



THE ADVANCE-GUARD OF A HOMEWARD-BOUND GĀRFLA

Days and Nights with a Caravan

BY CHARLES WELLINGTON FURLONG

WESTWARD from the green valley of the Nile to where the blue waves of the Atlantic curl in on its sands, stretches the vast orange-yellow belt of the Great Desert, the "Sahra" of the Arabs. Although partly walled in from the Mediterranean on the north by the classic Atlas, along the coast of Tripoli its sea of gold blends green with the sapphire of the Middle Sea.

The port of Tripoli, low-lying and white, shimmering under a hot African sun in her setting of palm-gardens, is the natural gateway to the Sahara, the focus of the three great caravan routes which stretch away south. The Sahara is not a deserted tract of level sand. Its sun-scorching surface of sand-hills and oases, mountain ranges and plateaus, greater in area by some half-million miles than the United States and Alaska

combined, is peopled by three to four millions of Berbers, Arabs, and Blacks, with a few Turkish garrisons in the north. By way of Ghadames, Ghat, and Murzuk, through the Fezzan to Lake Tchad, go the caravan trails, and then far away south again—south to that country called Sudan, Land of the Blacks. Here its teeming millions form the great negro states of Bambara, Timbuctoo, and Hausaland in the west; Bornu and Baghermi around Lake Tchad; Wadai, Darfur, and Kordufan in the east, extending from Abyssinia to the Gulf of Guinea.

Of these trails, their trade and the men who escort the heavily loaded gārflas (caravans), little enough has been said; still less of the innumerable dangers which constantly beset them as they creep their way across the burning, desolate wastes on their long journeys to

the great trade marts of the Sudan: Timbuctoo, Kano, Kannem, Bornu, and Wadai.

Southwest from Tripoli twenty days' journey as the camel travels, on the direct route from Tripoli to Timbuctoo, lies the little sun-baked town of Ghadames, which has figured largely in the history of the caravan trade with the interior. From Ghadames also runs the route to the Sudan by way of Ghat; so, by reason of her location, Ghadames erected fonduks (caravansaries) and became a stopping-place for gārflas; and her merchants, pioneers of the gārfla trade.

Many years ago they established themselves in the town of Tripoli, with agents at Ghat and the big trading posts in the far Sudan. To these, gārflas conveyed periodically large consignments of goods, which were exchanged for ivory, ostrich feathers, and gold-dust, to be sold in Tripoli and eventually, in the form of finished products, to enhance the wealth and display of Europe. Through their superior intelligence and honesty, the merchants of Ghadames enjoyed for many years a monopoly of the trade which they had created.

But the Tripoli merchants could not indefinitely withhold their hands from a trade within their grasp, and upon which, to a great extent, the commercial prosperity of their own city depended. However, it was not until some thirty years ago that they seriously entered into competition with the Ghadamsi. At times large profits are reaped, but frequently enormous losses are entailed — not so much through the rise and fall of the European market as through the dangers *en route*, in which attacks and pillage by desert robbers, and reprisals to make good losses incurred by tribal warfare, play no small part. The merchants who fit out a gārfla must stand all losses, consequently great care is given to

the selection of both the camels which carry the valuable merchandise and the men who accompany them.

The tall and swift riding-camel known as the mehari is seldom met with in northern Tripoli. The finest male draught-camels, the jamal, costing from \$50 to \$60 apiece, with a carrying capacity of about three hundredweight, are used for transport. From consumption or the effects of the long strain, scores often die by the way and many others at the end of the "voyage." The wages of the men for conducting a return cargo are sometimes as high as five thousand dollars. Not only must the gārfla sheiks have great courage and endurance, but must be trustworthy traders, and shrewd diplomats of no small calibre. Many of the Sultans and chiefs, particularly the Touaregs, through whose territories lie the gārfla routes, exact not only homage but tribute from the gārfla sheiks. To bring this tribute within a reasonable sum and



RAIS MOHAMMED GAWAHJE, LEADER OF THE CARAVAN



FONDUK-EL-TAJURA, THE FIRST HALTING-PLACE

secure a safe-conduct requires extraordinary skill and tact. The opportunities for dishonesty afforded the gārfla men are many, and occasionally men and goods are never heard from again.

