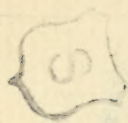


# The Holy War in Tripoli


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G. F. Abbott



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THE HOLY WAR IN TRIPOLI







MOHAMMED EL KIANI PREACHING THE HOLY WAR.  
*Sketch by Capt. Ismail Hakki.*



# THE HOLY WAR IN TRIPOLI

BY

G. F. ABBOTT

AUTHOR OF "TURKEY IN TRANSITION," "THE TALE OF A TOUR  
IN MACEDONIA," ETC.

"Know that the great Italy, after having conquered  
your mother Tripoli, has become your father."—*Italian  
proclamation to the Arabs.*

"The mosque is not yet built; the blind beggars have  
sat down in a row before it."—*Arab proverb.*

ILLUSTRATED

LONDON  
EDWARD ARNOLD

1912

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## PREFACE

FOR the material of the story related in the following pages I am chiefly indebted to the tolerance of the Turkish military authorities, who, though knowing me for an outspoken critic of the Government which they served, yet permitted me not only to see all that I wished to see, but also to carry away my notebooks, without even exacting a promise that I should not make improper use of their contents. I was deeply touched by this implicit trust in my honour, and I have done my best to prove worthy of it.

It is not a very easy task for anyone who takes his functions of chronicler seriously to combine discretion with candour, and to reconcile the obligations of hospitality with the demands of historic impartiality. I have endeavoured to perform this difficult task by withholding from publication any details, military or topographical, that might be of advantage to the enemy, while, in all other matters, reserving to myself full freedom of speech.

The acquisition of experience, however, was simple enough when compared with the labour of recording it. I never had more to say than on my return from Tripoli; nor was I ever less inclined to say it. There are things one instinctively shrinks from talking about. The struggle of the Arabs in defence of their liberty, the emotions which that struggle stirred within me, and the scenes of life and death in the desert which I witnessed, were among those things. I felt writing about them as a sort of sacrilege; and I doubt whether I could have over-

come my reluctance and brought myself to commit my impressions to paper, were it not for my wife, who has most nobly assisted me in the effort, and whose sympathetic interest in the work supplied an antidote to my own discouraging consciousness of its imperfections.

It only remains for me to express my gratitude to the gentlemen who have supplemented my own feeble essays in photography by generously placing the products of their camera or pencil at my disposal—the Austrian fellow-campaigner, Baron von Binder-Krieglstein; the French war correspondent of the *Petit Marseillais*, M. Pol Tristan; the American traveller, Mr. Isidor Morse; and, above all, my talented Turkish friend, Captain Ismail Hakki. The names of other persons who, in one way or another, have lent me their aid will be found in the book itself.

G. F. A.



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MEDITERRANEAN SEA



DISTRICT SURROUNDING TRIPOLI.

# THE HOLY WAR IN TRIPOLI

## CHAPTER I

### TO THE FRONTIER

THE Turco-Italian War had been going on—or, rather, standing still—for seven weeks when I decided to join the main Turkish and Arab forces in the desert round Tripoli town, with the object of collecting material for a book on the campaign.

How to get there, or whether I should succeed in getting there at all, were questions that nobody in London seemed able to answer for me. The way by Egypt was too long—six weeks' journey across Tripolitania, in addition to the week from London to Alexandria. The way by Tunis was much shorter; but, on inquiry at one of the principal newspaper offices, I was told that their special correspondent in the town of Tripoli had tried to get round to the other side, and had failed, owing to the opposition he had encountered from the Tunisian authorities. Another newspaper editor whom I consulted informed me that he had not even thought of sending a special correspondent to the Turkish side, because he did not wish to expose an Englishman to inevitable death, and he did his best to dissuade me from my purpose.

“The Arabs are a wild lot—and now they are mad against all Europeans,” he said. “They will cut your throat before you reach the Turkish headquarters. Or, supposing you get there safe, the Italians, if they catch you, will shoot you without any ceremony, for they do not recognize the Turks and Arabs as belligerents.”

With these encouraging words he bowed me out of his office.

All this sounded most exciting, and it stimulated my appetite for the adventure.

Truth to tell, I allowed a generous discount on all these dismal prognostications. I have learnt from experience that the

dangers and difficulties one hears about are generally like the mirage of the desert—the nearer you get to them, the smaller they grow. So, without further waste of time, I applied to the Ottoman Embassy for credentials.

The Embassy at once acceded to my request, and promised me not only an official recommendation to the Commander-in-Chief, but also a personal introduction from one of its leading members to the Chief of the General Staff.

Then it recalled, or was reminded of, my record as an unsparing critic of Turkish statecraft, and, naturally enough, felt reluctant to undertake the responsibility of recommending a person who might prove a hostile chronicler. I set the case before them as follows :

“ I disapproved strongly of the old Turkish régime, and denounced it openly. When the new régime came into being, with its promises of better things, I was among the first to welcome and to support it in the Press. After a time, however, I perceived that the new powers that had arisen in Turkey were taking a course which, in my opinion, was as crooked and disastrous as the one pursued by the old ; and then I was again among the first to expose and to condemn them. I never concealed my opinions, but I have always said what I believed to be the truth. I intend to act in the future precisely as I have acted in the past. But I am not prejudiced against the Turk as such, and, since I propose to go out to Tripoli, not to discuss politics, but to describe events, I fail to see in what way my political views can bias my pen. Surely you can have no objection to the truth being known ? ”

The Embassy, after some hesitation, perfectly intelligible in the circumstances, fulfilled its original promise in part by giving me a letter of qualified recommendation to the Commander-in-Chief.

Meanwhile it had introduced to me another Englishman, a Mr. Bennett, intent on the same adventure.

We left London together on November 23rd for Tunis, hoping for success, but also prepared for disappointment. We might not be able to reach the frontier, or, having reached it, we might be turned back, or—most horrible possibility of all—peace might be declared before we gained the Turkish camp. In such state of uncertainty we arrived at Marseilles, where we

hoped to obtain reliable information and advice as to ways and means from the Ottoman Consul. Alas! when I interviewed that gentleman, I saw that he was as much in the dark as the London Embassy. All he could tell me was that the chances of crossing the frontier were very small, owing to the obstacles the French Government placed in the way. He suggested, however, that we might go to Gabes, and, if we found the overland route impracticable, hire a sailing-vessel and try to land at some point on the Tripolitan coast. In any case, he warned me, we should have to elude the vigilance of the French on land, and that of the Italians at sea.

With this doubtful prospect, we landed at Tunis on November 26th, and, behold, the difficulties began to shrink as soon as we faced them. We reflected that the French authorities had no conceivable reason for preventing non-combatants from crossing the frontier, and that the very secrecy some of our predecessors had seen fit to observe was probably responsible for the opposition they had encountered. We determined to take a more simple and straightforward course by frankly applying to the Résidence Générale for an official permission.

We found Captain de la Poix de Fréminville, "Chef du Service et du personnel militaire des Affaires Indigènes," fully prepared to recognize the reasonableness of our demand, and courteously willing to assist us to the best of his ability. There were three routes to our destination: the first from Zarzis by a sailing-vessel to some Tripolitan harbour; the second from Ben Gardane, near the frontier and not far from the coast; the third from Dehibat, some ninety miles farther south on the frontier. Captain de Fréminville gave us letters to the officers at all three points, requesting them to let us pass freely, and, if we wished it, to procure for us the means of transport.

Thus the most serious difficulty was overcome, and all that we had to do was to choose among the three routes open to us. That from Zarzis was evidently the most dangerous, for the Italians were in command of the sea. That by Dehibat was the most circuitous, as it involved a long journey down the frontier. That by Ben Gardane lay so close to the coast that by the time we got there it might be in the hands of the enemy. But, as it was by far the easiest, we decided to try it first, and, if we found it closed, to go on to Dehibat.

I lost no time in making my preparations. I began by purchasing a money-belt—a matter of a few minutes. It took me longer to obtain the wherewithal to fill it.

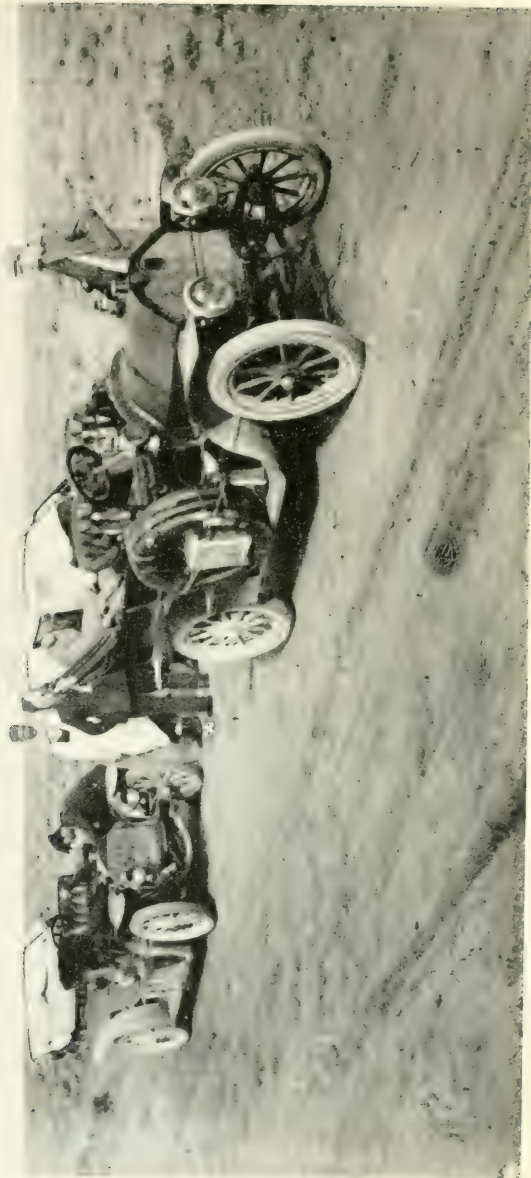
A short time before our arrival in Tunis the natives of the country had shown their sympathy with their Tripolitan coreligionists by collecting a large quantity of gold and exporting it to the Turkish camp; and the local banks, alarmed at this outflow of the precious metal, refused to cash notes above ten louis. The result was that I had to visit several establishments, raising a few pieces here and a few pieces there. The sum I thus obtained was too small for my needs, and I wandered about wondering how to augment it, until a friendly Israelite came up to me in the street, and volunteered the suggestion that I might supplement what I had got at the banks by going into the shops and offering in payment for my purchases hundred-franc notes. "So you'll get plenty of change in gold," he said. I followed this excellent advice, and in a couple of hours my preparations were completed.

I had brought with me from London a tiny tent of waterproof stuff—six feet long, two feet three inches broad, and two feet six inches high—with a sleeping-bag and some rugs; a small folding-chair; a portmanteau containing clothes, writing material, and some other small odds and ends; a few cooking utensils; a pair of field-glasses; a photographic camera, and a pocket-edition of Homer's "Iliad."

As it was imperative not to be overburdened with baggage, to these impedimenta I was obliged to add only what was necessary for the immediate future, and to trust to Allah for more remote contingencies. I added a dozen packets of tobacco and a thousand cigarettes; a dozen tins of sardines and potted meat; some tins of condensed milk and a pound of coffee; a small bottle of saccharine tabloids; two dozen Maggi soups; one hundred small packets of pulverized chocolate and a dozen pieces of Chocolat Meunier; three pounds of dry figs; a tin of ship's biscuits; two small boxes of pepper and salt; also a cheap lantern, a few pounds of candles, and three dozen boxes of matches. Further, I purchased a voluminous white turban as a defence against sunstroke and casual bullets that might easily be addressed from a distance by irresponsible Arabs to a European hat, under the suspicion that it covered an Italian head.







HAJ MOHAMMED &

"WE HALTED TO EXAMINE THE TYRES."

L. Myers, Phot.

During our brief sojourn in Tunis we had the good fortune to make the acquaintance of Mr. Pernull, manager of a tourist agency, whose knowledge of the place and people proved most helpful to us, and of Mr. Isidor Morse, an inveterate killer of wild quadrupeds, who was waiting for his instruments of slaughter to arrive from England, that he might proceed on a shooting expedition to the interior.

I do not know for how many innocent lives Mr. Morse had already to answer, but he appeared to have pursued with a deadly impartiality all sorts of big game in all the countries where big game is still to be found. His particular quarry this time was wild sheep.\* Both these gentlemen consented to favour us with their company as far as the frontier.

We left Tunis early in the morning of November 30th by train, and, after an uneventful journey of nine hours across a well-cultivated and prosperously uninteresting plain, reached Sfax—a walled city on the shore, formerly one of the most romantic haunts of Moslem piracy in the Mediterranean, now one of the busiest commercial ports in what I will call—meaning thereby no offence to the power that has succeeded the Barbary corsairs—*l'Afrique bourgeoise*. The railway ends at Sfax, and the traveller to whom time is no object can continue his journey by diligence, on horseback, on camel, or on foot. As we were anxious not to waste a minute, for the fear of peace was still upon us, we hired two motor-cars, and next morning saw us off.

An exhilarating run of sixty-five kilomètres on an excellent road—with the blue sea on one hand, green fields and olive-groves on the other, and a cloudless sky overhead—brought us to the Borj of Achichina—one of those primitive resting-places, half inns, half military posts, which are to be found throughout French Africa, along the caravan routes, at intervals of a day's slow journey. At this point we began to realize that we were leaving civilization behind us. The cultivated fields and the olive-groves henceforth yielded to tracts of yellow desolation, relieved only by tufts of grey scrub. The road was broken here and there by dry watercourses, which forced us to alight

\* I was secretly glad to hear when, on my return home, I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Morse again, that his six weeks' arduous chase in the mountain hinterland of Gabes had resulted in the destruction of only one representative of that species. The natives, he found, had the bad taste to take for food the life he wished to take for fun: hence its scarcity.

and push the motor-cars through deep ruts of soft sand, and in lieu of villages we passed only encampments of nomad Arabs.

Presently, however, there arose before us the city of Gabes—a multitude of low, flat-roofed, white-washed houses squatting amidst dark green palm plantations. We drove in and halted at an inn for our midday meal. We had been warned that cholera was raging in the town, yet the open space outside the inn was crowded with merry-making Arabs: the men arrayed in bright burnouses, sky-blue, green, pink, or marigold; the women adorned with strings of silver coins and amulets flashing round their necks, silver rings dangling from their ears, and large silver clasps gleaming over their breasts. They were celebrating the Great Feast (Aid el Kebir) with all customary joy and sacrifice.

Immense was the interest aroused by our presence as soon as it became known—and it is wonderful how soon things do become known to the Arabs—that we were going to join the forces that were fighting for Islam. The innkeeper himself, forgetting for a moment his profession, gave practical expression to the popular sympathy by adding to our menu, as a free gift, a dish of most fragrant cous-cous cooked for his own family. I had often heard, but never before partaken, of this culinary paradox. It consisted of semolina flavoured with saffron, and it contained as many surprises as any Christmas pantomime: turnips, potatoes, red pepper-pods, pieces of mutton, and limbs of chickens, made their appearance from under the mound of grain in a most unexpected style.

O cous-cous of Gabes! how often in the lean days that followed did I look back with longing upon thy succulent inconsequence!

We were just starting again, when one of the festive crowd approached us, and offered his services as guide to the Turkish camp. He was a tall youth, loose-limbed and loose-tongued, with a complexion of *café-au-lait*, and a mouse-coloured silk burnous thrown over a greasy grey jacket. An artificial red rose blushed in his buttonhole, and his neck was encircled with an india-rubber collar. He smiled profusely, and shouted a kind of French. His name was Haj Mohammed Ben Amor el Hamruni.

There were certain things about Haj Mohammed I did not greatly admire. He had an unpleasant way—not uncommon

among Arabs—of looking at you through half-closed eyes, and otherwise his manner did not inspire enthusiasm. But, as we needed someone to help us across the desert, we engaged him at once. He hurried into a cottage close by, bade farewell to his family, and hurried out again with a small bundle of clothes. Thus equipped for the campaign, he jumped on to one of our motor-cars, and we resumed our journey.

For a while the sea might still be seen shimmering on our left, and a range of blue hills sinking and swelling on our right. But soon the sea was lost to view, and we sped along a solitary road that crawled and curved like a giant yellow snake across a vast waste of sand and weeds. The only objects that broke the monotony of the wilderness were a few flocks of flat-tailed sheep and black goats grazing in the distance, or an occasional string of camels silhouetted black against the pale horizon.

The sun had already set when we reached Medenine, a typical Tunisian town, made up of three-storied white-washed dwellings, with arched roofs and no windows, huddled as close together as are the cells in a honeycomb. Here we spent the night, and with the morning we took the road again. I said "road" from habit; strictly speaking, henceforth we had no road, but only a rough track, sandy and stony by turns, cleared out of the wilderness; and our speed was reduced to about thirty kilomètres an hour. We were already in the ante-room of the real desert. Only at rare intervals we passed a clearing hedged in with thorny bushes, planted with bare fig-trees, and populated with a few feebly twittering birds. Beyond these patches it was all solitude and silence, and one or two ravens, circling in the sky over some invisible carcass, constituted the only signs of life I saw till we reached the Borj Nefatiya—another small post mounting guard at the point where the caravan route from Taousel to Zarzis crossed ours.

We halted for a few minutes to examine the tyres of our much-tried machines, and then set off on the last stage of our race. The sun was in mid-sky when we again perceived tokens of human industry—wells, trees, and Arabs tilling their fields with toy ploughs drawn by colossal camels. We were within the oasis of Ben Gardane, created some fifteen years ago by the French, and already showing what intelligence can achieve even in the desert—a well-planned and ordered little town

with broad tree-shaded streets of Arab *ghorfas* (arched huts) and French houses, set in the midst of neatly hedged and abundantly irrigated gardens, the property of a peasantry that has no reason to regret the compulsion which forced it to exchange a vagrant for a stationary existence.

Here we found the first contingent of the Turkish Red Crescent Mission on its way to the seat of war. The Red Crescent is the Turkish equivalent of our Red Cross. Its foundation dates from the epoch of the Geneva Convention. But during Abdul Hamid's reign it remained, like the Ottoman Constitution, in a state of suspended animation. It awoke to life again with the Constitution itself, and, in the spring of 1911, under the patronage of the new Sultan and the honorary presidency of the Heir-Presumptive, it reorganized itself. Less than six months afterwards the Society was called upon by the outbreak of the war in Tripoli to give an active proof of its vitality. Supported with funds liberally contributed by a patriotic public, the Central Committee was able, soon after the commencement of hostilities, to despatch this first contingent—five doctors, two chemists, four male nurses, a cook, and an accountant—under the directorship of Dr. Kérim Sébati Bey.

It was a surprise for me to meet him and his party at Ben Gardane, for I had seen from the papers that they had left Marseilles some time back, and I fully expected them to be already at the Turkish headquarters. The delay, they explained to me, had been caused by the machinations of the Italians, who had denounced the Mission to the French authorities as harbouring Turkish officers disguised as nurses, and as carrying in its medicine-boxes munitions of war.

The truth is that some of the so-called "nurses" were really military officers, whose insistence on going—despite the doctors' protests—to the seat of war under the protection of the Red Crescent, and subsequent indiscretions, were responsible for the difficulties the Mission had met with. For the rest, the examination by the French authorities cannot have been very severe, for most of these gentlemen, I was assured by one of the Turkish doctors, had escaped detection, and later on I had the pleasure of making the personal acquaintance of one of them—a fine artillery Captain.

In making this statement I betray no secret confided to my



MEDENINE.

*L. Morse, phot.*



GHOEFAS AT BEN GARDANE.

*L. Morse, phot.*





keeping, for, I have it on the authority of the same Turkish doctor, among the officers in question was a correspondent of the well-known Constantinople journal *Tanin*, who afterwards sent to his paper a full account of their escapade—and this account, incredible to relate, was actually published by the *Tanin*.

The Italians forwarded a copy of the interesting and self-incriminating document to the French Government, which, after this revelation, made the passage of the frontier harder for patriots who would not remember that discretion is the better part of valour.

Turkish officers were not the only individuals whom zeal for the cause had impelled to seek a clandestine passage to Tripolitania. I have already noted the enthusiasm which the war had aroused among the Tunisian Arabs. Here I had fresh evidence of it. Among the persons I met at Ben Gardane ready to start with us was a peaceful-looking, dusky gentleman, dressed in the garb of the country. I had some talk with him, and, in answer to my question in what capacity he was going to the war, he replied that he was a journalist. Some weeks afterwards I met in the Turkish camp a smart, dusky Sub-Lieutenant clad in khaki, whose face seemed strangely familiar. He smiled affably, and said: "Don't you remember me?"

Our own guide, Haj Mohammed, had by this time begun to hint about going to the war to fight, and even asked us to let him get a rifle before crossing the frontier, a request which I opposed, as utterly incompatible with our character as non-combatants.

Besides these Mohammedan volunteers, I met at Ben Gardane a young German in spectacles, who, in execrable French, informed me that he was a medical man anxious to serve the Sultan. His credentials consisted of a postcard bearing his own photograph and a few lines in Turkish signed by a minor member of the Ottoman Embassy at Berlin, and a Red Crescent arm-band, which, Kérîm Bey pointed out to him, was not officially stamped. His equipment included, besides the clothes he stood in, a cheap little portmanteau, a rug, and a Kodak.

Meanwhile we had presented ourselves to the French Chef d'Annexe, who furnished us with a pass and a letter of recommendation, engaged horses for ourselves and a camel for our

luggage, and, the Red Crescent having also got themselves ready, we all started together at 4 p.m., a cavalcade of fifteen, with a score of slow baggage-camels following. We were a heterogeneous collection: Turks in European black clothes and small red fezes; Arab camel-drivers and horse-owners wrapped in voluminous hrams—white, grey, or brown—pulled over their heads and thrown over the left shoulder like ancient Roman togas, and primitive flint-locks slung across their backs; ourselves in Norfolk jackets and riding-breeches, my companion with a battered helmet, and I in a voluminous turban over an ordinary English cloth cap; a handsome Albanian in his national garb and a conical white cap; our Haj Mohammed in his silk burnous and low red fez, with an immense black tassel flowing over his shoulder; and a loud-voiced, orange-bearded sheikh, who had been sent from Zwara to act as guide to the Red Crescent Mission.

Four hours' ride—the first in a blazing sun, the last three by moonlight—brought us to the Borj of Shusha, or Allouet el Gounna, the last French military post, a solidly built and loop-holed square with two flanking turrets. It was in charge of a big native tchoush, or sergeant, and a slender native clerk. The latter attended to the telegraph and telephone service, the former commanded the small garrison—a score of mounted spahis and gouniehs, who are quartered with their horses outside the borj in huts constructed of matting, dry palm-leaves, and camel-hair cloth. Our arrival was greeted by the barking of numerous dogs, which drowned the hooting of the owls and the twittering of the bats.

We alighted at the gate of the borj, presented our passes and letter to the tchoush, and were shown to one of five rooms that line one of the sides of the square. It was a fairly large apartment, full of flies and bare of furniture, except for a rickety little table and an iron bedstead belonging to a country-born French contractor, who was there looking after some repairs to the building. Light was provided by a guttering candle stuck in an empty bottle. We made our dinner—soup, tinned tongue, bread, dry figs—and then turned in. The French contractor offered to lend a spare mattress and pillow to anyone who desired them. Personally, I preferred the hardness of the concrete floor to a populous couch. So I spread

out my rugs, leaving the luxury of the mattress and its inhabitants to my companion. We slept as best we could through a pandemonium of braying donkeys, growling camels, neighing horses, barking dogs, and incessantly chattering camel-drivers.

The chilly dawn was just breaking through a thick white mist when we woke up. The borj was already awake—a cock outside was crowing lustily, some lambs were bleating, and the camels were growling sullenly. We sprang to our feet. We had been told by our Turkish friends overnight to be ready to start at 6 a.m. It would never do to keep them waiting, so we had a tablet of chocolate for breakfast, and hastened to pack. We packed and—waited. We were the only members of the party who had taken the hour mentioned literally. All the others were still either lying in bed or quietly drinking tinfuls of nice Nestlé's milk, warmed up over a wood fire, or smoking placidly their morning cigarettes. It was egregiously stupid of us to have brought into the leisurely East the habits of mind acquired in the busy West. I, at all events, ought to have known better. I ought to have remembered that the Turk refuses to be hustled. Time has no value in his eyes, and the hours he fixes for any action in his life, important or unimportant, are always to be understood in a figurative sense.

It was 8 o'clock, and the mist had cleared away, when at length we rode forth, the same cavalcade minus the German medico, who was held back by the tchoush, for he was unprovided with a pass.

In about an hour's time we reached one of the terminal blocks of stone which mark the recently delineated frontier. Three stalwart spahis in ample blue burnouses stood beside it, holding their horses; and it was easy to see, from the smiles that suffused their swarthy faces as they greeted us, that, like all other sons of Islam, they were in hearty sympathy with our enterprise.

## CHAPTER II

### IN THE DESERT

WE were now in the absolute desert. The world, with its noises and restraints, had already receded into the dim past. There was nothing in all the boundless horizon around us to suggest humanity and its works—only a rolling, scrub-studded, virgin plain that had never known the touch of the plough. Our very road consisted of a number of faint and narrow tracks that meandered in and out of the tufts of scrub, meeting and parting, and meeting again, as unmethodical and irresponsible as the camels whose feet had trodden them for centuries.

We rode on between a large salt lake on the right and on the left the sea, both serene and grey under the grey December sky. "What are the Italians doing?" I asked myself, as we trotted or cantered cheerfully along, filling our lungs with the clean, crisp air of the desert. "Why have they not yet landed on this flat, inviting coast, to cut off communication with the Turkish Army? Where is their fleet?" An answer to these questions I obtained when, at midday, we reached Bu Kamesh, an old Turkish fort of modest dimensions and primitive construction, which stood, square and white, on the very margin of the sea, commanding a narrow gulf formed by a long, low, tree-covered sand-spit or headland (Ras Mekabes) that shoots out of the coast from the east. In times gone by this narrow gulf no doubt sheltered the swift galleys of the Tripolitan corsairs who scourged the Mediterranean. Now a few tiny feluccas slept peacefully on the still waters, while under the long, low sand-spit beyond steamed an Italian warship—a big black cruiser with one mast, belching clouds of black smoke from its two funnels.

We were face to face with the enemy at last, and the tokens of his inefficient activity lay before our eyes. The coast



STARTING FROM BEN GARDANE.

L. M. ...



was littered with splintered shells of all sizes, and the ground round the fort was perforated with the pits they had dug where they had dropped. Bu Kamesh had been bombarded repeatedly—the last time only a few days before our arrival—yet the only damage done to it consisted of a small block of masonry knocked out of a corner of the seaward wall, and a hole made in the middle of the same wall.

How had the Italians succeeded in not pounding to dust so good a target? and why had they not followed up their bombardments with a landing? I looked up at the poor old walls, and could see no guns. I looked round for the garrison, and saw only five Turkish Tommies lounging about; one was quietly drawing water from the well outside the fort. There were neither guns nor any garrison to resist a landing, and yet the Italian cruiser was content to smoke in the distance, looking for blockade-runners on the sea, while the overland route remained open to the enemy!

Having seen all that there was to be seen at Bu Kamesh and partaken of a frugal lunch—a tin of tongue and some bread—my companion and I left the fort and joined our Turkish friends, who, as soon as they espied the Italian warship, had prudently retired out of reach of its guns. We found them resting on the ground. Some of the horses had run away, and we had to wait till they were caught.

It was 3 p.m. before we set off again. The sky had in the meantime grown darker, and we had hardly travelled for one hour before the rain came down in torrents. We rode on through the deluge, past two other forts on the coast—Sidi Said and Sidi Ali—till we got to the edge of one of those marshes that are formed suddenly in the desert, wherever the sand is too hard to absorb the rain-water, and are as suddenly dried up when the sun comes out again. We dismounted to let the beasts drink, and our horses and their keepers lapped up the water gratefully. Then we resumed our journey, and splashed across the morass.

On the farther side a messenger from one of the forts we had just passed met us with the news that the Italians had, during the past six days, been bombarding Zwara—our destination—and that a landing seemed imminent. This news induced the Red Crescent party to change their plan, and instead of getting

to Zwara that evening, they decided to go to Rigdaleen—a village some way inland. The change of plan naturally involved a change of course. So, leaving the beaten track that ran parallel to the coast, we struck across the desert in a south-easterly direction.

By this time night had fallen, and we in the van of the cavalcade heard our comrades behind shouting to us to stop and wait for them, so that we should all ride together, otherwise we might easily lose one another, and our way, in the dark—the more easily as now that we had left the beaten track our sole guide was the orange-bearded sheikh.

At 7.30 p.m. we came to a well—a round hole in the desert without any parapet. No wonder so many of the Tripolitan wells are choked up with sand and with the carcasses of unwary camels. We alighted, and, on finding that the water came up to within only five feet of the mouth, some of our comrades proceeded to extemporize buckets out of the jugs they carried with them and pieces of rope. I was so thirsty that, casting prudence aside, I followed their example, and drank of the brackish water thus drawn, while our beasts slaked their thirst at two or three immemorial troughs hollowed out of palm logs.

Meantime the rain had ceased, and the moon began to peep intermittently between the clouds. In her dim light the patches of grey scrub looked black against the sand that now shone white, and here and there glittered like frozen snow. But there was not the faintest trace of a path anywhere. We began to fear that our orange-bearded guide had lost his way, for when we asked him how far we still were from our destination he could give no answer, either as to the distance or as to the time it would take us to get there. All he knew was that it was six hours from Bu Kamesh, and that it lay “straight ahead.” With this vague assurance and occasional peeps into my compass, we were obliged to ride on and on and on, literally in semi-darkness, figuratively in total darkness, till about 9 o’clock we stumbled against some mud-enclosed gardens of olive and palm trees. These, we were glad to hear, marked the outskirts of Rigdaleen. But it was not until another three-quarters of an hour had elapsed—and in a long march it is the last step that costs most—that the white cottages of the village began to be vaguely silhouetted in the moonlight, and



presently we reached an arched gateway which led into the queerest kasr I have ever seen.

How queer it was I realized the next morning. The gateway led into a broad square court, each side of which was lined with some fifteen low, blind apartments built in compact rows. All the apartments on three sides of the square were of the same height, their flat roofs forming one continuous terrace. But the side on which we entered was more original. The apartments on the right hand of the gateway were of various heights, some with flat and others with vaulted roofs, while on the left stood four narrow two-storied buildings, all with vaulted roofs. Most of these dwellings harboured, in addition to the normal population, refugees from Zwara—women and children, whose shrill voices reached us from behind the closed low doors. In addition, the court itself contained three bell-tents, one circular hut made of dried palm-branches, and an Arab tent, all standing amidst piles of sacks, heaps of firewood, camels and donkeys.

On our arrival we alighted close to the gateway at the foot of a flight of steep stone stairs which led up to one of the vaulted chambers. We climbed up, and surprised the governor of the village in his nightshirt. We climbed down again, and arranged to spend the night with our Turkish friends in the Arab tent. But an Arab tent affords small protection against the cold, penetrating night dew, and we had neither beds nor coverings with us; the camels that carried our baggage had lagged behind in the desert, and we had long since lost all hope of seeing them again that night. There was not even straw to be had. So, having supped on a piece of half-baked barley-bread and some tinned milk, we lay down in the tent, fatalistically resigned to the inevitable. But the Turks were less disposed to submit to fate, and in the end they contrived to find a more satisfactory sleeping-place for themselves and us. We dragged our stiff limbs across the court to a ladder made of two rough palm trunks and some pieces of wood tied across by way of rungs, and climbed up to another vaulted chamber, where we stretched ourselves on the floor like sardines in a barrel. The chamber, of course, had no windows, and the small door was hardly adequate for ventilation. Nevertheless, we were thankful to have a solid roof over our heads, and, for

my own part, I made myself quite comfortable with my overcoat for a mattress, my mackintosh for a blanket, and my photographic camera and turban for a pillow. It was long since I had slept so well, and I would recommend to all persons suffering from insomnia an eleven hours' ride in an Arab saddle across the desert.

When we rose in the morning our camels had not yet turned up. The drivers had apparently chosen to stop and spend a restful night at some nomad encampment rather than try to overtake us. We were therefore obliged to dispense with soap, tea, coffee, and even tobacco. Unwashed and unshaven, we breakfasted on *quioslemeh*—flat round oatmeal-cakes fried in oil—and then began our preparations for another march.

We had hired our Ben Gardane horses as far as Zwara, being assured that once there we should be able to get Tripolitan mounts for the rest of the way. But the owners declared that, as Rigdaleen was not in the original route, our contract ended here, and they refused to take us any farther. Having ascertained that Zwara was only two hours' distance, we paid them off, and decided to proceed there on foot. Then another difficulty arose. Haj Mohammed had proved himself a most unsatisfactory factotum. Contrary to our agreement, he had hired a horse at our expense—and a much finer horse than either of ours—and all through the journey, instead of attending on us, he indulged his vanity by plunging, curving, and pirouetting on his grey steed, or by fraternizing with the Turkish doctors, and leaving his employers to shift for themselves. He gave us to understand that he was not our servant—he had only condescended to act as our companion. He was a gentleman adventurer. He had a brother who was a Khalifa, and a cousin who was something else equally important. He had served for three years with immense distinction as a spahi in the Tunisian army, but, tired of the monotony of military life, he had taken to "guiding" as a relaxation. While still a soldier, he had challenged to a duel a French officer, who avoided an encounter with so redoubtable an adversary by offering him a sum of money and an abject apology. Since he took to "guiding," he had been to the Brussels Exhibition with a great German nobleman, who treated him as his son—and so on, and so on. There seemed to be no end to the fellow's boastful

garrulity. Now he consummated his insolence by demanding that we should pay him in advance. I told him that, as he had broken his engagement with us in every particular, he was entitled to nothing save one day's pay and our cordial detestation. He did not like this, and tried to browbeat me. I consigned him to the devil.

Just as we were leaving Rigdaleen, about 10 o'clock, our camels arrived. We instructed the driver to follow us to Zwara, and, without further ado, we set out on our walk. A series of narrow tracks winding north-eastwards marked our way. On either side the desert was populated by herds of camels and flocks of sheep and goats grazing on the scrub. In front a fringe of green trees edged the horizon; behind it must lie the coast. My companion forged ahead. I preferred a more leisurely pace, as affording greater opportunity for observation. One and a half hours' walk brought me to the green fringe, which turned out to be a long line of palm and olive plantations, forming the first of three belts of vegetation. Between it and the second belt stretched a bad mile of flat ground, very hard and very slippery, with sorry tufts of scrub scattered here and there. It took me half an hour to cross this flat. And so I gained the second belt of palm-groves, crossed it, and got to a ridge of sand-dunes stretching for miles to east and west, with numerous palms rising dark and stately out of the yellow soil. I climbed over the dunes, my feet sinking at every step in the soft loose sand, and suddenly found myself in a large compact mass of one-storied, flat-roofed cottages spreading down to the sea. This was Zwara.

## CHAPTER III

### IN THE DESERT: ZWARA AND ITS BIMBASHI

YEARS ago I had spent some melancholy hours wandering among the excavated dwellings of Bubastis. Zwara, as soon as I stepped into the first of its narrow streets, brought that dead Egyptian city back to my memory.

As I have already stated, the women and children had fled from the town when the bombardment began, and only the fighting men had remained. The dwellings on either side were quite deserted, and through the open doors I could see interiors stripped of every stick of furniture, and the ashes of fires that had burnt themselves out untended. One or two houses had been totally destroyed by the heavy Italian shells, and several lay in various stages of partial demolition—here a roof had been knocked in, there the supporting walls had been reduced to heaps of stone and dry mud, and the roof hung loose, showing its bare palm-trunk beams; and again, farther down, a wide gap marked the passage of an iron missile. I passed one of the very few two-storied buildings—the roof and the top floor had collapsed bodily, and the big wooden gate swung on its hinges with a faint creak that sounded poignantly loud in the deadly silence. The only two modern houses in the town—the private residence of the Commandant and of the second in command—towering above the rest, had suffered most, and their upper parts nodded over the street with the lattice windows suspended in the void. Of the Government House, though a low building, scarce a third remained whole. Through the paneless windows I saw a room that represented the ideal of wreck and ruin—a pile of open registers with torn pages stood in one corner, other papers lay in loose heaps about the floor, amidst broken chairs and splintered desks, all already





*Baron von Binder-Kraglstein, phot.*

ITALIAN NAVAL SHELLS EXPLODING OVER ZWARA.



*Baron von Binder-Kraglstein, phot.*

ARAB WARRIORS LAUGHING AT DAMAGE DONE TO TREES BY ITALIAN SHELLS.

under a thick coat of white dust—the dust of a dead domination, an Italian might have said.

Outside the building I met a skeleton-like hound roaming about despondently. He was evidently hungry, and looked as if he knew that before evening he would be hungrier still.

The domed shrines of saints had shared the fate of profane edifices. It was only when I emerged into the market-place in the middle of the town that I detected some animation. The open space and the small coffee-house were crowded with armed men, some standing about in groups, others squatting on the ground with knees drawn up and hands clasping them. They did not seem dejected or even sullen, but quietly determined to face any contingencies that might arise.

Here I also saw a few grocers' shops still open, and some peddlers selling gourds, onions, lemons, flat loaves of barley-bread, and fly-blown dates. This was the only living spot in Zwara, and its life was that of a camp rather than of a city.

My companion had reached the place before me, and I found him at the coffee-house, together with the unspeakable Haj Mohammed. The latter had dogged my footsteps for some time, endeavouring to obtain a reconciliation. But he left me alone when I told him that the only condition on which he could be readmitted to our service was absolute submission. He had apparently come, meanwhile, to the conclusion that he had nothing to gain by impudence, for now I found him prepared to apologize humbly for his past sins, and full of promises for better behaviour in the future. He even went so far as to order for us a strange decoction which he called tea.

While sipping this mysterious beverage, I made, among the friendly warriors, some inquiries about recent events, and this is what I heard then, and what subsequent investigation confirmed. An Italian *fergata* had opened fire on the town—an unfortified town—on Tuesday, November 28th, and bombarded it incessantly from about two hours before noon till nightfall. Next day it repeated the performance, beginning at dawn and not desisting till late in the afternoon. The five following days witnessed intermittent attacks of a similar kind. On the day before our arrival the warship had sailed past the coast without firing. This morning it had been sighted again, and, as on all previous occasions, the Arabs both of the town and

neighbourhood had rushed to the beach with their rifles, ready to give the enemy a warm welcome should they try to land. But nothing particular had happened, and on my walk from Rigdaleen I had met many of them returning to their homes.

Apart from the wanton demolition of cheap mud cottages, I could not discover that this insensate waste of powder had done any damage. The only casualties I could hear of were two unfortunate cows and a camel that happened to be browsing on an exposed part of the coast. Rumour added also a woman, or, according to another version, a boy. But that was not certain.

However, be the material effect of the Italian shells what it might, there was no question as to their moral effect. The bombardment of an unfortified place like Zwara, instead of cowering, had infuriated the Arabs. They did not care a piastre about the loss of property—mud cottages are easily rebuilt—and the few animals and trees destroyed could easily be replaced. “If the infidel’s dread engines of destruction can do no more than this,” they said, “we have little to worry about.” In other words, the terror with which the Italian guns may have inspired them at first had, through familiarity, been replaced by utter contempt. And this feeling extended to the persons who wielded the guns. If the Italians were men, the Arabs said, they would have made, at least, an attempt to land. The fact that they had not ventured to make such an attempt convinced them that the Italians were cowards. They themselves did not mind fighting a bit. They would go on fighting “for sixty years”—a favourite expression meaning “for ever.” They were not like the Italians: they had *forza*—curiously enough they borrowed the word for “power” from the very people they pronounced utterly devoid of it—and so on. There was no mistaking either the sincerity or the fixity of their purpose.

From the market-place, as soon as our camel came up, we proceeded to the military quarters on the east of the town—barracks, a small unfinished mosque, and a single-storied, blue-painted Kasr or official residence of the Commandant and his Staff—all lying in a shallow valley shielded on the sea side by the palm-fringed sand-dunes. Of all these buildings, the Kasr, owing to a slight depression in the sand-dunes which exposed it to the Italian fire, showed the most conspicuous signs of the



ordeal to which the place had recently been subjected. A projectile had smashed some of the panes of the windows that faced the coast and hit the wall opposite, while another had knocked down part of the low parapet of a sort of terrace that ran along that side. Many fragments of exploded shells lay about, and we heard that many shells had failed to explode at all; which, in addition to bad marksmanship, perhaps accounted for the comparative ineffectiveness of this singularly inept and unnecessary performance.

Our camel was made to kneel down with the customary *kh's*, guttural imprecations, and persuasive kicks. Our luggage was taken into the unfinished mosque—which also bore a mark of the bombardment in the shape of a hole through its seaward wall—and deposited on one of the halfa grass mats that covered part of the earth floor. An orderly was posted at the door to guard it, while we went to the Kasr to make our salaams to the Commandant.

There we were given to understand that we could not go on to the Turkish camp until a special permission had been received from the Commander-in-Chief. That was an unexpected blow to my impatience. Still, the frequent visits of the Italian fleet made Zwara anything but a dull place, and a short sojourn in it would not be very disagreeable. I therefore hastened to adjust myself to the situation in a spirit of acquiescence befitting the mosque which I hoped was to be my temporary abode.

In spite of the shell-hole in its side, there was something essentially peaceful about this simple place of tragically interrupted worship, and I looked forward to a tranquil night between its clean whitewashed walls, whose only ornaments were a few texts from the Koran. I had already selected a cosy corner for my couch close to the plain wood pulpit, and not far from the niche that indicates the direction of Holy Mecca, when a soldier arrived from the Commandant with orders to remove our belongings for greater safety and comfort into the Kasr. The room allotted to us turned out to be the one with the smashed windows. All the furniture that escaped destruction had been taken out of it, and its total bareness was relieved only by a case of cartridges that stood against one wall and some mats that still covered the floor.

Into this room we retired for the night, made our beds on

the floor, and undressed in the dark, by order of the Commandant, as our uncurtained windows faced the depression in the sand-dunes, and a light might have tempted an unpleasant surprise. We were lulled to sleep by the music of the sea beating on the beach beyond the sand-dunes, and we slept soundly till 7 o'clock in the morning, when we were roused by tidings, brought by the sentries stationed along the coast, that the Italian warship was in sight again. We sprang to our feet, huddled on our clothes, rolled up our rugs, and rushed out to see the fun.

Alas! it was a false alarm. We returned to the Kasr disappointed, and anxious to go where the real fun was. We were told that the Commandant had wired to headquarters, but no reply had yet come. Our Red Crescent friends had departed the evening before, and two young Turkish officers who, during the night, had arrived from Tunis in disguise also went on the way we longed to go.

Our disgust increased in the evening, when we were again forced to roll up our bedding by what turned out to be another false alarm. The cruiser had passed, but had preferred to bestow its attentions elsewhere; for during the night we heard the report of heavy guns somewhere in the east. There was nothing for it but to wait.

Waiting did not prove so tedious as I had feared. We were the guests of Yusbashi (Captain) Hassan Nazif—of all hospitable Turks I have known the most absurdly hospitable. He was a man who carried his charity far beyond the precept which inculcates that, if you have two shirts, you should give one to him who has none. He had only one bed, and yet he had already given it up to a stranger, and obstinately refused to occupy it even when ill, sleeping the while on an awkward corner sofa, with his knees bent up and his feet resting on a chair. He insisted on our sharing his meals—chickens and eggs and macaroni and pillaf—all cooked by a Greek-speaking little orderly who answered to the name of Ibrahim, and who added to his master's good-nature a laughing vivacity thoroughly Hellenic. Our host kept on apologizing most unnecessarily for all inevitable *kusurs* (deficiencies). And he crowned his kindness by presenting us, for our safety, with *kalpacs*—soldiers' caps of greenish astrakhan lined with leather—which we henceforth wore.

Including our host, the Staff consisted of four commissioned officers who represented four distinct races—a fair Albanian, a black Fezzani Arab, a European Turk, and an Anatolian Turk. These officers, with a grey-bearded Lieutenant, were in charge of a battalion of khaki-clad regulars, who also included not only representatives of the above races, but in addition some pure negroes. This force, and all the Arab irregulars along the coast, were under the command of Bimbashi (Major) Musa, one of the most remarkable personalities I have ever known.

A native of the Yemen, Musa Bey presented all the physical characteristics of a pure-blooded Arab—slender in form and small of stature, he had a lean, swarthy face, with a spacious forehead, an aquiline nose, a drooping moustache, and a short, curly beard under a firm chin. His hair, like his beard, was jet black, and his hands and feet were the hands and feet of a high-bred lady.

This delicate little man was entrusted with the task of defending an unfortified coast more than eighty miles long against the fleets and armies of a great European Power ; and at first sight no one could have seemed less qualified for the task or less conscious of it. With his tunic and shirt unbuttoned, a grey overcoat thrown casually over his shoulders, a pair of yellow slippers imperfectly adjusted on his feet, and a conical white cap carelessly perched on his black curls, the Bimbashi was to be seen at all times sauntering about like one in a state of perpetual somnambulation. His words were few—perhaps twenty a day—and he had cut down even the short Arab inquiry “ *Keif el hal* ” (How are you ?) into the shorter still “ *Keif* .” He never raised his voice above a soft whisper, and a curiously wistful smile always accompanied his monosyllabic speech. Nothing seemed capable of rousing Musa Bey from his apathy—not even the advent of the enemy.

Early on the third morning after our arrival (December 6th), Ibrahim, our host's little orderly, thrust his head inside our door, and with a genial smile announced, “ The ship is here .” We sprang up as usual, flung on our clothes, and rushed off to the beach. It was no false alarm this time ; the ship was there—a big black cruiser with two funnels and one mast steaming towards us at half-speed from the north-east. We recognized it as our old friend of Bu Kamesh.

The Bimbashi was already there on the top of a sand-dune, in his habitual *deshabille*, blinking a bored indifference at the sea. His languid unconcern at such a moment mystified and fascinated me. Was it the callousness of stupidity or the calm of strength? I glanced at his hand. It held a pair of field-glasses. He had obviously seen all there was to see.

I climbed down the side of the sand-dune, and found some of the regulars in the pits and trenches they had already dug, while others were in the act of digging fresh pits. It began to dawn upon me that the Bimbashi knew his business, and he refused to be flurried simply because there was nothing to be flurried about. The men had their orders, and, as I found out gradually, few men in all the eighty odd miles of coast on either side of Zwara cared to disobey Musa Bey. The Turkish garrison under his command had long known him for a just but very stern ruler, who would not tolerate the least breach of discipline. Every man who neglected his duty was immediately sent up to headquarters to be chastised by the Bimbashi's own hand—a hand that had been seen administering corporal punishment even to a Captain. The Arab volunteers soon got to know him, too.

Unlike most of the other Turkish commanders I subsequently met, Musa Bey made no distinction in matters of discipline between regulars and volunteers, between Turks and Arabs. They were in his eyes all alike soldiers, and he expected from all alike the same single-minded devotion to duty. When some of the tribesmen, tempted, poor fellows, by the rain which had visited their country after four years of drought, evinced a desire to leave their posts and return home to till their lands, the Bimbashi quietly told them that the penalty for desertion was death. And it was notorious that the Bimbashi never threatened in vain; also that his eye was as quick to see as his hand was to strike. Some weeks before an Arab had stolen arms from the Turkish camp at Suk el Juma, near Tripoli, and made off with them towards the west. He was caught by one of Musa's patrols as he was crossing the desert to the south of Zwara, and was shot by Musa himself.

Briefly, this man, in appearance never awake, was in reality never asleep. Like a great spider sitting still in the centre of a vast web, Musa sat at Zwara, and thence controlled silently



MUSA LEVY.  
*Portrait of Bimbashi Khatib, Zowara, Africa.*

THE BIMBASHI OF ZWARA AND SOME LOCAL SHEIKHS.



and surely all around him. The pickets that watched the sea on the north and the patrols that scoured the desert on the south were alike answerable to him ; the caravans that passed to and from the Turkish camp were under his protection ; his spirit was felt in every spot and by every man within the region entrusted to his care.

In the meantime the ship was drawing nearer. But when she had got within something like a two-mile range, instead of making for Zwara, she turned about, shaped her course to the north-west, and slowly steamed out of sight. The Bimbashi cast one last bored look at the sea, and thrusting his hands into his trouser pockets, he sauntered back to the Kasr. He must have grown, poor man, quite blasé with frequent bombardments, anticipations of bombardments, and fruitless alarms.

About an hour later we heard a dull cannonade from the west ; apparently our friend was calling at one of the forts on the coast. But it must have been only a flying visit, for a little later, whilst we were at our midday meal, the *fergata* was reported to have made her appearance again. We gobbled our roast chicken and pillaf, and once more rushed to the coast. She was now coming from the west at a fair speed. Nearer she came and nearer. Presently she slowed down, taking soundings. Then she stopped dead still with her broadside towards us, exactly opposite the depression in the sand-dunes, and so near the shore that through my glasses I could see plainly the men moving to and fro on deck. I made sure that they meant business this time, and my heart beat with the eager anticipation of at least a bombardment—even, perhaps, if Allah was in an obliging mood, a landing of Italian troops. In the latter contingency I had no doubt about the result, for I knew that everything was ready for their suitable reception. The only thing that lacked was a gun ; one good gun, hidden behind the sand-dune on which we stood, would have been enough to repay with ample interest the loan of lead which Zwara owed to that cruiser. A six-inch shell in the right spot might have wiped off the debt—and the cruiser—in an instant. As it was, we had to do without that useful instrument, and the Italians were evidently aware of our limitations, otherwise they would never have ventured so near the shore. I wondered, however, whether they had any conception of the confidence

with which their debarkation was awaited. From their decks they could not see a single stirring soul—not the least sign of life, but only a great sunlit solitude, a wavy expanse of soft sand-hills whose whitish surface was barely streaked with the grey shadows of tall palm-trees, the sole visible sentinels.

Yet, for all that, the place was alive and very much awake. It had been awake ever since the early break of day, when news first came of the enemy's reappearance. Only, it must be added, the wakefulness of the Turk is not like our wakefulness. The soldiers along the foot of the sand-dunes would have impressed an observer unacquainted with their character as the reverse of alert. Having dug their pits, they lay up to the neck in them, some smoking cigarettes, others scratching their bare legs, all perfectly silent and seemingly apathetic.

While waiting for the commencement of the spectacle, I tried to secure the best possible seat. With that object I crept from sand-dune to sand-dune, and from one cluster of palm-trees to the next. My search, although carried on with all caution, irritated greatly the poor old Lieutenant in charge of the trenches, who kept on beckoning frantically to me to lie down. In the end I found an ideal coign of vantage among some bushes on the top of a dune—a point from which I could see both the ship and the buildings over which I expected the shells to burst.

Hour after hour passed, and the eagerly expected flash which was to herald the first shell did not come. The sun had already travelled some way towards the west, and the grey shadows of the slim palm-trunks lay longer and darker upon the white slopes of the sand-dunes, while those of their leafy heads fell far away over the flat beach below, whence came the faint murmur of the sea rippling on the shore. It was the only sound audible, and instead of relieving it seemed to accentuate the oppressive silence around me. Sick with hope deferred, I stole out of my crow's nest, slipped down the dune-side, and found the soldiers sleeping peacefully in their pits.

We decided to fill in the time, pending the commencement of the Italian entertainment, in a less passive manner by taking a stroll through the town, and we found ourselves once more in the market-place. We had scarcely sat down on one of the long wooden benches outside the coffee-house when the German doctor whom we had left behind us at Shusha turned up on



horseback, with his little portmanteau, rug, and Kodak. We hailed him with delight, asked him to dismount and have a cup of coffee with us, and introduced him to the Arabs around as an illustrious Hakim who had come all the way from Alemania to preserve the health of the Sultan's army. In reply to our inquiries as to how he had managed to come on, he told us that he had worried the French Lieutenant of Ben Gardane by telephone and the German Consul of Tunis by telegraph until they got him a pass. On his way here he had seen the Italians bombarding the little fort of Sidi Ali on the coast, which accounted for the boom of guns we had heard. We told him in return that the vessel that had bombarded Sidi Ali was now here, and we expected it to bombard Zwara again at any moment. With this we walked back again to the shore to see what was going on. All was peace. The sun had sunk behind the palm-trees, and the western sky glowed like red gold between their black trunks. The low ground behind the sand-dunes was already dark as I strolled back to the Kasr and to dinner.

Night came, and the cruiser still remained in the same position. The Bimbashi, suspecting an attempt at a landing under cover of darkness, had given his orders accordingly, and all the Turks and Arabs, including even the camel-drivers, spent the night on the shore, ready to welcome the enemy.

For my own part, I had already come to the conclusion that the movements of the Italian warships backwards and forwards had for their sole object the prevention of smuggling. The periodical bombardments of the coast appeared to be dictated by the wish to arouse native discontent with the war, and not to facilitate a landing. If the Italians had intended to land, they would have done so long ago, before the coast Arabs had been taught by familiarity to despise the infidel's noisy shells.

Two other Turkish officers had arrived on the previous day. They had left Constantinople a month earlier, landed at Algiers, and worked their way to the Tunisian frontier, where they had narrowly escaped being arrested by the French. After a day's stay at Zwara, they were now preparing to leave for the Turkish camp. I spoke to them, asking them to tell the Bimbashi that there was no sense in keeping us any longer in suspense, since we carried letters of introduction to the Commander-in-Chief. If our presence in the Turkish camp was

desirable, we wished to go on at once ; if it was not, we were prepared to go back, but we could not stay at Zwara indefinitely. The Bimbashi saw the reasonableness of this view, and, though the expected answer from headquarters had not yet arrived, gave us permission to proceed on our way.

When we had crossed the frontier at Ben Gardane on December 3rd, our destination was Ain Zara, where the Commander-in-Chief had his headquarters. Now (December 6th) we were told that we ought to shape our course to Azizia—a place the name of which we had never heard before. No explanation was given us for this, and we imagined that Azizia must be some advanced post on the way to Ain Zara. Presently, however, I ascertained to my surprise that Azizia was actually the Turkish headquarters, and that both the Red Crescent party who had left us on the night of the 4th and the two young Turkish officers who had left on the morning of the 5th had gone there. Evidently something serious had happened in the meantime, yet, such is the Turk's capacity for keeping a secret, even where secrecy is superfluous, no hint of what had occurred was allowed to reach us. The mystery interested without disturbing me ; I should find its solution awaiting me at Azizia.

We had failed to obtain new horses at Zwara. So we hired two camels for our luggage and ourselves (giving our wretched guide Haj Mohammed to understand that in future he would have, in accordance with our agreement, to find his own mount), and arranged to leave with the two Turkish officers next morning. The German doctor was not allowed to accompany us.

Suddenly, when we were preparing to retire for the night, they told us that they intended to start at once. "So much the better," we said, and hastened to pack.

While we superintended our things being put on the camels in the open space behind the Kasr, the Bimbashi stole out of his room, and shuffling up to us, he thrust some pieces of toast into our hands. Before we had time to thank him he patted us on the cheek—I think he even kissed my companion, but I cannot be certain, for it was dark—and shuffled back into his room.



ON THE SAND-DUNES AT ZAVARA: WAITING FOR THE ITALIANS TO LAND.

*From the Bazaar King's Own Press.*



## CHAPTER IV

### IN THE DESERT : FROM ZWARA TO AZIZIA

WE left Zwara at 8 p.m., the two Turkish officers on horseback and our guide on a sorry little ass. I do not profess to be a judge of asses, but this particular ass appeared to me to be remarkably wanting in merit. I dare say he was cheap, and cheapness was a great merit to Haj Mohammed now that he had to pay for a mount out of his own pocket. My companion and I decided to walk or ride on the camels as the mood should dictate. Before long the two horsemen outdistanced us, and when I had footed it for a couple of hours I climbed on one of the camels for a change.

We had left Zwara in palpable darkness ; but by this time the round disc of the moon had crept over the desert sky, filling the vast expanse of sand and scrub with a hazy, mysterious half-light which blurred the outlines and fused the forms of things so that the only definite impression left on the mind was one of space. For three hours I jogged contentedly on, gazing on the moonlit expanse of sand and scrub before me, and listening to Haj Mohammed's shrill chatter with the camel-drivers. When he had done with prose, he burst forth into poetry—heroic Arab poetry—which, coupled with the rhythmic sway of the camel backwards and forwards, had a most narcotic effect upon me.

Suddenly the recitation ceased—the poor little ass had broken down under the bard's weight, and a glance back revealed the latter sprawling upon the sand.

It was the second mishap of the kind that had occurred since we started, and I thought it was time to intervene on the miserable quadruped's behalf.

“ Haj Mohammed,” I said, “ you are a big man, and this

ass is a small ass. He has carried you for five hours. If you dare to mount him again, I will make *you* carry *him* for the rest of the way."

He objected that he had no other mount.

"You need none," I replied—"you can walk;" and reinforcing precept with example, I dismounted and walked beside him.

We plodded across the flat plain, with the shore dimly adumbrated on our left by a row of white sand-dunes. We could not see the sea, but only felt its vicinity through the cold moist breeze that blew from it. All of a sudden athwart the path before us fell a brilliant beam of light—a searchlight from some Italian warship patrolling the shore. Then it vanished, leaving us in deeper gloom. We had now been travelling for seven hours. Our legs had begun to feel numb with the length of the road, and our minds to be oppressed by its monotony; but we plodded patiently on, hoping that we should soon reach our destination.

At length, about 4 a.m., we saw some mules grazing over the desert. These were the first living things we had met—the natives of Tripolitania do not love travelling by night for fear of robbers—and we welcomed their appearance as a sign that we were near human habitations. The camel-drivers confirmed our surmise. The oasis of Ajilat, they said, was not far off, and, in truth, we had not gone much farther before a mass of palm-trees loomed out of the plain, the edges of their long, sharp, sabre-like foliage glimmering like polished steel under the moon, and by-and-by the crowing of cocks and the barking of dogs saluted our ears—a sound sweeter than any music to the way-farer of the desert.

But, alas! these groves were only the fringe of the oasis. We soon left them behind, and entered upon a large circle of open, treeless ground, hard and slippery like the track from Rigdaleen to Zwara. In half an hour we had traversed this region also, and plunged into some more palm-groves; but even then we were not at our destination. Another half-hour's walk through these groves brought us to a second open space wholly different from the first—an ocean of bare yellow sand, here surging up into great billows, there sinking into deep troughs. We strained our eyes for a sign of house or habitation in vain. The moon showed us nothing but an interminable

succession of sand-hills, with a few date-palms towering, still, black, and grim, like ghostly sentinels, above their crests. We ploughed painfully through the soft yielding soil, sighing at every step, "Will this road never end?" This was the only waste of breath we indulged in. The very camel-drivers, and even Haj Mohammed himself, had left off chattering, and dragged their legs noiselessly over the ground, too tired to talk.

On we trudged and on, and still no sign of house or habitation greeted us. Our eyes were so weary that, in the treacherous moonlight, we often mistook for rows of houses what on closer inspection turned out to be mere banks of inhospitable sand. It was a case of the wish being father to the vision.

At last, as we doubled one of the sand-dunes, feeling as though we could not take another step forward, we suddenly saw rising from the summit of a ridge in front of us a big white structure with heavily buttressed sides and many windows. This was no trick of the moon, but in glad earnest the Kasr of Ajilat. With renewed vigour we pushed on, and were soon at the end of our ordeal.

It was now 5.30 a.m. The Turkish officers, who had got there already, had told the inmates of the Kasr about us, so we were readily admitted to its precincts. We passed through a big, half-opened gate, and entered into a square enclosure, with soldiers' quarters and stables along its four sides. We were shown into one of these apartments, rolled out our rugs on the hard earth floor, and immediately went to sleep.

We slept for three hours the sleep of the dead, and we got up at 8.30 perfectly fresh and ready for another long day's march. But, thanks to the leisurely ways and incurable procrastination of the East, we had to wait for over four hours before our Turkish friends were ready to start. I employed the interval in looking about me. The enclosure in which we had spent the night was the barracks. Beside it rose the Government House—a building prematurely aged and sadly neglected, with mounds of immemorial filth accumulating under its windows, from which most of the panes were missing.

The Kaimakam—a fat, lethargic Arab—had his residence in it, but his family had been sent away for safety, and the large edifice wore a look of desolation. At the foot of the sand-ridge, upon which the Kasr stood, lay the Suk—two rows of den-like

shops, with an open space between them. It was apparently market-day, for this space was thronged by a miscellaneous crowd of sellers and buyers, camels, cattle, donkeys, and by many idlers of both sexes squatting in the sunny sand, while the children sprawled about with fly-covered faces. All around spread the dusky palm forests and the yellow sand-dunes that make up the oasis of Ajilat, with green cornfields interspersed wherever the presence of a well rendered cultivation profitable.

We set out again at noon on foot, followed by our baggage-camels. After two hours' walk, we halted for about twenty minutes under a clump of palms near a ruined well, and breakfasted on a tin of sardines, bread, dry figs, and water. Our march for the rest of the day presented no traits different from those of yesterday. We met a few Arabs on the road—some on camels, others on donkeys, but most on their bare feet—and many insects—big black ants, big dung-beetles, long black beetles striped with white, like ladies in half mourning—as well as legions of vivacious little lizards scuttling across the sand and leaving long trails behind them.

About two hours after dark we entered the oasis of Surman, which we found in a state of terrible uproar. One of the natives had been killed in the war, and all his female relatives were lamenting with shrill heart-rending cries, while a whole tribe of dogs joined its loud barks to the wails of the women. And as if these noises and the darkness were not enough to make the night hideous, to them was added the din of fire-arms from the coast—the Arab warriors were emptying their rifles on some passing Italian cruiser. And even that was not all. The ground under our feet gaped here and there, disclosing subterranean caves illuminated with glowing wood-fires, the red glare and smoke of which issued from the earth after a most uncanny fashion. Had Dante been with us, he would certainly have got some lurid hints for his "Divina Commedia."

As we left Surman behind us, these discords grew fainter in the distance, making room for features of a different kind, but of a character not less infernal. We now found ourselves in a vast marshy tract, with a thick mist lying low upon it. In the dim moonlight that had succeeded the utter darkness it looked like a great spectral sea, and the clumps of trees that loomed here and there seemed to float like phantom islands upon the



silvery surface of the mist. The air was clammy and full of fever. We mounted our camels and plodded on across this pestilential region, until we got to another endless, weary succession of date-plantations—magnificent forests of tall palms fenced round with colossal cactus growing out of high mud-banks. We rode between these hedges through what appeared to be tortuous hollow lanes, the soft feet of the camels falling noiselessly on the soft sand, and only the rare bark of a dog interrupting the weird stillness that embraced us as in a deadly grip.

All this under different conditions would have impressed us as ineffably grand. In our actual state of exhaustion—be it remembered that we had been on the road for nine hours, and that we had slept only three hours the night before—it looked unspeakably gruesome. At the entry of each plantation we thought the end of our journey had come, but presently the trees thinned, and we were in the open desert again. So it lasted, grove after grove, and gradually my brain began to succumb to the fatigue of the camel motion and the suggestions of the environment.

I rode on like a man in a mad dream. At moments I imagined that the cactus from either side reached out its cruel, uncanny arms to clutch at me. At other moments it seemed as if those evil-looking arms were stretched across the lane to bar my way. I tried to keep myself awake and alert by repeating mentally passages from the Greek Anthology or by conjugating Arabic verbs, but my mind could not grip any subject for more than a few minutes. Every now and again my eyes closed automatically, my chin dropped forward, and I felt sweet sleep creeping upon me. It was only the fear of falling from the camel that kept me from falling into absolute unconsciousness.

At last, about midnight, we reached the Kasr of Zawia. The inmates were fast asleep. We knocked at the big gate, which, after some delay, was opened, and we entered into the usual quadrangle. A Tommy showed us into an apartment—a black scribe's office. A plain deal wood desk stood opposite the door, with bundles of papers and a coloured print of a new Turkish battleship nailed on the dirty, whitewashed wall. One side of the room was occupied from end to end by a long divan. Myriads of flies covered walls and ceiling, forming a tapestry suggestive of inexhaustible stores of secret filth. The Tommy

who had conducted us here brought us a tiny earthenware brazier of glowing charcoal and a jug of water, which enabled us to make some soup and coffee. He then retired, asking if we needed anything more, just like a trained hotel-waiter. We requested him to bring us some more fire and water in the morning, and bade him good-night.

We decided to avoid for once the hard earth floor; and, heedless of the tribes of insects that inhabited its old straw mattress, we made our beds on the divan. We paid dearly for our recklessness later on, but meanwhile we were far too weary even to think of the danger. I rolled my jacket into a pillow, and stretched my limbs to their utmost length with a sigh of inexpressible satisfaction, and was instantly asleep. Never before had I really known the meaning of the phrase "physical exhaustion," or the supreme luxury of a horizontal position.

We were roused at 7 o'clock by the noise of grunting camels and wrangling camel-drivers in the quadrangle outside, and presently the obliging Tommy appeared with another charcoal brazier, over which we made our tea and coffee. We spent the earlier part of the morning exchanging our two camels for two more robust ones, and purchasing two big and two small water-jugs, which were to prove of the highest value to us, both during the journey and afterwards in the camp. Having completed our preparations, we sallied forth to the open space in front of the Kasr, and found it seething with barefooted warriors ready to proceed to the front.

There were among them lads of less than fifteen and grey-bearded men of more than fifty years of age, all wrapped in voluminous hrams and armed with rifles. One of these carried aloft a pink banner with a white crescent on it. Two ragged negroes moved among the warriors, one blowing a small goat-skin bagpipe, the other beating a small drum slung over his right shoulder. Besides banner and band, they were accompanied by the minstrel of the tribe, who shouted an exhortation, and the warriors responded, "*Owlad bu Zein*" (We are worthy sons of our fathers), brandishing aloft their rifles. The local military Commandant—a Bimbashi or Major—who watched this enthusiastic demonstration from the gate, informed me that these men represented only a fraction of the forces Zawia was sending to the war. The oasis is the premier

Kaza in the vilayet of Tripoli. It supplies no fewer than 10,000 able-bodied volunteers. Six hundred had already started the day before, and seven hundred and fifty were starting to-day.

We left Zawia at midday on foot, and we had not gone very far before we met a band of six Arabs on their way back from the war, one with a bullet-wound through the thigh, which he showed us with great pride. I asked him how he had managed to get it healed, and he answered simply that it had healed itself.

Some two hours later, while we were discussing by the roadside the bit of tinned tongue, dry figs, bread and water, which we had come to look upon as a normal lunch, we were overtaken by a party of the volunteers we had left behind at Zawia. Their Captain told us that they had been sent by the Bimbashi to act as our escort. I did not really think that we needed an escort, for all the Arabs that we had met so far were inclined to be perfectly friendly to us. Even the warriors I had come across when walking alone from Rigdaleen to Zwara—a region which, as I afterwards learnt, enjoyed a very ugly reputation—though still smarting from an infidel attack, had been most civil. As for Italian enemies—well, the nearer we got to them, the less dangerous they seemed to be. Nevertheless, I appreciated the society of our Arab escort; it lent to our party what journalists call “atmosphere.”

They had much to say about the war, and talked of the part they had taken in it with greater eloquence than modesty. One boasted that he had killed four Italians, and, while stripping one of the bodies, he found it to be the body of a woman! Another affirmed that he had found, not one, but two Italian women disguised in men's clothes! These and other things they told us—all interesting things, and some of them possibly true. Every now and then they broke forth into wild war-songs, which testified to the spirit that animated them. At the time of prayer one or another would drop out, retire a little way off the track, lay his rifle down, spread out his hram on the ground, and go through his genuflections. Even so, I thought, centuries ago our own Crusaders must have marched singing and praying, and the analogy was accentuated by the swords with which some of our Mujehaddin were armed—long straight blades with wooden hilts in the form of a cross,

apparently a design handed down from the Crusaders' time, and preserved, like everything else in these lands of no change.

In this fashion we walked across the barren, broken waste of sand, past many circular patches of burnt scrub, showing the places where other holy warriors had bivouacked the night before.

As we went on, we met shepherds armed with flintlocks, leading large flocks of flat-tailed sheep and bleating new-born lambs. We exchanged greetings—"Salaam aleikum—aleikum es salaam"—and the time flew so quickly that only the setting of the sun made us realize that we had been walking for four hours. Presently we were overtaken by darkness. The holy warriors had sped ahead, the camel-drivers had lagged behind, and we were alone under the desert stars. But we were sure that we were on the right road, thanks to several bivouacs we saw glowing beacon-like around us, and to the Italian warships, whose searchlights played intermittently on our left.

By-and-by any doubt we might have felt was dissipated by a furious fusillade in front of us—flash after flash cut across the darkness, followed by a loud report. Our holy warriors had reached the end of the day's march, and were letting off their rifles in token of joy and of the small account they made of the enemy. It was a foolish proceeding enough, involving a sinful waste of ammunition; but it served, at all events, one purpose—to bring home to me the queerness of this war. I had thought that here, if nowhere else, we should have to be careful, for we were on the very road that leads to the town of Tripoli—the enemy's base—and yet, apart from the impotent searchlights from the sea, we encountered no other sign of his existence.

It was 7 o'clock when we joined our comrades at the Fenduk of Terina—a large whitewashed and exceptionally prosperous Tripolitan country inn. Like all establishments of its class, it consisted of a big rectangular enclosure, with high walls of mud and a big arched gate opening into it. Two sides of this enclosure are taken up by lodgings for guests—windowless and cheerless apartments, with hard earth floors, and no furniture of any description. The rest of the place affords stabling for the beasts. To this essential part were added two new buildings for the accommodation of extra

guests, forming altogether a most imposing but utterly uninviting house of rest.

We preferred to spend the night in the open desert outside. We pitched our tents in a small valley of bare sand near the well, induced our guide to provide for us some of the brushwood that abounded on the low hillocks around us, made a fire, cooked over it some supper, and then parted for the night.

I lay in my sarcophagus-like tent, with the flap thrown up. A great moon—just past its full, and in shape like a silver football—had risen about an hour after our arrival, and now shone serenely from an almost cloudless sky. Despite the light of the moon, the Orion and many other constellations twinkled brightly in the deep blue heavens. From the crowded fenduk came an incessant clatter of Arab tongues drowning the noises of the camels, and the night-dew fell heavy and chilly from above. I closed my tent and tried to sleep. But the loud, dissonant clatter of the Arab tongues frustrated my efforts. About midnight all other sounds appeared to have been hushed, but one tongue went on clattering as if it would never stop. I crept out of my tent and walked to the fenduk.

In one of the large rooms a brushwood fire was crackling, and through the smoke I saw the holy warriors who had accompanied us, and our guide, Haj Mohammed, squatting on the mud benches round the walls, with their chins resting on their knees, their lean arms clasped round their bare legs, their eyes fixed upon the man of the clattering tongue. He was an ancient sheikh, with hollow cheeks, a short white beard, and small eyes set deep under beetling eyebrows. They gleamed with animation as he talked at the top of his voice—a wonderfully vigorous voice for so ancient a talker—and the shadow of his long, emaciated arm, as he lifted it up now and again, swept across the high ceiling.

I had come to scold, and stayed to listen. Haj Mohammed informed me in a whisper that the speaker was father to the Captain of the Zawia volunteers who had escorted us here, that the fenduk and all around it belonged to him, and that he was one hundred and ten years old. At that moment the old sheikh caught sight of me, and invited me to step in and sit on the mud bench beside him. I accepted the invitation. He

had heard that I was a Rûm who had come to assist the Moslems in their holy war against the invader ; was it true ?

“ Yes, O sheikh, it is true.”

But the old man could scarce believe it till Haj Mohammed swore “ By my God and by the head of the Prophet ” that it was so. Then the flood-gates of the old man’s hospitality burst wide open, and he begged me to stay for a whole week at the fenduk as his guest, promising me mountains of fragrant cous-cous. I explained that we were in too great a hurry to reach the seat of the Jihad, and thanked him for his kindness. Whereupon he resumed his harangue.

He told his hearers that he had taken part in half a dozen campaigns—the last being the Turkish war with Greece in 1897. He was too old to fight by then, but he had gone to assist the Turkish Generals with his advice ! So they ought to pay attention to his words, for they were the words of experience. He advised them how to conduct themselves in battle, saying that it was their sacred duty to fight to the end in defence of their country, and assuring them that whoever died in war went straight to heaven. To all this the young bloods assented with cordial and guttural : “ *Sahé ! Sahé !* ” (True ! True !).

He next spoke of their forefathers who conquered ages ago the land of which the Italians wished to rob them ; he exhorted them to emulate the glorious exploits of those heroes, and then he launched forth into a long tale of atrocities perpetrated by the infidels. He told how they had outraged, chained, and slaughtered innocent Moslem women and girls in Tripoli, “ whereas,” he said, “ we true believers are forbidden to make war on women, even when attacked by them.”

“ But,” he declared, “ Allah, the compassionate and merciful, shall most surely punish these crimes. It is written in the book of the blessed Sidi Abdul Selam—peace be upon him !—that the Italians will take the town of Tripoli, advance as far south as Gharian, and tie their horses to the saint’s shrine ; but not one of them shall leave Gharian alive.”

It was impossible to question the speaker’s sincerity, for when he spoke of these things his voice shook with anger and his eyes glistened with tears. True or not, it was clear to me that the Italians had by their alleged cruelty earned the

hatred, and by their alleged cowardice the contempt, of the Arabs, and that it would take them ages to live down either of these feelings.

We got up at the first break of day, struck our little camp, and started through a chilly grey mist, that reminded me of an English December morning, across an undulating scrubby plain, which, under the wan, misty sky, looked not unlike an English moor. In spite of the depressing surroundings, and as if in defiance of them, the youthful camel-driver who had cheered the way with song on the previous evening lifted up his sonorous voice again.

