally termed the Genaiyeh range. *Vide* p. 25.

damped by the groans of Abdul, who started to set us a good example, but soon came hopping back with a nasty bite on his foot from a tarantula. The application of much ammonia assuaged the pain, but for days his foot was badly swollen and extremely uncomfortable.

Our escort had talked much of a 'Holy Man' who lived in this place, and after settling our quarters for the night we strolled up in the sunset to a walled enclosure entered by an arched gateway. Above the arch was a simple stone cross which looked strangely homelike in this Mohammedan wilderness. Repeated knockings brought a grave Arab youth who admitted us. Within was a veritable paradise of green things, lemon trees in abundance, wheat and vegetables, besides many shapely cypresses. Our conductor led us to the centre of the enclosure, where was a simple stone, one-roomed house, and in front of it under a thick trellis of vines sat a remarkable figure robed in a thick black cassock with a black biretta on his head. Long, unkempt locks framed his shrunken face and an enormous hooked nose seemed to dominate every other feature. He received us with every mark of courtesy, but conversation was a difficulty. Our Arabic was limited to a few phrases connected with climbing, hunting and eating, and our modern Greek—which we gathered was his native tongue—to 'Good-night.' He regaled us with cups of the superbest cognac I have ever tasted, but it is not a beverage I recommend on a very empty inside when the temperature is over 100°! However, we bowed profoundly many times, gave tobacco to the four or five Bedouins who were standing round, and retired as gracefully as we could.

This veritable hermit has lived here for twenty-six years and grows vegetables for the convent at Jebel Musa. Next morning, after an extremely uncomfortable night spent in the uproarious company of at least a million creeping, crawling and buzzing little hosts, we were roused by the appearance of our venerable friend, come to return our visit. Somewhat abashed, we hurriedly crawled out of our bags and bowed ecstatically, making such cooing sounds as we felt were most likely to convey an impression of delighted welcome. He had not come empty-handed, for he presented us with several fine lemons which we were uncommonly pleased to have. After a hasty consultation we pressed upon him a slab of chocolate which he regarded with doubtful satisfaction, and a pair of scissors to cut his hair; this called forth a beaming smile; then inspiration seized me and I routed out a tin of

Keating's powder, the use of which I explained in pantomime. Seldom have I seen a face so illumined with the radiance of grateful joy as was that ancient man's. I am not surprised either; we reckoned he must be a good deal troubled that way.

The evening before, we had arranged for a local Bedouin to come with us up Jebel Serbal, as we learned that this was etiquette. He had intimated that we must start before dawn and that it would take us twenty-four hours to make the journey up and down. Eaton had thereupon regarded the mountain with some attention and hazarded a guess of four hours up and three down. Personally I inclined to four and a half up, but anyhow we flatly refused to start before 8. At that hour then we set out, past a low hill on which are still visible the ruins of an ancient monastery and a higher one which is the traditional and indeed probable site from which Moses watched the battle with the Amalekites while Aaron and Hur sustained his hands in prayer.

I will leave to other and more scholarly pens the discussion of whether Jebel Serbal or Jebel Musa is the actual Mount Sinai of Exodus. The evidence certainly seems to point to the former, and topographically it answers the description to a remarkable degree. It is impossible to conceive a more fitting theatre for the tremendous drama of which Holy Scripture gives us so vivid an account. Jebel Serbal is truly a magnificent and awe-inspiring mountain. Huge buttresses and pinnacles in serried array form a mass of unsurpassed grandeur. As we made our way up the stony Wady Aleyat, Eaton was constantly impressed by the resemblance to the Chamonix Aiguilles, while I could not help marking a startling likeness to Montserrat in Spain—a likeness which became constantly intensified during the day.

Passing several very curious and interesting inscriptions and primitive drawings of men and animals cut upon a smooth black stone, we crossed the valley and began to climb a steep couloir shut in by tremendous granite buttresses which gradually closed in towards the top. To our surprise and delight a sound of running water reached us about a third of the way up. Eaton first thought it was a delusion of parched toilers, but there, sure enough, from under a large block, issued a tiny trickle of ice-cold water. A halt was naturally called, and we lay and laved our heated heads and arms and wondered whether Moses had refreshed himself at this very pool 3500 years ago.

Though steep, the couloir is never a matter for more than an occasional use of the hands, but it was back-aching work and



J. C. Eaton, photo.

Swan Electric Engraving Co. Ltd.

