



Courtesy: Chemins de Fer du Maroc

Berber nomads resting by one of the big road-signs
beside a Moroccan highway

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THE LAND OF MUD CASTLES

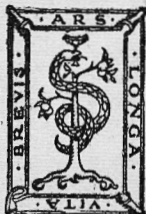
by

JIM INGRAM

AUTHOR OF

"I Found Adventure" etc.

With twenty illustrations



JOHN LONG LIMITED

LONDON

NEW YORK

MELBOURNE

SYDNEY

CAPE TOWN

First Published - 1952

To
RAYMOND HAYES
IN FRIENDSHIP

Printed in Great Britain by
William Brendon and Son, Ltd.
The Mayflower Press (late of Plymouth)
at Bushey Mill Lane
Watford, Herts.

PREFACE

by

Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald

THIS is a book about Morocco. You might even call it an out-of-date book about a walking tour in Morocco, for Jim Ingram's trip started at just about the same time as General Franco's revolution—and that is ancient history indeed. You may well say: "Well, why bother about it? It's difficult enough to keep pace with the present." Of course, if you read Jim Ingram's previous book, *I Found Adventure*, you will not be saying anything so silly as that, for you will have been awaiting this one eagerly. But if you did not read that earlier book, I should like to quote for you two sentences from the last page. "For myself, I have come to the conclusion that in spite of all my troubles my life has been a happy one. I say this though my hold on life is still precarious, for each year my lameness gives me a little more trouble, and the fight against pain grows harder." You see, there is so much more in this book than a mere record of a walking tour that took place years ago.

Jim Ingram was born a cripple, and he is still crippled. And, as if that were not sufficient burden in itself, he went blind when he was sixteen. Operations brought some sight back, but only some; for the rest there was nothing to be done. Partially blind and a cripple, Jim Ingram still wanted to be an explorer and an archæologist and an author, and he would let no handicap stand in his way. He had no money, and he had no friends of the sort who can pull strings to untie knots, so he set off without either.

Jim Ingram is the bravest man I know. Here is no mere quality of physical courage; here is the true spiritual bravery. As you read this book you will forget that the author is a cripple who cannot see more than dimly; you will read this as the book of a man as fit as you are, and even then you will marvel at his endurance. And that is the proper measure of Jim Ingram's stature as a man.

I can think of no finer, more heartening message for the poor and lonely and physically handicapped, for the frustrated, than this book—unless it be the one before.

BRIAN VESEY-FITZGERALD.

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CHAPTER I

REVOLT IN AFRICA

YELLOW sunlight, slanting through the iron-barred window set high up in the rough stone wall, lit up the small cell in which I sat on a rough plank bed wondering how long I was to remain a prisoner.

From outside the heavy wooden door came the muffled tread of the sentry's feet as he paced to and fro along the stone-floored corridor. Occasionally men's voices reached me from the courtyard outside, and through the window drifted a low, sullen rumbling which might have been the roaring of far-off artillery; but most of the time a silence so oppressive that it might almost have been felt, made the dreary hours seem longer.

Forty-eight hours previously General Franco had flown from the Canary Islands to raise the standard of revolt in Spanish Morocco. Among various persons whom his soldiery had seen fit to imprison was myself, an amateur archaeologist, who, while on a vagabond journey across Morocco, had accepted a lift in a stranger's car without realizing that in a civil war the dictum that a man is known by the company he keeps may have disagreeable consequences. For laughing, devil-may-care Raoul, in whose car I had been travelling to Tangier, was now confined in a neighbouring cell as a suspected government agent, so I, *ipso facto*, faced a similar charge.

It had been in the hot, drowsy forenoon when the bearded Moors, rifles in their hands, their tunics criss-crossed with cartridge belts, had brought me to this old walled and gated Spanish house on the road to Arzila. Now the last sunlight was vanishing, giving place to the silken blackness of the African night. From far off came the sound of a *muezzin* calling the faithful to the evening prayer. How long the hours seemed.

I thought over the events which had led to my being in this predicament. Early in the morning we three, Raoul, myself, the Moorish servant, Ali, had sped northward in the big blue Renault. At the frontier of the French and Spanish zones nobody had definite news of what was happening; a severe bombardment was reported to have taken place along the western coast, Tetuan was in ruins, Arzila was held by the rebels, Larache was being bombed from the air. Eager to reach Tangier we dismissed much

of this as mere rumour, and pressed northward along the dusty road. The frontier was closed and there was no turning back.

A tense, sullen atmosphere hung over the bare, brown land. At the occasional villages the women and children scuttled away out of sight, while the men stared at us hard faced, their rifles in their hands. We passed through towns full of armed men, where barricades had been drawn across the streets and all traffic stopped. The militiamen halted our car and said it was dangerous to proceed. Soldiers, looking very young, clustered about our car, more concerned with discovering whether we had any cigarettes than ascertaining our political views.

After a long halt we were allowed to proceed, till we reached another barricade across the road. A soldier came and took our passports and escorted Raoul to a house surrounded by purple bougainvillaea. Time passed, and he did not return, and I grew worried. The grim, unsmiling faces of the Moorish troops made me hope that I did not fall into their hands. Beyond the mere fact that there was a civil war in progress, I knew nothing of political conditions in Spain.

A squad of Moorish soldiers armed with rifles and bayonets surrounded the car and ordered me to get out. Their leader searched me for arms, then they fell into step around me and took me to the house, which apparently served as temporary military headquarters. In an inner room whose furnishings consisted mainly of maps and racks of rifles I was cross-examined by a plump, little, olive-skinned Spanish officer, but as he spoke no English and I no Spanish we did not make very much progress.

"Bloody Red," said he, pounding the table with his fist. He repeated the phrase; it seemed to comprise his entire stock of English.

I explained that I took no interest in politics, that archaeology was the subject which interested me most, that my passport was in order, and if he would communicate with the British Consul this official would vouch for me.

The officer replied with more unintelligible questions. It was clear he did not understand a word of what I had been saying.

"No *sabe*," I replied, shrugging my shoulders.

It seemed his patience was exhausted, for he snapped: "Take him away," and the guards came and took me back to my cell. Ten hours passed.

Locked in his cell a prisoner's thoughts turn again and again to the ideas and actions which led to his imprisonment, and whether, by following another course of action he could have

avoided the misfortune which has overtaken him. Often the wanderer asks himself why he pursues his roving life. Why travel? What is this powerful force which makes men leave their homes and kindred and go wandering across strange lands, to undergo pain and hunger and perhaps a violent death?

In this book you will read of long journeys under difficult conditions, of rough treatment at the hands of inhospitable men, of the high adventure which resulted in my being Franco's prisoner. And if you are not of that breed in whose heart the wanderlust burns like a steady flame you may well ask: "Where is the sense in it, when one might remain comfortably at home in England?" How can one explain to the stay-at-home mind the terrific compulsions which send men roving in queer lands and queerer company?

"A climb down the side of a ship, a few strokes of an oar, and a man may still pass, *if his tastes lie that way*, from the last refinements of our world, into the grim adventure of a thousand years ago, experience it may be the captivity of a Cervantes or a St. Louis, even the martyrdom of a slave."¹

One may fall under the spell of such a phrase, read in the pages of a book. The writer had in mind those gallant Spaniards who met death or captivity in the Riff country of Morocco, during the long and bloody war against Abd el Krim, but it is equally applicable to the state of mind of all men who, against all reason, venture upon strange quests in strange lands, though they know that such ventures may bring them only pain and hunger and death.

If your tastes lie that way?

But why?

Psychology teaches us that young people are always attracted by a cause which promises risk and adventure, even though it calls for sacrifice and danger. Psychology teaches us, too, that each individual re-lives in his or her own lifetime the entire past history of the human race, and is subjected in turn to the instincts of each past stage. In turn we are primitive hunter, herdsman, cave-man and forest-dweller. Modern city life, by cutting us off from our natural environment, allows no legitimate outlet for the expression of these instincts, which then often make their appearance in a perverted form as acts of hooliganism and crime. Hence our desire to go 'roughing it', to go tramping, camping, hunting and exploring. The call of the out of doors is a reminder of the

¹Page 376, *A Vision of Morocco*, by V. C. Scott O'Connor (Thornton Butterworth).

need for a closer touch with Nature, for the proper enjoyment of a full and healthy life.

Is not ~~this~~ an explanation of the vagabond mentality, of those persons who do not fit easily into the mould of modern civilized life, who refuse to be regimented, who have a nostalgia for a way of life which is different? Think of those lines from Frank Tatchell's delightful book, *The Happy Traveller*:

"I ain't got folks an' I ain't got money, I ain't got nothing at all,
But a sort of a queer old thirst that keeps me movin' on till I fall;
And many a time I've been short of shelter an' many a time o' grub,
But I've got away from the rows of houses, the streets, an' the corner pub——
And here by the side of a sea that's shining under a sky like flame,
Me that was born with a taste for travel gives thanks because o' the same."

It was because my tastes lay that way, and because, for the traveller in search of new, even of rude, experience, barbaric south Morocco remained unknown and unspoiled, that I was here.

As the hours passed and nothing happened I began to feel frightened. I did not know what it was all about, and I wondered what had happened to Raoul, and why we were being held as prisoners.

Then the door was unfastened, my guards reappeared, and took me before the officer again. Raoul, big, broad-shouldered, dark-haired Frenchman, was there.

"Why are they keeping us here?" I demanded.

"They think we are government sympathizers from the French zone," Raoul replied. "Among my papers were some business addresses belonging to men known to be hostile to Franco."

There was no time to say more for the plump little Spanish officer pounded the table with his fist and spat out a string of questions. Raoul jabbered back at him in halting Spanish, while I looked through the open doorway to where a lantern glowed redly against the courtyard wall. Was it my imagination, or was the wall, at the height of a man's chest, pitted with bullet holes? I suddenly felt sick.

"Keep your chin up," remarked Raoul with a grin. "They won't shoot us. Don't let them see you feel nervous."

He was interrupted by the arrival of two Moors, half dragging a dishevelled Spaniard between them. The man had suffered some rough treatment, for blood was streaming from his cheek and one eye was black and swollen, and when they released their hold on him he swayed dizzily as he stood before the table at which the officer was seated. A heated argument took place. The newcomer's yellow teeth showed in a scowl as he snarled defiance at his captors.

Frowning, the officer snapped out an order, one of the Moors stepped forward and drove his brown fist into the man's face. He collapsed, a sobbing, groaning bundle of rags, on the floor. The telephone rang, and while the Moors dragged their prisoner out, the officer alternatively chattered into the instrument, and fired questions at Raoul.

Suddenly we heard the roar of aircraft overhead, then firing. The officer sprang up and yelled out orders and our guards rushed us back to our cells. Another hour or so passed. Again I was released, and escorted outside where the big blue Renault was waiting. No explanations were given.

Raoul and Ali were already seated in the car. My passport was handed back, the soldier saluted and said: "*Viva England!*" The barrier across the road swung up and we headed north once more. I realized, as I had realized on several previous occasions, the power and the magic that dwells in the word 'England', and what a fine possession is a passport stamped with that name. For the word 'England' still meant a lot in lands beyond the narrow seas, and it is good to know that you shared this prestige by right of birth.

It was long past midnight, with the stars blazing like lamps in the dark sky. We sped over the red hills of Andjera and through a patch of forest where the trees clustered thickly on either side. Like twin searchlights the powerful headlamps of the Renault probed the dark roadway ahead. Then something happened. Out of the dark and the night came the crack of a rifle and the wind-screen shivered into fragments.

The car lurched, threatened to plunge headlong into the trees, but Raoul with a curse wrenched the wheel round and by some miraculous endeavour kept it on the road. We saw men running through the trees, pointing guns, then the car leaped forward like a rocket and they were gone. *Tack-tack-tack* went something behind us, and I dropped to the floor, while what might have been a swarm of bees passed angrily overhead.

Jolting and swaying the car tore along, while Raoul, white-faced, blood streaming from his temple where it had been cut by broken glass, clung grimly to the wheel. Behind us we heard the stammer of the machine-gun again, then it stopped, and there was only the deserted roadway stretching darkly under the starlit sky. What it was all about—ambush by government supporters, or a misunderstanding on the part of some rebel patrol—we never learned.

A river swung into view, a bridge, we had reached the international territory of Tangier—and safety. A few minutes later we were speeding along the last stretch of road leading down to the sea at Tangier. Where the road leads into the new modern quarter which adjoins the old Moorish city Raoul stopped the car and lit a cigarette.

"So now your adventures are over and you are returning to England," he remarked.

"But I am coming back," I said, "my journey is only half completed. I set out to visit the desert cities which lie south of the High Atlas Mountains—'The Land of Mud Castles' one of your French writers described it—and getting mixed up in this civil war has upset my plans. So I must return and try again."

I was thinking, as I tramped along the silent streets of Tangier to the little Spanish inn at which I stayed, of all the things which had happened to me on my first Moroccan journey. For it was from this colourful, mongrel city of Moor and Christian that I, like a pilgrim striving to reach a distant goal, had started out weeks before to reach that romantic trans-Atlas territory which had only been occupied by French forces a year or so previously. How much had happened to me since I last strolled along this palm-bordered promenade, how many curious adventures and strange companions had been mine since I first set foot in Africa.

CHAPTER II

THE ECONOMICAL TRAVELLER

It was early dawn when I first saw Africa. I had chosen to spend my last night on shipboard on deck, sleeping curled up in a blanket on one of the hatch covers. Awakening suddenly at an early hour I discovered that the star-embalzed darkness of the tropic night was gone, and the ship was moving steadily across a wide smooth bowl of shining sea. Looking across the steamer's rail toward the far horizon I saw a pale, reddish shape rise cloud-like out of the sea, and my heart gave a leap. It was Africa, I knew, that alluring land which had called me since childhood, making the narratives of Mungo Park, Du Chaillu, Livingstone and Stanley as exciting as any work of fiction.

Beyond those dark hills, now so rapidly taking shape in the hard, shadowless light of the dawn, lay the strange lands which had called me from my home in smoky Manchester, intriguing lands where even yet were barbaric walled cities little known to white men and forlorn rivers winding through uncharted wildernesses to die amid desert sands. The sight gave me a feeling of elation.

Beside me something stirred, a blanket was thrown aside, and the dark, tousled head of Piper Murdoch appeared. The bagpipes which he had been playing when he fell asleep lay beside him, also what was left of the bottle of Scotch whisky (made in Japan), which was necessary to induce the condition required for the playing of the more elaborate compositions. For it was a Japanese liner bound for Yokohama upon which we were travelling, and most of the passengers were Scotsmen, soldiers on leave returning to stations out East.

We had a couple of pipe bands on board, and for the past four days, ever since leaving London, almost without a break, the ship had resounded to the skirl o' the pipes. Between them they must have worked their way through a goodly portion of the repertoire of the army school of piping. It would be about the third day out that the little, monkey-faced Japanese second-in-command had come to us with the honourable captain's compliments and would we please stop playing the bagpipes as the sound was getting on their nerves. Now it was bad enough to have to endure the sarcastic remarks of sundry English passengers

who did not appreciate the subtler qualities of one of the finest musical instruments invented, but to have a confounded Jap also complaining was not to be tolerated, so the pipers told him to go and boil his head and then went on playing.

I had only reached the stage of practising on the chanter myself, under Murdoch's critical tutorage, and I had already discovered that there is more to pipe playing than the layman realizes. About eleven o' the night I discovered Murdoch was missing and presently discovered him, in a somewhat befuddled state, explaining to an irate husband that he was quite willing to share the cabin with his wife.

One cannot abandon a pal in his foolishness, so I apologized to the husband, got a half Nelson round Murdoch's short and stocky figure, and hauled him back to his bunk. But the minute my back was turned he ambled outside again to resume the argument. In his efforts to reach the required state of feeling necessary for the playing of the finer pieces of music Murdoch had imbibed more Japanese 'Scotch' whisky than was good for him, so thinking that some fresh air might do him good, I grabbed a couple of blankets and took him up on deck, and that is how we came to spend the night there.

"Blurry ole Africa," quoth Murdoch happily, sitting up and looking about him with a speculative eye.

He supped the final contents of the bottle, picked up the set of pipes and began to play, probably to annoy a Japanese officer who was making his way forrard. I buckled on the belt of my shorts, and, walking to the rail, saw the shores of Africa slide by to the accompaniment of 'MacCrimmon's Lament'. I was in that excited, exultant mood which comes from experiencing the realization of a long-pursued ambition. I had always wanted to see Africa, and even the thought of the discomforts and possible dangers which I might experience there only served to make me more resolute.

I think that some men are born out of their right place. The accident of birth has placed them among certain surroundings but all their lives they feel that they do not belong there. They should be living out of doors as explorers, seamen, hunters or woodsmen, but are condemned instead to spend their lives in factories, shops or offices. All their lives they have a nostalgia for a way of life which is different, an impulse to leave their homes and kindred and go seeking something, they know not what—perhaps the place where they belong. Reason cannot guide them; they go because they must.

Mine was a lonely life for I was born crippled and when I

was sixteen went blind with cataract. It was five long years before I could see fairly well again, and then I vowed to go out into the world seeking that vague quantity known as romance or adventure, so that if blindness ever descended upon me again I should have memories and not regrets to look back upon. I wanted to be an explorer and archaeologist, but in a decadent and dying civilization which preferred to keep millions of men permanently without employment and without hope, rather than allow them to live useful lives, there was no chance that people such as I could get the technical training and experience which we required. For a long time books were my only comrades.

For several years I endured the soul sickness which comes from frustrated ambitions. I hated the grey streets and the gloom and dirt of my native city, and longed always to go wandering in a brighter, freer world. The sight of an unknown footpath leading through a wood, or the curling smoke from an unseen camp fire, or a carved and painted gipsy caravan moving slowly along a country lane, was enough to set my pulses stirring.

Have you ever been fed up with life? Have you ever felt that life isn't giving you a square deal, that you are missing all the colour, sunshine, romance and adventure which it has to offer? If circumstances did not chain you to your work and responsibilities you would 'chuck' your job and go vagabonding off to live your life just as you wished, free from petty cares and restrictions.

How I envied those fortunate persons who could travel to foreign lands and make money by writing books about their experiences. But how did one begin? One day the idea came to me: *You can do the same as them!* Start out now with what money you have and let the future take care of itself. Your fate lies in your own hands.

It is a popular fallacy that one needs a lot of money in order to travel. Once, as a boy, I talked to an old tramp who had wandered across many countries. "You can travel a long way on very little money if you know how," he declared. "If you have a little cash and don't mind roughing it and taking casual jobs then the whole wide world is yours to explore. And a tramping man can see, hear and experience things impossible to the conventional traveller."

"The less you carry the more you will see, the less you spend the more you will experience," wrote Stephen Graham, in his *Gentle Art of Tramping*. "Young people come to me and say: 'How shall I write?' and I generally reply: 'First you must live. Books

should not beget books; life should beget books. Tramping and vagabondage is a short cut to reality.' ”

Putting my trust in such sentiments I started out, a few pounds in my pocket, rucksack on back containing food and sleeping-bag; a wandering freelance, willing to tackle any job, and full of a desire to study history and the visible remains of it which could be unearthed with a spade. In five years I managed to visit a score of countries, to compare the scenic delights of the Dalmatian coast with the Norwegian fjords, to witness the Midnight Sun and the Saharan mirage, and view such a diversity of cities as Sarajevo, Detroit, Copenhagen, Fez, Paris and Hammerfest, which is the most northerly town on earth. My quest led me into strange adventures and stranger company. This was *living*.

Now I was here.

Africa confronts Europe across narrow Gibraltar Strait. From Ape's Hill, facing Gibraltar across ten miles or so of narrow sea, the tawny African coastline stretches westward for fifty miles to where rock-bound Cape Spartel thrusts out into the green-gold Atlantic breakers. The African shore is high, bare, inhospitable, seemingly lifeless save where the white city of Tangier rises above its curving blue bay; yet, times without number, out of its tawny solitudes hordes of fanatical brown-skinned fighting men, in wave upon wave, have swept across the narrow sea and hurled themselves on Europe.

Islamized Berbers, surging out of Morocco, fierce, arrogant, resolute men, carried their green banners as far north as central France before being thrust backward across that narrow sea. For centuries Moroccan emperors were masters of Spain and Portugal, builders of great cities, fortress-palaces, founders of churches and colleges which rivalled Oxford and Cambridge in learning and antiquity. For a thousand years Christian and Moslem battle fleets fought for supremacy in this narrow sea.

The land lying behind that inhospitable coast, the ancient Barbary, though part of Africa is not of it, for geologically and botanically it belongs to Europe, to Iberia; only south of the Atlas Mountains does the real Africa begin. Once Morocco was geologically one with Spain (the Riff mountains contiguous with the Sierra Nevada) and the flowering plants, trees, shrubs, one sees in Morocco also prove relationship. The Berbers who are the aboriginals of Morocco (not Arabs) are physically akin to the men of southern Europe. But despite these affinities the atmosphere of Barbary is Oriental rather than African or Spanish, for architecture, dress, language, customs and religion were brought there from the Nearer East by the invading Arabs.

So I mused, leaning against the rail listening to the drone of the pipes, while the African coast, golden now in the morning sunlight, slid silently past. I had no eyes for the sunlit hills of Spain, with Tarifa, where I was told, the women still went veiled. Then the music ceased, and thinking what a long way it was from the misty Isle of Skye to the golden Moroccan shore I picked up my blanket and went below, into the hot, stuffy, smelly, noisy interior of the liner.

I was travelling steerage, having paid three pounds for a passage to Gibraltar, and shared a six-berthed cabin with five other men. At the booking-office in London they had given me a long printed form setting forth details of food and travelling conditions provided. I had been apprehensive, I must confess, at the thought of living on Japanese food, but was pleased to discover that the meals they served were as good as anything provided by an English ship at three times the cost. Nor had I lacked for company of my own kind.

Collecting soap and towel I went off to bath, Japanese style, squatting first in a tall round tub of water so hot it threatened to burn square inches of skin off me, before plunging into the big rectangular bath alongside. "What a dirty way of bathing you westerners have," the Japanese steward had remarked to us in staccato English. "You wash the dirt off your bodies and then lie in the dirty water and let it soak in again. Now we Japanese have a small bath in which the dirt can be removed, and a larger one in which to lie and relax." The bathing place was deserted when I began splashing happily about, but presently broad, squat yellow-skinned men invaded my privacy so I dressed and departed.

In the cabin I found Erling Bacme, the young Danish author, shaving before the cracked mirror.

"*Labass salama*," he greeted me.

"*Labass*," I replied, adding inconsequently in Arabic: "I am the guest of God."

"I thought you might have been somebody else's guest last night," he replied with a grin. "Where did you get to?"