The mist gradually cleared away, and we proceeded on the last and shortest stage of our journey. By-and-by we began to meet parties of Arabs—first a man with a rifle, followed by a red-robed woman, who urged on a donkey, upon which sat a little child; next a man astride a donkey between two red saddle-bags and an iron brazier, followed by his two wives on foot; then a caravan of camels. Our own camel-drivers passed the time of day with the travellers, and, as their custom is, stopped to exchange news. And now for the first time we heard that on the day of our arrival at Zwara (December 4th) a great battle had been fought, the camel-drivers' version of the event being that the Italian artillery had at first the best of it, but later on, in a hand-to-hand engagement, the Turks and Arabs had driven the enemy back. It was a very severe fight, the Moslems having lost 600 and the Rûm 1,500 dead—most of them killed with knives. As a result of their victory, the Turks were advancing to a place called Saniat Beni Adam, a village nearer to Tripoli than Ain Zara, with a view to dealing a decisive blow at the infidels.

Our Tripolitan geography was still too vague to enable us to criticize these statements, but it seemed to me highly unlikely that if the Turks had won such a brilliant success they would have moved their headquarters to Azizia—a place which, by the direction in which we were travelling, lay far to the south of Ain Zara. However, I did not worry about the details, knowing that I should soon learn the truth, and we pushed vigorously on.

At 9.45 a.m. we crossed a small bare valley, with a well and a tree—the first tree, apart from date-palms, I had seen since

we left Ben Gardane—and at 11 a.m. we caught our first glimpse of our destination—a broad rocky hill, crowned by a white-domed saint's tomb. To the south of that hill stood a large whitewashed building, with a few humbler edifices near it, and in the desert round these buildings we saw a small number of white bell-tents and black Arab tents.

At this point we were overtaken by another band of some seventy or eighty volunteers from Zawia—one on horseback, three on donkeys, and the rest on foot. They were a contingent of the miscellaneous mob we had already seen. Their arms were as motley as their complexions. Some carried comparatively modern rifles (Mausers or Martinis), most were armed with antediluvian flintlocks, whose slender barrels—four or five feet long—protruded far above the right shoulder, glinting in the sun. One, besides a gun, carried in his hand a bayonet, another an odd-looking, naked, rusty sword, with which he beat his ass; a third a long straight sword, with the blade sticking some six inches through the end of its ancient scabbard; one brandished a spear.

The large pink flag with the white crescent and star flapped wildly in the breeze, as the warriors strode along without any formation or order whatever, the minstrel crying out in shrill, quavering tones his exhortation that they should be as good as their fathers, the men assuring him with deep-throated earnestness that they were, and occasionally backing their statement with a volley.

Thus accompanied, we reached Azizia at noon of December 9th, having covered in six days (excluding the two days we were detained at Zwara) about a hundred and forty miles as the camel crawls.

We found both the open space outside and the court inside the Kasr thronged with warriors similar to those I have already described, while large numbers of peddlers—potato, onion, date, and bread sellers—squatted about, with their goods spread before them. The place was full of the grunting of camels, the neighing of horses, braying of donkeys, whining of beggars, and all the other dissonant cries and chaotic confusion of an Eastern camp.

My first concern, naturally enough, was to obtain full and accurate information about the great event that had necessi-



tated the change of headquarters, but I looked in vain around me for any special indication of the great event. Everything was in normal disorder, and there was nothing either in the bearing or in the conversation of the men to suggest that only five days ago they had taken part in the most important battle that had hitherto been fought, and that they had been defeated. Stoicism and taciturnity could be carried no farther.

It was only by dint of patient investigation, which had to be carried on tactfully as opportunity offered during the next few weeks, and by a careful comparison of statements collected at various times from a multitude of eyewitnesses, that I managed at last to piece together the story which I am about to lay before the reader.

M E D I T E R R A N E A N   S E A



0 1 2 3 Miles

F - Fort  
 Italian position on the eve of  
 the Battle of Ain Zara ( Dec 4,  
 1911 ) -----

## CHAPTER V

### THE CONQUEST OF AIN ZARA

ITALY, towards the end of September, had asked Turkey to cede to her the Turkish vilayet of Tripolitania, and, on finding Turkey unwilling to comply with this request, despatched a powerful fleet and army to occupy the province by force.

The capital of the country seemed to have been specially prepared by the Porte to be the first-comer's prey. Its fortifications were represented by two medieval forts, armed with obsolete cannon. Its garrison, weakened by the recent withdrawal of 5,000 men to Arabia, consisted of only 3,000 infantry and two squadrons of cavalry, with one field-battery of twelve antiquated guns. And of these troops only one-fourth were Turkish regulars; the rest were raw native recruits. Further, the Governor of the province—a strenuous opponent of Italian projects—had been lately recalled, and his successor had not yet had time to arrive. It is true that a Turkish transport, the *Derna*, sent from Constantinople at the eleventh hour, had contrived to elude the Italian cruisers, and had disembarked at Tripoli 12,000 rifles, some Krupp guns, and a quantity of ammunition. But it was known that all this warlike material had been sent into the interior on camels, which showed that the Turks did not mean to defend the town.

The Italian armada appeared before Tripoli on September 30th, blockaded the port, and three days later, before the time fixed for the surrender of the town had expired, began the bombardment. Three ironclads in line opened fire on the fort Hamidieh, and the others on the fort Sultanieh. The Turks replied stoutly with their ineffective cannon for two hours, and then retired from a place it was impossible to defend. Whereupon the Italians landed a detachment of marines, took pos-

session of the town, and lost no time in getting up a subscription for raising a monument to Crispi, "the great inspirer of the conquest of Tripolitania"—a somewhat premature subscription, for the conquest of Tripolitania turned out to be something quite different from the occupation of its capital.

For nearly two months the Italians, with an army over 40,000 strong (not to mention their other armies at Khoms, Benghazi, Derna, and Tobruk), an enormous force of artillery, captive balloons, aeroplanes, and all the other equipments of a modern European army, remained practically where they had landed, not venturing to advance an inch beyond the range of their naval guns; while the Turks and Arabs outside, destitute of everything save valour, amused themselves with night and day attacks on the enemy's trenches.

These trenches started from a point on the coast about one and a half miles east of Tripoli, and ended at another point on the coast about one and a half miles west of the town, forming a rough semicircle six miles long and about two miles deep, which just embraced the positions of Bu Meliana and the Tomb of Sidi Misri. Both these positions had been strongly fortified with two batteries each (the Tomb of Sidi Misri had four guns facing south and four facing east). Kasr el Hanni—a large white building, the local Kaimakam's residence, beautifully situated on the top of a little hill in the midst of palm-groves—and the Fort of Sidi Misri—an earthwork, with only a small building for ammunition depôt, standing on an eminence that commanded the plain—had been occupied by the Italians, as well as Suk el Juma and Jami Feshlun, soon after their landing at Tripoli; but they had since been retaken by the Turks and Arabs (the recapture of Kasr el Hanni by assault having cost the Masrata tribesmen who attacked in front over one hundred dead). Of these places, Kasr el Hanni remained well within the Turkish sphere, which extended even a little to the west of Jami Feshlun—forty minutes' distance from the centre of the town of Tripoli. The Fort of Sidi Misri was in the neutral zone. The Turks and Arabs visited it, but were unable to stay on it because the Italian gunners had gauged exactly the distance from their own fortifications at the Tomb of Sidi Misri—about 800 or 1,000 mètres—and seldom missed.

The Turkish trenches stretched within less than two miles of

the enemy's lines. The most picturesque of them were those among the sand-dunes south-west of Bu Meliana—primitive ditches following the up-and-down, in-and-out curves of the dunes, and providing very indifferent cover for the Turkish marksmen. For a whole month the poor Tommies had lived in these ditches, exposed by day to a fierce and almost uninterrupted bombardment from land and sea—two or three hundred shots every day—and after dark to the penetrating dew of the night. Through rain, wind, and sand-storm, they had stuck to their posts, sleeping in the clothes in which they fought, for they had no other—not even flannel underclothing.

It was only after a month of indescribable misery that a means of relief suggested itself to the ingenious mind of one of the Staff officers. Could they not imitate the native cave-dwellers? True, there were no natural caves in the loose sand-dunes, but artificial ones might be made. Presently new ditches might be seen zigzagging down the slopes of the dunes, and leading from the trenches into semi-subterranean chambers, roofed over with planks and sand, and carpeted with halfa-grass mats and blankets. Each of these apartments provided shelter for ten or a dozen men—shelter from the enemy's shells as well as from the elements—while at the same time it served the purpose of concealing the Turks' numbers and position from the Italian scouting balloons and aeroplanes. For these shelters the Turks were indebted to the enemy: the spades with which they had been dug were Italian loot, and the planks with which they were roofed over had been carried off by the Arabs from the Italian camp and sold to the Turkish commissariat.

This extreme left was defended by one machine-gun and thirty Turkish infantry, with one hundred and fifty to two hundred Arabs, under one Lieutenant. Farther east, facing the Tomb of Sidi Misri, and about two miles from it, stood Battery A, consisting of three field-guns under Ahmed Effendi, an old artillery Captain, and protected on the right by a small fraction (twenty men) of an infantry battalion, the bulk of which lay in reserve some way off. In addition to these, another field-gun stood on the hillock Guzenata, opposite the Fort of Sidi Misri; and a second battery of four guns—Battery B—under Captain Elias, lay behind, near Ain Zara: altogether eight guns, all ancient Krupps.

Ain Zara is a small oasis, the palm-trees of which supplied cover and its wells water to the Turkish cavalry camp, pitched under one of the hills which rise on the north. The place boasted also two fenduks—large mud enclosures of the usual type, with blind rooms opening into them. One of these—Fenduk Sharki, the nearest to the camp—had been converted into a hospital, and the invalids, while waiting for the over-worked surgeon to dress their wounds, amused themselves by squatting under the arched gateway and watching the Italian shells swish in the air, burst, and drop, digging deep pits in the ground around them. Some of these projectiles dropped on the hospital itself, despite the Red Crescent flag that flew over its roof.

Along this line was ranged a portion of the Turco-Arab army, holding the enemy in check from the south. Another portion was dispersed over the oasis to the east of Tripoli town. The Commander-in-Chief and his Staff controlled both from two centres. The principal of these lay, about three miles to the south of Ain Zaza, on a bare stretch of yellow sand, the utter desolation of which was relieved only by the neighbourhood of a marsh. There, amidst the heights and hollows of the dunes, straggled the tapering white bell-tents of the Turks and the squat, black-cloth tents of their Arab allies—a motley mass of noisy life, human and animal, sprung out of the desert, and destined to melt away in the desert again.

The second centre, which kept in touch with the forces in the oasis, was at Suk el Juma—a spot about seven miles to the north, so called from the fact that a market is held there on Fridays. Suk el Juma, indeed, is nothing but a market-place, with a row of paltry little shops on one side of it, and facing them a small Government House, and a school which the Staff used as their headquarters. But quite close to it stands the village of Amruz, surrounded by gardens, and containing many habitable houses, in which the Turkish soldiers were comfortably lodged.

Such were the relative positions of the belligerents until the third week in November. The wild optimism which had greeted the successful landing of the Italians at Tripoli had long since given place to a puzzled and widespread scepticism. The absorption of Tripolitania seemed farther off than ever. Even in the environs of the capital the invaders, instead of gaining,

had lost ground, and the world waited in vain for the long-promised forward march of the modern Roman legions into the country which they already called their own. The very correspondents with the Italian army, in spite of the strict censorship exercised over their despatches, could not disguise their disgust at that army's inexplicable immobility. They were sick of what one of them called "the very small-beer of daily snipings and skirmishes." They found it "intolerable and destructive of all self-poise continually to hear geese described as swans, or listen to creations of what has and has not happened, that bear no closer relation to the verities than do those of the *Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Castle of Otranto*."

On the other side of the line a totally different spirit prevailed. The consternation that had at first predominated had long since given place to self-confidence; any day the invaders might be driven back into Tripoli town, if not, indeed, into the sea!

On November 20th the Italians began to throw up new trenches on the low sand-dunes between the three forts and the Wadi Mejneen. At first only a line was visible, then a reconnaissance revealed places prepared for guns, and that was all; the Turkish reconnoitring-parties could not get any nearer to examine what the enemy were up to, on account of the heavy fire of the Italian guns from Bu Meliana and the Tomb of Sidi Misri.

At the same time the Italian cruiser *Carlo Alberto*, off Fort Hamidieh, began to bombard daily the part of the oasis occupied by the Arabs and Turks as far east as Suk el Juma. The bombardment, carried on with the aid of a captive balloon and an aeroplane, was highly methodical; the oasis appeared to have been divided by the enemy for purposes of destruction into four sections. One day the fire was concentrated on Section A, next day on Section B, the third day on Section C, the fourth on Section D, so that the inhabitants, as they fled from one part of the oasis to another, found themselves continually pursued by shells. The northern façade of Kasr el Hanni was reduced to ruins, and the solitary Turkish gun at Guzenata was destroyed. But Suk el Juma suffered little, for the Italian projectiles were more particularly directed against the village of Amruz, which the Italians imagined to be the Turkish headquarters. Only their aeroplanes dropped a few bombs over Suk el Juma.

The object of this daily and systematic bombardment was

twofold—first, to clear the oasis of the enemy ; and secondly, by scaring and scattering the Turco-Arab forces, to prepare the way for an advance. And, in fact, on the morning of November 25th news came to the headquarters at Ain Zara from the Commandant of Battery A, which stood only two miles from the new Italian fortifications, that one battalion of infantry and one squadron of cavalry were advancing towards him.

But the alarm proved premature, for half an hour later he reported that the enemy had retired. Next morning, however, before daybreak, the Staff heard a very violent cannonade from Bu Meliana, the Tomb of Sidi Misri, and the battleships off the coast, and at about 9.30 a.m. it received from the Commandant of Battery A intelligence that a considerable force was again advancing upon him. Half an hour later it was announced that this force amounted to a brigade composed of artillery, cavalry, and infantry—a total of some 5,000 men, who marched in two columns. This Italian force, it must be remembered, had to face a Turkish force consisting of fifty Turkish regulars and one hundred and fifty to two hundred Arabs (all under one Lieutenant), about thirty cavalry, plus a battery of three antiquated guns and one machine-gun.

Owing to the lack of telegraphic or telephonic communication, and to the nature of the ground, which rendered signalling impossible, much time was wasted in receiving those reports and sending back orders by couriers. However, as speedily as the conditions permitted, the Staff despatched a body of some three hundred Jebel Arabs to the left of Battery A. This was all the succour they could afford, for the Arab auxiliaries had begun to disperse to their homes to celebrate the approaching Great Feast, and those that still remained were urgently needed in the oasis, for there was every reason to suppose that the Italians contemplated an advance to the east as well as to the south. And, in fact, presently a fusillade was heard from the direction of Fort Sidi Misri and Kasr el Hanni.

By that time the battle had begun on the south. All the Italian guns at Bu Meliana, the Tomb of Sidi Misri, and those between the two forts, had opened a terrific fire on the Turkish Battery A. The men who manned this battery had held their ground gallantly for forty-five days, but now they found themselves powerless in the face of the shower of lead. The range



of their guns was only one-third of that of the enemy's, and, as they were not equipped with shields, they were obliged to show themselves in order to aim. Besides, the Italian gunners had by long practice gauged the distance accurately, and as soon as they saw a Turkish head popping up they let fly at it as many as fifteen, twenty, or twenty-five shots at once. Their shells tore up the ground on all sides, raising clouds of fine sand, and, to make matters worse, there was some wind, which added to these clouds, so that the men had to use their bayonets to clear the breeches each time before loading. The machine-gun had been dismantled and replaced twice in order to be cleaned, and in the end, choked with sand, it was removed to another hill, where it was hoped it could be used more easily.

It was now decided to bring Battery B from Ain Zara to the front. But the ground was so difficult and the guns so heavy that each needed ten pairs of horses to drag it across the deep sand. However, three of them were dragged along—in the course of four hours—and, together with a company of about fifty regulars, were placed to the left of Battery A at a distance of two hundred or two hundred and fifty mètres from each other, so that a little might be made to go a long way.

The enemy, under cover of their deadly cannonade, advanced safely and comfortably. The three hundred Jebel Arabs could do nothing to check their progress. They had taken up the position to which they had been ordered at the left of Battery A, but they were driven out of it by the Italian fire, and had to fall back. The Turkish infantry stuck to the trenches doggedly, but what else could it do with scores of guns belching lead over its head? Captain Ismail Hakki, who had been sent to the spot from Suk el Juma by Major Fethi, Chief of the Staff, got there only by crawling on his hands and knees, and showed me afterwards a hole in his kalpac made by an Italian shrapnel-bullet.

About 1 p.m. the Italians had planted their Red Cross hospital close by the Agricultural School, and were not more than six hundred mètres from Battery A, which now found itself exposed to the fire of a fresh Italian mountain battery stationed about 1,200 mètres before it. By 3 o'clock the enemy seemed to have it all their own way. One of their columns was only 1,000 mètres off the Turkish trenches, while the other was within four hundred mètres of Battery A. The

Turkish infantry had spent all their ammunition, and sent to the bulk of the battalion behind for more. But they got very little. One of the messengers, as he dodged the Italian shells and bullets among the sand-dunes, was wounded, and remained in a ditch. A second, though also wounded, managed to carry back half a caseful of cartridges, and a similar quantity was carried by a third. It was impossible to get any more, and there were moments when they had not two cartridges apiece.

A fraction of a battalion that was guarding the Wadi Mejneen was ordered to go to the assistance of Battery A, but the order did not reach it till after the battle. Had the Italians pushed on with anything like a reasonable amount of vigour, there can be no doubt that they would have taken the Turkish guns and found the way to Ain Zara practically open to them. But it would seem that the first column was brought to a standstill by the fear of exposing its flank to the three Turkish guns that had been brought with so much difficulty from Ain Zara. Be that as it may, instead of pressing ahead, the Italians crept on, digging trenches at every one hundred mètres—admirable tactics for defence, but for an advance purely imbecile. Finally, as the sun was setting, they began to beat a retreat, the first to retire being the fresh mountain battery, much to the poor Turkish artillerymen's relief.

The Turks' losses were not very heavy. On the left they consisted of one Captain wounded, five dead and four wounded men. The Arabs had suffered more.

The Turks followed the enemy with a weak fire, and during the night they left their trenches and went to inspect the ground on which the Italians had recently stood; they picked up there about a hundred shovels, as well as some flasks, capes, and other odds and ends, which the warriors had left behind.

Meanwhile a similar advance was taking place on the eastern side. One Italian regiment pushed from the Tomb of Sidi Misri towards Guzenata; another, with the help of the battle-ships' fire, attacked a position between Fort Hamidieh and Kasr el Hanni; and the Turco-Arabs, while opposing these forces in front of them, saw "men in white" landing from warships on the coast between Fort Hamidieh and Suk el Juma. The odds were too many; the Arabs in the oasis were not more than 1,000, and the Turkish regulars less than half that number.

The first Italian regiment, though badly decimated, managed to take Fort Sidi Misri, notwithstanding the resistance offered by a battalion of some sixty Turkish regulars, and was now threatening Guzenata. The second got as far as Kasr el Hanni, but was checked by the Turks and Arabs posted before that position. The check, however, in view of the enemy's superior force, could not last long; and the Commander-in-Chief, fearing lest the enemy should succeed in surrounding his men in the oasis and cutting off their retreat, ordered the officer in command of the battalion posted at Suk el Juma to leave one company there, and fall back on Ain Zara with the other three companies. So there was left one company of regulars at Suk el Juma, one battalion at Guzenata, and one battalion at Kasr el Hanni.

Despite this withdrawal of Turkish troops, the Arabs went on fighting furiously, and towards evening the Italians, on hearing that their southward advance had been checked, began to retire, having captured only a few spots about two hundred mètres in advance of their original position, the most important among these spots being Fort Sidi Misri. Kasr el Hanni, which might also have been occupied—for the Arab defenders had been forced to fall back—remained empty in the neutral zone.

Such was the only practical effect of this action. Its moral effect was to strengthen the Turco-Arabs' faith in themselves; for had they not repelled the enemy once more? and had they not fresh quantities of miscellaneous spoil to testify to their new victory? Even the women and children of refugees and camp-followers shared the feeling, and one of them—a swarthy young lady with bare legs—was seen strutting amidst the tents wrapped round the waist with an Italian flag!

During the next few days the Italian aeroplane continued to spin overhead, and the fleet continued to bombard the Turkish positions, rendering the hill-ridge to the north of Ain Zara untenable. Some of the shells reached as far south as the headquarters, while those that fell about a hundred yards in front of Battery A were so big that they dug in the ground holes almost large enough to hold ten men. When I was told this I doubted my informant's accuracy, but later on I myself measured pits made by Italian naval shells on the coast near Zanzur, and found some of them six feet six inches long, four feet seven inches broad, and four feet two inches deep.

However, Fort Sidi Misri was a very real gain to the Italians, who lost no time in planting on it a battery which commanded the road between Suk el Juma and Ain Zara. Henceforth the Turkish Staff officers had to ride backwards and forwards from one of those places to the other under a continuous artillery fire, which convinced them of the impossibility of holding their present position much longer. But they could not retreat from Ain Zara without an excuse; for the Arabs, unable to understand strategical considerations, would have construed the move into a desertion. The excuse for which they were waiting came nine days after the battle just described.

The Italians, though they had failed on November 26th to push their manifest advantage to its logical conclusion, had not failed (as how could they?) to discover the weakness of the Turkish side, and, having rehearsed their parts on that day, they proceeded with more than due deliberation to the real drama on December 4th. The performance began as usual with an early and furious cannonade from Bu Meliana, Tomb of Sidi Misri, Fort Sidi Misri, and the fleet. Next the Turks perceived that they were in for the same kind of attack as on the 26th—a simultaneous move to south and east, with some variations. The southward move was directed more to the left—obviously that the advancing column might not be again exposed to a flank fire—and it was carried out by a whole division, one brigade of which appeared more especially bent on a turning movement to the west of Wadi Mejneen. Major Nasmi Bey, who was posted with thirty-five Turkish cavalry and fifty Arabs at the extreme left of the Turkish line towards Girgaresh, saw this right column advance past him, and counted thirty-five guns. At the same time, another but weaker column advanced eastward into the oasis. The Turks estimated the strength of the attacking army at 30,000. A distinguished English war correspondent with that army computed it as 25,000. Most of these troops had just been brought from Italy, and were sent straight into action before they could have time to be contaminated by the demoralization of the troops already in Tripoli.

To this army of 25,000 fresh men—an army with many batteries of mountain and field guns, the fire of which was directed by aeroplanes, with long ammunition trains carried on

mules, and with a splendidly organized medical corps—the Turkish Commander had to oppose some seven hundred Turkish regulars, including sixty cavalry who had been constantly on duty for over two months, and about 1,500 Arab irregulars, with seven antiquated guns. It was indeed a case of making a little go a long way. He considered the southward move as by far the most serious, and therefore concentrated most of his force on that side. One nominal battalion was beneath Battery B, another near Battery A, a third guarded Ain Zara, and a fourth was a little to the west of Wadi Mejneen. As soon as the Italians were seen coming on, the battalion from Ain Zara was ordered to advance and occupy the sand-dunes a little to the north of Battery A. At the same time the battalion to the west of Wadi Mejneen was ordered to advance on a level with that battery, in order to protect its left flank. So when the battle began the Turkish northern front, about three miles in length, consisted of four nominal battalions (say five hundred men), strengthened by some thousand Arab volunteers. No assistance could be expected from the oasis, because the distance was too great, and the few Turks and Arabs left there would have their own work to do.

The Italians advanced slowly, their artillery thundering without a moment's stop from the forts, field batteries, mountain batteries, and ships. Their fire, guided by the aeroplanes which cruised overhead, reached as far south as Ain Zara. Projectiles kept pouring over the Turkish cavalry camp there, and everywhere, far and near, the air was full of the yelling and screeching of shrapnel-bullets that came down in showers. The Turkish guns in their turn did some firing, each gunner seizing a favourable moment to send off a shell; but they did no damage to the enemy, for the Italian fire was so continuous that the Turkish gunners were not given a chance of gauging distance, but only put in a shot when they could do so, without seeing where it went. Besides, a strong wind was blowing again that day, choking the breeches of the guns, so that it took the men an hour to load each time.

The Turkish infantry, though unprotected by trenches, went on fighting in spite of the rain of bullets that fell thick all round them. The squadron of thirty-five cavalry on the extreme left could do nothing but harass the enemy. Soon after midday

the battalion which supported Battery B was obliged to retire before the enemy's overwhelming numbers, and to withdraw to Ain Zara ; it had already lost its Captain (killed), two or three Lieutenants wounded, and about ten men killed and wounded. I say "killed and wounded," but in truth the two things often meant the same to the Turks. The ambulance organization was very elementary, and those of the wounded who could not walk were carried off anyhow. One who reached Ain Zara dead was conveyed in an empty orange-box, too small to hold him, with his head hanging over the side.

The battalion that had come from Ain Zara was presently forced to fall back slowly ; while the battalion posted on the west of Wadi Mejneen, having engaged a cavalry regiment of the Italian brigade which was carrying out the turning movement, was also compelled to retreat. By 2 p.m. the Italians had gained a big sand-dune (about fifty mètres high) on the extreme left, and, placing upon it a battery of mountain guns, which dominated the whole plain, they assaulted the flank of Battery B. It was only now that the Italian infantry, which had so far hung off at a distance of 2,000 mètres, began to press forward. Meanwhile the second of the retreating Turkish battalions had taken up a position to the left of Battery B, and the third had made a stand on the extreme left. But the Italian cavalry and infantry continued to press forward—a portion of it down Wadi Mejneen, and another towards the ineffectual Battery B. Nasmi Bey saw these developments and their significance, and sent a note to the Commander, saying : " You are falling !" Half an hour later he wrote : " You are fallen, if you don't retreat at once." At the same time he announced that it was his own duty also to retreat without delay. As he himself afterwards told me : " There was nothing else to do. When I saw the enemy coming on—regiment after regiment—my only thought was to save my men. I feared the Italians might take it into their head to send a regiment round our left, and take us all prisoners !"

About 3 p.m. the Turkish artillerymen and the two Turkish battalions that had so long disputed the ground inch by inch, on finding themselves faced by a whole brigade with three batteries of mountain guns (including the one on the big sand-dune), were compelled to withdraw to Ain Zara.

At that moment a Turkish battalion which had been summoned from Fenduk el Togar to Ain Zara was seen marching eastward in careless disorder, without scouts, utterly unaware of the proximity of the enemy. Nasmi Bey, as he was retreating, saw the danger, and sent a messenger after it to warn the officer in command. The messenger overtook the battalion close to Wadi Mejneen, and delivered the message. Thereupon the officer in command lost his head completely, and, instead of taking up a position in the Wadi and checking the progress of the enemy for a time—until the Italians found out his weakness—he turned back and fled down the Wadi. He was the only Turk who on that day failed to do his duty, and he was subsequently cashiered for his incompetence.

The Italians then pushed south and took the abandoned Turkish batteries, meeting with no resistance. An officer with twenty men had come from Battery A, and tried to dispute the passage; but the only result of his rash act was to weaken the side he had quitted, and the half a dozen soldiers who had stayed behind, left without any officer, retired. Indeed, there was nothing for the Turks to do but to retire. It was heroic to have held their positions as long as they had done; to have attempted to hold them longer would have been lunacy. The Commander-in-Chief had already come to this conclusion, and ordered a general retreat to Azizia.

The Turco-Arab forces in the oasis did not get that order till many hours later, and when they got it they were most reluctant to obey it. Whether the eastward move of the Italians was a mere feint, calculated to divide the Turco-Arab forces and to divert their attention from the south, I do not know. What is certain is that the Italian column which advanced in that direction was much weaker, and that it found its task much harder than the column which advanced towards the south. There was no open plain there to be swept clear by artillery fire, but a maze of deep, tortuous lanes, winding among gardens and groves, the trees and enclosures of which afforded ample cover to the defenders. In such ground the enemy's guns could do nothing, and the Italian sharpshooters met with more than their match in the Turks and Arabs, who fired from behind their familiar mud-banks, cactus hedges, trunks of trees, or even from the tops of date-palms. There,

indeed, was a field for the sniping and skirmishing which the Arabs loved and the Italians had learned to dread.

This day's experience confirmed both sides in their respective feelings. The Arabs, with two nominal Turkish battalions and one company, managed to repel the far superior forces of the enemy all along the line. A portion of the latter had got as far as Suk el Juma in the north, but were soon forced to fall back on their original positions. Another portion got no farther than Kasr el Hanni in the centre, and there met with a disastrous repulse. The same thing happened farther south, as will appear from the following simple and succinct narrative, which I owe to Ismail Effendi, a middle-aged Lieutenant of infantry—the Turkish officer in command at that point :

“ I was stationed in the Fenduk Jemel, opposite Fort Sidi Misri, on the Ain Zara road, with fourteen Turks and two hundred Arabs. An Italian regiment attacked us furiously, shouting ‘ Hurrah ! hurrah ! ’ and drove us out of the fenduk. Then my Arabs made a counter-attack, yelling ‘ Allah ! Allah ! ’ and forced the Italians to fall about one hundred and fifty mètres back. These attacks and counter-attacks went on till evening, and at sunset the enemy withdrew into their trenches. About an hour and a half later we made an offensive reconnoissance to see if there were any Italians in front of us or not. We found the field deserted and covered with knapsacks, water-flasks, caps, shovels, rifles, and cartridges. We picked up as much of the loot as we could, and returned to the fenduk, where we rested and slept till midnight. About an hour after midnight two horsemen came to tell us that the headquarters had moved from Ain Zara to Ben Gashir, where we were ordered to follow at once. We could not make out why.”

In the circumstances, it was natural that the defenders of the oasis should be unable to understand the Commander's order. They did not know what was happening in the south, and their own success had inspired them with the belief that they were going to recover Tripoli that day. The Arabs especially were certain of it, and their reluctance to conform with the order was proportionate to their self-confidence. Even leaving the certainty of ultimate victory out of the question, who likes to be interrupted in the midst of a congenial



and successful employment? One example will suffice to show the spirit that animated the Arabs of the oasis on that day. One of them reached Ain Zara with his side drenched in blood. The Turkish doctors there, as soon as wounded men began to arrive, had hastened to supplement the existing accommodation by erecting hospital tents. Into one of these tents the wounded warrior disappeared. A few minutes later he came forth again with his side bandaged, and immediately he darted off to the battlefield, anxious to take up the fighting where he had left off. However, the Commander thought differently—the forces in the oasis were far too small for a real victory; even if they broke through the Italian trenches, what then? While they pursued the Italians from the east, the Italians who advanced on the south might envelop and destroy them. So the order for a retreat was sent forth, though, as has been said, it did not reach its destination until 1 o'clock next morning, and even then many of the Arabs, disregarding it, remained in the oasis, and continued to harass the Italians for three days.

Meanwhile the main Turkish forces were retreating like an East End mob going home after a day on Hampstead Heath. There was no hurry about their retreat—even at such a moment the Turk refuses to be hustled. The soldiers just strolled away, passed Ain Zara, and got to the headquarters. The first to arrive there were the artillerymen with some of their horses, but without any artillery. The infantry followed. Then came the Staff officers. Like the soldiers, they had had nothing to eat all day, and the first thing they did on dismounting was to forage in the kitchen tents, whence they emerged munching scraps of bread or any other eatables that chanced to be lying about. By that time the Italians had drawn nearer, and their approach was literally to be felt in the air, which was now shaken by the heavy artillery fire. There was no time to lose. The Staff ordered the men to pack. Then it was discovered that there were not enough camels to carry off the baggage and the stores. Although they had long anticipated the emergency, the Turks had not provided for it. One hundred camels with drivers properly drilled could have carried away everything. As it was, the dozen camels or so at the Commander's disposal could carry off only a small number of sacks of flour, and that they did only thanks to the Italians, who gave time to the caravan to go

backwards and forwards several times during the night. The tents and clothes—things much harder to replace than flour, and things most urgently needed in view of the wet and cold nights—had to be left behind. Ten more camels would have rescued at least forty tents and preserved the health of hundreds of poor Tommies.

This fact throws a curious light on the Turk's limitless improvidence. Another fact connected with it illustrates the Turk's limitless hospitality. There were in the camp two English journalists—Mr. Seppings Wright, of the *Central News*, and Mr. Alan Ostler, of the *Daily Express*—and the Turks, who had not enough transport to rescue their own effects, actually permitted the Arab servant of these gentlemen to commandeer three camels for their use. I doubt whether there is another nation on the face of the earth capable of such a literal obedience to the precept concerning the "stranger within your gates."

While the Turkish soldiers were packing, the Arab camp-followers and the beggar women and children who were hanging about occupied themselves in pilfering. They rushed hither and thither, laying greedy hands upon everything within reach of their long lean arms—pieces of camp furniture, tins of sardines or meat, oranges, vegetables—in short, whatsoever they could pick up, either in the open market-place or from the officers' tents. Never before had the poor wretches had such an opportunity for getting all they needed for nothing, and they seemed utterly bewildered by the abundance of their good luck. One woman was seen trailing three little brats behind her, while hugging to her bosom two armfuls of miscellaneous plunder—tins of preserves, crockery, a bit of carpet, and a lot of other odds and ends. Suddenly she threw the whole armful down, and grabbed an old saucepan that lay on the ground. Thus loaded, they straggled towards the west—where the sun was already setting—followed by the Turkish soldiers, who were also loaded with all they could carry in their pockets, in their bosoms, and in the skirts of their great overcoats.

They were terribly hungry, the poor fellows. Some of them were glad enough to pick up and eat some oranges which an Arab had let drop from the folds of his hram in his eagerness to grab at something else that took his fancy. However, in the

midst of all their hunger, they clung to their trophies as a drunken man clings to a lamp-post. They were especially anxious to save the waggons (*carrette alpine*) they had taken from the Italians, though they were too light to be very useful, and the road so heavy that they each required two or three horses to drag them—and horses were as scarce as camels, there not being enough mounts even for the officers. The Staff rode off on horseback, but most of the junior officers had to walk, while a few managed to get donkeys to carry them.

In retiring, the Turks could not use the ordinary caravan route, since it was exposed to the Italian guns ; so they had to retreat across the yellow sand-dunes, now aglow with the golden radiance of the setting sun.

Presently two or three of the Italian waggons broke down under the strain, and their fragments had to be left on the way, to add to the litter—broken chairs, splintered tent-poles, shreds of cloth, sherds of pottery, etc.—that marked the route of the retreating army. By-and-by some of the camels turned nasty and sat down on the sands—their way of protesting against the excessive and ill-adjusted loads they were made to carry. Never was strike more justified or more obstinate, and the employers were compelled in the end to unpack, lighten the loads, and pack again.

In this fashion this singular army carried out its singular retreat, and it must have afforded a most amazing subject of contemplation, first to the Italian aviators whose aeroplane hovered over the straggling column as long as there was any daylight, and then to the moon, whose beautiful bright, silvery disc now smiled serenely down upon the scene : men, women, camels, mules, horses, donkeys, wandering over the desolate sands, without the least pretence of order. And those who witnessed this strange scene had a unique opportunity for realizing the marvellous and matchless extent of Arab endurance. Little children—almost babies—struggled along on their bare little feet over the sand of the desert, some of them driving before them new-born lambs, kids, and calves, while their elders haled recalcitrant she-goats and cows by the halter. As to the Arab warriors, no one who saw them during that retreat would have said from their carriage that they were beaten. Instead of feeling disheartened by their defeat, they were

elated by the thought that they had at last got the Italians out in the open, and they were inflated by the hope that the real war—the Homeric hand-to-hand fight which they love—would now begin.

While the main forces were retreating, a small body of cavalry had been told off to keep in touch with the Italians, and see what they were doing. Captain Ismail Hakki, who was in command of this reconnoitring-party, gave me an amusing account of his experience. He had crept to within one hundred and fifty metres of the enemy, and, hidden on a high dune, he observed through his glasses. The ground below him was a flat sandy plain, and the dark groups of the Italian troops were clearly visible in the moonlight. He saw the sharpshooters of the brigade which had made the turning movement west of Wadi Mejneen occupying the positions vacated by the Turkish battalions, while the Italian reserve battalions behind them remained massed. Farther east the Italians had passed the positions of the abandoned Turkish artillery, and stood firing to right and left wherever they saw a bush swayed by the breeze, mistaking it for a Turkish or Arab head. Now and then he saw a flash of a match lighting a cigarette—the Italians had settled down for the night!

Why did they not follow up their victory by pursuing the retreating enemy? This is one of the many mysteries which the historian of this unparalleled war will have to solve. Had they done the obvious thing, it is absolutely certain that they could have destroyed the whole Turkish force, and perhaps brought the war to an end there and then. But it would seem that the Italian *piano piano* which had already enabled the Turks—despite their own *yavash yavash*—to organize the resistance came once more to their salvation. For, as has been seen, by all the rules of the game they should have perished.

The Staff were the first to reach the Fenduk Ben Gashir, just before midnight. They entered one of the stuffy mud-walled rooms and sat down on the hard earth in a state of utter exhaustion. Then they went out into the quadrangle to forage. For a long while they could find nothing to eat. But presently some tea and an old teapot were discovered, also a tin of sardines, which Fethi Bey smashed open. They fell upon it. When the imperious calls of the stomach were in

some degree silenced, they fell to business again. A map was spread out upon the floor of the fenduk, and was scanned by the flickering light of a tallow candle stuck in an empty beer-bottle, which had somehow—Allah only knows how—found its way into that Moslem inn. Some minutes passed ; they were discussing the next move, while the tallow from the candle and the sardine oil from their fingers dripped over the map, and their shadows danced upon the mud walls of the room.

It was decided to send off some more scouting-parties to keep in touch with the enemy. These parties rode off—dead-beat men on dead-beat beasts—and spent the night patrolling and skirmishing up and down the moonlit sand-dunes, while their comrades continued their southward stroll.

It was not long before Ben Gashir was turned into a midnight chaos by the rag-tag and bob-tail of the retreating camp, which had now begun to reach it. But after a few hours of rest and confusion, the crowd thinned out again, part of the army with most of the baggage being ordered to push on to Azizia. The Staff soon followed in the same direction, arriving about 8 a.m. at the headquarters, where I found them five days later.

In the meantime the Turkish scouting-parties watched the enemy wasting the valuable hours in senseless immobility. It had already become abundantly clear to them that there was not a shadow of a danger of pursuit, and Captain Ismail Hakki, reassured and bored by the uninspiring sight, rode back to Ain Zara about 9 p.m., and dined at the hospital, which had not yet moved, with the chief doctor, Major Avram, Dr. Beshir Fooat, and the three chemists. It was a very merry dinner-party, and the members had had so much exercise and so little food during the day that they did more than justice to the menu : mutton stew, with spinach, oranges, and new, succulent dates—a most memorable meal.

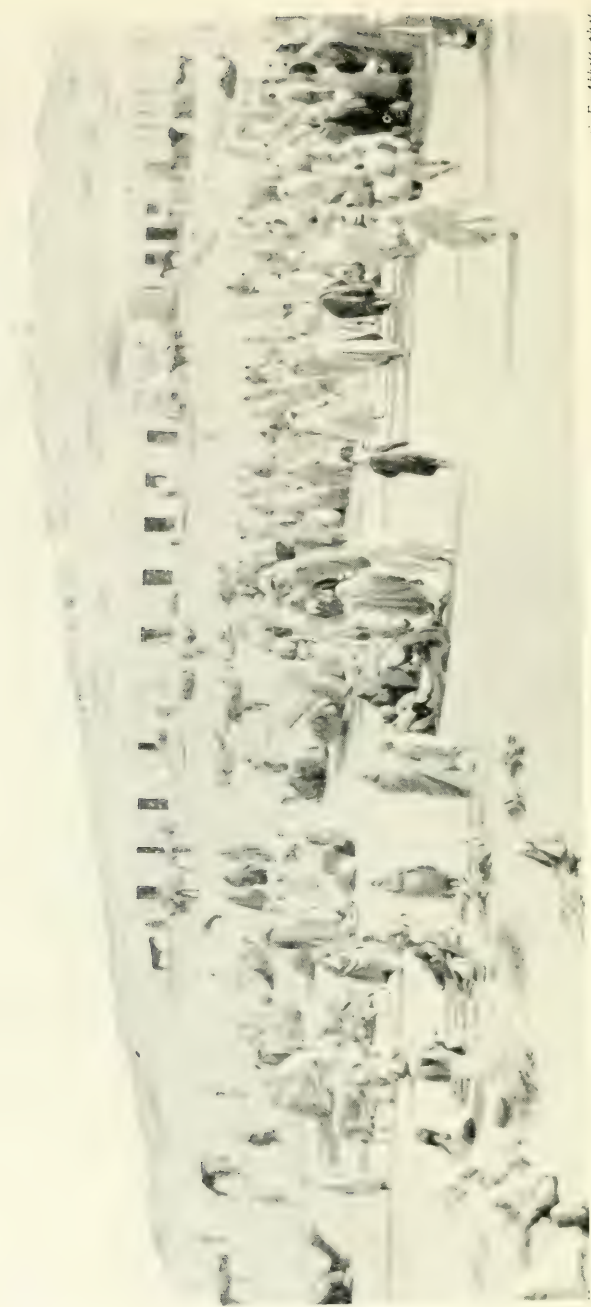
At about 2.30 a.m. a party of Turkish soldiers retreating from Guzenata passed through Ain Zara, having met no one to hinder or harass them. The small caravan of camels moved backwards and forwards, carrying off the sick and hospital stores, and it was not till 4 a.m. that the doctors departed with the last contingent, reaching Ben Gashir at 8 a.m.

They had managed to remove all their invalids, except two

Turkish regulars and five Arab auxiliaries who had just come in wounded. I do not know what became of them, for when afterwards two gendarmes were sent to fetch them away, they found the hospital tent burnt down. The Turks would have it that the Italians had burnt the tent and the invalids ; but I prefer to believe that the Turkish regulars, at all events, were carefully preserved to adorn this modern Roman triumph. My reasons for this belief are these : The Italians claimed to have captured a wounded Turkish *officer*, and an English correspondent saw this prisoner and gave a pathetic description of him, repeating what he had been told by the Italians as to his quality. Now, I took considerable pains to ascertain the truth about this matter, and I satisfied myself that no Turkish officer had fallen into the enemy's hands. Four Turkish officers had been killed in battle, and twenty-four were wounded—all of whom recovered from their wounds. But, since an English correspondent vouches for having seen a badly wounded Turkish prisoner in the hands of the Italian doctors, I conclude that he must have been one of the two Turkish Tommies who had been left behind in the Ain Zara hospital.

And while in this contradictory mood I may correct another inaccuracy made by the Italians, and accepted by the English correspondent in perfect good faith—namely, that the Bersaglieri and Grenadiers “descended and occupied Ain Zara at 4.30 p.m.” No, my friend, such a proceeding would have been utterly incompatible with the prudence hitherto displayed by the Italians, and, in point of fact, it never took place. The Roman legions did not show their plumes at Ain Zara until the following day—until, that is to say, their mountain guns on the high sand-dune had once more well peppered the position with shells, and their cavalry had reported that in very truth there was not one Turk or Arab left. Then they dashed bravely on and hoisted the tricolour over the deserted hill ridge.





G. F. Abbott, phot.

AZIZIA.



## CHAPTER VI

### A SCHOOL FOR STOICISM

It would be hard to imagine a less inviting spot than Azizia as it appeared on that December day when I first set eyes on it : a sandy desolation, sparsely dotted with scrub, stretching to the north and east farther than the eye could see, and bounded on the far south and west by a line of sombre mountains. Closer acquaintance has not softened that first impression. There are some gardens within a few miles to the north, but they lie hidden by the undulations of the plain, and all the vegetation that is visible consists of one tree—a fig-tree, which stands some way off, naked, grey, skeleton-like, as though smitten with some peevish magician's curse.

In the midst of this dreary wilderness squats a broad, isolated, rocky hill, no more than one hundred and fifty feet in height, with a small whitewashed domed edifice—the mausoleum of Sidi Ramadan—perched on its summit like a monster beehive fastened to a colossal camel's hump.

Every locality in Tripolitania has its patron saint, whose name is invoked in time of need, and whose favour is propitiated with prayers and offerings : Sidi Said here, Sidi Ali there, Sidi Abdul Kader elsewhere, and so forth. And, as it is the custom of the country to bury holy men on the hill-tops, nearly every summit, both on the coast and in the interior, is crowned with a saint's whited sepulchre, so that the passer-by may say : " There lies buried a holy man that died in days of old, a servant of God."

These shrines vary in size, but not in style. They all consist of a square base bulging up into a dome, sometimes pierced with three or four small holes, which seem to be intended for loopholes on an emergency. Frequently even such small

apertures are lacking, and the building in its absolute want of windows, in the extreme lowness of its door, and in its vaulted ceiling, seems to carry on above ground the troglodytic traditions of the subterranean caves so common in this part of the world.

The mausoleum of Sidi Ramadan is what mercantile people would call a fair average sample of this cavernous class of architecture. I crept one day through the entrance into the interior. Three faint shafts of daylight, struggling through three small holes in the dome, fell upon a plain wooden sarcophagus, the pointed lid of which was decorated with numerous votive rags—red, green, and yellow—tied banner-like to short sticks. A decrepit old man crouched against the saint's tomb. On hearing my step he staggered up on his knees, and crawled towards me, with a tallow candle in his hand, begging for a light. I produced my box, struck a match, and handed it to him. But his shrivelled hand shook so and his eyes were so dazzled that, lest he should set light to himself, I snatched the candle from him, lit it, and stuck it at a safe distance on the ground. Then I put a little coin into his palsied old hand, and crept out of the stuffy shrine.

At the foot of the hill stands a modern one-storied house, built for a school, now used as a hospital, and at some distance to right and left of it lie four or five rows of dingy dwellings, some with flat, others with arched roofs, serving as shops, barracks, warehouses, or sick-rooms, and forming, together with the hospital, three sides of an irregular square, on the fourth side of which rises the Kasr—a rectangular building, about forty-five yards long and thirty broad, with some stables adjacent to it. Originally this building was intended only for the accommodation of a garrison, but at some later date there was superimposed a second story running along the façade and a little way down each side, and serving as the local Kaimakam's residence and offices—altogether half a dozen spacious rooms opening on the inside on to a sort of balcony. One of these rooms now bears pinned to its blue door a slip of paper with the Turkish inscription: *Komandanlik Odassi* (Commandant's quarters). In another is installed the telegraph and post office. The rest are occupied by officers and the Red Crescent doctors. Down below the court is lined with dungeon-like apartments, with thick walls, low arched door-

ways, and iron-barred windows, the flat roofs of which form a broad three-sided terrace, surrounded by a loopholed parapet in parts over six feet high.

A general air of squalid neglect pervades the place from end to end. It begins at the very gate: one of the big wooden leaves is off its hinges, and leans heavily against the wall like a weary veteran. On the right-hand side as you emerge from under the arched gateway you see a small room, no doubt originally meant for a sentry's lodge. It is now carpeted with loose chaff and dung, and tenanted by a mangy horse, who puts his head out through the small window, gazing at the passers-by in a puzzled manner, as though asking them to tell him what on earth he is doing there. He would very much like to get out of the small room, but, alas! egress is barred by a cart-wheel placed against the doorway, for the door is, of course, gone—perhaps to cook the Commandant's dinner. On the left as you proceed to the stairs that lead up to the balcony, you pass by the prison—a vaulted den, with a tiny iron-barred window and a big iron-plated door off its hinges, but kept firmly in position by a long pole that reaches across and is fastened to it with a rope. Entry and exit are afforded through a small square opening situated in the middle of the door, and shut with an iron bolt. The prisoners press their faces against the iron bars of the window, or peep through the crevices between the unhinged door and the sides, trying to enjoy what light and air circumstances permit. A melancholy-looking Arab gendarme in shabby uniform mounts guard outside the door, having for his couch two empty packing-cases covered over with empty sacks.

You mount the worn-out stairs, reach the balcony, and, leaning on the rusty iron rail—not too heavily, for one end of it is kept in its place only by a piece of suspiciously slender string—you look down into the court. What you see is calculated to make you reflect rather than rejoice. The mortar is peeling off the brick walls, the iron bars of the windows are red with rust, and their arches black with the smoke of wood-fires lit within or without the apartments. Here and there a stallion is tethered to the window-bars, which explains why some of them are missing and others hanging, bent or broken, out of their sockets. Even while you look one of these stallions

has wrenched away the bar to which he is tied, and is now galloping round the court, trailing it gaily over the heaps of camel and horse dung that alternate with piles of fuel and pools of stagnant water, upon the foul surface of which float orange-peel, lemon-peel, pieces of paper, and all sorts of other rubbish flung from the balcony above.

In the centre stands a slightly elevated square platform of brick, with a well in one corner and a wooden kiosk in the middle—all sharing the universal dilapidation. The brick wall is crumbling away, the well is choked, and the kiosk, wherein once the Kaimakam sipped his after-dinner coffee, serves other purposes now. On its ruined roof the Turkish soldiers dry their washing, inside it some Arab camel-drivers deposit their pack-saddles and halters, while others squat outside it with their flintlocks resting against its windows.

Round this kiosk of the past goes on the dance of the daily routine. Here are two soldiers, clad in greasy khaki, holding, stretched between them, the carcass of a newly-slain sheep, while a third is hacking it with a bayonet, and flinging the pieces into a caldron that stands over a smoking wood-fire. There another soldier similarly attired stoops over a copper soup-dish, washing his shirt with hot water obtained from a battered, smoke-blackened, paraffin-oil tin, which simmers over another wood-fire. Beside him a third ragged soldier bends over a caldron full of pillaf, stirring it with an Italian sapper's shovel. Farther down a negro is chopping wood, and another squats near him peeling potatoes. And everywhere camels are stumbling, sitting, or lying on one side with their necks spread out. There are also some diminutive donkeys roaming about in search of eleemosynary onions.

You turn away from this interesting spectacle into one of the rooms, and you are not surprised to see what you do see. It is a modern room of noble dimensions; it used to be the Kaimakam's *Mejlis*, or council-chamber. In it now live half a dozen military and medical gentlemen. How can they live in it? The windows are seemingly not intended to open; their sills are crowded with saddles, bottles, bandoliers, bridles, putties, and miscellaneous gear. Their panes are crusted with the dirt of many days, and where they are missing the gaps are carefully stuffed with clothes or patched up with paper, so that no whiff

of pure air should ever intrude. The floor is of dry mud, very brittle, and it is rubbed by the tread of feet into a perpetual supply of dust.

Flies are merrily buzzing through the stagnant air, and settling upon the dirty walls in large patterns. There are hundreds of them even in winter ; I shudder to think of the thousands that the summer will breed. Meanwhile I am glad enough to add myself to the crowd that lives somehow in this room. I had pitched my little tent at the foot of Sidi Ramadan Hill, dug a trench round it, and rigged out of my waterproof rugs a shelter for my belongings. Then the rain came down to demonstrate the futility of my amateur efforts. At night it rained more heavily still, and I was invited to sleep under cover by the doctors, who did not wish to have a sick foreign author on their hands. "It is madness to sleep under canvas in this weather—plenty of time for camping when the winter is over. *We don't mean to live in tents till the summer.*" Thus spoke they, and I, overcoming my prejudice against flies, rolled up my bedding and carried it into the room. I had already searched for straw wherewith to soften somewhat my couch, but there was no straw to be had in the camp—only chaff for the camels and horses, and very little of that. So I spread my rugs out on the uncompromising hardness of the floor, duly grateful for a watertight roof over my head. This has proved to be the sole advantage of the room ; otherwise it is as full of noise as it is of flies.

In the balcony outside, near the top of the stairs, saunters a sentry, carrying a rifle slung over his shoulder with a piece of string. He is posted there to keep intruders out of the Commandant's headquarters. But he finds the task difficult. Arab warriors, camel-drivers, and beggars, stream up the stairs, all wishing to interview the Commander-in-Chief.

"*Yassak !*" (Forbidden !), says the Turk.

"*Ayb !*" (Shame !), answers the Arab, trying to push past.

Thereupon ensues a conversation which rapidly degenerates into an altercation. Sometimes the Turk, if he be of a determined disposition, shoves the Arab down the stairs with the butt-end of his rifle. But if he be of a slack and tolerant turn of mind—and he generally is—he soon gets tired of the debate, and lets the trespasser slip by.

The Turkish officers themselves seem to regard this constant intrusion as rather irksome in theory ; and one day I saw the sentry armed, in addition to his rifle, with a stick, destined to keep the crowd at bay. But the tree has not yet been planted which can produce the stick that will impress the obstinate Arabs. Their persistence is as unwearied as that of the flies. If you drive them away one instant, they are back again the next. Even common suk vagabonds of both sexes manage to penetrate into our room to pick up cigarette-ends from the floor, or whatever they can lay hands on.

The camp outside the Kasr presents the same unexhilarating sight of foul disorder. The square in front serves as a suk, or market-place, and as you come out of the gate you have to insinuate your way between, or to stride over, the dense mob of peddlers who squat upon the ground behind their wares and weighing-machines, using stones, copper coins, or cartridges for weights. What do they sell? They sell flat loaves of oatmeal-bread and potatoes, monkey-nuts, eggs, and chickens of all ages. They sell tobacco and matches, loaf-sugar, some green-black stuff which they call "tea," oil, red pepper, and brown salt. All these commodities are limited in quantity, and in quality loathsome. I had expected to find at least decent dates in abundance ; but even the dates I have found are meagre and measly—rotten sweepings, mashed into chunks, impregnated with sand and covered with flies. Besides the sellers and buyers, there is a numerous and representative assembly of beggars—male and female, young, middle-aged, and old—holding high revel under the very Commandant's windows ; also a miscellaneous mob of armed loafers chattering in the shade against the walls of the Kasr and of the shops that line the square. Pack-camels, horses, and donkeys, roam and repose amidst the peddlers' baskets, grunting, gurgling, snorting, braying, and generally contributing their own share to the symphony of din, dust, and dung.

Two or three Red Crescent tents pitched at the foot of the hill, and three or four bell-tents sprinkled over the slopes, give a touch of reality to this desert camp. For the rest, it might be a gipsy encampment. Some of the soldiers are quartered in the dingy shops, others have extemporized sheds out of wattles and palm-trunks. A ragged Arab tent is used for a





*Baron von Rindler-Krieglstein, phot.*

SHRINE AND FORT OF SIDI SAID.



*Col. Tristan, phot.*

SUBTERRANEAN DWELLINGS AT AZIZIA.



kitchen. Outside it two caldrons stand over fire-pits scooped out of the ground, and on the roof of it the skin of a newly-flayed sheep is drying in the sun on the top of an Italian cloak. Inside a number of soldiers are reclining among the ashes of last night's fires. Close by some camels are kicking the sand up into the caldrons wherein their dinner is cooking.

A dozen underground caves are to be seen here. They are weird, old-world dwellings, carrying one's mind back to a condition of the human race far beyond any recorded by history. A tunnel sloping down to a depth of some eight or nine feet brings you to a doorway so low that you have to bend double in order to enter. When your eyes have become used to the dusk, you perceive an apartment about fifteen feet long, ten wide, and six high, excavated out of the conglomerate soil. Sometimes the vault is supported in the middle by a pillar of the soil left standing ; more often it supports itself. The floor is either bare or strewn with straw. No window or hole, except the doorway, lets in light or air, and the atmosphere is suffocating. But the inmates do not find it so, and they tell you that it is very warm in winter and pleasantly cool in summer. They appear to thrive, if one may judge by the number of people which each dwelling harbours—men, women, and children. The men just now are engaged in the Holy War, and they point with pride to the rifles resting against the walls. The women are busy with their household duties—one grinding oats in a stone hand-mill, another nursing her baby, a third cooking food over a wood-fire. The children are sprawling about in dusty nudity.

The younger females do not look very repulsive ; some of them might, after vigorous washing, be even presentable. Meanwhile their efforts at personal adornment begin with the fuzzy curls that decorate their foreheads, and end with the arabesque tattoo-marks that disfigure their chins. Some of the little children are almost pretty, with pale complexions and black hair, but the majority are of various shades of darkness, unsightliness, and filth. The old ladies are simply subhuman in their ugliness. Their bodies look like moving bundles of bones covered over with a shrivelled skin and a few squalid rags. Their faces are yellow, parched, and wrinkled like dry figs. Yet, oddly enough, these ancient hags, who have outlived all feminine charm, still preserve their feminine vanity, and the

necks of many are encircled with chains, from which dangle numerous amulets—battered little coins, a rhombos of copper, a silver hand, and the early Christian emblem of the fish !

This is the normal population of Azizia, the poorest and most underfed population I have ever come across, not even excepting the Indian ryots in time of famine. That they procreate is evident, but how many of the children that are born grow up ? Only the very toughest can survive such misery ; the rest lie on yonder hill, round the tomb of the holy Marabut Ramadan.

The shelter afforded by the Kasr and the few other buildings mentioned seems to be the only attraction that has induced the Turkish Staff, after the loss of their tents, to pitch their headquarters at Azizia. In every other respect the place is the worst that could have been chosen for the purpose. It lies too far from their base and not near enough to their front, and these defects of distance are counterbalanced by no corresponding advantages of any sort or degree whatsoever. There are two wells in the camp—both sufficiently deep and dirty—but the graveyard on the hill drains straight into them. The Arabs, of course, drink the brown liquid drawn from these wells with great pleasure. But the Arabs will drink any liquid with pleasure. I have seen them lapping up the contents of stagnant pools created by the late rains round the camp, and also sprinkling with the same the tobacco which they sell in the suk. They know nothing about microbes, and, in any case, make little account of death.

The Turkish Staff know something about microbes, and cannot imitate the Arab indifference to consequences ; so they are obliged to send for water to one of the gardens about two miles away on the north. A couple of camels, in charge of a couple of soldiers, go off every day loaded with casks, a pulley, and a long rope, to which is attached an old paraffin-oil tin by way of a bucket. Sometimes there are even four camels and four soldiers, and the water they bring, although quite as dirty as that of the local well, is said to be less dangerous ; but somehow there is never enough of it—not enough to wash face and hands with, not enough to cook or knead bread with, not enough even to make tea with. Every morning we have the same story. A sleepy orderly, who is supposed to look after our room, comes in, takes a kettle, and saunters out. After an hour or two, he

saunters back again with the kettle—empty. I step out onto the balcony to see if I cannot do better for myself, and my heart fails me when I hear the following dialogue between two Tommies in the court below :

“ Ahmed, *su varmi ?* ” (Is there water ?), asks Mustafa ; and Ahmed laconically replies :

“ *Yok !* ” (There is not !)

If no water is to be found for the Commandant’s breakfast, what chance is there of my finding any for mine ?

Sometimes the water-famine breaks out in the afternoon instead of in the morning. I endeavoured to ascertain its causes, and I found that it was nobody’s business to see that the camels went off at a fixed hour ; also I found that there were not in the camp enough vessels to hold a sufficient quantity of water. At the beginning of the war, I was informed, the army possessed about a hundred goatskins, but most of them had been ruined by the sun, because it was nobody’s business to see that they were kept moist. So one cask a day is made to serve the needs of six or even eight persons, the average population of the room in which I dwell.

At length, a few days ago, I saw an itinerant vendor walking about the camp, with a pitcher slung over his back and a coil of rope tied to its neck ; he fills it from the well by simply letting it down into it, thus saving himself the expense of a separate bucket. He walked about crying “ *Moya, Moya !* ” in a melancholy monotone. His supply was limited. He was only a retail dealer. His presence, however, gave me a hint, and on further investigation I discovered some Arab women squatting, each with a full pitcher before her. I found that I could have mine also filled and carried to the Kasr for one piastre (2½d.). The water with which it is filled is like pea-soup. No amount of straining avails. But if you let it stand for twenty-four hours, the sand settles, and the liquid becomes almost limpid.

The water problem was thus solved after a fashion, and then a fire problem arose. The orderly could now fill my kettle, but he sometimes brought it back cold. Why ? The scrub in the surrounding desert offers an abundant supply of fuel. This is collected by the Turkish soldiers, and carried into the camp on camels. Some of the local Arabs also find profit in gathering and selling faggots. But the Tommies in the court had not yet

lit their fires ; for the camels which bring the fuel had not yet returned, or had not been sent, or had not brought back enough. True, there is some charcoal to be bought in the suk, but what is the use of charcoal without a thing to light it in? All my researches for some kind of stove have proved fruitless, and I am obliged to depend on the Tommies' uncertain wood-fires.

So much for water and fire. Now as to food. There is some oatmeal-bread at headquarters—somewhat better than that sold in the suk—and the Commandant has ordered that a ration of one loaf a day should be dealt out to each foreign visitor. This was all the allowance possible during the first few days, for most of the stores of flour had been left behind at Ain Zara. Afterwards, when caravans began to come from Tunis, it was raised to two loaves. The quantity is now sufficient, though the quality varies—sometimes it is almost pure wheat, and well baked ; sometimes it is half wheat and half oats, and very doughy ; sometimes it degenerates into pure oats, and then it is both doughy and gritty. I asked the baker for the reason of this variation, and he replied :

“ These two days we have run short of flour. But look there ”—he pointed to half a dozen sacks lying in the court, apparently just arrived. “ To-morrow it will be good, *Inshallah*.”

“ *Inshallah*,” I echoed fervently.

But, alas ! man cannot live by bread alone—even when that is eatable. I saw from the first that the suk afforded some meat and chickens and potatoes. But I could not eat these things raw, nor could I cook them for myself. On being disappointed in my researches for a servant, I had, *faute de mieux*, proposed to Haj Mohammed to stay and cook for me. He refused, saying that he wanted to fight. I did not believe him, for his character, as it had hitherto revealed itself to me, suggested a person more likely to prove dangerous to his employers in the dark than to the enemy in battle, therein doing the wretch a horrible injustice, for which I will make full amends in the sequel.

At last I bethought me of a young Tunisian, Ahmed Ben Slama, who had come with the Red Crescent officially as a nurse, but practically as a man-of-all-work. He reckoned cooking among his many accomplishments. I proposed to him that he should cook for me for a consideration, and he agreed. Our

meals consisted, for the most part, of chicken and potatoes stewed in a small earthenware pot over a wood-fire. We dined in the tent which Ahmed shared with three other Red Crescent attendants. Another fire burned in the middle of the tent, and over it another of the attendants—a big and pessimistic-looking Armenian—was preparing the chief doctor's dinner. A third attendant—a flabby little Turk—sat cross-legged beside that fire, puffing at his eternal narghileh, and cracking jokes. The rest of the space was taken up by beds and packing-cases. It was a weird restaurant enough, but it afforded an excellent alternative to starvation.

For two days I was Ahmed's paying guest, and I hoped the arrangement would prove permanent. But on the third day Ahmed left us, and he relegated me to the tender mercies of a fat fellow-Tunisian, who had come to the war ostensibly as a champion of the Crescent, but really for purposes more closely connected with finance than with faith. His cuisine was very circumscribed in scope and thoroughly Arab in character, its most memorable feature being an abundance of floating oil and burning red pepper. These two ingredients made themselves felt in everything Amara cooked—meat, chicken, potatoes, haricot-beans. For three days had my unfortunate palate been exposed to this fiery ordeal, when Amara also announced to me that he had been called to the front. The culinary edifice I had erected with so much trouble and endured with so much patience crumbled to the ground. I turned to the Red Crescent doctors, and offered to join their mess and pay my share, until I could make some other arrangement. They told me that there was no mess, but if I did not mind roughing it a bit, I could fare as they fared.

So far as food was concerned, the doctors were better off than myself, for they had men to cater and cook for them. But in every other respect I was amazed to find them absolutely devoid of the most obvious necessities. Five persons had one plate, two spoons, and one knife and fork between them. By this time the German doctor had turned up from Zwara with his little portmanteau, rug, and Kodak, and he joined our mess. He also had come to the desert without any eating apparatus at all.

In the circumstances our meals can easily be imagined. Our first dinner consisted of two courses—roast meat and pillaf—

both served on the one plate in succession. We ate it in a hospital tent which still stood empty, seated cross-legged on a sheet of canvas. We all helped ourselves out of the same dish. Those of us who had knives and forks used them; the others used their fingers. Our second meal was in another empty tent—they could not even fix on one feeding-place. This time the one plate served first for fried eggs, and then, unwashed, for pillaf. The only new feature on this occasion was a basin of soup, and the German doctor trying to eat it with a tiny tea-glass. I need not dwell on details. After a day or two nothing struck me as notable, and I had become an adept at cleaning my own plates, knife, fork, and spoon with bread, thus foiling the absence of water and at the same time putting the bread to some use. Bread is always good for washing up, even when it is not fit for eating.

I may mention that the only light we had during these repasts was supplied by my own lantern. It was the only lantern in the whole camp, and one evening I overheard a Turk drawing another Turk's attention to it as a remarkable instance of an Englishman's "practical spirit." I had never prided myself on the possession of a spirit of that particular brand. But everything is relative in this world, and the fruits of my rudimentary forethought became even more manifest when one of the doctors came to me for soap, another for sewing-cotton, a third for a candle, a fourth for a clothes-brush, and so on. What did these medical gentlemen, then, possess by way of personal equipment? The chief had a shaving-case, and the others nothing, except some articles they found in the Kasr—the plate, knife, and fork aforesaid; a miserable coffee-pot of enamelled tin, with a little hole in its bottom, which was lent about by one person to another without any washing, preliminary or subsequent; and an ancient kettle of the same material, which had lost its lid and got its spout wounded in the wars. Empty preserve tins and bottles, thrown away by some of us Europeans, were also eagerly annexed and turned to strange uses. And yet these medical gentlemen had brought eighteen camel-loads of baggage with them!

For some days I could not decide whether they were old campaigners, disciplined to every conceivable hardship, or men who had neither been on a campaign before nor had

sufficient imagination to picture one to themselves. The latter seemed to be the more probable explanation.

Equally puzzling was to me at first their primitive contempt for ordinary sanitary precautions. They never boiled the water, of which they consumed inhuman quantities at all hours of the day and night ; but they filtered it with a filter carried away from an Italian officer's tent by the Arabs during one of their raids before the retreat from Ain Zara, and sold to the Turkish Staff, who had religiously preserved it as a trophy. This filter did service for a few days, until it got out of order under the unaccustomed medical treatment to which it was subjected.

Presently some more of the baggage left behind at Ben Gardane arrived, and I saw one of the doctors dallying with a spirit-lamp. Of course, no spirits were brought with it, but somehow the doctor after a while managed to procure a small supply. Henceforth one would be independent of the Tommies' precarious fires. Alas ! when next day I tried to light the lamp, the liquid with which it was filled refused to ignite. I laid the case before the doctor, and he calmly explained that he had endeavoured to increase the quantity of spirits, which had already run short, by mixing it with water.

I have already said that there was no fixed place for our meals. Nor was there any fixed time. The Turks in theory distinguish between breakfast, lunch, and dinner ; but in practice these distinctions are apt to be ignored. The meal may be cooked and served at any time or none. We often sat cross-legged on the ground for an hour or more waiting for the one plate to turn up, munching dry bread the while. Or, again, when, after a lengthy waiting, the food arrived, your messmate suddenly remembered that he had left something undone. He went off to do it, and the food was left to cool. Or, again, after the meat had been brought in, he was seized with a sudden desire to make soup. By the time the soup was ready the meat was frozen. What did it matter ? We should either have it reheated, or, if there was no fire left, eat it frozen.

I suggested to one of the doctors one day that we might make some chocolate. He procured a broken earthenware brazier of charcoal, produced the dilapidated coffee-pot, and filled it with water. Before these preliminaries were com-

pleted, the charcoal was nearly dead. He blew it into life again; the pot began to steam. The water was just tepid when he insisted on putting the chocolate in. He went on blowing at the charcoal till all the ashes were neatly transferred from the brazier into the pot. So far, the experiment amused me, and I wondered what the result would be. The pot was now boiling—we should soon see. At that moment two new men turned up, and expressed a wish to share our chocolate. Forthwith my doctor poured into the pot more cold water. I magnanimously resigned my portion of the unholy concoction.

And so our weird life winds its weary way, and my appetite seems to increase in inverse ratio to the means of satisfying it.

\* \* \* \* \*

What I have said about the Turkish doctors applies also to the Turkish officers. Some possess uniforms long past their middle age. But most of them go about in all sorts of quaint dishabille. A cavalry Captain may be seen with his breeches tucked into his socks, and on his feet yellow Arab shoes. Another cavalry Captain had to slip across the frontier in plain civilian dress and ordinary elastic-sided boots, and since he has been here he has only modified this guise by screwing a spur to the heel of his right boot. One Lieutenant is clad in green velveteen jacket and breeches, like a French gamekeeper's livery; another in pale brown corduroy breeches and a heavy jacket lined with long fox fur. Not one of them—not even the Commander-in-Chief—bears a sword. As regards cooking and feeding utensils, they are in exactly the same predicament as the doctors; and their meals are as frugal and perfunctory as those I have already described.

Of the common soldiers, some are dressed in greasy and tattered khaki that was once dull yellow, others in dark greenish stuff. The heads of some are covered with kalpacs, those of others with fezes, and some go about in white conical caps of soft felt, like pierrots. Some wear putties round their legs, and others their trousers inside their socks. Many have no socks at all. The boots of most are in a fragmentary condition. Over their threadbare uniforms all, or nearly all, carry heavy grey coats, some of which seem to have exchanged owners, for the sleeves either hang far beyond or fall far short of their wrists. Their bizarre appearance is enhanced by the





TURKISH OFFICERS.

*Sketches by Capt. Edward Hall.*



remnants of Italian loot which they so carefully rescued from Ain Zara. I have seen one of them dressed in an Italian soldier's shirt. There are also some Italian blankets about, but not nearly enough. The enemy has got back most of the loot taken during the preceding two months, and our Tommies must wait for a fresh battle to replenish their wardrobes.

The animals share the shabby equipment of their masters. I do not think there is one saddle either among the cavalry or among the artillery horses less than thirty years old. I am told that they all date from the time of the Russo-Turkish War, when a supply was sent to Tripoli, and an officer who has been in Tripoli for twenty-one years declares that he does not remember ever seeing them new. Certainly their appearance bears out their reputation for antiquity. The leather, once light brown, is now nearly black; the straps and bridles are patched and repatched; the seats are as hard and angular as boulders. Damp and mildew have caused the cushions to rot away, and the stuffing peeps out through the holes.

At first I had imagined that the woeful state of destitution in which I found the Turks at Azizia was simply due to their precipitate retreat from Ain Zara. But I gradually learnt that it dated farther back—to the headlong retreat from Tripoli, the evacuation of which, according to all I have heard from persons who played a prominent part in it, was a performance even more picturesque than the retreat from Ain Zara.

For the evacuation itself the Turks hold responsible the Central Government. No other course seemed possible, for the town was not prepared for resistance. Perhaps this was the result of mere stupidity, perhaps of something worse. One hears the whisper of treason in high places. The Minister of War, after the disaster, tried to exonerate himself by laying the blame on the Grand Vizier, and the Grand Vizier, in his turn, shifted the blame to the German Ambassador, who had assured him that Italy had no sinister designs.

Be that as it may, when the Italian attack was reported, the Cabinet ordered Neshat Bey, who in the absence of the Governor-General acted as his deputy, to resist it, but only outside the town, and, if necessary, to withdraw as far south as Gharian. Immediately on receipt of this vague order, I was told, Neshat Bey called together his senior officers and three

leading Arab sheikhs of the town to a council. The sheikhs urged an immediate evacuation, as the only way of saving the town from destruction. Neshat Bey and his officers yielded unanimously, with one exception—Major Nasmi—who, it was said, opposed the measure vigorously, pointing out, first, that, if the capital were deserted, the Turkish prestige among the natives, such as it was, would be completely destroyed; and, secondly, that, in spite of their warships and guns, it remained to be seen whether the Italians would be able to effect a landing if they met with serious resistance.

The Commandant naturally quoted the order from Constantinople. "Do you wish me to be hung?"

Nasmi replied hotly, "Why not? We must all die some time or other," and insisted that there were times when the man on the spot was justified in disobeying orders from headquarters. With tears in his eyes, he begged the Commandant, even if he felt bound to obey that order, to leave him behind with three hundred, or even two hundred, men to hold the town, declaring that in any case he was ready to bear the full responsibility for his temerity. "If an Italian sets foot on land while I am here, hang me!"

As it turned out, this apparently rash counsel was proved by subsequent experience to have been the counsel of wisdom. The Italians who have failed to land in the open and defenceless roadstead of Zwara would hardly have succeeded in landing in the port of Tripoli; and even if they landed they would have found it hard to occupy a town every narrow lane and every house of which could be turned to account by 15,000 armed citizens familiar with every inch of the ground.

But Neshat Bey only did what nine men out of ten would have done. He had his orders to evacuate, and no reason to suppose that disobedience to those orders would have been justified by success. He did not know the Italians yet; he naturally imagined that he, with his handful of men and medieval forts, was no match for the fleet and army of a great Power, and so, refusing to listen to Nasmi's protests and prayers, he commanded an immediate evacuation.

This order was carried out with needless precipitation. The Italians were in no hurry to land—in fact, they did not land till twenty-four hours after the garrison had withdrawn. The

respite could have been utilized for carrying out of the town all the munitions and supplies, of which there was great abundance. As it was, the six hundred camels that were available were hastily loaded with as much as they could carry, and were never sent back on a second journey, for which there was ample time. The result was that they left behind enormous quantities of shells, medical stores, kitchen utensils, clothes, and so forth—things which could have been saved if the Turks had either made time by resisting Italian aggression for a while, or made use of the time offered them by Italian procrastination.