Isabel L. L. L.

we were glad to get to the top. Here we found a patch of snow perhaps a foot square. It seemed strangely out of place, but I suppose during the short rains of December or January a certain amount of snow must most years be formed at this height. It was on arrival at the top of the couloir that I was chiefly reminded of Montserrat. We found ourselves in a huge basin surrounded by curious smooth granite pyramids of



BUTRESS OF JEBEL SERBAL.

strange shapes. Here and there stunted shrubs grew in cracks of the rock and flowers also were moderately plentiful. Turning to the left we rapidly mounted steep and very smooth slabs to the highest point, which consists of a huge mass of smooth granite topped by a great square block. Extraordinarily interesting specimens of granite erosion attracted our attention near the summit. It seems unlikely that the very small amount of water precipitated in this region can be responsible for the phenomenon which is perhaps caused by the prevalent N. wind driving sand against the rock.*

* Of the penetrating power of sand we subsequently saw curious instances in the shape of bottles near the oil boring works. The small particles had been driven deep into the hard glass.

What a marvellous view we had that day! To the N. stretched the wild jumble of crags, small ranges, patches of desert and winding valleys among which we had been wandering. Far away, across line after line of low peaks to the E., the gulf of Akaba shimmered faintly, with a hazy line of hills beyond in Arabia itself. Southward towered the Jebel Musa and Katerina group, while to the W. stretched the flat desert between us and the shore, with the palm trees of Tor just discernible on the farther edge. Above all was the eye delighted by the vivid turquoise blue of the Gulf of Suez, brilliant in its translucence on the near side and fading into an exquisite opalescent haze in the distance, where the graceful outlines of the grand African peaks rose in faintest pearl-grey silhouette.

The absence of vegetation on the lower and of snow on the higher slopes of the vast panorama of mountains on three sides of us gave an unobstructed view of the diverse geological formation. Great bands of red, pink or brown scored the prevailing grey-white and ran straight over range after range like Brobdingnagian switchbacks till they were lost in the distance. Everything seemed dead, parched, mummified. Even the impression of chaotic sterility conveyed by the savage panoramas in the Sierra Nevada paled before this.

We smiled at our guide's prophecies and at our own when we found that we had taken just $4\frac{1}{4}$ hours to the top (7700 ft.), and spent several hours basking on the hot granite and bemoaning a catastrophe to one of Eaton's boots of which the rubber sole was rapidly parting company with the upper. A leisurely descent brought us to camp in $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours. After all it may be that the guide's idea of time would be justified if one tried any route but that by the couloir. I fancy it would test the skill of the most daring cragsman to make an ascent by any other way, the extraordinary angle and the phenomenal smoothness of the rock in most places looking, to say the least of it, fairly formidable.

Of course the Mecca of travellers to Sinai is the convent of Jebel Musa, and we had ourselves intended to go there, but the fascinations of exploring new ground in the N. had taken so much time that we had decided to forego what must be a very interesting experience for the more appealing joys of climbing. Consequently, we now had to retrace our steps, promising ourselves, however, some good scrambling *en route*. Arriving back in the Wady Mukatteb we started at dawn one morning for the noble red massif which towers to the E.,

and which had attracted our attention on the outward journey.

A stiff scramble up a steep sandstone couloir of a couple of thousand feet provided the chief interest of the climb. Eaton had been obliged to fall back upon a pair of nailed boots, which he found rather troublesome on some of the steeper slabs. We had some difficulty in deciding which of several was the highest summit. The most obvious one was crowned with a huge boulder up which we crawled, only to see that another rather to the E. was a few feet higher still. On the latter we built a cairn, naming the peak *Jebel Tair Azrak*. As is so often the case here, the top consisted of a flat plateau of some acres' extent from which sprang the actual summits. It is a magnificent view point, and we spent a glorious hour studying the blazing landscape.

Following the dry bed of a watercourse on the plateau for a few hundred yards we came upon one of the smoothest and narrowest potholes we had met with, containing good water to within a foot of the surface. Here the filter came in useful and we had a most refreshing drink. We struck down a very steep gully to the N.W., the left side affording safe climbing, and ultimately reached the old turquoise mines whither the camels and baggage had meanwhile moved.