Bacme had spent some time in Morocco, and during the voyage had been instructing me in Arabic, and in Moslem etiquette. As I intended to travel on foot as much as possible, it was necessary for me to know something of Arab manners and mentality. So I learned the salutation by which the traveller asks for a night's hospitality in the name of Allah, learned that one must always remove one's footwear when entering an Arab's house or tent, must only eat food with the fingers and only those of the right hand, must never make any reference to an Arab's

womenfolk, must never, never make a mock of their religion. For the people of Morocco were a fierce, arrogant, hostile breed, and if a journey on foot to the trans-Atlas region was to be accomplished successfully then one must observe all these points of etiquette.

Study of some photographs of red-walled, many-towered castles, sent me by a friend, had inspired me with the desire to travel to the desert country south of the High Atlas Mountains. The last French military campaign, which had taken place less than two years previously, had opened up for the first time the colourful lands south of the Atlas. Jacques Majorelle, the only artist to penetrate south of the mountains, in his album of coloured drawings entitled *Les Kasbahs de l'Atlas* had given an astonished world its first glimpse of the remarkable architecture of that hitherto semi-legendary land.

For the castles of the trans-Atlas region are unique. With their thick walls and tapering Babylonian towers, their massive keeps and barbicans, they are one of the most astonishing forms of contemporary African architecture. How this type of architecture had arisen was a problem as yet unsolved by archaeologists, though their origin had been variously attributed to the Romans, the Vandals, the Egyptians and the Byzantines. Fortification had always been a subject which fascinated me, and, reading of T. E. Lawrence's explorations among the Crusader castles of Syria and wishing to do something similar, I decided to collect some first-hand material about the castles of the trans-Atlas territory.

It was not an easy area to reach, I found. The last Berber territory to be conquered, it was called by the French the 'Zone of Insecurity' because casual Christian wayfarers were still liable to meet with a sudden, violent death by shot or steel. The region could only be compared to such a district as the North-West Frontier province of India. Indeed, it was so newly opened up to the world that any knowledge of it had only been gained during the previous few years. Before the French conquest the number of persons who had explored its secret hills and hidden valleys could be numbered on the fingers of one hand.

"I have written down two addresses for you," Bacme told me. "Here is the name of a little Spanish inn in Tangier where I stayed. It is called El Delirio. And in Fez you must go to the house of Mohammed Ali, near the Bab bou Jeloud. You will get lost if you try to find your way there by yourself, so take the little green bus which leaves near the auto depot and stay on it till the Bab bou Jeloud terminus. Here is a little map to show you the

way from there. Mohammed Ali will try and charge you ten francs a night, but you can beat him down to five."

Thanking him, I took the map, disturbed to think that such an ancient Oriental city as Fez could be reached by bus. But several years of travelling had taught me that nowadays the ubiquitous motor-bus goes everywhere; even pilgrims to holy Mecca, I had heard, had forsaken the camel in favour of the internal combustion engine.

Breakfast over, we went on deck. Ahead of us, like a crouching lion, Gibraltar rose out of the sea. That side of the Rock which faces Spain across the deep, blue Bay of Algeciras is steep enough, but on the Mediterranean side the sheer grey walls of rock appear inaccessible except to Alpine climbers or monkeys. The buildings of the town rise pyramidwise from the water's edge; houses, shops, churches, warehouses, barracks, fortified posts mounting the steep hillside to where the bare rock shows. A thousand feet above is the bare rocky summit of the long limestone ridge which culminates in Windmill Hill, 1,400 feet above the sea.

The first thing I looked for was the Moorish Castle, built by Tarik ibn Zeyad in 742 and presently located its grey old walls perched half-way up the Rock. It was the first Arab fortress I had seen, and I wanted to examine it closer, but a soldier informed me that it was now used as a prison and I should not be allowed inside.

Bacme and I were discussing Knut Holmboe, the young Danish author who had become a Mohammedan and made an adventurous journey from Morocco to Tripoli, when the tender came alongside the ship bringing dark-skinned men laden with fruit, flowers, cigarettes and trinkets. (Holmboe was killed by the Arabs, by the way, but his book, *Desert Encounter*, reveals a brave, undaunted spirit possessed of a forthright, inquiring mind.) We said good-bye, for the ship was anchored now and it was time to leave.

Murdoch and his pals threw their kitbags and other gear down on to the tender's deck, scrambled down the ladder, and I followed suit. A few minutes later we were speeding across the blue Algeciras Bay, where dolphins played about in the golden sunlight. Arrived at the Commercial Mole we sprang ashore and I realized what a warm country it was I had come to.

We were immediately surrounded by a crowd of olive-skinned men, whose sombreros and red sashes added a picturesque touch to the scene; but they belied their Spanish appearance by speaking a sing-song sort of English. They all wanted to take us somewhere or sell us something, but the soldiers, ignoring them,

signalled a couple of *carrozas*, or open carriages, threw their kit inside and jumped on board. Seeing me standing there hesitant Murdoch shouted: "Come on, son," grabbed my rucksack with one hand and my arm with the other and hauled me aboard, and to the jingling of bells and the cracking of whips, off we went.

We rattled along the Mole, passed through a gate, clattered across a dusty parade ground, and were presently threading our way along the narrow Main Street of Gibraltar. It is a long straggling street vaguely Eastern in appearance, lined with houses, cafés, bars, shops exhibiting silk lingerie, chinaware, and leather and brasswork. Crowds of khaki-clad soldiers, white-robed Moors, English tourists and native Gibraltarians strolled about, making way for the carriages when the drivers addressed them in sonorous phrases which were probably extremely uncomplimentary. We passed the Spanish Cathedral, Government House with its sentry outside, the Law Courts with their shaded garden, and came to the gate known as South Port, with the naval picket house beside it.

The carriages deposited us outside the barracks, and here I said: "Cheerio!" to Murdoch and his fellow pipers, arranged to meet them at a café that night—but never did—and started back along the dusty road leading from Europa Point. I felt that forlornness which comes from parting with cheery comrades encountered on a long journey. But presently I cheered up, for I was young and it was spring, and the Alameda Gardens were really lovely with their masses of colour, begonias, heliotropes, blood-red geraniums, pepper trees, tangerines and cypresses. I paused a few minutes beside the South Port, with its tiny graveyard where the men who died at Trafalgar were buried.

I wanted to buy a sun helmet, and not being able to afford a new one, asked a policeman on point duty where I could buy one second-hand. He was the ordinary sort of policeman one sees in England, familiar blue uniform and helmet, but his skin was olive and the English he spoke had curious inflexions. Leaving the traffic to look after itself for the time being he directed me to the market-place, and told me to pay only half of what the vendor asked.

Thanking him, I went along to the market-place, and there, amid a miscellaneous collection of old clothing, broken gramophones and clocks, pottery, toys, and other objects, I found the very object I wanted. Acting upon the policeman's advice I haggled with the owner of the stall until I obtained the helmet for the quite reasonable sum of tenpence.

I wanted to visit the frontier, so walked into a garage and

asked the young man in charge of the petrol pump if I could leave my rucksack there for an hour or so. He readily assented, and stored it away out of sight. A level strip of ground perhaps a mile across joins the Rock to Spain, crossed by a road lined with houses and gardens. Following this one comes to an iron gate, the frontier, beyond which stand the stone buildings of the Spanish passport control, which mark the entrance to the town of La Linea de la Concepcion. I did not realize that I was later to see that frontier under far more exciting circumstances.

When I called back at the garage for my rucksack the young petrol-pump attendant greeted me with a smile.

"So you go tramping across Morocco, eh?" he remarked in clipped English. "Me—I should like to do that also. Can I help you?—I am a Rober."

"A rober," I repeated, trying to decide whether he meant robber or robot, though neither word seemed suitable.

"Yes, a Rober Scoot."

Enlightenment dawned. "A Rover Scout," I exclaimed. "And you want to do your good deed for today? Well, can you tell me where I can find a nice, dry, comfortable cave?"

I explained that travellers who want to go a long way on very little money cannot afford to always stay at inns or hotels, and that with a waterproof sleeping-bag in one's rucksack it was no great hardship to sleep out under the warm night sky. Ernest Llambia, for so he introduced himself, declared himself highly intrigued by the idea of spending a night out under the stars, and said he knew of a cave which would suit me admirably.

It was nearly sundown when we walked away from the town of Gibraltar, and following a dusty track which circled about the northern edge of the Rock, came to the small fishing village of Catalan Bay whose red-roofed houses nestle low down by the surging Mediterranean beach. Ernest told me that there was a long-standing feud between the Gibraltarians and the Catalan fishing folk, who consider themselves very superior. I also learned that Gibraltarians, racially a mixture of Spanish and British, are known locally as 'Scorpions'.

We followed a path under high limestone cliffs which resemble Derbyshire, for the Rock is a huge, sprawling mass of limestone hollowed out with caves and passages. He led me to a narrow shelf part way up the white cliffs, through a tangle of eight-foot-high thistles, and when we paused for breath one could look down upon the red-roofed village and the vast blue Mediterranean stretching far away.

The mouth of the cave gaped black in the white cliff; it was

dry and cosy and just the right size. We collected sticks and lit a fire and brewed some coffee. Afterwards we sat in the mouth of the cave and yarned, talking of scouting in various parts of the world. When it grew dark Ernest wished me "Good night" and strode off down the path leading to the town.

I had already spread my big cape-cum-ground-sheet on the floor of the cave, placed my sleeping-bag on top, and arranged the rucksack for a pillow. A fire of dried sticks was laid ready for morning, only needing a match to set it ablaze, and a dixie filled with water stood beside it ready to make the porridge for breakfast. There was nothing more to be done so I changed into my pyjamas, and, lying comfortably in my bag, looked out over emptiness to the twinkling lights of Spain and the dim, dark Mediterranean far below. Some time later I slept.

I was awakened suddenly by—*plop!*—and something striking me a sharp blow on the chest. I found myself sitting up in my bag wondering what had disturbed me. There in the mouth of the cave was the cause of my discomforture, several Gibraltar monkeys whose hairy bodies and simian faces appeared curiously exaggerated in that deceptive light.

Startled, I scrambled hastily out of my sleeping-bag. My knowledge of Gibraltar apes was slight, but I knew that if they resembled their kindred over in Africa they could behave very unpleasantly. My groping fingers encountered the cause of my rude awakening, a heavy piece of rock which had been flung at me while I slept. Apparently it was their cave and they were anxious to get me out of it.

When I walked forward they retreated slowly, then clambered slowly up the cliff and amused themselves by throwing stones at me. "Two can play at that game," said I, annoyed, picking up a piece of stone and throwing it at them. The answer was a hail of stones which sent me hastening back into the cave with blood trickling from a gashed knee. I decided that this had been foolish, and that the best thing to do would be to get away from that neighbourhood immediately.

In a chastened mood I collected my rucksack and sleeping-bag and began descending the cliff. A shower of stones greeted my reappearance, so that I was compelled to fling dignity to the winds and dash down the track to where a group of rocks offered protection. Seeing that I made no further move the apes grew bolder, and commenced to sidle cautiously down the cliff toward the cave. One of them found an orange which had been overlooked and commenced to eat it gluttonously, whereupon the rest of the gang swept down with a rush, and in the ensuing con-

fusion I was forgotten. Apparently they considered they had inflicted enough humiliation upon me.

I finished my sleep in a secluded spot beneath a tree and the sun was climbing high in the heavens when I awakened a second time. Armed with soap and towel I went down to the seashore for a wash, and returning lit a fire and cooked a dish of porridge. I ate a leisurely breakfast by the roadside, giving curious passers-by stare for stare, and afterwards slung my rucksack over my shoulder and started back for the town. Passing the mouth of the cave I saw two monkeys prowling about. "What harmless, insignificant creatures they look," I reflected, and my adventure of early morning seemed somehow ridiculous.

It appeared less ridiculous, however, when I learned that other persons had had unpleasant encounters with these beasts. One big ape named Jacko grew so vicious that he frequently frightened visitors to Gibraltar, for he would fly into a rage if not given sweets or chocolate. The monkeys are officially recognized by the authorities and soldiers feed them at stipulated times. So the order was given that Jacko must be removed to a place where he could not cause any further trouble.

Master Jacko, however, was the only male monkey left, so it was necessary that he produce a son to succeed him before being exiled, and, curiously enough, all his subsequent progeny were female. This state of affairs continued for some years, but at last the inevitable happened, a male monkey was born, and Jacko was put in a cage and shipped to England by steamer. You may have seen him yourself, in a cage in the monkey house at London Zoo (the one marked 'Barbary Ape, Gibraltar'), for it was there that he ended his days. Did he remember the wild, free life he had lived among the sunlit rocks of Gibraltar, one wonders?

The Gibraltar apes are the only wild monkeys left in Europe. Legend has it that they reached the Rock by way of an underground passage which connects Gibraltar with Africa, and there is a saying that when there are no monkeys left the British will leave Gibraltar. Whether or not the military authorities believe this saying they certainly appear to be taking no chances. A soldier whom I encountered told me that once the monkey population dwindled to five females and one male, and that one night the females killed their lord and master and ate him. At once an expedition was despatched to Morocco to procure another male monkey to ensure that the species did not die out. He seems to have done his best to ensure the future of his race.

An hour later found me aboard the s.s. *Jebel Dersa*, bound for Tangier. How exciting it was to watch the Rock growing smaller

and smaller until it had faded into the distance. As I looked across the steamer's rail to where the bare, brown hills of Morocco glinted in the sun a young man standing beside me made some remark in French, and, when I appeared unable to understand, translated it into English.

We chatted together, and I learned that his name was Durand, that he was a photographer by trade, and worked at a shop in Casablanca. His neatly tailored suit, smart hat and gold-rimmed glasses hardly fitted with my conception of Africa, but I was presently to realize that I had a lot to learn about the spread of modern civilization in primitive lands.

The beautiful Bay of Tangier came into sight, with its curving yellow beach and wooded hills behind, and in the centre the white city with its flat roofs and green-tiled minarets and grey old castle on a hill. Once Tangier was an English town, but after being besieged by the Moors for over twenty years they blew up the harbour works and sailed away. Long before that the Romans ruled their province of Mauritania Tingitania from that flat hill-top; the ruins of the prefect's house and of a Temple of Hercules lie buried under the Moorish castle. To a newcomer the city appears colourful and Oriental, but the Moors call it the 'Bitch of Cities' because despised Jews and Christians live there.

Now the ship had been made fast alongside a long concrete mole, and, from the rail, one could see that the open space beyond the Customs' barrier was packed with a dense crowd of shouting, gesticulating, dark-skinned Moors. They looked like ruffians or brigands, in their short coloured jackets and billowing trousers, and hardly had the passengers disembarked than this motley crew descended upon them like locusts upon a lettuce patch, wrenched their baggage from their hands and rapidly escorted them to various conveyances waiting in the roadway outside.

One swarthy fellow dived at me, but upon observing the steel-framed rucksack strapped to my back stopped and stared in sheer amaze. Evidently he had never seen the like of that before. Durand signalled to the driver of a carriage, called to me to jump inside, and we escaped the attentions of that mob of guides, porters, touts and miscellaneous gentry by starting off at a good speed along the Mole toward the town.

With harness jingling and the driver exhorting his bony nag the carriage rattled past the Water Gate and turned into a palm-bordered promenade. This seemed to be no way for a tramping vagabond to commence his African journey so I ordered him to stop and then jumped out. Durand had a small movie camera and wanted me to help him film some scenes of native life in

the market-place, so we arranged to meet at the British post office in two hours' time. In those days England maintained her own postal services at various towns in Morocco.

I wandered through a white arched gateway into the narrow, winding main street of Tangier, elbowing my way through a throng of white-robed Moors, water sellers carrying goat skins full of water, fierce-looking mountainers from the Riff, ragged Spaniards, shopkeepers and tourists. From the Petit Sokko, or Little Market, a street as crooked as a dog's hind leg leads to the Grand Sokko, or Big Market, where sellers of fruit, bread, eggs, vegetables, flowers and sweets cry their wares. Here I saw my first camels, a long string of them padding solemnly along, and men riding horses with high-padded Moorish saddles, and innumerable little donkeys burdened with incredible loads.

A street of steps led steeply uphill to the Kasbah, or castle, on a flat hill top overlooking the sea, so that from the balcony by the Flogging Gate one could look down two hundred feet to the flat roofs, cupolas and minarets of Tangier. The old city must have been destroyed and rebuilt so many times that the present town stands upon layer upon layer of the debris of earlier cities. Incorporated in the present castle, which dates only from the seventeenth century, is the workmanship of many races, of which English and Moorish are but the latest. The marble columns in the courtyard of the Sultan's palace are Roman, other masonry is Portuguese. A few months before my arrival a marble statue of a woman had been dug up and identified by the curator of Tangier Museum as that of the goddess Vesta. And before the Romans the Phoenicians were here.

Unable to find the house called *El Delirio* which Erling Bacme had told me to visit, I gave a Moor sixpence to guide me there, but he professed to be also unable to find it. What is more, he created such a scene by declaring that sixpence was a paltry sum to offer him for his services that a crowd of his compatriots gathered around us, and sight of their dark, unsmiling faces made me nervous. To pacify him, I gave him another sixpence, inwardly annoyed at being swindled, and it was not till later that realization came that had I stood firm he would have been quite content with the original sum and probably had a higher opinion of my intelligence as well.

Later experiences taught me that my fears had been imaginary, and I grew accustomed to holding my own in shouting crowds, and to walking down sinister black alleyways in the dark. I also learned that it is only the city dwellers who have learned to brow-beat tourists, and that the country folk will usually help you if

you ask them politely. Also, if you want to find your way about in a city it is better to ask one of the small boys who will be playing around, for they are content with a few coppers. On occasion some English cigarettes handed around will work wonders.

Ignorant as yet, however, I resolved to have nothing more to do with Moorish guides and to seek a night's lodging out in the country before darkness fell.

CHAPTER III

THE ROAD TO FEZ

DRUMS were throbbing and pipes wailing as a party of men mounted on lean Arab horses rode into the dusty, crowded market-place. They carried lances bearing long green banners which fluttered behind them in the wind. After them marched a line of cloaked, turbaned men, half dragging, half pushing a protesting little black bull whose curving horns were gilded and whose neck was decorated with paper garlands. The procession was bound for the shrine of a local saint, El Hadji Bu Arrakia, where the bull would be ceremoniously killed, roasted and eaten.

Durand, fumbling with the strap of his cine-camera, said: "I must film this. Can you shield me so that they do not see?"

Orthodox Moslems object to being photographed, for it is against the teaching of the Koran to portray a living being. So the photographer in Moslem lands is liable to find himself being stoned or otherwise maltreated if he points a camera directly at an interesting human study.

I unstrapped my big hiking cape from off my shoulders and spread it about us. "Get behind me," I instructed, "this should keep the camera hidden from view."

A low whirring sound indicated that Durand was filming the procession which was now passing directly in front of us. The horsemen had passed, and ragged men beating small leather drums with the palms of their hands or blowing with distended cheeks at long brass trumpets shambled past. The little black bull, with its attendant guard of cloaked men, came abreast of us. As though sensing the fate in store for it the animal lunged from one side to the other, striving to escape. Its guards dashed rapidly about, uttering shrill cries which were doubtless anything but endearments.

"I can't get a good view of things," Durand complained. "Can you distract their attention a bit? Here—take this!"

He thrust the smaller of his two cameras into my hand, and, before I could remonstrate, slipped away into the shelter of a neighbouring archway. His object of avoiding attention was achieved, for when the Moors observed me standing there with a camera in my hand I immediately became the centre of attention.

A low growl came from a man near me, and the dark faces about me looked hostile. Once a Moorish crowd's temper is roused anything may happen, and at the least a photographer may have his camera destroyed.

Uneasy, annoyed with Durand for having placed me in such a position, I slipped the strap of the camera over my shoulder and turned away. A bearded Moor called out something, and thrust forward a lean brown arm and grasped the strap of the camera. Smiling to conceal my nervousness, unhurriedly as though there was no cause for alarm, I pushed his arm away and then suddenly ducked behind him through the archway. The whirring of Durand's cine-camera had stopped, and with a muffled: "Let us go!" he led the way along a side street. Perhaps fortunately for us few of the watching crowd had observed the incident, or we might have fared badly. Durand, despite the fact that he actually lived in Morocco, appeared to know very little about the life and customs of its native people.

He declared himself in my debt, and invited me to visit him when I reached Casablanca. As events turned out that casual invitation was the means of getting me out of a difficult situation. But that is getting ahead of my story.

The long hot afternoon was drawing to a close when, having said farewell to Durand who was catching the evening train to Casablanca, I walked away from old Tangier, and followed a winding road out into the open countryside. On one side of me were bare brown hills, a sluggish winding river, little fields of corn and white-walled houses with red-tiled roofs, and on the other side the sea, vast and blue and glittering in the waning sun, with the white breakers eternally advancing and retreating on the yellow sand. Here and there were little settlements of conical-roofed straw huts, surrounded by hedges of canes and prickly cactus, which made the scene look very African. Beyond lay a windswept region of sand dunes and coarse grass, which is *not* the Sahara, as Tangier guides inform gullible tourists, just as the red Andjera hills in the background are not the Atlas Mountains. You must travel a couple of hundred miles farther south to reach the Atlas; to reach the Sahara, farther still.

I came to salt-pans, gleaming white by the sea, and, looking across a marsh, saw the ruined walls and towers of a forlorn city. Square watch-towers rose out of a tangle of sappy vegetation, by a sandy track coming up from the sea, where the only sounds were the crying of the seabirds and the thunder of the breakers. I passed through a gap where once had been a gate, saw scattered blocks of masonry, but where once had been the streets and

buildings of a rich and populous city now were only grass-grown mounds and desolate windswept spaces.

For this was Tingis, once capital of a Roman province, standing perhaps on the site of an even earlier Phoenician settlement. Somewhere I have read that Tingis was founded about the year A.D. 42 (the year before Claudius invaded Britain), and for four hundred years afterwards it continued to be a Roman colony, supplying the Imperial City with such commodities as corn, oil and ivory, slaves and elephants. From here the great roads ran to the sea cities of Lixus and Zilia and to distant Volubilis, the outpost garrisoned by men from the island of Britain.

I made myself comfortable beside a warm Moorish oven in one of the watch-towers, opened a tin of baked beans and fried a couple of eggs, and washed the lot down with half a litre of red wine. Down by the dark sea lights twinkled among the tropical gardens surrounding the Villa Harris, once the home of the celebrated correspondent of *The Times*, now a road house with swimming-baths and a dance floor where the good people of Tangier resorted in the evenings. The strains of a jazz band echoed softly over the intervening stretch of sand.