Groaning, grunting, wheezing, and bubbling, the last camel of the caravan was loaded. His driver, a Black from Hausa, took an extra hitch in a rope; in silhouette against the lurid afterglow the camel moved through the Tripoli fonduk gate, a hair-mattress on stilts.

With my own Arabs I brought up the rear. Another long shadow merged itself into those of my horses and men, and a keen-eyed, well-armed Arab, Rais Mohammed Gawahje, leader of the caravan, b'slaamed to my Arabs and rode on. No fiery barb carried this man of the desert, but a pattering little donkey. Soon he was lost among the camels and the dust.

Passing through the suburb of Sciara-el-Sciut we were well into the oasis of Tripoli; not the typical pictured oasis with a spring and a few feathered palms, but an oasis extending a five-mile tongue of date-palms along the coast at the edge of the desert. Under their protecting shade are gardens and the wells by which they are irrigated. In this oasis lies the

town of Tripoli. Beyond this oasis the Turks object to any stranger passing, lest he may be robbed or killed by scattered tribes which the Turkish garrisons cannot well control. Permission granted, safety over part of my route was doubly secure, for Hadji Mufta the Arab had spoken to his friend Gawahje, and I was assured of all the hospitality and protection which these nomads could offer—that is, after we had broken bread together. Mohammed Gawahje was among the most trusted of these leaders, having at times conveyed large sums of money along the dangerous coast routes to Bengazi.

The make-up of this gārfla, as is usual with those bound for the interior, had required months of preparation, and was composed of many smaller ones, which had delayed their time of departure in order to take advantage of the protection afforded by numerical strength. In its heavy loads were packed the heterogeneous goods generally taken, consisting of cotton and wool, cloth, waste silk, yarn, box rings, beads, amber, paper, sugar, drugs, and tea, of which British cotton goods formed more than fifty per cent. of the value. Besides these it carried some native products. Every

autumn caravans arrive from the interior and return with dried dates; for, among the tribes of the Fezzan, Tripoli dates form the chief article of diet, and, in the oases of the desert, dates chopped with straw are used as fodder.

So one August night I found myself a part of a Saharan gārfla, one of the vertebræ of a monster sand - snake which wormed its way through the oasis of Tripoli toward the Great Desert. The distorted shape of the moon bulged over the horizon through a silent forest of palm groves; the transitional moment between twilight and moonlight passed, the dew had already begun to cool the night, and the gārfla had struck its gait.

Across the moonlit roadway the long shadows of the date-palms lifted and wriggled over the dun-colored camels and their heavy loads, over trudging little donkeys, goats, and sheep, over the swarthy figures of men. Some were heavily covered in their brown baracans, some half naked, a law unto themselves, its power vested in their crooked knives, knobbed clubs, and long flintlocks, whose silvered trimmings caught the moon-glint as in the distance they scintillated away like scattered fireflies.

Silently the great snake moved on, save as some hungry camel snatched at the cactus hedge and gurgled a defiant protest as its driver belabored it about the head; or as the oboes and tom-toms in barbaric strains broke the stillness of the night. Then, to ease the march or soothe the restless animals, the gārfla men from time to time would take up the wild peculiar chant, with its emphasized second beat, and the songs of brave deeds in love or war would echo through the palm groves far off on the desert sands. We passed Malāha, a chott (dried lake) where salt is obtained. About midnight the gārfla halted.

