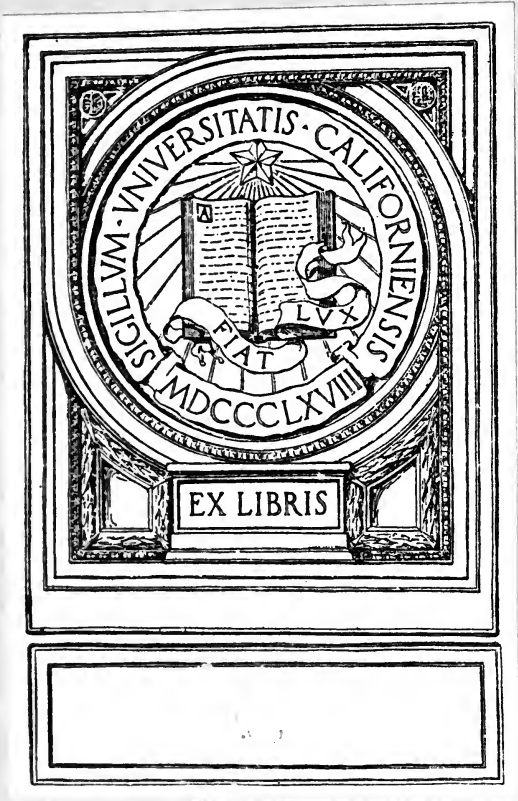


*In
French
Africa*

*M. Betham-
Edwards*



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IN FRENCH-AFRICA

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MARÉCHAL DE MACMAHON

[Frontispiece.]

IN FRENCH-AFRICA

SCENES AND MEMORIES

BY

MISS BETHAM-EDWARDS

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PHOTOGRAPHS*

“And not a tree but bloomed blossoms and yielded almonds.”



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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

FOR the illustrations of the great cedar forest of Teniet-el-Haad I am indebted to M. Fauchay, Lieutenant, 1er Tirailleurs, in garrison at Miliana. No photographer being available, this gentleman most kindly visited the forest on my behalf and photographed the most picturesque spots. For such serviceableness to an entire stranger I am indeed grateful. The portrait of the Marshal is reproduced from M. Hanotaux' great history, by especial permission of MM. Boivin. The views signed "N.D.," trade-mark of MM. Neurdein Frères, Paris, are also reproduced by arrangement with that firm. The remaining photographs are my own property.

As several of the most striking scenes visited by me have not been described by English writers, I alternate with these memories, personal and anecdotal, passages from my former works, *A Winter with the Swallows*, and *Through Spain to the Sahara*, both long since out of print. As will be seen, long before the *Entente Cordiale* was formulated, the English traveller in French-

Africa received not only a cordial, but an affectionate welcome; and in a recent work, to which I refer in the text, Captain Haywood repeats the tale. The gallant soldier's journey of just upon a thousand miles, over which waves the Tricolour, is one long record of French urbanity and good-fellowship.

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PART I
MY FIRST SOUTHING

CHAPTER I
A QUIXOTIC DOWNCOME

CHAPTER I

A QUIXOTIC DOWNCOME

ON arriving for the first time in Algeria I experienced a mortifying little surprise recalling an incident in the world's greatest romance. The beloved Don, fondly awaiting a winged chariot for his homeward journey, found himself hoisted into an ox-wagon; instead of being wafted aloft by griffins, he was jolted over stones and ruts by cart-horses. And a similar disillusion befell the chronicler of these French-African sojourns. The matter happened thus—

During the MacMahon Governor-Generalship, an artist, whom I had known for some years, was wintering in Algiers under quite exceptional circumstances. A draughtswoman of no mean capacity, an exhibitor in the Royal Academy, in 1866-7 she was lodged in the winter palace amid Vice-Imperial surroundings; she was, indeed, the guest of no less a personage than Mme. la Maréchale, the last to bear that historic title.

This great lady, who spoke English as to the manner born and loved English folks, had taken drawing-lessons of my friend and had also arranged for lessons to her children. Cordial

relations having ensued, during the winter of 1866-7 the artist was accommodated under the Governor's roof.

When, therefore, towards the close of the first-mentioned year, she wrote urging me to join her, saying that room was to be found for myself also in the same august quarters, I did not for a moment shilly-shally. How could I for one second hesitate? It was a case of now or never. Such a chance could never possibly occur again. The proposition was unrefusable. So with post-haste I packed scrip and scrippage, settled my small literary, household and farming affairs, and having loftily forwarded admiring relations and friends, and—as I fondly hoped—much impressed publishers, the following address—

MISS BETHAM-EDWARDS,
Palais du Gouverneur,
Alger,

I quitted my Suffolk farm *en route* for Marseilles, with exhilarating visions easier imagined than described.

My kind friend had written in haste and without entering into particulars. I had no distinct idea of what my co-guestship was to be. I only knew that the invitation seemed in her eyes, as in my own, quite an exceptional piece of luck—especially to “a chiel amang ye taking notes.”

Were the two English visitors to take their meals with the Maréchale's ladies-in-attendance, Presidential tutor, governess and pupils? Were they to be admitted to the quasi-Imperiale circle in the evening?

One thing was beyond question. We should be received both by the first lady in French-Africa and her courtiers as friends. And however other things might turn out, I should gain immense stores of experience—and no bagatelle to me in those early days—daily hear delightful French.

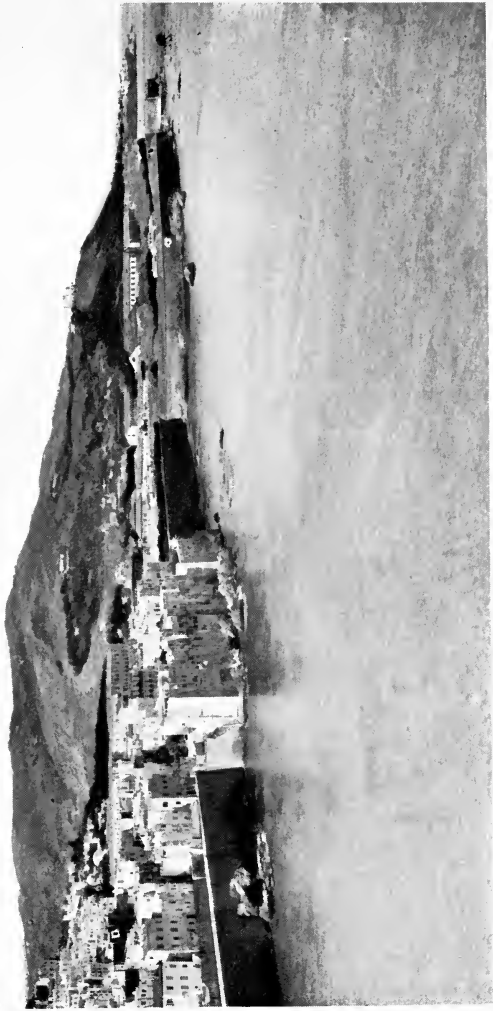
At the time I speak of, the sail from Marseilles to Algiers lasted two days, which often meant a tossing in that unfriendly Gulf of Lyons. Of the Bay of Biscay I have much more endearing remembrances, having glided from Southampton to Gibraltar in halcyon weather, although the month was November. But my four crossings to and from Algiers recall another unpleasant little voyage, that from Athens to Venice, the Adriatic in May vindicating the Roman poet's well-known epithet. In fair days the neutral-tinted sky of our northern atmosphere is left behind with the Château d'If, azure heavens and waves of deeper azure still compensating the philosophic for what sailors call "a jumpy sea," a sea always apparently very jumpy between the French and African coasts. After nearly forty-eight hours we came within sight of Algiers, rising like a vision from the waves, terrace upon terrace

glittering as if of white marble piled upon a sunny height, on either side stretching verdant plains, alternating gardens and tillage, wood and orchard, beyond these a line of snow-tipped mountains, the farthest summits dim and distant as clouds.

On nearer approach the lovely panorama becomes distinct, we see elegant villas dotting the nearer green slopes, minarets and domes, a lighthouse, arches of splendid docks crowded with shipping, brand-new hotels, palm trees and olive groves close to the shore. Then we slowly steamed towards the landing-place, a scene I shall never forget. The sky was of a burning blue, and as we reached the quay, scores of boats surrounded the steamer, plied by Arabs, Negroes, Maltese, Turks and Spaniards, in the transparent atmosphere their dark skins and brilliantly coloured garments seeming positively to shine with lustre, whilst the stalwartness, muscularity and grace of their unfettered limbs as they leapt on deck was wonderful to behold. What with the cries, gesticulations and elbow-catching of these boatmen, half-a-dozen pouncing upon myself, almost forcing me away for a moment, I forgot to look ashore. When I did so, to my great concern neither semi-Imperial carriage, Presidential footmen, nor friend were visible. The steamer must have arrived considerably before it was due, I thought, and a young Arab, with a beautiful face and of sym-

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TO THE
ARTIST



ALGIERS FROM THE SEA

[To face p. 7.]

N. D.

metrical proportions, having beat off his competitors and shouldered my bag and rugs, I elbowed my way down the gangway.

Here, again, I was too much preoccupied to cast longing looks towards the quay. I had unluckily reached the quay at Marseilles too late for the registration of luggage. Whilst, therefore, the other passengers could land at once, leaving their effects in the custom-house, I had to obtain permission to carry my own away or leave them to chance. The leave being granted, my card and address sufficing, there followed a scene of indescribable confusion and uproar.

Under a blazing sun, ragged old Pariahs in malodorous burnouses besieging me for a sou, stark-naked little Arabs and Kabyles hanging to my cloak with the same petition, I waited, powerless to stir, whilst a fight fierce as that waged over the body of Patroclus, took place over my boxes. One after another brown-skinned, bare-legged, powerfully-built fellows leaped upon the spoil, one by one my Antinous beating them off, trying to select from the mob. For quite a mob it was: Moors, Arabs and Kabyles pommelling, vituperating, cursing each other with a vehemence that would have been terrifying but for the comicality and picturesqueness of the scene.

On a sudden appeared a mild-looking Frenchman, a custom-house official, and the uproar vanished quickly, as the fisherman's unbottled

geni, into smoke. The French clerk, my good angel, nodded to the beautiful young Arab, whose name was Ali, and who turned out to be the laziest loon imaginable. For being endowed with authority, he immediately chose two rather poor-looking creatures, probably poor relations, neither of them his match in physique, on whose backs he piled bags, portmanteau and heavy trunk with ineffable coolness reserving for himself two umbrellas only.

Now followed a truly suspensive halt. In that blazing noonday sun I waited with my three porters, straining my eyes in vain for the promised friend and carriage. To drive in such humble guise to the Governor's palace and unfurnished with anything in the shape of an introduction, seemed out of the question; to settle down in a hotel might mean a vexatious game of hide-and-seek. And meantime, after two unappetizing days in a jumpy sea I felt cravings of hunger. What *could* have happened?

I had just decided upon taking a *fiacre* to the nearest hotel when I saw my friend tripping jauntily towards us, a large white umbrella shielding her from the sun, her lightest possible attire suited to this July weather in December, her attitude of entire composure "calm and unruffled as a summer's sea." Nothing like the artistic temperament to minimize *contretemps* and peccadilloes!

“I could not write to you or telegraph in time,” she began (aerial telegraphy had not yet been thought of), “all the arrangements I wrote of had to be changed at the last moment. I am very sorry, but I have taken a room for you at the Hôtel de l’Europe. You will be most comfortable there, and as it is so near, we can follow your belongings on foot.”

So off we set, my companion evidently revelling in the tropic heat, myself blowzed and panting. I learned that although the artist was remaining yet awhile under the palace roof, to the Maréchale’s great regret accommodation, after all, had not been found for her friend.

“But you will, of course, receive invitations for all Mme. de MacMahon’s receptions, and at Mme. Bodichon’s you will meet all the best people, French and English, in the place.”

A quarter of an hour later I was comfortably housed in the hotel afore-named, recounting home news to my friend over a *déjeuner* of quails roasted in vine leaves, fresh figs, bananas, dates, olives, Blidah oranges and salads of all kinds—a truly exotic and *Arabian Nights* repast!

On settling down one feature of this thoroughly old-fashioned French house greatly struck me. This was the company; with two or three exceptions, all seated at the table d’hôte in the evening being my country people.

Every one seemed hale and hearty and on the

friendliest terms with each other, but I could gather from their tittle-tattle hardly an inkling of what had brought them so far from home—unless it was the insular craze, rather necessity, of being anywhere except at home. And the majority here, it seemed to me, might every whit have just as well been holiday-making in English health-resorts, say Bath or Brighton.

There were a couple of artists certainly who discussed what they called “moddles,” and similar topics of their craft; there was a good-natured Swiss with his equally good-natured German wife, who did testify a little interest in Algeria and Algerian affairs; then there was a *Gnädiges Fräulein* or aristocratic young German lady with her companion, two oldish young English ladies chaperoned by a married sister supposed to be invalidish, an Anglican clergyman with his pretty timid bride on their wedding-tour, and a few others.

I was tabled by my neighbour on the second storey, and whose acquaintance I had already made on the landing-place. She was a Scotch-woman wintering here with an admirable old Scotch maid, both kindest of the kind. The lady had popped her head out of her bedroom door on hearing my ascent with artist friend, porters and luggage, and having already met the former, an introduction of course followed. So at dinner we chatted amicably enough, our conversation turn-

ing mostly on the Arabs and their bad treatment of donkeys.

Unfortunately, however, this excellent lady had heard of my authorship, and doubtless actuated by the desire of being congenial, plunged head first into belles-lettres. I expressed, of course, unweening admiration for the great twin-gods of Scotland, the beloved Sir Walter and the equally dear and immortal ploughman of Ayr.

“Well,” broke out my companion, “true enough, all you say, but after all that is said and done, no poet living or dead—to my humble mind—can touch Byron. Only think of those lovely lines—

“And Hugo is gone to his lonely bed
To covet there another’s bride!”

I heard aghast. This, then, was what I must expect? Instead of rapturously drinking in French sallies and subtleties, *persiflage* and *potins*, gossip, diplomatic and social, pronounced with the exquisiteness of the Comédie Française, that school of French in its sovereign purity, my fate was to be native twaddle-dum-dee only matched at parochial garden-parties and mothers’ meetings! An ox-wagon instead of Astolfo’s winged chariot indeed, or as street urchins would say of an overturned apple-cart, “My! What a cropper!”

CHAPTER II
STREET SCENES

CHAPTER II

STREET SCENES

BUT what could vulgarize this delightful land?

It is not only the climate, that from October till May is as near perfection as any in the world, but the beauty of the scenery, the odd mixture of races, the picturesqueness of daily life, and the perpetually varying interests around, that render Algiers and the entire colony so interesting. Here you find all the amiability, sprightliness and enthusiasm of French life, with all the colour, poetry and vagabondage of the desert. You may spend one day amid scenes as gorgeous and Oriental as those of the *Thousand and One Nights*, the next may be given up to botanical expeditions under learned guidance, meetings of archæological societies, concerts, social gatherings and other distractions of a capital. The city itself is attractive, ancient Moorish quarters, mosques and minarets strangely contrasted with the bustling boulevards and new squares. But the enchantment of Algeria begins farther off.

Exquisitely lovely as is the view of Algiers from the bay, envious and "paintable" as our German neighbours would call the Arab streets,

none but artists bent upon figure-subjects care to linger in the modern French town. The immediate environment is enchanting, whether you ramble along the rocky promontory of Pointe Piscard, where the crystal waves so musically lap the frowning coast, or climb the sunny slopes of Mustapha Supérieur and from a wilderness of wild flowers look down upon the romantic Hydra valley and the white walls of numerous villas rising amid olive and cypress groves, on the one side, or whether, still ascending between hedges of blue-leaved agate and feathery palmetto, stately palms rising here and there, you reach the breezy Bouzareah, from its summit gaining a splendid perspective, marble-white city, glittering blue bay and purple Atlas range—all to the new-comer is sheer fairyland.

The flowers, of which I shall speak later, are indescribable in beauty as in profusion—perhaps I should say *were*, as doubtless much of the flowery wastes that I describe have long since been built over.

The French arcades, streets and squares occupy a level lying parallel with the sea, whilst the old Moorish city is built on a steep ascent. No sooner do you begin to climb than you turn your back upon Europe and are in the East.

This Arab architecture seems strange at first, but is logical enough. What so adapted to burning African suns as these narrow streets through

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which scant light or solar rays can penetrate? You wander hither and thither vainly trying to discover some design in the interminable network, to find blind alleys, crooked or straight, everywhere, and often barely wide enough to admit two donkeys abreast. So continuous is the ascent that every street may be called a staircase, and but for the diversions by the way, would be found a weariful staircase too.

The houses are often built so closely together as almost to meet overhead, and have a construction as unique as it is fanciful. Sometimes you have a line of bare white wall, only broken here and there by an iron grating or heavy door; or, finding the sky shut out on a sudden, you look up and see that the dwelling on your right communicates with that on your left by an arch; or you come upon a picturesque corner house, the irregular sides being supported by wooden buttresses, sloping and slender, after the manner of thatch. Nothing is made to match; nothing is made to please the eye of the beholder from without; nothing is thought of but security against three enemies, namely, the public eye, the rays of the sun, and the catastrophe of an earthquake.

On the morning after arrival I climbed with my friend to the Moorish town, at every step realizing Browning's words—

“All we have willed, or hoped, or dreamed, of good shall exist
Not its semblance but itself.”

After the Bible, Shakespeare and Milton, the *Arabian Nights* had been a foremost educator of my unschooled childhood. How little I dreamed in the old Suffolk manor-house that I should one day discover the truth of poetic fiction!

There sits Alnaschar dreaming in the sun over his basket of trumpery glass-ware; with his arms out at elbows, his grey cotton pantaloons in rags, and his shabby slippers hanging from the heels, he looks a good-for-nothing fellow enough, and quite answering to the account of his immortal brother, the barber. In a moment, he will rouse himself, kick his imaginary wife, the Vizier's daughter, and one feels tempted to wait and see the amusement of his industrious neighbour. *He* is no dreamer, that tailor, it is certain. As he sits cross-legged in his little shop, built like an oven in the wall, no machine works quicker than his nimble fingers with needle and gold thread; and if he gossips now and then, it is only to take breath. And lo! there is the shop of poor Bedreddin Hassan, the brother-in-law of Noureddin Ali and the bridegroom of the Queen of Beauty, who, by the force of mysterious circumstances, became an alien and a pastry-cook. He is handsome, prince-like, and melancholy, as we imagine him; but a pleasant smell of hot pepper-cakes reaches the nose, those very cakes, of course, by which he is restored to his dignities and his bride.

A step farther and we meet Morgiana bound to the apothecary's, a well-knit, superb figure, half Negress, half Mauresque. What a dignified gait she has! What self-possession. She is wrapped from head to foot in a blue cotton shawl-like garment, having a single strip of crimson silk embroidery inserted in the shoulders, and in this simple dress possesses Greek statuesqueness and dignity. Numberless silver necklaces, anklets and bracelets adorn her fine limbs, thus testifying to the liberality of the master she serves so thoroughly.

And surely the leader of those mischievous urchins must be Aladdin! Half-a-score of them are playing round a fountain, impish, dirty, ragged, but fascinating little creatures, who cover us with dust, splash us with water, drive us against the wall, yet with a frolicsomeness that disarms anger.

Yon sinister old man watching the group must surely be the Magician whose marvellous lamp will lead to Aladdin's wealth and perdition.

Next comes a Jewess dressed as doubtless was her ancestress centuries ago, an ivory-skinned, coal-eyed woman, inclined to *embonpoint* and having the strongly marked features of her race. She wears a straight, narrow skirt of rich brocade, a black silk kerchief bound round her head, and a vest profusely embroidered in gold and silver. By her side trips her pretty young

daughter, wearing, in sign of her maidenhood, the most coquettish little cap imaginable, a mere tea-cup of gold and crimson, with a long drooping tassel.

Behind them,—is it a mummer or a ghost?—a Moorish lady shuffles along in her comical and ungainly dress of full white trousers, reaching to the ankle, and white shawl of woven silk and cotton, so wrapped round her as to form hood and mantle in one. Only her eyes are visible, but the white muslin handkerchief muffling her chin is a very unpicturesque veil indeed. A bright sash is the only relief to this queer toilette. Close at her side follows her domestic, a jovial-looking Negress, wrapped, like Morgiana, in blue drapery from head to foot, and bearing on her arm the daintiest little baby in the world, whose tiny hands are dyed to a brilliant yellowish pink with henna.

Here is a Kabyle woman, fresh from the mountain fastnesses of the Djurdjura, and the so-called legitimate descendant of the old Berber race. One sees at a glance that she has neither Arab nor Negro blood in her veins; the brow is square, the chin massive, the eye grey, the skin clear and red.

Her dress has a certain dignity. It consists of a long shawl-shaped piece of dyed cloth reaching to the ankles, confined round the waist with a belt, and fastened on the shoulders with metal pins. The arms and throat are bare, and are

ornamented with rude chains of silver, palm-seeds and coral. On her brow is a handkerchief fastened by a round brooch, betokening that she has borne her husband a male child.

There is something touching in the utter isolation of this wild creature, as she wanders through the friendless streets. One marvels what could have tempted her so far from her home among the mountains, and stops to ask a pitying question or two, but she shakes her head, understanding as little of French as of Arabic, and moves on.

Arabs wrapped to the chin in white burnouses, grave old Moors wearing turbans of costliest silk, Turks in brilliant suits of violet or brown merino, Biskrans from the desert, with their loose vests of gaudy patchwork, Jews in black leg-gear and blue stockings, Negroes—those universal dandies—in the lightest colours, of course, and having a flower stuck behind each ear—soldiers, both Spahis and Turcos—what a spectacle was here, no *féerie* at the Porte St. Martin Theatre half so breathlessly gorgeous and fantastic!

The shops, or rather workshops, mere chambers in the wall, are sights to see, each hung with wares, the master working with his men or solemnly reading the Koran as he sits behind the rest.

Here were pink-and-white kid slippers daintily embroidered with gold-and-silver thread; crimson leather harness and trappings, also richly decorated; pipe mouthpieces of amber, coral and ivory;

girdles of softest, flossiest, rainbow-coloured silks; embroidered curtains and cushions; coffee-pots and salvers of burnished metal-work, carpets gay as the flowery hills beyond, lamps of glittering-coloured glass surmounted with a crescent; ostrich eggs—not the fabricated eggs now palmed off on the unwary—mounted in silver and tasselled with silk; tables, stands and caskets of mother-of-pearl; cashmeres from Tunis; Kabylian pottery, Morocco scimitars. And, of course, everywhere we see the Arab amulet of amulets, the tiny hand in gold, silver or metal, a charm warding off the Evil Eye, and by its fingers recalling to good Mohammedans the five cardinal precepts of the Koran, namely, circumcision, fastings, almsgiving, ablutions and prayer.

These little symbols are scattered broadcast about miscellaneous wares, and are either carried or worn by old and young.

The merchants, or, more properly speaking, merchant craftsmen, are a wonderful study. Higher than artificers, hardly artists in the accepted sense, miracles of colour, skill and fantasy are turned out of these little workshops.

Delightedly I used to watch the lithe, umbery fingers as, swifter than weaver's shuttle, they moved among skeins of gold, silver and silken threads, apparently without plan or effort attaining the most charming combinations and harmonies. Doubtless the vivid scenery and brilliant

atmosphere in which these embroiderers are reared explains such success and facility. The love of colour and perception of artistic effects are inherited and innate.

Here and there, solemn as Jonah in his booth, would sit some patriarch, in his mouth a long chibouk, very likely in his hands a Koran—which on no account you, being a Christian, must touch—and before him a small pack of wares. Both single and solitary, vendors recall Kinglake's witty description of similar shopkeepers in Constantinople three-quarters of a century ago. Here, as we read in the ever inimitable pages of *Eothen*, the seller is ever—

“Striving to attain
By shadowing out the unattainable.”

He begins at the A of his fond expectations, and—as time has little or no meaning in his eyes—creepingly accepts the Z, or minimum price, resigning himself to the will of Allah. Whether matters are the same now-a-days I know not; I describe what I saw.

So long as you do not ask to look at your merchant's Koran or touch it—infidel contact with the Mussulman's Holy Book is profanity—you will find these traffickers never to be hurried or fussed. Grandees from the crown of their heads to the soles of their feet are every one. Every now and then we halted, admiring some pretty ware or other, or asking a question, sure

to meet courtesy and a smile. There is no such thing as Arab embarrassment, and Arab dignity is unmatched. We were never importuned to buy—perhaps at a glance being set down as lookers-on rather than purchasers—and no one seemed in a hurry to sell. The business of life apparently was simple, daily existence being centred in the chibouk and the Koran.

We were about midway in the old town, when my friend stopped at a corner house having the words "*Ouvroir Mussulmane*" written over the door.

"Now you shall see a Moorish interior," she said, "and judge for yourself whether the Moors or the French show the best taste in architecture."

Having traversed a gloomy little entrance, we found ourselves in the centre of an airy court, open to the sky, with delicately carved pillars supporting the galleries; the pavements were of tiles, covered with flowers and arabesques, and in the midst was a fountain surrounded by banana trees.

The bright blue sky overhead, the dainty white walls, the sparkle of the water, the wavy green leaves hanging over it, made a very pretty picture, but when we had ascended the staircase, we found a prettier picture still. Seated round the gallery, in rows, were about a hundred little Moorish girls, busy over embroidery-frames, their little brown legs tucked under them; their dark faces

all life and merriment; their bright clothing making them look like pageanters. A pleasant young French lady, one of the directresses of the school or workshop, came up and showed us some really superb work; soft white curtains covered with lilies and roses, cloaks of real cashmere from Tunis, worked with arabesques in white floss, scarves fit for the Queen of Sheba, linen to please Cleopatra.

Among these Arab children of both rich and poor were several little Negresses. This bright and busy scene was somewhat marred by the thought that the children were taught the use of the needle only. A French lady, the originator of these *ouvrirs*, made an effort in another direction, teaching her pupils to read and write. The Government, presumably finding the step disapproved of by leading natives, vetoed the innovation. On the subject of education I make a few remarks further on.

Nodding farewells to the smiling little Zorahs, Ayeshas and Fatimas, we continued our climb.

CHAPTER III
THE LADY OF MUSTAPHA
SUPÉRIEURE

CHAPTER III

THE LADY OF MUSTAPHA SUPÉRIEURE

NEXT day I drove to the suburban villa in which Mme. Bodichon, *née* Barbara Leigh Smith, had wintered since her marriage with a learned Breton doctor in 1857.

The day was perfect, the sky without a cloud, and the air fragrant with rose, myrtle and violet, the lovely pink almond blossom showing in every garden. That first upward drive was a joy to remember. Slowly, very slowly, my *fiacre* wound its way amid the verdant slopes. On one hand I caught sight of Moorish dome or modern palace glittering amid the silvery olive trees, or the white walls of a French villa peeping from lemon and orange groves; on the other, looking across cypress trees toward the sea, here no "shipless sea," as Lamb wrote of Hastings, but enlivened with sails flashing in the sunlight, whilst eastward rose range upon range of pale amethyst mountains. The hill-sides were clothed with foliage—the olive, which, as Mme. Bodichon beautifully said, seems to smile at you, the brilliant banana, the glossy palma Christi, the tasselled tamarisk, the wild cactus and fan-like

palmetto, the caroubier with its grateful shade; lastly, and crowning all, the palm. Only the leafless fig trees reminded me that we were within a few days of Christmas; but what is winter when a June sun shines overhead and flowers are a-bloom everywhere? The wild flowers would not be in full beauty, my friends told me, for another month or so; already mignonette, rosemary and large marigolds covered the banks, and the lovely, tall asphodel—there is a smaller, rarer kind—made me realize that I was in Africa.

An hour's drive brought me to my destination, a large, straggling, Moorish-looking house at that time standing almost alone on these heights, and commanding a splendid view of Algiers bay and Atlas Range. Inside, the aspect was still more Moorish, the large, bare, super-airy rooms being, after Eastern fashion, slenderly furnished. Indeed, to be comfortable in such a climate, the less your rooms are crowded with furniture the better.

Immediately my hostess entered, looking as English as it was possible to do, and strikingly contrasted with her exotic surroundings, her long, sumptuous golden hair—Godiva's veil was here to hand, had pageants then been in vogue—simply dressed, her Titianesque colouring matching such superb goldenness; looks, words, gesture expressing that love of life, that intense interest in the life of humanity—alike collective and indi-

vidual—rendering her own so full to overflowing and so serviceable to her generation.

This was my first meeting with one who was to become my close friend so long as she lived, and almost her first words were a plummet line, a feeler and also a revelation; indeed, a synopsis of character.

Already, as Barbara Leigh Smith, she had done valuable educational work, and set on foot many progressive schemes, later on to be realized. Before her marriage and at her own expense she had opened and carried on a school for the daughters of artisans and of the small middle class, a quarter of a century later so amply provided for by the School Board. In conjunction with friends she had also started a movement for the amelioration of the laws relating to women's property and earnings, the result of which was an Act of Parliament some years later. And though Girton College was as yet in the far future, her mind was full of "sweet girl graduates with golden hair," their academic gowns, triumphs and honours.

"Have you read this book?" she asked, producing a volume from under her sleeve, the long-forgotten memoir of an almost completely forgotten woman worker, in her own day, indeed, a lesser but no less zealous and much more intellectual Hannah Moore. This was *Letters and Remains of Caroline F. Cornwallis* (1786-1858),

published 1864. A daughter of a country parson, the author had occupied herself with many of the questions interesting, or rather absorbing, my hostess, and in the series of "Small Books upon Great Subjects" had written upon Ragged Schools, Criminal Law—and also Greek Philosophy!

Chambers's invaluable compendium gives a short notice of Caroline Cornwallis, a really remarkable forerunner of the remarkable women, outside literature, characterizing the Victorian epoch. I had never forgotten the book and the query of that first interview, and for the first time, forty and odd years later, procured a copy, from which I cite one or two sentences—keynotes, perhaps inspiration of Mme. Bodichon's life-work and ideals.

Written in 1838: "When the poor have more education I would have the poor man himself raise his voice in the House of Commons and plead the cause of his 'order,' but we must wait, I fear, for another generation ere this is possible."

Written in 1847: "It provokes me to see how little is done for Ireland now, when it is possible."

But here are two utterances, an earlier and a later, that touched upon the subjects above all interesting to the lady of Mustapha Supérieure.

In 1820 she wrote: "Why was I not a Fellow of a College, with free access to the Bodleian? I might then have been *approfondie* in something.

Now I skim the surface of everything, and can get no further for want of assistance."

Twenty years later came this sentence: "I want to have the great principle established that in a free country every one ought to have the rights of a free citizen, and that sex can never defeat those rights."

Wise and showing deep concern are her animadversions on the existing criminal system, so violent as a repressive measure, so utter a failure regarded from a moralizing point of view. In fine, this forgotten book above all brings out the contrast between the then and the now, the slow, very slow evolution of quite new theories.

Miss Cornwallis in early life refused, it is hardly clear why, the hand of the celebrated Sismondi, but the pair remained close friends till his death. Some charming letters in French, among the last he penned, are added as an appendix. A New Year's greeting on January 1842, the final and most affectionate of the series, closes this volume. Its recipient lived till 1864.

But Mme. Bodichon, to her disappointment, soon discovered that ragged schools, the higher education of women and social and philanthropic movements could only have my good wishes. Never throughout our long and warm friendship for a moment did she entice me from my allegiance to my legitimate calling; never throughout a pretty long life have I so much as upon a single

date forgotten the fable of the Cat and her one Device; in other words, divided my energies between social work and literature.

Such holding back was, however, soon understood and—excepting sighingly uttered regrets from time to time—respected.

Although the book and the query gave the keynote to my friend's character and the *leit-motif* or dominating object in life, she was far from neglecting immediate sources of interest and spheres of usefulness. A Frenchwoman by marriage, and wife of a settler in French-Africa, she grudged neither time, thought, nor money, as will be seen, where Algerian welfare was concerned. Her catholic and sovereign nature recognized no barriers either of race, nationality or religion. Just as during her American tour some years before her heart had gone out to what Walt Whitman calls "You dim-descended, black, divine-souled African," then in bondage, so here, alike in Jew, Moor, Kabyle, Bedouin and the negro, she saw no aliens, but as yet little understood brothers and sisters.

Tea was served by an engaging Arab boy wearing white cotton trousers and a violet cloth vest, and soon the doctor strolled in, a tall, dignified, picturesque figure. Emily, Shareefa of Wazan, and her magnificent Moor of whom we are now reading could hardly have presented a greater contrast than this pair, the one Anglo-



DR. EUGÈNE BODICHON

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Saxon to the finger-tips, the other bronzed to the hue of a Bedouin and hardly European in his dress. A striking point about the former army surgeon was his hair, an iron-grey poll, so thick, frizzed and fine that during one of his bivouacs in the desert a mouse curled itself up in the mass and there lay till dawn. A passionate lover of birds and beasts, not for worlds would the doctor have dislodged his little intruder till absolutely necessary.

Many projects were discussed over the tea-table, and many plans laid for the best possible disposal of my time. I had here, indeed, the open Sesame to all that Algeria had to show and to teach.

A few days later came Christmas Day; and what a twenty-fifth of December! The warm blue sea hardly murmured in its inland flow, the sky had not a cloud, the air was scented with roses and violets, and every window stood wide. As I journeyed, this time by omnibus, to the hospitable villa on the heights, I was one of holiday-makers past counting. Carriages, *fiacres* and other vehicles rattled in every direction. French officers in their uniforms—the welcome privilege of mufti whilst off duty was not accorded till twenty-five years later—Arab sheikhs, too magnificent of themselves to require any adornment beyond spotless white burnouse, workmen with their wives and children, all in Sunday attire,

negroes and negresses in gay-printed cottons, the men with a pomegranate blossom stuck behind the ear—coral contrasted with jet—every one bent upon easeful sociability and distraction.

My own day was a very long and full one. Instead of joining the twelve o'clock French *déjeuner* at Mme. Bodichon's house, I duly feasted on Christmas fare with other English visitors collected by another rich, generous and gifted countrywoman occupying a beautiful and much Europeanized villa close by.

Even on an Algerian Christmas Day, social and philanthropic obligations were not forgotten by the lady of Mustapha Supérieure. At some distance from her home stood—perhaps still stands among the hills—a Protestant orphanage. Thither in the afternoon we drove, Mme. Bodichon's carriage having a sack crammed with toys, knick-knacks and chocolate for distribution.

It was a lonely place for children to live in, a large, rambling Moorish house exposed to the four winds of heaven, and looking towards the sea and snow-tipped lesser Atlas. No wonder that in these solitudes the little ones welcomed us—and the sack—rapturously, the distributor and part-donor, moreover, being an old friend,

After entertaining us to their best ability, proudly showing their dog—which might apparently have guarded the Hesperides, so ferocious its aspect—their class-rooms, prizes and copy-

books, they led us to their playground and there sang hymns.

The singing of these fatherless, motherless bairns was especially touching. They were mostly Alsatians or Germans without kith or kin, utterly cut off from family life. As they joined in the simple canticles among the wild African hills, it was comforting to think that they looked healthy and happy, and were being trained for the probable destiny of each—that of a colonist's wife.

On our way home it was not so much the *Arabian Nights* as the Bible and the Koran that came home to me. Hundreds of texts, that had brought little or no meaning as I heard them Sunday after Sunday in my childhood, thus illustrated became suddenly new, and true, and beautiful. The most trifling incident recalls some pastoral. The most simple feature in a landscape strengthens some familiar though hitherto imperfect simile. One interprets Biblical and Mahomedan history by the aid of vision; and as I drove among the olive-clad hills I was realizing much that had hitherto been myth only. Jacob falling on the neck of Esau and kissing him; the company of Ishmaelites seen by Joseph's brothers with their camels bearing spicery, and balm, and myrrh; David keeping his father's flocks on the hills; the son of Kish seeking the asses that were lost—all these pictures were now

photographed in my mind's eye from life. It is, indeed, almost impossible to estimate the beauty of such idylls and the imagery of such poems without their help.

Who can understand "the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land" till he has suffered the heat and blessed the shadow; or how beautiful the spring can be in the south, "when the rain is past and gone, the voice of the turtle is heard in the land, and the fig tree putteth forth her tender leaves"; or how much real glory and wealth are suggested by "the dromedaries of Midian, the multitude of camels and the flocks of Kedar," unless he has seen something of the primitive and pastoral life of the East?

We met troops of Arabs, some mounted on camels, others riding little donkeys side-saddle fashion, driving a flock before them, laden with oranges and poultry; now and then a stately Cadi sitting bolt upright in a saddle that Sinbad might have embroidered.