The fire gradually died down, darkness came creeping up over the sea, and the stars came out one by one. I had made up my bed for the night on a mattress of dried grass, and as there was no roof to the tower I lay there looking straight up at the stars, which appeared like little jewelled lamps hanging just above my nose. Presently I slept.

It was early morning when I awoke in ruined Tingis and took soap and towel and went down to the sea to bathe. I left my clothing in a heap on the deserted beach and waded out into the water. How good it was to feel the cold sting of it against my bare skin, to plunge headlong into the dim green depths, and then to run naked across the firm sands until my body glowed pink all over. Then back to the ruined tower to squat by the fire and eat the remainder of the bread and beans, and the red wine, with nobody in the whole, wide world to watch or disturb me, or give a care what I did or did not do. This was the life.

I tramped back into Tangier, where the homeless folk who sleep on the pavements wrapped up in their woollen *jellabas* were just opening their sleepy eyes to the early morning sunshine. I wanted to reach Fez, the wonderful old city in central Morocco, as quickly as possible, and had discovered that the cheapest way of getting there was on one of the motor-buses belonging to a Spanish transport company. A bus would be leaving for Rabat

in an hour's time, I learned, so bought a second-class ticket with some Spanish currency obtained at a local travel agency.

The clerk squeezed in so many voluminous-robed Moors and their veiled wives and children into the second-class section at the rear end of the bus, as well as a varied assortment of bags, boxes and parcels, that he finally suggested I shift to the first-class section at the front. Just as I was beginning to think that they surely could not pack any more passengers inside, the engine suddenly roared into life and off we went.

Away we whirled by avenues of palms and flower gardens, past the stately blocks of hotels and apartment houses which give Tangier its appearance of pristine whiteness when viewed from the sea, out into green pleasant countryside, and in a very short time had stopped at the frontier of Spanish Morocco to have our passports examined. For present-day Morocco is divided into three parts: the small international Territory of Tangier: the larger zone administered by Spain: and the much larger zone controlled by France, though the sultan is the nominal ruler.

There was little sign of the proverbial slowness of Spanish officialdom, for the Customs' officer simply grinned at me amiably, scribbled chalk hieroglyphics on my rucksack, and waved me on.

Ahead of us was a bare, desolate land of rolling brown hills and plains, with vast salt marshes stretching mile upon mile. This was the *bled* (literally 'not town'), the open countryside of Morocco. It was an inhospitable land, with the swell of the Atlantic breaking upon the coast in huge tumultuous waves, and long sand bars piling up to prevent approach wherever there was a river mouth. There was a feeling of age about it, of great age, and with it classic legend has associated the tales of Hercules and those Gardens of the Hesperides from which the golden apples came. Phoenician seamen, before Carthage was built, pressing their oared galleys southward along a barbaric shore, left as reminders of their coming walled settlements whose crumbling ruins now lie half buried among the tangled vegetation.

Westward lay the red hills of Andjera where once lived Raisuli the Brigand, one of whose numerous exploits was the kidnapping of a couple of honourable Frenchmen and their wives, for whose release he demanded a ransom of five millions of francs and a gramophone of the very latest design! Towns of white-walled houses embowered in masses of roses, carnations and purple bougainvillaea appeared before us and faded away into the rear: Arzila, with its old Portuguese fortress standing on the site of the Roman outpost sacked in turn by Goths, Arabs and Northmen: Larache, the Lixus of the Romans, founded by

Claudius a few years after the conquest of Britain: Alcazar, 'The Great Castle'. A second frontier was reached, that separating the Spanish territory from the French, where another passport and luggage examination had to be undergone.

We came to a bridge spanning a wide, blue river, a white-walled town showed up ahead, Rabat, which the French have made the administrative centre of Morocco. The bus deposited me by a massive gateway and I wandered through streets of high windowless houses toward the sea. Above the blue-green expanse of the Atlantic rise ochre-tinted walls enclosing ancient palaces, colleges, markets, inns, mosques and a seven-hundred-year-old castle whose towers and bastions look down upon shaded gardens ablaze with flowers.

Along a path lined with crumbling bronze cannon I came to a Moorish café by the blue river. On the farther shore the walled town of Salé rose out of the yellow sand, its walls and gates gleaming pink in the sunlight. Salé, the one-time home of those infamous pirates known as the Sally Rovers, whose galleys once raided as far north as the Bristol Channel. If you remember your Robinson Crusoe you will recall that it was at Salé that the hero of Defoe's novel spent several years in captivity. In those days the town was the clearing-port for thousands of Christian prisoners whom the corsairs sold into slavery.

At the garage I made the acquaintance of a French lorry driver named Jean who agreed to give me a lift to Fez, five hours' journey away. After visiting a nearby bar to wash the dust out of our throats I squeezed into the cab of the heavy *camion* or lorry, between Jean and a burly, brown-faced half-breed named Ali. Rabat was soon out of sight and we were speeding across the brown, rolling *bled*. Western Morocco is a wide level plain more than a hundred miles across, traversed by excellent roads, so that journeys of two or three hundred miles can be easily accomplished in a day.

We turned inland, following the rolling flood of the Bou Regreg River, which stretched like a ribbon of blue silk toward the sunlit glades of the cork-oak Forest of Marmora. We passed the white, flat-roofed homes of French settlers, occasional farms and vineyards, forest clearings where cork was stacked ready for shipment to the coast. The woods gave way to rolling plains, with clusters of black tents, *doours*, dotted here and there. Shepherds were tending their sheep. A camel caravan showed against the horizon, the big brown beasts standing clear-cut against the blue sky.

After a journey of several hours walled Meknes rose like an

enchanted city out of the barren plains, the exotic city which the Sultan Mulai Ismail, better known as 'The Bloodthirsty', built as an African rival to Versailles. It is a city planned on a titanic scale, great gateways and mighty walls and towers now but crumbling memorials to a sultan's vainglory. Blood-thirsty Ismail ruled Morocco with an iron hand for fifty-six years, had five hundred wives and seven hundred sons (daughters were not counted), and aspired to be the French king's son-in-law. He thought nothing of lopping off with his sword the limbs or heads of persons standing about him, and at his orders thousands of persons were beheaded, impaled, burnt, boiled alive, or dropped from the city towers to fall upon hooks sticking out of the walls.

Hour after hour the heavy *camion* thundered across the plains while the shadows of approaching night crept over the land. Northward were the grey rock ramparts of the Zerhoun Hills, southward rolling brown heights were piled skyward, the bastions of the Atlas ranges. Into a magical sunset we travelled, pink clouds trailing across a gold and crimson sky, which gradually deepened to a intense green, and then to the deep blue-black of an African night.

Once we stopped at a roadside café to drink a bottle of wine, then on we went again, with the powerful headlamps showing only bare straight road and deserted countryside. The hot crowded cab of the lorry was full of the stink of petrol, and I was heartily glad when lights suddenly appeared about us and Jean announced that we had arrived in Fez. It must have been about midnight when I climbed stiffly down from the cab of the *camion* and discovered that we were in a big stone garage, apparently deserted.

A battered wooden couch stood against one of the walls so, half asleep, I stretched myself out on this, wrapped my cape about me, and almost immediately fell asleep. The next thing I remember was seeing a blue patch of sky in front of me. A loud hammering was going on near by, and turning my head I discovered a couple of brown-skinned mechanics at work on a dismantled lorry. They gave me a cheerful greeting, so I tossed them some cigarettes and looked about for my rucksack.

It was lying where it had been thrown carelessly the night before, untouched, so I decided that the stories which had been told me concerning the thieving habits of the Moors must have been exaggerated. Strolling through the open front of the garage into the early morning sunlight I discovered a small, shaven-headed boy in charge of a tiny open-air café, so I squatted on an empty soap box while he served me with a glass of coffee.

The garage overlooked the open space known as the *Place du Commerce* which separates the new modern French settlement from the old native city. For Fez is really three towns in one: first, there is Old Fez, founded early in the ninth century, and adjoining it is New Fez, which was built only eight centuries ago, both of them being walled and gated and looking as romantic and picturesque as Bagdad must have looked in the days of Haroun Raschid. A mile or so away is Newest-of-All Fez, a glittering white city which the French have built since their occupation of the country. Thanks to their foresight Old Fez remains unspoiled and almost unchanged.

From my seat I could see the white buildings surrounding the *Place*, and a section of tawny-coloured wall through which a breach had been made that cars might pass. Eager to penetrate into the old city, I washed my face under a water tap and dried it on a handkerchief, then picked up my pack and jumped aboard a green bus which whirled me away down narrow streets and under high, battlemented gates and past rushing green rivers till it deposited me beside the triple-arched gate called Bab Bou Jeloud.

A few minutes later I was knocking at the door of the big old house which Erling Bacme had told me about, which an enterprising Moor named Mohammed had converted into an hotel by the simple expedient of hanging a sign over the door. Picture Mohammed as a slightly built young man in a long white robe and red fez or Moorish hat, with oval, olive-skinned face, a ready smile and really exquisite manners. Bacme had said I should get a room for five francs, but all my haggling did not bring the price lower than ten.

Still, it was a large, cool room, with a small balcony overlooking the six-foot wide street below, and a floor of coloured tiles which Mohammed's wife used to swill with water each morning. It was furnished with chair and table, wash-basin, and a big comfortable bed (which, contrary to expectations, did not contain fleas), and was lit by electricity. The doorway looked down upon the central courtyard of the house, an open space of square tiles where Mohammed and his friends used to squat on reed mats smoking cigarettes and sipping glasses of thick, black coffee. This place was to be my home for a time until I had earned some money to travel farther.

It did not take me long to discover that the Moslem way of life was not quite as it is pictured, many of the townsmen, at least, having discarded the more irksome principles of their faith; they smoke and drink and let their womenfolk appear unveiled

before strangers. I remember how shocked I felt when first I saw a Moslem drunk. One accepts the fact that Christians do not adhere strictly to the tenets of their faith, but to one attracted by the teachings of Islam it came as a surprise to discover that the younger Moslems also had drifted away from the teachings of their prophet.

Mohammed's wife, Fatima—a plump little woman with a round, beaming face and a taste for gaudily coloured dresses—always carefully veiled herself before going out of the house, but indoors it did not seem to matter if a Nazrani, or foreigner, saw her. Each morning she would come into my room carrying a bucket and brush, and after greeting me cheerfully, would chatter about heaven knows what while swilling the floor.

And although it is emphatically laid down in the Koran that man is born the master and woman is but an inferior sort of creature ordained by Allah to serve him, in actual fact the women of Morocco seemed to get their own way just as they do in most other countries. Frequently I would hear Fatima's shrill voice calling out sharply below, and then Mohammed would sidle into my room looking sheepish, and squat on the balcony smoking a cigarette and looking resigned.

Apparently European ideas of women's rights and liberties were penetrating even that stronghold of Moslem conservatism, the harem. Once by accident I happened to overhear a conversation between an Englishwoman and a young veiled Moslem girl in the lounge of an hotel in Tangier. The Moslem girl spoke of the wave of unrest which was sweeping through the harems, and how difficult Moorish husbands were finding it to exercise their old tyrannical authority. Her best friend, she stated, the mother of two children, had just received the first beating of her life because her husband had found some contraceptives among her possessions.

Imagine with what delight I first walked away from Mohammed's house to wander through colourful, turbulent Fez, that city 'which beyond any other in the world has preserved its ancient character'. And indeed, to the traveller in search of the romantic, Fez does appear the most wonderful old city imaginable, for the atmosphere of Fez is, with a few comparatively unobtrusive exceptions, the atmosphere of a great Moorish metropolis of the Middle Ages. Moroccan towns have no suburbs; the walls, gates and towers rise suddenly from the surrounding countryside, at once a surprise and a delight. To see those walls and gates, surmounted by spikes upon which the heads of criminals were formerly exhibited, is to realize how in Morocco the medieval

and the modern can exist side by side. The winding streets of Fez are too narrow for vehicles, and the only signs of modern civilization which one sees are the bicycles and electric lights, the rolls of cloth, metal utensils and Swedish matches displayed in the bazaars, and the gaudy posters outside the cinema.

For the rest, it is still a romantic Oriental city of domes and minarets, mosques, colleges, palaces, inns, bazaars: of narrow, winding streets roofed with a lattice-work of palm leaves to keep off the sun: of winding battlements and great iron-studded gates (some of which are still closed at sundown): of picturesque crowds of soldiers, Moors in robes of many colours, veiled women, water-sellers, half-naked Negroes from the south, story-tellers, snake-charmers and fakirs, camels, donkeys, mules and arrogant horsemen.

In such surroundings one might reasonably expect exciting things to happen, but truth compels me to state that nothing exciting happened to me. Though I walked the dark, eerie streets by night and day (at first with one hand near the hunting knife which hung in a leather sheath from my belt), nobody interfered with me, tried to steal my money or knock me on the head. Once I *did* nearly get run over by a bicycle through not hearing the rider's frantic bell-ringing in time!

Along the Talaa, the long, winding main thoroughfare of Old Fez, are the *souks* or streets of shops, where the vendors of the various forms of merchandise squat cross-legged in little cubby-holes eight or nine feet square, with their wares spread about them. As in most eastern cities shops selling the same commodities are grouped together in the same quarter, so that in the Street of the Slipper Sellers one sees nothing but stacks of *babouches*, or heel-less shoes of soft leather, red, yellow or brown masses of them, and in the Street of the Tailors are piles of coloured burnouses, *jellabas* (woollen cloaks with short sleeves), and short, baggy trousers.

Near by, the Street of the Coppersmiths resounds to the clanging of hammers on metal, while in the Street of the Brassworkers the shops are filled with glittering piles of kettles, lanterns, bowls, basins and other brass objects. Most intriguing place of all, perhaps, is the Street of the Dyers, where amid an atmosphere of smoke and steam, half-naked figures whose skins are stained curious hues move about amid a collection of tanks and cauldrons of bright-coloured liquids. Farther along the potters, and the weavers, and the silversmiths can also be seen at work. The *souks* of Fez are the meeting place of several worlds, where the products of Syria and Persia, of the Atlas and the Sahara,

mingle with silks and cottons and metalware from England and France.

In the little open spaces crowds gather about the jugglers and the dancing boys, and the chemists selling magical remedies compounded of dried lizards and herbs. Beggars squat in corners, their begging bowls before them, crying out to passers-by: "In the name of the Prophet, give us alms. Ye who have riches pity the poor; ye who have eyes be merciful to the blind. Allah will repay you. Alms, in the name of Allah, give us alms." All this is an old way of life, not of our age, but of an earlier one, such as might have been witnessed in London or Paris in the fourteenth century. One wonders if this atmosphere of the old Orient can be found anywhere else now. The occasional sight of a uniformed French officer or a European woman bargaining with a shop-keeper appears almost as odd as the fact that Fez possesses factories.

Present-day Morocco is really two. North of the Atlas Mountains is the New Morocco created by the French since 1912; with its up-to-date European towns and ports, with their fine hotels, shops and schools, its network of modern highways and agricultural and irrigation schemes, its emphasis on sanitation, education, and respect for law and order. Present-day Fez is an example of how careful the French have been to preserve the individuality of the old Moorish cities. South of this lies Old Morocco, completely conquered only in 1934, where men live much as their fathers did in the days of Abraham, a way of life quite alien to European thought and tradition. There the great chieftains still live like independent feudal princes in their walled strongholds, with their wives and slaves, their retainers and men-at-arms. There one may find colour and romance, even danger, if one cares to look for it.

CHAPTER IV

LIFE AND WORK IN A MOORISH CITY

WALKING one day along a street in Fez I found the way blocked by a burly, white-robed Moor who was ambling sedately along, and dodge as I might from one side of the narrow street to the other, I could not get past him.

"By gum, owd lad, I wish you'd let me pass," quoth I to myself, aloud. "Hey, shift thisen, gormless!"

Judge my surprise when the Moor turned about, thrust a brown, bearded face close to mine and growled: "Keep a civil tongue in thi head, thi cheeky young devil, or happen I'll clout thi ear-oil for thi."

"Eeeh, mister, I'm right sorry," said I, taken aback. "But where did you learn to speak Lancashire?"

"In Manchester, same as yourself," replied the Moor promptly.

"What?—Are you from Manchester? You'll be saying you are in the cotton trade next."

"I am an' all," replied the Moor with a grin. "But come along with me. I know who you are, and I want to talk with you."

He led the way through an arched gateway into a cobbled courtyard surrounded by stone buildings. The place was a *fondouk* or Moorish inn, with stables on the ground floor and rooms above for travellers to lodge and store their goods in. Camels, donkeys and mules were tethered in the courtyard, while their owners squatted on the carved wooden galleries which projected from the upper storeys of the buildings. Behind were lock-up shops where travelling merchants could display their goods. The *fondouk* is the Oriental equivalent of our hotel, and there are many of them in Fez. No food, only accommodation, is provided.

My companion ascended some stairs and led the way into a large room which appeared to be an office-cum-warehouse, for it was full of boxes and bales, and at the far end was a table with a battered typewriter on it, and various cabinets with books and papers lying about.

"The office of Ben Slimane—that's me," explained the Moor. "Sit down. You'll drink a cup of coffee with me?"

He clapped his hands and a boy served us with cups of thick, black Turkish coffee. While I sat on a cushion sipping it Ben Slimane described commercial relations between Fez and my native city of Manchester. A number of Moors from Fez, it seemed, lived in Manchester, dealing in cottons for the Moroccan market. Ben Slimane had been sent there as a young man to learn the shipping trade, and with the Moor's ready facility for learning languages had not only learned standard English but had acquired a knowledge of Lancashire dialect as well. Now he was back in Fez selling cotton goods to his countrymen. To many Moors, he said, the name of Manchester was far more familiar than was London.

"Can you type?" asked Ben Slimane suddenly.

"I've used a typewriter since I was eight years old," I replied modestly.

"Do you want a temporary job?" he continued. "The clerk who handles my English correspondence is ill and I want somebody to do his job for a few days."

"I am just the man you need," I told him. "I know typing and shorthand and writing letters is my particular delight. Now just show me what you want me to do."

Anxious to earn some money to keep me while staying in Fez I eagerly listened to his instructions. Ben Slimane's business, I discovered, was not only extensive but extended into some curious byways. Caravans distributed the cotton goods to the various agents and traders located around Fez, often making payment in figs and dates, grain or hides, so that perhaps several transactions took place before a deal was completed.

So behold me a short time afterward seated at the rickety table pounding away on a battered typewriter letters and invoices destined for my home town. What an incongruous picture it created in my mind, a vision of rainy Manchester contrasted with this old inn with its cobbled courtyard with haughty camels tethered there, and the high red walls of Fez beyond. In my spare time I took advantage of the situation to type out stories and articles for submission to magazines in England. Most of them were destined to come back with the usual 'Editor's Regrets', but of this fact I was blissfully unaware at the time.

Surprising as the encounter with Ben Slimane had been, another encounter a few days later was hardly less surprising. Returning to my lodging Mohammed greeted me with the words: "A woman here wishes to speak to you." Wondering who it could be, I observed a little black woman of indeterminate age confronting me.

"You come from Manchester, master," she greeted me. "I lived in Fallowfield—on Egerton Road."

"Did you—my home is near there," I told her. "How did you come to be there?"

"My master bought me in Taroudant, beyond the Atlas Mountains," she replied. "He took me to Manchester and there I stayed for many years. Now he is dead, and I am back here."

Listening to her I could not help thinking how very odd it all was, this girl, for girl she had been then, bought in the slave market in the distant Sous Valley, taken to live in a big old house in Manchester, then coming back to end her days in Fez. Two worlds farther apart it would be harder to imagine, and one wondered what these Moors, in their secret minds, thought of modern civilization as typified by Lancashire? Certainly there was more warmth and colour, more quiet peace and beauty in Fez, than amid the dingy, squalid buildings of the cotton towns.

I was to get some sort of answer to this question a day or so later. Engrossed in my typing I did not hear the door open and someone enter, and it was only the sudden feeling that somebody was watching me which caused me to look up. A tall, pale-faced young man in a white robe was looking down at me.

"I am sorry I startled you," he said, speaking English with a slight accent. "I like to watch that machine at work, though I cannot use it myself. But perhaps I should introduce myself. I am Mulai Youssef, and it is my uncle for whom you are working." He kicked off his yellow slippers and seated himself on a low divan. "My uncle has told me about you and I wanted to have a talk with you. Tell me, what do you think of our country?"

I remembered that Ben Slimane had mentioned a nephew of his, a young Moor known for his Nationalist sentiments, leader of a group of young men who had no love for France, and guessed that this was he. To his question I replied that the country interested me more than any which I had yet visited, but that I had little knowledge upon which to give an opinion, save that the French seemed to have accomplished a great deal in the relatively short time in which they had been in the country. There is a little devil in me which makes me say things at times just to provoke people, and sure enough, this remark struck fire in him.

"That depends upon how you look at things," he exclaimed angrily. "Certainly France has provided us with such things as electric light, modern towns, railways, roads—useful for military purposes—and a horde of officials whose ambition is to get money out of the country and then return home. But suppose we do not

want these things? Suppose we should prefer to be left alone? What if we would rather live a free life in our own way, without having our land turned topsyturvy so that it can be exploited by an alien race? What do you say to that?"

"What I think hardly matters," was my reply, "for I am a man of peculiar ideas. One is that each land should be free to rule itself, that one country should not live by exploiting the wealth of others. It is better to live your own way of life, though poor, than have another way of life, even though a better one materially, thrust upon you."

His anger died down. "That is good," he said with a smile. "It is easy to say 'I am my brother's keeper', but altruism can so often cover a desire for personal gain. When a thing is in our own interests it is easy to find reasons why other persons should accept it also."

"They call it spreading civilization," I said. "But every nation in every age has used that catch phrase."

He laughed. "We Moors brought civilization to Europe a thousand years ago. In those days our culture was the envy of the world, and before us there were the Romans. Where is all that greatness now?"

"You know your history," was my reply. "My personal opinion is that this twentieth-century civilization is not so wonderful as propaganda makes out, nor will it last for ever as is generally believed."

Further conversation was terminated by the arrival of Ben Slimane, who asked whether I had finished some letters, and gave his nephew a quizzical look. It seemed that the merchant, keen business man that he was, had little sympathy with the opinions expressed by his nephew, and perhaps thought him indiscreet in speaking to me. But it seemed to me that Mulai had simply wanted to hear an Englishman's point of view, and I, for my part, was glad of the opportunity of learning what a native Moroccan thought.

I was destined to have other encounters with Mulai, to strike up a mild sort of friendship with him, and explore places of which otherwise I might have remained in ignorance. Days in Fez were filled with wonder, for of all the cities I had seen it was the most Oriental and the most alluring. It was my delight to rise at dawn and, passing through the Western Gate as the camel caravans came striding in, to climb the flower-decked hillside to a rocky ledge from which one could look down upon the holy city, lying like a pearl between silver-green hills.

