

CHAPTER X.

AMONG THE KABYLES.

‘ And in the mountains he did feel his faith.’

WORDSWORTH’S ‘Excursion.’



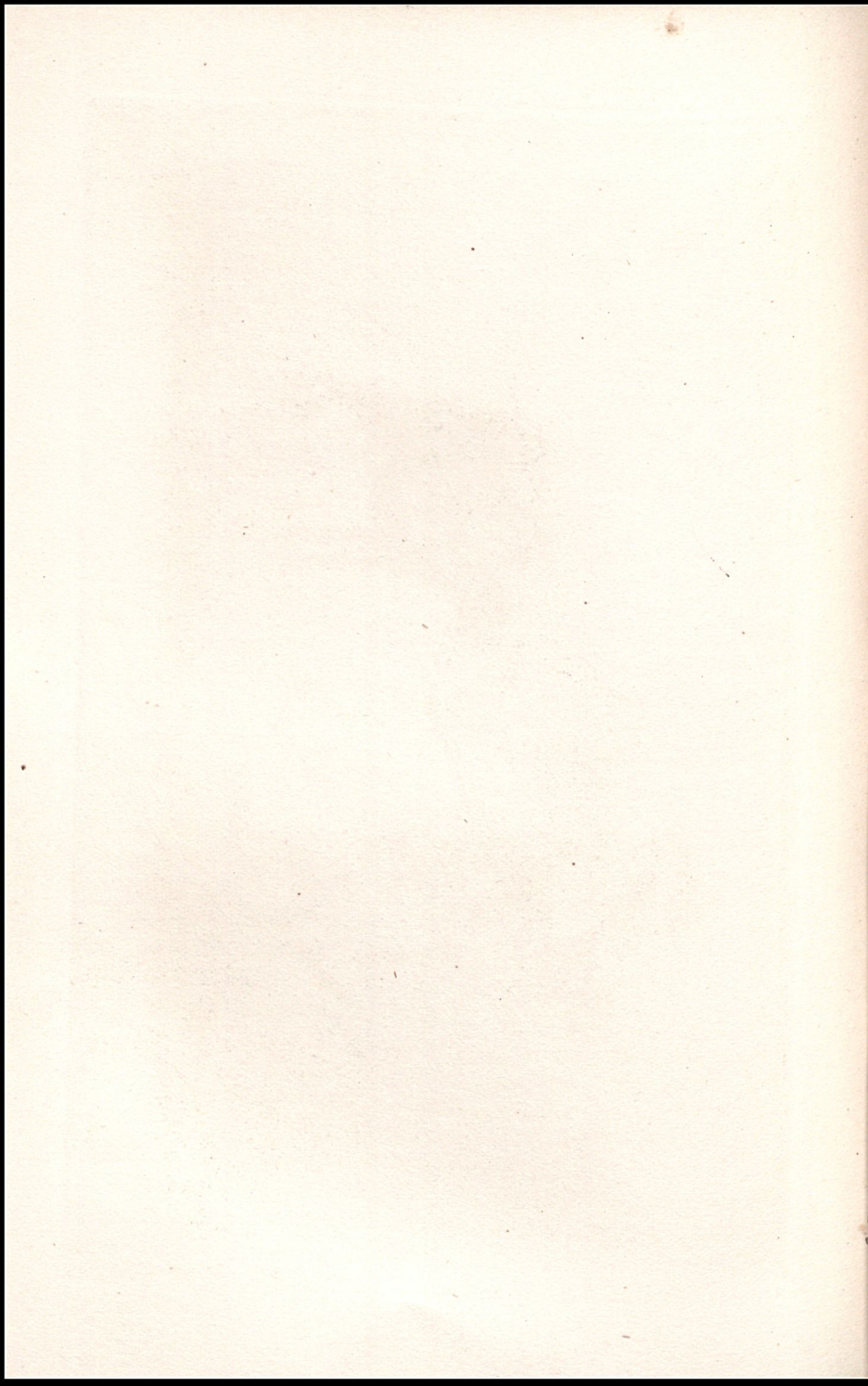
THIS chapter is penned at Tizzi Ouzi, in the Kabyle country. We are now in its very heart. We are between Algiers and Fort Napoleon. The latter place is upon one of the highest mountains of the Eastern Atlas range. It is a few hours' ride on donkeys from the snow summits of the Djurjura. We stopped last night here, where I write, and we are again here to-night, after going through the Kabyle valleys and over their mountains to Fort Napoleon. We might have pierced Atlas and come out on the little paths leading either to Bougie, on the sea, or to Tunis. We preferred, rather than go further east, to return to Algiers, and visit the southern and western parts of the country; perhaps go to the Desert before we leave for Spain.

