SIWA

THE WALLS OF SIWA

SIWA

THE OASIS OF JUPITER AMMON

BY C. DALRYMPLE BELGRAVE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY GENERAL SIR REGINALD WINGATE BART., G.C.B., ETC. ETC. ILLUSTRATED WITH SKETCHES AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

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TO
MY MOTHER

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FOREWORD

KNOCKENHAIR,
DUNBAR,
2nd November, 1922.

DEAR MR. BELGRAVE,

When you begged me to write a " Foreword " for your first book on Siwa, you asked me if I remembered you as a Junior Officer in the British Camel Company at Khartoum in the early days of the Great War—and later in the Camel Corps of the Frontier Districts Administration of Egypt. My answer is that I remember you well in both capacities, and I have a very happy recollection of the excellent services rendered by both the units in which you served. The appearance of British soldiers patrolling on camels up the White and Blue Niles had the best possible effect in cementing and consolidating the good relations existing between the Sudanese populations and our troops and confirming that spirit of loyalty and goodwill which, throughout the war, characterized the once fanatical Dervishes of Mahdist times—a truly marvellous transformation which had changed them from a fierce and ruthless enemy into loyal and brave soldiers and peaceful inhabitants, who were enabled to render the British cause wholehearted and ready support at a most critical period of our history.

Your transfer to the Frontier Districts Administration of Egypt also interests me, for it may not be known to you that one of the first reforms I instituted on my own transfer from the Governor-Generalship of the Sudan to the High Commissionership of Egypt at the end of 1916 was the organization of the new Administration to which you were appointed.

Before our reconquest of the Sudan I had, as Director of Military Intelligence in Egypt, some connection with the oases of the Libyan Desert and the activities of the Senussi, as well as with the government of the Sinai Peninsula. In those early days of the British occupation of Egypt, Turkish rule prevailed in Tripoli, and the actual frontier between that province and Egypt was often in dispute—whilst a somewhat similar condition existed on Egypt's eastern frontier in Sinai. It was thought politically desirable at that time to maintain the *status quo* and to avoid trouble with the Turkish authorities to whom Egypt still owed a nominal Suzerainty—that this was not always feasible is evidenced by the celebrated "Akaba incident" which at one time threatened to disturb the peace between the two countries. The preservation of the *status quo* to which I refer, meant the maintenance on the extreme eastern and western frontiers of Egypt of the purely Egyptian administrative control which, owing to the almost total absence of supervision, was of the lightest and could hardly be designated as efficient. The necessity of inaugurating some improvement in both directions

had frequently been mooted, but it was not until the advent of the Great War and the military operations against the Turks in Sinai, on the one hand, and against the Senussi invasion of Egypt, on the other, that the long-postponed reorganization became possible. By that time Italian had given place to Turkish control in Tripoli, whilst it was also evident that Palestine and Arabia were no longer to remain an integral portion of the Turkish Empire.

These facts made it very desirable to establish a closer Administrative Control in both directions, and it is to me a matter of great satisfaction that an organization known as the Frontiers District Administration materialized, under the able direction of Colonel G. G. Hunter and his efficient staff of British and Egyptian officers and officials, with its well-equipped Camel Corps, its patrolling system, and its more intimate and sympathetic government of the oases and of the somewhat unruly nomad tribes on both western and eastern frontiers.

The mere fact that you, as one of these District Officers, have been resident for nearly two years in the important, though remote and little-known, Oasis of Siwa, and have been able to write a very interesting and useful account of your experiences —together with an admirable survey of its ancient, mediæval and recent history—its customs, superstitions and its social life, is but one proof amongst many others of the value of this new organization which, in spite of the various political changes in Egypt, has, I hope, come to stay.

As an ex-officer and one who was lately in Egypt, you are wise to avoid in your book all reference to recent political events and the complicated situations to which they have given rise. In this letter I shall observe a similar reticence, and the more so having regard to the positions I have held in Egypt and the Sudan. Remarks on so controversial a subject must be complete and detailed if they are to assist the general public in forming a true estimate of the " tangled skein " which the political situation now represents—a situation in which truth and fiction are almost inextricably involved.

The perusal of the proof sheets you have sent me, together with your excellent series of illustrations (and here may I congratulate you on the artistic skill of the charming sketches displayed in the coloured reproductions?), recall that " lure of the desert " which is so fascinating to all of us whose lot has been cast in those countries bordering on the Great Nile waterway and the illimitable stretches of sandy desert beyond. Your apt quotations at the beginning of each chapter show that the " lure " has seized you also, and I can well understand your desire to undertake further service in those regions which so evidently attract you, and in which you have won the sympathy and respect of the nomad Arab and sedentary Berber tribes of the Western Desert.

The title of your book is well explained in Part I, Chapter III, and you are wise to add a bibliography of the various works you have consulted, for there is no subject more debatable than the origin of the

Berber tribes of whom you write. " This crossing to Africa by the Northern Mediterranean peoples," says Professor Breasted in his *History of Egypt*, " is but one of the many such ventures which in prehistoric ages brought over the white race whom we know as Libyans." His remarks refer to events in the thirteenth century B.C., when people known as the Tehenu lived on the western borders of the Delta of Egypt, beyond them were the Libyans, and still further to the west were the Meshwesh or Maxyes of Herodotus—all of them doubtless ancestors of the great Berber tribes of North Africa.

In the reign of the Pharaoh Mereneptah, the successor of Rameses the Great, it appears that one Meryey, King of the Libyans, forced the Tehenu to join him, and supported by roving bands of maritime adventurers from the coast (the Sherden or Sardinians, the Sikeli, natives of early Sicily, the Lysians and the Etruscans), invaded Egypt. It is with these wandering marauders that the peoples of Europe emerge for the first time upon the arena of history.

It is probable that not long before this invasion a great Canaanite migration into Libya had taken place, for it is recorded by the historian Procopius, a native of Cæsarea (565 B.C.), how the Hebrews, after quitting Egypt, attacked Palestine from beyond Jordan under Joshua. After the capture of Jericho they advanced westwards, drove out the Gergazites, Jebusites and other tribes inhabiting the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, and forced them to flee into Egypt, where they were not allowed to

settle, but were obliged to move westwards along the North African coast and into the oases. There is also evidence that some of these emigrants, under Roman pressure, were forced further westwards to Morocco and were called Moors. Later on they, in their turn, were followed by a similar migration of Jews from Palestine.

Thus it would appear that as far back as the thirteenth century B.C. the original Libyans, a warlike race, became co-mingled with maritime adventurers from Southern Europe, with Canaanites, Jews and Egyptians—a truly wonderful admixture of Asiatics, Africans and Europeans, and it is with the ancestors of this international potpourri that you deal so interestingly when you trace onwards, through the ages down to the present day, the history of those desert nomads and those sedentary dwellers of the Oasis of Jupiter Ammon. Surely your story will stimulate interest not only in the archæologist, but in all who desire to trace the manners, customs and characteristics of present-day peoples to their original sources. Those Siwans of whom you make a special study are of all people perhaps the most interesting, for, living, as it were, on an island, in a sea of desert, they—like the Abyssinians on the east—have been less affected by the world-changes than those who inhabit the main highways of the great African continent. The cult of Ammon and the seat of the Great Oracle, it is true, brought countless hordes of strangers to that mystic depression lying some seventy feet below the level of the Mediterranean, but the leading characteristics of the

inhabitants have probably altered little, and religion—from Ammon worship to Islam, with an occasional admixture of Christian, Jewish and Pagan rites (the last brought by countless slaves from Central Africa)—has remained the all-absorbing interest of these oases dwellers.

As you truly say, the origin of the branching-horned ram as the fleshly symbol of the great God Ammon, "the King of the Gods," "the unrevealed," "the hidden one," still remains a mystery. We know that the solar god Ra, whose supremacy in the "Old Kingdom" was so marked, from the Fifth Dynasty onwards and was at its zenith in the Twelfth Dynasty, became linked in the religion of the "Middle Kingdom" with Ammon, hitherto an obscure local god of Thebes who attained some prominence in the political rise of the city and was called by the priests Ammon-Ra. His cult gradually spread over the civilized world, and in the Roman period he was worshipped as Jupiter Ammon. He was essentially the god of Oracles, but how he came to have his special sanctuary in the Western Desert is still a mystery, though your account of this in the legends of the Arabic history of Siwa (Chapter III) throws an interesting light on the subject. Herodotus, we know, gave to Siwa the name of Oasis (probably derived from the Coptic word Ouahe, to dwell, from which the Arabic Wa is derived)—that is to say a fertile spot surrounded by desert, and thus from Siwa all other oases have derived their names.

To Siwa then came kings and wise men of the East, merchants and pilgrims, all bringing offerings to the temple of the god and soliciting the advice of the Oracle on their mundane affairs. For a thousand years and more these treasures were accumulating, but where are they now? As Egyptian research has yielded up unexpected buried treasure, may not the ancient god still have something in reserve for the archæologist and treasure-seeker who is bold enough to undertake excavation work in the little village of Aghourmi, some two miles east of Siwa, where the ruins of the Temple of Ammon still exist? Your interesting account of these ruins and the legends you have so sedulously culled from the Siwans, cannot fail again to create interest in the hidden treasures of the desert. One who has had some terrible experiences at the hands of the Senussi Arabs during the war—I refer to the gallant and gifted author of that thrilling story, *Prisoners of the Red Desert*, Captain Gwatkin-Williams, R.N.—writes, "It may be that this twentieth century of ours, this era of fish and bird men, may see lifted the mystery which shrouds the hidden treasure of Ammon, the 'Unrevealed,' for, so far as our limited modern information goes, those treasures have never yet been discovered."

Your interesting account of the visit of Alexander the Great (331 B.C.) to the Oracle, when, marching along the coast to Matruh, he turned south and underwent great hardships before reaching his destination, recalls a very different journey I made to Sollum in 1917. Leaving Alexandria by train

for Behig, I there found a fleet of armoured motor-cars awaiting me, and the journey to and from Sollum, then garrisoned by British troops, was comfortably accomplished in four days. To my great regret I was too pressed for time to be able to visit Siwa, where, "on all hands springs of water gushed forth . . . that human ants' nest, fabricated for the most part of rock-salt, mud and palm trunks . . . to which the Great War surging round the world had brought the drone of aeroplanes, the hum of armoured cars and rattle of machine guns."

Your reference in Chapter V to the wonderful work carried on by Miss Nina Baird amongst the bedouin women and children rendered destitute in consequence of the Senussi invasion, recalls several visits Lady Wingate and I made to Amria—the village in the desert west of Alexandria and not far from Lake Mariut, where, as you say, this courageous lady worked practically singlehanded in teaching these desert waifs and strays to make carpets—thus starting an industry and giving the women and children a means of livelihood and a form of protection which for ever will be remembered with gratitude by the Western Arabs. A daughter of that well-known and greatly respected Scotsman, Sir Alexander Baird, an excellent horsewoman, a good Arabic scholar, and one who performed important services in the Egyptian troubles in the spring of 1919, Miss Baird's energetic efforts throughout the war utterly exhausted her strength, and she fell an easy victim to typhoid soon after—to be followed a few months later by her talented

father, and thus was the British community in Egypt deprived of two valuable lives who had endeared themselves to Europeans and natives alike and whose loss is deplored by all. On my last visit the carpet-making industry was about to be removed from Amria to an imposing structure built by Captain Jennings Bramley at Behig, the headquarters of the Eastern District of the Western Desert. Here this energetic official had also constructed, out of the ruins of an old building, a mediæval-looking stronghold, where we spent a few days and visited the ruined church of St. Menas, to which you make a passing reference in Chapter I. This buried Christian city is locally known as Abu Menas, and for long defied discovery, as it had not occurred to those in search of it to connect it with the Arab name of Abumna, until the German explorer, Kauffmann, and his companion lighted on the historic spot, which lies from fifty to fifty-five miles south-west of Alexandria. Your readers may be interested to know that Menas was an Egyptian in the Roman army who became a Christian and took the opportunity of a great public function to make an avowal of his faith which was proscribed under the Emperor Diocletian. He was tortured and eventually beheaded. His friends begged or stole his body, tied it on a camel and determined to found a settlement wherever the camel should lie down. Menas before death had expressed a wish to be buried near Lake Mariut, and here surely enough the camel insisted on lying down, and could not be induced to go further—so his

followers buried the body on the spot. Many miracles were reported of his tomb, the settlement became a large Christian city with a magnificent cathedral built of granite from Assuan and marble from Italy. For some centuries the place became a resort for pilgrimage from all parts of the near East, but soon after the Arab conquest it was despoiled to provide material for the mosques in Alexandria and Cairo. Gradually the ruins were silted up with the ever-shifting sand, becoming mere mounds, and it was the chance discovery of a small terra-cotta plaque imprinted with the figure of Menas, standing erect with arms outstretched between two kneeling camels and a rough inscription, that led Herr Kauffmann and his friend to unearth the great basilica which had contained the tomb. The walls of the cathedral appear to have been lined with marble, whilst small pieces of mosaic on the floor give the impression that the dome was probably adorned in the same way. Some of the bases and capitals of the pillars are decorated after the Greek style with acanthus leaf ornaments, others in the stricter Roman method of straight panels. The dwelling-houses are small and constructed in blocks separated by narrow streets. Not far distant, on the coast, stand the ruins of Abusir (the Taposiris Magna of the Romans) which was evidently used as a port of arrival and departure by the thousands of pilgrims who came across the sea to pay their vows in this hallowed sanctuary. When I visited this place it was garrisoned by the very efficient Indian Camel Corps which the

Maharajah of Bikaner had sent as his contribution to the Egyptian Expeditionary Force.

Your interesting sketch of the rise of the great Senussi, the establishment of his now widespread confraternity and his invasion, at the instigation of German and Turkish officers and officials, of Egypt in 1915; his hostile occupation of the oases and the successful campaign so ably directed by General Sir W. Peyton, which finally drove his forces across the frontier and re-established Egyptian domination in the Western Desert, merits careful perusal if the reader wishes to understand the last of that series of invasions from the West which began in the days of the Pharaoh Mereneptah, nearly three thousand five hundred years ago, and which, given favourable conditions, may yet be repeated.

All you so interestingly describe recalls my long connection with the doings of the Confraternity when Sayed Mohammed el Mahdi, the son of Sayed Ben Ali, the virtual founder of the order, was its titular head. To him, in 1883, the Sudan Mahdi wrote, offering the position of third Khalifa in his new hierarchy. Had Sayed Mohammed accepted, it is possible that, in addition to the Sudan revolt, the whole of North Africa might have been ablaze; but the Senussi Mahdi aimed at peaceful penetration rather than military occupation: his zawias (religious rest-houses) had gradually been extended to Central and West Africa, they "were neutral meeting-places where difficulties, tribal, commercial, legal or religious, could be settled by an unbiassed authority. His akhwan were judges as well as missionaries.

They defined tribal areas, settled water and grazing rights as well as meting out the justice of the Koran to those who infringed the code of Islam."

The interest of the Turkish Government in this great movement dates back many years, and I well remember when the late Ghazi Mukhtar Pasha (then Turkish High Commissioner in Egypt) procured the original manuscript Senussi prayer-book, had one thousand copies lithographed in a private printing press in Cairo, and dispatched them as a present to the Senussi with a request in the title-page for the great religious leader's "help in prayer."

Sayed Mohammed died on the 1st June, 1902. I had full knowledge of the dispatch to Kufara—the then headquarters of the Order—of his tombstone which had been secretly cut and engraved in Cairo by an expert native stonemason; but if I digress in this manner I shall soon exceed the limits of a "Foreword," and so must rapidly pass over these early experiences which, nevertheless, proved useful when the Great War let loose all the hidden forces of hostility and revealed the immense influence of Islamic teaching for good or ill as applied in the interests of the various opponents. That, on the one hand, Sayed Ahmed, the uncle and successor of Sayed Mohammed, should have espoused the Turco-German cause and harboured Enver Pasha and other notable Turkish officers who had crossed to the north coast of Africa in submarines, to organize the Senussi campaigns against Egypt and the Sudan; whilst, on the other hand, British influence and

British officers were enabled to assist the Sherif of Mecca—the Guardian of the Holy Places of Islam—in his successful revolt against Turkish rule in Arabia, are interesting and little-understood features in the history of the great world upheaval from which we have but recently emerged, and no doubt they will be chronicled in due course by those concerned in these "side-shows," as they are somewhat inadequately described. It must not, however, be forgotten that—insignificant as they may appear in comparison with the terrific clash of arms in Western Europe—they have resulted in giving Egypt tranquillity on its western frontier, in restoring to the Sudan the great lost province of Darfur, and in freeing the Arabian Peninsula—results which in pre-war days would have been characterized as epoch-making events, but which have passed almost unnoticed in the great changes which have taken place in the territorial redistributions of the Treaty of Versailles.

To touch on but one little-known detail, you refer to the Talbot Mission. This has not attracted the attention it deserves, but I venture to think history will credit Colonel Milo Talbot with no mean achievement when it is realized that his mission effected the triangular treaties between Great Britain, Italy and the present head of the Senussi Confraternity, Sayed Mohammed el Idrisi, whereby both Egypt and Tripoli have secured, let us hope, a trusted ally.

Incidentally—through the good offices of Colonel Talbot's able Egyptian coadjutor, Hassanein Bey—

that intrepid lady, Rosita Forbes, accompanied by the Bey, was enabled to penetrate to the Oasis of Kufara in 1921. Another member of the Talbot Mission—Mr. Francis Rodd—is also utilizing his experiences of the Senussi Confraternity and the Western Desert by making a prolonged and important journey with Mr. Buchanan from West Africa, which should throw much new and interesting light on many still obscure localities.

In these days of improved communications—when the two ends of the great iron road destined to connect South with North Africa are gradually approaching one another, and when other railways are either under construction or projected to connect the Atlantic with the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea—the time may not be far distant when the great Sahara and Libyan Deserts, too, will be traversed from north to south and east to west, and the undoubted mineral wealth and new products of Central Africa will be brought to the nearest ports for shipment to all parts of the world. Your remarks, therefore, on mining, industries, trade and the means of communication southwards from the Mediterranean through the oases which you and others have visited, will doubtless prove of value and merit careful consideration.

Meanwhile, much good work remains to be done by officers and officials like yourself who take a keen interest in the welfare of the sparse nomad and sedentary populations of these still remote districts, fostering amongst them those feelings of confidence and goodwill which will go far towards

preparing them for the advent of the amenities of civilization which must come with the inevitable development of the no longer Dark Continent. Now, however, that the clash of arms is past and, let us hope, a new era of peaceful development set in, I might well have prefaced my remarks with this quotation:

> "God's benison go with you, and with those
> That would make good of bad and friends of foes."

The immortal poet's words seem to me not only to synchronize with the pleasantly conversational style of your own narrative which has induced the somewhat novel method I have adopted of writing you a letter by way of an introduction—but they also express the spirit which will, I trust, animate us in our present and future relations with those nations and peoples of the Near East who unfortunately for themselves espoused our enemies' cause in the Great War, but whose best interests lie—now and henceforth—in the friendship and goodwill of the Allies.

Your chapters on the customs, superstitions and "fantasias" of the Siwans recall much that is similar amongst the Sudan tribes and peoples—especially those of the Moslem Faith—and your account of the "zikr" is particularly interesting. In the words of an Islamic writer, by means of this religious exercise "the whole world and all its attractions disappears from the vision of the faithful worshipper, and he is enabled to behold the excellence of the Most High. Nothing must be

allowed to distract his attention from its performance, and ultimately he attains by its medium a proper conception of the Tauhid, or unity of God. . . . To enter Paradise one must say after every prayer 'God is Holy' ten times, 'Praised be God' ten times, and 'God is great' ten times."

If the age of miracles has not gone for ever then these Moslem devotees—the descendants of the ancient warriors of the Libyan Desert, side by side with their courageous and resourceful British helpers—may yet cause the great Oracle of Jupiter Ammon to reveal the secrets of that old-time sanctuary with which your book deals so interestingly.

Yours sincerely,
Reginald Wingate.

"On grassy slopes the twining vine boughs grew
And heavy olives 'twixt far mountains blue,
And many a green-necked bird sang to his mate
Within the slim-leaved thorny pomegranate
That flung its unstrung rubies on the grass."

"But a desert stretched and stricken left and right, left
and right,
Where the piled mirages thicken under white-hot light—
A skull beneath a sandhill and a viper coiled inside—
And a red wind out of Libya roaring 'Run and hide.'"

SIWA

SIWA

THE OASIS OF JUPITER AMMON

CHAPTER I

THE COAST

"... Some strip of herbage strown
That just divides the desert from the sown."

SIWA—pronounced "Seewah"—is a little-known oasis in the Libyan Desert on the borders of Egypt and Tripoli. It lies 200 miles south of Sollum, the Egypt-Tripoli frontier port on the Mediterranean coast, and almost 400 miles west of the Nile Valley. Siwa is the northernmost oasis of a string of oases which stretch from Egypt into the middle of Tripoli. These "Islands of the Blessed"—as they were called by the ancients—are natural depressions in the great Libyan table-land which are preserved from the inroads of shifting sand by the high limestone cliffs that surround them, and are made fertile and habitable by numbers of sweet water springs. Siwa consists of a little group of oases in a depression about 30 miles long and 6 miles wide, lying 72 feet below the level

of the sea, surrounded by a vast barren table-land, parched and featureless, where rain rarely falls, which can only be crossed if one carries sufficient water for the whole journey.

Siwa is one of the least known and most interesting places in North Africa, but owing to its inaccessibility very few Europeans had visited it prior to the outbreak of the Great War. It has a population of between three and four thousand inhabitants, who are not Arabs but the remains of an older race, of Berber origin. They have a language of their own, which is only spoken, not written, and has survived among the dwellers of the oasis from many centuries before the Arab invasion, owing to the remoteness of the country and the slight communication between Siwa and the outer world. At present the birth-rate is considerably lower than the death-rate, so it appears likely that in course of time the Siwan race will become extinct.

It was my fortune, after spending a year or so on the coast, to be stationed at Siwa, during 1920–21, in command of a section of the Frontier Districts Administration Camel Corps, and for some time as the District Officer of the oasis. Under the present regime there has been one British officer, seconded from the Army for service under the Egyptian Government, posted alone in the Siwa oasis. While I was there I spent my spare time in discovering as much as possible about the history of the place, and the manners and customs of this desert community, which differ very considerably from those of the

THE AUTHOR

Arabs or the people of Egypt. No history, from its earliest times to the present day, has ever been written of this strange place, and it appears probable that now, when British officials are being withdrawn from Egypt, Siwa will once more sink back into obscurity.

The oasis is most easily reached from Sollum, or from Matruh, another port on the Mediterranean coast west of Alexandria. The journey can be done in two days by car, when the rough desert track that is called a road is in good order ; it takes six days on a trotting camel, and about ten days with a bedouin caravan of slow walking camels. The Arab covers the whole distance on foot, living on a surprisingly small quantity of dates, water and camel milk. The desert is quite waterless, except for the first few miles, where there are occasional rock cisterns which fill during the rains and provide a little water during the first few months of the hot weather.

The coastal belt of Western Egypt was comparatively unknown country before the war, though by no means as remote as the inland oases. Strangely enough, excepting the few officials of the Egyptian Coastguards Administration, the Europeans who seemed to know most about this country before the war were Germans, who were encouraged by Abbas Helmi, the ex-Khedive, in their attempts to exploit the commercial and agricultural possibilities of the coast. In 1913 Herr Ewart Falls published a book called *Three Years in the Libyan Desert* which was an account of some archæological works carried out by

him and his colleagues—Germans—on the site of the ancient city of St. Menas, south-west of Alexandria. In this book he describes how he accompanied the Khedive on his visit to Siwa in 1905. He gives a flamboyant description of the Royal progress. The party consisted of the Khedive, four Europeans, twenty soldiers, a number of servants, 62 riding camels, horses, and 288 baggage camels, which seem an incredibly large number. The Khedive drove the whole way—200 miles—in a carriage, a species of phaeton, constantly changing horses. Herr Falls mentions the intense enthusiasm of the natives on the occasion of the Kaiser's birthday, and discusses the possibilities of a Pan-islamic rising against the much hated English who " curtail the Khedive's political activities." He gives statistics on the fighting forces of the Arabs, and considers that the time is ripe for stirring up sedition. One of his theories is that the Arab tribe " Senagra " originate from a German boy, called Singer, who was wrecked on the coast. There is a photograph in his book of one of the main streets in the old town of Siwa which he calls " Interior of an ancient tomb " ! It is really a very remarkable book and gives one a good insight into German ideas in Egypt before the war.

In ancient days the coast west of Alexandria was inhabited by various Libyan tribes, the most famous being the Nasamonians, who lived by the plunder of wrecks, and the Lotophagi, who are immortalized in Tennyson's famous poem " The Lotus-Eaters," dwellers of a land " In which it seemed always afternoon." These two tribes lived on the coast that lies west of the present frontier. The coast which lies between the present frontier and Alexandria was thinly populated by wandering tribes of Libyans, a nomadic people, who depended, as the bedouins do now, on the rains to feed their flocks. The inland country was a land of mystery vaguely described as being the haunt of strange wild beasts, although nowadays this waterless tract nourishes few wild creatures of any description. In later times Persians, Greeks, Romans and Byzantines established some centres of civilization on the coast, but this strip immediately west of Alexandria was never thickly populated, and one finds few signs of any former civilization. The Arabs, after planting Mohammedanism in Egypt, continued their victorious course westward along the coast, forcing their religion on the people at the point of the sword, or driving the natives inland to the oases, which remained unconquered till a later date. Thus, the Arabs of the desert have always considered themselves to be the conquerors, and the oasis dwellers to be the conquered.

The coastal belt from Alexandria to the sea slopes gently upwards in strips of undulating country till it reaches the foot of the ledge of the great Libyan plateau. This narrow strip of fairly fertile country between the desert and the Mediterranean gradually diminishes in width, from east to west, till at Sollum the cliffs of the Libyan plateau reach the sea. At its widest part, near Alexandria, the coastal belt stretches inland for nearly 40 miles before merging into the

desert. The coast is inhabited by Arabs of the Awlad Ali tribe, who move about with their flocks and camels from well to well, having only a transitory interest in the soil, which they sow with a little barley in the places where it will grow, and depending on the rains, which are very heavy on the coast, to fill their wells and cisterns, and to water the wild vegetation that feeds their herds. The land is most fertile close to the sea, but for the first 10 or 20 miles on the high desert plateau above the cliffs there is flat scrub-covered country that makes a good grazing-ground for sheep and camels. Farther south one sees less vegetation, and very soon the real desert begins, which stretches hard and dry under the blazing sun for 200 miles down to Siwa, and beyond Siwa over unexplored country till it reaches the distant Sudan.

As one goes farther west from Alexandria the country becomes wilder and one sees fewer people, but there are several little towns, or settlements, along the coast. The ex-Khedive had a project of opening up this district and, aided by German enterprise, he built a railway which was destined to connect Alexandria with his western frontier at Sollum, and shorten the sea journey from Europe to Egypt. But the line only got as far as Bir Fuca, about 100 miles west of Alexandria. The Khedive found that his agricultural experiments in the Western Desert were not a success and, realizing this, he tried to sell the railway to a German firm, but Lord Kitchener, who was then High Commissioner,

stepped in and secured it for Egypt. There is a motor road, known as the Khedival Road, from Alexandria to beyond Matruh, and another road, of very inferior quality, from Matruh to Sollum.

Mersa Matruh—Mersa means a harbour—a small town on the coast about 200 miles west of Alexandria, is where the Governor of the Western Desert has his headquarters. Matruh is the ancient Parætonium, sometimes called Ammonia, and was the port for Siwa in the days when that place was known as the oasis of Ammon. Matruh consists of a few dozen little one-storied stone houses, plastered and painted white, with gay shutters, yellow, green and blue, inhabited by Greek colonists who do a thriving business by trading with the Arabs, and exporting barley and sheep to Alexandria. There is a picturesque mosque on the cliffs above the bay, whose minaret forms a landmark for many miles, a hospital, police barracks, the Governor's house, and a number of Government offices and houses of Government officials. There are large numbers of resident Arabs in the neighbourhood who remain near Matruh, as it is the commercial centre of the desert. At most times, especially in the summer, Matruh is a singularly attractive little place, but when it is visited by a " khamsin " wind, which blows up the fine white sand—and this is not unfrequent—it becomes a more detestable spot than anywhere else on the desert. The cliffs at Matruh suddenly cease and are carried on by a reef of partly submerged jagged rocks which protect the large harbour. The entrance—between two

rocks—is so narrow that only ships of moderate size can pass, and when a heavy sea is running outside the entrance is impassable. The bay is 1½ miles long and half a mile wide, but in places where there are shoals the water is only 2 fathoms deep. To the east and west of the harbour there are a series of lagoons separated from the sea by a line of low cliffs, and divided from each other by narrow spits of sand. On the cliff above the bay, commanding the entrance, there is an old ruined Turkish fort, a yellow castellated building, which was occupied during the war by a detachment of Royal Artillery. The houses are on the southern shore, behind them there is a low rocky ridge crowned with some little forts which were built during the Senussi rising in 1916, when Matruh was for some time the British base. The bay is surrounded by firm white sands sloping gently down to the brilliantly coloured water. It is well sheltered and, consequently, never very rough; the varying depths of the water cause it to assume different colours—in some cases almost as brilliant as those of the kingfishers who fly up and down the shore; at times it is incredibly blue, so blue that the open sea outside looks black in comparison, and at other times it is vividly green, with long streaks of purple where the dark seaweed shows through the water. Matruh is a pleasant place in summer-time, the bathing is ideal, and the climate is cooler than Alexandria, which is the summer resort of all Egypt. But the great disadvantage is the lack of water; there are several wells, but the water in them

is of an indifferent quality, so at present it is brought by boat from Alexandria, at great expense, and pumped into tanks on the shore.

Some signs of former civilization are still visible, and it is evident that the Romans, with their usual appreciation of beautiful places, realized the attraction of this smooth, brilliant bay. There are ruins of several villas on the banks of the lagoons, and in places flights of steps have been cut through the rock leading down to the water. The Governor's bungalow is built on the site of a villa that was once inhabited by Cleopatra. According to tradition, Antony retired there after his defeat at Actium and found solace in the embraces of Cleopatra. One can scarcely imagine a more ideal spot than this for the site of the villa. It stood among low sand-hills a few feet above the harbour, right on the edge of the bay, so near that the rippling water must have sounded through the marble halls of the villa. From the windows of the present building one looks over the gorgeously blue bay to a line of sharp black rocks where the white waves break, and beyond to the deep blue open sea. At night, when the water shines silver in the moonlight, and the little waves creep up the white shore and break with phosphorescent splashes on the sands, one can easily picture Antony and Cleopatra gliding smoothly in a boat through the lagoons, which were connected by channels in those days, or feasting superbly to the sound of

"Some Egyptian royal love-lilt
Some Sidonian refrain,"

in the villa above the bay. In the summer quantities of " Mex Lilies " (Amaryllis) grow on the hills and scent the air with their heavy perfume. A short time before the war an American archæologist made some valuable finds among the foundations of Cleopatra's villa, and on several occasions coins have been unearthed in the neighbourhood.

The present-day Greek colonists of Matruh are not very attractive people. They are very clever at their trade and seem to become prosperous in a remarkably short time. They make their money by squeezing the Arabs, who are forced to deal with them, as there is nobody else from whom they can buy necessities such as tea, sugar, rice, etc. The Greeks have the monopoly of trade and sell their goods at a prohibitive price, quite out of proportion to their worth, even considering the cost of transport. Their favourite system is to buy whole crops of barley from the Arabs before it is ripe, when the owner is particularly hard up. The Administration, to a certain extent, is able to check excessive profiteering, but there are innumerable ways in which the Greek is able to " do " the Arab. It seems a pity, because, in my estimation, the Arab is a much better man than the Greek trader. Not unnaturally, Greeks are very unpopular. Farther along the coast, in Tunis and Algeria, their place is taken by the Jews, but on the Western Desert there are no Jews—so the Greeks have it all their own way.

There are generally two or three English officials at Matruh, and possibly their wives, so there is

usually more going on there than at any other place on the coast; in fact, Matruh is a sort of metropolis of the desert, but at the same time it is very much a desert station. Lately, when I was staying there, there arrived one evening an enormous new American car containing two English officers on leave, and a very smartly dressed lady, wife of one of them. By amazing good luck they had managed to get through from Alexandria without mishap, stopping a night *en route*. On arrival at Matruh they asked to be directed to the " Hotel," which they had heard was " small, but very clean and comfortable." They looked exceedingly blank when we told them there was no hotel—and never had been—but they were conducted to the rest house, where they settled down. Next day they complained that the rest house was neither clean nor comfortable. The greatest disadvantage, to my mind, in all the rest houses on the Western Desert is the multitude of fleas which nothing that one can do is able to destroy or even keep under. This car was not the kind used by the Administration on the desert; the party had brought no spare parts for it, no servant, no provisions except some biscuits and a tin or two of peaches, only a few glass bottles of water, which were naturally almost boiling after some hours in the heat of an August day, and none of them could speak any Arabic. At dinner that night they all appeared in full evening dress which they had brought with them, and, to everybody's horror, they announced their intention of " running down to Siwa " on the next

day. We explained carefully that to reach Siwa they would have to cross 200 miles of waterless desert, and no car ever attempted the trip alone. But nothing seemed to daunt them. Finally, however, the Governor heard of their plan and forbade it forthwith; they started off to Alexandria on the following day, with an escort of two cars, and as they went they murmured indignantly about "red tape and absurd restrictions." It is amazing what a a strange idea of the desert some people seem to have.

Matruh is the centre of the sponge fishing industry which is carried on during certain months of the year along the coast. The sponge fishers are mostly Italians, and a fine-looking lot of men. They have a little fleet of sailing-boats, and one steam-tug. The boats put out for several days at a time, working up and down the coast. They use no diving-bells, but when a man dives he holds on to a heavy stone, which sinks rapidly; he makes a jab at the sponges, cutting off one, and then lets go of the stone and rises to the surface. Sometimes the men seem to bound out of the water when they rise to the top. They are able to remain submerged for several minutes. But the work tells on their health; they are highly paid, but they say themselves that they usually die at about forty, and there is always the horrid possibility of being attacked by sharks, which are more plentiful in the Mediterranean than they used to be before the war. At Sollum there are several graves of sponge fishers who were killed in

this way. I never bought a single sponge myself during the whole time I was on the Western Desert. When I was at Sollum I used to ride out along the shore with a syce carrying a bag after every heavy storm and we would usually pick up about a dozen first-class sponges worth about half a guinea each at home. Fortunately, the Arabs had no use for such things as sponges. One found pumice stone lying about the shore also. During the war an enormous amount of wreckage was swept ashore and collected by patrols of Camel Corps for building purposes and firewood. Sometimes the whole coast would be littered with cotton from a wrecked ship carrying cotton to Europe; another time we collected stacks of good brown paper, which is still being used on the Western Desert, and another time a number of casks of wine and rum were picked up.

Between Matruh and Sollum there is a little place called Sidi Barrani, which consists of a police barracks and a high gaunt building which is a rest house and office, and about half a dozen white bungalows belonging to Greek traders. Each of these places has either a British officer or, if it is not sufficiently important, an Egyptian mamur who is responsible for keeping order, etc. Barrani is a desolate place, but very beautiful in springtime when the country is ablaze with flowers and green budding corn. Rest houses in Egypt and the Sudan correspond to the Dak Bungalows in India. Those on the Western Desert are quite comfortably furnished and well provided with plate and linen. An old Sudanese

soldier looks after each rest house. It is a relief after trekking along the coast by car or camel to arrive at a place where everything is ready and, in winter-time, to get a roof over one's head, though probably a leaky one.

Two roads run from Barrani to Sollum; one goes along the coast among the strangely white sand-hills which are a feature of the district, and the other, which is less liable to be flooded in winter, is higher and farther inland. The country that one passes on the upper road between Barrani and Sollum, between the blue Mediterranean and the high rocky Scarp that runs parallel to the sea, is very attractive, especially in the soft evening light. In the heat of the day it looks dry and parched, except during a month or two immediately after the rains. One meets very few travellers on the narrow road that winds up and down, round low hills which are covered with heathery undergrowth, and often topped with rough stone cairns. Some places are very like a Scotch moor, or a stretch of Dartmoor. There is a certain plant which is the colour of purple heather, and another that looks from a distance like withered bracken. In summer-time, especially on the lower road, one is constantly deceived by the vivid mirage that hovers above some salt swamps close to the white sand-hills on the shore.

Occasionally, one passes a party of Arabs, with their skirts tucked high above the knees, stalking along behind their woolly shuffling camels, or

perhaps one meets a patrol of Camel Corps, black Sudanese, in khaki uniforms, trotting briskly along on fast riding camels; then an old bedouin sheikh, wrapped in his long silk shawl, ambles past on his Arab pony. Farther on, one smells the sharp sweet scent of burning brushwood that comes from the fires outside the low black tents where some Arabs are camping, and one can see them squatting round the flame in the tent doors, with their white woollen cloaks pulled over them, while in the distance a boy drives the camels and sheep close up to the camp for the night. On the lower road, near the shore, between Barrani and Sollum, there is a lonely little hill crowned by a rough block-house where there used to be a detachment of the Camel Corps. This place is called Bagbag and was used as a frontier post before the war in Tripoli between the Italians and the Turks. As one approaches Sollum the escarpment on the left comes nearer, the foot-hills cease, and the road runs across a mile or two of flat country within sound and sight of the sea right at the foot of the towering cliffs. Before arriving at the camp the road crosses several deep water-courses which come " from thymy hills down to the sea-beat shore " through rocky ravines in the Scarp; they are dry and sandy in summer, but during the rains they become rushing torrents, quite impossible to cross in a car. Riding home in the evening, one sees a number of twinkling fires in the bedouin camp, and above them, sharply outlined against the primrose-coloured sky, is the top of the great rocky

Scarp, like a dark wall that one has to ascend before reaching the desert.

Sollum consists of about a score of little buildings, and a large bedouin encampment, situated on the shore of a bay in an angle made by the sea and the Scarp which rises to a height of over 600 feet immediately behind the camp, and juts out into the sea in a rocky promontory. There are several wells at Sollum and one little orchard of fig-trees which breaks the monotony of the brown-coloured soil. Most of the buildings, including a large Camel Corps barracks, were erected since the war. There are one or two little shops, owned by Greeks, and a rough native café presided over by an evil-looking, one-eyed Egyptian, who is also the barber of the place. For a long time there was a British garrison, but this was recently withdrawn, leaving a force of Camel Corps and a small detachment of Light Cars in the old Turkish fort on the top of the cliffs above the bay. At one time there were about a dozen officers quartered here, and five or six of them had their wives with them. Sollum became quite like an Indian hill station—perhaps even worse, and when a certain elderly general, well known as a misogynist, inspected the place, he stated in his report that there were six officers' wives and six different sets, the result being that they were very shortly moved and replaced by unmarried officers.

One gets to feel hemmed in at Sollum. On the north lies the sea, and on the south and west rise the rocky cliffs of the Scarp. The only open country is

[illegible] the coast towards the east. A steep twisting [illegible] road, like a Swiss mountain pass, leads up the [illegible] of the cliff on the track of an old Roman road, [illegible] very precipitous paths ascend the Scarp [illegible] the camp to the high table-land above. But [illegible] one has climbed the Scarp and reached the top [illegible] is a great flat plain stretching out into the [illegible]nce, which is good country for riding, and full [illegible] hares and gazelle. This is the bedouins' grazing [illegible]nd, and every few miles one comes across great [illegible]s of camel and sheep, and large camps of Arabs. [illegible] are a few rock cisterns on the northern edge [illegible] plateau and from these the Arabs get their [illegible]. They often camp 10 or 15 miles away from [illegible] and send in a party of women and boys [illegible] the water-skins every other day. Arabs [illegible] bathe, even when they are camped close to [illegible] sea, but fortunately the sun is a wonderful [illegible].

The nomad Arabs of the Western Desert are a [illegible] picturesque race, very different from the [illegible] of Egypt. Their active open-air life [illegible] them strong and healthy. Patriarchalism is [illegible]ant system among them; they are divided [illegible] number of tribes and sub-tribes, each under [illegible] sheikh who is responsible to the Govern- [illegible] the good behaviour of his people.

[illegible] tribal divisions breed factions, enmities and [illegible] feuds, which result in occasional raids and [illegible] neighbouring tribes, and the carrying off [illegible]. Another source of dispute are the rights

and ownerships of wells, which cause frequent fights, so a District Officer on the coast needs to be well acquainted with the tribal politics of the Arabs in his area. One of the greatest grievances of the Arabs on the Egyptian side of the frontier is the fact that, since the Senussi rebellion in 1916, they are not allowed to be in possession of fire-arms, but their neighbours, over the border in Tripoli, are under no such restrictions. The Arabs on the Egyptian desert argue, quite rightly, that they are liable to suffer from raids by the western Arabs who can dash across the frontier, drive off a herd of camels, and retire again into Tripoli where they will be safe from pursuit, as the Italians have very little influence outside their coastal towns, and of course if anybody belonging to the Egyptian Administration ventured across the frontier without an invitation, and was caught, it might almost lead to international complications. But the Egyptian Government considers that the forces of the Administration are sufficient to keep order on the frontier and protect the Arabs. (The situation is not dissimilar to that in Ireland during 1920.)

The Arabs are a pastoral people. As the Siwans depend almost entirely upon their date palms, so do the Arabs depend on their camels and sheep, and to a lesser extent on the barley crop. Their tents, called "kreish," in which they live, are made of camel wool, woven into long strips and fastened together, supported in the middle by two poles about 6 feet high, sloping down to about 3 feet

above the ground, with a movable fringe hung round the sides from the bottom of the roof-piece. These tents are very comfortable, especially in summer-time when the sides are kept open, propped up with short poles. There is no furniture inside them, but the floor is covered with matting and bedouin carpets, which are made of finely spun wool, white sheep's wool—sometimes dyed scarlet, brown, grey—yellow camel's wool, and black goat's hair. They are woven in stripes and geometrical designs, and ornamented with black and red tassels. The largest tents are often 20 or 30 feet long and 10 feet wide, sometimes divided into two parts by a striped Tripoli blanket which is hung across the middle. One can be very comfortable in one of these tents, with no furniture except a heap of carpets and rugs.

Each bedouin has two sets of tents, a thin summer one, and a thicker one which is used during the winter; the latter is lined with a wonderful patchwork made from pieces of coloured cotton and linen, like an old-fashioned patchwork quilt. When it rains the wool of the roof swells and tightens, and the water slides off the steep sides of the tent as it does from the proverbial duck's back. Being so low they are not torn up by the wind, and I have seen a whole camp of army tents laid flat by a hurricane which tore many of them to pieces, while the Arab ones remained standing and dry within.