And we saw two lovely pictures. The first was by the wayside—a man guiding a donkey on which were seated his wife and child—Joseph, Mary and the infant Jesus! He strode on before us; and in the level light of sunset the little group looked so distinct, and yet so dreamy, as not to belong to our own world at all. The man was a superb creature, wild, bearded, with marvellously symmetrical features, and carrying his burnouse

as if he had been a king clothed in purple. The woman was decently dressed in white, and bent her veiled face over the child, who had a bunch of freshly plucked oranges in its little hands, and crowed with joy.

We had hardly lost sight of them when we alighted at a little café, hidden in a perfect thicket of wild cactus and aloe. Two or three Arabs here sipped coffee and chatted, reclining on stone benches after the stately Roman fashion, and nothing could equal the grace of their salutation and the perfect subjection of their inquisitiveness to good manners. They were well dressed, and spoke tolerable French, thus implying a certain European culture; but just behind this scene of ease and enjoyment was such a suggestion of historic splendour and desolation as could not be forgotten.

At the back of the café were the ruins of a Moorish house—a column here, an arch there, fragments of coloured pavement telling of former magnificence. The windows were overgrown with palmetto, and the basin of the fountain was dry, whilst what had once been a courtyard was choked with stones and weeds.

A little donkey browsed close by; and sitting under a broken arch was an old man, so motionless and picturesque as to look a part of the picture, and not a living being like ourselves. His beard was white, his face pale and melancholy,

his eyes lustrous; and as he sat thus, wrapped in white from head to foot, and no more heeding our presence than if we had been a swarm of mosquitoes, it was impossible not to imagine some romantic story about him.

Had he come thither in the sunset to imagine a vision of prosperity now passed away? Did he see "a stately pleasure dome" where we beheld ruin and desolation only? Did he mistake the breeze that whistled through the loopholes, and our Frankish talk, for gay music and familiar voices long since hushed?

When, a little later, we looked back from the path by which we had come, he was still in his old position. I felt as if I should find him sitting amongst the ruins a hundred years hence, could but I live to see!

With a large and most animated Anglo-French gathering, theatricals and music ended my first Christmas in Africa. The second, as will be seen, was spent under utterly different circumstances.

CHAPTER IV
A VICE-IMPERIAL COURT

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A VICE-IMPERIAL COURT

No personages could less resemble their Imperial master and mistress than the Governor of Algiers and the Maréchale, and no Vice-Imperial Court could less resemble the Tuileries than that of their Winter and Summer Palace.

MacMahon's predecessor had been another Marshal, Pélissier, of valiant but tarnished memory, the soldier who did not hesitate to suffocate five hundred helpless Arabs sheltering in a cave, and—dire offence against etiquette as the other against humanity—to command the servants of Queen Victoria.

It was in 1859 that the third Napoleon ill-advisedly named the captor of the Malakoff his ambassador at St. James's. When dining with the late Queen and having the place of honour on her right hand, Pélissier felt a draught at his back, and turning round shouted stentoriously to the silk stockinged footman close by—

“Fermez cette fenêtre.”

The man, wholly taken aback, consulted her Majesty, who smilingly bade him shut the window in question.

Rigidly upright, but pitiless in warfare, like Ney, brave of the brave, this old soldier was given to unpermissible *gauloiseries* at his wife's dinner-table, uttering *doubles-ententes* that would have disgraced a cabaret.

The Marshal and Mme. MacMahon brought a new atmosphere into the French-African consulate. What the Imperial Court was like we learn from the pages of Prosper Mérimée—with one exception—the only brilliant writer of that dazzlingly brilliant period who did not repudiate the *Deux Décembre* and its author. The galaxy of nineteenth-century genius shed no lustre on the French Court. Only Mérimée and Saint Beuve preferred compromise to prison, enforced exile or aloofness.

Those who, like the present writer, have again and again seen the pseudo-Napoleon and his Spanish wife and their representatives in Algeria, would remark the striking divergence of type. Whilst Louis Napoleon ever, as M. Hanotaux writes, wore an expression of incertitude and questioning, to him every interlocutor being a sphinx, every day, every hour bringing dread of the morrow, MacMahon's honest face was, for all who could read, none causing him uneasiness. The austere, straightforward, one-speeched soldier had nothing to conceal and no insoluble problems perpetually before his mind. Nor were the respective mistresses of the two Courts less unlike

each other. That rarest beauty, a golden-haired Spaniard, whose loveliness as she passed by seemed to scintillate and leave a trail behind, may perhaps be pardoned many things, some would call them fatalities. For France, as well as for herself, natural endowment, transcendent loveliness proved indeed a dower of doom.

Quite another personage was the simple, unpretentious, yet essentially dignified capable little Maréchale. An admirable wife and mother, devoted to fireside domesticities, like her husband she was a stern upholder of propriety and decorum. Neither scandal nor intrigue were allowed to circulate during their joint rule, and, as will be seen on a later page, both could play a heroic part. Affable, fond of society, always ready to do her best for the colony, Mme. de MacMahon in great part made up for her husband's shortcomings from a social point of view.

Taciturnity personified, the Marshal has gone down to history as the man of one speech. What rarer, more desirable immortality?—than in an age of super loquaciousness to have uttered one sentence that “the world will not willingly let die.”

Such was the blunt, unlettered soldier's happy fortune. He gained one victory only—excepting that last and far greater victory over himself years later. He made no mark as a colonial governor, knew naught of art, literature, Shakespeare and the musical glasses. But a single sentence which,

although soldierly, was capable of a thousand applications—the famous, “J’y suis, j’y reste” (Here I am, here I stay), will keep his name alive as long as the French language lasts.

Thrice happy Marshal, to have attained undying fame by means of two vocables and two letters! Of course, French wits made merry at the Marshal’s expense. Whenever he made official progresses, journalists and *boulevardiers* followed him on the look-out not for what he said, but for what he omitted to say. Especially as President did his monosyllabic utterances and exploits of taciturnity minister to the gaiety of nations.

Thus when visiting submerged Toulouse, the Garonne having surpassed itself in the matter of inundation, as the Marshal’s eye surveyed the deluge he only ejaculated—

“Que d’eau, que d’eau!” (What water! what water!)

On another occasion, that of a review, a negro subaltern having been brought to his notice and summoned to the Presidential estrade, his only greeting was a paternal—

“So you are the negro soldier? Good-day, my lad.”

Of the Marshal’s truly Roman No, unuttered but signified by a sad smile, the No that saved the Republic and hindered a civil, perhaps a European war, I speak in my final pages.

I never extracted so much as a single word from

my distinguished host of the Winter Palace, nor did I ever learn that others were more fortunate. Mme. la Maréchale, on the contrary, liked conversation, always in English company forsaking that language which a mediæval Venetian fitly described as "plus délectable à oïir que nulle autre," for such insular speech and even slang as would come in her way. Thus when chatting with Mme. Bodichon and myself at one of her receptions, and seeing quite a little French crowd on the staircase, she cried regretfully, "Ah! what a bother, there's a lot of people coming up," doubtless the colloquialisms sounding delightful in her ears. Educated, English-reading French folks, I may here add, do not care a brass farthing for the choicest phraseology of our modern or contemporary stylists. Teach them the use of "kiddies," "ripping," "a cropper," and so on, and you make them your debtors for ever. A devout Catholic, the Maréchale was no bigot. Thus an English friend wished to give her children some story-books written by a fellow-countrywoman, like herself at this time a guest at the official receptions.

"I should mention," explained my friend, "that in one book of historic stories there are certain facts reflecting on Roman Catholicism."

"So long as the facts are historic, my children shall read them," was Mme. de MacMahon's reply.

The little boy and girl would sometimes be brought in to see their mother's guests, and nothing pleased her better than a quiet tea, a little sketching and talk about pictures with the lady artist of Mustapha Supérieure.

After Christmas a succession of gaieties delighted the English colony, what with residents and visitors, a pretty considerable one.

The leading event of a particularly gay season was a fancy ball which, although picturesque and splendid in the extreme, I should pass over but for one tragic association. My friends and new-made acquaintances were all bent upon vindicating insular taste upon this occasion, and for days beforehand all was busied frivolity.

The drawing mistress of the Maréchale, already mentioned, had designed for herself the charming travesty of a summer night, in other words a gown of dark-blue silk veiled with black gauze, and decorated by the principal constellations cut out in gold paper. Some one suggested that a winter day would form a fitting companion, and a friend, who shall be nameless, having agreed to be thus translated, our amateur costumiers at once set to work.

Amongst these was an accomplished and genial young Austrian doctor or medical student, I forget which. With extremest good-nature and no little skill he manufactured a goodly supply of icicles for winter, hours being spent upon the work.

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MADAME DE MACMAHON

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Merry hours they were, other fabricators of fancy dress and adornments keeping him company, some cutting out Orion and his train or the Square of Pegasus in gold paper, others deftly fashioning a contadina's head-dress or a neckerchief à *la Werther*, myself alas! alone looking idly on.

The energy of the young Austrian scientist was delightful to behold, and his determination to bring his crystals to perfection indicative of character. Trifling as was the task in hand, one could see that whatever he undertook would be carried out to the best of his ability. Gayest of the gay, possessing all the grace and distinction of the well-bred Austrian, well advanced in his studies, if ever a fair future could be predicted of any adolescent it seemed safe in his case.

And a few months later he fell on the thrice accursed field of Sadowa.

I have often thought since of that promising young Austrian doctor, and how much better he was employed in making artificial icicles for a fancy ball than in shooting down others, full of life, hope and promise as himself, and of offering his own stalwart, energetic frame as food for cannon. Such facts bring home to one the diabolical ineptitude and paganism of war.

To return to the ball and two other features worthy of mention.

The pretty, graceful and rather *petite* Maréchale wore a symbolic travesty needing, to do

credit to it, "some daughter of the gods divinely tall," if not "divinely fair." It was no historic character that she represented, but the colony itself, that lovesome land of Algeria and all its products, the beautiful and serviceable as well as the savage and profitless. Thus, although the famous Bombonnel had already rid the capital and its immediate surroundings of the most dreaded beasts in the colony, Mme. de MacMahon wore a panther's skin. Forming what dress-makers call a *panier*, the exquisitely mottled pelt threw all other ornamentations into the shade. How, indeed, the inexhaustible resources of the colony were one and all represented in a single costume I cannot say, but so it was. The lady not only advertised the fauna and flora of her husband's pro-consulate, but the wealth of ancient Rome's granary. She was indeed a living cornucopia, a goddess of plenty, not only indebted to Nature but to the milliner's skill. The ordeal of symbolism over much was bravely confronted, and beholders expressed delight and unqualified admiration.

Another noticeable thing about that gala was the presence of Arab chiefs and magnates. Amid the brilliant uniforms of French officers, military and naval, and the crowd of no less brilliant masqueraders, moved stately Mohammedans, affably received, affable to all, but denizens of a world apart. In their long white burnouses, not in the

least little particular national costume being deviated from, one and all towered above the rest of their sex, or it might be, seemed to do so, by virtue of superb carriage and unmatched dignity. If human beings were made only to be looked at, the sons of the desert assuredly bear the palm.

I add that both the Summer Night and the Winter Day were pronounced successes, the young Austrian doctor being delighted with the effect of his ice crown, girdles and pendants—powdered glass sprinkled at the last moment over the white dress rendering a last touch.

A few days later, happily without fore-feeling of his doom, he sailed for Marseilles.

CHAPTER V
FÊTES IN HONOUR OF AÏSSAOUA

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ONE evening my Arabic master invited me to witness one of those strange celebrations with which the faithful honour their saints. With natural enthusiasm amid such surroundings, I spent odd hours in writing out verbs from left to right, and in hammering through a fable of Lokman, the fabulist beloved of the Prophet. Aïssaoua was a poor and pious mystic who in the desert commanded his famished disciples to eat cactus-leaves and swallow burning coals, and that such self-devotion would be rewarded.

Having dined animatedly at the hotel, a party of seven, under the conduct of an Arab, we climbed the old town.

It was a superb night. The heavens had not a cloud. The moon shone with wonderful brilliance. As we followed our guide through street after street, so narrow as to admit of only three or four people passing at a time, the light and shadow played fantastic tricks on every side. It was difficult to believe that shadows could be so real; still more difficult to believe that light could

be so shadowy. Sometimes we passed a round archway under which lay a sleeping figure, rather two sleeping figures, one of a man, the other of his second and stranger self.

Sometimes we looked up at the white radiance of the terraced roofs, doubting whether these could be other than visions, so unreal did they look against the glowing purplish black heavens.

As we came upon a couple of Moors talking in a doorway, every line of their white drapery was sharpened in the marvellous light as if cut out of marble, themselves looking more shadowy than any shadow, looking, in fine, like statues, and not in any degree human beings with ourselves.

We had climbed for upwards of half-an-hour, when our guide entered a mole-track of a street and stopped at a house, the very walls of which seemed bursting with barbarous music. It was so dark and the music was so infernal, that I think if it had not been for the protection of three or four cavaliers we ladies would have lost courage and run away. I felt a terrible coward, but dared not own it. Following our guide, we now pressed pell-mell through an open doorway and grouped our way within, elbowed and jostled by a crowd of Arabs, thin, ragged, clean or dirty, as the case might be. Once inside we found everything bright, cheerful and gala-like. The court was spacious and spread with bright-coloured carpets; lights were abundant, chairs

were placed for the better order of spectators in a semicircle, the action of the play not having yet begun.

Opposite to us stood about fifty men in a circle, their clothes for the most part of brilliant colours, their dark faces rapt and eager, their voices mingling in a prayer, of which the name "Aïssaoua, Aïssaoua," and the formula, "La-allah-illa-allah!" "There is no God but one God!" formed the burden. Behind them squatted three or four musicians evoking diabolical sound from drum, castagnettes, and tambour; whilst the doorway through which we had come grew every moment more crowded with spectators—Jews, Turks, and Arabs, mostly of somewhat disreputable appearance. Only one or two French soldiers kept us company.

By and by, coffee was prepared in a little kitchen close behind us with an officiousness of hospitality delightful to witness.

How could folks have prophesied horrors to us? According to all authorities, learned as well as familiar, an Aïssaoua fête was everything that was ghoulish, revolting and unearthly; whereas we were treated to some excellent coffee, a picturesque assemblage, and some extraordinary moonlight effects. But when coffee had been served, a new spirit began to animate the musicians, and for about an hour they subjected us to a torture impossible to describe. Our teeth

were slowly drawn one by one, our tympana were beaten and bruised, our flesh was pricked with infinitesimal pins, our nerves were twisted and strained almost beyond endurance.

In the midst of this bogus suffering, which we only bore because we hoped for a reward afterwards, came a shrill, long-continued, collective cry. It was such a cry as some antediluvian monster like the Plesiosaurus might have given when swooping on its prey, and I looked right and left wondering in vain what throat could have uttered it. Again and again it sounded above drum and tambour, the unearthliest, cruellest, most horrible applause I ever heard in my life; and at last I discovered from whence it came.

The court in which we were seated was open, and ranged in rows around the uppermost gallery were a dozen or so women, their white immovable figures looking like ghosts against the background of the dark purple sky, their muffled faces bent eagerly over the balustrade. The voices of the women seemed to act like poison on the brain of both musicians and devotees. The tambours evoked sounds more diabolical still, the chants became more frantic. At last the spell worked, and one of the men broke from the ring and began to dance.

And what a dance! One was reminded of Goethe's ballad and the skeleton that performed such weird feats on moonlit graves, of everything

fiendish or fantastic that the imagination of man has conceived.

The body was bent backwards and forwards, the head was shaken, the breast was struck with a frenzied agility and recklessness, till the performer looked as unlike anything human as could possibly be. Now his head, with its horrible mass of snaky hair, hung backward as if dislocated; now his breast resounded with such blows that you feared some blood-vessel were broken; now he whirled to and fro, yelling, raging, glaring.

Soon another and another energumen were seized with the spirit, and now the sight became truly horrible. The dancers caught hold of each other by the waist, swaying this way and that, foaming at the mouth, wriggling like snakes, howling like hungry wolves, and never breaking the frightful Mezentian union, till one by one each fell upon the ground either in a tetanic swoon or a cataleptic convulsion. To see these revolting figures writhing at our very feet, to hear the shrill choruses of the women and the monotonous txchs-t-t-t-r-r-r-mmm—txchs-b-b-b-m-m-m of the musicians, was enough to drive away the most inquisitive ladies in the world, but our failing courage was filliped by such whispers as these: “What a scene for you—a painter, or for you—an author!” “You are English ladies, and own to cowardice?” Or, “Oh! they are only charlatans, and do it to gain *soldi*.” Or, “The grand

coup-de-bataille is yet to come. We have seen really nothing as yet."

So we stayed, not without dread. If this were done in the green tree, what would be done in the dry? In the little cave of a kitchen behind us, where all sorts of diabolical preparations were going on? There was a fire-place in one corner, and the Arab who had prepared our coffee now knelt before it, heating flat poker among the red-hot embers, whilst a big blue-black negro busied himself complacently among fragments of glass, knives, scorpions, needles, swords and broad leaves of the prickly cactus.

Meantime, the devotees recovered from their swoons and staggered hither and thither, contorting themselves in the most hideous manner, foaming at the mouth, looking as the evil spirits might have looked when driven out of the swine. And now the instruments of torture were exhibited, the exulting cry of the women rose to a higher pitch, the Mussulman crowd became ungovernably enthusiastic, and the followers of Aissaoua were fired with the spirit of faith.

The scene now grew demonic. The Mokadem, or priest, held out a leaf of the Barbary fig, bristling with thorns an inch in length, and his disciples knelt round him, snapping, biting, tearing the prickles like ravening beasts. Then a basket of blazing coals was brought out, and they fell upon them greedily, rubbing them

between their hands, making a carpet of them to dance on, grinding them between their teeth. One terrible-looking creature, a negro, walked about the court holding in his mouth a red-hot cinder, and looking like nothing so much as the Devil of primitive imagination. Then he dropped it on the ground with a fiendish cry, "Aïssaoua, Aïssaoua," and grovelled over the glowing fragments, picking up one at a time with his teeth.

But the worst was yet to come; for now red-hot irons were brought from the fire, with which they proceeded to seethe and scorch themselves in a manner perfectly sickening. They applied them carefully, as one applies a plaster, to the soles of their feet, the palm of their hands, the flat part of their arms; and all this was done with an ecstatic delirium that went far to overthrow the suspicion of charlatanry.

The smell of burning flesh, the howls, the groans, the contortions of the Aïssaoua, the universal frenzy, now became unendurable. The men of our party jested no more, but looked on as horrified as ourselves; the ladies huddled together, shrinking from the wild figures yelling about us, and only longing to go.

As soon as exit became possible we made our way to the door, having sufficiently supped on horrors for one night.

How delightful to breathe the fresh air of the

night again, and leave such a world of fantastic devilry behind! On our way home we naturally discussed the claims of the devotees to true fanaticism. One who, like myself, was a neophyte in Algerian experiences, and an artist, declared the whole affair to be a bit of barbaric enthusiasm, *pur et simple*. Our young Austrian and another medico argued on the same side, averring that as far as their experiences went, no Revivalism was ever more sincere; adding, "They couldn't deceive *us* as to the fainting fit and the bleeding mouths, you know." A French artist, and a sceptic, said that it was a parcel of trickery from first to last, though, as his little wife slyly observed, he had early proposed a retreat. Another of the party, long resident in the colony, pronounced the affair to be quackery and religious fanaticism mixed. Lastly, said another, "They seemed very glad to collect money from us, which looks very much as if they made a trade of tormenting themselves."

Well, after all that is said and done, are not cilices and scourges seen to-day in our own High Church vicarages? So we must not be too hard upon the disciples of Aïssaoua.

CHAPTER VI
KABYLIAN SCENES AND
HOSPITALITIES

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By six o'clock one bright March morning I set off for a trip in Kabylia with four friends, namely, Mme. Bodichon, a pleasant young barrister, his sister and her lady companion, two carriages and four good horses with relays being chartered for the expedition.

At this stage of the conquest the Kabyle, or Berber, was a universal pet throughout the colony. Settlers, traders, Jesuits, Trappists, no matter your interlocutor, you were sure to hear some such comparison as this—

“There is no kind of comparison between the Arab and the Kabyle. The latter builds houses, plants trees, tills the ground and is a monogamist. His wife is really a helpmeet, not a mere chattel or beast of burden, as is her sister the Arab. The Kabyle is a first-rate soldier, as has been proved in the Crimea, Italy, Senegal. A hundred years hence Kabyles will become Frenchmen.”

But as Renan has truly averred: “We may without exaggeration attribute to the Arab half the intellectual heritage of humanity.” Setting the glories of Arab science, architecture, learning

and poetry against the homelier Berber virtues of stability and thriftiness, the former must naturally kick the beam.

Transcendently grandiose and lovely is this plain of the Metidja. Lights and shadows fall with beautiful effect, white villages gleaming amid oases of culture; every bit of turf is kaleidoscopic with wild flowers, and in contradistinction to the thousands of brilliant flower-heads we move amid a solemn, as it seems interminable immensity!

To the flowers of this wonderful land I devote a separate chapter.

Without engaging society and the delightful enjoyment—for a time—of what our French friends call “*une vie degagée*” (life out of harness), the Metidja is an exhilarating experience. We thought of Browning’s lines—

“Oh, the wild joys of living,”

here drunk in with every breath.

Our drivers managed their horses well, and by five o’clock we were at Tiziozou, where we halted for the night, early next morning being again on the road.

The journey from the Metidja and ascent to Fort National is one long climb. The road wound round the mountains like a thread twisted about a sugar-loaf. We looked up, and said, “Oh! it is impossible that we can get there.” We looked down and said, “Have we really climbed

so high?" And still we crawled higher and higher and higher. Everywhere were signs of cultivation; and it was quite touching to see how laborious, and often ineffectual, was the system.

The implements were of the clumsiest kind, precisely, I dare say, as when Numidian corn filled Roman granaries; and the effect of the landscape altogether was to make you feel carried back to the times of Masinissa, and to wonder how the place could be so peaceful.

We were now breathing the brisk mountain air, and gaining at every moment a wider prospect of the distant peaks of the Djurdjura and the verdant hills and valleys on every side. Nothing, perhaps, could be more exhilarating than such a drive with such an object. The horses, as we employed relays, were fresh, the temperature was a delicious medium between spring and summer; the scenery was lovely and quiet, and suggestive of a golden pastoral life.

It was difficult to conceive what a different scene we should have traversed only a few decades back. These mountain-passes and lovely valleys were then alive with the sound of guns and the flash of swords, and few and far between were the villages that escaped the scourge of war. The Kabyles, incited by a fanatic, named Bon Bapla, fought well, but the sight of their ruined crops and burning olive-woods sooner than anything

else inclined them to peace, and there seems no likelihood of it being again broken.

By and by, our driver turned round with a joyful face, and cried, "Voilà Fort National," and stretching our necks and shading our eyes we did indeed see a white speck on the mountain before us.

A little later, and we drove into the quiet fort and alighted at the best inn it boasted of, to the infinite curiosity of some Kabyles lounging about. Despite some drawbacks, such as a saloon crowded to the last inch with French soldiers playing billiards, Kabyles and all kinds of miscellaneous travellers, tiny bedrooms, only approached by a staircase built outside, with holes in the roof, in the walls, and in the floor, we made ourselves very comfortable at what was formerly Fort Napoléon. The landlord and landlady did their best to please us, and after they had served our dinner, chatted to us over their own at the next table. The food was wholesome and the beds excellent.

And we had a very pleasant time. M. le Commandant, to whom we were provided with official letters introductory, received us kindly, and with great amiability consented to be looked upon as a sort of encyclopædia concerning Kabyle affairs. He was a pleasant, learned man, who had lived long among the Kabyles, and had busied himself with collecting such *disjecta membra* of their

grammatical language as yet remain. It was delightful to hear him talk of the people, and their prospects, much as if he were their father; and, unassuming though he was, one could see that he had proved a benefactor to them. He spoke very hopefully of the Kabyle arboriculture, and told us that he had found the people skilful in grafting several kinds of fruit trees introduced by himself.

When our talk with the Commandant was over, Madame, accompanied by a young lady, wife of the *chef du bureau Arabe*, did the honours of the place. A terrific north wind had arisen since our arrival, accompanied with heavy showers, and we felt quite sorry for all that the poor ladies endured in our behalf. We were driven hither and thither; our umbrellas were turned inside-out; our faces were all but skinned; it was impossible to stir a step till the blast had passed. I think one must travel to Fort National before understanding what a north wind can be.

There was, of course, a little new church, and a tiny shop containing groceries and Kabyle pottery; and a big barracks, and a splendid panoramic view of the country to see. But what interested us far more just then was the everyday life here, as described by our friends.

The wife of the *chef du bureau Arabe* was a young, pretty and elegant lady, who had only left Paris a year or two before. I naturally asked a

question or two concerning the amusements at Fort Napoléon: Were there military concerts, balls, picnics, or any available gaieties within reach? She gave a little scream of laughter.

“Balls at Fort Napoléon!” she said. “Why, there are only three ladies here, Madame la Commandante, Madame the Captain’s wife, and myself! And, unfortunately, we have no band; but we console ourselves as well as we can, and are capital neighbours to each other.”

“I dare say you often have visits of friends from Algiers?”

“*Pardon*, very seldom indeed. It is so far and the journey is so tedious. We are not dull, however, for we have our husbands and children with us, and lead a very tranquil life on the whole.”

The elder lady was equally philosophical, and both entered with interest into the subject of Kabyle idiosyncrasy and character. It was evident that they had taken pains to learn something of their adopted country, and that they made exile as bright as was possible. They told us of many and many an incident that had marked their monotonous life like a milestone, always speaking kindly of the Kabyles.

“They are excellent creatures,” said the youngest lady, with a pretty *moue* of dissatisfaction—“if they only washed themselves!”

I think nothing does away with the patented

notions of French ladies sooner than some experience of them in these hill stations. We grew up with the idea that a Frenchwoman is brilliant, elegant, but a plaything only, and with difficulty believe her adapted for a domestic life under circumstances of peculiar hardship. During my travels in Algeria, I made the acquaintance of many women living in out-of-the-way military stations, and must say that I never anywhere received a more distinct impression of good wives, careful mothers, and capable as well as graceful housekeepers.

Fortunately, the wind dropped that night, or we should have seen very little of Kabylia. As it was, we woke up to a glorious day, cold but bright, and saw the sun lighting up a score of soft green valleys and violet peaks tipped with snow.

Which way should we go? Eastward, westward? We descended from the height on which Fort National stands, neat little roads leading on each side to some eyrie of a Kabyle village. Chance led us in the direction of a shady path that wound round the fort, dipped sheer into a valley, and then climbed towards a cluster of cosy little houses, surrounded by fig and olive orchards.

Nothing could equal the variety and magnificence of the scenery that seemed to shift at every turning. The sunny hills crested with villages; the fair and fertile fields that lay below; the

distant range of lofty mountains standing out, as if of amethyst, against the cool blue sky. Such a prospect could but make us linger lovingly and regretfully, since we felt sure that we should never see it again.

When we came near the village, a troop of girls and children gathered shyly about us; one or two scampered home to tell of our arrival, and by and by we found ourselves in a circle of simple, wandering creatures, all smiling, shy and dumb.

They were for the most part good-looking, with healthful complexions and plenty of intelligence; women and children were dressed alike, in dark blue woollen *haiks*, or shawls some yards in breadth, which were fastened on the shoulders with a brooch and round the waist by a coloured girdle. These garments reached to the ankle, and they wore no kind of shoe. But this clumsy garb was brightened by all kinds of rude jewellery, such as chains, bracelets and anklets of silver, coral, palm-seeds, shells, coins, glass beads and berries. The proud mothers of sons were distinguished by a circular brooch, or fibula, of very gay metal-work, fastened in front of their head-dress; and some of the ornaments were really pretty and valuable. Most of them had a cross tattooed on the brow, which is said to be the relic of an early Christian faith once existing among these mountains. After a little, their shyness wore off, and though the French of the whole

party amounted to "Bon jour," and the Arabic of our own to a few words, we got on very well. The children grinned and gesticulated, the girls tittered, the women examined our dresses, cloaks and hats with enthusiastic wonder.

There was one charming creature about five-and-twenty who seemed to be the oracle as well as the life of the party. She had bright cheeks and lips, large grey eyes beaming with intelligence, and a frank, broad brow that told plainly enough how very little education would fit her for the very best kind of civilization. There was not a hint or shadow of shame in her bright face as she compared our European garb to her own, and evidently our condition too; for she turned to one of her companions and seemed to sum up a hasty verdict, whether in our favour or her own we could not tell.

It amused her immensely that we should be so amused, and she plainly thought us a little impertinent for trying to buy some of her necklaces. Sell her jewels, forsooth, and above all, the brooch she wore in honour of having borne her husband a male child; what were we good for, to dream of such absurdities? This was said as plainly as looks can say rather cutting things; but a moment after she was all fun and friendliness again, making the utmost of our precious little store of Arabic, and ready to tell us anything and everything—could we only have understood!

Some of the girls held out their hands begging, "Soldi, soldi," but she was far too proud, and when one of us touched her bracelet with a lingering look of admiration, she gave a wicked little "Phew!" as much as to say, "Don't you wish you may get it?" One or two women were only too eager to sell their ornaments, but expected a handful of money in return.

We wandered about the village, which was not so enticing as it had promised to be. The orchards were fresh and balmy enough, but the interiors had an unsavoury and unwholesome look; there was no appearance of whitewash, and the furniture consisted of a little pottery and some mats. Babies tumbled about among the goats, apparently as uncared for; heaps of refuse pained the eye and nose at every corner, and we felt constrained to look away towards the shiny hills and snowy mountains. Want of cleanliness was the blot on the idyllic picture of Kabyle life.

Soon after leaving this little village we crossed a broad river bed, and then entered a wholly new and equally beautiful region. The road—such a road as only French military roads can be—wound corkscrew fashion about the hills, which were verdant from base to summit. Now we passed under a natural arch of olive boughs; now we came upon a sunny plateau with fields of corn and orchards of the fig tree, the plum and the almond on either side. Everywhere smiled a

happy Nature; everywhere was the evidence of peace and plenty. As we advanced more and more, traces of French innovation disappeared, and instead of the straight little houses with their rows of carob trees, new church and handsome drinking fountain, we saw on every crest and mountain-top a Kabyle village, looking, I dare say, precisely as a Kabyle village looked a thousand years ago. Anything more picturesque and poetic than the scenery of Grand Kabylia cannot be conceived. The lovely hills, purple, green or golden as the light made them, each crowned with a compact mass of tiny stone cots, the deep valleys of tender green, the lofty rocks bristling with wild cactus, the groves of majestic olives, the distant panorama of blue, snow-tipped mountains—all these features made pictures not easy to forget.

The road which our brave little horses climbed so gaily was very solitary, and wound for the most part between a sharp ravine and precipitous rocks, feathered with almond and plum trees. Now and then we passed a group of men resting with their working implements by the wayside, stalwart, simple, strange-looking beings, who would greet us with a stare and a word of broken French or Arabic.

At first the comparison of Arab and Kabyle is by no means flattering to the latter. The Arab is always a grandee, by reason of his personal

beauty, dress and dignified manner; whilst the Kabyle, with his ragged shirt, leathern apron, ungraceful proportions and square, homely features, could be no more trimmed into dandyism than a camel. But, after a time, observers who are of a practical turn will perhaps prefer the physique that argues indomitable strength and perseverance to all the elegance in the world, and will side with every writer who has written a panegyric on the Kabyles.

As we were returning, a touching incident brought home to us all that we had heard and read of Kabyle hospitality. By the wayside sat a withered old woman, having on her knee a basket of dried figs; she was talking to a fine, stalwart, well-dressed young fellow, who bent over her pityingly, and to me it seemed, rather condescendingly. We stopped to interchange a greeting with them, and, finding the young man tolerably conversant with French, were enabled to carry on quite a conversation. The woman stared at us, and prattled about our queer costumes with the simple garrulity of age, but her companion held up his head, and evidently considered a Kabyle equal to a Frank any day. When our chat had come to an end, the kindly old creature doled out her figs to us as a parting gift, evidently delighted at our acceptance of them. Of course the figs were worth a sou or two only, but she had nothing else to give, and

evidently could ill afford them, so that we had double right to be grateful.

Tourists bring home carved ivory from Dieppe, mosaics from Florence, and pottery or arms from Kabylia. The pottery (of which there are now specimens in the South Kensington Museum) is quaint and highly interesting, whether you consider it from the artistic or manufacturer's point of view. Water-jars, vases, lamps, dishes and an infinite variety of vessels either for use or ornament were to be had in the little general shop at Fort National, and, for the most part, at nominal prices. This ware is all of dark rich red and yellow, patterned in black. No two pieces of pottery or patterns are precisely alike; and both design and manipulation of the clay are the work of women. It is said that those who excel in this art are much esteemed, however they may be wanting in grace or loveliness—which certainly speaks a good deal for Kabyle common sense.

I have read somewhere that a Kabyle was one day selling a beautiful lamp and some vases, when a neighbour came up, and cried in his enthusiasm—

“By the head of the Prophet, I would give a thousand douros for a woman with such taste!”

“You shall have her for the half,” said the merchant, and without ado he brought the poor artist forward. She was, however, so ugly that the lover of fine art took to his heels.

The colours are fixed on the clay by means of resin mixed with a little olive oil, and which, as the earth is yellowish to begin with, forms the yellow. The red is given by an ochre found in the country; and for the black they have recourse to fat or resinous bodies in ignition. With such simple materials it is marvellous what pretty things these Kabyle potters produce; and they do not confine themselves to the ornamental only, making pipkins for cooking, large jars for oil, and all kinds of smaller ones for honey, milk and butter.

The arms and weapons were no less interesting to us, though less easy to purchase and bring home, being heavy, and, of course, expensive in comparison to the pottery. These rude mountaineers have certainly had a village Ruskin among them at some time or another, to inculcate the worship of the Beautiful. Not an implement of whatever metal or make but was ornamented wherever ornamentation was possible; and we unwillingly left behind us a beautiful but cumbersome gun, to be had for a hundred francs. It was most curiously and artistically worked, and richly inlaid with coral. Short daggers were to be had in plenty, of very bad metal for the most part, though valuable on account of the workmanship and taste displayed.

CHAPTER VII
RAMADHAN

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IF the great Fast of the Ramadhan is gloomy and depressing, to the celebrants at least it comes in and goes out gaily enough. The negroes take the opportunity of decking themselves out and driving through the town, their houris put on silks and gauzes, and dance all night, their wise women practise a barbarous kind of Fetishism on the sea-shore; while the Moorish ladies make an infinity of sweets and pasties, and invite all their lady friends to a feast.

The negroes being a very sociable set of people, it is much easier to join in their gaieties than in those of the secluded Moors. I am, therefore, indebted to them for my share in the festivities preceding Ramadhan. Why the negroes, who still practise necromancy brought from the Sahara, should dance out their evil spirits, and propitiate their demons at this particular time, I don't know; but upon any and every public holiday or rejoicing, you are sure to hear their music and see their finery.

A few days before Ramadhan, we were guided by a nice old negress wrapped in blue drapery to

a Moorish house in the old town, where we were assured some wonderful things were to be seen. As we passed through the dark passage leading to the court, one or two negresses were coming out, and their nudge and look, as promising amusement, were very encouraging.

We found the court, as usual, open to the sky, and despite the crowds thronging it on every side, not unbearably warm. In the centre was a group of negresses, dressed in flimsy muslins and gauzes, whilst the gallery looking upon the court was crowded with Arabs, Jews, Zouaves, French soldiers, and miscellaneous spectators. A miserable little calf, to be sacrificed and afterwards eaten, lay in a dark corner; and as we made our way along, we could hardly help treading on some poor fowls, tied by the legs, that lay here and there, awaiting the same fate. A band of musicians, with an expression of the utmost solemnity upon their shining black faces, sat on the floor, making just the sort of music to give novices a shudder. Indeed, mild toothache is a pleasing pain compared with the endurance inflicted by the negro, who feels himself all the more important, and all the more likely of extra payment, for being noisy. He has brought from the Soudan a taste for those terrible iron castanets, called *keg-ka-kef*, a word derived from the sound evoked from them; and if any one will take the trouble to get the Sunday-school children of his parish to repeat

this word till they are hoarse, he will have some idea of it.

Finding ourselves a little too much elbowed, and being affectionately invited up-stairs by every negress who could get near enough to nudge us, we climbed two pairs of winding stone steps, and saw the rest of the performances from the terrace.

We had the top of the house all to ourselves, which was a great comfort, and, though the sun was warm, and the brilliant light of the surrounding white roofs glaring, the air was quite fresh.

Irrespective of the sight below, the terrace was picturesque and interesting enough to have kept us there a little while. The blue mountains in the distance, the bits of foliage breaking the white house-roofs here and there, the dark-eyed Moorish girls peeping over the neighbouring walls, the flowers and fruit trees trellised about us—all these formed a new and curious picture.