This village, where I rest, is somewhat French. It is a prominent military post in the Kabyle plains. It has about 250 French, and nearly 2000 native population. But it is not a fair sample of the Kabyle towns. We have to-day passed on foot through three or four towns, which are samples, and into their hovels or cabins. There is much to write about these people. But, before I begin, it would be well to tell why and how we came here. There were two incitements:—

First. On our approaching the city of Algiers—while thirty miles out at sea—there appeared on the horizon,



Kabyles



shutting it in, a magnificent mountain range. This was not on the shore. It was not the Sahel hills which environ Algiers and its bay. But tipped upon the top with silver head-gear—Kabye style—old Atlas, the veritable, classic, patient Atlas, appeared! What child, studying his geography, has not heard the word? Its very philology is enchantment! Atlas! Its mention calls up a big, burly, muscular, round-shouldered person, with few clothes, whose brows are knit, whose biceps muscles are strained to their utmost tension, the adductors of whose thighs are steady under the superincumbent weight of a world! Old Atlas! We have seen his head silvered, not by the snows of time, but by the flakes of this past winter. We have seen his shoulders protrusive and burly, all garlanded with olive and ash. We have seen his ribs extending far out of his range till the sea cooled them by its hydropathic treatment. To-day we have been creeping, not beneath his great legs like pigmies under Colossus, for his pediments were not visible, but over his burdened shoulders and around his brawny neck! Old Atlas! What a great name the myth gave him in the heathen imagination! His range was, to the Greek and Roman, the spine of the world! Hercules came to the Riviera on the opposite coast. According to the pre-historic account, he went further, to Spain. There being killed, his army came here. Here they made an end of their conquests, and set up pillars at Gibraltar, yet called the Pillars of Hercules. Beyond these pillars was the flaming bound. There may have been rumours of the Gardens of the Hesperides beyond, but only rumours. Over it—beyond it—all was unknown; or, if known, known in the Nubian geographer's account of the *mare tenebrarum*, as the sea of gloom, beyond the horrid black beetling ramparts of the world, against which the shrieking and howling waves—such as the earlier voyagers

round the Cape of Good Hope describe—lashed themselves in furious tempests with ghastly, grim, and shapeless demons! Up to this bound, and under the staunch earth to its limit, Atlas held the *orbis terrarum*—bore it up amidst the raging of the elements! Beyond it, therefore, in honour of Atlas, the unknown sea was called Atlantic!

Under the shadow of Atlas, as the sun sinks to the West, into and beyond that ocean where my heart goes—to the 'New Atlantis' of Bacon—I send to you of the Western World, upborne by giants of another mould, I send my greeting!

The Atlas range runs from Tunis to the Atlantic. Standing as we did on the mountain at Fort Napoleon, we could see lying under the flashing meridian rays of a sun about eighty degrees of Fahrenheit, the Mediterranean, as we had seen from that unstable element these very mountains robed in the blue drapery of distance, and hanging under the light, fleecy clouds of the land! So that one of our objects in coming to this interior Kabyle country is gratified.

The *second* incitement of our coming hither is to see the Kabyles. I confess to a strong predilection for them. I know they do not appear so well in history as the Arab. They do not dress so statuesquely. No sashes or cinctures bind their flowing robes like those of the Arabs. No fez cap or abundant turban hides their head. They are the common people, and therefore of uncommon interest in my eye. They do the work, raise the grain, attend the flocks, make the local law, fight the fights, and hold the religion of this country, with as earnest a soul as any class of labourers, patriots, or religionists on the earth. They tickle the ribs of Atlas till he laughs with plenty. As to their personal appearance, their heads are generally shaven, except the crown, which has a short tuft of their raven-

black hair. Their dress is very primitive. They wear wool, summer and winter. Their sheep give them their Roman senatorial robe and its capuchon ornament. Linen and cotton they do not yet use or know. In sight of the telegraph, they still dress and eat, and watch their herds, just as Abraham did, or any other Oriental patriarch. They do more, and better; they raise good crops, and are not nomadic.

