

**EDITH
WHARTON**

IN MOROCCO

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In Morocco

PREFACE

I

Having begun my book with the statement that Morocco still lacks a guide-book, I should have wished to take a first step toward remedying that deficiency.

But the conditions in which I travelled, though full of unexpected and picturesque opportunities, were not suited to leisurely study of the places visited. The time was limited by the approach of the rainy season, which puts an end to motoring over the treacherous trails of the Spanish zone. In 1918, owing to the watchfulness of German submarines in the Straits and along the northwest coast of Africa, the trip by sea from Marseilles to Casablanca, ordinarily so easy, was not to be made without much discomfort and loss of time. Once on board the steamer, passengers were often kept in port (without leave to land) for six or eight days; therefore for any one bound by a time-limit, as most war-workers were, it was necessary to travel across country, and to be back at Tangier before the November rains.

This left me only one month in which to visit Morocco from the Mediterranean to the High Atlas, and from the Atlantic to Fez, and even had there been a Djinn's carpet to carry me, the multiplicity of impressions received would have made precise observation difficult.

The next best thing to a Djinn's carpet, a military motor, was at my disposal every morning; but war conditions imposed restrictions, and the wish to use the minimum of petrol often stood in the way of the second visit which alone makes it possible to carry away a definite and detailed impression.

These drawbacks were more than offset by the advantage of making my quick trip at a moment unique in the history of the country; the brief moment of transition between its virtually complete subjection to European authority, and the fast approaching hour when it is thrown open to all the banalities and promiscuities of modern travel.

Morocco is too curious, too beautiful, too rich in landscape and architecture, and above all too much of a novelty, not to attract one of the main streams of spring travel as soon as Mediterranean passenger traffic is resumed. Now that the war is over, only a few months' work on roads and railways divide it from the great torrent of "tourism"; and once that deluge is let loose, no eye will ever again see Moulay Idriss and Fez and Marrakech as I saw them.

In spite of the incessant efforts of the present French administration to preserve the old monuments of Morocco from

injury, and her native arts and industries from the corruption of European bad taste, the impression of mystery and remoteness which the country now produces must inevitably vanish with the approach of the "Circular Ticket." Within a few years far more will be known of the past of Morocco, but that past will be far less visible to the traveller than it is to-day. Excavations will reveal fresh traces of Roman and Phenician occupation; the remote affinities between Copts and Berbers, between Bagdad and Fez, between Byzantine art and the architecture of the Souss, will be explored and elucidated; but, while these successive discoveries are being made, the strange survival of mediæval life, of a life contemporary with the crusaders, with Saladin, even with the great days of the Caliphate of Bagdad, which now greets the astonished traveller, will gradually disappear, till at last even the mysterious autocthonous of the Atlas will have folded their tents and silently stolen away.

II

Authoritative utterances on Morocco are not wanting for those who can read them in French; but they are to be found mainly in large and often inaccessible books, like M. Doutté's "En Tribu," the Marquis de Segonzac's remarkable explorations in the Atlas, or Foucauld's classic (but unobtainable) "Reconnaissance au Maroc"; and few, if any, have been translated into English.

M. Louis Châtelain has dealt with the Roman ruins of

Volubilis and M. Tranchant de Lunel, M. Raymond Koechlin, M. Gaillard, M. Ricard, and many other French scholars, have written of Moslem architecture and art in articles published either in "France-Maroc," as introductions to catalogues of exhibitions, or in the reviews and daily papers. Pierre Loti and M. André Chevrillon have reflected, with the intensest visual sensibility, the romantic and ruinous Morocco of yesterday; and in the volumes of the "Conférences Marocaines," published by the French government, the experts gathered about the Resident-General have examined the industrial and agricultural Morocco of to-morrow. Lastly, one striking book sums up, with the clearness and consecutiveness of which French scholarship alone possesses the art, the chief things to be said on all these subjects, save that of art and archæology. This is M. Augustin Bernard's volume, "Le Maroc," the one portable and compact yet full and informing book since Leo Africanus described the bazaars of Fez. But M. Augustin Bernard deals only with the ethnology, the social, religious and political history, and the physical properties, of the country; and this, though "a large order," leaves out the visual and picturesque side, except in so far as the book touches on the always picturesque life of the people.

For the use, therefore, of the happy wanderers who may be planning a Moroccan journey, I have added to the record of my personal impressions a slight sketch of the history and art of the country. In extenuation of the attempt I must add that the chief merit of this sketch will be its absence of originality. Its facts will

be chiefly drawn from the pages of M. Augustin Bernard, M. H. Saladin, and M. Gaston Migeon, and the rich sources of the "Conférences Marocaines" and the articles of "France-Maroc." It will also be deeply indebted to information given on the spot by the brilliant specialists of the French administration, to the Marquis de Segonzac, with whom I had the good luck to travel from Rabat to Marrakech and back; to M. Alfred de Tarde, editor of "France-Maroc"; to M. Tranchant de Lunel, director of the French School of Fine Arts in Morocco; to M. Goulven, the historian of Portuguese Mazagan; to M. Louis Châtelain, and to the many other cultivated and cordial French officials, military and civilian, who, at each stage of my journey, did their amiable best to answer my questions and open my eyes.

NOTE

In the writing of proper names and of other Arab words the French spelling has been followed.

In the case of proper names, and names of cities and districts, this seems justified by the fact that they occur in a French colony, where French usage naturally prevails; and to spell *Oudjda* in the French way, and *koubba*, for instance, in the English form of *kubba*, would cause needless confusion as to their respective pronunciation. It seems therefore simpler, in a book written for the ordinary traveller, to conform altogether to French usage.

I RABAT AND SALÉ

I LEAVING TANGIER

To step on board a steamer in a Spanish port, and three hours later to land in *a country without a guide-book*, is a sensation to rouse the hunger of the repletest sight-seer.

The sensation is attainable by any one who will take the trouble to row out into the harbour of Algeciras and scramble onto a little black boat headed across the straits. Hardly has the rock of Gibraltar turned to cloud when one's foot is on the soil of an almost unknown Africa. Tangier, indeed, is in the guide-books; but, cuckoo-like, it has had to lay its egg in strange nests, and the traveller who wants to find out about it must acquire a work dealing with some other country—Spain or Portugal or Algeria. There is no guide-book to Morocco, and no way of knowing, once one has left Tangier behind, where the long trail over the Rif is going to land one, in the sense understood by any one accustomed to European certainties. The air of the unforeseen blows on one from the roadless passes of the Atlas.

This feeling of adventure is heightened by the contrast

between Tangier—cosmopolitan, frowsy, familiar Tangier, that every tourist has visited for the last forty years—and the vast unknown just beyond. One has met, of course, travellers who have been to Fez; but they have gone there on special missions, under escort, mysteriously, perhaps perilously; the expedition has seemed, till lately, a considerable affair. And when one opens the records of Moroccan travellers written within the last twenty years, how many, even of the most adventurous, are found to have gone beyond Fez? And what, to this day, do the names of Meknez and Marrakech, of Mogador, Saffi or Rabat, signify to any but a few students of political history, a few explorers and naturalists? Not till within the last year has Morocco been open to travel from Tangier to the Great Atlas, and from Moulay Idriss to the Atlantic. Three years ago Christians were being massacred in the streets of Salé, the pirate town across the river from Rabat, and two years ago no European had been allowed to enter the Sacred City of Moulay Idriss, the burial-place of the lawful descendant of Ali, founder of the Idrissite dynasty. Now, thanks to the energy and the imagination of one of the greatest of colonial administrators, the country, at least in the French zone, is as safe and open as the opposite shore of Spain. All that remains is to tell the traveller how to find his way about it.