But the music from below, and the dancing that accompanied it, compelled our attention. The dance was by no means ungraceful, and consisted in undulating movements of the arms and body, whilst the music recommended itself by an unintermittent succession of surprises. For it is impossible to get used to negro music. What affected you like galvanism yesterday, affects you no less to-day; what sent a thrill of unexpected horror through every fibre of your body five

minutes ago, will have just the same effect a quarter of an hour hence.

We were inclined to endure any torments, moreover, for the sake of the curious and mystic ceremonies to come. Who could help wishing to see the sacrifices, horrid as they might be? One thought of the grand old Greek times, with the fancy that here there might be something to remind one of the goats without blemish, or of the firstling lambs offered to Phœbus Apollo in Homeric story.

But the poor little calf in the corner, which had no sort of dignity about it, being bony and bristly, and altogether un-Homeric, was kept as the *bonne bouche* of the entertainment—which we did not see. Hour after hour passed, dancer after dancer fell back exhausted on her seat, and we kept asking, “When is the sacrifice to take place?” when at last patience gave way, and we went home, wondering at the long endurance of people who were content to dance and sing, and voluntarily torment themselves for twelve hours in succession. These dances are not nearly so weird and fanciful as other negro ceremonies that precede the great Fast.

These sorceries take place on the seashore, and are too extraordinary not to attract every stranger in Algiers. Morning after morning, every omnibus bound to the pretty suburban village of St. Eugène, is filled to the last corner

with negresses carrying cocks to the sacrifice, with Jewish and Moorish women dressed in their best, and with inquisitive spectators like ourselves, intent upon seeing everything.

By eight o'clock one fresh morning, we were rattling away towards St. Eugène. In company with us was a handsome Quadroon woman, carrying a pair of lean chickens, and an Arab and his wife, all evidently very serious about the impending ceremony, and the part they were to take in it. In a quarter of an hour we felt the brisk breezes blowing off the Mediterranean, and alighted to find ourselves in a scene wholly new and almost indescribable.

The bit of coast selected for the ceremonies reminded me of Cornwall. A line of dark rocks, broken into stepping-stones where the tide was low, a little cove of glistening white sand here, a delicious rise of bright green turf there, a perspective of shelving cliffs and creamy billows—except for the aloes, I could have fancied myself at the Lizard.

Descending a steep path that wound amid a hollow to the shore, we were at once plunged into the midst of sorceries and mysticisms past counting. For the first few minutes the colour only, and no hidden meaning of the scene, was plain to us. We felt as if we had hitherto been blind, the purples, and reds, and yellows seemed so near our eyes. This distinctness of each separate bit

of brilliancy had never struck me in the same degree before; perhaps because this was the first time I had ever seen such a variety of complexion and costume in bright sunlight. The Quadroons with their lustrous gold-brown skins and blue drapery, the Jewesses with their black hair and crimson brocades, the little Moorish girls with their crocus-coloured shawls, pink trousers, and fingers dyed rose colour with henna, the negresses with their black cheeks and green *haiks*, I had seen a hundred times, but never before assembled against a background of bright blue sea and sky.

We descended the hollow slowly, impatiently elbowed by believers in the Djinns or spirits, here to be exorcised or appeased. The spot itself is consecrated to seven Djinns presiding over seven springs, the waters of which are held to be of miraculous effect. Very likely there is as much of science as superstition in this, for mineral springs of real efficacy are found elsewhere in Algeria.

There were many priestesses in this strange worship—witch-like old negresses, who wrought all their magic by the aid of a cauldron, a handful of fire, and a little incense. Rows of tiny wax-lights were stuck in the ground before them, and here childless wives paid a few sous, sipped the enchanted water, and went away believing in the advent of future sons; garments of sick people

were miraculously endued with the power of healing, children were cured of burns and bruises, cripples were cured of rheumatism, and lovers of coldness. Even one or two Frenchwomen were come to ensure themselves some boon not obtainable in a legitimate way.

Leaving the Moorish enchantresses, we next turned to the negro priests, old men in tattered shirts, seated amid crowds of devotees, and each forming the centre of a cruel and curious scene. Once fairly among these tatterdemalion brothers of Calchas, we found it impossible to stir a step or glance in any direction without the contact of newly shed blood. It was horridness incarnate. The bright red stains were everywhere, crimsoned feathers were blown in our faces, and from that time, until we came to that of departure, hapless cocks were half killed and thrown towards the sea. If the poor creatures flutter seaward in their dying struggle, the omen is propitious, and the women shout their horrid *yoo, yoo, yoo* of joy; but if they flutter landward, another pair of fowls is swung backward and forward by the priest, incantations are muttered over it, and the sacrifice is performed afresh. There were goats also, which met the same fate, and were skinned and cut up in indescribable haste, destined, as well as the cocks, to furnish the feast at night.

It was past ten o'clock when we left. Negroes, Moors, and Jews, were still flocking to the

sacrifice; but the sight was not a lovely one, and we had seen enough of it.

A few days after this, Ramadhan began. The firing of a cannon inaugurated it, at sound of which children clapped their little hands and shouted for joy, old men embraced each other, and not a Mussulman but expressed a certain kind of dignified satisfaction.

Of course it is very difficult to measure the significance of this great institution, the Fast of Ramadhan, the third fundamental base of Islamism as established by Mohammed. Prayer, almsgiving, fasting, ablutions, and the profession of faith, are the five indispensable principles of Mohammedan worship; and the third, naturally enough, attracts the stranger more than any.

“Oh, believers,” says the Prophet, “fasting is prescribed to you, as it was prescribed to those who came before you. Fear the Lord.

“The month of Ramadhan in which the Koran descended from on high to serve as a guide to men, as a clear explanation of precepts, and distinction between good and evil, is the time of fasting. He who is ill or on a journey shall fast an equal number of days afterwards.

“It is permitted to you to eat and drink till the moment when you can distinguish a white thread from a black one. From that time observe the fast strictly till night.”

Women who are *enceinte*, or nursing infants,

imbeciles, young children, and very old men are permitted to eat, the latter on condition that they give a little corn to the poor.

The fast is broken at sunset, when a cannon sounds, and the Moorish cafés begin to fill. You see little cups of coffee handed round, and after awhile the stolid silence melts, and the tall white-draped figures sitting round look a little less like statues.

During the daytime it is impossible not to notice the look of depression pervading the old town. The industrious little embroiderers whom I have noticed, get so faint about noontime that they are sent home; and of course the general physique suffers enormously from such a sacrifice imposed upon it. That there is a spiritual as well as a material purification intended in this ordinance, is sufficiently made evident by the word *Ramadhan*, which signifies the fire that purifies. It is not enough for believers to abstain from fleshly gratifications; they must also abstain from every lie and evil thought, and must not sin either with the ears, tongue, hands, or feet.

Nothing in the Christian religion is more impressive than the ceremony of evening worship during *Ramadhan*. The mosques are all lighted up; Turks, Moors, and Arabs flock thither in crowds; the fountains are thronged with the poor who there perform their ablutions, and the outer courts with beggars—the lame, the halt, and the

blind—who moan and mourn, and hold out their hands alike to Mussulman and Roumi.

Leaving the streets and passing through an avenue of these importunate and wretched creatures, I have found myself many and many a time in a scene almost impossible to realize, and how impossible to describe!

One's first experience is that of being in a garden. Those trickling fountains, those clusters of banana and palmetto, those dusky skies studded with brilliant stars, are surely no accessories of a temple. But a few steps farther on, and a forest of aisles breaks upon the eye, the white domes lighted by lamps not too thickly hung, the pavements covered with soft carpet, the columns countless in number, and exquisitely proportioned.

The loftiness, the immensity, and the partial light of these domes and arcades, cannot fail to be very impressive; but if the outer courts of the temple strike one with an involuntary feeling of solemnity, how much more shall do so the temple itself!

Picture to yourself a broad or dimly-lighted aisle with rows of worshippers on their faces, the elegantly dressed Moor beside the ragged Biskri, the Bedouin, the negro, and the Turk, united in the common act of prayer. The colours of their dress, the lines of their figures, the mingled sounds of their voices as they chant the sacred Litany, omitting no gesture ordained by the Prophet, have something strange and weird in this solemn sort

of twilight, whilst the leading voice of the Imam, from a high pulpit opposite, seems to come from an unearthly distance. But it is vain to attempt any description of such a scene. The lights and shadows are too dim, the outlines too vast, the accessories too difficult, to realize in words.

It is like the dream of a Mohammedan millennium when the temple serves for all worshippers, and yet there is space for more. One must live in Mohammedan countries to realize the inherent connection between Mohammed's religion and the people and country to whom he bequeathed it. One must study the Arabs, too, before talking of converting them to Christianity.

When Ramadhan comes to an end, the streets of Algiers are like the scenes of some *gay féerie* at the Porte St. Martin.

The negroes dance through the town to the sound of castanet and drum, wearing bright-coloured clothes and flowers stuck behind their ears. The Moorish ladies pay visits dressed in diaphanous drapery of silky white with sashes of crimson and gold, and their negresses follow leading by the hand some dainty little Omar or Zorah, its tiny fingers dyed with henna, and its body decked in purple and orange. Every one is bent upon pleasure, and if you drop into a bazaar, you find the merchant seated in the midst of his friends enjoying a grave kind of hilarity.

Monsieur L——, the good-natured *interprète judiciaire*, who had become my instructor in

Arabic, was kind enough to take me with his wife upon a round of morning calls at this time. It was the best, and at the same time the worst opportunity possible for visiting Moorish families; you might as well try to catch a Jew dull at a bargain as a Moorish gentleman or lady unoccupied during the week after Ramadhan. We were fortunate, however, to find the very persons we most wanted to see at home, and though the lady was busy preparing for friends, we were entreated to stay and partake of coffee. The host, a gentlemanly handsome man of forty, received us with that exquisite charm of manner which is Arab *par excellence*, and introduced us to his three children, boys whose ages varied from five to fifteen. The eldest, named Hassan, was a slim, delicate youth, —dressed in vest and silk drawers of pale mauve —who spoke French perfectly, talked to me of England, of foreign travel, and of his own prospects with much intelligence and no spark of hobbledehoyish embarrassment. The youngest, named Omar, a little fellow with roguish black eyes, kissed us prettily, though he didn't much like it, and then stood at his father's knee biting his henna-tipped fingers, and quizzing us to his heart's content.

We sat in an elegant room bright with soft carpets, coloured lamps, brackets painted with flowers and arabesques, and tiny looking-glasses framed in silver and gems. In an alcove stood a bed hung with magnificent curtains of white silk

embroidered with gold, and beside it a table of inlaid mother-of-pearl. Before us was a pretty little court, where delicate marble pillars, flowers and fountain, refreshed the eye after the superabundance of colour within, whilst stately negroes moved indolently about with brush and broom, making pretence to be busy.

We talked of many things, but mostly of the prospects of these three boys. Our host, whose face had grown familiar to me at the Governor-General's receptions, and who filled an important official post in Algiers, spoke openly of his perplexities on that head.

"That boy there," he said, smilingly indicating his eldest son, "wants, like everybody else nowadays, to see the world. He must be a barrister, I think, and go to Paris. If I make a doctor of him, he will get few patients among the Arabs, and none among the French. Trade is no longer a road to fortune. My boys do not labour under the disadvantage that I have done, and must turn their French education to good purpose somehow, but how? *Voilà la difficulté.*"

Hassan laughed gaily, thinking, I dare say, how pleasant it would be to see Paris and become a man of the world.

"I shall see England, too, shan't I, father?" he said, and when I promised to show him something in London if he got so far, he laughed more gaily still.

A negress now appeared at the doorway bearing

cake and coffee on a massive gold salver. Hassan sprang to take it of her, and setting it on the floor served us with tiny cups of delicious coffee, each being handed in an outer cup of delicate silver filigree work.

Nothing could exceed the cheerfulness and cordiality of this interesting family, and the visit would have been delightful but for one drawback. Whenever I was brought into contact with Moorish domestic life, the position of the women struck me painfully, but never so painfully as now. Here were all the accessories of a happy home, the refinements of wealth, graceful intelligent children, an amiable, worthy, and polished man at the head; but the mother remained invisible. We naturally asked after Madame, with many regrets at not being able to see her.

“My wife,” said our host, “is engaged; and moreover, like most Moorish ladies, does not speak French. It is not wonderful that she is a little backward in coming forward. To you English ladies,” he added, turning to me, “who travel so much, I dare say it seems surprising that our ladies can stay within doors as they constantly do; it is the custom—not a good custom, but *on s’y habitue*;” and then he dropped the subject as if it were to himself also a painful one.

CHAPTER VIII

THROUGH THE METIDJA TO
TENIET-EL-HAAD



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ONE fine morning I set off with Mme. Bodichon, two girl friends and the brother of one—a young barrister—for Teniet-el-Haad and its famous cedar forest.

We hired two carriages, making Blidah our starting-point, and from this little capital of the Hesperides ordering relays for the hundred-and-fifty-miles journey before us. After passing the well cultivated and quite French villages of Boufaritk and Bintut, we caught sight of gleaming white little Blidah, enchantingly nestled amid orange and lemon groves. No wonder that it has obtained its legendary name! Whichever way you turn you are sure to find yourself amid the surroundings so sighed for by Goethe's terribly pathetic child-woman—

“Wo die Citronen blühen
Im dunklen Laub die Gold-orangen glühen.”

To the unaccustomed eye the mass and depth of such yellowness is dazzling. Of all colours surely that of the richest, deepest gold holds the palm, and here it is beheld in quite unimaginable splendour.

Upon this occasion we only halted for the night, but as I had just before stayed here several days, I give first my experience.

After the heat and glare of Algiers, to myself and friend the quietude of the dusky orange and lemon groves were very refreshing. Looking upward, we seemed to breathe under a wholly new firmament, heavens of deep lustrous green lit by glowing golden orbs. Not a sound, not a glimpse of the outer world disturbed these solitudes, before, behind, to right, to left, stretching gardens gorgeous as Aladdin's. There were oranges of all sizes, constellations and Milky Ways of them, whilst here and there blossoms perfumed the air as only orange blossoms can. Then there were groups of lemon trees with their pale transparent green leaves and primrose-coloured fruit, and hedging in all this beauty and opulence, lines of stately cypress. Delightful it was to be lazy amid such scenes, whether the sun shone overhead or no, or a tender rain pattered on the glossy leaves and brought down golden spoils to our feet.

For one of the so-called winter rains came on, and compelled us to seek diversion near home. There was plenty at hand. In the first place, we made the acquaintance of a very intelligent proprietor of orangeries, who gave us his story, including the history of the Algerian orange trade during the preceding years. We heard it in the

large store-house attached to his gardens, where a negro and a couple of Frenchwomen were busily sorting oranges and lemons. Piles of the brilliant fruit dazzled the eye on every side. The ground was heaped with it; the walls were hidden by it; the air was perfumed with it. In spite of this plenty, it seemed startling to be told that the grower had to part with his oranges for three-half-pence a hundred!

Whilst talking trade and statistics, I was looking all the while at the busy negro opposite to me. If any one could look blacker than a negro, he did just then, as his figure stood out like a bas-relief in jet against the background of warm gold and amber.

Having learned all that we wanted to know about oranges, and gained the impression that it would be a very profitable as well as poetic thing to hire a corner in the Garden of the Hesperides, we strolled through the town. Such a dull little French town, in spite of the beautiful hills stretching above and around, and the prettiness of its aspect as seen from the plain!

There was a gateway at each end, and a square in the midst, and a little church and a big barracks; and hundreds of majestic Arabs and trim French soldiers wandering about, not knowing in the least what to do; and one or two real Arab streets, with quaint little mosques and marabouts, and deliciously cool cafés full of

stately coffee-drinkers, in such attitudes as to drive a sculptor wild.

We went to one of these cafés and drank coffee, partly because we were cold, and partly because we wanted amusement. There were only two or three men within, a richly dressed Kaïd, a couple of ragged but stalwart Kabyles, and an intelligent and gentlemanly Arab merchant of Blidah, who spoke French exceedingly well. Coming hither as do many full of prejudices against Mohammedan theories concerning women, it was what our French neighbours call *renversant*, a topsy-turvydom, the deferential attitude of Moors and Arabs towards all European ladies they met. In this café, for instance, we could not have been but in the way, yet the most honourable places were given us and our comfort studied quite touchingly.

We stayed several days at Blidah, a lovely little town in which at the time I write of folks could live upon nothing. Everything in the shape of food was superabundant, the woods abounded with game, the land teemed with milk and honey. An apronful of perfect oranges cost a halfpenny, and suburban banks were covered with wild strawberries.

There is a romantic gorge near the town, where apes may be seen disporting themselves on the trees, and where we found ferny banks reminding us of Cornwall. Although we visited this spot on

a wet day we found two English tourists in its most solitary recess.

What delighted us even more than the oranges and apes was the sight of regimental horses, fifty in all and of superb aspect. How Mme. Bodichon, a splendid and daring horsewoman, longed to mount one and have here her daily gallop ! We grew a little puzzled over our informant's details as to pure Arabian, Persian, Numidian and Syrian race, but in the works of a great authority on the subject, viz. General Daumas, we are assured that such terms are synonymous and mean the oriental horse exclusively.

The Mohammedan legends regarding the horse are poetic in the highest degree. When the Lord wished to create the horse he cried to the south wind, "I would fain have a creature born of thee; condense thyself." Then came the angel Gabriel, and took a handful of the condensed wind, and presented it to the Lord, who made therefrom a light bay horse.

The horse prays three times a day.

In the morning he says, "O Allah, make me dear to my master !"

At midday, "Be good, O Allah, to my master that he may be good to me !"

And at night, "May my master, O Allah, win Paradise on my back !"

One day the Prophet was asked by one of his followers if there were horses in Paradise.

“If God permits you to enter Paradise,” he said, “you will have a horse of ruby furnished with wings, by which he will bear you whither you will.” His own horse Bourak went there. And an Arab poet has sung—

“Who will weep for me after my death? My sword, my land, and my beautiful bay of the slender proportions.”

One could fill pages illustrative of the traditional love of the horse, which has been handed down from generation to generation, and the subject is so bewitching that one is tempted to do so. But I will content myself with dipping here and there into General Daumas' book, recommending the enthusiastic reader to such collections of Arab poetry and legend as lie within reach.

In the Sahara the horse is—or was—reared as tenderly as the heir-apparent to a throne. When the foal is weaned, the women say, “This orphan belongs to us; let us make his life as easy as possible.” The diet and training are attended to with the utmost care and regularity. Amulets and talismans are hung round his neck to preserve him from wounds, sickness, and the evil eye. The women and the children are his playfellows. He is fed with dates, kous-kous-sou, and camel's milk. In times of famine his master will stint wife and child that his horse may not suffer.

“Every grain of barley,” says the Prophet,

“given to your horse shall bring you a pardon in the other world.”

And a sage has said—

“The noble may labour with his hands under three circumstances without blushing, namely, for his horse, his father, and his guest.”

And another—

“Never strike a noble horse, for that is but to brutify him, and drive his pride to resist your authority. Words and signs are sufficient wherewith to correct him.”

“A thorough-bred,” says Abd-el-Kader, “a real drinker of air, should have long ears, long head and neck, long fore-limbs, short hind-quarters and back, large forehead, large chest, clean skin, eyes, and hoofs.”

The horse of the Sahara, in fact, should have all the desirable qualities of other animals, such as the courage of the bull, the swiftness and far sight of the ostrich, the endurance of the camel, and so on. The seller of such a treasure will say—

“It is not my horse that I offer, but my son. He has such sight that he can see a hair in the night.

“He can overtake the gazelle.

“When he hears the voices of the maidens he cries with joy.

“When he finds himself on the field of battle, he rejoices in the hissing of the balls.

“He understands things as well as a son of Adam; only speech is wanting to him.

“He is so light that he could dance on the bosom of your mistress without causing her to tremble.

“He has no brother in this world; he is a swallow.”

Anecdotes and legends bearing upon the pricelessness of these beautiful creatures abound. One day an Arab was sending his son to market to buy a horse. Before setting out, the young man demanded what kind it was to be. The father replied, “His ears should always be moving, turning now this way, now that, as if he heard something; his eyes should be restless and wild, as if he were intent upon something; his limbs should be well proportioned and well set.”

“Such a horse,” said the son, “will never be sold by his master.”

But I must bid adieu to the fifty horses of Blidah, no longer feeding on dates and kous-kous-sou, and sleeping under their masters' tents in the desert, but belonging to French officers. Indeed, it is not the Arab and his horse that present themselves before you in Algeria as inseparable ideas, but the Arab and his donkey, too often a lank, ill-fed and ill-used beast. Many a time the sight of these bruised, bleeding animals has spoiled the heavenly landscape.

My worthy Scotch friend—as she became—she

of a Byronic turn, had with her a homely maid herself coming from Deeside. Again and again when walking out with her mistress, the kind soul would stop donkey beaters, and with tears in her eyes and Christ and His teaching on her lips, implore pity for the victims. The Arabs, never inclined to jeer and, I am afraid, to improve, would hearken with a respectful smile and hurry on.

Doubtless matters are much improved now owing to the Gramont Acts and the S.P.C.A. Societies established in many towns. But according to Captain Haywood's delightful book just published (*Through Timbuctoo and the Great Sahara*), Bedouins, other tribes, and especially negroes, are absolutely brutal with regard even to their horses. This treatment of the donkey by pious Mohammedans is all the more astonishing, as among the half-dozen animals admitted into Heaven is the ass that lessoned Balaam!

CHAPTER IX
MILIANA

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MILIANA

I NOW return to my second halt at Blidah, on our way to Teniet-el-Haad and its famous cedar forest.

Quitting the glorious and historic Metidja, with its golden and purple shadows, infinite lines, nestled townlings and villages, our carriages slowly wound upward towards Miliana.

The weather was cold, and no sooner had we left the plain behind than north winds and heavy downpours compelled us to bring out wraps and, as far as possible, close our *calèches*.

So chilly were the blasts that for the most part we contented ourselves with furtive peeps at scenery we hoped to behold a little later under smiling circumstances. At every relay we exchanged carriages, thus varying talk by the way.

Miliana is most imposingly placed. Perched midway between mountain range upon range, one bold peak rising above the rest, the buildings shining as of white marble, with a belt of greenery around them, a sunbeam turns the distant prospect into an ensemble not easy to forget.

The circling summits are of varied outline, some mere monticules rounded and verdant, others sharp, sierra-like and steely grey. Alternating storm and sunshine render the scene doubly pictorial.

Looking back on the broad bright plain, a veritable lake of greenness, I was reminded of a view from the heights around Salzburg. The beauty of the Salzkammergut is softer, more homelike.

But the weather was wintrier than that of a cold English spring, and we did not arrive at a propitious hour. The town was filled to the last corner with French officers; we, however, were allowed to warm ourselves at a blazing wood fire, with a promise of dinner by and by, and perhaps beds afterwards. We did get dinner, and a very good one too, after waiting till all the hungry officers had been served; and when we had done, the landlady and her troop of waiters in white jackets sat down to theirs.

Next day we amused ourselves to our hearts' content. Early in the morning the *sous-préfet*, to whom we had official letters paid us a visit. He was a grave, pleasant man, past middle age, and equally ready to offer us hospitality and information. When breakfast was over he carried us off to see his wife and daughters. The *préfecture* was an old Moorish house, full of beautiful Moorish things, such as carpets, lamps

and arms, some of which were the spoils of Smalas, and of recent acquisition.

The *sous-préfet's* lady was well dressed, even in the latest fashion, and had not much conversation; but her daughters, who wore brown serge and looked pretty nevertheless, proved lively enough. The young ladies amused their leisure with turnery, whilst their father amused his own with wool-work. We were, therefore, shown the atelier of the first, and the slippers and sofa cushions of the last. I often thought afterwards of that pensive *sous-préfet* sorting out his wools and counting his stitches.

Having showed us their pretty garden full of flowers and palm trees, the ladies took us on a round of visits to Moorish families of their acquaintance. The first house we visited belonged to an Agha of great wealth and importance, whose womenkind were preparing for a wedding to take place that very evening. What with the Agha's four wives, married and unmarried daughters and daughters-in-law, it was a little difficult to understand the relationship of the numerous ladies who crowded round us, offering their faces like children to be kissed.

We were at once introduced to the bride, a pretty demure little creature of thirteen. She squatted on the floor, and in such a costume that it was difficult to believe she could be anything but a doll. Her neck and shoulders were literally

covered with gold necklaces and chains; and her brown legs, bare from the knee, had silver anklets. The dress of embroidered vest, gauze sleeves, and full white cotton drawers was pretty enough, but the incongruous mass of ornaments and the patches of black paint disfiguring her fresh cheeks spoiled all.

Being conducted to the apartments on the opposite side of the court, we found ourselves literally dazzled by the blaze of colour and gold.

It was the dressing-room of the ladies preparing for the festival, and a troop of dark-eyed, girlish creatures surrounded us, laughing, romping and tittering as they made their wonderful toilettes. Their purples, orange, crimsons and blues made up such a flash of colour as I never beheld. One, a lovely little thing, with rosy cheeks and large languorous black eyes, came up, dragging by the button a superb vest of deep carmine colour, heavy with gold braid. Another was clasping necklace after necklace of coral, amber and gold over her white silk chemisette. A third was adjusting a Tunis sash of delicate blue interwoven with silver. A fourth was merrily submitting to a process of hairdressing at the hands of a negress dressed in crocus-coloured cotton. All were merry as children out of school, excepting the first mentioned, with the large eyes, whose name was Hanyfa. Hanyfa was sad, her companions

said, because she had lost her baby, and her husband did not find her pretty!

One of the youngest and merriest of the girls brought this recreant youth before us, introducing him after a cool fashion—

“Here is the youth who finds one of his father’s wives prettier than his own!” she said, whereupon every one laughed but ourselves and Hanyfa.

“Is it really true?” asked the *sous-préfet’s* daughter, in a breath; “for shame, Hassan, your wife is really pretty!”

But Hassan still stuck to his text. He didn’t think so, he said, *voilà tout!* He was an effeminate-looking youth of about sixteen, and seemed to have nothing better to do than loiter outside the women’s apartments and talk nonsense.

After a little further entertainment we kissed the ladies all round, and took leave. When half-way down-stairs a negress came running after us with a tray of cakes and sweetmeats; and to gratify her and the family hospitality in general, we went away munching.

We next visited the ladies of a still richer Agha, but a daughter of the house had lately died, and all was silence and mourning. The Agha himself was at Algiers, and we afterwards learned that he had a wife there to whom he granted his company half the year. The wife to whom we were now introduced was a gentle and lovable creature, about

twenty-eight; pale, oval-faced, and with features of extraordinary refinement, she interested me more than any Moorish lady I had yet seen.

After a little talk, managed by our three or four sentences of Arabic and signs, the lady's daughter and daughter-in-law came in to see us. Then coffee and quince-jelly were handed round, our hostess telling us, when we praised the latter, that it was of her own making.

Moorish ladies, like Eve, always seem "on hospitable thoughts intent" whenever you visit them; and there is something quite touching in the way they sit by, trying to catch the meaning of a French word here and there, and, without doubt, quite aware of their own imperfect education and comparative servitude. We talked of our families at home, of European customs, and of a score of domestic matters. Mme. Bodichon, who had long golden hair, was begged to let it down; and when the Moorish ladies saw the mass of it, the colour of it, and the silkiness of it, they had no words for their admiration.

Hardly was the excitement of this incident over, when we heard an infantine crow close at hand, and looking up, beheld the prettiest mite of an Ayesha held by a young negress dressed in brilliant green. The child with its little henna-tipped fingers, and the nurse with her dark face and gay dress, made quite a picture as they rested in the doorway, their shadows falling on the white colonnade of the court.

Little Ayesha was very willing to be kissed and played with, but soon cried to be taken by her young grandmamma, our interesting hostess.

When she had been sent away, her mother brought from an inner room a life-size photograph, and put it into our hands, saying, with no little show of pride and affection, "Voilà mon mari."

What was my surprise to find that the grandfather of little Ayesha and the husband of our pretty hostess was no other than the handsome, gentlemanly, well-informed Kabyle at whose house I had lunched a few days before! I looked at the portrait again and again, but there was no possibility of being deceived; and the discovery spoiled both pictures of Moorish domestic life.

I felt too much sympathy with the wife whose acquaintance I had just made not to resent the ignominy of her position; and I think she read my thoughts. She looked proudly and sorrowfully at her husband's portrait, too, as if glad to belong to him, but sorry that some one else belonged to him as well.

We made our adieux in quite a friendly fashion, and amused ourselves for the rest of the day in sketching and strolling about the town. Madame, the *préfet's* wife, did not care for walking, however, and soon quitted us, with a parting charge to see her daughters safely to their own door.

"It is not *comme il faut*," she said, "for young ladies to be seen in the streets without a *chaperon*;

as the town is always full of officers, it doesn't do, you understand!"

Here was a parody on European emancipation of thought! We were pitying the seclusion and trammels of Moorish ladies, and found out that young Frenchwomen of twenty-three and twenty-four were not trusted alone beyond their own garden! Surely an Arab satirist might make something of such a state of things!

After dinner the *préfet* sent some officers to conduct us to a ball at the theatre. Genial are ever French officers, ready to take up any new amusement that comes in the way, to make themselves agreeable to strangers, whether congenial or not, to do good-natured things in season and out of season; in fine, to render life easy to themselves and their neighbours under any circumstances. And only the other day so our countryman before-named found them on that wondrous journey of his from Sierra Leone viâ Timbuctoo and the Sahara to Algiers.

We were excessively amused by one young lieutenant fresh from St. Cyr, who told us that he hoped to be sent to Senegal, or to Cochin China, or to Mexico ere long—he didn't in the least mind which of the three. "*A vrai dire!*" he added emphatically, "*j'adore l'inconnu!*"

The young gentleman who adored the Unknown, in company with his superior officers, carried us off to the theatre in great glee. The younger of our party were persuaded to dance,

whilst their two elders looked on from a box. The theatre was prettily decorated with flowers and banners, the upper ten thousand dancing on the stage, the multitude on the parterre or pit.

All classes of the little community of Miliana were here represented. There was the general's wife in satin and lace, and the general's cook in calico, stiff with starch. There were Jews, Arabs and Kabyles among the spectators; and whilst the dancing went on merrily, some strange things might be seen in the lower boxes. The Arabs are gamblers, though Mohammed particularly reprobates games of chance in the Koran, cap. v., when he says: "O believers, wine, games of chance, statues, and fortune-telling are an abomination invented by Satan. Abstain from them and you will be happy."

But despite the command of the Prophet, play, and high play too, is still common among the faithful. Some high play was going on to-night in dark corners of this little Miliana theatre.

When, a little before midnight, we returned to the hotel, it presented the appearance of an encampment. Beds were made up on the floors of the *salons*, and whichever way we looked we saw some rough head resting on an improvised pillow.

Early next morning we were on our way again. The horses were fresh, the weather was perfect, and we drove briskly through a magnificent country, the features of which changed at every

turn of the road. Sometimes we saw Arabs at work on well-cultivated slopes and valleys, whilst at others not a soul was in sight, and not a human element seemed ever to have modified the solitudes around us.

Looking back we had a superb view of Miliana, which, from a great distance, might be compared to a white dove resting midway between heaven and earth. Above its glistening walls rose the superb peak of the Zakkar; around stretched mountain after mountain of varied aspect, whilst at the foot of the town lay a fertile plateau, through which we were journeying.

The road was excellent, and our Arab drivers smoked their cigarettes in silent satisfaction with the prospect of things. But by the time we had lost sight of Miliana we had lost our way too, for the military road to Teniet-el-Haad was not then near completion. Just where the new bit ended and the old began was an encampment of about forty soldiers, whose tents, horses and uniforms made a bright and cheerful picture in the solitude. The *sous-officier*, after a little shyness, invited us to breakfast in his tent, and soon quite a feast was spread before us. Nothing could equal the hospitality and heartiness of our host, though his guests were all foreigners and strangers to him. After having wished the gentleman plenty of sport and the ladies plenty of sketching at Teniet, he bade us adieu regretfully.

An hour or two later we reached the solitary caravanserai of Anseur-el-Louzi, where we halted for the night. As we drove under the gateway, two or three dogs rushed out to announce arrivals, and the hosts came forward with a word of welcome.

They were rather rough-looking Alsatians, but well-meaning in the main, and seemed anxious to make us comfortable. The house-wife led us to the only rooms at her disposal for the ladies, promising our cavalier a room somewhere, and all of us a vegetable soup and roast quails for dinner. Our chambers were those usually set apart for the officers, who were warned, by a printed notice stuck on the walls, not to carry their dogs indoors with them; the outer one opened on to the court by a door of tremendous thickness, and the inner looked towards the hills and the road winding amid them by which we had come.

The caravanserai was built square, with small towers at each corner for defence, and thick walls divided into rooms and stables, all opening upon the court, which measured about a hundred feet by sixty. In the centre was a large fountain, and when we arrived, a group of Spahis in scarlet burnouses were giving their horses drink, and chatting gravely in the sun.

Nothing could surpass the solitariness and Eastern aspect of the scene. The court with its white walls cut sharply against a burning blue sky, the fountain, the dark-brown mountaineers

who came and went, the drinking camels, the meadows of asphodel and oleanders, and the ever-changing hills beyond—all this was not to be seen for the first time and easily forgotten.

The outlying country was lovely beyond description. We strolled about to pluck wild flowers, and in ten minutes our hands were full; there were crimson anemones, yellow asphodel, iris, white and purple, marigolds large as roses, and golden as ripe oranges, vetches purple, blue and pink, rosemary, mignonette, and an infinity whose names I do not know. With this glory of colour on the hills around, a river rippling amid oleanders below, a fresh spring air quickening our pulses, and a horizon of mountains on every side, here of the deepest green, there of dreamiest violet—who would not envy us such a walk!

One gets no twilight in Africa. The sun goes down and the stars come out in the same indescribable, delicious, tranquillizing light that is hardly of day or of night, but more beautiful than either. In a moment, as if by a miracle, the flowers at our feet are no longer cusps of glowing colour, the olive trees lose their soft gradations of hue and shape, the sea becomes of uniform sleepy blue, and the sky overhead purply black and studded with stars. So it was in this strange lodging, but instead of stars came darkness and rain, and we heard between sleep and sleep the plashing drops and the cries of jackal and hyena.

CHAPTER X

A SNOWSTORM IN THE CEDAR
FOREST

CHAPTER X

A SNOWSTORM IN THE CEDAR FOREST

FOLLOWING the river Chelif, that wound amid oleanders and tamarisk trees over a rocky bed, we pushed on towards Teniet. The weather was still cold and showery, and the rains of the night before had swollen the river in many places, making cascades and waterfalls wherever it found impediment. But for the foliage I could often have fancied myself in North Wales; there was many a dell and rushing stream that might have been those of Bettws-y-Coed, and many a glen and waterfall that one might find again in Llangollen. At some places it was arduous work to cross the jagged channel of the river, and more than once we alighted for the horses' sake, getting over by means of such stepping-stones as we could find. The bright reds and greys of the rocks, the bold shapes they sometimes showed against the sky, the mingled leafage of tamarisk, oleander, ilex, terebinth, and locust tree, the pale green water creaming into surf amid blocks of polished stone, made these ravines beautiful, especially when the sun came out, and showed us a party of red-cloaked Spahis galloping across

the Sierra, and a wild-looking goatherd, draped in white, and posed like a king, who exchanged Salamalek with us as we passed by.

About noon we stopped at a wretched little hut, and obtained black bread, wild-boar steaks, and what our host was pleased to call a mountain salad, in other words, wild endive well soaked in strong oil. When we had lunched a poor-looking Arab came up with his two wives, and loitered about, looking at us, and exchanging smiles and words with each other.

The women were not ill-looking, and Mme. Bodichon sketched each of the little party, by turns, to their infinite embarrassment and delight. They seemed too ignorant of the Prophet's precept to turn upon the artist—as the poorest Algerian will do—and refuse to have their portraits taken on simply religious grounds, but took their turns with childish amusement and self-consciousness. We gave each half a franc for the sitting, but the husband was so enchanted at the idea of his portrait travelling to England "beyond sea," that he presented the artist with a handful of new-laid eggs out of sheer gratitude!

In Algiers no one will sit for you unless driven to it by direst need, whilst no sooner do you begin to take a portrait chance-wise, than you are compelled to shut your book and put up your pencils. It is only at the extreme poles of society that any tolerance can be found. The better class of

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TENIET-EL-HAAD

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Moors have become so far infused with French culture as to patronize photography, and even the Arabs of the country are too ingenuous to see any harm in a portrait.

Late in the afternoon we drove through the gate of Teniet-el-Haad, to find snow on the mountains around us, snow half melted on the roadways, and a sharp north wind cutting our faces like a sword.