"Fonduk-el-Tajura," remarked one of our men. "Here we make our first halt." Serving as places of rest and protection and in some cases supply-depots, the importance of fonduks to gārflas and the trade is inestimable. These plain, walled, rectangular enclosures are often surrounded by the palm and olive gardens



SAND-BILLOWS OF THE GREAT DESERT

of the keeper, who may supply fresh fruits, vegetables, and other domestic products. Fonduk-el-Tajura was typical of those found throughout North Africa. The impatient beasts, hungry and eager to seek relief from their heavy loads, tried to jam through the single portal wide enough for but one camel and its burden. All was dust and confusion. Amid yells, curses, and "hike hikes," the drivers sought to extricate their animals or save the goods from being torn from the loads. The interior of the fonduk was a square open enclosure bordered by a covered arcade as a protection for the men in the rainy season. When all were in, the heavy doors were closed and barred against marauders. All about me the great beasts were dropping to the earth, remonstrating and groaning as vigorously as when they were loaded. The packs taken off, their saddles were carefully removed and scoured with sand, for the hump must be kept clean, healthy, and free from saddle-sores. Arabs declare that the camel feeds on his hump, and it is a



A GĀRFLA IN CAMP

fact that when near the limit of his endurance the hump seems to furnish nourishment by gradually being absorbed into his system, sometimes disappearing altogether; consequently, to the Arab, the hump is the barometer of the camel's condition.

The camels were soon given their green fodder, which, at fonduks, generally consists of fōoa (madder-top roots) or barley, the ksüb (guinea corn), or bishna (millet), while that cheapest and almost indispensable food, the date, finds its way to the mouths of men and beasts. The mainstay of the gārfla men is dried dates and bread made with guinea corn. On long voyages the day's fare is often consumed on the march, and halts at such times are made only to rest and feed the camels. At fonduks or oases longer stops are made; there groups of men may be seen squatting about a big wooden bowl of bazine or coos-coos, their national dishes, made chiefly of cereals.

The quick-moving form of Gawahje appeared here and there with the manner of a man used to command, and after he had brought informal order out of the confusion, I had an opportunity to meet my host. Under the portal of the

fonduk a charcoal fire glowed red in an earthen Arab stove. About it in the candle-light we seated ourselves—Rais Gawahje, the fonduk-keeper, my dragoman El-Ouachi, and myself. To Gawahje my dragoman presented my gifts, seven okes of sugar cones and fifteen pounds of green tea. Some of the tea was immediately brewed and mixed half with sugar and a touch of mint. We drank the syrupy liquid and broke bread together, and then Gawahje inquired after my health.

From my bed on the single stone seat at the side of the entrance I looked through an open door across the passageway to the only room of the place, used as a prayer-chamber, in which was the kibleh.* In the dim light of the oil-lamp indistinct forms of several devout Moslems knelt or prostrated themselves before Allah, droning their prayers. Out in the fonduk enclosure all was quiet now save for the peaceful chewing of cuds, or an occasional sound as a camel swallowed or a cricket chirped. The moonbeams shooting their silvery shafts lit up portions of the farther wall.

*The sacred niche which indicates the direction of Mecca.

The soft breath of the silent night blew gently from the south through the feathered tops of the date-palms, and pulling my blanket over me I feel asleep.

A low cry from outside awakened me and pandemonium broke loose among the dogs. Cautiously drawing aside a small panel covering a peep-hole, the keeper, after a brief conversation, satisfied himself that all was well, and as the heavy doors swung open, another caravan entered. The first beasts came through like a maelstrom. Half awake in the semi-darkness I dodged the swing of a long neck as one of the vicious brutes attempted to bite me in passing, while several Arabs dragged aside a badly crushed comrade.

Invariably the desert thief lurks about the fonduks in the small hours of the morning, watching an opportunity to prey on any belated traveller as he approaches, or to rob the fonduk. With the help of a companion he scales the wall outside, and by a rope drops noiselessly down in some dark corner of the square enclosure, or near a corner he scrapes a hole in the wall large enough for him to pass through. This is not difficult. A quart

