

The ruins scattered over the Sahara attest the former existence of important villages, whose ruin has entirely arisen in the accidental stoppage of a beneficent spring. In this case the Arabs say that the spring *dies*. The oasis of Tébaïch disappeared under similar circumstances some years ago. The tops of its date trees, stripped of their foliage, may now be seen emerging above the sands, like the masts of a foundered ship.

A very inaccurate idea is popularly entertained of the oases, both with respect to their extent and the character of their soil. The least

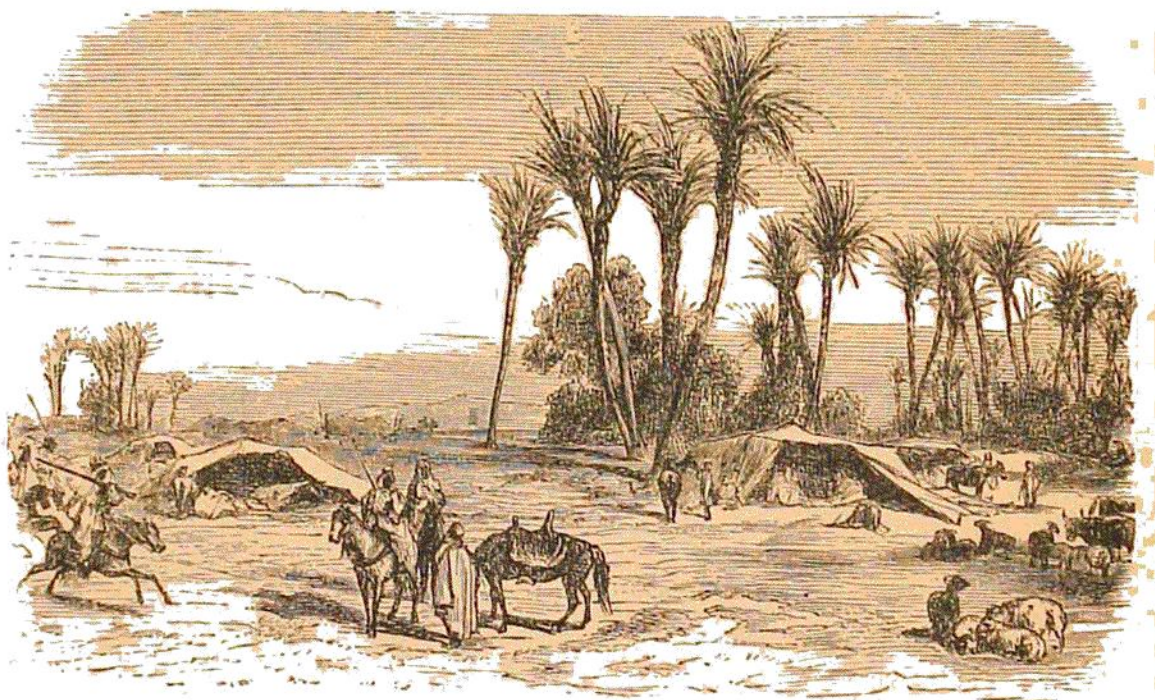


FIG. 91.—ENCAMPING ROUND AN OASIS.

considerable will not be of less area than several days' journey in one direction or another; that is, their superficies will consist of 200,000 to 300,000 square yards; an extent which only seems insignificant when compared with the immensity of the desert. The great oases are, however, more numerous than the little, because they can the most effectually resist the invasion of the shifting sands. The oasis of the Oued-Follesseles is 170 miles long by 60 broad. That of Thebes measures 60 miles by 9. The great oasis of Asben or Aïr occupies, from north to south, and from east to west, an extent of three degrees, or about 180 miles—according to Dr. Barth, who visited it in 1850.