It was our intention to settle ourselves for several days at this little military station, and accordingly we unpacked our valises, brought out our small supply of books, and tried to make the best of our wretched inn. There was no sort of accommodation for us beyond three bedrooms crowded to the last inch with furniture, clothes, provisions and lumber; and looking on one side, over the barracks towards the mountains, on the other over a miserable Arab village, and a little Catholic church flanked by green hills sprinkled with snow. These rooms were separated from the other part of the house by a wooden ladder, sloppy with snow and guarded by a vicious dog which barked incessantly; and as we had our meals below, we furnished ourselves with wooden shoes for the transit. The one element of delight and comfort was a fire of huge cedar-logs in our front room, round which we gathered, hardly knowing which to praise most, the grateful warmth • the delicious smell of the blazing cedar-wood.

In the evening the officers in command, to whom we had been especially commended by the Marshal, came to see us. M. le Colonel was a quiet, soldierly-looking man of about fifty, who had seen some sharp fighting in Algeria. M. le Capitaine, who had a young wife and some charming children, was an elderly soldier who had also seen hard service, and with him came a boyish young officer of rather aristocratic appearance fresh from St. Cyr.

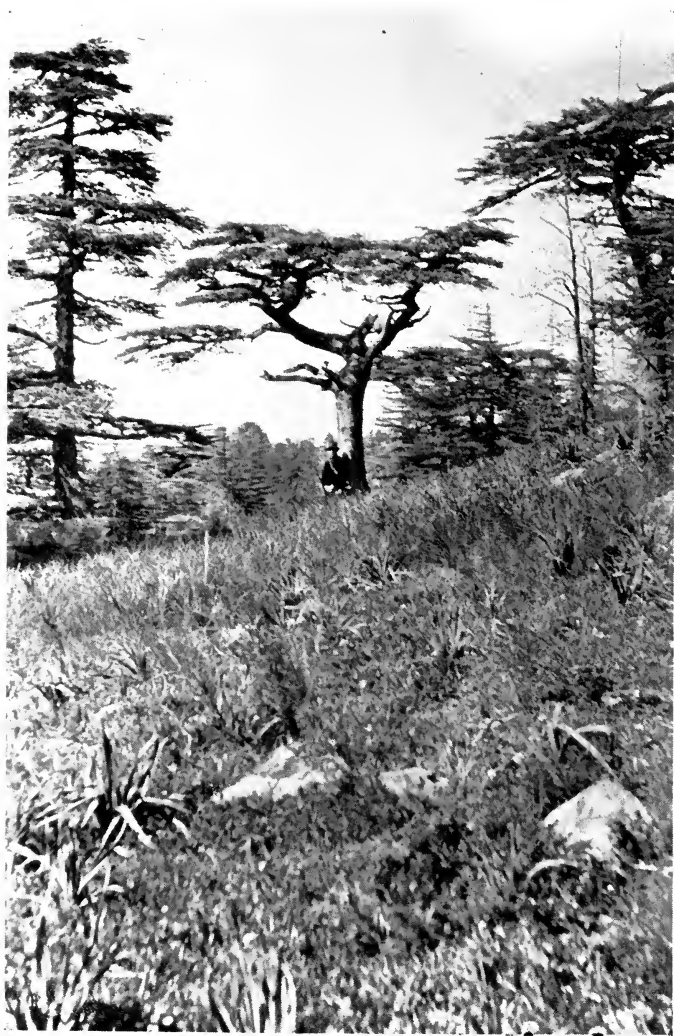
These gentlemen promised us horses, mules, guides and their own company for our excursion to the cedar forest next day, and a gazelle-hunt later if we only stayed for better weather.

By seven o'clock next morning we were up and looking at the weather. It was not promising. Heavy clouds half hid the mountains, and as the villagers turned out to Mass, umbrellas were held up one by one. We could hardly see the snow, if it was so fine, but the fact could not be disputed—snow was falling and likely to fall.

The gentlemen were true to their word, however, and taking that as a prognostication of good weather, we mounted the horses and mules they had provided for us. Such a cavalcade as we formed was evidently an uncommon sight at Teniet. Jews, Arabs and French came out to stare at us, and by the time we were fairly started, quite a crowd had collected in the street.

Our guide led the way, bearing provisions in saddle-bags. He was a handsome Kabyle, and

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IN THE CEDAR FOREST

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his uniform of crimson leather leggings, scarlet burnouse, and white linen head-gear, became him well. As he moved on in the wintry landscape before us, the warm colour of his dress seemed especially grateful. I think it is Leigh Hunt who wrote, "I never see an old woman wearing a scarlet cloak in wet weather without blessing her." And I agree with him, that if bright tints are acceptable in a sunny atmosphere, they are doubly so in a wintry one.

After steadily mounting for an hour and a half we entered upon the skirts of the cedar forest. Here we saw two or three solitary Arab tents. As we ascended we gained a wider and yet wider view of the surrounding country, till at last we reached a summit from which even Miliana was visible. But the sky was overcast, the snow began to fall without intermission, and very soon we could only discern the immediate scenery around us. Never shall I forget the grandeur of the cedar forest as we saw it in a snowstorm. At first we had no words for our admiration of those kingly cedars, which seemed to have sent out their gigantic branches in the throes of some tremendous struggle with an infinite power, and now stood like towers of strength, clothed in plumes of somberest green. The height of the trees, the size of the trunks, the vastness of their spreading shade, the isolation of their positions, render a cedar forest ever majestic. But when the mist

hid the mountains, and the storm-wind wrapped the stately crests with snow, the scene became one of awful grandeur.

Far as the eye could reach stretched an abysmal prospect of grey vapour, from which rose here and there a monster tree, its dark branches taking a spectral look in the surrounding solitude. Indeed, so superhuman was the solitude that one almost looked for a megatherium or megalonyx to break it, and no lesser or later created living thing. One felt, too, that some realization of annihilation was possible in sight of this infinite desolation and silence hitherto unpreconceived. The wail of Ossian, the story of Prometheus, and the music of Beethoven, may perhaps be compared to such a scene, but only the Promethean legend equals it in solemn majesty. Every one of those Titanic trunks looked as if it might have been forced to the verge of the depth below in some half god-like, half-human struggle against other forces; and the wind, as it swept down from the mountains, groaned and gasped, almost expressing positive pain.

We followed a wild tract that led now on the edge of an awful precipice, now through the mazes of the forest, and at last reached a deserted hut standing on a little plateau. Blackened stems, just silvered with snow, lay here and there, whilst our view was bounded by trees in their full



CHALET NOW REPLACING OUR HUT

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prime and glory, some of them reaching to the height of twenty yards, and capable of sheltering a hundred and twenty mounted soldiers from the sun.

We had hoped to make a little fire in the hut for the purpose of drying our soaked clothes and warming our benumbed limbs, but, unfortunately, neither the guide nor our cavaliers were provided with lucifers. There was nothing to do but to make ourselves happy. Our saddle-bags were produced, and we made a hearty meal standing on boards, and shifting from one foot to the other by way of keeping up circulation. When our supply of hard-boiled eggs, bread and wine had come to an end, the storm gathered force and fury. Down came the artillery of winds, crashing, laming, ruining wherever they passed, and as if gloating over destruction with shrieks and yells of triumph. Fast and thick came the snowflakes, covering every speck of greenness and every sign of life till the eye became dazzled with the glistening monotony. To go on was madness, to remain was madder still; so we remounted and faced the storm with as much courage and good humour as we had at command. For some time we kept to a path that wound through the very heart of the forest, having a steep ravine on each side, and gaining at every turn new prospects of wild and weird effect. The mist was now so thick that the huge cedars looked diaphanous and visionary.

We seemed to be wandering through an atmosphere that was wholly new, peopled by pale blue phantoms of antediluvian size and mystery. As soon as we began to descend, the horses and mules could with difficulty keep their feet. Those who, like myself (being no horsewoman), rode mules, were best off, the sagacious animals being quite equal to any emergency of the kind.

Again and again I had suggested that the especial guide told off to look after me should lead my beast.

“Not in the least necessary, mademoiselle,” was the careless reply. “That animal knows his way better than any of us, every gully, rut and stump—if he doesn’t know, something in his head—or in his inside, *le bon Dieu* who made him knows, I don’t—warns him of danger; you are as safe, *ma petite dame*, as if warming your toes by the fire.”

He was right. How slowly, guardedly and deliberately those delicate forelegs moved downward, not the abruptest turn, not the slipperiest slope, not the most jagged bit of rock, making him pause or stumble! From the beautiful self-complacency, rather, should I say, nonchalance of the creature, one could but suppose that, like human beings, he delighted in his *tour de force*. Be this as it may, whilst the mule-mounted fared well, our one horsewoman and the cavaliers, find-

ing prudence the better part of valour, alighted, despite snow, blast and gathering gloom, footing it home.

And, indeed, although drenched to the skin, benumbed with cold, our cheeks blistered, the little cavalcade reached Teniet in safety. To our discomfiture we found the good Capitaine awaiting us, determined to carry us home to dinner. His *chère moitié*, that is to say, Madame, counted upon our company, he said; no toilette was necessary, but no refusal would be accepted.

The prospect of another ride in the cedar forest, another facing of what was worse than King Lear's storm, could hardly have dismayed us more. Vainly we pleaded, saturated skins, fatigue and wet clothes. Vainly we explained that in order to lighten our horses' load for the long drive to and from Algiers, we had all kept luggage within the limits of a handbag. Our too hospitable Capitaine refused to hearken. There was plenty of time, he said, for he would return two hours later, and meanwhile there was the baker's oven—the military baker's big oven, close by. Our dripping garments therein would soon become dry and warm as hot cakes!

“As to the ladies' skirts,” he gallantly added, “permit me, a husband and father, proudly to take charge of them; the oven is close by.” Our Englishman, however, the brother, as I have said, to one of our party, would not hear of this, and with

the four skirts slung over his arm, hastened off to the bakery.

Two hours later our host returned, and what with a rest in warmed beds, hot tea and blazing cedar logs, we set off gaily enough.

The good Capitaine's *chère moitié* we found young, pretty, elegant, and the proud mother of two equally engaging and well-mannered children and a baby up-stairs. Several neighbours, military men and their wives, had been invited, and beamingly host, hostess, children and guests sat down to the tastefully arranged oval table, flowers, crystal and plate recalling Parisian *petits diners*.

Then a tragi-comic incident occurred. This Anglo-French banquet—foretaste of the *entente cordiale*, was evidently a rare event, and the lavish preparations in our honour had exhilarated the household. When, with a grand flourish, Hamet, the Kabyle man-servant, in handsome native dress, was about to place the soup, by some inadvertent slip, the large tureen tipped over, the savoury, steaming mess deluging spotless damask, glittering plate and Madame's new silk dress. With little screams and ejaculations ladies and gentlemen started to their feet, all snatching their dinner napkins and mopping up the *potage* as best they could.

Meantime the catastrophe strikingly brought out French character.

A good-natured shrug of the shoulders and the remark—

“Il faut passer de notre potage alors” we must do without our soup, then), was all the notice that the host took of the matter, whilst Madame, despite her damaged gown, soon smilingly reseated herself. The unfortunate Hamet got not so much as an impatient word or even a frown, and, it must be admitted, went through his duties as unmovedly as if nothing whatever had happened. The dinner was excellent, every one's appetite and spirits left nothing to be desired, so it was a case of all's well that ends well.

But this journey to the cedar forest was destined to be tragi-comic from beginning to end. Next day a wave of risibility swept over the little settlement, our innocent selves forming the subject. In the most cordial French eyes, John Bull ever possesses a touch of Pickwick, the English character—alike, masculine or feminine—is never without eccentricity. We learned that the most whimsical, the most egregious gasconade had got abroad. It was not the English ladies' dresses that had been carried to the baker's oven the night before. The four drenched Anglaises—(“Que voulez-vous, c'était tout que les pauvres dames avaient à faire, vu les circonstances!” was the good-natured comment)—so the story ran, *i. e.* myself and three countrywomen, like Shadrach,

Meshach and Abednego, had bodily entered the oven, in the deliciously warm and desiccative atmosphere therein restoring their torpid and half-frozen limbs. We stayed on and let the *potin* die a natural death.

CHAPTER XI
SOCIETY AT TENIET-EL-HAAD

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THE snow having come seemed in no hurry to take leave. There was nothing to do but pile up our cedar-logs, bring out books, drawing materials and needlework and await fine weather. There was no possibility of getting to Miliana till a change came. Our cavalier read the French newspapers and smoked cigarettes with the French officers in their cafés, and we always dined out, invitation upon invitation being heaped upon us. We picked up acquaintances too at the mid-day table d'hôte of our untidy little inn.

One of these was a pleasant and very conversant Maronite or Christian Arab, and an interpreter by profession, who offered to give me lessons in Arabic, would I only stay on a little, and who presented me with one of the Gospels he had translated from the Greek into his own language.

That little paper-bound Gospel I have still with the donor's signature, "Offert a Mademoiselle B.-E., par Th. Chidiac," but, alas! the little Arabic I once possessed is all gone, and I can no longer read St. Mark in the tongue of Mohammed, nor a word from my beautifully printed quarto

Koran, another Algerian gift of this period. The Mohammedan Bible and its author have ever possessed extraordinary fascination for me. How lovely the mottoes, parables and narratives scattered through the Koran! And how striking from beginning to end was the Prophet's life! Where can we find a sweeter tale than that of Kadijah and Ayesha?

When Mohammed, then in the apogee of fame and glory, was asked for the interests of Islam to put away the elderly Kadijah and wed the young and beautiful Ayesha, he replied—

“No, Kadijah was the first to believe in me and to stand by me in thought, word and deed. I will never put away Kadijah for Ayesha or for another, were she even more beautiful.”

Well, indeed, has a great nineteenth-century Talmudist written of Mohammed—

“Take him for all in all, the history of humanity has seen few more earnest, noble and sincere prophets, men irresistibly impelled by an inner power to teach and to utter austere and sublime truths, the full purpose of which is unknown to themselves.” And the writer adds: “The most complete and admirable parts of Islam, namely, the ethics of the Koran, like golden threads are woven into the huge fabric of the religious constitution of Mohammed.”

But I am getting far from our rough and ready little hostelry and its innumerable social attractions.

Two very intelligent French lads studying Arabic here joined the table d'hôte *déjeuner* and used to show me their books, and with great lucidity explain the methods of their professors. Very advanced in mentality, as French youths invariably are, this interchange of sociabilities with English people evidently afforded them great pleasure.

One day Mme. Bodichon's young Arab servant brought in a little wild boar offered for sale. My friend was always ready to buy anything, no matter what, so long as it pleased her, and the few francs demanded were immediately paid down. Hamet used to bring in the baby boar at times to divert us with his infantine antics. It was carried home by the proud purchaser and presented to her husband. Long, I believe, it flourished under the doctor's care. Dr. Bodichon adored animals, and had a pet pig in their Sussex home; the maids used to play at hunting him in the adjoining wood, greatly to the animal's delight.

"Voilà," said the doctor, "une bête qui a énormément d'esprit!"

But weather-fenced we might be, without dinner-parties, Maronites, French boys and wild boars we might be, my Algerian hostess would have made up for all. Like Lady Hesketh so lovelily immortalized in Cowper's letters, Mme. Bodichon "annihilated the difference between cold and heat, gloomy skies and cloudless."

Wherever she went she carried charm and stimulus as health-giving plants their flowery aroma.

The only one of our party who uttered Touchstone's wish from time to time was our Hamet. He had never quitted Algiers before, and even the pranks of the baby boar could not cure his home-sickness.

"But, Hamet," I said, "isn't it a pleasant thing to run about the world a bit and see how other people live?"

"Ma foi, oui, Madame," he answered, scratching his head ruefully, "c'est un très bonne chose de voyager, mais je serai très content, moi, de revoir Alger. On se trouve fou quand on ne connaît personne."

Hamet was an excellent lad, devoted to his mistress, obliging to us all, honest, active, and thoughtful for our comfort, but he lacked the art of looking cheerful under adverse circumstances. Ill content with the cold, the want of his usual occupations, and the absence of his fellow-servants, he lounged about the door of the inn smoking cigarettes, and looking the very picture of *ennui*.

Mme. R——, the wife of the Capitaine, was with us a good deal, and when the men were out riding despite the bad weather, we ladies amused ourselves indoors. It was a very pretty picture of domestic life that we saw at the little military station of Teniet-el-Haad. A perfect housewife, this lady taught her children, made their clothes, supervised the business of the

kitchen, presided over her table, and entertained her guests with a grace and ease perfectly charming. She was accomplished too, sang and played exceedingly well, could discuss English authors intelligently, and knew a great deal about the country in which she lived. Her account of African experiences was touching in the extreme. She had come from France as a young bride of eighteen, and till within the last year or two, had constantly suffered anxiety on her husband's account. Sometimes he had been sent into the interior subduing Arab or Kabyle tribes within a day's journey from her, and more than once she had been in imminent peril of her own life.

"Here at Teniet last year," she said, "just before my baby was born, we were in a state of direst fear. A caravanserai not far from here had been surprised by Arabs in the night, the door fired, the people murdered, and unmentionable horrors perpetrated. My husband was fighting a tribe of insurgents in the mountains, and we had only a few soldiers left in the fort; for nights and nights, I and the two ladies who were here with me were kept awake by apprehension for ourselves and our husbands. Now, thank God, all is quiet immediately around us, but no one knows how long it will be so."

One evening we were invited to a dinner-party at the Caserne, given by the Colonel. His bachelor rooms were very pretty, and enlivened

by the presence of a tame gazelle, which played an infinity of tricks for our diversion. The walls were hung with splendid skins of panthers, hyenas, gazelles, and jackals, most of which he had himself taken in the hunt; and also with Kabyle arms and Moorish carpets, spoils of many a skirmish in the interior. That poor lonely Colonel, a man already past his meridian, with only a pet gazelle to make up for home, wife, children, and looking forward! A year later I met him again, he had been transferred to another and less isolated post in Oran, but he was still alone in the world still consoled by his gazelle.

At last the weather broke, and as if by enchantment, all was golden sunshine and greenness. We went into the cedar forest hardly believing our eyes. Soft breaths of wild flowers were blown across our faces; the tips of the cedar boughs were burnished with tender light; pleasant sounds of trickling water came to our ears as we passed on; the mountains stood out in the sunny atmosphere like gems in clear water; all was freshness, and softness, and beauty.

We made a picnic in a lovely spot, and lingered there for hours well content. Before us, the high lands of the forest parted, showing a stupendous peak crowned by a solitary cedar, and a vast prospect of hill and valley mellowed and softened by the genial sunlight. The knoll on which we bivouacked was a very paradise of verdure, and on each side dipped sheer into intricate mountain

ways and thickets. Panthers make their haunts in these solitudes, and we had been expressly enjoined by our military friends not to linger within the precincts of the forest after sundown. But what restrictions can check artistic ardour?

Leaving Mme. Bodichon comfortably settled with easel and paints, myself and the two girls strolled out of sight in search of flowers; Hamet, meanwhile, being a little way off looking after the horses and mules, none of us marking time.

On a sudden we heard shouts, and soon perceived our artist hurrying towards us. Fear, this lady never knew, but voice and gesture betokened consternation now.

“Call Hamet, let us hie away, there is a panther lurking near; I have just heard and *smelt* him!” she cried.

So there was a lightning-like stampede. In a twinkling our things were got together, our mounts brought up, and happy at having missed an adventure, post-haste we trotted homewards. It was something to have smelt a panther!

We reached Teniet as the sun was crimsoning the vast plain of the Little Desert. Sighingly we used to gather around our blazing cedar-logs, longing to carry home a wagon-load.

This exquisite wood was one of the dearest luxuries during the last years of the Roman Republic. Pliny says how “the attraction of ivory and cedar-wood has caused us to strip all the forests of Libya.” Prefects and proconsuls set

an example of devastation which has been followed by French commanders. Tables of cedar-wood fetched fabulous prices among millionaires and connoisseurs at Rome. Cicero bought a table for the enormous sum of four thousand pounds, and others fetched the prices of a fine estate. The most esteemed were those carved from a single block, surmounted on an ivory pillar and ornamented with a circular band of gold. But what a different aspect did the forests of the Atlas present then! Dr. Bodichon, in his *Études sur l'Algérie et l'Afrique*, shows in an interesting chapter how Roman colonization modified the condition, and by the demolition of forests, indeed, the climate, of North Africa. The solitary lion and panther captured at Teniet now and then, are the remnants of a savage host, once numerous, the elephant, the lion and the wild ass roaming unmolested till disturbed by the hosts of Suetonius Paulinus and Hosidius Geta.

And as of late years has been discovered, "in birthless time" long before these epochs, prehistoric civiliziers had inhabited French-African solitudes, preparing the way. A learned French archæologist having averred that no age is comparable to the progressiveness of those great ancestors! ¹

¹ See M. Hanotaux' brilliant little work, *La Fleur des Histories Françaises*. Hachette, 1911.

CHAPTER XII

A ROMAN CITY AND A BREAKFAST
WITH THE TRAPPISTS



CHAPTER XII

A ROMAN CITY AND A BREAKFAST WITH THE TRAPPISTS

ONE never tires of the Metidja, a plain so famous in Algerian annals. There is an undefinable charm in the vastness of its brown wastes and beauty of its sunlit oases, in its apparently interminable lines and endless coloration, in its harmoniously massed contrasts, desert and corn-fields, hill and plain, wilderness and civilization.

With a Swiss fellow-tourist and his homely but intelligent German wife, I made the excursion to the Roman city of Cherchell, sleeping at Blidah, and thence starting in an open carriage at six o'clock the next morning.

The day was just breaking, and the air keen till there came that ever Apocalyptic splendour, that indescribable pageant in this land—the sunrise. Poor Christina Rossetti, who confessed in my hearing that she had never seen the sun rise! What she missed, and herself a poet! For the first few miles, straight as a long-drawn-out ruler, lay the splendid sward. On either side vineyards and fields of tobacco, corn and flax, everywhere little trickling springs and flowers, irises, purple

and white, marigolds and mignonette, olive and carob trees making pleasant shelter here and there. Occasionally we met farmers driving to market in a gig or cart, or a troop of Arabs and negroes driving cattle and sheep; or we saw a wild-looking little fellow in ragged burnouse, keeping goats or cows in the thick brushwood, or a French or Arab farmer ploughing a tiny field; but the scene was for the most part very solitary.

At Marengo we breakfasted. The landlord and landlady of the village hostelry were Germans, and on finding out that one of my fellow-travellers was of the same nation, no words could sufficiently express their welcome. The eldest daughter of the house was a very Gretchen in prettiness and innocence, and for her sake especially we got interested in the family. They had come from North Germany, and did not seem at all discontented with their prospects, though they declared that any idea of saving money was quite out of the question.

“We can maintain our family of seven children respectably, but that is all,” they said, “and we shall never see the dear Fatherland again, never—never!”

“And the Arabs,” we said, “how do you get on with them? Naturally you have much to do with each other!”

“The dear God, yes! we have plenty to do with

them, and can't say that they are worse than Christians. Perhaps, here and there, one will have two wives or will steal your poultry. But does no one steal poultry, or do worse than marry two wives, in Europe? That's what we should like to know!"

The children, who could hardly speak a word of French, took us by the hand to see the church and the village. It happened to be market-day, and we saw a busy and picturesque scene that we had not looked for.

In a large field bordered by carob trees were hundreds of Arabs and Kabyles, some squatted beneath the shade, others grouped around a horse or a score of sheep, others wandering about, like ourselves, content to be spectators only.

We saw some faces of marvellous wildness and character; of beauty, too, though beauty to us of such unaccustomed kind, that, at first, it seemed positive ugliness. So used as we Europeans are to a uniform trimness of exterior and neatness of type, we cannot for a long time realize the charm of perfectly untrained and unconventional symmetry of form and feature. There were limbs and lineaments here that realized all one's preconceived ideas of patriarchal times. Those brown-cheeked, stalwart sons of Ishmael might well have figured in life-stories fierce and isolated as their own deserts; and as we lingered about

the market, we saw many a Nebajoth bartering for corn or cattle.

We were witness, too, of more than one scene of Biblical pathos and simplicity. Whilst engaged in talking to a very well-dressed, handsome young fellow, who could speak a little French, a white-bearded, venerable, but ragged old man came up and greeted him by name. In the twinkling of an eye our companion had excused himself gracefully for quitting us so hastily, and had fallen on his friend's neck, and kissed him. Then they drew aside and chatted together. And this sort of scene we saw repeated more than once.

There were a few Kabyles with their wives at the fair, some of whom were eating figs and talking volubly under the shade. The men, with their greasy leathern aprons, coarse shirts, and bare cropped heads, contrast greatly to their own disadvantage with the Arabs, who always look clean, engaging and gentlemanly under any circumstances.

Leaving Marengo we soon entered a wilder district, ever having before us a beautifully shaped mountain of pale transparent blue. On either side stretched wastes of brushwood and dwarf palm, solitary as death, save for the rare smoke of a settler's chimney, or the cry of a goat-herd among the thickets. The sky was fickle, but brilliant, and as we drove along, we had superb



CHERCHELL—A MARABOUT

N. D.

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aspects of distant mountains and surrounding plain.

Near Cherchell the scenery became magnificent. Now we dipped into the heart of a smiling gold-green valley: now we traversed the edge of a gloomy ravine; now we crossed a dry river bed, overhung by the tasselled tamarisk and the glossy Aleppo pine; or we threaded an olive grove through which the sun could not sparsely penetrate.

A cry of admiration escaped our lips as a turn of the road brought us in sight of a wide spreading valley, crossed at the base by a superb Roman aqueduct. Perfect, but for one arch, and standing in the midst of fertile fields, this structure impresses the gazer with an unspeakable feeling of pleasurable surprise. One thinks so much of the Arabs and Kabyles in Algeria, that one forgets what a part the Romans first played there till reminded of it in this way.

Nothing can be prettier or more poetic than the view of Cherchell, as approached from the land side. Its white walls form an amphitheatre, above which rise green hills and fragrant gardens, whilst below, the bright blue sea extends as far as the eye can reach. At this time of the year the almond tree was in full flower; and I cannot describe the effect of the pure pink blossoms that flushed the hills like a rosy cloud. "And not a tree but bloomed blossoms and yielded almonds."

These brilliant colours, the enamel of the turf, the pale yellow of the seashore, the soft, deep turquoise of the waves, the rosy hue of the almond trees, the glistening white of the mosques and roofs, seemed so near the eyes that one rubbed them, feeling but just awakened from the blindness of partial sleep. I can still revel in the picture of Cherchell as it looked on that summer day. For though we were in March the weather was of summer-time.

A little Arab volunteered to show us the Roman ruins, but did not in the least know where they were, and but for a stern Maltese, who sent him off with a cuff and a scolding, we might have wandered about in vain for hours. The Maltese, having given vent to his indignation, proved a sorry sort of guide himself, so we trusted to our own eyes, which was, after all, the safest plan. After wandering about a little hither and thither, we needed no history to tell us of the ancient glory of Cherchell, the Iol of the Carthaginians and the Cæsarea of the Romans.

These broken columns and capitals, these disinterred statues and frescoes, monumental stones and sculptured altars, tell their own story—a story of barbaric pomp, of Roman conquest, of proconsular power, of Christian martyrdom, of fluctuating triumphs and falls without number. One reads the history of Cherchell palimpsest-wise from its records. The Phœnician story

comes first, then the Roman, then the Vandal, then the Turkish; but the second are clearest and most interesting.

The most remarkable monuments here are those of the Hippodrome, the circus wherein Saint Severin and his wife, St. Aquila, were burned alive, and the Thermæ. But on a verdant slope stretching to the sea and shaded by chestnut trees, are heaps of later discovered treasures, such as columns, cornices and friezes, which are no less interesting, and amongst these we wandered for upwards of an hour. Work was over; Arabs, Kabyles, French and Spaniards—for there are great numbers of Spaniards in these little colonies—were walking about, or chatting as they sat on some fragment of sculptured stone; a fresh breeze blew from the sea, and the whole scene was one of peace and pleasantness.

The smaller treasures discovered at Cherchell are collected in a little museum, now in the Louvre, and the greater part were at this time exhibited in a tiny garden opening on to the street. Here we saw a faun, terribly disfigured by time and accident, but sunny and beaming with life nevertheless; a graceful Diana; delicately carved capitals, busts, monumental stones, cinerary urns, amphoræ, and other waifs and strays saved from the wreck of the once flourishing Mauretanian capital.

One of the most curious things is an altar

set up by a Roman prætor to the native gods!

Leaving the museum we started through the town under the escort of an intelligent young soldier, an Alsatian, who, seeing that we were strangers, offered his friendly services. He took us first, naturally enough, to the barracks, and showed us the little theatre which had been constructed by himself and fellow-men, and was patronised by the officers and residents of the town.

Outside the doors was pasted a bill bearing the following notice in a bold hand—

TO-NIGHT WILL BE GIVEN,
MADELEINE,
A VAUDEVILLE IN THREE ACTS BY
M. LE CAPITAINÉ TARVER.

Doors open at seven o'clock. Admission free.

“Do come and see us play, ladies,” said our guide, persuasively. “M. le Capitaine writes such pretty pieces, and M. le Sous-lieutenant is to play the part of Madeleine. I assure you, ladies and gentlemen, that but for our theatre we should die of *ennui* in this out-of-the-way spot.”

We excused ourselves from accepting his kind

invitation, as we intended to leave Cherchell the next day, and were anxious to see as much of it as possible. He took alike the refusal and apology good-temperedly, and strolled with us to the Christian burial-ground, which covered a lovely hill-side reaching to the sea.

“Ah!” mused our companion with a sigh: “it is a pity to give us such a large cemetery at Cherchell, where the air is so healthy that we positively never die!”

“Is it really so?” I asked.

“So healthy that people never die except of old age, Madame. How can it be otherwise with the sea on one side, and dry, warm hills on the other? We never suffer from heat or cold, ague or fever: and though life is a little monotonous here, there are many things to enjoy.”

Whilst we were loitering among the graves, reading a name here, removing a dead rose there, we saw a strange procession hastening down a hill-side opposite to us. It was an Arab funeral. The body, wrapped in a wretched cerecloth of thin woollen stuff, was borne on the shoulders of four men who led the way, the mourners and tribe following. As they went, they chanted verses from the Koran; and the weird wail of the litany and the wild figures of the men, treading down the sweet asphodels in their haste, and bearing bunches of prickly cactus in their hands, made a strange picture.

There was one poor mourner who separated

himself from the crowd in his great grief, and tottered and trembled like one drunken, whilst he gave utterance to such moans as one hears from poor beasts robbed of their cubs. It was pitiful to hear.

The others walked so quickly that it was with much ado we could keep up to them, but in a quarter of an hour we had reached a solitary burial-ground overlooking the sea.

There the body was placed into a shallow grave, with neither coffin nor shroud, the face turned towards Mecca, the marabout repeated a prayer for the dead, the grave was heaped up with stones and faggots to protect it from the jackals, and all was over.

The solitariness of the cemetery, the savage simplicity of the rites, the wild, yet sorrowful, faces of the crowd, made the whole scene striking, but not so striking as one we saw early next day.

It was Friday, the Mussulman sabbath, and when we visited the new-made grave, we found it covered with branches of olive, ilex, and uprooted aloe, whilst a group of female mourners were squatted round it, chanting the virtues of the dead.

There was something eerie in their white figures and monotonous wail, whilst perhaps the lines of smoke rising from the little valley below reminded them of souls fleeing upward; and the

broad blue sea beyond of the happy eternity for which they were praying.

I am not sure whether the prayers for the dead around Algiers are precisely those in use among the tribes of the Desert, which are singularly touching and beautiful. The ceremony is almost the same, only more imposing. If the deceased be a chief, his horse is led in the procession by a slave,¹ his gun, yataghan and spurs being hung from the saddle. Hired women chant lamentations, and all the tribe follow their chief to the grave echoing the marabout's prayer: "There is but one God, and Mohammed is His prophet."

On another day, and accompanied by other friends, I visited the Trappist monastery at Staouëli. This retreat was built on the site of that battle deciding the fall of Algeria in 1830.

Leaving Algiers, the road curled for a couple of hours amid homesteads of French colonists and wastes entirely uncultivated. As we ascended, the chain of the Atlas mountains seemed to rise with us, and by and by we had a glorious prospect of deep-blue sea, pale-purple hills, whose olive-clad slopes and Moorish villas glistened against a wondrous Eastern sky. When we had

¹ Slavery is now forbidden throughout French Africa, *i.e.* the portions of late annexed; as Captain Haywood tells us in *Through Timbuctoo*, 1912, a slave has only to apply to the local Commissioner to be enfranchised.

left Algiers some miles behind us, we entered upon an extensive plateau, covered with the fan-like leafage of the dwarf palm, laurustinus in full blossom, clematis, wild rosemary, and other lovely flowers. The Trappists have turned their land into a little oasis of beauty and cultivation; and no sooner had we come within sight of their territory than we were lost in admiration of the pastures, orchards, vineyards and cornfields.

The first thing that struck us as we drove to the door of the convent was this inscription, "Les dames n'entrent pas"; and when the men of our party were carried off by an intelligent Father Superior to see the farm and ateliers, and we ladies were left in a dingy little parlour, with only a heavy-looking lay-brother to entertain us, I felt inclined to rebel. A Mussulman legend came into my head, which might very well have served as an argument against these woman-hating Trappists.

All true believers, as is generally known, perhaps, have a second Koran in the so-called *Hadites*, or Conversations of Mohammed. One day, when the Prophet sat amidst a circle of disciples, he explained the Word of God after this fashion—

"Let those among you who are rich enough to support one or more wives, marry. When a man marries, the Evil One utters a terrible cry; all his angels fly to him, asking, 'What is the matter,

Lord?' 'A mortal has just escaped me,' answers Satan, in despair."

Now I defy the Trappists to tell me a better story on their side than this. Mohammed also added—

"Protect the woman; she is weak. Marry young."

Not being allowed beyond the little parlour, we tried to get all the conversation possible out of our host, the soft-voiced brother just mentioned. He, with five others, carried on the housekeeping, entertained strangers, doled out benefits to the poor, and lived a little in the world. By way of entertaining us, he brought out rosaries of beads and medals—of Birmingham manufacture—tempting us to lay out a few francs in recollection of our visit. He next showed us a large picture adorning the wall, descanting on the merits and sanctity of the donor of it, adding, with a sigh—

"Il faut faire quelque chose pour entrer dans le Paradis."

It did not seem to me a very great piece of work by which Paradise was purchased, namely, the gift of a daub in oil-colours, representing the Madonna and Child; but no two people see things alike. After a time he brought out a couple of 'devotional books, begged us to amuse ourselves with them, and went away "on hospitable thoughts intent." We found the books not quite

to our taste, and preferred a stroll up and down the avenue by which we had come. The outer wall of the convent was covered with this inscription, "S'il est triste de vivre à la Trappe, qu'il est doux d'y mourir!"

Well indeed may the silence, isolation and hardship of the life at Staouëli make death welcome!

When we returned, a plentiful repast of black bread, honey, fresh butter and figs was spread before us, accompanied by wine. The melancholy *frère concierge* then retired, and one of the brother superiors entertained us. He was a shrewd, cheerful-looking man of fifty, quite *au courant* with the affairs of the outer world, quick to read character, and apt, I should say, at ruling his fellow-creatures. We had an animated discussion on the present state of the Romish Church; and as our party consisted of a Swiss Catholic gentleman from Berne, his Lutheran wife, a Churchman and myself, there was a diversity of opinions to begin with.

I have ever loved a heated discourse, so true it is, as the fabulist wrote—

"La dispute c'est d'un grand secours,
Sans cela on dormirait toujours."

What company could have been more disputatiously inclined? Accordingly, straight we plunged into burning theological, rather sacerdotal questions of the day.

I must admit that we were no match for the father. He was so apt, so witty, so well trained as a dialectician, that we were all tripped up—by truisms—one at a time. This he saw, of course, delightedly. When other subjects were brought forward, our host had plenty to tell us about his convent and its prospects. He seemed pleased to hear his wine praised, which, with everything else on the table, was the produce of the Trappist farms, and brought out some oranges of particular flavour as a special little attention.

We were quite sorry to go, and promised the father we should not easily forget either our talk or our entertainment. There is something else too at Staouëli that one never forgets, and that is a magnificent group of palms in the courtyard. So many palms were cut down when the French took Algiers, that a new-comer cannot fail to be disappointed at finding them scarce. One pictures how

“Mid far sands

The palmtree-cinctured city stands,
Bright white beneath, as heaven bright blue
Above it.”

Whereas palm trees are so scarce about Algiers, that one's heart thrills with pleasure to see them, but instead of sands, its surroundings are all verdant and varied hill and dale.

We drove home by way of Sidi Ferruch, a dreary spot on the coast, where the French first

landed in 1830. From thence to Algiers our attention was chiefly directed to the French farms, through which we passed; little homesteads cropping up in the waste with almost a human look of sadness about them. Here and there one might see a few goats and sheep herded by an Arab boy; or a horse tethered to a bit of broken wall; or a tiny hut that might have been Robinson Crusoe's, around which children were playing in the sun. The sun shone brightly on those poor little homes and the green slopes around them, but they looked desolate nevertheless. In some places we saw some colonist digging up the picturesque but pernicious dwarf palm; and in others, potatoes and grain had been planted between little knots of them, as if the task of extermination had been given up in despair.