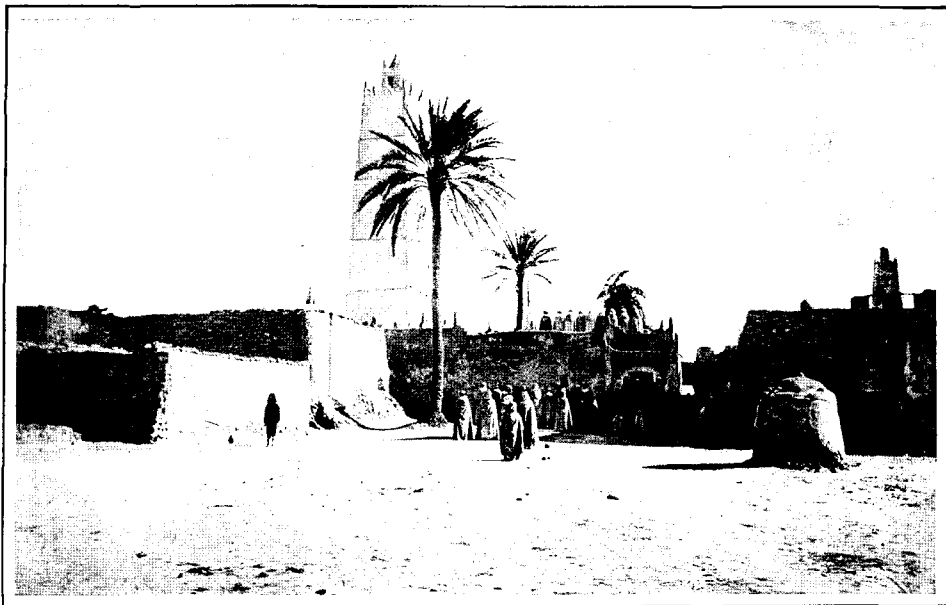
or two of vinegar occasionally applied not only assists in disintegrating the wall of sun-dried bricks, but renders his work noiseless as he digs with his knife. Inside he sneaks among the men and camels, keeping always in the shadow, stealing here a baracan, there a gun or whatever it may be, and frequently, unobserved, retreats as he entered.

After a scant three hours' sleep a lantern flashed in my face, Gawahje passed and the fonduk was soon astir. The camels once more took up their heavy burdens and passed out. The last to leave was Gawahje. At the entrance he and the keeper kept tally of his animals, after which he paid the fonduk fee of ten paras, or two cents per head for camels and donkeys and a nominal sum for goats and sheep. The charge for my horses was twenty paras apiece.

The gardens had long since disappeared, and the lanelike roads lost themselves in the sand which carpeted the palm groves through which we now travelled. The night dew which nourishes the desert's scattered plant life lay heavy jewelled on bent blades of rank grass and sand-lilies. The date-palms through violet



SAHARA—AN OASIS AMONG THE DUNES



GRAND MOSQUE OF OUARGLA, IN THE DESERT OF SAHARA

ground mists showed indistinct and softened against the brilliant rose-dawn of day. They ended, and suddenly in the orange-gold of the morning sunlight the sand billows of the mighty Sahara rolled away south over the horizon.

For days we travelled over these hills of sand, sometimes wind-blown into all kinds of queer wave formations and shapes, sometimes over endless level reaches; obliterated by the shifting sand, great sections of the gārfla routes are mere directions, the only guides the sun and the stars. Through regions where grows the tall rank grass, and in oases, the routes are traceable by hard-packed sand. In the dry season at times they pass over stony wadees (dried river-beds) containing only rippling heat-waves. In the rainy season these wadees are transformed to roaring torrents and often sweep away men and beasts at the fords. Through deep defiles the trails worm their way to high plateaus, where above the sand level they wriggle along in parallel camel-paths with their innumerable connections. Up over the rocky mountainous routes, among the parched thorny shrubs, patches of halfa, and poisonous

milk-plants, they become very much worn, sometimes to a depth of ten or twelve feet below the level of the ground, where they interlace like the bewildering paths of a maze.

During the season of the warm rains, which sink into the porous surface until they are arrested at no great depth, vast subterranean sheets of water are formed, which could almost anywhere be brought to the surface by sinking artesian wells. Many streams flow inland, where they are lost in the sand or the salt lakes. At this time whole sections of the parched desert seem almost overnight to have changed to another land. Mountains and valleys blossom, and the banks of the wadees seem afire with the flaming oleander. By these streams or springs are the oases where date-palms and gardens are planted, and Arab houses, fonduks, or towns are built which determine the course of the caravan routes. At intervals are wells for the use of the gārfla. A great danger lies in missing these wells. One very hot summer some men nearly reached the gardens of Tripoli, but could go no farther. When found they could only say, "ma! ma!" (water). It was

given them, and they drank, and died straightway.