I have already said that they numbered 600,000. I should have said that they furnish one-fourth of what are called the 'indigenes.' Algiers is made up of nearly three millions of people. Of these 200,000 are Europeans, nearly all French. There are some 60,000 French soldiers here. The rest of the three millions are Mussulmans, 2,692,812 in number; and Israelites about 28,000. Of these indigenes, the Kabyles seem to be distinct from the Arab or Moor. The illustra-



Kabyle Man and Woman.

tions which I have introduced are intended to represent these diversities. The Moor is the descendant of the

Turk or other Mussulmans. He is distinguished from the Arab, because he is a 'man of the house.' He lives in towns and houses. The Arab lives under the sky and in the tents. He sings songs about his freedom and his out-door tents. The Arab is very dirty. The Moor is proud of his ancestry. His fathers fought the old wars. For seven hundred years, how they fought the Hidalgos—has not Irving told us? The Arabs are distributed into tribes, called after the patronymic name. The tribes are divided and subdivided. The chiefs are the supreme rulers. Their domestic government is aristocratic. They have an hereditary nobility, a military nobility, and a religious nobility. I mention this only to show that, while the Arabs are the pretentious and supercilious part of the population, they are not the most important indigenous element here, as they are generally believed to be. The Kabyle may or may not have the same origin and religion as the Arab; though he has many of the same habits as the Arab, still he has a distinct and independent polity. It is democratic, on the American model: or rather we are, or should be, democratic on the Kabyle model. For is he not older than even the nomads of Job's era? He goes back to the twilight of antiquity. He is considered, at least in Algiers, as aboriginal. Some hold that he is a melange of many nations. I do not think so; but we shall see. His face is brown, not black, but varying from a light to a deep sunburnt brown. His features are regular. The women are, when young, at least, not ill-looking. They are smaller in proportion than the men. The latter are fine-looking, walk erect and gracefully, are courteous, hospitable, good-natured, and, as the French found, they are patriotic and brave. They were the last to yield to French power. From my window I can see the plains, hills, and mountains, which were ensanguined with their

blood within the past five years. These mountains were lined with their braves, in the last great fight before they yielded to McMahan. The struggle was terrific. They are hardly yet subdued. They have only recently paid their tribute in cash at Fort Napoleon. It was collected before last year, with the bayonet.

Their polity I said was democratic. The tribes live in villages. You may count the villages by the hundred from any elevation. These villages are subdivided into communes, or *decheras*. Each *dechera* has as many *karoubas* as there are distinct families. The members of the *karoubas* elect a local legislator, or *dahman*, who represents the interest of his commune, in the *djemaa*. This is the local congress or parliament. The president of this body is an Amin. He is mayor of the village, and possesses judicial and military powers. He is elected by the Assembly and has to be re-elected every year. I asked one of the French officers of Napoleon how the election was conducted by the villagers? He said that they meet *en masse*, and vote *viva voce*. The majority rule. The Amin is the intermediary between the French and the people, and as such he is held responsible. I saw a dozen of these mayors of villages, sitting serenely cross-legged in the court at Fort Napoleon, giving their advice as to local matters to the officer, while several hundred anxious suitors were waiting for the decisions.

Again, the Amins of the tribe name an Amin of Amins. He is the political chief or president of the united tribes. The French supervise or control this election. When the various local legislatures or *djemaa*s assemble, it is a sort of federate congress. It is called the Soff. It is this system which has made the Kabyles potential. The French officer at Fort Napoleon confessed to me that the Kabyles were industrious. He took us through the machine-shops,