Out of a chequer board of tiny white squares which were the

flat roofs of innumerable houses rose the minarets of the mosques, not the round slender shafts which one sees farther east, but square towers like the famous Giralda of Seville. Castles, palaces, mosques, inns, colleges, shrines, bazaars and all the paraphernalia of an Eastern city were there, surrounded by winding, battlemented walls. It is the lofty walls and towers which surround every Moroccan town which give it its atmosphere of mystery and enchantment, shading, as they do from terra-cotta to ochre, or appearing sometimes by some trick of the light almost golden.

Though Fez is no longer the administrative capital of Morocco it is still the religious and intellectual centre, a fanatical Moslem city, secretive, aloof, enigmatical. Its people remember the former glories of their city, when it was second to none in all the Moslem world. In the twelfth century it possessed 480 inns, 785 mosques, and 120,000 private houses. Perhaps it is the contrast between what she was then and what she is now under Christian rule which makes the people of Fez show veiled hostility to Europeans. Meanwhile 'It is written' that they should be subject to the Infidel, so subject they will remain until Allah wills otherwise.

When one has lived a week or two in such surroundings they become so familiar that it seems quite natural to live where women go veiled and men wear cloaks and turbans and carry carved daggers in their belts. There appears no strangeness in having to dispute the right of way with men on donkey or mule back, or having to dodge out of the way of a line of camels. Beggars pestered me at first, this being a recognized profession in Morocco, but apparently the word went round that I was as poor as a mosque mouse, and after that I was troubled no more.

When the Moors had decided that I was not a spy but merely mad (and thus under the protection of Allah), some of them became friendly, and would greet me courteously in Arabic and invite me to drink mint tea with them. Having no money to pay guides I learned to find my way about the city by myself. The first time I went exploring down the Talaa it was four hours before I found the way back to my starting place. One can wander through this labyrinth of streets and alleys for days and hardly ever see another European.

Thus there was the sudden surprised thrill of looking through the arched doorway into the courtyard of the largest mosque in Africa, El Karaouine, which is to Morocco what Westminster Abbey is to England. No Christian is allowed inside a mosque in Morocco but through the archway one catches a glimpse of the vast interior with its forest of carved pillars (270 of them, I was told), surrounding the tiled courtyard where the fountains play

and white-robed worshippers touch their foreheads to the ground in prayer. So big is this mosque that 20,000 Moslems can gather there for the Friday prayer.

Thus there was the sudden view of the shrine of Mulai Idriss, with its tall green minaret, beneath which congregate pilgrims from all parts of North Africa. Mulai Idriss was the sultan-saint who founded Fez at the beginning of the ninth century. The area about his tomb is known as the *horm* or sanctuary, where formerly wrongdoers could claim immunity from arrest. Within its barriers refugees were safe even from the sultan, but they could not leave except to stand trial, and then only if they carried a sacred inscription and were accompanied by one of the guardians of the shrine. Once in recent years has the sanctuary been broken, when a Moslem fanatic killed an Englishman in the street, and having sought refuge in the shrine, was removed at the sultan's command and killed. This medieval idea of sanctuary was once common to England, as a visit to such cathedrals as Durham may remind us.

The shrine of Mulai Idriss is so holy that even the sultan must come on foot when he comes to pray. Wooden bars stretch across the street, so that no unbeliever may pass, and it is best not to linger near the sacred portals lest sight of a Christian should upset Moslem susceptibilities.

El Karaouine, as well as being a mosque, has been the seat of the University of Fez for 800 years, the Oxford and Cambridge of Morocco in one. Because of the edict forbidding entrance to Christians no traveller may pass through its eleventh-century bronze gates into the ancient halls where hundreds of Moorish students from all parts of Africa study theology, law and philosophy under celebrated Moslem professors. But one can visit the *medersas* or colleges, of which there used to be ten in Fez, and others in various cities of Morocco. These old buildings show Moorish architecture at its best, and, squeezed in between shops and houses as they are, are still bound up with the life of the people. They still seem full of the life and vigour which led to the blossoming of Moorish civilization centuries ago, and which may one day blossom again. Who knows?

This latter reflection was born of another discussion with Mulai Youssef ben Slimane. Standing one day outside the Medersa Attarine, wondering whether I might be allowed inside, I heard a familiar voice hailing me and turned to discover Mulai standing in the doorway. This College of the Attarine is a really lovely old building dating from the fourteenth century, with great doors of chiselled bronze and halls embellished with marble columns

and carved wooden archways. The various trades and crafts of Fez were controlled by the guilds, as in a medieval European city, and it is to these old trade organizations that the colleges, mosques and inns owe their existence. The Attarine College is located in the quarter of the perfume sellers, where, beside scents, one can buy the big coloured candles which are burned before saint's shrines.

"*Salaama*," Mulai called out to me. "Would you like to look inside the college? I am known here."

Eagerly assenting, I followed him through the bronze doors into a tiled courtyard, where a fountain played and bearded students squatting about on reed mats stared at me curiously. Formerly these colleges, like the mosques, were closed to Christians, but the French authorities agreed to keep the buildings in repair on condition that travellers were allowed to visit them. Despite this agreement the more fanatical students are at no great pains to conceal their dislike of unbelievers. When Mulai introduced me to some of them as "an English student who wishes to obtain personal knowledge of life in Morocco" they greeted me courteously with low-voiced *salaams*.

The Medersa Attarine which includes under its green-tiled roofs a students' chapel, halls for study, cloisters and small cells in which students sleep, is a masterpiece of Moorish art. Here amid scenes of beauty and peace unsurpassed by any Oxford college is enshrined the craftsmanship of five centuries ago, the coloured tilework and mosaics, the elaborately ornamented plasterwork, the doors and panels of carved cedar wood and worked bronze. All these things date from the flowering of art and learning in Morocco in the fourteenth century. Very striking to the Christian eye is the absence of human or animal forms in Moorish art, for since the Koran does not allow the representation of any living thing decoration is confined to geometrical designs in mosaics and glazed tiles. The result is a feeling of light and airiness and freedom.

Pigeons fluttered about us as we walked back to the main entrance. Generations of students have received their education within these old walls, and Mulai told me that they can remain at such a college for five, ten, or twenty years, a lifetime if they wish. We who live in a world dominated by money may well envy them their peace and seclusion. The *medersa* provides lodging and instruction and a certain amount of food, the rest the student must get as best he can, by having some more well-to-do person as patron. It seems to be an accepted fact that a student is always ready for a meal, as witness the story of the merchant who said

to his servant: "Put another plate on the table—I see a student is approaching." But life cannot be so very hard in such a land as Morocco where the climate is warm and dry and a man's wants are few.

A flight of steps led us to the roof of the college from which we looked out over Fez, to the forts which frown upon the hill-sides overlooking the city, to the palace called Dar Jamai with its white front, to the Mosque of El Karaouine where in the 'Court of Ablutions' worshippers were washing themselves before praying. What a peaceful scene it was.

We walked away from the college, along the Talaa, surely one of the strangest and most fascinating streets in the world. But, then, who could imagine that such a city as Fez could continue to exist in this fast-changing world? As we walked Mulai pointed out places which hitherto I had known only in the pages of books. Like something out of the pages of a fairy tale there appeared before us the arched gateway of the Nejjarine Fondouk or Inn, with its cobbled courtyard and carved wooden galleries, its fountain glittering with blue and green mosaics. There are many such fountains in Fez, for it was because of the numerous springs of clear water that the city was built here.

The Nejjarine Inn belonged to the Carpenters' Guild, but the days when camel caravans loaded with gold, ivory and ostrich feathers stalked into its yard are long since passed. Another object which Mulai pointed out was that curious relic of the past known as the 'Clock of Bou Ananiya'. From the ornamented plaster front of a building, over the busy street, jutted thirteen short beams, on each of which stood a green bronze gong. In front of the beams are narrow openings in the wall, from which once projected thirteen hammers, which, striking the requisite number of gongs, proclaimed the hour of the day. The timepiece is supposed to have been constructed at the order of the Sultan Abu Inan in the fourteenth century, but the mechanism has been disused so long that now nobody can explain how it worked.

Equally fascinating are the huge water-wheels which one encounters, Persian in origin, which, turned by the rivers which rush through Fez, lift the water to higher levels to irrigate orchards and gardens. The rushing, bubbling streams which penetrate the heart of the walled city are a constant source of surprise. They appear and disappear in remarkable fashion, visible for a moment as they plunge under quaint hump-backed bridges, to disappear between canyons of high-walled houses, reappearing in gardens filled with cypresses, pomegranates, apricots and oleanders.

The streets, like the rivers, also appear to burrow under-

ground, becoming dark winding tunnels where the upper storeys of the houses are built right over them, and were it not for the electric lights some of the streets would be in complete darkness. Fez is a dim, grey city; one is often struck by the pale complexions of its people, due perhaps in part to a strain of white blood in their ancestry, but more probably because they are disinclined to expose themselves to sunshine.

At last we came to the Bab Guissa, the most northerly gate of Fez, where in the evenings the story-tellers entertain their audiences with tales of love and war. The gate is situated in a natural amphitheatre looking out on olive groves and tawny hillsides, the tribal lands of the Beni Warrain. With the high red walls of the old city for background, to the sound of pipes and drums, oft-told tales of Ali Baba and Sinbad are recounted nightly to hushed audiences. Mulai and I stopped and looked down at the animated scene.

"You might say that the modern history of Fez began at this gate in nineteen hundred and twelve," Mulai remarked. "A Lieutenant Chardonnet and his men were besieged in the gate and were killed by riflemen hidden in the minaret of the mosque yonder. It was through this gate that the Berber tribesmen from the Atlas stormed the city. You can see the marks of the bullets in the walls of the tower. Now if you like we will walk along to the Bab Mahrouk which means 'Gate of the Burned'. You know it was there that Ibn el Khatib, the Moslem traveller and historian, was burnt alive, and the heads of rebels used to be stuck on top on spikes as in your English city of York. Thus you have ancient and modern history along one stretch of this old city wall."

We walked along the road which encircles the city, outside the walls, with views of the rounded, olive-clad hills across the valley. It was sunset when we reached the Gate of the Burned, and from every minaret the *muezzins* were calling the faithful to prayer, so Mulai bade me good-bye and hastened away, while I strolled leisurely back to my lodging.

The following day the knowledge which I had gained was put to practical use, for, passing the Bab Guissa, I heard a nasal American voice exclaim: "Say, Cyrus, this guide gives me the willies. Let's pay him off and hike round the town by ourselves."

"Sure," replied another American voice. "He seems to think we are only interested in seeing women undress. Hey, you Ali, here is your dough."

The two speakers now appeared in sight, young Americans of about my own age, dressed in light-coloured suits and Panama hats, one of them wearing the inevitable horn-rimmed spectacles.

When the disconcerted guide had departed, calling upon Allah to witness that they were doing a foolish and dangerous thing in thus dispensing with his valuable and indispensable services, I strolled over and introduced myself and suggested that I could tell them more about places of historic interest than they could learn by themselves.

After they had looked me up and down and deemed me to be honest and respectable they introduced themselves as Cyrus Goole and Wilbur Anderson of Pittsburgh, Ohio. They were interested in hearing about my hitch-hiking experiences, and declared it was the sort of thing they themselves would have liked to do if their parents had not forbidden it. For the first time I realized some of the appalling disadvantages of being born rich. Both, it transpired, shared my weakness for archaeology, so they told me to go ahead and show them round.

"You might say the modern history of Fez began at this gate in nineteen hundred and twelve," I began, blessing Mulai for this item of information. "A French lieutenant named Chardonnet and his men were besieged in the gate and were shot down by marksmen hidden in that minaret." Two pairs of eyes solemnly surveyed the tower in question. "Through this gate the Berber tribesmen from the Atlas Mountains stormed the city. . . . Now if you like we will walk along to the Gate of the Burned where the heads of rebels used to be exhibited on spikes, as a warning of what happened if you were unsuccessful."

My listeners were anxious to learn as much as they could in the short time at their disposal, and the questions which they put to me taxed my ingenuity at times. My knowledge was eked out by information gleaned from various booklets secured from a local travel agency. We finished the excursion by going into a café for a drink, and as we rose to leave Anderson placed a fifty-franc note into my hand and wished me luck on my journey. Disconcerted, for it had been a pleasure to talk with people interested in the same things as myself, I could only stammer my thanks.

"Take it, son," he said. "You've earned it." I realized once again that one of the sorrows of travelling is that you meet nice people only to part again.

One morning, as I was trying to decipher somebody's scrawled handwriting in the office, Ben Slimane looked up from his account book and said: "Come and have dinner at my house tonight. I am inviting a few friends and you might care to meet them."

Naturally this offer was accepted with alacrity, partly for the opportunity which it offered of getting some first-hand knowledge of native customs and also because it meant a good meal. So poor

a traveller as I could not afford to buy meals at an eating-house, so I used to patronize the *kabob*-stalls. This is the Moorish form of quick-lunch counter, where for a penny one can buy a handful of skewers containing pieces of meat and fat which have been grilled over a charcoal fire. Behind the shop front, where the vendor sits cross-legged tending a long stone trough filled with glowing coals, is a room furnished with mats and benches where one may sit and eat one's purchases. Other stalls sell bowls of hot bean or tomato soup, and various stews and savouries.

Always interested in cooking, it used to fascinate me to watch the cook studying his collection of pots and pans suspended over the glowing charcoal, with the intent air of a magician about to perform some remarkable feat. I would ask the name of the various concoctions, taking a sip of this or that, making a grimace or nodding my head in approval according to the flavour. Lack of a common language did not prove a barrier.

In the market-place were bread-sellers by the score, selling circular flat loaves of various hues and degrees of grittiness, and stalls selling fresh fruit and vegetables, where a penny would buy a big pile of dates, tomatoes or potatoes, or four hard-boiled eggs. At other stalls you could buy hot doughnut-like cakes fried in oil (how amused the Moors were when I put sugar on mine), roasted corncocks, pieces of fried fish, and other delicacies to which it was difficult to give a name. For sixpence you could have a meal which made you feel comfortably full.

In case you may shudder at the thought of eating food which was bought in a Moorish market I might add that nothing ever went wrong with me. No matter what I ate or drank, and I drank some queer things at times including scum-covered water from ditches, I always kept fit and healthy and full of life. The only trouble I ever experienced was when I returned to Tangier and ate something one afternoon which twisted my inside up in knots for a couple of hours, but a few spoonfuls of peanut oil put me right again.

That evening when I had finished work a small boy took me through the winding streets to Ben Slimane's house, which was approached by a small door set in a high white wall. In Morocco one must not judge buildings by their outward appearance; it is the interiors which matter. The finest houses present to the street only an expanse of blank wall, almost windowless, in mean and narrow lanes. Yet dismal as they appear from the street their interiors are gay with gardens and fountains, and spacious rooms and courtyards decorated with coloured tiles and mosaics. The peace and beauty of such buildings presents a striking contrast

to the bustle and squalor of the narrow streets which lie but a few yards away. In such homes live the well-to-do families of Fez, the educated, cultured class which has a tradition and code of manners which is all its own.

In a tiled hall I took off my boots and followed the servant into an open court where a fountain played and bearded men reclined on cushions and carpets arranged round a couple of low tables. Near by was a charcoal-fired samovar with a brass tea-service gleaming beside it, and silken cushions, and rugs coloured vivid red, green or blue were scattered about. "A thousand welcomes to the house of Absalom ben Slimane," exclaimed my host, giving the conventional greeting, and after telling me to make myself comfortable among the cushions he turned to greet the other guests, exchanging the usual formula of Arab courtesies.

"Peace be with thee."

"And may safety remain with thee."

"Allah's blessing be upon thee."

"And may he prolong thy days."

"May he protect thy house."

"May he increase thy goods."

Lying snugly among the cushions I studied the faces of the men about me, for here were representatives of the various races of Morocco whom I should encounter on my journey. Some had skins no darker than my own, Berbers, fair-haired men with blue eyes, of the race who were here before the coming of the Arabs. There were Arabs here also, lean, dark, hook-nosed men, descendants of those nomads who had wandered westward across Africa until they found farther progress barred by the Atlantic. Moors, that mongrel race of mixed Arab and Berber blood, handsome in swarthy Oriental fashion, surveyed their surroundings blandly.

Servants entered carrying brass ewers from which water was poured over the guests' right hands, and conversation stopped in preparation for the more serious business of eating. I had been warned that a Moorish dinner was a substantial affair, so having fared leanly during the past few days was prepared to do it justice. First came a dish of stewed mutton, with a sort of salad made of bits of orange and hard-boiled eggs and almonds; then came chickens boiled in butter, surrounded by olives, and other meats, vegetables and sauces, all mixed together in a glorious conglomeration. Afterwards a huge dish of *cous-cous* was brought in, the national dish of Morocco, made of meat and onions and raisins, embedded in a steaming pile of broken wheat grains.

With a pious "*Bismillah*—In the name of God" Ben Slimane began the meal by thrusting a swarthy finger into the dish and

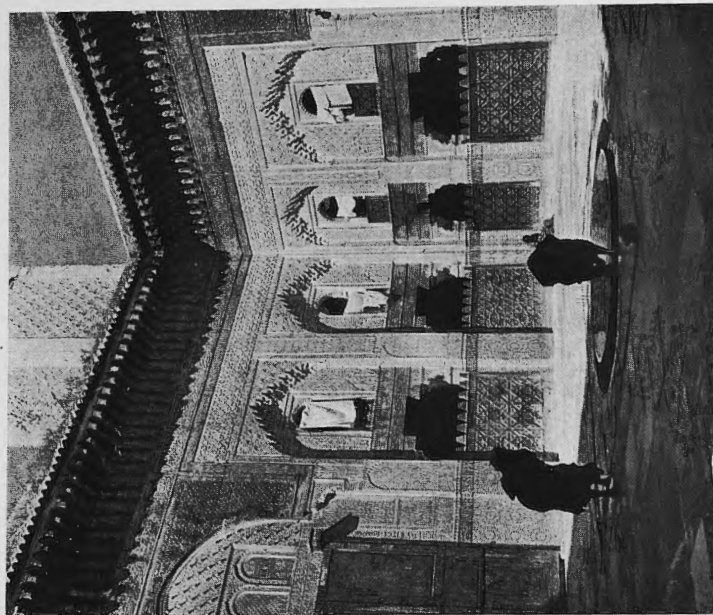
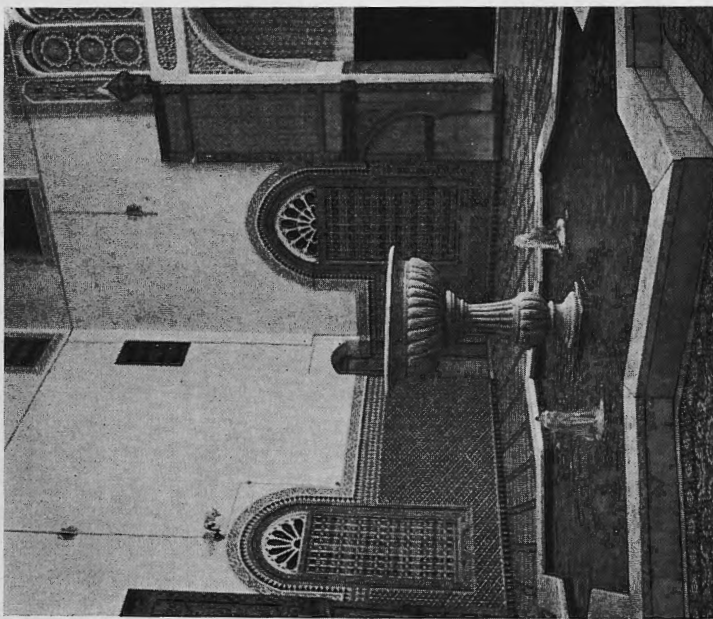


A Moorish barber

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One of the gates of Fez



Courtesy: Chemins de Fer du Maroc

Inside a Moorish college, Fez

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jerking out a piece of greasy mutton which he thrust into his mouth. The others followed suit. Although they were too well bred to stare directly at me it was obvious they were curious to see how the dog of an infidel in their midst would manage without the aid of a knife and fork. Moslems do not use cutlery, only the fingers of the right hand, and this is an art which has to be acquired.

My fellow-guests appeared to experience no difficulty, tossing bits of meat and vegetable into their mouths with the greatest of ease, and tearing chickens apart and stuffing bits down their throats as if they had been doing it all their lives (as indeed they had), but it was only by exercising the greatest caution that I was able to get anything as far as my mouth at all.

The food was so exceedingly hot, or so greasy with oil and fat, that it was only by getting a firm grip on it that I was able to pick anything up. Sometimes I had to chase a recalcitrant piece of meat round and round the dish before I was able to finally bear it triumphantly to my mouth, while the other diners observed me solemnly with raised eyebrows. "What an ill-bred, uncouth-mannered, uneducated sample of a man this is," they were probably saying to themselves. Eventually I discovered that by holding a small piece of bread between my fingers I was able to convey the food to my mouth without making too much of a mess.

Now and again my host would stick his finger into the dish and pick out a morsel which he thought particularly choice, a sheep's eye, for instance, and stick it in my mouth. This was a mark of esteem, but as his idea of what was a choice morsel was not always the same as mine I wished he would bestow his attentions upon somebody else. Fortunately for my self-respect servants came round between the courses with water and towels for the diners to clean their hands. They also brought glasses of water, which was the only drink. While I was struggling to get enough to eat, the various dishes, still half full, were whisked away from under my nose and taken to another part of the house to be given to the women.

Eating *cous-cous* was an art which taxed my ingenuity. The correct method is to pick up some of the meat and cereal between the fingers, roll it deftly into a ball with a circular motion of the hand, and then toss it into the mouth. A mere Englishman finds it difficult enough to pick up any of the hot, steaming mixture, to roll it neatly into a little ball is almost beyond his powers, while to toss it deftly into the mouth is to court disaster. Nevertheless, I did my best, inwardly wishing that Ben Slimane would

leave me to concentrate on the job instead of conversing at length about the climate of Manchester. I could only reply with grunts, which caused no offence, as to the Moslem mind grunts and belches indicate to your host that you have appreciated the food provided.

Sweets followed, confectionery made of figs, almonds and honey mixed together in pastry, and little cakes of various sorts. Then the servants came round with water, soap and towels, with which I was able to remove the bits of meat, vegetable and oil with which I was splattered.

An old man proceeded to play strange music on a sort of violin, but I was feeling very sleepy by now, and by the time we had drunk the three cups of tea required by etiquette I could barely keep my eyes open. I must have dozed off, for when I awakened Ben Slimane was seated beside me.