In appearance the Western Desert Arabs are fairer than the Arabs of Arabia and Palestine. This

is probably due to the fact that when they originally took the country it was occupied by Berbers, a blue-eyed, fair-haired type, who are supposed to have crossed over from Europe into Africa at some remote period several thousand years ago. The Arabs are slightly darker than the Egyptians with features that are distinctly Semitic, expressing more intelligence than the fellahin. They are of a finer build and more wiry. Some of the Arab women are very handsome, and their costume is particularly becoming. They usually wear a long black robe with full sleeves, but on special occasions the robe is of striped silk, and a red woollen belt, several yards long, twisted round the waist like a cummerbund. Their head-dress consists of a coloured silk handkerchief tied tightly over the head, but allowing two coils of braided hair to appear on both sides of the face, then, above this, a long black scarf with a coloured fringe and a red and yellow border twisted into a high head-dress, folded like a mediæval coif below the chin, with the fringed ends hanging down behind. Soft scarlet leather boots complete the costume. Almost all the women tattoo their chins and often their foreheads with a blue pattern; this is considered by them to be very ornamental, but to European eyes it is singularly ugly. Old women dye their hair a brilliant orange colour, and men sometimes tint the tips of their beards, as well as their horses' tails, with henna, presumably following what one sees advertised as "The henna cult of beauty."

As in most Eastern countries when an Arab

marries he pays "marriage money" to the parents or guardians of the bride. So a daughter is a source of riches to her parents if she is attractive enough to be worth a handsome dowry. The amount varies on the Western Desert from about five to a hundred pounds, according to the age, appearance and position of the girl. Half is paid on marriage, and the remainder is paid later by instalments, and it is liable to be forfeited if the wife does not behave well, but if the husband divorces the wife he must pay up the residue of the money to her parents. This makes a man very careful in the choice of a wife. In many ways the plan of buying a wife on the instalment system is a good one. Arabs have more freedom in these matters than many other Orientals. Women are not veiled, and men and girls have plenty of opportunities of seeing each other, and even speaking together, before marriage, though the actual negotiations are always carried out by a third person representing each party. Arabs rarely have more than two wives, though their religion allows them to have four, and divorce is not so very common among them. The women have a certain amount of influence which they exert without the men quite knowing it, but although their position is better than that of the Egyptian women, and infinitely better than that of Siwan women, they have a very hard time. They weave wool and make tents and carpets; they milk the flocks and make butter and cheese; they grind corn on rough mill-stones for making bread; they fetch water, often from a well many miles

distant; and they collect wood every day for the camp fires; all this in addition to looking after their children and cooking. Mohammedan women of all classes are not expected to concern themselves with religion; they are not allowed to enter mosques, except on one day of the year, and during seven years in the Sudan and Egypt I only twice saw a Mohammedan woman praying in public. There are very definite social divisions among the Arabs, especially among their women. The wives of respectable Arabs never associate with or speak to women whose morals are considered doubtful. These ladies of the *demi-monde* inhabit tents, generally on the outskirts of the camps, and are conspicuous, as in every part of the world, by the brilliant colours of their clothes, and their many ornaments.

The Arabs are a kindly, hospitable people, not phlegmatic like the fellahin, but easily moved. I had some very good friends among them. When I was out on trek, if I came across an encampment, they would see us from a long distance off and invariably come out and invite me to dismount and rest awhile, and " fadhl " in their camp. " Fadhl " is an untranslatable word which means roughly " Stop and pass the time of day." Sometimes I used to accept their hospitality for a few hours in the heat of the day, and rest in a cool dark tent, or wait talking in the tents in the evening while my men rode on ahead and prepared my camp a little distance away. One could never camp near bedouins, as their camels generally had mange, which is very catching, and

their dogs were a nuisance at night, being " snappers up of unconsidered trifles " in the way of food, etc., and not always " unconsidered " either. These dogs are white or yellow woolly creatures who guard the flocks with great apparent courage, and attack any stranger, but when threatened they run yelping away with their tails between their legs. When I dismounted I would wait for a minute or so talking to the men, so as to give the Arabs a chance to arrange things. Women would run frantically from tent to tent carrying mats and carpets, and shooing away sheep and goats and small brown children; then the sheikh would lead me to the largest tent, spread with black and scarlet carpets, with probably a long striped blanket hung across the centre and screening one side of it. Or on warm summer nights the carpets were spread in front of the tents, on the open desert under the stars. Unless I specially asked to be excused the finest kid of the herd would be caught and killed and an hour or so later it would be brought in, boiled, on an enormous wooden dish, and I would be expected to eat " heavily " of this, also of the " asida " that followed. Asida, a dish which I always had the greatest difficulty in pretending to eat, consists of lightly cooked flour dough, with a hole scooped in the middle full of oil or melted fat and sugar, however, *de gustibus non disputandum*. The sheikh, and perhaps one or two of his relations, would join in the feast, watched with the greatest interest by the ladies of the camp who would collect on the other side of the curtain, and gaze firmly at

me from underneath it, whispering, giggling and tinkling their bangles and ornaments as they moved. If I knew the people well they would not bother about hanging up a curtain, and women and children would creep into the tent and sit staring from the far end, or carry on their usual occupations—milking goats, spinning or making semna—but no woman would ever eat in the presence of a man out of respect to him, and a son would never think of sitting down and eating with his father unless he was specially invited to do so. Generally the sons waited on the party, and ate afterwards.

Semna is a kind of cheese made from goat's milk. In the morning the sheep and goats are milked into wooden bowls, the milk is poured into a water-skin and rolled vigorously up and down by two women seated on the ground till it thickens into a sort of butter. The addition of a certain herb is needed if it is to be made into cheese. One kind of white butter made by the Arabs is very good and forms an excellent substitute for real butter, and a change from the tinned species.

Arabs are very free in their conversation, and personal remarks are not considered to be ill-mannered. They usually ask one's age, and inquire whether people are married or not. The idea of a man being over twenty and still unmarried surprises them enormously; they think that he can't afford to buy a wife. They always show a keen interest in what they consider the peculiar habits of Europeans. Hardly any of them can read or write, and very few

have ever been off the desert. When a bedouin gets to Alexandria he is like a countryman in London. The bedouin are superstitious, but not as intensely so as the oasis dwellers. In every tent one notices a little bundle of charms hung on one of the tent poles to avert the Evil Eye. One such collection would consist of a black cock's leg, a red rag, a dried frog, two bones, and a little leather charm, tied together and hung on the pole.

One day I was sitting talking to some Arabs in a tent when suddenly I realized that everybody was staring in a fascinated way at my mouth. I wondered what was the matter. Then I heard the women whispering to themselves: "He must be a very wealthy one; see how he adorns himself with gold." I couldn't imagine what they meant as I was only wearing a shirt, shorts and stockings, nothing very remarkable in the way of clothes. Then I heard something about "Gold tooth," and I realized that their attention had been caught by a hideous gold crown that had been put over one of my front teeth in a great hurry just before I left Cairo the last time I was on leave. They thought it a most attractive and novel form of decoration.

When Arabs get money they either invest it in sheep and camels or bury it in the ground. Some of these men who lead the most primitive lives, living in a tent and feeding on a meagre diet of milk, bread, rice and dates, are the owners of many thousands of sheep and hundreds of camels. Sheep are generally worth two or three pounds, and camels about fifteen

pounds each. Besides this, they often have a little bag of gold buried somewhere in the desert. They never spend their money on creature comforts, and the poorest and the richest men live practically in the same way. My Sudanese Camel Corps men used to criticize them, saying what a waste it seemed that they had so much money, and apparently didn't know how to enjoy it, whereas in the Sudan when a man made money he would build a house, feed better and live in a more comfortable way than his neighbours. An Arab when he was "mabsout" (well off) didn't seem to know how to be "mabsout" —meaning also "happy."

Once I was camped near some Arabs and one of them, an old sheikh, was ill and considered by his relations likely to die. He was known to possess some money buried somewhere in the neighbourhood, and his relatives were most anxious that he should not die until he had disclosed the hiding-place. But the old man obstinately refused to tell them where it was. A deputation of his heirs called on me and asked me to make him speak. I agreed that it was unfortunate for them, but I could do nothing. When I suggested that they should take him to the hospital at Sollum, they were quite indignant and said that evidently Allah willed that he should die; the only distressing thing was his obstinacy about the money. This went on for several days, and then, to every one's surprise, the old gentleman suddenly recovered. Some of his relations seemed sorry, and some relieved. When I

A FALCONER OUTSIDE A BEDOUIN CAMP

last saw him he was watching a " fantasia " which was being held in honour of his recovery, with a pleased, benignant expression. Personally, I always had a faint idea that the money never existed, but all his people firmly believe in it, and he has kept the secret to this day.

One rather associates the idea of an Arab with his steed, a wonderful fiery creature that skims across the desert like a bird. The ponies on the Western Desert are a somewhat sorry collection. Only a few of the well-to-do Arabs keep horses. They are small hardy ponies very unlike the Arab steed of fiction. But they look better when they are ridden, with their high scarlet saddles, great iron stirrups and gaily tasselled bridles. The Arabs ride them either at an uncomfortable jog trot or at a tearing gallop. They have some curious ideas on the " points " of a pony ; certain things are considered lucky or unlucky ; for instance, if a pony has white stockings on both forelegs it is much esteemed, but a white stocking on one fore and one hind leg is exceedingly unlucky. There are many stretches of hard stony ground along the coast, so horses have to be shod ; this is done by covering the whole of the foot with a flat piece of iron, and results in a terrific noise when they gallop over stony ground.

There is very little sport to be had on this part of the desert. The only form that the Arabs indulge in is the ancient pastime of hawking. Certain men of each tribe are proficient in training and hunting with hawks. Skill as a falconer seems to be hereditary in

the same way as snake charming, fortune telling and various other practices. The Arabs prefer catching a full-grown bird and training it, to taking a young bird from the nest, which would appear to be the easiest plan. The method of trapping them is rather clever. When an Arab wants to catch a hawk, he takes a pigeon, slightly clips its wings to prevent its escape, and fastens a number of horsehair loops round its body, then he releases the pigeon, which flutters away. A hawk sights the pigeon, swoops down and becomes entangled in the meshes of the horsehair, so that the Arab is able to run up and secure it. The hawk takes many months to train. Gradually it becomes accustomed to its master, who invariably feeds it himself, and whistles when he gives it food in a way that it learns to know. Later he takes the bird on his wrist, hooded, and fastened by a leather thong; by degrees it becomes accustomed to his wrist and then he carries it about with him, still hooded. Finally he removes the hood and lets it tackle a hare or two which he brings to it, then one day he takes it out on to the desert and looses it at a running hare. The bird attacks the hare, brings it down, and sits on its prey till the master arrives, or if it flies up he draws it back by whistling and flinging a lump of meat into the air. Sometimes an Arab will catch over a dozen hares in a day's hawking, but occasionally, after months of training, when he looses his bird for the first time it will fly away and never return. One sees a tethered hawk outside a tent in almost all the big encampments. A well-

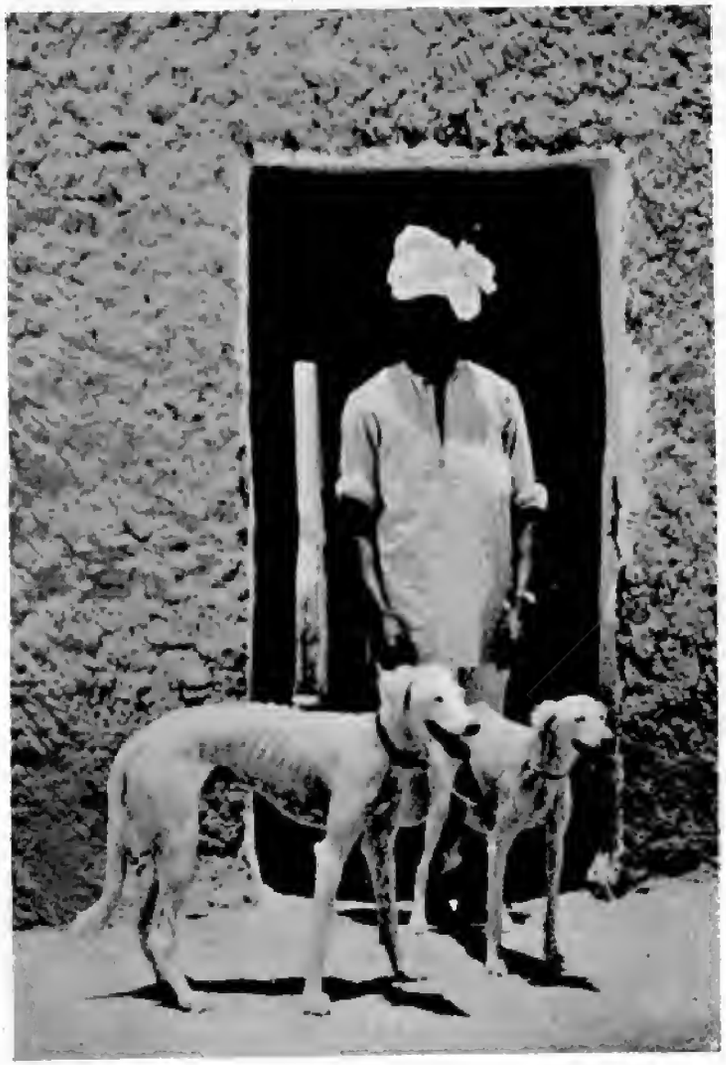
trained bird is worth several pounds among the Arabs, and it is very difficult to persuade them to part with one; they are used to catch pigeons, quail and other birds, besides hares.

Another sport which we went in for along the coast was coursing hares with Silugi dogs. These dogs are gazelle hounds and came originally from Arabia. There are now a certain number of them in Egypt, and all the officials on the Western Desert keep one or two. Silugis are very similar to greyhounds, generally white or pale coffee colour, with feathery tails and long-haired, silky ears. They are very fast indeed, but have no sense of scent, and hunt entirely by sight. They are rather delicate and very nervous, and in most cases they show little affection for human beings. At Matruh there was quite a pack which included a couple of fox-hounds, silugis, several terriers—of sorts—and a few nondescript bedouin pariahs. The Matruh pack specialized in foxes, but at Sollum there were more hares than foxes. The desert hares are rather smaller than the English ones, but they seemed to be faster.

The open country above the Scarp stretches over alternate patches of hard stony ground, and strips covered with low vegetation where a certain plant that smells like thyme predominates. Generally two or three of us went hunting together, or if there were only two Englishmen we took a couple of Sudanese syces or servants, who thoroughly enjoy all forms of hunting, all mounted on ponies, and accompanied by four or five dogs. We rode in extended order

with intervals of about thirty yards between each rider, the dogs generally trotting along in front. Whoever raised a hare gave a wild yell and galloped after it, " hell for leather," the rest following. The hounds would sight the hare and fling themselves in pursuit. Quite often the hare got away before they saw it, or managed to reach a bit of cover well ahead of the hounds, and then they would slacken down, at a loss, and wait till the riders came up and scoured the country round to put up the hare again. It sounds rather unsporting, but the hare stood a very good chance ; in fact, generally more than half of them got away, and it gave one some splendid long gallops across the country. Sometimes we would raise a gazelle, and give chase, but few dogs or ponies can catch up a gazelle when it gets a little start and is really moving. I think the scale of speed was, gazelle, silugi, hare and ponies. It was a primitive form of hunting, but one liked it none the less, and jugged hare made a welcome change in the menu.

There were a certain number of gazelle on the desert quite close to the top of the Scarp and it was occasionally possible to get a shot at them, but they were very shy, and needed careful stalking over country that was almost without cover. When anybody went out specially to shoot gazelle none would appear, but when riding along on a camel one saw numbers of them ; however, by the time one had dismounted and loaded the gazelle would be out of range, probably standing a long distance away " at gaze." Gazelle do not mind camels if they have no



SILUGI HOUNDS

people on them, and the Arabs sometimes get quite close to a gazelle by stalking it from among a number of grazing camels. At one time, after the war, the men of the Light Car Patrols took to hunting gazelle in Ford cars with a machine-gun ; fortunately this practice was forbidden, but it scared the gazelle from the neighbourhood for a considerable time.

Numbers of rock pigeons nested among the cliffs on the coast, and quantities of them collected round the camel lines and fed off the refuse grain. In the autumn thousands of quail arrived on the coast from Europe ; they were often so exhausted that the Arab boys could catch them in their hands. The natives netted them for sale to the Greeks, who exported them alive in crates to Alexandria. One got very tired of eating quail during the month or two that they were in season ; still, at first they were extremely good. Among the wadis in the Scarp there were occasional coveys of red-legged partridge, and lately there have been a few sand-grouse about the high country ; once or twice I have seen duck on the marshes near the sea, and an occasional bustard, but, on the whole, there was very little to be had in the way of shooting.

A number of jackals and a few wild cats lived in the caves among the wadis in the Scarp. Their mournful wailings echoed through the rocky ravines, and owing to its eeriness at night the bedouins thought that it was haunted by evil spirits. But in the daytime they climbed about it quite unconcernedly, and their goats snatched a scanty pasturage among

the rocks. During most of the year the Scarp looks harsh and forbidding, but after the rains a change comes over it; one notices a faint green tinge about the cliffs, and a closer examination shows that it is covered with blossoming flowers and rock plants. The slopes become gay with mauve, pink, yellow and blue flowers, saltworts, samphires, sea lavender, yellow nettle, campanulas, little irises, marigolds, ranunculas, Spanish broom, masses of night-scented stock and a quantity of other little flowering plants which clothe the grim rocks in a robe of brilliant colour. The flat country, too, blossoms out into colour. One sees scarlet poppies, mallows, and tall scabious among the budding corn, and fields of swaying asphodel, and the whole desert is scented in the evening by the night-scented stock.

The rain that causes this transformation falls occasionally during the winter months from November till about March. During this time there are clouds in the sky, and sometimes terrific downpours. The Arabs greet the first rain of the season with great delight, the men sing and shout, and the women raise piercing shrieks to show their pleasure. Unless there is a good rainfall none of the barley grows, and the grazing on which the sheep and camels depend is insufficient. When it rains the wadis become rushing torrents, roads are impassable, every house leaks and many of the roofs subside. The camels have to be led from their flooded lines to the higher ground where they stand shivering. Camels hate rain. If one is out on trek and a really stiff

shower comes on the camels barrack down, with their backs towards the direction of the rain, and nothing will make them budge till it is over. One just has to wait till it stops. If the track is muddy and wet the camels slither and slide and one must dismount and lead them; they were made for hot, dry countries, not for a damp, wet climate. Hardly any of the houses at Matruh or Sollum are watertight, and it was nothing out of the ordinary when one called on a man to find him camped out in the middle of his most watertight room, surrounded by his perishable belongings, with a sort of canopy consisting of a waterproof sheet and a mackintosh or two stretched out above him. But though rain storms were very violent they did not last long, and the sun soon came out and dried everything up again. When, however, one was caught by a bad storm out on trek on the desert, with only a thin tent, and no change of clothes, it was very disagreeable.

The word "house" is misleading. People imagine at least a large comfortable bungalow. But on the Western Desert the average house occupied by an English official, with possibly a wife, was a three-roomed stone hut, with plastered walls and a wooden roof, with a very thin layer of cement. The largest room would be about twelve feet square, the plaster invariably crumbled off the walls owing to the salt in it, and the cement invariably cracked in the summer so that the rain poured through the roof in the winter. Cement for some reason was almost impossible to get. One always heard that for "next

year " the Administration had included the building of real houses for its officials in the Budget, but this item was always one of the first to be struck out on the grounds of economy. Nobody has yet discovered an ideal roofing for the Western Desert, where there are extremes of heat and cold and occasional terrific hurricanes and downpours. So far, the best type of abode seems to be the bedouin tent.

One of the chief events on the coast was the arrival of the cruiser, *Abdel Moneim*, which came up from Alexandria about once every fortnight or three weeks bringing mails, supplies and sometimes high officials on tours of inspection. She spent a day or two in harbour at Matruh and Sollum on each trip. This little cruiser was built in Scotland for the Egyptian Government, and with two other boats comprises the navy of Egypt. She was a neat-looking grey ship, always very spick and span with fresh paint and shining brass, manned by a crew of Egyptians in white or blue sailors' uniform and red tarbooshes. Her captain was an English bimbashi in the Egyptian Coastguards Administration, whose uniform was somewhat confusing, as he wore, besides the naval rank on his sleeve, a crown and star on his shoulder. The cruiser was carefully built so as to allow a spacious saloon and two state cabins, for the accommodation of the Director-General. Two machine-guns were posted fore and aft. The *Abdel Moneim* had the well-deserved reputation of being warranted to make the very best sailor seasick, even in comparatively calm weather. She

rolled and pitched simultaneously in a more horrid manner than any ship I have ever known. The result was that, when people went down the coast to Alexandria on leave, they arrived in Egypt looking and feeling like nothing on earth, and spent the first few days of their all too short leave recovering from the evil after-effects of the voyage. I have never yet met anyone who really enjoyed a trip on the cruiser. Personally, the only time that I felt comfortable on board was when we were firmly moored to the quay at Matruh or Sollum. When the high officials landed after a sea trip they were generally feeling so ill that their visits were not entirely a pleasure to the people who were being inspected.

Occasionally misguided individuals, who knew nothing about it, got permission to go up to Sollum and back by cruiser, hoping for a pleasant little trip on the Mediterranean. Generally, when they arrived at Matruh, they inquired anxiously whether it was possible to return to Alexandria by car, or even by camel. Some queer visitors sometimes came on these " joy rides," but very little joy was left in them by the time they reached Sollum. On one occasion, a Mr. B. of the Labour Corps, a Board School master in private life, arrived by cruiser at Matruh. He announced that he had come to study the coast and the Arabs. He was just the type that Kipling describes so well in his poems. The Governor invited him to lunch ; he arrived in spurs, belt, etc., though it was the summer and every one else was wearing the fewest and thinnest clothes ; however,

that may have been politeness. There happened to be three or four other men present. At lunch Mr. B. proceeded to air his views on how the desert should be run; we heard some startling facts about it; he disapproved of the Administration, and told us so; he then proceeded to tell us about the Sudan, as he had lately spent one week in an hotel at Khartoum. The Governor had been recently transferred from the Sudan, where he had been Governor of one of the largest provinces, and as it happened every single man present had served there for some considerable time, so, naturally, we were interested to be told a few facts about it!

A couple of days later I happened to go down the coast with Mr. B. and a certain District Officer. The latter spent his whole time, when he wasn't ill, telling Mr. B. the most outrageously impossible stories of camels, Arabs and the desert, which he swallowed unblinkingly and noted down in a copybook in order to give lectures, so he told us, at his club when he returned home. That club must have heard some startling stories. One of the facts—or fictions—that interested him particularly was a description of " watch camels which are posted by the Arabs round their flocks and when a stranger appears they gallop across to the camp and warn their masters." Another very vivid story was the description of a whole herd of camels going mad from hydrophobia. It is wonderful how credulous some people can be, but I think he deserved it.

CHAPTER II

THE DESERT

"So on, ever on, spreads the path of the Desert,
Wearily, wearily,
Sand, ever sand—not a gleam of the fountain;
Sun, ever sun—not a shade from the mountain;
As a sea on a sea flows the width of the Desert
Drearily, drearily."

THE Western Desert of Egypt is regulated by the Frontier Districts Administration, a comparatively new department of the Egyptian Government which was formed during the war and took over many of the duties of the old Egyptian Coastguards Administration. The F.D.A. is a military Administration with British officers, and is responsible for the Western Desert, Sinai and the country between the Red Sea coast and the Nile. In each of these provinces there is a Governor and several District Officers and officers of the Camel Corps. The Military Administrator at the head of the whole Administration is Colonel G. G. Hunter, C.B., C.M.G., and the Governor of the Western Desert is at present Colonel M. S. Macdonnell. The forces of the F.D.A. consist of a Sudanese Camel Corps and local police.

On the Western Desert there is one company of Camel Corps, about 170 strong, divided into three

sections, of which two are stationed on the coast and one in the Siwa oasis. The duties of the Camel Corps are practically those of mounted police, patrolling the coast and frontier, preventing smuggling and gun running, and keeping order among the Arabs in case of any disturbance or trouble. But since the successful termination of the British operations against the Senussi in 1917 the Western Desert has been very peaceable, and the Arabs seem to be thoroughly satisfied with the organization by which they are now governed. During all the trouble in Egypt in 1919–21, when the country was seething with anti-British agitations, there were absolutely no disturbances or demonstrations among the Arabs of the Western Desert, and I have heard them in their tents discussing, quite genuinely, the foolishness of the goings-on in Egypt.

The F.D.A. Camel Corps was originally formed of Sudanese men from the Coastguard Camel Corps, with a large proportion of " yellow bellies " (Egyptians) who were gradually weeded out and replaced by Sudanese and Sudan Arabs, who were enlisted on the borders of Egypt, as the Sudan Government does not allow recruiting inside its territories except for the Egyptian Army. The F.D.A. Camel Corps is supposed to consist entirely of Sudanese, but a certain number of the men who were enlisted in the regions of Luxor and Kom Ombo are not real Sudanis. They are very well paid, provided with good uniforms and rations, and a certain percentage are allowed to have their wives with them on the

coast. Every camp has its " harimat "—married quarters—where the married men and their families live. But before a man is allowed to marry he has to pass a test in musketry. Many of the men marry Arab women, and this sometimes caused considerable trouble among the Sudanese wives, who are by no means fond of their Arab " sisters." As they all live close together in rather cramped quarters they have a very lively time. One's office hours are often occupied in endeavouring to pacify some irate old Sudanese lady who brings a furious complaint that the Arab wife of her next-door neighbour is " carrying on " with her husband. Or one gets a long involved case like the following story to inquire into, generally when there is a great deal of other work to be done.

Ombashi (corporal) Suliman Hassan married an Arab lady called Halima bint—daughter of—Ahmed Abu Taleb ; when she married her father gave her an old primus stove, a favourite possession of the Arabs at Sollum, which he had bought from the servant of one of the English officers—this incidentally caused another inquiry. The marriage was not a success, and after six months of unhappy married life Ombashi Suliman divorced his wife. Apparently he " celebrated " the divorce " not wisely but too well," because on the next day he got a month's hard labour for being drunk on duty. He took the primus with him when he went to prison. Halima retired to Bagbag with her goods and chattels, and after a suitable interval she married another Camel

Corps man, this time a "naffer"—private—who brought her back with him to Sollum.

Ombashi Suliman had also consoled himself, and presented the primus stove, now very worn and shaky, to his new wife, a buxom Sudanese. She sold it to her married sister. It exploded and set a tent on fire; so the sister gave it to her little girl Zumzum, a small black infant with tight curls and one pink garment. Then one day Halima saw the primus, her primus, in the hands of the small Zumzum, and remembered about it. She rushed home to her new husband and stirred him to action; so he arrived at my office with a long incoherent complaint, demanding justice and the return of the stove.

I had to spend an entire morning unravelling this history and examining endless witnesses, who all wished to talk about any subject except the one I was getting at. When the present wife and the divorced wife of Ombashi Suliman met outside the office they were with difficulty restrained from fighting, and the lurid details which were wafted through the window, about the lives and antecedents of both ladies, were interesting, but quite unprintable. Eventually the small Zumzum, now in a state of inaudible terror, produced the primus, which was found to be worn out, irreparable, and absolutely useless.

One of the features of Sollum is a little cluster of tents and huts, near the Camel Corps Camp, which is known as the "Booza Camp." It is run by about a dozen elderly Sudanese widows and divorcees who

manufacture "marissa," a drink made from barley. The men are allowed here at certain times and on holidays, as marissa is not permitted to be brewed in the camp. The wives have the strongest objection to this institution which attracts their husbands away from home, as a public-house does in England, though the dusky barmaids could not possibly be called attractive. One can rightly say of the Sudanese that their favourite diversions are wine, women and song.

The Sudanis of the Camel Corps are a very likeable lot. They are thoroughly sporting and have a strong sense of humour, but in many ways they are very like children. They have an aptitude for drill and soldiering, but are useless without British officers owing to their lack of initiative. They are faithful and become very attached to Englishmen, but they have a keen sense of discrimination. Like all native troops there is a tendency for each man to consider himself a born leader, and offer his advice and opinion on all occasions; this takes a long time to subdue. But with careful training they become efficient soldiers, and they look very smart in their khaki uniform, which is rather similar to an Indian's. Physically many of them are splendid men, very powerful and muscular, like bronze statues, but although the climate of their own country is intensely hot they are by no means immune from the effects of sun, and they seem to be almost more liable to catch fever than an Englishman.

The three sections take it in turns to go to Siwa,

where they generally remain from six to nine months. It is not a popular place, in spite of the fact that every man is allowed to marry, with no restrictions, such as first having to pass a musketry test. The men much prefer being on the coast where there is more going on, as they are at heart intensely sociable, and also, though living is cheap at Siwa, the climate has a bad reputation.

The best time to go to Siwa is in the spring, when the weather is cool and there is probably water on the road. The trip needs a good deal of preparing for, especially as one has to take down stores for many months. A camel patrol from Siwa used to meet a patrol from the coast at the half-way point on the road once every month, and in this way the mails were sent down to the oasis. A car patrol was supposed to go down at certain intervals, but they were very irregular, and sometimes, on the few occasions when they did come, they forgot to bring the mail. One depended so much on letters at Siwa that this was an intense disappointment. The following is a rough diary of a trek down to Siwa in the hot weather.

Saturday, July 24th.

Spent a busy morning making final arrangements for the trip and seeing that everything was ready. We moved off from Sollum at 3.30 p.m., myself, 39 men, 50 camels, and one dog. The whole camp turned out to see us off, including many small black babies belonging to the men. Some of the men wept

profusely at parting with their wives, but almost before we were out of Sollum I heard them gaily discussing which of the Siwan ladies they would honour by marriage. Saturday is a fortunate day to start on a journey. Apparently the prophet Mohammed favoured Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays, but Saturdays most of all. Another good omen was the appearance of two crows which we passed just outside the camp ; a single crow would have been cause for anxiety, and to see a running hare before camping at night is considered a very serious piece of ill-luck. I think this started from the idea that a running hare was a sign of people on the move close at hand, probably enemies.

We marched along the bottom of the Scarp and reached Bir Augerin, where we camped for the night, at sunset. At Augerin there is one of the many rock cisterns that one finds on the coast. These cisterns are large rectangular underground tanks, often 40 feet square and 20 feet high, with one or two square holes in the roof large enough to admit a man. The Arabs draw the water up in leather buckets on the end of a rope, or if the supply is low one man goes down and fills the bucket which is drawn up by the man above. They are always built in the middle of a hollow with several stone runnels that carry the rain water down from the higher ground. Generally there is a mound near the well with a sheikh's tomb on the top of it, a cairn surrounded by a low wall, ornamented with a few little white flags which are contributed by passing travellers as a thank-

offering for the water. According to M. Maspero, the cisterns along the coast were built by the Romans in the second century A.D., and were in use until the middle or end of the fourth century. Most of them are now so out of repair that they only hold water for a very short time after the rains have ceased, and when they are dry they become the home of snakes, bats and owls; however, I believe it is proposed to restore several of the most useful of them.

We camped near the well at Augerin. I had an indifferent dinner. My new cook, Abdel Aziz, seems to be a fool and unaccustomed to being on trek. He is a Berberin, a despised "gins"—race—but always considered to be good cooks. The men I have got with me are a fine lot, all "blacks" and mostly "Shaigis"—from the North Sudan. The old Bash-Shawish—sergeant-major—was previously in the Coastguards and knows the country well. I did not bother to put up a tent, but slept in the open under the stars, which were gorgeous. Not a very hot night.

25th.

Moved off at 4.30 a.m. by chilly but brilliant moonlight. Led the camels and walked for the first hour, then mounted and rode. The men made a long line riding along in file. Arrived at Bir Hamed, another cistern, at about 8 a.m. We stay here till to-morrow morning in order to give the camels a good day's grazing and watering, as this is the last well before

CAMEL CORPS

the real desert. Bir Hamed is a very wild, picturesque place among the rocky foot-hills below the Scarp. In the spring it becomes one mass of flowers, but now it looks dry and barren. The camels drank frantically and then went out to graze. There is still a fair amount of water in the well, which is icy cold and very refreshing. I, and almost all the men, had a bath, as it is the last opportunity till we get to Siwa. I spent a lazy day in my tent and the men slept most of the time. At four o'clock the camels were driven in to drink again, this time they were less eager to get to the water and sipped it in a mincing way like an affected old lady drinking tea.

After dinner, when I was sitting outside my tent in the moonlight, I heard a faint sound of shouting in the distance. I took a couple of men and walked in the direction the sound came from. About a mile from the camp we sighted a large number of black Arab tents that showed up clear in the moonlight on a slight rise in the ground. There had been a marriage in the tribe and the festivities were being concluded by a dance.

Two girls were slowly revolving round in the centre of an enormous circle of white-robed bedouins each holding in her hand, above her head, a long cane which she flourished in the manner that a dancer uses a bouquet of flowers. The girls wore the usual Arab dress, the black, long-sleeved robe and scarlet waist-band, but their faces were hidden by long black veils, and they wore white shawls fastened in flounces round the waist, which stuck out almost like a ballet

girl's skirt. The moon flashed on the heavy silver bangles on their arms and on their silver necklaces and earrings.

The audience were divided into four parties, the object of each party being to attract the dancers to them by the enthusiasm of their singing and hand-clapping. A man playing on a flute and another with a drum led the tune, which was wearily monotonous but strangely attractive and a fitting accompaniment to the scene. Gradually the singing became faster and louder, the white-robed Arabs swayed to and fro urging the dancers to fresh exertions; the girls revolved more rapidly and one of them began the "Dance de ventre," which consists of rather sensuous quivering movements, not attractive to a European, but much admired by natives. The singing and hand-clapping became more violent and finally culminated in frenzied shouting when one of the girls halted, swaying, before the loudest section of the audience, and several men flung themselves on their knees, kissing her feet and exclaiming at her beauty, which if it existed was quite invisible to me, and praising her skill in dancing with high-flown speeches and compliments. Outside the circle of brown-faced, white-clad Arabs, and in the doors of the tents, there were a crowd of women watching the performance, and a group of dancing girls stood whispering to each other under their black veils, tinkling their ornaments, as they waited to step into the circle and relieve their companions.

I stood watching the dancing for a long time, and

then returned to my tent. As I walked away I heard hoarse shouts of "Ya Ayesha—ya Khadiga," as two new girls began to dance, and the whistle and the drum struck up another queer little melody. Not until almost dawn did quiet reign again on the desert, broken only by the occasional wail of a wandering jackal.

26th.

Moved off at 4 a.m. and marched till 9.30. We led the camels for the first two hours along the rocky, difficult ground below the Scarp, and then up a steep, stony pass to the top. I reached the top just as the "false dawn" glimmered with a streak of pale light in the east. There was a heavy dew; all the country down below looked grey and misty. Gradually the long, twisting line of led camels reached the summit, and as we rode off across the level upland towards Siwa the real sunrise began and the stars faded in the sky. The dew was so thick that the spiders' webs on the bushes all sparkled. By midday it was intolerably hot. We halted at a place called Qur el Beid, a most depressing spot consisting of three low sand-hills and a tiny patch of vegetation which the camels sniffed at contemptuously, probably comparing it in their minds to the much superior grazing near Bir Hamed. I lunched lightly and lay sweating in my tent with Howa, my Silugi dog, lying openmouthed and panting at my side till we moved on again for the afternoon "shid"—march.

The first hour of the afternoon "shid" is the worst of the day. The swaying motion of the camel, the glare, and the burning sun beating down, makes one terribly inclined to sleep, and the hard, yellowish brown desert is absolutely monotonous. A good "hagin"—riding camel—is very comfortable to ride when it is trotting, but not at a walk. Its action is peculiar, first the two off legs move together, and then the two near legs; this is what causes the swinging motion. There is an idea that when people first ride a camel they are afflicted by a sort of sea-sickness, but although I am a bad sailor I have never felt this, nor have I yet met anyone who did. Camels are very easy to ride; one just sits on the saddle with legs crossed over the front pummel, and there is very little chance of falling off as long as the camel behaves itself. The usual way of mounting is to make the camel kneel down and then step on to the saddle, but if one is long-legged and active it is possible to spring up into the saddle from the ground, which is much quicker and useful when the ground is hard and unsuitable for the camel to kneel on. A camel's usual pace is a slow trot, about 4½–5 miles an hour, and they can keep up this pace for hours on end. Of course they can go at a sort of gallop, if they like, and when they do this they cover the ground at a terrific speed, but it is rather difficult to ride them, and they have an unpleasant trick of suddenly swerving which generally shoots one over the camel's head on to the ground. I have known, too, camels that bucked, and others that suddenly knelt down when one did not expect it,

both very disconcerting tricks. They are not affectionate animals and they never seem to know their own masters; there was only one among mine that had any "parlour tricks," and he used to inhale tobacco smoke through his nose, apparently with the greatest appreciation.

We saw several gazelle in the afternoon, but all too far away for a shot. Halted for the night at a place where there were about four small tufts of vegetation. The camels are less fastidious now and condescended to nibble at them.

The best time of the day is the evening when the sun sinks low, the desert becomes a pinkish colour, and our shadows stretch like huge monsters for yards across the ground. Then I begin to look out for a camping place, anywhere where there are a few scraps of dried-up vegetation, or, failing that, a soft-looking patch of ground where the camels will be comfortable. When we halt the baggage is unloaded and the camels are allowed to roam about and eat what they can find; in five minutes my tent is pitched, chair and table unfolded, and dinner is being prepared. Some of the men begin measuring out the camels' dhurra—millet—and others go and collect bits of stick for the fires, or if there is no wood they use dry camel dung, which is an excellent fuel. Then the camels are driven in again, unsaddled and tied down in a long line; at a given signal the men run along the line and place each one's food on a sack in front of its nose. Every man squats down by his own camel and watches it eat, preventing the ones who

eat fast from snatching at their neighbour's grain. Afterwards the men have their own supper—lentils, onions, bread and tea, and soon roll themselves up in their blankets, covering face and all, and go to sleep behind their saddles, which they use as shelters against the night wind. The only sound is the munching of the camels and an occasional hollow gurgle as they chew the cud, and the footsteps of the sentry as he moves up and down the line, " till the dawn comes in with golden sandals."

Abdel Aziz is improving; he produced quite a decent dinner—sausages, fried onions and potatoes, omelette and coffee, followed by a cigar. One sleeps splendidly on the desert. Even in the hottest weather the nights are fairly cool. Towards morning, just before the " false dawn," a little cool breeze blows over the sand and stirs the flaps of one's tent, like a sort of warning that soon it will be time to get on the move again.

27th.

We marched for six hours in the morning and about four hours in the afternoon, and camped for the night at the half-way point between Sollum and Siwa, which is a mound ornamented by a few empty tins. The temperature in my tent at midday must have been about 120 degrees, and not a scrap of breeze or fresh air. This is real desert; there is not a vestige of any living thing, animal or vegetable. The ground is hard limestone covered with dark, shining pebbles, and in some places there are

stretches of dried mud, left from the standing water after the rains. These mud pans are impassable in wet weather, and one has to make a wide detour to avoid them. Now they are cracked by the sun into a number of little fissures of a uniform size, about 6 inches square. The effect is very curious.

I once motored down to Siwa in a car driven by an English A.S.C. private who had never been out in the desert before. When we were running over one of these mud pans he remarked to me, " It seems wonderful how they have laid bits of this road with paving blocks—don't it, sir!" I thought he was trying to be funny, but when I looked at him I saw that he was perfectly serious, so I agreed that it was indeed wonderful. Nobody believed the story when I told it afterwards, but it really did happen.

The mirage is very vivid. Almost all the time one sees what appears to be a sheet of shining water ahead in the distance, and one can distinguish bays and islands on it; gradually, as one gets nearer, it recedes and then fades away. It is like the shimmering heat that one sometimes sees at home on a hot day, but greatly intensified. Distances look out of proportion on the desert; little mounds, too small to be called hills, appear like huge mountains. About every thirty miles there seem to be slight rises of a terrace-like formation.

Every evening the men make bread, which they call " khuz." It is very simply done and quite good when freshly baked. They take flour and a little salt and mix it together with water, in a basin or on a

clean sack, kneading it into dough with their hands. When it is solid and firm they smooth it out into a flat, round loaf about 1½ inches thick. Then they go to the fire, scrape aside all the embers, and lay the loaf on the hot sand. Then they put the embers back on the top of the loaf. After a few minutes' cooking they rake aside the fire again and turn the loaf, replacing the fire on the top as before. The time taken in cooking depends on the heat, but is generally about ten minutes. The bread lasts until the following evening.

All the way we are following what is known as a " mashrab," a desert road, which consists of a narrow rut about a foot wide, worn by the passage of camels through many centuries. Without specially looking for them one would hardly notice these mashrabs, which are almost identical to the " gazelle paths " that wind aimlessly about the desert, but one is helped by the cairns of stones which are raised by the Arabs on every bit of high ground, sometimes to show the way and sometimes to mark the lonely grave of a less fortunate traveller. Each of these twisting desert tracks is known to the Arabs by a different name. There is the " Mashrab el Khamisa," from Bagbag to Siwa, called thus because there are five wells on the way ; there is the " Mashrab el Akhwan "—the Brothers' Road, from Jerabub to the coast, which was used by the Senussi Brethren when they travelled from their Zowia at Jerabub into Egypt ; and the " Mashrab el Abd "—the Slave's Road, as according to legend, once upon a time, in

the dim ages, a slave who was captured and brought by this route into Egypt from his home in the west, returned to the west and led an army against Egypt by the very road that he had come by as a captive. Often the mashrab seems to fade away, and then the trackers have to ride on ahead and pick it up again.

A number of Bisharin from the North-East Sudan were specially enlisted in the Camel Corps as trackers and guides. They are thought to be more skilful at this work than any other tribe, though personally I think a bedouin is cleverer. But when working in a bedouin country it is best not to employ local natives. Some of the Bisharin are almost unnaturally clever, they can follow a footstep over hard, broken ground where anyone else would see no sign of anything. These men have a natural instinct for finding the way, a sort of abnormal bump of locality. When they first arrived on the coast some of them were wearing the usual clothes of their country and the fuzzy-wuzzy coiffure that is so remarkable a characteristic of their race. The Arabs had never seen this type of Sudanese and were intensely interested in them. Small bedouin boys used to stand and stare at these tall brown men with the great mops of woolly hair ornamented with a few skewer-like objects, but the Bisharin were absolutely indifferent.

28th.

Left " Keimat en Nus "—the half-way tent—at a very early hour and rode for a long time by moon-

light; one can cover more ground when it is cold, but there is a danger of going off the track. The mashrab is faint enough in the daytime, but almost invisible at night. When we start off in the morning all the men shout together three times, "Ya Sidi Abdel Gader," invoking a certain sheikh who is the patron sheikh of travellers. One of my men told me that he was born in Berber "min zaman"—a long time ago—and used to travel about the Sudan deserts without water or food. His descendants still live at Berber where he is buried.