I watched our gārfla wind around or zigzag over the hills of sand, breaking and linking itself together again as it crawled its slow pace of three miles an hour. It marched in irregular order, characteristic of the Arabs, stringing out for miles, but closing in together for protection against attack as night approached. The Arab usually refrains from riding the jamal, for every pound of weight and its adjustment on these great beasts must be considered; and even an Arab has to ride a jamal but an hour or two to appreciate the luxury of walking.

Through the most dangerous districts the men were distributed the length of the caravan, with a strong rear-guard—for it is from this point that an attack by an enemy is most feared. As the sun gets high, most of the men muffle themselves in their heavy woollen baracans to keep out the heat, and transfer their long flintlocks from across their shoulders to the packs of the animals. Between eleven and three o'clock occurs the midday rest. Tents are rarely if ever carried by gārflas. Instead the camels are unloaded and lie down; the men repose under a tentlike covering, using their baracans propped up a few feet with a stick, war-club, or gun. Under these in the suffocating heat their owners snatch the only rest of the day, for, generally speaking, they travel twenty-one hours out of the twenty-four.

We moved south. Passing caravans became scarce. A dust-cloud would appear in the distance, grow large, and a caravan of Bedouins, those nomads of the desert, in all their barbaric paraphernalia would pass by, eying us suspiciously with unslung guns, calling to their savage wolf-hounds or holding them in leash in order to avoid a conflict with our gārfla dogs. For many of their tribal

wars and feuds have started under less provocation than a dog-fight.

Sometimes I would ride forward with my dragoman, anticipating a longer rest by reaching a fonduk several hours ahead of the slowly moving gārfla. On one of these occasions, as we ascended a sand-hill, the advance-guard of a homeward-



HADJI ALI, KEEPER OF THE FONDUK

bound gārfla suddenly loomed up before us. Eleven months before, they had started from the great trade mart of Kano, the first caravan to arrive from there for two years, owing to the general insecurity of the roads. Three months they had held over at Zinder and a month at both Aïr and Ghat. It took us all the afternoon to ride by the twelve hundred and twenty camels. They carried a thousand loads of Sudan skins from the famous dye-pits of Kano, destined to find their way to New York for the manufacture of gloves and shoes; two hundred loads of ostrich feathers, and ten loads of ivory, besides odd lots of rhinoceros horns, gum arabic, and

wax, valued altogether at over two hundred and five thousand dollars. Ostrich eggs, worked leather, and basket-work dangled from the loads. Here and there the skin of a leopard or cheetah, shot on the way, was thrown across a pack or hung from the shoulders of some big negro. Black women there were, too, slaves or concubines for some of the rich town Moors or Turks. As the gārfla neared Tripoli runners would be sent ahead, and there would be great rejoicing among the men who had waited several years for the arrival of their goods.

I well remember one day in mid-August; the mercury stood at 155 degrees in the sun. I do not know what it registered in the shade, for there was none save our own shadows. As the sun wore round behind us I shifted the broad band of my woollen cholera-belt to my back, and cast my own shadow to protect as far as possible the neck and head of my horse, for the poor beast was suffering terribly from the heat.

All day we rode in this furnace, and the brave fellows trudged barefooted in the scorching sand. At intervals I heard a rumble like distant thunder, which proved to be only the sighing of the gibli (southeast wind) through the vent in the top of my sun-helmet. Strange as is the fascination of the desert, yet one feels its monotony keenly; he notices with avaricious interest anything which will relieve him from the intense heat overhead and the everlasting wriggling heat-waves of the sun-glare underneath. So for hours at a time I watched the formation of camel footprints in the sand. Sometimes the feet of the great beasts would kick over the shining dung-beetles, the black scarabeus, or would scuff through and destroy the beautiful point-lace patterns of the lizard tracks, left by their toy-like designers as they scurried away and mysteriously disappeared beneath the sand. As the afternoon wore on I would doze in my saddle, to wake up with a jump as I jammed against a jamal, or the muzzled mouth of a "biter" swung sharply against my head.