"So this is the last we shall see of you," he remarked. "I understand you are leaving Fez tomorrow."

It was true. It was time to be leaving Fez and moving on. My next goal was Marrakech, the greatest native city in Africa, which lay 300 miles or so to the south-west. From there I planned to go over the mountains to the desert country beyond.

"It is time to be on my way," I told him. "But there are so many places which I want to see. I shall be sorry to leave Fez, but someday I hope to come back."

The gods were kind, for less than a year later I did go back.

CHAPTER V

THE ROAD TO THE RED CITY

IT was the following morning. Plodding along the dusty road which stretched for endless miles across the sun-scorched Plain of Sais, I wondered if I was as keen on walking as I had imagined. It had not been so bad at first, striding away from the gate of Fez until the golden ramparts of the town had vanished into the distance, for the air was cool and the early morning sunshine made everything appear fresh and colourful. It seemed romantic to be following the winding Oued Juaher, or River of Pearls, and the hills which guard the approach to the city appeared pale rose colour at that inspiring hour.

But as the hours passed it grew hotter and hotter and the far hills lost their allure, and became only brown, burnt slopes under the fierce summer sun. By ten o'clock the heat was like that of a furnace. The far horizon shimmered in the haze, and there did not seem to be a breath of air stirring. Nor was there any sign of life along the road, except myself. There were farms and gardens and cool white houses surrounded by groves of oaks and olive trees, and little native villages of thatched huts, very African looking, but no living thing except myself.

Near one of these settlements, named Nzala by the Negro governor who built it as a resting place for caravans, I sat down in the shadow of a wall to rest. The wine bottle which I had filled with water before starting out, with a cloth sewn about it which was kept damp to prevent the contents evaporating, was already half empty. I sat there for some time, wondering whether or not to proceed in that heat, scanning the roadway for an approaching lorry. Time passed. At last there came the sound of an approaching engine, so I stepped out into the roadway and jerked my thumb interrogatively westward. The driver stuck his head out of the window and eyed me reflectively.

"You desire to ride?"

I replied in the affirmative.

"What is the name of the place to which you desire to proceed?"

"Marrakech."

"And if it is not permitted that you ride?"

"Then I will walk."

"A man will walk there on his feet!" exclaimed the driver. "One can perceive wonders even yet. It is clear then that you cannot be French, and as it is so hot a day then you must be English." This reasoning is not so muddled as it sounds, for obviously only a mad Englishman would attempt such a feat. "Jump up, my little one, and I will assist you for part of your journey."

This lorry driver, who rejoiced in the name of Fleur, proved to be a very entertaining and instructive character, for he enlivened the tedium of the journey by pointing out places which had associations with the early history of the French occupation of the country: 'early' in this case meaning as much as fifteen or twenty years ago. He was an ex-service man, like many of the lorry drivers, who, suffering from the restlessness common to many young men when the war ended, had come to Morocco in search of fame and fortune. Whether he had found them he did not say, but he had certainly collected a fund of interesting experiences and knowledge.

You meet many like him in Morocco, lean, tough-looking men with skins like leather, arms and faces burnt to the colour of an old saddle by the constant change from the burning heat of the desert to the cold of the high mountains. Upon these men depended the maintenance of civilization in south Morocco, for without them it would not have been possible to transport the vast quantities of supplies necessary to support life in those inhospitable regions. These men had seen the dusty *pistes*, or native tracks, change to modern highways, had seen the walled outposts with their barbed-wire barricades give way to gleaming white towns, farms and country houses, had seen the land change from a lawless region where the European traveller journeyed in constant fear of attack, to a land where the casual wayfarer could wander about in safety.

"Ah yes, how different it is now," Fleur remarked, and pointed a lean brown finger outside. "That house, you perceive, was built by a French settler about fifteen years ago. It would be when I first drove this way that the Arabs attacked him one night—his servant was killed and he himself was wounded and his property taken. Such things do not happen in this region now."

As midday approached and the sun climbed higher into the sky and the world about us became even hotter, conversation flagged. Once again I saw the walled city of Meknes rise out of the dusty plain, and once again I was destined to leave it with no more than a casual glance. It must wait till another journey. We stopped for an hour or so at a depot to unload boxes and

parcels, and drink a bottle of wine and swap yarns. Then we went on again across the sun-scorched land.

It was a country of vast horizons, as bare and brown under the pitiless summer sun as the South African *veldt*. Forty miles away the rolling heights of the Middle Atlas Mountains heaved themselves toward the sky, a chaotic landscape of peaks and ridges, scenery such as one might expect to encounter on the moon. You must think of Morocco, behind its inhospitable coastline, as a land of wide plains, the *bled*, colourful in the brief spring with myriads of wild flowers: of wide, winding rivers which coil sinuously across the tawny plains: of great mountain ranges almost as high as the Rockies or the Alps, with snow-clad summits 'white as salmon' as Sir Francis Drake observed: and beyond them, the desert. Such is *Maghreb el 'Aksha*, 'The Land of the Farthest West,' as the Moroccans call their homeland, and indeed, it is farther west than the greater part of Europe.

The plains were left behind and now all about us were the hills, tall peaks that were six, eight, ten thousand feet high, heights and valleys stretching wave upon wave into the blue distance. Beyond this range lies a second, the High Atlas, whose summits reach to nearly fifteen thousand feet, and beyond that yet another, the Anti or Little Atlas, whose red peaks are scoured by the blast of the desert winds. The people of the mountains differ markedly in character, those of the Middle Atlas being fiercely individualistic, living together in tiny republics, while those of the High Atlas are ruled by *Kaids* or lords who exercise a patriarchal and despotic authority.

Clothing the slopes of the hills were pine trees and holm-oaks, and patches of vivid green which Fleur said were cedars. How surprising to encounter great forests in central Morocco, yet here at altitudes of six thousand feet are woods of pine and cedar so vast that one can travel through them for days without coming to the end. Once these great forests stretched all the way to Meknes, but Ismail the Bloodthirsty had square miles destroyed so that they might not afford shelter to tribesmen who questioned his authority. To eyes tired of the scrubby dwarf palms of the plains these woods, with monkeys swinging from branch to branch among the oaks and cedars, are a delight.

Hour after hour the lorry went on, into a strange region of brown volcanic hills and heat-filled valleys dotted with the black tents of the Berber nomads. This was the country of the Beni M'Guild, whose ancestors furnished the contingents with which the Moors had conquered Spain. Their flocks and herds were all about us, and we could see their fortified villages in the distance,

remote and inaccessible. They were now settling down to a peaceful mode of life, and as much as half a dozen years had passed since their raiding parties stormed the plains.

The people who live in this land are fierce and arrogant, hostile to Christians, but faithful to their own creed. They have always been 'agin the government' whether it be Roman, Arab or French. A brave and determined race, reckless with their lives, they fight for the love of it. Many of them are nomads, living in tents woven from the hair of goats and camels, while they move with their flocks and herds from one pasturage to another. Others live in fortified *ksour* or villages of mud huts. Their methods of agriculture are primitive, for they are content with little. In the spring they sow maize, beans and chick-peas; the autumn sowings give them barley.

It was fiercely hot inside the lorry, and most of the time I crouched with a woollen scarf wrapped about my face like a veil to keep the dust out of my mouth and eyes. The metalwork of the lorry was so hot that it burned the fingers to touch it, and the tattered leatherwork was too warm to lean against. Even at four thousand feet the air was no cooler. The heat struck down like something solid so that one could scarcely breathe.

Now and again we would stop to unload boxes and parcels at a wayside settlement. Parts of the road were still in course of construction and we passed and repassed gangs of men engaged in roadwork. The workmen were usually sturdy Berber tribesmen, who worked bare-footed and bare-headed, with only a ragged *jellaba* fluttering about them. They would greet us with a cheer as we came rumbling up the gravelly slopes, dropping their tools to stand in a line by the roadside, shouting encouragement.

Their camps dotted the brown hillsides, clusters of grey and white tents and rough shelters of timber thatched with straw. Their womenfolk crouched over tiny camp fires, giving us curious glances as the narrowing of the road forced the big vehicle down to a crawl. Late in the afternoon Fleur pulled up outside a tin-roofed canteen presided over by a fat, red-cheeked Frenchman. We had a meal and then stretched ourselves out on a bench for a couple of hours' sleep. At least Fleur was soon snoring lustily, but I could only lie there listening to the buzzing of the flies.

Darkness was beginning to fall when we started out again. Now we seemed to be leaving the hills behind and entering a rolling country of dim, dusty distances, stony plains covered with low scrub. The highway, which had hitherto been almost deserted, now became busier. Parties of tribesmen, on gaily caparisoned

horses, rode swaggering past us. Once we passed a company of the French Foreign Legion on the march.

Night had fallen when we reached Khenifra, a Berber town lying among the foothills of the Middle Atlas. Beside the winding Oum er Rbia rise the walls and towers of two castles, one on either side of the stream. About them is a fortified enclosure containing barracks, shops and houses. Khenifra was the headquarters of the Zaian tribesmen, whose leader Moha ou Hammou declared a holy war against the French during the closing stages of the First World War. French troops captured the town and doggedly repulsed attack after attack, but made the mistake of making a surprise sortie against the Berber camp, ten miles away. On the way back they were attacked by the tribesmen and almost the whole of the French force, nearly a thousand men, was killed.

At last an avenging column fought its way through the hostile land and recaptured Khenifra. When the tide of battle turned Moha ou Hammou ordered his fourteen sons to surrender to the French. In this way he made certain that one of them would live to become chief of the tribe in his place. He himself fought on and was killed by one of his sons, now fighting for the French. That son, in turn, was killed by his own clansmen who had refused to surrender. Such is the Berber way.

We bumped our way along a narrow lane until we came to an open space where an Arab named Abdul waited with a lantern. We unloaded some boxes off the lorry, put others in their place, and then Abdul disappeared back to his resting place. Fleur was going to spend the night with a young woman, and said I could sleep in a neighbouring shed if I wished, as we would be starting off early the following morning.

Feeling tired and stiff and more interested in bed than sight-seeing, I sat on an upturned box and felt glum. Tiring of my own company, and feeling less sleepy than I had imagined, I decided to go in search of something to eat. I stowed my rucksack in a corner of the shed before leaving, and then stumbled along various unlighted lanes to a street with shops and cafés.

While I was strolling along considering their possibilities a man stumbled into me. I swore at him in English and to my surprise he replied in the same language. We both stopped and stared at each other curiously. I saw that he was dressed in the uniform of a *légionnaire*.

"That is a Canadian jacket you are wearing," he exclaimed. "How the hell did youse get here, kid?"

I told him that I was hitch-hiking across Morocco and had just arrived there on a truck.

"Gosh, it sure is swell to meet someone who can speak English," declared the *légionnaire*. "I'm from Detroit myself. Know the place?"

Yes, I did know Detroit, having stayed there for a short time, and we found ourselves talking about familiar scenes. Then Hank, the name my companion was known by, remarked: "I'm joining some pals at a café, so you can come along and eat with us. Ah, here they are!"

Two more men in Foreign Legion uniform suddenly materialized out of the darkness, with whom I found myself shaking hands. One was a stocky little man of indeterminate nationality called Kruse, the other a big blond German named Adolph, who gave my hand such a hearty shake that I gingerly felt my fingers afterward to see if they were still intact. Adolph proceeded to lead us off into the darkness.

We went along sinister alleyways along which I should have hesitated to venture alone and finally came to a brightly lit room filled with soldiers, Arabs and several scantily dressed women. Making our way through the crowd until we found an empty table in a corner Hank called for drinks. When we had washed the dust out of our throats we leaned back in our chairs and watched what was going on about us.

A stout young woman commenced to do a sort of dance which consisted mainly of wriggling the body and hips backwards and forwards. This was greeted with applause from her audience. Then other girls began mingling with the patrons, and one of them plumped herself down in Hank's lap and helped herself to his wine. He laughed and gave her a squeeze. Hank's companion, Kruse, also had his arm round a girl's waist and presently they rose and disappeared behind a curtain.

A half-drunk man at an adjoining table turned round and accused Hank of stealing his wine. Hank promptly punched him in the face so that he fell to the floor in a heap. Then the man's two companions sprang up in a rage and flung themselves at Hank. With a whoop of delight Adolph released his light o' love, dumped her unceremoniously on a couch, and sprang forward to help Hank. Within a couple of minutes there was as fine a free-for-all as you could wish for in progress, with knives flashing, bottles flying, and chairs being used as weapons in the way you see on the films.

Wedged in between Hank and Adolph, who was doing his best to persuade a large Arab to part with a murderous-looking knife, there was no time to feel scared. The fight had now developed into a matter of The Legion versus The Rest, for Hank

had sounded the familiar rallying cry: "*A la Legion!*" and his companions had formed themselves into a compact group to beat off their attackers. Suddenly a huge, black-bearded ruffian came charging down at me, armed with a bottle with the bottom knocked off. Not liking the look of this dreadful weapon I picked up a wooden stool and hurled it at his face, sending him staggering backward.

Bayonets were out now, flashing wickedly in the lamplight, and what had begun as a drunken brawl was now a grim battle in which old scores might be settled. Memories of past defeats and unavenged wrongs, held in check only by fear of punishment, came welling to the surface. A Moor went down with a bayonet in his arm; a *légionnaire* crumpled under the crimson swish of a curved Moroccan blade. Then loud and clear came the sound of a bugle, whistles, the clatter of approaching footsteps.

"If that is the patrol, then it is time we got out of here," yelled Hank. "Scram—everybody!"

They dashed behind a curtain and down a narrow passage into a yard. An Arab was on guard at the big, iron-studded gate, but he took one look at us and stood not upon the order of his going. Flinging open the gate we dashed into the street, which was filled with flying figures. "This way," growled Hank, and I followed him through various alleys till we emerged in a wide open space. Everything was dark and quiet and we seemed to be the only human beings astir.

"Well, so long, kid," said Hank. "It's been a great night, but I guess it is time we were going." With these words he disappeared into the darkness.

Not knowing how to get back to the place where the lorry was parked I walked hesitatingly along the road, but each step seemed to take me farther out into the country. The road came to an abrupt end and rather than risk my neck any longer by walking about in the dark I decided to sleep out. Coming to a clump of trees I made myself comfortable on a pile of leaves and spent the remainder of the night there.

I awoke suddenly the next morning to find a group of Berbers standing round me in a ring; it was their chattering which had awakened me. They were hard-faced, unsmiling fellows, dressed in dingy *jellabas*, with long-barrelled guns in their hands and short, curved daggers dangling from their belts. Looking about me I saw that there were tents pitched on the neighbouring hillside. Drums were throbbing and there seemed to be a lot of people about. Later I learned that I had fallen asleep near the camp of El Hassan, overlord of the Zaian tribesmen.

My head felt hot and heavy and at first I could not remember what had happened. Gradually recollection of the previous night came back to me, and I remembered Hank and the fight in the café, and wondered what it was I had had to drink. Quick on the heels of that train of thought came another; where was Fleur and the lorry and had they left yet? As I scrambled hurriedly to my feet the Berbers fired a stream of unintelligible questions at me, to which I replied with a shake of the head. Then they led me toward one of the tents.

In front of it a couple of French officers and Berber dignitaries in long robes stood clustered about a big man with a bushy black beard like an Assyrian king. I guessed afterwards that this was El Hassan himself, leader of fifteen thousand fighting men. Seeing us approach, one of the Frenchmen came forward and asked what the matter was. In halting French, as imperfect as was his English, I explained that I had gone for a walk the previous evening and had been unable to find the way back. Naturally I did not mention my part in the scrimmage at the café.

The Frenchman gave me the sort of look which indicated that in his opinion all Englishmen were mad, and that, therefore, one ought not to be surprised at anything they did. Fortunately he happened to know Fleur, and mention of his name and examination of my passport convinced him that I was not there to stir up dissension among the tribesmen. He explained matters to the other man, who curtly commanded my captors to release me. I lost no time in departing.

In Khenifra I learned more of this Berber chieftain, who lived there in an exotic-looking stronghold surrounded by massive walls and towers. There he conducts the affairs of his tribe, and—it being considered effeminate for a fighting man to be able to read or write—employs, I was told, a staff of secretaries to keep account of the thousands of sheep, cattle and horses which he owns. Today the great confederacy of the Zaian, instead of fighting against the French, fights battles for them.

When I arrived back in town another problem confronted me for I could not remember where we had left the lorry. It had been dark when we arrived and one place looked very much like another. I wandered futilely up one lane and down another, vainly trying to recall some distinguishing feature, conscious that time was passing and Fleur was due to leave at any moment. Suddenly I encountered Abdul, the Arab caretaker of the yard where we had parked the lorry, and he took me there by a short cut. But we were too late. Fleur and the lorry was gone and only my rucksack, lying forlornly on the floor, was left.

No other lorries were leaving so the only thing to do was to start off on foot. The next town of any importance was Kasba Tadla, farther down the valley of the Oum er Rbia. This appeared to be about forty miles away, but as the road which I was following was marked on my map only by a series of dotted lines it was difficult to judge distances. Soon Khenifra was left far behind and I was tramping alone across a hot, dusty countryside.

At first there was a considerable amount of traffic along the road, and I was constantly encountering other travellers journeying toward the city. A lean, ragged Berber would come tramping along, followed at a little distance by his wife, bent double under the weight of various domestic utensils. Long strings of camels strode haughtily past, or little donkeys burdened with huge loads of firewood. Once a local chieftain came riding past, mounted on a chestnut mare whose saddle cloth was of brilliant green with gold-embroidered harness. He was surrounded by half a dozen retainers, armed with long rifles whose graceful stocks were decorated with silver and mother-of-pearl.

These gentry stared at me with cold hostile eyes, and I knew by their look that they despised the infidel, and that had I ventured there only a very few years previously they would not have hesitated to cut me down with their daggers. As the day wore on and the heat increased, the traffic became less, and by eleven o'clock the road was deserted. It is an unknown world, this valley of the Oum er Rbia, described in only one book of the many about Morocco which I have read. History was not static here, for as newly pacified tribes were brought under French rule the boundary of the military zone was pushed farther and farther southward, so that places which one year were military outposts might the following year be embryo European settlements, complete with shops, hotels, garages and bus services. That was why no book on Morocco was ever complete, for hardly was it published than another section of the country was pacified, revealing unsuspected valleys and towns and chieftains ruling in medieval state.

For nearly five hundred miles the rolling flood of the Oum er Rbia surges across the Moroccan plain. Sweeping along between cliffs half obscured with masses of oleanders, broadening out into dark pools where the pigeons gather, shading from brown to amber in the fierce sunlight, this Mother of Grass, as the Berbers term the stream, rushes along to reach the Atlantic at Azzemmour. The greatest and longest of Moroccan rivers, it has played its part in history. Across its yellow waters, with banners waving and drums beating, claimants for the throne of Morocco rode out of

the south to contest the sultan's title. When they were unsuccessful the river ran red with their blood.

Various writers have been decried for calling Morocco a beautiful land, yet it is true that there is beauty here. Not the mellow loveliness of cornfields and meadows and old stone and half-timbered villages, but a more austere, clear-cut beauty quite different from the green landscapes of England. A winding brown river, a few palm trees, sheep grazing, white clouds towering overhead in a blue sky, a sense of space and distance, these things constitute beauty, as in a different way do the dark forests and granite ridges of northern Canada and Finland. But it is a beauty alien to the softer English landscape, too hard and primitive perhaps to appeal except to those who feel the call of the wilderness in their blood.

When it got too hot to walk I sought shelter in some bushes by the stream and rigged my hiking cape on some sticks to form a shelter to keep off the sun. Then I lit a fire and cooked a meal, fried eggs and potatoes, and afterwards had a sleep. It was late afternoon when I started out again, and after walking for an hour or so began looking about me for a place to spend the night. I was now crossing a stretch of bare, open country dotted with occasional clumps of palmetto and prickly cactus. It was a region apparently devoid of human habitation, though even if one of the familiar mud-walled villages had appeared in sight I should have hesitated to apply there for a night's lodging. A few years enforced peace did not necessarily mean that the people's nature had changed, and it would be more prudent to sleep out of doors in some secluded spot.

After studying with a speculative eye every cluster of rocks, bushes and trees which I passed, considering their merits or demerits as possible sleeping places, I spied what appeared to be some ruined buildings in a sheltered side valley. Tramping across a strip of sandy desert I found myself standing in a ruined house whose roofless walls gaped forlornly at the sky. First searching the ruin for signs of snakes and scorpions I arranged my bed in one corner and then cooked and ate a meal. Afterwards I sat in the doorway, watching the sun go down behind the distant hills, until it became too dark to distinguish anything.

Next morning while tramping along the road, I was overtaken by a car containing some French soldiers. They asked to see my passport, so I told them I was a writer tramping across Morocco collecting material for a book. Upon hearing this they laughed, handed back my papers, and waved to me to proceed. Then they

were gone and there was only the lonely road winding across the tawny landscape.

The day passed much as the previous one had done, tramping during the cooler hours of the morning, a long rest during the midday heat, tramping on again in the evening. Berbers, mounted and on foot, passed me and eyed my rucksack curiously. I plodded steadily onward, acutely conscious of some blisters which I had acquired the day before. The land remained bare and brown and desolate; the season was now nearly mid-July.

As darkness fell I looked about me for a sleeping place and saw the purple-black tents of a nomad camp grouped in a circle on the hillside. While studying them speculatively, wondering whether or not to seek hospitality there, a man stepped out into the roadway in front of me and uttered the single word: "*Inglizi?*" I replied that I was, whereupon he motioned to me to follow him, and led the way toward the camp.

Another Berber, dressed in white, came up and greeted me, speaking far better French than I. He explained that the soldiers who had passed me in the car that morning had called at the camp and asked the sheik, his father, to be on the lookout for me. I must be their guest for the night, he said. It was a prospect which delighted me, for I had wanted to stay at an Arab encampment but had hesitated to approach one uninvited.

Fires glowed redly in the darkness and drums beat softly as they led me to a big tent where a tall man with a long black beard, the sheik, greeted me courteously. I knew enough of Moslem etiquette to halt in the doorway of the tent and remove my heavy boots, an action which caused the sheik's red lips to part in a slow smile. He growled something to his son, probably some remark as: "Well, at least the infidel dog is sufficiently well bred to observe our customs."

The tent was quite roomy inside, with coloured carpets laid down on the earthen floor and a profusion of cushions and pillows lying around. It was lighted by several lanterns hanging from the roof. A curtain hanging in the middle shut off what appeared to be the harem part of the tent, for from behind this came the sounds of excited giggles and chattering; apparently the sheik's womenfolk found my arrival a source of considerable amusement. But it would have been bad manners to let my gaze wander in that direction.