Ten years ago there was not a wheeled vehicle in Morocco; now its thousands of miles of trail, and its hundreds of miles of firm French roads, are travelled by countless carts, omnibuses and motor-vehicles. There are light railways from Rabat to Fez

in the west, and to a point about eighty-five kilometres from Marrakech in the south; and it is possible to say that within a year a regular railway system will connect eastern Morocco with western Algeria, and the ports of Tangier and Casablanca with the principal points of the interior.

What, then, prevents the tourist from instantly taking ship at Bordeaux or Algeciras and letting loose his motor on this new world? Only the temporary obstacles which the war has everywhere put in the way of travel. Till these are lifted it will hardly be possible to travel in Morocco except by favour of the Resident-General; but, normal conditions once restored, the country will be as accessible, from the straits of Gibraltar to the Great Atlas, as Algeria or Tunisia.

To see Morocco during the war was therefore to see it in the last phase of its curiously abrupt transition from remoteness and danger to security and accessibility; at a moment when its aspect and its customs were still almost unaffected by European influences, and when the "Christian" might taste the transient joy of wandering unmolested in cities of ancient mystery and hostility, whose inhabitants seemed hardly aware of his intrusion.

II

THE TRAIL TO EL-KSAR

With such opportunities ahead it was impossible, that brilliant morning of September, 1917, not to be off quickly from Tangier, impossible to do justice to the pale-blue town piled up within brown walls against the thickly-foliaged gardens of "the Mountain," to the animation of its market-place and the secret beauties of its steep Arab streets. For Tangier swarms with people in European clothes, there are English, French and Spanish signs above its shops, and cab-stands in its squares; it belongs, as much as Algiers, to the familiar dog-eared world of travel—and there, beyond the last dip of "the Mountain," lies the world of mystery, with the rosy dawn just breaking over it. The motor is at the door and we are off.

The so-called Spanish zone, which encloses internationalized Tangier in a wide circuit of territory, extends southward for a distance of about a hundred and fifteen kilometres. Consequently, when good roads traverse it, French Morocco will be reached in less than two hours by motor-travellers bound for the south. But for the present Spanish enterprise dies out after a few miles of macadam (as it does even between Madrid and Toledo), and the tourist is committed to the *piste*. These *pistes*—the old caravan-trails from the south—are more available to motors in Morocco than in southern Algeria and Tunisia, since

they run mostly over soil which, though sandy in part, is bound together by a tough dwarf vegetation, and not over pure desert sand. This, however, is the utmost that can be said of the Spanish *pistes*. In the French protectorate constant efforts are made to keep the trails fit for wheeled traffic, but Spain shows no sense of a corresponding obligation.

After leaving the macadamized road which runs south from Tangier one seems to have embarked on a petrified ocean in a boat hardly equal to the adventure. Then, as one leaps and plunges over humps and ruts, down sheer banks into rivers, and up precipices into sand-pits, one gradually gains faith in one's conveyance and in one's spinal column; but both must be sound in every joint to resist the strain of the long miles to Arbaoua, the frontier post of the French protectorate.

Luckily there are other things to think about. At the first turn out of Tangier, Europe and the European disappear, and as soon as the motor begins to dip and rise over the arid little hills beyond the last gardens one is sure that every figure on the road will be picturesque instead of prosaic, every garment graceful instead of grotesque. One knows, too, that there will be no more omnibuses or trams or motorcyclists, but only long lines of camels rising up in brown friezes against the sky, little black donkeys trotting across the scrub under bulging pack-saddles, and noble draped figures walking beside them or majestically perching on their rumps. And for miles and miles there will be no more towns—only, at intervals on the naked slopes, circles of rush-roofed huts

in a blue stockade of cactus, or a hundred or two nomad tents of black camel's hair resting on walls of wattled thorn and grouped about a terebinth-tree and a well.

Between these nomad colonies lies the *bled*, the immense waste of fallow land and palmetto desert: an earth as void of life as the sky above it of clouds. The scenery is always the same; but if one has the love of great emptinesses, and of the play of light on long stretches of parched earth and rock, the sameness is part of the enchantment. In such a scene every landmark takes on an extreme value. For miles one watches the little white dome of a saint's grave rising and disappearing with the undulations of the trail; at last one is abreast of it, and the solitary tomb, alone with its fig-tree and its broken well-curb, puts a meaning into the waste. The same importance, but intensified, marks the appearance of every human figure. The two white-draped riders passing single file up the red slope to that ring of tents on the ridge have a mysterious and inexplicable importance: one follows their progress with eyes that ache with conjecture. More exciting still is the encounter of the first veiled woman heading a little cavalcade from the south. All the mystery that awaits us looks out through the eye-slits in the grave-clothes muffling her. Where have they come from, where are they going, all these slow wayfarers out of the unknown? Probably only from one thatched *douar*¹ to another; but interminable distances unroll behind them, they breathe of Timbuctoo and the farthest desert.

¹ Village of tents. The village of mud-huts is called a *nourwal*.

Just such figures must swarm in the Saharan cities, in the Soudan and Senegal. There is no break in the links: these wanderers have looked on at the building of cities that were dust when the Romans pushed their outposts across the Atlas.

III

EL-KSAR TO RABAT

A town at last—its nearness announced by the multiplied ruts of the trail, the cactus hedges, the fig-trees weighed down by dust leaning over ruinous earthen walls. And here are the first houses of the European El-Ksar—neat white Spanish houses on the slope outside the old Arab settlement. Of the Arab town itself, above reed stockades and brown walls, only a minaret and a few flat roofs are visible. Under the walls drowse the usual gregarious Lazaruses; others, temporarily resuscitated, trail their grave-clothes after a line of camels and donkeys toward the olive-gardens outside the town.

The way to Rabat is long and difficult, and there is no time to visit El-Ksar, though its minaret beckons so alluringly above the fruit-orchards; so we stop for luncheon outside the walls, at a canteen with a corrugated iron roof where skinny Spaniards are serving thick purple wine and eggs fried in oil to a party of French soldiers. The heat has suddenly become intolerable, and a flaming wind straight from the south brings in at the door, with a cloud of blue flies, the smell of camels and trampled herbs and the strong spices of the bazaars.

Luncheon over, we hurry on between the cactus hedges, and then plunge back into the waste. Beyond El-Ksar the last hills of the Rif die away, and there is a stretch of wilderness without

an outline till the Lesser Atlas begins to rise in the east. Once in the French protectorate the trail improves, but there are still difficult bits; and finally, on a high plateau, the chauffeur stops in a web of crisscross trails, throws up his hands, and confesses that he has lost his way. The heat is mortal at the moment. For the last hour the red breath of the sirocco has risen from every hollow into which we dipped; now it hangs about us in the open, as if we had caught it in our wheels and it had to pause above us when we paused.

