

their path. Impelled by the winds, they invade the shores and islands of the vast waterless sea of the desert. In Egypt, whole cities have been buried under billows of dust ; and modern researches have revealed the existence of well-preserved monuments under the beds of sand which to-day fill up certain valleys that were formerly inhabited.*

Rain is known only in the mountainous regions of the Desert. There the heights arrest the clouds suspended in the atmosphere. From the month of July to that of November, incessant torrents, it is true, inundate the high grounds ; but the wild waters quickly disappear without descending to the plain ; they lose themselves in the arid sand, or are rapidly evaporated by the sun's fiery rays.

For this reason, water-courses are of rare occurrence in the Desert. From the southern slope of the Atlas, some few streams find their way into the plain, but they are dried up in the hot season. The same is the case with the small rivers which feed the lakes of the great Oasis lying south of Algeria ; these lakes, too, are almost dry during the summer. The western border of the Sahara is watered by the river Ouêd-Draa, which descends from the Atlas chain in Morocco ; and by the Sagniel, which comes from the south. Both are reputed to be of considerable length, but they disappear during the great heats, and very little of their course is accurately known.

The rains absorbed by the desert sands very probably accumulate underground in immense tracts of water, at no considerable depth. This circumstance is well known to the Arabs, who, from time immemorial, have availed themselves of these subterraneous waters by digging a species of Artesian well. For them, the Sahara is an island which floats upon a subterranean sea (*bahar toht el erd*). When they are in want of water, they bore through the sand until they arrive at the aqueous strata.

On this subject, we may quote the remarks of the traveller Shaw :—

“The Wady-Reag is a cluster of villages situated far in advance in the Sahara. . . . These villages have neither springs nor fountains.

* [Rev. A. C. Smith, “Banks of the Nile;” Sir Gardner Wilkinson, “Thebes and Ancient Egypt,” etc.]