We seated ourselves cross-legged in a circle on a brown rug. The sheik clapped his hands and a servant brought in a low circular metal table, on which he placed a silver teapot and half a dozen glasses. He brewed the tea and then stuffed lumps of

sugar and leaves of mint into the pot. After this mixture had been allowed to stand for a few minutes he poured it out with a flourish and handed the glasses round. The tea was scalding hot and sickly sweet, but I had already acquired a liking for its piquant flavour of mint.

We drank three glasses of tea each and then the servant came and removed the table and tea-things. A silence followed, for nobody seemed to know what to do next, and this lasted so long that I began to feel disconcerted. The sheik and his men continued to eye me steadily, and as I looked at their lean, brown, bearded faces and hard, expressionless eyes I could not help wondering how different circumstances might have been had they encountered me there only a few years previously. I wished something would happen to break the silence.

The sheik also was apparently disconcerted, for he knew only a few odd words of French, and his son, who might have acted as interpreter, was elsewhere. To relieve the tension I began pointing to the various objects about me and asking their name in the *Chleuh* or Berber language. It always amuses a man to hear a stranger try and speak his language. At first they were a bit puzzled by my questioning, but when I tried to pronounce the words after them grins lit up their faces as they grasped my meaning.

Then they entered into the fun of the thing, pointing first to one object and then another, calling out the names with much laughter and grimacing, till in the end the sheik had to call them to order to make himself heard. Now that the ice was broken a big tribesman who had been staring solemnly at my rucksack walked over to where it lay on the floor and squinted at it curiously.

He reached forward tentatively and picked it up, estimated its weight, and fingered the steel frame and shoulder straps with a puzzled air. He tried carrying it on his back, but it got mixed up with the folds of his *jellaba*, so he put it on the top of his head—but quickly removed it—and after carrying it in his arms for a yard or two, replaced it on the floor and shook his head, clearly perplexed. I got up and slung the rucksack on my back, showing him the proper way of carrying it, and the rest crowded about me with cries of "Ah-hah!"

Then nothing would satisfy them but they try it on themselves, and now it was my turn to laugh at the ludicrous sight they presented. Seeing they were interested I unpacked the rucksack and showed them what it contained, which was not very much. A waterproof sleeping-bag, an oval-shaped billy-can with fry-pan inside, a half-size biscuit tin filled with food that was perishable,

a waterproof case containing maps and stationery, a tin of corned beef, some clean socks and underwear, first-aid outfit, sewing outfit and other odds and ends. One of them sniffed my wine bottle and wrinkled his lips in a grin, whereupon his companions frowned.

Now one of them became interested in my knife, which dangled in a leather sheath from my hip. This was a Finnish *poukko* or hunting knife, which I had bought in Lapland two years previously. He examined the long, keen blade of Swedish steel and the decorated leatherwork of the sheath, comparing the workmanship with that of the short, curved dagger which hung from his own hip. This led to the question of how I came to be there, so in a mixture of French, Arabic and sign language I traced my journey to that spot.

I got out my maps and let them discover for themselves the location of the various places—Tangier, Rabat, Fez, Khenifra—and afterwards traced for them the route from distant Inglizstan. By now they were all interested, for the Berber has an intelligent European type of mind, and they crowded about me examining things and asking questions, laughing at our attempts to understand. One of them felt my leg muscles and grinned when he heard I had walked from Khenifra. Once again I had proved that lack of a common language need not be a barrier between peoples.

These Berbers, the aboriginals of Morocco, are very different from the Arabs by whom they were conquered. Though they belong to the white race nobody really knows their origin. Always a fighting race they have twice invaded Europe, once when they marched with Hannibal over the Alps to Rome, and again when they followed their Arab leaders to conquer Spain for the Moslem faith. Unlike the Arabs they are mechanically minded, more inclined to accept European civilization, and in the end they may become assimilated by it.

Later, squatting on cushions amid a circle of dark-robed clansmen, I dined on meat which had been roasted on skewers over brushwood fires. Stray gleams of light from the lanterns lit up the gorgeously hued saddle-cloths draped against the tent wall behind us, glowing with crimson, green and gold, and glinted on the long rifles decorated with silver and ivory which each man kept at his back.

I ate so much, in fact, that I had just sufficient energy to crawl on to a convenient cushion and make myself comfortable there. From under the rim of the tent I looked upon a mode of life which had probably changed but little since the days of Abraham.

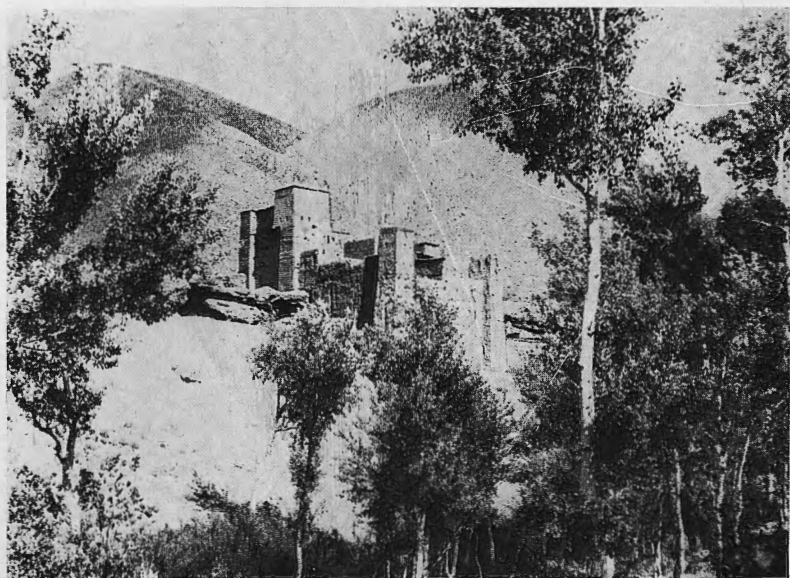
There were the tents pitched in a circle on the hillside, with the sheep and cattle driven into the open space in the centre for the night: there was the line of cooking fires glowing redly in the darkness, with the women gossiping round the well as they waited to draw water: the conquest of the country by the French had done little to change the scene.

When the time came to sleep a blanket was flung down on the floor beside me. The men curled up on the rugs where they lay, and were soon snoring lustily. The sheik had vanished behind the curtain some time previously, probably to give his wives a first-hand account of my appearance and characteristics. I did not get much sleep myself, but passed a lively night with a few score fleas for company.



The holy town of Mulay Idris

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Courtesy: Chemins de Fer du Maroc

A native Berber castle



A nomad camp

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A Moorish festival

Courtesy: French Railways

CHAPTER VI

IN MARRAKECH

THE following morning, after we had breakfasted on bread and cheese and a glass of coffee, the sheik told me that some of his people were going to visit a village a few miles farther along the road, and that I could travel with them if I wished. Now if there is one thing better than carrying a heavy rucksack on your back, it is to have it carried for you; my pack was accordingly strapped on top of a diminutive donkey, and the sheik indicated that I was also to ride on another. I am not enamoured of riding donkeys—indeed, with the exception of certain episodes at the seaside in my far-away childhood, I could not recall ever riding a donkey before in my life—but reflecting that one might as well try anything once, I seated myself astride the beast and hoped for the best.

After a lot of shouting and much argument amongst the various members of our party, we started off. There were about a dozen of us all told, including the big man who had been intrigued by the appearance of my rucksack the evening before, and under whose charge I had apparently been placed. It was still early morning, with the sun shining only mildly as yet, and the countryside about us looking fresh and bright. The first mile or two passed fairly pleasantly, and I quite enjoyed the novelty of it all.

But after a time I became painfully aware that as a form of locomotion the donkey has its limitations. Its backbone, for example, might have been a little more conveniently designed in order to suit the requirements of the human frame. This beast, in addition, had a very strong will of its own, or else it realized that an ignoramus in the ways of donkeys was riding it. It would persist in stopping to examine anything and everything along the roadside which attracted its eye, or to chew herbage, or would simply stop for no reason at all. And nothing I could say or do would induce it to proceed again.

Thus I would find myself straggling along at the tail end of the procession, and the big man would turn round and shout out something to me, and I would belabour the donkey with the short stick which had been given me for the purpose, but all to no effect; the creature simply took no notice of my presence at all. Then the big man would let rip a few pungent Berber oaths and come

riding alongside, and he would give the donkey a few sharp cuts across the hindquarters with his stick, at the same time uttering remarks which were certainly not endearments.

At this the donkey, recognizing the professional touch, would twitch one grey ear pathetically, and philosophically plod on another kilometre or two—until the big man's attention was distracted elsewhere. But though there appeared to be no limit to the donkey's endurance, there was a limit to what my behind could endure, and after a time I began to consider the advantages of honest walking over this painful method of progression. So I slid off the donkey's back and tramped along on foot beside the beast, a course of action which caused all my companions to roar with laughter.

So, alternatively walking and riding, we journeyed on through the heat across the bare, brown countryside, till some time about midday we came to a little mud-walled village nestling on a hillside under the shadow of a squat, dun-coloured, loop-holed tower. We rode through a gateway into a courtyard where we were received by a tall, gaunt man dressed in a blue *jellaba*, turban and sandals. He seemed surprised to see a European riding with his fellow-clansmen, but invited me inside the tower to drink the inevitable mint tea, and eat hot, freshly baked bread with melted butter poured over it.

Later, while dozing on a rug in a darkened room, the big man came and told me that there was a car containing a couple of French officials outside; there was room for me if I wished to go with them. After a hurried farewell to my host I picked up my pack and went outside and introduced myself to the Frenchmen. They were going to Kasba Tadla, the historic stronghold which Sultan Ismail, 'The Bloodthirsty,' built and garrisoned with three thousand Negro soldiers. In what seemed a very short space of time we had arrived within sight of the big fortress, which stands four-square on a hilltop, one of the most impressive sights of Morocco.

My impressions of Kasba Tadla are vague, for I had hardly entered the place than I left it again. This is one of the penalties of travel, that often one cannot remain sufficiently long in a place to gain a true impression of it, but must instead hasten to board some vehicle bound for somewhere else, where the same situation may be repeated. In this instance, it was the sight of a native bus bearing the magic inscription 'Marrakech', which caused me to leave Kasba Tadla with little more than a hurried glance about me. The bus was on the point of leaving, so I bargained with the driver for a cheap ride. It was to be a constant source of wonder

to me that a country so recently pacified should possess such a convenient number of local bus services; but I gathered, afterwards, that almost the first thing to happen after the submission of a part of the countryside to the French was the organization of such transport services. These proved so popular with the natives that already, in some parts, those traditional age-old forms of transport—the donkey and the camel—had been supplanted by the internal combustion engine.

The hard, wooden seats of the bus were already tightly packed with white-robed Moors and their wives, but room was made for me, though we were wedged in as tightly as sardines in a tin. And what with one thing and another, almost immediately I fell asleep. So I had only a hazy recollection of the remainder of the journey, save that I awoke suddenly to find that the bus had stopped. Something had gone wrong with the engine, and learning that Marrakech was only a couple of miles away I decided to leave the bus to its fate, and push on ahead on foot.

By now it was nearly sunset, and a line of greenery ahead indicated the palm forests along the Tensift River. Soon I was part of a continuous line of camels, horsemen and well-laden mules, all making for Marrakech. Presently, out of the dusty plain rose the red-tinted walls and towers of an alluring city, with the dim, blue peaks of the High Atlas Mountains beyond. A tall, square minaret dominated the scene; the tower of the Kutoubia Mosque. There was no doubt that this was Marrakech—the Red City—at last.

Alluring though it may have appeared from a distance, a closer view of Marrakech failed to endorse these initial expectations. Here was none of the glamour which intrigues the visitor to Fez at first sight. Marrakech appeared an untidy, shapeless sort of place, a city of wide, sandy, windswept spaces from which dusty streets lined with undistinguished buildings led away to unattractive hinterlands. In one of these windswept, open spaces I presently found myself, gazing regretfully at a range of buildings, in hybrid Moorish-European style, which in my opinion spoiled the appearance of the native city. Then darkness fell.

My plans for seeking cheap accommodation in a native house had to be abandoned, for in this darkness I was more likely to lose my way or twist an ankle. The sign of a small hotel run on European lines caught my attention; I decided to spend the night there, and a short time later was luxuriating in a hot bath and tastefully prepared food. Then, having drunk more red wine than was good for me I went to bed and slept the sleep of the just. That one evening saw me squander more money than I had spent

the previous week, but an occasional spree is the vagabond's privilege.

The next day I moved into a little mud-built native house off the Djemaa-el-F'Naa, the great open-air market-place in the centre of Marrakech. It is known as 'The Meeting Place of the Dead', because in the good old days—not so very long ago, either—wrongdoers were executed here, and their heads exhibited on spikes stuck on top of the city walls. And their ghosts still come back to the Djemaa-el-F'Naa at intervals to see what is happening there, or so the people of Marrakech believe.

The owner of the house was an old, white-haired Arab called Othman, whose chief occupation in life consisted of sitting cross-legged in the doorway all day long, puffing away reflectively at a long-stemmed pipe. For the equivalent of sixpence I had a small room to myself, furnished with a clay fire-pot, a couple of reed mats, and a dusty mattress, and I was probably grossly overcharged at that. One of the first things I did was to go to the market and buy some eggs and vegetables, for it was my ambition to practice cooking in the Moorish style over a little fire of charcoal.

It required a stay of several days in Marrakech to make me realize that my original estimate of the city had been correct; it is, indeed, one of the most fascinating cities in North Africa. As I explored the city and discovered more of its unique character, the feeling of disappointment which I had experienced when I arrived passed away, and I classed it with Fez as among the most interesting cities I had seen. For the charm of Marrakech does not strike you immediately, as does that of Fez; it is a charm of a different order, but just as fascinating when you get to know it.

Sprawling across the sun-scorched, hazy Plain of Haouz the red ramparts, and green and golden roofs and minarets of Marrakech challenge the snows of the High Atlas, whose peaks rise up beyond the plain like the drop-scene of a theatre. Marrakech is a huge, sprawling city, of one-storeyed, flat-roofed mud buildings, dusty winding streets devoid of shade, and high, red walls which measure seven and a half miles round. All this surrounded by groves of palm trees so numerous as to form a forest above the city.

El Hamra—the Red City—is the name by which Marrakech has been known for centuries, and though it no longer boasts half a million inhabitants, it is still the greatest native city in Africa. Its atmosphere is entirely different from that of Fez; if Fez is Oriental, then Marrakech is African in character. Its

atmosphere is that of the not-so-distant Sahara, and as you look at its red-tinted walls and houses you feel that Timbuctoo and the Sahara are not very far away. One gets the impression that it is less a city than a great camping ground, with caravans continually arriving and departing.

The Djemaa-el-F'Naa is the focal point around which the life of Marrakech revolves. It was a never-ending delight to watch the townspeople go about their daily business, and I spent one whole day squatted on a reed mat in the potters' market, content merely to watch the picturesque crowds continually passing by. There were Moorish dancers and musicians, woolly headed Negroes from Senegal, swaggering soldiers in red turbans and baggy blue pantaloons, Jews in red and yellow robes, spearmen with matted hair from the ochre-tinted southern desert, lean, brown Berbers from little-known valleys of the Atlas Mountains. And there were the usual crowds gathered about the storytellers, the snake-charmers, the witch-doctors, holy men, and nondescript wayfarers. Whoever described Marrakech as 'a city of brown adventurers seeing life in the sunshine' certainly chose a happy phrase.

Now and again there would come the clatter of hooves and the flash of swords, and the Pasha's bodyguard would go galloping past, resplendent in scarlet and white. The Pasha is still nominally the ruler of the city; though nowadays his powers have been considerably curtailed by the French. Or else a company of Moroccan Spahis would come riding by, and you would see, fluttering in the wind, that horse-tail standard brought to Morocco by Kheir-el-Din, 'The Lord of the Seven Banners'. The Second Regiment of the Spahis, from Marrakech, is recruited from among the tribesmen of the High Atlas Mountains, and provides the escort for the Sultan on state occasions.

Once, as I sat there, a man came running along the street firing a rifle into the air, and when I would have ducked down in alarm my companions laughed and explained that he was merely celebrating the birth of a son!

One morning I got up at four o'clock and went along to the 'Gate of Skulls' to watch the camel caravans come striding in. It fascinated me to watch a long line of these haughty beasts moving steadily along the skyline, against a background of sand dunes and palm trees, while the great red disc of the sun crept slowly over the horizon and flooded the landscape with a fiery glow.

Looking southward I saw the great peaks of the High Atlas Mountains towering up thousands of feet into the sky. A few

minutes later they had vanished again, hidden behind a barrier of cloud. But the sight had been enough for me; I resolved henceforth to tramp over the mountains to the half-legendary Oasis of Tafilet, following the ancient road by which the caravans had brought gold and slaves and ivory from distant Timbuctoo. This was the route which Walter Harris, of the *London Times*, had followed in 1893. It was true that I had very little money left, but I was willing to risk it.

My ambition was destined to be postponed, however, for when I returned to collect my pack old Othman thrust a newspaper into my hand. Its flaring headline proclaimed that civil war had broken out in Spanish Morocco, that the country was the scene of fierce fighting, and that all the frontiers were about to be closed. My decision to tramp to Tafilet was immediately forgotten; I decided, instead, to try and cross Spanish Morocco to Tangier before the frontiers were closed, as otherwise I might find myself marooned in the French zone without any money.

Accordingly, I boarded the first motor-bus for Casablanca, arriving at that modern French seaport about noon. Feeling bewildered and helpless, and not knowing whom to ask for information about events in Spanish Morocco, I thought of Durand, the young French photographer whom I had met on the steamer coming over from Gibraltar. He had told me to look him up if ever I found myself in Casablanca, so I went round to the address he had given me and was lucky enough to find him at home.

Durand appeared quite pleased to see me, and listened excitedly to an account of my experiences. There was very little he could tell me about what was happening in the Spanish zone, but he mentioned that a friend of his was going to try and drive through to Tangier in his car. Immediately I asked whether it was possible to travel with him, so Durand telephoned his friend, who replied that if I cared to risk it then he was willing to take me.

A short time later a big motor-car drew up outside Durand's shop, and I found myself shaking hands with a curly-headed, handsome man who answered to the name of Raoul. Beside him in the car sat his Moorish servant, Ali. I slung my rucksack into the back seat, called out a hasty farewell to Durand, and we started off.

When we got to Rabat we found the place full of rumours, but nobody had any definite news about what was happening. Various towns were reported to have suffered from bombing, and harrowing descriptions of the destruction wrought by the rebels were being circulated. Tetuan was in ruins, according to one

report, Arzila was held by the revolutionists, while heaven only knew what was happening at Larache. We made due allowance for the imaginative powers of newspaper reporters, and, undaunted, went on.

"What brought you to Morocco?" Raoul asked curiously.

I told him of my journeys to the Arctic in search of adventure.

"I thought it would be interesting to visit a warmer country for a change," I explained.

"You may find this country a bit warmer than you bargained for," he grinned, lighting a cigarette.

As we drew nearer the frontier between the French and Spanish zones I grew excited; would the frontier guards let us pass? At the first military post on Spanish territory the soldiers immediately surrounded our car. They kept us waiting a long time, but at last we received permission to proceed 'at our own risk and peril'. The officer in command said: "God be with you, *senors*," and ordered his men to open the gateway blocking the road to the north.

"See you in hell, *mes amis*!" roared Raoul, with a laugh, waving farewell.

With a roar the big car leaped forward and soon the frontier post and its khaki-clad guardians were left far behind. Looking back I saw the barrier gates crash shut behind us; the frontier was closed now and there should be no turning back. Would we be able to get through?

Ahead of us lay the red hills of the Riff country, from whence came the sullen rumble of a bombardment. It was a bare, dried-up land which we were crossing, and when we came to an occasional village the women and children scuttled away out of sight, while the men stared at us grimly with rifles in their hands. But they made no attempt to stop us going north. The atmosphere everywhere had the tenseness that comes before a storm, as if they were all waiting for something to happen.

We came to a town, full of armed men, with barricades drawn across the street, and no traffic moving. The militiamen halted our car and said it was dangerous to proceed. The town was Larache, which showed little sign of the devastation which was supposed to have taken place. Yet when I stopped to admire a gorgeous display of purple bougainvillea a rifleman came along and reminded me that there was a war on.

They let us proceed at last, and we went on again, until the buildings of another town appeared to view. Grim-faced Moorish troops guarded the road, stopped the car, and made us go with them, as is related in the opening chapter of this book. Later,

much later, we were allowed to proceed. Afterwards a river came into view, and a bridge, the frontier of the International Territory of Tangier. A short time later we entered the city.

"Well, *mon ami*, that's that, as you English say," remarked Raoul, as he deposited me at a street corner. "You came for adventures, my son, and you certainly found them. *Au revoir*."

He drove away, and that was the last I saw of him.

CHAPTER VII

JOURNEY'S END—AND BEGINNING

TANGIER was dark and silent, with a few lights showing here and there, as I made my way to a little Spanish inn called *El Delirio*, which was hidden in the warren of streets and alleys behind the *Rue de Siagheen*.

You will hear more of *El Delirio* later in this book, and of Pablo, the landlord of the inn, and Maria his wife, so let me describe the place. It was a tall old house, originally Moorish, its only entrance by a low, wooden door four inches thick, studded with nails and iron bars. Inside the doorway were two *patios* or courtyards, now roofed with glass, with balconies running around the upper floors so that one could stand there and look down upon the guests eating their meals at the long dining-table in the court below.

The street in front of the inn was only about nine feet wide, and the alley-way by which I reached the place was so narrow that two people had to press breast to breast in order to pass. It seemed such an excellent place for a murder that the first time I traversed that alley at night I half expected to be hit over the head with a sandbag, and kept one hand on my knife. And yet, within a few days, I had grown quite accustomed to walking along these narrow, unlighted alleys in the dark, and was not in the least disconcerted by finding myself rubbing shoulders with grim-faced Moors whose short daggers pressed into your ribs as they squeezed past.

My fears proved to be groundless, for this hotch-potch of humanity comprised of Spaniards, Moors, Jews and most of the races of Europe were friendly enough, and the only danger appeared to be from the girls who sat displaying their charms in front of the houses with red-lighted doors. Politics, of course, was a subject best left alone.

People were always popping in and out of the inn on various errands, and who should stroll in one morning but the Arab who had bluffed me into giving him a shilling, the first day I arrived in Tangier. Sight of him made me angry at first, but he had a very disarming way about him, so we were soon chatting together in friendly fashion. He started telling me about himself, that his name was Mohammed—almost every male Moslem in Morocco

appears to bear this appellation—and that he came from the Riff country (a statement which may or may not have been true, since nearly all Tangier guides claim to come from there, though they may have been born no farther away than the Villa Harris).