The last few miles of the journey from Sidi Ferruch to Algiers reminded me of the Cornish coast. Bold rocks dip sheer into a transparent sea of pure green; the sands are white and shining; the waves are sometimes dashed with tumultuous fury against their stormy barrier, and sometimes ebb and flow so gently as scarce to be heard at all.

This coast is full of interest. At one point we passed a ruined Moorish fort, the broken towers projecting over the sea affording to sensation novelists excellent scenes for murder.

We stopped our horses and explored these

ruins, as far as exploration was safe. Then we took coffee in a quaint little Moorish café, looking upon an Arab cemetery crowded with ghost-like figures draped in white, Moorish women praying to their dead. It was Friday, the Mohammedan Sabbath, when those who have lost husbands, fathers or children flock to the graveyards, and commune with the spirits of the departed. They take kous-kous-sou, the national food, with them; they call on the dead to eat, to drink, to give counsel or comfort, and, so they say, seldom come away unheard. But there is another side to the picture. These women lead rather dull lives at home, and if they don't go to the cemeteries to pray, they go just the same to see their friends and make merry. Friday is, indeed, their only holiday. Who can wonder that they both use and abuse it?

Children take part in this custom, which I imagine represents little else but play to them. A friend of mine, an artist nevertheless, told me that she had once taken a youthful Arab into a cemetery, where she was painting, in order to carry her things to and fro. The urchin got tired of waiting for his patroness's penny, and after a time, coolly squatted himself on the very stone she was sketching.

"You are obstructing my view," said the lady in French. "Please go farther."

"I must be here, I am praying to the bones of

my father," answered the imp, with the utmost nonchalance, and my friend began to copy another tomb. Immediately her little persecutor changed position, as effectually hiding the second object as he had done the first. On being a second time remonstrated with, he retorted—

"I must be here. I am praying to the bones of my grandfather."

Perhaps after all the little Mussulman had been taught to circumvent what might be regarded as desecration in the eyes of his parents.

CHAPTER XIII
FLOWERS AND FOUR-FOOTED
“PRETTY DEARS”

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FLOWERS AND FOUR-FOOTED "PRETTY DEARS"

THE flowers of Algeria! Who having seen can describe, who not having seen, can imagine them? We here only realize winter by shortened days, twilight, or rather night, stealing upon us, amid roses and violets, at Christmas as in an English September. But the flowers are ever there, recalling the Prophet's saying, so mystical yet so capable of homeliest interpretation: "If you possess only the wherewithal to purchase a loaf or flowers, choose the flowers." The poorest of the poor are enjoined, rather thus commanded, to put the god-sent before earthly needs. To understand Algeria, or, indeed, any Mohammedan country, we must know their Bible by heart.

For tourists, outsiders and mere flower-lovers, this semi-tropical flora has a special and not precisely a sympathetic charm. The unending gardens, the continuous parterre around us may not caressingly woo, now awakening tears, now smiles. Most of the glorious flower-heads are new—all possess the glamour of extreme rareness. We are not at the moment reminded of some tear-

wet garland lately placed upon a beloved grave, or of a posy fêting some equally beloved anniversary. These flowery wastes and hot-house blossoms, here needing no glass, have had neither part nor lot hitherto in our daily existence. We enjoy them without tender, imperative, yet at times weariful, even heart-rending claims of association. Ecstasy is relievingly impersonal.

When English hedges glow with their scarlets, the fiery red of the holly berry and the softer vermilion of the redbreast, already Algerian wastes are a-bloom with a rich ungarnered harvest, but the flower-harvest, unreaped for the market, is only seen in unmatched splendour from February till May. Spring covers suburban hills with asphodels, tulips, irises, crocuses and marigolds, sprouts bursting every clod, every shower quickening, we can almost see them grow. The banks are as thick with pink and white cacti as our own hedgerows with primroses in May.

Relieving this dazzling tessellation is the surrounding foliage, and here I cite Mme. Bodichon's charming description of a scene from her own house: "The little group of olive trees opposite with their knotted, gnarled, twisted stems and delicate, slender branches are contradictions beyond description and a perpetual delight to me. One moment the foliage is a dark bluish green, almost black in some aspects, and of a somewhat grave and solemn expression. At the least breath

of the west wind, it is stirred with a rustling silvery ripple, and the whole tree laughs and sparkles with delight. We have also a group of poplars, towering over the savage mass of spiked aloes and prickly cacti. Dwarf palms cover the slopes as ferns our own in England and Wales. I have seen Swiss mountains, Lombardy plains, Scotch lochs and Welsh mountains, but never anything so unearthly, so delicate, so aerial as these long stretches of blue mountain and shining sea, the dark cypresses showing against a background of a thousand dainty tints and the massive Moorish houses gleaming from the grey, mysterious green of the olive woods."

As is here seen, the born artist was also an artist in words.

Now for a few, a very few, particularizations.

The common asphodel, with its tall panicle of delicate yellowish and white blossoms is a ravishing flower enough, but lovelier still is the lesser (*albus*) and less frequently found kind, with its dainty star-like flower of purest white, and as a friend has beautifully said, "full of light."

Less poetic and traditional than Persephone's flower, but of more striking aspect, is the *ornithogalum lacteum*, having dark shining leaves and slowly emerging single stem, as slowly developing a glorious pyramid, each pearly globe constituting the mass showing a tiny jet-black centre—one of Nature's delight in contrasts and Shake-

speare's famous simile reversed. The ornithogalum is a long-lived flower-head, and for two or three weeks, even after a journey, will remain fresh and beautiful.

Exquisiteness embodied are also the African cyclamen, with its great polygonal marbled leaves, the elegant jonquil (Bossier's narcissus oxypetalus), and the frolic clematis (cistus cirrhosa) festooning the olives from tree to tree, hanging in clusters of wax-like bloom as they join hands. Then there are the golden, purple and spotted flags, reminding us of Smyrna and the East, the fragrant white and pink cistus, the myrtles and other fragrant plants, and instead of our own so welcome but humble ficary, gladdening every mead, hedgerow and childish heart in England, Algeria has a veritable cloth of gold in her majestic marigold! Linnæus, who fell on his knees at the sight of flowering gorse, thanking God for the gift, like many another genius, "should have died to-morrow." What would have been his ecstasy here?

I now turn to my four-footed "pretty dears," the jackals and hyenas, whose cries and howls disturbed our sleep whilst at Fort National, in Kabylia, and in the neighbourhood of the cedar forest, and to the other wild beasts mentioned throughout these pages. Thereby hangs a tale—and, of course, a moral. Some of my readers may remember an affair that happened at Berne



BOMBONNEL

[To face p. 171.]

many years ago. A half-drunken waggish Englishman late one evening made a wager that he would descend alone into the pit of the famous bears, then the one "sight" of that delightful old Swiss town. How it came about that the madcap escaped custodial vigilance I do not remember. I rather think that the raid was made at night. The bears were like the animals of the fable, they were so extremely vicious that when attacked they defended themselves! Anyhow, the unwelcome intruder was mauled, I believe, to death.

This occurrence took place whilst I was a guest of my cousin, the late Amelia Blandford Edwards, then residing at Westbury-on-Trim with a friend, Mrs. Braysher by name, a woman of much spirit and wit and a passionate champion of the animal world; she had, moreover, lately visited the famous bears of Berne. As she read the *Times* to us at breakfast—the report of the bully and his reception by the unoffending animals, she dropped the paper and, sighing deeply, ejaculated, "Pretty dears!"

When regarded in the proper light, are not all, even the most ferocious animals, "pretty dears"? So my late friend, the celebrated Bombonnel,¹ averred, and if in deed and in certain circumstances he was compelled to act as an exterminator

¹ Died, June 1890. See *Bombonnel, ses Chasses* (Hachette), also my own *Anglo-French Reminiscences*.

of the non-man-eating, he was a benevolent friend of all and a most keen observer.

It is owing to the Dijonnais hunter and *franc-tireur*, on whose head in 1870-71 a price was set by the Prussian Government, that certain Algerian "pretty dears" no longer carry off lambs, goats and, horrible to relate, children in almost suburban Algiers. The lion and the panther no longer stalk like the stealthy grimalkin around caravan-serai and farmery, but the jackal, with its wailing cry, and the equally unmusical and nocturnal hyena prowl in search of prey from sunset till dawn. Between sleep and sleep we always heard their discordant notes when in remote regions.

Yet the jackal has its endearing qualities, the hyena very likely also, although unchronicled by my friend. Here is a charming story—which I have more than once heard recited—in his own inimitably naïve and racy way, and here give it in his own words. This astounding little man, who without any education but that of the village school, attained the distinction of a courtier as far as manners went, and wrote classic French, was many and many a time my companion when strolling through the woods and vineyards near Dijon. Thus he tells of a jackal supremely gifted with resourcefulness—

"I have elsewhere remarked that others might be induced to keep my open-air vigils if they

could only realize their charm. During the three hundred nights spent in the open air, of which my volume is the chronicle, no more amusing incident occurred to me than that I am about to relate.

"One day, tired of watching in vain for a panther, I was about to return to Algiers, an Arab in the neighbourhood of Fendouck said to me—

" 'Stay and kill some of the wild boars that ruin my garden. They have devoured the maize, and now are attacking my potatoes and melons just as they begin to ripen.' "

"As he undertook, if I killed a wild boar, to let me have it carried to Algiers, I consented to stay one night more.

"Having placed myself in ambuscade at night-fall, I soon perceived an enormous jackal, who came sniffing along the melons, first looking at one, then another, finally concentrating his attention on one which seemed exactly to his taste. Looking warily about him, he now quietly gnawed it off the stalk; then, still very wary and afraid of lookers-on, he rolled it gently along the ground.

"The garden, I must explain, was an enclosure, every part of which was surrounded by a gently inclined mound, and the difficulty confronting my jackal was how to get his melon to the top. Once or twice as he rolled it carefully upwards, it escaped him, bounding to the middle of the

garden. He now caught hold of the melon by the broken stem, and tried to back up the slope with his heavy burden, the melon weighing not less than seven or eight pounds.

“ Exactly half-way up, the stem breaking off, the melon escaped him, and came tumbling down the slope. My jackal followed in perplexity, and assuring himself that there was now nothing to catch hold of, took breath, evidently much fatigued and disappointed. I could not help laughing in my sleeve, and uttered a prayer to St. Hubert that he would keep away the wild boars for a time. I imagined my companion to be at the end of his resources, and wanted to see what he would do. He now uttered a cry, something like the bark of a dog, which was answered by a similar cry about three hundred yards off, and soon another jackal made his appearance, having been evidently summoned to help. The pair regarded the melon very deliberately, then together rolled it up the slope with their snouts, and I was secretly congratulating them on their well-earned success, when, lo! down tumbled the melon to the bottom as before.

“ The jackals followed and seemed to take counsel together; then gently rolling the melon to the foot of the mound, the first throwing himself on his back, takes it between his paws; the second holds firm to his companion by the jaw, and climbs backward. The matter is now happily

under weigh! I watch the curious manœuvre, each jackal performing his part with the utmost care; and at last see them disappear over the embankment with their honestly deserved spoil.

"Well might the fabulist exclaim—

'Qu'on m'aïlle soutenir après un tel recit,
Que les bêtes n'ont point d'esprit!'

"This curious scene had so absorbed my attention that I do not think the aggressive grunt of a wild boar would have distracted me. I have, I confess, spent some nights in ambuscade that were long and wearisome enough, but by way of compensation some have been delightful, not the least the one I now describe.

"I shot a wild boar that night, and had the pleasure of presenting the flesh to my friends at Algiers."

Who after this delightful story will not forgive the ugly, unsightly, but supremely ingenuous animal for having disturbed their nightly slumbers? Who would not here ejaculate—like Amelia Blandford Edwards' friend—"Pretty dears!"

CHAPTER XIV
MORE "PRETTY DEARS"

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MORE "PRETTY DEARS"

HERE are two more stories—rather recitals—this time of that absolutely untamable wild beast, the panther—so averred his great enemy, Bombonnel, after many years' experience. The first, as the forerunner, deals with the frugiferous tastes of these carnivora; the second gives a terrible fight and an amiable family picture.

"I had hardly been a week at Algiers, one year, when Nabi came to fetch me, saying that a panther was devouring the goats of a certain tribe, and that I need not wait for the moon. The marauder was so audacious I should be sure to surprise him in broad daylight, he said. I set out next day with him for the mountains, where we were looked forward for with much impatience. Twenty goats had been devoured by the panther within a week. The Kaid received me warmly, and as I lay reposing under his fig tree a crowd of Arabs came to look at me. They wanted to see if I—the panther-slayer—were like other men to look at, and at last had to be driven away, being so troublesome. They went away, but returned in

an hour's time laden with provisions, intended as presents to me. To repay such politeness I was obliged to taste of everything. The Arabs religiously observe the law of hospitality, in accordance with the commands of the Prophet: 'Be generous towards your guest, for in coming he brings you a blessing; on his departure he carries away your sins'; and elsewhere: 'God will never do harm to the hand that has bestowed.' During your stay you are one of the family; your host takes you under his protection, and feels responsible for your comfort and well-being. I was not only a guest here, but regarded in the light of a champion against a terrible enemy. Thus my arrival was the signal for a fête. After our repast we were regaled with Arab music, the women and children looking on from a distance. My arms were a subject of great curiosity to the men, and my Lefauchaux gun aroused the greatest astonishment and admiration. 'The French know everything,' said these mountaineers; 'they can do everything except hinder death!' At sunset the Arabs performed evening prayer and ablution by the river-side. I would fain then have retired, but they insisted on keeping up the festivities till midnight.

"Next morning I was sound asleep and wrapped up in my burnouse, when an Arab shook my arm, crying, 'Roumi, Roumi, the panther!' I looked up, and saw indeed a panther on the eleva-

tion opposite dragging a goat it had just pounced upon. To charge my gun and follow was the work of a minute, but the animal had already vanished in the brushwood. I nevertheless hid myself near, hoping it would return, and for four hours waited without stirring an inch. My teeth now began to chatter with cold, and I trembled all over, partly from chill and hunger; on a sudden I heard something brushing the thicket, my trembling disappeared as if by magic, and I prepared to take aim, when lo! there emerged the friendly head of a dog! The Arabs had come to see if I would have something to eat. I bade them not to disturb me till nightfall. All sensation of hunger had passed away.

"I saw nothing that day, and next morning returned to the same spot, this time being provided with food and my burnouse, which I had forgotten in my excitement yesterday. That day and the next, however, were equally unsuccessful, although the panther still continued to carry off the goats.

"I now lay in wait at night, but equally to no purpose, and was at length compelled to return to Algiers, *en route* for France. On the eve of my departure two Arabs came to me from the same neighbourhood, begging that I would go and rid them of a panther that was eating up all their figs under their very noses.

"The panther, as a rule, is very fond of figs,

and, standing on its hind legs, will draw down the branches as cleverly as a man. All the unripe ones are rejected; and when no more in a sufficiently ripe state remain within reach he looks at those beyond, perhaps consoling himself after the manner of the fox with regard to the grapes. Never, as is sometimes affirmed, will it climb the trees. I have never yet found an Arab willing to spend a night with me in the brushwood, but they will constantly climb a tree, and watch for the panther there, knowing well they thus run no risk.

“I was obliged to refuse this invitation, however, and set out for France, promising to go in search of panthers on my return in the autumn.”

My friend's exploits as panther-slayer had taken place many years before my own acquaintance with the colony. He always spent the summer in his Burgundian home, so familiar and dear to me somewhat later. The second of these stories he called “the happy family.”

“In the following December I returned to Algiers, and hardly was I arrived when Nabi came to tell me of the depredations of a panther among the tribe of the Bon Mardas; we immediately set out, and as I had already rid these good people of an enemy, my reception was of the most flattering kind. I have upon more than one occasion made the remark that in matters of hospitality we

have something to learn from the Arabs. No orders given here, none received. Each, naturally and as a matter of course, sets to work to prepare the feast, and apparently without being put out of his way. Whilst enormous preparations were being made for the feast, some of the Arabs entertained me with the panther's depredations. But for the extravagant joy they testified on my arrival, I must have accused them of exaggeration in this matter. For twelve days, they told me, although the panther continued to destroy as before, it hardly ate anything. My informants declared that the panther, like themselves, kept a month's fast at Ramadhan! I have, indeed, observed that at certain seasons, although it destroys for the pleasure of destruction, the panther is almost herbivorous. When the feast was over I minutely examined the environs of the *douar*, or Arab village, and at last fixed upon a ravine opening into others still deeper; above was a bit of rising ground, thickly grown with lenlisk bushes, and here by sunset I had seated myself for the night.

"It was about ten o'clock when there emerged from the bottom of the gorge a sound so like the noise of a camel as to be easily mistaken for it. A panther was coming towards me at a distance of about two hundred yards. Soon I could distinguish the voice of a second panther about a hundred yards from the first, and then the voice

of a third about twenty-five yards off. The savage warning of the third was enough to make even a hunter shudder.

“The first panther now paused and listened, followed by two others, each arriving from a different direction, and seeking the first, evidently two males in quest of the female, with low, hoarse roars. As soon as the last two came up, ensued the battle; and vain were it for me to describe by any words at command the awful noise made by the combatants. Never was human ear greeted by uproar so frightful. The roar filled the gorge and was echoed by the mountain sides. My heart beat fast, but not with joy; I uttered no prayer to St. Hubert; I had no time to think of it, but had I done so it would have been this time to rid me of the panthers.

“The hideous battle lasted about a minute, when the roar seemed to come from a greater distance, and was soon echoed by the sides of the neighbouring ravine. The scene of the struggle had been an impenetrable thicket, but I shall ever regret that I made no attempt to get nearer and see whether one of the panthers had fallen.

“I watched eight successive nights in these parts, but saw nothing; and, the moon being on the wane, I was compelled to give up the search. The following month, a deputation of tatterdemalion Arabs waited upon me, begging me to visit their tribe, and rid them of a female panther

and two young ones working terrible destruction among their flocks and herds. The weather was very unfavourable, but the moon was in her first quarter, so I consented. On the very day of my arrival the panther had carried away a sheep in broad daylight and in sight of the shepherd.

"I spent six nights lying in wait, but to no purpose. Snow was falling, and upon one occasion I had three inches of it on my shoulders, which I could not get rid of till morning. As the panther had evidently quitted the neighbourhood, I gave up this spot. An Arab belonging to the neighbouring tribe now came to tell me that the said panther had just killed a calf belonging to his people. I at once set off with him, and he showed me the ravine into which the animal had dragged its prey. As it was very narrow and densely wooded, I posted myself on the crest of a neighbouring hill, although the night promised to be dark and rainy.

"True enough, there came such a deluge of rain as we do not see in France, and after having endured it for several hours the Arabs came to fetch me. We reached the gourbi soaked to the skin, and dried ourselves by a large fire; unfortunately there was no chimney, so that by daybreak we were as smoke-dried as German sausages.

"It had rained all that night, thus enabling me to trace the panther's footsteps, for it had come

near my ambuscade and carried off a goat, dragging it to the bottom of the ravine for her little ones. I had begun to descend in search of the family, whom I hoped to find at breakfast, when all at once the Arabs called out to me from above to go up to them. I made the best of my way, and they then pointed to the rising ground in front, on the top of which, they said, was a garden planted with fig trees, and in this garden a panther looking at us.

“I looked a long time without being able to distinguish anything, but at last saw what I took to be a cow lying on the ground. One of the Arabs then guided my eyes to another point higher still. Here I did indeed see a panther, with its head turned to us, at a distance of about three hundred yards. This was the male. A hundred yards nearer, half hidden by the trees, was the female, which I had at first taken for a cow. A hundred yards off were the two little ones. They were about the size of average bulldogs, and were playing together very prettily. All four were basking in the sun, till the brushwood should dry a little after the rain.

“I determined to flank the ravine and surprise the male. I begged the Arabs to be quiet and plunged into the thicket, but when half-way through I found it impossible to get any further, and had to turn in another direction. The Arabs now shook their burnouses, a sign to make

me turn back, and, seeing that I still persisted, shouted that I was taking a wrong path. Their noise and gesticulations seemed to disturb the male panther; he rose, uttering a low roar, the mother fetched her little ones, and the happy family took refuge in the gorge.

"I lay in wait in different places and on several successive nights, but without success. I had here to do with cunning, suspicious animals, who, for fear of being surprised in their lair, changed it every day. The want of moonlight compelled me to go, to the great regret of the Arabs."

In later years my friend the great hunter had planned to take me with him one evening, not to slay panthers, but to enjoy what our neighbours call *un nouveau frisson*, i.e. the experience of a night spent amid haunts of these "pretty dears." Such delights were frustrated by the *chasse aux hommes*, that career of the *franc-tireur* in 1870-1, after which Victor Hugo declared that a few more Bombonnels would have turned the scale and given France the victory!



CHAPTER XV
PLAGUE AND FAMINE

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PLAGUE AND FAMINE

My experiences of the *Golfe du Lion*, a deservedly accorded name, have not figured among travelling agreeables. After a stormy crossing, during which in sight of Marseilles we had to put for some hours to sea, however, we arrived safe and sound, but to find the great P.M.G. line to the capital blocked with snow. It was a case of "snowed up at Eagles." When after several days the line was cleared, myself with other tourists coming almost penniless from their holiday, had not the wherewithal to pay our bills and a railway fare. As it happened I had laid out some thirty pounds on an Arab rug, pottery and so forth, and at once, seeking the patron of the big Hôtel du Louvre, asked for a loan of the cost to Paris, and proposing to leave my cases behind as a guarantee. With the most affable air possible Monsieur replied—

"Madame, all the funds you require for your journey by first-class are freely at your disposal, take your cases and let me hear from you at your entire convenience."

I add that I was returning alone, and at that

time there was no system of procuring money by telegraph at a moment's notice.

I had hardly reached England when the following note reached me. The date was April, and the writer Mme. Bodichon.

“I am sure you will be sorry to hear of the calamity that has befallen our pleasant Algiers, and that the poor people are altogether desolated and despairing, so unexpectedly has it come upon them.

“In the midst of this lovely weather, when everything was looking so luxuriant and beautiful, the vegetables in perfection, the flowers blooming everywhere, the fields promising an early and abundant harvest—when all was hope and cheerfulness, *the locusts have come!*

“I much fear that all this beauty and abundance will be turned into a bare and arid wilderness, and my heart aches for the ruined and starving people we shall soon leave behind. There were rumours last week that the locusts had reached the plain of the Metidja, and had there committed some ravages, but it was hoped that the wind might change and drive them into the sea. Last Thursday morning one of our maids—little Katherine, whom you know, came running into my room, looking white and ghastly, and crying, ‘*Les sauterelles! les sauterelles!*’ I rushed to the window and saw what looked to be some small glittering birds flying over my lower field. It

was the beginning of a great storm. They came in millions and trillions of billions! I can give you no idea of their numbers. The air was full of them. It was like a black storm of the largest hailstones you ever saw. If you could only have seen the wondrous sight!

“In a moment, as it were, the whole population was in a state of frightful excitement, and many folks were weeping aloud. Poor little Katherine’s heart was all but breaking for the expected desolation of her father’s and brother’s little farms. The people turned out shouting, screaming, beating kettles and frying-pans with sticks and stones, firing guns, and waving handkerchiefs to prevent the destroyers from settling on their field. This has been going on around Algiers during the last few days, till the poor people are quite worn out. Some have had soldiers to help them, but all in vain. The advanced guard seen in front were speedily increased to an enormous army, till nothing else could be seen. Soon they began to settle, and the work of destruction went on apace. They have devoured our neighbour’s fine crop of potatoes and peas; but it is much worse for the small farmers like poor Katherine’s people, who have lost all their wheat, besides vegetables. I am so sorry for them. The Bouzareah and the fertile slopes of Mustapha, which you know so well, are all bare now. I much fear the poor people will suffer from famine.

“Such a visitation of locusts has not befallen Algiers for twenty-two years; it was a strong wind from the Desert that brought them here. A lady just come from Laghouat tells us that they were lying many inches deep on the road through which they drove.

“Just now the air is so thick with them that it is quite unpleasant to be abroad. You have to keep waving your parasol to keep them off your face, and they alight on your skirt, and stick there by means of their hooked feet. In look they are like immense grasshoppers, with yellow and green bodies, as long and thick as your middle finger. Dr. Bodichon says that each female lays ninety eggs. The weather is close and warm, with a sirocco blowing. We only hope for a strong wind to come and blow them into the sea. The children run about all day catching the locusts and sticking them on long pins; at first, the sight horrified us, but the creatures cause so much suffering that one gets hardened to it. Thousands and hundreds of thousands are thus caught, but what is that out of thousands and thousands of millions?

“April 29.—The locusts keep coming in great clouds and disappear for a while. To-day, from early morning till one o'clock, they were thicker than ever, and in those few hours have done a great deal of mischief. We had a thunderstorm last night, but little rain; had it fallen in torrents it would have been a blessing, for the poor people

are in dread now of the sickness that usually follows a swarm of locusts. We leave for Europe in a few days, and are glad, for it makes one's heart sick to witness so much misery one is powerless to alleviate!

"Fortunately the plague is one of rare occurrence!

"And now good-bye and *au revoir!* How sorry I am that our golden days in Algeria should have had such a deplorable ending!"

Then indeed came home to Biblical readers the poetic words of the prophet Joel—why, by the way, do the minor prophets and poets so often touch us more than the major?—describing, as we learn, a similar horridness he had witnessed: "That which the palmer worm hath left, hath the locust eaten . . . the field is wasted, the land mourneth . . . the vine is dried up and the fig tree languisheth, the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also and the apple tree, all the trees are withered. Alas, for the day! How do the beasts groan! The herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture, yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate!"

And as in Joel's time, famine followed on the heels of plague. Needless to say, that although settled in England for the summer, Dr. and Mme. Bodichon most generously contributed to the French and Algerian relief funds. The great

Cardinal Lavigerie worked wonders in the way of collecting money, and, humanly speaking, all was done that could be done to relieve the prevailing misery. No such scourge had as yet visited the garden of the Hesperides under French rule.

One English friend, the late Mrs. Bridell-Fox, spent the following summer in Algiers, Mme. Bodichon having lent her the large villa of which I have spoken. This is her report of the dog days—

“Of course it was very hot, but I never felt so well in my life. My appetite was enormous, and I could sleep very well. For some days the sirocco blew, and then it was awful, even up here at Mustapha. The lovely prospect of the city, green hills, sea and mountains, were all one yellow blur. If you touched a stone lying in the sun the skin came off your fingers. Dogs died of heat in the streets, and sunstrokes were of daily occurrence. This house was then full of Kabyle workmen, and they all took a siesta in the middle of the day, dropping asleep in the corridors—on the stairs—anywhere. In the evening it was pleasant, except during sirocco.”

A French author gives the following account of the last-named phenomenon in Algiers—

“The rains have ceased. A drop of water would be a phenomenon. The heavens seem turned into copper. Nevertheless, the temperature maintains itself at moderate degrees. I have seen evenings sufficiently fresh as to make woollen clothes necessary. And from midday till six o'clock we have the sea-breeze, which produces the effect of an immense fan, and neutralizes the effect of the heat.

“I must now, as a conscientious narrator, tell you something about the sirocco. It was during a former summer that I was turning over the pages of a book at the reading-rooms, when, the sun being too hot, I rose to open the venetian blind. As I did so I felt myself repulsed as if by the flames of a great fire.

“‘The sirocco!’ cried some one close by.

“You have doubtless passed before the mouth of a furnace or of a locomotive. The sirocco produces precisely the same impression. The air was full of a dust so thick and fine that one at first mistook it for a fog. The green hills of Mustapha were quite hidden. The azure peaks of the Atlas were drowned in a bath of fire.

“The passages, galleries and arches of the old and new town preserved their usual temperature, but in the broad open streets, and especially along the quays, the heat was stupefying.

“People put their hands in their pockets and put up their coat-collars to protect themselves

from the heat. The Arabs, whose costume is so appropriate to the climate, enveloped themselves in their burnouses as in winter.

“The leaves of the trees faded before the eye. After periods of a heavy and suffocating calm came squalls of stinging wind. The clouds of flying sand soon eclipsed the disk of the sun; and the different shades, yellow, orange, saffron and lemon, melted into a mass of copperish colour impossible to describe. The covers of my books were shrivelled as if they had been lying a whole day before the fire. When in company with some officers I happened to touch the sword of one of them my hand was seared as by a hot iron.”

There is no accounting for tastes, and it was one of the late Mr. Brabazon's perpetual regrets that he had not also once accepted the loan of Mme. Bodichon's villa and enjoyed similar experiences. Again and again the charming impressionist said to me: “Ah, that proffered *villegiatura* at Mustapha Supérieure! How could I have missed it?”

PART II
MY SECOND SOUTHING

CHAPTER XVI
THE START

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THE START

Qui boit, boira! When, in the following October, my super-energetic and super-endowed friend of Girton fame invited me to return with her to Algiers, "taking," as she put it with happy unconcern, "a few things on the way," could I possibly refuse? Having, moreover, just finished a novel which was already in the hands of the printer, and leaving my little farm to the care of a worthy "head man," I immediately prepared scrip and scrippage.

Mme. Bodichon's programme was as follows:—to journey from Paris to Bayonne, halting at the great agricultural reformatory of Mettray, near Tours, thence to Libourne and St. Foy on the banks of the Dordogne, in order to visit Pastor Bost's famous orphanage for idiots, spending two or three days in both places.

Then the dreary Landes must be traversed—a region retraversed and described by myself years after—next we were to visit the pine forests and salt baths of Arcachon, and, stage by stage, Biarritz, Burgos, Madrid, Toledo, Cordova, Malaga—from that town sailing to Oran.

Between the African coast and our final destination "just a few things more," my friend had said, "lay on our way"; namely, Tlemcen, the Granada of the East, the astounding ruins of a Moorish capital built after the expulsion from Spain, being the chief reason of such a round-about journey; Saïda on the borders of the Sahara, Mascara, and other romantic villages of the Metidja; to say nothing of inspecting schools, lunatic asylums and prisons whenever they came in our way. And as our lucky stars would have it, despite checks without tale, delays equally innumerable, floods, brigands and earthquakes, at last we reached Mustapha Supérieure safe and sound, our itinerary having been carried out to the last item. The reformatory for unruly lads, rich as well as poor, of Mettray, the even more pathetic collection of embryo humanity of La Force, semi-idiots, idiots, and the absolutely brainless, had both been inspected, the tourists being hospitably entreated by their founders. What hosts, indeed, to remember! French history records no more angelic-minded men, no more apostolic names than those of Demetz and Pastor Bost, the first spending his days in an atmosphere of moral twilight, the second in the still gloomier turgidity of mental darkness.

We plodded through everything, at Burgos seeing all that Ford had enjoined, in Madrid

religiously carrying out our dear friend Brabazon's charge, there studying Velasquez and Velasquez only—with, of course, a visit to the appalling Escorial and a shuddering ten minutes in the bull-ring—this being shirked by my companion. In Toledo—to my thinking the most wonderful show of Spain—we spent many happy days, traversed Don Quixote's country, dwelling upon the most engaging heroine of fiction, Dulcinea del Toboso, as, buxom and blunt of speech, she winnowed corn; then, with equal unhaste and ever increasing enthusiasm, we lingered at Cordova. Who, indeed, would visit Spain without seeing what was once the rival of Cadiz in wealth and traffic, the birthplace of sage, poet and philosopher, of Seneca, Lucan and Averroés, the seat of a splendid Caliphate, its history like a chapter from the *Arabian Nights*—alike the Athens and Bagdad of Western Mohammedanism.

From Cordova to Malaga we journeyed at a snail's pace through the scenery so wondrously portrayed by Gustav Doré in his *Don Quixote*. That volume—one of the half-dozen great books of the world—must never, as Ford has said, be out of the traveller's hand in Spain.

Having reached Malaga, where we hoped to find a steamer bound for Oran, we experienced an amusing instance of Spanish nonchalance. No one ever seemed to know or to care anything about practical matters, and many years later,

when revisiting Spain, I found this national characteristic unchanged.

To obtain information regarding steamers for Oran was impossible. Hither and thither, to steamship office and office, we ran, one official after another dismissing us with the proverbial "No sé" (I don't know); we telegraphed to headquarters at Gibraltar, we wrote dozens of letters, we spent, rather squandered, time, money and patience to no purpose, and meantime beguiled the time by seeing "just a few things." Among these sights were some orphanages founded by a young, rich, beautiful and inconsolable Spanish widow. Having lost both husband and children, this lady devoted her fortune and energies to good works. Very zealously and under the direction of a sweet-faced sister we made the round of infant schools, class-rooms for advanced pupils, and work-rooms, seeing some beautiful hand-made lace and embroidery. Each girl's earnings were set aside for herself, as a dowry when she should come of age. Mme. Bodichon, educationalist and philanthropist, always insisted upon seeing everything and going into particulars, myself being a mere looker-on.

At last came just a glimmer of hope. When almost on the point of retracing our steps, we heard that there was really a weekly boat to Algeciras, and thence a fortnightly boat to Gibraltar, both of which we had just missed. So,

trusting to the tardigrade statement and having several days at our disposal, we decided to fill up the interval by a run to Granada.

A run, did I say! It is always at tortoise's pace that anything is achieved in this provocative but most bewitching country. So to Granada we hied, there enjoying a spell of unmixed enchantment, the quintessence of romance. Lodged in the delightful Ortiz Hotel of the Alhambra gardens, we felt that we hardly wanted to see more—that this enchanted spot might be the “utmost limit of our farthest sail.” So delicious were our surroundings, so moving the associations of every spot—and so great the charm of my Spanish mistress!

For at every halting-place in Spain neither of us were in the least bit of a hurry. I had engaged a teacher, and it is owing to those lessons, crumbs of grammar, syntax and idiom picked up by the way, that I owe an acquaintance at first hand with the majestic Spanish tongue, and my enjoyment of Lope de Vega, Calderon, Cervantes and their gifted followers, dramatists, poets and novelists of later epochs and of to-day.

What a carnival was that stay in the Alhambra gardens! So rich in health, spirits and resources were both of us that even the inspection of a *Casa de locos* or lunatic asylum did not rebut. And of course there were “just a few things” more: potteries, gardens, Spanish dances, Sunday

parades of wealth and fashion, to say nothing of Granada itself and of the Generalife—lightest, airiest, most fairy-like summer-house ever reared by Oriental devotee of fountains, running streams, and bosquets of rose and myrtle.

But time was going fast. Reluctantly we decided to go whence we had come, and if nothing better offered, charter a fisherman's lateen sail for Gibraltar. All the old difficulties about boats now recommenced; and much as we disliked Malaga, which seemed hotter, dustier and fishier than before, we waited and waited. At last we learned somehow that there was really a little steamer, called the *Adriana*, doing weekly journeys between Malaga, Algeciras, and Malaga and Tangier, and that, on account of a cholera scare, all direct communication between our halting-place and Gibraltar had ceased for a time. On the *Adriana* we must, therefore, build our hopes. Nothing remained for us but to tarry and exercise patience.

What made our very fates, as it were, hang upon the *Adriana* was the information received by telegram that a boat left Gibraltar for Oran on the following Friday. It was now Monday, and, according to all accounts, this boat was to return on Tuesday or Wednesday, and sail for Algeciras the next day. But Tuesday passed, and Wednesday came; people prophesied bad weather; and the *Adriana* did not appear. Cervantes and his fellow-captives at Algiers hardly

looked oftener for the ship that was to deliver them than did we for the *Adriana*. We were always running down to the beach and straining our eyes after some imaginary sail. But none appeared; and we were dining in rather a melancholy state at the prospect of losing our boat to Oran, when the master of the hotel sent us a message that the *Adriana* had arrived, and would set out for Algeciras at seven o'clock next morning.

We had splendid weather for the trip. The dawn was grey and pearly, and from its heart, like some gorgeous bird slowly soaring from a dusky nest, arose the warm, brilliant, southern sun. The sea was smooth as a lake; the sky of deepest, warmest blue; the mountains of loveliest form and colour; the little sailing-boats, fairy things, seen in so enchanted a scene and atmosphere! Words, indeed, fail to give any idea of this beautiful coast scenery; but it must be seen on such a day as we saw it.

One is not accustomed to think much of the beauty of Gibraltar, and the first sight of it was quite a surprise to me. The Cornish coast has no finer view than this colossal mass of limestone rock, and the colour of it, so grey, silvery and soft against a light blue sky, is something indescribable.

We had been assured again and again that we should reach Algeciras in time to get into Gibraltar that night; but, as the afternoon wore

on, public opinion on board veered. The captain, who seemed quite confident about the matter at noon, an hour later shook his head gravely.