where they were learning to make furniture, &c., and had turning-lathes. He praised their ingenuity, but he said they were quarrelsome, litigious—always claiming and defending their rights or objecting to wrongs. He said a Kabyle was then in prison for shooting another who *had stepped on his land* after being forbidden. Well, I rather like this, for it shows a sort of individual independence, which accounts for the fact that the Kabyles of these mountains and valleys were never conquered by the Romans or Turks, and never by the French until 1857. Marshal Randon promised to conserve all their domestic and ancient institutions, and then and then only, they agreed to the French domination. So you see that this part of Algiers has some local self-government; that the authorities conciliate and mitigate the vigour of the military rule for the general tranquillity. As an instance of the acquiescence of the French in these ancient and native customs, I mention what was told me by the judge at Fort Napoleon: A Kabyle woman was maltreated by her husband; she left him; but alas! with another man. She was overhauled at Bougie *en route* to France or Tunis, and brought back to the mountains. Word was sent to the husband. The officer said that he must deliver her to the husband, though he was sure that the husband would assassinate her. The Kabyle is very jealous. He holds his wife with a tyrannical grip. I said, 'But why do you turn her over to certain murder?' He said, 'If we do not, we raise turbulence and trouble. We agreed to respect the Kabyle customs, and this is one of them. If, however, he assassinates his wife, we shall capture him and set him to work.' To my understanding this was very foolish or very—French.

The Kabyle belongs to the mountains. His little houses, made of cane and covered with the same and

straw, or in some places made of stone and covered with a rude red tile, indicate considerable social advancement. His women are not so sedulously hid and veiled. We had no trouble in seeing them and going into their houses, both in the plains, on the mountain sides, and even perched upon the tops of the Atlas spurs.

If I were to speculate about the Kabyles, and with the valuable work of John D. Baldwin before me, I should say, first, that races are seldom found pure; secondly, that Africa, even in its interior, is not inhabited by savage blacks, like the Guinea negroes; thirdly, an opinion based on conversation with Dr. Beke and other explorers, that the African proper, if not white, is a 'red race,' *i.e.* brown or olive coloured, like the Kabyles; fourthly, that in northern Africa, although there is a great intermixture of black and white—growing out of conquests of Phœnician, Greek, Roman, Goth, Turk, and French—yet, so far as that portion of the continent is concerned, the Berbers, or Barbarians, now supposed to be the Taurigs, or Touricks, are of the prehistoric, primordial stock, from which the Kabyles are doubtless an offshoot. These Taurigs are of the Desert and not the people to acknowledge the relationship; they are proud and reluctant to recognise any power but their own. Even their camels are said to be more aristocratic than the beasts of other tribes.

But whether these people, who live alone and in a great degree untainted by commixture, are aboriginal and pre-historic; whether they are coeval with the first forming of the Mississippi delta, only 100,000 years ago; or the Florida coral reefs, still thirty-five thousand years older; whether they are Cushite, Semite, or Aryan; whether out of Arabia, Egypt, or India; whether they are the second birth of a race,

aroused to self-consciousness by some new physical developments;—one thing is as certain as any other connected with these nebulosities of history, viz. that the Kabyle is very like this same pre-historic Berber. The Kabyle is not black; neither is the Berber. Their colour comes alone from solar exposure; it is not organic. So of the Berber. Mr. Baldwin, in his book, in describing the Berber, unconsciously describes the Kabyle, as I have seen him. They have towns, and an excellent condition of agriculture. They are very skilful in the cultivation of fruit. Their method of political organization is democratic, somewhat after the fashion of the old Cushite municipalities. To quote Mr. Richardson, he affirms (what I allege of my Kabyle friends) that in the Touarick countries all the people govern; that the woman is not the woman of the Moors and Mussulmans; that she has much liberty, walks about unveiled, and takes an active part in the affairs and transactions of life. I shall have occasion especially to verify these latter statements. That Berber and Kabyle each has a confederacy, has had a literature, that they once had extensive supremacy in the ancient world, that the whole continent was once controlled by them from this northern coast,—all these facts help us to account for the wonderful relics of civilization which exploration has disclosed to the sunbeams of the African coast. But if other proof were wanting to establish the relationship of Kabyle and Berber, the similarity of language does it. For the discussion of the question, I refer to General Daumas' book, 'La Grande Kabylie.' One thing is beyond discussion, their language is from the Orient. Its history, grandeur, and glory, and that of its cognate languages, are well described in the following extract from the volume of J. R. Morrell:—
'With reverence we approach the ancient and venerable

tongues of Northern Africa, but mostly the Semitic, of yore the speech of angels, and the vehicle of the Almighty Himself, when He walked with man and spake unto the fathers. The accents of tenderness and love transcending the heart of man, the utterance of a sweetness emanating from higher harmonies, flowed in the soft Syriac stream from Immanuel's lips; and that mysterious writing on the wall, the warning of the despots once again startling the vision of the New World, was traced in the primeval Ninivean characters affiliated with the great Aramæan family; and lastly, the glowing yet sublime language of the Koran must ever command the respect and admiration of Christian charity.'