Tall, sun-tanned Arabs, and big negroes black as ebony, formed the escort of the gārfla. Many of the latter first saw Tripoli when they were driven up from

the Sudan under the crack of the slave-whip. Rarely complaining in the intense heat, they moved forward, long guns slung across their backs and often native fans in their hands. Usually the men go barefooted; sometimes over stretches of soft sand they wear broad-soled desert slippers, and on rocky ground sandals are worn. Most of the Blacks have their tribal marks, a certain number of deep slashes across the cheeks and temples, made by their parents with sharp stones when they were children. As one Black trudged along beside me his splendid calf muscles played underneath three stripes cut in the black skin.

Early one morning I had ridden some miles in advance of the gārfla. Save for the soft scuff of my horse's hoofs and the stretching of my leather trappings, a great silence hung over the untrammelled sand-hillocks, and their blue-pervaded, mysterious shadows lengthened. A rounded top here and there broke the silver moon as it mellowed toward the horizon. Suddenly my horse shied, nearly unseating me. Instinctively I searched the sky-line of hilltops. Had it not been for the black spot of a head I might not have noticed the gray baracaned figure of a desert thief who, in his sleep, rolled out of his sandy lair. Startled, he sat bolt upright, and for a second stared blankly at me. He reached for his long gun which lay by his side, but I covered him with my revolver and there he sat until out of range and sight. The fellow had been left by his comrades, who were probably in the vicinity. This trick of burrowing under the sand beside the course of an oncoming gārfla is often resorted to. As the gārfla passes, the thieves rise out of the earth, make a quick onslaught, and then rapidly retire, taking with them what booty they can lay hands on, and frequently stampeding some of the camels.

Occasionally these vultures also resort to the tactics of a sneak-thief, and choose a time at night when a fast-moving caravan overtakes a slower one. During the confusion caused by the mixing-up of men and animals in passing, the thief falls in from the rear and naturally is taken by either party to be a member of the other gārfla. Then, pilfering anything he can seize from the loads, he falls back

to the rear and drops out of sight behind a sand-hill.

Lightly blowing in the face of the south-bound gārflas, there springs from the southeast a gentle wind, the gibli, which playfully twirls little eddying whiffs of sand into miniature whirlwinds. In this manner it may blow for days, evaporating the water in the goatskin bags, and sometimes terminating in a terrible sand-storm. Then, when the jamal, craning their long necks, sniff high in the air and utter a peculiar cry, the gārfla men know well the ominous signs; far off on the horizon, creeping higher and higher, the sky of blue retreats before a sky of brass.

To the hoarse cries and curses of the men as they try to hobble the fore legs of the excited camels are added uncanny guttural groanings of the jamal, the braying of the asses, and the pitiful bleating of goats and sheep. High in the air great flames of sand reach out, then the lurid sand-cloud, completely covering the sky, comes down upon the gārfla. In the confusion some of the water-bags are broken and the precious liquid disappears in the sand. Turning tail and driving down before the blast go some of the unhobbled camels, maybe carrying a driver with them, never to be heard of again.

In the deep-yellow gloom the gārfla, back to the storm, lies huddled together; the men, wrapped up completely in their baracans on the leeward side of the camels, hug close to the goatskins of water. The whole air is surcharged with suffocating heat and fine powdered sand-dust, which finds its way even as far as Malta and Sicily. It penetrates everywhere, inflames the eyes, and cracks the skin of the already parched tongues and throats of the gārfla men. The torment at times is indescribable, and some poor devil, like the camels, will run maddened into the hurricane.

The sand-storm lasts from a few hours to six or seven days, and during it the men lie thus, occasionally digging themselves to the surface as they become partially covered with sand. Frequently all the remaining water dries up. At such times camels are often sacrificed for the sake of the greenish water which may be obtained from the honeycomb cells of

the reticulum, a mature camel yielding about five or six quarts; and, strange as it may seem, this water is cooler than that carried in goatskins. The storm over, a surviving gārfla of emaciated men and animals staggers on to the nearest oasis or town, over plains which before were sand-hills, and sand-hills which now are plains.