The same slackness characterizes everything about these good people. When they quitted Tripoli they found themselves in the midst of the unknown. None of the officers of the garrison had ever stirred out of the town. One Commandant, I was told, had tried to induce the officers under him to accompany him on hunting expeditions in the neighbourhood, so that they might combine instruction with healthy recreation, and he proposed to have a pack of hounds sent out from Constantinople. His proposal met with no response. The consequence was that none of them knew even places which might have been learnt by heart in the course of one afternoon's ride. Sahel, Suk el Juma, Ain Zara, were as new to them as might have been the oases in the heart of the Sahara, and they had to depend for information on casual camel-drivers they met on the way. Nor was want of personal knowledge remedied by maps. I have seen a Turkish Ordnance Survey of the environs of Tripoli which has shocked me by its glaring inaccuracies, and I have seen the Tunisian Lieutenant who crossed the frontier with us trying to work up a map of the interior as far south as Azizia from a sketch published in an English illustrated daily. The General Staff are only now endeavouring to put together some kind of chart of the territory around us. The only scientific map they had—and left behind in Tripoli—was one of the coast, which a French civil engineer was commissioned by the Turkish Government to draw two years ago for other than military purposes.

What, however, this army lacks in size and smartness is richly made up in variety—variety of race, speech, complexion, and character, as well as of costume. It is a veritable museum

of human odds and ends drawn from all the elements that make up the motley of the Ottoman Empire : Kurds, Syrians, Mesopotamians, Circassians, and other natives of Asia Minor, are to be found mixed up with natives of all parts of European Turkey—Thrace, Macedonia, and especially Albania. Add to these some Cretans, and you have a tolerably bewildering idea of the composition of this military mosaic. Among the swarthy faces of Anatolian Turks you see the red hair and freckled cheeks of a child of Bulgaria ; men of almost pure Mongolian type are to be found in the same tent with men as typically European as the vikings of Scandinavia. And as if Asia and Europe were not enough, Africa has been called upon to enhance the confusion with a sprinkling of sooty faces and frizzy heads.

But the confusion lies only on the surface. Whatever the tint of their skins and the texture of their hair may be, all these men are bound together by two ties infinitely stronger than any difference of blood or speech—allegiance to the Khalif, and, far more important, to the Prophet, of whom the Khalif is the Vicar. I have found but one Christian in this assembly of Moslems, and his presence here is due to a mere accident. A few months before the war he had come to Tripoli with his officer to purchase horses. He was on the point of returning to Constantinople when the outbreak of hostilities made that impossible. With this solitary exception, there is no unbeliever to spoil the essential harmony that lies deep beneath the superficial diversity of our brave little band of fighters for the Crescent.

Religious unity apart, there is a similarity of training that conceals all differences of temperament. Be its racial constitution as varied as it may, our camp is uncompromisingly Turkish, which means simple and solemn to the verge of dulness.

During my travels in Turkey I had often witnessed, when staying in a garrison town, a little ceremony that never failed to interest and impress me. It was the hauling down of the flag in the evening. The troops were drawn up on the parade-ground before the barracks, and as the flag went down with the sun, to the sound of trumpet and drum, they broke forth into three cheers for the Padishah. I eagerly expected to see this little ceremony here. But my expectation was not to be

gratified. Our Turks do not go in for flag-wagging, drum-beating, or trumpet-blowing. The only flag we have is a Red Crescent flag, and it flaps over the hospital—except when the wind blows it down, and then it does not flap at all. The only bugle-call heard, and that only now and then, is for medical inspection. It is well that it is not heard every morning regularly, for its lugubrious wail has the reverse of an exhilarating effect. A Staff Officer informed me that they had a sort of band when they were still at Ain Zara, but after the retreat they found its brazen discord rather a nuisance, and banished what had been left of it to Gharian. The conductor is dead, and one of the principal musicians has been put in charge of the bakery. He is the tall, slim, obliging young officer, Ibrahim by name, who sends me—or, rather, fails to send—my ration of bread.

I confess that I miss the pomp and pageantry of war. But the Turks do not seem to feel the want either of colour or of music. Their sense of decorum appears to blunt all other senses, including the sense of humour. I shall not easily forget the horror with which a young officer told me how a party of Italians one evening made merry with a harp in a garden in the outskirts of Tripoli. Men capable of such indecency were capable of anything, and he concluded solemnly: "I suppose they must have been drunk. The Italians drink a lot of wine, don't they? Yes; I thought so. That accounts for their conduct." Then he proceeded to tell me how he, with some Arabs, broke into the garden, and how the merry musicians, surprised and scared, skedaddled for dear life, leaving their harp behind them.

Turkish deportment is almost funereal. They neither sing, nor shout, nor show any sign of vivacity. It is true that I have seen two Tommies punching each other playfully, two wrestling, and one chasing another. I have also heard three or four laugh, and some singing in the evening. But all these irrepressibles turned out to be Albanians. Among the genuine Osmanli, especially the Anatolians, such levity is inconceivable. When not on duty, they are content to do nothing—and they do it thoroughly. It is the one thing they can do thoroughly. They seem to have mastered the secret of perpetual immobility.

This extreme gravity, however, does not come of insensi-

bility. It is pleasant, almost pathetic, to see them pet the little lambs whose mothers they slaughter. "Fury" is the word which I have often heard used in connection with the Turkish soldier, and furious they are when they must be—in fight. But the word which describes their nature much more faithfully under normal conditions is "kindliness." They are not only kind to people of their own kin, and ever ready to help one another, but also kind to the alien who has no claim upon them. I have received many proofs of this trait in their character. One Tommy will offer to draw water for me, another to boil it over his fire, a third to hold my kettle while I am washing. All this is done without any servility of manner, and without any mercenary motive; for I always find it hard, and sometimes impossible, to make them accept any pecuniary reward for their services.

Part of the general decorum is the absolute sobriety that prevails in our camp. Among the officers, I have reasons to think, there is a moderate amount of surreptitious indulgence in date-gin—the only kind of intoxicant available. But I am certain that the men have not a drop of anything less innocent than tea, and even of the libations of the officers I have never seen any evidence whatever in public. What is drunk is drunk under the decent cover of darkness, and in the privacy of their quarters. Of other forms of vice—such as are supposed to be inevitable in a place where a number of healthy and idle men are gathered together—I can truthfully say that I have not observed the faintest suspicion.

In all these respects the Ottoman army, even in the most abnormal circumstances, carries on the noble traditions of the past—of the ages when the order, the discipline, and the morality prevailing in a Turkish camp were candidly contrasted by Christian observers with the opposite conditions that prevailed in the contemporary armies of Christendom. As early as the fifteenth century (1445) we have the testimony of the Byzantine historian Chalcocondyles to that effect—the testimony of a witness the reverse of friendly to the Turks. And more than two centuries later (1665) Sir Paul Ricaut, who knew the Turks as few foreign diplomatists have ever known them, tells us how "in the Turkish camp no brawls, quarrels, or clamours are heard; no abuses are committed . . . no com-



plaints of mothers of the rape of their virgin daughters, no violences or robberies offered to the inhabitants.”

Personally, while adding most cordially my own testimony to these tributes of long ago, I feel obliged to own that I should like to see around me a little more vivacity. Could nothing be done to temper this appalling apathy? The officers seem tacitly to encourage instead of discouraging it; for when the men are not occupied cooking, washing clothes, hewing wood, drawing water, or looking after the horses, they are given nothing else to occupy themselves with. Reading, of course, would be out of the question, for hardly any of them can read. But ordinary drill might do something to amuse them. As it is, I have only once seen about a score of infantry on parade, and it was a sight calculated to amuse the spectators, at all events. Some of the men were in putties, some without, some in boots, others in sandals. Their tunics were buttoned awry, their belts hung loose, and their trousers seemed to have been hitched up anyhow.

Their diet is as scanty as their dress. It consists mainly of rice, potatoes, oatmeal-bread, and meat, when it can be had. They eke out this fare with such luxuries as their pay of one mejidieh (four shillings) a month and the resources of the suk permit—eggs, dates, tobacco, tea, and sugar. When they first came out of Tripoli town they lacked even these opportunities for self-indulgence. There were no vegetables of any sort to be had. One egg cost threepence, and a packet of twenty cigarettes, that normally costs twopence, was sold for two shillings—half a month’s allowance.

All this penury—largely due to lack of system—is calculated to shock and scandalize the European observer. Even the Tunisians we have with us, accustomed to French methods, express themselves disgusted with Turkish ways. Haj Mohammed himself, by no means a model of alertness, commented severely on the Turkish soldiers’ slovenly manners and shabby attire. But to see things in their true proportions you must see them from within as well as from without. How does the Turk feel about his privations? What effect have they upon his spirit? To what extent do his material deficiencies impair his moral efficiency? These are questions which deserve to be asked and answered.

At the beginning, when the men faced the sternness of the desert for the first time, there was a good deal of suffering and consequent grumbling among them. There was even a moment when the officers feared a mutiny. But all that soon passed away. Once the resistance to the invader was organized, and passive retreat gave place to active aggression, the Turk's martial ardour prevailed over every other sentiment, and the men resigned themselves to all their hardships as became soldiers and sportsmen. This is their attitude at the present hour. In conversation with me some give utterance to a certain measure of self-commiseration, which is barely articulate enough to be called complaint.

"These are the only clothes I have," a sentry I found shivering on the slope of the Sidi Ramadan Hill said to me; and he unbuttoned his tunic to show that he wore nothing next to the skin. He described how they retreated from Ain Zara, leaving most of their stores behind, and concluded: "Now I have one blanket—nothing more."

They all seem to realize dimly that things might be better, but this realization does not lead them even to spiritual rebellion, and they invariably end up their catalogue of woes with a shrug of the shoulders and a "*Nayssa!*" (So be it!)

There is a dignity about their acquiescence in things as they are which commands my respect, for it is not a merely negative quality, and it does not in the least destroy their capacity for daring and doing; it only restrains and disciplines that capacity. There is no reckless dash about the Turkish soldier, but a calm, slow, inflexible determination—a sort of rocky obstinacy equal to any test of privation, of fatigue, even of defeat. He knows no despondency because he knows no elation. His soul, through all vicissitudes, maintains an unvaryingly equable temperature.

Some time ago three soldiers had been sent to Fezzan—forty-five days' journey—with despatches. They returned the other evening with the answer, and were told that they would have to go back again at once. "*Pek ey*" (Very well), they said, raising their hands to chin and forehead in salute, and departed straightway on another forty-five days' journey.

The same virtue is manifest among the officers even more

clearly, because they are conscious of it, and are able to express it in words.

“For three months we have not known rest,” said one of them to me the other day. “I have had nothing to eat for twenty-four hours. Nevertheless, we will persevere to the last drop of our blood. It may be that we shall fail to turn the Italians out. So be it. We have made up our minds, and our families at home know it, either to quit this country victorious or never to quit it at all.”

“Even if our Government is compelled to come to terms with Italy and cede Tripoli,” another officer has said to me, “we will not give up the struggle. We will throw up our commissions, and go on fighting till not one of us is left alive.”

“No reconciliation with the invader is possible,” said a third. “The war must and shall go on—for ever, if necessary. Better to die fighting than to commit suicide.”

In face of such iron self-devotion, what does it matter that the Turk's imagination is sluggish, his clothes shabby, and his pace slow? A wise man once observed that there are two kinds of slackness. There is a slackness which comes of weak will, but there is another and a very noble slackness which springs from confidence. The Turk's slackness unquestionably belongs to the second category. He is slow of pace, but strong of will; and his will alone often enables him to succeed where more brilliant gifts might fail. The Greeks, who have known the Turks longer and more intimately than any other European nation, express all this in the homely proverb: “The Turk catches the hare with a coach and pair.”

And may it not be that the very mental defects and material deficiencies which the critical outsider deploras are really advantages in disguise? His lack of a vivid imagination makes the Turk impervious to panic. His lack of rigid organization enables him to recover quickly from shocks that might shatter a less elastic army. All the privations to which he submits, when he might with a little initiative avoid them, harden him, so that he is all the better prepared to endure them when he cannot avoid them. He is in perpetual training for hunger and thirst and painful marches across waterless and shelterless wastes.

I am beginning to think that the difficulties which European

armies encounter in colonial warfare are largely due to their want of such a training. How can men who in time of peace are pampered like babies—how can they, when the emergency arises, develop at a moment's notice the capacity for enduring the hazards and hardships of war? Alexander, with a handful of Macedonians, conquered Asia, and the Romans found small difficulty in conquering North Africa. And neither the Macedonians nor the Romans could boast any marked superiority in point of arms and equipment to the nations they subdued. How is it, then, that our modern European armies, which in point of warlike equipment possess so immense an advantage over these nations, find it so hard to subdue them? I think the answer is that our soldiers, however superior they may be to the enemy as regards rifles and the skill in their use, are greatly inferior as regards the essential matter of endurance, owing to over-indulgence. And the same applies to horses. No European horse, with all the care lavished upon him, can do and endure what a Barbary or a Balkan pony does and endures, in spite of a treatment which in its carelessness often amounts to cruelty. We are careful and troubled about many things, when one thing is needful. The Turks have chosen that thing which shall not be taken from them; and as to the other things, they dismiss them with a simple "*Zarar yok*" (It does not matter).

One evening, during the interregnum between the departure of Ahmed and the accession of Amara—a period which will remain indelibly commemorated in the annals of my stomach—I happened to say to a Turk: "I have had nothing to eat all day." He replied: "It does not matter!"

At the moment I execrated his callousness; now I applaud his philosophy, for there is a whole school of philosophy in that short phrase—a great school, the disciples of which are scattered over a large part of the earth. I have met them in Eastern Europe, in Africa, and in Asia. The Russians say "*Nitchevo*," the Arabs "*Malesh*," the Turks "*Zarar yok*," the Indians "*Kutch parwa nahin hai*." They all mean the same thing—"It does not matter."

"Unprogressive fatalism," says the Western Philistine. No, my friend; I prefer to call it "imperturbable stoicism," the mother of manly endurance. I have ended by joining this

school. At first I sighed for the commonplace decencies of civilization. I regretted the absence of water ; I resented the presence of sand. " It is intolerable," I said one day. " Sand seems to pervade everything. We eat sand, we drink sand, we breathe sand." I denounced charcoal as of all forms of fuel the most futile. I cursed the flies that pestered me by day, the fleas that kept me awake at night, and the other things—I have heard them called " little inconveniences " most unfairly, for in Tripoli, at all events, they are not little—which tormented me always. But I soon realized the utter uselessness of regret, resentment, and blasphemy. I decided to embrace the creed of the men among whom I lived, to cultivate their contempt for comfort, to inoculate myself with their philosophical phlegm. I succeeded to some extent, and at once my old standards of comfort and cleanliness underwent a miraculous modification. I discovered how very few things are, in truth, essential to one's being. A single candle suffices for light ; a plain packing-case makes a most luxurious chair ; a few rugs afford quite a tolerable couch. If I could only find some straw to spread under them, I should not envy any European Sybarite his spring-bed or feather mattress. I now drink soup-like water with gratitude, eat gritty bread without grumbling, and relish barbarous cooking as I have never relished a Carlton dinner. Things that nauseated me before nauseate me no longer. Even the " little inconveniences " have lost their stings for me. I owe all this to the philosophy of *Malesh*.

The German doctor, poor fellow, has not succeeded in joining our school. He got tired of sleeping on the ground and of eating soup with a tea-glass. He sighed for the sausages of the Fatherland. So he has deserted us, with his little port-manteau, rug, and Kodak. He departed on foot, his luggage being deposited on the back of a camel, which also carried the luggage of another European deserter. At the last moment the poor Teuton reflected that he might need water on his journey, so he rushed back and asked me if I could oblige him with some vessel. I presented him with an empty jam-pot.

The two deserters quarrelled violently before they left the camp, and I feared that they might fall out by the way. It was on the Teuton's account that I feared, for the other one

had carried away with him a Turkish sword. The German was unarmed, except with a cigarette-case shaped like an automatic pistol. For some time I felt anxious for him, especially when I heard that his enemy and fellow-traveller had been seen on the Tunisian frontier alone. But as I never heard of any German doctor being found dead in the desert, I am justified in hoping that he reached the Fatherland and its sausages in safety.

## CHAPTER VII

### SOME PERSONALITIES

THE army whose common characteristics I have endeavoured to depict in the foregoing pages is under the command of Colonel Neshat Bey—a simple-mannered officer, who, on the Governor-General's departure, found himself at the head of both the civil and military administration of the province: a double burden which he carries with cheerful equanimity, assisted by an enthusiastic staff of younger men who have since gathered round him.

When the Turks evacuated Tripoli, Neshat Bey was alone with the few officers of the garrison. But it was not long before the Committee of Union and Progress made good the deficiency. Whatever may be thought of the general activity of that political body, and I am certainly not one of its admirers, the splendid energy with which they hastened to repair the stupendous blunder of leaving the province defenceless merits the highest admiration. As soon as war became inevitable, they despatched to the scene a number of officers to give cohesion and guidance to the scattered forces of Islam.

The first to reach the seat of war were Major Fethi and Captain Tahir, and they were followed by Captains Javid, Talaat, and Ismail Hakki.

Major Fethi, the Chief of the Staff, was at the moment Military Attaché to the Ottoman Embassy in Paris. Immediately on receipt of orders from Constantinople, he left for Tripoli with Tahir and Talaat, who also were on the spot, and five young military doctors who were completing their education in France. This party of eight sailed from Marseilles, and when they reached Sousse they heard that the war

had broken out. Landing in Tripoli town became doubtful ; so they separated, and while four of the doctors proceeded on their way, trusting to luck, Fethi, with three members of his party—Captains Tahir and Talaat and Dr. Eshref—got off at Gabes, and gained Ben Gardane. But they were stopped by the frontier authorities, and obliged to retrace their steps. From Tunis Talaat returned to France, whence a month later he managed to get to the seat of war with Javid. Meantime, Fethi, Tahir, and Dr. Eshref, were joined in Tunis by the rest of the party, who had found it impossible to land at Tripoli. After ten days spent there, they got to the frontier, and this time succeeded in slipping across it.

To these officers—young, well-educated, and full of zeal—is due, in a large measure, the resistance which has hitherto prevented the Italians from penetrating beyond the neighbourhood of the capital.

Major Fethi—a tall, fair Albanian of about thirty-five, with a quiet, cultured manner and an unfailing courtesy—is reputed to be the ablest of all. I am not enough of an expert to judge of his military ability, but I can bear testimony to his indomitable endurance. He is anything but robust physically ; yet he has volunteered to exchange the luxuries of Paris for the hardships of the wilderness, and he has been roughing it like one of the most primitive peasants for three months. Captain Tahir, also an Albanian, belongs to a Young Turk type more admirable than attractive ; but he possesses special qualifications for the work he is now doing. He has been on secret missions to Egypt and Morocco, and is acquainted with the speech and character of the Arabs. His activity in the last-named country obliged the French to expel him twice. Of the others, Javid, a native of Adrianople, is that rare phenomenon—a Turk with a keen sense of the ludicrous. Ismail Hakki, a native of Macedonia, has charmed me from the first by his frank and cordial geniality. He seems to have brought away from France not only the science, but also the spirit of his polished French mess-mates. To his more serious gifts he joins a cultivated artistic talent that might earn him distinction in other than the field of battle.

But excellent as all these officers are, they supply little “ copy ” to the seeker of the picturesque. They have all had



a modern European education, and they are too much like ourselves to be interesting to us.

Fortunately, there is no dearth of piquant personalities in our camp. Among my earliest acquaintances was Emin Effendi, a Syrian youth with beautiful dark eyes, who had left the military school of Constantinople but eighteen months, when the arrival of the Italians gave him the opportunity of translating theory into practice. He seized it with both hands, and played a brilliant part in most of the skirmishes for which the Tripoli oasis supplied the stage during the first two months of the war. Turks and Arabs alike sing the handsome youth's praises, and the authorities repose in him a confidence of which a much older man might be proud. There is nothing modern or European about the young Lieutenant Emin. In spite of his school training, he might be a knight fresh from a medieval romance. Torquato Tasso might have taken him as a model for one of his Saracen heroes. Perhaps in his veins courses some of the Arab blood which our Crusaders learnt to respect in Syria. Fearless as a lion, unsophisticated as a lamb, and pious as a monk, he seems to combine all the traits of the ideal paladin.

He thanks God for having placed him in the path of glory. "I am indeed a most fortunate young man," he said to me one day, "and I cannot be sufficiently grateful to God when I think of the thousands of soldiers who never have a chance of proving what they can do!" At the moment he was suffering from fever, but his pain added pathos to the child-like sweetness of his smile, and the fever only made his fine dark eyes shine the more brilliantly.

He believes firmly that the cause he is fighting for is the cause of God, and he entertains no doubt whatever about its ultimate triumph. He dreams of the day when the hosts of Islam will drive the infidels back into their ships, and he has no misgivings as to what may happen to himself before that day dawns. "Something within me tells me that it is not my destiny to die in this war," he naively confessed to me, adding that he only prays that God may give him health and strength, so that when the time comes he may be among the first to enter Tripoli town, and win imperishable glory amid the children of Islam.

Zeal for the faith and love of fame—these are Emin's

consuming passions. They are noble passions, and they fill his whole heart, leaving no room for rancour in his gentle soul. He despises but does not hate the Italians. Bitterness seems to be as alien to his simple and ardent nature as baseness.

Another character that forms at once a parallel and a contrast to this chivalrous young Syrian is Captain Ahmed Shukri, a pure Anatolian Turk, totally untouched and unspoilt by the foreign spirit. He tells me that he is only fifty-one years of age, but I should not have been surprised had I heard that he is a hundred and one—so venerable is his mien, so luxuriant the grey beard that ripples down his bosom. Officers and men address him as “*Baba*” (Father). It is always “*Merhaba, Baba!*” (Hail, Father!) “*Nassil, Baba?*” (How are you, Father?) The term is a tribute of affection as well as of respect, for no more amiable patriarch has ever breathed. His voice is gentle, his smile is gentle, his look is gentle. His whole face exhales gentleness, and his big brown eyes are full of an embarrassing innocence. He gives you the impression of a great baby that has grown old without growing up. In every new thing he sees he displays an intelligent child’s delighted interest. When a European visitor inflated and deflated his air-cushion, Baba followed each movement with wide-eyed curiosity. When an electric toy lamp was produced, he picked it up and examined it with a look of awe in his big brown eyes. A Kodak is a source of inexhaustible wonder to him, and it is good to see the tremulous eagerness with which he poses for his photograph.

Baba is very pious. Punctually at each of the five stated hours of prayer he spreads out his mat, taking care that it shall face as near as possible the point of the horizon where Mecca is. After the last prayer at night he steps on to his couch, and sits on his heels for a long time, fingering a string of beads with one hand and passing the other caressingly down his beard. Nor is his piety manifested only in prayer and meditation. His whole conversation is as full of God as was the conversation of Cromwell’s Puritans. When he sneezes he exclaims, “*Elhamdulillah!*” When he yawns he whispers, “*La illah il Allah!*” Every action in his life is sanctified by the name of Allah. But even his piety is no proof against his curiosity. The slightest incident is enough to distract his



"BABA."

*G. E. Arnold, phot.*



*Baron von Bredow-Kru., lens. phot.*

CAPT. ISMAIL HAKKI. (FACING THE READER.)



attention from his devotions. Sometimes, without any incident, his eyes wander round, as if seeking for some excuse to play truant. Concentration is as difficult to him as it is to a child doing a tedious task.

I have seen him lose his temper only once, and I shall never forget it. It was night, and as I crossed the court, I heard through the darkness a soldier crying "*Aman! Aman!*" (Mercy! Mercy!), and the thud of a stick descending on his back. I approached the group, and saw a Tommy stretched on the ground face downwards, with one soldier on his feet and another on his neck, and standing between them Baba, armed with a cane. Presently he threw the cane aside and marched away. As he passed me, I caught the sound of a great sob. I do not know what was the crime that caused the castigation, but I am sure that the recipient of the punishment suffered less pain than the man who felt it his duty to inflict it.

With that solitary exception, Baba's placidity appears to be superior to any trial. He eats when he can, and goes without food when he must. He wards the cold off by wearing two threadbare jackets over a threadbare waistcoat. He sleeps contentedly on a piece of furniture that looks like the bottom part of a wardrobe with the drawers gone. No conceivable discomfort can ruffle his serenity. His benevolence is inexhaustible, and it knows no limits of race or creed. He is most kind to every one of us strangers, telling his orderly—whom he always addresses as *tchujughim* (my child)—to wait on us, and pressing upon us a share of whatever little luxury comes his way. He revels in helping others. One day I caught him in the midst of a veritable orgy of charity. A sick man had been brought in. Shukri was immediately on the spot. He got the patient a bed, and with his orderly hastened to make it, shaking the blankets and spreading them. The bed ready, he helped the invalid to lie down, tucked the blankets in, and made him comfortable. Then he took charge of his money, after having carefully counted it, and did not go away till he was assured that there was nothing more to do for the moment. In the evening he came back to see how the invalid was getting on. He bent over the bed, and, laying a hand on the patient's forehead, he asked gently, "*Nassil?*" (How are you?) The man mumbled back that he was very ill. Shukri sat beside

him, and addressed many words of comfort to him. Few trained nurses could have shown greater tact, solicitude, and tenderness.

I had something like a shock when I discovered that this amiable embodiment of patriarchal benevolence, gentleness, and piety, was in truth a renowned warrior.

He had been in the Tripoli garrison as a gunner for twenty-one years when the war broke out. In the course of those years he had risen to the rank of Captain, and when the Italian fleet appeared off the town he commanded the battery at Fort Hamidieh. He replied to the Italian fire with his guns up to the last moment, and then, when the garrison evacuated the town, he continued in command of Battery A till the retreat from Ain Zara—that is to say, he remained in constant action for nearly two months. He loves to narrate his exploits and his experiences during those fifty-eight eventful days. “ My battery was only three kilomètres from the Italian fortifications at the Tomb of Sidi Misri, and I was daily exposed to the Italian shells. I answered as best I could. I had only three guns, and it took one hour to load for each shot. I fired four or five shots a day. But one day I fired nine and another eleven. One day I took one of my guns and placed it within a kilomètre of the Italians. I had with me fourteen shells. I gave them thirteen, and then stopped firing. When I stopped they began, and went on for one and a half hours, showering thousands of shells. When they left off I gave them my last shot by way of a good-bye, and withdrew. At the beginning I was astonished at the hail-storm of the Italian artillery ; I had never imagined that shells could fly on one so thick as that. The noise, too, they made was tremendous. *Boom, boom, boom*—the heavy guns ; *pan, pan, pan*—the machine-guns : they went on all day, and the echoes from the sand-dunes behind made the noise louder still. The ground round my battery was covered with splintered shells and shrapnel. One morning we saw in front of our guns a hole ten paces in diameter and about two mètres deep. My men asked what had produced it, and I could not tell them. I did not believe it could have been made by a shell, till we found behind us another hole just as big, and pieces of an exploded shell in it. But we did not mind very much. We had got used to that sort of thing, and our guns were safe

between sacks full of sand. I always stood up and looked at the Italian batteries through my glasses. Only once I was hit on my cap ;” and, taking off his kalpac, he showed me a groove about two inches long dug through the astrakhan by a shrapnel bullet. “ I didn’t know I had been hit. Suddenly my sergeant said, ‘ You are bleeding, Captain,’ and he pointed to my head. I took my cap off, and truly there was some blood—the shrapnel, as it shot past, must have scratched or burnt the skin slightly. This, and also this ”—pointing to a small tear in his left trouser—“ is all the harm I suffered. It is true that I lost eight out of my fifteen men ; but I can boast I did more damage to the enemy than anybody else, because to every one of my shots they replied by hundreds, which must have cost them much money. I was very angry when they fired at our hospital. So one day, when I saw four or five thousand of them gathered round their Red Cross flag, I thought I would give them a lesson. ‘ They can’t all be wounded,’ I said to myself. ‘ Anyhow, we shall soon see if they are ;’ and I let fly. Immediately they scattered to right and left. They have no courage, the Italians. One day I saw three Italian columns at a distance of some 1,500 mètres, and I fired ; they dispersed and fled at once. Another day I went with Ismail Effendi, whom you know, close up to the Italian lines, and fired. The Italians would not reply. So angry was I that I stood up, spat in their direction, and shouted : ‘ Cowards ! have you no shame in you ? ’ ”

In relating these things he worked himself up to a great pitch of excitement. The string of beads dropped from his fingers as he illustrated his story with arms uplifted. His voice, usually as soft as the cooing of a dove, resounded like the rumble of thunder or the roar of cannon. His big brown eyes had lost their babyish mildness, and blazed with furious wrath. I then saw that behind that simple, placid, and benevolent face there lurked a capacity for implacable resolution and an indomitable will that only needed the occasion to call them forth. I could picture him behind his antiquated guns placidly firing his leisurely four or five shots a day to the enemy’s incessant cannonade, and then the comicality of the picture broke in upon me. I envied the Italians the spectacle, but I doubt whether they were able to appreciate the humour of it. Baba

did appreciate it, for presently his eyes beamed again, and the crow's-feet beside them wrinkled into a smile.

Now that his guns are gone, he spends his days sauntering about the stable next to the Kasr, where the artillery horses are kept, and seeing that they are looked after properly. He must have a fellow-feeling for them, for are they not, like him, bereaved of their favourite occupation? In his kind old heart there must be a feeling of regret for the battery gone out of his life—an emptiness which prayer alone cannot fill. This came out the other evening, when, having found an appreciative audience, he once more, for the fiftieth time, related his exploits. He took the cap off his head, pointed to the shrapnel groove, and told once more how it had happened. When he had finished his story, he replaced the cap on his head, let a few seconds pass in silence, and then heaved a deep sigh, as much as to say: "Ah, the good days have gone by!" Then, as though rebuking himself for a regret unworthy of a True Believer, he made a gesture of resignation with both hands, palm upwards, and said, "*Nayssa!*" (So be it!)

However deeply he may feel the loss of his beloved battery, Baba rarely allows the feeling to emerge on the surface. He never looks depressed. Why should he? Allah gave, and Allah took away. *Elhamdulillah!* He has done his duty, and he enjoys vastly talking about it. His cheerfulness and kindness have made him a universal favourite. He is a great social success. He spends his evenings visiting. As soon as one party breaks up, he strolls on to another, to talk and drink tea. Tea-drinking is his one great vice, for he does not smoke, and surely snuff-taking is hardly to be reckoned among the sins? But when it comes to tea, he reminds me of Dr. Johnson. Like him, Ahmed Shukri may be described as "a hardened and shameless tea-drinker, who with tea amuses the evening, with tea solaces the midnight, and with tea welcomes the morning." And I can echo Boswell by saying about *my hero* that the quantities of tea which he drinks at all hours are so great that his nerves must be uncommonly strong not to have been relaxed by such an intemperate indulgence in what to me is the most insipid of all beverages. However, I have not set out here to denounce Baba's foibles, but to describe his feats. From party to party he wanders—Staff room,



doctors' room, other officers' rooms, ending up at the telegraph room ; and when this last party has broken up, he retires to bed late and distended with sweet tea.

Such is our Baba—gentle, pious, charitable, brave, unself-conscious, and withal, master of an easy, spontaneous, and unaffected dignity which might do credit to any Court-bred Prince.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ALLIES FROM AFAR

I HAVE already introduced the reader to some of our Arab allies—the band of holy warriors who accompanied me from Zawia. Since that date other bands have been arriving from the purple mountains in the south : Nalut, Fessatun, Yefreen, Gharian, and other districts. They come in contingents, varying in number from a hundred to a thousand, and representing in physiognomy all the races that inhabit Tripolitania—from the hatchet-faced Arab, with his high forehead, straight nose, thin lips, and deep-set, keen eyes, to the flat-faced negro, with his low forehead, expansive nostrils, high cheek-bones, round, rolling eyes, and thick lips. The chasm between these racial extremes is bridged by intermediate types—Berbers, Kabyles, and hybrids of all complexions. Some of them are honest husbandmen, or herdsmen, and some desperate cut-throats ; some are young and others old ; some are tall and others short ; but they all are hardy highlanders—spare and scraggy, like their native soil. And they all wear the same simple costume : a white shirt, or smock, with short, wide sleeves ; and over this undergarment, which reaches to the knees and is gathered up round the middle, the voluminous hram—an immense wrap of coarse wool wound about the body and drawn over the head. Their sinewy legs are naked, and the feet either bare or shod with thin-soled sandals.

The chiefs are more elaborately dressed. From beneath the hram peep a blue jacket and a pair of trousers of white calico or of blue cloth, tapering down to the ankles. Their feet, too, are encased in yellow shoes adorned with silk of many hues. They ride at the head of their respective tribes on saddles with peaked pommels and high back-rests, both covered with finely





TWO SHEIKHS FROM THE JEBEL.  
*Sketches by Capt. Ismail Hakki.*

embroidered leather. The bridles and the straps of the deep, shovel-like stirrups are similarly adorned with designs in silk or silver, the whole forming an agreeable relief to the drab simplicity of the men, who follow their chief on foot, now marching with long, loose strides, now breaking into a trot.

In their weapons, also, the sheikhs show a great superiority over their followers, every one carrying a rifle slung from the back-rest of his saddle, and a sword slung over his right shoulder by a red leather strap ; while the latter arrive armed with weapons that seem to have been picked out of some old curiosity shop—long-barrelled flintlocks, sometimes patched up with wire, and very often slung across the back with strips of linen or pieces of camel-cord ; old-world swords with long, straight blades and cross-wise hilts, rusty bayonets, common pickaxes, or sometimes only crooked sticks. Each warrior carries on his back a kind of nose-bag, containing the few provisions which he needs, and some of them also carry over the shoulder bushes of dry brushwood for fire.

When near the camp, they fall into a sort of column and rush in with a stupendous amount of noise, the minstrel shouting in a loud, long-sustained quaver, "Be sons of your fathers!" and the men vociferating back, "We are! we are!" while they brandish aloft their muskets, naked swords, and bayonets, or, if they have none of these, their brawny arms and clenched fists. Sometimes the contingent is accompanied by a red or green flag, which flutters over the warriors' heads, adding a touch of brilliance to the greys and browns of their cloaks. A few pack camels and donkeys follow, loaded mainly with fuel and the sheikhs' impedimenta. The guttural yells of the strange warriors are answered by the strident voices of the local women, who creep out of their subterranean caves and stand on the heights, emitting their shrill ululations—a sound that seems to have a wonderfully stirring effect on the Arab male heart.

The enthusiasm with which these champions of the Crescent are greeted is something that does one good to witness. It is like a strong, invigorating current of pure air that sweeps through the camp, bracing up all who breathe it, and lifting them for the moment to a higher level. The peddlers leave off peddling, the beggars begging, and the loafers loafing. Every-

body is for the time being transformed into a worshipper, and on every side you hear the sacred words "*Islam!*" "*Allah!*" "*Inshallah!*" uttered with a reverence and an intensity that send, even through the infidel heart, a thrill of sympathetic emotion.

The other day I caught amidst the din the cry, "O Owwad Suleiman! when will you come?" I asked who were the men whose advent was so eagerly expected, and was told that the Owwad Suleiman are a large and warlike tribe dwelling in the great desert of Syrtes, and ruled over by a famous old chief who rejoices in the name of Seif en Nasr—the Sword of Victory. Many are the stories that are told concerning this aged hero. One Arab summed up his portrait of him by telling me: "He always rides to battle armed with a lance only—he needs no other weapon!" Another gave me a version of the Sidi Abdul Selam's prophecy, according to which the Italians are destined to advance as far as Syrtes, and doomed to meet there with destruction at the hands of Seif en Nasr. Certainly the record of the man and of the tribe over which he rules justify the hopes that are built on their co-operation. The chief's father, half a century ago, aspiring to become the independent Prince of his part of Tripolitania, led a rebellion against the Sultan. He fell in battle, and the movement ended in the division of the tribe, a section of it being forced to emigrate to the Sudan. But, though the father was foiled in his ambition, the son continued a desultory warfare against the Ottoman Government, and until recently he was wanted in another sense of the word. His banner supplied a rallying-point for all the disaffected Arabs of the province, and protection to all the lawless characters of the desert. Caravan raiders always found in Seif en Nasr a patron and a partner in iniquity. However, this war has induced the ancient miscreant to turn his lance from the Moslem rulers of the country to its infidel assailants, and he has promised to join us at the head of his fierce warriors, accompanied by his sons.

We had the other morning a sample of the kind of men that obey the Seif en Nasr in a body of warriors come from Fezzan—the advance-guard of the auxiliaries expected from that region. They were much darker than the Jebel Arabs, and were led by two sheikhs—Ahmed Ben Hassan and Mahdi Musa—mounted





*By E. J. Hibert, photo.*

HOLY WARRIORS FROM FEZZAN.



on *m'harris*, or trotting camels, one of which—a lean brown and white young beast—was said to perform an ordinary camel's twelve days' journey in one day. They came preceded by a red flag, with a white star and crescent on one side, and on the other the inscription "*Mujehaddin Fezzan.*" Their sheikhs seem to be somewhat richer than the chiefs I have hitherto seen, for, besides their swift-footed mounts, they have brought with them a few tents and rugs, and a number of pots and pans made of stiff hide and lined on the outside with fine leather, the pots containing oil and butter, the pans meant for cooking. They reminded me, in the splendid simplicity of their equipment, of the great Khalif Omar reaching Jerusalem on a camel that carried him and all his effects.

They were received with quite exceptional honours. On arrival they assembled in the market-place before the Kasr, and one of the Turkish officers, who looked on from above, made a patriotic speech, which elicited a tremendous applause from the holy warriors. They brandished their weapons over their heads, and shook their clenched fists, cheering enthusiastically; and at the end of the address they clapped their hands, shouting devoutly, "*Inshallah! Inshallah!*" (Please God! Please God!) I could detect not the faintest sign of weariness about them. After forty-five days' march, their tall, gaunt, stringy figures appeared as fresh as if they were just starting. This is indeed a war for the Faith, when men endure six weeks' journey to face death.

Having paraded through the camp after this wild fashion, the tribesmen proceed to pitch their tents in some spot in the surrounding desert, each tribe by itself. These temporary settlements bear witness to a meagreness of existence beside which even the Turk's indigence might pass for magnificence. True, some of the sheikhs may be described as comfortably, even elegantly, housed. One dwells in a canvas cottage with many corners and a conical roof—white outside, and inside lined with bright-coloured stuff. It is obviously a tent that has seen a good deal of service, but it is scrupulously neat, and the numerous patches on the walls and roof enhance the look of antiquity without detracting from its beauty. The floor is carpeted with clean rush mats and soft rugs spread over them. In the middle stands a pyramid of rifles, and against

the sides two ancient trunks covered with canvas and armed with strong iron locks. On the top of one of these trunks rests the sheikh's Koran—well worn by generations of pious readers—one or two other devotional books, and an inkstand of brass, with a case for reed-pens attached to it.

This tent belongs to a sheikh who arrived at the head of three hundred and fifty men from Gharian. Another sheikh's tent I have visited is even larger in size, and the lining is richly embroidered with texts from the Koran arranged in a kind of frieze. But these palatial dwellings are rare. The common Arab tent is a very poor affair. Even when new it affords a most inadequate protection against the rain and dew, and the ordinary tent which the holy warrior brings with him is not even new. It is an age-worn black rag, with more holes than patches, supported by a vertical stick in the middle. It forms an apartment about fourteen feet long at the bottom and about six feet high in the centre, and it accommodates a dozen men with their belongings, the bags which contain their provisions huddled on the ground, and their muskets leaning against the ropes. But there are few even of such fragmentary shelters. The deficiency is in some small measure made good by rotten Turkish bell-tents, unearthed from some ancient depôt, and lent to the Arab auxiliaries. But the majority of them are content with the roof supplied by the desert sky.

“Content,” I think, is the right word, for these hardened sons of the desert seem to stand exposure to the chilly air and penetrating damp of the night better than the poor Turkish Tommies. Nor is exposure the only matter in which the Arabs show their extraordinary powers of endurance. They can march day after day at the rate of four miles an hour, gliding over the soft sand easily and lightly, as if their sandals were armed with the wings of Mercury. During their long marches they seldom carry a water-supply with them, but on reaching a well they unwind the belt or sash from round their waist, tie to it a jug, tin, skin, or whatever vessel happens to be available, let it down, and draw the water. They can exist without food for periods incredible to a European unacquainted with their habits. When I first arrived here I heard of an Arab volunteer who, after the fight of Bu Meliana on October 23rd, remained on the Italian side, hidden in the sand, for nine days, till he

found a chance to sneak through to the Turkish camp. All that time he had had nothing to eat. "If that is true," I sceptically said, "it is indeed a nine days' wonder." But all I saw afterwards convinced me that, even if untrue, the story was not improbable.

Their usual diet consists of flat round loaves of oatmeal-bread, or even of unbaked oatmeal kneaded into a ball with water. Only the richer among them indulge in oil. To this food they may add, if circumstances permit, a few leathern dates, onions, eggs, and very rarely meat. Sameness of diet does not bore them any more than it bores the animals.

Such warriors cost the Sultan very little—one *bu-tissain* (fourpence halfpenny) a day for the pedestrians and two for the horsemen, paid either in corn or in kind, seems to satisfy them. The only luxury which none, not even the poorest, appear to deny themselves is tea. One of their sheikhs tells me that it is only some fifteen years since this article was introduced into the country—by the Senussi, who found it useful as a stimulant during their night prayers. But its use rapidly spread, and now it is impossible to find a group of Arabs, whether dwelling in a tent or bivouacking in the open, without a small, begrimed teapot of enamelled tin.

Directly after sunset they begin to light their small wood-fires, and as soon as the more solid part of the meal is over the tiny teapot begins to simmer on two stones that serve as a fireplace. Then, when they have put away from them the desire of food and drink, they squat round the glare and smoke of the wood fires chanting hymns. For hour after hour they sing either in antiphonal solos or in chorus. Sometimes one, standing up, chants out a sentence of prayer for success in the Holy War, and the rest chime in with the refrain "*Allah—Allah—Allah—Allah!*" swaying backwards and forwards with eyes bent on the flames, into which, now and again, they cast a fresh stick to keep them alive. The glow of the fire falls upon the stern, earnest faces, and the hymns float through the night air—a little picture of light and song framed by the dumb darkness of the desert.

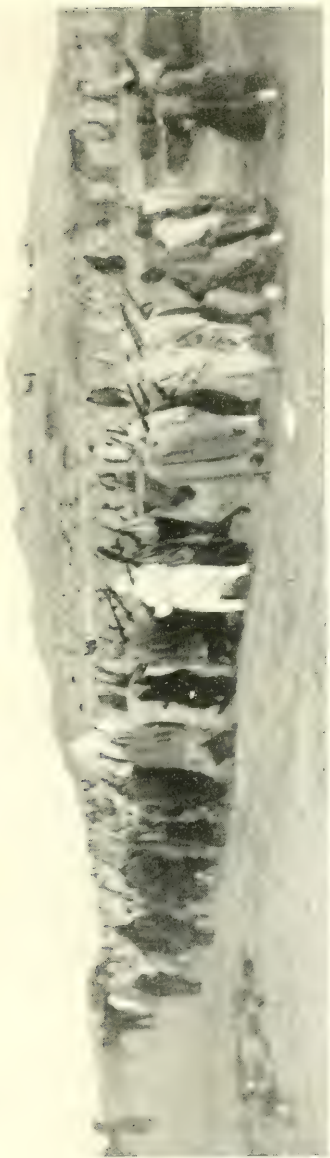
After a while the chanting ceases, the fire is left to burn itself out, and each man, drawing his hram over his head, lies back and composes himself to sleep.

One pitch-dark night I heard, through the cold stillness, the strains of some musical instrument—a shrill, drawn-out tune not unlike a Scotch jig on a bagpipe—pleasant enough in the distance. I got up and groped my way towards the sound. As I drew nearer, it grew shriller, and at length I came upon a group of Arabs lying on the ground under the stars. I struck a match, and by the light of it I saw that one of them was blowing a pipe, consisting of two perforated reeds bound together with string; the others listened in silence. No doubt they found music a comfort in the chilly night—perhaps they had had nothing to eat.

Besides their nocturnal religious exercises, they observe, it goes without saying, the ordinary devotions of True Believers. Five times a day—at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and evening—the voice of the muezzin rises above the vulgar noises of the camp, proclaiming, “*La illah il Allah wa Mohammed rassul Allah! Allah akbar!*” And each time rows of tall, gaunt figures wrapped in their hrams are seen standing up, bowing, prostrating themselves, rising, bowing, and prostrating themselves, again and again.

Next to their frugality, their endurance, and their piety, these sons of the desert display a fortitude which would have made a Spartan or Roman feel small. They submit to the surgeon’s knife without anæsthetics and without wincing, and look on while their limbs are cut off as unconcernedly as if they belonged to someone else. The only thing they dread is confinement, and therefore, when wounded, they refuse to go into hospital, but prefer to stay in their own tents, or, better still, if the wound does not preclude movement, to roam about the camp, parading their “decorations”—this is their word for wounds received in battle, and a common wish of one holy warrior to another is, “May Allah decorate you!” I need hardly add that death has no terrors for them. Why should it? They are happy enough to believe that death is only a passport to another and better life. They always dart in the direction whence comes the sound of guns. Without food, water, or covering, and armed with an obsolete rifle only, they go off to face cannon-fire.

Insensible to privation and to pain, knowing neither fatigue nor fear, and inspired by a great ideal, these men seem born



ARAB REFUGEES BEETING THROUGH AZIZIA



TURKISH REGULARS



for the work which they now are doing. They, no doubt, lack many of the attributes of soldiers. Their organization is primitive. Each sheikh is at the head of a clan consisting of several kindred families, the number of which may be anything from five to 2,000. These tribal chieftains have never yielded to the Central Government more than the minimum of obedience. Rebellions have always been rife among the greater of them, and if they serve the Sultan now, they do so entirely from their own free will. In war or in peace they are extremely jealous of their independence, and apt to resent any interference with it. The men in their turn, though they obey their own chief, will obey no one else. This organization, in some respects, is superior to the organization of a regular army. There is nothing mechanical or rigid about it. An Arab army possesses all the spontaneity, the elasticity, and the mobility of a living body. The very looseness of its composition renders it impervious to disintegration. Like a centipede, it goes on living and acting, though piece after piece may be lopped off. An army of this kind, under the leadership of a man of genius, could work wonders; but, in the absence of such a leader, it suffers from the defects of its qualities. The volunteers, impatient of inaction, and unused to discipline, are very hard to control. Their idea of war is to dash off to the front, with the least possible delay or preparation, to kill some enemies, take some plunder, and then return home. Compulsion being impossible, the only means of keeping them together is persuasion. And when the moment for action has come, the same impatience, impetuosity, and inability to see beyond the immediate object, either lead to failure or rob success of its more solid fruits. They rush to battle yelling like men possessed by the *Sheitan* himself, all their fighting instincts aroused to uncontrolled ferocity. They are eager to begin firing as soon as they come in sight of the enemy, and, as their eyes carry much farther than their rifles, by the time they have got within hitting range they have wasted most of their ammunition. Then they run up to the officer in command, saying, "See, we have no cartridges left."

Or it may be that, after hours of fighting, they have taken a position. First, instead of pursuing the fleeing enemy, they waste their time picking up plunder. Secondly, when they

have picked up all they can find they retire, imagining that they will be able to come back again next day. In the meantime the enemy have reoccupied the position, and the same fight has to be fought over again—so much the better, say the Arabs: the more fighting, the more fun—and the more loot.

Such are our levies when they first arrive raw from the desert, and the Turks do their best to remedy their defects without wounding their susceptibilities. I accompanied one of my Turkish friends one day on his round of visits to the Arab tents, and I listened to his efforts. He advised the holy warriors to obey orders—to advance, stop, retreat, fire, or cease firing, when they are told; not to dash forward all at once pell-mell, and waste their cartridges and their lives. As I listened to this elementary lecture, I thought of Xenophon and his exhortations to the Ten Thousand, or even of Nestor and his platitudinous addresses to the Greeks before Troy. These things, however, are not platitudes to the Arabs before Tripoli. They listened attentively, and expressed their comprehension and acceptance of the teaching with frequent “*Sahé! Sahé!*” (True! True!)

As time went on, I saw these instructions, and the experience of the consequences that attended their non-observance, produce a most remarkable change in the conduct of the holy warriors. I saw them learn to take cover, to fire in an extended line and not massed, to attack noiselessly. But meanwhile the part of the speech that elicited the heartiest applause was the peroration: “The Italians have no heart. You are brave, and God is with you. If you will only do as we tell you, you ought to drive them out of Tripoli in no time!”

So much concerning their value from the point of view of tactics. As regards their shooting capacity, the exaggerated accounts of Arab marksmanship I had read made me expect miracles, and miracles do not happen. There is a widely-spread story, for example, to the effect that no Arab is considered a perfect shot till he can hit at a hundred yards' distance an egg resting on his boy's outspread palm. After seeing some of our holy warriors shoot, I had no difficulty in crediting the story with this qualification only—that the boy does not belong to the marksman, but to his greatest enemy. However, in this respect also I found longer acquaintance corrective of



first impressions. The Arabs are not all crack shots, as legend alleges, but there are among them many first-rate marksmen, and even the worst among them possess the supreme virtue of not realizing their own incompetence. They go to battle shouting as much as they do when they go to market. But when they aim to fire they are quite silent. Their whole attention is concentrated on the enemy ; and it is only now and then that they hit their own friends by mistake. Some of these mistakes occur on the battlefield, others in camp.

They arrive with the arms I have already described, but soon Mausers and Martinis, with a number of cartridges, are distributed among them. Their joy in the acquisition of these comparatively modern rifles is like the joy of children in a new toy. They clean them, load them, pat them, and then they naturally itch to try and see how they work. So they let them off, the consequence being a perpetual din of irresponsible firing, accompanied with bullets flying about in all directions, much to the dismay of nervous visitors. I have seen one of the latter rush out of his tent with hair dishevelled, protesting frantically against the danger "of dying an ignominious death." "Bullets are flying all round my tent!" he cried. "What am I to do?" I am afraid my answer was somewhat unsympathetic : "Pick them up and keep them as souvenirs."

What else could I say ? If a man wants to be able to boast that he has been in a holy war, even as a spectator, he must put up with the eccentricities of holy warriors. It is all part of the game. Personally, I treat this as I treat all the other details of our daily routine here—in accordance with the doctrine of *Malesh*—and I derive quite a considerable amount of satisfaction from so treating it. Besides, what are the chances of being hit by a stray bullet ? Not one in a thousand ; and every time you are *not* hit is an occasion for lively self-felicitation—an emotion you hardly ever enjoy under conditions of dull, normal security.

Of course, this sort of thing can be carried too far, and were I in a position of authority I would do my best to discourage the practice from a pure sense of duty. For last week two unfortunates fell victims to the holy warriors' reckless and aimless play : one was shot through the leg, and will probably remain lame for the rest of his life ; the other through the

middle of the body, and died next morning. Thereupon indiscriminate firing was prohibited, and some of the warriors who disregarded the prohibition were put in prison. They felt very indignant at this limitation of their freedom of action.

Fortitude, frugality, piety, and gallant disdain of death—such are the Arab virtues I have learnt to admire in the course of this campaign, and they are, in my estimation, sufficiently great virtues to condone a multitude of faults, for of faults they do possess many and flagrant. The greatest and most flagrant of all is cupidity. There is no more frequent word in ordinary Arab conversation than *felus* (money). In dealing with an Arab trader, you see this trait in its most repulsive form. His quick, furtive eyes at the mere sight of gold gleam with an unholy light. His thin fingers clutch at the coin as the claws of a kite clutch at a carcass. His whole body quivers with cupidity. For the fraction of a farthing they will haggle and quarrel for hours. I have never known an ordinary Arab refuse a present as the ordinary Turk does. Even if his stomach be already full to the bursting-point, he will accept the proffered food, and perhaps sell it to someone else. From this love for money flow, as from an impure fountain, many unpleasant surprises. One day, as I was strolling through the suk, a boy, in dress and demeanour like a diminutive sheikh, approached me, caught hold of my hand, and kissed it. I smiled down upon the little fellow, and patted him on the head, touched by his action. Then he looked up, and gravely said, "*Atnt bu-ashereeen*" (Give me a piece of twenty paras).

It was sad and disillusioning to find a child of the desert behaving like a child of a London slum.

But, in dwelling upon the greed of these people, one must bear in mind that they live in perennial penury, and that for four years they have been subject to a scarcity which has caused the death of many children and beasts. No wonder that the very sight of gold makes them giddy. One must also bear in mind another thing. Despite their poverty and their cupidity, they allow convoys loaded with provisions, and sometimes with cash, to cross the desert unmolested. These convoys travel either wholly unguarded or escorted by two soldiers only; yet not a box or bale of goods has been lost on its way from the frontier.

If the Arabs were Europeans, I doubt not that gangs of robbers would infest the land, for the prospect of plunder is alluring and the chances of capture remote.

One explanation of this curious phenomenon offered by some people is Arab patriotism and piety. The convoys are sacred, for they serve the Jihad—a cause holy enough to sanctify even a camel in their eyes. Be the explanation what it may, the fact remains that the desert in time of war is far safer than it ever was in time of peace.

This fact, I think, supplies a brilliant disproof of the charge of dishonesty often brought against the Arabs. Another charge as often brought against them is that of dirtiness; and, in truth, at first sight it would seem as though the Arabs had succeeded in divorcing godliness from cleanliness, for they do not appear ever to wash. I have only seen two young dandies pouring a little water over their hands, and then passing them over their faces. And my own ablutions, though Allah knows how elementary they have to be, afford to the holy warriors an endless source of wonder. They will stand and stare at me with a look of undisguised amazement at the Rûm's extravagant waste of water.

However, they are not really dirty. The sun seems to act as a spontaneous purifier, and the sand which they use occasionally as a substitute for water does the rest. But neither the sun nor the sand has any power against the impurity that lives and crawls. Both sheikhs and men swarm with "little" inconveniences," which the flowing hrams communicate liberally to everyone that comes into contact with them. Even so, I doubt not, swarmed the cloaks of the Hebrew patriarchs of old.

There are some other characteristics that make the Arabs rather disagreeable companions at times. They are great liars—always when it profits, and sometimes for the pleasure of it. In talking to an Arab, I often see that he is lying, but politely forbear to tell him so, for I realize that the poor fellow cannot help it. Before he attempts to deceive me he has already contrived to deceive himself. They are a people who find it remarkably easy to believe what they wish to be true. They begin by saying, "Oh, if such and such a thing happened!" They then elaborate their pleasant imagining in detail, until it assumes all the vividness of reality. The fable thus begotten

is passed from mouth to mouth, till the very parent of the fiction comes to accept it for a fact. This faculty for creating much out of nothing is one of the many points of difference between the Turkish and Arab nations—a difference which is here emphasized by the close juxtaposition of the two elements.

Unlike the Turk, the Arab knows no rest but in motion, and his garrulity is as irritating as the Turk's taciturnity is restful. A Turkish conversation is a series of monologues—one talking, and everybody else listening. An Arab conversation is an orgy of gutturals—everybody jabbering at full pitch of his voice, and nobody listening. Now and then the jabber ceases, and, as soon as the collocutors have got their second wind, it breaks forth again. When an Arab talks, it seems as though the words tumbled on each other's heels in a hurry to get out. No doubt the pitch of their voices is a habit they acquire from having to talk in the open air, in the wind, and often across great distances. But their torrential volubility must be the result of their temperamental impetuosity.

Their shameless inquisitiveness also contrasts most unpleasantly with the Turk's scrupulous reserve. You feel that the Turk, in not worrying you with impertinent questions, shows that he respects both you and himself. The Arab's eagerness to find out all about you seems to imply that he is totally free from either kind of respect. When I dress they gather round, and stand still watching me intently as I put on my clothes. Their expression is one of insatiable curiosity tempered by critical mockery. I suppose they marvel at the madness of people who, instead of sauntering in ample graceful draperies that admit of cool draughts, prefer to suffocate in tight, idiotic, and ugly garments, and instead of treading on picturesque light sandals, imprison their feet in heavy, clumsy boots.

Their conceit is colossal. There are no poets like their poets, no warriors like their warriors. That they are as brave as men can be no one disputes. What everyone disputes is their right to shout it at the top of their voices. The Turk, also, is brave, and the best of it is he does not know it. He is as unconscious of his valour as the thoroughly healthy man is of his health. The Arab is brave, but, alas! he knows it too well.

Then there is the profound mistrust which characterizes the

Arabs' dealings with one another. It has often happened to me, in buying things from several traders in the same shop, to offer them one coin to divide among themselves, for change is extremely hard to find. They always refuse, insisting that they must be paid separately.

Two Arabs arrived one day at the market with a hen to sell. The fowl was their joint property, and both had come together a whole day's journey on foot, because neither could trust the other. As the average price of a hen is fivepence, the margin for cheating could not have been more than a halfpenny.

Many of the faults I have pointed out are but the exaggeration of the Arab virtues. Their mutual mistrust and abhorrence of co-operation is individualism gone mad. Their mendacity is due to their excess of creative imagination. Their garrulity is the result of a strong craving for self-expression. Their inquisitiveness is the inevitable accompaniment of intellectual alertness. All these are defects found in promising children. They need but schooling to turn them into merits.

European travellers love to depict the Arabs either as paragons of superhuman nobility, or as monsters of subhuman meanness. I have endeavoured to show them as they are—frail human beings with their good qualities and their bad qualities.

Sameness is the dominant note of their existence—sameness of diet, sameness of dress, sameness of mental attitude. They always eat the same food, wear the same clothes, and think the same thoughts. Their life, like their music, consists of one note, which repeats itself indefinitely, with hardly any variation or relief. It is a simple, hard, and meagre life; but if it has not the subtlety or the richness of ours, neither has it the frivolity and feverish instability.

The Arab holds fast to the wise maxim that few things suffice. He has reduced his needs so that life entails for him the minimum of labour and the maximum of leisure—leisure to wander. He suffers from what we in Europe call the "artistic temperament," and which could more aptly be called the "nomadic temperament." The Arab tilling, as seen in the oases, represents a reluctant concession to necessity. The tiller's heart is not in his plough. Impatient of steady toil, he is anxious to escape from the labours of the field into the untrammelled freedom of the wilderness. The Arab, it is said,

is thriftless. He loves to live from hand to mouth. He hates to think of the morrow. Of course, he does. How can he help it? His outlook is the outlook of a poet, and so are his tastes.

Among these wanderers of the desert I find myself back in the world's dawn, when men enjoyed little, but enjoyed it intensely. I have no hesitation in describing the Arabs as a happy people. Their prevailing mood is one of cheerful melancholy—the mood of men who realize the sadness of things, but are bravely prepared to make the least of it. It is a mood begotten of an all-pervading consciousness of man's oneness with God. Their life, informed by such a spirit, presents, through all its outward restlessness, an inner unity, a sincerity, and a serenity for which I would gladly give all the subtlety, variety, and complexity that mark the lives of the races that call themselves "advanced."



*Baron von Bismarck-Kroghsbohm, photo.*

ARAB HORSE.





## CHAPTER IX

### HOW IT CAME ABOUT

THE Turks did not always enjoy the support and sympathy of the Tripolitan tribesmen. Indeed, they had never done anything to deserve such support and sympathy. Among all the neglected and misgoverned vilayets of the Ottoman Empire, none had been more thoroughly neglected or misgoverned than Tripoli. The Sultans in all the seventy-seven years of their undisputed sway had done nothing for the province except tax it, and the Italians had done much to turn native discontent to their own advantage. Their emissaries dwelt on the actual poverty of the country and on the developments which might be made under a more enlightened rule, and they gave an earnest of those benefits of the future by a liberal distribution of bribes among influential Arabs. This propaganda had been in progress since Cripsì's time, but of late years it had received an additional impetus through the establishment by the Banco di Roma of numerous local branches, which lent money to the farmers at low interest, and also ran shops where various articles might be bought at low prices.

Naturally, these methods earned for the Italians a certain number of partisans among the greedy and the needy elements of the population. I am also inclined to believe that many other Arabs had turned a favourable ear to Italy's promises from purely patriotic motives. The Italian rule would, no doubt, be an infidel rule; but Italy was a great civilized Power, and Tunisia on one side and Egypt on the other showed how much a great civilized Power could do for the material welfare of True Believers. Then came the four years' drought to accentuate the discontent of the natives and their wish for a change. For even after the Turkish Revolution things showed very little im-

provement, and that was counterbalanced by the introduction of compulsory conscription. The Italian agents redoubled their activity, and the propaganda appeared to be making rapid headway.

In many cases the progress was more apparent than real. For example, I heard of a sheikh who received a bribe of L.T. 100 from the Italian Consul, in order that he might oppose the levy of recruits in his own tribe, and who, having pocketed the money, reported the affair to the Turkish Governor. But in many other cases the Italians were successful in their efforts to gain partisans, and had some ground for their belief that the province would offer no resistance to their ambition.

The event at first justified this belief. The Turks lost, together with the capital, what little prestige they still enjoyed among the Arabs. The raw native recruits who formed seventy-five per cent. of the garrison deserted the ranks in a mass, taking, of course, their rifles with them. An Arab leader with whom I discussed the matter explained that it was a dispersion rather than a desertion. The recruits had not yet been imbued with the military spirit. Discipline was irksome to them, and they felt unhappy in the tight European uniforms and boots which they were made to wear. They longed for the loose draperies and the barefooted freedom to which they had always been accustomed. So they seized the opportunity of self-emancipation, without realizing that they were committing a crime. However that may be, the Turks suddenly found themselves alone. Nor was that all. When the Turkish garrison, after spending two days at Girgaresh, withdrew to Saniat Beni Adam, bands of armed Arabs from Ajilat, Zanzur, and Zawia attacked it at night, and tried to rob it of its provisions. At the same time, the inhabitants of those oases and of Azizia hoisted the white flag. Everything tended to show that the Arabs considered the Sultan's rule over, and were prepared to submit to the enemy without striking a blow.

Of course, there were among the Tripolitan sheikhs men opposed to the Italian occupation ; but, while Italy's partisans were organized and knew their own minds, these patriots were utterly devoid of organization and leadership. Therefore they remained quiescent simply because they didn't know what else to do. In some cases this difference of opinion found ex-

pression in the familiar form of a house divided against itself. One of the leaders of the urban community, Hassuna Pasha, threw in his lot with the invaders; but his son, a lad of nineteen, went over to the Turkish camp. Whilst there he had two letters from his father urging him to forsake the Sultan's flag. His reply was that, not only would he never play the traitor to his country and his faith, but that, if Allah granted that he and the Turks should enter Tripoli again, he would shoot his father as one. Some little time before my arrival this brave young man had succumbed to the hardships of the campaign.

This state lasted three weeks, and had the Italians taken advantage of it by doing the obvious thing—namely, by pushing on and seizing the places which were ready to welcome them—there would have been no war. As it is, they wasted their time changing the status of the country with the pen instead of taking possession of it with the sword. They had apparently come prepared to annex, and not to conquer.

The invader's supineness proved the patriot's opportunity. Two of these patriots—Ferhat Bey and Suleiman el Baroni—took the initiative, and by exhortation and example induced their fellow-countrymen to rally round the Sultan's flag. They are now here with us actively directing the movement which they have created, and forming two of the most interesting characters in a most interesting drama; for neither of the two has been prepared by his previous career for war. Both are Deputies in the Ottoman Parliament, and they look like men driven by some great force to exchange the platform for the camp.

Ferhat Bey is a native of the oasis of Zawia, and he exercises great influence over that part of the littoral, for he belongs to one of the leading families of the Kologhlu, or Feudal Militia—descendants of Turkish fathers and Arab mothers—who inhabit the agricultural regions round the capital. He is a man of some fifty years of age, with a reddish beard just turning grey, and small bluish eyes, in which simplicity seems to struggle with shrewdness. Every line of his rugged face and uncouth figure, every accent of his loud and uncultivated voice, proclaim the strong and uncompromising apostle who has few ideas, but who holds them very firmly. He is proud of his country, fervently certain that its cause is a just cause, and convinced beyond the possibility of doubt that God thinks so too.

His unpolished exterior notwithstanding, this politician turned warrior is a man of considerable intellectual attainments. His early education, commenced in Tripoli and finished in Tunis, was purely Arabic. But he spent five years in Paris studying the French language and law. On his return home he became Juge d'Instruction, and afterwards Kaimakam of the Shaati district in Fezzan. But, although a Government servant, he was not a palace slave, and as soon as the Constitution was proclaimed he stood for Parliament, and was returned for the town of Tripoli. He was spending the vacation in his native oasis when the war broke out.

The event did not take him by surprise. He told me that he, together with some other Tripolitan Deputies, had repeatedly warned the Porte of the danger that menaced the province, exposed the machinations of the Italian agents in the country, and urged that the garrison should be strengthened. All these warnings fell on deaf ears, so that when the enemy appeared the province seemed utterly incapable of resistance. The population said: "Turkey has abandoned us. We must shift for ourselves." Those near Tripoli town hastened to hoist the white flag; those near the Tunisian frontier wanted to invite France to take possession of the land. And while the peaceful inhabitants were thrown into consternation, all the unruly elements were beginning to break loose—there were many cases of brigandage in the Zwara district.

The situation looked desperate, but Ferhat Bey did not lose hope. Immediately he offered his services to the Turkish Commander, and at the same time he wrote to the sheikhs of the various oases on the coast, adjuring them to rise in defence of their country. In spite of the counter-propaganda carried on by the Italophile sheikhs of the capital, his appeals proved successful: the white flags were hauled down and the Star and Crescent hoisted up.

Ferhat was the first Arab to join the Turks at Azizia with a number of volunteers from Zawia, Ajilat, and Zwara. He found the Turkish Commander at his wits' end, for he expected the enemy to march inland at any moment, and he thought there was no alternative but to retire for safety farther south to Gharian, and there wait upon events. The Arabs' arrival put heart into the garrison, and the Commander de-

cided to make a stand at Azizia. This decision, in its turn, steadied the wavering tribesmen, and more of them came in response to Ferhat's vigorous appeals. The Italophile sheikhs in the capital endeavoured to stay his hand by writing to him letters in which they said: "Why are you acting in this way? If you do it from patriotism, you are mistaken, because the Italians are going to confer so many benefits on our country: they are going to promote agriculture, make roads, establish industries, and so on. If, on the other hand, you do it from self-interest, because the Committee of Union and Progress has made you Deputy, Italy also is prepared to make you Deputy for Tripoli in the Italian Parliament, and you will be the only Tripolitan representative, because you are the only man capable of representing the province. Let us meet and discuss the question, so that either you shall persuade us that your policy is right, or we shall persuade you to leave the poor Arabs to earn their living in peace, instead of exposing them to the horrors of a war against a great Power which is bound to prevail in the end." Ferhat replied that he was not deceived by his conscience. He was an educated man, and knew what honour dictated. He and those who thought like him were determined to fight to the end. Even if they died, their children would inherit their ideas and carry on the war.

He told me all this with great simplicity, and even if I were disposed to question his sincerity, a look at the Arabs who follow Ferhat's lead would be enough to dispel my scepticism. They seem to worship their leader. A sheikh one day touched his chin, and said to him in public: "We must each take a hair from your beard and keep it as a relic." It must be remembered that the Arabs are not readily given to hero-worship. They are extremely suspicious by nature, and they wait long before they worship.

And so it has come about that this obscure member of the Stambul Parliament has risen to the eminence of a great war leader, and his fame has spread from the palm-fringed littoral of the Mediterranean to the burning heart of the Sahara.

The other prominent personality in the Holy War, Suleiman el Baroni, is a Berber by birth—a native of Fessatun, in the Jebel. Nothing could be more peaceful than his appearance: a middle-aged man of medium height, with a soft black-

bearded face, mild brown eyes, and a perennial smile. He is smooth of speech, bland, and persuasive. He goes about dressed in ordinary civilian grey trousers and a blue overcoat, over which he sometimes throws the national hram. He habitually fingers a rosary, and only when on active service he displays a martial implement in the form of a big revolver in a red case, strapped round the waist. He looks like a man of letters rather than like a man of arms, and, in fact, he is a savant of repute in the Arabic-speaking world, and the author of several learned books on the history of North African Islam. He is not acquainted with any Western tongue or country, but he has travelled extensively over the Sahara, and has spent many years in Egypt, where he received his education and began his career.

It has been a chequered career, for, like many other literary men of his time and temperament, Suleiman el Baroni began early to mix politics with letters. Now, politics under Abdul Hamid meant either sycophancy or conspiracy, and every publicist had to be either a parasite or a plotter. Suleiman el Baroni chose the latter part. Whilst in Egypt he joined a secret revolutionary organization against the Sultan; he was detected, and was sentenced to hard labour for life, or, to use the Turkish legal formula, for one hundred and one years. After a time he was pardoned, but he still remained under suspicion, and the spies who shadowed him procured a new sentence: two years in prison, to be followed by one year under police surveillance in the town of Tripoli. His reputation among his fellow-countrymen, however, was so high that a deputation of sheikhs went to Constantinople and begged the Sultan to pardon him. He was once more released from captivity, but not from espionage. Police agents continued to dog his steps, until, tired of this intolerable supervision, he fled back to Egypt and started there a revolutionary organ, *El Assad*, or *The Lion*.

Shortly afterwards, the dream for which Suleiman had suffered so many things came true. Abdul Hamid's despotism was overthrown, and a Constitution established in the Ottoman Empire. Suleiman returned home, and was elected Deputy for his native Jebel. His opponents—Tripolitan sheikhs, whom he describes as partisans of Italy—tried to have his



SULEIMAN EL BARONI (A) AND FERHAT BEY (B), WITH SOME OF THEIR FOLLOWERS.

G. F. Abbott, photo.





election annulled. But his supporters prevailed upon the Government to confirm it, threatening that, unless this were done, they would invite France or England to establish a protectorate over their country.

At the moment of the Italian invasion the Deputy was on a holiday in his home at Fessatun, where he heard that the enemy had occupied the capital and the Turkish garrison had withdrawn from Girgaresh to Saniat Beni Adam, and thence to Azizia. Like Ferhat, he forthwith put himself into correspondence with the Commander, and shortly after he arrived at Azizia in person at the head of fifty Jebel sheikhs, conferred with Neshat Bey, and promised volunteers to carry on the war. Then he returned to the Jebel, called together all the local sheikhs, and appealed to them to fight for Islam and the Ottoman Empire. They responded to his appeal, and presently Suleiman el Baroni found himself at the head of a thousand tribesmen. With this force he hastened to the seat of war, which was now in the oasis round Tripoli. He reached Saniat Beni Adam one night about two hours after dark, and pushed on to the Turkish headquarters at Ain Zara. He got there two hours later, and, without stopping to rest, he proceeded straight to the neighbourhood of Kasr el Hanni and the Tomb of Sidi Misri, and led the first Arab attack on those places early in the morning of October 23rd. From that moment he and his sheikhs have not left the Turkish army for one day, but have shared all its fortunes.

Their co-operation has been of the highest possible value to the cause, for the Jebel Arabs are reputed to be among the most warlike in Tripolitania, and their region contains no fewer than 1,000 clans, counting altogether over 150,000 men, one-third of whom are said to be provided with rifles.

To these two ex-Deputies and also to the religious ministers is due the credit of kindling the conflagration which has checked the Italian penetration into Tripolitania. But I doubt if any of these preachers of resistance would have been so successful had not their efforts been ably seconded by the Italians' own sins of omission and of commission. The great sin of omission perpetrated by the invaders was their imbecile immobility at the very moment when a vigorous advance was imperative. Had they moved at that moment, they would have found no

difficulty in making themselves masters of the whole territory as far south as the purple mountains yonder. No Arabs are less disposed by nature and habit to fighting than the inhabitants of the Tripolitan coast, and the readiness with which the peaceable peasants hoisted the white flag showed that they were prepared to act according to their character. The mountaineers who might have fought were not yet stirred to action, and a display of vigour on the invader's part would have, in any case, made them hesitate. The absence of such vigour not only doubled the innate self-confidence of the highlanders, but turned even the fellaheen of the coast into fighters. The mischief produced by this great sin of omission was augmented by many sins of commission, which may be divided into mistakes and misdeeds.

It was an unpardonably gross mistake to give to the war a religious colouring, as the Italians did from the first, by sending forth their armada with prayers from the priests and blessed rosaries from the Pope, and then by celebrating their ridiculous victory with ostentatious thanksgivings, not only in Italy, but in the town of Tripoli itself. They thanked God for having helped them, as they fondly imagined, to replace the Crescent by the Cross. This was precisely the attitude to rouse the opposition of every Moslem not utterly lost to self-respect, and by adopting this attitude the invaders played admirably into the hands of the Turks, whose only bond with the natives was community of creed, and who, through their religious emissaries, were striving to exploit that bond for all it was worth.

Not less colossal was the second mistake committed by the invaders. Immediately on landing at Tripoli they put into circulation paper-money—a measure which refuted, in the inhabitants' opinion, all the Italian promises of prosperity more conclusively than any argument. "Are these the people who will make us rich?" they said. "Why, they themselves are even poorer than the Turks. If the Turks brought us little money, it was, at all events, real money—silver and gold. These people give us instead dirty bits of paper."

These two errors supply evidence of an ignorance of Arab mentality which is almost incredible in its dimensions, when one considers that Italy had been aspiring to the subjection of the Arabs, and presumably studying their idiosyncrasies, for

thirty years. Paper-money—and prayers. The two errors have something else in common besides the magnitude of the ignorance which dictated both—it is the fact that the Banco di Roma, which conducted the economic propaganda in Tripolitania, worked with capital belonging to the Vatican, which conducted the religious propaganda. This fact explains the zeal with which the Pope hastened to bestow his blessings on the expedition, and the delight with which he hastened to thank God for its apparent success. It also gives a satisfactory answer to the question I heard asked at the time by puzzled outsiders: “Why is the spiritual power in Italy so eager to assist the secular, in spite of the hostility that divides them?” At the time, the only answer that occurred to me was: “Enthusiasm for the Cross.” I have since found that in this matter the Cross had a powerful competitor in Cash.