“You doubt, señor,” I said, “whether we shall reach Algeciras in time, and whether we shall find means of getting into Gibraltar?”

“I doubt both,” he replied.

“But,” I continued, “we are going to start for Oran by the steamer that leaves Gibraltar tomorrow. It is absolutely necessary that we get into Gibraltar to-night, or the steamer may have left.”

“I don’t say that you can’t do it, señora,” he said; “but there are difficulties. It is difficult to get into Gibraltar by sea at all, on account of the quarantine, and after four o’clock it is impossible.” He pulled out his watch. “I am afraid by the time we reach Algeciras it will be too late for that. As to riding round the bay, if we get into harbour in pretty good time, and if you can get horses, and if it is tolerably light, why, you can do it, of course.”

There was nothing to do but wait; and the captain’s prognostics proved true. We did not reach Algeciras in time to get into Gibraltar—supposing there had been boats to take us, which there were not; and as to the latter part of his speech, that was also true; for there was no obstacle in the way of riding round the bay that night, except that there were no horses; and if

there had been horses, there was no time; and if there had been time, there was no light.

There is only one inn at Algeciras, and hither flocked all the unhappy passengers by the *Adriana*, clamouring for horses, mules, boats, guides, anything so long as they could get into Gibraltar that night.

It was a universal cry of "A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!" You would have fancied that everybody's life hung upon getting into Gibraltar. I think some of the men did get horses, but they were lucky exceptions; and the little inn was so crowded as to present the appearance of a camp. Beds were made up *ex improviso* all over the house, and we had to content ourselves with an insectivorous hole of a room, boasting neither window nor chimney, nor chair, nor table, nor, indeed, any furniture but two poor beds, and fleas innumerable.

Before retiring to this cell for the night, however, we had a very good dinner seasoned with some racy gossip of Gibraltar life. We were too tired to dine at the tables d'hôte (wise travellers will avoid tables d'hôte when possible), and preferred to eat the crumbs that fell from other travellers' tables afterwards. These were served to us in a pleasant little *comedor*, looking towards beautiful, inhospitable Gibraltar, with its thousand lights shining like tiers of stars above the dark blue bay. The waiter, who called himself an Englishman, though on what grounds I cannot

precisely determine—perhaps because he was born within sound of Gibraltar gun-fire—served the dinner, and then sat down to see us eat. He was so young, so evidently overworked, and so unconventional that we took this familiarity as a matter of course, and listened to what he had to say.

“You seem to be the only waiter in the place,” we observed; “how do you manage to attend upon everybody?”

He sighed a very long sigh.

“It’s awful work,” he said, in his queer Gibraltar English, “since the quarantine regulation keeps everybody out of Gib. I am ready to drop of fatigue now, and this sort of thing has been going on for weeks. We don’t get to bed till midnight, and we are up at four or five o’clock in the morning, and sleep just anywhere. The quarantine is ten times worse than the cholera.”

“You are English?” I asked, a little cautiously.

“The Lord be praised, I am! Oh! the Spaniards are a bad set, I assure you; and don’t we pitch into ’em when we get a chance! It was not very long ago that we had a regular fight, six Englishmen against six Spaniards, all of us young men, and the Spaniards came off very shabbily. We killed one outright.”

“How shocking! But do you mean to say that the police don’t interfere?”

“That’s as it happens. The English have no business in Algeciras, you know, and if the Spanish gendarmes disturbed themselves when-

ever knives are drawn, they'd have an uneasy time of it."

He went on to tell us some more stories about the state of society in Algeciras, which we took *cum grano salis*, having no personal experience of it.

"Shall I not take mine ease at mine inn?" was not applicable to the unfortunate people whom unhospitable Gib. had driven into Algeciras. We dined pretty well because we were not dainty; but so stringent were the quarantine regulations that such refreshing luxuries as lemonade, vegetables and fresh fruits could not be had for love or money. Whatever we asked for, and we only asked for very simple things, "was at Gibraltar"; indeed, everything was at Gibraltar—except the fleas!

We went to bed early, having ordered horses and Spanish saddles at six o'clock next morning; but the above-named pest would let us have no sleep. There was no armour against them but Spanish patience. Glad indeed were we when morning came, and, after a hasty toilet and a cup of poor coffee, we descended to the street, being informed that the horses were ready. The word *ready* does not, however, bear its English signification in Spain. If you have ordered a horse in England and you are told it is ready, you know that you have only to put on hat and gloves and mount. In Spain it suffices for an animal to exist, or for a thing to be known to be somewhere, and they

are both ready. We had made, perhaps, an unwise bargain, but the only one that seemed possible to make, in ordering horses of two proprietors—two of a very big Spaniard and one of a very small Englishman. Of course this led to all sorts of complications, but I must tell my story from the beginning. In the first place, on being told that the horses were ready, and not finding them on the spot, we sent a man to look after the lad who had gone to look after the little boy who had gone to look after the horses that the Spaniard and Englishman had promised to send, but didn't. When the man had come back to say that the lad told him that the little boy told him that the men told him they were coming, we resigned ourselves for a while, and by and by the men and the horses did indeed come. But then ensued an altercation as fierce as any detailed by Homer. It was like the fable of the big boy with the little coat, and the little boy with the big coat. The Englishman's horse was small, but he had only a large saddle, and the Spaniard had only a small saddle for a very large horse. There was what is popularly called a "row," and the inhabitants of Algeciras turned out like a swarm of bees to see and hear and take part in it. This commotion lasted nearly an hour, and not till two hours from the time of our descent into the street did we set off.

The ride round the bay was so full of gracious, soothing beauty that we soon forgot all the dis-

comforts gone through before. The atmosphere of early morning is always delicious in the South; and, to-day, the pale-blue bay, the green heights, the glistening white sands, the terraced city, and the grey rocks, seen through so transparent a medium, looked more like a reflection of a beautiful scene than a scene itself.

We rode quite close to the water's edge, and the musical plashing of the waves, and sweetness and softness of the air, would have healed any weariness of flesh and spirit, I think. We were weary enough at starting, but had grown quite fresh and strong by the time we had reached the "Lines."

The only drawback to this delicious drive was the discomfort of my mount and the garrulousness of my guide. Unlike that learned theologian, Pierre Pol, cited by Montaigne, who had a *plaisante assiette* on his mule, and thus jogged about the streets of Paris, I was most uncomfortably seated. The fat Spaniard led the way on his best horse with the baggage, looking the picture of slothful self-satisfaction, my friend—a splendid horsewoman—jauntily caracoled on his second best horse, a veritable Bucephalus compared to my own Rozinante, the Englishman's small, incapable beast, which had evidently been ill-baited and overworked for days past.

There are some people, luckily very few, who inspire one with instinctive repugnance, and this little Englishman, as he called himself, was one.

He was so small, freckled and ugly, so conceited, and so envious of the big Spaniard, that he reminded one of the frog in *Æsop's Fables*, which tried to blow itself out to the size of the ox.

“Look at that fellow going there,” he said in his queer Gibraltar English, and pointing to his enemy; “he is the most vicious man in the world, and would as soon stick a knife into you as look at you. Just because I set up as a horse-dealer and let out animals, he spite me so that he would kill me if he dared; but I’m an Englishman, and he just knows that he’d better keep his hands off me. He is as mad as a hornet because you English ladies employed me, although he hadn’t another horse in the world. When English travellers come to Algeciras, whom do you suppose they would employ, señora, an Englishman or a Spaniard?”

“I suppose they would pick the best horses,” I replied wickedly; “that is the most important point.”

He looked at his own poor brute a little ruefully. “I’d back my horse against any in Gibraltar when he is fresh,” he said, “but he went this same journey late last night, and has been hacking at it for days.”

“Precisely,” I answered, “he can only just put one foot before the other, and if the saddle hurts him as much as it does me, the sooner I get off the better for both of us.”

“Yes, I know the saddle goes badly,” he went

on in the same aggrieved tone; "but it's all that bad man's fault. His saddle just fits Bobby here, and this one is just twice too big. I ran home and got the very pillows from under my wife's head, who is ill of ague, but they slip off like nothing."

"I'm sorry you robbed your wife of her pillows," I said; "but, pillows or no pillows, my saddle is as uneven as a gridiron, whilst the señora yonder rides as comfortably as possible."

"Oh yes; that bad man is rich, you know, and can afford to have everything nice. It's just such men as he who eat up poor young beginners like us."

"Of course," I answered coolly; "the man may be bad or good, but so long as he supplies good horses and comfortable saddles, he'll find customers—though he is a Spaniard, and were to run a knife into somebody every night."

We were now on English ground, and fancied ourselves in England. The change happened all on a sudden. We had been in Spain a few minutes back. Spain was not a hundred yards off, and now we were at home, among home-like faces, friendly voices, and familiar scenes; and over our heads, on the crest of the grand old rock, waved the jolly Union Jack. There was a hunt outside the town, and we met parties of officers in scarlet accompanied by fair-haired girls managing their thoroughbreds as Englishwomen can; groups of red-haired, clear-complexioned Highlanders stood about the camps, and the infantine

population of some English village seemed out at play on the grass; sturdy housewives were cooking, washing, and nursing babies in the tents; the roads were no longer break-neck bridle-tracks, but real, broad, smooth roads, hard and fit for use; the Spanish soldier, in tight moccasins and short brown cloak, had disappeared as if by magic, giving way to the scarlet coat, kilt, and trim cap with elastic band.

The Spanish lines are, indeed, no more nor less than a handful of houses called by courtesy the town of La Linea. In Ford's time, La Linea consisted of "a few miserable hovels, the lair of greedy officials who live on the crumbs of Gibraltar"; at least so he wrote of it in 1839, but we were assured that there was now a decent inn, and that it is quite possible for belated travellers to sleep there. The contrast between Spain and England—two opposed countries placed in such strange juxtaposition—is most striking. You pass in five minutes from a land of sleepy, blissful lethargy to a stirring, bustling, look-alive seaport and garrison town. I dare say Gibraltar would not be a pleasant place to live in, but after spending so many weeks among people who think nothing in the world worth hurrying about, and no one's time of the slightest importance whatever, it was delightful to breathe the business-like, martial air of the place. You cannot help doing in Spain as the Spaniards do, and by the time you have traversed the length and breadth of Old

Castile and Andalusia, you must be of a very unimpressionable temperament indeed if you have not imbibed the *genius loci*, that indescribable Oriental habit of living from morning to night without the least inclination to trouble oneself about anything under the sun.

Here in Gibraltar you feel at once subjected to the spirit that rules it. The streets are alive with music; the sharp fife, the warlike cornet, the rolling drum; there is always a "recall" being sounded, or a *réveil* or a gun being fired. You might fancy war was going on from the constant bustling to and fro of regiments and recurrence of signals. And there is a stirring air about the streets. The town is alive with people all intent on business or pleasure, and if you have any business on hand, you find means of doing it quickly and satisfactorily.

The day was delicious, and at the Club-house Hotel we were met by my friend's cousin, Colonel —, who carried us off to his pretty home outside the town, and introduced us to his wife and beautiful little fair-haired child. The house commanded a lovely view of the sea, and was surrounded by roses and geraniums in full bloom; otherwise we might have imagined ourselves in England, so thoroughly English was the household. We had a long, busy, delightful day at Gibraltar, driving about in the Colonel's pretty English carriage; and the very name of the place will always be pleasant to me on account of the

wonders of nature and art we saw there, the brilliant atmosphere that made every impression doubly vivid, above all, the graceful and hearty hospitality of our host and hostess. Gibraltar is superlative. Sorry, indeed, were we that we could not make it the head-quarters of excursions to Ronda, Tangier and Tetuan. As it was, we saw something of the stupendous galleries tunnelled in the rock, of the bastions and batteries, of the marvellous scenery from the heights, and something of the gay, rattling, picturesque town. We saw nothing of the apes—a little colony which have the topmost crags all to themselves, and are most religiously and wholly tabooed, no one being allowed to molest or kill them—and nothing of the three hundred classes of plants which are said to flourish on the rock.

At nine o'clock gun-fire we left the port in an open boat, and after an hour's rowing reached our steamer, the *Spahis*. The night was glorious, and the sea as smooth as glass. Overhead shone myriads of large bright stars, and the lights of Gibraltar made a lesser, but hardly less brilliant, firmament lower down. We thought, as we looked alternately at those shining fields above and below, that we had happy auspices for our onward journey.

CHAPTER XVII
NEMOURS (NOT BALZAC'S)

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NEMOURS (NOT BALZAC'S)

WE had originally intended to take tickets for Oran, but finding that the *Spahis*, if weather permitting, stopped at a little town called Nemours, we resolved to halt there. The African namesake of Balzac's favourite townling, scene of *Ursule Mirouët*, had much to recommend it. By this plan we saved ourselves twenty-four hours of sea, and alighted at a point on the African coast much nearer Tlemcen than Oran. The weather favoured us. When we awoke next morning the sun shone bright and warm in a cloudless sky, and the steamer was gliding gently as a swan over the still, lake-like waters.

The sea-passage between Gibraltar and Oran is a dull one, and in our case it was especially so, as we were the only first-class passengers, excepting an old French gentleman, an employé of the Imperial Messagerie Company, who, with his son and daughter-in-law—a bride of a few days—was bound also to Nemours.

One great resource was a bundle of English newspapers kindly supplied to us at Gibraltar,

and we pored over them from morning till the early twilight, when there was a ringing of bells and a smell of dinner, and an air of liveliness among the little company on board.

I joined the table d'hôte and found it very amusing. The captain had travelled all over the world, evidently making use of his eyes and ears everywhere, and the bridal party were by no means uninteresting. After dinner the father-in-law ordered champagne, and the officers were invited in to drink the health of the bride. She, poor child, was a little overcome, what with her new honours, sea-sickness, and the prospect of exile at Nemours; but all the rest were merry enough, and when we retired to our cabin we heard their talk and laughter till late in the night. There was not much time to sleep, for about 3 a.m. we were told to dress ourselves in readiness for the boat, and an hour later we went on deck. It was cold and fine. The sea was perfectly calm, but we heard it breaking on the shore with an angry, threatening sound, and we saw in the dim, grey light, a rocky coast, a formidable barrier against which the smoothest waves could not break silently. Nemours is, indeed, no harbour, but a mere roadstead, and only approachable in the calmest weather and by small boats. A hard pull our good boatmen had of it ere we could reach the landing-place, and the poor bride shivered in her thin summer dress.

“I was married in such a hurry,” she had said to me, “that mamma had no time to prepare anything extra, and all my clothes are to be sent after me;” but it seemed to me that a good warm cloak for the sea-journey would not have required much preparation. However, we wrapped her up in spare rugs and greatcoats and she took no harm.

We had to be carried ashore one at a time, and I thought of Gilliat, and of the seafaring life Victor Hugo has so wondrously portrayed. Savage-looking men, their bare limbs shining like bronze in the pearly light, dashed into the water, and bore us to the strand as if we were mere parcels.

Much as we had enjoyed Spain, how glad we were to find ourselves in France again—especially in African France!—speaking, as it were, our native language, and not having to attempt the stately Spanish phrase, to hear friendly French voices, and see friendly French faces around us, to know that wherever we went we were truly welcome, and that we might do exactly as we liked without being thought extraordinary!

We found Nemours just like any other little French town in Algeria, very formal and neat, with a little square, a little church, and boulevards in their early stage, and a certain indescribable air of order and importance about it. We went straight to the inn—I think it was called *l'Hôtel des Voyageurs*—and after knocking once or twice,

the landlord came down, very shaggy and sleepy, but pleasant and amiable, as Frenchmen are always. He went out at once to his neighbour, the baker's, and came back with a panful of red-hot ashes, which was very apt of him, for we were bitterly cold, and nothing else would so effectually have heated the room. Then he brought out a bottle of good Bordeaux and excellent bread and Roquefort cheese; and by the time we had finished our meal, there was a clean bedroom and excellent beds ready for us, and hot water: and what more do weary travellers require? The *douane* did not choose to wake up and give us our luggage till late in the morning; it was such a lazy custom-house, and though I went again and again, and said pretty things to the gendarmes, it was of no use. They said pretty things in return, but kept our luggage. At last we got our portmanteaus, and were able to get at dressing-cases and clean gowns, and to sit down to breakfast clothed and in our right minds.

Then we obtained the services of an old soldier as guide, and went out to see something of the place. The weather was perfect, and our cicerone just the person to make you feel in a new world. He had something unexpected to tell us about everything; the people of Nemours, the past of Nemours, and the existing aspect of French-African colonization collectively.

A bright blue sea, glistening white sands, and

bold dark rocks will make any place beautiful; but, otherwise, Nemours is uninteresting enough. It is only when you are outside the town, and breathing the air of the wild desolated hills, that you understand the romance of the place. For its history, if written with a vigorous pen, would abound in incidents thrilling as any experienced—or imagined—by George Borrow.

We passed through the town, and were just entering upon a picturesque gorge, when our guide pointed to a little farm-house that peeped sunnily from its orchards and gardens, and said—

“Do you see a great patch of new whitewash, just above the door yonder?”

“Yes, we see it.”

“*Eh bien!* I will tell you the history of that new whitewash. A good colonist lived in the house, and was murdered a few weeks back by the Arabs. He had gone to bed as usual, first having seen that every lock was secure, and that his pistol was loaded—for only fools go unarmed here by night or day—and at midnight awoke suddenly, hearing the dogs bark and the cocks crowing. ‘The Arabs!’ he says to his wife, who wakes up too, and then he takes his pistol and throws open the window, ready to scare the scoundrels away. But before he can do it he is shot through the head, and his blood and brains were all over the wall, so it had to be whitewashed as you see.”

“And the poor widow, and the guilty Arabs?” we asked.

“The widow lives there still. The poor can’t indulge in tremors and sentiment, you see, Madame, and must stay where their bread is to be earned. The Arabs got away to Morocco—they can do it in a few hours from here—and *voilà l’histoire!*”

“A sad history indeed!”

“And not the saddest I could tell you. Ah! Madame, the life of us poor colonists here on the borders of Morocco is hard enough. Only the good God knows how hard it is.”

“On account of the great insecurity, you mean?”

“Yes, Madame. We have to keep watch-dogs fierce as tigers, to look well to our bolts and pistols before going to bed, to distrust an Arab as *le diable*, and, withal, we are always being burned out, robbed, assassinated; and those who burn us out, rob us, and assassinate us, as often as not get across to Morocco safe and sound.”

“But the soldiers protect you?”

“*Mon Dieu*, Madame! the soldiers have hard work to protect themselves! and the soldiers, you see, are not always hand and glove with the colonists. I often think we should do better in Algeria without soldiers at all. Being a *colon* myself, I speak for the *colons*, of course.”

We were now in a wild and beautiful spot at

some distance from the town. On either side rose green hills, sharply shutting in a little river that flowed amid tamarisk and oleander, and, here and there, shone the round white dome of some small Moorish sanctuary.

We sat down to rest a little while and enjoy the perfect solitude of the place, whilst my companion sketched the nearest of the mosques or marabouts.

“Ah! that marabout yonder will never be forgotten as long as the French hold Oran. A few years ago there was sharp fighting in these parts, and the Arabs, who were very strong, contrived to get a few hundred of our brave fellows here by some diabolical cunning or other, and, being thousands themselves, mowed them down like so much standing corn. But this is only one story of hundreds. If blood of the bravest would make lands rich, we ought to have fine crops here indeed, Madame.”

“The Arabs seem a very savage set,” one of us said. “Around Algiers they are, for the most part, harmless.”

“Il y a des Arabes et des Arabes. Voilà, Madame. We are close on Morocco. The Arabs who have burned, murdered and stolen in other places flee hither, and so we are in a sort of Devil's Island of 'em.”

Just as he spoke a wild figure came running down the mountain side, and made towards us,

gesticulating, crying aloud, shaking his shaggy hair, laughing a horrible laugh. So brown he was, and so uncouth an object, that it seemed belying alike Frenchman and Arab to class him as either. Instinctively we started and drew back.

“Don’t be alarmed, ladies,” said our old soldier, with a smile; “it’s only a poor madman—he is harmless enough if not teased. *Bon soir, bon soir, Père Michon, ça va bien; tu vas te promener? C’est ça. Allons!*” And the poor creature mouthed and laughed and went his way. This was the only person we met in that solitary walk. When we returned, the short, bright day was drawing to a close, and we were so tired that we were even glad to lie down and shut out the glorious colours spreading in fiery flakes across the sky, and the purple sea, that seemed another firmament in its immovableness and depth, and the large pale stars that belonged to both.

The stars were not pale when we arose next morning at three o’clock to start for Tlemcen; it was worth one’s while to rise so early, if only to see them, so large and brilliant, shining out of heavens neither blue, nor purple, nor black, but indescribably beautiful. Never shall I forget that journey. It seemed interminable. First of all, we had the long, long reign of stars—stars now mildly luminous, moonlike and primrose-coloured, heralding the dawn. Then we had the dawn—a long, grey, cold dawn—a day in itself—

and then the blessed sun, warming the world into perfect ripeness, as if it were a flower, and then twilight again, with new stars.

But if the longest day of our lives, it was by no means the least pleasant. The weather, as usual (for, I think, in point of weather, travellers were never so fortunate as ourselves!) was all that could be desired, warm, breezy and bracing, and there was recreation enough in the region through which we passed. Every feature and aspect of the country was new to us. We had never before seen anything like these undulating wastes of sand, and interminable plateaux of stone and grass, all bathed in the mellowest, warmest, goldenest light. The light was one long surprise to us. We looked up at some sheep browsing on a rocky ledge, and they seemed turned into copperish gold images—not the mere white woolly things we know. We looked from a bit of rising ground across a broad steppe of sand and stone, and we could hardly believe that the sun was not setting, so yellow it was, and so full of misty, delicious warmth. Everything seemed transfigured, and the transfiguration was almost blinding. We were alone in the *coupé* of the diligence, and the only passenger in the rotunda was a stately Kaid, magnificently dressed in purple gaudoura and white burnouse of softest, silkiest Algerian manufacture. But what was the magnificence of his dress to the magnificence of his

complexion? To understand what an Arab complexion is, one must have seen it, as we saw it that day, bronzing and glowing under a southern sky. Transported to canvas or cold climates, the rich tint loses half its life, warmth and beauty.

When we alighted, the Kaid invariably alighted too, and would smile down grandly upon us as if we were children, and say a complacent word or two in broken French, as if he thought we might be afraid of him. We were sorry enough that we could not chat and tell him how far we had come to see the great works of the Moors in Spain and Tlemcen. Our well-armed driver was as picturesque as the Kaïd, and almost as silent. I think he was a Breton by his style of face, which was full of character and nobility, and such as Rembrandt would have painted. He wore a fur cap, very rich in colour, and a light-blue coat of quaint shape, bordered with the same sort of fur, and was fully armed. Anything finer or more poetic than this man's appearance I had never seen. But beyond the courtesy of offering us some of his wine, when we asked for water, he hardly opened his lips.

For the most part, the country was uncultivated and uninhabited. There was no foliage excepting that of stunted olive, tamarisk and palmetto, and nothing to break the universal monotony, but here and there a *douar*, or Arab village, consisting of a cluster of tents hedged in by walls of wild

cactus, or haulm. Whenever we passed close to such a *douar*, the dogs would rush out yelling and barking, and the whole little brown-skinned community would come forward and stare us out of sight. The younger children were generally stark naked, though such a brown skin seemed a sort of clothing in itself, and the elder ones had nothing on but one *cutty sark* of coarse sacking or woollen stuff. The men and women were decently clothed, and would greet us with a grave "Salamalek!" or "Bon jour!" whilst the youngsters, veriest imps of fun and impudence, ran after the diligence, begging for a sou as long as their breath would carry them.

We reached Tlemcen about six o'clock in the evening, and established ourselves at the Hôtel de France, a cool, pleasant, roomy house, where they gave us large rooms, native fare and gracious Algerian courtesy.



CHAPTER XVIII

TLEMCEN, THE GRANADA OF THE
EAST



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TLEMEN

N. D.

CHAPTER XVIII

TLEMCEN, THE GRANADA OF THE EAST

AT Tlemcen, we found ourselves in a second and hardly less beautiful Granada—a Granada, moreover, peopled with those who had made it what it was, a Granada not wholly dead, but teeming with happy, picturesque Eastern life. The climate is delicious, and the atmosphere of the place so sweet and gracious, that one is never ready to go away. We made up our minds to stay a week or ten days in this Capua of Capuas, where climate, scenery, and surroundings gave wings to the hours. We never knew how the time went; we only know that, like Faust, we said to the hour, "Stay, for thou art fair," and that it escaped us like a vision.

The Arabs, who are enthusiastic about things small and great, have described Tlemcen in poetic and figurative language recalling the Song of Songs. Listen, for instance, to Abd-el-Kader, who made Tlemcen his capital after the treaty of 1837: "At sight of me," said the great chief, "Tlemcen gave me her hand to kiss; I love her as the child loves the bosom of his mother. I

raised the veil which covered her face, and my heart palpitated with joy; her cheeks glowed like flames. Tlemcen has had many masters, but she has showed indifference to all, turning from them with drooping eyelids; only upon me has she smiled, rendering me the happiest sultan in the world; she said to me, 'Give me a kiss, my beloved; shut my lips with thy lips for I am thine.'"

Another Arab writer thus writes: "Tlemcen is a city enjoying a pleasant climate, running waters, and a fertile soil. Built on the side of a mountain, it reminds one of a fair young bride reposing in beauty on her couch. The bright foliage which overshadows the white roofs is like a green coronal circling her majestic brow. The surrounding heights and the plain stretching below the town are made verdant by running streams. Tlemcen is a city that fascinates the mind and seduces the heart." Thus wrote in the fifteenth century Ibn Khaldoun, the Arab Prescott, whose work no one has completed; and though the sun of Tlemcen has set, the place retains its magnetic charm.

It was under a bright, brief dynasty that Tlemcen virtually became the Queen of Morocco. Possessed of a large, enlightened and wealthy population, of commercial enterprise, of a well-disciplined army, a brilliant court, munificent and cultivated rulers, Tlemcen was one of the best

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TLEMCEM—A STREET SCENE

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governed and most polished capitals in the world, as her monuments bear witness.

If you go farther back into history, you find Tlemcen was christened "Pomaria" by the Romans, on account of its orchards and fruit-gardens, but the Tlemcen of to-day is far more interesting. It was indeed the Moorish Athens. The modern city lies at the foot of green hills, its minarets standing out against the sky, its terraced houses surrounded by belts of lustrous foliage, whilst beyond stretches a plain as grandly covered with ruins as the seven hills of Toledo; only unlike the hills of Toledo, here all is green, gay and sunny.

The life of the streets is intoxicating to an artist. At every corner you see children playing, brightly dressed as little Prince Bedreddin when he went with his slave to buy tarts; the boys wearing blue and crimson vests embroidered with yellow braid, scarlet Fez caps, and spotlessly white trousers; the girls, dainty, dark-eyed darlings in soft white dresses and *haiks*, their waists bound with broad silk scarfs of many colours, and flowers stuck coquettishly behind their little ears. Never were such children as those of Tlemcen, so pretty, so frolicsome, so utterly kittenish and captivating. You cannot help stopping to play with them; one would like to adopt half-a-dozen as nephews and nieces. The Negro and Jewish children are also very pretty here. The Jewesses

brighten the streets as much as the Mauresques. They are handsomer here than in Algiers, and wear outside their brocades and silks, *haïks* of soft, bright crimson cloth, which envelop them from head to foot. The Arab type is handsomer too, I should say much purer than of the capital. There was a boy of fifteen, at the hotel, whose face I shall never forget. It was the face one should copy for a Christ in the Temple; perfectly oval, the features refined and pensive; the eyes soft, dark, and full of expression; the mouth sweet and serious. This lad acted as our guide, and as soon as we had arranged our sketch-books and shawls, would lose himself in a reverie. His face then was perfect.

We used to divide our days between the Arab village of Sidi Bou Medin and the mins of Mansourah.

The way to Sidi Bou Medin lies amid one vast cemetery called the *Mokbara*, where the Tlemcenians have been buried for hundreds of years. Our French guide-book had this remark upon the horrible condition of this cemetery, "Ici s'amoncellent depuis des siècles les tombs des Tlemceniens; le temps les a peu respectés"; but is it time alone that has so mishandled the dead?

There was hardly a spot at the time of our visit where time, or the road-maker, had not laid bare a skeleton, and in some places the bones lay

in heaps. Some pretty little marabouts lie scattered about these acres of graveyard, and near one we saw a ragged Bedouin at afternoon prayer. The kneeling man, the white temple peeping amid olive trees, the long lines of the cemetery, the yellow evening light bathing all, made a touching picture. The dry bones preached to us. We thought of the Moors driven thither from Inquisitorial Spain, and of the sad hearts they brought into exile.

The village of Sidi Bou Medin covers a hill terrace-wise, and is overtopped by a graceful minaret. It has a gracious and sunny aspect, with its hanging gardens of myrtle, and orange, and pomegranate, its running streams, vineyards, olive-groves, shining white domes and minarets. Not a French element seemed to have penetrated the place; and when we had climbed the precipitous shady path and entered the court of the great mosque, we felt as far from France as if Abdel-Kader's dream of a new Mohammedan dynasty at Tlemcen were realized, and the Muezzin was summoning, not Bedouins and beggars only, but turbaned princes and rulers to prayer.

Sidi Bou Medin, after whom the village is called, was a great saint, and his tomb (*koubba*) is considered the sight to see, it being very richly decorated with draperies of cloth and gold, ostriches' eggs set in silver, chains and amulets of gold and beads, arabesques, mirrors in mother-of-

pearl frames, lustres and lamps. To enter this *koubba*, you first descend into a little court, around which runs a graceful arcade supported on pillars of onyx; the panels are decorated with inscriptions, and hung with cages of singing birds, and the whole place is wonderfully rich and fantastic.

The Arabs heap up wealth on the shrines of their saints with a zeal unequalled by Romanists, however fervent, and Bou Medin is the favourite here. There are many strange, touching, and also—for even saints have humour—quaint stories about him. He was born in Spain, and was brought up, first to arms, then to the profession of science; but, after many wanderings to Cordova, Bagdad, Mecca and Constantine, came to Tlemcen—finding it, as he said, “a place in which the eternal sleep must be sweet”—where he died with these sublime words on his lips: “God alone is the Eternal Truth.”

His life, as are all the lives of deified Mohammedans, was both meditative and active, miraculous and ordinary, and abounds in legends. He could read the most secret thoughts of men, in testimony of which the Arabs tell this story: “A certain sheikh was angry with his wife, and wishing to be separated from her, without feeling quite sure that he had reasonable grounds for doing so, went one day without saying a word to anybody to consult Sidi Bou Medin. Hardly, however, had he

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MOSQUE OF SIDI BON MEDINE

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entered the room when the marabout, looking at him, called out sharply—

“‘ Fear God, and don’t put away your wife !’

“Of course the sheikh was at a loss to understand how the saint came to quote the Koran so à propos, to which Sidi Bou Medin replied—

“‘ When you came in, I saw, as it were, the words of the Koran written on your person, and I guessed at once what was in your mind.’”

From the court you enter the *koubba* itself. The cenotaph, which is of richly sculptured wood, lies under a dusky dome only lighted by small panes of coloured glass. A devoted disciple and friend of the saint lies by his side.

But it is the beauty of the mosque that those who are not devotees care for most. Here you see *azulejos* and *artesonados* (tiles and vaulting) as original in design and as perfect in finish as any at Granada, and probably of the same period. The tiles of the three primary colours, red, yellow and blue within, the red tiles without, the sculptured porticoes and walls, are quite of the same style, and in no degree unequal to the finest Moorish work we had seen in Spain. Some of those gorgeous inscriptions, historical and religious, such as cover the seat of the Caliph in the mosque of Cordova, remain intact, and I do not remember to have seen any defacement or

delapidation anywhere. The building is a perfect specimen of Moorish art, which is always simple where simplicity has its use, and always profuse of ornament, where ornament is in place. Take, for instance, the outer court wherein the Arabs perform their ablutions before prayer; there you have a marble basin, a floor of *faïence* in bright colours all shut in by an airy arcade and open to the bright blue sky. What could you add that would not spoil the purpose of a purifying place that ought to be unadorned? But within, where the devotee has the right to worship, having purified himself, flesh and spirit by the outward and visible sign as well as the inward and spiritual grace, the Mohammedan makes his temple magnificent for the one God and His Prophet. Neither wealth nor workmanship are spared, and the result is what we see, walls covered with ornamentation, most delicate both as to colour and design, pillars of jasper and onyx, arcades of lovely fretwork, the priestly seat or pulpit of cedar-wood richly sculptured—lavishness of labour and materials, perfection of form and colour everywhere.

The ruins of Mansourah, once the rival of Tlemcen, lie about two miles from the town. It is now six centuries and a half since this city was one vast congeries of palaces, public buildings, gardens, baths, hospitals and mosques. Nothing remains now but ruined walls and the minaret,



THE MINARET

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though these alone are quite sufficient to show what once was Mansourah and what was once Spain.

Photographs may help you a little to imagine the place, but, having looked at them, you must shut your eyes and colour the minaret and the walls with richest, reddest ochre; you must clothe the hills in living green, fill the space between hill and sky with soft warm skies of southern blue, and then set the whole picture floating and palpitating in golden mist.

This minaret is unlike anything else in the whole world. It is like a gigantic monolith of solid Indian gold, and is quite as wonderful as the Pyramids. When you come closer you see what a ruin it is now, and what a splendour it once was; it has been cleft in two like a pomegranate. The construction is of a rich reddish-coloured tile, and these tiles are arranged in panels sculptured and coloured. Some of the colour remains wonderfully bright still, but the whole building one would think could hardly stand the shock of an earthquake.

Looking inside, you see the traces of gradually inclined stairs by which mounted horsemen could ride to the top, and by dint of a little patience, you are able to master the original ground plan of the place. The exquisite columns of jasper and marble have been removed to the museums of Tlemcen, Algiers and Paris, where are also to

be seen many beautiful mosaics, enamelled tiles, shafts and pedestals here found.

Whilst sitting at the foot of this minaret and looking from one scene of ruin to another, we picked up some fragments of coloured glass, blue, green, amber and red, which alone sufficed to show how splendid the mosque must have been. We looked at these bits brilliant as jewels, from them to the half-buried portico and the shattered minaret; and gradually the past became vivid as a dream, the dry bones were covered with flesh, the flesh palpitated with happy life, and the city of Mansourah was young and fair and gay again!

We did not live wholly in the Granada of the East. Warmly welcomed by the little French colony, here at that time mostly Protestant, we found ourselves discussing various questions just then agitating writers on Algeria. One resident, a Philo-Arabe, as advocates of assimilation were then styled, castigated the French system and was all for the civic equality of the natives. "The Arab," he said, "would assimilate with us if we would only let him. To-day, for instance, I met a friend of mine, an Arab who lives in Tlemcen, and I told him that I would bring some English travellers to see his pretty Moorish house. He was as delighted as if he had been a countryman of yours. 'I will prepare a *diffa* (feast),' he said; 'there shall be a good *cous-cous-sou* with which

to regale your friends,' and if you go, you will find him, in every sense, a gentleman—polished, kindly, and intelligent. Our boys play together. Do you suppose those young Bedouins will not be influenced by the companionship? If I were to leave Tlemcen to-morrow, there are some Arabs I should part from as from my brothers."

"And then," said his young wife, treating the subject from a romantic point of view, "there is something so poetic about everything they do! If you ask a simple question, they answer you with parables and figures of speech. It is like reading the Scriptures. Oh, ladies! my husband is right in advocating the cause of the Arabs! I think they could teach us Christians many a lesson of piety and resignation. If a parent loses his child he says, 'It is the will of Allah. Allah's will be done!' The name of God is ever in their mouths, and, I do believe, in their hearts."

There are a good many Jews at Tlemcen, and it was pleasant to find them—as indeed we found them all over Algeria—living happily among their former enemies. The French conquest has certainly done a great deal for the Jews, who, under the Turkish rule, suffered inexpressible persecutions and hardships. They throve, and throve deservedly, and at the time of our visit the horrible Juden-Hetze had not disgraced Republican France. At Tlemcen we found a little Protestant temple or church, and in a recent number of

La Revue M. Onésime Reclus tells us that no less than twenty-one Protestant churches with pastors attached now exist throughout Algeria, among these little centres being Blidah, Cherchell, Tizi-ouzou and other places mentioned in this itinerary.

CHAPTER XIX

ORAN—AND “THE BLITHEDALE
ROMANCE”



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ORAN—AND “THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE”

SORRY enough were we to leave beautiful Tlemcen, and the friendly folks who had made the place so homelike to us; but at the end of a week we were obliged to turn our faces towards Oran.