For the first hour or two the men are very lively and rouse the desert with their singing. Usually one man sings the refrain in a rather drawling falsetto voice, and then the whole lot take up the chorus with a real swing, and some of them have very good voices, too. Sometimes the song is the history of a certain Abu Zeyed, a legendary character and an exceedingly lewd fellow, from all I could hear of his doings. Sometimes they would sing stories from the Thousand and One Nights, or sometimes the songs would be chants that reminded one of the Gregorian music in a very "High" church at home. Often I used to ride on ahead, almost out of sight, and then wait while the chanting voices gradually grew louder, and the long line of camels came into sight across the white moonlit sands. There was something very fascinating in the sound of the singing as we rode through the African desert at night.

But later on, when the sun began to warm up,

nobody felt like singing. Occasionally somebody started, and a few voices joined in, but they very soon subsided again. At the midday halt the men rigged up rough bivouacs with blankets, and rifles as tent poles, then for several hours one lay in the scanty shade, feeling like a pat of butter that had been left out in the sun by mistake.

Howa is getting very tired. I picked her up and carried her on the saddle across my knees for several hours to-day. She is quite fit, but 200 miles in the hot weather does take it out of a dog. The camels are in good condition but much looking forward to water, their flanks are beginning to look "tucked in," and at night some of them groan and gurgle horribly. To-morrow we should be in the oasis at the first well. This evening I functioned with the medicine chest; I gave several of the men pills and Eno's, which they enjoyed, and dressed a foot with a bad cut on it. My own knees are like raw beef from the sun, though I've been wearing shorts all the summer. We have to be "canny" with the water as several of the "fanatis"—water-cans—are leaking. Fortunately I have trained myself only to drink a little in the morning and evening, and I can wash quite thoroughly in two cups of water.

Sometimes in the evening I walk right away from the camp into the utter quiet of the desert, out of sight of camels and men. It is a wonderful sensation to be in such absolute silence, with nothing to see but the horizon and "the rolling heaven itself." Then I retrace my footsteps to the camp

and enjoy the pleasant feeling of seeing the twinkling fires in the distance, and arriving at a neatly laid dinner-table right in the middle of nowhere.

"Daylight dies,
The camp fires redden like angry eyes,
The tents show white
In the glimmering light,
Spirals of tremulous smoke arise, to the purple skies,
And the hum of the camp sounds like the sea
Drifting over the desert to me."

29th.

In the early morning, before dawn, we passed a caravan going north. I rode over to see who they were and found that it was a party of Mogabara Arabs on their way up to the coast, and thence into Egypt. One of them, Ibrahaim el Bishari, is quite a well-known merchant who travels about Egypt, Tripoli and the Sudan. He had come lately up from Darfur, via Kufra, Jalow and Jerabub, and was going down to the Sudan again after spending some time in Egypt. He talked about people I knew in Darfur and carried "chits" from a number of Englishmen. His fellows looked a fine lot of men, very different to the few Siwans who were travelling with them. I should have liked to have seen the stuff in his loads; he said he had some good carpets that he hoped to sell in Egypt. We wished each other a prosperous journey, and so parted "like ships that pass in the night."

We camped at midday within sight of the high country above the oasis. This morning one of my

men was talking about the Sudan and touched on the "Bilad el Kelab"—the Country of Dogs. All Sudanese believe that this place exists somewhere down in the south of the Sudan towards Uganda. I have seen them draw maps on the sand to show its position. In this mysterious country all the men become dogs at sunset time and roam about the gloomy forests like the werewolves of mediæval fiction. I have heard the men yarning over the camp fires and saying how their cousin's wife's brother—or some such distant relation—actually reached this country and returned alive. Of course it is always somebody else who saw it, but the story is firmly believed by all Sudanese, and so it is a very favourite topic of conversation. Sometimes they enlarge on it and tell how So-and-So married a wife from that country and one night a number of dogs arrived at his hut and carried the woman away with them.

This afternoon we ascended from the desert to the high limestone range that forms a rampart to the oasis on the north, and then we started crawling down into the Siwa valley. The desert plateau is about 600 feet above sea-level, and the oasis is 72 feet below it, and as the height of the hills is considerable there is a big drop down into the oasis. The track winds in and out through strange rocky passes, among weirdly shaped cliffs whose tortured shapes remind one of Gustave Doré's illustration of the Inferno. These wild ravines are utterly desolate, even in the spring no vegetation grows among them.

This is a land of broken stone where huge boulders seem to have been hurled about by giant hands. The sun sank low before we had escaped from the mountains, and the fantastically shaped crags were silhouetted with monstrous shadows against the yellow sky. Sometimes the narrow road seemed to cling to the side of a towering cliff, and at other times it twined in and out through deep, echoing valleys in the shadow of the overhanging, jagged rocks. In places the camels had to be led in single file. Once the men began to sing, but the dismal echoes among the caves sounded almost inhumanly depressing, so they gave it up, and we marched along in silence. Finally a line of far distant green appeared down below between two great cliffs, and one could see, very faintly, the masses of graceful palms nodding their crests over the murmuring oasis. To weary men after a six days' camel ride across the desert the first glimpse of Siwa is like the sight of the sea to those ancient Greeks on the far-away shores of the Euxine.

When all the camels had come out from the last valley among the rocks we "got mounted" and rode for about half a mile, past groups of palm trees, already heavy with clusters of yellow dates, to Ein Magahiz, which is the first spring in the oasis. Here we camped for the night, watered the camels, who simply revelled in the water, and I enjoyed a luxurious bathe in the deep cool spring which rises among a cluster of palm trees. All night we could

CAMEL CORPS TREKKING TO SIWA, NEAR MEGAHIZ PASS

hear the thudding of tom-toms in Siwa town, which is only a mile or so away.

> "The cadenced throbbing of a drum,
> Now softly distant, now more near,
> And in an almost human fashion
> It, plaintive, wistful, seems to come
> Laden with sighs of fitful passion."

30*th*.

The mosquitoes last night were a reminder that we are no longer up on the high desert; they were maddening, in spite of a net. This morning everybody bathed and shaved and generally polished up. We rode across to the town in great style; past the palm-shaded gardens with fences of yellow "gerida"—palm branches; past the white rest house, on the terraced side of a curious conical hill called "The Hill of the Dead," honeycombed with rock tombs; past the long low "Markaz," where the mamur and the police guard turned out to see us; across the wide market square, and through the narrow streets between tall houses of sunbaked clay below the enormous high walls of the old town. The heat was already great, and the streets were almost deserted, except for a few recumbent figures in a shady corner of the market-place, who scrambled up as we rode by and then hurried off to tell their friends that the "Hagana"—Camel Corps—had arrived.

The Camel Corps barracks and the District Officer's house are out on the sand about half a mile south of the town. They occupy two isolated rocks about a quarter of a mile apart, which were formerly

the strongholds of two Siwan sheikhs. The District Officer's house stands on a limestone rock about 50 feet high. It is a high house built of mud and palm log beams. To reach it one goes up a steep path in the rock with roughly cut steps on to a little terrace with a sort of loggia that opens through the building into the large courtyard behind, which is surrounded by a high loopholed wall. There are two rooms on the ground floor, both high and long, about 30 by 15 feet, and two more rooms above with a roofed loggia and an open roof. The rooms have three windows in each, with glass in them, the only glass in Siwa, facing north and looking across the grove of palm trees below the house to the strange-looking town on its two rocks. The house was built by the former District Officer, who added to the old Siwan fortress which existed there; it has a wonderful position and is high enough to be free from mosquitoes.

I spent a busy day settling down and fixing up things with S——, who starts with his section for the coast in two days. S—— is heartily sick of Siwa and longing to see the last of it. We dined on the terrace outside—to the accompaniment of throbbing tom-toms over in the town—on soup, chicken, caramel pudding and a dish of every sort of fruit, which was a pleasant change after months on the coast without any. Caramel pudding is the "pièce de résistance" of every cook in Egypt; unless one orders the meal it always appears on the menu. S——'s cook is an indifferent one. Out here

I have noticed a universal habit of considering, or pretending to consider, one's own servants absolute paragons of virtue, honesty, cleanliness and skill, and invariably running down everybody else's. I have heard men hold forth for hours on the excellent qualities of their Mohammed, or Abdel, knowing myself that Mohammed—or Abdel—or whatever his name may be, was a double-dyed villain and swindling his master right and left—but now I am doing it myself!

I think what impressed me most on arriving at Siwa was the intense heat, the excellent bathing, the enormous height and strange appearance of the town, and the incessant sound of tom-toms from sunset onwards. One misses "the slow shrill creak of the water wheels, a mournful cry, half groan, half wail," which is such a feature of Egypt and the Sudan. The average temperature in the summer was about 108 degrees in the shade, or on warmer days 110 degrees or 112 degrees, but the nights were cool, and every evening regularly at about eight o'clock a little breeze blew across from the east and freshened things up. The only way to keep the house cool was by leaving the doors and windows open all night, and keeping them closed and tightly shuttered during the day. It resulted in dark rooms, but at least they were fairly cool and free from flies. I soon made the house very comfortable with some rough home-made furniture and a few carpets and mats.

When a new Section of Camel Corps arrived at

Siwa one of the first events that occurred was the " taking over " of wives. In most cases the men who were leaving handed on their wives to the new men, in the same way as the stores, barracks, camels, etc., were officially handed over by the officer who was going away to his relief. On the day before the new Section rode in all the ladies retired from the camp *en masse* to the houses of their relations in the town ; the new men then entered into negotiations with the retiring Section for the taking over of the wives. A few of the men sought fresh pastures, but most of them took on the wife of a man they knew well in the other Section. On the day that the departing Section left Siwa all the ladies assembled on the road that they would pass, carrying their boxes and belongings, and when the camels came by they shrieked and wept, throwing dust on their heads, beating their breasts, pretending to tear their clothes, and showing signs of the most frantic sorrow at the departure of the men. As soon as the camels were round the corner out of sight they brushed off the dust, put on their bracelets, tidied themselves up and hurried merrily across to the " harimat " outside the barracks, followed by boys carrying their boxes, to their new husbands who were waiting for them. This performance happened regularly whenever there was an exchange of Sections. I used to watch the little tragi-comedy from my terrace. The harimat of Siwa consisted of a number of rush huts below the rock on which the fort was built. If any of the wives caused trouble, and they often did, they were

ejected and never allowed to marry a soldier again. Polygamy was forbidden, and each lady, before she married, was required to produce a certificate stating that she was a respectable person, signed by several sheikhs and notables of the town. The Siwans had no objection to these alliances between Sudanese soldiers and Siwan women, as women in Siwa outnumber the men at the rate of three to one.

The daily routine at Siwa did not vary very much. In the summer I was generally called at 5.30, in time to run down from the house and have one plunge in the cool deep bathing pool in the palm grove below the rock before dressing. Clothes were a very minor matter ; one wore simply shirt, shorts, shoes and stockings, all of the thinnest material. Then I used to walk over to the C.C. barracks and take the parade, sometimes mounted drill, sometimes dismounted. We did mounted drill on a stretch of firm white sand among the dunes south of the barracks. Breakfast was at about eight—eggs, coffee, bread and jam, the eggs being even smaller than Egyptian ones, about the size of bantam's eggs, so one needed a lot for a meal. After breakfast I went across to the barracks again, and then rode down through the town on my pony to the Markaz.

The path to the town passed over a disused cemetery where the pony was very liable to stick its foot through the thin layer of soil above the graves, under an archway and into the street that divides the Eastern and Western quarters. The street itself was hard rock and very steep in parts, but owing to the

height of the tall houses on each side it was generally cool and shady and a favourite resting-place of the inhabitants, many of whom lay stretched full length across the street taking their siesta. But the clattering hoofs of my pony generally roused them, and they scrambled out of the way when I came. The Siwans are well mannered, a virtue that one never sees in Egypt nowadays, and even in the Sudan it is on the wane. When I rode or walked in the town everybody would stand up as I passed, and if I met people riding they would dismount until I had gone on. I have heard people at home say what a scandal it is that in some places the poor downtrodden natives have to stand up and move off the path for an Englishman, but after all they would do exactly the same for their own Pashas, and apart from being an Englishman one was entitled to respect as being the representative of the Egyptian Government in Siwa. Once I was badly "had" over this. I was riding through the market with some policemen following me on my way to make an inspection. There was a group of Siwans sitting talking on the ground, and as I passed they all stood up—except one man who remained comfortably seated in the shade right in the middle of the path. I ordered one of the policemen to see who he was and to bring him along to the Markaz to answer for his bad manners. A few minutes later the man from the market was led into the office. He was stone blind!

The Markaz is a large building outside the town with square courtyard surrounded by prisons, stores

and offices. It has a permanent guard of locally enlisted police; they are quite smart men, but of little use when there is trouble in the town, and always at enmity with the Sudanese Camel Corps. At the Markaz I would usually find a number of petitions to be read and examined, some cases to be tried, and probably people applying for permits to cross the frontier who would have to be questioned and seen. Then the sheikhs would arrive and there would be discussions about various things—taxes, labour, work on the drains or Government buildings, new regulations and orders, and then perhaps the merchants would be summoned, and a heated controversy would follow about the price of sugar, or the butchers would come to complain of the cost of meat. It was like a daily meeting of a town council, and complicated by innumerable interests, rivalries and intrigues. All these matters, though they sound very small, were of considerable importance to the Siwans.

There were six sheikhs recognized by the Administration, three of them eastern, and three western. Sheikh Saleh Said was the most influential and the most unbiassed by personal considerations. He was a big handsome man with a dark moustache and features that might have been copied from the bust of a Roman consul. He always wore a long blue robe, and was the most dignified and impressive of the sheikhs. I never saw him in a hurry or at all excited. Sheikh Thomi was a little dark fellow, and reputed to be the richest man in Siwa. He had a

queer, quick way of speaking, was intensely obstinate, a staunch Westerner, but honest—as far as I ever knew. I once offended him very grievously. One day he sent me a basket of grapes, the first that had ripened in his vineyards. I gave the servant boy a piastre for bringing them. The boy returned and presented the piastre to Sheikh Thomi, who was very hurt at being sent 2½d. when he had made me a gift of fruit. Sheikh Thomi was a man of means and worth several thousand pounds. I heard about the piastre incident and explained it to him. To offer to pay for what is meant as a present is a real breach of good manners, much worse than refusing it.

Sheikh Mohammed Abdel Rahman was a venerable white-bearded individual who had been to Mecca and apparently lived on his reputation of excessive sanctity; he always agreed with everything I said, and then if I veered round and deliberately contradicted myself he did the same—it was not helpful!

Abdulla Hemeid was a sly, fat, greedy man with a pale face and blue eyes. He was very stingy and always complaining against taxation or anything that affected his pocket. He never gave an entertainment, but I always noticed him eating heartily in other people's houses. His family were much esteemed and he had succeeded his father, who had been a very famous man in Siwa.

Mohammed Ragah was a thin, dark, hawk-like man, more like an Arab than a Siwan. He was very badly off for a sheikh, but keen and clever, and not above doing a bit of hard work with his own hands. He

was the only man in Siwa at whose house one was given good coffee. He had shown great courage during the Senussi occupation in protecting some Egyptian officials who were in Siwa.

Mahdi Abdel Nebi, Sheikh of Aghourmi, was the youngest of the sheikhs, and the most reasonable and intelligent, though he had never been out of Siwa. He was a cheerful, pleasant fellow, but cordially disliked by the rest of the sheikhs. These six were the men who to a certain extent controlled the destinies of Siwa.

About once every week when I arrived at the Markaz I would find the doctor, or the mamur, or the clerk waiting for me in a state of tearful hysterics, begging me to forward his resignation to the Governor, as he could exist no longer in the company of his colleagues—the two other officials. Then would follow a long infantile complaint. If I could not smooth him down I had to bring in the other two, who would also dissolve into tears, and try and get to the bottom of the affair, which was always absolutely childish and ridiculous. On one occasion the mamur had refused to allow the doctor to have a watchman to escort him home past a certain graveyard which alarmed him, or the clerk accused the mamur of inveigling his cook into his service, or something equally small. Unfortunately the clerk was a Copt, the doctor a Syrian, and the mamur was a Cairene. It went on unceasingly, the most preposterous things served to bring one of them weeping to my office. And when they were relieved their

successors were just the same. Yet they were good men at their work; the clerk had a heavy amount of office work and did it well; the doctor was quite clever and had been trained in America; and the mamur was good at his job. Exactly the same thing occurred among the native officials on the coast, so it was not only the effect of Siwan solitude.

From the Markaz I rode home, and after a light lunch either painted, read, or went to sleep till about four, when I had another bathe, followed by tea. After tea I went over to the Camel Corps for "stables," and then generally out for a walk. Sometimes I went to Gebel Muta, the Hill of the Dead, a rocky hill on the north of the town full of tombs hewn out of the living rock, some of them being large and lofty with as many as eight coffin spaces round the sides. In one of them there were the remains of a coloured wall painting with figures of men and animals. Other times I climbed up to the top of the town. The view from the flat roofs of the highest houses on the rock is very wonderful, especially at sunset. On the south of the town there is a long ridge of rolling yellow sand-hills which change their contours when the desert winds sweep across them, and become pink and salmon-coloured in the evenings; towards the north one looks across a sea of palm groves and brilliant green cultivation to the jagged range of mountains that separate Siwa from the desert; on the west there is a great square mountain with a gleaming silver salt lake at its foot, and in the east one sees the little village of Aghourmi

crowning another high rock which rises above the tree-tops.

At sunset the scene is exquisite, the hills turn from pink to mauve, and from mauve to purple, and their peaks are sharply outlined against the gold and crimson sky; long violet shadows spread across the rosy-tinted sand-hills, and the palm groves seem to take on a more vivid shade of green. The smoke ascends in thin spirals from the evening fires, and a low murmur rises from the streets and squares below; then suddenly the prayer of the muezzin sounds from the many mosques, and one can see the white-robed figures swaying to and fro on the narrow pinnacles of the round towers that in Siwa take the place of minarets. When the call to prayer is over and the last mournful chant has echoed across the oasis, and the glow in the sky is fading away, one hears far down beneath the soft thudding of a tom-tom and perhaps the faint whine of a reed pipe. When the deep blue Libyan night covers the city the music becomes louder and seems to throb like a feverish pulse from the heart of the town.

Often in the evening I rode out and called on the Sheikh of Aghourmi, which is the little village on another rock two miles from Siwa. Mahdi Abdel Nebi had recently succeeded to his father as Sheikh of Aghourmi and was having some difficulty in sustaining his authority, even with the support of the Administration, against the plots and intrigues of an old cousin of his, one Haj Mohammed Hammam, a sly old man who was rich, influential, and a thorough

scoundrel, and wished to oust his cousin and become sheikh himself. After the war Haj Hammam had carefully cultivated the acquaintance of any British officers who came to Siwa, and he was inordinately proud of knowing their names and of certain small gifts that they had given him—a broken compass, a highly coloured biscuit tin and some photographs. These he showed on every occasion, and also remarked that they used always to call him "*The* Sheikh of Aghourmi"—this apparently being his only claim to the title.

Hammam used to employ people to let him know immediately when I was riding out to Aghourmi, so that he, and not the sheikh, should be waiting to receive me at the gates; then he would try to persuade me to accept his hospitality instead of the sheikh's. Sheikh Mahdi always invited his old cousin to the tea drinking, though I could well have dispensed with him, but one could not object to the presence of another guest. Sheikh Mahdi's house was the only one in which a woman ever appeared when I was there. She was an old Sudanese slave woman who had been brought many years ago from the Sudan. Once I got her to tell me her story, but she spoke such a queer mixture of Arabic and Siwan that it was difficult to follow.

It appeared that when she was about eight years old she and her small brother were playing outside their village somewhere in the North-West Sudan, and a band of Arabs—slave raiders—swooped down and carried them off. They were taken up into

SHEIKH MAHDI ABDEL NEBI, OF AGHOURMI WITH HIS DAUGHTER AND COUSIN

Tripoli and there she was sold to another Arab who brought her to Siwa on his way to Egypt. She fell ill and almost died, so the Arab, who did not want to delay, sold her cheap to the Sheikh of Aghourmi, father of the present one ; he handed her over to his wife who cured the child. She remained at Aghourmi for the rest of her life. She was a lively old body and told the story in a very cheerful way, giggling and laughing, not apparently feeling any wish to return to her own land.

Aghourmi is almost more picturesque than Siwa. The road to the gate passes below the overhanging rock on which the houses stand, which is thickly surrounded by a luxuriant wilderness of apricot, fig and palm trees. The steep path to the village goes under three archways, each with an enormous wooden gateway, and this path is the only possible means of entering the place. Above one of the gates there is a high tower, and the houses alongside the path are loopholed so that an enemy making an attack could be safely fired at from all sides by the defenders. Inside the town there is the same dark maze of narrow streets as in Siwa, with wells and olive presses, but all on a smaller scale than those in Siwa town. There are a few houses below the walls. The sheikh lives in the middle of the town in a big, high house with a roof that has as fine a view as any that I have seen.

I got home after sunset and often had another bathe—by moonlight—before changing into flannels for dinner, which I had on the terrace in front of the

house. I slept upstairs, on the roof, but I always kept a spare bed ready in the room as quite often a wild "haboob"—sand-storm—would blow up in the middle of the night, and even indoors one would be smothered and choked with sand. Such was the average day at Siwa, and by nine or ten o'clock one was glad to turn in.

Occasionally after dinner one of the natives who were employed as secret service agents would arrive very mysteriously at the house on some excuse and report that there were fire-arms in the house of So-and-So. Sometimes the information was no more than an exaggerated rumour, but if it sounded true I would make a night raid on the person who was supposed to have rifles. These night raids were very dramatic, but did not always yield the harvest that was expected. The informer would lead the way, disguised by a turban pulled low over his head and a scarf muffling his eyes. I followed with a dozen armed Sudanese. The difficulty was to prevent the owner of the house getting wind of us before we surrounded the building, and to surround a Siwan house which has dozens of doors and passages and exits over roofs is no easy matter. It was not a matter of entering a hostile town, but of surprising a household. We would pad silently into the town, and anybody who we met roaming the streets would be attached to the party to prevent his giving warning. On reaching the house the guide slipped away in the darkness, and I surrounded the house with men; then at a whistle each man

lit a torch and I beat on the door and demanded admittance.

Immediately the wildest hullabaloo began inside—men shouting, women yelling, donkeys braying and hens cackling. Sometimes this was done in order to distract our attention from somebody who tried to slip out and remove the rifles to a safe hiding-place. When the door was opened all the male occupants were marched outside and the harem sent into one room, where they sat on the floor with shawls over their heads and reviled us—but in Siwan, so nobody was any the wiser. The house was searched from top to bottom, the ceilings probed, the mats raised, and every room examined. Sometimes the rifles were buried in the floor, or hidden in bales of hay. Occasionally a modern rifle and some ammunition was found, but usually some old Arab guns and a bag or two of shot and gunpowder. If we had a successful haul the master of the house would be marched off in custody to the jail in the Markaz, and next day he would be tried, and probably heavily fined or imprisoned.

CHAPTER III

THE HISTORY OF SIWA

"Cities have been, and vanished; fanes have sunk,
Heaped into shapeless ruin; sands o'erspread.
Fields that were Edens; millions too have shrunk
To a few starving hundreds, or have fled
From off the page of being."

SIWA lies thickly covered with "the Dust of History," and its story is difficult to trace. For certain periods one is able to collect information on the subject, but during many centuries nothing is known. Some of the leading sheikhs have in their possession ancient documents and treaties which have been handed down through many generations from father to son. There is also an old Arabic history of Siwa, which appears to have been written some time during the fifteenth century, kept by the family whose members have always held a position corresponding to that of a town clerk, but this old history is so interwoven with curious legends and fables that it is difficult to separate fact from fiction. I used to sit in the garden of the old sheikh who owned the book and listen while he read. He was a venerable but rascally old fellow in flowing white robes, the green turban of a "Haj," and huge horn spectacles. The

book itself was a muddled collection of loose sheets of manuscript kept in a leather bag.

Roughly the history of Siwa can be divided into four periods. The first, which is also the greatest period, dates from the foundation of the Temple of Jupiter Ammon. The second period begins at the Mohammedan invasion in the seventh century A.D. The third period commences with the subjugation of Siwa by Mohammed Ali, early in the nineteenth century; and the fourth and last period is the history of Siwa during the Great War.

(I)

FIRST PERIOD

THE TEMPLE OF JUPITER AMMON

According to the late Professor Maspero, the great authority on Egyptian antiquities, the oasis of Siwa was not connected with Egypt until about the sixteenth century B.C. In about 1175 B.C. the Egyptian oases, of which Siwa is one, were colonized by Rameses III, but very little authentic information is available on the history of Siwa until it came definitely under the influence of Egypt in the sixth century B.C. Mr. Oric Bates, in his exhaustive work, *The Eastern Libyans*, states that the original deity of the oasis was a sun god, a protector of flocks, probably with the form of a bull. The African poet Coreippus, mentions a ram-headed Libyan divinity

called Gurzil who was represented as being the offspring of the original prophetic God of Siwa. His priests fought in battles, and the emblem of the god was carried by the Libyans in the fray. A sacred stone at Siwa is referred to by Pliny, which when touched by an irreverent hand stirred at once a strong and harmful sand-wind. The theory of sun worship, and the idea of an evil wind directed by some spirit in a stone is substantiated by the local customs and legends which are prevalent in Siwa at the present time.

It is certain that when the Egyptians occupied Siwa, in about 550 B.C., according to Mr. Bates, they discovered a local Libyan god firmly established and supported by a powerful but barbarous cult. So great was its reputation that King Crœsus of Lydia travelled to Siwa and consulted the oracle a little before, or at the time of, the Egyptian occupation. The Egyptians identified the local god of the oasis with their own Ammon. In the fourth century B.C. the god Ammon, of the Ammonians, for this was the name by which the people of Siwa were now known, had become one of the most famous oracles of the ancient world. At the time when the Egyptians recognized and worshipped the god of the oasis, a number of stories became prevalent, tending to prove that the deity at Siwa originated from the Ammon of Thebes, and one legend even went so far as to assert that the Ammon of Thebes was himself originally a Libyan herdsman who was deified by Dionysius. The following are some of the many legends which

relate the origin of the Siwan god, and which suggest its connection with the Theban Ammon.

Herodotus, in whose works there are frequent allusions to the Ammonians, describes the inhabitants of the oasis of Ammon as being colonists from Egypt and Ethiopia, speaking a mixed language, and calling themselves Ammonians, owing to the Egyptians worshipping Jupiter under the name of Ammon. He relates that the colonists instituted an oracle in imitation of the famous one on the Isle of Meroë, and mentions the following account of its origin. Two black girls who served in the Temple of Jupiter Ammon at Thebes were carried away by Phœnician merchants. One of them was taken to Greece, where she afterwards founded the Temple of Dodona, which became a well-known oracle; the other was sold into Libya and eventually arrived at the kingdom of the Ammonians. Owing to her strange language, which resembled "the twittering of a bird," she was supposed by the inhabitants to possess supernatural qualities; her reputation increased, and her utterances came to be regarded as the words of an oracle. There is a different version of the same fable in which the girls are represented as two black doves, one flying to Greece, the other to Libya.

According to Diodorus Siculus the Temple of Jupiter Ammon was built as far back as 1385 B.C., by Danaus the Egyptian. Rollins, in his *History of the Ancient World*, names Ham, the son of Noah, as the deity in whose honour the temple was built by

the Ammonians. Another legend tells that Dionysius was lost in the desert on one of his fantastic expeditions and nearly died from thirst when suddenly a ram appeared, which led the party to a bubbling spring. They built a temple on the spot, in gratitude, and ornamented it with representations of a ram's head. It is interesting to compare this story with one of the legends written in the Arabic history of Siwa. A Siwan, journeying in the desert, was led by a ram to a mysterious city where he found an avenue of black stone lions. He returned home, and set out again at a later date, meaning to rediscover the place, but he never found it again. In both cases it is a ram that led the way, and the god of Siwa is represented as having a ram's head.

The temple, whose ruins are to be seen at the village of Aghourmi, near Siwa, was built probably during the sixth century B.C. The date is decided by the style of its architecture. This temple was known to the Egyptians as " Sakhit Amouou," the " Field of Palms," owing to its situation among groves of palm trees. It is evident that at this time Siwa was the principal island in a desert archipelago consisting of several oases, most of which are now uninhabited, obeying a common king and owing their prosperity to the great temple of the oracle. Such a cluster of islands would invest the dynasty to which King Clearchus and King Lybis belonged with considerable importance. Herodotus tells how certain Cyrenians held a conversation with Clearchus, King of the Ammonians, who told them that a party

of young men had set off on an expedition from his country to the west, through a wild region full of savage animals, eventually arriving at a great river where they found a race of small black men. They supposed this river to be a branch or tributary of the Nile, but it was actually the river Niger. Thus it is shown that at this period Siwa was an independent monarchy. The Ammonians lived under the rule of their own kings and priests, and chieftainship was associated with priesthood. Silius Italicus describes the warrior priest Nabis, an Ammonian chief, " fearless and splendidly armed," riding in the army of Hannibal.

Another early visitor to the oasis was Lysander the Spartan. Being disappointed by the oracle of Dodona he travelled to Siwa, under colour of making a vow at the temple, but hoping to bribe the priests to his interests. Notwithstanding " the fullness of his purse " and the great friendship between his father and Lybis, King of the Ammonians, he was totally unsuccessful, and the priests sent ambassadors to Sparta accusing Lysander of attempting to bribe the holy oracle. But " he so subtly managed his defence that he got off clear." The Greeks held the oracle of Ammon in great veneration. The Athenians kept a special galley in which they conveyed questions across the sea to Libya. Mersa Matruh, sometimes called Ammonia, was the port for Siwa, and it was here that the ambassadors and visitors disembarked and started on their desert journey to the oasis. The poet Pindar dedicated an ode to Jupiter Ammon,

which was preserved under the altar of the temple for some six hundred years; and the sculptor Calamis set up a statue to the god of the Ammonians in the Temple of Thebes at Karnak.

In 525 B.C., Cambyses, wishing to consolidate his newly acquired dominions in Northern Africa, dispatched two expeditions, one against Carthage, the other into Ethiopia. He made Memphis his base of operations and sent 50,000 men as an advance party to occupy the oasis of Ammon. His generals had orders to rob and burn the temple, make captives of the people and to prepare halting-places for the bulk of the army. They passed the oasis of Khargeh and proceeded north-west. But the whole army was lost in the sea of desert that lies between Siwa and Khargeh. The Ammonians, on inquiries being made, reported that the army was overwhelmed by a violent sand-storm during a midday halt. But it is more probable that they lost their way during one of the periodical sand-storms which are so prevalent in this desert region, and were overcome by thirst in the waterless, trackless desert. There was no further news; they never reached the temple, and not one of the soldiers returned to Egypt. This huge army still lies buried somewhere in that torrid waste, and perhaps some fortunate traveller may at a future date stumble unawares on the remains of the once mighty host. In the old Arabic history there are two other stories of armies that were lost in the desert. In one case it was a Siwan army which opposed the

Mohammedan invaders, and in the other case an army of raiders from Tebu were lost on their way to attack the oasis.

In 500 B.C., Siwa and the other oases were subjected to Persia, and in the following year Cimon, the celebrated Athenian general, sent a secret embassy to the oracle while he was besieging Citium in Cyprus. The deputation was greeted by the oracle with the words, " Cimon is already with me," and on their return it was found that Cimon had himself perished in battle. The foretelling of Cimon's death augmented considerably the reputation of the oracle.

Oracles were most frequently situated in the vicinity of some natural phenomena; this at Siwa consisted of a sacred spring known as " Fons Solis," the " Fountain of the Sun," which by its strangeness contributed to the divine qualities of the temple. Very probably it was the " Ein el Hammam " which lies about a quarter of a mile south of the temple ruins and is to-day one of the largest and most beautiful springs in the oasis. Ancient writers describe its waters as being warm in the morning, cold at noon and boiling hot at midnight. Blind, black fish lived in the pool, according to the Arabic history, which was connected with the rites of the temple. The water to-day is a trifle warmer than most of the springs, and for that reason it is the favourite bathing-place of the inhabitants of Aghourmi. I have stood by the spring at midnight and tested its warmth, but it seemed in no way to

differ from the other springs, except that it was a very little warmer.

There are many contemporary descriptions of the actual temple, and antiquarians have from time to time disputed as to its original size and form. It appears to have consisted of a main building, or sanctuary, surrounded by triple walls which enclosed the dwelling-places of the king, priests and the guards, standing on a rocky eminence among the palm groves. A smaller temple stood a few hundred yards south of the acropolis. The rock on which the village of Aghourmi now stands was evidently the site of the original temple and fortress, and the ruins below the village, known as " Omm Beyda," are those of the minor temple. The two temples were connected by an underground passage.

The old history of Siwa gives a detailed description of the court of the king. The following is a rough translation. " At one period Siwa ranked among the important towns of the Egyptian sovereigns. It was ruled by a king called Meneclush who built a town and cultivated the land. He made the men drill and inaugurated a seven days' feast in commemoration of his succession. The people of King Meneclush dressed richly and wore golden ornaments. The king lived in a stone and granite palace, and assembled his people in a great square which had four different courts, and in each court there was a statue which caught the sun at different times of the day, and when the sun shone upon the statues they spoke. When the people assembled

they stood on seven steps. On the highest step sat the king, below, in succession, the king's family, priests, astrologers and magicians, generals and courtiers, architects, soldiers, and, below, the people. Each step was inscribed with these words, ' Look down, not towards the step above, lest ye become proud '—thus inculcating the principle of modesty. The king lived in a palace called Kreibein, inside the walls. In those days there were many buildings in Siwa, spreading from Omm Beyda to Gebel Dakrour. King Meneclush was stabbed by a girl and is buried, with his horse, in the Khazeena, underneath Aghourmi. . . . At a later period Siwa was divided into two parts ruled by two princes called Ferik and Ibrik. Afterwards a queen called Khamissa ruled in Siwa and gave her name to the square hill at the end of the Western lake."

Much of the history is missing, and at times it plunges into descriptions of neighbouring countries, but it is interesting to find mention of " statues that speak " when touched by the sun.

As recently as 1837 there was a considerable portion of the smaller temple standing. Travellers described the roof, made of massive blocks of stone, the coloured ceilings, and the walls covered with hieroglyphics and sculptured figures. But the depredations of Arab treasure hunters, and a Turkish Governor who committed an unpardonable vandalism by blowing up the temple with gunpowder in order to obtain stone for building an office, have reduced the once imposing building to a single

ruined pylon, or gateway, which towers above the surrounding gardens, a pathetic reminder of its former grandeur. This solitary ruin, and two massive stone gateways almost hidden by mud buildings in the middle of the village of Aghourmi, is all that remains of the temple that was once famous throughout the world. In a way the ruins are symbolic of Siwa which was once a powerful dominion, but is now nothing more than a wretched desert station with three or four thousand degenerate inhabitants.

In 331 B.C. the fame of the oracle reached its zenith, owing to Alexander the Great visiting it after having settled his affairs in Egypt. The visit to the famous oracle was undertaken in order to inquire into the mysterious origin of his birth. Probably at the same time Alexander wished to emulate the deeds of Hercules, from whom he claimed descent, and who was supposed during his wanderings to have visited the oasis. He marched along the coast to Parætonium —Matruh—where he was met by ambassadors from Cyrene, a wealthy city on the coast some 400 miles further west, who presented him gifts of chariots and war horses. He then turned south across the desert into a region " where there was nothing but heaps of sand." After journeying four days the water supply, carried in skins, gave out, and the army was in danger of perishing from thirst when, by a fortunate chance, or by the direct interposition of the gods, the sky became black with clouds, rain fell, and by this miraculous means the army was preserved from destruction.

A little later the expedition lost its way, and after wandering for miles was saved by the appearance of a number of ravens who, flying before the army, guided them eventually to the temple. They found the oasis " full of pleasant fountains, watered with running streams, richly planted with all sorts of trees bearing fruit, surrounded by a vast dry and sandy desert, waste and untilled . . . the temperature of the air was like spring, yet all the place around it was dry and scorching . . . a most healthful climate." Alexander was received by the oracle with divine honours, and returned to Egypt satisfied that he was indeed the authentic son of Zeus. As the son of the god he became a legitimate Pharoah, and adopted the pschent crown and its accompanying rites.

About this time various nations applied to the oracle for permission to deify their rulers, and on the death of his friend Hephistion, Alexander dispatched another embassy asking that Hephistion might be ranked as a hero. When Alexander died, in 323 B.C., it was suggested that he should be buried at Siwa. However, the suggestion was not carried out and he was buried at Alexandria, the city to which he gave his name. One of the hills in the desert near Siwa is still called " Gebel Sekunder," and tradition has it that from this hill Alexander saw the ravens which led him to the temple.

The ritual of the temple was somewhat similar to several other oracular temples. The actual oracle was made in human figure, with a ram's head, richly

ornamented with emeralds and other precious stones. The figure of the god appears to have been shown as though wrapped for burial, and this dead god, who was a god of prophecy, may possibly have set the fashion of menes-worship which one still sees in Siwa when natives resort to the graves of their ancestors in order to learn the future. When a distinguished pilgrim arrived for a consultation the symbol of the god was brought up from the inmost sanctuary of the temple and carried on a golden barque, hung with votive cups of silver, followed by a procession of eighty priests and many singing girls, "who chanted uncouth songs after the manner of their country," in order to propitiate the deity and induce him to return a satisfactory answer. The god directed the priests who carried the barque which way they should proceed, and spoke by tremulous shocks, communicated to the bearers, and by movements of the head and body, which were interpreted by the priests.

Those spaces among the palm groves at Aghourmi must have witnessed in ancient days many a splendid spectacle. One can imagine the magnificent ceremonies and the awe-inspiring rites which were solemnized among the shady vistas of tall palm trees, in the shadow of the great temple on the rock, the processions of chanting priests, the savage music of conches and cymbals, and the gorgeous caravans of Eastern monarchs, carrying offerings of fabulous treasure to lay before the mystic oracle of the oasis, whose infallible answers were regarded by the whole

RUINS OF "OMM BEYDA" THE TEMPLE OF JUPITER AMMON

world with profound respect. In those days caravans from the West, and from the savage countries of the Sudan, brought slaves and merchandize to Siwa, and the barbarian followers of African chieftains mingled with the courtiers of Eastern potentates, and gazed with awe on the white-robed priests and the troops of pale singing girls. To-day the people of Aghourmi build their fires against the great crumbling archways that gave access to the holiest altar of Ammonium, and shepherds graze their flocks among the ruins of the smaller temple.

> "The Oracles are dumb
> No voice or hideous hum
> Runs through the arched roof in words deceiving."

Towards the end of the third century B.C. the fame of the oracle declined, although, according to Juvenal, the answers of Ammon were esteemed in the solution of difficult problems until long after the cessation of the oracle at Delphi. But in the second century B.C. the oracle was almost extinct. Strabo, writing when its fame was on the wane, advances a theory in his *Geography* that the Temple of Ammon was originally close to the sea. He bases his argument on the existence of large salt lakes at Siwa and the quantities of shells which are to be found near the temple. He considers that Siwa would never have become so illustrious, or possessed with such credit as it once enjoyed, if it had always been such a distance from the coast, therefore the land between Siwa and the sea must have been created

comparatively recently by deposits from the ocean. Undoubtedly at some remote period the whole of the northern part of the Libyan Desert was under the sea, but there is nothing to prove that even then Siwa was a coast town, because one finds shells and fossils, such as Strabo mentions, over a hundred miles south of Siwa.

The Romans neglected Oriental oracles, especially those of Ammon. They preferred the auguries of birds, the inspection of victims and the warnings of heaven to the longer process of oracular consultation. In the reign of Augustus, Siwa had become a place of banishment for political criminals. Timasius, an eminent general, was sent there in A.D. 396 and Athanasius addresses several letters to his disciples who were banished to the oases, " a place unfrequented and inspiring horror." The French poet Fénelon, in his play, *The Adventures of Telemachus*, makes the mistake of describing Siwa as a place where one sees " snow that never melts, making an endless winter on the mountain tops."

Somewhere about the fourth century Christianity penetrated to Siwa, and the ruins of a church, or monastery, built probably at this time, where one can still distinguish the Coptic cross carved in stone, are visible at Biled el Roumi, near Khamissa. The ruin is described in the Arabic history as the place where " bad people " lived. But apparently Christianity was never embraced with much zeal. During the Berber uprisings in the sixth century Siwa relapsed into barbarism, and the Siwans probably

took part with the Berbers in their struggles against the Byzantine rule which flourished on the coast. Early in the seventh century, when the Arab army invaded Egypt, the inland country west of Egypt was practically independent, the Berber tribes having won back their freedom.

(2)

SECOND PERIOD

Mediæval Siwa

The second period of Siwa's history is the most difficult to trace, especially with regard to the fixing of definite dates. One has to depend on the Arabic history at Siwa, and occasional highly coloured references to the oasis by the Arab historians and geographers. Siwa was known to the Arab writers as " Schantaria," or " Santrieh," spelt in various ways, which at a later date became " Siouah," and finally " Siwa."

In 640 Egypt was invaded by a Mohammedan army commanded by Amrou, who seized the country from the feeble grasp of the representatives of Heraclius. The tide of conquest swept west along the northern coast of Africa. The disunion of the Berber tribes made the conquest of the country more easy for the host of Islam. Fugitives from the Arabs fled inland to the remote places such as the oases, and it was not until several centuries later that the Arabs

established their religion in Siwa. According to the Arabic history when Egypt was invaded by the Mohammedans the Siwans sent an army to help repel the enemy, but this army, like many others, was lost in the desert.

Mohammed Ben Ayas, an Arab historian who wrote in 1637, gives an account of the mysterious country of " Santarieh," and describes how Moussa Ibn Nosseir was repulsed from its gates. In 708 Moussa attempted to reduce Siwa. He crossed the desert from Egypt in seven days. On arrival he found that all the Siwans had retired into their fortified town, which was surrounded by enormously high walls, with four iron gates. Finding it impossible to force an entrance he ordered his men to scale the walls and see what lay on the other side. With the aid of ladders they managed to reach the battlements, but each man who scaled the wall immediately disappeared over the other side and was never seen again. Moussa was so discouraged by this that he renounced his project and returned to Egypt, having lost a large number of soldiers. In 710 Tharic Ben Sayed, another Arab general, was also repulsed.

The mediæval Arab writers have many stories to tell of the strange things at Siwa. Among the wonders of the country was a magic lake over which no bird could fly without falling in, and it could only escape from the water if drawn out by a human hand. The four gates of the town were surmounted by four brass statues. When a stranger entered the gates a

deep sleep fell upon him, and he remained in this state until one of the inhabitants came and blew upon his face. Without this attention he lay unconscious at the foot of the statue until death claimed him. There was a sacred stone in the town which was called " The Lover," because of its strange power of attracting men. It drew them towards itself, and then when they touched it their limbs stuck to the stone. Struggles were of no avail, their only release was death. The neighbouring country was full of wild beasts, and serpents of prodigious length, with bodies as thick as palm trunks, dwelt among the hills and devoured sheep, cattle and human beings. Another species was particularly fond of eating camels. In one of the gardens there flourished a marvellous orange tree which bore 14,000 oranges, not including those that fell to the ground, every year. The author who mentions this tree asserts that he saw it himself !