Mohammed finished up with the usual suggestion that I pay a visit to a girl he knew, but was in no way disconcerted when I made it quite clear that I had no money and that he was wasting his time. In spite of this he used to visit the inn every day or so for a chat. He taught me some Arabic phrases and profanity, and other items of useful information, so I suppose that in a way that shilling was not wasted after all. Why he did this I do not know, unless it was vanity at showing an Englishman how well he could speak his language, for he spoke very good English, and French and Spanish as well.

He was one of the few Arabs I met who appeared to be genuinely interested in the history of his country, which we sometimes discussed as we sat sipping coffee. In fact, Mohammed was a most entertaining rogue, for apart from earning a living as a guide he had other side-lines of which white slaving appeared to be one. With charming candidness he provided me with nauseating details of what happened to girls who had been lured to out-of-the-way places and held captive there.

He suggested that if I wished to get material for a newspaper article which I was writing I ought to visit the home of a Moorish notable who was living in retirement near by, and who liked to meet and talk with English people. I was quite intrigued at the prospect, and promised to go, but one of the men at the inn warned me that the Moor in question was a homosexual with a partiality for young white men, so I did not go and neither did Mohammed visit me again.

My problem was how to return to England, for I had not enough money to pay my fare home, so I spent most of my time writing accounts of Morocco and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War (and had the gratifying experience, when I returned, of seeing them in print). Somehow or other I must raise the three pounds fare, so that I could sail on the next Japanese steamer from Gibraltar to London in ten days' time. And raise it I did. Going round to the English post office one morning, I found waiting for me a money order from an editor who had printed one of my articles. I was saved.

About this time I made a new friend, for as I sat down to dinner at El Delirio one evening a voice called out asking if I was English.

"Hallo," it said. "Do you know how I can get travel to England cheaply?"

The newcomer, a big, loose-limbed, good-looking young man, introduced himself as Frits Benoist, a Dutch student touring Europe and Morocco. He had railway tickets for his return journey across Spain, but owing to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, could no longer return by this route. Now he wished to go by ship to England, where he could communicate with his parents in Holland. How pleased he was to discover that he could travel to England for the remarkably small sum of three pounds, and he lost no time in accompanying me to the shipping company's office to purchase a ticket.

Frits and I spent ten lazy, languorous days in Tangier, swimming and sun-bathing in the mornings, sleeping during the day, and hob-nobbing with the local Bohemian group at night. For Frits had a painter friend named Van Hamm, who had a studio on the other side of the town, and there we used to congregate until the small hours, quaffing Moroccan wine and arguing about subjects of which I was supremely ignorant. Frits was a gay and delightful companion, and to lie half naked on the sand under the palm trees, discussing every subject from women to Saracenic art and back to women again, made one feel that life was good.

Nightly the roar of artillery shook Tangier, and the flashes from the Spanish guns across the Strait lit up the quiet corners on the promenade where courting couples sat holding hands. Once there was a tremendous explosion, and we learned later that part of Tarifa ammunition dump had gone up in flames. Six Spanish warships had taken refuge in Tangier Harbour, their officers being imprisoned down below while their crews held a council of war, and regularly every morning General Franco's warplanes zoomed down over the city, daring the ships to venture outside the harbour.

One morning an aeroplane, bolder than the rest, sent its bombs crashing down on the roadstead, but four rounds from H.M.S. *Whitehall's* guns sent the aircraft scurrying back to Tetuan, leaving behind as a casualty, one very dead dog. When this event took place I was sitting on the end of the Mole, a long, long way from the shore, and seeing columns of water spouting high into the air about me, caused me to decide that the place had lost its attractiveness.

At the last moment Van Hamm, an excitable little man whose fragmentary English had to be eked out by gesticulations, decided to accompany us to England. When we boarded the s.s. *Jebel Dersa*, bound for Gibraltar, there was some doubt as to whether

we would reach our destination, for the steamer had been fired upon on her last trip, and it was rumoured that Gibraltar had been bombed from the air. We made the passage along the Strait unmolested, however, and I was surprised at the change which had taken place since I left the place.

Gibraltar appeared to be crowded out with Spanish refugees, and riflemen and machine-gunners now guarded the barrier of sandbags and steel fencing which blocked the road into Spain. I stood for some time behind the barricades, watching an apparently endless stream of people plodding along the dusty road leading from the Spanish frontier post of La Linea toward British territory. Many carried bags, bundles or haversacks containing their worldly possessions on their backs.

The refugees were only allowed to enter through the barricade one at a time, undergoing questioning and examination by the blue-uniformed British policemen on guard at the gate. As they entered they were compelled to give up any weapons in their possession, but in spite of protestations of innocence, many tried to smuggle bombs and guns in with them. The police-inspector in charge was annoyed to find that an innocent-looking individual sauntering through, had a couple of revolvers and a dozen rounds of ammunition concealed in his clothing. The man was at once put on a lorry and sent back to the frontier. Any explosives which were discovered were immediately despatched to a seaplane anchored in the harbour, where they were promptly destroyed.

All the hotels in Gibraltar were crowded, with people sleeping in corridors and bathrooms, so a place for me to sleep was found on a ship moored alongside the quay. Frits and I spent our last night in Gibraltar at a cinema, and after stopping here and there for a few drinks, it was late when we started back for our billets—he had found a bed at a *pension*—so I got lost, and was lucky to reach my berth on the ship unchallenged.

I remember little of the voyage back to England, except that the Bay of Biscay failed to live up to its usual reputation for dirty weather, and that we spent glorious days lounging on deck in the sun. When we reached London I took my two companions to the Dutch Consulate. What a sight we must have presented walking along Regent Street, a battered, sunburnt trio, me with the toes sticking out of my boots, and a big, white sun-helmet perched on top of my battered rucksack.

My parting with Frits and Van Hamm came with dramatic suddenness. We were sitting in a carriage on the Underground, talking nineteen to the dozen about various subjects, when I suddenly realized that the station we were approaching was my

destination. There was just time to shout good-bye, and I was jumping off the train and they were being whirled away out of my life. Some months later, when I was working at a forestry camp in Hampshire I received a card from Frits, asking me to write to him. As it happened, part of the camp buildings were burnt to the ground, and with them the leather bag containing the address which he had given me. So I was unable to reply, and if Frits Benoist, of The Hague, should ever read these lines I wish he would write to me.

That evening I went along to the offices of a transport company near Bow Common Lane, and inquired if an acquaintance named Joe was driving back to Manchester that night. It was on Joe's lorry that I had started out from Manchester on my long journey to Africa, and he had told me that he would give me a lift back home, if, as he jokingly remarked, I did not get shot in the meantime. How close that wisecrack of his came to being fulfilled he did not know.

"Here I am!" called out a cheery voice, and there sat Joe, behind the wheel of his big lorry.

"So you didn't blinking well get shot, after all?" he inquired. "You're just in time, mate. Hop on!"

I hopped on, and we headed north into the night. When we reached Manchester the following morning it was still raining!

* * * * *

Now I must start planning another journey to that alluring 'Land of Mud Castles', which I had failed to reach; but first it would be necessary to go into hospital again, for my eighth—or was it my ninth?—operation for cataract. This ordeal over, I could return to Africa.

* * * * *

It was on a spring day that I saw for the second time, from the deck of the Japanese liner *Yasakuni Maru*, the shores of Africa. Yes, there it was again, that vague, tawny, alluring coastline, the first sight of which had excited me so much the year before. In my mind's eye I saw Morocco spread out like a map, saw the ranges of coastal mountains and beyond them the great plains of central Morocco, and beyond these again the high peaks of the Atlas Mountains, and beyond everything else—the Sahara, with its mud-walled cities and veiled tribesmen. Would the quest which had proved unsuccessful the previous year prove more

successful this time? Would I reach the alluring 'Land of Mud Castles' on this present journey?

A copy of the American *National Geographic Magazine* lay on the seat beside me. An article in it had attracted my attention, for it described the road known as the '*Route Imperiale*' which had been built across the Middle and High Atlas Mountains to the ancient, mysterious Oasis of Tafilet in the Sahara. Certain passages in the article intrigued me mightily:

"... There are regions in the Great Atlas where die-hards still maintain their freedom . . . and in the desert spaces of the Sahara, horsemen and cameleers who ride acknowledging no lord. . . . In the cedar forests there is still need for watch and ward. . . . From here on no one may go except in a caravan protected by armoured cars, and this once only in every ten days. . . . Tafilet remains a closed book, we may not enter there."

The article had been written five years previously, and I was anxious to discover whether these conditions still prevailed.

The Oasis of Tafilet was to be my 'jumping-off' place for the 'Land of Mud Castles', which lay among the desert valleys a hundred miles or so to the west. Once Tafilet (also spelt Tafilaleit) had been a separate kingdom from Morocco, and its capital city of Sijjilmassa had been one of the great trade centres of Africa, for it controlled the caravan route from the Niger to Tangier. French troops had occupied the oasis only in 1932, and so far as I could discover, no Englishman had visited the place since Walter Harris, the correspondent for the *London Times*, travelled there in disguise in 1894. Because of this fact I decided to walk to Tafilet; by the route which I had chosen to follow the distance appeared to be nearly a thousand miles.

Once again I saw the white city of Tangier rise out of the sea, for having disembarked from the Japanese liner at Gibraltar I had only a short wait before boarding the steamer bound for Tangier. A few hours later there once more appeared before my excited gaze the spectacle of a shouting, gesticulating crowd of Moors waiting to greet new arrivals on the quayside at Tangier, but this time I was an old hand and knew how to deal with them.

Behold me, rucksack on back, an umbrella in my hand, jumping ashore and elbowing my way through that excited crowd, and tramping the long length of the Mole toward the city. Once again I passed through the Water Gate of Tangier, and walked up the narrow, winding street to the old Spanish inn called El Delirio.

This time I came to Tangier as a man returns to an old, familiar friend, and the way in which old Pablo and his wife Maria greeted me was warming to the heart.

"The *senor* is most welcome again," declared Pablo, shaking my hand several times. "The room you had last year—it is empty—you will sleep there again?"

A night's lodging was all I required, for I planned to leave the following day for the old Moorish city of Salé, where a missionary whom I had encountered in Manchester had formerly been living. Salé appeared to be a suitable place in which to prepare for my long journey to Tafilet. To tramp across Spanish Morocco was out of the question (as I quickly discovered when I called at the British Consulate to obtain a Spanish visa), and it would be necessary to travel to Salé by train.

At the time of my arrival anybody in search of excitement could find it in Tangier, for clashes between Communists and General Franco's sympathizers were of almost daily occurrence. Let me relate a typical 'incident'. A man strolling past a café took a sudden dislike to one of the customers, and proceeded to belabour him with a cudgel. The injured man promptly hit his assailant over the head with a bottle.

The frequenters of the café took sides, and all those possessing firearms started shooting wildly in all directions. Before the police succeeded in separating the combatants and restoring order four persons had been wounded and that particular street became decidedly unhealthy. As I had no wish to have my enterprise terminated abruptly by a stray bullet, the sensible thing was to leave Tangier without any delay.

One of my first tasks was to find somebody who would prepare a document in Arabic for me, telling who I was and what I was doing in Morocco, for it seemed to me that such a document might be useful when travelling alone amongst the tribesmen. A Englishman whom I encountered told me of a Moor who would perform this service for me, and I presently found myself the possessor of a piece of paper covered with sprawling Arabic script which began, "I am a guileless man. . . ." What eloquent descriptive phrases concerning my character followed this beginning I cannot say, for I thought it best not to inquire. What I had overlooked, of course, was the fact that most of the Arabs and Berbers among whom I would be travelling were unable to read or write—considering it, indeed, an effeminate occupation—so that document would not prove of much use after all.

And now, hey ho! for Salé.

* * * * *

Squatting on a wooden seat in one of the picturesque *barcasses* or ferry boats which play from bank to bank across the Bou Regreg, I looked across that glittering river to the tawny walls of Salé, Salé, that ancient lair of pirates which in days gone by had made the name of the Barbary coast a terror to honest sailors and merchants. It looked innocent enough now, just an old town sleeping in the sunlight, little touched by the modernizing influences which had converted its sister city of Rabat into a bustling capital. They stand there facing the Atlantic, these two cities, with the broad river flowing between.

It was at Rabat that I had arrived by train a short time previously, but the fine modern city created by the French held little attraction for me. I hastened, instead, down to the river bank for a first sight of that Salé which Mr. Gabrial, the missionary, had told me about. Yes, there it lay colourful and inviting in the late afternoon sunlight, that city which I had decided upon as a fitting starting place for my travels. As I watched the walls and buildings draw nearer the tall, sinewy Moor propelling our craft gave a thrust of extra vigour and our craft covered the last few yards with a rush and buried its bows in the sand.

I sprang ashore, strapped my rucksack in position, and walked across an expanse of sand toward the ramparts of the city, and a gate through which I could see people passing. This sandy expanse, though I did not know it at the time, was the original harbour in which the pirate galleys had been moored, and had been connected by a short canal to an inner harbour inside the walls, but which was now all silted up and blocked by sand. In fact, my first impression of Salé was one of sand, for there was a wind blowing at the time so that the sand whirled and eddied about me as I walked to the gate, and passing through, found myself in a wide dusty street lined with nondescript buildings.

One's first impression of Salé was that it hardly came up to the expectations created by its appearance seen from across the river, for closer examination showed it as a rather unprepossessing place of narrow, winding streets and bare-looking buildings with high windowless walls. Only by the battlemented walls and bastions overlooking the sea did there appear any hint of the picturesque. And yet, hidden among the narrow streets were buildings worth more than a passing glance—the Great Mosque, with its decorated minaret, the *medersa*, or college, dating from the fourteenth century, the shrine of Sidi Ahmed el Tijani, with a finely decorated doorway. But these things I only discovered later.

It is a town with an exciting past, for from its now-silted harbour the Moorish galleys sailed to conquer Spain, and centuries

later in the time of Charles I the 'Sally Rovers' roamed the seas as far north as the Bristol Channel, leaving a trail of death and destruction behind them. Salé became the clearing port for prisoners captured by the pirate galleys, and along its streets passed thousands of Christian captives, the women to be sold into the harems of Moorish overlords, the men to toil as slaves building new cities and fortresses at their masters' bidding. Under the burning Moroccan sun European men of all nations worked and died, and their bones are still embedded in the walls of the buildings they raised.

Every now and again the various nations of Europe sent war-ships to bombard the pirate city (in 1765 and 1852, to mention but two occasions), but owing to international jealousy and lack of co-operation between the powers, these tactics had little effect and the pirates continued their depredations almost unchecked. It was the development of the steamship which finally ended the superiority of the swift sailing galleys, though Salé remained hostile and independent until occupied by French troops in 1913.

Perhaps it was this unrelenting hostility toward Christians which had induced a number of missionaries to make their home in Salé. Before leaving Manchester I had observed a notice outside a mission hall, announcing that a missionary who had spent several years in Morocco would give a lecture about the country. Mr. Gabriel, the missionary, gave an interesting and informative talk about the difficulties confronting anyone who attempted to convert the Moors and Arabs to Christianity. When I told him of my proposed tramping trip across Morocco he gave me some useful advice, and told me of the house in Salé, which served as the missionaries' headquarters.

As I walked along the sandy street I wondered whether I should encounter any Europeans in Salé, for most of the missionaries were either on leave in England or travelling about the country. Presently an English-looking sort of house appeared in front of me. A gate in a wall led into a garden, in one corner of which could be observed a wooden hut. There was no one in sight when, after knocking on the gate and getting no response, I pushed it open and entered the garden.

Inside stood a bull-terrier who eyed me suspiciously at first, then came forward, tail wagging. "English, eh?" he said; sniffing my legs carefully. "My, but I am glad to see you. You staying here? My name's Gyp. Want me to show you round the place?" Anybody who believes that dogs can make themselves understood will also understand that conversation. I scratched behind his ears and he recognized me as a friend, and during the remainder

of my stay in Salé we were inseparable. For Gyp's owners had gone away and left him, and he was languishing for lack of companionship.

From an inner room of the hut, which appeared to serve as a dwelling, a Moor appeared, and without showing any surprise, asked in English what I wanted. I told him of my meeting with Mr. Gabriel in Manchester, and that I had hoped to encounter some of his colleagues in Salé. The Moor replied that the missionaries were away, travelling about the country, and that the house was locked up. He also informed me that his name was Omar, and invited me into the hut to have a cup of tea. A Moorish woman, unveiled, also appeared from the inner room, and quite unabashed began in the manner of women all the world over, to question me, where had I come from, where was I going, was I married, and other personal details.

While we sat on a reed mat drinking tea Omar explained that he and his wife acted as caretakers for the house while the missionaries were away. His wife had been converted to Christianity, he explained, but he had remained a Moslem. No; he did not know when the missionaries would be returning. This information suited my plan nicely, for I wanted to spend a few days in Salé learning Moorish customs and phrases, and as Omar and his wife appeared friendly, this place would be useful for my purpose. An empty shed in a corner of the garden would serve me nicely as a sleeping place. When I explained all this to Omar he smiled and replied that I was welcome, and told Fatima to lay a mat on the floor of the shed for me to sleep on.

There was just time for a short walk before darkness came, and presently I found myself strolling along the western rampart of Salé, with Gyp close at my heels. I seemed to be alone in a wide, windswept expanse of bastions and turrets, all of stone, and quite deserted now. I saw the sun go down flaming into the western sea, and the sky grow dark, and trusting to Gyp's capacity for smelling his way back home, returned to my lodgings. Fatima was preparing some sort of tasty dish over a charcoal fire, and when this was eaten I retired to the wooden shed and stretched myself out comfortably in my sleeping-bag.

Presently there came a snuffling sound at the door, which was thrust open, and Gyp came in and made himself comfortable beside me, so comfortable, in fact, that he had presently acquired most of the reed mat which was supposed to be separating my limbs from the hard wooden floor. But I slept soundly all the same.

As a result of this happy encounter with Omar and his wife

I remained for three days in Salé, and the place became as familiar to me as the streets of 'council houses' in Manchester. I would arise in the early morning, drink some mint tea and eat some buttered bread, and go out into the streets of the town, in whatever direction my wandering feet might lead me. Perhaps it would be to walk along the ramparts overlooking the sea, or to explore the countryside outside the walls of the town, or to take the ferry over to Rabat.

There are a number of places outside Rabat which are of interest to an archaeologist. A place which fascinated me was the ruined city of Chellah, abandoned six hundred years ago, so that its great walls and towers now enclose only orange groves and tombs of dead emirs and sultans. Another place which demanded exploration was the Hassan Tower, a towering shaft of stone, which, if it had been finished, would have rivalled the Giralda in Seville. A sloping ramp inside leads to the top, from which there is a fine view over Rabat and Salé.

* * * * *

That tunnel intrigued me. The mouth of it was a black square in the yellow, sun-drenched pavement, in that deserted courtyard which I had discovered while walking with Omar the Moor along Salé's northern rampart. Now I had come back to investigate the place by myself.

I knelt by the edge of the shaft and peered down. What was hidden below? Something urged me to descend and explore, but common sense held me back. Suddenly the matter was settled for me. My little English-French dictionary slipped out of my shirt pocket and fell down the shaft. Without it my journey would be even more difficult. I should have to descend now.

I had brought a length of rope with me, so fastened one end to a nearby post and then slid down, hand over hand. When my feet touched the ground I let go of the rope and switched on my electric torch. About me was a long, gloomy chamber, one end of which was partly filled with water. It contained some lengths of timber which appeared to be the spars of a ship, and an old rusty cannon half buried under a mound of rubbish.

Since Salé had been the home of the notorious Barbary pirates, my thoughts promptly flew to hidden treasure, but though I searched around among the accumulated litter I failed to find anything of interest. So I climbed back up the rope into the sunlight again. Next day, while chatting with a chance acquaintance—a young French sailor named Alphonse, who had jumped

his ship at Casablanca, and hitch-hiked to Salé for reasons of his own—I happened to mention my discovery. Alphonse promptly became very excited.

"Where is this subterranean chamber?" he demanded. "It appears to be the very place I am looking for."

"Let's hear your story first," I told him, cautiously. "Then, maybe, we can make a deal."

Rather reluctantly Alphonse launched into what struck me as a very improbable yarn. During a local riot, it appeared, a Jew had buried some money in the old ramparts of the city, but had been killed before he could return to collect it. A rough map showing the location of the Hebrew's wealth had come into the sailor's possession (how he did not explain), but certain alterations had taken place in the town, and though he had searched for some time he could not find the spot he wanted.

He was convinced that it could not be far away, however, and reiterated his belief that I had accidentally stumbled on the place he was looking for.

"Lead me to it," he concluded.

"I'll show you where it is," I said. "But remember—half shares in whatever we find."

To this Alphonse reluctantly agreed.

As it was hardly advisable to let the Moors see us investigating the ramparts, I met him that night near an old bastion, and we started off together for the place where I had found the shaft. We carried with us a rope, candles, shovel, and an iron bar to use as a pick. But at once an unexpected difficulty arose, for the gate leading into the bastion was firmly fastened.

Not wishing to arouse the people living in some ramshackle buildings close by I helped the nimble-footed Alphonse to clamber over a crumbling section of the wall, so that he could unbolt the gate from the inside. Once within we tiptoed past the Moorish huts—from where loud snores were audible—and finally reached the mouth of the shaft. Fortunately for us there was bright moonlight, so that we could see what we were doing.

Fastening our line to the nearby post I slid down the shaft, with Alphonse following close behind. Then, having lighted a candle, we proceeded to study the sailor's plan. Personally, I could not make head or tail of it—for it seemed to consist of, to me, meaningless lines and circles—but Alphonse appeared to understand it, declaring emphatically that this seemed to be the place he sought. Thereupon we set to work to make a hole in the wall. If this was indeed the place where the money was hidden, Alphonse explained, we should presently emerge

into a second chamber in which the Jew's wealth had been buried.

We took turns at digging, for it was fatiguing work standing ankle deep in water levering stones out of an old wall by the light of a flickering candle. While one of us toiled the other cleared away the debris, and while he was thus engaged the sailor suddenly gave a cry of delight. Turning my head I saw him closely examining an old coin he had picked up.

"It's Spanish—a doubloon or a piece-of-eight," he told me. "That shows we are on the right track."

"Seeing I dug it up then I ought to have it," I remarked, and took it out of his hand.

"Not likely," growled Alphonse, and snatched it back again. "I saw it first and I am going to keep it."

I had begun by completely disbelieving his story, but now I was so excited that I was determined to have that coin at all costs. I made to grab it once more, whereupon the sailor jumped back so quickly that he fell over a stone. The coin flew from his hand, dropping with a splash into a pool of water.