The diligence travelled, of course, at night, both driver and conductor being well armed, and we set off for Oran in the evening, reaching our destination early next day; not our destination only, but welcome letters, newspapers and books, luxuries of which we had been long deprived. Oran is a second and more bustling Algiers, only that Algiers is far more picturesque and Eastern. In Oran you are wholly in France—African France, that is—with a burning blue sky in December, and a burning blue sea reaching to the foot of the town—if it were only cool enough to walk so far!

We kept indoors almost all day during our sojourn, resting after the hard travel gone before, and in anticipation of hard travel to come. But we were as gay as possible; for what with official

letters of introduction and letters from friends' friends, we had visitors all day long, and invitations for every evening. Certainly hospitality flourishes on Algerian soil. It was quite delightful to be so welcomed and so regretted, and for years after I could not think of Oran without wishing to go thither again—if life were long enough—just to shake hands and exchange an hour's talk with the kind and pleasant people whose acquaintance I made there.

Amongst these was that of an Algerian author and charming personality, M. Léon Beynet, whose *Drames du Désert* and other stories of French-African life give an admirable idea of the relative positions of native and colonist, Arab and Frank at that time. M. Beynet makes the heroine of one of his stories a beautiful young Kabyle girl, who is certainly the most charming little savage that ever got into print. These novels are quite a feature in Algerian literature, and make you live in the wild scenes and society they portray.

Oran is a handsome city. The houses are of enormous height, and are built in blocks, so that the town is divided into many sections. From each side of the city rise green hills and rocky heights, crowned by round white towers built by the Spaniards; and below lies the sea, so calm and blue during those December days, that we could hardly credit the reports of the bad weather received from home. We had some pleasant walks on the hills, which abound in wild flowers,

and everything else dear to the naturalist; but we were impatient to be making the best of our way to Algiers, and did not stay at Oran more than a few days.

Our next halting-place was Le Sig, where we spent Christmas Day. I doubt whether Le Sig would be found on any map, and I should not mention it except for an amusing error into which we had been led respecting its claims upon our attention. “Not go to Le Sig?” certain enthusiasts had said to us. “Not go to Le Sig?—the Phalansterian colony, the little settlement of Saint Simonians and Fouriérist? You *must* visit Le Sig.”

Now it happened that for us both the very word Phalanstery was a spell. We had been indoctrinated in the theories of those glorious optimists by Dr. Bodichon, himself a warm sympathiser with many of their views; we had studied Saint Simonian literature, of which the *Paroles de Providence* of Clarisse Vigoureux (Librarie Phalanstérienne), Paris, 1847, is one of the gems, the works of Pierre Leroux and others, and a novel of our adoration was Hawthorne’s little masterpiece, *The Blithedale Romance*. Much and often we had discussed the Saint Simonian system based on that new and inspiring message to the world—“The Golden Age is before us and not behind,” and now we revelled in the notion of seeing such theories at work, a little centre of men and women in which the words labour and toil had a quite

fresh and better meaning, in which intellectual and æsthetic enjoyments were the portion of all, every member in his own person sharing alike the good things and the labours of the day, individually elevating the commonest tasks.

“Had the doctor and myself joined a Phalansterian colony, a kind of Brook Farm,” my companion said to me on the way. “I made up my mind not to bake, brew, sew or scour, but to act as errand woman and messenger. I should ride to market or to the town to do commissions and bring home commodities.”

The thought of my friend galloping across country like John Gilpin of immortal memory, one saddle-bag holding a quarter of mutton, another a flagon of wine, was diverting enough.

Then we talked of Brook Farm and its occupants, and wondered if we should find as entertaining a company at Le Sig.

Injustice shown in the least particular Barbara Bodichon could never forgive. Of Hawthorne’s superb heroine she had before said—

“No, I do not like Zenobia at all. She was so unkind to poor little Priscilla.”

Full of Hawthorne’s romance and revelling in romantic expectation we set out. Le Sig lay on our way; we made a halt there, and saw what was to be seen.

Sig Proper is a prosperous little half-French, half-Spanish town, but Le Sig of the Phalansterians was about a mile off; so as we reached the

former at night we put up at the first, and found ourselves tolerably well off. The people were Spanish, and the cooking Spanish; just as in Oran we were constantly coming upon little clusters of Spanish families, who seemed thriving and happy.

Early next morning we got a youthful Arab to show us the way to *La Colonie*, as the Phalanstery was called, and after a hot and dusty walk reached a rather deserted looking homestead, consisting of farm-houses and buildings surrounded by orchards and vegetable gardens. This was the Phalanstery. But, alas! Where was the spirit that should have animated the place? Where were the philosophical grinders of corn, and assiduous cultivators of the beautiful? Where were the tribes of children happier at their work than our own at their play? Nothing remained of all this. Instead of devout followers of Saint Simon, Fourier and Enfantin in broad-brimmed white hats, we only found ordinary French labourers working after the ordinary way. The Phalanstery had, in fact, dwindled down till only two of the original occupants were left, and these, Monsieur and Mme. B——, were a simple, old-fashioned couple, who seemed to concern themselves mighty little with Fourierism; they let out such of the land as they did not care to farm themselves, and sent their only child, a girl of twelve, to a convent school. It seemed impossible to believe that only a few years before this almost deserted spot had been the centre of a fervid,

determinate little community, who had fled thither from the storms and passions of the world, intending to lead an ideal life.

Monsieur and Mme. B—— received us kindly, and took us round the premises, showing us the former dwellings of the Phalansterians, neat little wooden houses in rows, now turned into stables and granaries. The vegetable garden seemed very flourishing, and, indeed, so did the crops of every kind. We tasted the home-grown and home-made wine—it was sour enough to have driven away the most ardent Fourierist going.

To my companion and myself this experience brought equal measure of alternating melancholy and exaltation. Saint Simon's later days were a protracted tragedy; Fourier's experiment proved disastrous, and he died poor and neglected; Enfantin paid for his propagandism by imprisonment. The theories of all three, put into practice, came to an untimely end.

But never was the Parable of the Sower more vindicated on the human stage. To these disinterested and lofty-minded dreamers, the modern world owes the conception of Christian Socialism in its purest form—noble ideals of social duty realizable as far as actual conditions permit. Co-operation alike for spiritual, intellectual and material ends, free libraries, people's stores, garden suburbs, Browning Settlements, University extension lectures, Brotherhoods, institutional churches and chapels, *crèches*, children's happy

evenings—these are a few instances of Saint Simonism and Fouriérism carried out so successfully among ourselves, and the number of them is ever increasing. It is indeed to their founders that we owe the use of that grand social watch-word—solidarity—a word in itself summing up the Alpha and Omega of moral and social duty.

I am here minded to cite one or two passages from a recent work, the perusal of which is in itself an education. In the *Correspondence of John Stuart Mill* (1910) we find him writing thus to his Saint Simonian friend D'Eichthal, in November 1831: “Your system, even supposing it to be impracticable, differs from every other system which has ever proposed to itself an unattainable end in this, that many, indeed almost all attainable good lie on the road to it.” Further on he adds: “If the Saint Simonian system holds together without schism and heresy and continues to propagate its faith and to extend its numbers at the rate it has done for the last two years—if this shall continue for a few years more—then I shall see something like a gleam of light through the darkness.”

Sad, yet not without consolation, indeed would have been the great thinker's reflections at Le Sig!

We had brought other letters of introduction, and by one were introduced to a charming young English lady who had spent her life in Africa, and was now settled down in this spot. Her husband was a Frenchman, and held an official post of some

authority, being entrusted with the supervision of the gigantic *barrages*, or waterworks, which were turning the barren plain of Le Sig into gardens of beauty and fruitfulness.

When Napoleon III. visited Algiers in 1865, he asked an authority on Algerian affairs what was most needed in the colony.

“Barrages, sire,” was the answer.

“Et après cela?”

“Encore barrages,” repeated the political economist; and the Emperor gave heed to the words, as all who follow in our track from Oran to Algiers will see. These gigantic and noble works are well worth inspection, especially at Le Sig; and if future travellers have the good fortune that fell to our share, they will come away with a very clear idea of the importance and working of these monster systems of irrigation. Monsieur O—— most kindly drove us to the *barrages* himself, and told us, in round numbers, the annual cost of the works and the quantity of water dispersed; but I am afraid of quoting figures from memory, especially when they come to millions, and refer the curious reader to statistical reports.

The reservoirs are colossal. You drive through a pleasant and verdant country, part cultivated, part pasture, and then come to the entrance of a wild gorge, above which rises the colossal mass of masonry, like a sentinel guarding the vast tracts beyond. The burning African sun shone straight down upon the broad surface of the build-

ing, turning the hard grey of the granite to a soft and beautiful orange colour. One might have thought the structure a thousand years old. Whilst we rested here a grave Arab, with three little girls, came to look at us. The children had complexions the colour of ripe chestnuts, and were wild and fearless as monkeys, dancing to the very edge of the lofty stone platform in a way that made us giddy. There was no sort of coping, and we were some hundred feet above the river bed.

Next to the extraordinary and freakish agility of these children, I was struck by their obedience. The father had but to knit his brow, lift his finger, or cry Ayesha, Zorah, or Zaïda, and these wild creatures obeyed like soldiers. Yet they did not seem one whit afraid of him, playing hide-and-seek behind the folds of his burnouse, caressing his hands, smiling into his face.

When we had seen enough of the *barrages*, and Mme. Bodichon had made her sketch, we went back to the town and spent a little time with Mme. O—— and her half-French, half-English children, having Anglo-Saxon skins and hair, dark brown eyes, and speaking a pretty language of their own, mixed English, French and Arabic. The house was very large, and stood amid orange, oleander, magnolia, palm, and almond trees: Arab servants in handsome dresses were lounging about the corridors, and the whole made a pretty picture to bring away from so remote a region.

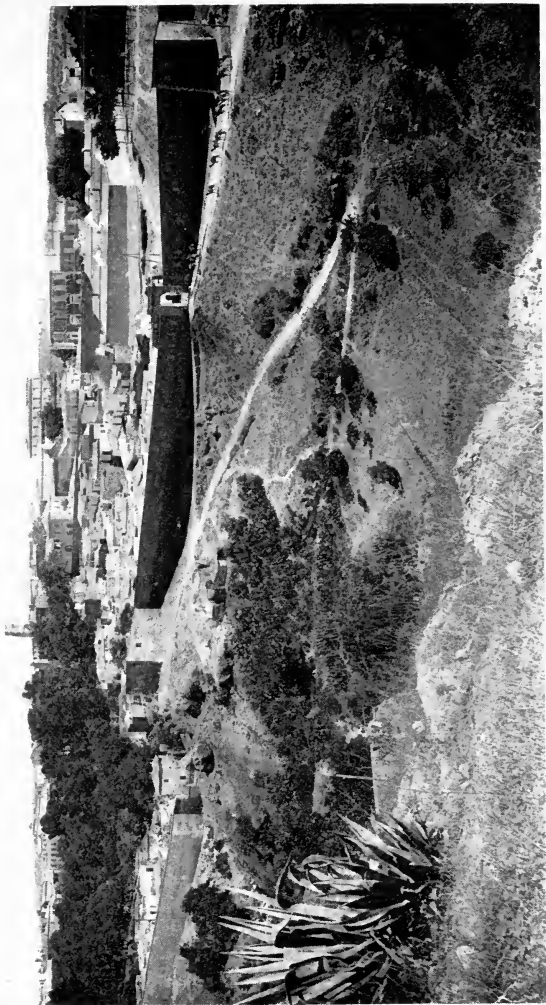
The lady looked as fresh as a rose, but the children were a little fragile, and she told us how much they had suffered from malaria.

“The fever is the curse of the place,” she said, “and every one falls a victim to it in turn. A few months back my husband was brought to death’s door by it, and the poor children suffered frightfully. Ah! what should we do but for that blessed, blessed quinine?”

Wherever we went we heard the same complaints. The fever—the fever—every one was ill, or had been ill, or was falling ill of the fever. We were particularly warned from exposing ourselves to the smell of freshly ploughed soil. The earth seems to emit a sort of poison, and there is no remedy for the evil—which is felt by thousands—save quinine, planting and drainage. The only wonder is that before the introduction of the eucalyptus colonization had prospered in these districts at all.

From Le Sig we journeyed—always by diligence—to Mascara, a town possessing romantic interest as the birthplace of Abd-el-Kader.

Mascara is charming. Great chalk hills, each crowned with its little mosque or marabout, rise round the town, and, when you have climbed these hills, you come upon broad belts of half-wild, half-cultivated country flanked with settlers’ huts or Arab tents. The colouring of the place is thoroughly Eastern; you get here, as in Andalusia, long lines of wild cactus and aloe standing out



MASCARA

N. D.

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against a burning blue sky, and those indescribable effects of yellow and white that are only seen where every building is whitewashed and every bit of ground is bronzed and baked by a blazing sun.

The place itself is quite French, and herein we were a little disappointed, as we had been led to expect a second Tlemcen, bright as Joseph's many-coloured coat with Moorish costume. The Arab population is a poor one, and for the most part is settled in wretched huts built of cob and rubble outside the town. We went inside the mosque, now used as a granary, where Abd-el-Kader preached war against the Christians, and found it very beautiful, but in sad ruin. There were formerly tiles and arabesques on the walls, not a trace of which remains. Nothing, indeed, is left but the finely proportioned domes and aisles and the ceiling of inlaid cedar-wood.

From Mascara we made an excursion to Saïda, where we smelt the real air of the Desert, and saw many wonderful things that must be described without hurry. Finding that the diligence to Saïda possessed no *coupé*, we engaged the whole vehicle to ourselves, and what a vehicle it was! The glass was out of the windows, the seats were rickety, the floor screeched ominously whenever we got in or out. Never was such a crazy old diligence in the world, and, as we went along, it had spasmodic attacks of creaking and cracking without rhyme or reason, and we expected nothing more nor less than a total collapse in some

wild spot or other—which, however, did not happen.

It took us a day to get from Mascara to Saïda, but not a long day. With tolerable roads and horses, the journey would be trifling. As it was, we were shaken up and down in a way that blackened and bruised us, and, though a halt of five minutes and a breath of the sweet air of the desert revives and heals, we got to Saïda tired enough. What added to our discomfort was a high wind that accompanied us all the way, first making us shiver with cold, and afterwards burning us with a sirocco-like heat. We did our best to keep out the alternate cold and heat, but it was difficult work, as all the windows were broken. As soon as one improvised curtain was up, another was sure to be down; and at last we solved the difficulty by covering our faces instead. I think the journey to Timbuctoo before mentioned could hardly have been wilder or more solitary than this. For the most part we passed through a totally uninhabited country—some parts all stone and sand; others overgrown with rosemary, wild asparagus, fennel, candied tuft, thyme, and stunted tuya and tamarisk trees. When the dust did not blow, the air was very sweet and invigorating, and sometimes the sky looked grey and blowy, and we could get out and walk a little in comfort. After passing a vast and beautiful plain we halted at a little village or post to breakfast and change horses. It was a curious half-French, half-Arab settle-

ment; and from the Arab *douar* close by came lots of little half-naked children to look at us. When we had breakfasted we went towards the tents, and my friend, as she sketched, soon had an eager group round us—a stately Bedouin, his wives, his mother, and their children. Every one wanted to be useful, to hold the umbrella or the palette, or fetch water; and, when nothing remained to do, they watched the artist with smiles of amazement and gratification. The grandmother was a delightful old lady. She was by no means ugly, as most old Arab women are, but had a charming face with bright eyes and intelligent features. She had keen observation, too, as I saw, for, without being in the least degree rude and troublesome, she looked at us so narrowly that she seemed to gather what we said to each other. I should like to have adopted that old lady as my grandmother and brought her to England. Her sympathy with the sketcher was quite beautiful, and, when the children giggled and tittered and came so close to her as to hinder her progress and bring forth some such expression as this: “How are we to send these troublesome little things away?” the old lady understood at once and commanded them to be still, which they were; and as the objects of the landscape were brought out one by one, the dark-brown tents, the bright blue sky, the wavy, yellow plain, the low line of purple hills beyond—the artist cried aloud in ecstasy.

Whilst we were so occupied, a little urchin of five years, utterly naked, ran out of the tent close by and stood still, as much amused with us as we were with him. All laughed aloud but the father, who looked a little ashamed; perhaps because he had been to Mascara or some other town, and knew that nakedness was not quite the thing in the great world. The women were like big children, and if you but held up a finger, giggled, showing their white teeth.

When we had done we shook hands all round, and returned to the *auberge* to see a pitiful sight. It was a little Arab child of fourteen months old sick of the fever; he was riding on the shoulder of his grandfather, a patriarchal-looking old man with silky white hair and beard. I don't think I ever saw anything more touching than his care of the little suffering thing. Its poor face was livid, its eyes leaden, its limbs shrunken. What could we do for it?

The mistress of the *auberge* came out and questioned the old man in Arabic, then turned to us.

"Ah!" she said, "think of it—that poor baby has neither father nor mother, no one to tend it but that old man, and it has been ill of fever for months; but then we all suffer alike! Three of my five children are ill now; that is, ill every other day with shivering fits and sickness, and there is nothing to do but try quinine. But quinine is very dear, and we have to do without it."

"Do the Arabs try it?" I asked.

She shrugged her shoulders expressively.

“*Voyez-vous*, Madame, the Arabs are poorer than we. We must buy bread before quinine.”

We gave the poor old man a little money, and recollecting that I had brought a small bottle of quinine from England, fearing those marsh fevers myself, I got it out of my travelling-bag, and gave it to the woman. She promised to give the poor baby slight doses, but I fear he was past all help, and I looked sadly after the patriarch as he stalked away in his tattered burnouse, bearing his poor little burden on his shoulders.

Since these experiences plantations of the *Eucalyptus globulus* have transformed vast areas throughout Algeria, rendering once miasmatic districts absolutely healthful.

Farther on, we halted to see some hot springs which lie within a few leagues of Saïda. Following a small path that wound through labyrinthine thickets of tuya, palmetto, and lentisk, we came suddenly upon a scene that with very little idealization might make as poetic a picture as one could see.

It was a party of Arab girls bathing in a small round pool. The bathers and the bathing-place were shut in by lustrous green foliage, above which showed the dark lines of the tents, the bright blue hills and brighter sky. A noontide shadow lay on the water, in which, like a flock of young ducks, plashed and played, and dived and ducked, a dozen wild young girls, their dark hair streaming

to the waist, their faces expressive of the utmost enjoyment, their limbs glistening as they rose out of the water.

All at once they caught sight of us. There was a short succession of screams, a unanimous splashing, a glimpse of bare feet, and all was still again. They had fled the spot without even a thought of their clothes; and we unfortunate intruders were only harmless women after all!

After this we passed a tawny, monotonous region, all stone and sand, and only here and there varied by oases of cultivation. These little oases, poor patches of wheat and vegetables growing amid the intractable palmetto, were green and radiant, despite the rudeness of the tillage; but, alas! the locusts had found them out. Both on our journey to Saïda and back we saw swarms of these creatures settling like glittering birds on the corn or filling the air like snowflakes. My heart sank within me as I thought of the poor Arabs and the devastation that threatened their little all.

We reached Saïda in good time that afternoon.

CHAPTER XX

SAÏDA—ON THE THRESHOLD OF
THE SAHARA

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SAÏDA—ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE SAHARA

SOME authorities declare Saïda to be an oasis in the Little Desert, others declare it to be an oasis in the Great Desert, others again declare it to be in no desert at all. For my part, I wholly side with those who are of opinion that Saïda stands on the skirts of the Sahara, the "Dry Country abounding in Dates," as the old maps have it; but I will leave the matter an open question to the curious, merely describing Saïda as I found it.

We had a comfortable room in the house of our driver—for as nobody ever went to Saïda at this time there were no inns—whose wife was Spanish, and as ill-favoured and dull as he was handsome and bright. He seemed devoted to her, so that it didn't much matter. They carried on almost as many trades as there are weeks in the year, and were evidently making money. They catered for the officers, they kept the diligence, they owned land, they had geese and cattle, they managed the post—it would be hard to say what they did not do. And they wore good clothes, lived on really dainty food, and were of importance in the place, which must have been some consolation under such exile.

Our first thought was to inquire for horses and side-saddles, our second to forward our vice-imperial letters to the Commandant. The first request proved fruitless. There being no ladies at Saïda, how should there be ladies' saddles? But M. le Commandant very kindly came to us at once, and told us what to see and how to see it in this oasis, as he delighted to call Saïda. He was a merry, middle-aged bachelor from Normandy, who had seen a good deal of the Desert, and bore the responsibilities of his post—which were heavy—with great complacency.

“The life here seems dull,” he said, “but after long marches in the desert, and hard fighting, I assure you I am very contented to remain. There isn't a lady in the place, *c'est vraiment triste, ça*, but there is an infinity of distractions in the way of work and pleasure. You see I represent both civil and military authority, having 40,000 Arabs under my jurisdiction, and this involves all sorts of intricacies, out of which I make my way as best I can. I have to act as military commander, *préfet* and mayor all in one; and these Arabs are difficult people to manage, I assure you.”

“They are miserably poor, I hear,” I observed.

“*Pauvres diables*. You may well say that, Madame. They are starving; that's just the truth of it; and what with those who steal and murder because they are hungry, and those who steal and murder because they like it, the road from hence

to Fig-gig—our last post in the Desert—is unsafe enough. Without a military escort it is impossible.”

“We were told at Oran,” I said, “that there were some grand waterfalls we could see in the neighbourhood of Saïda. Is the excursion practicable?”

M. le Commandant opened his eyes and shrugged his shoulders expressively.

“Madame, no one knows in Oran what is going on at Saïda. That excursion is impossible, I repeat, quite impracticable. You propose to remain two days? Good. To-morrow I will send a military escort with you as far as the marabout of Sidi-ben-Baila, from whence you can look over the plateaux lying between that point and the Desert; if you went on as far as Géryville, our next post, and Fig-gig, our last,¹ you would see no more. The day after Madame Bodichon would like to sketch probably? *Bien*, I will send my servant and Spahis with you to the ravine near, and the lady will find fine things to draw; and when my work is done, I will ride round and show you what else is to be seen in our little Saïda;” and, after telling us a great deal more that was interesting, the good-natured Commandant left us.

We carried out these plans, and all turned out satisfactorily. There was only one sort of vehicle to be had, a sort of wheelbarrow on four wheels,

¹ Compare this statement with Captain Haywood's book.

belonging to a butcher, which we gladly accepted for the drive to the marabout. Our driver, the owner of the cart, proved a most entertaining person. He was a Parisian by birth, an African by right of long residence, and as rich in mother-wit as a Gascon. The well-mounted Spahis followed.

“You don’t mean to say that you think of leaving Saïda without going to see the waterfalls?” he asked; “why, that is the only thing that is really beautiful in the place.”

We said that we had been dissuaded from the excursion on account of the unsafety of the roads; and thereupon the incredulity of the butcher’s face was a sight to see.

“*Mon Dieu, Mesdames*, you mustn’t listen to what the military authorities say—they always make mountains of molehills. I would undertake to carry you safe to Fig-gig in this trap without as much as a pistol in my belt. *Voilà!*”

“But you don’t attempt to convince us that the roads are safe, do you?”

“*Mesdames*, they are safe for you or for me; but I wouldn’t say as much for myself if I were an officer. This is how it is: the Arabs hate the military, and do them an ill turn when they can; but the Arabs, *ma foi*, are not the bad set of people one would have you believe. Why, I have travelled to Géryville and back, and to Fig-gig



AN ARAB TENT

and back alone before now, with money in my purse too, and the Arabs treated me as if I had been a brother, made me a dish of cous-cous, gave me a bed under their tents, saddled my horse for me at parting, and bade me God-speed. Having been thus treated, how else can I speak of them? Pardie, I don't see a pin to choose between a good Christian and a good Mohammedan, or bad Christian and a bad Mohammedan: *voilà ce que nous pensons.*"

We let our butcher have his way, for his talk was too racy and fresh to be spared in a world where one has to endure so much commonplace. I should fill a chapter if I were to repeat half the stirring stories and original opinions he gave us; but as this book is intended as a stimulant to others longing for the palms and temples of the South, I hope it may lead some to Saida and equally amusing acquaintances.

All this time we were driving through what seemed to be a stony desert, flooded with an indescribably mellow, monotonous light, above all, having a pale-blue sky. By and by, we came to a rocky height where we halted to take in every feature and aspect of a wondrous scene. Below lay a billowy waste of plain upon plain—expanses of silver and gold—tall alpha grass and yellow corn alternating, those nearest to us broken by Arab tents, or the shining dome of a marabout; those farthest off more solitary, vaster, grander

than the surface of an ocean without a sail. Where the plains ended and the sky began was a straight, continuous line; and we looked at this line, so suggestive of distance, mystery and the unknown, till we longed to accept the butcher's offer, and, *coûte que coûte*, set off for Fig-gig and the "Dry Country abounding in Dates!" It was here a case of—

"Yon mountain looks on Marathon,
And Marathon looks on the sea."

But that sea we could not hope to reach.

What fascinated us more than anything was the wonderful briskness, purity and sweetness of the air. It seemed as if we never could have breathed real air before, and the experience was too delicious to describe. Softer and sweeter than the breath blown off Cornish moors when the heather is out, fresher and more invigorating than the sea breezes one gets on Lowestoft pier on a bright September day, a whiff of this air of the desert amply repays any hardships undertaken to obtain. We felt as if we could never come away, as if we could never drink deeply enough of such reviving, rejuvenating ether. The Commandant's high spirits and talk, the butcher's vivacity, the general look of briskness, physical and mental, characterizing the people of Saïda, were accounted for. The sweet air of the Desert did it all.

About half a mile from our point of view stood

the little marabout which was to be to-day's bourne, and around it we could see wreaths of white smoke curling from the dark-brown tents, and horses and cattle feeding. Near to us were one or two wild-looking Bedouins keeping their sheep, marvellously transformed in the yellow light, their fleeces looking like bosses of brightest orange colour. Whilst resting thus, a serried line of wild geese slowly flew towards us, keeping strict order till out of sight.

"Now we shall have rain," said our driver. "We want no weather-glasses at Saïda, I assure you."

What inventions of man does one want indeed at such a place? Place any one gifted with quick mental capacity out of the world, that is to say, out of the conventional, comfortable world of shops, railways and penny newspapers, and how readily does he shift for himself! This butcher of Saïda had as many interests in life as home-folk in these days of social, literary and political excitement; he was always solving some knotty point in Algerian political economy, or speculating how this or that natural feature of the country could be turned to account. He knew the geography, geology and mineralogy of every rood; he could tell us what birds lived in the air, what beasts haunted the wastes, what plants grew in the oases, and how the Arabs lived hereabouts. It was curious to find how much more he respected

the Bedouin than the Spahis, and how lightly he esteemed the influence of the French upon the people they had conquered.

"Where are our Spahis?" I asked, for we had never seen our escort since starting.

He smiled and pointed to a cluster of Arab *douars* at some distance.

"You can't see a little red speck among those tents, I dare say, ladies; but my eyes are used to looking a good way off, and I can. It is one of your precious Spahis, and he's just thinking as much of you as I am of his wives out there whom he has gone to see. I know 'em, those Spahis; they like nothing better than to be sent *as an escort* with travellers, for that means that they can pay a visit to their women, who begin to cook cous-cous as soon as ever they see a red cloak in the distance. When your Spahis have eaten up everything that comes in their way and seen enough of their good ladies, they'll come home."

And true enough, just as we were approaching Saïda, our escort came galloping up, two wild, fine-looking men, their scarlet burnouses flung over their shoulders, their dark, handsome faces wrapped in white linen trimmed with camel's-hair, their brown, muscular arms bare to the elbow, their legs thrust in moccasins of crimson leather richly embroidered. They rode pretty little barbs, and sat upon their high-backed saddles with quite a

royal air. Nothing could be more brilliant or picturesque.

Saïda, that is to say, the Saïda of France—for the present settlement is entirely French—was heroically defended by Abd-el-Kader, and, as we drove home, we saw the ruined walls of the old town and the deserted camp of the French soldiery. Throughout the entire province of Oran, indeed, we were reminded of the great chief whose career has a wild, sad Saracenic romance about it out of harmony with the humdrum of actualities. We saw no more of our driver after that day. The superb air and savage plenty of such places as Saïda seem to make people magnanimous, for he went off to Géryville next morning, never concerning himself about being paid for his services; and we were constantly receiving little presents from some one or other during our stay—ostriches' eggs, beautifully polished stones, wild-bears' horns and so on.

Jackals, hyenas, wild boars abound in these rocky wildernesses; there are also panthers and gazelles, though they are rarer. If it were not for the hunt and the chase, what would become of the officers in exile?

Next day M. le Commandant showed us his pretty garden, planted with apple trees by way of recalling his native Normandy, and promising to be very beautiful by and by, when the rich tropical flowers should be out. Then he went

with us to a very savage and splendid gorge called *La Source*. Here, issuing from a tiny aperture in the rock, a stream of clear, rapid water had cleft its way through the rich red heart of the mountain, and tossed and tumbled amid oleanders and tamarisks as far as the eye could reach. The rocks, piled in lofty masses on either side, made natural ramparts to the little town of Saïda which lay a mile off, and were the lairs of wild beasts and Arab thieves.

“I have placed sentinels here for several nights of late,” said M. le Commandant, “for the Arabs are like the jackals, and steal down to scavenge where they can. My Spahis will come as soon as it is dusk, and this precaution I must take till the thief, or thieves, are caught.”

“And what will be done to them?”

“*C'est très simple*,” replied M. le Commandant coolly. “Whoever comes down that pass at night gets a bullet through his head, that’s all.” As we looked shocked, he added, “*Que voulez-vous? Il faut vous dire les choses comme elles sont.*”

It seemed that the harvests had been very bad of late, and that the Arabs were driven to all sorts of desperation by hunger. Was there work for those who chose to do it, we asked of the Commandant?

“In plenty, I assure you—in great plenty, but the Arabs don’t like work, and will rather starve.

Give a Kabyle a field to plough or a house to build, and he'll do it as well as a Frenchman, whilst an Arab or Bedouin is only good for fighting and plunder."

"That is your opinion?"

"That is my experience, Madame."

Thanks to the kindness of the Commandant, we came away from Saïda with a pretty comprehensive idea of the perplexities and responsibilities of his high post, and of the working of the military system of government in Algeria.

Next day, the last day of the year, we returned to Mascara, and had, if anything, a more trying journey than before; the wind was colder, the sun was hotter, the clouds dustier, and every one prophesied rain.

We spent New Year's day with some kind friends from Algiers, an army surgeon and his wife. What a sumptuous breakfast we had! I do not mean sumptuous in the matter of dishes only, but in the matter of conversation, which was as piquant and full of flavour as the fare. Monsieur and Mme. D—— were of those happy mortals who are gifted with perpetual youth, coupled with a habit of quick and just observation. An hour's talk with them was like reading a witty and wise novel. Throughout the shifting scenes of their African life, they had naturally fallen in with all sorts of characters and conditions, and they gave us a lively picture of French society

in Oran, touching on the follies, errors and good things of it with kindly satire.

“I will take you to see Madame la Générale,” said our hostess, “for I don’t suppose in any of your travels you have been introduced to a Moorish lady married to a French commanding officer. Our General’s wife is one; and though she does not speak French quite easily, you will find her in dress and manner quite a Parisian. They have four children, such little dark, handsome, wild things, and there is not one of them so fond of sweets as mamma! Moorish ladies almost live on sugar.”

Mme. la Générale had a cold, however, and could see no one, so we had to leave Mascara without personally seeing a Moorish lady turned Parisian.

So warmly were we received by Monsieur and Mme. D—— on New Year’s Day that we hardly realized we could be so far from home and in a spot so remote as Mascara! French hospitality is as genuine and gracious as any in the world; and we were quite touched by the way in which people thought of us and for us wherever we went.

To give one instance out of many. On the eve of our departure I was disturbed in my packing by a gentle rap at the door, and on opening it saw Monsieur D——, followed by an Arab servant bearing a small basket heavily laden.

“Ah, Mademoiselle!” he said, “I disturb you—but only for a little moment, and then I will wish you *bon voyage* and go. When you and Madame had left us to-day, we remembered that you praised my wife’s preserved peaches and apricots, and we thought you might like some to eat on the way.”

Then he helped his lad to unload the basket, which contained several tin cases of fruit hermetically sealed. We thanked him, said it was too bad of us to rob Madame when she had been at the trouble of preserving the fruit herself, that we should take the cases to England, and that we should never forget the kind reception we had met at Mascara.

“And we shall not forget,” he said, with a hearty shake of the hand, “what pretty things you, Mademoiselle, have already said in print about French ladies. *Adieu, au revoir, Mesdames*, if not in Africa, in Paris; if not in Paris, in England!” and then he went. Alas! not to meet us again.

We were to rise very early next morning, but though we retired at eight o’clock, sleep was out of the question. New Year’s Day only happens once a year, and the good people of Mascara seemed determined to make the best of it. I never heard anything like the noisiness of that little town keeping holiday. Drums beat, bands played, trumpets sounded, all mixed with the

sounds of singing and laughter that continued till long past midnight; and just as things were growing quiet and we were getting drowsy, came a tremendous rat-tat-tat at the door and the noise of Arab porters—domestics and chambermaids of course there were none—shouting at the top of their voices, “La diligence! La diligence!”

CHAPTER XXI
THE EARTHQUAKE



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Now came the thrice blessed rain. We had heard it pattering and plashing between our dozes, and when we came out into the open air it was moist and sweet and cool. For the first time throughout our entire journey we were unable to procure the *coupé* to ourselves, the assizes commencing at Mostaganem next day, and, what with witnesses, *avocats*, lawyers, plaintiffs and defendants, the diligence was more than crowded. It was no case that day like that of the post chaise conveying four "insides" to *Headlong Hall*, "whose extreme thinness enabled them to travel thus economically without experiencing the slightest inconvenience." Instead of a Mr. Gall, a Mr. Treacle and their equally attenuated companions, we had one whose single rotundity made up for Love Peacock's quartette. We could not see our companion, but, from the large share of the *coupé* that he monopolized, we thought he must be a very stout person indeed. How we had hoped and prayed that he might prove thin! But there was no help for it, and by the time we began to be cramped in every limb came the blessed,

beautifying daylight and the ever-shifting African landscape, making us forget everything else.

We forgave our fellow-traveller's excessive burliness after a while, for he proved very pleasant and full of information. He was a barrister, and told us of the most important cases coming off at Mostaganem, and a long list it was. By far the greater number of prisoners were Arabs, charged with assassinations. We told this gentleman of what we had heard at Tlemcen.

"In one place," we said, "the Arabs are represented as harmless, improvable, mild; in another, as the incarnation of villainy. What *are* we to believe?"

"Well," he said, "the fact is this: many of the Arabs are *pauvres diables*—that is to say, the Bedouin, the shepherd and the cultivator of a little land—and the consequence is in bad times they are led from theft to murder. When we stop to change every one will alight to take coffee, and you will see a couple of priests, one looking as if he had just come out of a hospital. He was attacked near Tlemcen one evening, robbed, and left on the road for dead. That is one of the worst cases we have, though there are others of a piece with it. The priests ride on the box with the armed driver, and in the rotunda are some Arabs who are going to witness on the side of the accused; one of them you must look at—he is

dressed like a prince and has the face of *le diable même*. He is the son of a Bach-Agha."

By and by we came to a little roadside caravan-serai, and every one got out, the handsome, non-chalant Arabs and their "murdered man" among the rest. The poor *curé* looked very ill still, and had a refined but shabby appearance. The Bach-Agha's son was dressed in purple and fine raiment, and looked a king—till you saw his face closely, when he looked a very Mephistopheles. It was an indescribably cruel, clever, sensual face—a face from which one turned with repugnance.

After passing through some very lovely tamarisk groves, amid which wound a broad, bright river—a branch of the Chelif—we entered upon the vast monotonous plain of the Habra. These African plains are only varied here and there by shifting bands of road-makers, military posts, and by little French colonies or Arab *douars*; and when you commence your journey you feel as if it would never end. You cross horizon after horizon. You see a white speck in the distance, and say, "That *must* be our halting-place"; but when you arrive it is a military post and nothing more. The dogs rush out barking and yelling; French Zouaves, who stand basking in the sun, come up to ask for newspapers and letters; and the Spahis look at us whilst they smoke their paper cigarettes, and show their white teeth as they say "*Bon jour*." Then, after

every one getting a glass of wine and a bit of bread, the diligence moves slowly off, and we leave behind the glistening white post, the red-cloaked, brown-skinned Spahis and the pack of dogs.

How hot it is! When we alight and walk a little way, ankle-deep in alpha grass and wild thyme, the leaves seem warm and dry as if the soil below were burning with volcanic fire. We shall be sunburnt to the complexion of Moors before our journey is done, we say, and when inside the diligence, yet we pin up shawls, curtain-wise, to keep out the wind that is as hot now as it was cold when we started. The plains have each a climate of their own, and travellers should always plan their journeys as we did, *i. e.* avoid crossing them at early morning or at night, when a terrible miasma arises from the soil, and is never harmless—often dangerous as poison.

