

Finally, the Sahara has its pilots, its corsairs, and even its wrecks, like that liquid desert which we call the Ocean.

At all epochs the Sahara has been traversed by numerous caravans, trafficking with the tribes encamped upon its confines. These grand convoys of men and camels often number a thousand heads. Nothing can be imagined more picturesque than the long line of wayfarers defiling across the immense plain, or than the camp improvised by the caravan at its halting-places, which are generally chosen



FIG. 83.—A SCENE IN THE SAHARA :—THE FLIGHT OF VULTURES.

near some brackish well, under the shade of a few palms, or—happiness incredible !—on the bank of a flowing stream.

Except for chance encounters with other caravans, they march sometimes for whole days without seeing a single being, or even a tree, or blade of grass, or the least trace of organic life. All around, as far as his wistful glance can reach, the traveller discovers sand—sand—or barren rocks. The deadly silence which weighs upon nature, weighs, too, upon his spirit, like the nightmare of solitude ; it inspires him with the gloomiest forebodings, which, moreover, are too often justified by the event. The burning sun of the Tropics, which deluges with his fires this denudated soil, warms the atmosphere to an incredible intensity. Under the influence of an