The first stop of any length made by the gārflas on their southward march is at Murzuk with its eleven thousand inhabitants, that desolate capital of the Fezzan—Murzuk the horror of Turkish exiles, where a man is fortunate if the deadly climate takes away only his senses of smell and taste. Here a thorough rest is given to camels and men. Fresh supplies are obtained, the gaps in the ranks filled out, and again the wearisome march is resumed. Some fifteen hundred miles south of the coast they pass over the undefined boundary-line of Tripoli through the dangerous country of the Touaregs and the Damerghous.

From time immemorial, slaves suffering inconceivable torments have been brought across the Sahara from the Sudan, for those regions extending from Abyssinia to the Gulf of Guinea have furnished an almost inexhaustible supply. Particularly from the Central Sudan the slave-trader has gathered in his human harvest to the chief depots of Timbuctoo in the west and Kuka in the east.

You will find an occasional Arab who will tell you of a route heretofore unmentioned, a secret route known only to the Senusi, a large fraternity of Moslems located in Tripoli who make proselyting wars and expeditions from Wadai to their capital. Along this route never less than fifteen caravans cross the desert every year, which bring about ten thousand slaves alive to tell the tale; and they estimate that forty thousand victims fall on the march. Once on the secret route you cannot lose your way, for it is lined with human bones. Many of these slaves were formerly embarked for Turkey, and there seems to be little doubt that slaves are still conveyed to Canca and Salonica, Constantinople and Smyrna.

Arriving late one night at a fonduk we found the place already so crowded that when our gārfla was in, men and

animals were literally jammed together. The filth and vermin in the place, not to mention the sickening odors, disturbed not the sons of Allah. The great doors were bolted; I slept outside under the olive-trees with my men in the gardens of Hadji Ali, the keeper, preferring the external annoyance of thieves. They disturbed us twice during the night, and a white wolf-hound entered my camp under the direction of his master, getting away with a pair of my men's desert slippers. To make up much-needed rest I delayed my start next morning to some five hours behind the gārfla.

As the sun rose high, I found Hadji Ali seated outside the fonduk adjusting a new flint in his pistol. This done, he gazed long at the weapon, and his wrinkled, scarred old face softened as when a man looks upon a thing he loves. Many journeys across the Sahra with the gārfla had sapped his wiry arms of their youthful strength, and the ugly scar over his left eye was a trophy of his last voyage three years before, which had nearly landed him in the fields of the blessed. Under the shade of an olive-tree Hadji Ali told me the story.

"You must know, Arbi [master], that we were a gārfla thirteen thousand camels strong, proceeding north to Tripoli from Kano, which was many months behind us. The escort and transport were principally men of Air and their animals. Three years before, Sadek, one of their chiefs, was slain by Moussa, a brother of the Sultan of Damerghou. Two years after, the slayer in turn was killed by the men of Air.

"As we entered the country of the Damerghous our guards were doubly watchful and our camels tied one to the other. All through the wild country, when in camp, we formed a square with the animals, the men and guards being inside. We were strong and not afraid, and did not intend to pay either tribute or homage for passing through the territory. It was at the end of the dry months, and some of the wells contained no water. We were all weak and suffering, and a number of our men had the sleeping-sickness. We made haste to reach the wells of Farok, not two days'

journey from Damerghou itself. We had almost reached them when narrow ravines obliged us to fall one behind the other. Suddenly from ambush the men of Damerghou furiously attacked us in great numbers. The character of the country prevented us from bringing our men together. We fought hard and well, but Allah willed. Two hundred and ten were killed on both sides, amongst whom were twelve Tripolitans, some of them being among the most famous gārfla leaders of Tripoli. Twelve thousand camel-loads of guinea corn destined for Air, one thousand camel-loads of ostrich feathers, ivory, Sudan skins, and mixed goods, with the entire transport, fell into the hands of the Damerghous.

"Near the end of the fight, Arbi, a big man, broke through my guard with his two-edged sword. It was night when I came to myself and I had been stripped of everything. With great effort I reached the wells of Farok. Near where I fell I found half buried in the sand my pistol with its charge unfired—but that is another story."