All around is the featureless wild land, palmetto scrub stretching away into eternity. A few yards off rises the inevitable ruined *koubba*² with its fig-tree: in the shade under its crumbling wall the buzz of the flies is like the sound of frying. Farther off, we discern a cluster of huts, and presently some Arab boys and a tall pensive shepherd come hurrying across the scrub. They are full of good-will, and no doubt of information; but our chauffeur speaks no Arabic and the talk dies down into shrugs and head-shakings. The Arabs retire to the shade of the wall, and we decide to start—for anywhere....

The chauffeur turns the crank, but there is no responding quiver. Something has gone wrong; we can't move, and it is not much comfort to remember that, if we could, we should not know where to go. At least we should be cooler in motion than sitting still under the blinding sky.

Such an adventure initiates one at the outset into the stern facts

² Saint's tomb. The saint himself is called a *marabout*.

of desert motoring. Every detail of our trip from Tangier to Rabat had been carefully planned to keep us in unbroken contact with civilization. We were to "tub" in one European hotel, and to dine in another, with just enough picnicking between to give a touch of local colour. But let one little cog slip and the whole plan falls to bits, and we are alone in the old untamed Moghreb, as remote from Europe as any mediæval adventurer. If one lose one's way in Morocco, civilization vanishes as though it were a magic carpet rolled up by a Djinn.

It is a good thing to begin with such a mishap, not only because it develops the fatalism necessary to the enjoyment of Africa, but because it lets one at once into the mysterious heart of the country: a country so deeply conditioned by its miles and miles of uncited wilderness that until one has known the wilderness one cannot begin to understand the cities.

We came to one at length, after sunset on that first endless day. The motor, cleverly patched up, had found its way to a real road, and speeding along between the stunted cork-trees of the forest of Mamora brought us to a last rise from which we beheld in the dusk a line of yellow walls backed by the misty blue of the Atlantic. Salé, the fierce old pirate town, where Robinson Crusoe was so long a slave, lay before us, snow-white in its cheese-coloured ramparts skirted by fig and olive gardens. Below its gates a stretch of waste land, endlessly trailed over by mules and camels, sloped down to the mouth of the Bou-Regreg, the blue-brown river dividing it from Rabat. The motor stopped

at the landing-stage of the steam-ferry; crowding about it were droves of donkeys, knots of camels, plump-faced merchants on crimson-saddled mules, with negro servants at their bridles, bare-legged water-carriers with hairy goat-skins slung over their shoulders, and Arab women in a heap of veils, cloaks, mufflings, all of the same ashy white, the caftans of clutched children peeping through in patches of old rose and lilac and pale green.

Across the river the native town of Rabat lay piled up on an orange-red cliff beaten by the Atlantic. Its walls, red too, plunged into the darkening breakers at the mouth of the river; and behind it, stretching up to the mighty tower of Hassan, and the ruins of the Great Mosque, the scattered houses of the European city showed their many lights across the plain.

IV

THE KASBAH OF THE OUDAYAS

Salé the white and Rabat the red frown at each other over the foaming bar of the Bou-Regreg, each walled, terraced, minareted, and presenting a singularly complete picture of the two types of Moroccan town, the snowy and the tawny. To the gates of both the Atlantic breakers roll in with the boom of northern seas, and under a misty northern sky. It is one of the surprises of Morocco to find the familiar African pictures bathed in this unfamiliar haze. Even the fierce midday sun does not wholly dispel it: the air remains thick, opalescent, like water slightly clouded by milk. One is tempted to say that Morocco is Tunisia seen by moonlight.

The European town of Rabat, a rapidly developing community, lies almost wholly outside the walls of the old Arab city. The latter, founded in the twelfth century by the great Almohad conqueror of Spain, Yacoub-el-Mansour, stretches its mighty walls to the river's mouth. Thence they climb the cliff to enclose the Kasbah³ of the Oudayas, a troublesome tribe whom one of the Almohad Sultans, mistrusting their good faith, packed up one day, flocks, tents and camels, and carried across the *bled* to stow them into these stout walls under his imperial

³ Citadel.

eye. Great crenellated ramparts, cyclopean, superb, follow the curve of the cliff. On the landward side they are interrupted by a gate-tower resting on one of the most nobly decorated of the horseshoe arches that break the mighty walls of Moroccan cities. Underneath the tower the vaulted entrance turns, Arab fashion, at right angles, profiling its red arch against darkness and mystery. This bending of passages, so characteristic a device of the Moroccan builder, is like an architectural expression of the tortuous secret soul of the land.

Outside the Kasbah a narrow foot-path is squeezed between the walls and the edge of the cliff. Toward sunset it looks down on a strange scene. To the south of the citadel the cliff descends to a long dune sloping to a sand-beach; and dune and beach are covered with the slanting headstones of the immense Arab cemetery of El Alou. Acres and acres of graves fall away from the red ramparts to the grey sea; and breakers rolling straight from America send their spray across the lowest stones.

There are always things going on toward evening in an Arab cemetery. In this one, travellers from the *bled* are camping in one corner, donkeys grazing (on heaven knows what), a camel dozing under its pack; in another, about a new-made grave, there are ritual movements of muffled figures and wailings of a funeral hymn half drowned by the waves. Near us, on a fallen headstone, a man with a thoughtful face sits chatting with two friends and hugging to his breast a tiny boy who looks like a grasshopper in his green caftan; a little way off, a solitary philosopher, his eye

fixed on the sunset, lies on another grave, smoking his long pipe of kif.

There is infinite sadness in this scene under the fading sky, beside the cold welter of the Atlantic. One seems to be not in Africa itself, but in the Africa that northern crusaders may have dreamed of in snow-bound castles by colder shores of the same ocean. This is what Moghreb must have looked like to the confused imagination of the Middle Ages, to Norman knights burning to ransom the Holy Places, or Hansa merchants devising, in steep-roofed towns, of Barbary and the long caravans bringing apes and gold-powder from the south.

Inside the gate of the Kasbah one comes on more waste land and on other walls—for all Moroccan towns are enclosed in circuit within circuit of battlemented masonry. Then, unexpectedly, a gate in one of the inner walls lets one into a tiled court enclosed in a traceried cloister and overlooking an orange-grove that rises out of a carpet of roses. This peaceful and well-ordered place is the interior of the Medersa (the college) of the Oudayas. Morocco is full of these colleges, or rather lodging-houses of the students frequenting the mosques; for all Mahometan education is given in the mosque itself, only the preparatory work being done in the colleges. The most beautiful of the Medersas date from the earlier years of the long Merinid dynasty (1248-1548), the period at which Moroccan art, freed from too distinctively Spanish and Arab influences, began to develop a delicate grace of its own as far removed from the

extravagance of Spanish ornament as from the inheritance of Roman-Byzantine motives that the first Moslem invasion had brought with it from Syria and Mesopotamia.

These exquisite collegiate buildings, though still in use whenever they are near a well-known mosque, have all fallen into a state of sordid disrepair. Fortunately to build in the old tradition, which has never been lost—has, like all Orientals, an invincible repugnance to repairing and restoring, and one after another the frail exposed Arab structures, with their open courts and badly constructed terrace-roofs, are crumbling into ruin. Happily the French Government has at last been asked to intervene, and all over Morocco the Medersas are being repaired with skill and discretion. That of the Oudayas is already completely restored, and as it had long fallen into disuse it has been transformed by the Ministry of Fine Arts into a museum of Moroccan art.