Mostaganem is a lively little place, and on account of the assizes was full of strangers. Greatly to our amusement, we encountered our stout *compagnon du voyage* on the evening of our arrival, as shrunk from his natural size as a rabbit after skinning. What strange metamorphosis had changed him in so short a space from a Falstaff to a Cassius? It was very perplexing, but on a sudden it flashed upon us that as all his luggage had consisted of a hat-box, and that as he had doffed a thick grey travelling dress and now wore

a suit of shining black cloth, he must have carried his wardrobe on his back. It was very simple.

At Mostaganem we made the acquaintance of a countrywoman, the wife of a French gentleman there holding a responsible official post. Every one in Oran is sure to be an official if he is not in the army; and it is curious to see how the difference of calling modifies the political and social opinions. I never at this time talked with a French officer who was not entirely opposed to the assimilation of races and incredulous of Arab civilization, nor with an official who was not equally enthusiastic about both.

My countrywoman spoke of the Arabs with great sympathy.

She said: "Think of what they have suffered during the past year! They had planted their little bits of cornfields, and the corn was shooting up in abundance, when the locusts came in billions and trillions, and corn, potatoes, rye, everything was destroyed. They starve, or else they steal, and fill our prisons and reformatories. People say, let them starve or work; but you cannot change the habits of a people in a day.

"Most of these poor things under trial," this lady continued, "are Bedouins, as ignorant as savages from Timbuctoo. I have lived for years among the Arabs—in Constantine, in Algeria, in Oran—I have studied Arabic on purpose to hold intercourse with them and to be able to sympathize

with and understand my husband's calling, and I have come to this conclusion : it is only by assimilation that the Arab is to be improved. There was a great outcry among the colonists after the Emperor had visited Africa in 1865, because he was said to show partiality to the Arab; but, good heavens! what a different position does the honest *colon* hold to the richest *indigène*! The *colon* is a Frenchman, and therefore a noble being; the *indigène* is an Arab, and what isn't good enough for an Arab? For my part, I think the Emperor was wise in taking that tone. The colonists have much to suffer, but the Arabs incontestably more; and if the Emperor did not take their part just then, who would have done so?"

We rested two nights at Mostaganem, the blessed rain falling all the time, though no sooner were we on our way again than the sun came out and all was bright and warm.

Our next halting-place was Relizane. We reached Relizane in six hours' easy travelling through a monotonous country, part wild, part cultivated, with flocks of cranes feeding on the pastures, vultures and eagles flying overhead, coveys of partridges whirring from the brushwood, and hares scuttling across the road as we passed along. Whenever we passed an Arab village a crowd of half or wholly naked children ran down and followed us, calling out for coppers. They would run incredible distances thus, and when a

coin was thrown out there would be a diving of little black polls in the grass, a momentary scramble, then all were ready to start afresh. Those who were fortunate enough to get the money put it in their mouths—having no clothes, they could clearly have no pockets—and if not a comfortable, it was certainly a safe and convenient mode of carrying their spoils.

It was here that we learned of the earthquake, hitherto having only got news of “smart rumbles” here and there. We now learned that the Metidja had just been rendered desolate, church spires in many villages alone remaining aloft.

Never shall I forget our journey from Relizane to Algiers. We were, happily, under no apprehension about those dear to us, as we now received telegrams from them assuring us of their safety; but every one we met had some fearful story to tell throughout the villages of the Metidja. We knew these places well, having visited them twelve months before; and our hearts failed us at the thought of what we were now to see in place of the peace and plenty we had then beheld.

The first town within the devastated circle, Miliana, stood intact, though the prevailing panic was indescribable. All the women were well-nigh frenzied. Some had lost relations and friends, swallowed up like Korah, Dathan and Abiram, or buried under the ruins of their own homes; others lay abed, clean paralyzed by terror;

other sat abroad, white and dumb, awaiting a final shock which was to prove the crack of doom. Wherever we went we heard dreadfully exaggerated reports. According to one, the Zakkar, a mountain as high as Snowdon, rising to the north of Miliana, had rocked to and fro, emitting flames of fire; according to another, many houses had been split and shaken by the shock.

If the former account were true, we found the mouth of the Zakkar shut close enough, and its sides had grown marvellously green since the catastrophe, though happening only a few days back. We walked round and round the town, and saw no houses here that had taken any harm. The shock was, nevertheless, awful, as we gathered from the plain, unvarnished account given us by the *préfet*. He had expected at the time nothing more nor less than the entire destruction of Miliana.

The shock had been severely felt at Algiers and Blidah, but it was a little cluster of villages—Bou-kika, Mouzaiaville, El-Affron and others—that had most suffered. Our way lay through some of these, and so recent was the calamity, and so inaccurate the accounts of it, that we set off to Algiers without in the least knowing where we could break the journey. Some people said: “Bou-kika is unharmed; you will find every accommodation at Bou-kika.” Others said:

“You will have to go right to Blidah, and break your journey there. Blidah is recovering itself, and you will find the hotels much the same as if nothing had happened.” Others said: “Blidah is as empty as a plundered place. There isn’t a crust of bread to be had there.”

In this uncertainty we set off. It was a superb moonlight night, and as we passed along we saw woeful things.

We had talked of sleeping at Bou-kika, but the place was dead and silent as if death were in every dwelling. Folks lay, in fact, encamped outside the village, and knots of soldiers, gathered round a watch-fire, guarded the deserted houses. Here the ruin had been partial; but soon we came to ghastly spectres of what, a week ago, had been thriving little towns—each with its church, hotel, shops and cafés. Here and there, above great heaps of brick and mortar, stood out a chimney, wall or doorway, or, indeed, a dwelling, split like a pomegranate; the place had collapsed like a child’s card-house. One must tread upon the heels of an earthquake to understand what it is—the suddenness of it, the despair of it, the desolation of it. More than a hundred souls had been buried alive in this neighbourhood alone, among them many infants. In some cases terrified mothers had forgotten their nurslings!

We reached Blidah early in the morning, and

found the town as deserted as if stricken by a plague. The large, prosperous hotel where we had often stayed before was shut up. The streets were death-like silent, the shops were all closed. Thankful enough were we to get coffee and a morsel of bread at a little half-ruined cabaret before taking the early train to Algiers. All Blidah was under canvas, but the waiter or maybe *patron* had not forsaken his post. "You don't mean to say you sleep under those tottering walls?" we asked, as we breakfasted outside. "What would you have, ladies?" was his reply. "One must get one's daily bread."

The camps were outside the town, and the long lines of tents, and unwonted aspect of hundreds of wealthy families turned out of house and home, and shifting for themselves in the best way they could, was sad and strange. It was breakfast-time. Coffee was boiling on every little camp-fire; children were running about borrowing a neighbour's cup or pitcher; ladies were making their toilettes as best they could; men were wandering hither and thither, smoking away their disturbed thoughts.

The Arabs alone looked perfectly unmoved. "It is the will of Allah," they say when any evil happens, and they resign themselves to it, outwardly calm as statues.

In about an hour and a half we reached Algiers. The weather was glorious; and as we drove up to

the well-known villa on the green height of Mustapha Supérieure, and looked down upon turquoise sea, glistening shore, and palatial Moorish city crowning its umbrageous heights, never had the whole seemed more enchantingly beautiful.

CHAPTER XXII
SOME OF "THE QUALITY"

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DURING these sojourns on French-African soil, I may say, in the words of Lord Bacon, that I "obtained acquaintance with many citizens not of the meanest quality." As in my own case, these leaders of thought were mainly concerned with Algerian progress, and are rather of colonial than cosmopolitan renown; I do not attempt a roll-call. Twentieth-century travellers following in my footsteps and caring to compare their experiences with my own, will realize the magnificent results of patriotic fervour and collective enterprise. Concerning two Algerian acquaintances, certainly "not of the meanest quality," I will, however, allow myself to be anecdotal.

I have before alluded to the Maréchal's feats of taciturnity. I now relate a *tour de force* of other kind, namely, a smile that not only saved France from civil war, but probably a European conflagration, and last, but not least, his honour.

When in 1873 Royalist plots and machinations had failed, the Comte de Chambord decided upon

a step to which even a Charles X would not have stooped, in other words, to humble himself in the dust by secretly obtaining an interview with the Marshal-President at Versailles. The bluff old Irishman had already formulated the situation by an epigram.

“Should the white flag be displayed in Paris,” he had said, “the *chassepots* would go off of themselves.”

“But,” reiterated the devotees of the oriflamme holding a divan, “would the Bayard of the nineteenth century shut his door against the descendant of French Kings?”

The Bourbon came of an absolutely unlearnable race. For each scion of that race French history ended as in French convents at the time, namely, 1789.

So the ignominious and immoral step was decided upon. The champion of the Church, the man whose daily life was principally spent in devotional exercises, left Frohsdorf for Versailles with the utmost secrecy, his errand being to entice an honest man from his pledged word and duty.

On the 10th of November, 1873,¹ a card was handed to Madame de MacMahon bearing the name of “M. de Blear-Blacas, emissary of the Marquis de Dreux-Brézé.” On the visitor being received, his first words were—

¹ See M. Hanotaux' *Great History*, Vol. II.

"The King is at Versailles and wishes to see the Maréchal!"

Even this thunderbolt did not unnerve the ready-witted and loyal little lady. Promptly and without the slightest agitation she replied—

"I am unable to speak for my husband, but I doubt that it will be possible for him to meet monseigneur's wishes." Note the tactful omission of the word "king."

The emissary still harping on the subject, Mme. de MacMahon at last suggested that the Comte de Chambord, accompanied by her visitor, should call on her husband at his "official residence," adding that of course he would be received and treated with the utmost respect. It was now M. de Blacas' turn to receive a shock.

"*Comment!*" exclaimed the horrified legitimist, "you propose, Madame, that the King should himself call on the Maréchal?"

That French equivalent for our own simple "what," a Frenchman once explained to me, is capable of expressing a dozen meanings from surprise to contempt, and from indignation to the last and most vehement reproach.

The discomfited emissary then took leave and personally interviewed the Marshal-President, who repeated his wife's words. Did the Comte de Chambord honour him with a visit he would be most courteously received. Even this rebuff did not damp the other's ardour. After reiterated

argumentation and passionate pleading, he drew from his pocket a key and held it towards MacMahon.

“Here,” he said, “is the key of the King’s private apartment,” naming a hotel close by. “The King awaits you and is alone. On my most solemn vow, no one shall ever learn of this step having been taken.”

MacMahon smiled—and did not take the key. We may well imagine that the famous smile was a sad one. All the gallant soldier’s sympathies were with monarchy and the old order of things. As he afterwards confided to another friend of the Comte de Chambord, he could offer him his life, but never his honour. M. Hanotaux adds: “This little drama, this decision, terminated the history of old France . . . a key offered and refused, a smile, and destiny was accomplished.”

The proposed meeting between the President of the French Republic and “Henri V.”—I still quote the same historian—“was to have resulted in a restoration, after the manner of 1814. The hero of Majenta and the last of the Bourbons were suddenly to enter the Chamber of Deputies arm-in-arm. Astoundment, admiration of dash and daring, MacMahon’s enormous prestige, lastly, romantic sentiment, would have restored the *Ancien Régime!*”

I am glad to have oft-times seen a smile—so often a mere inanition or artificiality—of one who

once smiled to such good purpose. Glad am I also to have known the keen-witted, resolute little lady ever capable of literally taking a bull by the horns, and never allowing feelings, however warm, to stand in the way of duty.

I will now say a few words about my host of Mustapha Supérieur, as was his wife, "an acquaintance not of the meanest quality," and one who deserves a memorial from my pen.

Original, epigrammatical, picturesque as his brilliantly complexioned Anglo-Saxon wife, the pair presented a striking contrast, the Breton doctor, swarthy as a Moor, his tall stature and slow, deliberate carriage being also in keeping with his Oriental neighbours. When husband and wife strolled abroad, passers-by might well have anticipated the wonderful life-story of Emily, *née* Keene, Shareefa of the Wazan.¹

Sixty years ago no more picturesque sight could have met an artist's eyes in Algiers than Dr. Eugène Bodichon holding gratuitous consultations in his Moorish quarters.

Below his airy height—for the room was on an upper storey—gleamed the city, sloping towards the sea; above shone the unbroken sky of intense blue, whilst worthy of such romantic environment was the figure of the miracle-working doctor himself, for such indeed he seemed to his artless, half-savage clients. A motley crowd would collect—pure-blooded sons of Ishmael, children

¹ Published 1912: Duckworth.

of the desert, the swarthy negro, the brown Kabyle, besides Jews, Spaniards, Germans and French soldiers—who came to be cured or advised for nothing! Their faith in the French physician was absolute, and certainly some of his successful cases, surgical and otherwise, were worthy of the noise they created in Algeria at the time, and worthy to be recorded.

One of the little band called the “Republicans of '30,” austere, incorruptible, dauntless fellow-worker with the great Tribune, Ledru-Rollin, with Louis Blanc, Guépin of Nantes, and other defenders of liberty and the democratic idea, lastly, as a foremost pioneer of civilization in Algeria, among the first to realize on African soil what there was the business of the conqueror, and what it was not, the liberator of the slaves in Algeria, the advocate of the Berbers, the planter of the eucalyptus—such was my old friend.

The Breton *savant* was a physical type also. Sussex county folks turned to take a second look at that tall, striking figure, with bare head crowned with masses of close-set, short, curly black hair—because he always went hatless, of course he was deemed demented!

When making his way to Algiers through southwestern France in the winter of 1870, he was arrested at Bordeaux under suspicion of being a Prussian spy. “Now,” said the doctor, confronting the commissary of police, “I appeal to your

reason and ethnology. Look at my hair. Had ever a Prussian hair like mine?" "Hair goes to dye, doctor," remarked the commissary, who, however, let his prisoner go.

Breton characteristics, mental as well as physical, marked him. In the maternal château near Nantes, the doctor's home of childhood, ghostly noises and spectral visions were heard and seen at night. These were the cries and shapes of decapitated ancestors and ancestresses, victims of the Terror; and the doctor, as well as other members of the family, firmly believed in them. Nor were these ghost-stories the only marvellous pages in the domestic chronicle.

One of Dr. Bodichon's aunts was a cloistered nun at Le Mans, where, in her old age, he occasionally, and once with his wife, visited her. The lady, when a young and handsome girl just introduced into society, a devotee of fashion and pleasure, visited on horseback an elder sister, herself a cloistered nun. The visit being over, she had remounted, the convent gates were thrown wide to admit of her egress, when her mount backed. The horsewoman touched it lightly with her whip, but it backed a second, a third time.

"I recognize the voice of Heaven!" cried the young lady, throwing the reins over the horse's head, and preparing to dismount. "My vocation is here."

True enough, the convent gates were straight-way closed. She alighted, re-entered the convent walls, then and there exchanged her riding-habit for the robe of a novice, and devoted the remainder of her existence to penitence and prayer.

In spite of such early associations, Eugène, as soon as he was capable of independent thought, went over to the ranks of democracy. Such a career indeed affords curious insight into French history. We realize how tremendous must be the force of conviction that leads loyal, affectionate and patriotic natures thus to break loose for once and for all from family tradition, domestic ties, social usages and public opinion.

There were ardent spirits in Paris in those days, and associated with the choicest of these, many of them lifelong friends, young Bodichon pursued his medical curriculum, at the same time contributing to the scientific and democratic literature of the day. One important result of his physiological studies in the school of Majendie was an abhorrence of vivisection. Throughout his after life the doctor remained a steadfast opponent of experiments in any shape upon living animals. Perhaps it was the spectacle of the torments inflicted on them in his youth by his terrible master that made him ever after the tenderest friend of dumb things. During his student days he made a holiday trip to Algeria and brought

home a pet jackal, which used to follow him about like a dog. Circumstances compelled him to give it to the Jardin des Plantes of Paris. At the end of a week or two he visited the jackal, who received him with the liveliest marks of joy and affection. The visit was repeated, whereupon the keeper respectfully begged him to go no more.

"I assure you," he said, "the poor animal would not touch food for days after your last visit. We were afraid he would starve himself to death."

That experimental trip to Algiers resulted in a final settlement on African soil. On the completion of his medical studies, the doctor sold his patrimonial estate in Brittany and sailed for Africa, there devoting himself to gratuitous medical services among the native population and the poor, ethnological and historical studies, the work of colonization, and that close observation of animal life for which he was so remarkable.

He was a wonderful relater of dog-stories. One of his dogs was a bit of a snob, he used to tell us, delighting in worldly prosperity and in the sense of being looked up to accordingly. On a certain occasion—this was when the doctor no longer lived in the Moorish quarter before alluded to, but married and moved to Mustapha Supérieure—the dog returned from a run with a canine neighbour evidently belonging to an inferior posi-

tion in life. The host took his guest all over the house, with a look that said as clearly as words could do, "Now, how would *you* feel if you lived in such a house as this?"

Another dog—not a pet, but an enemy and disturber of the public peace—was Dr. Bodichon's "Professeur d'Aboiement," or self-constituted leader of an Amateur Barking Society. This misguided animal used to commence operations after sunset in Algiers, and take the lead of all the dogs inclined to bark in season and out of season. The nuisance became so intolerable that the canine "Professeur" was at last laid violent hands on by the police.

The doctor had plenty of more momentous work on hand. His most interesting and valuable contributions to the study of ethnology, and important works on French colonization in Africa, were written and published between 1835 and 1866. He was also employed by the Government as "Médecin de la Justice," that is to say, consulting coroner. Upon one occasion he was summoned by the authorities to examine three travellers who had been, as they declared upon oath, robbed and half murdered by assassins on the public road, for which loss and outrage they demanded a government indemnity. The doctor carefully examined the wounds, which were not trifling, but he found that one and all had been self-inflicted, and with a most scientific avoidance

of vital parts. His private practice, chiefly gratuitous, also abounded in curious experiences. One day an Arab came to his surgery carrying something wrapped up in the folds of his bur-nouse. The poor fellow had been gored by a wild boar, and thus brought his own intestines to the doctor to be restored to their proper place, which was effected! Bedouin Arabs would often come from a great distance in the interior to consult the doctor about their wives. Fatima or Ayesha, the pride of the desert harem, had been *enceinte* for two years, but the child could not be brought to the birth. What was to be done? It was, maybe, is still, a common belief among these people that the condition of pregnancy may be almost indefinitely protracted, and often husbands were deluded into the fond prospect of offspring when there was no foundation whatever for the hope. Such consulters the doctor had to send uncom-forted away.

But the surgical case which noised his skill abroad was the cure of his friend Bombonnel, described by the patient. Who has not heard of Bombonnel, extolled by Victor Hugo, put just as he was, although still alive and well, into Daudet's novel of *Tartarin*—the valiant, vivacious Frenchman, small of stature, who began life by hawking shoes and stockings in the streets of New Orleans, rapidly made a fortune, as rapidly spent it in those wonderful raids upon the panther,

chronicled by his own untrained pen so graphically; finally, after as many hair-breadth escapes as Othello himself, settling down on the pleasant little estate near Algiers presented to him by the French Government in recognition of his services, there to enjoy, *otium cum dignitate*, the society of lions, tame and wild, with an occasional visit from some royal or distinguished devotee of the chase. Bombonnel died soon after his friend.

It is noteworthy, by the way, that the Breton doctor, although a staunch opponent of Bonapartism and Ultramontanism, was always in good odour with the priests. Upon one occasion he was the means of saving the lives of several clericals, including that of a bishop. The party were travelling together after heavy rains in the wilds of Algeria, and had come to one of those mountain streams, in usual weather traversed by horsemen and even by the *diligence* without difficulty. After the amount of rain that had recently fallen, however, it was now perilous to go back, and it seemed impossible to proceed. The doctor, then of Herculean strength, first of all shouldered the bishop and got him safely across the river. He next returned for the two priests, and succeeded in carrying each in turn to the place of harbourage. The bishop then and there gave his preserver plenary absolution, and no wonder! Had his rescuer written even harder hitting things against sacerdotalism—were that possible—no

right-minded prelate could have surely done less.

The nuns also were always on friendliest terms with their anti-clerical neighbour, for a sisterhood adjoined Dr. Bodichon's country residence. The sisters would tell him of their little troubles, and doubtless, poor simple souls, thought that as the doctor was Catholic born and bred, there never could be any harm in him, no matter what he might write or think! There was one poor girl dying of consumption, a Little Sister of the Poor, or something of the kind, who used to find comfort in thus getting a word of sympathy from a stranger. She had forsaken her happy home in far-off Alsace for this calling, and was now about to die, unpitied and unregretted. "What does it matter to any one here when I die?" she said. "Another is ready to take my place." So she went about her work uncomplainingly to the last, uncheered save by an occasional word of comfort from the Breton doctor. Such a power of eliciting the confidence of those as far as possible removed from ourselves by habits of thought, bringing up and general surroundings, is very rare, and he possessed it in an eminent degree. On the occasion of his year's sojourn in America later with his English wife, this sympathetic quality, combined with the originality and force of his character, brought him into contact with the finest spirits of that epoch—Emerson, Long-

fellow, Agassis, of such were his transatlantic friends.

After his marriage, the doctor's active life as a physician terminated; but the work to which he now devoted himself was equally important.

This was the endeavour to force on the public mind the necessity of replanting Algeria, with the certain amelioration of its climate, by means of the febrifugal *Eucalyptus globulus*, of which at one time we heard so much. This wonderful tree, the blue gum of Australia, a species of the myrtle tribe, was discovered by a Frenchman at the beginning of the French Revolution. How little dreamed the gallant navigator Labillardière, sent out in search of his equally gallant countryman, La Pérouse, that the tall, striking tree, with its bluish-green leaves dispensing fragrance, was in its turn to effect a veritable revolution! No other name befits the important economic changes wrought by the eucalyptus in Algeria and other tree-denuded regions within our own times. So rapid is its growth, and so beneficent its influence, that twenty years after sowing the seed exists a noble and health-giving forest! Wherever planted in sufficient numbers, the deadly miasma of marshlands disappears; with it fever, the entire conditions of the climate and soil being transformed. It would be superfluous to mention here the numerous products of the eucalyptus: the

fragrant soaps, sedatives, salves, pills, lozenges are now in every European pharmacopœia.

Long before the introduction of the tree into Algeria, Dr. Bodichon had insisted on the need of replanting the country, in many places completely denuded by Arab incendiaries and other methods of wilful destruction. Ever an epigrammatist, when he put pen to paper, he wrote—

“The tree, the spade and the bale of merchandise, these should figure on the seal of the ruler of Algeria.”

And elsewhere—

“The introduction of an unknown plant is often the only benefit accruing to humanity from wars and wholesale migrations.”

Here, pregnant sentences showing to what good purpose history had been studied by the writer!

“What were the results of the gigantic struggles between Europe and Asia in the Middle Ages? Four or five millions of men perished. Their ashes have been scattered to the winds; but meantime, the mulberry tree, the sugar-cane, and buckwheat were introduced into Europe. Such is the real result to humanity.”

Up to a certain point he lived to see the realization of his dreams. Not to speak of his own plantations, hundreds of thousands of eucalyptus trees have now been grown from seed in what

were once the unhealthiest and most arid spots in the colony, now completely transformed by means of this health-giving tree. The same experiments have been made, and with equal success, in Spain, Corsica, Italy and elsewhere.

And the propagation of the eucalyptus by private individuals and companies is still actively carried on, and various plantations are now among the sights of Algeria shown to the tourist.

But the doctor was much more than the apostle of the tree in Algeria. As a writer in the *Journal des Débats* averred after his death, when the history of the French Colony is written, the name of Eugène Bodichon will shine in letters of gold on the first page. He was, indeed, in one especial sense, the maker of liberty there. Strange as it may seem, after nearly twenty years of conquest, slavery existed in full force throughout Algeria. Rulers and lawmakers had apparently forgotten that the famous declaration of the Rights of Man, pronounced by the National Assembly in 1789, abolished slavery. When, in 1848, Dr. Bodichon was named corresponding member of the Chamber of Deputies for Algeria, he immediately suggested the liberation of slaves throughout the province, a measure which was at once carried into effect. There can be little doubt that he also greatly contributed to abolish another kind of slavery. We speak of public opinion in the matter of the Napoleonic prestige, an

intellectual subjection almost as much to be deplored. French contemporary literature contains little finer in its way, if anything at all, than the study of the first Napoleon in the second volume of his *opus magnum*, *De l'Humanité*.¹ No wonder that the types were broken up by the Imperial police, and the writer's movements made matter for suspicion and surveillance. This essay may be read irrespective of the remainder of the work, and I was told by William Allingham that Carlyle not only perused it more than once, but was convinced by it, having up to that time entertained quite a different opinion of the modern Cæsar, here dwindled and dwarfed to a very contemptible specimen of humanity under the merciless microscope of positive science and physiology. Observe, by the way, too, that this analysis of character, so trenchant, so original, so *true*, was penned long before the appearance of Lanfrey's *Biography*, Mme. de Rémusat's *Memoirs*, and other recent works corroborating the Breton *savant's* view. As we read these axiomatic and discursive pages, we are led to regret that the writer did not give to the world some historical work pure and simple. His knowledge of French history was prodigious. No matter what question you put to him, trivial or important, he could answer it promptly. No slow

¹ Brussels : Lacroix, 1886. Translated in Temple Bar, 1873.

ransacking of the chambers of his brain was necessary; each fact was in its proper place, and ready to hand.

In a later work, a mere *brochure* published in 1882, called *Le Vade-mecum de la politique française*, are one or two passages of anticipatory interest. Axiom 17 of this curious little pamphlet runs as follows—

“The great work of the nineteenth century will be the conquest of the Sahara and its transformation into productive territory—suppression of brigandage and re-establishment of commercial relations between the Soudan and the Mediterranean.”

We read in Captain Haywood's work that French civilization of the Sahara has been unimaginably rapid since the conquest of Timbuctoo fifteen years ago. In the wildest and most isolated spots you find little centres of French life, even elegant homes presided over by highly educated wives of soldiers and civilians; and, disconcerting enough to animals, telegraphic communication in sandy wastes—giraffes getting their long necks therein entangled!

It is a current notion among English folk that the typical Frenchman, especially the typical democrat, must be a cynical Voltaire. Worthy of record is it that the man whose career I have just been sketching remained to the last a stead-

fast believer in God and immortality. Evidence of this serene and high-souled faith abounds in the pages of *De l'Humanité*. Deeply significant are such utterances as the following: "Moral truth exists in God. The best way of conceiving a notion of the Divinity is to study nature." "The naturalist will be the theologian of the future." "The Divine word which comes without any intermediary or interpreter is the admirable wisdom visible in every work of the Creator." I could cull numberless sayings equally full of faith and reverence from his writings, but will content myself with one illustrative anecdote. A friend was discussing with the doctor the subject of death and immortality, and the latter said, "Our life was yesterday, is to-day, and will be to-morrow. The Jehovah of religious life among the Jews meant the three tenses of the verb to be—the present, the past and the future. There is no disjunction. Death is only a transition from this present life to a superior one."

His interlocutor asked, "How can I prove such faith to others?" He replied, with a smile, "The faculty of reasoning belongs to science, and that of faith and love to a subtler organ, and can only be proved by itself." The narrator remarked later, "The death of Eugène Bodichon must have been like that of Socrates, calm and joyous except for the pang in thinking of his wife's deep grief."

The liberator of an entire population held in

the bonds of slavery; the unsparing censor of a corrupt administration and dissolute society; the persistent advocate of a rational, practical and beneficent system of colonization; the staunch upholder of freedom of opinion, often at the risk of personal safety—men of this stamp live less for themselves than for humanity. Sooner or later their merit is recognized, and that respect is paid to their memory perhaps withheld during their lives. The true lover of his kind, moreover, is content to be ignored, even forgotten in the tomb, provided that his thoughts live and his deeds bear fruit. For, as the poet says—

“Our many thoughts and deeds, our life and love,
Our happiness and all that we have been,
Immortally must live, and burn, and move,
When we shall be no more.”

Dr. Bodichon died in Algiers in 1885; his noble wife followed him seven years later.

In the recently published *Letters to William Allingham* occurs the following sentence from this warm friend: “I should like always to live in this world,” wrote Mme. Bodichon then in her exuberant and ever-exuberating prime. Alas! not for a single moment did she give thought to the resplendent health and spirits with which nature had endowed her, and which made Browning exclaim: “Madame Bodichon, it is a benediction to see you!” The quintessence of common sense in most matters, she acted as if without any

precaution whatever one could enjoy even the ordinary span on earth. No wonder that her over-taxed brain and physique gave way in early middle life. Did she, perhaps, ever say to herself with Browning in *Pauline*?—

“I envy—how I envy him whose soul
Turns its whole energies to some one end.”

Be this as it may, divided and sub-divided activities quite prevented her from achieving excellence and public recognition in the one thing that perhaps lay nearer her heart than even the advancement of her sex, namely, art. Had she devoted her life to artistic ends only she would doubtless figure as the first woman artist of the Victorian epoch. But she could be wise for others, not for herself. “That woman who does one thing *well*, who, either in art, literature or any other calling, attains the first rank, does more for our cause than all the propagandists of woman’s rights put together,” she once said to me. Yet, what with efforts on behalf of education, laws affecting women’s earnings and her fallen sisters—this being with her an ever-present and deeply sorrowful preoccupation—the foundation of a university for her sex, her modest beginning at Hitchin, developing into Girton College, to say nothing of social and personal matters—

—“ . . . that care though wise in show
That with superfluous burden loads the day ”—

Is it any marvel that health and brain power so prematurely gave way?

Of Girton fame, however, she lives, and her portrait has lately been added to the great National Gallery in South Kensington—no Victorian woman worker worthier of the honour.

EPILOGUE



ALGIERS—THE PORT

[To face p. 321.]

N. D.

EPILOGUE

OF travellers in French-Africa, it can no longer be said—

“They should have died to-morrow.”

Commodity has killed the poetry of travel. The railway, the cycle, the hateful hooter have banished wayfaring romance. Adventure and the thrill of unexpectedness are only to be had by falling head first a thousand feet from an aeroplane, or faring on tallow grease for six months on the frozen top or bottom of our little ball.

Nevertheless, but for years and other hindrances, with what exhilaration should I continue these perustrations, presenting my cheques at the French bankers of Timbuctoo the “Mysterious”; traverse the Sahara where the zebras still wander at will; in another direction with what delight should I wander about the “city disinterred” of Timgad, and in yet another direction gaze upon the prehistoric sculptures at Tiout in Constantine! But I can only now recall and read of Africa and golden joys.

Since the experiences here recorded France has

held me spellbound, not, of course, by its scenery and monuments only.

At the close of a long, not uneventful—and with all humility I add, satisfying—and I hope not wholly useless life, to French-Africa as a holiday ground I award the charm of witchery.

I have witnessed the sun set with indescribable splendour at equally indescribable Granada. In halcyon calm I have steamed from the lovely land-locked bay of Smyrna, gliding by Delos, Chios, Ithaca and the rest, each islet alike a fane, a poem and in itself a Walhalla—after five days casting anchor at the Piræus, ready to fall on my knees and kiss the soil of Greece. I have gathered mignonette, asphodel and the lovely single-petalled nigella on the acropolis, have climbed Mars' Hill, musing on St. Paul and the first wonderful coming in contact of Christianity and Paganism described by Hart Milman, from that desolate crag turning to the cool, luxuriant, bird-singing Academe, my thoughts full of Plato, companion and teacher of so many years. In happy fortune myself and companion sailed from Athens to Italy, the traditional rough weather of the Adriatic calming down as we approached Venice from the sea.

On a sweet May morning shortly after dawn we glided gently towards what seemed indeed a city of pearl against a primrose sky, in which a star or two lingered with lessening light; on nearer

approach, the aspect changing, every cupola and palace being flushed with roseate tints, goldenest radiance flooding the scene. It was Turner's "Approach to Venice" realized!

Nor have I missed many a Northern haunt of fame and quieter, less dazzling charm, the beautiful valley of Ilmenau eternized by a lyric, Luther's grandiose Wartburg, symbol of the greatest genius of his century, one akin to the mighty prophets of old—these sites—and how many more?—proving milestones on Life's high road, not the road leading to self-abnegation and the fulfilment of moral and civic duty, but to the other, to the enlargement of one's intellectual and æsthetic being and the inner voice of vocation.

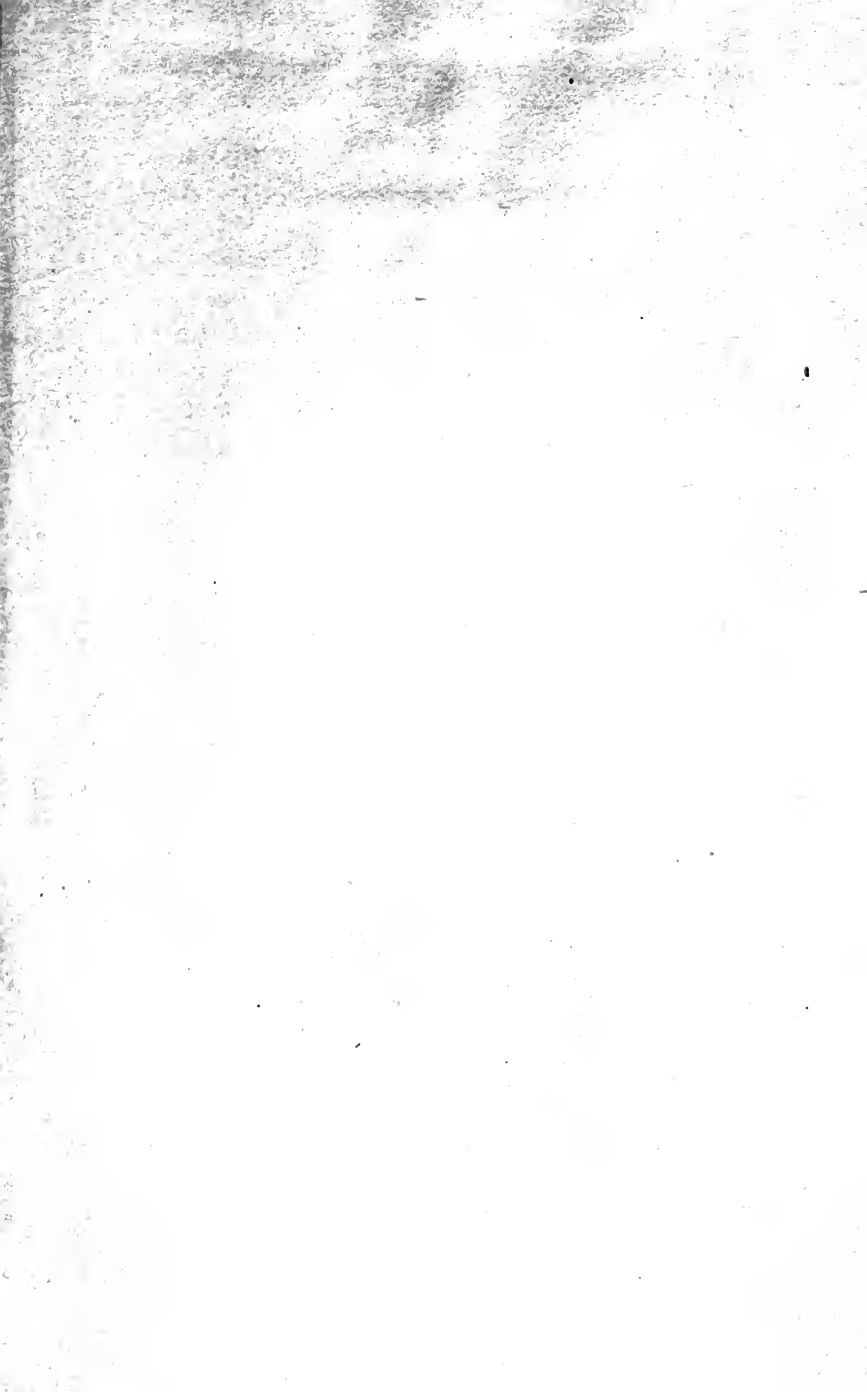
A French philosopher¹ of our own day has beautifully descanted on what may be called a fictive fatherland, a second and voluntary home. "We come into the world," he writes, "belonging to a nation we have not chosen. As civilization advances and international relations take wider extension, many individuals will select a complement of birthplace and nationality, a country of which the language, history, literature, art and scenery, will become familiar as our own, and in which will be formed ties of closest intimacy, as well as co-operation in practical concerns. The choice of this supplementary and freely selected

¹ *Sociologie objective*. A. Coste. Paris, 1899.

home should be made with the utmost discretion, to native soil, affection and loyalty remaining firm as before."

Never for a moment having succumbed with so many of my contemporaries to the glamour cast by Italy, my adopted and additional country has been France. But could I once more undertake oversea travel I should forego that much-loved land, the France of '89, and a third time sail for her delightful shores of Barbary!

THE END



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