The total value of these goods lost, including the animals of burden, amounted to more than \$800,000, and the wells of Farok, where the capture occurred, lie in an air-line about 1905 kilometres south-west of Tripoli.

The opening of new routes southward and deflection of trade in that direction still lessen the prospect of inducing it to return to the shores of Tripoli, and except as regards Wadai and part of the Sudan the bulk of the trade may be said now to be lost to Tripoli. Tribal feuds on caravan routes unexpectedly change favorable aspects and disconcert traders.

Long before the royal caravan of the Queen of Sheba, with its heavy embroidered trappings, brought gifts to Solomon; long before that Semitic nomad Abraham came out of Ur—caravans had crept their patient, steady way across the hot sands and deserts of the East. But the days of the Tripoli caravan trade are numbered, and the single wire of telegraph line which has already found its way to Murzuk is but the forerunner to herald the coming of the iron horse into the land of the gārfla.

The Mystery at Zeke's

BY PHILIP VERRILL MIGHELS

WHEN little Mollie Worthington rolled up her sleeves and took in hand a rolling-pin of exceptionally ominous dimensions, her four husky mining-camp suitors stirred uneasily upon their seats and underwent a vague, instinctive alarm.

They were sitting here in Mollie's cabin with a sort of truce between them, each determined to outstay his neighbor and thereby create an opportunity for wooing the plump young widow. Now, however, not even the beauty of Mollie's pretty elbows could quite reduce the sense of impending disaster which each and all experienced as she gripped that bread-tool firmly in her hand and turned to scan their faces, one by one. That something was coming, all the men were thoroughly convinced. It came without delay.

"Frank Peters," said Mollie incisively, "what date is this lovely afternoon?"

Mr. Peters seized his great mustache with both his hands and groomed it savagely.

"Why—May the—somethingth, 1868," he stammered, awkwardly, attempting a smile that looked sadly in need of a tonic. "Why was you askin'?"

"Just for your own pretty sake," answered Mollie, standing the rolling-pin on end on the table. "I want you to put down the date the best way you can, for this is the day you git fired. You may be dyin' to remember it when you're married to some other woman, some day."

Peters stared at her dumbly for a moment. Then he said,

"Ain't this a kind of clammy way to give me the bounce, with these here fellows settin' 'round grinnin' at the joke?"

"Oh, they're goin' to git the same, right away," said Mollie with delightful candor and cheer. "I don't want you all goin' off together. Savvy?"

"You don't have to hit *me* with no kitchen club," asserted Peters. "Hope

you'll git married to a strong, nervy man, some time—that's all!" He took up his hat and departed.

The three remaining suitors writhed where they sat. Each had a feeble hope that he might, at least, be the last to be told to decamp. It was laughing Bud Ingalls who was next excused. He burst into most hilarious merriment as he went, for such was his means of expressing all his emotions, from woe to genuine amusement.

Of the two men still awaiting calamity, one was Patrick McFarlan, a red-headed Irish teamster, and the other was Thomas Fulton, sometime sheriff of the camp ten miles away, but now once more a common mining-man, ready alike for riches or for poverty.

"Now, then, it's the Blarney stone to go next," said Mollie, inexorably. "And, Mr. McFarlan, don't burn the door-frame up at the top while you're walkin' out."

McFarlan's head grew hot without delay.

"T' hell wid the dure, then," he answered, as he clapped on his hat. "I'm throwin' ye out of me heart that fast that ye niver got in at all entoiely!"

He slammed the door so emphatically that Mollie gasped for breath. Thomas Fulton settled firmly on his three-legged stool. He waited in silence.

Mollie faced him bravely for nearly a minute, then her brown eyes faltered before his dancing gaze, and the crimson crept swiftly up from her throat, across her cheeks, to the very roots of her hair.

"Well," she said, turning her back and making brisk pretence of preparing for work, "have you put down the date, Mr. Fulton?"

"No," said her suitor, calmly. "I was figurin' up and sort of mentally jottin' down a date like, say, about June the third—which I think comes along on a Sunday."