The disastrous effect of these two gigantic blunders was enhanced by other acts. The Italians, who had at first promised to leave the natives unmolested in the possession of their property, as soon as they landed instituted a general disarmament, which, though imperfectly carried out, aroused a great alarm in the suspicious Arab mind. The consequent discontent was deepened by the scant respect with which the Italian soldiers treated, or were reported to treat, Moslem women, and especially by the great misdeed of which the world has heard so much.

I refer to the October massacres in the Tripoli oasis, provoked, it is true, by the Arabs' sudden attack on the invaders from behind—an attack which the latter chose to describe as an act of treason—but none the less unpardonable on that account. I will not dwell on the details of this most inexpedient crime, partly because I was not an eyewitness, and partly because it is not so much the brutality as the stupidity of it that I wish to emphasize. What did take place, and, I doubt not, a great deal that never took place, has been described at length by the lurid pens of professional massacre-mongers. I will confine myself simply to the impressions which I have gathered among the Turks and Arabs.

In the first place, they all believe that most of these horrors did take place—some are even prepared to give circumstantial accounts of what they have seen. Ferhat Bey, for example, assured me in the most solemn manner that he saw with his

own eyes, in one of the houses which the Italians had occupied, and from which they were afterwards driven, seven bodies tied together—they were the bodies of women and children, slaughtered by the Italians. But he can no longer remember whether it was four women and three children, or four children and three women. A Turkish doctor likewise assured me that he saw in the mosques and houses taken from the Italians men, women, and children lying in groups murdered. Many of the Arabs in our camp affirm that they have lost wives, sisters, daughters, and other members of their families, in the same way; and a Greek chemist, although anything but anxious to trumpet abroad the crimes of fellow-Christians, confessed to me that he often overheard women patients at the Ain Zara hospital relating among themselves how other women whom they knew were done to death. To this unpremeditated gossip I attribute greater weight than to any amount of carefully prepared evidence.

It is easy to detect in some of the accounts I hear palpable exaggerations, and even inventions; but the fact still remains that the Arabs are persuaded that they have many victims of Italian brutality to avenge. This is the important fact, and its importance is not lessened by that other fact—that the Italians also must have many victims of Arab brutality to avenge. For that the Arabs themselves have indulged in acts of savagery no one attempts to deny. It is only suggested in extenuation that they are primitive folk—between animals and human beings—with a primitive conception of war, no discipline, and no officers to restrain their ferocity; whereas, it is urged, the Italians are a regular organized army of so-called civilized men, under the control of officers.

It is foreign to my purpose to attempt to determine the moral balance of brutality. I am only concerned to show its practical effect. It is simply this—the blood of those slain women and children has already proved the seed of many sorrows to the reputed slayers, and will prove the cause of more sorrows in the future; for these reports have spread through the length and breadth of Moslem Africa. All the Arabs who come up from the South have heard some of these tales, and when they return to their homes they will take back more tales of the same nature. The result is that their hatred of the invader

has been fanned to a white-heat. Hassuna Pasha, in an interview with the correspondent of an Italian journal, asserted last November that his son and the other Arabs who fight for the Crescent were forced to do so by the Turks. A glance at the relative strength of Turk and Arab is enough to show the fatuity of such an assertion. And a few minutes' conversation with a holy warrior is enough to show that they are not fighting for the Crescent only, but also for revenge.

Of course, they are fighting for other things as well—for their land, for their liberty, and for loot. The smallest amount of plunder is a great gain to men who possess almost nothing. They are a very poor and a very greedy people. In going to battle they look forward to despoiling the enemy of everything—even of his women. And the recapture of Tripoli town, for which they pray so fervently, possesses as its principal attraction the opportunity for plunder which it promises. It is this hope more than any other that sustains their efforts and fills their conversation. Battles are very well in their small way, but they offer no plunder at all comparable to the sack of the enemy's headquarters. Personally, I am no admirer of war for its own sake. Heroism of the martial kind leaves me cold. But most people love a brave fighter, and in the eyes of such people the Arab's passion for plunder ought not to detract from their admiration for his bravery; for a similar passion has characterized in various degrees all brave fighters. I find Homer's heroes counting on the loot they are going to get, and quarrelling over its division when they have got it. I find the Elizabethan heroes who sailed forth to fight the Spaniards frankly acknowledging that their hearts were wafted by the hunger for Spanish gold. I have found even Nelson's gallant Captains confessing in their letters to a similar passion for "prizes." And the Arabs, it must be remembered, are more primitive and far poorer than any of these noble warriors of the past. Love of freedom, zeal for the Faith, and the hope of plunder, all go to strengthen in the Arab heart

" the unconquerable will,  
And study of revenge, immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield."

## CHAPTER X

### *EN ATTENDANT*

THE Turks declare that they are expecting 10,000 or 12,000 more tribesmen, and then there will be a great forward movement. The Italians will be driven out of their new position at Ain Zara, back into the town of Tripoli, and—who knows?—perhaps out of the town into the sea. All this, the more sanguine spirits prophesy, will come to pass in a week: “Next week we shall be in Tripoli—*Inshallah*,” they say, and I heartily echo “*Inshallah*.” But with me it is a wish rather than an expectation; for I doubt whether the requisite force can be got together so quickly. The Arabs, whatever their attitude may have been three months ago, are now unquestionably eager for action. But, though the spirit is willing, the flesh cannot be ignored. The late rains, after a protracted drought, tempt many of them to stay at home and till their fields. Naturally, for they have had no crops for four seasons, and no crops to primitive folk means no food. There are no reserves of corn in the country, no stock of the products of previous years—in brief, no capital. A blind trust in Divine Providence, combined with the barbarian’s very human improvidence, makes accumulation impossible to the Arab. He consumes at once what he produces, and he never produces more than he can consume at once. He just scratches the soil with his inefficient, tiny plough, driving it carelessly, and with as little will as the camel that draws it.

In these circumstances it would need more than religious ardour, thirst for vengeance, and hope of plunder, to counteract the certainty of famine. Material considerations must necessarily retard the coming of the auxiliaries. The marvel to me is not that they do not come faster, but that they come at

all—that so many of these poor fellows, instead of praying for a speedy conclusion of peace and peaceful tillage, consent to leave their families and fields in order to continue the war.

Meanwhile those who have come are armed and sent to the front. The Arab is ready to start at a moment's notice. His rifle is cleaned and loaded. His cartridges are disposed of in two or three bandoliers which he carries round the waist and across the breast under his hram. His nose-bag is stocked with a handful of dates or of oatmeal, and slung over the back. Thus armed and equipped, the holy warriors form themselves into marching disorder, and go off to join one or other of the two wings into which our forces are distributed.

The left wing spreads from Azizia northwards on the west of the Wadi Mejneen towards Bu Meliana, and the right on the east of the Wadi towards Ain Zara. Each wing has a number of advanced posts scattered over it at various points, recommended by the presence of a well and frequently, also, of an inn. The principal posts on the left wing are Saniat Beni Adam, Fenduk Magusa, and Fenduk el Togar; those on the right Fenduk Ben Gashir and Fenduk el Aoon.

Our base, Gharian, lies to the south of Azizia, in the very heart of the purple Jebel.

The distance as the crow flies is not more than twenty miles. But, since the camels cannot fly, the journey usually takes two days. The first part of the road meanders across the flat, cheerless expanse of grey scrub and yellow sand that spreads to the foot of the mountains; but the second day brings the traveller into a scene startling by its bold contrast and enchanting by its wild beauty. The mountains stand up on either side, their lower limbs bare and sun-baked, their shoulders mantled by the shady foliage of many olive-trees, gnarled and twisted with age—venerable relics of noble days that are past. Every now and again may be seen the white walls of some dilapidated fort, brooding over the villages and fruit-gardens which dot the higher slopes. The rocky pass grows steeper and rougher as you go on, and it is at intervals flanked with deep tunnel-like dwellings hewn out of the solid granite. Each troglodytic settlement is a subterranean palace, with a spacious court for the beasts and several clean and comfortable rooms for the human members of the cave colony.

After climbing up many rugged rocks, here and there carved into rude slippery stairs, you emerge upon a green tableland that commands the desert which you left behind, and is commanded by another steep ridge that rises before you. Having crossed this tableland, you struggle up a second hill-track, which winds its way through bracing heights and soft, grassy hollows, strangely reminiscent of Scottish glen scenery. And so you reach the mountain city of Gharian, once the centre of a populous and prosperous district, the dead glories of which are enshrined in the ruins of numerous castles and villas dating from Roman times, and even now a place of immense importance to the would-be masters of Tripolitania. The city itself has dwindled into a village, and it seems to exist simply because it has existed. But the old Saracen Kasr occupies a position that Nature herself has marked out for a military stronghold. It towers, massive and proud, on a rock that dominates the whole region, overlooking the caravan routes to Fezzan in the south and to the Mediterranean in the north, and affording a panorama of unsurpassable grandeur in peace, as well as an impregnable point of defence in war.

The Turks, expecting that the Italians after taking Tripoli town would press straight into the interior, fixed upon Gharian as the point that afforded the best chance for serious resistance. They poured into the place all the ammunition that they had carried away from the capital; they piled it with stores of all sorts, and planted in it their military hospital. And so Gharian suddenly rose from its obscurity of centuries into a place of supreme eminence. Hitherto its celebrity is purely provincial. We, on the spot, realize the magnitude of the part which it is destined to play in this campaign. But should, peradventure, the Italians attempt to do in the future what they so strangely neglected to do in the past, the name of Gharian will blaze forth in letters of fire throughout the world, and the glens that surround it will provide a beautiful resting-place for thousands of Roman bodies.

Meanwhile the Kasr harbours, as an earnest of the things that may yet lie hidden in the womb of the hereafter, five Italian prisoners. They were captured on November 6th, five days after their arrival in Africa, and the story of their capture is worth relating.





GERMAN ALLIES.

*Pat. Lushan, phot.*



ITALIAN PRISONERS.

*Pat. Lushan, phot.*



It was about midday, and the Turco-Arab forces at Suk el Juma were preparing their meal. Suddenly intelligence came from the advanced posts that an Italian column was making a sortie from Tripoli town. A courier was immediately despatched with the news to Fethi Bey, who had left Suk el Juma and gone to Ain Zara, to inspect the batteries with the Commander-in-Chief. Meanwhile the Arabs, without waiting for orders, dashed forth to meet the enemy. A skirmish ensued, the Arabs firing volley after volley from behind the cactus-hedges and palm-trees of the oasis, the Italians replying with their rifles, while their cannon vomited missiles of all sizes. There was a veritable downpour of shrapnel bullets over the headquarters at Suk el Juma when Fethi Bey arrived on the scene with some other officers.

By that time the enemy had been beaten back, and were now firing from their fortified lines.

Presently a body of Arabs rushed into the camp, shouting "*Allah yansur es Sultan!*" (God save the Sultan!) They were bearers of good news. Eight Italians, unable to follow their comrades in retreat, had taken refuge in a house, and were there besieged by the holy warriors. The latter wanted to know what they were to do: were they to kill the men, or try to take them alive? Fethi Bey replied: "Bring them alive if you can." The order was taken back to the besiegers. The besieged kept up the fight with great courage; they were fresh troops, and their spirit had not yet been broken by failure. But the odds were too many against them. While they were firing from the windows of the house, two Arabs scrambled on to the flat mud roof, broke it open, and, letting themselves down through the hole, fell upon the Italians from behind. Other Arabs followed, and the house was theirs, together with its defenders.

Of these three lay dead. Of the surviving five, two were wounded, one in the arm and the other in the cheek. They were taken to Suk el Juma in triumph, amidst deafening yells of "*Allah yansur es Sultan!*" from the men, and shrill ululations from the women. The wounded were immediately handed over to the Turkish doctors. There were very few bandages available, and there were many Turks and Arabs in need of them. Yet the doctors did not hesitate for an instant.

As one of them said to me, "For a medical man there is no friend or foe—no kinsman or stranger; but only a sufferer!" The wounds of the prisoners were carefully dressed, food—macaroni and meat—was given them, and in a few minutes the poor fellows found themselves the pampered guests of their enemies. Their surprise was as profound as their gratitude. "We fought so desperately," they confessed, "because we were afraid to surrender. We had been told that the Arabs not only tortured and killed, but even ate every Italian who fell into their hands."

From Suk el Juma they were conducted to Ain Zara, thence to Azizia, and so on to Gharian, where they are at this hour, as happy as captives can be. They are loud in their praises of their captors. They are lodged and fed better than any Turkish private. They are allowed to wander about and play at will. They write to their friends in Italy, and receive letters from them. Yet they are longing for home. At best, the bread of captivity is bitter. And—suppose their compatriots do advance south, what will their fate be then? Will the Arabs spare them a second time, or slaughter them like sheep? Personally I do not believe that the dreaded contingency will soon arise; the character of the country and of its inhabitants offers obstacles that would tax to the uttermost the endurance and resource of an ancient Roman army. As regards the actual invaders of North Africa, their rate of progress makes me fear that before they reach Gharian the prisoners may die of old age.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE ITALIANS BEGIN TO STIR

THE enemy, after taking Ain Zara, seemed to think that they had expended quite enough energy, and, instead of following up their success by an advance on Azizia, as we expected them to do, they settled down quietly behind their new trenches. During a whole fortnight I saw only two signs of their existence. One night, as I stood at the foot of the Sidi Ramadan Hill idly gazing at the Orion, I was startled by a brilliant flame that suddenly flashed behind me, making the darkness light as day. On looking quickly round, I saw a shower of sparks falling from the sky far away to the north. Some of those who witnessed the spectacle with me took it for a shooting star, but its extraordinary brilliance inclined me to think that perhaps it was a firework sent up from Ain Zara.

Be that as it may, there was no ambiguity about the monoplane which was seen early next morning reconnoitring about an hour's distance to the north of our camp. The Turks recognized it as an old friend, and prepared to receive it, if it drew nearer, with a salute from three machine-guns, which they promptly placed on the top of the hill round the saint's shrine.

We welcomed the aerial visitor's appearance as an omen of lively times in store for us, and we were not altogether disappointed. On December 15th two Italian warships dropped anchor in front of the coast between the two small forts of Sidi Ali and Sidi Said, and sent a boatful of men ashore. Those men landed safely, but were seen by a woman, who gave the alarm. The few Arabs in the neighbourhood immediately dashed to the spot. The Italians scampered back to their boat. The warships opened fire, and under its protection the boat got away.

This was apparently only an experiment intended to advise

us of the enemy's intentions, so that we might be prepared to frustrate them. In any case, so it was interpreted by Musa Bey, who without loss of time reinforced the patrols on that part of the coast with tribesmen from Zwara, instructed to take up convenient positions behind the sand-dunes which overlook the sea, and to watch unseen.

The event showed that the Bimbashi's calculations were not wrong. Next day at dawn the Italian warships returned, and, seeing the coast clear, hastened to land. The Arabs kept quiet until several boats had disembarked their passengers. Then the sheikh in command gave the order "Fire!" The Arabs poured volley after volley down upon the hapless marines. These, after the warning which they so kindly gave us on the previous day, must have known that preparations had been made for their reception in a suitable manner. Nevertheless, they seemed surprised. They tried to repel the attack, and, supported by the big guns from the warships, they answered the Arab fire. But they had to fire from low and open ground at an enemy whom they could not see. After a time they gave up their futile fusillade and fled back to their boats, carrying off half a dozen dead with them, and leaving a quantity of rifles, ammunition, and other loot, to make glad the heart of the Arabs, who, having picked up these spoils, retired from the fray with only one wounded. The warships went on bombarding the sand-dunes.

This was but a prelude. Next morning, the wind being from the north, we at Azizia heard a loud peal of cannon from the Italian lines at Bu Meliana, as well as from the sea. A squadron of thirty horse was got ready in a hurry, and galloped off along the track that leads to Saniat Beni Adam. The tom-tom began to beat. A score of Arab sheikhs jumped on their steeds, and galloped off after the Turkish squadron. A Red Crescent waggon, with two nurses on it and a number of stretcher-bearers on foot, followed suit. All this time the tom-tom continued beating, and the tribesmen mustering amid the wildest confusion and excitement imaginable. Some let off their rifles in the air, others rushed into the Kasr yelling for cartridges, and had to be driven out by the Turkish sentries, who pushed them back with the butt-end of their rifles, calling out "*Yassak! Yassak!*" Presently all the holy warriors were got together,

and, each tribe led by its sheikh, they marched out of the camp, shouting "like unto cranes fleeing from the coming of winter, and flying with clamour to the streams of the ocean, bearing slaughter and death to the Pygmy men."

Once out in the open desert, they scattered abroad in groups and in units, some walking with long, loose strides, others running, while their hrams fluttered in the breeze and the barrels of their rifles glinted in the sun.

They had scarcely vanished behind the scrub-crowned knolls, when the Commander-in-Chief rode off with the Staff in the same direction, followed a little later by a second small squadron of cavalry and a small company of infantry. When night fell Azizia looked strangely empty. Few fires twinkled in the desert around, and no hymns came to break the silence of the wilderness. Only the bakery in the Kasr seemed roused to supernormal activity. All night through the ovens glowed red, and the bakers were busy kneading bread for the men who had gone to the front.

We foreign visitors had been forbidden to go where the fun was, but we were near enough to the scene to hear the report of the guns. What had happened was this: An Italian column, composed of one regiment of infantry, one battalion of lancers, one battery of field-guns, and one battery of mountain-guns, had marched in the morning out of Tripoli town westward upon Zanzur; while another column, composed of two battalions of infantry, two squadrons of cavalry, and one battery of mountain-guns, marched southward upon our left wing.

This latter move seemed to be meant only as a distraction, for as soon as the Italians came in sight of the small Turco-Arab camp at Fenduk el Togar they paused, content to pepper it with shells at a distance.

The advance on Zanzur was more serious. The Italians marched towards the village, which was simultaneously bombarded by their fleet. On getting there they found no one to dispute its possession. The Turks had considered the position untenable, owing to its proximity to the sea on one side and to the town of Tripoli on the other. Most of the male Arabs were away, dispersed among our various camps. The women, the children, and the old men, could offer no resistance. The Italians therefore entered the village, and began carrying out a

rapid perquisition for arms amidst the frightened inhabitants, while at the same time they cut the telegraph-line from Zwara to Azizia which passes through the oasis. While engaged in these operations they were attacked by the tribesmen, whom the sound of the naval guns had drawn to the scene. The fight was obstinate on both sides ; but at sunset the Italians were driven back to the town, carrying off with them a few rifles, which the villagers had been forced to give up, and four notables. Their brief possession of the village was reported in the Italian Press as follows : " The oasis of Zanzur has been occupied, and the population has submitted." Their rapid evacuation was explained as follows : " The operation at Zanzur had for its sole object to destroy telegraphic communication between Zwara and the Turkish headquarters. In this it has succeeded."

This success cost the Italians, according to the Turkish estimate, forty dead, including three officers, and over three hundred wounded. The Turks and Arabs, according to their own statements, had nine dead and forty wounded. What the enemy had failed to gain by force of arms they endeavoured to obtain by diplomacy. The four captive notables were petted and preached to, and when they seemed to be converted they were allowed to go back to Zanzur, provided with permits, in order to fetch their families away to Tripoli town. They fetched their families away to the interior, and they themselves joined our camp, bringing the Italian permits with them.

I thought I had done all that decency dictated by staying behind at Azizia while these things happened. But when I saw that the other Europeans, contrary to orders, were hurrying to the front, I allowed my curiosity to get the better of my sense of decency. I saw no reason for hurry. The battle had been fought and won. All I wished for was to be near the spot in the event of something fresh turning up.

No horse was available, the officer left in command at Azizia being unable to spare any of the twenty-five mounts that still remained in the artillery stables next to the Kasr. Camels were equally hard to find at short notice. Fortunately, one was ready to leave for Saniat Beni Adam with some medical stores. I obtained permission to add my few belongings to the load, and, the distance being no more than twelve or thirteen miles, I decided to accompany the camel on foot.



I found the road to Saniat Beni Adam a well-defined track, wide and hollow, which the winter streams, now dry, had channelled and broken up with land-slides. For nine miles it meandered across a sandy plain, here sprinkled with short grass, like an unshaven face, there dotted with tufts of scrub. Cactus-hedged plantations of olive and fig flanked the way at rare intervals. Each plantation had a well, whose high white-washed walls, with the windlass between them, were seen from afar glancing through the foliage of the trees. A few isolated wells, without any parapet at all, also gaped by the wayside, and round them stood ancient troughs made out of palm-logs. Spent cartridges lay scattered upon the track, marking the path of the volunteers who had preceded me. I passed several shepherds tending their flocks by the roadside, and met several caravans of camels and donkeys. I exchanged the usual salutations, asking and answering many questions regarding recent events, and went on. Suddenly a cavalcade came into view cantering gaily towards me. It was the Commander-in-Chief and his Staff, escorted by a dozen troopers and followed by my European colleagues. They informed me that the Italian movements which I have already described were of no significance whatsoever, and that they had been ignominiously repulsed. They tried to persuade me to turn back to Azizia with them, assuring me that the fun was over, and that there was nothing more to be seen at the front. I shook my head and pursued my way. Something seemed to tell me that the fun was only just beginning—and so seemed to think two belated Arab horsemen who caught me up soon afterwards. I therefore pressed on.

For the last three or four miles there was no well-defined road, but only a faint path across a dreary waste of pure yellow sand. I trudged slowly up bare sand-hills and down bare sand hollows, followed by the camel and its driver.

Some columns of white smoke were presently seen curling up above the undulating skyline. A little later I saw the tops of many palms—that was Saniat Beni Adam, the Garden of the Sons of Adam. One wood-fire after another rose into sight, and in a few minutes I was in a maze of Arab tents.

The air was permeated with the odour of burning brushwood, and was rent by the neighing of horses, the barking of dogs, and

the clatter of many human tongues. Groups of holy warriors squatted round the camp-fires, chattering, scratching their bare arms, singing war-songs, or rolling cigarettes between finger and thumb. They directed me to the Turkish quarters, which lay a little farther east. I passed by a dozen bell-tents, harbouring about one hundred regular infantry, and reached the cavalry camp—three bell-tents, and round about them pickets of sixty horses, some standing, others lying down on their sides, their bellies heaving in utter exhaustion—all saddled. The three machine-guns, which had been transferred from Azizia here, stood close by, with a few boxes of ammunition, and near them a team of six horses and mules, all saddled and tethered to one long rope.

Everything around me suggested stress and strain—a heroic effort to compass great ends with small means. Those poor horses that lay on the ground, with their backs saddled and their bellies heaving, had been on duty for eleven weeks with no relief. The men had known as little rest as their mounts, and one of them, just back from the field of the engagements I have mentioned, told me that he had found no time to eat for twenty-four hours.

The Commandant, Major Nasmi Bey, in some respects personified the spirit of the camp, and in other respects stood for a living protest against it. He is the officer who had opposed so strenuously the evacuation of Tripoli town, and who on December 4th had held with a handful of men the hazardous post on the extreme left of the Turkish line. After the retreat from Ain Zara, he had been left for more than a week at Fenduk el Togar, less than four miles from the enemy's lines, with only those sixty Turkish horsemen and no Arab auxiliaries at all. All that time he had hardly slept, for fear lest the Italians should come out at any moment and surprise him and his little band. Day and night he was in the saddle patrolling in person, and going to within half a mile of Bu Meliana to see what the enemy were doing.

The constant strain on the nerves must have been terribly wearing even to a man of stolid temperament, and Nasmi Bey struck me as the very reverse of stolid. He would have passed for a highly-strung individual even among Europeans. Among the Turks he is a tragic anomaly : irritable, intolerant of pro-





DR. IZZET (A) AND MAJOR NASMI (B).

*G. F. Abbott, phot.*



STRETCHER DRILL.

*G. F. Abbott, phot.*

crastination, vehemently critical of incompetence, utterly at variance with the happy-go-lucky ways of the East.

When I saw him I could hardly believe that he was a Turk. He might have come straight from the mess of a great European army: a tall, well-set-up, well-groomed cavalry officer of forty, with keen grey eyes wide apart, a firm, scrupulously-shaven chin, grey hair neatly parted, spotless uniform, gloves on his hands, and on his feet polished boots with shining spurs. No French officer could have looked smarter in a review, and this was a Turkish officer in a desert camp.

His tent supplied a fitting background for the man—clean mats covered the floor, and a quantity of cartridge-cases, symmetrically arranged and similarly covered with mats, formed a divan. At some distance from this tent stood another—Nasmi Bey's bath-room!

I imagined at first that the Commandant had received his training in the West. But I was quite wrong. He was born in the vilayet of Brusa, educated in the military school at Stambul, and passed the better part of his life in a God-forsaken garrison in Kurdistan. The French he spoke was the French which he had acquired in Constantinople, and which he had somehow preserved through the long years of exile in the wilds of Asia. He had never set foot outside Turkey until some eighteen months ago he was sent to Tripoli. I ventured to compliment him on his marvellous neatness, and he replied with a smile: "It is an officer's first duty. How can he see to the lives of other men who does not know how to live himself?"

I enjoyed Nasmi Bey's hospitality and conversation for a brief while, and then, provided with an artillery horse and a sowari, made my way to Fenduk Ben Gashir, the chief camp on our right wing.

The medical stores I had brought with me from Azizia had already been sent there; for, in fact, the fun was not yet over. While the Commander-in-Chief and his Staff were cantering back to their headquarters, there was in full progress one of the most sensational acts in the Tripolitan drama.

We rode across the trackless plain that stretches between our two wings. The southern horizon was fringed with green gardens; but to east and west there was nothing to be seen save bare sand-dunes glittering in the sun. The sowari was

very vague about the way, and we had to ask a shepherd lad, armed with a flintlock twice his own size. He directed us to a distant knoll, and when we reached it we found six worn-out Turkish soldiers resting on the shady slopes, their horses beside them. They were returning from the place to which we were going, but they were too tired to talk much. I only gathered from them that a great battle was being fought a little to the north-east of Ben Gashir. With this information, and some further particulars about the way, we pushed on, gaining Ben Gashir just as blackness settled on the desert.

The first person I saw on dismounting was the fat Tunisian Amara, and he greeted me effusively with the news: "Your Haj Mohammed lies yonder wounded!"

I had lost sight of the wretch for some time, and thought that he had returned to Tunis. But no. The Turkish Staff had formed a more just estimate of the man. I had tried him only as a servant, and found him indolent, insolent, comprehensively incompetent, and utterly unreliable and undesirable. They judged him as a soldier. They gave him the rank of *Mulazim Sani* (Second-Lieutenant), and sent him to the front; and so the rascal was destined to take part—and a very creditable part—in a most important engagement. He now lay stretched luxuriously on a camp-bed, with a bullet-hole through his loin, a heap of Italian spoils—rifles, cartridges, water-flasks—at the head of his bed, and a broad smile of ineffable self-satisfaction on his lips.

Close by lay the middle-aged Turkish First-Lieutenant, *Ismail Effendi*, with a bullet-hole through his left breast just over the heart. It was his fifth wound since the beginning of the war—his head, face, and left arm, bore the scars of the four previous ones.

To these two wounded warriors, and to some other protagonists in the drama, I am beholden for the most vivid details in the story I am about to tell, assuring the reader that there is not in it one statement that I did not take the trouble to verify.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE BATTLE OF BIR TOBRAS

THERE was among the Arab sheikhs of the district a certain Mukhtar, a rich man who owned Bughamtsa—a large estate, consisting of a dozen palm-groves, with many mud dwellings and wells, and situated about one hour's distance to the east of Ben Gashir. That sheikh had hitherto sided with his fellow-countrymen, and had fought bravely with them at Suk el Juma and elsewhere. But after the Italian occupation of Ain Zara he began to suspect that the Arab cause was doomed, and that the enemy who had advanced so far would soon advance farther still. When that came to pass, his property, owing to its position, would be the first to be seized, ravaged, and confiscated. He saw in fancy his noble palm-trees cut down, his mud dwellings demolished, his wives and his children, if not slain, driven to starvation and mendicity. He determined to avert this fate from himself, while there was yet time, by entering into secret negotiations with the enemy, and offering not only his submission, but also his assistance.

The Turco-Arab forces at Fenduk Ben Gashir, he assured the Italians, were insignificant—not more than two hundred and fifty all told—and the natives of the district ready to welcome the invader with open arms. All the Italians had to do in order to conquer was to advance without delay. He himself and one of his tenants, named Nesmeddin, would personally conduct them—for a consideration. The Italians welcomed the proposal, and an agreement on these terms was entered upon.

The traitors carried on the intrigue with consummate cunning. A few evenings before they had called on Lieutenant Ismail Effendi at his tent. drank tea with him, and presented him with oats for his horse and money for the volunteers under

his command. Then they took their leave, saying that they would come back in the morning, and returned to Bughamtsa. But in the morning they did not come back, and it soon became known that during the night they had tried to bolt with their beasts and their families to Tripoli town. They succeeded in getting themselves off on horseback, but their beasts and their families were intercepted by Turkish patrols.

The incident roused the Arabs to great wrath, and while some of them posted themselves of their own accord across the Sidra Way, near a well called Bir Tobras, to watch the road which the fugitives had taken, the Commandant of Ben Gashir also took such measures as the situation demanded and the forces at his disposal permitted. There were hardly fifty Turkish regulars in the camp, and the Arab volunteers all told were well under five hundred, including a body of sixty Fezzanis, forty so-called "Tunisians"—old emigrants from Tunis into Tripolitania—and a hundred natives of the neighbourhood, who had arrived from Azizia with Haj Mohammed and Ismail Effendi a week ago. The Commandant tried to make this force go as far as possible. He sent fifty more Arabs to Bughamtsa to watch over Mukhtar's estate, another fifty to Fenduk es Shereef, a spot farther south, and a third body of fifty Arabs and six Albanian sowaris, with Haj Mohammed, to Fenduk el Aoon—about four miles from Ben Gashir and seven from Ain Zara.

At dawn of December 19th, Haj Mohammed, with thirty Arabs and the six Albanians, went out on reconnaissance over the sand-dunes to the south-west of Ain Zara, and they drew close enough to the Italian lines to see that the enemy were preparing for a move. As soon as they made this discovery, they returned in all haste to El Aoon, and despatched two horsemen to Ben Gashir with the news. But before these messengers got to Ben Gashir, the Commandant had received intimation from the guard at Bughamtsa, which had intercepted letters addressed by Mukhtar and Nesmeddin to their families, informing them that they were coming with five Italian battalions to rescue them.

Meanwhile the enemy had left their trenches—a column of infantry, cavalry, and artillery, which Haj Mohammed estimated at 3,000. The Italians afterwards stated that its



strength was only 2,000. However that may be, this force, having left Ain Zara about two o'clock in the morning, blundered southward up the Sidra Way. Thanks partly to the darkness, partly to their own astonishingly nebulously topography, they took nine hours to cover as many miles, and it was not till eleven o'clock that their cavalry got to Bir Tobras, and there they suddenly found themselves greeted with a furious fusillade from the Arabs, who had posted themselves at that spot.

In the meantime, Haj Mohammed, having left one sowari and some Arabs at El Aoon, was coming south to Ben Gashir to rejoin his battalion, when he met Ismail Effendi, with the Pezzanis and the "Tunisians," going north to see which way the Italians were advancing. At that moment they heard the report of guns and rifles on the east. Immediately they rushed towards the sound down the Sidra Way, Ismail Effendi advising Haj Mohammed and the others to keep in the hollows, so that they might draw near the enemy undetected. This advice was obeyed, and, hidden by the banks of sand, they crept to within about three hundred mètres of the enemy. Then they stood up, and saw that the Italians had come to a halt, and were busy, some digging trenches, others firing from behind the natural cover offered by the sand-dunes. As soon as Haj Mohammed and his party appeared, the Italian mountain-guns began belching lead upon them—"pan, pan, pan." But they did not hit one. The Arabs continued pushing on. As long as they were in the hollows they crawled on hands and knees, but once on the crest of the dunes they stood up, answering the enemy's guns with their rifles. Ismail Effendi led by ten or twelve mètres, firing and shouting to his followers "Come on! Come on!" The Arabs followed, yelling "*Allah akbar! Allah akbar!*"

In this manner they got to within some hundred mètres, yelling and firing, and loading and firing again, all the time. The five Albanians with Haj Mohammed were even more reckless. "I always thought we Arabs were the bravest fighters in the world," he said to me, "but now I think the Albanians beat us. They fought more bravely than the Arabs, drawing to within twenty-five mètres of the Italian cannon, and shouting as they charged: '*Ya hanzir! Ya Italiana!*' (O Swine! O Italians!)"

"Suddenly," he went on, "I saw an Italian on the point of

firing his gun. I raised my rifle, sighted it, fired, and hit him in the right shoulder. He quitted his gun, turned, and fled. Another man near me, an Albanian, fired at him as he fled, and hit him in the back ; we saw him fall. A Fezzani fired at an Italian corporal, and hit him in the head ; we saw him fall too. In the meantime, Ismail Effendi had moved round to direct the Arabs who were fighting on that side, and at that moment I heard him shout : ‘ There is Mukhtar Bughamtsa on horseback with the Italian horsemen ! ’ Mukhtar heard it, and turned and fled, while one of the Italians with him advanced. I stood up, fired twice, and hit him first in the head, and second in the chest ; he fell from his horse. Then I saw Mukhtar and all the Italians running away—the officers first, the men following helter-skelter. They had found themselves attacked on all sides, and were trying to escape back to Ain Zara. Ismail Effendi shouted to me : ‘ After them, after them ! Courage ! ’ I again stood up and fired at Mukhtar, but missed him. I fired again, and I think I hit him in the arm ; for he suddenly gave a jerk, and turned his horse round to the right and joined the fleeing Italians. We pushed on. We were now not more than fifty mètres from them. They fired on my party. I fired again, and killed the corporal whose haversack and water-bottle you see.” He handed to me a small, wooden, barrel-shaped flask, and I read, scrawled on its bottom in pencil : “ 11° Reggimento Bersaglieri, 5<sup>a</sup> Compagnia Napoli. Caporale Sciotti Pietro. Provincia Roma.” Ismail Effendi handed to me a similar trophy with a similar inscription, which was too badly written for me to decipher.

“ All the time,” continued Haj Mohammed, “ the Italians showered bullets on us—‘ *zin, zin, zin,*’ they whistled over our heads. Five pierced my head-kerchief ; look, you can count them for yourself. I was on the point of firing on an Italian, but he fired first, and the bullet went through here ”—showing me the wound through the left loin.

Ismail Effendi and Haj Mohammed, the only two officers wounded, were lifted up by the Turkish horsemen and carried off the field, so they could not tell me what happened afterwards.

While these men were fighting on the west, the Arabs from Fenduk es Shereef had likewise, on hearing the noise of battle, rushed up from the south. All these tribesmen, though few in

number, covered a wide area, and fought scattered in small groups—five here, three there—the distance from one group to the other often being more than five hundred mètres. At the same time a third body (one hundred and fifty to two hundred Arabs and half a dozen Turkish regulars), under the command, more or less, of a Turkish Lieutenant, were attacking from the east.

“ I had left Ben Gashir,” said this officer to me, “ early in the morning on my usual reconnaissance, with half a dozen artillerymen, who, now that we have no longer any artillery, act as cavalry. About 7 o’clock, Turkish time, I saw the enemy move, and at once sent word to Ben Gashir. At the same time I joined the Arabs who were posted a little to the north of Bughamtsa, and, placing myself at their head, I undertook to direct the attack on the Italian left. I was not officially in command of this force, but, as I happened to be the only officer on that side, I assumed the command and tried to do my best. At first the Italian fire was very formidable, for the place was open and their guns had a splendid range. It was so deadly that the Arabs with me could not stand it. No wonder ; it isn’t a pleasant thing to find yourself under a hailstorm of rifle bullets and shrapnel without cover. So they began to fall back. That wouldn’t do. I got off my horse, ran to their sheikh, and expostulated with him, and he induced his followers to advance. From that moment there was no more falling back. The Arabs fought like demons. I will just tell you one wonderful thing I witnessed. Three Arabs were crouching under a sand-dune ; on the crest of the dune were at least fifty Italians, firing down from behind trenches : they were very quick at throwing up trenches. For two hours these Arabs kept up the fight, jumping up, firing, and lying down—jumping up, firing, and lying down—again, and again, and again. Presently the enemy began to retreat. We followed them, harassing them on the left till night fell. About one hour after sunset I saw the Italians on the little hill of Bir Tobras, where they had planted their guns, and were throwing up trenches like mad. The Italians on the plain behind the hill had already fortified themselves ; they dug three trenches as they retreated. As I said before, they are very good at digging, and the ground being soft sand made the work easy.

We could not fire now owing to the darkness. But the Italians fired their guns in the air, and I guessed it was a distress signal, so that their friends at Ain Zara should send out reinforcements."

This, then, was the position at nightfall when I reached the scene. The Italians were trying to go back the way they had come, with their battery planted, to cover their retreat, on the knoll of Bir Tobras, a small eminence dotted with the spiny scrub which gives to the region its name—Sidra. Of the Arabs, one body was attacking them from the west, another from the south, a third from the east. Surely a fourth could be found to attack from the north, complete the circle, and cut off the enemy's escape? My Lieutenant, with his half a dozen regulars and the Arabs, made an attempt to do this by moving down the Sidra Way towards the enemy's rear.

At 8 p.m. a messenger arrived with the intelligence that the Italians still found their retreat impeded by the Arabs. But reinforcements were urgently needed, for many tribesmen had been wounded. Alas! where were the reinforcements to be found? It was past 9 o'clock before I saw a small body of volunteers, with two mounted sheikhs and two or three Turkish regulars, arrive from Saniat Beni Adam, and muster in the dark. They stood for a while on the crest of a sand-hill near my tent under the innumerable stars, their bodies and heads muffled up in their hrams, the long barrels of their rifles projecting above their right shoulders. Then they started off—a mass of hurrying phantoms, their bare or thinly-sandalled feet falling noiselessly on the sand—and disappeared behind the dunes.

During the night news came that one of the Italian battalions, as they were retreating, lost its way in the dark. We had great hopes it would be taken, even if the rest got away. Early in the morning came the sad, the maddening news that the Italians had escaped about 4 a.m., with the help of a column that had come out of Ain Zara in the evening and spent the night in the desert. The surrounding movement had failed.

I cannot say that I noticed any deep regret for this failure among the Turks. They were disposed to take it as something that could not be helped, and dismissed it with a resigned "*Neyssa*." As to the Arabs, when I pointed out to them that they had lost an opportunity of capturing 2,000 Italians, they showed their white teeth and said they didn't care. They

had beaten the enemy, hadn't they? And the 2,000 Italians had fled before 500 of them, hadn't they? That was enough for the day. Allah was great. Another day he would help them to do even better.

Meanwhile they had much to thank Allah for. They streamed back from the battlefield, brandishing their rifles aloft, with loud cries of "*Allah akbar!*" and "*Allah yansur es Sultan!*" The camp-followers rushed out to meet the victorious warriors, and joined their own voices to the clamour, while the women swelled the deafening chorus with their shrill ululations of joy. They came back loaded with spoils of war—infantry rifles and cavalry carbines, together with quantities of cartridges, officers' capes, men's plumed hats, sappers' shovels, tunics, shirts, breeches, haversacks, water-flasks, and a miscellaneous assortment of odds and ends, including lanterns, purses, cheap silver-plated little medals bearing the image of the Madonna, American one-dollar notes, Italian five-lire notes, fragments of Catholic Prayer-Books, and a whole collection of postcards and letters, which I was asked to read and translate. Some of these were found on a dead sergeant's body; they were letters from a mother to her son. Others were addressed to a corporal by his sisters, and others came to a hapless private from his sweetheart. Bulkier articles might be seen in the form of portable brown tents, blankets, and a chest full of surgical instruments and medical stores. But the mass of the loot consisted of rifles. There were scores and scores of them, and as I could not believe that every rifle represented a dead enemy, I was obliged to accept the explanation which everybody gave—namely, that the Italians, knowing the Arabs' unquenchable thirst for plunder, throw their rifles and cartridges away as they flee, so that they may escape while their pursuers waste time in picking them up.

All these articles were offered for sale—an officer's cloak at four shillings, a blanket at two shillings, a rifle at twenty shillings, a lot of two hundred cartridges at thirty shillings, and so on. There are in our camp a few individuals who combine other occupations with a profitable purchase of plunder.

One of these gentry is said to have made quite a small fortune by giving to the unsophisticated warriors a few pieces of silver in exchange for paper notes representing hundreds of francs.

Another has been known to get such notes by simply drawing the holy warriors' attention to the cross in the Italian coat of arms, and telling them that it ill becomes True Believers to keep about them the emblem of the unfaithful. The innocent Arabs would forthwith cast the accursed thing away in horror, for the wily one to pick up when they were not looking. The same gentleman has bought from an Arab an Italian officer's diamond ring for eight shillings, a military compass for fourpence, and an automatic pistol for a mejidieh—the last article by telling the seller that it was a telescope with its lenses gone. After this battle he appeared dressed from head to foot in Italian clothes—breeches, jacket, cape, boots—all complete. However, the holy warriors are glad enough to obtain any price for articles which they do not know what to do with, and they never fail to wish the buyer that his purchase may prove "*mabruk*" (blessed).

A few Italian horses and mules also fell into the Arabs' hands alive. More were found dead on the battlefield and along the line of retreat. Of human prisoners there were none. In this sort of warfare no quarter is asked or given. The Italians do their best not to be caught, and the Arabs prefer killing to catching. But they do not habitually indulge in torture of the wounded or mutilation of the dead. They are in too much of a hurry to strip both, and their cupidity acts as a preventive of brutality. For the rest, they have absolutely no scruples in their treatment of the lifeless bodies. They fall upon them, and quarrel over them as pariah dogs do over a carcass. They tear the clothes off them, turn the pockets inside out, and then leave them naked upon the ground—a prey for the ravens and kites of the desert.

This spoliation of the dead goes on long after the great peace and stillness of the desert has descended upon the field of strife and turmoil. For many a day after the battle of Bir Tobras the Arabs continued to visit the region, searching with eager eyes and nails in the sand for some loot that might have escaped them. One day they scented bodies buried hurriedly by the retreating enemy. They unearthed eight, and despoiled them. One of these ill-fated Bersaglieri was discovered buried with his rifle, which showed how hurried the burial had been. The others offered no attraction beyond their clothes. They lay,

poor fellows, still and silent, unheeding the rough and greedy hands that pulled the clothes off with feverish haste, lest someone else should come and claim a share of the spoil. Some more bodies were unearthed afterwards by the wind, and were treated in the same manner. Even two months after the battle a score of corpses were still to be found on the field, some lying close together in groups, others scattered over the sandy ground; some staring at the sky with wide, sightless eyes, others face downwards with their limbs stretched stiffly apart, while from under the spiny bushes might be seen protruding a leg here, an arm there. All were stark naked, and in various stages of decay. Some seemed to have been mummified by the sun and the sand, the faces of others showed the work of beasts and birds—eyes gone, cheeks eaten away, and bones gleaming white through the gaps in the flesh.

How many were the enemy's losses it was impossible to ascertain. Haj Mohammed said that he himself had counted thirty casualties in his own part of the fight, and others estimated the total at three hundred. On our own side, as regards regulars, one Turk was killed on the spot and one Albanian succumbed afterwards to three wounds which he had received accidentally from the Arab allies while, with the Turkish Lieutenant mentioned, he attempted to storm the hill on which the enemy were entrenched. Of the volunteers, about thirty were killed and as many wounded.

All our wounded displayed their usual indifference to pain. A Turkish Tommy was brought into the hospital tent while I was there. A bullet had gone through his chest, injuring the lung and the windpipe. He spat blood. He could only whisper hoarsely. He sat down, his dark face flushed, his eyes full of dumb patience. I offered him a cigarette. He thanked me with a smile, and smoked it while waiting for the surgeon to attend to his wound. When that was dressed, he refused to go to Azizia. He wanted to stay on at the front and to keep fighting—with a hole through his lung. Finally he was taken to the Commandant, who compelled him to go. Five days later I saw him at Azizia strolling about the suk. I asked him how he was getting on, and he smiled, his lips forming the monosyllable "*Ey*" (Well). I could not catch the sound. His voice was quite gone. Yet he walked abroad.

Soon after the battle I met another insatiable warrior—this time an Arab auxiliary with a bullet through his arm. He also obstinately declined to leave the place where more fighting was to be hoped for.

But perhaps the most striking example of heroism that came under my notice on this occasion was supplied by Haj Mohammed—all the more striking because I had never given the fellow credit for any kind of nobility.

“It was my duty to fight for the Faith,” he said. “Afraid of death? No, I was not. I knew I shouldn’t be killed unless it were written here”—and he drew his finger across his forehead. “When my wound has healed I will fight again. That won’t be long. Look at the Italian bullets”—producing an Italian magazine—“they just go clean through you, and do no harm unless they hit the head or a vital part.”

That was true. All our killed had been hit in the head. The ordinary Italian bullets—slender and nickel-plated—are most merciful.

Ismail Effendi was just as contemptuously proud of his fifth wound, but being a Turk he gave Allah thanks, and made no boast of it.

I tried to find out what became of Sheikh Mukhtar, Nesmeddin, and their families; and I learnt that the Arabs wished to destroy the houses and massacre the families of the traitors, and on being prevented by the Turkish authorities, they planned to write to them letters as to friends, thanking them for having led the Italians to disaster, in order to render them suspect to the latter. Afterwards I heard that Nesmeddin wrote to his wife, saying that the Italians were going to hang him and Mukhtar. I do not know whether they were really hanged, but it was evident that the villains had nicely fallen from the frying-pan into the fire.

I returned to Saniat Beni Adam on my way to Azizia, and there I saw a large force of Arab volunteers, with several sheikhs on horseback and three flags, just arriving from Nalut, with my friend Suleiman el Baroni at their head. They were met by shouting and cheering crowds from the camp. A fantasia was instantly improvised. The new-comers halted on one of the sand-ridges that overlook the Garden of the Sons of Adam, formed into a sort of line, and charged—the white head-dresses





HOLY WARRIORS AT SAMIAI BENI ADAM.

*G. F. Abbott, photo.*



and hrams of the mounted sheikhs flowing in the air, their drawn swords flashing in the sun. The Arabs from the camp charged against them. Then the two bodies mingled, dashed all together up a hillock, and, standing there, they thundered forth three cheers for the Sultan. After this display the newcomers marched off to pitch their tents, amidst wild yells from the men and strident ululations from the women.

It was a very impressive and inspiring scene ; but why were all these thousands at Saniat Beni Adam, when a portion of them at Fenduk Ben Gashir would have turned the brilliant success of Bir Tobras into a valuable victory ?

News of the Italian advance on our right wing had reached Beni Adam about 11 a.m. of December 19th. Together with the news there had come an urgent message from Bimbashi Hamid Zaffir, the Ben Gashir Commandant, saying :

“ I have not enough men to defend the place. In God’s name send me all the succour you can.”

Now, at the moment when this message was received there were 1,200 Jebel and 600 Zawia tribesmen at Saniat Beni Adam. Some of these, I was told, were despatched to the scene with the least possible delay, but they did not arrive in time. “ It is hard walking across the sand, and in order to reach Bir Tobras they had to go first to Ben Gashir, otherwise they might have lost themselves. Besides, they had no food or water with them, and so they got tired on the way, and stopped to rest.” This was one excuse. Another offered me by a Turkish Staff officer was : “ What can you expect from men who have never heard of organization, tactics, or discipline ? The Arabs refused to obey the Lieutenant who conducted the surrounding movement.” It was further added that the Arabs who were actually in the battle had wasted their ammunition, and so, left without cartridges, they could do nothing. “ Ah, it would have been different if there were sufficient Turkish regulars !” Want of artillery was another reason given for the failure to destroy or capture the enemy.

After listening to all these excuses, I still asked : Why did the Commander-in-Chief and his Staff return to Azizia just when their place was most clearly at the front ? And how in the name of Supreme Imbecility could they—professional soldiers—imagine that the fun was over when I, a

mere dilettante who had never before seen a campaign or taken the remotest interest in matters military, felt certain that it was only beginning ?

Had the General Staff been on the spot to conduct operations, I have small doubt that the battle of Bir Tobras might have resulted for the enemy in a catastrophe of the first magnitude. As it is, that they had a very narrow escape can be shown from their own admissions.

Some time after the *Stampa* of Milan published, from its war correspondent at Tripoli, a letter stating that it was only thanks to the courage of the officers and the valour of the troops that the Italians had avoided a disaster similar to that of Dogali, where out of a whole battalion only one Captain, and he wounded, had escaped the hands of the Abyssinians.

On their own showing, also, the Italians had at least 2,000 men, supported by artillery. The Turco-Arabs who actually got into contact with them were thirty regulars and hardly five hundred volunteers, and they had no guns. Yet they only just failed to annihilate the enemy !

The whole credit of this achievement belongs to the Bimbashi of Ben Gashir—who had disposed his small forces to the greatest advantage—to humble subalterns like Ismail Effendi, the other Turkish Lieutenant, and my Haj Mohammed, who led their men according to their own lights, and to the rank and file of the Albanians and Arabs who followed the lead, counting the odds no more than the wolf counts the number of sheep, and hazarding their lives in a manner to describe which the much-abused adjective “heroic” is ludicrously inadequate.

## CHAPTER XIII

### CAMELS, SOME COMEDIES, AND A TRAGEDY

AFTER the three days' storm, which culminated in the enemy's shipwreck at Bir Tobras, a great calm has settled upon us. Neither side appears anxious for another trial of strength. The Italians remain dormant behind their trenches, apparently convinced that no advance is possible unless it is made on a large scale—that is to say, with a great army adequately provisioned. Further, they must feel that a forward move, even if successful, may prove anything but a blessing, unless they first make their base secure against all possible surprises. To do all this they require more troops—troops to garrison Tripoli town, troops to guard every new point taken, troops to scour the desert for miles on either flank of the advancing column. They also require a vast commissariat, including several thousand camels to carry food and water; for, though there are many wells in the plain between their present positions and the mountains, I doubt whether they—supposing the Arabs did not destroy them—could be depended on to supply the needs of thousands of thirsty Europeans and their horses for any length of time.

The enemy's quiescence is therefore intelligible, and in perfect consonance with the spirit which has so far characterized all their operations. They spent two months preparing for the first step forward; they may well spend two more preparing for the second. They must live up to their reputation.

Besides, this campaign apart, the Italians are the authors of the proverb, "Who goes slowly, goes safely"—a proverb that may embody a world of wisdom in peace, but one that does not seem to conduce to brilliant success in a war of conquest. It would be a pretty problem for an idle mathematician to play

with : If Cæsar moved three times faster than Caneva, how many centuries would he have taken in conquering Gaul ?

Among our own Turks there is still a good deal of talk about the intended attack on Ain Zara. But my faith in this prophecy has suffered considerably from repeated disappointment. The project never is, but always to be carried out.

I thought at first that what our Commander was waiting for was a dark night—when the enemy's artillery would be innocuous—and I have been studying the ways of the moon with an interest utterly foreign to my unastronomical mind. But in vain have I watched her wane and wax, and wane again. The other night we had a new moon which set quite early, and from all I had observed during the day I felt sanguine that the hope I had so long cherished was on the verge of fulfilment. I had observed that nearly all the Arabs massed at Azizia had gone to the front, and I had heard that they had received strict instructions to abstain from firing till they were ordered to do so. The auxiliaries gone, the plain around, which the night before sparkled with numerous camp-fires, lay shrouded in gloom. I expected to hear the rifles go off every minute, but the night passed and nothing happened. I then gave up studying the ways of the moon, and turned my eyes back from heaven to earth.

In the absence of more exciting subjects of study, I devote several hours a day to a philosophical contemplation of the camels that crowd our camp. Caravans are constantly arriving at the Kasr, bringing rifles and cartridges from Gharian, or food and fodder from Tunis. And there is a mighty noise of unloading all day and far into the night—the camels contributing their angry grunts as they are made to kneel down, the men their shrill shrieks as they lift the load off the beast's back, and lurch with it towards the depot.

I confess that in this struggle between man and beast all my sympathy is with the latter. There is something about the camel's ugly face—with its long, loose, upper lip and big, projecting, almond-shaped, melancholy eyes, overshadowed by heavy pendulous lids—that appeals to me strongly. As I watch them, overworked and underfed, moistening their lips with their tongues, or snatching a mouthful of dry grass out of each other's torn pack-saddles, I cannot help asking my-

self, "What right has man to tyrannize over these hapless quadrupeds?"

For that the camel looks upon man's domination as tyrannical is clearly shown by its conduct. Most Europeans I have discussed the matter with regard the camel's snarlings and foamings at the mouth as proofs of bad temper, and they dismiss the subject with the phrase "Surly beast!" or something equally derogatory and unjust. To me the surliness of the camel stands for a symbol of perpetual protest against oppression. It is the one animal that has never reconciled itself to servitude. Man has tamed the camel, but has never subdued it. No self-respecting camel ever kneels down or gets up without a protesting grunt, and these gruntings become especially emphatic when any addition is attempted to the load which the camel considers legitimate. There is something really affecting about these inarticulate appeals for fair play.

Next to an excessive burden, there is nothing a camel resents more bitterly than confinement. In the desert it displays a serene contempt for the beaten track, preferring to wander hither and thither with the leisurely proprietary tread of a grand seigneur. But if a camel despises the limitations of a highway, it abhors those of a high-walled enclosure. The other day I saw several of them obstinately refuse to enter the gate of the Kasr. When the drivers tried to force them in, the camels simply knelt down and sat staring at the horizon with calm, stubborn eyes. They yielded only when the drivers, who belaboured their knees with sticks, were reinforced by soldiers who prodded their posteriors with bayonets, while others pushed and pulled at their sides. And even then they yielded with a very bad grace, growling and gurgling loudly, as though taking the gods to witness that their submission was merely due to superior force.

On the other hand, they will press most eagerly to the exit of the court, jostling each other in their impatience to escape into freedom. Of course, the pathos of it all is lost upon the drivers, who do their worst to break a spirit of insubordination so incompatible with servitude. They sometimes halter the camel by one fore-knee, and then the poor animal's antics as it limps along on three legs are passing grotesque. Sometimes they halter it by both fore-knees, and then the animal's struggles to rise from the ground are most painful to witness. Now and then

you see a camel shackled with a chain and pair of fetters, which it rattles as it hobbles about, and, again, one with its mouth imprisoned in a muzzle made of solid iron bands. These must be slaves that are not content to give vent to their resentment in empty snarlings and impotent foamings. But, for the most part, the camels that fill our court are free to roam at pleasure within its four walls. They while away their temporary confinement by scratching their own or each other's humps with their mouths, by trying to expel a flea from their ear with the hind-leg while bending the long neck backwards, or by resting quietly with their necks stretched forth at full length and their heads on the ground. A few are accompanied by their offspring—baby camels, all leg and hump, with fluffy white coats, and the timid, hesitating manner of persons but newly introduced into this puzzling world.

From the camels my eyes stray to the prisoners who are peeping through their small iron-barred window. Round that window seems to centre their whole life. It is through its bars that they get the air they breathe, the food they eat, the water they drink, the recreation which helps them to relieve the tedium of their confinement. A vendor of thin, flat, round loaves of ill-baked barley bread comes with his grass basket to the window. Two or three brown faces press themselves against the bars. After some haggling, two or three lean brown arms shoot out, hand a few copper pieces to the vendor, and draw back again with a few loaves of bread clutched in their fingers. Then an old negress, with a fringe of corkscrew curls on her forehead and a pair of enormous silver rings in her ears, brings to the window a pitcher of water. The faces appear again—more haggling ensues, more chinking of copper coins. The *cafedji* who squats at the door supplies the prisoners with tea in tiny glasses, also through the window.

Friends always cluster round that window to chat with the inmates, and, let the gaoler do what he can, they persist in clinging to its bars. Not that the gaoler has any serious objection to their presence. He often joins in the chat himself, and sometimes he consents, for a trifle, to allow the visitors into more intimate intercourse with the prisoners. He draws back the bolt, the small door in the middle of the big one hangs on its one hinge, the prisoner from within hands out



two coppers, the gaoler pockets the money, makes a perfunctory pretence of searching the visitors, and then each of them drops his stick, takes off his slippers, and squeezes through the narrow aperture. The gaoler slams the little door to without bolting it, and after a while, when the interview has come to an end, he lets the visitors out again.

He is a very nice gaoler, and the relations between him and the prisoners are those between a host and his paying guests. The other day an Arab youth was arrested for theft, and brought to the prison by a gendarme. The gaoler shot the bolt back and held the little door open for the new-comer to enter. The youth, however, was loth to profit by this act of politeness. He hung back, protesting that he was innocent. A long debate followed. It was conducted with the utmost good temper and good taste : the prisoner wishing to know the reason why, the gaoler begging him to get in. In the end the youth allowed himself to be persuaded, and, dropping his stick, he took his slippers off and squeezed in.

However, though the host is good, the hostel leaves much to desire. The window, as I pass by in the daytime, gives glimpses of a damp, foul earth floor, and of a grimy vaulted roof, and the smell that issues from within is pestilential. At night I see the prisoners, by the fitful flicker of a tallow candle that gutters from a wall, crouching upon the damp earth floor, and I hear them jabbering, coughing, quarrelling about a farthing, or otherwise amusing themselves. But they are not contented. Sometimes as I stroll past they beckon to me to throw them a cigarette. The other day one of them was clinging to the iron bars, yelling "*Allah yansur es Sultan!*" (God save the Sultan!) As soon as he caught sight of me, he changed his hymn into an "*Allah yansurak, atti bu-ashara!*" (God save thee, give me a tenner!)

Once a week it is customary for the prisoners to be brought out of their dungeon, that they may receive the bastinado. When I was informed of this, I naturally thought that the castigation was meant as a punishment for crimes already committed. I was wrong. It is meant as a preventive of crimes that may be committed. But, like other Turkish rules, it is more honoured in theory than in practice, and this weekly function very rarely takes place. I was privileged to assist at it once.

It was a bright, sunny afternoon. The last caravan had gone out of the Kasr, the next had not yet arrived. The court was clear. The twenty prisoners were invited to come forth. They crept out reluctantly through the small door by ones, by twos, and by threes. Some immediately lay upon the ground motionless. The doctor felt their pulse, and pronounced that they were shamming. The gaoler confirmed the doctor's verdict with his stick. The prostrate figure at the first taste of it jumped up with all the agility of perfect health. And so none missed his fair share of the function.

As each emerged from the prison, a gendarme seized him by the scruff of the neck, threw him down, and sat astride on his neck, holding his hands behind his back, while a second gendarme sat on his feet. Two other gendarmes stood on either side, each armed with a fine palm-rod, wherewith they belaboured the prone figure alternately, one telling the strokes aloud in Turkish—" *bir, ikee, ootch, dort,*" and so on. This teller—a tall, lean-visaged, evil-eyed Arab—seemed to take an artist's genuine joy in his task. He often gave an extra stroke or two, as one who does not spare himself in a labour of love, and he finished with a flourish of his stick that suggested the successful artist's satisfaction with the work of his hands. He impressed me as a man possessing an infinite capacity for giving pain.

Reader, shudder not at my callous flippancy. The horrors of the bastinado have been monstrously over-rated by common report. Old travellers in the Levant delighted in filling their pages with gruesome and detailed descriptions of the "most creuell and Torturinge punishments used in Turkie" — such as "Stakeinge, gaunchinge, drubbing or beating on the feete." As travellers never lie, I suppose their accounts are correct with regard to their own day; but, in my day, the bastinado is one of the few barbarous methods of punishment that survive among the Turks, and even the barbarity of that is greatly attenuated.

Here and there it still retains its ancient form of "drubbing or beating on the feete." The culprit is thrown on his back, his ankles are passed through a loop tied to a pole, two men lift the pole and hold it up so that the culprit's legs are nearly at right angles with his body, and a third beats his soles with

a stick. I saw a performance of this kind in the oasis of Zawia, and, I admit, it was not amusing. The victim—a lad of twelve—though he had received only half a dozen strokes, could not set his feet flat on the ground, and had to limp away, treading on his heels. But this is not the common form of the bastinado at the present day.

In the performance which I am reporting there was more to arouse laughter than terror and pity. The number of strokes administered was scrupulously proportionate to the recipient's capacity. An oldish man got only six, and the sturdiest young vagabond no more than "forty but one." In all cases the stick fell upon the recipient's shirt and cloak, and in some cases upon the thick sack which the wily rascal had the forethought to wind surreptitiously round his loins. It fell, raising clouds of dust from the prostrate figure's clothes; it was the only dusting they ever experienced.

The performance was watched by a full and appreciative house. Officers and doctors looked on from the balcony above. Down below soldiers, camel-drivers and idlers stood in a ring; they were all enjoying themselves thoroughly. The function was treated as a joke by everybody except the victims, and even they, as soon as it was over, sprang to their feet none the worse for it. The ordeal, apart from its disciplinary value, was an excellent test of character. I saw one man receive his twenty strokes without flinching or uttering a single groan. Some protested feebly. Many, however, I regret to say, filled the court with such cries as these: "*Ya rassul illah! Ya Mohammed! Ya mumineen!*" (O apostle of God! O Mohammed! O True Believers!) Or the invocation would take the more prosaic form, "*Ana massugh! Ana massugh!*" (I throw myself on your mercy!) Or the victim would shout, incongruously enough, "*Allah yansur es Sultan!*" (God save the Sultan!) As a rule, the man who howled the most loudly was the man least hurt, and at the end of the chastisement he would spring to his feet and run back into prison with remarkable alacrity.

The persons who played a passive part in this prison comedy were vulgar vagabonds and petty thieves. But we also have occasionally prisoners of an entirely different type. While the vast majority of the natives are risking their lives in fighting

the invader, there are a few who try to line their pockets by serving him as spies, or, as the Arabs express it, *beya* ("sellers")—*i.e.*, of their country.

From time to time individuals engaged in this detestable trade are caught in our advanced posts, and brought to headquarters with their arms tied behind their backs. One evening I saw five brought from Saniat Beni Adam on foot by two mounted soldiers, and handed over to the gaoler. He untied their arms, and counting aloud, "*Wahad, etneen, talaata, arbaa, hamsa,*" pushed them one after the other into the dungeon through the small door. The warriors in the court pursued them with invectives. On another occasion a single spy was brought in. The sentry took hold of one end of the rope with which his arms were tied, and led him upstairs to the Commander's room. An Arab sheikh who stood on the balcony slapped the prisoner, spat into his face, calling him "dog," and would probably have caused him serious injury if the soldiers had not intervened in time.

Most of these wretches are only suspected of espionage. There is no tangible proof of their guilt, and they assert their loyalty whilst in prison by shouting at intervals through the day and night, "God save the Sultan and damn the Italians!" But every now and again we have a captive who carries about him incontestable testimony to his character. One afternoon I was startled by a sudden storm of yells and howls in the court below. I rushed out, and saw a dark, negroid ragamuffin of some thirty years of age kicked and slapped by five infuriated sheikhs, while a vast rabble of holy warriors raged round the group gesticulating and vociferating demoniacally. A Staff officer and the Chief of the Gendarmerie elbowed their way through the crowd, and got possession of the prisoner and of the papers that had been found on him. Among these—incredible though it may sound—was a printed form from the Italian Commando at Tripoli, empowering the bearer to cross the Italian lines, and bidding him on his return to report himself immediately (the word *subito* was heavily underlined) to the politico-military authorities. In face of this evidence the Arab's guilt was as plain as the imbecility of the men who had thought it necessary to saddle the creature with such an incriminating document.

He was thrown down upon his face, struggling like a wild beast, and after a great deal of trouble he was pinned to the ground by a gendarme seated on his neck and another on his feet, while a third began to beat him with a stick. He would not confess, but continued to howl. The Chief of the Gendarmerie and the other Turkish officer begged the castigator to desist at the twentieth stroke. The Arab sheikhs would not hear of it. They insisted that the man should be beaten until he confessed. An altercation ensued, till one of the sheikhs cut it short by snatching the stick from the gendarme's hand, and, having given the wretch a preliminary kick, took up the tale where the gendarme had left off, following each blow with the cry "*Ghul!*" (Speak!) At the ninth stroke the stick splintered. Then the Chief of the Gendarmerie interposed effectively. The spy was lifted to his feet, his face covered with dust and dung, and was pushed across the court towards the prison, the Arabs continuing to kick and slap him, with many guttural execrations of the *beya*. In this manner he was literally thrown into the dungeon.

I have heard that the Arabs have a quick way with "sellers" of this sort, and I fully expected to see the wretch dragged out to be hanged; but this did not happen. Perhaps he was induced to transfer his services to our side, for many of the people who are paid by the Italians to spy for them are known to play a double part. Be that as it may, one day we had two captives who, having proved true and conscientious traitors to their country, were treated accordingly.

They were two native gendarmes from Tripoli town. When the Turks decided to evacuate the capital, they had told the gendarmes that they could do just as they liked: either stay behind and serve the new Government or go to their homes. A good many of these poor fellows, considering, as everyone else did at the time, that the Sultan's rule had come to an end, chose to stay behind. It was not a very heroic part to choose, but they had their families to think of, and every man is not born a hero. Neither the Turks nor the Arabs had any right to condemn them.

The case of these two men, however, was peculiar. They had been reconnoitring with an Italian officer outside the Ain Zara trenches in the small hours of December 26th, when a

band of thirty Arabs similarly employed caught sight of them. The wrath of the holy warriors, when they recognized True Believers in the uniform of the infidel, knew no bounds. But acting with that self-control which they can display at times, they decided to take them alive. They crept stealthily up to within a short range and fired, killing the Italian officer, but only hitting the gendarmes' horses. The latter fell. The Arabs darted forward, seized the riders, and brought them to Azizia.

The mob in our camp surrounded the party, shouting, brandishing their rifles wildly, and trying to lynch the prisoners; but the escort—twenty Arabs and one or two Turkish soldiers—managed to bring them safely into the Kasr. They were taken upstairs to the Komandanlik odassi, the armed mob following and shouting.

After a cross-examination by the Commander-in-Chief and Staff, they were led out again and taken downstairs into the court, where a handsome Albanian sergeant found for himself a congenial task by binding their arms tightly behind their backs. The mob swayed round the group, smiling and scowling its approval, but offering no violence to the prisoners. When tied, these were led about the court, reviled by some, questioned by others.

Meanwhile the Commander-in-Chief and his Staff, assisted by Ferhat Bey, held a court-martial upstairs. The case was clear. The prisoners had been caught in the act. The only question was whether their act constituted a crime. In cross-examination they had justified themselves by saying that they had served the enemy because they had families to feed.

The Commander replied :

“ Why did not all the other gendarmes do likewise? Here they are—ask them if they are not paid as regularly as before the war, and quite as much as the Italians pay you.”

However, that was not the point, since the men had been officially permitted to choose their own masters. The point was that they had not been content to serve as guardians of the peace in the capital, but had come out armed to spy upon their fellow-countrymen and to fight against them. Therein lay the treason. The Court decided that they deserved hanging.

In the meantime the captors, having delivered their prisoners into the hands of the constituted authorities, squatted in a

circle outside the Kasr, with their rifles upright, grimly awaiting the tribunal's decision. Great was their satisfaction when they heard it. The prisoners were led off, each between two mounted soldiers, and some of their captors following, one to Ben Gashir, the other to Beni Adam, there to be executed in public. It says much for the self-restraint of the Arabs that, instead of gratifying their instinctive ferocity, they permitted justice to take its normal course.

The sentences were carried out next morning with perfect order. At Saniat Beni Adam a gibbet was extemporized out of a telegraph-post, a barrel, and a noose of greased rope. A detachment of regulars was drawn up in a square about the gibbet. The prisoner was brought forth, pushed into the square, stripped of his tunic and trousers, and made to step on the barrel. A crowd of spectators seethed round the gibbet, but the prisoner did not seem to be conscious of the hundreds of hostile eyes fixed upon him. He stood on the barrel, while the sentence was read out, in his shirt, with his arms bound behind his back, silent and stoical, his pale face as rigid as that of a statue. His lips only were seen moving inaudibly—he prayed. Presently the noose was passed round his neck and the barrel was kicked from under his feet. His eyebrows went up as though in astonishment, his tongue came out, and he hung, staring right ahead with wide-open, unseeing eyes.

The crowd gazed on in awe-stricken silence. Suddenly an ancient Arab raised his withered arm, and, shaking a finger at the hanging figure, shrieked: "That is what is done to men who sell their Sultan and their Faith!" That shriek broke the spell. The men shouted "Allah! Allah!" The women sent forth their shrill ululations; and the corpse was left hanging from the telegraph-post, with a paper stating the crime and punishment pinned to its breast.

## CHAPTER XIV

### “ YAVASH, YAVASH ”

For some time past it had been a matter of speculation for me what the Constantinople Government was doing, besides sending money, to assist the gallant little army which is fighting its battles and raising its prestige in this remote outpost of the Empire.

The weeks went by, and I could see no indication whatever that help of the sort most urgently needed was forthcoming. But that efforts to that end were made became manifest one day, when I heard that a Russian vessel with a cargo destined for our camp was arrested at Sfax. The ship, called the *Odessa*, had sailed from Stambul, carrying a large quantity of munitions of war—cartridges, explosives, machine-guns of the latest pattern, and even, it was said, some pieces of heavy artillery. She had tried to disembark this precious cargo secretly at El Biban, close to the frontier, and at Jerba ; but she had failed, and had been forced to put in at Sfax, where the Captain declared that he carried only three hundred and fifty tons of coal, partly destined for a local merchant. However, the Custom-house authorities, whose suspicions had been awakened either by reports from Italian spies or by indiscretions committed by the Turks themselves, refused to accept this declaration.

A Lieutenant, bearing the Italian name of Albertini, was sent on board to examine the cargo, and there, hidden under the coal, he discovered the war-stores mentioned. The ship was forthwith seized, her contraband freight was confiscated, and her Captain was prosecuted for “ false declaration and grave omission.” I was curious to see the impression which this mishap would produce on my Turkish friends ; but I could



detect not the faintest symptom of emotion in their placid countenances. The matter was barely mentioned in my presence, and not one word of regret accompanied the mention. Yet I could measure their unexpressed chagrin by my own. I felt almost as disappointed as Antonio must have felt when tidings reached him that “ he had lost a ship.” I would have given something to provide our Baba with another battery, and see him again pounding the Italians therewith. What new quaint stories he would have to tell of heavy cannon-shells dropping “ *tlob, tlob,* ” and of quick Maxims merrily singing “ *pan, pan, pan,* ” under his auspices ! Well, it was not to be.

However, though these useful engines of destruction have so sadly failed to reach us, we are constantly enlivened by the arrival of enthusiastic officers from Turkey. They come under all sorts of disguises, by all sorts of devious ways, and after enduring all sorts of hardships. But they do come, and their tanacity is only less amazing than their resourcefulness.

Here is one of them—Lieutenant Ekram, a fair young giant of Albanian highland blood, which proclaims itself loudly in the youth’s splendid physique and schoolboy buoyancy. He is the son of the renowned Field-Marshal Rejeb Pasha—some-time Governor-General of Tripolitania—whose death soon after the Revolution was mourned throughout the Ottoman Empire as a great national calamity. He profited by his father’s official position to travel over the province and to master its language. He knows the Arabs as few Turks know them, and his hearty, open manner is calculated to gain their confidence. These are assets of inestimable worth in a campaign where mere military book-learning counts for so little and the personal element for so much.

Ekram Bey has spent six weeks on his journey from Constantinople to Azizia. He landed at Tunis, and twice he got as far as Sfax, only each time to be turned back by the police. Finally he managed to slip out of Tunis in a motor-car, and, carefully avoiding beaten routes and police-haunted cities, he crossed the border near Dehibat, traversed the desert on horseback, and arrived here in a khaki riding-costume as smart and gay as if he had just stepped out of his father’s palace. The two days he spent at our headquarters were days to remember. His talk, laughter, and song filled the Kasr from

dawn till midnight, galvanizing its solemn inmates into a temporary forgetfulness of their solemnity. On the morning of the third day he prepared to start for the front. He buckled a bandolier round his waist, stuck a wooden spoon into his left legging, and, with a riding-crop in one hand and a cigarette in the other, he went off, humming one of his favourite tunes.

Soon after this gay Albanian's departure we were joined by a couple of Circassian cavalry officers, Major Isac and Major Sabi—the one tall, blond, and broad-shouldered, with a face full of smiling good-nature; the other short, thick-set, and dark, with a strong, square forehead and a strong, square jaw. They had left Constantinople thirty-two days before, and at Marseilles they assumed the incognito best suited to their respective figures. Isac Bey passed himself off for a Russian nobleman; Sabi Bey shaved his upper lip, donned a slouch hat slightly cocked, and adopted the swagger of a Yankee tourist. Their knowledge of foreign tongues, combined with much native aplomb, enabled them to land at Algiers without arousing any suspicion. From Algiers they travelled to Tunis by rail. Fortune favoured them. After a time they found themselves in the carriage alone with some Moslems. They immediately revealed to them their identity and destination, nothing doubting but that those True Believers would aid them. Nor were they disappointed. The Tunisian Moslems recognized in the Circassian Moslems brethren, harboured them in their homes at Tunis, disguised them as native merchants, engaged for them a motor-car driven by an Italian chauffeur, and saw them safely as far as Medenine. Hence the travellers decided to continue the journey after a fashion more consonant with their incognito, and by a route less exposed to official inspection. They hired camels, which took them in seven days to Nalut on the Jebel. Thence they proceeded to Yefreen; and from Yefreen, leaving the mountains, they crossed the desert to Azizia, sleeping on the ground under the canopy of heaven, with only a hram between their bodies and the night dew, and subsisting on such food as they could pick up by the way.