The plan of the Medersas is always much the same: the eternal plan of the Arab house, built about one or more arcaded courts, with long narrow rooms enclosing them on the ground floor, and several stories above, reached by narrow stairs, and often opening on finely carved cedar galleries. The chief difference between the Medersa and the private house, or even the *fondak*,⁴ lies in the use to which the rooms are put. In the Medersas, one of the ground-floor apartments is always fitted up as a chapel, and shut off from the court by carved cedar doors still often touched with old gilding and vermilion. There are always a few

⁴ The Moroccan inn or caravanserai.

students praying in the chapel, while others sit in the doors of the upper rooms, their books on their knees, or lean over the carved galleries chatting with their companions who are washing their feet at the marble fountain in the court, preparatory to entering the chapel.

In the Medersa of the Oudayas, these native activities have been replaced by the lifeless hush of a museum. The rooms are furnished with old rugs, pottery, brasses, the curious embroidered hangings which line the tents of the chiefs, and other specimens of Arab art. One room reproduces a barber's shop in the bazaar, its benches covered with fine matting, the hanging mirror inlaid with mother-of-pearl, the razor-handles of silver *niello*. The horseshoe arches of the outer gallery look out on orange-blossoms, roses and the sea. It is all beautiful, calm and harmonious; and if one is tempted to mourn the absence of life and local colour, one has only to visit an abandoned Medersa to see that, but for French intervention, the charming colonnades and cedar chambers of the college of the Oudayas would by this time be a heap of undistinguished rubbish—for plaster and rubble do not "die in beauty" like the firm stones of Rome.

V

ROBINSON CRUSOE'S "SALLEE"

Before Morocco passed under the rule of the great governor who now administers it, the European colonists made short work of the beauty and privacy of the old Arab towns in which they established themselves.

On the west coast, especially, where the Mediterranean peoples, from the Phenicians to the Portuguese, have had trading-posts for over two thousand years, the harm done to such seaboard towns as Tangier, Rabat and Casablanca is hard to estimate. The modern European colonist apparently imagined that to plant his warehouses, *cafés* and cinema-palaces within the walls which for so long had fiercely excluded him was the most impressive way of proclaiming his domination.

Under General Lyautey such views are no longer tolerated. Respect for native habits, native beliefs and native architecture is the first principle inculcated in the civil servants attached to his administration. Not only does he require that the native towns shall be kept intact, and no European building erected within them; a sense of beauty not often vouchsafed to Colonial governors causes him to place the administration buildings so far beyond the walls that the modern colony grouped around them remains entirely distinct from the old town, instead of growing out of it like an ugly excrescence.

The Arab quarter of Rabat was already irreparably disfigured when General Lyautey came to Morocco; but ferocious old Salé, Phœnician counting-house and breeder of Barbary pirates, had been saved from profanation by its Moslem fanaticism. Few Christian feet had entered its walls except those of the prisoners who, like Robinson Crusoe, slaved for the wealthy merchants in its mysterious terraced houses. Not till two or three years ago was it completely pacified; and when it opened its gates to the infidel it was still, as it is to-day, the type of the untouched Moroccan city—so untouched that, with the sunlight irradiating its cream-coloured walls and the blue-white domes above them, it rests on its carpet of rich fruit-gardens like some rare specimen of Arab art on a strip of old Oriental velvet.

Within the walls, the magic persists: which does not always happen when one penetrates into the mirage-like cities of Arabian Africa. Salé has the charm of extreme compactness. Crowded between the river-mouth and the sea, its white and pale-blue houses almost touch across the narrow streets, and the reed-thatched bazaars seem like miniature reductions of the great trading labyrinths of Tunis or Fez.

Everything that the reader of the Arabian Nights expects to find is here: the whitewashed niches wherein pale youths sit weaving the fine mattings for which the town is still famous; the tunnelled passages where indolent merchants with bare feet crouch in their little kennels hung with richly ornamented saddlery and arms, or with slippers of pale citron leather

and bright embroidered *babouches*; the stalls with fruit, olives, tunny-fish, vague syrupy sweets, candles for saints' tombs, Mantegnesque garlands of red and green peppers, griddle-cakes sizzling on red-hot pans, and all the varied wares and cakes and condiments that the lady in the tale of the Three Calanders went out to buy, that memorable morning in the market of Bagdad.

Only at Salé all is on a small scale: there is not much of any one thing, except of the exquisite matting. The tide of commerce has ebbed from the intractable old city, and one feels, as one watches the listless purchasers in her little languishing bazaars, that her long animosity against the intruder has ended by destroying her own life.

The feeling increases when one leaves the bazaar for the streets adjoining it. An even deeper hush than that which hangs over the well-to-do quarters of all Arab towns broods over these silent thorough-fares, with heavy-nailed doors barring half-ruined houses. In a steep deserted square one of these doors opens its panels of weather-silvered cedar on the court of the frailest, ghostliest of Medersas—mere carved and painted shell of a dead house of learning. Mystic interweavings of endless lines, patient patterns interminably repeated in wood and stone and clay, all are here, from the tessellated paving of the court to the honeycombing of the cedar roof through which a patch of sky shows here and there like an inset of turquoise tiling.

This lovely ruin is in the safe hands of the French Fine Arts administration, and soon the wood-carvers and stucco-workers

of Fez will have revived its old perfection; but it will never again be more than a show-Medersa, standing empty and unused beside the mosque behind whose guarded doors and high walls one guesses that the old religious fanaticism of Salé is dying also, as her learning and her commerce have died.

In truth the only life in her is centred in the market-place outside the walls, where big expanding Rabat goes on certain days to provision herself. The market of Salé, though typical of all Moroccan markets, has an animation and picturesqueness of its own. Its rows of white tents pitched on a dusty square between the outer walls and the fruit-gardens make it look as though a hostile tribe had sat down to lay siege to the town; but the army is an army of hucksters, of farmers from the rich black lands along the river, of swarthy nomads and leather-gaitered peasant women from the hills, of slaves and servants and tradesmen from Rabat and Salé; a draped, veiled, turbaned mob shrieking, bargaining, fist-shaking, call on Allah to witness the monstrous villanies of the misbegotten miscreants they are trading with, and then, struck with the mysterious Eastern apathy, sinking down in languid heaps of muslin among the black figs, purple onions and rosy melons, the fluttering hens, the tethered goats, the whinnying foals, that are all enclosed in an outer circle of folded-up camels and of mules dozing under faded crimson saddles.

VI

CHELLA AND THE GREAT MOSQUE

The Merinid Sultans of Rabat had a terribly troublesome neighbour across the Bou-Regreg, and they built Chella to keep an eye on the pirates of Salé. But Chella has fallen like a Babylonian city triumphed over by the prophets; while Salé, sly, fierce and irrepressible, continued till well on in the nineteenth century to breed pirates and fanatics.

The ruins of Chella lie on the farther side of the plateau above the native town of Rabat. The mighty wall enclosing them faces the city wall of Rabat, looking at it across one of those great red powdery wastes which seem, in this strange land, like death and the desert forever creeping up to overwhelm the puny works of man.

The red waste is scored by countless trains of donkeys carrying water from the springs of Chella, by long caravans of mules and camels, and by the busy motors of the French administration; yet there emanates from it an impression of solitude and decay which even the prosaic tinkle of the trams jogging out from the European town to the Exhibition grounds above the sea cannot long dispel.