The reader being somewhat prepared for the inspection of the Kabyle communities, and of their portraiture, as it appears in these pages, I go back to Algiers and travel with him to this point, in the Kabyle land.

As to the mode of coming hither: We left Algiers early in the morning, in a carriage. Dr. Henry Bennet and two ladies were of the company. Hahmoud was upon the seat with the driver. He is our Arab conductor, and bears a great name here. We had three horses, with bells on them, and a relay of horses sent on the evening before. We soon pass eastward out of the City of Algiers. We drive along the sea, under the brow of Sahel, and reach the broad, long, fruitful Plain of Mitidji. This plain was once the granary of the Roman world. It is yet, or could be, as fruitful as of old—*potens armis atque ubere glebæ*. For forty miles east, and from the sea side to the swelling hills and rising mountains, which are the steps to the summits of Atlas, there were many shifting scenes, but they all presented views of cultivation and evidence of labour. Of course here and there was to be seen some shrub-covered land. It is like parts of

Corsica or the heaths of Scotland. It has been left to the pelican and the brushwood. Over it the sheep and goats brouse and the cattle and camels feed under the care of shepherds and drivers. The road is good, but not yet as complete as French roads in Corsica. Some fine bridges are made of iron, but they are not to be used till the 15th August next, the centennial anniversary of the great Napoleon's birth.

We invariably start for travel in Algiers before breakfast; or, taking coffee, travel towards breakfast. To an unaccustomed tourist, almost the first object on the route to Fort Napoleon, is the cactus. It is so common and so high. It is the hedge or dividing line between farms. It was in use here before the French came. It is not only good for its fruit—the prickly pear—but it would 'turn' any animal except a crazy dervish. Lions, tigers, hyenas, and jackals, yet in plenty here, hardly dare attack a cactus fence. We perceive, also, some bamboo hedges. Upon the road we meet a team which smacks of the Yankee—a waggon drawn by two oxen and a horse in the lead. It is driven by a Kabyle sometimes, but generally by a French colonist. We meet heavy waggons with ten horses or mules. The animals are feeding out of baskets as they go. Now and then a big bird—the heron—dashes by us and lights in a distant marsh, or presents a good shot from the top of a hay-stack. Sheep and goats are seen. Charcoal in loads, in waggons, and on donkeys, passes by. In the early morn the blue smoke of the charcoal-burners is seen curling through the mist of the distant mountain. The Atlas range seems far upon our right and front. Great shadows hang down its sides, like the furrowed folds of a garment. The clouds to the south, towards Blidah and Milianah and the desert, lead us in our imagination thither, though our course lies towards

the Kabyle land and breakfast. We pass by houses—long, one-story houses—walled in. In fact, they are known as ‘fortified farms.’ In the recent wars, and in the interest of military colonization, like that of the Roman and French, these farms were a part of a system. In the fields of the Mitidji Valley, over which we are rolling, we perceive the ploughs at work. Far up into the mountains, five, six, and sometimes ten ploughs are going on one farm. The plough is a rude wooden one, with a tongue or pole, and another pole at right angles with the tongue, to which, far apart, the oxen are rudely yoked. They pull slow, and slower, and *seem* to stop. This plough has been used in the Orient some thousands of years. Here the natives, when they have been offered the shining share of civilized people, let it rust, and plough in the old soil a few inches deep in the same old way. You perceive in yonder field, walking with dignity, holding one handle—the only one—some Kabyle Cincinnatus, robed in his flowing bournous, every inch a Roman, clad in his toga. Indeed, the Kabyles claim to have been mixed with the old Romans, and to have their customs and manners. Perhaps so. The Romans never conquered them. That is true. But it was the Roman custom to colonize by settling down the soldiers and marrying them to the maidens of the land. If they could not conquer them by arms, they did by arts, or by a combination of both.