I remember we had a great feast that night, lying at the foot of a beetling cliff opposite the tomb of some local saint, a rough round stone erection through the unglazed windows of which one could see a sheet covering what gave the impression of being a body, but this of course we could not investigate. The Bedouins had collected various desert roots for our delectation: wild asparagus which was tasteless but soft and edible, and a curious gnarled root from which the outer husk is removed, leaving a clear white core with a pleasant taste, faintly resembling a cocoanut. We suffered a good deal from driving sand that night and were looking our grimmest when awakened next morning by the appearance of two shaved and immaculate Englishmen—a very practical proof that we were on the main highroad again. These proved to be Mr. Arthur Sutton of Reading and Dr. McKinnon of Damascus, who were making the round trip from Cairo to the Monastery and back *via* Tor and the Khedevial steamer. We had a pleasant chat with these gentlemen, who most generously offered us stores and comforts from their many and well-laden camels, but our foraging Bedouins and our iron cooking grate were all-sufficient for our simple needs and we gratefully

declined. I have been unable, on subsequently meeting Mr. Sutton, to resist the temptation of giving away his very imposing-looking dragoman, who, after we had bade a cordial goodbye to his Effendim, slyly crept back and asked us for the love of Heaven to tell him his whereabouts as he was hopelessly at sea!

But time was getting short as we had to catch our launch which connected with the mailboats, and long forced marches were necessary. After many windings we finally emerged on El Markha, a flat stretch of desert between the mountains and the sea, and pitched camp alongside a pleasant fellow-wanderer who was surveying the coast and who regaled us with much tepid mineral water and his very excellent company. We declined his offer of a tent and stretched ourselves luxuriously upon the shingle after several of the most grateful and comforting bathes I ever hope to enjoy.

One short day's march along the shore, past Ras Abu Zenimeh, a large and much venerated tomb—which Eaton entered, while I contented myself with a peep through the windows, not feeling moved to take off my boots and endure the accompanying tedium of unwinding and rewinding puttees—brought us back once more to our starting point, Jebel Tanka, the scene of the oil-borings. Here our kind friends Messrs. Growder and Hoops, who are in charge of the works, met us with the disturbing news that the launch had not yet appeared, and in view of the heavy N. wind would probably take fifty hours to make Suez again when she did.

However, there was nothing to be done, so we contented ourselves with taking impossible pot shots at schools of porpoises and with rowing round a small sailing craft at anchor off the shore containing two hasheesh smugglers who had been caught in the act, and who were now awaiting an escort to the Suez gaol. At first we wondered why they did not up sail and away, but it was soon explained that Soudanese police were lying on the cliffs above ready to fire on them at the first suspicious movement. Never have I seen two finer specimens of the stage villain: half-breed Greeks, their terrific moustachios, slouch hats and gay rags were positively operatic in their suggestiveness. They seemed to regard their position with perfect philosophy and exchanged friendly greetings and offered advice regarding our abortive efforts to catch some fish for supper.

Though we did not know it at the time, that evening was to be our last chance of enjoying the wonder and delight of a

Sinaitic sunset. At every hour of the day the mountains change their colour, but in the evening they change every minute. From grey-white to pink and from pink through every gradation of delicate rose to deepest crimson. Then in a few moments the sun is gone and a pearly opalescence spreads over everything, till you are suddenly aware that it is night and a million stars are blazing overhead.

Next morning—no launch ; but we rubbed our eyes—a steamer of some size was lying near the shore. We tumbled into our clothes and ran to the mess room. Here were two strangers, one a big bluff British sea-captain, the other a froglike creature, part French, part Italian, part several other forebears, in ochre button boots. He was a prospector of some kind who had just reached the coast and was frantically bargaining for a passage to Suez on the unexpected tramp steamer. The captain fixed a merry eye on the ochre button boots and persistently replied to everything with a curt ‘Suez ! Ten pounds.’ We naturally took a pretty vivid personal interest in the matter, and when at last the ten pounds were handed over we mutually and sorrowfully shook our heads and murmured ‘Too much.’ However, I thought that as the matter really was urgent I would just try my luck. Drawing the captain aside I asked ‘How much did you say to Suez ?’ He slowly closed one eye. ‘You’re English, aren’t you ? Got any button boots about you ? No ? Good. Say a sovereign and grub thrown in !’

Here was luck indeed, and a frantic half hour followed, packing our baggage. Saying farewell to our trusty escort and our kind hosts, we tumbled into a dinghy and accomplished the delicate operation of scrambling up a rope on to the steamer’s deck, no easy task in a heavy sea. Seated at ease on the bridge and listening to the racy yarns of genial Captain Edmanson we found the voyage to Suez all too short, and many a regretful glance we threw at the desolate shore on our right where we had spent such a delightful holiday. True, we had not accomplished great things ; a little climbing, a great deal of scrambling, a little shooting, a little new ground covered and a little information acquired for the makers of maps ; but for the man who loves the wild places of the earth and the primitive in mankind, who loves the sun and regards luxuries as superfluities and who possesses several pairs of rubber-soled boots and a perfect companion, I can recommend that strange corner of the East as a playground he will love and long to revisit.