All the Arab writers mention the mines at Siwa. Among the mountains that enclose the oasis people found iron, lapis lazulis and emeralds, which they sold in Egypt. They also exported the salt which they picked up on the ground, and obtained barley from Egypt in exchange. The only manufactures were leather carpets of great beauty, which were much prized by Egyptians.

The inhabitants of Siwa were Berbers ; they worked naked in their gardens ; the country was independent, thinly populated and showed signs of a former civilization. A strange breed of savage

donkey, striped black and white—zebras—lived in the oasis. These animals allowed no one to mount them, and when taken to Egypt they died at once.

People used to find enchanted cities in the desert near Siwa, but latterly they have disappeared and their positions are now only marked by mounds of sand. Abdel Melik, Ibn Merouan, made an excursion from Egypt into the desert near Siwa, where he discovered a ruined city and a tree that bore every known fruit. He gathered some fruit and returned to Fostat—Cairo. A Copt told him that this city contained much treasure, so he sent out the Copt with a number of men provisioned for thirty days to rediscover the place, but they failed to find it. On another occasion an Arab was journeying near Siwa and suddenly saw a loaded camel disappear into a deep, rocky valley in the middle of the desert. He followed it and arrived at an oasis watered by a spring where there were people cultivating the land. They had never seen a stranger before. He returned to Egypt and reported the matter to the collector of taxes, who immediately sent out men to visit this oasis, but, as usual, they never found it.

There are innumerable stories of hidden cities in the desert near Siwa. This idea, and that of buried treasure, appeals strongly to an Oriental mind. Siwa itself, owing to its history, probably does contain a great deal that could be advantageously excavated. It is a field that would yield many treasures, as up to now no really thorough work has been carried out, though various people who have happened to be

there have " done a little digging." The ex-Khedive spent some money in uncovering some old ruins near one of the lakes, but really there is a great deal that has never been touched. Labour, and the difficulty of reaching Siwa, are the most formidable obstacles to any excavating projects.

It is interesting to note that nearly all the mediæval Arab historians mention the emerald mines at Siwa, and in these days the natives still hold a belief in their existence. In the time of the Temple of Jupiter Ammon the figure of the god was decorated with emeralds, which were probably found in the country. According to a Siwan tradition there exists a cave in the hill called Gebel Dakrour, south of Aghourmi, which contains precious stones. But its entrance is guarded by a jinn, who makes it invisible except to a person who has drunk from the water of a certain spring among the sand-dunes south of Siwa. The spring is unknown in these days, but I have seen it marked on an old map of the desert. Possibly some of the peculiar shafts that pierce the hills round Siwa are the remains of old mines ; it is difficult to imagine what else they could be.

In 1048 the tribes of Hilal and Ben Soleim, who had been transported from Arabia as a punishment, and were living in the country between the Nile and the Red Sea, were given permission to cross the Nile and advance into Tripoli. Some 200,000 of them hastened like hungry wolves with their wives and families from Egypt to the west. They overran Tripoli and pushed on towards the shores of the

Atlantic. It was some of these colonists who eventually forced Siwa to accept the Mohammedan rule, and by 1100, according to the Arab historians, the Koran flourished within the precincts of the Temple of Ammon. From that date onwards Siwa has been fanatically Mohammedan. The Siwans were not swept into oblivion by this great Arab invasion; apparently only a very few Arabs remained in the oasis, and very shortly they themselves became indistinguishable from the Siwans. From this time the Berbers, as a nation, ceased to exist, but they remained Berbers, not Arabs, and in a few out-of-the-way places, such as Siwa, they retained much of their original language.

The history at Siwa tells how one Rashwan was King of Siwa when the Mohammedan army arrived, commanded by the Prophet's khalifa. Rashwan summoned his priests and magicians and consulted them as to how the enemy were to be repelled. Acting on their advice he removed all the bodies from "Gebel Muta," a hill near Siwa which is honeycombed with rock tombs, and cast them into the springs in order to poison the enemy. Then he retired into the town, depending on the wells inside the walls. The Mohammedan army arrived, but the water of the springs did them no harm. They stormed the town and captured it after a strenuous fight; Rashwan was killed, and the inhabitants embraced the faith of Islam at the sword's point.

During the period that followed the Arab invasion very little is known of Siwa. The oasis was inhabited

by a mixture of Berbers and Arabs, the Berbers predominating. Occasional caravans of slave-traders passed northwards along the main desert routes, and some of the slaves, having been bought by the Siwans, remained in the oasis and intermarried with the inhabitants. The Siwans, diminished in numbers and in power, began to suffer from raids by the Arabs from the west and from the coast.

According to the old history, which is preserved at Siwa, there was another small incursion from the east at a later date. About the middle of the fifteenth century there was a great plague which carried off a number of Siwans. A certain devout man in Egypt dreamed that the ground at Siwa was very rich. He came to the oasis and settled there, planting a special kind of date palm which he brought from Upper Egypt; he also grew dates for the "Wakf"—religious foundation—of the Prophet, which custom still continues. Later he made the pilgrimage and described the country of Siwa to the people of Mecca, who had never heard of it. They did him great honour. He returned to Siwa accompanied by thirty men, Berbers and Arabs, who settled in Siwa. They built an olive press in the centre of the high town and inscribed their names thereon. From these men, and their Siwan wives, certain of the present inhabitants are descended, and some Siwans boast to-day that their forebears came with "The Thirty" whose names were inscribed on the old olive press. "The Thirty" occupied the western part of the

town, and the original Siwans remained in the eastern quarter and in the village of Aghourmi. Later the Siwans elected a council and chose a " Kadi "—judge—who drew up a code of laws.

Under this government the population increased and the people flourished again; they treated travellers well, especially pilgrims from the west on their way to Mecca. The people of Tripoli came to hear of them, and they made an alliance together. Siwa became a " Zawia "—religious dependency—of Tripoli, and the Siwans fought in the army of Tripoli. Siwa once more became a market for slaves and a halting-place for the caravans from the south and the west. Slaves came in great numbers from Wadai and the Sudan, via Kufra, Jalo and Jerabub. Egyptian merchants came to Siwa bringing merchandise, and returned to Egypt with slaves and dates. From the Sudan came ivory, gold, leather and ostrich feathers.

During the time of Sidi Suliman, a very devout Kadi, the savage people of Tebu, in the south, made constant raids upon Siwa, and troubled the people greatly. On one occasion it was known that a large army of the enemy were advancing on the oasis. The venerable judge offered up prayers for help against the enemy, and every man in Siwa went to the mosques. As a consequence the whole army was buried in the sand and the road they came by was blotted out. Sidi Suliman encouraged his people to show hospitality to strangers, but some years after his death the people, forgetting his injunctions,

drove away from the gates some poor Arab pilgrims who sought their hospitality. It is said that the door of Sidi Suliman's tomb miraculously closed, marking the strong displeasure of the saint, nor did it open until the Arabs had been brought in and hospitably entertained. According to another legend Sidi Suliman, whilst walking near the town, suddenly became thirsty. There was no water at hand so he struck the ground seven times with his staff, and fresh water gushed forth, which flows in that place to-day. Before Sidi Suliman was born his mother felt a frantic desire to eat some fish. There was none in the town, and the sea lay 200 miles distant. The woman seemed on the point of death. Suddenly a pigeon flew through the open window of her room and deposited a large fish on the floor. She ate the fish, recovered, and Sidi Suliman was born. For this reason all Siwan women eat fish when they are pregnant, hoping that their offspring may be such another as Sidi Suliman. These, and many other legends, are told of Sidi Suliman, who has become the most venerated patron sheikh of the Siwans.

The system of living in Siwa in those days was very curious. The high town existed, with a thin fringe of buildings huddled at the foot of the walls. None of the suburbs, such as Sebukh or Manshia, were built. At night all flocks and cattle were driven within the walls. Married men only, with their wives and families, lived in the high town. Unmarried men, youths over fifteen years of age and

widowers shaved their heads, as a distinction, and occupied the houses outside the walls. The town was one vast harem. After sunset no bachelors were allowed inside the gates, and any man who divorced his wife was cast out—until he bought a new one. The bachelors, who were known as " Zigale," formed a kind of town guard. On the approach of strangers they sallied out to meet them and detained them until the council of sheikhs had decided whether they were to be permitted to enter the town. Strangers were almost always accommodated outside the walls. There was one family of Siwans who were always interpreters, for in those days, unlike to-day, hardly any of the natives spoke any language but their own. The council of sheikhs met in a room close to the main gate of the town, and near it there was a deep, dark pit which served as a prison.

After Sidi Suliman a number of other kadis ruled in the oasis. One of them was called Hassan Mitnana, and during his lifetime a great quarrel arose between the eastern and western factions of the town. This began in about the year 1700. The dispute originated about a road which divides the town into two parts. A family on the eastern side wished to enlarge their house by building out into the street. Their opposite neighbours objected to the public thoroughfare being narrowed merely in order to enlarge a private dwelling-place. There was a dispute, a quarrel, and a fight in which the two sides of the street took part. One side called themselves " Sherkyn "—the Easterners—and the other

side called themselves " Gharbyn "—the Westerners. The whole population took up the quarrel, which developed into a permanent civil war. At times it died down and seemed on the point of extinction, then, quite suddenly, it flamed up, ending in pitched battles in the space before the town, where the casualties were often very severe considering the smallness of the population.

Before the days of gunpowder these battles were fought in an open space below the walls of the town. On an appointed day the two opposing armies faced one another. The men stood in front, armed with swords and spears, the women collected behind the men, carrying bags full of stones which they hurled at the enemy, or at anyone on their own side who showed signs of cowardice. Platoons, each of a few dozen men, advanced in turn and fought in the space midway between the two armies, then gradually the whole of both forces became engaged. The women displayed great fierceness ; they often joined in the fray, beating out the life from any of their enemies who they found lying wounded, with sharp stones. It seems amazing that, notwithstanding these frequent battles, the Siwans managed to live in such a confined space, so close together.

It is only during the last few years of peaceful government, since the war, that the violent animosity between the two parties has died down. A few families of opposing parties have intermarried, but even now one rarely meets a western sheikh in

the eastern quarter, or vice versa. Both quarters are entirely self-supporting. They have their own wells, olive presses, mosques and date markets.

At the time of writing I hear from Siwa that a few months after I left there was another outbreak between east and west. Some eastern men were riding home from their gardens, excited by " lubki " —palm wine. They rode through the streets of the western quarter, shouting and singing. The western people took this as an insult and attacked them. In ten minutes 800 men had collected in the square, the east and the west facing each other. A fierce fight began, but fortunately, as the men were only armed with sticks and tools, there were no fatal injuries. The local police and the mamur were unable to do anything, and the Egyptian officials retired to the Markaz—Government Office. A few minutes later the Camel Corps arrived with fixed bayonets and dispersed the crowd. There were about fifty cases needing hospital treatment, some of them being quite severe.

Such were the lively conditions of internecine warfare when Browne, the first Englishman to visit Siwa, arrived at the oasis in 1792. He came in disguise with a caravan from Egypt. But against an infidel, a common foe, the Siwans stood united. Browne's identity was discovered ; he was received with stones and abuse, roughly treated, and sent back to Egypt without having seen much of the oasis. But during his brief stay he formed no favourable opinion of the people. They were notorious for

their monstrous arrogance, intense bigotry and gross immorality.

Six years later Hornemann, of the African Association, arrived at Siwa, travelling in the guise of a young mameluke, with a pilgrim caravan on its way from Mecca to the kingdom of Fezzan. He described Siwa as a small independent state, acknowledging the Sultan, but paying no tribute. He estimated the population at 8000 persons. The Siwans were governed by a council of sheikhs, who held their meetings and trials in public, and flew to arms on the slightest provocation when they disagreed. When Hornemann left Siwa he was followed by the inhabitants who apparently suspected his identity. " The braying of several hundred asses heralded the approach of the Siwan Army." With great difficulty he persuaded the sheikhs that his passport from Napoleon Buonaparte was really a firman from the Sultan. They finally allowed him to proceed on his way. He sent his papers to Europe from Tripoli, but he himself perished while exploring North Africa. It is very curious that most of the few Europeans who visited Siwa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were Germans.

The difficulties that meet a European travelling in the guise of a Mohammedan are not so formidable as they would appear. Knowledge of the language would seem to be the greatest stumbling-block. But in North Africa there are so many dialects, and so many different pronunciations, that an Arab from one part of the desert would find it difficult to

understand an Arab from another district, and the difference in the accent or pronunciation of an Egyptian from Cairo and a European speaking Arabic, would not be recognized in many of the more remote districts.

(3)

THIRD PERIOD

The Turkish Rule

"A house divided against itself cannot stand."

In the year 1816 there was a great fight between the two factions, in which the easterners gained the day. Ali Balli, a western sheikh, went to Egypt and described to the Government the independent state of Siwa and the condition of anarchy prevalent there. In 1820 Mohammed Ali invaded the Sudan. In order to protect his western flank he sent a force of 1300 men, with some cannon, commanded by Hassein Bey Shemishera, one of his generals, against the fanatical population of Siwa. They crossed the desert via Wadi Natrun and the oasis of Gara. A few of the western faction welcomed the army, but most of the population prepared to fight. After a desperate battle, lasting for several hours, the Siwans were severely beaten, and from that date Siwa was permanently secured to Egypt. The Turks entered the town, seized the principal men, and in course of time some sixty of the notables were executed by

Hassein Bey, who punished by death on the least suspicion of rebellion or revolt. A tribute was imposed on Siwa, and Sheikh Ali Balli was made omda, supported by the Turks. After some time Hassein Bey and the army returned to Egypt. The Siwans promptly refused to pay tribute, so in 1827 Hassein Bey returned with a force of 800 men, occupied the town after a brief contest, executed eighteen of the notables, confiscated their property, but paid the widows of the unfortunate men ten pounds each as full compensation for the life of a Siwan notable. He also banished twenty of the sheikhs, increased the tribute, and appointed a Turkish officer as Governor of Siwa, with a small force. Under Hassein Bey the Siwans suffered considerably. He seized their money, slaves, dates and silver ornaments, which he sent to his home in Egypt. He built the first "Markaz"—Government Office—whose ruins stand behind the Kasr Hassuna, the present District Officer's house, where I lived.

During the nineteenth century several Europeans visited Siwa, but they met with no encouragement and were in most cases badly treated. One of them, Butin, a French colonel, carried on his camels a collapsible boat in which he hoped to reach the island on the salt lake of Arashieh, which according to legends contained fabulous treasure and the sword and seal of Mohammed. He managed to bring the boat to Siwa, but the natives refused to let him embark. These early travellers all mention the

subterranean passages connecting Aghourmi and Omm Beyda, also between Siwa town and the Hill of the Dead. The natives described these passages as having " biute "—houses—or possibly burying spaces, opening out on either side. The entrances have now in all cases been blocked up by stones and rubbish, but with a little labour they could easily be excavated. Several old men in Siwa know the exact position of the entrances to these passages, which I have seen myself.

The successor of Hassein Bey was Farag Kashif, who built a causeway across one of the salt lakes, making each family work on it in turn. It is a useful piece of work, a narrow path, wide enough for two camels to pass abreast, supported by rough stakes and palm logs, crossing the salt bog which would otherwise be impassable. Several more mamurs were appointed, but they were mere figureheads, as all the power lay in the hands of the omda, Ali Balli. Each year that the taxes were unpaid, and this was frequent, a punitive expedition arrived from Egypt.

The omda was hated by most of the Siwans, who held him responsible for the Turkish occupation, and the years of oppression. Knowing his unpopularity he never left his house after sunset. Certain of the eastern sheikhs bribed two young western men to lure him from his house at night. They persuaded him to come to Mesamia, a narrow tunnel in the western quarter, and there they stabbed him to death. Yousif Ali, the omda's son, demanded blood money, or the surrender of his father's murderers, but the

eastern sheikhs refused and secretly sent the men to Derna. Then followed a few years with neither omda nor mamur, and a government, of sorts, by a council of sheikhs.

Yousif Ali was a clever, ambitious man. Bayle St. John, who visited Siwa in 1849, described him as " a broad, pale-faced man, with a sly, good-humoured expression, of ambitious character, with speech full of elegant compliments." He wore a tarbouch, a white burnous and carried a blunderbuss. Except for the blunderbuss the description would suit several of the present-day Siwan notables. For seven years he went every winter to Cairo, trying to persuade the Government to make him omda in place of his father. He earned the nickname of " The Schemer." He spent a great deal of money on bribes in Egypt, but was always unsuccessful.

In the year 1852 Hamilton, an English traveller, came to Siwa on his way back to Egypt, after journeying in Tripoli and North Africa. In his *Wanderings in North Africa* he devotes several pages to his experiences in Siwa. The following version of what happened to him is told there now by the Siwans. He pitched his camp near the Markaz, half a mile south of the town. The Siwans bitterly resented any European visitors, so Yousif Ali, knowing this, collected the fighting men and deliberately inflamed their anger against the stranger who had come to spy out their land ; he urged them that it was their duty to kill the " Unbeliever," so they determined to make a night attack on Hamilton's camp. Then

Yousif Ali secretly warned Hamilton of the intended attack, and persuaded him to take shelter in his house. Hamilton left his tents standing empty, and during the night the " Zigale "—fighting men—opened fire on them, but the Englishman was safely lodged in Yousif Ali's house. Thus Yousif Ali gained credit for having saved Hamilton from the attack which he himself had instigated. This is a characteristic example of Siwan diplomacy.

After the attack the Siwans refused to let Hamilton leave the town, and for six weeks he was practically a prisoner in a little house adjoining that of Yousif Ali. During this time the people amused themselves by shooting and throwing stones at his windows, and collecting in crowds to stare and jeer at the " Nosrani "—Christian. Matters became worse and the most fanatical sheikhs on the town council advocated his execution. With great difficulty he managed to send two letters, by slaves, to the Viceroy of Egypt ; but he spent an anxious time as the days passed and no answer came. The Siwans found out about the letters, and as time passed and it became more and more probable that the messengers were lost, so the people became more and more insolent. Some of the sheikhs offered to lend him camels to escape from the town, on the condition that he first wrote to the Viceroy saying that he had been well treated. They intended to murder him as soon as he left the town, and to secure his baggage for themselves, but he discovered the plot and refused to leave.

One day an abnormally hot wind rose from the south and blew with great violence for three days. This was taken as a serious omen of coming disaster. The idea that a sudden violent wind, stirred by an evil " jinn," foreshadows a catastrophe, is implicitly believed by the Siwans and by all Berbers. A number of Siwans who had been most aggressive hurriedly left the town, and the remainder endeavoured, to the best of their ability, to conciliate Hamilton. The sheikhs who had been most vindictive now fawned upon their " guest," who became a person to be conciliated instead of a despised Christian. Evidently they had secret news of the approach of a party of cavalry from Egypt. On the 14th March, 1852, two sheikhs arrived and announced the approach of 150 irregular cavalry, who with 14 officers had been dispatched by the Viceroy to effect his release, in response to Hamilton's letter. A week later, with much " fantasia " and display, the army left Siwa accompanied by Hamilton and Yousif Ali. The Turkish Commandant, with typically stupid obstinacy, refused to take any prisoners, but bound over a number of the sheikhs to appear in Egypt in two months' time. Needless to say they failed to appear.

Shortly after Hamilton arrived in Cairo the Viceroy sent another expedition of 200 men to bring back a number of Siwan notables to answer for their conduct. The army reached the oasis and camped at Ain Megahiz. The Siwans retired into their fortress town. A certain Arab sheikh, who knew

Siwa and was with the Turkish expedition, went down to the town and persuaded forty of the leading men to come out to the camp and see the Commandant. He successfully tricked them with a promise of a favourable treaty, and they believed him. On arrival at the camp they were arrested and thrown into chains ; the army entered the town without opposition, as the people, having lost their leaders, had no heart to fight. As before, the Turks spoiled the people, the soldiers robbed the inhabitants, seized the women, and shot down anyone who opposed them. Then at last Sheikh Yousif Ali was appointed Omda of Siwa by the Government of Egypt.

Some years later, in 1854, Abbas, son of Mohammed Ali, died, and was succeeded by his son, Said Pasha. The latter, on his accession, granted an amnesty under which the Siwan notables, who had been condemned to hard labour and were working as prisoners, were released. They hurried back to their oasis, eager to be revenged on Yousif Ali. On arrival they were joined by their slaves and retainers, but met with considerable opposition from the westerners. For three days there was sporadic fighting, then they surrounded the omda's house. But Yousif Ali had fled to the house of one of his supporters in the suburb, called Manshiah, and garrisoned it with his few remaining slaves. His friends among the western sheikhs deserted him, seeing that popular opinion was entirely against him. From the house in Manshiah, which is a miniature fortress, he sent his two young daughters to bribe

the mamur to help him. The mamur was the same Arab who had betrayed the forty sheikhs, and was busy enough looking after himself. The two girls were caught by the eastern sheikhs. One of them was persuaded to go back to her father's house, and at a given signal to let in the enemy. They surrounded Manshiah and forced an entry to the house. The slaves stopped fighting and surrendered. Yousif Ali was caught on the roof, trying to escape ; he was dragged down through the house, out into the street and strangled.

The news of this outrage reached Egypt, and in 1857 a new mamur arrived with a detachment of soldiers. The system of two omdas ruling at once, one eastern and one western, was tried, but found to be a failure. The force under the mamur was quite inadequate to collect the taxes or to keep order. The post was an unpopular one, and was considered, as it is now, a form of exile by the Egyptian mamurs who detest a place that has not the liveliness and amusements of Cairo, or a provincial town. All the mamurs at Siwa used constantly to say to me, " Saire—Siwa ees what you call exile ! "

There followed in quick succession a series of somewhat incompetent Turkish mamurs who were in most cases quite powerless to keep under this turbulent town and population. To add to their difficulties the power of the Senussi sect was beginning to make itself firmly felt, and this complicated still more the political situation in the oasis. The

Senussi brethren at Jerabub were regarded by the Siwans as the ultimate arbitrators in any disputes which arose among the people, thus ignoring the jurisdiction of the Turkish Government officials. One mamur married, on the day of his arrival, a girl of the eastern quarter, and oppressed the westerners to such a degree that they obtained his recall from Egypt. He was sent back to Egypt, and as he entered the Governor's house in Alexandria one of his men stepped forward and shot him. Another mamur infuriated the people by wishing to demolish the tomb of Sidi Suliman, in order to build a house on the site. He made all preparations for the work, but on the night before the building began he died mysteriously, possibly from poison. Another mamur imitated the Siwans in every way—eating, dressing and speaking as one. He kept his position for fourteen years, becoming very popular on account of the interest he took in the well-being of the people. But few of the mamurs were liked; they generally sided definitely with one faction or the other, which resulted in intrigue against them by the opposite faction, who tried to procure their dismissal.

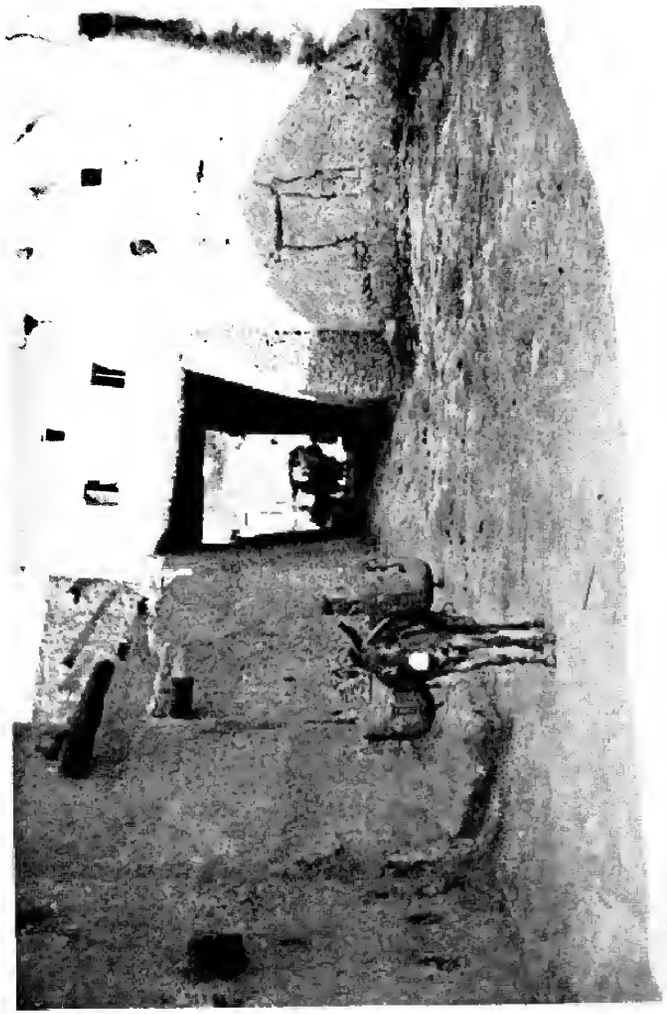
In 1896 Mustapha Mahr, Governor of the Behera Province, was dispatched to Siwa, with fifty soldiers, to inquire into certain disorders. He arrived to find Siwa in an uproar, the administration of justice at a standstill, and three years' taxes unpaid. A powerful western sheikh, Hassuna Mansur, had retired to his stronghold, Kasr

Hassuna, a fortress on an isolated rock south of the town, with a large number of slaves and adherents. He refused to pay taxes and defied the Egyptian Government. This individual became the nucleus of opposition. He was besieged; but friends among the besiegers supplied him with water, and even helped him when he sallied out from his fortress and carried away corn, sheep and cattle from the neighbourhood. The Turkish official was helpless. Mustapha Mahr and his fifty men were unable to cope with the rebel. On the advice of the sheikhs he appealed to the Senussi brethren at Jerabub, and very soon Sheikh Ahmed Ibn Idris, a relation by marriage to Sheikh El Senussi, appeared on the scene. The Turkish Commandant asked his assistance. Sheikh Ahmed ordered Hassuna to surrender, which he did at once, and after much discussion an agreement was made, signed by the Senussi sheikh, by which the Siwans promised to pay taxes, but on the condition that they should not be retrospective. The Senussi sheikh then returned triumphantly to Jerabub. This illustrates conclusively the power of the Senussi at this period. A few months later another dispute arose, about some goats, which ended in a battle between east and west, in which Hassuna Mansur was slain, and with him over 100 Siwans.

In 1898, five years after the death of this firebrand of the desert, another affair began which is known as the "Widow's War." The Omda of Siwa died leaving a son, Mohammed Said, and a wealthy young

widow of great personal attractions. An eastern Siwan, named Ahmed Hamza, wished to marry her. It was considered a suitable match, and all her relations approved, except her stepson, Mohammed Said, who was supported by the Medinia sect of Siwans, who had another prospective husband. One night she disappeared. It was found that she had fled to the house of Osman Habun, a very powerful western sheikh, the most influential man in Siwa, who was the representative of the Senussi. The son demanded his mother from the Habun family, who refused to surrender her. The war drums were beaten, and a fight between east and west was imminent. But at the last moment Habun surrendered the woman, who returned to her own house. On the next day she ran away again; this time she went to the house of a western Siwan, called Abdulla Mansur, whom she wished to marry, although she herself should have held no views on the subject. The whole town was disturbed by the widow's unseemly behaviour. Finally her stepson forced her to marry the man whom he had chosen, and the widow retired from the scene.

But Ahmed Hamza resented losing her, and in revenge, some of his friends attacked some relations of Mohammed Said's, on the road to Aghourmi, and killed two of them. Then Mohammed Said, with the easterners, raided the western gardens, and the westerners retaliated by carrying off sheep and cattle. The war drums were beaten, which signal meant that every man must be ready and armed within



CAVE IN TO THE WESTERN QUARTER

twenty-four hours; flags were displayed on the western hill and on the highest fort of the eastern quarter, and the doors leading into the street that divides the town were barred with palm logs. At the end of the twenty-four hours the eastern force assembled on Shali—the high town—and the western forces stationed themselves on their rock. The easterners opened fire and shot, by mistake, a small Arab boy. A truce was called while both parties discussed the compensation. But during the truce an eastern man, going out to his garden, was killed by a party of westerners, so the fight began again, both sides firing across the street with long, Arab guns and old-fashioned blunderbusses. The Turkish mamur and his little force retired to the Markaz, well out of harm's way.

The westerners had only one good spring within convenient reach of the town. They posted a guard round it, and the easterners, not expecting to meet with resistance, made a sortie, intending to capture the spring. The attacking party was beaten off and driven away from the town towards the gardens. The rest of the easterners, seeing their comrades in flight, came down from the town and followed after them. Then the entire western force, led by their chief, Osman Habun, on his great white war-horse, the only one in Siwa, surged out of the town, through the narrow gates, firing and shrieking, waving swords and spears, followed by their women throwing stones. Every able-bodied man and woman joined in the battle beneath the walls, and only a

few old men and children remained on the battlements watching the fight.

After a fierce combat, lasting for nearly a day, resulting in many casualties, the western force was beaten back towards the town, and "The Habun" found himself in danger of being captured. The western women had followed their men out from the town and were watching the battle from the gardens. Habun's mother, seeing her son in danger, collected a dozen women of his house and managed to get near him. He left his horse and slipped into the gardens where he joined the women. They dressed him as a girl, and with them he escaped to the tomb of Sidi Suliman, where he hid. While in hiding Habun communicated with the Senussi brethren at Jerabub, who intervened and patched up a peace. Nowadays, if one wants to insult one of the Habun family, there is no surer method than by inquiring who it was who escaped from a battle disguised as a woman.

After this the Egyptian Government realized that a stronger force was needed to keep order in Siwa, so they sent some more men and a few cavalry. The Senussi Government also tried to make a lasting peace between east and west. Sheikh Osman Habun, agent of the Senussi in Siwa, was at this time the most wealthy and powerful man in the oasis. He was a large landowner and employed a small army of slaves. He was related by marriage to most of the western sheikhs, and many of the Siwan notables were beholden to him for financial assistance. From his large fortified house in the

town he dominated the western faction, and his armoury included some modern weapons which he had stolen from a certain English traveller. In appearance he was a fine, handsome man, with a masterful manner and a commanding presence. When he went abroad a numerous retinue followed him, and he received visitors to his house with almost regal state. He married several times, and had nine sons and daughters.

Several years before the Great War a certain Arab called Abdel Arti, a notorious smuggler of hashish between Egypt and Tripoli, made a raid on some bedouins who camped at Lubbok, a little oasis where there is water and good grazing about eight miles south of Siwa, among the sand-dunes. He called at Lubbok to get water on his way to Egypt via the oasis of Bahrein. One of the bedouins came to Siwa and warned the mamur, who summoned the sheikhs and the people. Osman Habun was at this time an ally of Abdel Arti and knew his plans. The eastern people assembled, but the westerners delayed. Eventually, after many absurd excuses, Osman Habun arrived and accompanied the mamur and an armed party to Lubbok; but they found that the smugglers had escaped, carrying off several women and leaving two of the bedouins dead on the field. The delay caused by Osman Habun had saved Abdel Arti from capture. When they returned the mamur held a court on Osman Habun and threatened to depose him and make another man omda in his place. Habun retired to his house

and sulked, refusing to appear again when summoned by the mamur. One of Habun's sons was ordered to bring his father to the Markaz, but he returned with a message that being the month of Ramadan his father was fasting and could not go out.

Then the mamur, with his few soldiers and some Sudanese camel corps, followed by a shouting mob of Siwans, went up the steep, dark streets that lead to the house of "The Habun." By the time that they had arrived night had fallen. They found the great wooden door locked and barred, and the house full of armed men, but they managed to break in the door and enter the ground floor. But the stairs were strongly barricaded, so they went outside and lit lanterns while they discussed what to do. Then the soldiers started firing up at the windows, and the defenders fired back, people in the adjoining houses joining in. The soldiers retreated under some buildings across the lane, but as they did this the mamur was shot and left lying in the narrow alley. A Camel Corps man dashed out and dragged him into shelter. Meanwhile Osman Habun had escaped by a private door through the mosque behind the house. Eventually the soldiers entered the building and captured the defenders. Osman Habun attempted to escape through the town to Jerabub, but he was caught by Sheikh Mohammed Said, his rival of the eastern faction, and brought a prisoner to the Markaz where the mamur lay dying. He was tried for the murder of the mamur, found

guilty, and hanged, and his eldest son, Hammado, was awarded penal servitude. He is still alive, in prison at Tura.

Osman Habun was one of the biggest men that Siwa ever produced, though he had many bad qualities. The Siwans say that he sacrificed himself for his son, Hammado, being an old man and not willing to see his son hanged, though Hammado is said to have killed the mamur. Abdel Arti, the cause of the trouble, had a fight with some of the Egyptian Coastguard Camel Corps, and killed one of them. They met him again among the desolate sand-dunes south of Siwa, and killed him, together with several of his followers. Their graves are distinguishable—rough stone cairns—on the unmapped desert where a route from Egypt to Tripoli is still called "Abdel Arti's Road."

(4)

FOURTH PERIOD

Siwa and the War

The history of the British operations on the Western Desert of Egypt against the Senussi in 1915–1917 has been well described in several books, and by people who were actually present at the various engagements. I was not there at the time, so I am unable to give a first-hand account of it, but no history of Siwa would be complete without a sketch of the principal events of that campaign, which was

one of the most brilliant and successful "side-shows" of the Great War, and has left a lasting impression on the Arabs of the Western Desert, which will be remembered for many years to come.

After the war in Tripoli between the Italians and the Turks, in 1911, the suzerainty of Italy over Tripoli was formally acknowledged at the Treaty of Lausanne, but although the whole of the country became an Italian possession only the coastal towns were held firmly. The Arabs in the south, and the Berber inhabitants of the various oases, strongly resented the Italian rule, and for this reason the seeds of propaganda sown by Turkish and German agents found fertile soil among the natives of Tripoli.

Germany had for a long time cast envious eyes on North Africa, and early in the war the Germans seem to have hoped that by their influence in the country they could stir the Arabs to sweep their much-hated Italian masters off the coast, and to advance against Egypt from the west. At the outbreak of war the Arabs in the south listened readily to the Turkish agents, who encouraged them with arms and money to revolt against the Italians and to take part in the Holy War, which was declared by the Sultan of Turkey against the English and the Allies. But the most important military and political factor on the Libyan Desert was the Senussi confraternity, and they, up to this time, had been decidedly pro-British.

The Senussi confraternity was founded by Sidi Mohammed Ben Ali es Senussi, who was born of

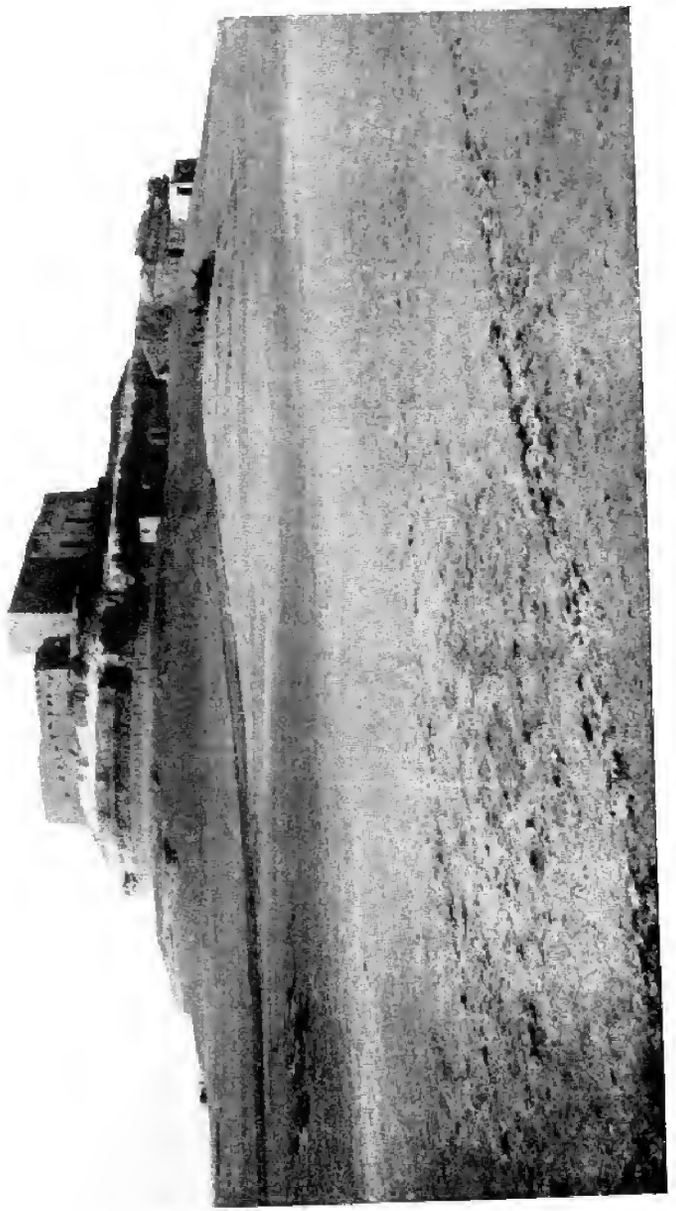
Berber stock, but claimed descent from the Prophet, in Algeria, in 1787. In 1821 he went to Fez and became known as an ascetic religious who held severely to the simple teachings of the Koran. Just before the French occupation of Algeria he left his country and began travelling in North Africa, teaching his doctrine of a pure form of Islam. The occupation of his native country by Unbelievers probably contributed to the dislike of Christians which characterized his later life. After spending some years in North Africa he went to Cairo and settled at El Azhar, the great Mohammedan university of Egypt, but his strict ideals found no favour and his teaching was condemned by the Ulema. From Cairo he went to Mecca, where he studied with Sidi Ahmed Ibn Idris el Fasi, the leader of the Khadria confraternity, which had some influence in Morocco. On the death of Sidi Ahmed, Mohammed es Senussi became head of the sect and travelled for some years among the bedouins of the Hedjaz. But his doctrines were too peaceable for these fierce Arabs, and in 1838 he returned to the west and settled at Siwa.

In Siwa he inhabited the caves in the limestone rock below the Kasr Hassuna, living in one of them and using the other as an oratory. With his own hands he carved out the nitch—or "mihrab"—which faces Mecca. During his sojourn at Siwa he became very ill and at one time he almost died. The people of Siwa accepted his teachings with enthusiasm, and since then the greater proportion of

the population have been ardent Senussiya. For this reason it has always been considered very dangerous for anybody who is not exceedingly religious and virtuous to inhabit these caves in the Kasr Hassuna.

When I was in the Kasr one of my servants asked for permission to live in the cave. I reminded him of the superstition, but allowed him to do so. It was most disastrous; after about a month he moved out and complained to me of the persistent misfortune that had dogged him. His wife ran away, he became ill, he had some money stolen from him, and was badly bitten by a tarantula. Another man, who had a reputation in the Section for being particularly religious, moved in, but he only remained a week, and after that the caves were left severely alone. None of the Siwans would live in this place under any consideration, and the Siwan wife of my Sudanese orderly lived in a little hut outside the entrance.

After eight months in Siwa Mohammed es Senussi went on to Jalo and came into contact with the Zouias, a fierce and warlike race of Arabs who held various oases in southern Tripoli. They adopted his teachings, and in 1844 he founded his first zawia—religious centre—at El Beda, where his eldest son was born. From this centre the Senussi brethren carried their teachings all over Africa, travelling with the great caravans of the merchants who traded in slaves, ivory, arms, etc., between the Sudan, Tripoli, Wadai and Egypt. Gradually they grew to be regarded as arbitrators in disputes, and important cases were brought to Mohammed es Senussi for his



"KASR HASSUNA," THE DISTRICT OFFICER'S HOUSE

judgment. They successfully combined the duties of merchants and magistrates, acquiring great wealth and great influence. The Senussi were at all times opposed to luxury and intolerant of Unbelievers; they claimed that their form of Mohammedanism was more pure than any other, and as far as possible they kept aloof from politics.

In 1852 Mohammed es Senussi returned to Mecca, and shortly afterwards he formally excommunicated the Sultan of Turkey. In 1856 he came, for the last time, to Jerabub, ninety miles west of Siwa. He died here three years later and was buried in the tomb in the mosque. At the time of his death his prestige was enormous; pilgrims travelled many thousands of miles to visit Jerabub, and Senussism had spread all over Central and North Africa. The Senussi zawias became rich from the profits of trading and owned large numbers of slaves, also arms and ammunition were imported from Turkey, landed on the Tripoli coast and taken down to the south. One of the greatest authorities on the Senussi estimated their numbers at between one and a half and three millions at the time of the death of Mohammed es Senussi. But their importance as a military factor was not great; being spread over such a vast area they lacked cohesion, and any combined action would be almost an impossibility.

Mohammed es Senussi left two sons, Mohammed el Mahdi and Mohammed el Sherif. The former succeeded his father as the leader of the Senussi. He spent a considerable part of his life at Jerabub,

acquiring great wealth and strengthening his influence by peaceable penetration. In 1884 he refused to help the Sudanese Mahdi, who appealed to the Senussi for assistance in driving the English out of Egypt. If the Senussi had risen then and joined with the Sudanese the position of Egypt would have been very dangerous. Mohammed el Mahdi died in 1902 and was succeeded by his nephew, Sayed Ahmed, as the son of Mohammed el Mahdi was still a boy.

When Sayed Ahmed succeeded, the French were pushing their conquests inland from the coast, and the Turks were also advancing southwards in Tripoli. Sayed Ahmed did all he could to oppose them, but gradually he was forced to retire. One by one the various zawias were occupied, till finally the Senussi chief was driven back to Kufra and Jerabub. In 1911 Sayed Ahmed allied himself to the Turks, although the Senussi had always been at enmity with them, and when the Italians landed on the Tripoli coast the Senussi supported the Turks in the war against the Italians, and when the Turks were finally beaten the Senussi in the interior became once more practically independent.

In the summer of 1915 the Senussi were still ostensibly at peace with Egypt and Britain, but the pro-German agents had successfully fomented an anti-British feeling, and the Arabs were being armed and organized by German and Turkish officers who landed in submarines—from Constantinople—evaded the Italians on the coast, and went down south into

the Senussi country. The British and Italian alliance was an incentive to the Arabs in Tripoli, who bitterly resented the Italian occupation of their country.

Sollum, the frontier post, was garrisoned by a small detachment of the Egyptian army and the Coastguards, native troops with two or three English officers. In August, 1915, the crews of two English submarines, wrecked on the coast west of Sollum, were fired upon by the Senussi, but Sayed Ahmed apologized and declared that he did not know what nationality the men were. In the autumn it was known that the British attempt at Gallipoli was doomed; there was a danger of disturbances in Egypt, and the Turks attacked the Suez Canal.

On November 5th the *Tara*, an armed patrol boat, was torpedoed off Sollum. Three of her boats came ashore a few miles west of the frontier, and ninety-two men of the crew were captured by some Senussi Arabs and carried inland to a place called Bir Hakim, a well which lies about seventy miles south of the coast; here they were kept prisoners for several months, and during this time they suffered the most excessive privations at the hands of their captors. They were so badly fed that they were forced to eat snails, which are very plentiful in some parts of the desert; several men died, and their attempts to escape were in all cases unsuccessful. The history of their sufferings and adventures forms the subject of two books written by one of the survivors on his return home. Even after this incident Sidi Ahmed

continued to protest his friendship for the British, and disclaimed any knowledge of the whereabouts of the *Tara's* crew.