Perpetually, even in the new thriving French Morocco, the outline of a ruin or the look in a pair of eyes shifts the scene, rends the thin veil of the European Illusion, and confronts one

with the old grey Moslem reality. Passing under the gate of Chella, with its richly carved corbels and lofty crenellated towers, one feels one's self thus completely reabsorbed into the past.

Below the gate the ground slopes away, bare and blazing, to a hollow where a little blue-green minaret gleams through fig-trees, and fragments of arch and vaulting reveal the outline of a ruined mosque.

Was ever shade so blue-black and delicious as that of the cork-tree near the spring where the donkey's water-cans are being filled? Under its branches a black man in a blue shirt lies immovably sleeping in the dust. Close by women and children splash and chatter about the spring, and the dome of a saint's tomb shines through lustreless leaves. The black man, the donkeys, the women and children, the saint's dome, are all part of the inimitable Eastern scene in which inertia and agitation are so curiously combined, and a surface of shrill noise flickers over depths of such unfathomable silence.

The ruins of Chella belong to the purest period of Moroccan art. The tracery of the broken arches is all carved in stone or in glazed turquoise tiling, and the fragments of wall and vaulting have the firm elegance of a classic ruin. But what would even their beauty be without the leafy setting of the place? The "unimaginable touch of Time" gives Chella its peculiar charm: the aged fig-tree clamped in upturn tiles and thrusting gouty arms between the arches; the garlanding of vines flung from column to column; the secret pool to which childless women are brought

to bathe, and where the tree springing from a cleft of the steps is always hung with the bright bits of stuff which are the votive offerings of Africa.

The shade, the sound of springs, the terraced orange-garden with irises blooming along channels of running water, all this greenery and coolness in the hollow of a fierce red hill make Chella seem, to the traveller new to Africa, the very type and embodiment of its old contrasts of heat and freshness, of fire and languor. It is like a desert traveller's dream in his last fever.

Yacoub-el-Mansour was the fourth of the great Almohad Sultans who, in the twelfth century, drove out the effete Almoravids, and swept their victorious armies from Marrakech to Tunis and from Tangier to Madrid. His grandfather, Abd-el-Moumen, had been occupied with conquest and civic administration. It was said of his rule that "he seized northern Africa to make order prevail there"; and in fact, out of a welter of wild tribes confusedly fighting and robbing he drew an empire firmly seated and securely governed, wherein caravans travelled from the Atlas to the Straits without fear of attack, and "a soldier wandering through the fields would not have dared to pluck an ear of wheat."

His grandson, the great El-Mansour, was a conqueror too; but where he conquered he planted the undying seed of beauty. The victor of Alarcos, the soldier who subdued the north of Spain, dreamed a great dream of art. His ambition was to bestow on his three capitals, Seville, Rabat and Marrakech, the three most

beautiful towers the world had ever seen; and if the tower of Rabat had been completed, and that of Seville had not been injured by Spanish embellishments, his dream would have been realized.

The "Tower of Hassan," as the Sultan's tower is called, rises from the plateau above old Rabat, overlooking the steep cliff that drops down to the last winding of the Bou-Regreg. Truncated at half its height, it stands on the edge of the cliff, a far-off beacon to travellers by land and sea. It is one of the world's great monuments, so sufficient in strength and majesty that until one has seen its fellow, the Koutoubya of Marrakech, one wonders if the genius of the builder could have carried such perfect balance of massive wall-spaces and traceried openings to a triumphant completion.

Near the tower, the red-brown walls and huge piers of the mosque built at the same time stretch their roofless alignment beneath the sky. This mosque, before it was destroyed, must have been one of the finest monuments of Almohad architecture in Morocco: now, with its tumbled red masses of masonry and vast cisterns overhung by clumps of blue aloes, it still forms a ruin of Roman grandeur.

The Mosque, the Tower, the citadel of the Oudayas, and the mighty walls and towers of Chella, compose an architectural group as noble and complete as that of some mediæval Tuscan city. All they need to make the comparison exact is that they should have been compactly massed on a steep hill, instead of

lying scattered over the wide spaces between the promontory of the Oudayas and the hillside of Chella.

The founder of Rabat, the great Yacoub-el-Mansour, The Moroccan Arab, though he continues to build—and called it, in memory of the battle of Alarcos, "The Camp of Victory" (*Ribat-el-Path*), and the monuments he bestowed on it justified the name in another sense, by giving it the beauty that lives when battles are forgotten.

II

VOLUBILIS, MOULAY IDRISS AND MEKNEZ

I

VOLUBILIS

One day before sunrise we set out from Rabat for the ruins of Roman Volubilis.

From the ferry of the Bou-Regreg we looked backward on a last vision of orange ramparts under a night-blue sky sprinkled with stars; ahead, over gardens still deep in shadow, the walls of Salé were passing from drab to peach-colour in the eastern glow. Dawn is the romantic hour in Africa. Dirt and dilapidation disappear under a pearly haze, and a breeze from the sea blows away the memory of fetid markets and sordid heaps of humanity. At that hour the old Moroccan cities look like the ivory citadels in a Persian miniature, and the fat shopkeepers riding out to their vegetable-gardens like Princes sallying forth to rescue captive maidens.

Our way led along the highroad from Rabat to the modern port of Kenitra, near the ruins of the Phenician colony of Mehedyia.

Just north of Kenitra we struck the trail, branching off eastward to a European village on the light railway between Rabat and Fez, and beyond the railway-sheds and flat-roofed stores the wilderness began, stretching away into clear distances bounded by the hills of the Rarb,⁵ above which the sun was rising.

Range after range these translucent hills rose before us; all around the solitude was complete. Village life, and even tent life, naturally gathers about a river-bank or a spring; and the waste we were crossing was of waterless sand bound together by a loose desert growth. Only an abandoned well-curb here and there cast its blue shadow on the yellow *bled*, or a saint's tomb hung like a bubble between sky and sand. The light had the preternatural purity which gives a foretaste of mirage: it was the light in which magic becomes real, and which helps to understand how, to people living in such an atmosphere, the boundary between fact and dream perpetually fluctuates.

The sand was scored with tracks and ruts innumerable, for the road between Rabat and Fez is travelled not only by French government motors but by native caravans and trains of pilgrims to and from the sacred city of Moulay Idriss, the founder of the Idrissite dynasty, whose tomb is in the Zerhoun, the mountain ridge above Volubilis. To untrained eyes it was impossible to guess which of the trails one ought to follow; and without much surprise we suddenly found the motor stopping, while its wheels spun round vainly in the loose sand.

⁵ The high plateau-and-hill formation between Tangier and Fez.

The military chauffeur was not surprised either; nor was Captain de M., the French staff-officer who accompanied us.

"It often happens just here," they admitted philosophically. "When the General goes to Meknez he is always followed by a number of motors, so that if his own is stuck he may go on in another."

This was interesting to know, but not particularly helpful, as the General and his motors were not travelling our way that morning. Nor was any one else, apparently. It is curious how quickly the *bled* empties itself to the horizon if one happens to have an accident in it! But we had learned our lesson between Tangier and Rabat, and were able to produce a fair imitation of the fatalistic smile of the country.

The officer remarked cheerfully that somebody might turn up, and we all sat down in the *bled*.