Among other arrivals of the same nature, I need only mention Khalil Bey, the famous Enver Bey's uncle, who stopped with us one day on his way to take over the command

of the forces fighting at Khoms, and Lieutenant-Colonel Muheddin, who replaced Major Nasmi Bey in the command of our left wing.

Besides military men, we have other interesting visitors from Constantinople—now an agent from the Committee of Union and Progress, whose mission here is somewhat of a mystery to the uninitiated; and now a journalist, whose mission is obvious enough. A representative of the latter class brought with him a touch of romance, striking in itself and significant of the extent to which this war has stirred the heart of Islam. He was a Pole by nationality, but a Moslem in faith—a descendant of some Tartar families who fled into Poland many centuries ago, and who, though they have mixed their blood with that of their Christian neighbours, have preserved their religion pure. His name was very characteristic—Seif ed din (Sword of the Faith) Gashtowtt, and his profession “Correspondant particulier du *Jeune Turc*.” He also came by way of Algiers and Nalut, with the object of fighting as well as of writing; but he left us soon after on a confidential mission.

Nor is zeal for the cause confined to True Believers. The other day we were joined by three young German Lieutenants, to whom afterwards was added a fourth. They have all come out here to fight for the Crescent, and no doubt their military training would be helpful were it accompanied by some knowledge of Arabic or even of Turkish. As it is, their participation in this desert warfare seems likely to prove of greater benefit to themselves in the future than to the Turco-Arab forces in the present. Nevertheless, their arrival is a practical evidence of sympathy, and as such most welcome.

The Arabs continue to bring fresh tints into a picture already overcharged with colour. Not only have we received more tribesmen from Fezzan, some from Sinaun—a small but very warlike tribe near the Tunisian frontier—and other contingents from the Jebel, but we have also been favoured with contributions from new and more remote fields. The seed scattered over the desert by Italian violence and assiduously tended by Ottoman eloquence is bearing fruit.

Seif en Nasr, to whose appearance I have been looking forward, it is true, has not yet come. Whence this delay? I thought at first that it was due to the weight of years. He has

passed the hey-day of adventure, I said to myself, and has reached a patriarchal age which longs for rest. The call of war does not stir him. The prospect of plunder does not lure him. The Sword of Victory has grown rusty. Then I learnt that my psychological guesses were at fault. The venerable hero had received from the Turkish authorities money wherewith to provide both for his own tribe and for the neighbouring tribe of Gidadfa in Fezzan ; but he forgot to give to the latter their share of the gold—hence an intertribal feud, in which the larger stake was obliterated by the lesser. The children of Gidadfa rose up against the fraudulent Owwad Suleiman, a battle was fought, Seif en Nasr lost some dead and wounded, and withdrew back into the depths of the desert.\*

Meanwhile my curiosity has found other food, even more stimulating than the one it has missed. A few nights ago, as I was wandering about the camp, like Dr. Syntax, in search of the picturesque, my eye fell upon a group that struck me as unfamiliar : three Arabs dressed, unlike the Tripolitans, in white burnouses and *ganurs*—muslin kerchiefs thrown over the cap, fastened round it with coils of twisted camel-hair, and flowing gracefully over the shoulders. They sat on mats round a small brushwood fire, sipping tea, and behind them, through the darkness, loomed the enormous forms of thirty camels, some standing, others lying down, all munching slowly and noisily their evening meal of barley. The countenances, framed by the white muslin kerchiefs, were as unfamiliar as the costumes : very dark and gaunt, with hollow cheeks, thin black beards, curling like fine wire under the chin, and deep-sunk, swift-glancing eyes. The lips, always parted, disclosed a gleam of sharp, irregular teeth which put a grim suggestion of ferocity into the restless, keen expression of the features ; and—most remarkable thing—all three were exactly alike.

As I drew nearer, I discerned seated beside the strangers my ex-guide Haj Mohammed, just convalescent. I had long since forgiven the rascal his rascality for the sake of his wound—a “decoration” which in my eyes atoned for all minor misconducts—and therefore I gladly accepted his invitation to

\* A contingent of the Owwad Suleiman did arrive at last in March, but I was no longer near enough to witness their arrival.

join the party. The strangers were old friends of his—he had met them some time ago in a Tunisian market where they had gone to buy tea; they were brothers. He introduced them to me as Mohammed, Mulai, and Ali Ben Hammaida Ben Kher.

After many mutual salaams and compliments, we settled down to an evening's talk. I learnt that they came from Wargla in Algeria. They were men of substance and consequence in their distant country; they had sheep, and goats, and he-asses and she-asses, and camels—especially camels. The herd behind them was a gift which they had brought for the army—their contribution to the holy cause. They had arrived on three trotting m'harris, which they pointed out to me proudly, singing their praises with all the eloquence and exaggeration of which an Arab is capable when on that inspiring topic. It was fine to see their countenances, so sullen and stern in repose, soften and relax when they spoke of their beloved m'harris.

And, indeed, they were noble beasts—lean and sinewy and gentle, they stood out from the coarse under-bred pack-camels round them as thoroughbred animals, whether quadruped or biped, will always stand out from the common herd. My admiration for their mounts completely subjugated the dusky warriors. Their faces beamed with friendly smiles; their fingers were busy offering me tiny glassfuls of syrup-sweet tea, and, as I handed the empty glass back, they all wished me in chorus, “*Sahaa!*” (Good health!)

We went on talking far into the night. They told me that they had taken a whole month over the journey, owing to the slow pace of the pack-camels they brought with them. Other members of their tribe were also coming to the Jihad, but they had not waited for them, being anxious to reach the theatre of hostilities as soon as possible. When they arrived at the headquarters that evening, the Commander had offered them sleeping-room in the Kasr, but they refused it, preferring, like true children of the desert, to bivouac under the stars.

“We are used to sleep anywhere,” they said, “and to go for three or four days, if need be, without food.”

And, in fact, the only thing I saw about them that suggested some provision for a month's journey across the desert was a long *gurbah*, or water-bag, made of goat-skin, well cured and ill-flavoured with pitch.

We parted with many cordial benedictions and promises to meet again.

It is a far cry from Wargla to Azizia ; but farther still is the arid desolation that stretches from Ghadames to Ghat. Yet even that far-away region has sent us some of its strange children. The other day there arrived two mysterious figures with the lower parts of their faces muffled by a white veil, as the faces of Moslem women are muffled in the cities. Yet these new-comers were neither women nor city dwellers : they were wild warriors armed with long, straight swords and long, slim brass lances, and they arrived mounted on long-legged m'harris, one of which carried a modern rifle suspended from the high back-rest of its fleece-covered round saddle ; the other a brass dish suspended from the high cross-shaped pommel.

These warriors were Twareks—members of a tribe in which the women rule and the men raid. They are a curious community of hen-pecked marauders, dreading their women-folk as much as peaceful travellers dread them. They arrived here, covering the distance from Fessatun, over which an ordinary camel takes a week, in two days, to offer their services and to say that more of their tribe are to follow shortly. Their arrival was absolutely unexpected. No emissaries had been sent to the Twareks to solicit their aid, and no news of their coming had been received, as they traversed the desert by paths unknown to the telegraph. Could a better proof be adduced of the spontaneity and the sincerity of the spirit which animates the children of Islam ?

But, alas ! every silver cloud has a dark lining.

It is deeply to be regretted that a good deal of this magnificent moral force is wasted for want of some intellectual power to preserve it and shape it to proportionately great ends ; but a capacity for administration and organization is not among the Turk's gifts.

It is several weeks since I came to Azizia, and I cannot yet see any improvement in the conditions which shocked me at first. The Kasr continues in the same chaos of squalid confusion as when I first set eyes on it. The soldiers have not yet been provided with a change of linen. The suk continues as rich in sounds and smells and as poor in commodities as ever. I had hoped that some enterprising Jew or Greek trader might

arrive any day to supplement the deficiencies of our primitive peddlers ; but none has hitherto thought it worth his while to visit Azizia. I have looked all over the camp for milk—cow’s milk, sheep’s milk, or goat’s milk. I might as well have looked for pigeon’s milk ! There are cattle in the country, but nobody has thought to get any for milk—for the headquarters, at least, if not for the whole camp. I do not know how the others fare. For my own part, I live mostly on the memories of past meals.

Of course, this Lenten life has its compensations. We are free, and freedom is dear even to the soul that fasts. I move about at will, drawing the clean desert air into my lungs with a sigh of satisfaction. It is the sweetest air I have ever breathed ; but it is not a substitute for a square meal.

It is not even a substitute for an Arab meal. The very children of the desert find this diet somewhat insufficient. One night two of them came up to me and, apparently mistaking me for a Turkish officer, said :

“ We are holy warriors. We want to eat.”

I thought their occupation admirable, and their demand not unreasonable ; but I explained that if they were *mujehaddin* and hungry, I was only a *mussafir* (a guest), and also hungry. And I directed them to the officer whose duty it is to feed holy warriors.

But I had not realized how perfunctory and irregular is the provision made for these poor defenders of the Faith until the other evening. It was about half an hour after sunset, when a band of seventy-five tribesmen arrived from Ben Gashir to lodge a formal complaint at headquarters. It was a most interesting scene, this demonstration by a mob of wild Arabs armed with gas-pipes and a grievance—interesting specially to one who has witnessed parallel demonstrations by Western mobs in the capitals of some countries that call themselves civilized.

The tribesmen, having reached the square before the Kasr, drew up in a line, and stood facing the gate with their gas-pipes on their shoulders, as if they were regular troops on parade. Then they selected a deputation to wait on the Commander and lay before him their grievance. I was told that money had been given to their sheikh for their sustenance, but, unfortunately, it had stayed in the sheikh’s pocket. However that may be, whether the famine the poor men endured was

due to their own chief's dishonesty or to negligence on the Turkish authorities' part, the Arabs, having sent in their deputation, squatted down in front of the Kasr, still in a line, and holding their long-barrelled guns erect before them. They remained perfectly calm and silent in the dusk, waiting with wonderful patience for the result of their protest.

By-and-by half a sack of flour was brought out to them. They did not pounce upon it as one would have expected from men who had come over twelve miles' journey on foot to ask for food. They remained still for a quarter of an hour longer, with the sack before them, until their deputation came back; then they rose and split into groups to discuss the situation. In the meantime the dusk had deepened into darkness, and the silver sickle of a new moon shone gently against the blue of the sky. The tribesmen, having satisfied themselves with the answer, formed themselves into five rings and squatted down again, while the persons who had acted as ambassadors distributed the flour by handfuls—so many to each group.

I wondered upon how many Trafalgar Square meetings that moon had shone, and what comparisons the man in it would make if he could speak.

Still, could not something be done to render such scenes superfluous? Our holy warriors are most willing to go to heaven, but they do not wish to get there hungry.

The provision made for the families of the Arabs who have died in the war seems to be equally defective, and the stairs of the Kasr are constantly haunted by poor widows holding tattered veils across their faces with one hand, and proffering with the other a bit of paper which certifies that they are entitled to relief. Sometimes these women carry babies in their arms and also in their wombs. Very often they are accompanied by little children clinging to their skirts. The Turks are not callous to distress. On the contrary, there is no nation upon the earth more addicted to almsgiving, and I have known at least one officer here give away to these bereaved females twenty pounds out of his own pocket. But private charity, however generous, cannot meet a public necessity unless it is properly organized. At best it is only a spasmodically-applied remedy to an evil that requires systematic treatment.

The same lack of efficiency marks the treatment of the



wounded. The Red Crescent Mission has elaborated a plan which looks admirable on paper. It is in the form of a three-pronged fork, including a base hospital at Gharian, and another at Azizia; field-hospitals in the main camps at the front, and first-aid stations at all the outposts. I admired the proportions of the various parts of the plan and the scientific symmetry of the whole, until I saw it at work.

The wounded from the field of Bir Tobras had to be carried on stretchers all the way from Ben Gashir to Azizia, because there was no field-hospital at the former place. During their long journey their wounds got swollen, and their sufferings were so excruciating that after a certain point some refused to proceed any farther. The inconvenience, not to say the inhumanity, of transporting in this fashion patients in mortal need of rest and immediate attendance, was so manifest that the chief of the Mission said to me: "Next time we are going to have the wounded carried from the front on stretchers only as far as Fenduk es Shereef, where we shall organize a field-hospital, and thence only the worst cases shall be transported to Azizia in waggons." A whole month passed before this intention was carried out—after a fashion.

In Azizia itself the accommodation and general treatment of these sufferers, judged by a civilized standard, is scandalous. They have to lie on the hard floor wrapped up in their hrams only, while their wounds fester; or they may be seen wandering about the camp, with limbs or faces bandaged, seeking for someone to change the dressings.

Of course, it would be in the highest degree unfair, in judging the case, to lose sight of the extenuating circumstances; but, when all possible allowance has been made for unavoidable limitations, there still remains a large residue of unpleasantness that might have been avoided had the Red Crescent Mission, which has come to assist the overworked regular military doctors and the medical volunteers whom Fethi Bey has brought with him, been better fitted for its task. As it is, one of its members left us soon after his arrival, and returned to Constantinople, on the plea that his father was dying. Another, after a week's experience of desert warfare, departed on a financial mission to Tunis and Marseilles, and after a whole month's holiday, which included a visit to Paris, came back

to curse the conditions which it is his business to improve. Surely, this is not the spirit of self-sacrifice which alone can make up for the necessary deficiencies under which we labour.

Again, the Mission arrived here destitute of the most elementary articles. Three weeks had to elapse before a small caravan came bringing some beds, stretchers, and utensils; and this was only a fraction of the stores which were said to be expected. Meanwhile the only really trained medical assistant that had come with them—the French-speaking Tunisian Ahmed Ben Slama—found his position untenable. He complained bitterly that superfluities had been bought and essentials omitted; that one man had to do the work of ten, and lacked the most rudimentary implements for doing it, and so forth. He proposed to go back to Tunis, and not only bring with him all that was necessary for the moment, but also organize a regular service of convoys for the future. But his offer was not accepted, and he threw up his appointment in sheer disgust and despair.

Another properly-qualified young Tunisian assistant came to take Ahmed's place, and found himself handicapped in the same way. I first met him at the front on the day after the battle of Bir Tobras. He had arrived from Azizia on foot in charge of thirty Arab carriers with stretchers, and his first experience of active service was not calculated to fan his enthusiasm. He had been at headquarters for five days, and had not yet discovered who was really responsible for anything. He told me that he was bewildered by the administrative chaos which paralyzed individual effort. That day he had been sent off from Azizia at a moment's notice and without breakfast, informed that he would have dinner at the other end. With this cold comfort and his thirty carriers, he trudged for five hours, and on arrival at the front he found even that comfort illusory. After making a fruitless application for food to the local Commandant, he went forth to forage for himself, and returned with a few potatoes, which he got a soldier to boil for him. Afterwards he prevailed upon another soldier to give him some boiled rice. But by the time he had obtained this dinner he was far too exhausted to enjoy it—five hours' march in sun and sand on an empty stomach had made him sick. So he ate only three potatoes and two spoonfuls of rice,

and lay down to rest, with a stretcher for his couch and a splitting headache for his bed-fellow.

The wretched carriers were even in a worse plight. They were paid off—one bu-tissain (fourpence halfpenny) per man—and told to find food for themselves. Two of them came to me and implored me to let them have a drop of water. I had already made their acquaintance at Azizia.

Like all their colleagues, they were crude camp-followers—local ragamuffins of all complexions—recruited by the Red Crescent on the spot, and drilled by Ahmed Ben Slama. Their instruction was a curious and entertaining spectacle: a lot of bare-footed scarecrows drawn up in line, numbered, and taught to answer to their respective numbers, to step, halt, and turn about at the word of command. They seemed to look upon the performance as a novel sort of game, and they entered into the spirit of it with wonderful docility and gaiety. But their joy reached its climax with the second stage—stretcher-drill.

As the Red Crescent stretchers had not yet arrived, a plain deal-wood bier had to be employed instead. Two of the scarecrows were picked out to carry the frame and one to personify the wounded. The latter laid himself out upon the bier—upon which many corpses had already been borne to the grave—laughing, and he played the part to the delight of all concerned—instructor, carriers, and spectators.

An important branch of their teaching, and a branch which they grasped as quickly as every other, might be termed "moral instruction." Ahmed warned each scallawag, under the direst penalties, that it was his duty to treat the wounded enemies exactly as if they were friends. Although the idea of treating an enemy as a friend was both incomprehensible and distasteful to the pupils, yet they seemed to assent to it readily—it was part of the strange game.

The quickness with which these raw recruits mastered their lesson, and the alacrity with which they carried out the orders given to them, contrasted most pathetically with their clumsy attire, and I sympathized with Ahmed Ben Slama in his lament on the lack of garments better suited to the work than the voluminous hrams, which impeded the free action of their arms. The absence of proper blouses for the carriers was typical of the general inadequacy of equipment and manifold

inefficiency which characterizes our Red Crescent disorganization. And that in its turn is only typical of the spirit that pervades the whole administration of our camp, to the detriment of the sick and sound, of men and beasts alike.

I have already noted the dearth of remounts. I expected that something would be done to remedy this defect at least, and relieve the worn out animals. Barbary has always been famous as a breeder of horses, and the Turkish War Office, up to the eve of the war, used to get many of its remounts from Tripoli. The sheikhs who come from the interior are superbly mounted. In brief, horses are easy to buy, and there is the money to buy them with ; but they are not bought.

The Turks could also have organized a camel-corps, as we have done in the Sudan and in India. Plenty of trotting camels are to be had. Yet I have seen only a few such camels, and those employed only for carrying despatches.

This brings me to another thing which should have been done without delay, and is not done at all—the establishment of quicker means of communication between headquarters and the advanced posts. Whilst still at Ain Zara, the absence of such communication—by telegraph, heliograph, telephone, or some system of signalling—had made itself felt. Since the retreat from that place I have shown how the same lack has made us miss a great success at Bir Tobras. I expected that the defect, once brought home to the Staff in so striking a manner, would have been remedied with the utmost speed. Not a bit of it. Heliograph, perhaps, is impracticable ; but why not perfect the telegraph which is already in existence ?

I knew, of course, before I came to Tripolitania that telegraphic communications were as undeveloped as everything else in the province ; but it was only on my journey to Saniat Beni Adam that I was induced to pay special attention to the matter. As I travelled along, I saw a telegraph-wire bulging loosely between rough-hewn palm-trunks, and in parts almost touching the ground, at the mercy of any misguided camel's legs and of any mischief-maker's whim. I also saw lying about by the roadside some cast-iron telegraph-posts made in England. As such things do not grow spontaneously in the desert, I tried to find out how they came to be there, and this is what I gathered.

At some time or other, perhaps after the Revolution, the Porte had decided to perfect the telegraphic system in the province, and voted a sum of money for the purpose; but the persons to whom the job was entrusted devoted most of that money to their own pockets—hence the small number of lines and the great number of gaps by which they are broken. After the beginning of the war, the Staff, I was told, had realized the advantage of more continuous lines, and their theoretical conviction found a characteristic expression in the line between Gharian and Dehibat.

That line is the best channel of communication between our camp and the outside world, and the gap causes a whole day's delay, as the messages, after reaching Nalut, have to be carried to the French telegraph-post at Dehibat by couriers, the result being that a despatch takes two days to reach Constantinople. This would never do. The gap should be patched up.

In course of time a donkey, loaded with a coil of wire and a Syrian telegraphist, set out from Gharian and travelled to Nalut, followed by a camel carrying two of the cast-iron English posts I have already mentioned. These posts were duly set up, the wire was stretched upon them, and then camel, donkey, and telegraphist, returned to Gharian for more posts and wire.

The work, I am assured, is still in progress, but it is necessarily retarded by the camel, which objects to the clatter made by the two cast-iron posts on its back, and persists in shaking them off periodically. When I heard this, I predicted that the war would be finished before the line. My Turkish collo-cutor shook his head in slow but emphatic dissent.\*

Such is the Turk in all matters that appertain to government. I already knew him at home, and now that I have known him in camp, I find him just the same—*domi militiceque semper idem*. The faults which have made him fail utterly as a statesman prevent him from succeeding to the extent to which he might, in view of his matchless military virtues, as a soldier. He knows how to die, but not how to live.

“ *Yavash, yavash* ” (Slowly, slowly), his favourite maxim, being interpreted, means: Never do to-day what can—or even

\* The event proved that he was right and I wrong. It is true that three months later, when I left Azizia for good, the line was not yet finished, but, then, neither was the war.

cannot—be put off till to-morrow. Upon this moral principle he bases his conduct both in peace and in war.

The love of procrastination often prevails even where prompt action is dictated by the instinct of self-preservation. Where mere comfort and convenience are at stake, it carries the day without a struggle. I have heard Staff officers recognize the manifold disadvantages of Azizia as clearly as I recognize them myself, yet I have seen no effort made to move the headquarters elsewhere. I have heard Red Crescent doctors dwell on the advisability of moving their hospital tents to a more salubrious spot, yet I have seen no attempt made to act on that conviction.

But the most amusing instance of the Turk's choice to suffer rather than to act was offered to me by the officers of a garrison where I spent a few days. Their cook had been infected by the Arab passion for red pepper, with the result that we all had to quaff oceans of water to extinguish the conflagration in our mouths. This occurred at every meal, and at every meal I heard the remark: "Ah, Ibrahim has put too much fil-fil again!"

It would have been so easy to order Ibrahim to discontinue his lavish expenditure of fil-fil; but somehow it did not occur to any of my mess-mates to give the necessary order.

Now, all this, to one fresh from the relentless method, the iron fixity, the mechanical regularity of the West, is most charming. There is romance about it, there is poetry, there is adventure. But it won't work; or, rather, it works after a most queer manner. Its simplicity is only superficial. When closely examined, it is seen to lead to complications. Everybody's business is to do everything, the upshot being that nobody does anything. "Coast lights," a wise man has remarked, "are good. Yet, multiplied, they complicate navigation." At all events, they make navigation much more uncomfortable than it need be.

## CHAPTER XV

### OFF TO THE FRONT

SEVERAL weeks have passed, with nothing to break the even flow of our existence. Each day's sun rising over the shoulder of the Sidi Ramadan Hill lights up the same scene.

The sleeping beauty of the desert awakes slowly, and together with it awakes the life of the camp. As soon as the sunbeams fall level across the plain, drying up the dewdrops that glitter upon its bosom and turning its patchwork of brown sand and grey scrub into a mantle of gold, Azizia begins to stir. First the larks and sparrows are heard trilling and twittering as they flit hither and thither picking up their morning meal. Next the Arab women are seen gathering round the well with their pitchers on their shoulders, and presently the musical creaking of the windlass mingles with the songs of the birds. Then the warriors, camping or bivouacking out in the plain, push the hrams off their faces, and, rising to their feet, set to work to prepare their breakfast. By-and-by little columns of blue smoke curl up from the midst of squatting rings, filling the chilly, crisp air with the pungent smell of burning brushwood. Meanwhile the Turkish Tommies have also shaken off sleep, and are slouching about on their various errands.

At the same time the little donkeys burst into their hymn—one leading, the others joining in a symphony of prolonged discord. The sheep bleat as they are driven to the slaughter, and the fat Hussein has loaded his narghileh. I see him sauntering across the market-place, carrying the bottle in one hand, and with the other lifting the long tube to his lips.

And so the day wears out and the sun sinks behind the Jebel range. The mountains stand out for a brief while blue

and bold against the regal red, purple, and orange tints of the sky, then they are fused in the soft dusk which trembles tenderly over the desert. The cry of the muezzin floats upon the serenity of the twilight, the stars begin to sparkle up above, and the gloom of the plain below is pierced by the red glow of the Arab evening fires. A cricket may be heard chirping in the scrub despite the night cold; an owl hoots dismally here, and some pariah dogs bark there. But above these sounds rise the weird, monotonous chants of the holy warriors, dominating the scene and giving to it a meaning.

After a time the human voices die out, the dogs bark intermittently, the shrill song of the cricket reasserts itself, and the owl goes on hooting in the wilderness.

Sometimes when I wake up in the middle of the night I see the Italian searchlights from Ain Zara and Bu Meliana playing upon the desert, like a pair of giant lances, now thrusting now standing erect, now crossing each other, and again returning to rest. These performances come to remind us of the existence of the enemy and to intensify our auxiliaries' impatience. They have left their far-off homes, not to study the risings and settings of the sun with us, but impelled by other desires. They wish to return to their homes, but not until those desires have been gratified. Otherwise they fear that their women and their children will jeer at them, saying: "What did you go to the war for—to eat and drink only?"

This is the sentiment I have heard expressed by the three brothers from Wargla, and Haj Mohammed shares it. He has been persecuting the doctors with daily inquiries as to how soon they will allow him to go back to the front. "I have not come here to do nothing," he said to me one day. "I could do nothing much better at Gabes—or there, perhaps, I could do something. Here the only thing I have to do is to fight."

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At last Haj Mohammed's wound was pronounced completely healed, and he obtained the long-demanded leave to return to the front, together with his companion-in-arms, Ismail Effendi, whose wound was also nearly healed. They told me that they were going back to their old positions on our right wing, and, as experience had already taught me that I was much more likely to see interesting things in the company of the two humble



Lieutenants than in that of our General Staff, I decided to go with them.

There was only one difficulty—what about food at the front? At Azizia I had so far managed to exist somehow without a servant, but should I be able to do so at Ben Gashir? Haj Mohammed assured me that the question should not worry me in the least. He would undertake to make me comfortable; for, he said, he wished to re-enter into my service, so that when he returned home he might be able to describe himself as the follower of a non-combatant, and thus avoid any trouble that might threaten him from the French authorities through his active participation in the war. I replied that, if he really meant to keep his word this time and did for me all that he promised, I would overlook the past, and lend him my protection.

On the morning following the conclusion of this solemn covenant he received his marching orders, and I immediately rolled up my rugs, threw some provisions into a bag, and set forth on the back of a camel which Haj Mohammed procured for me. He was to follow with the three brothers from Wargla.

I started at 10.30 a.m., glad to quit the unsightly court of our Kasr, and to escape from the pestilential atmosphere of the Azizia camp into the pure air of the desert. I had not gone very far when I was overtaken by Haj Mohammed, mounted on a black steed, and the three Algerians, mounted on their m'harris. He had been unable to obtain a costume more congruous with his martial rôle, and was still dressed in the greasy grey jacket, with the Italian bullet-hole through pocket and back and the artificial red rose in its buttonhole, and in the dirty india-rubber collar with which he had left Gabes. But he displayed a bandolier full of slim Italian cartridges round his waist, and the long black tassel of his low red fez flowed, after a most warlike fashion, over the hood of a new silk burnous—no doubt the very garment he pretended to have lost during our journey from Ben Gardane. He formed a comic contrast to the three Algerians, in their clean white draperies and head-kerchiefs, who, perched on their tall, long-legged camels, swung beside him at a shuffling trot.

We exchanged salaams, and they passed on. For some time I could see them ahead of me bounding up the rises and down

the hollows of the road, three spots of white gleaming brightly amid the sombre greys and browns of the desert. Then they disappeared behind the sand-dunes in the north, and I jogged on alone across a region that seemed created specially for guerilla warfare.

The ground on either hand was dotted densely with low knolls, all crowned with brakes of brushwood or of cactus, and each big enough to afford cover to a dozen sharp-shooters. Here and there it was intersected by bleak ridges and broken valleys of bare sand, so soft and loose that even my camel's spongy feet sank deep into the soil.

In the former parts, the wilderness was mitigated by occasional wells that gaped in the middle of open, circular clearings, beaten hollow and hard by the tread of immemorial caravans. In these parts I met several men and women digging in the soil for roots, while their sheep, goats, cows, and camels, browsed at large on the thin grass that was now beginning to sprout, thanks to the late rains. They were poor, peaceful peasants, and, mistaking me for a Turkish officer, they greeted me as I jogged by with "*Naharak mabruk, Effendi!*" (May your day be blessed, sir!)

But in the tracts of pure sand, solitude reigned supreme. There was no vegetation there, save, perhaps, some tufts of anæmic scrub struggling through the yellow surface, only to be swallowed up again; no living thing, save a little lizard scuttling across the path that wound its tortuous way between huge billows of sand, or a little snake basking, curled up, in the sun; no sound, save that of the wind whistling sorrowfully between the bare sand-hills, scoring their smooth sides with delicate ripples, and sweeping off their surface puffs of fine sand-spray.

It is in these lonely tracts that one realizes the dread power of the desert. There is no desolation in the whole world like the desolation of sand. The sea, even in her calmest moments, is animated with a hint of lurking life. The desert, in spite of her waves and troughs, contains no such hint. It is a sea from which life seems to have departed finally and irrevocably. Even the ripples that score the sides of her waves and the spray that is wafted off their crests convey only suggestions of death. The utter desolation ends by entering into your

very soul, filling it with a dull, despairing sense of emptiness. You feel as if all that made up life has suddenly slipped away from you, and you are lost in an absolute void—a soul wandering without a place in the universe. You stop your ears to keep the unearthly silence out of them. You long for a noise to come and break the uncanny spell. And yet, when caravan meets caravan and the camel-drivers' high-pitched voices cut keen and clear through the stillness, they produce on you an agonizing sensation akin to sharp physical pain. You curse them, and welcome the silence that ensues. By-and-by the slow, rhythmic swaying of the camel backwards and forwards lulls you into a doze—you close your weary eyes for what seems a long, long time; then you open them again, and you are confronted by the same eternal yellow sand, swelling and sinking and glittering in the sun. You are no longer asleep, and yet you are not awake. The brain, dazzled, numbed, exhausted, refuses to think coherently, but falls into a dreamy haziness, through which the coats of the camels and the cloaks of the Arabs seem to blend with the sand and scrub around you into a dull, confused mass of greys and browns, too vague, indistinct, and indefinite, to be even a picture of monotony.

In this mental state I jogged on, trying to resist the inner depression by seizing upon such new features in the landscape as presented themselves from time to time. Now it was a small dome of a saint's tomb smiling all white amid the grey bushes on the top of a knoll. We reached it and passed it, leaving it on our left.

After a while the flat, whitewashed roofs of some buildings peeped over the skyline. When we drew near, I found that it was one of our advanced posts—Fenduk es Shereef—a tumble-down mud enclosure with two or three blind hovels opening into it, and next to it a cactus-hedged garden.

We went by without stopping, and now found ourselves in the Wadi Mejneen—a broad, sandy watercourse which two months before, swollen by the rains, rolled an angry and muddy flood that nearly swamped the Italians out of Tripoli. Now it lay under our feet, dry and broken by landslides, and on each side of it spread a flat plain, greenish with young grass and studded with many gardens.

The wind, a mild, cool breeze when I started, had grown stronger and colder as I went on, and now it blew hard from the north, veiling the sun with floating clouds, flecking the sun-steeped sand with cloud-shadows, and changing the colour of the dunes from pale yellow into deep dull brown.

Very glad was I to see, all of a sudden, at the mouth of the hollow wadi, some white bell-tents, the tents of Ben Gashir—and the end of my journey.

## CHAPTER XVI

### AT FENDUK BEN GASHIR

BEN GASHIR is not more than twelve miles from Azizia ; but, thanks to the nature of the ground and of my mount, I had spent five and a half hours in reaching it.

The white bell-tents I saw first harbour a handful of Turkish regular infantry. Beside them stands a camp of Arab auxiliaries—some twenty-five black tents, with about fifteen saddled horses tethered outside them. Farther away to the left are quartered the Turkish cavalry—half a dozen bell-tents, with some thirty-five horses picketed among them.

I rode between the camps towards one of the two buildings which, together with a garden, make up the estate of the Sons of Gashir. I threaded my way across the crowded suk and dismounted at the fenduk, which is now the local Commandant's headquarters. I had no sooner reached the gate, when the clouds that had been gathering burst, and I was grateful to find myself under its protecting archway. My things were hastily taken off the camel into one of the blind rooms close to the gate, while I was conducted into another where I found the Commandant, Hamid Zaffir Bey—a Turkish Major of middle age and middle stature, with a short neck and a short black beard growing thick and covering completely the lower part of a very solemn face. His manner, as he received me, was kind, quiet, and dignified ; his voice, as he bade me welcome, was slow and measured ; the look of his eyes, as they met mine, was calm, steady, confident, and confidence-inspiring. I at once recognized him as one of the old-fashioned Turks whose personal character I have always liked and admired, and I was not surprised to find out that he was reckoned one of the bravest and most pious defenders of the Sultan's sovereignty in Tripolitania.

With the Commandant, at the moment of my arrival, were half a dozen Arabs, seated on a blanket spread on the earth floor. I sat down on the Commandant's camp-bed, which stretched from end to end along one of the sides of the narrow apartment, and looked down on the strange group, trying to distinguish their features in the dim twilight that found its way through the door.

Salaams over, they resumed the occupation momentarily interrupted by my entrance. They seemed engaged in a furious and general dispute, shrieking and gesticulating like men filled with a dozen jinns apiece. So shrill were their voices and so emphatic their gestures that I almost expected to see them next fall to blows. But Hamid Bey sat listening, speaking very seldom. His attitude was reassuring. In fact, what had sounded and seemed to me like a furious dispute was only a friendly conversation in the Arab style—and a profoundly interesting conversation it was.

One of the Arabs—a young man over-clad in a heterogeneous combination of Bedouin, Tripolitan, and Algerian garments, and over-armed with a rifle, four bandoliers of cartridges, and a curved sword—was just narrating a dream he had had the night before. He had dreamed that he had strayed into the Italian camp at Ain Zara, and stood all alone in the midst of the enemy's tents. He did not know how he had got there, nor how he was to get out again, and was greatly frightened. All of a sudden a long-bearded old man approached him and said: "My son, what is it that frightens thee?" He replied: "My father, I am afraid of the Italians; they are many, and I am alone." Then the old man took him by the hand and pointed to the tents, and, behold! they were full of Turks and Arabs. The bearded old man was, of course, Sidi Abdul Kader, a saint of repute buried to the south of Tarhuna, on a spot which bears his name. The narrator interpreted his dream as an excellent omen for the near future, and all the hearers concurred in this interpretation, only qualifying their confidence with a pious "*Inshallah!*"

Presently the party dispersed, and we had dinner—the Commandant, a doctor, and one or two officers. Our meal included *koftés*—balls of minced meat, which I ate with my fingers and great pleasure—a sort of sauce which I durst not

approach, and enormous round, thin cakes of barley bread scarcely baked. They are so soft and so large that they are usually folded up for convenience. I thought they would make excellent door-mats; but my hosts ate them without any apparent effort.

Our conversation turned, for the most part, on the stupendous folly of letting the Italians set foot in Tripoli at all. Hamid Bey had arrived in the town from Constantinople twenty days before the war with a commission to purchase horses. Like many other Turks, he deplored the defencelessness in which he had found the place, denounced the late Grand Vizier Hakki as "*chok ahmak adam*" (a very stupid man), and bitterly complained of the German Ambassador, Baron Marschall von Bieberstein, for having brought this misfortune on the Ottoman Empire by his misleading assurances. However, what had happened had happened—" *Nayssa* " (So be it). Allah was good, and, despite our own errors and shortcomings, had helped us to hold our own.

After dinner I was conducted to the cactus-hedged garden beside the cavalry camp. There were in it a few tents, and I was allowed to share one of them with Mr. Alan Ostler, who had just followed me from Azizia.

\* \* \* \* \*

On the other side of the cactus-hedge that surrounds our garden there stands a row of ragged Arab tents and huts—some made of wattle, others partly of wattle and partly of shrubs, some entirely above ground, and others half underground. These miserable dwellings shelter a colony of poor natives, mostly refugees from the Tripoli oasis, which the Italians have pacified by depopulating.

A look into the colony is enough to teach you what a war of conquest means in reality: how terrible a thing it is, how iniquitous, how ugly, how unlike the picture drawn of it in school-texts of falsely called "history." Here is a withered old man, with a withered old baby in his lap, squatting outside one of the hovels. He squats with his eyes bent wearily to the baby, chanting by the hour imprecations on the Italians who drove him out of his home into the desert, and prayers for the men whom Allah has appointed to punish them for their inhumanity. I see him in the same posture every time

I pass, and every time I pass the picture he presents burns itself into my brain as I have seen pictures burnt into wood with a red-hot needle.

But I do not know that his dull, passive despair is more pathetic than the brave, stubborn activity of his fellows-in-misery. All the able-bodied males are engaged in the holy war; all the able-bodied females are engaged in domestic work—cooking over wood-fires, grinding barley in stone hand-mills, washing clothes—trying in various ways to earn a piastre and keep death at bay. Misery has not made them lose the Moslem woman's modesty, and as I go by they pull their dirty draperies half across the face, while they peer at the strange man out of eyes of unfathomable darkness. Only the little children and the cripples crawl out of the hovels, and come up to me holding out their palms and whining for alms.

In this awful collection of huts, which has come into being since the Turkish retreat of December 4th, I see an epitome of the Italian operations from the beginning of the war up to the present hour. They first cleared the immediate environs of Tripoli town of their inhabitants; then, as they pushed farther inland, they thrust them little by little to the extremities of the oasis. Finally, when the Turks lost their grip on the strongholds of Ain Zara and Suk el Juma, the inhabitants were driven right out into the desert. This, so far, has been the only practical result of the Italians' self-imposed mission for the prosperity of the country.

In spite of the vicinity of this melancholy settlement, I find the Garden of Ben Gashir a pleasant change from the Kasr of Azizia. It contains many date-palms and olive-trees, with vegetable-beds beneath their boughs, and a well standing on an artificial mound between two lofty whitewashed structures of mud and stone supporting the wooden framework of the windlass. This well provides an abundant supply of water, most refreshingly clear after the pea-soup of Azizia, and the kind Tommies from the cavalry camp close by are always ready to fill my pitcher for me. Of course, disappointments will occur. For example, the other morning, as the bucket drew near the mouth of the well, the rope suddenly broke, and the bucket dropped back into the depths with a mighty bang. "It is the sixth bucket I've lost in the same way," said the



Tommy, with a cheerful smile, in answer to my exclamation of dismay. "I must get another." In course of time he came back with a new bucket, improvised out of an old paraffin-oil tin, and I had my pitcher filled.

I had for the first day or two to depend on the Tommies for such little services, and also for the use of their fires. For Haj Mohammed, true to precedent, played me false again. I searched for him, and found him swaggering in the suk, with his hands in the pockets of his greasy grey jacket, his artificial red rose in his buttonhole, his dirty india-rubber collar round his neck, and his legs encased in a newly-purchased pair of slate-coloured breeches taken from a dead Italian. He was sorry he could do nothing for me. Thoughts of war engrossed his heroic soul to the exclusion of all humbler occupations. However, I explored the suk and found, to my immense joy, that there were boiled potatoes, dates, and coffee ready roasted and ground. The potatoes were flinty and the dates leathern; but I was hungry.

Then, joined by Ostler, I searched for utensils. No new ones were to be had in the market; but at last we saw in a shop a group of Arabs squatting round a boiling kettle. I forthwith stepped in and asked them how much they wanted for the stove, the kettle, and a teapot. At first they said they could not spare any of the articles; then they asked a fabulous price. We haggled, pretended to be going away, suffered ourselves to be tempted back, and so, in true Oriental fashion, we bought a second-hand kettle of enamelled tin, battered, smoke-grimed, and without a lid, for two francs; the Arab demanded four. Also a small teapot of enamelled tin, and—greatest treasure of all—a cylindrical earthenware stove, about ten inches high and five inches in diameter, with a wide mouth gapping on one side and three holes near the top.

Next we discovered and purchased charcoal at sevenpence halfpenny the oke (three pounds). Oh the luxury of having a fire all of one's own, and as much water as one needs to wash with! These treasures I shared with my companion, but we parted company at cooking. He had been clever enough to arrange with two French correspondents, who had recently arrived, to share their meals, and he fared sumptuously, for they had come with ample stores, and one of them was an

expert chef. I had to shift for myself, and managed to do so with the help of a little servant, whom Allah seems to have sent me in answer to my secret prayers.

It all happened just as things happen in the fairy-tales of the West and the real life of the East. I was awakened one morning by the rattle of tin pots and cups. I sat up, and saw a little Arab, dressed in a shabby shirt and a dirty old fez, down on his bare knees outside the tent scraping the aforesaid pots and cups with sand. I asked him who he was, and what he was doing. He replied that he had been employed the day before by my companion to carry some things from the suk, and he had come to-day of his own accord to serve me. I gazed at him amused. In appearance he was anything but a heaven-born angel. He had a mouth almost as wide as that of the earthenware stove; his nose curved upwards, and his brow bulged forwards; and, like many of the people of this land, he had something the matter with one of his eyes. In brief, he was a very ugly boy. But he could smile, and when he did one forgot the ugliness of his face. So I told him that he might stay.

When he had finished scraping the pots and cups, he got hold of my knife, fork, and spoon, and in a few minutes every one of these articles shone with a brilliance to which they had long been strangers. Then he ceased scraping, and, sitting back on his heels, squinted at me with his transfiguring smile as much as to say, "Well, what do you think of me?"

"You are a good boy," I said, and subjected him to a short catechism.

His name is Mohammed. He does not know how old he is, but he looks about thirteen. He can speak some broken Italian, and also knows two English words—"plyte" and "tyble." He has been in the employ of Italians and Maltese in Tripoli town, and he owes his English vocabulary to a master of that nationality—apparently a native of the eastern parts of the great British metropolis. He tells me that he has served Europeans ever since he was so high, and would have gone on serving them till he grew up; but, alas! the war interrupted his career. As soon as the Italians landed, he, with his mother and sister, left Tripoli in fear, and fled first to Sahel and thence to the south. Now they are among the dwellers in the hovels

on the other side of the cactus-hedge of our garden. How he regrets, poor boy, the life he has left behind! "I used to wear good, clean clothes and a white apron. I used to go to the theatre. I used to drink beer, and once I had some champagne—champagne very good drink. Here there is nothing—no beer, no wine, no cheese, not even milk. Only sand and wild Arabs making noise like donkeys."

Such is little Mohammed's history, and his character could not have been improved upon by any amount of training. He is as intelligent as he is industrious, absolutely trustworthy, and, most astonishing trait, absolutely trustful. He has not made any bargain, but is content with what I choose to give him from day to day. It would be impossible to find a servant more eager to please. I have only to say, "Mohammed, fire," and he is down on his hands and knees blowing upon the charcoal in the tiny earthenware stove as though he would burst. When the charcoal is glowing, I will say, "Now, Mohammed, we must make this bread eatable." He promptly takes the doughy loaf, cuts it into circular slices, and toasts them over the fire.

The air we breathe is as clear as the water we drink, and the birds that twitter among the trees during the day make up for the myriads of pariah dogs that bay at the moon during the night. My neighbours in the next tent—a Turkish Captain and a Syrian, a Kurdish and a Mesopotamian Lieutenant—seem to find life eminently worth living. Their standards of comfort are not our standards. The young Mesopotamian gentleman tells me that he is astonished and shocked at the number of French meals—*petit déjeuner*, *déjeuner*, dinner, supper! Allah! Allah! the amount these infidels eat! I wonder what he would have said had he known our English meals—tea, breakfast, lunch, tea, dinner, supper!

They seem to be as indifferent to the quality as to the quantity of food. Once only I heard invidious comparisons drawn between the bread consumed at headquarters and that at the advanced posts, where the loaves of Azizia only find their way in the wake of the Commander-in-Chief and his Staff when they pay to them a visit. Once only I heard one of the Lieutenants say that he was tired of rice, which is the main part of their daily diet, and suggest that it might be replaced

by haricot beans. "You can't have haricot beans, save now and then," answered the Captain; and there the matter ended.

These murmurings are as rare as they are natural—little flitting clouds which pass away, leaving no trace on the normal serenity of their stoical minds, and which do not in the least degree affect their determination to carry on the war to a final issue. Their conduct proves the sincerity of their conversational optimism. They are indefatigable in their efforts to make their slender resources go as far as possible.

Of an evening, after having despatched their kebobs and pillaf—or maybe pillaf only—which they eat from a fragmentary dish (two-thirds of a basin) by the light of a fragmentary lantern precariously hoisted to the roof of the tent, they produce a battered, smoke-grimed little kettle of tin, boil in it their tea, and then they break forth into song—dreamy, plaintive melodies which float across the moonlight and fall upon my ear like a soothing lullaby.

It must be stated that this lullaby is not a luxury, but an indispensable inducement to sleep. For, apart from the canine disturbances from outside, there is no lack of disturbing elements inside—things that fly, things that leap, and things that creep, all united in a cruel league against me. Sometimes the attack is irresistible, and I am forced to seek distraction in the open air.

The nights are cold, and the grass sparkles with half-frozen drops of moonlit dew. I try to keep warm by striding now among the trees of the garden, now among the horses that stand in the cavalry camp—saddled night and day—munching their chaff and oats in the chilly moonlight. Their equine equanimity rebukes my human frailty, and I return to my couch with a renewed determination to treat its tenants as things that "do not matter."

Philosophy and fatigue prevail in the end, and I slumber for a while. Then suddenly I wake up with a start—there is a weird sound of women's wails. It comes from the colony of refugees outside the garden. Someone must have died—perhaps one of the skinny little children. This sound spurs the packs of pariah dogs to emulation. A coryphæus begins, and is ably supported by a deep-toned chorus. And for the rest of the night there is an incessant concert of human and canine howls, which effectually murders sleep.



TURCO-ARAB FORCES AT FENDUK BEN GASHIR.

*The Photographer*



## CHAPTER XVII

### FROM THE CLOUDS

It is January. Three months have passed since the occupation of the capital, and the occupation of the province seems as far off as ever. The Italians continue making themselves safe and comfortable at Ain Zara. They have fortified the hills to the north of the small palm-grove, where the Turkish cavalry camp was, with four field-guns facing west, four field-guns facing east, and a great number of mountain-guns, ranged at intervals of about six yards along the slopes in front. On the crest of the ridge is installed the searchlight apparatus that disturbs our pariah dogs' peace of mind at night. To the south of the ridge is pitched a large infantry camp, well protected with trenches and entanglements of barbed wire.

In other directions, also, the little oasis has been transformed by the enemy's industry. To the two mud inns has been added a third building—wooden barracks for the cavalry—and, to complete the metamorphosis, they are now constructing a light railway from Tripoli for the transport of provisions.

Their force at Ain Zara is estimated at 12,000 men. But, not considering this army large enough to impress the Arabs, they endeavour to make it appear larger still by devices that remind me vividly of a provincial stage: a large number of boards, shaped and painted so as to look like soldiers, have been planted behind the trenches. If the Italians really believed that they would deceive the Arabs through this puerile trick, they must have sadly underrated the intelligence of our auxiliaries.

"We are not fools," said one of them to me, after describing the wooden tableau. "We saw at once that those soldiers were not alive, because they did not move at all."

However, the Italians show little more inclination to move

than their wooden dummies. The Turks and Arabs are doing their best to stir them into action by frequent demonstrations, but without success.

Sometimes the Italians send out similar parties of their own, but as soon as they see a Turkish or Arab patrol they immediately beat a retreat. Thus, the other day the Kurdish Lieutenant, Ahmed Hairi, while patrolling with only two Turkish soldiers, came in sight of an Italian detachment of infantry and a squadron of cavalry. He forthwith ordered his men to get some distance off on either side of him and fire at the enemy from behind cover, while he himself fired from where he was. The Italians, apparently imagining that there were three hostile forces ready to attack them, hastened to retire to their trenches. No better illustration could be had of Turco-Arab audacity and Italian prudence.

It may be urged, of course, that the Italians who are described as fleeing before much inferior Turkish and Arab forces are simply scouts, and it is the duty of scouts to run away, and not to run any risks which might rob their Commander of the information they have acquired. But that is not how my friends here view the enemy's behaviour.

"Our plan," said a Turkish Lieutenant to me, "is to tempt them out of their trenches, beat them in the open, and then enter at their heels Ain Zara and even Tripoli. But they won't leave their trenches again—too much afraid after Bir Tobras."

"They have come to conquer our country," said an Arab sheikh to me on another occasion. "Let them do it. Why don't they come out and fight? It is because they have no heart!"

The enemy's idleness is all the more incomprehensible to me, because I know that they have lately been reinforced by a regiment of Lancers and other troops, which bring their total force in Tripoli town and the neighbourhood up to at least 50,000 men. The other evening I heard a cock-and-bull story which shows how the Arabs interpret that idleness. A band which had been prowling round Ain Zara brought the news that it had found fifty Italian soldiers frozen to death. I laughed at the absurdity of the fiction, and my Arab informant joined in the laugh. "But," he added, "they must be frozen, since with such a big army they are doing nothing!"



I confess that I share my neighbours' discontent. I had always found the Italians delightful as friends ; but as enemies I find them very disappointing. The most charitable hypothesis I can hazard on their behalf is that they are not really afraid, but that they only wish to mark well before they march. Meanwhile they make up for their timidity on land by a bold display of activity in the air.

Late in the afternoon of January 2nd we saw their captive balloon " Draken " glide slowly from behind the sand-dunes to the north of our camp. As it rose it caught the waning sunlight and stood out distinct—an oblong ball of gold afloat in the pale blue heavens. It shone brilliantly for a while ; then the light went out, and the balloon disappeared. It had gone up to reconnoitre. But I fear it saw very little ; for some time afterwards I read in the belated papers which reached us that the " ' Draken ' has not yet succeeded in discovering the point of the Turkish troops' concentration, which remains always unknown." I laughed when I read this. What concentration, and what Turkish troops ? All the Turkish troops that there are, are here. But apparently the Italians cannot believe that the few hundreds of regulars they see scattered over our various camps are the Turkish army, and are still scanning the desert for a non-existent concentration.

In the same way they profess to be entirely in the dark as to the Arab forces. Three spies arrested here the other day, and cross-examined by Hamid Bey, said that the Italians believe us to have 120,000 auxiliaries. Personally, I find it hard to credit the enemy with such grotesque ignorance. I am rather disposed to think that they affect inability to locate the Turkish army, and exaggerate the number of the Arab auxiliaries, in order to justify in the eyes of the world generally, and of their countrymen more particularly, their own inaction.

During the next four days the atmospheric conditions were not favourable to aeronautic displays. On the 3rd we had gusts of wind blustering among the olive-trees in our garden, and shaking our tents violently. Then came down hail pattering on our canvas roofs, followed by thunder and some heavy rain. All these things happened before noon. At midday the sun glanced through the clouds, and the sparrows began to chirp again in the trees. The rest of the day was taken up by

intermittent showers and spells of sunshine. On the 4th the sky was swept by strong breezes from the south.

Early on the morning of January 5th, however, I was awakened by a volley of rifle and revolver shots, accompanied by a dull drumming sound overhead. I stepped out of the tent, and saw Turks and Arabs staring up and firing at something in the sky. It was an Italian monoplane. It looked like a giant dragon-fly as it sped over our heads at a height of about 2,000 feet, with a loud humming. The sun-rays, striking aslant, touched the edges of its wings with gold. It did not seem to heed our shots, but flew gracefully and surely from north-east to south-west. A few hours later it reappeared, flying in the opposite direction. It had made a complete tour of all our camps, circled over the Sidi Ramadan Hill at Azizia, and it was now steering straight back to Tripoli. Next morning it appeared again, but, instead of passing our camp, it just whirred over our heads in a wide curve from north-east to north-west and vanished. The Arabs, beyond emptying their rifles at the visitor, showed small emotion at the visit. I could detect no consternation or dismay, scarce even surprise, in their faces. Although so excitable, their minds are not really impressionable. They have an enormous capacity for taking new things as matters of course, and their habitual attitude is one of *nil admirari*. Certainly nothing the Rûm can do will ever astonish them. They are convinced that Allah has given this world up to the infidels to play in, and that he will punish them for their presumptuous puerility in the next.

The Turkish officers took a different view of the matter. "These reconnaissances," they said, "show that the Italians mean to do something at last;" and they were glad. Alas! all the Italians did was to drop from the clouds bundles of proclamations to the Arabs. The sheets fluttered in the air for a while—like so many flakes of toy snow—and then slowly settled on the ground. The Arabs left off firing, and, stooping, picked the sheets up eagerly, in the vain hope that they might be bank-notes. The performance was worthy of Italy's best theatrical traditions.

I secured one of these documents. It is printed on a large sheet of cheap native paper, and written in excellent Arabic. The composition is embellished with apt quotations from the

celebrated historian Ibn Khaldun, and from the Koran, and at the end it bears the signet of General Thomas Salsazo, "Lieutenant-Governor." It runs as follows :

" O DWELLERS AND WANDERERS,

" Let it not be hidden from you that Italy (may Allah strengthen her !), in determining to occupy this land, aims at serving your interests as well as ours, and at assuring our mutual welfare by driving out the Turks. Beware lest the traitors deceive you by posing as your friends in order the better to ruin you. How can you believe them ? They have always despised you. They have murdered your great men. They have given you promises which they have not fulfilled. We, on the other hand, have studied your customs and your history. We know that you keep your word, and that the Turks oppress you by taxation and conscription. You are in indescribable misery, therefore we wish to save you. Be assured that the annexation of Tripolitania will prove a good thing for you. The future will show you this, and then you will be grateful to us.

" We desire your happiness and prosperity. We want you to make progress in agriculture for your own and our profit. Do not believe those who may tell you that we have come here to confiscate your goods, in order to give them to our own colonists. Never ! These are lies, calumnies, intended to mislead you.

" We respect your noble religion because we recognize its merits, and we respect also your women. Woe unto him who will venture to touch them ! It is true that we belong to another faith, but we also are People with a Book (Ahl el Kitab), and we practise justice and give alms to the poor. We recognize the rights of all men, and especially of the Arabs, about whom history records so many great things.

" We are addressing this to you so that you may no longer take part in the war with the Turks, and let yourselves be killed to no purpose, and perish as the dust scattered by the wind. Do you not know that a weak State cannot resist a powerful nation ? Do you not know that ' iron is subdued only by iron ' ? War is like this. You are simple inhabitants, and know not the art of war. There is no doubt that, with God's help, we shall drive the Turks out of this country. In that

event, what will become of you, if you persist in fighting with the Turks? Great Italy has an innumerable army of heroes. Her engines of war are terrible, as you have seen for yourselves. Therefore, leave us to settle the question with the Turks, and then we shall say, 'Let bygones be bygones.' Whoever gives up fighting from this moment need never fear of being punished.

"We have learnt that the Turks have spread among you a report that we have killed the women and the children of the oasis. No! It is not true. Your own countrymen will tell you so. Only we have killed some traitors, who, after having submitted to us, fired on our soldiers in the back.

"*Justice is the foundation of a State.*"

"O Arabs! You know that this is the time for tilling and sowing. Leave the Turks and till your lands, since for five years drought has reigned in your country. We will give you seed and cattle sufficient for your needs. We intend to lighten the taxes, to exempt you from military service, and to employ your own chiefs as public officials, so that they may govern you according to your customs and traditions, and to pay them big salaries, so that they may not fleece you, but govern you justly.

"If you are grateful to us, we also shall be grateful to you. The Italian Government is your father, and you are its children. Therefore, beware of those who wish your ruin. Have you not seen that in fighting you are placed in the first line, while the Turks march behind you, so that they may flee from the battlefield and expose you to the fire of our guns and rifles?"

"Believe in God, have pity on your children and your little ones, *and throw not yourselves with your own hands into perdition.*

"Greetings to those among you who will take to the path of God!"

The Italian aviators were so pleased with themselves that they repeated their performance. One day they dropped over us a report in Arabic of the successes of the Italian fleet in the Red Sea. It was in the form of a telegram from the Cabinet at Rome to the "Viceroy of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica," and it announced how Turkish men-of-war, carrying troops and arms to Tripoli, were destroyed or captured by the Italian cruisers.

This missive was followed by a third proclamation, signed by

the Italian Commander-in-Chief, Carlo Caneva, and couched in the terms of an ultimatum :

“ Why do you not come to us ? Are prayers in the mosque and a peaceful life in the bosom of your families matters of no moment to you ? Do you not care for your flocks and your commerce ? We also have a Religion and are People with a Book. We enjoy liberty. Know that the great Italy, after having conquered your mother Tripoli, has become your father. Therefore, come to us without fear, and we assure you that no one will hurt you. What is past is past. Besides, know that whoever gives up to us a rifle with its cartridges shall get twenty francs and a sack of wheat or barley. As to your religious and political chiefs, the Italian Government will not only confirm them in the positions they already hold, but will give them rank and official posts.

“ We tell you this for the last time. God is merciful. Ask Him to give you sense that you may understand the truth and be saved.”

The Arab warriors who read these “ letters,” as they called them, laughed in derision. But Hamid Bey hastened to collect them, so that their contents might not poison the minds of those to whom they were addressed. It was a wise precaution. For, although there is small fear of the Arabs selling their liberty for the problematical mess of pottage promised by the enemy, these manifestoes were cleverly calculated to widen such dissension as there is between Arab and Turk. The Italians have from the first counted on that dissension, and, though the united resistance they have met with must have disillusioned them, yet they continue to hope that the hardships of a prolonged campaign will bring about a disruption. To accelerate this much-desired consummation is the main object of their pathetic appeals to the Arabs to allow themselves to be conquered.

Now, all that I have seen has gone to convince me that the Italians have terribly overrated the gulf that separates the Turk from the Arab, though the existence of a certain antipathy between the two elements is undeniable, and, indeed, inevitable, in view of their widely different temperaments. The

## الى صرب طرابلس الغرب

ماذا يصدقكم عن القدوم الينا . اما تهكم الصلوة  
 في الجوامع والراحة اتم وعنا ثلاثكم في سيوتكم . اما  
 بهمكم رعى مواشيكم وتساطي تجاراتكم آمنين . نحن  
 أناس اصحاب دين ومن اهل الكتاب واحرار  
 واعلموا ان دولة ايطاليا المظمنة قد اعطيت لكم عقام  
 الوالد بعد ان اخذت امكم وهي طرابلس الغرب .  
 فاقدموا الينا بلا خوف وبكمال الامان ونحن نوكد لكم  
 انه ليس من يؤذبهكم وما من يسى اليكم او يضركم بادنى  
 شئ فان الماضى لا يذكروا واعلموا ان كل من يأتي الينا  
 يبارودته مع المهمات نمحسن اليه بمشرين فرنكا مع كيس  
 قمح او شمير كيفما شاء . اما رؤسائكم الدينون والسياسيون  
 فان الحكومة الايطالية تقبلهم وتؤيدهم بالصفة التي كانوا  
 عليها قبلاً . بل تعين لهم روائب ومعاشات .

وناهيكم ان الكلام واحد والله سبحانه وتعالى كريم  
 فاطلبوا اليه عز وجل ان يفتح عيون عقلكم لتعرفوا  
 الحق وهو بمخلصكم

طرابلس الغرب في ١٥ كانون الثاني سنة ١٩١٢  
 قائد جيش الاحتلال في طرابلس الغرب وسنازي

المشير

كارلو كاييفا

ordinary Turk differs from the ordinary Arab in the same way as an ideal Teuton, embodying all the Teutonic characteristics in their most extreme form, would differ from an ideal Celt similarly endowed with all the Celtic characteristics in their most unmitigated form.

Between two such antagonistic types sympathy would be unnatural. And the Turks have done little or nothing to create it artificially. They only attempt to conciliate the Arabs by sparing their susceptibilities, by not interfering with their habits, and by trying as far as possible to meet their demands for money. No camels are requisitioned by the military authorities, but the camel-drivers who let to them their beasts are handsomely paid in advance, and are allowed to travel as lazily as they like. When, on our journey from the frontier, the Red Crescent camel-drivers lagged behind in the desert, and left their employers without their luggage at Rigdaleen, they were not even reprimanded. "We cannot in the actual circumstances afford to hurt their feelings," said one of the doctors to me then.

I have known caravans take two days over the eight hours' journey from Zawia to Azizia without a word of reproof. This is the general rule: a camel-driver may go out of his way to have a good time with his family, and then claim his *bakshish*. The military authorities show the same regard for Arab susceptibilities in their treatment of Arab property. The garden in which we are camped belongs to an Arab, and the Commandant is most particular that it shall not suffer more than is absolutely unavoidable. Animals are not allowed in it, and the other day one of the officers offended mortally a French correspondent by turning his donkey out of the cactus-hedged precincts.

Nor is that all. When it was found that the original allowance of one *bu-tissain* (fourpence halfpenny) a day did not satisfy the volunteers, it was raised by one-half; and to this, when money became plentiful, was added half a Turkish pound a month. Further, the inhabitants of the oases along the coast—Zanzur, Zawia, Ajilat, Zwara, and so forth—have been prevailed upon to leave their fields untilled by a generous pecuniary compensation, so that no agricultural cares may come to interrupt their military duties.

Now, all this is sound policy, and, so far as it goes, it has an excellent effect. "These Italian appeals are waste of energy," said to me a Tripolitan officer. "As long as there is money and ammunition, the Arabs will remain loyal to the Turks." I fully agreed with this pronouncement, for it coincides with my own observation. I find the Arabs hugely content with the war, and prepared to continue it indefinitely. No wonder! The war has brought the camel-drivers—the most numerous industrial class—lucrative employment on unprecedented terms. It has brought the fighters congenial employment under no less favourable conditions. It has brought money to all, and a consideration from their former masters such as they had never been accustomed to in time of peace. Besides these present advantages there is also the prospect of Italian plunder—not to add the equally certain prospect of eternal bliss. Yes, the Arabs are quite shrewd enough not to leave the feast in order to go for faggots.

Nevertheless, I believe the Turks could make much more of Arab loyalty if they paid greater attention to other things besides their allies' material interests. They seem to think that all they have to do to secure the permanent allegiance of the tribesmen is to feed them. They forget that human beings need sun as well as oats. They make no attempt to appeal to the Arab's heart and imagination as well as to his stomach. When the volunteers arrive, full of religious fervour and fiery zeal for the war, they are very rarely honoured with any attention from the Commander-in-Chief and his Staff. If I were in the Commander's place, I should make a point of always receiving them in person, addressing enthusiastic words to them, and organizing a semireligious, semipatriotic demonstration. I am sure that the Arabs would appreciate immensely this sort of thing. Again, I should have public prayers in which Turks and Arabs would join. As it is, the Arabs pray by themselves, and the Turks, with very few and rare exceptions, do not pray at all. This is not the way to earn the confidence of holy warriors, and I have heard a leading sheikh express in a scandalized whisper the suspicion that there are among us Turkish officers who do not believe in God. Thus the religious tie—the only tie that binds the Arab to the Turk—instead of being drawn tighter, is suffered to relax. Nor is any social tie put in its place. No effort is made to cultivate



close and cordial relations between the two elements. In each camp the Turks are quite separate from the Arabs, for whom they entertain a most unreasonable contempt.

“What! take Tripoli with this breechless rabble! Pooh!” exclaimed to me one day an Albanian sergeant. “Give me Albanians, or Greeks, or Bulgars, or Montenegrins—those are men. These are only shrieking geese.”

This speech was typical of the attitude which the regulars maintain towards the volunteers. The officers share these sentiments. They despise the Arab for his defects, and do nothing to correct them.

“No drilling of these wild bashi-bazuks is possible,” they say, with a shrug of the shoulders.

The Arab's superior intelligence seems to deepen the dislike that arises from his inferior discipline and from his different temperament.

“We don't trust the Arabs,” said to me a Turkish officer. “They are too clever and too malicious.”

So the real leaders of the Arabs are the two Deputies, Ferhat and Suleiman el Baroni, who meet them on arrival, consort with them in camp, exhort them, and earn their affection and respect.

All this shows a lamentable want of imaginative comprehension on the Turk's part—precisely the want which has always made him fail as a leader of men. However good the Turk may be as a conqueror of bodies, he is no conqueror of hearts.

This failing has in the present case led to a good deal of disgust, distrust, and discontent, which might otherwise have been avoided. The Arabs are chilled by Turkish aloofness, and exasperated by Turkish lack of dash and initiative.

If the Turk scorns the Arab for his excitability, the Arab scorns the Turk for his stolidity. I have heard Arabs blame the Turks for sleeping too much. “He sleeps ten hours a day,” said a sheikh to me, referring to a Turkish officer in a position of command; and then he added, as though he was paraphrasing Homer: “To sleep all night through beseemeth not one that is a Commander, to whom people are entrusted and so many cares belong. I, being an ally, and having come from afar—far off is the country where I left my dear wife and children, and my great wealth, that each one covets that is in need—yet for all that I urge on my men, and myself am eager

to fight, and I sleep only three hours. Then it behoves to give thought to all these things by night and by day, and to exhort and set an example to the chiefs of the allies summoned from afar to hold on unflinchingly."

Of course, I listen to this, and to other tirades of the same kind, in a critical spirit, and make the necessary deductions. How can our Commander do more than he has done with the material at his disposal? The truth of the matter is that the Arabs dreamed of recapturing Tripoli, and enriching themselves with Italian plunder. They never asked themselves, How could this be done in face of the Italian fortifications, guns, and numbers? They only wished to see it done, and now, on finding that the Turks are not realizing their grandiose dream, are disappointed, disenchanted, and embittered. These feelings have recently found expression in two characteristic incidents.

The first occurred during one of the reconnaissances to which I have already alluded. As soon as the two hundred Arabs caught sight of an Italian squadron of cavalry outside the Ain Zard camp, they surrounded the Turkish officer and clamoured that he should let them attack the enemy straightway. The Turk tried to make clear to them the madness of such a proceeding. He explained that the Italians were too close to their trenches, and their assailants would find themselves exposed to the fire of the artillery from the camp.

"We must not attack them there," he said. "We must try to lure them away from their guns by feigning a retreat. When we have got them right out in the open, then we can attack them without fear of the guns. For they won't fire, lest they should hit their own men. Then at the sound of our rifles reinforcements will come to us, and we shall win a victory."

The Arabs would not listen to these arguments. They wanted to attack forthwith, and pursue the Italians into their trenches. The officer endeavoured to make them see that rushing into fortified trenches without artillery was sheer suicide. His words fell on deaf and defiant ears. They could not see his point. They thought that his reasoning was simply dictated by a strong desire to get away from danger. They became violent. They gesticulated, they shouted, they jeered, and abused the Turks as cowards who always hung behind, while they themselves risked their lives. It was hopeless

trying to reason with the enraged mob. Finally they turned back, swearing and fuming at their enforced inaction.

There can be no doubt, of course, that the Turk was right and the Arabs wrong. The latter behaved simply like naughty children. They wanted the fun and the excitement of a skirmish regardless of consequences. Their conception of war differs from the Turkish officer's conception as a lance differs from a magazine rifle. They are impatient of delay and incapable of self-restraint. They mistake prudence for poltroonery, and recklessness for prowess. They like to dash headlong against trenches, and to bring about a hand-to-hand fight. When the folly and futility of this course is pointed out to them, they say: "It is the only way to fight that is worthy of men." Experience has not modified their notion of warfare. They make little account of cannon-balls, and they treat the enemy's rifle bullets with a sublime indifference, which has ripened into pure disdain since they have found that these slim nickelled things of steel, unless they chance to hit the head or some vital part, pierce the body and come out clean on the other side, inflicting no harm beyond a temporary disablement. And even if they do die, what then? Is there not a heaven prepared for them?

All this is very noble and very inspiring, but it is not war, and it is easy to imagine the feelings of the poor Turkish officer during the scene above described. He had come out to command, and found himself forced to receive advice—and such advice, too! He had a very bad quarter of an hour that early morning, and I fully sympathized with him when afterwards he spoke bitterly of Arab insubordination. "They are people who have never heard of organization or tactics," he said. "They have not the faintest notion of discipline. They are just savages." At the same time, I was strongly tempted to ask: "Why have you not associated more closely with these impatient and impetuous children of the desert, and inspired them with respect for your ability and with confidence in your valour? They would not then have been so ready to mistake your caution for want of spirit. They are clever enough to see the point of an argument when it is properly brought before them, and they do obey the man they have learned to trust."

The other occurrence was of a different nature, but equally enlightening. Some days ago a report somehow was circulated among the holy warriors that an Italian General had come secretly to Saniat Beni Adam to see the local Commandant, while an Aide-de-Camp had been sent to Azizia to interview the Commander-in-Chief. The news made the holy warriors furious, and they swore to kill both the Italian guests and their Turkish hosts. When they got to headquarters, they found that they had been hoaxed, and felt ashamed of themselves. On investigation, it turned out that the canard had arisen from a foolish jest made by the cook of the Saniat Beni Adam Commandant. A negro had remarked to the cook, "*Mashallah*—what a banquet you are preparing!" And the cook facetiously replied: "To be sure, I must. We are having a big guest to-night—between ourselves, an Italian General."

These two incidents illustrate the instinctive mistrust that separates the Turk from the Arab. It is a mistrust that arises from incompatibility of temperament and mutual misapprehension. As I have already said, I think it might be removed. But I must add by way of qualification that in both the Turk and the Arab one has to reckon with habits of mind which are the growth of centuries. The Turk acknowledges his stolidity, and the Arab his excitability; but though they both admit their respective faults, neither can cure them. Each can only point out and deounce the other's. In the circumstances, a certain amount of friction is unavoidable. The Italians are aware of these conditions, and are doing their best to exploit them; hence their cleverly-concocted proclamations.\*

But, while laying these conditions bare, I am persuaded that the Italians will find themselves sadly disappointed if they rely too much on them. Be the friction between the two elements as serious as it may, it does not prevent co-operation. Of course, there are Arabs and Arabs. With some, no doubt, self-interest is the chief motive of action. The Italians,

\* Some seven weeks later the special correspondent of the *Temps* at Tripoli telegraphed to his paper that one evening an Arab messenger came to the Italian lines at Ain Zara from the Turkish camp, bringing a letter purporting to be from our Commander-in-Chief, Neshat Bey, to General Caneva. The event, the correspondent added, gave rise to much comment in Tripoli. I venture to express the opinion that the whole affair was an Italian comedy, intended to deepen the Arabs' suspicion of the Turks. In any case, it forms a curious parallel to the cook incident I have related.

both before and during the war, have been spending money in buying adherents, and they have met with some success among Arabs of that type. But that type of Arab does not represent the majority. Religious fervour, edged by hope of plunder and steeled by hunger of vengeance, is the spirit that animates the majority of these wild and brave volunteers, and, I repeat, as long as there is money to supply them with the pittance which suffices them for existence and cartridges to load their rifles with, they will go on fighting. The ordinary warriors made that plain to me by the derisive laughter with which they treated the contents of the Italian manifestoes.

Ferhat Bey, together with some of the sheikhs, indited an answer, addressed to the Italian Government and sent to Constantinople for publication through the Turkish Press.

It ran as follows :

“ We have read with our brothers the Turks the appeal which you have dropped in our camps. We consider it untrue, and so we wish to refute it in a few words.

“ We do not remember that the Turks have ever murdered our great men. On the contrary, it is you who have been the first to massacre our innocent people.

“ You pretend that the people you have massacred were men who used arms against you. Did the children of five years of age and the women whose limbs you cut in pieces use arms against you? Had we ourselves not seen these atrocities, perhaps we might have believed your words.

“ You pretend that you admire the grandeur of our religion, but is it not you who have destroyed the mosques which were full of people? Is it not you who have used the minarets of our temples as marks for your guns? Do not these deeds show that you have acted contrary to what you say?

“ You pretend that the Turks force us to the front of the fighting. But you must reflect that the Turks and we are one inseparable body in the Ottoman fatherland. Only they are our instructors, and that is why we are bound to shield them. It is they who have taught us military tactics in the battle of Bir Tobras, where we were but five hundred strong, and gained a victory over our enemies, who were five times more numerous than ourselves.

“ Had we not neglected their instructions, we are sure that we could have made prisoners of the whole regiment.

“ This land, is it not our fatherland ? Is it not a shame for a Government which pretends to religion to deceive with falsehoods warriors who fight for their country ?

“ We repeat that we will fight to the death, and we are determined to defend this land of sand to the last drop of our blood, and we will command our descendants to follow our example.

“ Therefore we advise you to get out of our country and leave us alone, and not to cause bloodshed for low greed.”

## CHAPTER XVIII

### EIGHT LANCES AND A BUGLER

THE reply to the Italian manifestoes indited by Ferhat Bey was emphatic enough, but more emphatic still was the practical answer which the holy warriors made of their own accord. The enemy's aerial displays appeared to have the effect of spurring them to emulation. "We shall soon retake Ain Zara—*Inshallah! Inshallah!*" they cried; and no power on earth seemed strong enough to check their impetuosity.

A few hours after the first appearance of the aeroplane we began to hear the boom of artillery. An Arab band had in broad daylight attacked an Italian outpost a little to the east of Ain Zara. The Italian guns opened fire, and the Arabs naturally were compelled to retire—not, however, without a few tangible tokens of their reckless intrepidity. Some Italian mules tethered at that outpost stampeded, leaving their halters behind them. The Arabs possessed themselves of these trophies—it was better than nothing—and continued to prowl about the Italian camp in small bodies, now on horseback, now on foot, as stealthily as foxes prowling about a poultry-yard.

In the afternoon of January 7th their perseverance was rewarded. Thirty Italian Lancers, under the command of an officer, had quitted Ain Zara, and proceeded a little way to the south-east towards a well. Eight mounted tribesmen from one of our advanced posts happened to be on the spot reconnoitring. They suddenly saw the skyline bristling with a small forest of dark little pennons flying from pointed staffs. The novelty of the sight aroused their curiosity. Leaving their horses behind, they crept cautiously forward and peeped over the scrub-covered hillocks. The Italians perceived them and opened fire. They replied. The sound of the rifles served as a signal for all the Arabs within earshot to hasten to the scene.

In the twinkling of an eye the suk at Ben Gashir was deserted, and hundreds upon hundreds of holy warriors rushed pell-mell towards Ain Zara, with yells and war-cries defying description. Where all these men came from none could tell. I had no idea we had so many auxiliaries around us. I had inspected the Arab camp again and again, and had only seen a few tents. However, here they were, and as soon as the alarm was given they sprang out of the earth, as it were, snatched up their rifles, and darted north. In vain did our Commandant Hamid tell them that Ain Zara was ten miles away, and by the time they got there the skirmish would be over. They rushed off as if their prosperity in this world and their salvation in the next depended on the speed of their bare heels.