About this time large numbers of Arabs began to collect on the high desert above Sollum. The garrison was slightly reinforced and some armoured cars came up the coast from Egypt. On November 23rd Sollum was attacked by a numerous force of Senussi, armed with a miscellaneous collection of fire-arms and some old guns. The garrison was evacuated on to the *Rasheed*, an Egyptian gunboat, during a heavy sand-storm, and on the same day the garrison of Barrani was taken down the coast on another boat. They landed at Matruh, which was put into a state of defence, and the garrison was very soon considerably augmented by British troops who were hurried up from Alexandria in trawlers and in cars from the railhead. A few days after they arrived at Matruh some of the men of the Egyptian Coast-guards went over to the enemy, and Colonel Snow Bey, of the Coastguards, was shot while speaking to some so-called friendly Arabs on a reconnaissance.

Colonel Snow and Major Royle, another officer of the Coastguards who lost his life later in the war, after joining the Flying Corps, were both very well known on the Western Desert. As a rule, the bedouins do not talk much of the Englishmen who lived and served among them, but even now, several years later, one constantly hears these two names mentioned round the camp fires of the Arabs.

While the British force was building up the defences of Matruh, the Senussi collected a few miles west of the town. On December 13th the garrison advanced against the enemy, and a force of about 1300 Senussi was cleared out from a long wadi and driven off with heavy casualties. On this occasion a squadron of Yeomanry, who were fired on from a gully, charged at the enemy and came suddenly on a deep and unexpected drop.

Towards the end of the month another large force of Arabs, under the command of Gaffar Pasha, a Germanized Turk and a very capable officer, occupied a valley called Wadi Majid, near Matruh. It appeared that they intended attacking Matruh on Christmas Day, when they supposed that the garrison would be eating and drinking—though, as it happened, there was not even any beer in the town. On Christmas Eve the British force, consisting of part of a New Zealand brigade, some Sikhs, Australian Light Horse and British Yeomanry, supported by aeroplanes and naval ships, which shelled the enemy from the coast, went out of Matruh and fought a successful action on Christmas Day. The Arab camp was destroyed, and the enemy were beaten off with heavy casualties. After the engagement the British force returned to Matruh. By this time the usual winter weather had begun ; floods of rain fell on the coast, filling the wadis, swamping the roads and turning the country into a morass. Once again the enemy concentrated, at a place about 26 miles west of Matruh. They were located by

aeroplanes, attacked and again driven westward. On February 26th another engagement took place at Agagia, near Barrani. The enemy lost heavily and Gaffar Pasha, the Commander of the Senussi army, was captured during a brilliant charge which was made by the Dorset Yeomanry. After this defeat Sayed Ahmed, the Senussi chief, with a number of his supporters and a huge quantity of baggage, retired from the coast, which was getting too hot for him, and trekked across the desert down to Siwa, travelling in great comfort with gramophones, clocks, brass bedsteads and a large harem !

On arrival at Siwa he settled himself in the Kasr Hassuna, but he lived in a very different style to his ancestor, the original Mohammed es Senussi. A renegade Coastguard officer, Mohammed Effendi Saleh, was appointed as his second in command. At first the Siwans welcomed Sayed Ahmed with great enthusiasm, but their feelings rapidly changed when the ill-disciplined mob that made up his army took to spoiling the gardens and robbing the people. Mohammed Saleh had been in Siwa before and he knew exactly how much money the various inhabitants had. This acquaintance with everybody's financial position was of great use when he began to extort money from the natives. Those who could not or would not pay were beaten in the market-place and forcibly enlisted into the army; those who paid a little were made corporals and officers, and only the people who gave much money were exempt from service. The richest sheikhs and

merchants were presented with Turkish and German medals and orders and promoted to Pashas and Beys. The officers of the Senussi force attired themselves in bright green putties, which they manufactured from the green baize tablecloths in the offices of the Markaz; all the files and the Government furniture, etc., was seized by Sayed Ahmed, who carried it about with him during the rest of the campaign, eventually leaving it at Jerabub when he finally left the country.

Meanwhile the campaign on the coast was going badly for the Senussi. Barrani was occupied after the battle of Agagia, and from there the British force, reinforced by the Duke of Westminster and his armoured cars, pushed on towards Sollum, which was occupied on the 14th of March. Sollum was captured by a rear attack from above the Scarp, armoured cars and troops having managed to find a way up the cliffs by a steep, precipitous pass known as " Negb Halfia," or " Hell Fire Pass," as it was afterwards called. The Senussi blew up their large ammunition dump at Bir Wær, on the frontier, and the remains of their army were driven over the desert for many miles, pursued by the British cars, which scattered them far and wide and inspired all the Arabs with a holy dread of "Trombiles "—motors—which will never be forgotten. The capture of Sollum virtually ended the fighting on the coast; after that only Siwa remained to be cleared out. The country was full of fugitives and their starving families, who were fed and provided for by the

British. Arab women flocked round the garrisons at Sollum and Matruh offering their silver ornaments and jewellery in exchange for food.

On April 16th, much to the relief of the inhabitants, Sayed Ahmed left Siwa *en route* for the Dakhla oasis. He took with him most of the able-bodied men in the place, as well as a number of Senussi soldiers and many camel loads of luggage. The Siwans were expected to bring their own food, but by this time they were reduced to such a state of poverty that they had not even enough dates to support themselves. A number of men died on the road, and still more deserted and made their way back to the oasis. Sayed Ahmed stayed for several months at Dakhla and then returned to Siwa, hurrying back like a hunted hare. On each of these little desert trips the Grand Sheikh shed a little of his baggage.

During his absence from Siwa the sheikhs of the Medinia sect organized a very successful little rebellion. The people revolted against the Senussi sheikhs who had been left in charge, drove them into the Markaz, and besieged them for two days. Eventually peace was made, but not before the Senussi sheikhs had sent frantic messages to Sayed Ahmed complaining of the scandalous behaviour of the Siwans and imploring him to return. The Siwans at the same time sent letters to Sayed Ahmed with complaints against his sheikhs who had stayed in Siwa to keep order. The messengers met on the road and journeyed together till they came upon

Sayed Ahmed and his party between Dakhla and Siwa. They handed their letters to the sheikh and he read them together. The news of the "goings-on" at Siwa hastened his return.

Once again he established himself in the Kasr Hassuna. Here he indulged in severe religious observances and urged the people to pray for divine help against the Unbelievers who had destroyed the Senussi army on the coast. In January Sayed Ahmed and Mohammed Saleh, his second in command, were considering retiring to Jerabub, so as to be still further away from the British. On the 2nd of February a force of armoured cars, lorries and light cars arrived a few miles north of Girba, a little oasis in a deep rocky valley north-west of Siwa. On the following day the cars successfully descended the pass and attacked the enemy camp at Girba. The Senussi were absolutely astounded. They had already learnt to fear the British cars, but they never for one moment thought it possible that a large force of motors could dash across the desert from the coast, almost 200 miles, and attack them in their stronghold. Owing to the rocky ground the cars were unable to get at close quarters with the enemy. The action lasted a whole day. The Senussi, who numbered about 800, were under the command of Mohammed Saleh, and another force of about 500 men were at Siwa with Sayed Ahmed. At the first alarm the Grand Sheikh bundled himself and his belongings on to camels and fled frantically over the sand-dunes towards Jerabub, followed by a straggling

mob of Arabs. On the evening of the 4th the enemy began to retire from their position at Girba, burning arms and ammunition before evacuating, and on the 5th of February the cars entered Siwa and the British force was received by the sheikhs and notables at the Markaz with expressions of relief and goodwill. The column left the town on the same day and reached " Concentration Point," north of Girba, on the following day.

Another detachment had been sent to a pass above the western end of the oasis in order to intercept the fugitives, but only a few cars were able to get down from the high country above, but the one Light Car Patrol which did descend managed to cut off a number of the enemy who were retreating to the west. On the 8th February the whole column went back to Sollum. The enemy's losses were 40 killed, including 2 Senussi officers, and 200 wounded, including 5 Turkish officers. Sayed Ahmed and Mohammed Saleh both escaped, but after this crushing defeat, and the capture of the Siwa oasis, all danger from the Senussi forces was at an end.

Some time previously, after the occupation of Sollum by the British, information was found as to the whereabouts of the prisoners from the *Tara*, who had been joined by the survivors of the *Moorina*, who had also landed on the coast and had been captured by the Arabs. A force of armoured cars and other cars, under the command of the Duke of Westminster, set off on the 17th from Sollum with a native guide. They dashed across the desert to Bir

Hakim, rescued the prisoners and brought them back to Sollum, having travelled across some 120 miles of unknown desert and attacked an enemy whose numbers they did not know. This gallant enterprise was perhaps the most brilliant affair which occurred during the operations on the Western Desert. The Duke of Westminster received the D.S.O. for his exploit, and was recommended for the Victoria Cross.

After the capture of Siwa there was no more fighting on the Western Desert. Sollum, Matruh and the various stations on the coast were garrisoned with British infantry, gunners and Camel Corps, and a standing camp of Light Cars was made at Siwa, where they remained for some time. The F.D.A. took over the Administration of the Western Desert, and gradually the garrisons were withdrawn and replaced by F.D.A. Camel Corps. To-day there only remains one small detachment of Light Car Patrols in the fort at Sollum.

Sayed Ahmed and Mohammed Saleh were never captured. The Grand Sheikh's progress terminated on the Tripoli coast, where he was met by a Turkish submarine and carried over to Constantinople. He was received by the Sultan and has remained there ever since, an exile from his native land, probably regretting that he ever allowed himself to be persuaded to throw in his lot with the Turks.

Sayed Ahmed did not distinguish himself in this campaign. Whenever he thought that the fighting was too near he hurriedly retired to some more distant place. His cowardly conduct was to a

certain extent responsible for the failure of his troops; he never took part in the fighting and never led them in person. His behaviour was very different to that of Ali Dinar, Sultan of Darfur, in the Sudan, who was also persuaded by the Turks to rebel against the English at the same time. The latter showed considerable personal courage, and was killed on the field at the end of the war. Sayed Ahmed was succeeded by his cousin, Sidi Mohammed Idris, the son of Mohammed el Madhi, who had always shown himself to be strongly pro-British, and had carefully refrained from taking any part in the Senussi rising and the subsequent campaign. An agreement was drawn up by the British and the Italians which arranged that Idris should be responsible for keeping order inland, and that he should receive money and assistance. This arrangement has been in force up to now, and is in every way a success.

SHEIKH MOHAMMED IDRIS, THE CHIEF OF THE SENUSSI

CHAPTER IV

SIWA TOWN

"Through sun-proof alleys,
In a lone, sand hemm'd
City of Africa."

SIWA town is like no other place that I have seen either in Egypt, Palestine or the Sudan. It is built on a great rock in the centre of the oasis, and from a distance it resembles an ancient castle whose rugged battlements tower above the forests of waving palm trees, and the rich green cultivation. It is somewhat similar to St. Michael's Mount, but the inside of the town reminds one more of those enormous ant hills which are found in Central Africa. The houses are built of mud, mixed with salt, with occasional large blocks of stone from the temples let into the walls. The builder works without a line, gradually adding to the wall, sitting astride the part which he has completed, so few of the walls are straight. Another architectural peculiarity is that owing to the necessity of constructing walls thicker at the base than at the top most of the houses, especially the minarets of the mosques, become narrower towards the summit. The houses are built one above the other against the face of the rock, and the outer walls form one great

line of battlements, pierced by little groups of windows, encircling the town, and rising sheer above the ground, in some places to a height of almost 200 feet. The original site of the town was the summit and sides of two limestone rocks which rise abruptly from the level of the plain; but as the population increased more houses were built on the top of the old ones, and the town, instead of spreading, began to ascend into the air, house upon house, street upon street, and quarter upon quarter, till it became more like a bee-hive than a town. Fathers built houses for their sons above the parental abode, till their great-grandsons reached a dizzy height on the topmost battlements. The mud of which the walls were built gradually hardened and became almost of the consistency of the original rock.

In course of time the inside of the town has become a vast warren of houses connected by steep, twisting tunnels, very similar to the workings in a coal mine, where one needs to carry a light even in daytime, and two persons can scarcely walk abreast. This labyrinthine maze of dark, narrow passages, with little low doors of split palm logs opening into them from the tenements above, forms the old town of Siwa. In some places the walls are partly ruined and one gets little views of the green oasis, or the lower part of the town with its flat roofs and square enclosures, framed by the jagged ruined masonry. It took me nearly two years to know my way about this part of the town, at the expense of hitting

my head many times against the palm log beams supporting the low roofs which are in most cases only about 5 feet high.

This human warren is surprisingly clean and free from the smells that one would expect in a place where there is such an absence of light and ventilation. One of the most curious things that one notices is the subdued hum of human voices, from invisible people, and the perpetual sound of stone-grinding mills, above, below and all around. When one meets people, groping along these tortuous passages, they loom into sight, silently, white robed, like ghosts, and pass with a murmured greeting to their gloomy homes. It is a great relief after stooping and slipping and barking one's shins to reach the open roof on the highest tower of the town where, for a moment, the brilliant sunlight dazzles one's eyes, accustomed to the murky gloom of the lower regions. When, on rare occasions, I had visitors, I used always to take them up to see the view from the highest battlements, with a few stout Sudanese Camel Corps men to help pull, push and propel the sightseers. But most of them, especially the elderly colonel type, were too hot and exhausted to appreciate the view when they finally arrived, so I eventually kept this "sight" for only the most active visitors.

High up in the heart of the town, in a little open space surrounded by tall grim houses, there is an ancient well cut out of the solid rock. It contains excellent water. Apparently there is a spring in the

centre of the rock which supplies the well, and two smaller ones close by. Half-way down the well, about 30 feet from the top, just above the level of the water, there is a small entrance, wide enough to admit a boy, which leads into a narrow tunnel bored through the rock, terminating in the precincts of a mosque on the level ground. Nobody has traversed this passage for many years, owing to fear of snakes —which certainly exist, also jinns and afreets. The tunnel is about 150 yards long, and must have taken years to complete, but it is difficult to guess its original object. This old well is specially popular with women, as by drawing water here they can avoid going out to the springs where they would necessarily meet with men. Often when I passed out from the narrow entrance of a passage I would see a dozen women busy with their pitchers, veils cast aside, laughing and chattering—in a moment, like magic, every one would have silently vanished, and only the eyes peering from the adjoining windows would show any signs of life.

Below the old high town, huddled at the base of the mighty walls, there are more houses, and these, too, are surrounded by an outer wall. Beyond this more modern houses have been built when there was less fear of raids from hostile Arabs. Most of the sheikhs and the rich merchants have deserted the high town and built large, comfortable houses down below, or among the gardens in the adjoining suburbs of Sebukh and Manshia. Many of them have also country houses, where they retire in the

summer when the heat in the town becomes intolerable, on their estates in different parts of the oasis. Residences of sheikhs and notables are distinguished by a strip of whitewash across the front, but woe betide a poor man if he decorates his house in a like manner. Tombs of sheikhs and holy men are whitewashed all over every year, at public expense. One of the most wealthy, and most unpopular, merchants covered the whole of his house with whitewash. This innovation caused grave disapproval among the conservative sheikhs of Siwa. They complained to me, saying that from time immemorial the notables had distinguished their houses by the strip of whitewash, but nobody had ever whitened the whole house—therefore nobody should ! When a few days later some thieves broke into the " whitewashed sepulchre " and stole twelve pounds, the whole population agreed that it was a just retribution on unseemly pride.

The three date markets are large walled-in squares where every merchant and family have a space to spread their dates for sale ; one of them is common, the other two belong to east and west respectively. There is a little house by the entrance of each market where an old Sudanese watchman lives, paid in kind by contributions from everybody who uses the market. In the autumn thousands of Arabs come from Egypt and the west to buy dates, which are considered among the best in Egypt. Round the markets there are enclosures for camels and lodgings for the Arabs, who are only tolerated in the town

because they come to trade. At the height of the season there is a busy scene. Hundreds of white-robed Arabs wander among the heaps of red, brown and yellow dates, arguing and bargaining loudly, while their camels gurgle and snarl outside, and over everything there rises a swarm of flies. Half-naked negroes toil and sweat as they load the camels with white palm-leaf baskets pressed down and full with sticky dates. Lively diversions occur when a shrill-voiced she-camel shakes off her load and runs wildly through the crowd, scattering the people, with her long neck stretched out like an agitated goose. Arab ponies squeal and shriek, donkeys bray and the pariah dogs snarl and yelp. There is a custom in Siwa that anybody may eat freely from the dates in the markets, but nobody is allowed to take any away ; so the beggars, who are very numerous, crawl in among the buyers, clutching greedily with filthy hands at the best dates, and adding their whining complaints to the general din. Also all the dogs, children, chickens, goats and pigeons feed from the dates before the owners sell them. The most popular form of date food is a sort of " mush," which consists of a solid mass of compressed dates with most, but not all, of the stones removed. I used to like dates, but after an hour in the markets one never wishes to eat another.

The square white tomb of Sidi Suliman dominates the date markets. Although not actually a mosque it is the most venerated building in Siwa. Around it there are a few white tombstones, and on most nights

the building is illuminated with candles burnt by votaries at the shrine of the saint. Close by there is a large unfinished mosque which was built by the ex-Khedive, who left off the work owing to lack of funds. Mosques in Siwa are conspicuous by their curious minarets, which remind one of small factory chimneys, or brick kilns ; otherwise they are very similar to houses, except that they generally include a large court with a roof supported by mud pillars. In several of the mosques there are schools, and one sees a number of small boys sitting on the ground, with bored expressions, droning long verses of the Koran in imitation of the old sheikh who teaches them.

Lately the " Powers that Be " decided that a regular school would be beneficial to the youth of Siwa. With some difficulty I secured a building and a teacher. The school began in great style. Almost every boy in the town attended. They learnt reading and writing, and after sunset they did " physical jerks " and drill, marching round the market square, much to the admiration of their parents. But the novelty palled. Attendance diminished. Attendance at school was to be quite voluntary, so I could do nothing. In about a month it had ceased to exist, and the little boys sat again at the feet of the old sheikhs in the mosque schools. Such is the conservatism of Siwa.

Shopping in Siwa is very simple. Each shop is a general shop and contains exactly the same as the others. Prices do not vary, so one deals exclusively

with one merchant; the shops are sprinkled about the town and the customers of each are the people who live nearest. The shops themselves are hardly noticeable. There is no display of goods, nothing in fact to distinguish a shop. One enters a little door and the room inside looks rather more like a storeroom than a living room; sometimes there is a rough counter, some shelves and a weighing machine, but measures consist mostly of little baskets which are recognized as containing certain quantities. The sacks and cases round the room contain flour, beans, tea, rice and sugar; in one corner there are some rolls of calico and a bundle of coloured handkerchiefs hung on a nail from the ceiling.

In the storeroom which opens out of the shop there are more sacks, tins of oil, and perhaps a bundle of bedouin blankets. Yet some of the Siwan merchants clear over a thousand pounds a year by their shops and a little trade in dates. Egyptian money is used, the silver being much preferred to the paper currency, and credit is allowed, which enables the merchants to obtain mortgages and eventually possession of some of their customers' gardens.

The merchants' wives attend to the lady customers. There is a side door in every shop which leads to an upper room, and here the Siwan ladies buy their clothes, served by the wife or mother of the merchant. Their purchases are mainly "kohl" for darkening the eyes, henna for ornamenting fingers and hands, silver ornaments, soft scarlet leather

shoes and boots, blue cotton material manufactured at Kerdassa, near Gizeh, grey shawls, silks for embroidery, dyes for colouring baskets and very expensive flashy silk handkerchiefs made in Manchester, which they wear round their heads when indoors. Some of the merchants' wives sell charms and amulets besides clothes. The women are very conservative in their fashions, only certain colours being worn. I once wanted a piece of green material to use in making a flag. I sent to every single shop in the town, but without success. However, it caused great excitement, and I heard, on the following day, that the gossips of the town had come to the conclusion that I was going to marry, and the green stuff was to be part of the lady's trousseau. They were disappointed.

There is nothing in Siwa that compares with the gorgeous bazaars of Cairo, or the gaily decked shops in the markets of provincial towns. These dark little shops have no colour, only a queer, rather pleasant smell, a potpourri of incense, spices, herbs, onions, olive oil and coffee. Meat is bought direct from the butchers, who combine and kill a sheep or a camel. Sugar and tea are the most popular necessities on the market. During the war, and for some time after, there was a sugar shortage. The supply for Siwa arrived at the coast, but rarely reached the oasis. When a small quantity did reach Siwa it was bought up immediately, and the merchants who obtained it took to gross profiteering. The price of an oke ($2\frac{1}{2}$ lbs.) reached as much as 40 piastres (8s.),

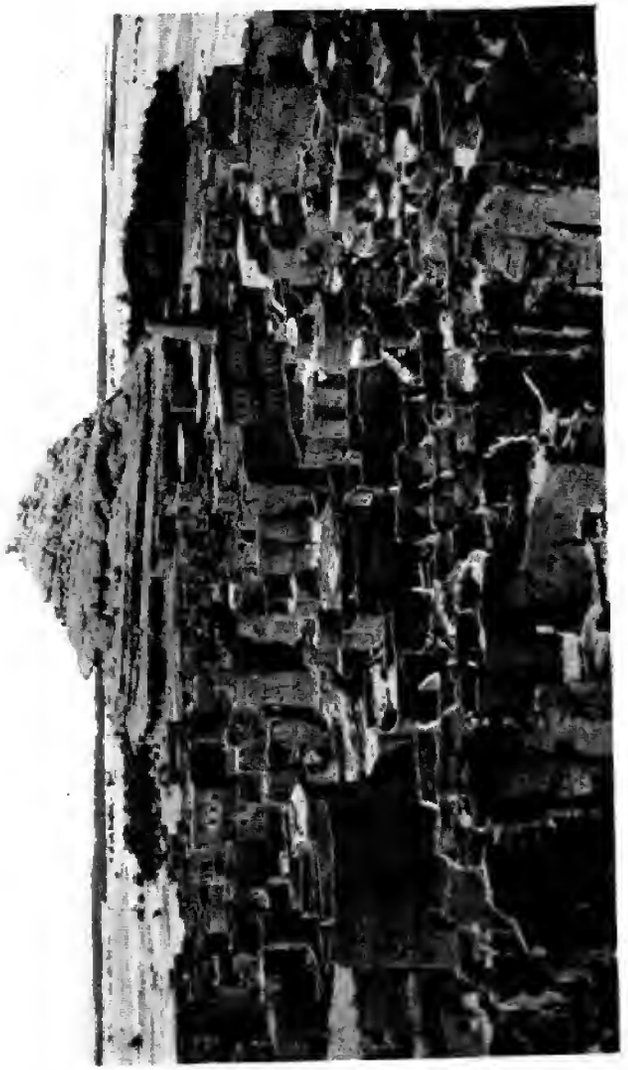
which in Egypt is an excessively high price. Eventually the sale of sugar was supervised by the Government and sugar tickets were issued. Even then there were cases of sugar being smuggled across the frontier to Tripoli, where the shortage was even more severe. Arabs or Siwans are simply miserable if they have to go without sugar in their tea. It makes them cross and tiresome, and they say themselves that it injures their health. For the rest people depend on their garden produce, on dates, onions, fruit and coarse native bread. The women make their own clothes, and generally their husbands' too, sometimes weaving the wool for the long " jibbas," worn by the working men, on rough hand-looms. There is a carpenter in the town and several masons, but as a shopping " centre " Siwa is not much of a catch.

Although Siwan houses are unprepossessing from the outside their interiors are comparatively comfortable. What I personally objected to was the exceeding lowness of the doors, and yet the Siwans on the whole are tall. They told me that doors were made small for the sake of warmth. Roughly the houses are built on the usual Arab pattern; on the ground floor there are storerooms, stables, and servants' quarters, upstairs there are guest-rooms, harem, and living rooms. The entrance hall has seats of mud similar to the walls, and is usually screened from sight by a corner inside the door. Stairs are steep and narrow with sudden sharp turnings; they are always pitch dark, as only the rooms in the outer

walls receive any light. Each house consists of two or three storeys and above them there is an open roof, sometimes with several rooms built on to it. The old houses of the high town are different, only those on the topmost level have open roofs. The immense thickness of the walls makes the houses cool in summer when the temperature often reaches 112 degrees in the shade, and warm in winter when icy winds sweep down from the high desert plateau. The rooms in the houses of the better classes are large and high, lit by little square windows, which are made in groups of three, one above and two below in order not to put unnecessary strain on the masonry. Each window has four divisions with a shutter to each division; these shutters are kept open in summer-time. The windows are very low, a few feet above the level of the floor, which allows people sitting on the ground to see out of them. The ceilings are made of palm trunks covered with rushes and a layer of mud; the ends of the trunks, if they are too long, project outside the walls and serve as pegs on which to hang bundles of bones to avert the " Evil Eye." Mud, which becomes as hard as cement, is used not only for the walls, but for the stairs, the divans, ovens, and most of the kitchen utensils. Old stone coffins, discovered near the temple or in some of the rock tombs, are utilized as water-troughs in most houses. The floors are covered with palm matting, and an occasional old Turkish or Persian carpet; the divans are furnished with a few cushions, white bolster-like objects, or beautifully stamped

leather from the Sudan. The walls are whitewashed and sometimes ornamented with crude coloured frescoes, and in almost every room there are several heavy wooden chests, handsomely carved, sometimes of great age, which are used for keeping valuables. Occasionally one sees a couple of chairs and a round tin table, like those which are used outside cafés, but personally I have always felt much more comfortable sitting cross-legged on a heap of cushions near the window than perched up on a rickety chair above my hosts. A brass tray, a low round table, a few baskets and an earthenware lamp hanging on the wall, completes the furniture of a guest-room. I have spent many pleasant hours sitting in one of these high rooms looking out over the feathery palm trees and watching the colours change as the sun sank behind the mountains, gossiping to some old sheikh, puffing a cigarette, and drinking little cups of sweet, green tea.

In summer-time the people sleep on the flat roofs of their houses, which for that reason are surrounded by low mud walls to ensure privacy from the neighbours. They lie on the roofs, men, women and children, always with their faces covered from the moon, because they say moonlight on sleeping faces causes madness. In the daytime the women gossip on the housetops and carry on intrigues, for there is nothing easier than hopping over the walls from one roof to the other, and it is not considered *comme il faut* for husbands to frequent the roofs in daytime. Often when I climbed up to the citadel and looked



THE WESTERN QUARTER FROM AN EASTERN ROOF

down over the town I saw a group of girls sitting on the roofs, generally singing and dressing each other's hair. When they caught sight of an intruder watching them from above they bolted down the steep stairs like rabbits to their burrows. One sees real rabbits, too. Almost all the natives breed them, and for safety's sake they are kept on the housetops.

One of the features of Siwa town are the "Dululas," or sun shelters. They consist of spaces shaded from the sun by a roof of rushes and mud, supported by mud pillars. Often in the centre there is a stone basin containing water, which is kept always full at the expense of one of the sheikhs in memory of a deceased relation. Here the greybeards of the town assemble in the evenings, strangers sit and gossip when they visit the town, and the Camel Corps men wander through to hear the latest news. It is a sort of public club, and one hears even more gossip than at a club at home. The largest of these sun shelters has become a little market, and a few decrepit old men spread out their wares in its shade—a few baskets, a dozen onions, an old silk, tattered waistcoat and some red pepper would be the stock-in-trade of one of these hawkers. What they say in the "suk" corresponds to the "bazaar talk" in India, and it is incredible how soon the most secret facts are known there.

The Siwans are a distinct race quite apart from the Arabs of the Western Desert, but in appearance they differ very slightly from their bedouin neighbours. Owing to their isolated dwelling-place they have

retained their original language, which appears to be an aboriginal Berber dialect. They are unquestionably the remnants of an aboriginal people of Berber stock, but constant intermarriage with outsiders has obliterated any universal feature in their appearance, and through intermarriage with Sudanese they have acquired a darker complexion and in some few cases negroid features. On the whole one does not see the Arab type, or the Fellah, or the Coptic type among the Siwans.

The men are tall and powerfully built, with slightly fairer complexions than the Arabs. In some cases they have light straight hair and blue eyes, and one whole family has red hair and pink cheeks, though they themselves do not know where this originated. Most of the younger men are singularly ugly and have a fierce and bestial expression, but with age they improve, and the elders of the town are pleasant, dignified-looking men, though effeminate in their manners. The children are pallid and unhealthy in appearance. The Siwans have high cheek-bones, straight noses, and short, weak chins. They are very conceited and think much of their looks; on feast days even the oldest men darken their eyes with "kohl" and soak themselves with evil-smelling scent.

The wealthy Siwans wear the usual Arab dress—white robes, a long silk shawl twisted round the body and flung over one shoulder, a soft red, blue-tasselled cap and yellow leather shoes. On gala days they appear in brilliant silks from Cairo, and coloured

robes from Tripoli and Morocco, but on ordinary occasions the predominating colour is white. The servants and labourers, who form the bulk of the population, and include many Sudanese who were brought from the south as slaves, wear a long white shirt, white drawers, a skull cap and sometimes a curious sack-like garment made of locally spun wool ornamented by brightly coloured patterns in silk or dye. Siwa is the only place in Egypt where one does not see the natives apeing European dress or slouching about in khaki trousers or tunics—remnants of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force.

The women are small and slender, and very pale owing to the inactivity of strict seclusion. The palest women are the most admired. Their large black eyes are ornamented with "kohl," and their small hands are tinted with henna. In public they wear a universal dress which is quite distinctive. It consists of a dark blue striped robe, reaching below the knees, with full sleeves, cut square and embroidered round the neck, white drawers with a strip of embroidery round the ankles, and a large square grey shawl with a dark blue border, which covers them when they go abroad. Their ornaments consist of innumerable silver ear-rings, with bunches of silver chains and little bells, silver bangles, anklets, and necklaces. An unmarried girl is distinguished by a "virginity disc," which is an engraved silver disc about the size of a saucer, suspended round the neck by a heavy silver ring. These rings are generally very old and beautifully engraved with

arabesques. When a Siwan woman is wearing all her silver ornaments she tinkles like a tinsmith's cart, but her husband poetically compares her to a caparisoned pony. Their general appearance is quite pleasing, but they are very unlike the handsome, healthy-looking Arab women of the coast.

At home the wealthier women wear coloured silks and richer clothes. They wear their straight black hair thickly oiled and dressed in a complicated coiffure. A fringe of short curls hangs above the eyes, and a number of plaited braids are worn on each side of the face, like the fringe of a mop. Strips of scarlet leather are twisted into the tresses, which must always be of an uneven number, and on the ends of the leather are hung silver bells, rings and amulets. One of the first travellers to Siwa remarked on the strength of an ear that could bear such heavy silver ear-rings, but instead of hanging from the actual ear the rings are fastened to a leather band across the top of the head. All the material for women's clothes is made by one family of Egyptian merchants at Kerdassa, near the Pyramids. One brother has a shop in Siwa, and the others live in Egypt. Owing to this the price of clothing is very great, yet none of the Siwan merchants have ever considered setting up an opposition trade.

Women of the upper classes rarely appear in public during the day, except at funerals, when hundreds of them squat round the house, like a crowd of grey crows, howling and shrieking. When one rides past

they hop up from the ground and run a few steps, with long grey shawls trailing behind them on the ground, and then they squat down again, like vultures scared off a carcase. They never work in the fields or drive the flocks to pasturage like the Arab women, or the fellahin, but occupy themselves in making baskets, or pottery, and in household duties. When one woman calls on another she wears all the clothes she possesses, and gradually discards them in order to impress the people she is visiting with her wealth. When I met a woman in the streets she would scuttle into the nearest doorway, or if there was not one handy she would pull a shawl over her face and flatten herself against a wall; even hideous old harridans affected an ecstasy of shyness on seeing an Englishman. Hardly any of the women can speak Arabic, and it is owing to their strange secretive lives that the Siwans have retained their language and are so unprogressive to-day. They resolutely oppose all innovations, refusing even the help and advice of the Egyptian Government doctor. It is to their influence as mothers that the women owe what power they have, because Siwan men care very little for their wives. Most men keep one wife only at a time, but they often marry as many as twenty or thirty, if they can afford to, divorcing each one when she ceases to please.

The Siwans are typically Oriental. They are hospitable, dishonest, lazy, picturesque, ignorant, superstitious, cheerful, cunning, easily moved to joy or anger, fond of intrigue and ultra conservative. They

are not immoral, they simply have no morals. The men are notoriously degenerate and resemble in their habits the Pathans of India. They seem to consider that every vice and indulgence is lawful. It is strange that these people who are among the most fanatical Mohammedans of Africa should have become the most vicious. Yet most of the Siwans are Senussi, members of that Mohammedan sect which corresponds in a way to the Puritanism of Christianity. It advocates a simple and abstemious life, and condemns severely smoking, drinking and luxury. Yet the most religious sheikhs are generally the most flagrantly outrageous.

In spite of their unenviable reputation the Siwans are quite satisfied with themselves, and speak with tolerant pity of the Arabs and the Sudanese. The Siwan Sudanese have become like their original masters, and do not seem to object to being called "slaves," but there are constantly furious rows between the natives and the Camel Corps originating with the word "slave" being used with reference to the latter. The Arabs, and to a greater extent the Siwans, consider themselves very superior to the Sudanese who, until quite recently, they could buy and sell.

The population is divided into two classes, the one consisting of the sheikhs, merchants and land-owners, the other of the servants and labourers. The former class is an all-powerful minority. There is no middle class. There is also a religious division; the Senussi predominate in numbers, but

the Medinia sect is the richest. The latter sect is said to be the successor of the Wahhabi confraternity; it is connected with the Dirkawi, which was founded by Sheikh Arabi el Dirkawi. It was established about one hundred years ago by Sheikh Zafer el Medani, who was born at Medina in Arabia. His doctrines found favour in Tripoli and were adopted by the Siwans some time before the arrival of the Senussi, and Sheikh Zafer himself visited Siwa on several occasions. The two sects are very similar. The Medinia have still several religious centres in Egypt and Tripoli, but they lost ground considerably on the advent of Senussiism. In spite of their similarities the two sects are by no means well disposed to each other. Membership is hereditary, and no one has been known to change from one party to the other. They have their own mosques, sheikhs and funds, and on religious festivals they hold their meetings in different parts of the town. I used always to make a point of visiting the gatherings of each sect. There are two other less important religious bodies known as the "Arusia" and the "Sudania," but they only consist of a few dozen old men who perform strange dances on festivals in honour of their particular saints. The Siwans are very religious, more so than the average Arab, but this is probably owing to the fact that their mosques are conveniently near, and if one is absent from mosque the neighbours notice, and talk about it! One has heard of such things at home.

The prosperity of the people depends almost entirely on the date harvest. The date groves, which form the wealth of the oasis, are watered by some two hundred fresh-water springs. The water rises through natural fissures, or artificial bore-holes, from a sandstone bed about 400 feet below the surface. The largest springs, such as the " Fountain of the Sun," measure as much as 50 yards in diameter, with a depth of about 40 feet. Each basin is fed by a group of little water-holes, and the water comes up from the ground sometimes in continuous streams of bubbles, and sometimes with sudden bursts, so the surface seems constantly moving. There is a theory that an underground river flows east towards the Nile and its water comes to the surface in the various oases between Egypt and Tripoli. The fact that Siwa lies considerably below the level of the desert plateau, and even below sea-level, supports this theory. Or possibly the water comes from the high desert plateau north of Siwa, where there is a heavy rainfall; but the water supply never varies, and has never been known to run dry. The water in the springs differs considerably. In some it is very brackish, in others it is quite sweet, and some springs are flavoured with sulphur; again, some springs are warm, and others are several degrees colder, so one can chose a bathing-place, hot or cold, according to inclination. Many springs, often the sweetest ones, rise a few feet away from the salt marshes, and one spring, which used to be salt, has now become sweet. The largest springs are edged

to a certain depth with squared stones and blocks of masonry, which looks as if it might have been finished yesterday, though it was probably built almost a thousand years ago. The basins are generally round, shaded by a ring of palm trees, beyond which lie the gardens.

The sides of the basins have been gradually built higher and higher, so that the surface of the water is now several feet above the level ground, and little brooks run down from the spring heads into the gardens in all directions. They are regulated by rough sluice gates, made generally of a large flat stone, which is removed to allow the water to flow, and replaced, with a plaster of mud, when the water is no longer needed. Each spring forms the nucleus of a garden which belongs to a number of different people. The gardens are divided into little beds of a uniform size, about 8 feet square, lying an inch or two lower than the level of the ground. These beds are known as " hods." When the water is flowing the labourer goes in turn to each " hod " and scoops a passage with his hands connecting the " hod " with the water channel, which is on a higher level, then he makes a rough dam across the channel so that the water flows into the " hod " and fills it; afterwards he closes the entrance of the " hod " with a handful of mud, pushes aside the mud dam, and the stream flows on to the next " hod," where the same thing occurs. I have seen little boys at the seaside doing just the same sort of thing. In

some cases two water channels cross, and then one of them flows through a hollowed palm trunk.

The cultivation round every spring is made up of a number of gardens owned by different men, some of them consisting of no more than half a dozen palm trees and a couple of " hods." All the ground is watered by the central spring, so a careful water system has been evolved by which the water is divided and portioned out to each piece of garden. For each spring there is a ponderous tome called " Daftar el Ain "—the Book of the Spring, which records the exact quantity of water, or rather the time of water, that each garden is allowed. This is followed with the greatest care by the Keeper of the Spring, who regulates the irrigation, and is paid by the owners of the adjoining garden in proportion to the number of trees that they own. Each day is divided into two halves, from sunrise to sunset, and sunset to sunrise; this again is subdivided into eighths, and each subdivision is called a " wagabah." Thus if Osman Daud's garden receives an allowance of four " wagabah " every other day, it means that he receives the full strength of the water from the springs for twelve hours on consecutive days.

When one buys a garden the water rights are included, but men often sell part of their water right to a neighbour, this, of course, being recorded in the Book of the Spring, which is kept by one of the sheikhs. The " Ghaffir el Ain," or Guardian of the Spring, takes his time from the call of the muezzin, or in distant gardens by the sun and the stars. At

night a special muezzin calls from one of the mosques for the benefit of the watchmen on the springs out in the gardens. The system has been in force for so many centuries that there are very rarely any disputes on the subject. All questions are referred to the books, which serve also as records of ownership of the gardens.

Each Siwan, however poor, keeps a book of his own in which he enters, or rather pays a scribe to record, an account of his property. It states the boundaries, number of trees and water rights of his garden. When a man buys a garden he writes down the particulars in his " daftar," and this is signed by the person who sold the garden, and witnessed by several responsible sheikhs or " nas tayebin "—respectable people. This entry serves as a title-deed for the purchase. When I was at Siwa there was a lengthy and involved law case about the ownership of some property, in which one party, in order to prove inheritance, forged an entry in his " daftar." But cases of forgery were not frequent—fortunately, as they added considerable complications to an already difficult case.

There is more water in Siwa than is required for irrigating the gardens, and in many cases sweet water flows to waste among the salt marshes. The Siwans are unenterprising. They only cultivate just sufficient for their own needs, and not always that: they only work in the gardens where the soil, after centuries of watering and manuring, has become very rich. They grow a very little wheat and barley, but

not enough to supply the population, who depend on imported barley from the coast, yet there are many fertile plots of land which would raise corn, and which could easily be irrigated. Lack of labour and implements is their excuse when one questions them, but in the spring numbers of Siwans go up to the coast and hire themselves out to the bedouins as labourers, preferring to work on the coast instead of increasing the cultivation in their oasis.

The palm groves of Siwa are very beautiful. It seems a veritable Garden of Hesperides when one arrives there after a long trek on the waterless desert which surrounds the oasis. One appreciates the slumberous shade of the luxuriant gardens, long, lazy bathes in the deep cool springs, and feasts of fruit on the banks of little rushing streams. Perhaps it is not surprising that the Siwans are lazy and indolent, for their country is in many ways a land of Lotus Eaters. The natives have a happy-go-lucky Omar Khayyámish outlook on life which is accentuated by the place they inhabit.

The gardens consist mainly of date groves with some olive orchards. But among the date palms there are many other trees—figs, pomegranates, pears, peaches, plums, apricots, apples, prickly pears, limes and sweet lemons. The numerous vineyards produce quantities of exceptionally fine grapes, which last for several months and are so plentiful that large quantities rot on the branches. The natives are not very fond of them and no wine is made in Siwa, except " araki," which is distilled from ripe dates.

Dates and a little olive oil are the only exports, and it is on the produce of the date palms that the life of the people depends. The poorer Siwans live almost entirely on dates; the beams and the doors of the houses are made from palm trunks; mats, baskets and fences are made from palm fronds; saddle cross-bars are made from the wood; saddle packing consists of the thick fibre, the branches are used for fuel; the young white heart of the budding leaves is eaten as a special delicacy, and the sap of the palm makes " lubki," a drink which is much liked by natives. The wealth of the whole community is derived from the sale of dates, so it is not surprising that they watch anxiously in springtime to see if the crop will be a good one. Generally, on alternate years, there is a good crop, then a fair crop, and when dates are plentiful olives are few. Nature seems to have made this careful arrangement.

The cultivation of dates is by no means as simple as it would appear. The trees need careful watering, manuring and trimming, and one notices very clearly the difference in crops from well or badly cared for gardens. In the early spring the work of artificial pollination is carried out by special men who are skilled in the process. A branch is cut from the male date tree, which bears no fruit, sharpened, and thrust into the trunk of the female tree. Unless this is done to every tree the fruit becomes small and worthless. There are about 170,000 trees, each of which bears, after the fifth year, an average of three hundred pounds of fruit. Little attention is paid to the other

fruits which deteriorate from lack of pruning, but with a little trouble and proper methods they would improve. Formerly the oasis produced rice, oranges, bananas and sugar canes, but these no longer grow as they needed more trouble to cultivate. Only dates and olives are sold, and it is considered very shameful for a man to sell other fruit; the same idea applies to milk. Siwans either eat fruit themselves, give it to their friends, or let it rot; only the very poor natives sell any. I had considerable difficulty in getting a regular supply, but eventually I accepted " gifts " daily from certain men, and repaid them with sugar, which they liked, though if I had offered them money they would have considered themselves grievously insulted.

While at Siwa I dried large quantities of figs and apricots—mish-mish—which were very successful, and especially useful for taking out on trek when fresh fruit is unobtainable. None of the natives had attempted drying fruit, though the excessive heat and the flat roofs offer excellent opportunities, and quite an industry could be developed in this way. A variety of vegetables are grown, but only by a very few people. The most common are onions, watercress, radishes, pepper, cucumbers, gherkins, egg fruit, mint, parsley and garlic.

