

Every day we hear the Great African Desert compared to a Sea of Sand, and in many respects the poetical analogy is strikingly justified. The wind creates vast powdery billows, which surge, and roll, and sink, like the waves of ocean. This fine mineral dust is, indeed, as mobile as any liquid ; it responds to the least breath of air.

The sea and the Sahara may be compared with one another in their apparently boundless immensity, in their solitude and silence—a solitude and silence only disturbed by the tempests which occasionally sweep across their surface.

The Sahara, like the Ocean, has its isles of verdure, its reefs, its

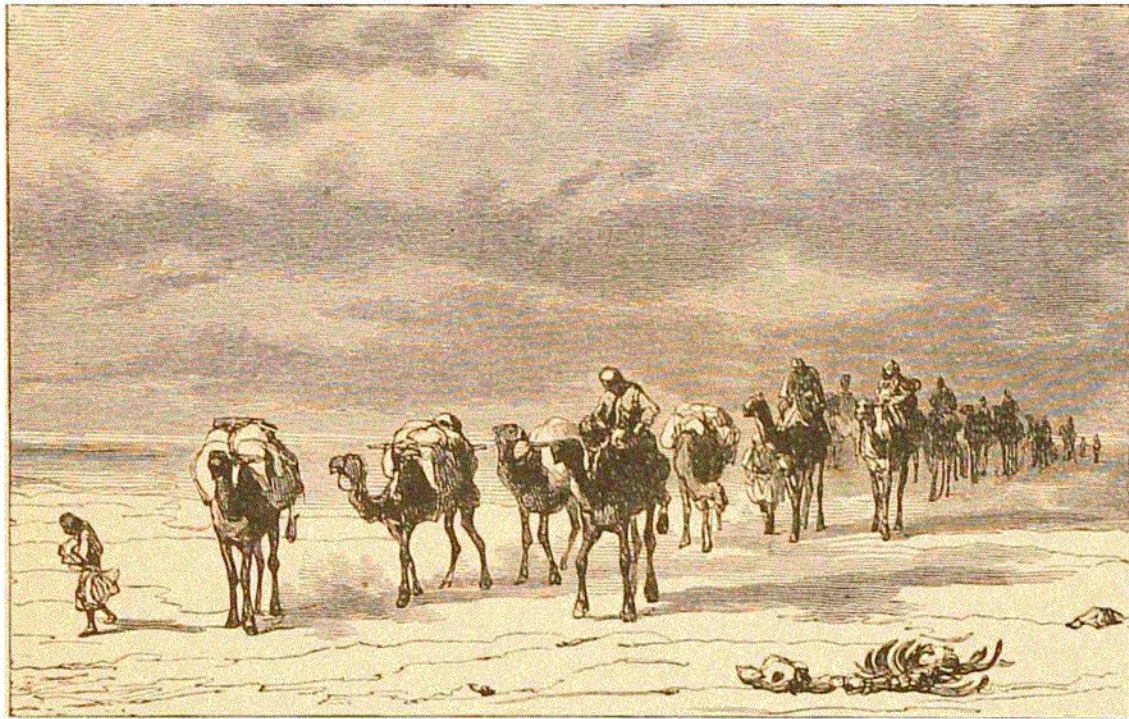


FIG. 87.—THE CARAVAN IN THE DESERT:—THE COMING STORM.

shores, on which it is always encroaching. Seen by the moon's pale lustre, in the stillness of night, the undulating masses of sand, which by day present a brown shadow or a dazzling whiteness, seem to give forth strange phosphorescent gleams, like the waters of the Equatorial ocean.

The modern Arab, and the ancient Eastern legends, term the camel "the ship of the Desert." Perched on this patient and docile animal's back, the traveller, like the mariner in the open sea, has no other means of guiding his course than the compass and the stars.