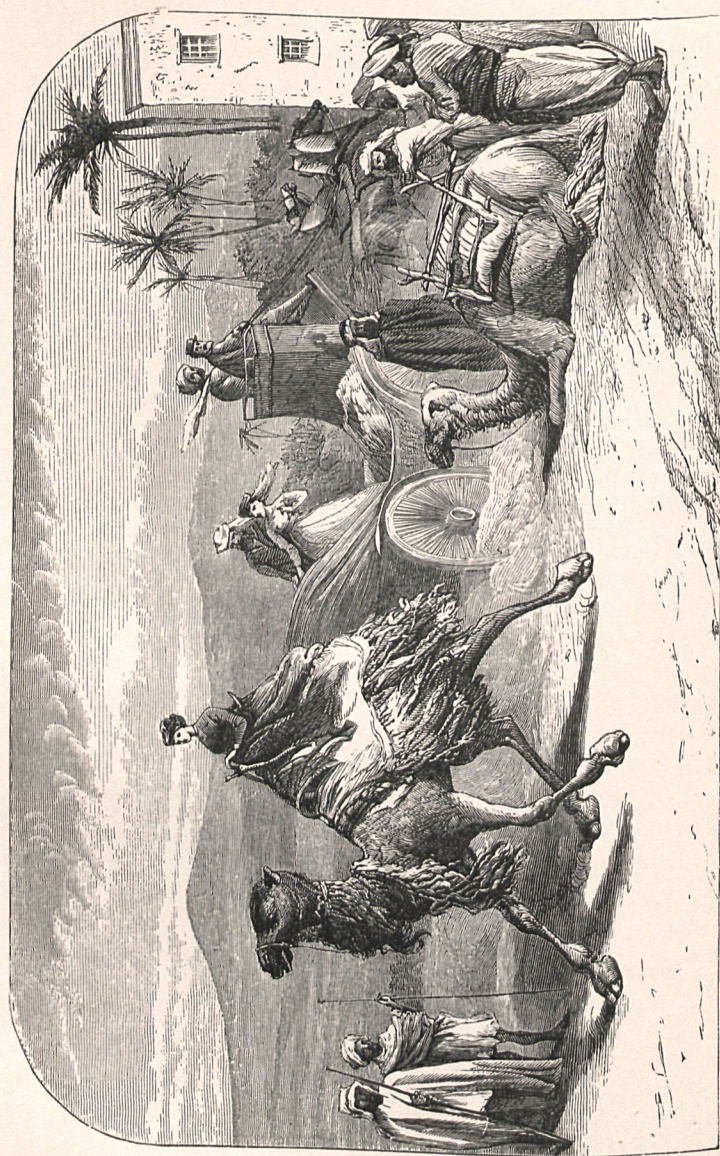
There is something very beautiful in this grand plain of the Mitidji. Not only its fields of waving oats, barley, and wheat, just ripening; not only its flax fields, in bluest bloom; not alone its flowers and shrubs, two out of every three of which we have seen in Corsica or in the Riviera; not alone its yellow genista, a flower of Gascony, and from which the Plantagenets took their name—for they were Gascons,

like the flowers; not alone the ferula, so common here, resembling in its green the asparagus, and in its blossom like the aloe. This is the same ferule, known to the Roman schoolboys and celebrated by Roman poets; and not unknown, though not philologically, as the same ruler by which Young England, Ireland and America have been seasoned, *a posteriori*, by bellicose pedagogues. It is the same plant as that, known to the classics, within whose cavity Prometheus—that ‘thief of fire from heaven’—brought down surreptitiously, for the benefit of mankind, ‘Sunbeams’ and fire. This plant is therefore—notwithstanding juvenile associations derived from the time when I was flogged along the flowery path of knowledge—a favourite with me; and I, therefore, recall its Greek equivalent—*νάρθηξ*.

Yonder, in the plain, are a dozen camels and as many donkeys, feeding, some of the former upon their knees, and some of the latter saying their grace with the most hideous outcry. These remind us of what the inner monitor confirms, that we, too, need breakfast. In a little village we find it all ready, for we had sent our horses on, and word with them. The name of the village I cannot recall, but the inn was the Hôtel de Col Bernaycha, and its sign was two pipes crossed. The village has cane huts with straw roofs, and one little stone, white-washed house. It was French, and there we were ushered through the hotel into a summer-house, amidst some chickens, dogs, and little pet piglings, of the wild boar tribe, and served with five courses.

We are not long in despatching the meal. Soon we are on the move. We meet French soldiers guarding prisoners. The latter trudge along sadly. We cross some little streams, having on their banks fringes of oleander. We arrive at Isser. Here we





RIDING CAMELS.