The gardens are manured with dry leaves and dried bundles of a thorny plant called " argoul," which grows about the oasis and is much liked by camels. Bundles of it are cut and left for some months to dry, and finally dug into the soil round the

fruit trees. The streets, markets and stables are all swept carefully, and the manure is sold to owners of gardens. The contents of public and private latrines are all collected and used as manure in the gardens. It is a good system, as it ensures sanitary arrangements being promptly carried out. The soil of Siwa is strongly impregnated with salt. In many places there are stretches of " sebukh " which consists of earth hardened by a strong proportion of salt which feels, and looks, like a ploughed field after a black frost. It is almost impassable, and the occasional deep water-holes, hidden by a layer of thin soil, make walking as dangerous as it is difficult. Two large salt lakes lie one on the east and one on the west of the town. The water in these lakes rises irregularly during the winter months, and subsides in the summer, leaving a glistening white surface of pure salt which looks exactly like ice, especially in places where the dark water shows between cracks in the salt. One can lift up white slabs of salt in the same way as ice, and send a piece skimming across the surface, like stones on a frozen pond at home. Sometimes there are deep pools in the midst of the marshes where the white salt and the vivid blue sky combine to colour the water with the most brilliant greens and blues. Causeways built by the natives traverse the marshes, and by these alone it is possible to cross them. In ancient days the Ammonians sent a tribute of salt to the kings of Persia, and such was the quality of the salt that it was used for certain special religious rites. The glitter of the salt lakes in

the middle of the day is intensely trying to the eyes, but at sunset they reflect and seem to exaggerate every colour of the brilliant sky.

The salt lakes, the numerous springs, and the stagnant water lying about the gardens bred mosquitoes and fevers. Formerly this low-lying oasis was a hotbed of typhoid and malaria. Its evil reputation was known to the bedouins who never stayed there a day longer than was necessary, and even now they speak of almost every fever as " Siwan fever." The natives themselves attributed the fever to fruit, and still call it " mish-mish fever," owing to its prevalence during the season when apricots are ripe. But nowadays conditions are enormously improved. Typhoid is practically unknown, the malarial mosquito has been banished from Siwa, though it still swarms in the neighbouring oases; several thousand pounds has been spent by the Egyptian Government in draining and filling up stagnant pools, and fish have been imported by the Ministry of Health which breed in the springs and feed upon the mosquitoes' eggs. The town is kept clean and there are very strict regulations about sanitation, and thousands of sugar-coated quinine tablets are distributed to the people each week. They have discovered now just how much of the sugar can be licked off before the quinine begins to taste. The result is that since the war there have been very few new cases of malaria, though many of the people are so sodden with fever that it is impossible to cure them.

CLEANING FAMOUS SPRING

It is supposed that the fever is a form of malaria, but when I got it myself, very badly, and had several blood tests taken in Cairo, no germ of any known fever was found. The same thing happened to three other Englishmen who caught the fever in Siwa. So far no careful analysis has been made of the disease, which is spoken of as " malaria " because it is certain that malaria exists in the oasis.

Each spring in Siwa is cleaned out once in every two years in the summer-time. On these occasions the owners of the gardens give a free meal to the labourers, and a luncheon party to their friends. It is a popular and pleasant entertainment. Almost all the men in the town turn out and work in relays of fifty or a hundred, baling out the water from the springs with old kerosene tins, leather buckets and earthenware pitchers. It is a slow proceeding; some of the largest springs take several days to finish, and the work must be continuous, as the basins are continually filling. The men and boys, covered with mud, shout and sing as they work, every now and then diving into the water and swimming round. Every man, woman and child in Siwa can swim, and most of them are expert divers. The women swim like dogs, with much splashing, but the men are very good. A pump would drain a well in a single day and save much labour and wasted time. As the water sinks masons and carpenters repair the sides of the basin, fitting in new stones and patching up old ones. A curious custom terminates these occasions. Each guest and labourer is presented by the owners

of the spring with a handful of berseem—clover—as a partial payment for his labour. When the men ride home in the evening they twist the clover in wreaths round their heads and round the donkeys' ears, then, when they arrive at the town, the donkeys are allowed to eat it.

One of the " characters " of Siwa, always very much in evidence on these occasions, was an old, half-witted man known as " Sultan Musa." He suffered from a delusion that he was the Sultan of Siwa, but I fancy that he was trifle less foolish than he pretended to be. He played the part of court jester at all entertainments. The Siwans found him intensely comic; they asked him questions—how old was he, how many wives, and what he had done; when he mumbled that he was 100 years old and had 20 wives, and various other domestic details, they simply shrieked with laughter. I got heartily sick of the old imbecile and announced that I did not wish to see him when I went anywhere. Sometimes when I arrived at a party I would catch sight of him being hurriedly bundled out of sight, and later I heard the servants in the background laughing hilariously at his dreary witticisms.

A few days after my arrival at Siwa I received an invitation to a luncheon in the garden of one of the leading sheikhs. The messenger announced that Sheikh Thomi would call for me at eight o'clock on the following morning; I wondered at the hour—but accepted the invitation. The next morning, while shaving before breakfast, I was disturbed by a

terrific hullabaloo. My dogs, who strongly object to unknown natives, a trait which I encouraged, were circling furiously round a party of Siwans who sat on their donkeys below the house. My servants went out and rescued them, explaining that I would be down soon; a few minutes later I joined them. After many salutations and polite inquiries I was introduce to the other guests, a crafty-looking, one-eyed merchant, two venerable, white-bearded sheikhs and several notables of the town. They were all dressed very distinctly in their best, wearing coloured silks or spotless white robes. Sheikh Thomi, a cheerful, rotund little man, with the reputation of being the richest sheikh in Siwa, wore a long white burnous and a gorgeously embroidered scarlet silk scarf, and rode a big black donkey with a satanic expression. I was offered the choice of a number of donkeys. I picked out the largest one, and off we went. The donkeys have no bridles or reins; one steers them by beating their necks with a stick, and very occasionally they go the way one wants them to. Mine was the fastest, so I led the cavalcade, hoping that my mount was sure-footed. We dashed through the town with a tremendous clatter and a cloud of dust, scattering children, hens and old women, out on to the roads, and then for a mile or so at a hard gallop towards some gardens. My donkey knew the way. We arrived at the garden as it was beginning to grow hot, and were met at the entrance by a troop of servants who took the donkeys.

Sheikh Thomi led me, slightly dishevelled, through

a thick palm grove, followed by the rest of the party, to a large summer-house built of logs and thatch, set on the edge of a round spring from whose green-blue depths constant streams of silver bubbles rose to the surface. Little green frogs swam in the water and numbers of scarlet dragon-flies hovered over it. The walls of the summer-house were hung with gaily striped Tripoli blankets—vermilion, white and green—the floor was covered with beautiful old Persian carpets, and cushions were ranged round the sides. Through the open ends of the building I saw long vistas of palm trunks, and the sun caught the scarlet blossoms of the pomegranates and the shining, purple grapes on their trellis frames. The air was heavy with the scent of orange blossom and "tamar-el-hindi," and the deep shade inside the hut was a welcome relief. Outside the white-robed servants hurried to and fro, carrying baskets and dishes, while two boys, in the distance, sang curious Siwan songs, answering each other back as they swung to and fro high up on two palm trees. Sheikh Thomi, with much whispering and smiling, went outside. I leant back on my cushions lulled by "the liquid lapse of murmuring streams," thinking how absolutely Eastern the whole scene was.

Suddenly—to my horror—I heard a hideous grinding sound and a shrill, raucous voice with a pronounced American accent began singing, "Waiting for the Robert E. Lee," a tune which I always object to. It was a gramophone, very old and decrepit, the most prized possession of Sheikh Thomi. I tried to

look as if I enjoyed the tune, which was played over and over again for about half an hour, and followed by some slightly less repulsive records of native music.

After listening to this musical interlude a servant brought in a bunch of pink and white sweetly scented China roses which were distributed among the guests, and then the meal began. A dozen boys served as waiters, carrying the dishes from an open-air fire round the corner where several cooks presided over the food. At first it was suggested that I should eat alone, in solitary state, but I protested, so Sheikh Thomi and three others ate with me, while the rest of the guests retired outside to eat later, probably with more ease in my absence. We sat cross-legged on the ground, a position that without considerable practice causes the most agonising "pins and needles." The meal was eaten almost in silence, broken only by the noisy sounds of eating.

A round wooden table was placed in the centre, and each guest was provided with several flat round wheaten loaves, which served as plates, and some strips of thin native bread, which looks rather like pancake, only darker and more solid. The meal consisted mostly of mutton, cooked in various ways—boiled, fried and stewed—with different kinds of vegetables, salads, spices, curries and flavourings. One of the dishes, a very excellent one, was stewed doves, eaten with fresh grapes. The pudding was the least appetising dish on the menu, it was made

of crumbled bread, mixed into a sticky mass with " semna " oil and sugar. There were about a dozen courses. Each one was brought in in a big dish of polished ebony and placed on the table. The guests ate from the central dish, using the thin bread to pick up the meat. One takes a piece of thin bread between finger and thumb, dips into the dish, sandwiching the meat in the bread. It sounds a messy proceeding, but after a little practice I found it quite simple. Servants brought round a brass ewer, and each guest washed his hands after every course ; the Siwans also rinsed their mouths—noisily. Every now and then some one would fish out an extra succulent morsel and hand it to me, or if one man had secured a tasty bone he would tear off the meat and heap it on to my loaf. Towards the end of the meal a few loud hiccoughs are not considered amiss, and to loosen one's belt, very obviously, is thought most complimentary. One needs it too !

The food was very good, excellently cooked, and so tender that there was no difficulty in separating the meat from the bones. When I thought, and felt, that we had finished, there followed an enormous dish heaped high with perfectly plain boiled rice. This is called " Shawish "—The Sergeant—because it clears away the other dishes ! Afterwards an enormous copper tray was carried in by two boys loaded with every kind of fruit—plums, peaches, pears, grapes, apricots and figs. Last of all came tea, and bowls of palm wine for those who liked it. It is made from the sap of the date palm, and when

freshly drawn it tastes like sweet ginger-beer, but a little goes a very long way.

Tea-drinking in Siwa is as solemn a ceremony as after-dinner port at home. The host either dispenses it himself, or as a compliment invites one of the guests to pour out. Towards the end of my time at Siwa I was thought to have acquired sufficient experience, and occasionally I poured out myself. The guest invariably pretends to refuse, protests that he is not worthy, but eventually accepts the honour. The pourer-out is called the " Sultan " of the party, and every " Sultan " tries to make the best tea in the town. People are very critical, and opinions vary as to who is the super Sultan in Siwa. As soon as the " Sultan " takes over the job he becomes, for the time, master of the house. He calls loudly for more sugar, boiling water, and scolds the servants as if they were his own. If he doesn't like the quality of the tea, he says so and the host apologises. A servant brings a low table with a number of little glasses about 4 inches high, a locked chest containing three divisions for red and green tea, and sugar, and a bowl of hot water to rinse the cups. One is asked which kind of tea is preferred, red or green, and the safest and most popular reply is " A mixture of both." The " Sultan " then very deliberately rinses the glasses from a kettle of boiling water which stands on a little brazier at his side, measures out the tea into the pot, adds a little water, pours it away, then carefully makes the tea, pours out a little, tastes it, and finally, if he approves of

the flavour, hands one glassful to each guest. The tea is drunk with no milk; the first brew is rather bitter, with a very little sugar, the second is very sweet, and the third, and best, is flavoured with rose petals, orange blossom, or fresh mint. Each guest drinks one glass only of each brew, and what is over is poured out and sent to the servants, or into the harem. It should be sipped noisily, and satisfaction expressed in the sound of drinking. One drinks either three glasses, six, or nine. I have known twelve, but that is considered rather an excess in polite society. Personally I consider it one of the best drinks I know, but at first people dislike it.

The Siwans are greedy, when they get the chance, and on these occasions their appetites are enormous. They have the greatest admiration for anyone who eats copiously. A certain Government official, whose fondness for large meals was famous, came down to Siwa. He attended a luncheon party, which was given in his honour by some of the sheikhs. The meal was a matter of some dozen or fifteen courses. I myself, by using the greatest discretion, and only eating a few mouthfuls of each dish, managed to last out. But the guest of the day took, and ate, a liberal helping of each course. The Siwans themselves became a trifle languid towards the end of the meal, but he persevered. Even the plain boiled rice did not daunt him, or the sticky oily pudding. It earned him an everlasting admiration in Siwa, and his name is always mentioned at

Siwan parties as a really fine fellow, "The Englishman who ate of everything."

Meat is difficult to get in the oasis. When a bedouin convoy arrives the Arabs often slaughter and sell a camel. There are a few sheep and goats imported from the coast, but the price of meat makes it impossible for the poorer folk to buy it. I had with me a number of dogs. One of them, an attractive mongrel, produced a litter of pups. Several people asked me to give them one, and I did so. I was pleased to see how well their new owners looked after them; they appeared even fatter and fitter than when I had them. Then I went into Cairo on local leave. When I returned, about a month or so later, I inquired after the puppies. One of the men who had taken one told me, "They were fine, so fat and so large——" But "Where are they now?" I asked. He looked surprised, pointed to his stomach, which was a very obvious one, and explained that they had all been eaten last month on the "Eid el Kebir," one of the Mohammedan festivals. He said that nobody could ever imagine that I had given them away for any other reason than for eating. There was nothing to be done, but I never gave away another puppy. I drowned the next litter, and it was considered extremely wasteful.

The Siwans eat cats too, and mice and rats. At one time there were many cats in Siwa and no rats. Now there are rats but no cats. Cats were easier to catch than rats, so they went first. One man, a merchant, complained that his house and shop

was overrun with mice and rats. He had gone to great trouble and brought a cat from Egypt, but as soon as it was full grown it disappeared! Dogs are considered "unclean" by the Mohammedan religion, and they are never eaten in any other places in Egypt.

Dogs are useful at Siwa both as watch-dogs and companions. My dogs used to sleep on the high terrace of the house, and they always gave one warning of anybody coming over the half mile of sand from the town. Besides, dogs are the most human and affectionate of all animals, and one gets to feel the need of companionship at Siwa. It is a solitary life. One either likes it or hates it; there is no compromise, and most men hate it. Sometimes one does not see a single white man for several months, and then, when a car patrol arrives, they stay a few hours in the town and dash back on the same day. One needs a certain temperament to stand living at Siwa. In the summer the heat is so great that one does not go out much in the middle of the day, unless there is urgent necessity, consequently for many hours every day there is nothing to do. If one sleeps much in the daytime one is unable to sleep at night. A man at Siwa must have some form of hobby in which he can interest himself without needing the assistance of other people. Painting, writing, photography and reading all serve the purpose. I mention them as they formed my own spare-time occupations. But without something of this kind life becomes unbearable. It is an ideal place

for painting and photography. The strangely varied scenery, the brilliant sunshine, the picturesque natives, and the wonderful colouring, especially the sunsets, provide a variety of subjects on every side. Siwan men quite enjoy being photographed, but the women strongly dislike it. Eventually by teaching my Sudanese servant to use a camera I managed to secure a few indifferent photos of women. When one "snaps" people they immediately demand a copy of the photo, imagining that the camera is also a simultaneous printer and developer.

According to the proverb "Two is company, three is none," but I think most men who have experienced it would agree that in an isolated district three is generally company and two is purgatory. The odds are one in a thousand that "the other man" will be congenial, and if he is not life is insufferable. If there is a third man things feel better, but to live for months on end with one other man, who one does not really like, results in mutual detestation. This may sound morbid and unnatural, but one sees so many examples. I knew two quite ordinary normal men posted in a lonely district where they rarely saw another Englishman. For the first month they lived together quite happily, in the second month they quarrelled, in the third month they took to living in separate houses, and at the end of four months they were not on speaking terms! Then there are other men who cannot stand living alone. They have no personal occupation, they become depressed, take to whiskey in

large quantities—or worse, and therein lies the way to madness.

Then there is the question of marriage. In most cases the authorities do not encourage, or rather do not allow, men to marry. They very reasonably consider that married men are unsuitable for desert work; they either leave their wives in Egypt, and worry about them, which is not surprising, or they manage to " wangle " a permission out of the powers that be and take their wives out to the desert. Then, of course, a married man is stationed in a pleasanter place than one who has no wife. It is a difficult problem, and in most cases results in men wasting the prime of their life in a bachelor condition on the desert.

But one was kept fairly busily employed at Siwa. A considerable part of the work consisted in judging cases, similar to the duties of a magistrate at home (this, to my mind, was the most interesting part of the routine); also there was a section of Camel Corps to keep in training, and the local police. I went out on patrol for a few days every month, but after once exploring the whole neighbourhood these " treks " were not exciting. Most of the law cases were not of great interest; they consisted mainly of petty thefts, assaults and infringement of Government regulations. Divorce and questions of inheritance were not supposed to be dealt with by me, as they came before a special Mohammedan court, whose representative, an old kadi, went on circuit every year, though he always avoided Siwa, owing to the tedious journey

and the huge file of cases that were waiting for his decision. The Siwans knew almost to the penny how much they would have to give him for a favourable decision on any case.

Sometimes, however, I did get curious cases, and the following one illustrates the social conditions in the town.

A young Siwan woman called Booba, about fifteen years old, after a series of very varied matrimonial experiences, married an Arab who was settled in the town. Although she had been married many times she was considered a very respectable person and related to one of the leading sheikhs. Divorce is considered no disgrace, and a divorced woman does not lose caste as in other parts of the country. Very soon the Arab husband died. This occurred in January, by the end of March she had married again; this time her husband was a Siwan merchant. He quickly grew tired of her and divorced her after a month of married life, but he treated her well and paid the residue of her marriage money to her brother who was her nearest male relation. She returned to her brother's family, who were by no means pleased to see her. Being an exceptionally good-looking girl she was courted again by another man, the young son of a sheikh, who was considered rather a " catch." He married her in June, and very soon after she gave birth to a child. As the child was a girl, the husband divorced her two days after its birth. The wretched woman was turned out of the house in the night by her late mother-in-law. She managed to get to her

own home, but her brother's wife refused to let her in. The brother himself was away. Eventually she found a lodging with an old woman, a relative of one of the earlier husbands, who had, it seemed, some liking for the girl. While staying here the child died—possibly from exposure, possibly from other reasons.

Immediately the families of the last three husbands hurried to give information against her, and charged her with murdering the child. The doctor examined it and found signs of possible suffocation. I listened for several days to the evidence of a number of witnesses, mostly repulsive old women who enlarged with horrid keenness on the most disagreeable details. But eventually nothing was proved, and the girl was acquitted. It was a disagreeable case, but one could almost find parallels to it in the English police-court news.

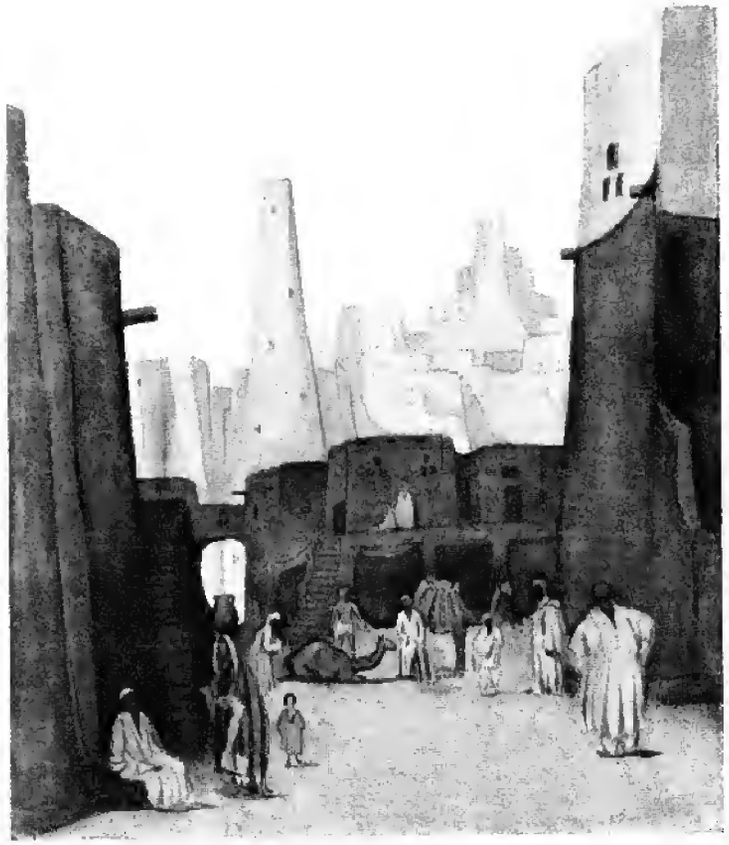
Female witnesses at Siwa were very difficult to manage. They never spoke or understood any Arabic, so the six sheikhs, who acted as a jury, interpreted for them. I used to sit on a platform at one end of the room, and the six sheikhs occupied a bench along one side. Women pretended to hate coming into the court-house, but I think they really rather enjoyed it. The orderly, one of the police, would firmly propel the lady into the middle of the room, she being completely covered from head to foot with clothes. As soon as the orderly retired she sidled over to the wall and propped herself against it, generally with her back turned on me. The sheikhs

would remonstrate, " For shame, turn round Ayesha, daughter of Osman, and speak to the noble officer." The lady would wriggle round a little and allow one eye to appear through the drapery. When questioned she mumbled inaudible replies, growing slightly more coherent if she was personally concerned in the case, but if there was another woman giving evidence she would gradually lower her veils, speak louder, and finally show her whole face as she shrieked abuse at her opponent—quite regardless of the eyes of the court. The sheikhs were invaluable on these occasions; it would have been very difficult to work without them.

One woman, who sued her neighbour for throwing stones at her hens, disturbed the court considerably. When she was led in by the policeman she appeared particularly cumbered with clothes. Suddenly a terrific disturbance began among her shawls and draperies; she gave a shrill squeal and two hens disentangled themselves from her clothes and dashed madly round the court-house. Two of my dogs, who were lying at my feet, sprang after the birds and chased them round the room, which plunged the proceedings into the wildest confusion. The woman had carried in the hens intending to confront her opponent, at the critical moment, with the injured victims. Judging from their activity they had not been much injured.

One man, Bashu Habun, son of the old sheikh who was hanged, caused more legal work than the whole of the rest of the population together. He spent his

time appropriating the property of one of his brothers who was in prison. The brother had an agent in Siwa, a foolish old sheikh called Soud, who was too honest, or stupid, to withstand the sly cleverness of Bashu Habun. At one time there were seven cases between them, involving many hundreds of pounds. I settled the first three, but found that the latter dealt with inheritance, and so were beyond my jurisdiction, but I got heartily sick of the sharp, foxy face of Bashu Habun and the noisy, foolish obstinacy of old Sheikh Soud. Both of them tried to secure my support by sending donkey-loads of fruit to my house before the cases were tried, and on one occasion the servants met both bringing presents, and returned together with their offerings to the town. The idea of " baksheesh " is so firmly planted in the native mind that it takes a long while to die out. Still, one finds that the natives really appreciate and prefer an impartial administration of justice, in place of justice—of sorts—which depends on which of the two parties can offer the highest bribe to the judge. The Senussi were by no means above this method, but they let political considerations weigh equally with " baksheesh " on their scale of justice. In the days when a Turkish governor ruled in Siwa he made his money by accepting and extorting bribes, and if, when British Administration retires from Egypt, the oasis is ruled again by a native mamur, the same system will possibly flourish.



CHAPTER V

SUBURBAN OASES

". . . tufted isles
That verdant rise amid the Libyan wild."

SIWA itself is the largest, richest and most important oasis in a little group of oases which are mostly uninhabited. Similar oases, such as the Kufra group and the Augila group, are scattered at intervals, few and very far between, over the vast arid surface of the great Sahara desert. In most of them there are fresh-water springs surrounded by small patches of green, which have an appearance of almost magical beauty to those who arrive at them, weary after days of travel over the hot and barren solitudes of the desert. Ancient poets compared the yellow desert to a leopard's tawny skin, spotted with occasional oases. Doubtless when Siwa was more thickly populated than it is to-day each of the outlying ones was inhabited, but now the ever-shrinking population is insufficient even to cultivate all the gardens in the immediate vicinity of Siwa itself.

About 20 miles east of Siwa town, at one end of a long salt lake, there is a village called Zeitoun, and close by it a cluster of rich gardens which are the

finest and best cared-for in the oasis, famous for the olives which give the place its name. In the whole of Siwa there are about 40,000 fruit-bearing olive trees, and a large quantity of olive oil is manufactured locally. Rough wooden olive presses are used by the natives, which are so primitive that a large proportion of the oil is wasted. The oil is of an excellent quality and is very profitable when exported, but owing to the difficulty of obtaining suitable tins and vessels to store it in only a small amount is sent up to the coast. It is bought by the Greeks at Matruh and Sollum, who dilute it and sell it at an enormous profit to the Arabs.

Along the shores of the lake there are several other groups of gardens, and at one of them the ex-Khedive proposed to start a model farm, but as usual he got no further in his scheme than erecting some huts for the labourers to live in. He also did a certain amount of excavating in this neighbourhood, and according to hearsay he carried away camel-loads of " antikas " which he dug up among some ruins at a place called Kareished. Some of the gardens slope right down to the shores of the lake, and there are several fine springs among them. I often thought that Kareished would be quite a pleasant place to live in if one built a good house and had a boat to cross the lake to Siwa. The people in these outlying villages ride into Siwa town every few days to do their shopping, across a long causeway which divides the lake and the mud swamp.

North-east of Zeitoun, across 90 miles of high

THE SPRING OF ZEITOUN

desert tableland, one comes to the oasis of Gara, or "Um es Sogheir"—the Little Mother. The word "Um"—mother—is used indiscriminately by the Arabs in names of places, hills, valleys and rocks. According to one theory this practice originates from very ancient times when places were named after certain female deities or goddesses. Gara is a lonely valley about 10 miles long and 5 miles wide, surrounded by precipitous cliffs that one can only descend in a few places, sprinkled with vast isolated masses of rock, upon one of which the village is perched. Many of the rocks have had their bases so worn away that they look like gigantic mushrooms, and one can camp most comfortably in their shade as under an umbrella. There are nine wells and springs in the oasis, but the water has an unpleasant bitter taste, which is mentioned in the accounts of Alexander's journey to Siwa. Owing to the bad water and lack of labour the Garites are unable to grow anything except dates of a poor quality and a few onions and tomatoes. Grapes and fruit trees will not flourish in the oasis. The people eke out a miserable existence by selling dates, mats and baskets to the caravans which pass between Siwa and Egypt. They are wretchedly poor, exceedingly dirty and very distinctly darker in complexion than the Siwans. In former days they were too weak-spirited to be aggressive and too poor to be attacked, although owing to the position of Gara on the Siwa-Egypt caravan route they might easily have made themselves very awkward to travellers by levying a toll on

convoys calling at Gara for water on their way to Egypt.

But on the one solitary occasion when the Garites did attempt to do this they fared very badly. According to the tradition a famous religious sheikh called Abdel Sayed was travelling from Tripoli to join the pilgrim caravan at Cairo. He had with him a few attendants and some devout men who were also on their way to do the Pilgrimage. When they halted at Gara the inhabitants, instead of feeling honoured and entertaining the travellers, came out of the town and attacked them. The sheikh and his followers managed to escape, and when they were safely out of the valley the venerable Abdel Sayed stood on a rock and solemnly cursed the people of Gara, swearing that there should never be more than forty men alive in the village at once. Since then, although the total number of inhabitants is over a hundred, there have never been more than forty full-grown men. When the number exceeds forty, one of them dies. On this account the Garites have a great objection to strangers, and when I arrived, with a dozen fully grown Camel Corps men, the sheikh anxiously begged me to forbid them to enter the village, but as there were under forty men living there at the time I myself and an orderly went up into the town. Presumably if we had all walked up several of the Garites must have died.

The village is a miserable imitation of Aghourmi, but dirty and squalid. A steep winding pathway

leads up the rock to the gateway, and in the centre there is a square open market where nothing is ever bought or sold as nobody has any money except the sheikh, and he spends it at Siwa when he rides in every fortnight on a donkey to report at the Markaz. The sheikh himself is an intelligent man, but scarcely able to speak any Arabic. One of his duties is to look after the telephone from Siwa which passes Gara on its way to Matruh. This telephone was erected by the army after the Senussi operations, and is remarkably clear considering the distance of desert which it crosses. My visit caused a great sensation, as the people had not seen an Englishman for a very long time. The inhabitants came out to my camp and sat in silent rows gazing at us, until they were politely "moved on," and the women spent the whole day looking down on us from the roofs. I believe, during the war, a car patrol visited the place, but as the sheikh said, "They came—whirrrr—and they went—brrrrr!"

According to another legend some bedouin raiders once attacked Gara. The people retired to the village, shut the gates, and prayed to the patron sheikh, who is buried outside, for help. The spirit of the dead sheikh rose to the occasion and so dazzled the eyes of the enemy that they wandered round and round the rock and were totally incapable of finding the gate. Eventually they became so exhausted that the Garites were emboldened to come down from the town and kill them. The old muezzin of the mosque of Gara related this story to me, and an

audience of Garites, who evidently knew it well, with what I considered unjustifiable pride, and he did not seem to think at all that his forebears had played rather a cowardly part in this signal victory.

Between Siwa and Gara there is a pass through a rocky gorge called Negb el Mejberry. Across the track there is a line of fifty little heaps of stones, each a few feet high. Once, many years ago, a rich caravan set out from Siwa to the coast, via Gara. They reached the negb (pass) at twilight and noticed the heaps of stones, but thought nothing of it. Suddenly, when they were quite close to them, a bedouin leaped up from behind each heap and rushed on the caravan. With great difficulty the merchants beat off the robbers, and the ambuscade failed, but not without several men being killed. The merchants buried them close to the place, which is haunted to-day by the ghosts of the brigands who still appear lurking behind the stone heaps. The pass has an evil reputation, and natives prefer to cross it in broad daylight, and not when the sinking sun plays strange tricks with the shadows of the rocks, or when the moon lends an air of mystery to the rugged ravine.

Due west of Zeitoun there is a string of "sebukha"—salt marshes—which lie at the foot of a line of cliffs, a continuation of the mountains that surround Siwa on the north. In this country, which is rarely crossed, one finds little plantations of gum trees that remind one of the Sudan, and also patches

of camel thorn bushes. I have not seen these growing in any other part of the Western Desert. Possibly they may have grown from seeds dropped by caravans passing up from the Sudan. There is no fresh water in this area, but the country is very full of gazelle.

South-west of Siwa there are two other uninhabited oases, El Areg and Bahrein—the two lakes. El Areg is a very surprising place. Riding along the flat rocky stretch of country on the east of the Pacho mountains, named after a European explorer who visited Siwa in the early nineteenth century, one arrives suddenly on the brink of a precipice which is the top of the cliffs that surround the oasis. There are two steep, difficult paths leading down between enormously high white rocks with bunches of straggling, overgrown palm trees at their foot. Much of the oasis is a salt marsh, but at one end there is a mass of bushes and tall palm trees, with two springs of drinkable water among them. The cliffs are very high indeed, and their whiteness makes them look strange at night. In places there are stretches of fossilized sea-shells, and I especially noticed sea-urchins and starfish. In a kind of bay in the cliff, between two enormous high rocks, there is a natural terrace, and in the centre of the terrace there are remains of a building; in the surrounding cliffs, sometimes so high up on the face that one wonders how and why they were made, there are the square entrances of rock tombs or dwellings. Some of them are quite large, but in all cases very low. All the

lower ones are full of skulls and human skeletons, but many are so covered with sand-drifts that I could not get inside. The oasis is full of gazelle, which feed on the luscious vegetation round the marshes.

At Bahrein there are two long, brilliantly blue salt lakes, fringed with a tangled mass of vegetation and palm trees, surrounded by yellow sand-dunes. Bahrein always reminded me of

> "A tideless, dolorous, midland sea;
> In a land of summer, and sand, and gold."

Here also are rock tombs in some of the cliffs, and in one of them I discovered the remains of a coloured mural painting, a picture very much obliterated, of a cow and some palm trees with large clusters of dates on them, roughly done in brown and blue colours. Evidently at one time the oasis was inhabited, and if one sought complete seclusion it would be quite a pleasant place to live in. There are several thousands of date palms at El Areg and Bahrein which would produce fruit if they were pruned and looked after. At one time men used to come out from Siwa and tend the trees, collecting the fruit later on, but now there is not enough labour in Siwa to cultivate all the gardens, so both these oases are deserted. The route from Siwa to Farafra passes through El Areg and Bahrein, and there is another caravan track from El Areg to the Baharia oasis, and thence to the valley of the Nile, which it touches somewhere near Assiut. But practically no travellers pass this way, and the Mashrabs are almost lost to knowledge.

West of Siwa town, at the end of the lake, at the foot of an enormous flat-topped mountain, there is a little hamlet called Kamissa, and a number of gardens. Beyond this, if one crosses the cliffs by a rocky pass, one arrives at a valley called Maragi, where there is another salt lake surrounded by gardens which belong to a colony of about sixty Arabs who settled here some fifty years ago and have remained ever since. They do not intermarry with the Siwans but " keep themselves to themselves," as they consider that they are very superior to the natives. They live in tents and breed sheep and cattle, and are to all appearances similar to the Arabs on the coast, except that they have no camels. At one time two of these Arabs moved into Siwa and settled in houses, but they were regarded as renegades by the remainder. Further west there is yet another salt lake called Shyata, a long patch of blue among the yellow sand-hills, with good grazing around it and fresh water which can be obtained by digging in certain places, which one needs to know from experience, as there is no indication of its whereabouts.

North-west of Shyata there is a cluster of uninhabited oases, Gagub, Melfa and Exabia. They are queer wild places with wonderful rock scenery, huge towering limestone cliffs, deep morasses, and stretches of shining water, edged with rotting palm trees, like

> ". . . That dim lake
> Where sinful souls their farewell take
> Of this sad world."

These oases have a strangely evil appearance, one could well imagine the witches of Macbeth celebrating their midnight orgies in such places. At night a feverish miasma rises from the dark rotting vegetation, and with it myriads of venomous mosquitoes. By moonlight the scene is even more *macabre ;* the gigantic masses of strangely shaped rocks take on the appearance of

> "Dome, pyramid, and pinnacle,
> A city of death, distinct with many a tower
> And wall impregnable ——."

and the dead branches on the gaunt palm trunks sway like corpses on a gallows tree. When I trekked in these parts I always tried to camp for the night above the cliffs, but this was no easy matter, as in places they rose perpendicularly from the ground.

Yet the presence of innumerable sepulchral chambers cut in the cliffs shows that these melancholy valleys were once inhabited. The water here is practically undrinkable. At Gagub there is a well, and on one occasion my men all drank from it, but it was so strongly impregnated with sulphur that it had the same effect as a very powerful dose of physic ! There is a great difference between these deep gloomy valleys, with their oozing marshes and dead funereal palm trees, and Siwa itself, with its rich gardens, cool defiles and long green vistas among the trees. From the top of a hill near Melfa, the westernmost oasis, one can see the dome of the mosque at Jerabub. In Siwa the mosques have no domes, so one becomes

unaccustomed to the sight of them, and for this reason the dome at Jerabub looks quite impressive, though it is actually only about the size of those that one sees over tombs in numbers of the cemeteries of Cairo.

Jerabub used to be the Mecca of Senussiism, but what glory it ever had has now passed away. To-day it only contains about a hundred half-starving natives, and a few old sheikhs who still teach the children in the zowia (religious school). Lately the people were in such sore straits that the Senussi Wakil, Sidi Ahmed, had to send down a convoy of grain from the coast, and the Siwans who rode into Jerabub to sell things returned with their goods and complained that nobody had any money to spend. The dates in the Jerabub gardens are very inferior, so the Siwans export quite a lot of dates to their neighbours.

The only man of any wealth in Jerabub was an old retired merchant called Mohammed el Ithneini. He was so old, and so enormously fat, that he was unable to walk, and had to be carried about by his slaves in a litter. In his day he had been a great merchant, travelling between Tripoli, Wadai, Egypt and the Sudan, and in course of time he had amassed considerable riches. But lately, finding himself short of cash, with a large family to support, he began to raise money on his belongings.

One day I got information that two men from Jerabub had passed through Siwa on their way to the coast and Egypt without coming to the office to see whether they had anything on which to pay

customs. Customs are collected at Siwa on imports from the west. I sent a patrol after them and brought them back to the Markaz. One of them was a grandson of the old sheikh, and the other was his cousin. I examined their camels, and ordered them to turn out their bags, which they did very reluctantly. They spread the contents out on the steps of the Markaz. It was quite like a scene from the Arabian Nights. There were heavy silver anklets, curiously chased bangles, silver earrings shaped like a young moon with filigree bosses from which hung long silver chains with little pendants, rings, brooches, necklaces, several small lumps of gold, two complete sets of trappings and armour for an Arab horse made of silver-gilt and gold-fringed velvet, filigree ornaments and cases for charms and a little bag full of seed pearls; all this was emptied out of two dirty old leather bags. It made a fine show shining in the sunlight and I longed to make a bid for some of it, but I came to the conclusion that it couldn't be done. They were taking it to sell to a certain merchant in Cairo, so I sent them up with a Camel Corps patrol who were going to the coast, as already the Siwans were casting envious eyes on the stuff. The men returned two months later and told me that they got £140 for the lot, which I myself had estimated as being worth a very great deal more. For several years the old merchant had been sending stuff to be sold in Cairo, and every year I imagine he received as small a price.

Among the valuables in his house there are a

number of old Persian and Turkish carpets, but these he keeps as they are too heavy to send about. I had entered into negotiations with him about some of these, but just when the bargain was being completed I got a bad "go" of fever and had to leave for the coast. A few of the Siwan sheikhs have good carpets, but they know their worth and are very unwilling to part with them. Other household articles that some Siwans possess and are very proud of are large brass Turkish samovars which they use with charcoal for making tea. Their owners say that they were originally brought from Constantinople, but now they have become quite like heirlooms, and curiously enough they do not seem to wear out.

South of Siwa, beyond the shifting yellow sandhills, there is a vast stretch of desert without a single shred of vegetation which reaches down to the Sudan. Only the first hundred miles has been explored, beyond that is *terra incognita*. The Arabs call this the Devil's country, and rightly so. In these huge silent spaces one sees incessant mirage, for which the native name is Devil's water, and frequently "the genii of the storm, urging the rage of whirlwind," sends a high hurricane of hot stinging sand tearing across the desert, smothering men and beasts in blinding dust, snatching up anything that is loose and bearing it away.

"In solitary length the Desert lies,
Where Desolation keeps his empty court.
No bloom of spring, o'er all the thirsty vast
Nor spiry grass is found; but sands instead

In sterile hills, and rough rocks rising grey.
A land of fears! where visionary forms,
Of grisly spectres from air, flood and fire
Swarm; and before them speechless Horror stalks.
Here, night by night, beneath the starless dusk,
The secret hag and sorcerer unblest
Their Sabbath hold, and potent spells compose,
Spoils of the violated graves ——"

I once trekked down here in summer-time on the track of some gun-runners who were supposed to be making for Egypt from the west. It js a dreary region, horribly dead and monotonous, consisting of alternate stretches of hard ground covered with shining black pebbles, and white sand-dunes, stretching east and west, where the sand is so soft and powdery that camels and men sink deep into it, and the surface is so hot that one can hardly bear to feel it. There are no tracks or mashrabs, and we were the first party to set up cairns on the hills, wherever there were stones. If one travelled on and on for about a thousand miles one would arrive at Darfur, in the north-west corner of the Sudan. Until the war Darfur was an independent kingdom whose Sultan, Ali Dinar, reigned from his capital El Fasher in a similar manner to the Sultan of Wadai.

The Kufra, sometimes spelt " Kufara," group of oases lie south-west of Siwa, but owing to its distance from all civilization Kufra was never of any importance historically or politically, though comparatively lately it has become a convenient retreat for some of the Senussi sheikhs. Quite a number of natives who had recently been in Kufra visited Siwa during the time that I was there, and when

I questioned them, and various Siwans who knew Kufra well, they all described it as being very thinly populated, less fertile and very inferior to the Siwa oasis—from their point of view. When I discussed the possibilities of visiting it they were exceedingly surprised at the idea of anybody wishing to see Kufra, which they described as being " muskeen "—wretched—but at the same time they said that the people in Kufra would certainly not object to anybody going there, as it was in no way a sacred place like Jerabub used to be at one time. At Kufra there is no strange metropolis like that of Siwa, and as recently as 1854 an English traveller who visited Jalow and Augila stated that Kufra was practically uninhabited, except during a certain month of the year when natives from the other oases went there in order to gather the dates.

There is a great fascination in travelling over unexplored desert; somehow I always had the feeling that perhaps beyond the rocky skyline, or perhaps over the next ridge of sand-hills, there might possibly appear the languidly swaying palm trees of some unknown oasis. Nobody has penetrated into the heart of this desert, and it is not beyond the realms of possibility that there are oases, either inhabited like the lost land of Atlantis or like the mysterious desert cities that the story-tellers describe to their evening audience in the market-place, hidden away among those unmapped plains of the Sahara.

There are still great possibilities of excavating at Siwa, and in the outlying oases, which have been

even less explored, but I myself had neither the leisure nor the money to do any serious digging. In many parts of the oasis, sometimes in the middle of a palm grove, one finds what appear to be the foundations of ancient buildings, made of well-squared stones; and many of the rock tombs, especially in the cliffs of the more distant oases, still contain mummies. I examined a number of them myself, but with no luck, as they were, apparently, of a very inferior class and had no ornaments buried with them. Near some of them there were broken earthenware pots of an antique shape not made in Siwa to-day. All the tombs whose entrances are visible in the Hill of the Dead, the great rock mausoleum outside Siwa town, have been rifled many year ago and nothing is left except scattered bones, skulls and scraps of grave wrappings. A few of the finest tombs have been converted into dwellings by some poor Siwans who are courageous enough to brave the demons of the hill in order to secure a freehold residence, cool in summer and warm in winter, and scented with the

> "—— Faint sweetness from some old
> Egyptian fine worm-eaten shroud
> Which breaks to dust when once unrolled."

But on the whole Siwans strongly disapprove of interfering with the tombs, although they firmly believe that some of the hills near the town contain hidden treasure, more valuable

> "Than all Bocara's vaunted gold
> Than all the gems of Samarcand."

All the more obvious places, such as the ruins of the Temple of Jupiter Ammon, at Omm Beyda, have been thoroughly dug about, but after spending some time in the oasis one comes across various places that appear to be untouched—virgin soil for the excavator.

Behind the hill on which my house, Kasr Hassuna, was built there stood another great, isolated, limestone rock about 70 feet high with a circumference of about 400 yards. One evening, when I was climbing on this rock looking for a hawk's nest, I came across the entrance of what I supposed to be a cave right at the top. I went in, but as I found that it stretched far into the rock I sent for my servants and an electric torch; then armed with this I pushed on into the darkness. There was a narrow tunnel about 5 feet high and 3 feet wide cut out of solid rock, and sloping downwards so steeply that in some places one could almost have sat down and tobogganed along. The tunnel, which was about 10 or 11 yards long, terminated at the mouth of a deep, dark shaft like a well, going straight down into the depths of the earth. I did no more exploring that day.