A Berber woman, cropping up from nowhere, came and sat beside us. She had the thin sun-tanned face of her kind, brilliant eyes touched with *khol*, high cheek-bones, and the exceedingly short upper lip which gives such charm to the smile of the young nomad women. Her dress was the usual faded cotton shift, hooked on the shoulders with brass or silver clasps (still the antique *fibulæ*), and wound about with a vague drape in whose folds a brown baby wriggled.

The coolness of dawn had vanished and the sun beat down from a fierce sky. The village on the railway was too far off to be reached on foot, and there were probably no mules there to

spare. Nearer at hand there was no sign of help: not a fortified farm, or even a circle of nomad tents. It was the unadulterated desert—and we waited.

Not in vain; for after an hour or two, from far off in the direction of the hills, there appeared an army with banners. We stared at it unbelievably. The *mirage*, of course! We were too sophisticated to doubt it, and tales of sun-dazed travellers mocked by such visions rose in our well-stocked memories.

The chauffeur thought otherwise. "Good! That's a pilgrimage from the mountains. They're going to Salé to pray at the tomb of the *marabout*; to-day is his feast-day."

And so they were! And as we hung on their approach, and speculated as to the chances of their stopping to help, I had time to note the beauty of this long train winding toward us under parti-colored banners. There was something celestial, almost diaphanous, in the hundreds of figures turbaned and draped in white, marching slowly through the hot colorless radiance over the hot colorless sand.

The most part were on foot, or bestriding tiny donkeys, but a stately Caïd rode alone at the end of the line on a horse saddled with crimson velvet; and to him our officer appealed.

The Caïd courteously responded, and twenty or thirty pilgrims were ordered to harness themselves to the motor and haul it back to the trail, while the rest of the procession moved hieratically onward.

I felt scruples at turning from their path even a fraction of

this pious company; but they fell to with a saintly readiness, and before long the motor was on the trail. Then rewards were dispensed; and instantly those holy men became a prey to the darkest passions. Even in this land of contrasts the transition from pious serenity to rapacious rage can seldom have been more rapid. The devotees of the *marabout* fought, screamed, tore their garments and rolled over each other with sanguinary gestures in the struggle for our pesetas; then, perceiving our indifference, they suddenly remembered their religious duties, scrambled to their feet, tucked up their flying draperies, and raced after the tail-end of the procession.

Through a golden heat-haze we struggled on to the hills. The country was fallow, and in great part too sandy for agriculture; but here and there we came on one of the deep-set Moroccan rivers, with a reddish-yellow course channelled between perpendicular banks of red earth, and marked by a thin line of verdure that widened to fruit-gardens wherever a village had sprung up. We traversed several of these "sedentary"⁶ villages, *nourwals* of clay houses with thatched conical roofs, in gardens of fig, apricot and pomegranate that must be so many pink and white paradises after the winter rains.

One of these villages seemed to be inhabited entirely by blacks, big friendly creatures who came out to tell us by which trail to reach the bridge over the yellow *oued*. In the *oued* their womenkind were washing the variegated family rags. They were

⁶ So called to distinguish them from the tent villages of the less settled groups.

handsome blue-bronze creatures, bare to the waist, with tight black astrakhan curls and firmly sculptured legs and ankles; and all around them, like a swarm of gnats, danced countless jolly pickaninnies, naked as lizards, with the spindle legs and globular stomachs of children fed only on cereals.

Half terrified but wholly interested, these infants buzzed about the motor while we stopped to photograph them; and as we watched their antics we wondered whether they were the descendants of the little Soudanese boys whom the founder of Meknez, the terrible Sultan Moulay-Ismaël, used to carry off from beyond the Atlas and bring up in his military camps to form the nucleus of the Black Guard which defended his frontiers. We were on the line of travel between Meknez and the sea, and it seemed not unlikely that these *nourwals* were all that remained of scattered outposts of Moulay-Ismaël's legionaries.

After a time we left *oueds* and villages behind us and were in the mountains of the Rarb, toiling across a high sandy plateau. Far off a fringe of vegetation showed promise of shade and water, and at last, against a pale mass of olive-trees, we saw the sight which, at whatever end of the world one comes upon it, wakes the same sense of awe: the ruin of a Roman city.

Volubilis (called by the Arabs the Castle of the Pharaohs) is the only considerable Roman colony so far discovered in Morocco. It stands on the extreme ledge of a high plateau backed by the mountains of the Zerhoun. Below the plateau, the land drops down precipitately to a narrow river-valley green with

orchards and gardens, and in the neck of the valley, where the hills meet again, the conical white town of Moulay Idriss, the Sacred City of Morocco, rises sharply against a wooded background.

So the two dominations look at each other across the valley: one, the lifeless Roman ruin, representing a system, an order, a social conception that still run through all our modern ways; the other, the untouched Moslem city, more dead and sucked back into an unintelligible past than any broken architrave of Greece or Rome.

Volubilis seems to have had the extent and wealth of a great military outpost, such as Timgad in Algeria; but in the seventeenth century it was very nearly destroyed by Moulay-Ismaël, the Sultan of the Black Guard, who carried off its monuments piece-meal to build his new capital of Meknez, that Mequinez of contemporary travellers which was held to be one of the wonders of the age.

Little remains to Volubilis in the way of important monuments: only the fragments of a basilica, part of an arch of triumph erected in honour of Caracalla, and the fallen columns and architraves which strew the path of Rome across the world. But its site is magnificent; and as the excavation of the ruins was interrupted by the war it is possible that subsequent search may bring forth other treasures comparable to the beautiful bronze *sloughi* (the African hound) which is now its principal possession.

It was delicious, after seven hours of travel under the African

sun, to sit on the shady terrace where the Curator of Volubilis, M. Louis Châtelain, welcomes his visitors. The French Fine Arts have built a charming house with gardens and pergolas for the custodian of the ruins, and have found in M. Châtelain an archæologist so absorbed in his task that, as soon as conditions permit, every inch of soil in the circumference of the city will be made to yield up whatever secrets it hides.

II

MOULAY IDRISS

We lingered under the pergolas of Volubilis till the heat grew less intolerable, and then our companions suggested a visit to Moulay Idriss.

Such a possibility had not occurred to us, and even Captain de M. seemed to doubt whether the expedition were advisable. Moulay Idriss was still said to be resentful of Christian intrusion: it was only a year before that the first French officers had entered it.

But M. Châtelain was confident that there would be no opposition to our visit, and with the piled-up terraces and towers of the Sacred City growing golden in the afternoon light across the valley it was impossible to hesitate.

We drove down through an olive-wood as ancient as those of Mitylene and Corfu, and then along the narrowing valley, between gardens luxuriant even in the parched Moroccan autumn. Presently the motor began to climb the steep road to the town, and at a gateway we got out and were met by the native chief of police. Instantly at the high windows of mysterious houses veiled heads appeared and sidelong eyes cautiously inspected us. But the quarter was deserted, and we walked on without meeting any one to the Street of the Weavers, a silent narrow way between low whitewashed niches like the cubicles in

a convent. In each niche sat a grave white-robed youth, forming a great amphora-shaped grain-basket out of closely plaited straw. Vine-leaves and tendrils hung through the reed roofing overhead, and grape-clusters cast their classic shadow at our feet. It was like walking on the unrolled frieze of a white Etruscan vase patterned with black vine garlands.