Of course, long before they got to the scene the play was over. The eight tribesmen had managed to do the work by themselves, and after a most masterly fashion. While four replied to the enemy's fire in front, the other four divided into two groups, ran to right and left, and fired from behind the hillocks on either side, so as to create the impression that there was a large body threatening to surround the enemy. The ruse succeeded. The Italian Lancers, finding themselves confronted with an enemy whose real strength they had no means of estimating, harassed by the bullets that whizzed among them from invisible rifles, frightening their horses, and impeded in their movements by their lances, fled in disorder; and when the other Arabs got to the scene in the evening they saw the victorious tribesmen joyfully employed in searching the battle-field for loot. They joined in the search, and found scattered over the tortuous tracks among the knolls eight dead Lancers, whom they duly stripped.

Next morning they returned to camp, carrying eight long steel lances with dark blue pennons flying from them, a sword, and a few other odds and ends which the Italians had dropped in their flight. One of the trophy-bearers was clad in an Italian grey overcoat with a silver star on its collar. They were greeted with loud war-cries from the men and shrill ululations from the women, and then they proceeded to the headquarters at Azizia, where they delivered their trophies to the Commander-in-Chief, and received from him a bakshish.

This little affair, of small importance in itself, illustrated





THE THREE BROTHERS FROM WARGLA.

*Pol Tristan, phot.*



ITALIAN LANCES IN ARAB HANDS.

*Pol Tristan, phot.*



once more the imbecility of civilized modes of warfare in a primitive *milieu*. What is the use of heavy steel lances in a place where mobility is imperative? Admirably ornamental in the parade-ground, those implements would be an encumbrance in any battle-field, and in this kind of battle-field they are simply suicidal. The poor Lancers would have had enough to do to guide their horses over the broken, narrow, winding tracks, even if their hands were free. As it was, the double task proved too much for them. They moved to and fro, a mass of confusion, offering a splendid target to the scattered Arab sharpshooters, who fired from behind the scrub-covered knolls at leisure and in perfect security. For the rest, the captured trophies have served to prove to us the correctness of our information as to the arrival of a regiment of Lancers, and have supplied us with its number—the 9th.

The episode served other purposes as well. It served to prove how clever and resourceful these untutored warriors can be, and how brilliantly they can act on their own initiative. It also served to make them keener than ever in their hunt.

Four days passed, and on January 12th Allah again blessed the efforts of his children. A band of sixty Tarhuna tribesmen had crept up to the Italian lines, and were lying in wait for anything that might turn up. Suddenly a squadron of thirty-seven Italian horse, with an officer and bugler, came forth. The Arabs divided into two bodies, and attacked them from right and left. The Italians, who were apparently quite unaware of the proximity of the enemy, turned their horses' heads round and fled incontinently back toward their camp. The Arabs gave chase, firing on them, and had they refrained from attack till the Italians were farther away from their trenches, they would doubtless have done serious damage to them. As it was, all the Italians got back to cover safely, except one—their bugler.

Next day the prisoner was conducted by his captors and their sheikh to Azizia. They arrived at headquarters after dark, but the news of the event had travelled before them, and the whole camp was out to gaze on the rare bird of an Italian prisoner. They marched into the Kasr, and upstairs to the balcony; and while the sheikh with the captive was ushered into the Commander-in-Chief's room, the others—half a dozen

scallawags, one of whom limped with an old wound—squatting silently in the passage outside. Cigarettes were given to them, and presently half a dozen little flames glowed through the darkness. They sat still, smoking, without a word. Their bodies were tired with the long and rapid march, and their minds busy reckoning how much they would get as a reward for having spared the infidel's life. It was, of course, to be more than the sum they would have realized from the sale of his clothes. I understand that the Turks offer L.T. 5 for every live Italian; but so far we have got only six prisoners. Either the reward is not high enough, or the Italians are too careful to be taken.

After a brief conversation with the Staff, through an interpreter, the prisoner was brought out and handed over to the Turkish Tommies, who are to act as his guard and his hosts. He is a tall, pleasant youth, with large brown eyes, sunburnt cheeks, and a jolly laughing mouth. His name is Corini Nicola, and he comes from Velletri, a village to the south of Rome. I have found him very communicative, and he has given me a fluent account of his adventure.

They had come out of Ain Zara for a reconnaissance about half an hour after noon. They rode forth carelessly, scattered about, having no suspicion of danger. All of a sudden, when they were barely one and a half miles from their lines, they were met with a furious fusillade—bullets, fired at a distance of not more than a hundred mètres, whistled from two or three directions. They were taken utterly by surprise, for they had not seen a single Arab. There was nothing for it but to flee back. Infantry can drop down and fire from the ground; cavalry cannot. His officer—a native of the same village—set the example by turning his horse round and galloping off towards Ain Zara. The men followed. He tried to do likewise, but his horse plunged and reared, threw him off, and galloped away after the rest, carrying his arms and trumpet with it.

He had fallen on his knees and attempted to crawl away, taking cover behind the sand-hills, while the Arab bullets whizzed all round him. But, seeing that escape was impossible, he crouched on the ground. The Arabs pounced upon him, dived into his pockets, and took the few soldi he had, his handkerchief, his cigarettes—everything. They were so rough

in their search that they tore one of his trouser pockets. When they had taken all he had, they lifted him up and swept him off in a tempest of triumphant yells to their encampment, and straight into the tent of their sheikh—a fat Arab with one hand missing. All this time he was trembling for his life. But the sheikh patted him on the back with his one hand, and was kind to him. They slaughtered a sheep, gave him plenty to eat and drink, and he slept in the sheikh's tent.

Next morning he was taken to the first Turkish outpost at Fenduk el Aoon on foot, and he was there completely reassured on seeing regular soldiers' uniforms. At midday he was placed on horseback and taken to Ben Gashir, accompanied by his captors on foot or on little donkeys. There the Commandant was very kind to him, and, after a rest, he was brought on horseback to Azizia.

He has a poor opinion of Arab marksmanship: "They did not hit one of my comrades, in spite of the hundreds of shots they fired at close range. Their only great quality is fleetness of foot. They are also very cruel." The Italians, he explained, have found many mutilated Italian corpses since they took the oasis, and he himself saw a Bersaglieri's body tied to a tree, with eyes plucked out and ears cut off. But he had no fault to find with the Turks. "The Turkish soldiers are very kind—not cruel like the Arabs," he said to me.

Indeed, he would have been monstrously ungrateful if he spoke otherwise, for his treatment in Turkish hands leaves nothing to be desired on the score of humanity. As soon as he reached Azizia, the Staff composed from his dictation a telegram to his mother in Italy, telling her what had happened, and that her son was safe. He had as good a dinner as the Commander-in-Chief had, and a much better couch than many of us have. Next morning he complained of pain in his joints. He thought he had caught a chill on his journey to Azizia. Immediately a doctor attended to him, and he was given a warm grey overcoat. In brief, he was made as comfortable as anybody can be in the Azizia Kasr. Naturally, that does not amount to much, and our life here must be a dismal change from the life he has been accustomed to on the other side of the lines. He tells me how at Christmas all the soldiers there had sent to them from home wine, cognac, tins of sardines, sweets

and many other luxuries. He was sorry to learn that there was no wine or cognac to be had amongst us, and wished to know if he and the other Italian prisoners would be repatriated at once.

"That," I said, "is impossible, I am afraid. You cannot go back home till the war is over."

His face fell.

"Ah!" he sighed, "when will this war be over? It is bad for everybody."

I tried to direct his thoughts into a less gloomy channel, and turned the conversation to the affair of Bir Tobras. Colonel (now Major-General) Fara, he informed me, was bitterly blamed by the Italian soldiers for his rashness, "which cost many lives."

"Why rashness?" I asked.

"The ground was difficult, and his force was not numerous enough for an advance. Nevertheless, he ordered the men to push on, while he sent Marconigrams for reinforcements. But as he pushed on too fast, the reinforcements arrived too late. That's not the way to do things. You see how we generally act—*piano, piano*. Look how long we were in Tripoli before we advanced to Ain Zara, and how we take our time before we make a further advance—*piano, piano*. That is the best way."

I did not tell him what I thought of the Italian *piano, piano*—how it had ruined their chances of success in the past, and how it had rendered progress impossible in the future. I only told him that we on our side, too, believed in that maxim; and he was greatly interested to hear that we also had a literal equivalent of the Italian *piano, piano*, in the Turkish *yavash, yavash*. As to the prospects of a further advance, he said that the Italians are expecting 4,000 camels to land in Tripoli before they make a move.

Although he sighs for peace and home, he appears prepared to make the best of his present position. His liveliness forms as curious a contrast to the gravity of the dozen Turkish soldiers whose room he shares as his neat new uniform to their greasy and tattered khaki. But, in spite of the difference in character and habits, in spite also of the ignorance of each other's language, he at once made friends with them, and they made a pet of him. They all seem to take in the strange youth the delight which children take in a new toy. But there is

one of them, Hallil—a clumsy and good-natured Anatolian—who has fallen desperately in love with him. He tries to talk to him with many broad smiles, waggings of the head, and spreading out of fingers. He puts an arm round his neck, takes him out for walks, gets him cigarettes to smoke and sugar to eat, and will not let anybody else touch him—Hallil is jealous. But he brings him to me, for he knows that the poor prisoner wants to talk with someone who understands his language, and watches him sip the coffee I make for him and smoke the cigarettes I give him, with his head on one side and a smile on his lips, like a mother watching a baby enjoying itself.

The Arab leaders are equally good to him. Ferhat Bey, when Corini was to be sent off to Gharian to join there the other Italian prisoners, insisted that he should be given a horse to ride, not a camel, as it was proposed; “for,” he said, “the young man is a European, unaccustomed to camel-riding, and it will tire him out.” And in talking to me afterwards he said that his heart went out to the poor lad. “In fighting he did his duty. I am at war with the Italian Government, and shall fight it and its army to the death; but I have no animosity against the Italian nation.”

Such, let me state once for all, is the attitude of everybody towards our prisoners. Nor is it an attitude maintained deliberately and with a view to impressing the European observer. Its sincerity is proved by the spontaneous and unpremeditated manner in which it finds expression at odd times. On one occasion I heard a Turkish officer say to another: “I don’t see the point of keeping these poor fellows here. We ought to send them to their homes. They are too few to be of value as hostages, and this life may kill them.” And when, later on, one of the prisoners died of fever, and I happened to mention the matter to an Albanian soldier, the latter clapped his hand on his leg, and exclaimed with deep and unmistakable emotion: “Ah, the hapless one!”

All this is very nice, very touching, and very wonderful. When one considers the feelings entertained towards the Italian *kelab* by these men, it is impossible not to admire the kindness of heart and breadth of charity which impels them to see in a captive no longer an enemy, but a brother-soldier who has had bad luck.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE BATTLE OF GIRGARESH

MEANWHILE the Turkish officers adhered to their conviction that the enemy's aerial flights were only the heralds of a serious movement, and many were the speculations I heard as to the probable direction of that movement, some maintaining that the Italians would advance this way, others another. The General Staff shared this conviction, and took their measures accordingly. Both our wings were strengthened, so as to be ready to oppose the hostile forces whether they advanced from Ain Zara or from Bu Meliana. The camp at Saniat Beni Adam, where the main concentration of auxiliaries was, stretched now for nearly three miles across from the last Arab tent on the left to the last on the right. The number of tribesmen at Fenduk Ben Gashir was similarly increased. At the same time a small Turco-Arab detachment was sent to watch over the way from Tripoli to Zanzur, in case the enemy should attempt an advance along the coast towards the west.

When the Turks were driven out of the Tripoli oasis on December 4th, it was anticipated that the enemy would lose no time in occupying all the places on the coast which were left undefended, and in point of fact they did occupy Tajura, about eleven miles to the east of Tripoli town. But, incredible as it may sound, they had neglected to occupy Girgaresh, a village on the west of the capital, and so near it as to form almost a suburb of it. It lies within a distance of less than three miles from Fort Sultanieh and the other Turkish forts which the enemy seized on landing, and have since strengthened with heavy artillery and all modern improvements. And, besides lying entirely at the mercy of those fortifications, it is also exposed to the fire of the fleet. Yet it still remained



without an Italian garrison—a manifest proof of the lack of well-matured plan with which the Italians have embarked on their Tripolitan adventure. As to Zanzur, which lies some four or five miles farther west, no attempt has been made upon it since the abortive attack of December 17th, which I have described. Yet all this time, until a few days ago, there was no Turkish or Arab force to oppose any resistance to its occupation.

It looked as though one side did not think Zanzur worth taking, and the other not worth keeping. However, the Turks, acting on a tardy afterthought, took advantage of the enemy's absent-mindedness, and, as I have already mentioned, sent a small force in that direction the other day. It would seem as if the Italians waited for this show of resistance in order to do what they ought to have done long ago. Or, rather, it appears much more likely that they had no idea that any resistance had been prepared.

Early in the morning of January 18th a detachment of thirty tribesmen from Ajilat, under Lieutenant Emin, while scouting in the neighbourhood of Girgaresh, perceived two squadrons of Italian cavalry and a company of sappers among the palm-groves of the village. The cavalry rode forth to reconnoitre; then they rode back, and returned followed by three battalions of infantry, one battalion of Grenadiers, a battery of four mountain-guns, and a section of heavy artillery. This force emerged from the palm-groves, and pushed southwards through a hollow sandy road which joins the highway that runs from Tripoli along the coast to the west. But it had not advanced more than one and a half miles when Emin and his Arabs, scattered in small groups, opened fire on it. The Italians seemed to be taken by surprise. The cavalry fell back. The Grenadiers hastened to take up a position a little to the west of Girgaresh, with the cavalry massed on their left and a battalion of infantry to support them, while the rest of the troops lingered on the fringe of the palm-groves as a reserve. Meanwhile the battery of mountain-guns planted to the left of the cavalry began to fire on Emin's Arabs. They were glad to hear the Italian guns crashing, for they knew that the noise would reach their friends behind faster than any courier, and serve as a signal for reinforcements. They were not disappointed.

A Turkish cavalry officer who commanded the advanced post at Fenduk Magusa, and who had at once galloped off to Saniat Beni Adam in order to give the alarm, before he got halfway found that his mission was superfluous. The Italian guns had forestalled him. At their sound reinforcements rushed north from our left wing : some Turkish regulars, with four hundred Arab volunteers, under Talaat Bey ; eight hundred Jebel and Zawia tribesmen, under Sheikh Rassim, Sheikh Shahse, Sheikh Sof, and other chiefs ; Major Isac, Lieutenant Atif, and one of the German Lieutenants, with a body of some fifteen Turkish horse ; and several other detachments of Arabs from the various advanced posts.

All these forces — about 3,000 strong — swarmed northwards, passed Fenduk Magusa, Fenduk el Togar, and finally, on reaching the crest of a sand-ridge, they saw the enemy in the flat below. The Turkish horse were the first to come in sight of the Italians, and immediately opened fire, while Lieutenant Atif galloped back to direct the Arabs to the right spot.

It was now noon, and the plain bathed in a brilliant tepid sunshine, which fell upon the white sand-dunes and the green palm-groves, and touched the tips of the rifles that glistened close to the ground. There was not a breath of wind to spoil the performance. The battle opened under the best possible auspices, and was soon in full swing. The Italian infantry, buried up to their shoulders in the trenches they had dug, blazed away with their rifles. The mountain battery, planted on a small elevation to their left, blazed away with its guns, and the heavy artillery from the forts contributed its share of lead and noise. The Turks and Arabs, undaunted by this fire, advanced, emptying their rifles.

The Arabs, as usual, were the most rashly impetuous of all. The madness of the fight seemed to have entered into them, driving all thoughts of caution out of their heads. They fired standing up, and then charged in a disorderly mob, shouting : “ *Allah akbar ! Allah akbar !* ” (God is great !) That was their answer to the infidels’ fire. And, as if their masculine ferocity was not enough, they were incited to still greater feats of recklessness by the piercing voice of a vitriolic and frowning female from Zawia, who, imperfectly clad in a dirty red-checked *ferejeh* and a dull brown cloak, had come with her

husband to the fight, and ran beside him, flourishing a stick over her head, emitting shrill "ulu-ulu-ulus!" pouring curses upon the enemy, and exhorting the holy warriors to do their duty. "Be men!" she yelled. "Do not behave like children. If you do not show courage, I will tell your wives!" So saying, she roused the spirit and soul of every man, even as did the white-armed goddess Hera of old.

But in other respects Selima had little in common with Hera. Her bare arms and legs, and her face, were brown like her cloak; her nose was flat with expanding nostrils; her eyes deep-set and steady, but not beautiful; her chin square and strong, but not at all like that of a Greek divinity. She was a massive female—broad of chest, broad of face, broad of speech; but she was as brave as a lioness. Her voice rang out louder than any bell. In her eye there was the glitter of an heroic flame; and in this battle she was "decorated" with two Italian bullets, one of which went through her left shoulder and the other through her left hand.

The Turks were almost as bad. Isac Bey, an amiable young Circassian, and a pattern of quiet good-humour in time of peace, seemed to have been converted by the wine of battle into a raging lunatic. He completely forgot the men behind him, whom it was his duty to control. He only saw the enemy before him, whom it was his desire to conquer. He threw his cap up in the air, and, brandishing his rifle over his bare head—under the illusion, I suppose, that it was the sword he had left behind him in Constantinople—he dashed on. Atif, though younger in years, was much older in self-possession, and called upon Isac not to expose himself so rashly; but on finding his words unheeded, he naturally followed his superior. The German Lieutenant, though a very brave young soldier, was not used to this Homeric fashion of fighting. But he followed his companions, lest he should be left alone.

Thus the three caught up the Arabs in the first line, and then the young German's nerve broke down. No wonder! The Italian rifle bullets fell on the sand round them *pat-pat-pat* like a hail-storm, while the Italian shrapnel shells crashed overhead, showering lead upon them. The machine-guns rattled and the heavy cannon thundered. The Arabs yelled. Selima shrieked. It was hell with all its demons let loose.

The poor Teuton buried his face in the sand, groaning "*Mein Gott! Mein Gott!*" And that was not all. An Arab close by heard the words, and, shouting, "*Haza Rûm!*" (this is a foreigner!), he pointed his rifle at him. Isac Bey tried to reason with the fanatic. "True, he is a Rûm," he said, "but he is fighting on our side. All Rûm are not Italians. If you want to kill Italians, there they are—blaze away at them!" The Arab would not listen. Then Isac caught him by his hram, and called to his orderly Eshref to seize him. Eshref flung himself upon the fanatic and pulled him away. As he was doing so two shrapnel bullets hit the Arab in the back and wounded him, but not seriously.

The battle continued to rage for four hours, and so fierce were the Turco-Arab assaults that the enemy were obliged to send out of Tripoli two fresh battalions, which remained close to one of the forts as a reserve. But even these reinforcements availed little. The Italians, assailed on the left by Isac Bey with a hundred and thirty mounted Arabs, and pressed on the right by the others, began to fall back. Scrambling out of their first trenches, they retreated some three hundred and fifty yards to the north, and entrenched themselves again. The Arabs, spurred on by Selima's shrill exhortations, dashed forward, shouting, leapt into the abandoned trenches, and swarmed out again, firing. For half an hour more the Italians managed to hold their second position, and then, worn out by the Arab fire, they scrambled out, fell another three hundred and fifty yards back, and entrenched themselves close to the palm-groves of Girgaresh. The Arabs dashed on a second time with hoarse cries of triumph, and, upon entering the second trenches, found the sand soaked with blood, and nine bodies, which the enemy were in too much of a hurry to carry off with them, lying amidst shovels, rifles, caps, capes, haversacks, two officers' swords, machine-guns' implements, some boxes of infantry ammunition, some portable tents, many coils of barbed wire, and some camels loaded with bread. To judge from the caps found, the Italian force was a mixed body, consisting of men drawn from many regiments—apparently soldiers who had volunteered for this venture.

After a short time, the Italians, finding their third trenches untenable, sprang up and plunged into the palm-groves,

leaving more booty, blood, and bodies behind them. While some of the Arabs possessed themselves of these spoils, a body of three hundred, inebriated by the sight of blood, swept past the palm-groves and on across the open plain towards the coast, yelling their wild war-cry. It was fortunate that there were no battleships on the blue sea beyond, for the naval guns would have made short work of them. As it was, the heavy artillery from the Italian forts on the right belched shells upon them, while the Italian rifles sent hissing bullets from the palm-groves on the left. But the Arabs were in too exalted a mood to mind such trifles.

The fall of night brought the battle to an end, and saved many brave maniacs from destruction.

There was no moon, and in the dim starlight shooting was out of the question. About three hours after sunset a weird moaning began to be heard ; a strong wind had arisen, and the clouds raced from the north, blotting out the stars, merging sky, palm-groves, and plain into one mass of solid blackness. For hour after hour the doleful moaning of the wind continued, now rising into a shriek, now dying down into a sob, and then again whistling and howling among the sand-dunes.

The Italians remained sheltered in the palm-groves. The Arabs, finding it impossible to dislodge them from that cover, retired to their camps, or spent the night huddled up in the enemy's trenches, each acting according to his own pleasure and sense of fitness. Their losses amounted to twenty-five killed and over a hundred and twenty wounded, chiefly by the projectiles from the Italian forts, to which they had so madly exposed themselves.

Among the wounded the most conspicuous figure was Selima. She returned to Saniat Beni Adam with her shoulder and hand bleeding, and was taken to the Commandant in triumph by a crowd of the tribesmen she had incited to victory. The Commandant felicitated her on her valour, and offered her a sum of money as a prize for her wounds. This she rejected disdainfully, but asked, instead, for a rifle, so that next time she might go to battle properly armed. A rifle was promptly handed to the heroine. She snatched at it, closed her eyes, threw her head back, and, whirling the weapon aloft, she sent forth a shrill long-drawn cry. The tribesmen broke into

thunderous applause, and for a time the camp rang with yells of "*Allah! Allah!*"

Besides the rifle, Selima was given a curved Arab sword and a share of the loot, and now she may be seen strutting about with her wounds bandaged and her person entirely transformed. She has exchanged her old red-checked dress for an Italian portable tent of brown waterproof stuff turned into an Arab smock. From her shoulders flows, in lieu of the old brown cloak, an Italian officer's grey hooded cape. From her side dangles the curved Arab sword. How proud is the grim lady of these accoutrements! Only less proud than she is of her "decorations." She has shown her wounds to me with a quiet modesty that compelled respect, and I saluted her with a hearty hand-shake, quite forgetful of her sex, but only mindful of her magnificent valour. I was, in my turn, proud of the privilege of shaking hands with a living goddess of war. For, if war there must be, I like to see it conducted in a godlike fashion.

The woman's picturesque prowess had for the moment eclipsed the courage of the men. But every one of them had that day given a fresh proof of the Moslem's sublime contempt for death and stoical endurance of pain. The majority of the wounded Arabs made light of their wounds, and preferred either to remain in their usual encampments, where the surgeons might or might not discover and tend them, or to go to their own oases. For the benefit of the latter a hospital was established at Zawia, so that their women-folk from that place or from Ajilat might come and visit them. Only the worst cases—and those mostly of natives of the Jebel—were taken to the base hospital at Azizia on stretchers.

Presently, when convalescent, they might be seen wandering over the open space between the Kasr and the hospital, one with an amputated leg, another with an arm in a sling, a third with his head bandaged, and so on. I saw one of these obscure heroes, with a hole in his face and another in his left thumb, crawling silently about the camp, his cheeks pallid and hollow, his one uncovered eye full of mute suffering. But he, like all the others, insisted upon being sent back to the front to fight again. A good many, before their wounds had quite healed, slipped away without waiting for a formal permission.

The enemy's losses are variously estimated, the estimate

growing bigger every hour. The first account I heard was that only a dozen Italian bodies were found in the trenches. Soon that number grew to twenty, a little later to sixty, a hundred, three hundred, finally to four hundred. I believe the first figure to be nearest to the truth, as fancy had not yet had time to add to fact. But, naturally, in addition to the dead left on the field, there must be others carried off, besides those who must have succumbed to wounds afterwards. Perhaps the Italian casualties were, all told, one hundred and fifty dead and wounded. What the aim of their move was it is hard to determine.

Most of our Staff officers think that the enemy's objective was Zanzur, others that they only meant to occupy and fortify Girgaresh, in order to protect the quarries which are to be found there, and so secure the stone necessary for the construction of a harbour and other public works in Tripoli town. This, I have learnt, is what the Italians themselves say, and if that really was their sole object, they have certainly succeeded, and now they are fortifying Girgaresh. But it is an object which could have been secured long ago without a stroke, and it has now been secured at the sacrifice of many lives and much prestige. If, on the other hand, Girgaresh was only the first step in an advance upon Zanzur, they have conspicuously failed. Be that as it may, in the actual fight they have been defeated, and the Arabs take the whole credit of their defeat to themselves, saying, "This is our answer to the Italian proclamations to submit!"

To what extent they are justified in claiming the credit of the victory is a delicate question which I will refrain from answering. I have already described the preparations which the Turkish military authorities had made to meet the contingency that has come to pass.

But the fact is that, though the Turks anticipated the move and took their measures accordingly, they failed to reap all the benefit they might have reaped from their success, for the battle of Girgaresh, like the battle of Bir Tobras, was, as a Staff officer with cynical candour put it, "a battle by accident."

History has repeated itself in every particular. As soon as the enemy appeared on the scene and the guns began to speak, the Arabs rushed to the front of their own accord, and so the

battle came about. For the rest, its accidental origin is sufficiently shown by the manner in which it was conducted. Had our army acted upon a deliberate plan and under proper guidance, the volunteers would have pushed to the west of Girgaresh and placed the enemy between two fires; instead of which, by pushing to the east of the village, they placed themselves between two fires and suffered quite unnecessary losses. The consequence is that the triumph we have scored is purely moral, and of no direct practical value whatever. Like the victory at Bir Tobras, it has led to nothing decisive. It would have been otherwise had the Arabs been led by Turkish officers understanding them and understood by them.

The Turks, on their part, assert that the Arabs are not amenable to efficient leadership; but, viewed in the light of a little episode which occurred the same evening on our right wing, the assertion seems too sweeping.

A band of a few regulars and some two hundred volunteers under the Kurdish Lieutenant Ahmed Hairi availed themselves of the darkness and the storm to steal up to the Italian lines at Ain Zara in order to give the enemy a little surprise. The Lieutenant had given the Arabs strict orders to march without noise, to keep close to him, and not to fire till they were told. He found them perfectly tractable. They marched as they were bidden, in twos like regulars, and got, undetected, quite close to the wire entanglements that surround the Italian camp. They heard the dogs barking in that camp and saw the lamps glowing inside the enemy's tents. Then the Lieutenant ordered the Arabs to fire low into the middle of each tent. The rifles began to rattle amid the howling of the wind. The Italians hastened to put out their lights, and darted out of their tents shouting, panic-stricken. But naturally, with the small force under his command, the Lieutenant could not rush a fortified camp. So when every Arab had fired five shots he ordered a retreat, and the band returned to Ben Gashir, satisfied with the knowledge (which has since been confirmed by Arabs from Tripoli town) that they had given the enemy more than a surprise. On the following night the Italians kept their searchlights playing over the desert, to avoid a repetition of the emotion.

While boasting of their victory, the Arabs complain of the



losses which they have brought upon themselves. However, their discontent finds vent in words only, and even in their moments of sorest disappointment the holy warriors evince not the faintest inclination to throw up the sponge. I can see no sign of weakening in their determination to carry on the war.

“There is no room in Tripolitania both for the Italians and for us,” declared to me Ferhat Bey soon after the battle. “The country is to be either theirs or ours. We will not agree to any compromise—neither protectorate, nor division of the territory between Italy and Turkey, nor any other form of subjection. No, we shall go on fighting to the end. We shall eat oatmeal without oil,” he cried, bringing his fist down on his open palm—“we shall, if need be, starve to death. But we shall not make peace. We prefer to die with honour!”

“Suppose,” I suggested, “the Porte concludes peace on some such compromise as you have mentioned, what will you do then?”

“Do?” he replied. “Just what I have said. Even if Turkey abandons us, that will not make any difference to our attitude. We will gladly declare the country independent of the Sultan and go on fighting on our own account. I am not sure that we shall not be even stronger if we are thrown entirely upon our own resources. For now the Arabs are ignorant enough to fancy that the Sultan can do everything. They look upon the Porte as a sort of Providence; and so they don’t exert themselves as much as they would if they knew that they had only themselves to rely on.”

“Have you the means of carrying on the war indefinitely without help from Turkey?” I asked. “The Arabs might get exhausted and wish to return to their peaceful pursuits.”

“No,” he replied, without hesitation; “one-third of the population will till the soil for the other two-thirds, which will fight. They will take tilling and fighting by turns.” Then he added, with a laugh: “We shall carry out in practice the Socialist doctrines which you Europeans preach through your newspapers. Tripolitania will have the honour of being the first Socialist State in the world!”

There was a pause, and then my friend resumed in a more serious tone:

“At the same time, if there is such a thing as a civilized

Europe, if the 'humanitarianism' and 'justice' of which you talk are not empty words, we hope that, when the truth becomes known, Europe will help us."

I said what I thought about Europe's "humanitarianism" and "justice." Ferhat Bey listened, and then, rising to his feet, began to pace up and down in great agitation. Finally he said :

"If there is no help from outside, and if our own resources fail us—well, we will fight till we die. Although we are not educated, we are more human than the Italians. So we don't need *their* civilization, and we will not have their protection at any price. In this determination we are all united. Every Arab in Tripolitania thinks as I think, and feels as I feel. Ask them !"

## CHAPTER XX

### WEALTH AND WANT

FOR some weeks past I have been suffering from an abscess in a most inconvenient part of the body. I got it in the first instance by riding on hard artillery saddles, and, in default of medical advice, I made it worse by doing to it just the opposite to what I ought to have done. It was lanced and dressed once at Ben Gashir ; but in order to heal it needed three things that were unobtainable—rest, regular attendance, and nourishing food. The lack of the last requisite, I suppose, retarded my recovery more than the lack of the other two.

Little Mohammed could cook, so to speak ; but the frequent alarms and dislocations to which we were subject had ended by completely disorganizing our little *ménage*, and my diet for days together consisted of boiled potatoes, leathern dates, and half-baked barley bread, eked out by an occasional tin of meat and a piece of chocolate, for my supplies, in spite of all my economy, had reached a very low ebb.

Insufficient nourishment had taxed my physical strength very severely, and when I set out on a camel on my way back from the front to headquarters I almost doubted whether it would prove equal to the strain. However, I bade good-bye to little Mohammed, and set off in the early afternoon.

A strong wind blew from the north-east, raising clouds of fine, suffocating sand. But the sky overhead was clear, and the sun that beat down upon me merciless. The heat, the glare, the wind, and the jerky motion of the camel, acting upon a half-starved body, made me giddy and sick. I dismounted and tried to walk. But after taking a few hundred steps I found my legs yielding, and got on the camel again.

Presently the sun set, and after a short dusk the stars began

to come out. But they gave just enough light to make the darkness deceptive. The brakes of scrub on either side and in front of me assumed strange, fantastic shapes. Sometimes they looked like men squatting on the ground. Sometimes the ground itself looked like a wall standing up before me to bar the way. There came a moment when I felt as though it would be better to lie down in the desert, yield to exhaustion, and go to sleep, than take another step forward. But next moment I experienced a partial reaction. It seemed as though some of the energy that had ebbed away flowed back again. "It cannot be very far," I said to myself; "we shall soon be at Azizia," and, as if in confirmation of this solacing reflection, suddenly the solid blackness ahead of me was rent by a red light steadily burning. "It must be a camp-fire," I thought, and pushed on.

But, alas! the light presently vanished in the darkness. After a time it appeared again, but only to disappear a second time. This happened several times, and every time I tried to delude myself into the belief that it would be the last. But there seemed to be no end to its fitfulness. Later, two or three other lights came in sight, and were lost in the same tantalizing manner. There could be no doubt that they were camp-fires, but they were a long way off, and the undulations of the plain hid and revealed them alternately.

Finally a bigger light with a luminous haze round it peeped over the dim skyline, and remained more or less visible. This time we were really drawing near! By-and-by I discerned, looming through the darkness, a black rigid mass pierced by several lights. I knew that it was the Sidi Ramadan Hill, but even when close to it it looked to me like a big low building, and the camp-fires scattered over it like lights in its windows. The illusion was most complete. Nevertheless, I rallied for a last sprint, and I reached the goal of my journey, glad to find myself once more inside the court of the Kasr.

The camel knelt down at the foot of the stairs. I got off its back, had my things unloaded, and, limping up to the room which had sheltered me before, I spread my rugs on its hard floor, and forgot both famine and fatigue in a death-like sleep.

Next morning I began to cast about for some means of establishing my commissariat on a firm basis. My stores

would not last long if I drew upon them entirely. It was imperative that I should find new supplies. Fortunately, while the events I have described were going on at the front, a more pacific but not the less interesting development had been taking place elsewhere.

Large convoys had been arriving daily from Tunis loaded with flour, haricot beans, rice, and other foodstuffs in vast quantities. These caravans from the west met other caravans from the north-east and the south, which brought great loads of good dates from the rich oasis of Masrata and other places beyond the Italian zone. So that when I returned to Azizia I found the depôts crammed with provisions, and the open space outside the Kasr, as well as the court inside, piled up with sacks under waterproof sheets.

At the same time the supply of meat has increased and improved wonderfully. Where a couple of months ago nothing could be seen but scrub and sand now grows long, luscious grass, and the cows, sheep, and goats, of which there are millions in Tripolitania, browse upon it and prosper exceedingly. The suspension of traffic with Tripoli town and the lure of war prices impel the nomads to bring their fat flocks and herds to our camp, and rows of carcasses hanging from scaffolds of palm-logs bear witness to the abundance of prime beef and mutton.

And as it never rains but it pours, the servant I longed for has also turned up, like a *deus ex machina*. One morning, as I stepped out into the balcony to wash myself, I saw standing there the little Mohammed I had left at the front. He came up to me with a broad smile, and explained how, by dint of inquiry, he had tracked me to my lair.

So we renewed our connection, and he is serving me at Azizia as faithfully and honestly as he had done at Ben Gashir. Every morning when I open my eyes I see beside me the little earthenware stove lighted with charcoal, and the tin teapot simmering over it. Ostler, who for a time occupied another corner of the same room, enjoyed a share of little Mohammed's services, and between us we managed to clothe him in a jacket, a pair of trousers, and tennis-shoes. Very proud is little Mohammed of his civilized clothes, and when not on duty he strolls about the court, smoking a cigarette, and patronizing the Turkish Tommies. They seem to have established a sort

of club round one of the kitchen fires, and it is there that little Mohammed is to be found when he is wanted.

But a room—even a clean and uncrowded room—is a most unpleasant substitute for a tent, and as our room in the Kasr is now peopled by no fewer than nine persons, some of whom are ill, I have pitched my tent outside, under the loop-holed parapet that surrounds the flat roof. There I have made myself passing comfortable with an empty ammunition-box for a cupboard and my portmanteau for a table. The tent affords ample protection against the night cold, and the wind, though it frequently conveys great quantities of dust from the desert into my couch, purifies the air. My strength has rapidly returned; little Mohammed's cheeks are growing plump, and a reddish tint begins to suffuse his dusky skin. We both feel happy, and neither of us would exchange our present state for the Persian King's throne—if the Persian King still has one.

Nor is that all. The Tunisian nurse, Ahmed Ben Slama, returned from Ben Gardane a short time ago transformed into a trader. He brought with him a few camel-loads of coffee, cheese, chocolate, jam, tinned sardines, biscuits, condensed milk, tea, lump sugar, cigarettes, and other necessary luxuries, which were instantly snapped up. Encouraged by the success of this first experiment, he went back to Ben Gardane, and has returned with a larger assortment of the same kind. One or two other Tunisian traders have followed suit with a similar stock, and now we have a regular emporium, in which, besides the articles enumerated, there is to be had an abundance of other wares of no interest to me, but highly appreciated by my less well-equipped neighbours—tin plates, cups and saucers, paraffin-oil stoves, cheap looking-glasses, and haberdashery of all kinds.

Nearly all the members of the General Staff are now provided with knives, and even forks, and it is most exhilarating to see twice a day a stately procession of Tommies marching up the stairs, through the balcony, and into the Commander's room, each with a new wash-hand basin of enamelled tin. It is His Excellency's dinner. Each basin contains a course—stewed meat, haricot beans, soup, and, it goes without saying, pillaf.

Besides the things we buy, we foreign visitors are every now and again embarrassed by gifts from some of our native friends.

Our chief benefactor among the Turks is old Baba. He will send us a portion of any delicacies that come his way—cheese, butter, dates, even sour milk, which he keeps in a telegraph jar carefully hidden under his bed. Where that excellent milk comes from is a mystery which has baffled all my ingenuity. Little Mohammed has twice bought milk for me in the suk, but on both occasions it has proved the reverse of excellent. On the first, a thick coat of oil floated upon the surface. Apparently the vessel in which it was brought to market had already served other uses. I threw the unsanctified liquid away. On the second, there was no suspicion of oil, but upon its surface floated numerous dead fleas—from the goatskin bottle in which it had been kept. But as in other respects it looked innocuous, I suppressed my æsthetic repugnance, skimmed and strained it, and put it over the fire. As soon as it began to boil it went bad. But I would not throw it away. I wondered if I could not turn it into cheese. Robinson Crusoe, I recalled, had made cheese. Why should I prove less fortunate? I poured the mess into a handkerchief, strained it, and then, twisting the handkerchief into a bag, I hung it up. No chemist ever watched his test-tubes with more tremulous anticipation than I watched that handkerchief. For a whole day I went about weighed by thoughts of my fateful experiment, and then I timidly, hopefully, untwisted the ends of the handkerchief. There before me lay a semisolid white mass, its surface adorned with a delicate design. I tasted it. It did not taste like any cheese I had ever known. I concluded that it was curds.

A day or two later I had a present of real cheese from Ferhat Bey. He has also promised me some fresh milk—whenever he can induce the cow which he has caused to be brought from Zawia to yield. But so far his efforts have been unsuccessful. He has coaxed the animal with chaff, he has coaxed her with grass, and he has set her oats to eat. All in vain. She remains thin and dry, like one obsessed by a secret sorrow.

Suleiman el Baroni is another of our benefactors. Of his princely generosity I had already heard much from Mr. Sepings Wright and Mr. Alan Ostler. He had pressed upon the former a golden five-pound piece, and upon the latter an Italian officer's cape. The other day I had personal experience of

his passion for giving. While we were talking together, four of us, a Staff officer brought to the Arab leader a gift consisting of two tins of green French beans, one tin of peas, and another small tin. He promptly insisted upon each of us accepting a tin. We none of us liked to accept, but neither did any of us know how to refuse without offence.

The market-place behind the Kasr has grown into a small village of improvised huts, cleverly constructed against the slopes of the sand-hills, which are scooped out into chambers. A few hurdles are used for side-walls, and two or three palm-logs as props for the roof, which is made water-tight with a thick layer of sand. The hollow paths that wind among the hillocks have evolved into lanes. In this desert mart one can get now all sorts of treasures at first utterly unobtainable—even richly-coloured Tripolitan rugs. On Sundays and Wednesdays the suk is especially populous and picturesque. Arab peasants from the distant oases—two or three days' journey off—come in the morning to sell their farm produce. They come on camels, donkeys, or on foot. The shepherds drive their flocks to the same place, and the bleating of the sheep as they come out of the desert at dawn sounds inexpressibly sweet through the crisp cool air. Others bring bulkier beasts for sale, and they sell them after a fashion of their own. If it is a camel, the owner leads it by a halter round the market among the bystanders. The would-be purchaser bids, the camel-owner bawls the bid at the top of his voice, and continues his round till he has got a higher bid. And so for hours he goes round and round, bawling out the rising price. If the animal for sale is a horse, the owner rides it and gallops from group to group, through and round the market, crying out the price and pirouetting so as to impress the would-be purchaser.

When the sun begins to decline towards the mountains, the crowd gradually disperses. The farmers who have disposed of their produce set out on their return journey with lighter loads and heavier purses. The shepherds depart with their unsold sheep and goats. Men and beasts are going back into the mysterious desert whence they came. They move slowly along the winding tracks, some south, others east, and others west—so many streamlets of life that had flowed hither in the cool of



the morning, and are now flowing away in the cool of the evening. They grow smaller and dimmer in the distance, till they vanish in the gathering dusk.

We owe our great prosperity nowadays partly to the generous and enthusiastic children of Islam, who have been raising funds for the holy war in every corner of the Moslem world—from Natal in the South to Stambul in the North, and from Morocco in the West to India in the East—funds which, collected in silver, reach us in gold—packing-cases full of glittering Turkish liras, French louis, English sovereigns, and German twenty-mark pieces—partly to the Ottoman Government, and partly to Allah, whose rains this year have made the wilderness rejoice and blossom as the rose.

Those who have known the desert only in December would be astonished to see it in February. It is no longer a desolation of sand and scrub, but a garden resplendent with all the colours of the rainbow. Wild iris of most delicate purple bloom at the end of long slender stems, which the soft breeze sways gently to and fro; great crimson poppies blush passionate and self-conscious amidst the meek and bashful little daisies; deep yellow marigold, pale little flowers that may be poor relations of the English primrose, blossoms in shape like the pimpernel, but in hue like the forget-me-not; and an endless wealth of other bright-coloured plants strange to me, have sprung up to beautify the wilderness.\* Those to whom the winter harmony of grey scrub against grey sky is dear may now lament the intrusion of the warmer tints of spring. For my part, I do not like to limit my tastes. My artistic sense is not sufficiently developed to warrant the presumption of a critical attitude towards Nature. I prefer to accept Allah's gifts in the spirit in which they are given.

Yet, as I wander about this delicious paradise that no man

\* I have brought home with me a collection of these flowers, reduced from things of living beauty to dry botanical specimens; and for the benefit of the botanically curious, I will give a list of their names. I owe it to the kindness of Miss Ruth Gimingham, of St. Hilda's Hall, Oxford, who took the trouble to identify them for me.

The list includes first the familiar names of camomile, broom, mustard, iris, toadflax, campion, thistle, mallow, hawkweed, poppy, vetch, yellow adonis, blue pimpernel, and corn marigold. Then come some specimens which have no English names—*Thuia articulata*, *seriola*, *scorzonera*, and *erigeron*. Three represent varieties of hawkbit, annual stock, and muscari. Six have successfully eluded identification.

has planted, and no civilized foot has yet profaned, I feel that my exaltation is in peculiarly bad taste at this hour. For while I am revelling in plenty, I see about me hundreds that are starving.

Most of the peasants who drift to the Azizia market are oppressed by poverty, and some, I suspect, undertake the long journey, not to gain wealth, but to ward off want. Here is a group that suggests much: a ragged old farmer trudging with the aid of a crooked stick, his old wife in dark blue draperies beside him with a similar stick. In front rides their little son astride a little long-haired donkey, with a white-fleeced, broad-tailed sheep across his knees. The mother keeps urging the donkey on with her stick. She seems to be eager to reach the market early to secure a good price for the sheep—perhaps their only one.

But these needy people who come from outside are few, and rich in comparison with the poor that are always with us.

I have already mentioned the presence in all our camps of hordes of famine-stricken peasants. Many of them are permanent inhabitants of these parts, others are refugees from the environs of Tripoli. I don't suppose any of them ever were burdened with the good things of life. The province is poor by nature, and human art for many centuries has done nothing to lessen its poverty. The total want of rain during the last four years has also contributed towards the general misery. But it is the war that has turned scarcity into famine. By putting an end to all caravan traffic between the interior of the country and the coast towns, it has deprived many peasants of their means of subsistence. To these causes may be traced the distress of the permanent inhabitants. For the sufferings of the refugees the responsibility lies almost entirely with the Italians. The ruthless devastation of the villages on the littoral has robbed whole communities of all they possessed, and turned hundreds of widowed women and orphaned children out into the desert. Such are the fruits of the organized brigandage which the conscience of mankind still sanctions under the name of war.

I had heard much about "military exigencies" before I came out here, but all that I have seen since has taught me that fine phrases can do little to alter ugly facts. Nor have I ever

witnessed an uglier fact than the condition of the people who have been driven to face the unknown by the desolation of their old home. Women and children, clothed in dirty and disintegrated rags, spend the whole day digging into the dung-heaps for grains of barley which the horses have dropped. They pick them out one by one, and when, after many hours of patient digging and sifting, they have collected a handful, they carry it off into their hovels to grind it into flour, or to boil and eat it as it is. I have even seen children conveying the grain straight out of the dung into their mouths. When human beings have come to live on the droppings of beasts, I think the limit of misery has been reached. At least, I can conceive no lower degradation.

But even a Tripolitan pauper cannot live on a few grains of barley alone, and all those who cannot find a job are compelled to eke out their unsavoury meals by indefatigable mendicancy. Some of these beggars are stationary and others itinerant. Here you see an emaciated old man sitting on the ground, with his back against a wall and his skeleton legs stretched out before him, calling on the passers-by in the name of Allah to have pity on him. A maid sits beside him, and takes up the mournful invocation when her father pauses for breath. Close by you see an ancient hag squatting on her hams, and adding her own share to the lugubrious antiphony. A little farther off a boy, all skin and bones, lies on his side, covered with a sack, whining feebly "*Ya sidi, ya sidi!*" Lower down a little girl of not more than three years, with prematurely aged features and big, sad eyes, stands wrapped in a cloak five times too big for her, gnawing at a bone she has picked up somewhere. A pariah dog stands near, looking up at the girl with a reproachful look in his eyes. A little farther—to add one more figure to a picture which for a full presentment would need acres of canvas—another little girl is squatting on the ground, an earthenware bowl before her and a sack behind her. Her rags and her face—like the rags and the faces of all the others—are covered with clusters of flies. She sits perfectly still and silent, waiting for some charitable person to throw something into her bowl.

These are a few among the representatives of the stationary class. The itinerant class is even more numerous. The other

day, as I strolled out of the Kasr, I was met by an old woman with cadaverous cheeks, tangled hair hanging over her forehead, and a half-open mouth, showing a few yellow teeth. She held a little boy with one hand, and in the other she carried an empty goatskin bottle. As soon as she saw me, she lifted her lean arm, and, flourishing the goatskin before my face, shrieked: "Look, I have nothing in the world!" I gave her a trifle and went on, but before I had taken five steps I was accosted by another mendicant—a girl of about twelve. She sidled up to me, and held out a small henna-stained hand, while with the other she drew the drapery that covered her head half across the face. She glanced timidly at me from under her long dark eyelashes, and in a low, hesitating voice she said she had had nothing to eat for three days.

There are scores like her, not professional mendicants, but respectable maids, whom hunger compels to outrage their Moslem modesty by begging of strange men. Their timidity soon wears off by practice, and they pursue you round the camp holding out importunate henna-stained hands, and whining with unwearied persistence. And no sooner have you satisfied the demands of one than you have a dozen damsels dogging your footsteps, chanting in dismal chorus: "*Ya sidi lillah!—ya sidi lillah!—ya sidi lillah!*" Charity is a long-suffering goddess, but I doubt whether Charity herself, if she has any nerves, could tolerate this melancholy refrain for more than a month.

They frequently invade the Kasr itself, and either roam about the court, or even mount the stairs and steal into the rooms, to pick up what they can find. When a caravan arrives, the court is clogged with a hungry crowd, crawling under the camels' bellies and scooping up the oats or haricot beans that chance to fall out of the sacks as they are unloaded.

Sometimes they try to vary their vegetarian diet. A few days ago an officer missed a pariah dog—a handsome beast, all white—which haunted his tent and grew plump upon the food the kindly Turk laid out for it. On inquiry, he found that an Arab family had been seen feasting on his friend.

At first the Turkish military authorities could do nothing for these poor people. But since supplies began to reach us in ever-increasing quantities, a more or less regular system of

relief has been organized in every camp, and especially at the headquarters in Azizia. Nearly every afternoon the open space before the Kasr is filled with a mob waiting for food to be doled out to them. It includes paupers of all ages—from two to seventy; of all racial types—from the pure Arab and Berber to the pure negro; of all complexions—from fair to black. There are among them smooth-faced babes and deeply-wrinkled hags, lame men leaning on their staffs, cripples lying full length on the ground, and blind men led by boys by means of a stick, the blind man holding one end, the boy the other.

They wait for hours, the males in one group, the females in another, some squatting stolid and impassive, as though past speech or motion, others chattering incessantly. Some of the women are suckling their babes, others while away the time by ridding themselves of a few of the "little inconveniences" that populate their rags. The children form the most pathetic feature in a scene full of pathos. A few may be seen laughing and playing, but the majority are precociously quiet. Here are two—neither of them more than three years of age—both sitting on their hams, with their hands clasped in their laps, and their pallid faces absolutely devoid of expression. They maintain this posture for hours—emblems of unnatural docility. Not far from them is another group: a little boy of two, and two little girls of perhaps three and four. The boy is sitting on his hams, one of the girls on her heels, and the other with her legs crossed. Dirty rags thrown over their little heads cover their backs, leaving their hollow chests and skinny legs bare. I watched them munching what they had picked up from the ground, while a pariah dog prowled about, anxious to share their repast. Every now and then the boy would pick up a pebble and drive the intruder off. He must have been a very poor dog, since he was reduced to sponge on human beings that sponge on horses.

When the north wind blows bleak and chilly, and the sand is swept off the ground into swirling eddies, the wretches pull their rags or sacks over their faces and lie huddled together like sheep caught in a storm. But neither cold nor hunger seems to affect their good-temper. I have never seen a riot, and only once a quarrel—two old hags pommelling and biting one another, and struggling to catch hold of one another's

tattered locks. A gendarme had to go out and separate the combatants. But this was a unique case, and, as the Turkish proverb has it, *Bir tchitchek illé yaz olmaz* (One flower does not make a summer)—nor one fight a riot. As a rule, no police is required to keep this starving mob in order. They are a people whose self-discipline can survive any degree of distress.

Thus they wait patiently for hours, with their pots, tins, or baskets before them. But as soon as the signal is given they spring to their feet, pick up their pots, tins, or baskets, and rush into the court through the arched gateway, pushing and pressing with wild yells of joy. Two gendarmes armed with sticks are posted at the entrance to regulate the influx of the stream. But they are too tender-hearted to be successful. They charge the crowd with ferociously uplifted sticks, and when at close quarters they beat—the ground. The little girls laugh merrily at them as they slip past, and they, good fellows, having tried to frown and failed, join in the laugh.

The crowd continues to push and press round the sacks of oats or dates that are doled out to them. They all want to be served at once, and, despite the gendarmes, some manage to be served more than once. What can two mere men do against hundreds of hungry women and children? Meanwhile the Arab officer in charge of the sack goes on dealing out handful after handful. The recipients fill their pots, tins, and baskets, or, if they have no other receptacle, they hold up their skirts, or stuff the food into their bosoms. Gradually, as the crowd thins away, the pandemonium subsides, until every man and woman has been provided—for the moment.

Every now and again there is a windfall for the starving wretches. An Arab of consequence or a camel may die, and either event spells an extra dinner to the poor. The other day a certain Sheikh Saad succumbed to his wounds, and he was buried on the Sidi Ramadan Hill with unusual pomp. A great number of women and children followed the funeral, and stood round the grave waiting for the feast to come. Nor did they wait in vain. When the body had been covered over, the brother of the deceased distributed, according to custom, handfuls of barley among the bystanders. The death of a camel is an even greater boon, for, instead of barley, it means meat.

One night I heard a dismal moaning in the court. It con-

tinued intermittently through the night. In the morning I found that the author of the sound was an unfortunate camel, which, as she limped knee-haltered about in the dark, stumbled against one of the loose cart-wheels on the ground and broke her legs. She was put out of her agony, the carcass was skinned, hacked to pieces, and then distributed amongst the poor. They had not had a meat dinner for ages, and they received the chunks of blue flesh with loud thanks to Allah and cheers for the Sultan. Earthenware dishes, empty preserve tins, baskets, nosebags, draperies—all were utilized to carry the meat in, and I even saw some women hugging the chunks of blue flesh to their desiccated breasts.

But neither the distribution of doles by the military authorities nor even the funeral feasts that Allah sends now and again suffice. The demand for food is far greater than the supply, and it can only be met effectively by help from outside. Ferhat Bey tells me that he applied to Constantinople for succour, and some money for that purpose has been sent. Even that, however, did not go far enough. Mr. Alan Ostler and myself have endeavoured to stir up the English public through the Press, and I hope that the cry will wake some response in the British Empire.\* But meanwhile the only consolation these hunger-bitten peasants have is the knowledge that the people who have submitted to the invader are even worse off than those who have preferred to brave the unknown.

We hear that the cost of living has risen to appalling and unheard-of heights in the town of Tripoli. Farm produce is especially scarce—one egg is said to cost fivepence—and the French correspondents who have come to us from that side report that no vegetables are to be had, because the gardens where they grew have been laid waste, and the gardeners have either been killed or driven into the desert. Nearly all the foodstuffs necessary for the subsistence of the normal population, and of the large foreign army quartered in its midst, have, since all traffic with the interior has ceased, to be imported from Europe, and the importation, in the absence of a good harbour and

\* Similar appeals have since been made by the English Red Crescent Mission to Tripoli, and by the Right Hon. Ameer Ali, President of the London All-India Moslem League.

quays, depends on the weather. Sometimes the steamers can disembark their cargoes as soon as they arrive; at other times they are obliged to wait long for favourable sea conditions. This causes a great uncertainty as to the amount of food available at a certain moment, and a proportionately great fluctuation in prices from one moment to the next, the only gainers being the Jewish traders and hotel proprietors, who profit by a vigorous and impartial exploitation of the conquered Arab and his Italian conqueror alike.\*

\* These reports have since been confirmed and amplified by the special correspondent of the leading French journal on the Italian side. His letter, dated "Tripoli, 1<sup>er</sup> Mars," appeared in the *Temps* of March 4th, 1912. Among ourselves, even at the time of greatest scarcity, the prices barely reached the level considered normal in Western Europe. When I first arrived, a chicken seldom cost more than a shilling, and an egg never more than a penny. Even for the luxuries that come from outside I have never been asked to pay more than double the amount I paid in Tunis. Now we feed sumptuously at two shillings a day.



## CHAPTER XXI

### DISEASE

FAMINE is not the only evil that mars one's joy in the beauty of the desert spring.

When I arrived at Azizia early in December, I noted that some of the regulars looked as though they had only just recovered from a long illness. This appeared to be especially the case with the men that acted as orderlies at headquarters—miserable, fever-stricken wretches, who seemed to have been chosen for domestic service because they were utterly unfit for any other.

There was, for example, Emin—a fragile little man, with dull eyes and pallid cheeks, who slouched about doing his work as a man might in his sleep. All energy seemed to have been drained out of the poor fellow by chronic ague. His speech was slow, even for a Turk, and when spoken to he preferred, for the most part, to answer with a vacant smile. I regarded Emin as the personification of my ideal of inertia till I made the acquaintance of Ahmed—a gaunt giant, with the complexion of a lemon and the expression of a log. I never could detect a spark of human intelligence in his glassy eyes, and I never heard the faintest sound issue from his mouth. There was something sepulchral and uncanny about the man, and as I watched him moving in and out, with nerveless, mechanical steps, staring fixedly at nothing, I could not help thinking of a semianimated corpse.

I learnt that the army had suffered from a variety of maladies, including cholera. This was said to have been imported into the country by the enemy. I was even assured that the bodies of Italian soldiers and sailors, who must have died during the passage, were washed ashore at Zwara and other points on the coast. However that may be, at the moment of my arrival

there was a lull. A few soldiers might be seen in the daytime going about with the flush of fever on their cheeks and its fire in their eyes. Many might be heard coughing at night. But the camp as a whole enjoyed an immunity from disease which filled me with wonder, when I contemplated the state in which the soldiers lived. Insufficient shelter and clothing apart, there was a rich field for the propagation of microbes in the water they drank and in the air they breathed. No sanitary arrangements of any description were made, and the camp depended for scavenging entirely on the pariah dogs and on Allah. The dogs performed their duty to the utmost of their ability. Allah also did his best: his sun dried up the filth, and his wind swept it off into the desert. These agencies sufficed for a time, and a pious young Lieutenant seemed to be quite right when he said to me:

“We have a good guardian of our health in God. When cholera raged, we did not trouble to have the clothes of the deceased burnt. Yet the epidemic disappeared. God loves us.”

Personally, though a great believer both in dogs and in Allah, I should have liked to see their efforts supplemented by such rudimentary expedients as ditches and the cremation of garbage. But those whose business it was to take these measures did not seem to share my apprehensions. The garbage, instead of being burnt, was suffered to accumulate in heaps. The very bandages of the wounded were thrown out of the hospital and left to rot on the ground. As regards the other matter, the general practice appeared to be based on the maxim, *Libera Libya caca ubi libet*.

The consequence was that, as time went on, the whole camp began to reek, and round the hospital especially the stench became intolerable. Hardly less offensive were the conditions which prevailed in the Commander-in-Chief's own quarters. After every shower the court below was converted into a muddy morass, and the balcony above into a series of stagnant puddles. The primitive latrines on the terrace were very rarely cleaned, and even then the refuse was allowed to flow out through holes in the walls and to accumulate at the foot of the Kasr, or to find its way into the rooms beneath and form there an open cesspool.

In the circumstances, Allah's patience was exhausted, and

sickness again spread her wasting arms over us. The cases of malaria, influenza, and dysentery, multiplied fast, and one day I heard one whispering to another the dread name of cholera.

The doctors tried to conceal the visitation as long as possible. Some even maintained that it was only gastric fever. And, indeed, while presenting some of the characteristic symptoms of cholera—such as vomiting, diarrhœa, and sallowness of complexion—the epidemic lacked some other equally characteristic symptoms—such as a depression of the abdomen and cramp of the limbs. But though the scientific designation of the disease was a matter of dispute, its effects were indisputable. Many men were smitten down, and those whose bodies had already been enfeebled by other maladies perished.

The first victim that came to my notice was a negro camp-follower. He died in the court of the Kasr one night, and next morning I saw his body—lean, stiff, and ash-grey—laid out on a stretcher, with the head only shrouded in a rag. Two Arabs presently came, threw over the body an empty sack, and lifted it on their shoulders. The court was crowded with Turks and Arabs, but none paid any attention to the cortège beyond just making room for it to pass. Shortly afterwards one of the prisoners succumbed, and was carried off in a like manner.

The authorities then began to look a little scared. I caught the doctors in frequent and anxious consultation. By-and-by these deliberations found expression in action. Both the rooms upstairs and the court below were swept somewhat. The door of the prison was laid down, the prisoners were transferred to another apartment, and the foul den was subjected to a perfunctory broom. The sentry at the head of the stairs received strict orders not to let vagabonds throng the balcony. The camels were forbidden to congest the court. Live lime was poured down the shafts of the latrines, and the fat hospital assistant Hussein, abandoning his narghileh, visited the rooms with a pump on his back, and sprinkled some disinfectant over our persons and belongings. Crowning precaution of all, the doctors, alarmed by an attack of diarrhœa that visited one of them, began to boil the water which they drank, and the sufferer himself favoured me with a learned lecture on the merits of the practice.

Outside the headquarters, too, the panic manifested itself in

certain tardy reforms. The market was transferred from the square before us to the open desert behind the Kasr. Some of the Turkish troops were moved to a clean spot on the other side of the hill, and others were even sent right away to one of the gardens on the north of Azizia.

After a few days, the chief of the Red Crescent Mission was able to tell me with a look of great satisfaction: "Not another case of cholera for twenty-four hours! Our measures have succeeded in stamping it out!"

One of the military doctors, however, said: "It could not have been real cholera. If it were, it would have carried us all off, considering the conditions under which we live."

Be that as it may, the epidemic, after having wrought some havoc in every camp, and even in the hospital at Gharian, disappeared. It was impossible to find out the number of its victims, for simultaneously with it there raged all sorts of other deadly maladies. And those continue. We have in our midst nearly all the forms of disease that human flesh is heir to—malarial fever, typhoid fever, dysentery, diarrhoea, pneumonia, and Heaven only knows what else.

Nearly every day small groups of from five to ten sick soldiers arrive from the outposts, mounted on camels, one or two on each camel. They jog slowly across the camp in their grey overcoats, with the hoods over their heads, crouching on their saddles, tired, haggard, and sad-eyed. Some arrive so exhausted that they doze and sway over the saddle; then the instinct of self-preservation seems to come to their assistance. Just when on the point of falling off, they wake up, and clutch at the camel in a great fright. In this fashion they reach the hospital. The camels kneel down, and the men are helped off their backs. They stagger on numbed legs to the wall, and there they squat, leaning against it, or lie huddled up on the ground until accommodation shall be made for them.

The other day I witnessed a peculiarly pathetic little scene. The camel had knelt down, and the camel-driver, apparently feeling that his task was over, squatted beside the beast. The poor soldier could not dismount unaided. For a few minutes he remained crouching on the saddle, then he feebly lifted his flask to his lips and drank some water. This seemed to revive him a little, and in a scarcely audible voice he implored the

driver to help him off. The Arab got up and did so. The soldier staggered to the ground barefooted, and with his boots in his hand slowly tottered to the steps of the hospital, but he could not climb them. A beggar was standing close by, and when he understood what the soldier needed, took him by one arm and assisted him up the few steps into the building.

The arrival in hospital is but one act in a long tragedy. One day I visited the establishment, and I found each of its four rooms containing from eight to ten invalids, some on beds and others on the floor. There they lay in unimaginable squalor. The floor was carpeted with rubbish, the air was heavy with foul smells. The so-called nurses, with few exceptions, were local loafers, who had no more idea of nursing than of washing. One of these ragamuffins was supposed to be attending to each ward. I saw them bringing soup to the invalids in tin plates dirty enough to repel a hungry pariah dog. I was not surprised to hear that an officer's sick orderly, after trying the *hasta-hanch*, returned to his master's kitchen tent, and begged to be allowed to remain there. "If I am to die," he said, "I prefer to die here."

There is an annexe to the hospital consisting of two rooms. One of these rooms is only partially roofed, and is tenanted by a mangy horse. The next had to be converted into a ward for human patients. The windows and the door were covered up with old sacking, and some mats and sacks were spread over the damp earth for the accommodation of sick soldiers. When the building filled to overflowing, many had to be lodged in the dingy shops in the market, in one of the dungeon-like apartments that line the court of the Kasr, and in a small block-house high up the hillside, which was turned into a ward by the simple process of having its two tiny windows blocked up with rags and stones.

But even this accommodation proved inadequate, and had to be supplemented by the erection of several hospital tents, the number of which rose gradually to seven. After some days spent in one of these overcrowded, unaired, and filthy quarters, the patient is pronounced convalescent, and is sent off to Gharian to recover and make room for a new-comer. Groups of such convalescents, ranging from twenty to forty, are to be seen every few days leaving Azizia. They march off mounted

on camels—one or two on each camel, according to the available number of beasts—some muffled in their grey overcoats, others, who have no overcoats, wrapped up in blankets; some lying prone over the necks of the camels, others managing to maintain an upright posture. The faces of all are yellow, their eyes sunk, their jaws prominent. One day it began to rain just as they got under way. Their overcoats and blankets gradually got soaked; the water dripped from their hoods. In this condition they would have to travel for two days—one day to the foot of the mountains, and another up the steep pass. As I watched the procession straggling southward over the desert, and finally diminishing behind the scrub-crowned knolls, I wondered if they would reach Gharian alive.

In spite of this periodical depletion, the multitude of resident patients shows no diminution. The whole camp now looks like one huge *hasta-haneh*. In the daytime invalids may be seen outside the hospital quarters stretched on the ground basking in the sun; at night they may be heard groaning and calling upon their mothers like children in pain.

Disease is no respecter of rank, and the officers suffer as much as the men. Fethi Bey, being the least robust member of the Staff, was the first to be attacked. For three weeks he lay prostrate with fever. He had no sooner recovered sufficiently to bear the strain of a journey to Gharian than his colleagues followed suit, one after another. The ranks of the sick in the Kasr are swelled by the arrival of other officers from the advanced posts, some on stretchers and others in carts. They arrive looking as if they were at death's door, yet by some miracle, after a longer or shorter period of suffering, they are up and back to their posts again.

The other day there arrived one of the carts captured from the Italians, and still adorned with its old superscription, "Carretta Alpina, 11<sup>mo</sup> Regg<sup>to</sup> Bersaglieri." It was drawn by two mules harnessed tandem, and escorted by two mounted gendarmes. Upon it lay an officer at full length, covered up with his cloak. He lay so still that I thought he must be dead. He was carefully lowered into a stretcher, and carried upstairs into the room recently vacated by Fethi Bey. Then I recognized him as my brave Kurdish friend of Ben Gashir, still clad in the same leather jacket. Four days later I met him crawling

about the balcony. He was evidently better, but still too weak to speak or even to smile. In three more days he was on his legs again, and telling me that he intended to go to Gharian for change of air. But before the week was out he informed me with a smile that he was going back to Ben Gashir instead. I expostulated with him, pointing out that he ought to recover completely before facing the hardships of the advanced posts again.

"I cannot afford the time," he replied. "There may be an engagement one of these days, and I don't want to miss it." And so this man, whom ten days ago I took for one dead, is off to the front as full of fight as ever.

The doctors and medical assistants are no more immune than common mortals. Most of them are, or have been, ill, and at least one of the male nurses has died.

One of the military doctors has just arrived from an advanced post, suffering from a typical form of *fièvre continue*. I was already acquainted with this dusky round-faced cherub of forty, with the mind of a precocious and diligent schoolboy. His mania was the glory of Britain and the supremacy of the British fleet, and in a moment of expansion he had declared that his great ideal was to be a bluejacket in the British navy. Foiled of this laudable ambition, he had consoled himself by studying the *Fleet Annual*, and mastering the name, tonnage, and station of every British warship. He talked interminably, and even intelligently, of naval affairs, and of the chances and consequences of an Anglo-German war.

Groans of "*Aman!*" "*Allah ha versin!*" "*Oh!*" "*Ah!*" heralded his arrival at headquarters; and, once installed there, he commenced an endless flow of incoherent invective—the most remarkable symptom of his fever. In his semidelirium he mixed miscellaneous maledictions with oburgations of Abdul Hamid and Anglomaniac declarations of the British fleet's supremacy. His garrulity was only interrupted for brief seconds by gaspings for breath; then off it started again, hour after hour—a mournful, exasperating monologue. It was pitiful and it was ludicrous.

I was told by another doctor that this fever is caused by mosquitoes (*Anopheles*). But where are the mosquitoes? I have seen two all the time I have been here, and the fever is so common!

And if man suffers, so do the beasts. Both camels and horses are attacked by mange. The bellies of many of the former are bare, and the hair left on their backs flaps loosely in the wind like a tattered cloak.

What is the cause of this pestilential visitation? The Arabs would have me believe that the author is *Sheitan*, subsidized by his friends the Italians. I consider that improbable. A Turk solemnly suggested that the enemy have poisoned the wells. I assured him that the wells of Azizia needed no poisoning.

The causes seem to be many. Bad water, bad air, dirt—they all conspire against us. But the main cause seems to be the fickleness of the weather, with its sudden, violent transitions from one extreme to the other. The days are sometimes hot and sometimes cold; the nights are always cold. Now and then we have rain, and very often a wind which frequently culminates into a howling storm. It sweeps through the camp, blowing the clumsily-erected hospital tents down upon the heads of the inmates, and it rages in the open plain around, hiding the desert in a haze of dull yellow sand like a London fog. During the last few days this wind has known hardly any intermission. The Arabs call it "*Kared el aanz*" (Tempest of the goat), and, although they cannot tell me why they call it so, they declare it to be perfectly seasonable. At this time of year, they say, there are twenty white nights, which are followed by twenty black nights. When the latter are drawing to an end, there always blows the "tempest of the goat."

Our doctors are battling with the demon as valorously as circumstances will permit, and some of them are very able and self-devoted men. Such are the five medical volunteers whom Fethi Bey brought with him from Paris, and among them there is one who merits special mention—Dr. Izzet, a young Albanian, barely five feet in height, with a pale, refined face and thoughtful dark eyes. He seems to be of very poor physique; yet he has been at the front since October without a day's rest, and without a change of clothes. I saw him both at Saniat Beni Adam and at Fenduk Ben Gashir night after night lying down on a stretcher undressed, for a few hours' sleep after a long, laborious day, and wondered at his endurance. Recently, on his way from the latter camp to Azizia, he was caught in the



rain, drenched to the skin, and naturally enough seized with fever. But he refused to stay in bed. He took some quinine, and continued to attend on others, while he himself stood in sore need of attention. A few days later he was called back to the front, and he rode off in his torn breeches, dilapidated overcoat, and gaping boots, with a promptitude that showed how a small and weak body can harbour the spirit of a hero.

I regret I cannot speak as highly of the Red Crescent Mission. None of its members are remarkable for heroic self-devotion or professional ability, and the material equipment with which they have come to the war would be laughable if it were not lamentable. Their neglect of the most elementary hygienic rules also shows a strange persistence of ancestral fatalism beneath the veneer of a modern scientific education. Among the few hospital attendants whom they brought with them from Constantinople the same traits and habits are seen undisguised by any veneer. With one or two exceptions, they do not seem to have had any training for the work, and their mentality fits them to console the dying rather than to cure the sick.

I had a long talk with one of them yesterday. He is a fat, florid Turk, full of ancient saws and modern instances. After telling me how many sick we had in the camp, and how he himself had been laid up for a week with influenza, he moralized: "But what does it signify? We must all die when the appointed day comes. Nobody can escape his Kismet. We are but travellers in this world. As the proverb has it: 'This world is a window; everyone who passes glances in and goes by.'"

"Yes, you are right," said I, and he went on to quote another text:

"'Since we accept birth, we must also accept death.'"

Fortunately, this is the invalids' view also.

Of the Turkish patients, it is true, few have died. Our physicians seem to manage somehow—Allah only knows how—to pull them through. But the Arabs suffer from a mistrust of medical science more fatal than any disease. "I need no physician," said a fever-stricken warrior to me one day. "Allah is the best physician."

The upshot is an almost unbroken series of funeral processions up the slopes of Sidi Ramadan Hill and a rapid multiplication of graves round the saint's shrine.

The first burial I witnessed made a profound impression on me by its stern simplicity, and it was typical of all the other burials I have seen since.

I had been for an afternoon's stroll up the hill, and paused on the top to look at the larks flitting joyously above the graves that straggle over its slopes and at the sun sinking slowly behind the blue mountains in the distance. Then I turned to climb down. As I did so, I saw a procession climbing up the hillside—four men carrying on their shoulders a plain wooden bier with a body wrapped up in a grey hram. One of the men also carried a shovel in his hand. They paused on the lip of a newly-dug grave—a narrow pit about six feet long and only two deep. They rested the bier on the ground, removed the hram from the body, and lowered the latter into the pit. Then they shovelled the sand back into its place, planted a small rough stone on the head of the grave, and went away.

It was all over in five minutes. A life had set with as little fuss as the sun, and the larks resumed their joyous flitting.

The wind soon smooths the little mound, till the stone only remains to mark the man's last resting-place. Presently the stone itself is kicked away by the camels which wander over the hill in the daytime, and the pariah dogs that prowl over it at night may be heard barking in the dark over an easy prey.

The human beings are hardly more respectful towards the dead. I have often seen Arabs strolling across the tombs, and trampling them under foot with an unconcern which shocked me at first and edified me afterwards. Theirs is, no doubt, the rational attitude. Once the vital spark is extinguished, a man ceases to be a man, and is only a mass of matter not a whit different from the earth that covers him. The ephemeral character of the tombs also shows that the sons of Islam prefer mansions in heaven to a mausoleum on earth. Not one of these holy warriors prizes posthumous honours; not one of them is childish enough to wish, as the Homeric hero did, that posterity may point to his burial-place and say: "This is the mound of a champion that died in days of old." Such vanity is confined to the saints only. The ordinary Arab's reward is not of this world. And so it comes to pass that, though the summit of the hill and the higher slopes are now completely covered by graves pressing the one against the other, its sur-

face, even when viewed from a moderate distance, wears the same bleak and bare look as ever.

For some time past these processions have been the most frequently recurring incident in our daily routine. The first thing I see when I get up in the morning is an Arab funeral on Sidi Ramadan Hill, and an Arab funeral on Sidi Ramadan Hill is the last thing I see in the evening before I lie down to sleep. The sight has its educative value. Seeing men dying with so much ease, and being buried with so little fuss, has in itself a strangely sobering and strengthening effect on one's mind. One becomes by sheer force of example familiar with death and indifferent to life.

There are, no doubt, other causes that contribute towards this mental attitude. Islam in its purity means a calm acceptance of the earth's limitations and a constant yearning after the perfections of heaven. And it certainly is a significant fact that Islam is a plant that can flourish in its purity only in the desert. In this environment death loses its terrors and life its attractions. It is natural that men for whom this world holds so few joys should be ready to escape into the next. The converse may be seen in the tenacity with which our invaders cling to their trenches. For the same things that make life pleasant also make death terrible; nor do I know any part of Europe where life is more pleasant than in Italy.

But their trenches are no protection against disease. According to Arab reports, the Italians, who are accused of having brought cholera into the country, had one hundred cases a day at Ain Zara. Since the disappearance of cholera, we learn from much more trustworthy witnesses that the wells of Ain Zara, and even those of Bu Meliana, are infected with the typhoid germ, and that the Italian troops are dying in large numbers. Matters are even worse in the congested and insanitary town of Tripoli, where typhoid claims as many as sixty victims a day.