On the next morning some of the sheikhs, who had evidently heard of my discovery from the servants, told me the following story very solemnly. Many years ago, in the time of their grandfathers, Sheikh Hassuna, the owner of the kasr—castle—discovered, as I had, the tunnel in the rock. He naturally supposed that it was the entrance to a place

of hidden treasure, but he did not like the idea of going down the shaft himself, and he could find nobody else who would. There was at this time a very venerated Fiki in Siwa, and eventually Sheikh Hassuna persuaded him to make the first descent, in order that he might exorcise the jinns and make it safe for the sheikh to secure the treasure. The Fiki was lowered at the end of a rope, with a torch, a Koran and a supply of incense. A few seconds afterwards the people who were in the tunnel and looking into the pit were startled by a rushing of wings and a great cloud of black smoke, which was the jinns escaping from the place. When they hauled up the Fiki he told them the following tale. At the bottom of the pit there was a vast chamber hewn out of stone, and at one end of it there was an iron door. When the Fiki began to read from the Koran the door swung open and two terrible jinns passed out of it, escaped up the shaft, and another jinn, a female, with huge wings, appeared and ordered him to depart and to warn all others never to visit the place again. So since that day nobody in Siwa disturbed the genii of the hill. Finally, the sheikhs advised me, if I would go down, to take with me somebody who could read the Koran.

The same afternoon I called on an old Sudanese Fiki, called Haj Gabreen, and invited him to come exploring with me. He was a stalwart old Sudani about sixty years old, much respected by his compatriots of the Camel Corps and reputed skilful in doctoring and magic. He was decidedly nervous,

but at length agreed to come, mainly, I suppose, owing to the audience of Camel Corps men who were listening. The affair was now, to my mind, patronized by the Church. I got a dozen of my stoutest men and a long rope. They lowered me down first, then a couple of men, followed by the Fiki who bumped from side to side with many groans and ejaculations of "Ya salaam"—"wallahi." It was very disappointing. The shaft was about 25 feet deep, narrow at the top, but widening as it got lower. At the bottom there certainly was a sort of chamber cut out of the rock, but very roughly done; the floor of it was covered with a mass of loose stone and rubble which had evidently fallen in at some time, possibly during one of the earthquakes which are mentioned as occurring frequently at Siwa by the eighteenth-century travellers who visited the oasis. There was absolutely nothing in the shape of a door or a tomb, but one could not tell what there was further down as it was choked with loose stuff.

I had men working at it for several days, trying to clear out the debris, but there seemed to be no end to it, and as one had to haul up every basket of stone to the top and then pass it from hand to hand along the tunnel, the difficulty was very great. The atmosphere, too, was very close and hot. Eventually we came to some large pieces of detached rock which we were unable to raise, and as the work had no appreciable result I finally gave it up.

Some time afterwards I went to see the tombs of the kings at Thebes. My orderly, who had been at

Siwa, was with me, and we were both struck by the similarity between the tombs of the kings and the underground place at Siwa, the latter of course being on a very small scale. Later, when I discovered that Siwa was at one time famous for its emerald mines, the idea suggested itself that this might have been an old mine. Unfortunately, not being an archæologist, I was unable to determine from the size and construction of the place whether it was likely to be a tomb or not. I afterwards discovered another passage, narrow but higher, cut into the outside of the rock about half-way down, apparently with the idea of tapping the shaft, but it only reached a few yards and then seemed to have been left uncompleted.

Haj Gabreen, the old Fiki who went down the shaft with me, evidently spread a very fantastic rumour of my discoveries, because after I left Siwa I got messages from the Governor inquiring whether I really had found an iron door in the middle of the hill.

There seemed to be an abnormally large number of old men in Siwa, as the climate is apparently conducive to old age. Siwans, like many other natives, are very vague about their own ages. Often if one asks them how old they are they reply, " Whatever age you would wish," or sometimes, " The same age as your Excellency "—which they seem to consider a polite answer. Certainly most of the deaths that occur are those of young children or very old people. Considerable deference is paid to old age, although it may not always be accompanied by corresponding

virtue. When I was at Siwa the " Oldest Inhabitant " was a wrinkled old man called Haj Suliman, the grandfather of one of the principal merchants. He used to spend most of his time sitting outside his house gossiping to the passers-by, and I often stopped to talk to him. Unfortunately he was deaf and had no teeth, so conversation between us was not very brisk. He and his relations told me that he was 102 years old ; he looked about 90, and could not have been less than 85. He used to tell me about his one and only visit to Cairo, some sixty years ago, on his way home from Mecca. He also remembered and described quite clearly the visit of a certain English traveller to Siwa in 1869.

One day I heard a great deal of noise in the neighbourhood of Haj Suliman's house ; on inquiry I was told that there was a " fantasia " going on, so I strolled over to see it. I found a number of dancers, music in the shape of drums and whistles, and free " lubki " being handed round. Carpets were spread in the courtyard and Haj Suliman, very gaily dressed, was receiving the company, surrounded by his sons and grandchildren. He looked very pleased with himself and invited me to drink tea, which I did. All the time he stood near, evidently expecting me to say something to him. Eventually I asked him why he was giving a " fantasia "—at which the whole family began talking and telling me that it was for a wedding. " But where is the bridegroom ? " I asked, and Haj Suliman leant forward with a silly grin on his antique face. Then, to my amazement,

they told me that the old gentleman himself was the bridegroom, this being his thirty-sixth wedding and the bride was 14 years old. I realized that he had been expecting my congratulations, so I offered them, as he was evidently not of the opinion that " crabbed age and youth cannot live together." He died suddenly about eight months later, " a victim of connubiality." I had seen him the day before in his garden working hard with an enormous iron hoe as big as a spade, which is much used in Siwa.

Another very old man in Siwa was an aged Sudani who sold a queer little collection of oddments in a corner of the market. At one time he had acted as postman for the Senussi between Siwa and Kufra. He told me, and I heard it besides from various sources, that he used to go alone to Kufra by a track across the sand-dunes south of Siwa. He was paid three pounds for each trip, but the danger was enormous ; if his camel had strayed or fallen ill he would have been absolutely done for. Another queer old character was an old woman called Hanoui, who was at one time a secret agent and remarkably clever at acquiring information. She was also useful when one wanted to get baskets made.

The only real industry in Siwa, and it is not an important one, is the making of mats and basket work from palm fronds. Mats and large coarse hampers for carrying dates on camels are made by men. The mats are usually round, very strong, lasting and useful. The Arabs buy large quantities

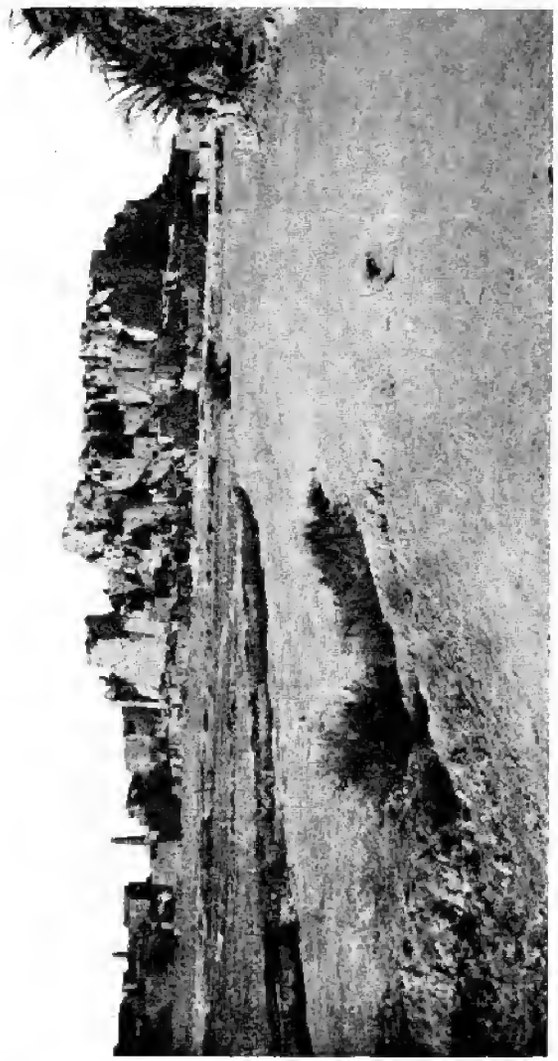
of them when they come down for dates in the autumn. The baskets are made entirely by women. They are manufactured from thin strips of palm leaves which become like raffia ; sometimes they are coloured with dye, but the better kinds are ornamented with minute patterns of coloured silk worked into the sides, and decorated with tassels of variegated coloured silks and scarlet leather flaps in which to fasten cords for holding them.

The work is very fine indeed, so fine that in some cases the baskets will even hold water. They are made in various shapes, but generally round with a conical cover. Besides baskets they make dishes and platters with covers to them, which are used for carrying food and fruit. These baskets are exceedingly attractive and useful and command a high price in Cairo and in England. They are very light and can be made in " nests " of five or six, in order to be more easily conveyed. They are very distinctive and quite different to those that are made at Assuan, in Sinai, or the Sudan.

Siwan women also make a rough kind of pottery. They get the clay from a hill near Siwa, and another kind of clay which they make into paint from another place on the oasis. The pottery is all made by hand, not on a wheel, so it is very rough, but it acquires a good colour and a slight glaze. It is used for making bowls, dishes, pitchers and little braziers for a charcoal fire on which the kettle is kept hot when the Siwans make tea. These utensils are ornamented with rude patterns of a darker colour, the ground

being generally yellow, or a reddish brown. I found that there was one old man in Siwa who was a professional toy-maker, which is an occupation that one rarely comes across among Mohammedans, all forms of statues or images being forbidden by the Koran as tending towards the worship of idols. But the Siwan children have dolls and toy animals, and they are very cleverly made, too. This old man made them chiefly of rags stuffed with sawdust, and they really compared very favourably with the "Teddy bears" and other monstrosities that one sees at home. Siwan children are queer little things, very solemn and not as lively as the small Sudanese. They start working at an early age, and before that they seem to spend most of their time dabbling about in the streams among the gardens. One difference that one notices between these small children and ones of the same age at home is that the former are not given to the tiresome habit of continually asking questions.

In trying to develop the basket-making industry one meets with many difficulties. The women are casual and lazy, so that it is almost impossible to ensure a definite supply of baskets by a certain date. The fact that the baskets are made only by women who live in strict seclusion is a great disadvantage, as one has to explain everything through a third person. Once as a great privilege I was allowed to see a woman at work on some baskets. She was the mother of one of the policemen, quite a venerable old thing, but for the occasion she sat swathed in a thick



SIWA TOWN FROM THE SOUTH

veil with only one eye showing, and thus with great difficulty she gave a demonstration of how baskets were made. I suggested several new shapes and patterns which she very quickly understood and taught to the others.

With the bedouin women it is different. During the war, especially at the close of the Senussi operations, there was great destitution among the Arabs. Numbers of men who had served with the Senussi were killed, and many others retired over the frontier and never returned. Their wives and children were left unprovided for. As usual the English, against whom they had been fighting, turned and helped these refugees. Miss Baird, the daughter of the late Sir Alexander Baird, collected a number of these women and their children at Amria, in the desert west of Alexandria, and in conjunction with the F.D.A. started a carpet-making industry. She lived amongst them herself, superintended the work, and by degrees she acquired a wonderful influence over them. She became somewhat like Lady Hester Stanhope in the Lebanon, only her influence was not due to religious superstition. I once stopped at Amria on my way from Cairo to Sollum by camel in the early days of the industry, and I shall never forget my first impression of the four or five hundred wild bedouin women working away at the carpets like girls in a factory at home, absolutely controlled by one young Englishwoman right out in the desert. Miss Baird's death in 1919 was a very great loss, but the work that she began is still being carried on by

the F.D.A., who have moved the factory from Amria and installed it in an imposing building at Behig, which is the headquarters of the Eastern District of the Western Desert.

One of the things that is noticeable at Siwa is the absence of flowers. Owing to there being no rain there is no sudden burst of vegetation in the spring, as there is along the coast. At certain times there is blossom in the gardens on the various trees—apples, almonds, pomegranates, lemons, etc.—and for a month or two there are roses and a very heavily scented flowering shrub called "tamar-el-hindi." But one does not see the riot of colour that follows on the track of the rains. There are very few wild animals, too. In the neighbouring oases one sees gazelle and a few foxes, and in Siwa itself there are quantities of jackals. According to the natives an animal which they call "Bakhr wahash"—wild ox—is to be found at a place called Gagub, an uninhabited oasis, consisting of a salt lake surrounded by sterile palm trees, between Siwa and Jerabub. But when I went there I saw no signs of the creature. It is described as being the size of a donkey, of a yellowish brown colour, with two horns like a cow's.

In Siwa there are very few domestic animals. None of the people keep camels, partly because they have no need for them, and partly owing to the presence of the "ghaffar" fly which inoculates camels and horses with a disease that shortens their life very considerably. For this reason one set of camels belonging to the F.D.A. remain permanently

at Siwa in order to avoid spreading the disease among the camels on the coast. Almost every man in Siwa has a donkey, and some of the large landowners have thirty or forty. One meets them everywhere, in the streets trotting along under enormous loads, but carrying them apparently with the greatest ease. The Siwans rarely walk any distance, they always ride. The donkeys are stout little beasts and are better treated on the whole than in Egypt. They are imported by the Gawazi Arabs from Upper Egypt and the Fayum, via Farafra, the oasis of "Bubbling Springs," which lies south-east of Siwa, but they breed freely in Siwa, and their diet of dry dates seems to suit them well.

Donkeys are also used as a threshing machine. When the barley is ripe it is cut and collected and spread out in a circle on a smooth, hard piece of ground. Ten or fifteen donkeys are harnessed abreast, in line, and driven round and round over the barley; when they wheel the innermost donkey moves very slowly, and the outer ones trot fast. In this way the corn is crushed out of the husks. Afterwards it is winnowed by the simple process of throwing it up into the air so that the straw blows away and leaves only grain. There are about a hundred cows in Siwa; they are small animals, about the size of a Jersey, but they give very good milk.

At certain times one sees quite a number of birds at Siwa, but they are mostly migratory. I have noticed crane, duck, flamingo and geese on the salt lakes; hawks, crows, ravens and owls among the

cliffs; doves, pigeon, hoopoes, wagtails and several varieties of small singing birds in the gardens. Some of them nest in the oasis, and I collected about a dozen different kinds of eggs, but unfortunately they all got broken. There is one bird which is, I believe, indigenous to Siwa, it is known by the natives as "Haj Mawla." It is about the size of a thrush, black with white feathers in its tail, and a very pretty song somewhat similar to the note of a robin.

Lately the Administration has installed lofts of carrier pigeons along the coast and at Siwa. On the coast they have been quite successful, but so far no pigeons have been trained to cross the desert. The hawks at Siwa are a serious menace to them, and quite a number have been killed. In former days the Libyan Desert produced ostriches. Browne, in 1792, mentions that he saw broken eggs and tracks of ostriches on his way to Siwa. But nowadays there are none. Many of the lions that were used in the arenas of Rome were brought from Libya, but these too are now extinct.

> "So some fierce lion on the Libyan plain,
> Rolls its red eyes, and shakes its tawny mane."

But the Arabs who travel between the Sudan and Tripoli tell of a long wadi, with water and vegetation, north of Darfur, which takes three days to cross by camel, and this wadi, so they say, is full of wild animals—lions, tigers, giraffe, etc.—which have never been hunted.

Siwa is a bad place for snakes, scorpions and tarantulas. The cerestes, or horned viper, is very

common, as well as several other poisonous species. One of the most deadly is a little light-coloured snake with a hard prong at the end of its tail like a scorpion, which lies half covered with sand. I also saw a specimen of the puff adder. My house seemed to be a favourite abode of snakes, which may possibly have been because I had a pigeon loft close to it. Several times I was awakened in the night by my dog barking in the room and found a big snake slithering along the floor, or underneath the edge of the matting. Three men were bitten by snakes while I was there and died as a result; in each case they had stepped on a snake with bare feet. Strabo relates that in these parts of Africa the workmen had to wear boots and rub garlic over their feet to protect themselves. The local cure, which seems quite ineffective, is to rub the powdered stems of a broombush on to the bite. Nothing will induce the natives to touch a snake, dead or alive, with their fingers, as they say the smell sticks to them and attracts other snakes. I was only once bitten by a scorpion, and unfortunately I was out on trek without a first-aid box. It was a large, blackish green scorpion, one of the worst kind, and it caught me on the end of one of my fingers. But my men knew what to do from previous experience. They tied my arm tightly at the elbow and the wrist with a tourniquet, and then cut several gashes with a razor blade across the finger which had been bitten. It was very painful during the night, and I had a good deal of fever, but I was none the worse for it after a couple of days. The cure for a scorpion bite

is a powder made from a snake's tail, cooked and pounded, and a few of the natives specialize in making this powder.

There are no snake charmers in Siwa, and I have seen none anywhere on the Western Desert. In Egypt one meets many, the most famous perhaps is a man at Luxor. I saw him perform a few days before I left Egypt, and I was most impressed by his exhibition. One evening, without any warning, I took him out with me to a place near Karnak, having first examined him and satisfied myself that he had no snakes hidden about his clothes. In about a quarter of an hour he discovered seven or eight snakes. He used no whistle, but walked about in a very small area muttering to himself, stopping dead every now and then in front of a stone or a bush, thrusting his hand into it and withdrawing it clasping a writhing lively snake. Several of the snakes were known to me as being venomous. He took two of these, one by one, held them to his wrist, and let them bite him so that when he pulled them off his flesh they left blood on his hand. Anybody else would have suffered severely, and would probably have died, but the snake charmer was immune. His father and his grandfather had practised the same trade before him, and according to him they had neither of them suffered in any way by their profession.

CHAPTER VI

CUSTOMS AND SUPERSTITIONS

" . . . Tell the laughing world
Of what these wonder-working charms are made. . . .
Fern root cut small, and tied with many a knot,
Old teeth extracted from a white man's skull,
A lizard's skeleton, a serpent's head:
. . . O'er these the leach
Mutters strange jargons and wild circles forms."

"Custom is King, nay tyrant, in primitive society."

AFTER being some time at Siwa one cannot help noticing how very much the life of the people is influenced by their belief in superstitions and magic arts. To every ordinary accident or natural phenomenon they seem to attach a supernatural explanation, and they constantly carry out little rites, which have no apparent purpose, whose origin and reason they do not know, but which they explain has been the custom " min zamaan." To believe, as they do, without knowing, is the grossest form of superstition. They have a number of purely local customs and practices which are entirely different to those which are prevalent in Egypt, or among the Arabs of the Western Desert. The Siwans are Mohammedans, and strictly religious in most of their observances, but in some of their habits one can trace a faint resemblance to rites that

have survived from former times, long before the people adopted their present religion. But most of the apparently meaningless practices are founded on the inherent fear of evil spirits, which are implicitly believed in by all the inhabitants.

These fabulous beings are of many kinds, and have various characteristics; there are jinns, in whose veins runs fire instead of blood, who once inhabited the earth, but sinned and were driven away by the angels of God; Sheytans, who are children of Iblis, the Devil; Afreets, Marids; and Ghouls, who are female demons and live among deserts and graveyards, assuming various forms and luring men to death. These creatures are usually found in caves, tombs, wells, empty houses, latrines, and at cross roads. Sometimes they assume the shapes of men and sometimes they appear in the forms of domestic animals; in Siwa they are said to favour most the disguise of a cow.

Among the most ignorant natives one meets with a decided reluctance to discuss things that are supernatural, but the more educated men are willing to speak of them. As in all countries the lower classes are the most credulous. For instance, in the case of certain old women who are reputed to be witches, the poor people avowedly believe in them, while the upper classes pretend not to; but when there is a birth or a wedding in the family of a sheikh, or a notable, they send presents to these old women saying that it is merely charity, although at heart they consider it safer to propitiate them in order to

avert possible misfortune. It is rather like the lady in church who always bowed at the name of the Devil, because she thought it safer to be on the right side!

The difference between the customs and superstitions of the Siwans and those of the Arabs on the desert which surrounds them is due to the fact that the former are of Berber origin. Their whole system of living is different, too. The Siwans are town dwellers whose dominant principle has been a sort of communism, whereas the Arabs are nomads, who adopted patriarchalism as their method of rule. The Siwans fought on foot, the Arabs were essentially cavalry. There are sheikhs in Siwa, but they are more like the members of a town council, while the real Arab sheikh corresponds to the feudal lord of the Middle Ages. It is strange to find the Siwans, with such a definite, different scheme of living, existing in the midst of a desert whose Arab population regards them almost as foreigners.

Two distinct kinds of magic are practised in Siwa, Divine magic, or white magic, and Satanic, or black magic, black being considered the Devil's colour. Certain old men and Fikis (readers of the Koran in the mosques) are supposed to have particular gifts in telling fortunes, compounding medicines and composing charms against evil, especially against the much dreaded Evil Eye. They work with the aid of the Koran, and by reciting long prayers and the names of Allah. This is legitimate magic. These men are conspicuously regular in their attendance

at the mosques, and their power is attributed to their peculiar goodness. Women are considered by Mohammedans, and particularly by Siwans, to be by nature more wicked than men. One Arab writer speaks of woman as "The Devil's Arrow," and another says, "—I stood at the gates of hell and lo, most of its inmates were women." Even in the *Thousand and One Nights* one reads :

> "Verily women are devils created for us, they are the source of all the misfortunes that have occurred among mankind, in the affairs of the world and religion—"
>
> "Verily women are treacherous to everyone near and distant:
> With their fingers dyed with henna: with their hair arranged in plaits:
> With their eyebrows painted with kohl; they make one drink of sorrow;"

This is the reason that any skill that the Siwan women possess in medicine, making amulets, or tracing lost property, is, as a matter of course, ascribed to their evil practices and their use of black magic, whereby they are able to invoke demons, ghools and afreets to carry out their orders, either for good or for evil. For this reason they keep their doings as secret as possible, and this secrecy increases their notoriety and evil reputation. But as their methods are said to be usually successful they are patronized as much, or even more, than the men, especially by their own sex. So there is quite a lively rivalry between Fikis, or wizards, and the wise women, or witches.

Siwan women, owing to their precarious position as wives, are not fond of bearing children. Many of

them use medicines, made from certain plants and herbs that grow in the oasis, to prevent childbirth. Browne mentions, as far back as 1792, that it was a common practice at Siwa for women to take their newly born infants, probably girls, up to the top of the walls and throw them over the battlements. There was one case of child murder reported while I was living there. Siwan women are not as hardy as Sudanese or Arab women, and the Egyptian doctor is of course never allowed to attend them for births. Women are looked after by the Siwan midwives, old women who have considerable practical experience, but make up for medical ignorance by a vast knowledge of amazingly futile superstitions. As a result quite a number of children die at birth. It was suggested that a Siwan woman should be sent to Cairo and be trained in a hospital; after much difficulty a suitable woman was found who was brave enough to be the first Siwan woman to leave the oasis, but unfortunately the proposition was never carried through.

When the birth of a child occurs in the family of one of the sheikhs or notables it is celebrated with great rejoicings, especially if the baby is a boy, as there is an enormous superfluity of women in Siwa. On the seventh day after the birth all the female friends and relations of the mother come to the house to congratulate her, bringing their own children with them. She receives them with the child and the midwife, herself lying on the bare floor. It is the custom for all women, even the wives of the richest sheikhs,

who occasionally have an old brass bedstead in their room, to sleep on the floor for ten days after giving birth to a child. A meal is provided for the guests—sweets, cakes, fruits, Arab tea, and a curious sort of edible clay which is brought from near Jerabub. This clay is a yellowish colour, tasting very like a mushroom, and is always eaten by Siwan, and sometimes by Arab, women when they are expecting a child. But the essential necessity at this meal is fish, which in a place that is 200 miles from the sea, and where there are no fresh-water fish of eatable size, is somewhat difficult to obtain. However, the merchants make a special point of bringing a species of salted fish from Cairo, which by the time it arrives at Siwa can be smelt from several streets away. This delicacy is the *chef d'œuvre* at birthday parties. It is curious that the Arabs on the coast, who could catch fresh fish, have the strongest abhorrence to eating fish of any kind. The practice at Siwa was inaugurated by the mother of Sidi Suliman, the patron sheikh, on the birth of her son.

If the child is a boy the father decides on his name, but in the case of a girl the mother is sponsor. After the meal everybody looks at the child and congratulates the mother. Then the midwife, who is generally a toothless, dirty old hag, mixes some henna and paints the cheeks of all the children with a red stripe, and they run out into the streets and markets calling out the names of the child. The women remain. A large, round, earthenware bowl, specially made for the occasion, is then brought in and filled with water.

Each woman throws into it her bracelets and silver ornaments. They stand in a circle holding the bowl while the midwife recites the name of the child, and the others repeat phrases, such as, " May he be happy—may he be favoured by Allah—may Allah avert all evil from him." Then they solemnly raise the bowl several times in the air and let it drop to the ground; the bowl smashes into atoms, the water splashes over the floor, the bracelets and bangles roll along the ground, and the child screams loudly with fright. At this all afreets and jinns take flight, and the newly born child is blessed with fortune and riches. Afterwards the women collect their jewellery and return to their homes. Young children are not washed or kept clean; they are deliberately made to look as unattractive as possible, at an early age, in order not to tempt Providence. The Siwans dislike people to admire their belongings, especially their children, who are considered most susceptible to the Evil Eye, as it is thought that nothing can be more valuable than one's offspring.

The status of a woman in Siwa is low. She is worth less, and is of less importance, than a donkey. She is worth, in money, a little less than a goat. There is a strange custom in Siwa which is absolutely different to that among the Arabs or the Egyptians. There is a fixed price for a woman; that is to say, the " marriage money " paid by the man to his future wife's parents is in all cases exactly the same—120 piastres (£1 4s.). It makes no difference whether the girl is young or old, maid or widow, rich or poor,

exquisitely beautiful, which is rare, or hideously ugly, which is common; the only thing that varies is the trousseau of clothes which is given by the man to his bride, and the quality of this depends on his means. The present of a poor man would be one gown, one silk handkerchief, one shawl and one pair of trousers, but a rich man would give his wife several silk robes and silver ornaments. There were innumerable quarrels on the subject, especially when wives were divorced and their husbands tried to keep the clothes (which belonged rightly to the woman) and give them to the next wife. Daughters, among the Arabs, if they are sufficiently attractive, are a source of wealth to their parents, owing to the large amount of "marriage money" which they can demand, but in Siwa they bring in practically nothing. Marriage is not a binding institution. According to the Mohammedan law a wife can be divorced by her husband merely saying, "I divorce thee," before two witnesses; he can do this twice, and after each time, if he changes his mind, he can order his wife to return to him, and she is compelled to do so. But if he says it three times, or if he says, "Thou art triply divorced," it is irrevocable and he cannot get her back until she has been married to another man and divorced by him also. But such a contretemps rarely occurs.

In Siwa a man marries, then divorces his wife as soon as he gets bored by her, and marries another. One man probably repudiates several dozen women in his lifetime, but each of them in her turn is his

A BRIDE—THE DAUGHTER OF BASHU HABUN BEFORE HER WEDDING

regular, official and recognized wife. Polygamy is rare, in fact almost unknown, because when a man fancies a new wife he divorces his present one ; owing to this there is very little promiscuous immorality, but the line between marriage and prostitution is very slender. A divorced woman does not lose caste, and in most cases she appears to have a better chance of marrying again than an unmarried girl. Men marry at sixteen, and girls from nine to twelve years old, so a girl of eleven has often been married and divorced several times. This state of things is simply the ordinary Mohammedan custom as regards marriage, but carried on in an absolutely lax manner. It has always been the same in Siwa, and so it is considered right and proper. It must be so confusing for the people to remember who is So-and-So's wife for the time being. Naturally the prevailing conditions have a very disastrous effect on the birth-rate.

A first-time marriage in the family of a sheikh or a rich notable is celebrated by festivities which last sometimes for several days. On the eve of the wedding, towards sunset time, the bride dresses in her richest clothes and accompanied by twenty or thirty girls walks through the gardens to a spring near the town called Tamousy. This spring is one of the oldest and most beautiful in Siwa. It is surrounded by stately palm trees and tropical vegetation; it is deep and very clear and the ancient masonry round it is still in excellent preservation. As the young bride and her attendants walk through

the palm groves they chant a curious tune, a plaintive melody that sounds more like a dirge than a wedding song.

> "As from an infinitely distant land
> Come airs, and floating echoes, that convey
> A melancholy into all our day."

The scene at the spring is very picturesque; the girls and women stand grouped round the water, their dark robes and silver ornaments reflected in its blue depths. Very solemnly the bride removes the large round, silver disc that hangs on a solid silver ring from her neck, which denotes that she is a virgin; she then bathes, puts on different clothes and has her hair plaited and scented by one of her friends. The procession then returns homewards. On the way they are met by another party of women, the relations of the bridegroom, who bring presents of money for the bride, each according to her means. An old woman collects the coins in a silk scarf, carefully noting the amount given by each individual, and the two parties return together, singing, through the palm-bordered paths to the town. These " virginity discs " are sometimes of great age, having been handed down from mother to daughter as heirlooms. Formerly they were always made of solid silver, but now they are often made of lead with a silver coating.

One evening rather late I was bathing at Ein Tamousy, swimming round the spring without making much noise. Suddenly I looked up and saw a large crowd of girls—a wedding party—standing on

the path above. It was most awkward. I splashed loudly, but they were singing and talking so noisily that they did not hear. Eventually one of them saw me and screamed out that there was a jinn in the spring, whereupon the whole crowd fled shrieking into the gardens, leaving the bride's wedding garment lying on the ground. I hastily slipped out, clutched my clothes and dressed hurriedly behind some palm trees, from whence I watched the party cautiously returning, one by one, to see whether the monster had disappeared.

Meanwhile the bridegroom collects his friends and summons the Fiki; carpets are spread in the courtyard of his house, which is illuminated with candles and lanterns, and dishes of food are set before the guests. As soon as the marriage contract is settled each guest seizes as much food of any sort as he can possibly hold in his hand and crams it into his mouth; the more he eats the more he is supposed to show his friendship for the bridegroom. The usual tea generally follows. At midnight the bridegroom's friends and relations—men, women and children—carrying lanterns and flaring torches, walk in procession through the narrow streets to the house of the bride and demand her from her father.

On the return of the bride from her bath she is taken by her mother and hidden in an upper room of the house. When the bridegroom's family have arrived they collect outside the door and call out, " Bring out the bride, the gallant groom awaits her." The girl's family answer, " We have lost her, we have

lost her." Then " Find her, the bridegroom is getting impatient," and the answer is, " She is asleep, still sleeping." Then the bridegroom's family say, " Go, wake her, and bring her to her man." Then the women of the bride's house weep and scream, and there is a mock fight between the families. The men flourish their sticks and sometimes actually strike each other, but eventually the girl is produced and handed over to the bridegroom's family by her father. The mock capture of the bride and the pretended resistance is possibly a survival of marriage by conquest, or possibly it is meant to denote excessive modesty on the part of the bride. If one inquires the reason the Siwans reply that it has been the custom " min zamaan," and nobody is any the wiser.

The bride wears her bridal gown, which is a long-sleeved robe of striped coloured silk and is weighed down with a quantity of silver ornaments, borrowed, if she has not enough of her own, from her friends ; over this she wears a long woollen blanket entirely covering her, and she has a sword hung from her right shoulder. In this costume she rides on a led donkey to the house of the bridegroom, followed by the people of both families, singing and beating drums and cymbals. On arrival at the house she is received by an old woman, usually a Sudanese slave woman, who lifts her off the donkey, and with the assistance of others carries her across the threshold, up the stairs, into the bridal room, and lays her on the couch, taking care that the bride's feet never

touch the ground. The crowd remain below and are entertained by Zigale dancers, who are hired for the occasion. Later a sheep is killed at the entrance of the house, and the blood is smeared across the doorway in the Arab fashion ; and if the family are wealthy several more sheep are roasted whole and a feast is made for the guests. Thursday is considered the most propitious day for a wedding, as the girl wakes up for the first time in her new home on a Friday, which is the Mohammedan Sunday.

All this time the bridegroom remains in the background, taking no part in the doings. The old woman who received the bride brings her some dishes of food and a handful of wheat and salt, which she places beneath the pillow, where it remains for a week to keep away bad spirits and afreets who might otherwise be attracted to harm the newly married couple. Then the bridegroom arrives outside the door and knocks upon it, on which there follows a long conversation between him and the old woman. She calls out to him saying what a beautiful bride he has obtained, describing her as a young moon with eyes like a gazelle, cheeks like peach blossom and the figure of a swaying willow. After a high-flown eulogy the bridegroom inquires, " What is the girl worth ? " to which the old woman replies, " Her weight in silver and gold —" which is queer when one remembers that she is actually worth £1 4s. The old woman then opens the door, and after receiving a present from the bridegroom retires and leaves them

together. The bridegroom takes the sword from the girl and puts it under the mattress for use against jinns, takes off the blanket which entirely covers her, and then removes her right shoe and strikes her seven times on the foot with the palm of his hand. This is said to bring luck to the marriage. He stays with her for some time, but the marriage is not consummated until two days later. During this time the bridegroom leaves his house and spends his time in the gardens with one other man, who acts as a sort of best man.

On the third day the presents from the girl's family arrive : carved wooden chests, finely made baskets which have taken several months to complete, earthenware cooking pots and supplies of sugar and foodstuffs. The money which was given to the girl at the spring of Tamousy is counted again, and each of the donors is presented with some doves, rabbits or chickens, in proportion to the amount which they gave. Among the Arabs, and especially among the Berbers of the oases in southern Morocco, an excessive shyness and bashfulness exists between the bridegroom and his mother-in-law and all the bride's near relations. This avoidance and aversion to the wife's relatives may be another survival of the idea of marriage by conquest, but in Siwa one does not find it to such an extent as in other places. These festivities are only celebrated by the wealthier natives, and only when the girl is being married for the first time. Later marriages are quieter affairs, with nothing more than a little dancing, a free

distribution of " lubki " and perhaps one sheep cooked for the guests.

When a Siwan dies his widow is expected to be " ghrula," that is in mourning for a month and a half, but the custom has slackened now and most women marry again as soon as they get the chance. During the forty-five days the woman dresses in white and keeps to her house, only going out in the evening after sunset. She lives plainly, eating no meat and wearing no jewellery. On the last day of her seclusion the town-crier, accompanied by a boy beating a drum, announces in the town that the widow of So-and-So will proceed on the following morning to a certain spring, having completed her period of mourning. On the next morning a number of boys run through the streets calling out the same announcement and warning the people by what road she will pass, in order that they can keep to their houses and avoid seeing her. When she leaves her house some of her relations go up to the roof and again call out the warning. At noon the widow, with her hair hanging loose, her face uncovered, wearing a white robe and no ornaments, walks down to one of the springs and bathes there. Anybody who meets or sees her on the way is supposed to incur very bad luck indeed. After this Lady Godiva-like progress, she hurries back to her house, puts on her ordinary clothes, oils and dresses her hair and invites a number of her women friends to a feast. She then begins to hope for another husband.

The town-crier is a venerable, white-bearded

individual whose family have held the post for many generations. It is his duty to announce any new regulations in the town, and to summon the populace to meetings or to work. When an announcement has been proclaimed on three consecutive days it is considered that everybody knows it, and if after this an order is infringed the excuse of ignorance is not entertained. The town-crier is a very necessary institution in a place where scarcely anybody can read, and public notices are therefore useless; his voice rivals the muezzin's, and his drum corresponds to the bell of the old style English bellman.

Funerals in Siwa are simple affairs. They generally take place in the early afternoon and are attended by almost everybody in the town. When a death occurs the women in the house raise the death-wail, which is taken up in piercing accents by the women in the other houses near, and then by the whole neighbourhood. It sounds appalling, especially when it starts suddenly in the night. The body is carried on a rough bier of olive wood, followed by a long procession, the relatives, the sheikhs and notables, usually riding on donkeys with umbrellas to shade them from the sun, and a nondescript crowd of women and men. As the procession passes through the streets the men chant a solemn dirge and the women swing their veils in the air, throwing dust on their heads, and every now and then joining in with shrill cries and wailings. On arrival at the cemetery the women sit down some distance apart, and the men proceed to the grave,

THE TOWN CRIER'S DAUGHTER

reciting verses from the Koran. At twilight the women collect again before the door of the deceased's house and continue the wailing, and afterwards the friends of the family are entertained at a funeral feast where they eat and praise the virtues of the dead person.

There are several cemeteries round the town, some of them belong to the easterners and some to the westerners. Almost all the roads into the town cross burying-grounds. Until a few years ago it was the custom to cover the grave with two split palm logs and a thin layer of earth, which usually subsided, leaving nothing but wood on the top. These old graves are still a source of danger, as often when one rides over them, without knowing, the wood gives way. Graves of sheikhs are distinguished by a roughly shaped headstone, and generally a little heap of earthenware braziers, left by the women who come to the cemetery and burn incense. When a particularly religious or important Siwan dies, his family keep a guard over the grave at night for about a fortnight after his death, which they say is necessary to prevent the ghoulish old witches from profaning it by digging up the corpse and stealing the dead man's hair and finger-nails for their charms.

The fear of the Evil Eye is almost more deeply rooted in Siwa than in Egypt. It is thought that ill-disposed and jealous people can cast a malignant influence over others, and also over animals and inanimate objects. The Prophet Mohammed permitted the use of charms against the Evil Eye,

although he forbade them for any other purposes. For this reason innumerable charms are worn and exhibited by the Siwans; houses, gardens and olive presses are protected from the much-dreaded curse by bundles of old bones, animals' skulls, or black earthenware pots stuck upside down and set along the roofs. In many houses and in tombs an aloe plant is hung just inside the entrance, swinging from the ceiling, which prevents any envious person from doing harm. Special charms are made for animals by the witches and the Fikis. The charm used to protect a donkey consists of some ashes, a spider's web, a little salt, and a scrap of paper inscribed with a verse from the Koran, tied in a black bag and hung round the animal's neck. Some of the most valuable donkeys have quite a cluster of amulets hung round them. The ingredients of the various charms manufactured by the women are very similar to those used by the witches in Macbeth, those that are the most difficult to obtain being the most efficacious.

But in spite of innumerable precautions people are constantly under the impression that they have incurred the Evil Eye, and then complicated rites have to be performed in order to raise the curse. This can be done in various ways. If the evil wisher is known his victim follows him without being seen and collects a little sand from his footprints which he takes to the Fiki. The Fiki, for a small fee, recites certain verses over it, which removes the curse. Another system is for the victim to go on a Friday, without speaking to anybody on the way, to a male

date palm. He pulls off some of the stringy, brown fibre and brings it back to the Fiki who twists it into a cord and binds it round the man's head. The patient keeps this on his head during the day, and in the evening he again visits the Fiki who unties the cord and reads some appropriate passages from the Koran, after which the object is no longer in danger. There is another method which is frequently practised in more serious cases. The Fiki takes a hen's egg—presumably a fresh one—and inscribes certain cabalistic signs upon it. He then burns a great deal of incense and mutters charms; when the patient has become thoroughly bewildered he takes the egg and moves it seven times round the victim's head. He then breaks it in a basin, gazes fixedly at it, discovers whose is the Evil Eye, and destroys its power by scattering it on the floor.

Any individual who was popularly supposed to possess an Evil Eye was carefully avoided. There was one old woman who was particularly feared on this account. She was quite old and rather mad, but she certainly had an exceptionally evil expression, and she showed her face more than most of them. Anybody who met her in the morning, starting out to his garden or on some expedition, would attribute any mishap that occurred during the day to her malevolent glance.

The witches of Siwa live among some ruined houses in the highest part of the old town. Their leader is a little blind woman who is said to be 100 years old. She looks exactly like one of the

shrivelled mummies that are found in some of the tombs near Siwa, but her scanty wisps of hair are dyed red which gives a most sinister effect. She creeps about leaning on a staff, like the regular witch in Grimm's fairy tales, and although she is quite blind she manages to slip about the high battlements like a lizard, knowing by force of habit every stone in the place. When a client wishes to consult her he comes after nightfall to a certain place among the ruins high up in the town, where a number of dark passages converge, and then he calls her. She lives somewhere up above with two or three others. She mystifies her visitors by appearing suddenly, quite close to them, noiselessly and apparently from nowhere.

I once sent a message saying that I should like to make her acquaintance. One night after dinner I walked over to the town, taking a man with me who knew the place well. We scrambled up and up, through pitch-dark passages to the highest part of the town and eventually arrived at a little low door about 4 feet high, in one of the narrowest and steepest tunnels. After knocking several times it was opened. I lit a match and saw the little old woman herself. She led me up several more dark flights of steps to the roof of the house, and there, sitting in the moonlight, I drank tea with her. The tea was served by her grandchild, a Sudanese boy. Unfortunately I could hardly understand a word she said, but the tea was excellent, and the view was very fine.

It was a hot summer night, but the high roof was

cool with even a faint breeze blowing across it. Looking down over the parapet one saw white-wrapped, sleeping figures on the roofs below, and in the distance there sounded the faint, mysterious melody of reed pipes and a tom-tom. These Libyan nights are very wonderful; the sky is a deep, dark blue, powdered with myriads of stars, and every few minutes a long-tailed meteor flashes downwards. Shooting stars are said to be hurled by the angels in heaven at the jinns on the earth below, but the Siwans fear them as they say that each star kills a palm tree. They prove this statement by arguing that when a tree dies in a natural way it withers from the bottom, but when it withers from the top, as many do, it is caused by a falling star.

When a Siwan girl thinks that it is about time that she was married, and no suitors are forthcoming, she adopts the following custom. On a Friday, when the muezzins on the mosques are calling the Faithful to pray at noon, she leaves the house, carrying some sugar in her right hand and a little salt tightly clutched in her left hand. She covers her face with her long, grey shawl and hurries through the streets, avoiding everybody, to a little hill outside the town—close to the Camel Corps barracks—which is crowned by the tomb of a very venerated Siwan sheikh. When she arrives she runs seven times round the tomb, eating the sugar and the salt and calling on the sheikh to help her. She does this on three Fridays in succession, and after that somebody comes to her parents and asks for her hand. Later, if she

has a child, she distributes food to the poor at the tomb of the sheikh as a thank-offering. The actual tomb of Sheikh Abu Arash is inside a little white-washed mud building. The tomb is covered with white linen, which is renewed by devotees of the saint, and a number of ostrich eggs, brought many years ago from the Sudan, are suspended from the ceiling. Sometimes women bring flowers and palm boughs and lay them on the tomb. Often on a Friday I have noticed a woman hurrying round it, muttering earnestly to herself and hoping for a husband. I wondered at one time whether the proximity of the Camel Corps barracks had anything to do with this recipe for obtaining a husband—but the belief has been held for many years, long before the Camel Corps were thought of.