The silence and emptiness of the place began to strike us: there was no sign of the Oriental crowd that usually springs out of the dust at the approach of strangers. But suddenly we heard close by the lament of the *rekka* (a kind of long fife), accompanied by a wild thrum-thrum of earthenware drums and a curious excited chanting of men's voices. I had heard such a chant before, at the other end of North Africa, in Kairouan, one of the other great Sanctuaries of Islam, where the sect of the Aïssaouas celebrate their sanguinary rites in the *Zaouïa*⁷ of their confraternity. Yet it seemed incredible that if the Aïssaouas of Moulay Idriss were performing their ceremonies that day the chief of police should be placidly leading us through the streets in the very direction from which the chant was coming. The Moroccan, though he has no desire to get into trouble with the Christian, prefers to be left alone on feast-days, especially in such a stronghold of the faith as Moulay Idriss.

But "Geschehen ist geschehen" is the sum of Oriental philosophy. For centuries Moulay Idriss had held out fanatically on its holy steep; then, suddenly, in 1916, its chiefs saw that the

⁷ Sacred college.

game was up, and surrendered without a pretense of resistance. Now the whole thing was over, the new conditions were accepted, and the chief of police assured us that with the French uniform at our side we should be safe anywhere.

"The Aïssaouas?" he explained. "No, this is another sect, the Hamadchas, who are performing their ritual dance on the feast-day of their patron, the *marabout* Hamadch, whose tomb is in the Zerhoun. The feast is celebrated publicly in the market-place of Moulay Idriss."

As he spoke we came out into the market-place, and understood why there had been no crowd at the gate. All the population was in the square and on the roofs that mount above it, tier by tier, against the wooded hillside: Moulay Idriss had better to do that day than to gape at a few tourists in dust-coats.

Short of Sfax, and the other coast cities of eastern Tunisia, there is surely not another town in North Africa as white as Moulay Idriss. Some are pale blue and pinky yellow, like the Kasbah of Tangier, or cream and blue like Salé; but Tangier and Salé, for centuries continuously subject to European influences, have probably borrowed their colors from Genoa and the Italian Riviera. In the interior of the country, and especially in Morocco, where the whole color-scheme is much soberer than in Algeria and Tunisia, the color of the native houses is always a penitential shade of mud and ashes.

But Moulay Idriss, that afternoon, was as white as if its arcaded square had been scooped out of a big cream cheese. The

late sunlight lay like gold-leaf on one side of the square, the other was in pure blue shade; and above it, the crowded roofs, terraces and balconies packed with women in bright dresses looked like a flower-field on the edge of a marble quarry.

The bright dresses were as unusual a sight as the white walls, for the average Moroccan crowd is the color of its houses. But the occasion was a special one, for these feasts of the Hamadchas occur only twice a year, in spring and autumn, and as the ritual dances take place out of doors, instead of being performed inside the building of the confraternity, the feminine population seizes the opportunity to burst into flower on the house-tops.

It is rare, in Morocco, to see in the streets or the bazaars any women except of the humblest classes, household slaves, servants, peasants from the country or small tradesmen's wives; and even they (with the exception of the unveiled Berber women) are wrapped in the prevailing grave-clothes. The *filles de joie* and dancing-girls whose brilliant dresses enliven certain streets of the Algerian and Tunisian towns are invisible, or at least unnoticeable, in Morocco, where life, on the whole, seems so much less gay and brightly-tinted; and the women of the richer classes, mercantile or aristocratic, never leave their harems except to be married or buried. A throng of women dressed in light colors is therefore to be seen in public only when some street festival draws them to the roofs. Even then it is probable that the throng is mostly composed of slaves, household servants, and women of the lower *bourgeoisie*; but as they are all dressed in

mauve and rose and pale green, with long earrings and jewelled head-bands flashing through their parted veils, the illusion, from a little distance, is as complete as though they were the ladies in waiting of the Queen of Sheba; and that radiant afternoon at Moulay Idriss, above the vine-garlanded square, and against the background of piled-up terraces, their vivid groups were in such contrast to the usual gray assemblages of the East that the scene seemed like a setting for some extravagantly staged ballet.

For the same reason the spectacle unrolling itself below us took on a blessed air of unreality. Any normal person who has seen a dance of the Aïssaouas and watched them swallow thorns and hot coals, slash themselves with knives, and roll on the floor in epilepsy must have privately longed, after the first excitement was over, to fly from the repulsive scene. The Hamadchas are much more savage than Aïssaouas, and carry much farther their display of cataleptic anæsthesia; and, knowing this, I had wondered how long I should be able to stand the sight of what was going on below our terrace. But the beauty of the setting redeemed the bestial horror. In that unreal golden light the scene became merely symbolical: it was like one of those strange animal masks which the Middle Ages brought down from antiquity by way of the satyr-plays of Greece, and of which the half-human protagonists still grin and contort themselves among the Christian symbols of Gothic cathedrals.

At one end of the square the musicians stood on a stone platform above the dancers. Like the musicians in a bas-relief

they were flattened side by side against a wall, the fife-players with lifted arms and inflated cheeks, the drummers pounding frantically on long earthenware drums shaped like enormous hour-glasses and painted in barbaric patterns; and below, down the length of the market-place, the dance unrolled itself in a frenzied order that would have filled with envy a Paris or London impresario.

In its centre an inspired-looking creature whirled about on his axis, the black ringlets standing out in snaky spirals from his haggard head, his cheek-muscles convulsively twitching. Around him, but a long way off, the dancers rocked and circled with long raucous cries dominated by the sobbing booming music; and in the sunlit space between dancers and holy man, two or three impish children bobbed about with fixed eyes and a grimace of comic frenzy, solemnly parodying his contortions.

Meanwhile a tall grave personage in a doge-like cap, the only calm figure in the tumult, moved gravely here and there, regulating the dance, stimulating the frenzy, or calming some devotee who had broken the ranks and lay tossing and foaming on the stones. There was something far more sinister in this passionless figure, holding his hand on the key that let loose such crazy forces, than in the poor central whirligig who merely set the rhythm of the convulsions.

The dancers were all dressed in white caftans or in the blue shirts of the lowest classes. In the sunlight something that looked like fresh red paint glistened on their shaved black or yellow

skulls and made dark blotches on their garments. At first these stripes and stains suggested only a gaudy ritual ornament like the pattern on the drums; then one saw that the paint, or whatever it was, kept dripping down from the whirling caftans and forming fresh pools among the stones; that as one of the pools dried up another formed, redder and more glistening, and that these pools were fed from great gashes which the dancers hacked in their own skulls and breasts with hatchets and sharpened stones. The dance was a blood-rite, a great sacrificial symbol, in which blood flowed so freely that all the rocking feet were splashed with it.

Gradually, however, it became evident that many of the dancers simply rocked and howled, without hacking themselves, and that most of the bleeding skulls and breasts belonged to negroes. Every now and then the circle widened to let in another figure, black or dark yellow, the figure of some humble blue-shirted spectator suddenly "getting religion" and rushing forward to snatch a weapon and baptize himself with his own blood; and as each new recruit joined the dancers the music shrieked louder and the devotees howled more wolfishly. And still, in the centre, the mad *marabout* spun, and the children bobbed and mimicked him and rolled their diamond eyes.