We were glad to hear that a German Red Cross Mission, financed by Krupp, Mauser, the Deutsche Bank, and other German firms connected with Turkey, was on its way to our relief, and more glad still to see them. The mission, consisting of two professors, one military doctor, three medical assistants, and six nurses, arrived at Azizia early in the afternoon of

February 5th on horseback, with a large Red Crescent flag flying bravely from a long bamboo stick. Immediately the Arabs rushed from all parts of the camp and crowded round the cavalcade, while the women greeted them with prolonged and strident ululations. Men and women alike seemed deeply impressed by the strangers. And, indeed, they offered a sight both impressive and incongruous in these surroundings. They were dressed in neat yellow khaki jackets and dark grey breeches and leggings of brown leather. On their heads they wore low red fezes with long black tassels. Each bore the Red Crescent badge round his left arm, and each carried a small sack and water-flask slung across his back, and a pair of field-glasses slung from his neck. Their fair Northern faces were as novel as the business-like neatness of their uniforms. They all seemed singularly out of place in the Arab saddles, and none more so than the banner-bearer—a stoutish, yellow-bearded, spectacled Teuton, who sat his steed as if it were made of wood.

They alighted at the gateway and marched into the Kasr—smart, stiff, self-contained—striking a discordant note of drilled efficiency into our concert of haphazard and multiform slovenliness. They marched up the stairs. The Commander-in-Chief came out on to the balcony to receive them, and they exchanged with him Oriental salaams with military rigidity.

They had no sooner entered the Kasr than their baggage began to arrive. First, fourteen two-wheeled waggons drawn by mules and loaded with heavy packing-cases. The women hailed them with ululations, and the tribesmen eagerly demanded if they contained cannon. They were bitterly disappointed to hear that they contained only a kitchen, an X-ray apparatus, an ice-machine, and other articles of a strictly peaceful character. Then, in the evening, began to arrive the rest of the luggage—a string of three hundred and sixty camels heavily loaded with all the necessaries for a first-rate hospital. They arrived, caravan after caravan, through the night, and in the morning there was a whole city of packs and boxes piled up in the desert, forming a sarcastic comment on the poverty of our own Red Crescent. The speed, too, with which so enormous a mass of material was transported from Tunis was no less of a criticism on our own torpor.



*Lucy, in Arab. Red Cross, 1914*

THE GERMAN RED CROSS AT WORK.



*to J. Albert, 1914*

HUSSEIN DISINFECTING.



But there are limits even to Teutonic efficiency. Next day the Germans and their belongings set out on the last stage of their journey, and marched off across the desert towards Gharian, which was allotted to their medical care. It all went well as far as the foot of the mountains, but once there it was found impossible to make the heavily-loaded mule-carts scale the steep passes. They struggled a little way up, and then they got stuck. Turkish soldiers and Arabs came down from Gharian to push the unwieldy vehicles on. But even that did not serve. At last the heavy boxes had to be taken off, split into packages of more practical dimensions, and put on the backs of camels. The Germans, who had thought of so many things, had completely forgotten the mountains. It was a curious illustration of science divorced from common sense.

Twelve days after the Germans, arrived a second Turkish Red Crescent Mission, originally composed of twenty-nine members—three doctors, twenty-four male nurses, and two accountants. The party had left Constantinople as early as January 4th, and at Marseilles they embarked on board the French steamer *Manouba* on their way to Tunis. But during the voyage the ship was seized by the Italian fleet and taken to Cagliari, on the ground that the Turks on board were military men under a medical mask. The Mission was obliged to land at Cagliari, where its members were detained as prisoners of war for a week, until a professional examination conducted by an Italian doctor sent from Rome, and the wrath which the incident aroused in France, convinced the Italian Government of its error. The prisoners were released, and taken by another French boat back to Marseilles, where they were subjected to a second examination by the French Government. As a result of this inquiry, they were allowed to continue their journey—except two, one of whom had fallen ill and had to stay at Marseilles, and another who carried on his person letters pronounced compromising.

The twenty-seven arrived at Tunis on the morning of February 4th, and so lively was the sympathy aroused by their misfortune among the native population that the authorities, in order to preserve order, found it necessary to guard the landing-place with two battalions of Zouaves and two squadrons of Chasseurs. However, the party did not land at Tunis. After

two hours the boat sailed for Sfax. At the moment of her departure the Moslem crowd gathered on the quay, which had remained still since the early morning, broke forth into loud cheers for France and Turkey, and, as the boat steamed away, thousands upon thousands of handkerchiefs and turbans waved " God speed " to the Turkish passengers.

From Sfax the Mission travelled overland to the frontier, and thence to Azizia. It could not have arrived at a more opportune moment, and the services it has rendered amply compensate for the delay caused by the enemy's misguided action. It has proved in every respect vastly superior to the first Turkish Red Crescent, and its chief, Dr. Emin Mehmed—a man of distinguished and prepossessing appearance, highly educated and energetic—has no reason to fear a comparison with his German colleagues.

Soon afterwards we learnt that an English Red Crescent Mission, organized by the London All-India Moslem League, was also on its way to our succour. I understand that when it arrives it will be asked to proceed to Gharian to relieve the German doctors, one of whom, together with four of the attendants, fell ill with typhoid almost on reaching that health resort.\*

The Germans are not the only visitors who have shared the sufferings of their hosts. Mr. Seppings Wright had a severe attack of dysentery in December, and was compelled to undertake a painful journey on a camel to Tunis in order to get cured. The correspondent of the *Temps* with us is only just recovering from a long and complicated illness which at one moment seemed to threaten his life. Mr. Alan Ostler is now down with a malady which the doctors describe as double pneumonia. I remain one of the few foreigners who have managed somehow to avoid the universal example. The only thing that has bothered me is my abscess. It was very rarely I could get it dressed, and I had made up my mind to carry it home with me, only hoping that I might escape blood-poisoning. But luckily a short time ago it healed of its own accord, and I congratulate myself on having got off so cheaply.

\* The English party, under the charge of Mr. Dixon-Johnson, reached Azizia at the beginning of March, but I did not see it, as I had just left the headquarters for the front. Later on, in June, a second English mission, under the charge of the same gentleman, was despatched to Tripoli to supplement the first.



## CHAPTER XXII

### A FEW SKIRMISHES AND A PAMPHLET

ARAB volunteers are swarming up from the south in larger hordes than ever, for seedtime is over and the harvest will not begin till June. Meanwhile the Jihad affords a relaxation from prosaic labour such as the Arab's heart loves. Most of them come from the Jebel highlands and are of the type already familiar. But every now and then we have a surprise.

The other afternoon there was a great commotion in the camp. All the men, women, and little children turned out in a body. I followed the crowd, and saw coming out of the desert a compact mass of lean warriors, bristling with rifle-barrels, naked sword-blades, blunderbusses, and axes which glistened brightly in the fading sunlight. They moved quickly over the plain, preceded by twenty-five sheikhs on red-saddled steeds. When they drew near the camp they broke into a trot, and filed past the Kasr in a loose formation of fours and fives, flourishing their weapons aloft and yelling, "*Owlad bu zien ! Owlad bu zien !*" I had seldom before seen such intense, passionate faces, eyes so full of the fire of the desert.

They filed past, glaring ferociously to right and left as though inviting admiration. Nor did they invite it in vain. All the spectators—male and female, young and old, sick and sound—appeared stirred by the wild spectacle. The ragged women massed in front of the Kasr waiting for doles sent forth their shrill ululations, and the very invalids who crouched outside the hospital looked animated for an instant. Even a lame old beggar, though doubled up with age, hobbled along the column on his one leg and a stick, keeping up with the warriors and joining his quavering voice to their hoarse cries.

The report soon spread from mouth to mouth that these were

no other than the Ovlad bu Seif—the Children of the Sword—a powerful tribe from the Khadamiya region, partly pastoral, partly agricultural, and reputed to number many men of learning among its members. Ferhat Bey had received from their sheikhs word that they were coming three weeks ago, and here they were at last.

After filing through the camp, they mustered out in the open desert, and executed some rough-and-ready evolutions to the dull sound of an enormous tom-tom carried by two men. This display over, they swarmed off to the spot which they chose for their encampment. Presently a sheikh's conical white tent sprang up in the desert, and round it clustered a dozen black tents. Soon afterwards a number of red wood fires began to glow among the sand-hills, lighting up the tall figures of the warriors, who moved to and fro in the dusk like an army of giant ants.

They stayed with us four days, so that those who had no rifles might be provided with such. On the fifth day the weapons for which they waited were issued to them—old Mausers, older Martinis, and even Sniders, the oldest form of breechloader ever invented. A store of these last seems to have been discovered in the depôt at Gharian, where they must have been lying for thirty or forty years, as may be seen by the condition of the cartridges—ugly, stumpy things two inches in length and over half an inch in diameter—the brass envelopes of which, black with age and damp, had to be cleaned with oil and ashes before they were fit for use. The Children of the Sword, however, are not fastidious. Even a forty-year-old breechloader is better than a hundred-year-old flintlock. They surged into the court eagerly, pressed round the open door of the depôt, counted the cartridges dealt out to them as if they were golden coins, and went away hugging the precious handfuls to their bosoms.

While watching this scene, I was approached by a French correspondent, who, scandalized at my headgear, said :

“ You must be mad, Abbott. Don't you know that a European hat is to these wild men what a red rag is to a bull ? ”

I pointed out that the sun was getting hot, and that there was more to be feared from a *coup de soleil* than from a *coup de fusil*.

The Frenchman went on :

“ They might mistake you for an Italian.”

I rebuked him for using the obnoxious term in the hearing of the holy warriors, and then elbowed my way through the crowd. I had scarcely reached the stairs when I saw that my scolding of the indiscreet Frenchman was justified. The warriors had heard the word “ Italian,” and one of them, suddenly turning on me, said :

“ Is it true that you are an Italian ?”

“ No,” I said, with a laugh, “ I am not an Italian ; I am an Englishman.”

He and the others who stood near smiled and said : “ The English good men.”

When they had all been served, they poured out of the Kasr in masses, and moved off towards the track that leads to Ben Gashir. There a minstrel raised his hoarse voice in exhortation, the men answered back, brandishing their rifles, the women ululated, and the warriors began to indulge in a *feu-de-joie*.

At that moment a Staff officer had the happy idea to prevent accidents and waste of ammunition by turning the warriors' ardour into a more useful direction. He asked them to stop at the foot of the hill, and have a shooting competition. The Children of the Sword were delighted. They ranged themselves in a great semicircle facing the hill, some standing, others squatting on the ground. Three empty ammunition-boxes were set up on the slope of the hill at a distance of some three hundred yards, and the match began. Half a dozen at a time were shown how to load and unload their rifles. As soon as they had mastered the lesson, they were told to fire. They did not drop on one knee or lie flat on the ground in order to do so, but just sat on their hams, their feet wide apart, with the butt-end of the rifle resting against the right shoulder, one hand supporting the barrel, the other on the trigger. In this posture they fired, and I was astonished to see how well they did with these unfamiliar arms.

Of course, they could not use the “ sights ”—that was too advanced a lesson for beginners. But their hands were so steady and their eyes so sure, and both hands and eyes had had so much practice with the flintlock, that time and again

they knocked down the marks, and the average shooting was as good as that of their Turkish instructors, most of the bullets falling to within a short radius of the marks. That, for a first trial, was a remarkably good performance, and it explained the success of the Arabs in this war. No matter how antiquated the weapon may be, if a man means to use it, he stands as good a chance as a man armed with a modern magazine rifle which he won't use. It is true that the Arab rifle can fire only one bullet to the Italian six. It is true that its range is little more than a third of the Italian's. It is also true that the Arab, unable to use "sights," can only aim accurately at five hundred yards, while the Italian, with his superior knowledge, ought to hit at two thousand yards. But the Arab's physical and moral superiority make up for his technical inferiority. His nerve never breaks down, and he never desists until he has hit or been hit. He advances firing, and loading, and firing again, until he gets to within a distance where marksmanship is a mere matter of a good eye and a steady hand. The consequence is that, after much waste of life and ammunition, he ends by getting there. The waste is, no doubt, regrettable; but in the circumstances it is unavoidable, and the Arab himself does not regret it.

And so for half an hour there was much banging and booming and hissing of bulky bullets, accompanied by the warriors' lively remarks, smiles, and gesticulations.

The interest they took in the performance showed how happy was its conception, and the conception itself showed that the Turk is at last beginning to understand the Arab. If similar opportunities for bringing the two elements together are utilized in future more than they have been in the past, the friction I have already noted will die out, and mutual comprehension will replace the mistrust which arises from mutual aloofness.

The match over, the Children of the Sword broke up and resumed their disorderly march northwards, followed by some camels loaded with rifles. They were anxious to take their share in one of the little skirmishes that was just going on at the front. We have been having several engagements of the sort lately; they are the only things that make us feel that we are, so to speak, in a state of war.

We fully expected the Italians to follow up their occupation

of Girgaresh by a vigorous advance westward on Zanzur at least, if not southward on Azizia, and our hopes were strengthened by reports brought by spies that the enemy were vigorously preparing for an important move. We learnt that 15,000 fresh troops were hourly expected from Naples, and we knew that they already had one regiment at Girgaresh, two at Bu Meliana, and one at Ain Zara. Besides, the railway laid from the capital to that oasis now enabled the enemy to pour any number of reinforcements there at a moment's notice. As regards camels and commissariat, surely they have had ample time to provide for both, and we hear that they have also imported Askaris from Massawa, including five hundred Erythreans mounted on trotting camels.

Our Staff, arguing on these premises, elaborated in detail a forecast of the Italian advance. It would be, they said, in three columns. One would march from Girgaresh on Zanzur, another from Ain Zara on Ben Gashir, and the main force from Bu Meliana on Beni Adam. This forecast was seriously discussed, and while acknowledging the difficulty of resisting the enemy's vastly superior forces, the Turkish officers did not relax their efforts to make his progress as hard and slow as they could. The advanced posts were frequently inspected by the Commander-in-Chief and his Staff, a garrison was thrown into Zanzur, both wings were put in order of defence, and kept in constant communication with the headquarters. The telegraphist was busy day and night, couriers galloped to and fro at all hours, and meals were indefinitely postponed. I had never seen the Turkish Staff more alert.

The Arabs on their part, while sharing these anticipations, refused to acknowledge any difficulties. "Let the Italians only come out," said one of them to me, "and you will see. We'll let them advance a little, and then we'll fall on them all round and destroy them. Never mind if they are fifty or sixty thousand; they will be destroyed!"

The Italians, however, do not seem inclined to oblige. One day we were startled by the report of heavy firing from Girgaresh. But it turned out to be only distance practice. The enemy were testing the guns they have placed on the new fort which they have constructed a little to the west of that village. In pursuance of their old tactics, they remain hidden behind

their elaborate fortifications, and the Turks and Arabs in vain try to tempt them into the open by carrying out audacious reconnaissances up to the enemy's trenches, and sometimes even breaking into them. Italian prudence is proof against any amount of provocation. The Turks and Arabs do not call it prudence—they have another name for it—and they love to compare the invaders, now to women hiding behind the lattices of their harems, and now to animals burrowing in the earth for shelter. It is easy to understand the feeling which inspires these comparisons. The other evening a Turkish officer with a band of Arabs got to within a thousand yards of the Italian camp at Ain Zara. A squadron of Italian cavalry rode forth as though to meet them, but it stopped short just outside the camp. The Turkish officer beckoned to them with his hand to come on, but they did not.

Italian reserve naturally acts as a spur to Arab impetuosity, and the Turks would fain give these impatient warriors something to do; hence, frequent night attacks on the enemy's positions. It cannot be said that these attempts are uniformly successful. For example, in the evening of January 28th two columns, each composed of some five hundred Arab volunteers and ten Turkish regulars, and each under the command of a junior officer, left Ben Gashir and Bughamtsa respectively with the object of delivering a midnight attack on the enemy's camp at Ain Zara from east and west simultaneously. The plan, however, though admirably conceived, was very imperfectly executed. The left column lost its way and its guides in the dark, and after wandering over the desert during the night, it was compelled by the break of day to retrace its steps. The right column was more fortunate. It is true that this also strayed from its course, and, instead of attacking the enemy's camp from the east, it got to the south of it. But, at all events, it had some fun for its pains.

The tribesmen lay hidden behind the sand-dunes till the moon set, and then stealthily crept up to the Italian lines. They found the enemy amusing themselves with songs, through which the raucous voice of a gramophone could be heard. Suddenly they fired a volley. The Italians left off singing, put the lights out, and when they recovered from their confusion they returned the Arabs' fire. At the same time an outpost hidden

among the palm-trees a little farther south, of whose existence our men were apparently unaware, joined in the music, and there ensued a skirmish in the dark, each side firing, but neither being able to see what they fired at. It cost the Arabs three dead and seven wounded, but they did not grudge the price, for they had something to show for their losses.

While the skirmish was in progress, two native women rushed out of an Italian tent and ran towards the attackers, crying : " Save us or kill us ! " I have small doubt that these ladies were no better than they should be, and they had obviously been having a good time with the infidel soldiers ; but, alarmed by the raid of the faithful, they were seized with a fit of penitence. The Arabs, however, like the Turks, cling to the fiction that all Moslem women are chaste ; therefore, they received the fugitives as victims of Christian lust, and carried them off with them, together with a few Italian tents and some barbed wire, when at the approach of daylight the fear of the enemy's artillery obliged them to retire.

The appearance of these females in our camp, and the unauthenticated stories of outraged innocence they have brought with them, has added fuel to the Arab hatred of the Italian, while the old hope for loot is fanned by the hope of capturing prisoners and earning the reward of five Turkish liras per head offered by the Commander-in-Chief. So day and night they creep right up to the Italian lines in small bodies, and keep a sharp lookout for anything fortune may bring their way. They take good care not to betray their presence by fruitless firing, but are ever ready to surprise the unwary. These tactics seem to inspire the Italians with ineffable terror. Instead of sending forth patrols to sweep the neighbourhood of their camp clean of the marauders, they flee before them in the day and try to frighten them off at night with their searchlights, only venturing to face them when they are conscious of an overwhelming numerical superiority.

What small effect the Italian precautions have on the Arab mind was proved on February 11th. It was a moonless night. The stars sparkled in the soft heavens above, and below the desert was swept by the Italian searchlight. Profiting by the absence of moonlight, and as though to demonstrate the futility of the searchlight, a band of half a hundred Arabs, acting

entirely on their own responsibility, stole up to the Italian trenches between Bu Meliana and Ain Zara, and crossed them without firing a shot. It appears that the Italians are in the habit of retiring during the night into the security of their camp, leaving their trenches undefended. In any case, the bold raiders, meeting with no resistance, penetrated into the Italian territory, picked up what they could lay hands on, and came away, carrying with them several hundred yards of telephone wire and four poles. Next evening three of the raiders arrived at Azizia on horseback bringing their trophies with them, and galloped into the Kasr shouting: "*Alla yansur es Sultan!*" (God save the Sultan!)

They were greeted with loud cheers, and one of the Turkish officers observed to me: "If some more wire is captured, we may yet be able to establish telephonic communication between Ben Gashir and Beni Adam. We have a telephone apparatus. All we need is wire." Another remarked: "It really is hardly worth while fighting an enemy who cannot keep their own property from irresponsible raiders—and that with the searchlight playing all night!"

Even whole battalions of infantry and squadrons of cavalry, which come out of Ain Zara and Girgaresh either for drill or reconnaissance, beat a retreat at the sight of a Turkish kalpac or an Arab hram.

On February 21st, about two hours before noon, a regiment of cavalry and two battalions of infantry were seen marching up the Wadi Mejneen. Immediately the Arabs rushed north to meet them. But the Italians declined the offered battle. Next morning another Italian force, consisting of two squadrons of cavalry, four battalions of infantry, and three batteries of mountain artillery, left Girgaresh, and tried to advance towards Zanzur. By this time the Turkish Staff had grown so accustomed to the rate of speed at which the Italians moved that they did not allow the news to interfere with their meals. After lunch, the Commander-in-Chief, Fethi Bey, Captain Ismail Hakki, and other officers of the Staff, proceeded to Saniat Beni Adam.

Meanwhile, the Turks and Arabs encamped at Zanzur had hurried to oppose the enemy's progress. The Italians, supported by their artillery, pushed on, divided into four columns.



The report of the guns acted, as it always does, as a signal for the Arabs, and a great number of them dashed to the scene from Saniat Beni Adam and the other camps on our left wing. They attacked the Italians in flank, while the Zanzur garrison attacked them in front, and forced them to fall back under cover of their artillery. The performance was over in less than three hours. The Arabs had only two men wounded by shrapnel, and no dead. The Italians, as we learnt afterwards from a spy we caught, had seven dead and nine wounded. But though the Arabs had neither suffered nor inflicted any serious losses, this new success came to inflate them more than ever.

It may be, as we hope, that these excursions have for their object to familiarize the Italian soldiers with the ground, and that they are the preambles to an ultimate advance. But in the meanwhile the only activity the enemy permit themselves is literary activity. I have recently seen a fresh product of General Caneva's printing-press—a small octavo pamphlet of sixteen pages in green paper covers—dropped from the clouds, according to custom, into one of our camps. Both in size and in get-up this booklet marks a creditable advance on the primitive leaflets we had last month. It is also wider in scope. It is addressed to the inhabitants of Tripoli, Derna, Benghazi, Fezzan, Jebel, etc. It reminds them that the Koran says a neighbour is better than a stranger; therefore, as Italy is nearer to Tripoli than Turkey, the Arabs ought to prefer the Italian to the Turkish rule. It goes on to say that the Koran bids every True Believer to obey the powers that be, and it claims that Italy has been put in possession of the country by Allah himself. It reiterates the promises of security and prosperity already made. It depicts the Government of Rome as a tender mother who wishes to teach the Arabs how to rear their children, and how to enrich themselves through the new inventions and industries she will introduce; and so the pamphlet drags out its weary length, just as the campaign does. Prolivity in speech and dilatoriness in action—these seem to be the main characteristics of the heirs of men who could subdue a whole empire by a single expedition and tell the story of their success in three words.

Ferhat Bey tells me that he considers a verbal answer to this rigmarole quite unnecessary.

“ We cannot afford to waste our time in words. We are sick of Italian quotations from the Koran. If the Italians wish to convert us, they will have to use other means than such silly sermons.”

And, indeed, “ silly ” was the right word. The Koran, like the Bible, has been made to mean many strange things ; but I never thought any interpreter would dream of making it to mean that it is the duty of a Moslem to submit to an unbeliever !

The Arabs’ confidence in a speedy triumph is strengthened still further by the predictions of the holy marabouts who accompany the tribesmen, and their faith is of the kind that can survive any number of prophecies unfulfilled.

One of these prophets a short time ago prophesied in the camp of Ben Gashir : “ In three days we shall be in Tripoli town. Please God.” When the period specified elapsed, and it was pointed out to him that it had not pleased God to prove him a true prophet, he calmly replied : “ The time has not yet come, but it is coming.”

The prophet remained unabashed, and the faith of his followers unshaken.

I have made the acquaintance of one of these holy marabouts, and it seems to me that both the man and his mission merit more than a passing allusion.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### A DREAMER OF THE DESERT

HE arrived at Azizia in the afternoon of February 25th, a brown-bearded and bare-legged saint of some forty-five years of age, clad in a short white burnous with a big grey coat over it, and spotless white breeches under it. On his head he wore a white felt cap with a white turban round it. He was no holy beggar with staff and bowl, but a soldier of the Crescent armed at all points. A short curved yataghan was suspended under his right arm, an Italian rifle was slung across his back, and over his left shoulder floated a banner, half green and half white. On the green portion, which was faded with age, was embroidered the inspiring text: "*Nasrun min Allah wa fethun karib*" (Victory is from God and conquest near). The white part was emblazoned with a green sphere, representing Africa, and four red patches arranged in the shape of a half moon over it, representing the provinces of Islam—Morocco, Algeria, Tunis, and Tripoli.

He mounted the stairs, rested his standard against the rails of the balcony, and stepped into the Commander's room. He produced letters from the other Turkish Commanders showing that he had walked from Alexandria to Derna, from Derna to Benghazi, from Benghazi to Khoms. At each place he had stopped, preached, and fought. The Italian rifle he carried was a trophy from a battle at Khoms. The journey from Alexandria to Azizia had taken him ninety-four days.

After a conversation with the Staff, he stepped out again, washed his hands and feet on the balcony, and prostrated himself in prayer. Then he got up, resumed his slippers and his standard, and walked about the camp addressing words of faith and fire to the Arab warriors. They listened to him with

profound veneration, and gave vent to the impression his words made on them in solemn, subdued exclamations and appeals to Allah.

I had several long talks with him, and the things he said to me and the manner in which he said them convinced me that I had to deal with no ordinary vagrant—one of the many who, under the cloak of sanctity, exploit the credulous—but with a veritable Peter the Hermit, the earnest preacher of a Moslem Crusade, and withal a man of wide experience of the world and considerable culture.

Besides a thorough knowledge of Arabic and Turkish, he can speak some English, French, German, and modern Greek. He has travelled in Europe as far as Hamburg, he knows Moslem Africa from sea to sea, and Asia from the western coast as far east as India and Afghanistan. The story of his life as he related it to me on the moonlit ramparts of the Kasr was a romance pervaded with a great purpose. He is of Albanian origin—his father was a learned Khodja in Egypt, and had been poisoned by the Khedive Ismail Pasha. He himself was born in the island of Rhodes, where he was kept for twelve years as a political prisoner under Abdul Hamid. He escaped seven years ago in a Greek sailing-vessel, which took him to the island of Syra. At that port he embarked on a French steamer, and reached Marseilles, whence he went to Tangier. He was wandering over Morocco when the Turkish Revolution broke out. The good news induced him to return to Turkey. He landed at Smyrna, and travelled to Constantinople overland across the Caucasus, preaching Pan-Islamism among the Moslems under Russian rule. Then he went to Afghanistan on a similar mission. On his return the Turco-Italian War broke out. He immediately gained the Syrian coast, crossed to Alexandria, and set out on this last tour. He had already traversed the Sahara on a previous occasion, preparing the spirit of the Arabs for a general rising against the infidel interlopers, and he regarded this last encroachment of Christian Europe on Moslem Africa as the beginning of the great Jihad of which he had dreamed all his life.

He grew very excited as he talked on the subject. He kept pulling the hood of his burnous on and off, and at last, taking his white cap off, he stood bare-headed, the moon shining down

upon his close-cropped scalp and the light of my lantern falling upon his strong, slightly aquiline nose, deeply-scored forehead, and dark brown beard, with a few silver streaks gleaming in it.

“People will tell you,” he suddenly said, “that I am mad. No, I am not mad;” and he tapped his forehead as if to assure me and himself of his sanity.

“I have spent years trying to bring all the Moslems together,” he added, locking his fingers with a nervous movement, “and this war will help to unite us. You see the Arabs streaming up from the south every day. That is nothing. Wait a little, and you will see the Bedouins from the heart of the Sahara—from Wadai itself—rushing up like a flood which shall sweep into the sea Italians and Turks alike. They are wild men, those children of the desert, and know no difference between one foreigner and another. Turks, Murks—they are all Rûm to them, and they will slay them all!”

“When will this happen?” I asked.

“The exact time I cannot tell you. Allah can only know it,” he replied, lifting his deep-set grey eyes to the sky. “But it will be soon, and then I advise you to be on the Tunisian side of the frontier—near enough to see and hear what happens, but also near the sea, so that you may escape. For it will not stop at Tripoli. We hate the Italians, but we hate the French no less. I hate them all. All the nations of Europe are robbers. One takes Egypt, another Algeria, and next day Morocco, Zanzibar, and so on, and so on. They say, ‘Islam is asleep. Let us go in and take all we can.’ But wait and see. The day of retribution is at hand. In a few years—very few years; I will give it to you in writing if you like—there will be a great European war—Italy fighting Austria Germany fighting France, England fighting Germany. England alone, being an island, will remain safe; France will be wiped off the face of the earth. Germany will be exhausted. Then is our time for a general sweep. Meanwhile we shall not remain idle. We shall not trouble the English much. They have filched Egypt by cunning,” he said, making a gesture as if stealing something underhand; “that is different. But these ruffians, the Italians and the French, have openly flouted Islam,” and he hit his clenched fists in fury, his grey eyes blazing.

Then he went on to tell me that a serious movement is

preparing in Tunis, Algeria, and Morocco—a real Jihad which will not end till the French have been swept off the face of Africa, and, raising his hand to his mouth, palm upwards, he blew along it, to illustrate the process.

Reverting to Tripoli, he informed me that there is no danger of the war dying out through lack of ammunition. Arms are smuggled in, both overland and by sea, and as long as there are piastres there will be powder. “And Allah will always send piastres when they are needed. Allah never fails those who put their trust in him. I never have any money, but when I need anything it comes from above. In the desert the Bedouins I meet stop and kiss my hand—I get from them the little food I require. They are like me—when bread fails, they live on grass. Their house is a tent which they can carry on their shoulders. And even if there is neither food nor shelter, what does it matter? We are not afraid of death. Look at me. I have had many narrow escapes, but I never was afraid. I am not afraid to face ten men.” He made a quick gesture as though unslinging a rifle, then he put up his hand as though firing it; after having fired five or six imaginary shots, he dropped the imaginary rifle and tapped his side, as though he was drawing his yataghan and charging an imaginary host. It was all done in a minute, and having finished off all his enemies (some, no doubt, took to flight), he resumed his parable quietly. “Why should I fear? I stand here, and Allah is up there,” he said, lifting his eyes to the sky. “I shall die when my time comes, not before. That is how we all feel. But our enemies are not like us. The Italians cannot live without macaroni. The French need railways. All the Europeans fear death, as if it were possible to escape it. And we are many of us—numberless millions!”

All I had seen in the course of this war had proved to me that Islam, so often represented by Western writers as a condition of static decadence, really is a dynamic force of incalculable magnitude—a force made up of two elements altogether beyond the modern European’s comprehension: boundless faith in the divine and a fearless contempt for death. Both these elements found their embodiment in the man before me—the spokesman of millions who feel like him.

He went on to say that those millions do not look to Stambul

for leadership. "There are many Pashas in Stambul, but not a single wise man among them. One pursues an English, another a German, a third a French policy—and they all take bribes. No; that is not the sort of people to do the great work. We want men with a Moslem policy—men who have faith in Allah. And these men are to be found in the desert, not in Stambul."

He calls himself Bimbashi, or Major; but when I asked him if he held a commission from the Sultan of Turkey, he replied: No; he held no commission from any earthly power; he owed allegiance to no earthly monarch. "God is my King!" he said, lifting his eyes to the sky.

On all matters he was perfectly outspoken, as strong men are, and he gave me the impression of a character one would like to have for a friend rather than for an enemy. When not excited by his Great Idea, he was a man of very refined manners, with a keen sense of humour, and a quiet charm that fascinated not only me, but all who came into contact with him. We discovered that we had common acquaintances in India and Turkey, and he furnished me with the latest news from the latter country, telling me how a certain English Consul had been transferred from one town to another, and how a certain Turkish brigand—the famous and chivalrous Teharkijali, who had for years played in Asia Minor the romantic rôle of a Robin Hood—had lately been caught and beheaded by the authorities.

He gave me what he playfully described as his *carte de visite*—two couplets, one in Arabic, the other in Turkish, setting forth that he was "the illustrious traveller, Mohammed el Kiani (known also as Baba Kiani), who had for his map of the world the footprints of the People of Understanding"\*—and offered to take me, disguised as an Arab, across the Sahara to Kufra, the headquarters of Sidi Ahmed es Shereef, the chief of the Senussi, and other places where no European has ever been, so that I might see with my own eyes the things of which he spoke, and write a great book about them.

It was perfectly easy, he said. All we needed was two trotting camels and two little tents like the one I had.

"What about food?" I asked.

\* *I.e.*, Mystics. He belonged to the famous mystic sect of the Kaderee, so called after their founder, Sheikh Abdul Kader el Ghailani.

“ We don’t need to think about that,” he replied, with a childlike simplicity that made one feel the full grandeur of the Eastern man’s improvidence and of his trust in God’s providence. “ We need very little food. These people here fall sick because they eat too much. Look at me! I am never sick, because I eat only a little bread and a few dates, and I drink a little tea. These things we can always find as we go along.”

I looked at his spare, wiry figure, and there could be no doubt that he thrived on that diet.

The prospect he unfolded to me—the two of us flying across the limitless desert on two lean m’harris, visiting oasis after oasis, one day here and next day far away—captivated me. I forgot the abscess I owed to a hard artillery saddle; I forgot the pangs of hunger I had suffered. All practical difficulties vanished in the dim moonlight. It was only next morning, when I reflected in clear sunlight on the scantiness of the diet, on the flinty nature of the m’harri saddles, and my own poor physique, that I doubted my ability to translate the dream into reality.

At last, when we parted for the last time, he said that, should I decide on the expedition, all I had to do was to communicate with him. I asked where I could write. He answered in a plain, matter-of-fact tone, that a Poste Restante letter could always find him if it were addressed to Tangier, Algiers, Tunis, Alexandria, Cairo, Rhodes, Smyrna, Constantinople, Baghdad, Kandahar, Bombay—or, in fact, anywhere. I realized that I had at last met the true Citizen of the World—a man whose address was everywhere.

He tried to procure a trotting camel to carry him to Sokna, and, on failing to find a satisfactory animal, he set out on foot, with his rifle across his back and his banner over his shoulder.

I watched him as he plunged into the desert, gliding in and out of the scrub-covered hillocks with short, brisk steps. His grey overcoat was soon lost to sight. Only his white cap and the white hood of his burnous were visible against the greys of the ground; then these also vanished, and only his banner might be seen like a tiny white butterfly fluttering over the scrub. Finally this also vanished. The desert had swallowed him up—to send him forth again one of these days, perhaps, at the head of myriads of Moslem warriors.



This is his own ambition, at all events. He dreams of playing the part of another Mahdi. His parting words to me were : " If you do not see me again, you shall hear about me. In a short time the whole world shall hear about me. And when you read the name of Mohammed el Kiani in the journals of Europe, you shall say : ' Ah, that was the man I drank coffee with at Azizia ! ' "

Personally, I should not be surprised if his dream came true. He boasted to me (if, indeed, his grave, earnest manner of speech could be called boasting) of his influence over the Bedouins from one end of the Sahara to the other, and he certainly is the sort of man to stir up a great storm. He is not a fanatic in the sense of hating all Christians, though he hates the Italians and the French with a consuming hatred. It is impossible to question his sincerity or his ability. His sanity is a matter of point of view. Some people would call him possessed ; I prefer to call him possessed of a great idea.

Perhaps he *is* a little mad, and his disclaimer of madness shows that he is a little conscious of it. Madness, however, is not a hindrance, but a help, in the work he has set his hand to. It was very easy to see the effect his words had on his Arab hearers, and I confess that I myself was not unaffected by the power of his personality. While he talked of the fortunes and the future of Islam he seemed to impart to me some of his own fire and enthusiasm. His hopes of a Moslem Renaissance may be chimerical, but when he gave utterance to them they sounded merely grand, and I echoed the Arabs' pious exclamation, "*Inshallah!*" with a conviction as fervid as their own. I am thankful to have met a man of Baba Kiani's stamp. As to his mission, whatever the future may bring forth, I have no doubt left in my mind about the strength of the Pan-Islamic movement at the present hour.

The General Jihad which my friend preaches is not yet with us ; if it were, I should not be alive now to discuss it. But after all I have seen I cannot doubt that it is coming, and coming fast. For years the newspapers of Stambul and secret agents from Yildiz had been beating the Pan-Islamic tom-tom in North Africa, but with small practical result. The Cross was felt to be too strong for the Crescent. This war has changed the situation completely. The failure of the Italians

has lowered the prestige of Europe in the Arabs' eyes by showing to them how little modern guns, magazine rifles, aeroplanes, and all the other vaunted advantages of Europe can accomplish, after all, in face of a determined and concerted resistance. The lesson has been learnt throughout the breadth and length of the Sahara. The Tripolitan War has dropped like a stone in a vast sea, and the circles are widening day by day, until every part of Moslem Africa that is in French or English hands is bound to feel the agitation.

The riots which broke out in Tunis on one hand, and in Alexandria on the other, soon after the outbreak of hostilities are the first symptoms. It is true that the native animosity in both those places was directed almost entirely against the Italians, but once the ball has been set rolling there is no telling where it will stop. Already the French authorities in Tunis are taking their precautions against the trouble which they know to be brewing. They make no secret of their anxiety. And to this anxiety may, in a large measure, be traced their vigorous connivance of the provisioning of the Turco-Arab forces across the Tunisian frontier.

A similar connivance, dictated by parallel considerations, prevails, I have reasons to believe, on the Egyptian frontier. No other course is possible. The Arabs of both countries are in cordial sympathy with their Tripolitan coreligionists, as is clearly shown by the sums of money and the contingents of volunteers which they contribute to the war. In Tunis I find even poor miners, who earn only forty francs a month, raising a sum of 2,500 francs among themselves for the holy cause. The troops which guard the frontiers share this feeling. Only an Italian army could prevent this correspondence, if it occupied the two frontiers. But the Italian armies have proved their utter inability to do so. The upshot is that the sympathy of which this inflow of food, money, and men, is but a sign will spread and spread as the war goes on, and with it will spread the agitation, till the whole of Northern Africa rings with the cry, "*Allah Akbar!*"

It is easy to discount, but impossible to deny, the effect of Italy's Libyan lunacy on the Arab mind. I consider one of the by-products of that lunacy the holy war which is now raging in Morocco. The Moroccans know, as the Algerians,

the Tunisians, and the Egyptians know, that their brother in Tripoli has beaten a great European Power. They have determined to beat another. For Northern Africa, in point of geography, as well as in point of religion and language, is one country ; and whatever happens in one part of it produces an instantaneous shock in every other.

The only thing that lacks for a successful resistance to European aggression is cohesion. But that desideratum will not lack always. There is already in Northern Africa one centre round which the patriotism of the Arabs may eventually rally. It is the Senussi sect. From the beginning of the war the attitude of this powerful community was a matter of anxious speculation both in Africa and in Europe, for in both continents it was felt that much would depend upon the part it would choose to play. As soon as I arrived at the Turkish camp I endeavoured to find out what that part was, and I found that the ancient feud between Kufra and Constantinople had been healed, and that the Senussi, like the rest of the Tripolitan Arabs, were determined to present a united front to the common enemy. We had but few members of the sect on our own side, owing to the immense distance, but I understood that thousands of them were with the Turks at Benghazi and Derna, which are much nearer to the Senussi settlements.\*

Notwithstanding this enthusiastic support, however, it still remained an open question what the official policy of the head of the community was to be. Would Sidi Ahmed actively cast in his lot with us, or would he remain a passive, if sympathetic, onlooker ?

The Turks were, of course, trying as hard as they could to induce him to declare himself in their favour, and finally they succeeded. About the middle of January the Sheikh es Senussi issued to the inhabitants of Tripolitania a manifesto inscribed on a silk banner urging them to continue the struggle, and stating that he himself would take the field at the head of a large force. This fervid proclamation spurred the tribesmen to greater exertions than ever, and hence the increasing hordes of warriors from the interior which I have already noted.

At the same time more numerous reinforcements began to

\* The distance from either of those towns to the oasis of Kufra is about five hundred and thirty miles.

pour to the Benghazi side, and Enver Bey, the Commander of the forces of the Crescent on that side, received a letter from the Sheikh, in which the latter declared himself as heart and soul devoted to the cause, and he reiterated his intention of leading his adherents to the front in person.

The Sultan hastened to reward the great chief's services by conferring on him a decoration set in brilliants and a sword of honour studded with precious stones.\*

The importance of Sidi Ahmed's participation in the war can hardly be over-estimated. He and his adherents wield an immense influence over the whole of Moslem Africa, and the call to rise in defence of the Faith which has issued from Kufra will meet with response not only among the children of the desert, but also among the Arabs of Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, and all the other regions in infidel hands. This is a fact the importance of which Europeans still refuse to grasp.

I was amused on my return home to see the Cairo correspondents of important London journals denying the fact itself. "It is extremely improbable," wrote one of these gentlemen in January, "that the Senussi will take any part in the Italo-Turkish War, and as long as they are let alone they are not likely to stir." This opinion was based on the Senussi's reputation as an essentially peaceable set of men, and it took no account of the fact that many of the tribes that were already in the field had always enjoyed a similar reputation.

The truth is that most of the Arabs under normal conditions prefer peace to war. But when they are attacked, they are never found wanting in readiness and ability to defend themselves. They are always armed, and never loth to use their arms, when they see adequate cause for doing so. Nor is there any more adequate cause for war in the Arab's eyes than the

\* When I left the Turkish camp in March, Sidi Ahmed himself had not yet appeared, but shortly after my departure I learnt that the advance-guard of the forces he promised had begun to arrive. On the 25th of that month a band of brawny warriors armed with rifles and bayonets marched to Azizia, brandishing their swords, and chanting "We are the sons of the Lion," to the sound of a big tom-tom borne by two men, and rushed up to the Kasr, exactly as the Owlad bu Seif, whose arrival I have described. I was also informed that this contingent brought the news that a still larger force, led by the Sheikh's own nephew, was on its way to our headquarters. To appreciate these facts at their true value the reader must remember that Kufra is no less than eight hundred miles distant from Azizia, and that great part of the road lies across the Libyan Desert.

defence of his religion. He literally believes that whoever falls in fighting for the Faith is assured of eternal bliss, and, acting on that belief, he does not hesitate to sacrifice this life to the next.

When the fact of the Senussi's participation in the Italo-Turkish War could no longer be denied, its importance was minimized by the reflection that the sect lacks homogeneity and concentration. It was pointed out that the Senussi are scattered over the whole of Northern Africa, and that they belong to various and sometimes mutually hostile tribes, and it was argued that a general movement is impossible.

In answer to this argument I have to point out that the medieval Crusaders lacked both homogeneity and concentration. They were scattered over the whole of Western Europe, and they belonged to various and sometimes mutually hostile nations. The national and linguistic gulfs between those nations were infinitely wider than the gulfs which separate the Arab-speaking tribes of Northern Africa. Yet that did not prevent a general movement and common action on the part of Christendom in what was considered to be the cause of God.

The modern Arab's mentality is exactly the same as the medieval European's. Islam still is where Christendom was before the Renaissance, and if Christendom, despite all the forces that made for disunion, united round the banner of the Cross, I see no reason for doubting the capacity of Islam for a similar union round the banner of the Crescent. Less reason do I see for doubt after having made the acquaintance of a preacher of the Jihad, who in his person embodied all the characteristics of Peter the Hermit.

My own conclusion is that the Pan-Islamic movement, though it may still want the cohesion and organization necessary for vigorous action, is a force with which Europe will have to reckon, and, viewed from a European standpoint, a peril for the accentuation of which Europe's diplomacy will have to thank Italy's Libyan lunacy.\*

\* While revising proofs of this chapter I received from Chérif Pacha the August number of his periodical *Mécheroutiette* wherein (pp. 18, 19) he asserts that England and France encouraged Italy to rush into Tripolitania so that she might check the Pan-Islamic agitation fomented by the Committee of Union and Progress. If His Excellency's information is correct, English and French statesmen have been given a rare opportunity for appreciating the humour of the sardonic goddess Nemesis.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### “JANUM SEKLEYOR !”

My Moslem friends, richer in faith than I am, continued to believe in an Italian advance on a large scale long after I gave up all such expectations. As the days dragged by, it became clear even to the most stubbornly optimistic among the Turkish officers that my scepticism was not excessive ; but even then they loved to cling to the hope that the enemy might at least make a serious effort to capture Zanzur.

“ I have a presentiment that they will one of these days march on Zanzur in great force,” said to me the genial Captain Ismail Hakki a few days ago ; and then he added : “ I cannot understand at all why they did not occupy Zanzur all the time it was defenceless. I can almost as little understand how they have failed to occupy it since. It is so near the sea and so near their fortifications at Girgaresh. Yes, my heart tells me that one of these days they will make a serious effort to take it. Even if they are again defeated as they were on the 22nd, they can easily retire to Girgaresh.”

“ My dear friend,” I replied, with a laugh, “ the march on Zanzur, even if it does take place, may satisfy you. You are a soldier, and any scrap is better than nothing to you. In time of drought even a hailstorm is welcome. But I don't care for scraps. To me half a loaf is worse than no bread ; so I give the Italians to do something commensurate with the expectations that brought me out here till the end of February. If they don't, I will go away. Nothing serious can happen after February. Since they have done nothing during the winter, they are not likely to do much during the summer. I, for one, have no desire to stew in idleness or to make the acquaintance

of the Tripolitan *gibla*. I have known its Egyptian brother, the *Khamseen*.”

The question now is : Why do the Italians persist in doing nothing ? Some answer it by saying that the command is to blame for lack of initiative ; others that the Italian Government does not wish to lose more lives than it can help, for fear of popular discontent. The majority, however, maintain that the true cause is poverty of spirit on the part of the army. The officers, though rich in personal courage,\* are afraid to move lest the men shall mutiny. Fresh troops are constantly brought out to replace the old ones for no obvious reason, unless it be that the old ones are found wanting. Our Arab spies confirm this view by reporting mutinies and desertions among the enemy.

Be the explanation what it may, the fact is that the Italians suffer from a strong disinclination to action, and this disinclination compels the Turks also to inaction. With the means at their disposal, a passive policy seems to them the only practicable policy, and their plan, if they can be said to have one, is to wear out the enemy by little night attacks such as I have described. But the noise of these martial amusements is only heard at the far front. We at Azizia seem to have settled down to a peaceful pastoral life. From the market outside the Kasr comes the gentle bleating of sheep, from the artillery stables next door the crowing of cocks and the cackling of hens. In the daytime these fowls wander among the horses and mules, picking up the grain which the quadrupeds drop ; in the evening they roost on the shafts of an Italian *carretta alpina* which is used for carrying water. In the camp round the Kasr the sparrows twitter, and the larks trill as they soar to the blue heavens. And in and out of the Kasr the camels come and go, grunting and snarling for want of something better to do.

And the men—how do they bear compulsory inaction ?

One afternoon, as I was taking a stroll over the Sidi Ramadan Hill, I saw an Arab tribesman perched on the smooth dome of the saint’s tomb, and straining his eyes towards the north—towards Ain Zara.

\* I have never heard from the Turkish officers any reflection on their Italian colleagues’ personal courage ; on the contrary, they have always spoken with a generous admiration of it.

“When will the Italians come out to fight?” he asked me.

“Allah only knows, my friend,” I answered.

“But they will come out, won’t they?” he insisted. “For if there is no war, I should like to go back home.”

I tried to comfort him by saying, with a confidence which I was far from feeling: “Oh yes, they will come out.” And then I added by way of a mental reservation: “*Inshallah*.”

“*Inshallah!*” he echoed, showing his teeth, and slid down from his perch.

It is natural that the impulsive and impatient Arabs should be bored. But I find that boredom has crept upon the Turks themselves. Even they, strange to say, begin to find doing nothing irksome.

“Eh, Mustapha Effendi, *ne var ne yok?*” (What is there, what is there not?—*i.e.*, what news?), asks one somnolent Tommy as he slouches up to another; and the other replies:

“*Hitch bir shay!*” (Not one thing!), and slouches past.

The officers try as best they can to kill time, lest time should kill them. A few of the younger sort now and again go out for a ride and a little shooting practice by way of a diversion. Some of the older ones tell the beads of meditation, or mark the crawling hours with pinches of snuff. Javid Bey, who is gifted with a sense of humour, when I asked him how he amused himself, gaily replied: “Oh, I make rice pudding every morning.”

Another, when I put to him the same question, frankly confessed, “*Janum sekleyor!*” (My soul is bored!), and he yawned widely.

In this fashion they spend their days, and they spend their evenings drinking tea and discussing politics. The stale French papers that come from Tunis and Paris, and the staler still Turkish papers that come from Stambul, afford subjects. Will or will not Europe intervene to bring this insipid farce to an end? What is England doing? Is there a chance of an Anglo-Turkish alliance?

Now and then the debates are enlivened by sensational rumours that spring up in the camp, nobody knows how. I had already heard the myth that France had declared war on Italy—it was a myth made plausible by the violent friction that has arisen between the two countries owing to the seizure





**BOREDOM.**

*Sketches by Capt. Ismael Hakkio.*



of French boats in the Mediterranean by the Italian fleet—but the other day I was startled by the rumour that England had declared war on Germany. It was impossible to discover how the fable originated. It seemed to have come to life without any parent through a process of spontaneous generation ; but it excited an amount of interest which showed that, since Italy will not move, and Europe will not intervene to force her either to get on or to get out, the only way my neighbours can see out of this impasse is some great international complication, and I am not sure that they are wrong.

However, be they as profoundly disgusted with the war as they may, none of them will hear of peace, if peace means the recognition of Italy's pretensions.

“ Why should we agree to such a peace ? ” they ask. “ Let the war drag on as long as it will. We stand to gain more than the enemy. It costs us little more than the normal expenditure of the administration. It costs the enemy millions in ready cash, let alone the loss of trade. How long will the Italians be able to bear the strain ? If it comes to tiring each other out, they are likely to be tired out before we are.”

This is the view even of those among us who like the campaign least. The other evening one of the first Red Crescent doctors invited me to his room. After tea, the inevitable question arose : “ When do you think the war will end ? ”

I replied that I saw no reason why it should ever end, any more than I could see any reason why it had ever begun.

My answer did not please him. He dwelt on the enormous expense the campaign entails on the enemy, and based his hope of a speedy termination of hostilities on Italy's financial exhaustion. I suggested that a more desirable termination would be a bold advance on the Italians' part and a good fight in the open.

“ No, no ! ” he exclaimed, alarmed. “ That would involve much bloodshed ; it would be inhuman. Better this slow fashion, which costs only money.”

There was a long silence, and I watched him with mingled compassion and amusement as he sat cross-legged on his bed in his flowered nightshirt—a picture of plump self-pity. He was, no doubt, cursing to himself the fate that drove him from

the comforts of Europe to the manifold hardships of Africa. Presently he opened his lips again.

“Let us forget the present, and talk of the past,” he said.

We talked of Stambul, Salonica, London. He grew communicative, and spoke of his plans for the future. If he returned home alive, he would invest his capital in land either in Macedonia or in Anatolia, and take to farming. Never again would he expose himself to the miseries of an African campaign.

Poor man! He longs for a return home. His whole heart is set on a peaceful life. Yet even he refuses to entertain the thought of peace on any terms, save the total withdrawal of the Italian troops and the revocation of the edict of annexation.

The Turks have good grounds for reckoning on the Italians' financial exhaustion, and their weariness of a war that so far has brought them neither glory nor gain. Let Italian politicians and publicists vaunt as loudly as they may their people's determination to carry on the campaign to final conquest, the letters addressed to the Italian soldiers from their relatives at home, and found in the pockets of the dead, tell a different tale. They tell of distress and impatience, and express the hope that the war will soon be over. The same is the tone of letters destined for soldiers and others in Tripoli town which often stray to our camp, just as letters addressed to us here often stray to Tripoli town. Some of those letters contain small bank-notes, and regrets that times are hard, owing to the war, so that the writer cannot send more money. The Staff officers open the missives, read them, then they replace the money, and readdress them to their destination, with the superscription: “This has been read by the Ottoman General Staff.”

What the Italian soldiers write to their families we have no means of knowing, but our spies continue to bring reports of disease and discontent among them. They tell us that a fortnight ago there was a real intention to advance on Zanzur; but the men refused to march, and a great number were arrested. Five houses, they say, are full of recalcitrant soldiers.\*

It is pathetic to hear of the expedients to which the Italian

\* I have since seen a Reuter telegram, dated “Paris, February 16th,” stating: “The Paris *Journal* says it has from an Italian source information showing that the situation in Tripoli is not as Italian official circles and Italian newspapers depict it. Many cases of desertion and insubordination are cited, and it is stated that men are dying in large numbers.”

officers have recourse in order to keep their men's thoughts away from home. We are told by our spies that they set them to construct miniature castles, like children playing with toy bricks.\* Alas ! my friends, castles in the sand may be more solid, but they are hardly more profitable than castles in the air.

Such are the feelings and the pastimes of the belligerents. The feelings and the pastimes of the onlookers, if I may judge from my own, are hardly more exhilarating. I have come out here to enjoy the emotions of a campaign, and I find myself doomed to endure its privations only. It seems that when Turk meets Italian, there is no tug-of-war, but only a worse kind of peace.

During the first two months or so, the study of the men and beasts around me afforded some diversion from the monotonous contemplation of the desert, but, now that the novelty of this life has worn off, its monotony is becoming intolerable. Three months may sound nothing to a town-dweller—the hours fly quickly when they are occupied, be it only with dissipation, and there is some compensation in the very variety of town idleness—but in the desert, where the daily occupations are always the same and the dissipations nil, every hour of idleness weighs a ton in ennui.

I try to lighten the weight by watching the caravans as they come and go, by talking with the living in the plain, and by counting the dead that are buried on the slopes of the hill, or by waiting for the mail that brings me a very rare letter from home. But it is all in vain. What at first was a picnic has now become a penance. I have got sick of seeing the sun rise every morning over the shoulder of the Sidi Ramadan Hill, and set every evening behind the Jebel range, its rays filtering through the clouds of fine sand which the light breezes of the heavens or the heavy feet of the camels raise, turning them into clouds of golden dust. I have got sick of the black band of tom-toms and bagpipes, which strolls through the camp and suk at night, filling the air with its horrible thumpings and shrieks, especially horrible now when disease and death are

\* I was inclined to doubt this report as an Arab invention until, on my return home, I came across a copy of the *Sphere* (March 23rd, 1912), containing photographs in which the Italian soldiers of the 40th Regiment are depicted “constructing sand-models of famous buildings behind the trenches in Tripoli.”

round us. Nor is that the only nocturnal noise that makes rest impossible. Last evening a number of Arab women in a hut, apparently situated to the north of the Kasr, but invisible in the darkness, were wailing some dead; on the other side some Albanian soldiers in the artillery stable-yard were singing. Presently, to this *mélange* of wails of sorrow and songs of carelessness was added a third element. The Italians suddenly started sweeping the desert with their searchlights from Ain Zara, and the flashes set the dogs barking, until human and canine voices rose to a distracting symphony.

Even when, in course of time, the noises subside, there come other agents to render sleep impossible. The approach of summer seems to have stirred to life millions of dormant pests. Myriads of sharp needles pierce our bodies, and when, after a restless night, we get up in the morning, we find them tatooed all over with red spots, patches, and blisters, arranged in an endless variety of painful patterns.

\*            \*            \*            \*            \*

My diary has degenerated into a dull log-book. In default of more interesting matters, I fill its pages with remarks on the vagaries of the weather. During the last week, I find, we have experienced an almost uninterrupted series of sand-storms, the wind blowing sometimes from the south-east, sometimes from the north-east, and sometimes from both points at once, and giving one a foretaste of the suffocating sirocco in store for those who will stay here through the summer. I am not one of them. I hear that even the natives of the place are compelled by the heat and the scarcity of water to flee from Azizia to Zanzur during the summer. I have lately been tormented by headaches, caused, no doubt, by the sand-storms, but serving to intensify the dread of disease which is stealing over my mind. The sight of so many men, physically so much more robust than myself, stricken down by fever round me is beginning to affect my imagination. Hitherto I have kept immune by sheer force of will; but I do not think my will is strong enough to resist suggestion.

I have therefore decided, as February has come to an end, and the Italians show no intention of breaking the monotony, to turn my back on Azizia. My plan is to move slowly from advanced post to advanced post, and from oasis to oasis, so

that should, contrary to my prognostications, the enemy be induced to do something grand, I may be able to regain the theatre of war and witness the performance. If nothing of the kind happens, I will turn my face homewards.

\*            \*            \*            \*            \*

I left Azizia at midday on March 3rd, with a camel carrying my effects and little Mohammed beside me. When I told him that I was going away for good, he asked me to take him to England with me. I had grown so fond of the ugly little man, and he seemed to be so fond of me, that I felt strongly tempted to do so. But then I reflected that my means did not permit me to educate him and fit him for a useful life in England, and, of course, I could not turn him adrift if once I undertook the responsibility of launching him into the world. So I regretfully told him that the thing was out of the question, but, if he liked, he could accompany me as far as the frontier. He agreed, and we started together.

We had hardly got outside Azizia, when the camel-driver asked for money to buy oats with. I gave him some money, and back he went—not to buy oats, as I found out afterwards, but on some errand that I could not fathom. In any case, his move caused us a delay that proved fatal to our plans. While we were waiting for him on the road, up rushed an Arab scallawag in a sack, with holes for neck and arms, and a woman in dirty and disintegrated rags round her body and a gaudy necklace round her neck. They pounced upon little Mohammed, and tried to pull him back, shouting and gesticulating mightily. They turned out to be little Mohammed’s parents, of whose existence I had a dim idea, but of whose presence at Azizia I was totally ignorant. They said he was trying to run away from them, and that, now they’d caught him, they would not let him go. I expostulated with them, saying that their son would be perfectly safe in my company, and would come back with money.

“ No ! ” cried the father ; “ all my boys and girls are dead. I have no other child. I cannot let him go. I know you have been paying him well, but—he has never given us any of the money he got from you.”

There was a combination of sentiment and self-interest against which it was impossible for me to do anything. So I

shook hands with little Mohammed, gave him some money and some good advice on filial obligations ; and, the camel-driver having joined us in the meantime, I went my way, while he went back with his parents.

It was a calm, sunny day, and the abundant feeding in which I had indulged during the last few weeks at Azizia had, in spite of all other discomforts, restored me to such a degree that I enjoyed the journey thoroughly. I walked part of the way, rode the rest, and in five hours I reached Saniat Beni Adam.

I found the camp moved a little farther away from the position it occupied when I had last visited it, and admirably organized by its new Commandant, Lieutenant-Colonel Muheddin—a tall, lithe cavalry officer, born at Beyrut of an Albanian father and a Syrian mother. The tents were pitched wide apart. The horses were picketed all in one place, and only those on actual service were saddled. The camels were grouped by themselves outside the camp. Sanitary arrangements were provided. System and order reigned everywhere. The only painful feature was the presence of poor women and children, who roamed about with empty meat-tins picking up oats dropped by the horses, and prowled round the tents whining for alms.

A muezzin was chanting his call to prayers as I arrived, and soon afterwards he joined the circle of officers who sat cross-legged on a rug under a pavilion of Italian waterproof cloth rigged outside the Commandant's tent, making tea. I was invited to take a seat on the rug and share their refreshment. I found among them several old friends : Major Isac, Lieutenant Ekram, Lieutenant Atif, Suleiman el Baroni, and Mr. Seppings Wright.

The moon had risen while we were having tea. By her light I was able to pitch my tent ; and, after a delightful dinner in excellent company, I retired to rest, and was soothed to semi-consciousness by the music of Arab psalms.

I was just dropping off to sleep, when I heard outside my tent a tiny voice that sounded familiar. I peeped out, and there in the white moonlight stood little Mohammed. He told me that he had given his parents the slip, and laughingly described how he hid among a caravan of camels bound for Saniat Beni Adam, how he got here, how he asked for the whereabouts



of the English gentleman who had arrived that evening, and how an Arab had taken him to my tent. His whole manner seemed to say, “ I have come to stay.” So he stayed, and resumed his functions as if he had never left off.

But, alas ! the fates were against us. Next day at noon his father turned up. He had tracked him to Beni Adam, and wanted to take him back. Little Mohammed refused to go. I spoke to the father, and at last he agreed to leave the boy with me, provided he got in future a portion of his earnings. Little Mohammed promised, and the affair seemed settled to the satisfaction of all concerned. But we reckoned without the mother. She turned up on the following morning, and refused to listen to any financial considerations. Maternal sentiment was with her stronger than self-interest, and so little Mohammed was led away by his parent, protesting. He was sorry to go, and I was as sorry to see him go. But there was no other way ; 'twas our kismet.

## CHAPTER XXV

### BANQUETS AND BOMBS

My last sojourn at the Garden of the Sons of Adam promises to be one of unmixed delight. The plain on which our tents are pitched is a tapestry of green, purple, red, pink, yellow, and white. Food is abundant, the air clean, the water pure, and, besides the Turkish and German officers, all of whom are most cheering and cheerful comrades, there is my next-door neighbour, Mr. Seppings Wright : that strangest of anomalies—a charming Englishman.

He is a journalist by profession, but in temperament and habits an artist of the extremist type ever invented by fiction. Dickens might have used him as a model for an expurgated portrait of his Harold Skimpole. He is a European by birth, but in mental attitude an Asiatic of the largest and most unalloyed kind. I never met in any part of the East—Far, Middle, or Near—a more complete presentment of the ideal Oriental. His contempt for time, money, and all the other prosaic encumbrances of life has endeared him to Turks and Arabs alike, and they all seem to recognize in him an elder brother. The sympathy with which they regard him on account of this spiritual kinship is enhanced by gratitude for his sincere attachment to their cause.

For the rest, the artist's sociability is in itself enough to subjugate all who come within its range. He loves to sit at the door of his tent like a patriarch of olden times, and to distribute hospitality to all passers-by, quite irrespective of their degree. Staff officers and semi-naked beggars are equally invited to partake of his bounty. "Come in, my friend," says the Englishman in English, with a wave of his arm that seems to

embrace the whole of Africa ; and in comes the vagrant, to sit, sip tea or coffee, smoke cigarettes, and gossip by the hour.

The guest talks in Arabic or Turkish ; the host, who does not understand a word of either tongue, replies in English ; and so the conversation goes on to the entertainment of all concerned.

Even when he travels on a camel, my neighbour prefers to ride facing tailwards, so that he may be able to talk to those who come behind, and be talked to by them. This is, indeed, love of the human voice for its own sake—absolutely uncorrupted by any utilitarian considerations as to meaning—and it has combined with his other qualities to make this infidel by far the most popular individual in this assembly of fighters for the Faith. I have seen Turkish officers, on their return from a night reconnoissance, bringing him bunches of flowers with the dew still upon them—flowers gathered in the desert dawn—and I have seen a young Arab sheikh who is here at the head of four hundred tribesmen come to him to solicit his favour in a matter of some delicacy—to wit, the young sheikh's appointment as Mudir, or Governor, in his oasis. I do not know if Mr. Seppings Wright has managed to obtain for the young chief the post to which he aspires, but the belief in his power to do so spoke volumes for his influence in high quarters.

He has a devoted servant called Selim—a young Arab from the Yemen who has travelled in India, and at the time of the outbreak of the war was a minor official in Tripoli town. Quite apart from his possession of a number of English words—an unassorted collection picked up on the coast of the Arabian Sea—Selim seems to have been born to serve Mr. Seppings Wright. He shares his master's unlimited sociability, and the two between them have coined a verb that aptly describes their most constant occupation—"to bakshish away."

They returned from Tunis provided with all sorts of supplies. In a few days they had bakshished them all away. And then Selim, who, besides being Mr. Seppings Wright's cook, nurse, and body-guard, is also his philosopher and friend, scolded his master in the following memorable words : " All men you want to give him. Now you stop like dat, now !"

Some of Mr. Seppings Wright's popularity appears to be reflected on me also, for I am sure I have done nothing to deserve the hospitality of which I am the recipient at Saniat

Beni Adam. It culminated the other evening in a banquet given by the Commandant in a dining-hall partly excavated out of the ground, with walls of slanting hurdles, and roof of Arab tent-cloth supported in the middle by a pole. We descended into this semi-subterranean apartment, and sat upon empty cartridge-cases on each side of a table improvised out of three planks. We were served in no fewer than five kinds of plates—plain tin, enamelled tin, and three varieties of china. Some of these plates were deep, and others flat, but as every course had to be eaten out of the same plate, and with the same spoon, fork, and knife, that made no difference. A wash-hand basin, as usual, served for a dish, and a candle stuck in an empty bottle for a light. We gorged on excellent mutton stewed with green French beans, and on many other concoctions, of which one of the young officers present confessed to be guilty.

Such scenes of simple conviviality, in which we sometimes play the part of guests and sometimes of hosts, are frequent, and they form very pleasant interludes in the more serious business of the camp. For our camp is busy. We have, besides the Turkish regulars, representatives of ten Arab tribes—Zawia, Ajilat, Zanzur, Surman, Azizia, Masrata, Jebel, Gharian, Urfula, and, most interesting of all, the Owwad bu Seif, whom I have already introduced to the reader. In addition, there is a new outpost of some Turkish regulars with a thousand Arabs about two miles to the north-west, not to mention the camps at Fenduk Magusa and Fenduk el Togar. The Commandant and his Staff have to provide occupation for all these warriors.

Lieutenant-Colonel Muheddin appears to have solved satisfactorily the problem of combining Turkish doggedness with Arab dash, and of securing the maximum of efficiency with the minimum of friction. Arabic is his mother-tongue, and he understands the Arab temperament thoroughly. He has entered into the spirit of the Arab organization, and, instead of either endeavouring to discipline these wild warriors according to textbooks or giving up the attempt as hopeless, he has adapted himself to their ways. The cardinal principle of Arab organization is the freedom of the individual—a freedom tempered only by the obedience due to the tribal chief. Whoever would lead the tribesmen must lead them through their

natural leaders. Muheddin Bey has grasped that principle firmly. It is pleasant to see how close are the relations between him and the Arab sheikhs, and how tactfully he leads the holy warriors through their own leaders. He speaks most appreciatively of their qualities, and does all he can to remedy their defects. He gives them frequent object-lessons in tactics and discipline. He gets a number of Turkish regulars, and makes them go through various evolutions, while the Arabs drawn up in a ring round look on. Then he gets hold of the Arabs themselves, and shows them how to lie flat on the ground and creep on, taking advantage of the slightest depressions for cover. He organizes manœuvres among them—one side attacking, the other defending—and, when the mimic warfare is over, they are trained to fall into a symmetrical circle two deep, and at the sound of the bugle to cheer the Sultan just like regular soldiers.

Under this able officer's direction, the camp at Saniat Beni Adam has been turned into a first-rate training school for the children of the desert, who show themselves apt and delighted pupils, as I always thought they would, if properly handled. They demonstrate their appreciation of the Commandant by referring all disputes to his arbitration, and using his tent as a court of appeal, even against their own sheikhs, when the latter, as it sometimes happens, prove unsatisfactory.

This very evening I saw a crowd of them gather outside Muheddin Bey's tent with their sheikh, whom they accused violently of embezzlement. Muheddin Bey came forth and held a court of justice. It was a very queer court. While the judge was cross-examining the defendant, the plaintiffs kept pointing the finger of scorn at him and vociferating, till the judge commanded the orderlies to bring him a whip and to push the crowd back. Presently order was introduced into the proceedings, and the warriors stood massed on one side, while a select number of them brought forward the charge. In a short time justice was done, and the crowd dispersed, shaking aloft their clenched fists, and cheering the Sultan.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Italians continue their efforts to seduce the Arabs from the cause. But they no longer act openly. Instead of dropping proclamations broadcast from the clouds, they now send secretly letters to individual sheikhs, saying that they do not

advance because they do not wish to shed blood (they do not explain whether it is the Arabs' blood or their own that they are so careful about), enumerating again the evils of the Turkish rule, and the blessings which the Italian rule would bring on the country, and, in brief, imploring them to submit and be saved while there is yet time.

The Arab answer to these missives is ever the same: "We are proud of our country, and fond of our liberty. Let the Italians, instead of hiding like rats, come out and fight. If they beat us, we shall submit to their rule, but not otherwise." In truth, I never saw the Arabs more keenly determined on carrying on the war than they are now. Any anxiety they may have formerly entertained as to their material interests has disappeared, since the growing influx of money has made it possible to add an extra half Turkish lira a month to their stipend. When this increase was announced to the tribesmen here, they received the announcement with immense enthusiasm and prolonged shouts of "God save the Sultan!" Plenty of money for their families, plenty of food and plenty of fighting for themselves—surely no better holiday could Allah send to his worshippers.

Suleiman el Baroni, who also received a letter of this kind, thought to return a practical answer to it, and the other night he led a little attack on the Italian fort at Girgaresh. It had been nicely planned between him and the Commandant, and, though it miscarried, it merits a brief description.

The fort is built on the summit of a small hill about two hundred yards from the coast. To the west of this hill stands another, which the Italians have not yet occupied. Suleiman, with two hundred and ten Arabs, concentrated just behind this second hill, and sent two scouts, who crept right up to the glacis of the Italian fort, and came back reporting that the enemy were fast asleep. Thereupon Suleiman divided his force into three sections: one column of eighty Arabs were sent round the right to a point within some hundred yards of the fort; another column of a hundred Arabs advanced in the centre to a similar distance from the fort; meanwhile, the remaining thirty—the most audacious of all—furnished with scissars with which to cut the Italian wire entanglements, crept round the left, and got to within fifteen yards of the fort. Unfortunately, the

Italians were not asleep. At that moment they turned on their searchlights, and opened a terrific fire—rifles, machine-guns, and heavy artillery—which compelled the Arabs to fall back. Only four of them were hit—one on the forehead, another on the upper lip, and so on—and all these were but skin wounds. Suleiman had a narrow escape; he showed me a rifle-bullet which he found in the folds of his hram.

Although a failure, this pretty little affair is eminently instructive. It proves, first, that Muheddin Bey's lessons have not been wasted: the holy warriors, thanks to his teaching, have learnt enough of tactics to carry out a turning movement with due caution and precision; and, secondly, it indicates cordial co-operation between a Turkish Commandant and an Arab leader. To me both these are points of immense significance with regard to the future course of this war.

Next morning we had another interesting performance. The scene was again the Girgaresh fort. A band of thirty Arab horsemen from the camp at Zanzur advanced to a well lying about a mile to the south of the fort. At that point they formed into a column, and rode past the Italian positions. They stopped there, spread out into a line, and made what they call a "fantasia"—that is to say, they fired a *feu de joie*, flourished their rifles over their heads, shouting, "*Owlad bu zein!*" and then they rode back to their camp. The Italians kept perfectly quiet, and only when the thirty had gone some way towards Zanzur they let off five or six cannon-shots, which fell harmless on the sandy soil, digging deep pits into it.

Lieutenant Atif, with two of our German officers and a Turkish patrol, who had gone forth on a night reconnaissance from Fenduk el Togar and slept in the desert, each man holding his horse by the rein (for there was nothing in the ground to tie them to), witnessed this performance, and they assured the Commandant in my hearing that, while it was going on, not a single Italian had dared lift his head over the trenches. Only an hour after the Arabs' departure a regiment of cavalry came out, and was seen drilling on the very spot which had served as a stage for the fantasia.

Lieutenant-Colonel Muheddin shrugged his shoulders, and said to me with a laugh:

"You see the sort of people we have to fight."

Then he showed me some boxes of choice Egyptian cigarettes and English chocolates which he had bought at Malta on his way out.

“What do you think of these?” he asked.

I glanced round his tent—at the earth floor, bare except for one halfa-grass mat, over which a blanket was spread for guests to sit on; at the plain camp bed; and at the packing-case which serves the Commandant for a writing-table, and I did not know how to reconcile all this Spartan simplicity with the tokens of Sybaritism which he held in his hand.

“They look all right,” I said at last. “You certainly do yourself well.”

“Myself?” he replied scornfully. “Not at all, my friend. I keep them for our prospective Italian prisoners—the officers, you understand. They shall be my guests. The privates will have to go to Gharian to join their brethren there. If they will only come out!”

But the Italians will not be tempted out, even by Egyptian cigarettes and English chocolates. Instead, they have now begun to send out the Abyssinian askaris, whom a short time ago they imported from Erythrea to do their fighting for them.

A few hours after the above performance on the western extremity of the Italian position, another took place on the eastern. A band of some bold Tarhuna tribesmen had the day before made a raid into the Tripoli oasis, and carried off flocks and herds belonging to the Tajura and other coast Arabs who are now under Italian rule. These complained to the Italian authorities, who despatched a punitive expedition consisting of six hundred Abyssinians with detachments of cavalry and camelry—altogether a force about a thousand strong. This force, starting from Tripoli town, passed through Ain Zara, and advanced to the south-east. Near Bir el Turki they saw traces of the Tarhuna encampment. A company of Abyssinians and a small party of cavalry were sent up the Wadi Rabeea with a view to protecting their flank. This detachment came suddenly upon the Tarhuna tribesmen, who were at the moment busy dividing the loot. An engagement ensued, each body of Africans falling upon the other with the fury of a tropical hurricane. The sound of the firing brought reinforcements to both sides, and the battle raged from 11 a.m. till 5 p.m., when



the fall of night brought it to an end. The Abyssinians retired to Ain Zara, having lost, according to an Italian semi-official account, nine dead and twenty-eight wounded. Our men also retired with eight dead and twenty-four wounded; the Italian version was that "the enemy's casualties exceeded one hundred killed!"

However, be the relative losses what they may, the Arabs had the advantage of carrying off a prisoner—a tall, dusky Askari, with thin lips, fine eyes, and a straight nose. Nobody could understand his language, but by signs he endeavoured to persuade his captors that he had been forced to come to Tripoli to fight, and that he was a True Believer. I doubted this last pretension, because I hesitated to credit even the Italians with such a blunder as to bring Moslems to fight against Moslems. The Arabs tried to refute my scepticism by pointing out that the man was circumcised. I happened to remember that the Abyssinian Church claimed a descent from Abraham, and that, in virtue of such ancestry, it observed circumcision. There the discussion ended, and the prisoner's religion, like his language, remained a puzzle. Somehow it did not occur to anyone to suggest that he should be subjected to the one decisive test—the form of Moslem prayer, with all its complicated genuflexions and prostrations.

The appearance of this mysterious captive in our camp—followed next day by a second who could speak some Arabic—was one picturesque feature of the engagement.