Another way of obtaining a husband is as follows. The girl summons one of the " wise women " to her house and provides her with a basket, which is, by the way, a perquisite. The old woman takes the basket and goes round to each mosque in the town collecting a handful of dust from the ground immediately in front of each door. She then brings the basket full of dust back to the girl and they mix it with olive oil, making a kind of putty. The girl then brings in a round tin or a large round dish and takes a bath, using the putty as soap. The old woman carefully collects the water which has been used in an earthenware pitcher. She goes out at night again to each mosque and sprinkles a little of the water round the doors. The next day, when the men come in and

out of the mosques they tread on the place where the water was poured, and probably some of the mud sticks to their feet. One of them is sure to demand the girl in marriage. There are various other methods of attaining the same ends ; amulets and charms are manufactured by the witches, which are supposed to attract a certain man, especially if the ingredients of the charm include something that once belonged to him. The whole idea is very much the same as the system of love philtres and charms that were used in Europe in the Middle Ages.

The witches are supposed to be able to summon jinns whenever they want to, but any ordinary person has to follow out a complicated proceeding before being able to do so. The system used for invoking jinns is only practised secretly, and by women, but it is implicitly believed in by everybody. For forty-five days the woman eats no meat, feeding entirely on bread, rice, lentils and fruits. Every evening she bakes a loaf of wheaten bread, unsalted and flavoured with red pepper, which is the favourite flavouring among jinns. She takes the loaf, naked, with her hair hanging loose, to the rubbish heap outside her house, where she leaves it. On the forty-fourth night a jinn appears in the form of some familiar animal : a camel, donkey, or cow. If the woman is afraid it kills her at once, but if she is brave, and speaks to it, it does her bidding. The jinn tells her to prepare a dinner on the following night for six of his brothers. Next day she makes six loaves and flavours them with spiders' webs besides pepper, and

takes them out to the dust heap as before. She leaves them and returns an hour later. Then she finds the chief of the jinns, Iblis himself, waiting for her, a monstrous creature with flaming eyes, horns and great hooked teeth, breathing out fire from his mouth. This individual asks her what she desires and promises to carry out her wishes on the condition that from henceforth she never utters the name of Allah.

There is another even more fantastic story that sometimes at midnight one of the witches swings a cord from her house on the battlements to the top of the tall minaret of a mosque just below. She then steps off the wall and walks along the rope, which is suspended in mid-air, like a tight-rope dancer. People also assert that it is a practice of the witches to creep out into the graveyards at night, to dig up a body, tear off the head, and carry it back in their mouths like animals. This gruesome habit was ascribed to werewolves in the olden days.

Often when there is a case of theft in the town one of the " wise women " is summoned to help discover the thief and the whereabouts of the stolen property. She occasionally finds the property, but very rarely exposes the culprit. One day a rich merchant came to my office in a great fuss and complained that a quantity of silver ornaments belonging to his wife had disappeared from his house. I held an official inquiry, but there were no clues, and nothing was found out. Then the merchant invited the help of an old woman called Marika, who according to

popular opinion was assisted by a familiar jinn. He offered her a substantial reward if she could trace the jewellery. About a week later Marika came to the merchant and asked him to collect every single person in his household outside the door of the house at a certain time that night. The door was closed on the empty house and the old woman hobbled up and down outside it for about ten minutes, muttering incantations and watched with considerable awe by the whole household. After this proceeding she flung open the door and led the merchant to one of the lower rooms where the missing ornaments were found lying on the floor near the window. She explained that a jinn had brought them back; the merchant paid her a reward and she then retired. Nobody thought of trying to discover who had replaced the stuff, and my suggestion that the lady herself had some knowledge of the culprit was indignantly dismissed. These old women have access to all the harems and have a considerable influence over the women, so they are able to collect an enormous amount of information which helps them in affairs like these, though they are by no means always so successful.

If a number of people are implicated in a theft another very curious system is used for discovering the culprit. A smooth, round dish, or a flat, round piece of wood about the size of a plate is produced and inscribed with curious hieroglyphics and verses from the Koran. Two men, one of them who has to be an expert, sit down on the ground facing each

other, holding the dish in the air about a foot from the ground, balanced on the tips of their fingers. Each of the suspects come in one by one and places a scrap of paper or rag on the middle of the round piece of wood. If they are innocent nothing happens, but when the guilty man has dropped his piece of paper on to it the wood begins to revolve. I have seen this performance done three times; on two occasions nothing happened, but the other time the wood certainly did move round, although I could not see how it was manipulated.

Divination, which is considered to be a form of satanic magic among good Mohammedans, is much practised at Siwa. Perhaps it is the idea of oracular communication which has lingered in the oasis since the days when Siwa was famous for its oracle. Its most frequent form is the interpretation of dreams, but future events are also discovered by examining certain bones in animals that are slaughtered for food, in a similar manner to the Roman augeries. The lines on certain bones of a sheep denote coming events. One old man, after examining the thigh bone of a young kid, announced to me that ten men and six camels would arrive on the morrow from Jerabub, and also that a large convoy was moving from the coast to Jerabub. Part of the prediction turned out to be true, but I expect that he found out about the camels before he made the prophecy.

The interpretation of dreams is considered the most reliable guidance of this kind. When a man

has a difficult problem to decide he pays fees to a Fiki and gives him some small article that belongs to him. The Fiki takes the article, a cap for instance, and goes to the tomb of Sidi Suliman or another sheikh; he prays and then lies down and sleeps. Afterwards he interprets his dream as an answer to his client's questions. Sometimes he has to visit the tomb many times before being able to give any advice, so in an urgent case this system would not be a success. The art of divination at tombs is hereditary, and there is a kind of code which attaches definite meanings to certain things that the man dreams about. The ancient Berbers who believed in an after life consulted at the graves of their chiefs in a similar manner.

One of the Fikis, an old man who has performed the Pilgrimage four times, is an expert fortune-teller. His methods are many, but his favourite one seems to be a complicated system by which he draws a species of chart in the sand or on paper, with a number of little squares or " houses " which he fills in with figures depending on his client's birth date. He has other ways of working with sand alone, or by opening a certain Arabic book on necromancy at random, and reading from the page at which he happens to open it. The natives have great faith in him, and say that his predictions are very accurate—but this was not my opinion when I once consulted him as an experiment.

When there is an epidemic in Siwa, such as the " Spanish Influenza " which carried off an enormous

proportion of the population in 1918, a ceremony takes place which must have originated when the Berbers of Siwa made sacrifices to appease their gods. The wealthy men of the town subscribe together and buy a young heifer. For several days it is allowed to roam about feeding as it likes in anybody's garden. On an appointed day the people assemble in the square before the tomb of Sidi Suliman, and the heifer is brought forward and decorated with wreaths and flowers. It is then led seven times round the walls, followed by a procession of the sheikhs and a band of men and boys playing on cymbals, drums and pipes. It is led to the gate of the principal mosque, Gama el Atik; a man steps forward and slits its right ear with a knife, drawing blood, and then throws the knife away. Afterwards the butchers slaughter it, cutting up the meat into innumerable minute pieces and distributing it so that each household in Siwa has one small piece. The people take the scraps of meat home and hang them up in their house, and this, so they say, has the effect of removing any plague or disease that affects the town. Herodotus describes almost the same ceremony as being a custom among the ancient Libyans.

Every Mohammedan is supposed, once in his life-time, to perform the Pilgrimage to Mecca. But only very few Siwans have enough money to do this. Generally, every summer, two or three men go from Siwa, taking with them a sum of money, the proceeds of the sale of dates from certain trees which have been dedicated by their owners as offerings to the

mosque at Mecca. Endowments of this description, either for the support of a mosque or religious school, or for the giving of alms to the poor on certain days in the year, are often made by wealthy Mohammedans. A gift of this kind is called a "wakf," and there is a special branch of the Egyptian Government which deals with them, but in Siwa the "wakfs" are administered by one of the sheikhs, and this gives cause for a great deal of quarrelling and libels. The pilgrims from Siwa carry the money with them, though it often amounts to well over a hundred pounds, which among Arabs is a very considerable sum, but the sanctity of their purpose protects them from robbery. They generally accompany a caravan of Arabs going direct to Alexandria, via the oasis of Gara.

On the day of their departure the whole town turns out to see them off, escorting them to the most distant spring on the eastern edge of the oasis. The wives of the pilgrims accompany them, and when they arrive at the parting-point the following quaint ceremony takes place. The crowd form up in the background, leaving the pilgrims and their wives on an open space by the side of the spring. A near relative takes from the wife of the pilgrim her round silver bangles and rolls them along the ground, a distance of about a hundred yards, to where the husband stands facing the east. The wife, who on this occasion is dressed entirely in white, runs along behind him and gathers up a little sand from each place where the bracelets stopped rolling and fell to the ground. She

puts the sand carefully into a little leather bag. After this she stands under a certain very tall palm tree near the spring while the relative climbs up and cuts off three long palm fronds which he gives to her. After farewells have been said the caravan goes on its way, the camels driven along in a bunch in front, followed by the Arabs and the pilgrims; the wives and people return to Siwa, the women wailing noisily, and the men beating tom-toms and singing. The spring is about a mile beyond Aghourmi, and generally on that day the sheikh of the village gives an entertainment and a luncheon to some of the people.

On arrival at her house the wife of the pilgrim, with the women of the family and one near male relation, goes up to the roof and ties the three palm branches firmly to one corner; she puts the sand into a little green linen bag and fastens it to the tips of the three palm fronds, so that they bend towards the east—towards Mecca. This ensures the pilgrim a safe journey and also serves to let everybody know that the owner of the house is doing the Pilgrimage.

In two months' time it is supposed that the pilgrims have reached Mecca. Their friends and relations have a feast on the roof and hold a reading of the Koran. Then the man who rolled the bracelets gets up and pierces the little green bag of sand so that the contents pour out; he then turns the palm branches round and fixes them in such a way that they point towards the west, in which position they remain till the pilgrim returns safely home again.

When it is known that the caravan has arrived at Ain Magahiz, or one of the outlying springs, a crowd of men ride out to welcome the returned pilgrims, but their women-folk stay at home, prepare a substantial meal, and then go on to the roof, take down the palm branches and watch the distant road for the cloud of dust that invariably announces a caravan.

There is one festival in Siwa which almost corresponds to our Christmas Day. It takes place in the winter, on the tenth day of the month of January. For several days before Yom el Ashur—the tenth day—the roofs of all the houses where there are children are decorated with palm branches, 10 or 20 feet long, with a torch soaked in oil fastened to each branch. After dark, on the eve of the day, all the children go up on to the roofs and set light to the torches. There is a blaze of illumination along the walls, and for a few minutes the whole town is lit by the flaming torches. It is a strange and beautiful sight, quite as effective as the most elaborate illuminations. The children on each roof sing songs to each other, and the wail of their voices sounds far on into the night in a monotonous sweet refrain.

On the following day the children visit each other and exchange presents which are very like "Christmas-trees." Each child makes a square framework of palm branches a few feet long, the white wood is stained and dyed with coloured patterns, and on it are hung fruits, nuts and sweets. Some of the richer children give each other doves and rabbits, but generally they keep to sweets, the most favourite

kind being pink and white sugared almonds which are imported by the merchants from Cairo. The children of Siwa look forward to Yom el Ashur with as much pleasure as their parents do to the annual mulids. It is really a very attractive sight to see these little Siwans, very clean and in fresh white clothes for the occasion, trooping solemnly along the streets on their way to visit their friends, while their papas sit outside their houses and chuckle at them, and the mammas watch them proudly from an upstairs window.

A LITTLE SIWAN GIRL

CHAPTER VII

"FANTASIAS"

"A very merry, dancing, drinking,
Laughing, quaffing, and unthinking time."

"I hear the women singing, and the throbbing of the drum,
And when the song is failing, or the drums a moment mute,
The weirdly wistful wailing, of the melancholy flute."

SIWANS, on the whole, do not take life very seriously, and when they have an excuse for an entertainment they thoroughly let themselves go and are glad of an occasion, if they can afford it, for a terrific gastronomic display, at which an Englishman feels like a canary feeding among hungry ostriches. The poor people eat twice a day, in the morning and evening; the meal consists mainly of dates washed down by lubki and a few drops of tea. They are very sociable, fond of talk, of entertaining their friends and holding "fantasias," but one notices very much the entire absence of communion between sexes. Men hardly ever speak to women in public, and it would be considered quite a scandal for anyone to be seen in company with his own wife, almost worse than if he was seen speaking to the wife of another man.

With the Arabs it is different. They meet about the camps, and especially at the wells, which from

the time of Rebekah have been the scene of many flirtations and courtships. The young men often go and sit by the well-head watching the women drawing water, chaffing and talking to them and, very occasionally, helping them to haul up a heavy bucketful. I have often seen most amusing " goings-on " at a well. Lifting up the weighty tins and drawing up the skins of water gives the girls an opportunity for coquettish displays of neat arms and ankles, but an infinitely more modest expanse is exhibited by these Arabs than by the average young woman in England to-day. But in Siwa if one rode past a spring where women were washing clothes they would run off into the gardens as fast as they could, and even when a Siwan man came to the pool they retired hurriedly with shawls pulled over their faces, and waited some distance away.

In the hot summer evenings, when noises are hushed and the day's work is over, men sit in little groups outside their doors on low mud benches, drinking tea, discussing the latest " cackle of the palm-tree town," and watching the piping shepherds driving their flocks home from the grazing, raising clouds of golden dust as they come along the sandy roads. The women collect on the roofs up above, playing with their children and talking to each other. Each sheikh sits before his house surrounded by a little crowd of sycophants, sipping tea and adulation, and listening to the latest scandal told about his rival of the opposite faction. Passers-by are invited to join in, and if a stranger arrives there ensues a

lengthy greeting of much-repeated phrases, many hand-shakings, and polite expressions. When one walked through the market-place after sunset there would be a murmur of conversation from the shadowy white figures sitting and lying round the doorways, who rose up and bowed at one's approach, and then sank down again silently. This Eastern deference is very impressive at first, but it does not take long to get accustomed to it.

In Siwa there is no lurid night life like that of Cairo, in which novelists revel. The people go early to bed and lights are very little used. Even the quarter of the women of the town is as quiet as the other streets. There are no noisy cafés with music and dancing girls, and no hidden houses where natives smoke hashish and opium. The Senussi religion forbids smoking, or " drinking tobacco," as it is called, also coffee, which is supposed to be too stimulating for the passions, and for this reason tea is the universal drink. Life is a very leisurely affair, a pleasant monotony, and " Bukra—inshallah ! "—to-morrow, if God wills—is the favourite expression. Very few games are played. Chess, which was invented in the East, is unknown, but one sometimes sees a couple of men deeply absorbed in a game called " helga," which is rather like draughts, played with onions and camel-dung on a board which is marked out in the sand on the ground.

The younger men, especially the ones with black blood in their veins, are much addicted to drinking lubki, an inexpensive, intoxicating liquor made

from the sap of palm trees. The branches that form the crown of the tree are cut off, leaving the heart of the palm tree bare. A groove is cut from the heart through the thick outer bark, and a jar is hung at the end of this groove which receives the juice when it oozes up from the tree. A palm which has been tapped in this way yields lubki for two or three months, and if the branches are allowed to grow again after some time the tree will continue to bear fruit, but the branches grow very ragged and trees that have been used for lubki acquire a rather drunken-looking appearance which always remains. One of the favourite tricks of small Siwan boys is to climb up the palm trunks and drink the lubki from the jar in which it is being collected by the owner of the garden. When freshly drawn it is as sweet and frothy as ginger-beer, but in a few days it becomes strongly alcoholic and tastes bitter, like sour milk. Labourers working in the gardens always retire to a spring and bathe after the day's work, then they enjoy a long "sundowner" of lubki before they ride home to the town. All intoxicating drinks are forbidden by the Koran, but in Siwa the people satisfy their consciences by saying that the Prophet approved of all products of the palm tree, so lubki cannot be a forbidden drink.

The Siwans are most particular in their religious observances. There are a very large number of mosques in comparison to the population, and Friday —the Mohammedan Sabbath—is very strictly kept. On Thursday evening the prayers of the muezzins

are longer, as they remind the people that the morrow is Friday. On Friday all the men visit the mosques; no work is done in the gardens, and sometimes one of the sheikhs distributes alms to the poor outside a mosque, or at the tomb of one of his illustrious ancestors. For a long time before the event the "mesakin" (poor) of the town collect at the place; one sees old blind men, cripples, shrivelled hags, and ragged women carrying solemn little babies, every one trying hard to appear the most abjectly destitute, and therefore the most deserving case for alms. Then the sheikh arrives, fat and prosperous, holding an umbrella, and followed by some stout servants carrying huge bowls heaped with cold boiled rice spotted with dark-coloured lumps of camel flesh. The dishes are set down before the people, men and women sitting apart, with a servant standing near each dish to keep order and prevent free fights. The paupers snatch and claw at the food, grabbing it with skinny, dirty fingers, squabbling fiercely over yellowish-looking lumps of fat, shrieking vile abuse at each other and trying to hide tasty scraps of meat in their clothes. The sheikh looks on with a complacent smile and listens with much gratification while his friends make audible remarks about his excessive generosity and his liberal qualities.

The typical Arab sheikh of modern fiction (if he does not turn out to be an Englishman) is a young, dashing, handsome and intensely fascinating individual, well mannered and well washed; but in real

life one rarely meets such a person—I myself have never seen him. The typical sheikh at Siwa or on the Western Desert was elderly, bearded and only moderately clean. Some of them were certainly very fine-looking men, but utterly different to the personage that one would expect from the descriptions in a certain style of popular novel. The "guides" who swindle visitors in Cairo are much more like the sheikh of fiction in appearance than are the real sheikhs whom one meets and has dealings with on the desert.

One of the most curious, partly philanthropic institutions which has survived in Siwa is the "Beit el Mal," a public fund used for providing shrouds for persons who die without money or relations, and also for repairing mosques, causeways and sun-shelters. The money is contributed from the sale of public land belonging to the community, and also from the sale of argoul, which is a plant that is used as manure, and rents for grazing paid by visiting Arabs. The fund is collected and administered by certain sheikhs, and in former days it included fines, inflicted as punishments, and taxes on strangers who visited the oasis. Any case which is considered deserving of charity is supplied from the money.

Ramadan, the Mohammedan Lent, the month in which the Koran was supposed to have been sent down from heaven, is kept very strictly in Siwa. During this month all good Mohammedans are expected to refrain from the pleasures of the table, the pipe and the harem; no morsel of food or drop

of water may pass their lips during the day, but at night the revels commence and they feast and enjoy themselves till the unwelcome approach of morning. Night is turned into day, and at Siwa, during Ramadan, there is a continuous rumble of drums from sunset till the early morning; at first it is disturbing, but one grows accustomed to it before the month is out.

The words of the Koran are:

"Eat and drink until ye can plainly distinguish a black thread from a white thread by the daybreak; then keep the fast until night."

It is possible to obtain a dispensation from keeping Ramadan, on medical grounds, and among the effendi class I noticed that this was frequently done; travellers are also excused from observing it, though I have often been out on trek during Ramadan with men who were strictly fasting. If the month occurs in the hot weather it is a very great strain on every one. Siwa, in the daytime, during Ramadan, is like a dead place; the minimum amount of work is done in the gardens, everybody stays indoors during the day, and one sees nobody about the streets except in the cool of the early morning and after sunset. Fasting, especially abstaining from drinking, is a severe strain; the sheikhs, when they come to the Markaz, look thin and ill, and one's servants make the fast an excuse for doing nothing.

This arduous month is terminated by a festival lasting for three days known as the Minor Festival or

Kurban Bairam. It is celebrated with great festivities and rejoicings in Egypt; servants expect tips and every one appears in new clothes, but in Siwa it is not so important an occasion; the people merely take a rest after the trials of the fast month, reserving all their energy and money for the great local mulid which occurs a week or so later. The mulid of Sidi Suliman, the anniversary of the birth of Siwa's patron sheikh, is the most important incident of the whole year. The festival generally lasts for three days, but the people take three more days to recover from it. All the year round everybody saves money in order to make a " splash " at the annual mulid.

For several days the women are busy cooking cakes and sweets; the best fruit in the gardens is carefully watched over to be ready at the mulid, and certain animals are fed up with a view to being slaughtered. If possible one or two camels are bought from the Arabs and kept at grass till they are fat enough to kill. On the eve of the feast there is a general spring cleaning of the town. The tombs of the sheikhs are freshly painted with whitewash, carpets and coloured blankets are hung from every roof, while the houses are swept and cleaned, and the place looks quite gay with its clean white tombs, and bright mats and rugs hanging out from roofs and windows. In the evening the sheep that are to be slaughtered on the morrow are led in from the fields, and everybody discusses with interest how many animals Sheikh So-and-So is going to kill. Sometimes the richest men kill as many as seven or eight sheep, and this is

remembered and often mentioned to their credit, all through the year. One year there was a great scandal in the town because Sheikh Mohammed Hameid had boasted to everybody that he had killed six sheep, but one of his household let out that there had only been three old goats slaughtered. Enormous supplies of lubki are drawn before the holiday in order that it may stand long and become really strong.

On the morning of the mulid everybody puts on his best clothes, and even the poorest labourer dons a new shirt or a clean jibba. Every man goes to pray in his own particular mosque, and the women visit the tombs and lay palm branches on the graves of their relations. After this people retire to their houses and eat an enormous meal and as much meat as they can possibly swallow. When the men have eaten, the remainder of the food is sent to the harem, and when the harem have finished, it is sent out to the servants and labourers who pick the bones clean. After this heavy meal and during the two following days everybody calls on everybody else, and on this occasion one may see eastern sheikhs riding haughtily through the western quarter to call on their much-detested neighbours. In all the streets one meets the sheikhs riding along on their best donkeys, wearing gorgeous silk, coloured robes, which emerge from the chests in which they are locked up during most of the year, each followed by an escort of servants. The people let each other know at what time they will be " at home " and when they will ride out visiting.

On arriving at the house one finds servants waiting to hold the donkeys, and if one is so indiscreet as to look up at the little windows numbers of female heads pop out of sight. The owner of the house is found seated in his largest room, with the best carpets covering the floor, surrounded by about a dozen little tables with dishes of peaches, grapes, figs, melons, nuts, cakes and sweets, and one dish which contains the young, white pith of a palm tree, which is much esteemed as a delicacy. Along the side of the room there are more dishes, covered with napkins, heaped up with meat, generally smothered by a cloud of flies. The host offers tea, coffee, or an exceedingly disagreeable syrupy liquor made from a species of fruit " syrop " which should be taken cold with soda, but is served hot like tea, according to Siwan fashion. Strict etiquette enjoins that one must drink three cups of tea or coffee, and taste every dish in the room, except the meat, which is reserved for the family at each house.

The extra amount of food everywhere attracts swarms of flies, and the sticky smell of fruit and meat is rather overpowering, when the temperature is about 106 degrees in the shade. One year I rode round myself and paid calls, but the next time I was wiser and invited the sheikhs and notables to a light meal at the Markaz, after their own solid luncheon, and even then, although showing post-prandial symptoms, they managed to eat very heartily. It was at one of these entertainments that I learnt that the Siwans have special names for people who offend

against the strict etiquette of eating. The following are all highly condemned :

The man who turns round and looks to see whether more is coming.
The individual who bites a piece of meat and replaces it in the dish.
The person who blows on his food to cool it.
The one who is undecided and fingers first one piece, then the other.
And finally the visitor who orders about his host's servants, which I have noticed myself as being a very common habit.

In the afternoon of the mulid the younger men and boys go out into the gardens, where they lie singing and drinking lubki. At dusk the people begin to collect in the open space below the highest part of the old town, round the square, white tomb of Sidi Suliman, which is illuminated with candles and lanterns, and ornamented with banners stuck along the parapet of the roof. Crowds of men keep on passing up the steps and in and out of the tomb, shuffling off their shoes at the entrance and praying at the grave of the saint. Then everybody collects at his own particular mosque, in various parts of the town, and a great " zikr," a kind of prayer-meeting and religious dance, is held outside the Medinia mosque in the eastern quarter of the town. It is a very wonderful sight, and is attended by four or five hundred devotees.

There is a large, open space outside the mosque

surrounded by tall, houses, whose little black windows look like gaping eyes, and behind them one catches a glimpse of the tops of palm trees in some gardens darkly silhouetted against the deep blue African sky. The whole scene is flooded with brilliant moonlight, except where the cold, black shadows fall from the high houses. The ground is entirely carpeted with old rugs and mats whose faded colours show dimly in the moonlight; along one side, in front of the mosque, sit the sheikhs and notables of the Medinia sect, and on the other three sides of the square there is a vast congregation of white-robed, seated natives, row upon row of "dusk faces with white silken turbans wreathed." A carpeted space in the centre is kept empty.

Among the shadows of the houses there are more blurred white figures, and in one corner of the square kettles are being boiled on open fires, and men in flowing robes walk to and fro across the light from the flames. There is a subdued murmur of conversation. The first part of the entertainment is a solemn tea-drinking. Dozens of men move about, barefooted and silent, carrying trays and distributing hundreds of little glasses of tea, which is made and poured out by the sheikhs. After everybody has drunk three glasses the low tables in front of the sheikhs are carried away, and the audience becomes absolutely silent. Then the chief sheikh of the Medinia mosque, a handsome, bearded man wearing the green turban, whose looks belie his notoriously bad character, begins intoning verses from the

Koran in a sonorous, impressive voice, sitting on the carpet with his hands spread on his knees. When he stops one of the other sheikhs begins, until most of them have had a turn. After this three men step into the space in the centre of the seated audience. One of them is quite a boy with a very beautiful voice, the other two are older men. They walk slowly round and round the square, abreast, singing together a tune which resembles the solemn grandeur of a Gregorian chant, and after each verse the whole audience, several hundred powerful male voices, intone the refrain. It is an intensely impressive performance and one feels thrilled at being the only white man present at such a spectacle. The bright moonlight shines down on the massed ranks of motionless natives whose faces look black, much darker than they actually are, in comparison with their white robes and white skull caps or turbans. For a background there are the high houses, and on the roofs, peering down at the square, a number of heavily veiled women, and "over all the sky—the sky! far, far out of reach, studded with the eternal stars."

After some time everybody rises and all the full-grown men close up and form a circle, tightly wedged together. The old sheikh steps into the centre and begins repeating more prayers, quietly at first then with restrained violence. The audience join in, chanting the Mohammedan creed. Gradually the singing grows louder, the voice of the sheikh is drowned, and the ring of white-robed men begin

swaying to and fro, backwards and forwards, their voices become hoarse and raucous ; every man jerks to and fro in a frenzy of religious excitement, and the prayer becomes a violent repetition of the word " Allah—'la, 'la, 'la." Then the sheikh who leads the prayer gradually slows down, and the congregation repeat more quietly the Mohammedan creed, " La ilahi illa—llah, wa Mohammed rasul Allah "—there is no deity but God, and Mohammed the prophet of God. The contrast between the performers at the beginning of the zikr, when they are calm and grave, and at its close, when they are hot, dishevelled and exhausted, is very remarkable.

Meanwhile the crowd in the Sidi Suliman square increases. From the various mosques come long processions of white-robed figures, singing and carrying banners ; the light of their torches and lanterns flashes in and out as they slowly thread their way through the steep, winding streets of the town, and their voices become faint, then loud, as they pass through and out of the arches and tunnels. They assemble in the square, forming large circles and dancing zikrs. In one corner one sees a ring of old men singing and clashing cymbals ; in another group there are a dozen men banging drums, while a half-naked young negro in their midst twirls rapidly round and round, then suddenly falls to the ground and rolls over and over till he reaches the tomb itself, where he is lifted up by his admiring and applauding friends and carried away unconscious. Behind the tomb there are fires where the drums

A "ZIKR" AT THE TOMB OF SIDI SULIMAN

can be warmed, in order to tighten their parchment. Numbers of women squat on the outskirts of the crowd, huddled in their dark robes, hardly visible, except when the moon gleams on their silver ornaments and pale white faces. Some of them are burning incense in little earthenware braziers, and occasionally one of them creeps up to the white tomb and kisses the wall, if she can reach it before being driven off by the ghaffirs—watchmen.

The dancers in the centre of the circles move faster, keeping time to the drums and hand-clappings of the audience, and soon everybody is swaying to and fro. Away in the gardens outside the town there are flickering lights and a sound of singing. The great zikr before the Medinia mosque ceases and all the people come streaming out from the dark, shadowy lanes towards the tomb of Sidi Suliman, which shines white in the moonlight with orange lights blazing from its open door and little windows. The sheikhs walk slowly about from group to group, each followed by a little knot of men—servants carrying carpets and cushions, and some watchmen in tall brown tarbouches, holding staves. The police stand about in the crowd, and when one walks up to watch a dance they hurry forward and push people aside, saying, "Make way, make way!" The sound of distant singing in the gardens grows louder and nearer, and suddenly mobs of men and boys, mad with drink, half naked, come leaping and shrieking into the square, scattering fire from their blazing torches.

Then drums are beaten madly, cymbals crash, and the shrill screech of reed pipes rends the air. The crowd forms into a great circle round the mass of frenzied dancers who career round, drinking as they dance, shouting and yelling. In the centre there are a dozen men lashing away at cymbals and tom-toms. One of the dancers is an enormous blind giant, almost naked, who flourishes a jug of lubki, and some of the boys have wreaths round their heads and bunches of flowers stuck behind their ears.

As the night goes on the pandemonium becomes wilder; the exotic timbre of the music grows more frenzied; many of the dancers throw off their robes, and great pitchers full of potent lubki are distributed among the people. The fires in the square, heaped up with rushes, blaze more brightly when the honey-coloured moon sinks behind the high walls of the town, and frantically writhing figures are seen whirling round by the light of the shooting flames and torches. The whole scene becomes even more *macabre*. Gradually boys and men among the audience, fascinated by the mad mob of dancers, plunge in among them, linking arms and revolving round the musicians in the centre, crouching, jumping, hopping, and running, each one executing strange steps and postures as he goes along. Sometimes the music is voluptuous and alluring, then the dance becomes frankly indecent; at other times it is wild and furious, and the performers seem to be overcome with savage transports of rage; but the whole time the music has a very definite rhythm which

urges them on. The light of many torches gleams on glistening black flesh and shining teeth and eyes; the air is thick with heavy fumes of incense, and the bitter smell of liquor. On the outskirts of the crowd one sees figures stretched like corpses on the ground, overcome with the orgy of drink and dancing. When the faint light of dawn shows in the sky, and the fires are dying down they begin to tire of the Bacchanalian revels, and one by one the dancers fall exhausted to the ground, lying where they fell, or crawl away, staggering through the silent streets, to sleep off the effects in readiness for the following day. Looking down on to this riotous African carnival from the highest roofs of the town one can imagine oneself, like Dante, watching damned souls writhing in hell.

The Siwans are extremely fond of music and singing. Their instruments are crude and simple, but they manage to obtain a surprising amount of music from them. Drums, or tom-toms, are of various kinds, either cylindrical gourds or basins with a skin stretched across one end, or large round tambourines with parchment covers. By striking first the side of the drum and then the resounding parchment, two different sounds are obtained, one hard, the other soft, and this again can be varied by using either the palm of the hand or the clenched fist. Flutes are usually made from the barrels of long Arab guns, or occasionally from reeds, and string instruments, like primitive guitars, are manufactured from a bowl covered with skin, a wooden frame, and string made from wire or gut which can be tightened or slackened.

The combination of these simple instruments with human voices is singularly effective.

There is a similarity in all African music; in fact, all Eastern music is somewhat alike. The melody is monotonous and barbaric: sometimes a song sung in a tremulous, high-pitched voice which rises above the throbbing tom-toms, or a tune played on a shrill flute with an accompaniment of drums and twanging string instruments. The scale ranges from bass to treble, sometimes short, sad notes, and sometimes long drawn-out wails, varied by sudden, unexpected pauses. It is difficult to describe, but the general effect is somewhat sinister, at the same time very fascinating. To a stranger it may sound like an inharmonious wail, but in time one gets to appreciate the subtle undercurrent of half-notes which makes the melody. It is suggestive of fierce passions, vague longings, and vast desert spaces.

The characteristic song of the Western Arabs, a dreamy refrain with a reiterated note, which they sing to themselves as they ride alone across the desert, is very similar to the Swiss yeodling; but Siwan music is quite different. The Siwans have songs and tunes of a distinct individual style. With them certain notes have definite meanings; there is a language of sound. When some of their best singers, usually boys, are performing, the listeners can interpret the meaning of the song without needing to hear the words. They sing everywhere, and at all times, especially when at work in the gardens. Several men and boys working in different parts of

a big palm grove sing to each other, taking up the refrain and answering each other back, and these unaccompanied quartets and trios sound very attractive, especially when one hears them in the evening, now loud and clear, now faintly in the distance. Good voices are much esteemed, and the best singing boys are hired to perform at entertainments. The songs that have words are in the Siwan language, but when literally translated they are exceedingly indecent.

Dancing, too, is very different to the fashion of the Arabs or the Sudanese. In many parts of the Sudan one sees men and women dancing together, and among the Arabs there are dancing girls who perform in front of a mixed audience. On the Western Desert it is not considered shameful for respectable women to dance, although most of the best dancers are very decidedly not respectable. But in Siwa only the men dance in public, and it is very difficult to see women performing, but on one occasion I did see an entertainment of this kind.

It took place at night in the courtyard of a house discreetly surrounded by high, windowless walls. A space on the ground was spread with carpets, with some cushions at one side, and the moon shone down and illuminated the scene. A little wooden door in the wall was pushed open and about a dozen girls, followed by an old woman, and a small boy carrying a brazier of smoking incense, shuffled into the court and squatted down in a line on one side. The girls wore the usual Siwan dress, a blue striped

robe reaching below the knees, and white silk-embroidered trousers; but besides this each of them wore a long silk, coloured scarf, hiding her face and shoulders, and a quantity of jingling silver ornaments and heavy bangles which they took off and gave to the old woman to hold while they danced. Three or four of them had small drums which they beat as they sang. At first they sat in a row, very carefully veiled, singing quietly to the accompaniment of the little tom-toms. Then one of them got up, with the thin coloured veil hiding her face, and began to dance, slowly at first, keeping time to the music, but gradually moving faster as the music grew wilder. The dancing began by simple steps and swaying gestures of the arms, then the movements became more rapid, and one saw a confused mass of swirling draperies and silver chains.

After each girl had danced for a few minutes the *motif* of music changed, becoming more sensuous, and the *prima danseuse* took the floor again. This time she performed a variety of the *danse de ventre*, which consists of queer quivering movements and swaying the body from the hips, keeping the upper part still, with arms stretched down and painted hands pointing outwards. This was varied by an occasional rapid twirl which gave the audience a sight of the dancer's features; a pale face with long "kohl" tinted eyes and a scarlet painted mouth, set in a frame of black braided hair, oiled and shiny. Finally, the lilt of the music became even more seductive, and the dancer swung off the long,

fringed, silk scarf and danced unveiled, swaying more violently, with her arms stretched above her head, stamping on the ground in time to the rhythm of the music, and finally subsiding into her place in an ecstasy of amorous excitement.

It was not an attractive performance, although the dance is one which is very much admired by natives, who consider it intensely alluring. One sees it in various forms all over Africa, and everywhere it is equally ugly and dull.

CONCLUSION

MANY people have at various times carefully considered the agricultural possibilities of Siwa from a commercial point of view. Undoubtedly the cultivation in the oasis could be greatly developed, as there is enough water to irrigate a much larger area of ground than that which is now being cultivated. At present the natives have only the most primitive ideas of agriculture; for instance, they neglect most of the fruit trees by doing no pruning, and through sheer laziness they have allowed various species to die out completely. They are handicapped, too, by having no proper tools or machinery. The dates of Siwa are exceptionally fine, famous all over Egypt, and besides these there is a quantity of other fruit whose quality could be much improved by proper care. Olive oil is a valuable product and commands a very high price on the coast and in Egypt. No wine is made from the grapes, and no one has experimented in drying fruit, which is a simple and lucrative industry.

But the difficulty that faces one in all commercial schemes is the means of transport. Camels can only be hired from the coast at rare intervals and during the season when the Arabs do not mind visiting

the oasis, and their hire is so prohibitive as to make any heavy transport hardly worth while. The ex-Khedive went to Siwa for the purpose of seeing whether it would be worth running a light railway from the coast to the oasis, and since then the project has been seriously thought of more than once, but it has always been considered impracticable on account of the expense and the great difficulty of crossing such an expanse of waterless desert.

An alternative scheme of running a service of motor lorries is a more likely proposition, and when once started it might be highly remunerative. Some of the richest and most progressive Siwans were very anxious to buy a lorry and send their olive oil direct to Alexandria, but they failed to appreciate that one lorry alone would be useless, and the minimum number would have to be four.

Apart from the possibilities of trade Siwa is valuable as a field for excavators. So far very little digging has been done in Siwa and the adjoining oases, and undoubtedly there are great possibilities in this direction. Labour is cheap and one could hire enough men in the place to do any work of this kind. Nobody has attempted to locate and examine the subterranean passages which connect Aghourmi and the temple, and Siwa town with the Hill of the Dead. There is also the possibility of rediscovering the emerald mines which brought fame to the oasis many centuries ago, and which are now so completely forgotten that I doubt whether half a dozen people have ever heard of their existence. Under the

present regime, though one does not know how long it will last, an Englishman can live at Siwa in perfect safety, and though the climate is certainly very hot in summer-time it is quite agreeable during more than half the year.

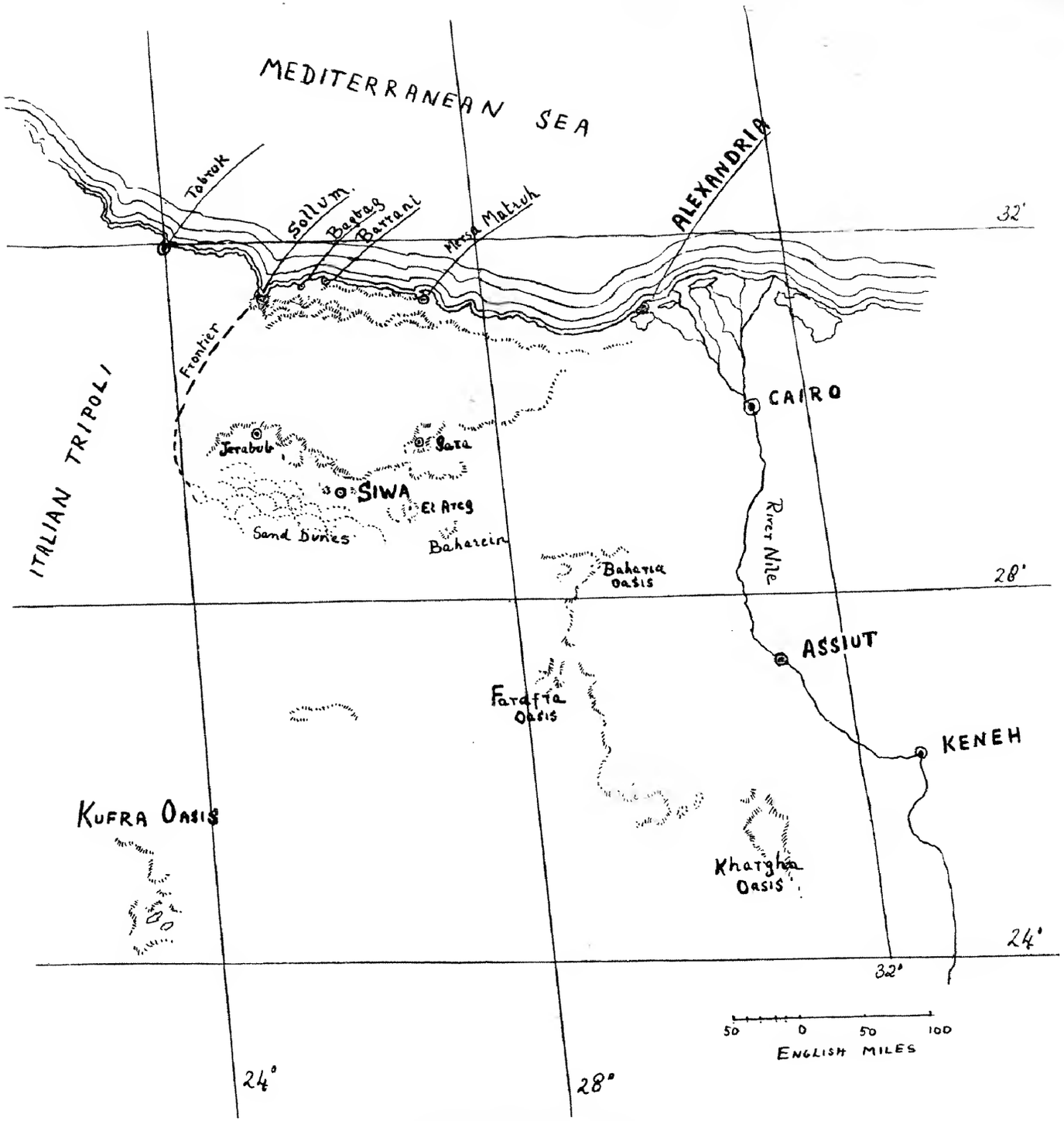
But Siwa will never become a much-visited place, which is perhaps all for the best, owing to the strip of desert which stretches between it and the coast. Otherwise it might have developed into another Biskra, which is the oasis in Algeria that Hitchens describes so wonderfully in *The Garden of Allah*. Quite lately I noticed in a travel book called *Kufara, the Secret of the Sahara*, by Mrs. Rosita Forbes, a mention of this very desert between Siwa and the coast which was described as a " tame desert." This expression, used by a lady with such great knowledge of deserts in all parts of the world, surprised me—and I own that it annoyed me ! Her only experience of this particular desert was acquired during the one day in which she motored up from Siwa to Matruh in the company of several officers of the F.D.A. who met her there. But people on the Western Desert can remember, only too well, a terrible fatality which occurred less than a year ago in which three Englishmen were involved, and which proved conclusively that no waterless desert is safe or " tame," even in these days when cars can travel across it.

I was not actually in Siwa when Hassanein Bey arrived there, accompanied by Mrs. Forbes, after their memorable journey to Kufra, but I returned there soon afterwards, and it was very interesting to

hear of her exploit from the various natives who came in to Siwa from the west.

In spite of a climate that was sometimes trying, in spite of a bad bout of fever, and in spite of an occasional feeling of loneliness, the memory of the time that I spent at Siwa will always be a very happy one. Siwa is so absolutely unspoilt, and so entirely Eastern. Even the ubiquitous Greek trader has not penetrated this desert fastness. It is a place that grows on one, and the few who have been there, and who appreciate its curious fascination, find it very hard to leave.

There is a saying in Egypt that whoever tastes the water of the Nile must some time return there, and I am very sure that he who drinks from the Siwa springs will always wish to go there again. Walking by moonlight under those huge, towering battlements of the strange old town, through streets and squares deserted save for an occasional white-robed figure, one could almost credit the queer stories of ghosts, jinns and afreets that are believed by the Siwans to haunt every spot in this mysterious little oasis which lies hidden among the great barren tracts of the pitiless Libyan Desert.



THE WESTERN DESERT OF EGYPT