Such is the dance of the Hamadchas, of the confraternity of the *marabout* Hamadch, a powerful saint of the seventeenth century, whose tomb is in the Zerhoun above Moulay Idriss. Hamadch, it appears, had a faithful slave, who, when his master died, killed himself in despair, and the self-inflicted wounds of

the brotherhood are supposed to symbolize the slave's suicide; though no doubt the origin of the ceremony might be traced back to the depths of that ensanguined grove where Mr. Fraser plucked the Golden Bough.

The more naïve interpretation, however, has its advantages, since it enables the devotees to divide their ritual duties into two classes, the devotions of the free men being addressed to the saint who died in his bed, while the slaves belong to the slave, and must therefore simulate his horrid end. And this is the reason why most of the white caftans simply rock and writhe, while the humble blue shirts drip with blood.

The sun was setting when we came down from our terrace above the market-place. To find a lodging for the night we had to press on to Meknez, where we were awaited at the French military post; therefore we were reluctantly obliged to refuse an invitation to take tea with the Caïd, whose high-perched house commands the whole white amphitheatre of the town. It was disappointing to leave Moulay Idriss with the Hamadchas howling their maddest, and so much besides to see; but as we drove away under the long shadows of the olives we counted ourselves lucky to have entered the sacred town, and luckier still to have been there on the day of the dance which, till a year ago, no foreigner had been allowed to see.

A fine French road runs from Moulay Idriss to Meknez, and we flew on through the dusk between wooded hills and open stretches on which the fires of nomad camps put orange splashes

in the darkness. Then the moon rose, and by its light we saw a widening valley, and gardens and orchards that stretched up to a great walled city outlined against the stars.

III

MEKNEZ

All that evening, from the garden of the Military Subdivision on the opposite height, we sat and looked across at the dark tree-clumps and moon-lit walls of Meknez, and listened to its fantastic history.

Meknez was built by the Sultan Moulay-Ismaël, around the nucleus of a small town of which the site happened to please him, at the very moment when Louis XIV was creating Versailles. The coincidence of two contemporary autocrats calling cities out of the wilderness has caused persons with a taste for analogy to describe Meknez as the Versailles of Morocco: an epithet which is about as instructive as it would be to call Phidias the Benvenuto Cellini of Greece.

There is, however, a pretext for the comparison in the fact that the two sovereigns took a lively interest in each other's affairs. Moulay-Ismaël sent several embassies to treat with Louis XIV on the eternal question of piracy and the ransom of Christian captives, and the two rulers were continually exchanging gifts and compliments.

The governor of Tetouan, who was sent to Paris in 1680, having brought as presents to the French King a lion, a lioness, a tigress, and four ostriches, Louis XIV shortly afterward despatched M. de Saint-Amand to Morocco with two dozen

watches, twelve pieces of gold brocade, a cannon six feet long and other firearms. After this the relations between the two courts remained friendly till 1693, at which time they were strained by the refusal of France to return the Moorish captives who were employed on the king's galleys, and who were probably as much needed there as the Sultan's Christian slaves for the building of Moorish palaces.

Six years later the Sultan despatched Abdallah-ben-Aïssa to France to reopen negotiations. The ambassador was as brilliantly received and as eagerly run after as a modern statesman on an official mission, and his candidly expressed admiration for the personal charms of the Princesse de Conti, one of the French monarch's legitimized children, is supposed to have been mistaken by the court for an offer of marriage from the Emperor of Barbary. But he came back without a treaty.

Moulay-Ismaël, whose long reign (1673 to 1727) and extraordinary exploits make him already a legendary figure, conceived, early in his career, a passion for Meknez; and through all his troubled rule, with its alternations of barbaric warfare and far-reaching negotiations, palace intrigue, crazy bloodshed and great administrative reforms, his heart perpetually reverted to the wooded slopes on which he dreamed of building a city more splendid than Fez or Marrakech.

"The Sultan" (writes his chronicler Aboul Kasim-ibn-Ahmad, called "Ezziani") "loved Meknez, the climate of which had enchanted him, and he would have liked never to leave it." He

left it, indeed, often, left it perpetually, to fight with revolted tribes in the Atlas, to defeat one Berber army after another, to carry his arms across the High Atlas into the Souss, to adorn Fez with the heads of seven hundred vanquished chiefs, to put down his three rebellious brothers, to strip all the cities of his empire of their negroes and transport them to Meknez ("so that not a negro, man, woman or child, slave or free, was left in any part of the country"); to fight and defeat the Christians (1683); to take Tangier, to conduct a campaign on the Moulouya, to lead the holy war against the Spanish (1689), to take Larache, the Spanish commercial post on the west coast (which furnished eighteen hundred captives for Meknez); to lay siege to Ceuta, conduct a campaign against the Turks of Algiers, repress the pillage in his army, subdue more tribes, and build forts for his Black Legionaries from Oudjda to the Oued Noun. But almost each year's bloody record ends with the placid phrase: "Then the Sultan returned to Meknez."

In the year 1701, Ezziani writes, the indomitable old man "deprived his rebellious sons of their principalities; after which date he consecrated himself exclusively to the building of his palaces and the planting of his gardens. And in 1720 (nineteen years later in this long reign!) he ordered the destruction of the mausoleum of Moulay Idriss for the purpose of enlarging it. And to gain the necessary space he bought all the adjacent land, and the workmen did not leave these new labors till they were entirely completed."

In this same year there was levied on Fez a new tax which was so heavy that the inhabitants were obliged to abandon the city.

Yet it is written of this terrible old monarch, who devastated whole districts, and sacrificed uncounted thousands of lives for his ruthless pleasure, that under his administration of his chaotic and turbulent empire "the country rejoiced in the most complete security. A Jew or a woman might travel alone from Oudjda to the Oued Noun without any one's asking their business. Abundance reigned throughout the land: grain, food, cattle were to be bought for the lowest prices. Nowhere in the whole of Morocco was a highwayman or a robber to be found."

And probably both sides of the picture are true.

What, then, was the marvel across the valley, what were the "lordly pleasure-houses" to whose creation and enlargement Moulay-Ismaël returned again and again amid the throes and violences of a nearly centenarian life?

The chronicler continues: "The Sultan caused all the houses near the Kasbah⁸ to be demolished, *and compelled the inhabitants to carry away the ruins of their dwellings*. All the eastern end of the town was also torn down, and the ramparts were rebuilt. He also built the Great Mosque next to the palace of Nasr.... He occupied himself personally with the construction of his palaces, and before one was finished he caused another to be begun. He built the mosque of Elakhdar; the walls of the new town were pierced with twenty fortified gates and surmounted

⁸ The citadal of old Meknez.

with platforms for cannon. Within the walls he made a great artificial lake where one might row in boats. There was also a granary with immense subterranean reservoirs of water, and a stable *three miles long* for the Sultan's horses and mules; twelve thousand horses could be stabled in it. The flooring rested on vaults in which the grain for the horses was stored.... He also built the palace of Elmansour, which had twenty cupolas; from the top of each cupola one could look forth on the plain and the mountains around Meknez. All about the stables the rarest trees were planted. Within the walls were fifty palaces, each with its own mosque and its baths. Never was such a thing known in any country, Arab or foreign, pagan or Moslem. The guarding of the doors of these palaces was intrusted to twelve hundred black eunuchs."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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