Another interesting feature was the employment by the Italians of explosive bullets. One of the dead Arabs was found with his skull shattered by a bullet of this description, while the other victims also, though less hideously disfigured, were wounded and killed by similar bullets. It was not the first time the Italians had employed this barbarous means of destruction in the present war. I had long before been told by the Turkish Staff that many such bullets had been found, and a whole boxful of them had been sent to Constantinople, so that the Ottoman Government might bring the matter before the Hague Tribunal. But, as I make it a point not to take statements on trust, I waited for an ocular demonstration. Now I am in a position to vouch for the statement as an eye-witness. I have seen and examined two such bullets. In size

and shape they do not differ from the ordinary Italian cartridges ; but the brass envelope, instead of ending near the base of the bullet, goes right up almost to the top. When opened, it revealed only the point of the bullet of solid steel ; the rest was of lead cut lengthwise and across into six sections, which, with the bits of the brass envelope when torn by the explosion, were calculated to create a horrible havoc in the human body of the unhappy recipient. Such are the methods to which the modern Romans descend in their prosecution of their civilizing mission.

Of course, the massive Snider bullets employed by the Turks and Arabs are very cruel in their action ; one of them has been known to smash an Arab hand accidentally hit. But they are not explosive, and they have never been forbidden by the laws of war. Nor would the Turks deliberately employ an obsolete weapon, if they could get a modern rifle, for I have already enumerated its manifold disadvantages. Necessity is their excuse.\*

\*            \*            \*            \*            \*

During the day which was signalized by these stirring events our scouts reported that the Italians in Tripoli town were "playing with kites like children." Next morning (March 5th) we saw the true meaning of this mysterious report. The sun had just risen, and with it had risen the Italian monoplane. It flew south and careered for a while overhead, buzzing and humming, and sweeping the sky with its usual grace. Then it descended, and directly afterwards a dark circular body, like a huge moon, soared slowly above the skyline, followed by a second. When they had risen a little higher, they turned and presented two monstrous barbel-like grey forms to us. They were dirigible balloons—the first to come forth in warfare. Yesterday's "kite-flying" was obviously a wind-testing preparation for this display.

They had come out of the great garage which we had already noted outside the western gate of Tripoli, and were sent up with great ceremony—bands playing, soldiers cheering, perhaps

\* Since my return home I have heard another atrocity alleged to have occurred in the course of that engagement. It is stated by the *Morning Post* correspondent at Malta (under dates March 7th and 10th), that the Abyssinian Askaris massacred the wounded Arabs they found on the battlefield. The statement is made on the authority of passengers from Tripoli, and is confirmed by the Italian Deputy, Signor De Felice Giuffrida, who was war correspondent at Tripoli. I cannot vouch for the occurrence, as I never heard a word about it while on the spot.

also priests blessing. They rose higher to the heavens and higher, the sunrays now falling on their pointed noses, now on their ribbed bellies, and again on their blunt tails, as they manœuvred majestically round and round, drifting now in this direction, now in that. Sometimes they soared to a height of over 5,000 feet, and anon they sank to 2,000 feet, to soar again—always the one behind the other, marvellously obedient to the steersman's hand.

Suddenly we saw something get loose from under the belly of one of the monsters—a tiny speck that glittered in the sunlight like silver, as it descended straight and swift to the ground. Another and yet another followed in quick succession. They were bombs—six to the sight, but only one to the ear: a dull detonation, hardly audible through the voice of the muezzin who had at that very moment come out of his tent and stood with his hands to his cheeks, chanting "*La illah il Allah,*" wholly unperturbed by the infidel's impious pranks. His accents rose and fell through the clear desert air—calm, sacred, and musical—calling the faithful to morning prayer; and yonder flew the airships of the Christians, dropping bombs on the people they had come to humanize.

They aimed them at the hillock between Girgaresh and Zanzur, where a body of fifteen Arab horsemen were gathered at the time. Of course, the Arabs, as soon as they saw the bombs coming down, dispersed. But the precaution was hardly necessary. Only one of the bombs fell at the foot of the hill; the others dropped all over the plain. Only one, happening to strike hard ground, exploded and sent forth a jet of shrapnel, which hurt no one, because no one chanced to be near. The others, falling on soft sand, turned quietly over, and the Arabs picked them up, together with the twisted and tortured fragments of the one that burst, and brought them to us.\* We inspected them at our leisure, and some of the spectators photographed them.

They consist of an outer iron cylinder, about nine inches long and four inches in diameter, and a narrower concentric cylinder

\* Some time afterwards, I saw in the English papers a Central News telegram from Rome, dated Wednesday, March 6th, which gave the Italian version of the event as follows:

"On arrival over the enemy's camp, they dropped bombs which exploded with terrible results."

In this fashion the descendants of Tacitus write history.

inside. The latter is charged with dynamite, the former with about three hundred shrapnel bullets embedded in brittle resin. On the top of the cylinder is a wooden cap; through its centre passes a tube about two feet six inches long. The upper and longer portion of this tube serves to suspend and direct the bomb. The portion that goes through the bomb contains a detonator. From below projects a needle resting on a spring. When the lower end of the tube, which for equipoise is armed with a small linen parachute, has struck a hard substance, the needle gets loose, shoots upward, and hits the detonator, thus bringing about the explosion.

The Arabs clustered round us as we examined the missiles, and seemed to understand quickly the mechanism when it was explained to them. They showed considerable interest in this new infidel invention, but not the slightest fear of its effects. Muheddin Bey, however, took a more scientific view of the matter, and immediately proceeded to teach them how to avoid the danger. He got all the tribesmen to muster in the plain, and divided them into two large bodies of five tribes each. They were drawn up in ranks, with a space of over one yard between man and man, thirty yards between rank and rank, and forty-five yards between tribe and tribe. A space of seventy-five yards separated the one body from the other. "Such," he told them, "must your formation be in the future, so that even if a bomb explodes in your midst it may have ample room to disport itself in without hurting you."

But what are the chances of a bomb dropping in the midst of men so quick to see and to move as the sharp-sighted and agile Arabs? Again, what are the chances of the bomb dropping on the hard soil which is essential for its action in a country mostly made up of loose sand? Personally, after having seen both aeroplanes and airships at work, I have conceived a very poor opinion of the scouting utility of the one and the destructive capacity of the other. The latter could perhaps do some harm if they employed time-fuzed instead of percussion-fuzed shells, but in that case the peril from a premature explosion would be as great to the attacker as the peril from a timely explosion would be to the attacked.\*

\* I was interested to find my opinion of the value of aviation for military purposes shared by observers on the other side.

"The aeroplanes," wrote the special correspondent of the *Temps* at

On the following day, about half an hour before sunset, one dirigible made its appearance over the sand-dunes, soared to a moderate height, and, after manœuvring about for twenty minutes, sank behind the horizon again. At the same time the guns from the Girgaresh fort began to roar. A party of officers with ten troopers started off at once in that direction. The tom-tom began to beat. The sheikhs jumped on their horses and galloped off. Thousands of tribesmen followed on foot, till the desert to the north of our camp was filled with swiftly moving crowds and enormous shouting.

But it was a false alarm. The Italians had been merely emptying their big guns on three Turkish scouts from Zanzur.

\* \* \* \* \*

During the subsequent weeks the dirigibles, satisfied with the imaginary destruction they had wrought among us, repeated their exploits on a larger and larger scale, sailing now westward over Zanzur and Zawia, now southward over Saniat Beni Adam, Fenduk Ben Gashir, and Azizia, and dropping sometimes as many as thirty bombs, which, according to the Italian accounts, "caused great slaughter and confusion."

Even if the slaughter and confusion were as real as the aeronauts wished it to be, how could it be, as they declared, "plainly apparent from the dirigibles," since these, according to their own statement, flew at a height of 6,000 feet? But, in truth, the confusion was mythical, and the slaughter,

Tripoli, "which have accomplished some very brilliant flights, have often proved disappointing in the military information collected, and in their effect on the Arabs."

As to the information collected, I will add one more example. The aeroplane that flew over our camp when I was at Saniat Beni Adam last reported that it saw guns in the trenches at Zanzur. What it mistook for guns I cannot conceive. On the other hand, I admit that these flights, from a spectacular point of view, were unquestionably brilliant, and they afforded much entertainment to the Arabs, who are fond of a good spectacle.

The writer, however, went on to express the impious hope that "the dirigibles seem likely to produce decisive results" (see the *Morning Post*, March 8th; "A Lesson from Tripoli," Paris, March 7th). This he wrote after having seen the first flight of the two Italian dirigibles already described—a flight which, as I have stated, produced no result whatever, decisive or otherwise, except this—to strengthen the Arab contempt for people who, they said, afraid to meet them in a fair fight, had recourse to methods of warfare unworthy of men.

For further confirmation of my own remarks on airships and their bombs, see the report of the competition recently held in Paris. (*The Times*, August 13th, 1912.)

as far as I could learn, consisted of the occasional destruction of a large hospital tent full of invalids who could not run away, or of the slaughter of peaceful villagers—*e.g.*, the death of a baby in its mother's arms, and the disembowelling of an unfortunate child struck while gazing on the new wonder, without any suspicion of what was coming. The victims, in short, were helpless non-combatants, whose loss did nothing to weaken the Turkish side. As regards the fighters, by them the enemy's aerial displays were treated as—to use the expression of my friend Captain Ismail Hakki—*des jolies distractions*. I can make this affirmation with a clear conscience, even regarding the performances which took place after my departure; for the flights which I witnessed, and the audacious fictions under which the Italians endeavoured to cover their futility, leave small doubt in my mind that what I have heard since is not unlike that which I saw then.

Let me, however, descend from the clouds to solid earth again, and bring my chronicle of this "sort of a war" to a conclusion with the last action that occurred while I was still near the scene.

For some time past I understood that the Italians at Ain Zara, like those in Tripoli town, were decimated by disease, which had considerably weakened them, while the continuous strain imposed by the frequent night raids which I had described began by shaking their nerves, and ended in completing their demoralization. The Italian authorities came to the conclusion that the concentration of a large and idle force at that point served no useful purpose, and withdrew most of the troops to Tripoli town, leaving only about two battalions there. The Turks and Arabs availed themselves of this partial denudation to deliver a more than usually vigorous assault. On the night of March 10th a body of five hundred tribesmen, divided into two columns, under the command of two Turkish Lieutenants and several Arab sheikhs from Sahel, marched north. Both columns crept up to the Italian trenches undetected, but when there, the explosion of two mines gave the enemy the alarm. The Arabs then cast caution to the wind, and flung themselves against the wire entanglements, crying, "*Allah akbar!*"

The first column cut its way through the barbed wire, rushed into the Italian camp, and, finding it half empty, set fire to

Fenduk Sharki, which the enemy had transformed into a stores depôt. The small Italian force, unable to offer any resistance, had retreated to the fortified hills on the north, and, firing thence, killed four and wounded nine Arabs.

The second column, which had for its objective Fenduk Gharbi, met with very serious opposition. When on the point of traversing the trenches, they were attacked with a furious rifle and cannon fire, and were forced to retire, with ten wounded and six dead, among the latter being Sheikh Ramadan Shereef, Mudir of Sahel.

The net result of this action was to push the Italians about one mile back, and to render the elaborate works they had constructed to the south of Ain Zara useless. The labour of months was absolutely wasted, and though their actual position on the hills to the north is, from a strategic point of view, more logical, their abandonment of the advanced posts is a moral loss of great importance.

The smoke of the burning fenduk was visible far and wide. That and their own imagination magnified the affair in the eyes of the Arabs to prodigious dimensions. As I travelled across the desert to the frontier I heard them day after day discussing what they called the battle of Ain Zara and the rout of the Italians. At one spot I was told that many men had been killed—both Rûm and Moslems. I asked, "How many?" and my Arab readily replied, "One thousand five hundred Rûm and a hundred and seventy Moslems." At another place the Italian losses were estimated at 5,000. The farther away from the scene I got, the more noughts were added to the figures.

The news had even crossed the border, and I found the French Lieutenants at Ben Gardane and Zarzis anxious to know the truth of the matter.

In a short time, I have no doubt, the report, embellished with all sorts of exaggerations agreeable to Arab feeling, spread from one end of the Sahara to the other; for news travels with marvellous speed in the desert. Caravans or isolated travellers cross in all directions, and at every crossing they stop to give and receive misinformation, which is thus passed from mouth to mouth, and carried simultaneously south, north, east, and west.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### FROM THE DESERT TO THE SOWN

I BADE farewell to my friends at Saniat Beni Adam, and set off on a hundred and forty miles' walk to the frontier, accompanied by a camel which carried my luggage and by the camel-driver. I chose a pedestrian mode of locomotion, because I wished to prolong my return journey as much as possible. The desert was beautiful, my health good, time no object, and there was always a faint chance of being drawn back to the theatre of the war by some sensational development. Therefore, why hurry?

I refused the escort proffered to me, because I wished to ascertain by personal experience what were the things likely to befall a stranger and an unbeliever travelling across the desert alone. So far I had received nothing but kindness at the hands of the holy warriors; but that might well be due to their knowledge that I was a guest at the Turkish headquarters. I wanted to know how they would treat me when the Sultan's ægis was withdrawn from me. Was it or was it not true, that their animosity was confined to the Italians, as they had often told me, or did they in their hearts look upon every infidel as a foe?

I had also heard many gruesome stories of Arab cupidity. Travellers were said to be murdered for the sake of the money they carried on them. That might, or might not, be true in times of peace. During this war I had every reason to admire the Arabs' phenomenal honesty. "But," I was told by the Arabs' detractors, "if they don't rob the caravans traversing the desert, that is only because they have a shrewd sense of their own interest. The supplies and the cash that the caravans carry they know to be destined for the Turkish camp—that is



to say, for their own maintenance. It would be bad policy to kill the goose that lays the golden egg. It would be otherwise if they came across an unprotected stranger."

That argument had never convinced me, for it postulated a degree of foresight of which the Arabs, as their whole life shows, are utterly incapable. I felt that a man carrying only a few sovereigns about him might safely trust himself to people who allowed camel-loads of gold to pass unmolested. At all events, these problems could only be solved definitely through a personal experiment. The desire to obtain a solution was my main motive in deciding upon such an experiment, though I confess that, mixed with my thirst for accurate knowledge, there was also a certain uncritical, irresponsible, and wholly childish thirst for adventure.

## I.

My first objective was the Turco-Arab camp at Zanzur, and I started at 11.30 a.m., nothing doubting but that three or four hours' journey would see me safe at my destination. I moved westward, with the bare sand-dunes on my right hand and the rolling scrub-dotted plain under my feet. The air was still, the sun was hot. The crickets chirped in the bushes blithely, and the track was populated with busy armies of black-beetles and large white ants. It was altogether one of those March days which gave a foretaste of the Tripolitan summer.

After an hour's walk I began to feel both hungry and thirsty. I took off the camel a bag containing some food and a jug filled with water, and, telling the camel-driver to go slowly on, I sat by the wayside to lunch. When I had satisfied my hunger with a piece of bread and cheese, and my thirst with a draught of water, I started off to rejoin my camel. But I could not see the beast anywhere.

I trudged on and on, up ridges and down hollows overgrown with tall grass, carrying my bag over the shoulder, my jug in one hand and my stick in the other. But still no camel was visible. I met two groups of Arab peasants, and each told me that they had seen a camel in front of me. This reassured me, and as I went on, now and then scanning the desert through my field-glasses, I caught a glimpse of the beast's hump bulging

above the undulating ground. But I lost sight of it again. There was a palm-grove ahead of me, and I thought the best plan was to make straight for it.

When I reached the palms, I found, to my dismay, that there the track forked off. There was no one to ask for guidance. The grove was deserted, and its well a heap of ruins. I skirted it, and, taking the path that looked most likely to be the right one, I went on.

I had by this time begun to feel uneasy. I knew that Zanzur lay to the north-west of Beni Adam, but so did Gir-garesh and Zawia. At what point should I leave my westerly course and turn north? If I turned too soon, I might blunder into the Italian lines at the former place. That would be most awkward. I should not mind being taken captive—on the contrary, that would be precisely the sort of adventure that I prayed for; but I minded very much losing the most precious part of my luggage—namely, my note-books. On the other hand, if I did not turn soon enough and missed Zanzur, I should be overtaken by the damp and chilly night in the desert, which meant certain fever. Distressed by these thoughts and hampered by my load, I sat down on the ground under the broiling sun for a few minutes' rest, and then set off again, walking as a man in the dark.

Presently I descried in the distance another palm-grove, and made for it, but that also turned out to be deserted, and its well in ruins. I toiled on, bag and jug getting heavier with every step, and shaped my course to a third palm-grove I espied ahead of me. It did not look deserted. I could see through my field-glasses a black windlass in the wooden frame of the well. When I drew nearer, I noticed that the owner's mud dwelling had a new gate to it, the old one lying against the wall. Cheered by these signs of life, I went up to the building and knocked. A lad of about ten opened the gate slightly, and gazed at me rather frightened. He was evidently alone in the establishment, and he held by the hand a little boy of about two, with a pretty face covered with flies—presumably a younger brother. I assured the lad that I was a friend, told him that I had lost my way and my camel, and begged him to assist me in finding both. He answered that he had seen no camel go by, but that he could show me the way to Zanzur. He

came out, and put me on a narrow and little trodden track, saying, "Take this track, walk past yon tree"—pointing to a solitary tree that stood on a ridge some way off—"and you will by-and-by find yourself on the big road."

I followed his directions, and presently I did find myself in a deep, broad wadi, covered with soft white sand, on which I saw the prints of many feet, both of men and of camels, some pointing north and others south. This was beyond question a thoroughfare, and I trudged along it, still uncertain whether it would take me to Zanzur or to Girgaresh, but hoping that ere long I might meet some wayfarer who would dispel my doubts. And, in fact, after a while I did meet three holy warriors. I asked them if they had seen a camel loaded with European luggage. They answered "No," and, looking very hard and suspiciously at me, they demanded in their turn who and what I was. I satisfied their legitimate curiosity, and asked them whither this road went. They answered that it was the right road, but at a certain point it forked out into two paths, one of which led to Zanzur and the other to Girgaresh. That was exactly where the rub was. "Which is which?" I demanded. One advised me to take the branch to the right, another shouted, "No, the left!" The latter seemed to me the more probably correct direction, but I had already had enough experience of the vagaries of desert roads not to trust to mere *a priori* probabilities.

I begged that one of the warriors should turn back and act as my guide, promising to make it worth his while. Thereupon all three offered to do so. And thus, with the three armed *mujehaddin* as a guard of honour, I proceeded on my way.

They were most kind to me. One took charge of my bag, another of my jug; and by-and-by they suggested that, as I might be tired and there was plenty of time, we might sit by the roadside for a rest. I gladly agreed, and we sat down. The first thing I did was to have another draught of water. When I had slaked my thirst, one of the warriors took the jug from my hand and lifted it to his lips. But the others stopped him. "Don't," they said. "This gentleman will be thirsty again before he reaches Zanzur. He is not used to thirst; we are." I need not say how keenly I appreciated this consideration from men who had been walking in the sun for hours.

While I lay back with my voluminous turban both for cushion and sunshade, they carried on a brisk conversation among themselves. It was, I grieve to state, all about money. Each said how many piastres he got a month, how many he sent to his family, how many he had left, and so on.

I joined in the conversation, and diverted it to more wholesome topics. We discussed the war, and they said: "The Italians have thousands of men, guns, balloons, aeroplanes, and what not, but they have no heart. We have nothing but heart, but it is enough—*Elhamdullilah!* Whether the Turks stay with us or not, it is all the same to us. We shall go on fighting for sixty years"—the Arab synonym of "for ever."

Then we talked about the airships and their bombs. I produced my notebook, showed them the sketch I had made of the missiles, and explained their action. They understood, laughed with delight at their own intelligence, and, tapping their foreheads, exclaimed: "*Tamam! tamam!*" (Just so, just so!) They agreed with me that the name was more formidable than the thing. From airships the conversation drifted to battleships. They wanted to know whether the Sultan had any. When I told them he had very few, poor fellow! they asked me whether the King of England, who, they knew, had many, would not send some to drive the Italians out of Tripoli. I evaded the question as tactfully as I could by offering them cigarettes.

Next we talked about boots and trees. They expressed a great admiration for my boots; but when they heard how much I had paid for them, one of the three exclaimed, "*Mashallah*—the price of a camel!" while another shrewdly commented, "There must be much money in England!" I explained that there was much wealth and much poverty in England, and that on the whole they had nothing to envy us for. They were convinced that I was right, and were very sorry for us, when, in answer to the question whether we had any date-palms, I told them that our date-palms grew only in glass-houses, for we had not their beautiful sun. Of course, since we had no dates, we couldn't have *lebke* (date-wine). So they promised to make me taste some by-and-by.

While we were talking, my camel and its driver hove in sight. The warriors rebuked him severely for wasting time by resting

on the way, and leaving his employer alone. After this interlude we resumed our march, one of my companions again carrying my bag, and another my jug. Presently the palm-plantations and gardens of Zanzur rose to view, stretching for miles along the coast. Not long afterwards we reached the outskirts of the oasis, and sat on a hillock shaded by olive-trees, and perforated with five enormous holes made by the enemy's naval shells.

Close behind us lay a cactus-hedged grove, full of stately palms planted in rows, with their mops gracefully drooping from above. The soil beneath was divided into regular plots planted with vegetables. Here and there among the palm avenues stood many fruit-trees, loaded with white blossoms. Beside the well sat a group of Arabs, chatting at their ease. All this within gunshot of the Italian fort at Girgareh.

One of my companions dived into the plantation, and presently emerged therefrom followed by an Arab carrying a pitcher. Here was the *lebke* which they had promised me. It was like muddy water—thick and grey—to the eye, but very pleasant to the palate.

We all drank by turns, and then they asked me to pay for the drink. I paid the halfpenny which the vendor demanded, greatly amused at this new proof of Arab avarice; for I could not believe that my three holy hosts had not a halfpenny between them.

We continued our walk, and in a few minutes were in the maze of mud dwellings, narrow tortuous lanes, and cactus-hedged gardens, that form the village of Zanzur.

I gave my guides the bakshish I had promised them, a note for their chief stating that I was the cause of their delay, my best thanks for their company, and my hearty wishes for the success of their cause. They salaamed and went off, leaving me at the Turkish military headquarters—a rich sheikh's house of very characteristic construction.

The ordinary Arab house consists of a mud enclosure with an arched gateway, and one or two rows of blind, flat-roofed apartments opening into it. The unoccupied space serves as stable and kitchen, the apartments as dwellings for the various households that make up the family. This building marked a long step in architectural evolution. On the right, as you

passed through the arched gateway, there stood a large Selamlik, consisting of an ante-room, with a mud bench on one side, and of a reception-room, with a daïs at the farther end stretching from wall to wall, and railed off by a wooden balustrade. The ante-room, with its mud bench, was intended for servants and suppliants; the daïs, covered with mats and rugs, for honoured guests. Two or three small holes high up in one wall permitted a limited supply of light and air. The palm-wood rafters that ran across the ceiling were adorned with wasps'-nests, and the balustrade that railed off the daïs with drippings of wax candles.

On coming out of this room, you found yourself in a front court, walled on all sides. A door in the middle of the left-hand side wall led into a garden. The wall facing you was lined with stables. A door in the middle of the right-hand side wall led into a dark passage, which ran parallel with the wall itself, and had on the left, near the bottom, a door that led into a second court. The labyrinthic contrivance was meant to make it impossible for anyone in the front court to see into the second, for the latter was the harem, or women's part of the house. Arched cloisters supported by low pillars of stone occupied the four sides. On each side two narrow, windowless, rectangular apartments opened into the cloisters. Two of these apartments were store-rooms, the rest living-rooms. I was conducted into one of the latter—the residence of Lieutenant Rifaat, the local Commandant.

I was sorry to exchange the freedom and cleanliness of the open desert for a stuffy, fly-pestered confinement; but I did not wish to offend my obliging host—a bright, half-negro young officer from Benghazi, in yellow slippers, with a spur fastened to one of them, and an Italian cloak. He was so anxious that I should be made comfortable that I yielded to his notion of what constitutes comfort, and accepted his offer of one of the two sleeping-lofts that stretched along the two narrow sides of the room.

As I spread my rugs over it, I noted a small fragment of a mirror built into the plaster of the wall beside the door. I wondered what had become of the fair *hanûm* that must have stood there, with the light from the court upon her features, admiring her beauty as it was reflected, bit by bit, in that patch of glass. The bed where she slept was now occupied by

an infidel idler. The room, once fragrant with her perfumes, was now full of sacks of provisions and boxes of ammunition ; and the walls, which were adorned once with articles of feminine attire, were now hung with rifles, bandoliers, water-flasks—all spoils of war.

I spent two days in this harem, which fate had transformed into barracks. A whole company of regular troops was lodged in it—a portion of the native recruits who had deserted at the outbreak of the war, but had since returned to the ranks, with a sprinkling of Albanians. Both courts were filled with the noise and the dirt of horses. I wondered why the men and the beasts were not quartered in one of the many gardens, whose palm-mops offered excellent protection against bombs and shells, instead of being cooped up in this house. The reason, I found, was lack of tents.

However, the spirit of the men suffered little from their depressing environment. Both Arabs and Albanians, though barefooted, were most lively, and they vied in their eagerness to look after me. Two of them were particularly told off to attend to my wants, and they formed a very remarkable contrast as they stood side by side talking to me. The Albanian, Suleiman, was a stalwart youth, over six feet tall, with a fair, handsome face and a swaggering manner. The Arab, Mohammed, was a swarthy, slender little man, his head barely reaching to the other's shoulder. Between them they gave me a fairly complete summary of the average Tommy's attitude towards the war.

“ Look at that woman ! ” said the Arab, pointing to a black young female, who squatted in the cloister outside my room, grinding barley for the horses in a stone hand-mill ; “ she has lost her husband and everything through the Italians. ” I interrogated the woman, and she told me that she was a native of the Tripoli oasis. Her husband had been killed in the Jihad at Suk el Juma. She had to flee with her two children, which she now supported by grinding barley for the horses. It was my little Mohammed's story over again, with a difference.

Then the Arab went on to repeat what I had already heard so often—his countrymen's determination to fight till either the Italians are expelled or they themselves are killed.

The Albanian was loud in his contempt for friend and foe alike.

“ These Arab soldiers,” he told me in confidence, “ first fled ; now some of them have come back. But they are no good. They ought to see my countrymen ! But, anyhow, they are better than the Italians. I am sick of them and their ways. When we made war on the Greeks in '97, it was a real war. They advanced as far as Arta ; then we marched against them. They fought ; we fought. They lost ; we won. It was real war. This is nothing but brigand warfare—such as we have in Albania every day. The enemy won't fight. Twice I have gone against their fort at Girgaresh—once in the daytime, and once at night. Both times they fired their big guns at us—and that was all. I have been here these five months, and I have not yet seen one Italian soldier at close quarters. I want to look at them, but I suppose they don't want to look at me. The other day, when the new balloons flew about over our heads, dropping bombs, I beckoned to them with my hand thus ; and I said : ‘ Why don't you come down to meet me face to face ? Aren't you curious to see what an Albanian is like ? ’ But no—they wouldn't. They were too much afraid. I wish they would go away. I have had enough of their war. I have been in Tripoli two years this March, and wish to see my mountains again. But, of course, as long as there is one Italian left in Tripoli, I shall have to stick here. I don't want to go home without finishing the war.”

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During my stay at Zanzur I visited the shrine of Sidi Abdul Jelil. It stands on a height close to the sea, and consists of a domed chamber—which contains the saint's wooden sarcophagus, with its usual ornaments of red, green, and yellow little flags—and of a buttressed block-house. On the slopes round the building straggle several old stone tombs, yellow and grey with dry lichen. I found the block-house in ruins, yet in possession of twenty-five Arab warriors, who lay in and outside the crumbling walls, huddled up in their hrams, trying to keep themselves warm against the fierce north wind that was blowing from the sea. They told me that the place had been shelled by the Italian fleet at the beginning of the war. But the saint's shrine had not been touched. Only close to its entrance I saw a dark red—almost black—patch of sun-dried blood. It marked the spot where one of the defenders had



been disembowelled by a shell. Had the Italians effected a landing under cover of the bombardment and the consternation with which its novelty filled the population, they might have easily possessed themselves of Zanzur. Now I doubted whether such a landing could be effected at all. The strip of open desert that stretches from the palm-groves of Zanzur down to the shore is only half a mile in width, and the main road from Tripoli through Gîrgaresh to Zanzur and the west runs across it. But on the northern side of the road the plain swells into a ridge of sand-dunes, which drop abruptly into the sea. There is no beach, but the waves beat against the base of the ridge, indenting it with numberless tiny grottoes and shallow little creeks.

Under these conditions, seeing that the Arabs are prepared to hold the sand-dunes against the invader, a disembarkation would be a very dangerous enterprise. Even if the enemy succeeded in landing, they would find it hard to advance, for the strip of desert on the other side of the ridge is seamed by numerous dry watercourses, like the nullahs of India, forming a perfect network of natural trenches, from which the Arabs would harass the invader at every step. These conditions, no doubt, explain the Italians' preference for the overland route, and recent experience accounts for their reluctance to take it.\*

\* Three months after these lines were written the shrine of Sidi Abdul Jelil was captured by the Italians, and the event fully bore out both my doubts, whether a landing could be effected, and whether the occupation of the little hill would lead to that of Zanzur.

On June 8 General Camerana attacked the place from the land side with a force which the Turks estimated at two brigades and a half, accompanied by four field batteries and two mountain batteries, and which the Italian official reports described as consisting of fourteen battalions of infantry, with corresponding batteries of artillery and a brigade of cavalry.

This force was supported by the heavy guns of the forts at Gîrgaresh and Tripoli on one hand, and by those of the fleet on the other. The fire of the latter compelled the Turco-Arab defenders to abandon the position.

While this attack was delivered by the Italians on Abdul Jelil, the Arabs from Saniat Beni Adam, whom the sound of cannon brought to the spot, delivered, in their turn, a determined attack upon the Italian fort at Gîrgaresh, and upon the reserve brigade left there.

The Italians were obliged to despatch another brigade from Bu Meliana, and then the Arabs from the south, finding themselves outflanked and between two fires, retreated.

As regards the respective losses, there prevails the customary romance on both sides. Let me give some figures as an illustration of the talent for fiction which each side displays.

The Italians declared officially that the Turco-Arabs had more than 500

I decided to have a last look at them before turning my back on the scene of their inaction. The local Commandant insisted on giving me as an escort one of his native regulars and an Arab sheikh with four tribesmen. Accompanied by these men, I left the village of Zanzur, which is situated at the easternmost end of the oasis, and plunged into the rough sandy plain, sparsely dotted with half-starved weeds, that rolls on to Girdaresh. It was a bleak afternoon, and the plain under the lowering sky brooded black, desolate and sullen. On the left spread the sea—an expanse of deep purple flecked with white foam. The coast was here and there scored by newly-dug trenches, some fronting the sea, and others Girdaresh, ready to be used by our holy warriors on an emergency, but now almost wholly deserted.

Half an hour's walk brought me to the last and longest trench, and here up to the shoulders in the earth lounged some fifty Arabs, leaning on their rifles or sitting on their hams, while two or three sheikhs' horses grazed close by.

My arrival caused far greater commotion among them than did the periodic visitations of the Italian shells. Indeed, so callous had they grown to these that I experienced much diffi-

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killed, and unofficially that number was raised to 1,300. They computed their own losses officially at one officer, nineteen regulars, and ten Askaris killed; and at eight officers, one hundred and eighty-two regulars, and seventy Askaris wounded.

The Turks, in their own official reports, stated that the Italians lost more than a thousand killed, while they themselves had only one hundred and fifty killed, and three hundred wounded.

As I was not there to form an independent estimate, I leave the matter to the reader's own sense of probability. But I am bound to add that my own sense of probability feels terribly insulted when the Italians tell me that the number of the Turco-Arabs employed in the fight "is computed at over 12,000."

The net result of this great action, which the newspapers have dignified by the name of "The Battle of Zanzur," was the occupation of the small shrine of Sidi Abdul Jelil. But what next?

I have already pointed out the difficulties of an advance upon the oasis of Zanzur itself, and I am glad to find the Rome correspondent of the *Times* agreeing with me. "It remains to be seen," he writes, "whether the occupation of this new outpost will mean the forced evacuation by the enemy of Zanzur, which has long been a thorn in the side of the Tripoli garrison."

One word more. The Italian journals, in their reports of this feat, wrote: "It shows that the Italian soldier, even after a long march in the Tripolitan summer, is more than a match for his foe." The long march in question was just about five miles, and a good many of the men who took that stroll were Abyssinians.

culty in preventing them from crowding about me, and thus presenting a target to the enemy. For there, less than three miles off, stood the fort of Girgaresh, with its guns pointed at us. Beyond the fort gleamed the white buildings of Tripoli town, with its minarets and trees tapering heavenwards. And in the background, faintly silhouetted against the sky, rose the masts of the ships in the port. The vast zinc-vaulted shed whence the dirigibles had issued the other day seemed now sunk in profound slumber, and so might be the garrison at Girgaresh, for all the evidence of life it gave. I gazed at the Italians loafing about the glacis of their fort, I gazed at the Arabs beside me loafing in their trenches, and they both seemed to be in perfect harmony with the drowsy genius of the desert.

Then I breathed a soft "Addio!" to the Italians, said "Allah be with you!" to the Arabs, and walked away.

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All the soldiers in the barracks, Arabs and Albanians alike, helped to load my camel on the morning of my departure, with the result that I had never had a camel so badly loaded. However, they meant well, and I offered them some money for their pains. The Arabs accepted it readily; the haughty Albanians refused it so stubbornly that I had to leave my gift on the ground and flee.

As I walked out of the western end of the village, I passed the Kasr, a new and spacious building of one story running round a square court. The civil authorities had, since the outbreak of the war, deserted it, and I found all the rooms—except the one used for a telegraph office—littered with straw and horse-dung.

## II.

I had left Zanzur at 8.30 a.m., and reached Zawia at 4 p.m. It was a good day's walk, but rather slow, owing to the heat of the sun, which made the perspiration stream down my face, and to the deep sand of the highway, which tried my heels and toes and knees sorely. That road—the only real road in the whole province—starts from Tripoli town and ends here. The Turks, thanks to their *yavash*, *yavash* methods, had carried it

only thus far when the war put an end to their intentions. On arrival in the oasis I heard that one of our Staff officers and the native Kaimakam were gone down to the seashore to superintend the excavation of trenches, for two aeroplanes had circled over Zawia during the previous day and night, and their visit was interpreted as a possible sign of an impending attempt at a landing.

The precaution proved superfluous. The Italians made no attempt to disturb the languid flow of life in the oasis. The Arabs were just now mildly busy tapping their date-palms for *lebke*. I watched them climbing up the tall, straight trunks with the help of a halter, perching themselves on the top, from which nearly all the foliage had been lopped off, and attaching or removing the jugs in which the sap is collected drop by drop. When one jug is filled, it is let down by a rope, and another hoisted up to take its place. The women clustered round the wells in the plantations, drawing water, filling their gracefully-curved pitchers, and carrying them off on their shoulders or on their backs. Little girls of six or seven, with fine night-dark eyes and raven curls, might be seen driving the cattle out to graze. The cocks crew, the donkeys brayed, the sheep bleated, the pariah dogs yelped, the camels grunted, the children laughed and cried, and the beggars whined, just as they had done for centuries. And when the sun sank behind the palm-groves, and the tall trees stood black against the golden sky, there rose the voice of the muezzin from some many-domed rural mosque proclaiming that there is a God on high to bless and protect those who believe in Him.

Only in the Kasr and its immediate neighbourhood one was reminded of the war and its sorrows. The ordinary civil administration had here, as in all other places within the zone of hostilities, been suspended, and in the whole upper story of the Kaimakam's residence where I lodged there was only one elderly attendant shuffling on loose-slippered feet in and out of the empty rooms like the ghost of a dead Government. But all the apartments below were alive with soldiers, and the court with military convoys; while the square before the Kasr was permeated with the smell of disinfectants, issuing from the school that had been turned into a hospital.

There I looked for my Albanian friend, Dr. Zeinel Abeddin, and discovered him fast asleep with a towel over his face to

keep off the flies. He was ill, and his place was filled by another Albanian friend of mine, the indefatigable little Dr. Izzet. He had come to Zawia to rest and cure himself of the dysentery, which, as he had had no time to take care of himself, had become chronic. But no sooner had he arrived than his colleague's illness obliged him to neglect his own health again, in order to preserve that of others.

Save for the prevalence of sickness, Zawia showed no evidence of distress. On the contrary, the market-place before the Kasr overflowed with plenty: loaves of bread stood piled up on tables, the vendors sitting behind them on chairs. Under the twisted boughs of a giant tree that reclined in the middle of the square, male and female Arabs squatted on the ground selling grass—fragrant masses of green starred with white and yellow flowers. Besides food for men and beasts, the suk on Mondays teemed with all sorts of other things. Small tents did duty for transient shops, and beneath them you saw the vendors squatting behind their wares—loaves of sugar, pieces of green soap, tea, shoes, linen, and so on. Thousands of peasants flocked here from all over the oasis to procure their weekly supplies.

It was on such a day that I passed through the busy market-place on my way out of Zawia. The sun was high up in the sky, but the mops of the palms on each side of the track mitigated its heat, and the crested larks flitted about, alighted on the cactus hedges for a moment, and then resumed their restless activity. The soil of most of the plantations lay fallow, its tillers being otherwise engaged at present, and in the place of barley wild-flowers bloomed in pretty and unprofitable abundance. As I went on, I met numbers of peasants on foot, on donkeys, or on camels, going to market, and here and there, under the cactus hedges, men and women with jugs of *lebke*, offering a delicious and inexpensive refreshment to the wayfarers. Near the end of the oasis I also met a stranger astride a camel, with a small portmanteau tied to its saddle. He was a belated Turkish journalist going to the scene I had just quitted. We introduced ourselves to one another, and went our several ways.

Even the desert that day was full of unwonted animation. Large convoys loaded with sacks and cases came from the

west, and met the caravans that were returning empty from the east. The camels jostled each other in the narrow track, and then, as each group separated from the other, they straggled over the plain. The drivers, forced by the heat to divest themselves of their drab woollen hrams, marched beside their beasts in their broad-sleeved snowy shirts, their red sashes and fezes adding a novel touch of colour to the scene.

After three hours' march I reached the oasis of Surman, and decided to spend the rest of the day beneath the shade of its palms. A gendarme whom I met in the suk undertook to guide me to the Mudir.

I found the great man—a fat, barefooted, yellow-slipped sheikh, with small crafty eyes buried deep between masses of flesh—lounging in the company of other Arabs outside a coffee-house under a thatch of dry palm-leaves. He wanted to lodge me in one of the stuffy, dingy, fly-pestered rooms that line the square. But I insisted that I preferred the open air, and he took me, the whole village following, to a garden close by. There I pitched my tent under a palm. The camel, duly haltered with a rope tied to knees and neck, was turned off to graze in the garden, while the driver settled down near one end of my tent and a gendarme at the other, apparently as a guard of honour, for the Mudir had emphatically assured me that there was no fear of robbers.

I spent the afternoon chiefly trying to keep beggars and loafers away; for, though the road ran just on the other side of the cactus hedge, there was a right of way across the garden itself, and all the natives who passed to and fro were tempted to stop and cross-question the dweller in the strange tent.

When I was left more or less quiet, I made myself some dinner, which I was barely able to eat, so numerous were the flies that got drowned in it. After this repast I strolled about the garden for a while. It was a cool, moonless night. The breeze whispered in the foliage of the palms overhead, and the stars twinkled between their boughs. I congratulated myself on having refused the Mudir's offer of a room, and then retired to my couch. Despite the intermittent concert of innumerable dogs—the night nuisance of every oasis—I slept soundly.

When I woke up in the morning and set to work to prepare my breakfast, I missed first my kettle, cup and saucer, bowl

and spoon. They had vanished in the night. A closer search revealed the disappearance of a hold-all containing underclothing, and of my boots. This last was the most serious loss of all to a pedestrian who had a good many miles' tramp still before him. I immediately sent for the Mudir. He sauntered up to my tent with his hram thrown over his head in a lump, followed by a dozen other sheikhs and the rest of the population. I reported to him the robbery, and told him that I held him responsible for it, since I had been encouraged to camp on that spot by his assurances of safety. My words roused him out of his lethargy, and he promised that the thief would soon be found. The other Arabs, taking their cue from their chief sinner, immediately constituted themselves into a body of amateur detectives. Stooping low, they scanned the ground about my tent, and one of them—an ancient sheikh—picked out one of the numberless footprints as that of the thief. It was the footprint of a child! He carefully drew a circle round it with his staff, and the Mudir agreed that surely that was the key to the mystery.

It did not require much sagacity to perceive that the Mudir and his satellites were simply trying to cast dust in my eyes. So I gave free vent to the suspicion that had already formed itself in my mind.

“Ya Sheikh Abeyda,” I said; “the thief who carried off my things was no child, and you need not trouble to search for him. There he is standing beside you!” And I pointed to the villainous-looking gendarme who had spent the night outside my tent.

Strange to say, the accused made no attempt to defend himself, nor did the Mudir even ask him whether the charge was true or not. Their silence confirmed my suspicion, and the camel-driver confessed in private that he thought so too, adding that the inhabitants of Surman were far-reputed rogues.

I could not help, in the midst of my annoyance, smiling at the whimsicality of Fortune that caused me, who had lost nothing either in the Turkish camps or in the open desert, to be robbed in an oasis, and that in the proximity of the Governor's residence and under the guardianship of one of his gendarmes. It was like the case of the sailor who, having crossed the high seas safely, suffered shipwreck in harbour, or like the

experience of a friend of mine who, after a whole summer in the country, was stung by a wasp in London.

However, as there was no remedy for it, I donned a pair of ordinary shoes which the thief had kindly spared me, and, having told the Mudir what I thought of him and his gendarmes in my choicest Arabic, I packed and set off.

As I left the village, I noticed a crowd of Arabs, both men and boys, climbing on the roofs of the houses to gaze at an Italian aeroplane which was just indulging in a morning flight over the oasis. But I was too blasé with the enemy's puerile pranks, and too anxious to put distance between me and that den of thieves to tarry. As I hurried on, I was struck by the woeful state of neglect and decay of the Surman plantations. The wells were in ruins, and the cisterns dry, the cactus hedges dead, and the mud enclosures broken through by men and camels whose feet had trodden new tracks across the gardens. I could not tell whether this dilapidation was the result of the war or of Sheikh Abeyda's rule, but I was prejudiced enough to believe that the Governor had his share in it.

Without any other mishap or incident worth mention, I continued my journey towards Ajilat, meeting many Arabs of all sorts and conditions on the way, and exchanging salaams with them. They all were curious to hear the latest news from the theatre of hostilities, and wanted to know if it was true that the Italians had been driven back to Tripoli town with great slaughter. This question referred to the last attack on Ain Zara, and, together with the dirigibles, which my collocutors called *tayaras*, or kites, seemed to form the main topic of discussion in the desert.

Next to their inquisitiveness, the trait that characterizes these Tripolitan Arabs most forcibly is their readiness to help one another. I frequently saw one camel-driver calling upon another who came from the opposite direction to stop and help him to readjust his load, or to give him some food or drink. These requests were always made and granted as a matter of course. My own camel-man was an eminent example of native reciprocity. Before we had gone very far we were overtaken by a young Arab, bound, as we were, for Ben Gardane. An acquaintance was immediately established between the two, and the new-comer became our fellow-traveller. Some hours



later we came upon a peasant standing still in the desert beside a bare-backed little ass, the saddle and load of which lay on the ground. When we drew near, he simply asked my companions to assist him in replacing it on the beast's back, and they did so with the greatest readiness.

Thus the three of us trudged on, myself in front, the two Arabs behind with the camel, chatting all the time. Their pace was so slow that I was obliged every now and then to halt, and, while shaking the sand out of my shoes, to wait for them to catch me up; after my recent adventure I had registered a secret vow never to let the camel and driver out of my sight again.

Four hours' tramp brought me to the great sandhills and palm-forests of Ajilat.

The lesson I had received at Surman cured me of my passion for free air. Therefore, as soon as I arrived at the Kasr, I asked the Kaimakam to let me have a room, telling him at the same time how I had been robbed in the other place. My tragic tale produced no emotion whatever on his placid countenance. All he said, when I finished, was, "*Mejlis*—Council," and I was promptly shown into the Council Chamber upstairs.

It was the only habitable apartment in the deserted and dilapidated old building—a maze of mysterious passages and rooms opening one into another, all floored with beaten earth and permeated with nauseous smells.

Next morning, when I looked out of one of the small latticed windows, I saw a thick mist lying over the oasis, and hiding both palm-forests and sand-hills from view. Gradually, however, the tops of the trees began to emerge, and by 8.30 a.m. the veil had lifted completely. Half an hour later we started, and ploughed painfully and patiently through the deep loose sand that surrounds the Kasr. Fortunately, after a while we diverged from the main track to a harder one, crawling in a north-westerly direction to Zwara. We were off the frequented highway now. During our eight hours' journey we were only overtaken by two mounted Arabs, and we passed only one party—a white-clad sheikh on his camel, with a negro servant on a donkey, and pack-camel and camel-driver following. These living creatures accentuated rather than broke the deadly solitude of the desert.

As the day advanced, the heat grew more intense. The air

throbbled in tremulous waves, along the skyline, and there was not a cloud to mitigate the fierce glare of the sun. It seemed to fill the whole world with a white brilliance which magnified every object into colossal dimensions, and utterly destroyed all sense of proportion. During the previous day I had had many optical illusions. At one point I saw moving down the sloping track towards me what I took at first to be a camel carrying a palanquin on its back. As I drew nearer, the camel assumed the form of a human creature. And when quite close, the creature turned out to be a damsel of moderate height, with a wooden dish on her head, and her arms uplifted to support it. Men on camels in the distance looked as tall as towers, and it was only after repeated deception that I learnt not to mistake camels grazing on the skyline for towns and groves.

These tricks had shown me the source whence the Arabs derive their capacity for exaggeration and distortion of fact. The sun is their master. He is the arch-liar. But to-day I had an even more striking instance of the sun's mendacity. I happened to look back, and there, in the hard, scrub-tufted tract I had just traversed, I saw, to my amazement, a large lake shimmering, with some isolated islets upon its surface, and on the far side rose a great palm-forest. I took a few steps forward, and then looked back again. The palm-forest had meantime split into isolated clumps of trees, the islets had vanished, and a promontory had come to view, jutting far into the lake. I took some more steps forward and looked back again. The promontory had split into islets, and where the palm-grove had stood a few seconds before now gleamed a wide sheet of water. I loitered so much while gazing on this marvellous spectacle that the camel-driver caught me up, and, noticing my amazement, he laughed. "It is only *sarab*" (a mirage), he said, and moved on. Only a mirage! It was the most wonderful wonder that I had ever witnessed, and, like all wonders, it grew with the distance.

Some days later I had an opportunity, on my way to Zarzis, of witnessing a double mirage—one ahead of me, and the other behind. The latter spread, the former shrank, in proportion as I moved farther away from the one and nearer to the other.

At last, when I had begun to feel wellnigh worn out with the heat, I saw a mass of real palm-trees nodding over the horizon.





THE BARRACKS.

*Baron von Koller-Kriegstein, phot.*



THE BIMBASHI'S HOUSE

*G. F. Abbott, phot.*

EFFECTS OF ITALIAN BOMBARDMENT OF ZWARA.

With every step it became more distinct. But it is one thing to sight an oasis, and another to reach it. An hour elapsed before I got to the trees, and then they turned out to be not Zwara but one of its advanced posts. I had to toil past several isolated groves, and to halt several times to shake the sand out of my shoes, and to rest, before I got to the oasis itself. The sun was setting as I finally dragged my weary limbs to Bimbashi Musa's quarters.

### III.

Zwara since my last visit had been subjected to another bombardment by the Italian fleet. The shells poured upon it for two days (January 18th and 19th), and destroyed much that had escaped the earlier assaults. I found the yellow barracks partially demolished, the low parapet of the veranda of the blue Kasr completely gone, and on the side of one of the rooms a gap large enough for a camel to walk through. Yet the Kasr seemed still as habitable as ever : the missing window-panes had been replaced by plates of tin, the cracks in the walls had been carefully patched up, and, as far as I could learn, the loss of life had been very small. Some said that a woman and a child had been killed ; others maintained that the only victim was a cat.

Two of the enemy's warships were still cruising about, but they were not likely to effect a landing as long as Musa the Imperturbable was there. At the moment of my arrival I saw him in his grey overcoat and conical cap going up the dunes, followed by half a dozen soldiers, each carrying two rifles, and others loaded with bags of ammunition. They were one of the little patrols that mount guard over the shore, cunningly hidden among the bushes that crown the sand-dunes, while Arab warriors are scattered for miles along the coast. As soon as the alarm is given, all these men concentrate on the threatened point.

In other respects also the place seemed to be even better prepared for resistance than it was in December. The Bimbashi's Staff had been increased by the addition of some new officers, and the Turkish regulars were now drilled. The bugle—strange sound in a Tripolitan camp—was heard at regular

intervals; sentries were punctually relieved; and, in brief, everybody from the Commandant down to the humblest private looked ready to do his duty.

Many of the non-combatants, too, absolutely convinced of the enemy's harmlessness, had returned to their ruined homes and normal occupations. In one shop I saw a weaver plying a primitive hand-loom, and in another a Tunisian tailor a Singer's sewing machine!

I quitted Zwara certain that no new sensations were to be gained in it, and, in fact, the one thing that happened there after my departure could only be described as sensational in Drury Lane. On April 6th a number of Italian battleships and destroyers appeared off the coast with some transports carrying troops. While the men-of-war again bombarded the town, the troops were seen entering the boats as though they meant to land. The Italians affirmed that this was only a feint, the object of which was to cause the Turks and Arabs to concentrate at Zwara, while a stronger Italian force was occupying another point on the coast. The Turks, on the contrary, asserted that it was a genuine attempt, frustrated by their own valour and the enemy's want of it. One of the Staff officers even wrote to me that the Italian soldiers, unwilling to run risks, had given warning to the Turks of the intending move by messages thrown overboard in bottles. Be that as it may, for a whole day and night the Italian battleships roared, and the Italian troops made real or simulated endeavours to land, without producing any effect on the Turco-Arab forces, which, under the command of Musa Bey and Fethi Bey, answered the naval guns with their rifles.

Leaving Zwara at 9 a.m., I walked westwards across the desert for five hours without meeting with any memorable incident, and about 2 o'clock in the afternoon I reached the fort of Sidi Ali—a saint's domed and whitewashed shrine with a blockhouse adjacent to it, perched on a height overlooking the sea. The shrine seemed intact, but of the blockhouse only two walls remained standing. The rest had been knocked down by the Italian naval shells.

I had passed the fort, and got to a hollow clearing with a well in the middle, and there I found half a dozen holy warriors watering their horses at the log troughs near the well. They

detected me for an unbeliever, and wanted to know who I was and what I was doing there. My answers did not satisfy them, and their dissatisfaction grew stronger when they cross-examined my camel-driver. He told them that he was a native of Zawia, but some Arabs from that oasis who happened to be going by failed to recognize him. There was nothing strange in that, for Zawia is a vast oasis containing many villages wide apart. But it deepened the warrior's suspicions, and there ensued a two hours' debate enlivened by vehement shrieks and gesticulations on the part of the Arabs, and increasingly blasphemous protestations on mine.

"Have you got a *teskereh*?" they shrieked.

"Yes," I replied, producing my English passport. But it was Greek to them. They wanted a pass in Arabic from the Bimbashi of Zwara. They formed part of the garrison of Sadi Ali, which was under the Bimbashi's jurisdiction, and they had strict orders from him to keep a sharp lookout for Italian spies. How could they tell that I was not one?

My next move was to produce some letters from Turkish officers at Zwara which I had undertaken to post for them at Ben Gardane. But even that evidence failed to convince the warriors of my good faith. Thereupon I lost my temper completely, and told them they must be fools to imagine that an Italian spy would be wandering about the coast so openly. This argument produced no impression. "No," they insisted; "it is our duty to arrest you."

There was nothing for it but to despatch a messenger post-haste to Zwara. I tore a leaf from my pocket-book, and calmly began composing an epistle to Musa Bey. My manner succeeded where my arguments had failed, and the chief of the party—a middle-aged, shrewd-eyed sheikh named Ramadan—suddenly said: "It is all right. You can go on."

I felt relieved at what I considered a happy termination of the episode, and in the fulness of my joy I offered him a *mejidieh*. He declined the gift, protesting by his God and my head that it was contrary to the code of holy warriors to receive *bakshish*. I put the coin back in my pocket, and said: "Well, then, you must give me one of your number to act as my guide, for the same thing may happen to me at the next fort—Sidi Said."

A consultation followed, and the upshot was that—they had changed their minds. I was to remain in custody till the pass came from Zwara.

The messenger went off with my note, and I was led up to the fort.

At first a truculent young warrior—who seemed to exercise great influence over the others, and who, I believe, had brought about this *volte-face*—took charge of my person, and, as we climbed up the height, he looked fixedly at me and said :

“ If the pass does not arrive, we shall kill you.” And he drew his hand across his throat to illustrate the manner in which I should end my literary career.

“ That’s all right,” I said cheerfully, and proceeded to light a cigarette.

“ Are you not afraid ?” he went on, greatly scandalized.

“ No,” I said.

At that moment one of the horses broke loose and galloped away ; the youth rushed off in pursuit, and Sheikh Ramadan took his place.

Almost at once he whispered :

“ The mejidieh you showed me—where is it ?”

“ In my pocket,” I replied. “ Why ?”

“ I should like to have it. I didn’t wish the others to know.”

I burst out laughing, and handed him the coin. He cast a quick look over his shoulder, and, on seeing that we were quite alone, he seized it and slipped it into his bosom.

“ I think it is a shame you should treat me like this,” I said.

“ Can you look me in the face and doubt that I am a friend ?”

“ By Allah, we know *you* are a good man,” he replied.

“ But we fear—— The Italians landed near this place not long ago, and our orders are not to let any stranger go by without a pass.” He spoke kindly, but firmly.

“ You are quite right,” I said, impressed by this inflexible adherence to duty. And yet the Arabs are described as undisciplined and incapable of discipline ! From that moment, despite the affair of the mejidieh, I began to look upon my captors with a feeling of respect.

In this fashion I was led up the hill and into the precincts of Sidi Ali’s shrine, which was to be my prison. I wished the Fates had chosen a better time and place for their little joke.



The afternoon had meanwhile worn into evening (two whole hours had been wasted in words), and the breeze that blew from the north had developed into a most disagreeable wind. The sky was overcast with leaden clouds, the sea looked black, everything promised a stormy night. I glanced round the place in which I had to spend that night. The ruined walls of the blockhouse afforded no protection against the wind, for they rose on the south side of the shrine. The shrine itself was a stuffy, low-vaulted, absolutely windowless structure of very limited dimensions. I put my head in through the tiny door, and saw that what little room was left in it by the saint's battered old sarcophagus was taken up by the holy warriors' belongings—rifles, dishes, teapots, hrams, and so forth. The absence of air and the plethora of "little inconveniences" made me shrink back. I could not possibly spend the night there. The court outside the shrine was scarcely more inviting. The parapet that surrounded it was only five feet high, and the entrance fronted the sea. So the wind swept freely in, bringing with it dense clouds of fine sand.

In a corner of the court the holy warriors had improvised a miserable and inadequate shed out of a piece of black stuff stretched across the angle and supported by a stick. When I arrived, this corner was occupied by a toothless old man huddled up in his hram. The others now joined him, and squatted close together, leaning against each other so as to keep warm. They asked me to join their group, and, when I had done so, the old man pulled from behind him a nosebag containing a bottle of oil, some green onions, and dirty, fragmentary dates. He offered me a handful of these. I accepted the gift, and pretended to eat. Then I recalled that I still had some dry figs among my things. I fetched the packet, and distributed its contents among my hosts. This was to be our supper, for, owing to the wind, we could not light a fire. When we had done eating, I told them that I could not possibly spend the night in that corner, and I proceeded to pitch my little tent against one side of the parapet, some of them volunteering to fasten down the pegs for me.

Presently two or three more warriors dropped in, and were greeted with hearty welcomes. One of them was just back from the Tunisian frontier, and was full of what the "gazettas"

said as regards the war—England's and France's attitude toward Italy, and so on. I had certainly not been prepared to hear the policies of the Great Powers discussed in the fort of Sidi Ali, and when they asked my opinion, I pleaded that I had not seen a newspaper for several months, and that I was not in the secrets of any European Government, but that I had no doubt that every decent man throughout the world, if he knew the truth, would sympathize with their cause.

By that time it had grown quite dark and the wind more violent than ever. My hosts retired inside the shrine, and pressed me to join them. I chose the lesser evil, and, withdrawing into my own little shelter, lay down with my clothes on. And then began the longest and most agonizing night I have ever passed.

The wind howled, and the sand beat against my cover, invading it every time I opened the flap a little in order to breathe. By-and-by big drops of rain began to patter over my head, and I heard someone moving my luggage away. I thrust my head out, and saw the camel-driver taking my things into the shrine. He explained that the warriors had ordered him to do so, lest they should be spoilt in case it came on to rain heavily. I asked him to thank them, and drew my head in again quickly.

After a while I dozed off, and then suddenly I woke up in frantic terror. I had dreamed that I was buried alive, and lay in a narrow coffin, struggling in vain for a breath of air. The feeling of suffocation continued even when the dream was gone. I lifted one corner of my tent, but the driving sand forced me to drop it down again.

And so hour after hour dragged on, and I lay listening to the hurricane that raged around me, afraid to fall asleep lest I should dream that horrible dream again, and yet not wholly awake either. I was all the time in a state of intermittent stupor, and I could not exorcise from my mind a dreadful image that haunted it—the image of the hero of Victor Hugo's *Misérables* at the moment when he was voluntarily buried alive. I had read the story as a boy, and I do not believe that I had thought about it all these years. Now, however, that scene rose up from some obscure recess of my subconscious memory in all its details, and with it revived all the sensations of horror

and pity with which it had inspired me when I had read it. But it was much worse now, for I now identified myself in fancy with the hero. It was not he, but I, who was being lowered into the grave. I could hear the earth falling upon the coffin, shovelful after shovelful, till the little hole in the lid was almost choked up. Then came the torture of slow suffocation and the impotent struggle for breath. . . .

An interval of utter unconsciousness followed. I must have slept from sheer exhaustion.

When I woke up it was daybreak. I crept from under my cover. The storm had ceased. The sky was still overcast, the sea continued to moan, and the air was very chilly, but there was no wind. My hosts were lighting a brush wood-fire in their corner. They asked me how I had fared. They themselves had slept peacefully beside the dead saint, and now we should have some tea. *Elhamdulillah!*

When the fire began to crackle, they squatted round it in a circle, with their bare feet turned up so as to catch some of its warmth. While the others were thus engaged, the truculent youth found more congenial occupation for himself. He picked up an exploded naval shell that lay on the ground. It was one of the shells with which the Italian fleet had bombarded the fort—three inches in diameter, and, without the head, which had been blown off, nine inches long. Clutching it in his hand, he scrambled like a cat to the top of the only angle of the fort that remained standing, and placed it there. Then he scrambled down again, produced his Mauser from the shrine, and, dropping on one knee, he aimed at the mark. The bullet went ringing right through the shell, and knocked it over. He laughed with satisfaction, and we all applauded him.

Meanwhile the water was boiling in a tin over the fire, and Sheikh Ramadan produced a loaf of sugar which he tried to break against the parapet, in vain. Thereupon another got hold of the shell which the youth had brought back, and, inserting his hand into the cleft made by the explosion, tried to wrench off a piece that might serve as a hammer. He tugged at the mass of solid metal, till, to my astonishment, a fair-sized fragment came off. Sheikh Ramadan used the hammer thus extemporized without any comment. Nor did any of the others take the slightest notice of the feat that had

excited my admiration. I suppose every one of them could have done the same thing at any moment.

Tea was made, and they invited me to partake of it, saying : " You are our guest." I drank stoically three glassfuls of the black and sickeningly sweet concoction, but struck at the fourth, gravely explaining that I was not a very strong man.

By this time captors and captive were on the best of terms. In spite of the infernal night I owed to these men, I could not harbour any ill-feeling towards them. It seemed odd to me afterwards that no apprehension had crossed my mind that they might murder and rob me. I had heard many blood-curdling stories of Arab unscrupulousness. I was alone, and only armed with a pocket revolver, which I could scarcely use. They were six, armed with rifles, and I had seen how well they could use them. They were poor, and quite shrewd enough to guess that a European does not travel without some money about him. Had I put these things together, I should certainly have come to the conclusion that my position was as unsafe as it was uncomfortable. But somehow none of these things occurred to me at the time.

They, on their part, maintained towards me an attitude of benevolent reserve. Some never addressed a word to me, but pretended to be absolutely unaware of my existence. Sheikh Ramadan was friendly. The toothless old man was even cordial. The truculent youth had made one more essay to browbeat me.

" Give me a cigarette," he said abruptly.

" I will, provided you say *min fadlak*" (if you please), I replied sternly.

He stared at me for an instant, and then said, with a sheepish smile : "*Min fadlak.*"

After this, he dropped his swagger entirely, and it was he who insisted that I should have a fourth glass of tea. Presently he fetched out of the shrine a tattered old manuscript Koran, reverently wrapped in a dirty handkerchief, and gave me a proof of his scholarship.

When I opened my diary and began taking notes, he looked over my shoulder and complimented me on my skill with the pen. "*Mashallah,*" he said, " you have ability." I returned the compliment by saying that the pen was my weapon, as the

rifle was his, and that he could shoot much better than I could write. Thereupon he informed me that he had not yet had a chance of showing the enemy what he could do, but that he had a brother who fell fighting at Ain Zara. He himself would not mind dying in the same way. Why should he? "Why, indeed?" I echoed, and quoted the Arab proverb, "Death is a door through which all men must enter." "True, true," they all exclaimed, and I could see that I had risen in their estimation.

Some three hours passed in such friendly conversation. All this time I wondered whether the messenger had taken my note to Zwara, and, if so, when he would return with the answer; and every now and then I stood up to look over the parapet across the desert for some sign of him. The Arabs, noting my impatience, said:

"Don't worry. Even if he does not come to-day, it does not matter."

The prospect of another night at Sidi Ali did not attract me, but I tried to imitate their indifference to time as best I could.

Suddenly in the opening of the enclosure appeared the bearer of my message, and pulled from his bosom a sheet of paper. It was the *teskereh*—three lines in red ink, duly sealed with Musa Bey's signet.

ع

حال وصول كتابنا اليكم قد استوفى محمد بن محمد  
من جماعتنا والحمد لله رب العالمين  
هذا ما ارضى عرفناكم والسلام

The document, after being passed from one warrior to another and scrutinized by everyone in turn, was handed to the youth—the only member of the party who could read—while the others sat round in a circle to listen. It was couched in the Bimbashi's terse and economical style, and ran as follows:

"When you get this letter of ours—gentleman going away

from our company—no one must molest him—this is to let you know. Peace unto you.”

The cloud under which I laboured was lifted. My character was vindicated. I could go on my way in peace. But before I went I ought to understand clearly what the Arabs were fighting for. The toothless old sheikh—the most talkative member of the band—made a lengthy and shrieking speech, of which this is a synopsis :

“ We have no quarrel with the French or with the English. If they came to conquer our country, they would fight, and we would fight, and Allah would decide the issue. But the Italians,” he went on in a crescendo of passion, “ are not so. They are dogs. They are swine. They have not come here to fight. They have come to murder old men like myself who cannot make war ”—touching his grey beard—“ and to cut the throats of women and babies ”—lifting his hand to his breast. “ This is not war. It is a disgrace ! We will go on fighting for sixty years.”

At the conclusion of this harangue, which was punctuated by deep groans of approval from the others, the old man put his arm into his nosebag and produced a handful of his detestable dates. It was more than a parting gift—it was a symbol. I accepted it as such, and offered him in return a mejidieh.

“ No,” he said, “ I want no money from you. Only I want you to give me your name and the name of your place, so that if I need anything from England I may write to you. My own name is Haj Selim Ben Gheree, of the tribe Kossar, in the Zwara district. If you ever need anything from Zwara, you must write to me.”

Then I struck my tent, and, having shaken hands with my hosts, I went out to superintend the loading of the camel. The old man came to see me off. I again offered him a mejidieh, and this time he did not refuse it. We shook hands once more, and I went down the hill followed by his benedictions.

#### IV.

An hour after leaving Sidi Ali I passed by Sidi Said—a more pretentious structure, and situated on a loftier hill, which commands the sea on one hand and the desert road on the other.

Three hours later I reached Bu Kamesh, where I halted for a short rest and lunch.

The enemy had not molested the place since my first visit, but three weeks later it figured in the Italian Generals' reports as the scene of one of their brilliant victories. The facts are as follows: While the last demonstration off Zwara was in progress, another contingent of the enemy's fleet and army anchored off Ras Mekabes, and as there was no one to dispute with them the possession of the peninsula, they occupied it in the night. On the following morning a force of 5,000, consisting of Abyssinian askaris, Italian sailors, engineers, and guards, with six guns and a detachment of cavalry, crossed the narrow gulf that separates the peninsula from the mainland, and succeeded in capturing Bu Kamesh and in hoisting the tricolor over it, despite the five Turkish Tommies that garrisoned it. This feat of arms, the Italian Press declared, for the information of Europe in general and of Italy more particularly, was of vital importance, for the invaders would now be in a position to cut off communication between Tunis and the Turco-Arab camps.

This pompous statement afforded but another Italian illustration of the Arab proverb concerning the unbuilt mosque and the blind beggars. Communication between Tunis and the Turco-Arab camps cannot be interrupted except by a penetration to the mountain route—eighty miles farther south—which connects Gharian, through Yefreen, Fessatun, and Nalut, with Dehibat. The Italians neither could nor dared attempt such a penetration. After landing at Bu Kamesh, they did what they had already done after landing at Tripoli. They poured into the place more and more troops, guns, and war material, and threw up elaborate trenches for their protection. The few attempts they have made to advance inland have met with the same success as the attempts which they have been making from Girgaresh and Ain Zara. The Turks lost no time in sending to the spot Arab warriors and Turkish officers, who not only drove the enemy back into their trenches every time the latter ventured out, but even delivered attacks upon them. In brief, the occupation of Bu Kamesh has resulted in the familiar deadlock. To the Italians it has supplied another coign of vantage from which to contemplate the splendour of the Mediterranean

sunsets, and to the Arabs a new field for the display of their dash, and for the acquisition of loot. Both sides seem to be making the most of their opportunities.\*

From Bu Kamesh I proceeded westward with the sea on my right. Herds of camels and flocks of sheep and goats were to be seen grazing at intervals on the left, while on the track were plainly visible the marks of cartwheels and of motor-car tyres, both belonging to vehicles in the service of the Jihad.

I hoped to see soon the Borj of Shusha in front of me, for I knew that no motor-car could have travelled very far from the frontier; but hour after hour passed, and there was no break in the flat expanse of scrub-dotted wilderness. I had underrated the distance and overrated my own endurance. I had enjoyed my hundred miles' walk from Saniat Beni Adam to Bu Kamesh thoroughly, and even the loss of my boots at first occasioned me no greater inconvenience than that arising from the necessity of stopping now and again to shake the sand out of my shoes. But that sand had all the time been causing a friction of which I was now only too conscious. A blister had appeared at the back of my right foot on the previous day, and had got worse and worse with every mile. However, I could do nothing but limp doggedly on.

At 5.45, as it was beginning to get dark, I saw two horsemen in European clothes coming towards me. When they drew near I recognized in one of them an acquaintance. He informed me that I was still several miles from Shusha, but

\* The situation has not been altered in the least by the seizure of Sidi Said and Sidi Ali (June 28th and July 15th). The capture of the first of these block-houses cost the Italians two days' fighting, and was only effected through their numerical superiority, and with the help of the heavy guns of the fleet and of the Bu Kamesh trenches. But the gain, as a glance at the map will show, is practically *nil*. The Turco-Arabs can view with absolute equanimity the loss of the whole coast, including Zwara, Zanzur, etc. The occupation of all those places, while leaving them scathless, involves for the invaders a multiplication of garrisons and an extension of their trenches, which means more troops, more guns, more money, and more deadlocks. This is the prose of it. The lyrical outbursts with which the Italians have hailed these new triumphs of their arms supplies a fresh example of their inability to grasp realities. I am not surprised at this. I have just seen the latest Italian map—a map drawn since the beginning of the war—and I find in it Azizia placed some six miles farther south than it is, and the Gulf of Bu Kamesh stretching past the fort of Sidi Said—over the road which I traversed in March. The error about Azizia is pardonable, for aeroplanes are of very little use for survey purposes, but Sidi Said lies open to inspection from the sea.



he added that there was a small Turco-Arab camp much nearer. I pushed on, resolved to spend the night there. Soon afterwards I heard a donkey braying sweetly through the darkness, and in a few more minutes I discerned two white bell-tents. I quickened my pace and reached the camp, which, in addition to those two tents, boasted also two Arab tents full of holy warriors. It was one of the donkeys belonging to the latter that had cheered my ear.

I pitched my tent near that of the Lieutenant in command of the camp, and I had barely done so when it began to rain. But long before daybreak the rain ceased, and I was able to start at 8 o'clock. A short walk brought me to the blocks of masonry which mark the frontier. A spahi in a flowing blue burnous came up to ask who I was. When he heard that I was coming from the seat of the Jihad, his fine bronzed face beamed, and he shook my hand as much as to say, "I wish I was there myself."

Ten minutes later we reached the rain-water cistern which the French have built—a useful object-lesson to the Arabs, and a proof of the advantages of French rule more persuasive than any propaganda of words. My camel-driver filled my jug and his own goat-skin with the clean and wholesome liquid. He quaffed a draught of it, and, having said, "Praise be to God!" he added, by way of an afterthought, "and to the French. Ah," he went on, "the French are not like the Arabs—they can think."

Other evidences of the difference between the world I was leaving behind me and that into which I was returning were supplied by the green cornfields which redeemed the waste of sand and scrub on this side of the border. It was like stepping from the purely pastoral into the semi-agricultural age. The road, too, though, judged by a European standard, primitive enough, was a change from the rough tracks of the desert most grateful to my blistered feet. In less than three hours I reached the Borj of Shusha, and that also in its regularity of construction and neatness of appearance presented a most striking contrast to the forts I had left behind. It amused me to compare the feelings which these things awakened in me now with those which the first taste of the opposite had aroused a few months earlier. Then I was glad to escape from civiliza-

tion into the desert ; now I was just as glad to escape from the desert into civilization. After a meal and rest at Shusha, I entered upon the last stage of my pedestrian pilgrimage, and covered the remaining fifteen miles in four hours.

A friendly spahi conducted me to the hotel of Ben Gardane—a tavern in front with two bedrooms at the back. The Maltese proprietor at first refused to accommodate me, alleging the palpable fiction that his house was full. But after an interchange of whispers with the spahi behind the counter, he relented, and asked me to follow him. As we crossed the backyard he explained his refusal. He had at first taken me for an Arab—"and you know, sir, how dirty they are." His mistake was intelligible enough, in view of my sunburnt face, beard, and turban ; but I could not quite understand why a Maltese should be so critical of the Arab in the matter of cleanliness, till I remembered the Eastern proverb, "The ass called the cock big-headed."

The room into which he showed me was the most luxurious apartment I have ever seen. It had in it a bed with sheets that looked perfectly white by candle-light. There were very few flies on the walls, and the earth floor was partly covered with a rug. My happiness reached its climax when I discovered that even a bath was possible.

"I want no dinner," I said ; "but I want water—much water—both hot and cold ; also a tub."

"Certainly, certainly," said the Maltese, and in a few minutes there stood in the middle of the room a large round earthenware basin and two paraffin-oil tins, full of hot and cold water. Sancho Panza had blessed the inventor of sleep. I now blessed the man who invented water and soap.

After bath I proceeded to shave, and then I stretched myself between the sheets with a hearty *Elhamdulillah*.

Next morning I asked for a hairdresser, and promptly the miraculous Maltese produced one—a typical *Arabian Nights* barber : stout and bearded, with a fleshy, garrulous face, enormous turban, and voluminous baggy breeches.

"Do you come from Baghdad?" I asked almost involuntarily.

No, he did not come from Baghdad. He was a Tunisian Jew, and while cutting my hair he gave me a minute account

of his branch of the tree of Israel, whose boughs seem to be everywhere and its roots nowhere.

\* \* \* \* \*

A mule-cart without springs or sides took me from Ben Gardane to Zarzis. A steamer without cabins took me from Zarzis to Sfax. A railway-train took me from Sfax to Tunis, and a mail-boat from Tunis to Marseilles. I felt that I was ascending the ladder of comfort, and even its lowest rung seemed to be separated from a camel-back by æons of progress.

Yet, I must own, as soon as I reached Europe I began to long for Africa. The edge of my craving for cleanliness and comfort and decent cooking had been taken off at Ben Gardane. By the time I set foot at Marseilles, the commonplace advantages of civilization had lost their charm. Civilization, it is said, has a few other points in its favour. Perhaps. But when those points are summed up, what does it all amount to? At best it is a narrow, and paltry, and mean, and timid thing, when compared with the limitless grandeur of the desert and the gallant simplicity of its children.

On landing in Europe, I felt as if I had left a great part of myself behind me. But I consoled myself with the reflection that I returned the richer by a great memory—the memory of large free spaces and of large free hearts—the hearts of men who do not mind dying.

## MORAL

*“Walled Townes, Stored Arcenalls and Armouries, Goodly Races of Horse, Chariots of Warre, Elephants, Ordnance, Artillery, and the like : All this is but a Sheep in a Lion’s Skin, except the Breed and disposition of the People, be stout and warlike. Nay, Number it selfe in Armies, importeth not much, where the People is of weake Courage : For (as Virgil saith) It never troubles a Wolfe, how many the Sheepe be.”—*  
FRANCIS BACON.

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