"Never mind," said Alphonse at last, after we had searched for it fruitlessly for several minutes. "There will be plenty more. Let us get on with the job."

So saying he took the iron bar from my hand and struck the wall a mighty blow. Without the slightest warning a big crack appeared and a torrent of water gushed out, catching the sailor full in the chest and sending him staggering backward. In the confusion the candle became extinguished, leaving the pair of us groping about in the flood in utter darkness!

"*Mon Dieu*," Alphonse swore. "I have the tap turned on—yes!"

Yes, he had turned the tap on, right enough. This unforeseen disaster brought our treasure hunt to an abrupt end, for acting on a common impulse we promptly headed for the bottom of the shaft. It was obvious that we had broken through the wall of some ancient well or tank; if there was anything at all in the treasure story then Alphonse must have made a gross miscalculation!

We stumbled across the uneven floor of the chamber, with the rising water swishing ominously about our knees, and thankfully clambered up the rope leading to the surface. Our night's adventures were not yet over, however, for when we approached the gate we found a small group of Moors gathered about it arguing among themselves as to how it came to be open.

This was obviously not the moment to make our presence known, so, wet and cold, we hid behind a rusty cannon on the

rampart till they finished their argument and went back to bed. Then we cautiously approached the gate again, unbarred it, and were just congratulating ourselves on our escape when several figures appeared out of the shadows, leaping toward us.

"Run!" yelled Alphonse, and I lost no time in obeying his command.

We hastened away across a Moorish cemetery, and finally shook off our pursuers by wriggling through a breach in the city wall. We heard shouts behind us but they finally died away. And thus ended our treasure hunt—concluding, as such stories should, on a note of mystery. I never saw Alphonse again, for next day I began my long tramp to Tafilet.

CHAPTER VIII

ON FOOT ACROSS MOROCCO

I AWAKENED early the following morning to find Omar the Moor preparing breakfast; not till I had eaten some rough maize bread and drunk the three cups of sweet mint tea required by etiquette was I allowed to depart. As I squatted cross-legged beside him on the reed mat, watching him blowing gently on the charcoal fire, I thought what a happy time I had spent in this garden by the murmuring western sea. Omar seemed quite unaffected by the hatred which the Moors of Salé were reputed to cherish for all unbelievers.

I said good-bye to the dog Gyp and wished him luck, picked up my pack and started off. We went out into the narrow streets, along which in days gone by, thousands of Christian 'dogs' had marched in chains. Omar came with me as far as the Fez Gate, wished me "*Salaama Aliikum*", and we shook hands and parted. I turned my back on the tawny-coloured ramparts of Salé, left the last houses behind, and came to where a great road stretched before me across the plain, until it was lost in the far distance.

This was the *Trek es Soltane*, or 'Royal Road of the Sultans', once a caravan route, and now a modern highway. Along this road I was to tramp, putting one foot before the other, for several days.

Before me lay the Moroccan *bled* or countryside (literally 'not town'), vast monotonous steppes, partly fallowland, partly tawny palmetto desert, which stretched mile upon mile into the blue distance. Here and there were little green oases, containing fig, apricot and pomegranate trees, surrounded by hedges of prickly pear. For the most part, however, the landscape was bare and brown, devoid of life or habitation.

During the first few miles I was full of a pleasurable excitement, and there were fields of waving corn to look at, and stretches of gorgeously hued wild flowers—poppies, bluebells, marigolds and daisies—so that I hardly noticed the hardness of the road I was following. For this was one of those magic days we remember all our lives, and I doubt if ever again I shall recapture the thrill which was mine when I first started off on the long road to far-off Tafilet.

In his *Eothen* Kinglake has expressed the temperament of those

persons who travel economically about the world, and ask no more than they be allowed to accomplish what they set out to do. "I travelled with the simplicity proper to my station," he wrote; "as one of the industrious class, who was not flying from his country because of ennui, but was strengthening his will and tempering the metal of his nature, for that life of toil and conflict in which he is now engaged." Surely there can be few better preparations for life, than by following a road to its end?

But after the first flush of enthusiasm had passed I became painfully aware that things were not all that they should be. My pack seemed to become heavier and more uncomfortable with every yard I covered. My footsteps grew slower and slower, till at last I could endure the discomfort no longer, and finally had to call a halt. Squatting down by the roadside I proceeded to unpack my rucksack. Somehow the weight must be cut down, but what to discard was a problem; not bread, butter, cheese, sugar, coffee, jam, oatmeal, or a tin of corned beef. There remained only my water-bottle.

Finally I decided to jettison my water supply. I drank all I could, kept a very little in reserve, and poured away—O foolish man!—the remainder.

After that I felt better and reeled off several miles in record fashion. The road entered the Forest of Marmora, a hot, dusty area of gnarled and twisted cork-oaks, formerly known as the 'Land of Fear', owing to the many robbers who had infested it. I saw no robbers, but the traffic became a nightmare. I was continually being overtaken by cars and omnibuses, by boys on cycles carrying milk cans, by Arabs on donkey back and Arabs who walked barefoot, carrying their shoes in their hands.

The heat was intense, and it would soon be impossible for me to walk much longer. Tramping in Morocco must be done in the early morning and late afternoon; in between it is too hot to move. By the time I had covered fourteen or fifteen miles it was very hot indeed, so I decided to rest at the next house I came to. But there *wasn't* any 'next house', and the trees suddenly gave way to sun-scorched plain, which I had sense enough not to attempt to cross. Thus I had my first lesson in African tramping; find a resting place before it is midday and the sun gets too hot.

My second lesson came later. Squatted under my umbrella on the edge of the forest I looked out across that dusty, burning plain. How slowly the hours passed, for I had nothing to read and was unable to sleep. Cork-oaks give almost no shade when the sun is directly overhead, and move around as I might it was impossible to discover a cooler spot. Thirst was my next problem,

and though I carefully husbanded my scanty supply of water it was soon gone. This was lesson number two; always carry enough water to see you from one supply to another.

For hours I remained on the edge of the forest waiting for the approach of sundown; finally, tormented by thirst, I ventured out. I had not gone a mile across that red plain when I regretted my rashness. The heat was still intense. At last I arrived at a partly built house and begged some water from a surprised Arab labourer I encountered there. It was brown and stagnant, from a disused well, but I gulped it down greedily and asked for more.

When I struggled on again my feet were soon raw with broken blisters; walking became sheer agony. The blisters were caused by the road being banked steeply at the bends, compelling me to walk crab fashion, and then it became covered with loose flints and sand which added to my woes. Wellnigh in despair, I sat down on a stone, but a snake crawled out from beneath it, causing me to leave that spot at a really remarkable speed considering my fatigue.

At sundown I came to the first hamlet I had seen since leaving Salé, and abandoning my original intention of sleeping out, spent the night at an inn. It was well I did so, for a few minutes after my arrival the sun went down with incredible swiftness and the countryside was enveloped in darkness. I forgot my blisters while dining on soup, fish, roast meat and red Moroccan wine; then indignant Nature asserted herself and I had just strength enough to limp to my room, fling myself half undressed upon the bed, and almost immediately fall asleep.

So ended the first day of my tramp.

I was off again at six o'clock the next morning, and, despite my blisters, succeeded in accomplishing the greater part of my projected day's march before the sun's rays became too powerful. Profiting by my experiences of the previous day I carried sufficient water with me, had a newspaper to read, and found a building to shelter in during the midday heat. I was still plodding doggedly across the featureless red steppes of western Morocco, and finding it very boring.

At first walking was sheer torture, for not only was I stiff and sore from over exposure to the sun the day before, but broken blisters gave me the sensation that I was walking on raw flesh. Old soldiers had told me that the best thing to do with blisters was to keep on walking, until your feet got well again, and Spartan though this treatment sounded, it proved right. After walking painfully for several days my feet hardened and I had no more trouble with them.

That night I camped in a typical oasis, complete with palm trees, resting camels, and white-robed Arab horsemen. About me were clustered the black tents of the Zemmour tribesmen, a clan reputed to be seventy thousand strong. After scooping out a hole in the sand for my hips I crawled into my sleeping-bag, used my rucksack as a pillow, put my umbrella over my head in case there should be a heavy dew, and slept peacefully throughout the night. In the morning after lighting a fire and making a bowl of porridge, I proceeded on my way.

The following day I came upon a Frenchman and an Arab engaged in building a house. The Frenchman told me that his Arab labourers had taken the day off, and I, therefore, helped to mix concrete in return for food and lodging.

So the third day passed, and the fourth, and on the fifth it began to rain, a real Manchester downpour. Then, almost in the twinkling of an eye, it seemed, that dull, brown countryside became transformed into a sea of colour. It was worth travelling far to see the wild flowers which appeared to have taken on a new lease of life and made this barren wilderness a delight to the eye. There were sheets of blue convolvulus, lilies, asphodel, poppies, big white daisies, and huge patches of blue iris which had all the appearance of a dark lake when seen from a distance.

The rain continued to fall heavily, turning the plain into a sea of red mud, so temporarily abandoning my tramp, I hailed a passing motorist and was given a lift to the city of Meknes.

* * * * *

I awaited the arrival of the Sultan. In the great square which lies before the magnificent Mansour Gate the sunlight gleamed on a veritable forest of bayonets, belonging to the Negro infantry, the famous Black Guards, resplendent in blue and gold uniforms. Grouped around the gate were regimental bandsmen in gorgeous uniforms, and the air also resounded to the clamour made by native musicians robed in purple. Khaki-clad foreign *légionnaires* held the watching crowds in check, leaving the roadway clear for the passage of the white-robed Moorish dignitaries and uniformed French officials.

Suddenly the drums began to throb—boom, boom, boom—and the pipes began to wail, and the blue-uniformed gendarmes cycling about keeping the crowd in order wheeled sharply right and left, leaving the roadway empty. The band of the Foreign Legion struck up a rousing march, there was the clash of bayonets and the flash of swords, and out through the great Mansour Gate

swept a column of cavalry, lancers in scarlet and blue with green banners flying. Following them came a big, blue limousine, which stopped in front of the gate, and from it a white-robed figure stepped and faced the crowd—His Majesty, Mulai Mohammed, Sultan of Morocco, Commander of the Faithful, the Chosen of God.

For a moment there was an expectant hush, then the cry "May God protect the life of our Lord" arose on all sides. While the band played the solemn 'Hymn Chérifien', the Sultan gravely accepted the salutations of the various dignitaries awaiting him, who kneeled to kiss his hand. Then, to the strains of the 'Marseillaise', he entered the car again and was driven away, followed by more cars and more cavalry, while from beyond the gate came the thunder of artillery crashing out the royal salute.

* * * * *

Meknes, where I spent three days, lodging at a small French hotel, is like no other city in Morocco. Although each of the other cities has its own individual character, they all have one thing in common—considerable antiquity. But the Meknes we see today is of no great age, less than three centuries, in fact, for the city and its buildings are largely the achievement of one period of fifty years, and of one remarkable man, the Sultan Mulai Ismail, a contemporary and rival of Louis XIV of France.

The great walls and bastions of Meknes, the ornate gateways, palaces, stables, barracks, granaries, all arose at the command of this sultan, descendant of an African slave, whose extravagant dream it was to create a new Versailles in Morocco. Twenty-five thousand Christian slaves, it is said, taken captive on the high seas by Barbary corsairs, laboured in chains to make his dream come true, and this incredible city was the result.

It is the titanic scale on which the city was planned which is so astonishing. The outer walls of the city were said to measure twenty-five miles round: the stables were built to house ten thousand horses; the granaries were nearly a mile long; another wall, if completed, would have reached nearly three hundred miles to Marrakech (built, so it is said, that the blind beggars might have guidance while tramping from one city to another). All these structures, though crumbling ruins now, are silent witnesses to the grandiose ambitions of Mulai Ismail, and give Meknes an air of desolate grandeur. Within this labyrinth of ruined walls and buildings one may wander for hours, often without seeing another human being.

One may well imagine that the spirit of Mulai Ismail himself, ambitious, voluptuous, cruel, a veritable black Nero, still broods over the whole place. Had he been born in Europe of white parents, instead of in Africa of black ones, he might well have left an imperishable name in European history. A planner on a gigantic scale, for fifty-five years he ruled Morocco with an iron hand, continually at war with the Berber tribesmen and always engaged in building or rebuilding Meknes. When short of building material for some new structure he would order that walls which had been previously erected should be torn down in order to use the stonework in the new building, indifferent to the fact that the speed at which the walls were demolished cost hundreds of workmen their lives.

The Sultan's harem is said to have been composed of five hundred women (though accounts vary, and no two give the same figure), many of them beauties from noble families in Spain, France and Italy, who had been captured by the 'Sally Rovers' who did not hesitate to attack any unprotected coastline in search of plunder. The number of his sons was almost countless, most of the daughters were strangled in infancy. Any member of his family who roused his anger died a slow and painful death, and he is said to have killed thirty of his women in one day, while to lop off a slave's head in order to test the edge of his sword was a common practice of his. When his eldest son revolted and led an army against him Mulai Ismail ordered that the young man's chief followers should be placed between planks and *sawn* in two; the prince himself took twelve days to die.

This was the man who aspired to be the French king's son-in-law, for having heard of the beauty of Louis XIV's daughter he demanded that she be sent to Morocco to become his wife. When asked why he desired her when he already had several hundred wives, he replied: "Because in her I find assembled in one person all those qualities which are now divided among so many." Needless to say, the princess preferred not to exchange Versailles for the barbarism and cruelty of its African counterpart. (Bloodthirsty tyrant though Mulai Ismail may have been, it is just as well to remember that 'civilized' Europe of this period was, in many ways, almost as barbarous, and that such practices as torture, racking, burning and breaking on the wheel were commonplace. Europe had little to learn from Africa about cruelty.)

It is said that when this bloodthirsty sultan died a great sigh of relief echoed across Morocco, and no other monument to his memory than the gigantic crumbling ruins of Meknes is necessary.

The other impression I retain of Meknes is of ostriches.

Enclosed within some of the huge crumbling walls is an ostrich farm, which was first formed some two centuries ago, and is now one of the sights of the place. In a wide, sandy expanse a number of these big, somehow ridiculous-looking birds were trotting round and round, their sharp, beady eyes surveying the visitor speculatively in search of something shiny which they could steal. They love anything that glitters, and no tiepins are safe when they are around. A man beside me fed one of them on copper centime pieces, but apart from a perceptible widening of the neck as the coin descended the creature appeared to suffer no ill effects. Ostriches once existed in a wild state in southern Morocco, and their feathers formed an important item of trade, but now those at the farm are the only ones to be seen.

Meknes stands on a plateau surrounded by high, wooded hills, the Middle Atlas Mountains lying to the south, and the Zerhoun Mountains to the north. It was across this latter range that I now proposed to tramp, for in a sheltered valley there were the remains of the largest Roman city which has been discovered in Morocco—Volubilis. Volubilis interested me for two reasons; firstly, because it was stated to have been garrisoned by men from an island called Britain, and secondly, because I had read somewhere that the lions to whom the Christians were thrown in the arena at Rome came from there. A man I encountered in Meknes told me that fresh excavations were being undertaken to discover various buildings which had been lost to sight for centuries, and this seemed to me a good opportunity of gaining some experience in field archaeology.

While wandering about Meknes I spied a shop with the name *Au Coin du Londres*, and, going inside, made the acquaintance of the owner, a Mr. Dixon. He told me that he was driving in the direction of Volubilis, and offered to give me a lift in his car part of the way. So presently I found myself leaving Meknes behind and travelling along a fine new road bordered by meadows and groves of olive trees. Then the bare peaks of the Zerhoun Range drew closer and closer, desolate-looking mountains between three and four thousand feet high, with occasional mud-walled villages clinging to their flanks, remote and seemingly inaccessible. Mr. Dixon deposited me at a cross-roads, warned me against trying to seek shelter at one of the native settlements, wished me luck, and went on his way.

The region was one of vast, rolling uplands, alternately streaked with green and brown, with occasional groves of olive trees and deep, fern-filled gorges through which hidden streams gurgled merrily, but of houses, farms or of civilization there was

very little sign. And the wild flowers!—I had read much of the beauty of the Moroccan steppes in spring when clothed with vivid hues, and had become sceptical, but it was true, for here were flowers by the hundred thousand, reds, blues, whites, all shades of colour. Here were many of our old garden friends growing quite wild along the mountain sides, lilies, blue convolvulus, marigolds, asphodel, red poppies and big white daisies, broom and heather. A yellow hillside became a mass of marigolds, a deep blue lake was a hollow filled with bluebells.

It was a lonely road which I followed, that went up and up and up, till from the top of a pass I looked back and saw the walls and roofs of Meknes miles away and far below. I halted and had a meal in the shade of some olive trees, read a copy of the *Morning Post* which Mr. Dixon had given me, and loitered so long that it was afternoon before I went on again. Now I began to meet little companies of Moors and Berbers, travelling on foot or on mule back, and in answer to their inquiries: "Where are you going, O Nazrani?" I replied: "To Ksar el Pharaoh—to the castle of the Pharaohs," for that is the name by which Volubilis is known to the Moslems.

Then, rounding a bend in the road, I saw, miles away on a mountain top, the holy city of Moulay Idriss, its walls gleaming white in the afternoon sun. For the rest of my journey it was ever there before me, growing more and more impressive with each turn of the road, till I was actually tramping in the shadow of its ramparts, and looking upward could see, hundreds of feet above me on top of a mighty cliff the gates and towers of the holy city. Morocco always appears a story-book land come to life, a land more eastern than the East, yet even so my first reaction to this sight was: "This is an incredible place," and an incredible place it remained.

The gates of Mulay Idriss are closed at sundown, and no infidels are allowed to remain for the night within its precincts, so as I had foolishly neglected to seek shelter for the night I suddenly began to wonder where I was going to sleep. Now the fast-setting sun warned me that darkness was approaching, so, giving up the idea of reaching Volubilis that night I followed a track which climbed along a hillside for a mile or so, till in the growing darkness I came upon a signpost which read 'Refuge de Zerhoun'. I climbed on up the hillside and at an altitude of about twenty-two hundred feet came upon a Berber village of brown mud houses, looking so like the hillside on which it stood that you were not aware of its presence until you reached it.

"What is this place?" I asked a Berber youth who was standing near by.

"The village of Zerhoun," he replied.

By now darkness reigned in the valley below, but up there on the mountain it was still light. Against the sky the jagged purple peaks showed stark and cold. Pressed against the hillside was a long, low house, almost hidden from view by bushes and trailing vines. As I stood on the veranda, listening to the throb of distant drums, a small, elderly, white-haired woman came to the door carrying a hurricane lamp, and called out something in French.

"Can I have a bed for the night, madame?" I asked, and received in reply a staccato burst of unintelligible French, from which I gathered that I could have a bed, yes, most certainly I could have a bed, and the price would be ten francs. At that moment the sky became as black as though a switch had been turned off, so I agreed to pay the sum she asked and presently found myself in a dark room which seemed to have been built into the hillside.

Outside the door everything was in darkness, save where the yellow rays from the lantern lit up the veranda, and hearing a slight sound caused me to look suddenly behind me. Standing in the shadows, just beyond the lantern's cheery glow were three men, tall, hooded Moors who eyed me curiously. When I looked again they were gone. I had a sudden feeling of apprehension, and wondered what sort of queer place I had stumbled into. How came a white woman, who looked old and frail, to be living alone in the Berber hills with only natives for her companions?

Feeling uneasy, I looked for a key with which to lock the door, but could not find one, so placed a chair in front of the door so that nobody could enter without my knowing. Then I laid down on the big bed, and was soon asleep, for my fatigue was greater than my apprehension, and some hours later was awakened by a sound I had been expecting—somebody was trying to open the door. I sat up and switched on my electric flashlight, and there came a sudden patter of feet outside as the intruder departed.

I went to sleep again, and experienced a curious dream about a man in red who kept imploring me to do something. He had a queer squeaky voice which set my teeth on edge, and suddenly I found myself wide awake listening to the squeaking which went on all about me. Rats! There were dozens of them, swarming all over the room. They were clambering up and down the walls, darting about the floor, and chewing at my rucksack, trying to get into the tin which contained my supply of food. Then some of them sprang up on to the bed.

To say that I was alarmed was putting it mildly, for it was quite dark in the room, and I could only see the rats when they came within range of my torch. I leaped out of bed and dashed to the door, only to discover it was locked—from the outside! I called out, but there was no response, so there was nothing for it but to clamber back on to the bed and spend the remainder of the night watching and waiting. So long as I remained wide-eyed and vigilant, flashing my torch slowly backwards and forwards across the room, the rats kept their distance, retreating into their holes, and only venturing out when they thought my vigilance was relaxed. But let me doze off for only a minute or two, or let the gleam of my torch waver and go out, and out came the rats again, in swarms.

I do not wish to ever pass another night similiar to the one I spent in that dark room at Zerhoun. I must have dozed off eventually, for when I awakened again sunlight was streaming into the room from a shuttered window, and when I went to try the door again it was no longer locked. I stepped out on to the veranda, and saw a Berber eyeing me curiously. He looked at me and grinned, and I had the uncomfortable feeling that I had been deliberately locked into that room to provide a bit of sport for the dark-skinned gentlemen who had been watching me the night before. After partaking of a scanty continental breakfast I was glad to leave that place without delay.

After walking for a mile or so there appeared before me, from the summit of a low rise, a prospect over miles of countryside, a great green valley stretching to the distant hills, but what appealed most to my imagination was the sight of a road running ruler-straight across the landscape, a road which was lined on either side with ruined stone columns and led toward the buildings of a city whose crumbling walls gleamed brightly in the early morning sunshine. I knew that it was the Roman road which led from Tangier to Volubilis, and those buildings which I could see in the distance were all that was left of the city. Of all the Roman cities in North Africa this was the remotest from Rome.

It fired my imagination to walk along this highway, whose marble columns, even in their broken state, still enabled one to imagine the appearance of the city at the height of its prosperity. Nobody appeared to be stirring amongst the ruins, so passing a building which later proved to be the museum, I wandered on among deserted streets and houses whose owners had been gone these fifteen centuries. The walls of the buildings still rose to a considerable height, with columns rising finely here and there, and across an open space one could see the ponderous 'Arch of

Triumph' raised to commemorate the victories of the Emperor Caracalla. It had collapsed, probably through the action of an earthquake, but had been reconstructed by French archaeologists.

These ruins of Volubilis, when compared with those of other Roman cities in North Africa, at Timgad, El Djem and elsewhere, may appear meagre and of little interest, yet the visitor from Great Britain may find them more *museworthy* (to borrow a phrase coined by Mr. Edmund Vale) than many more majestic ruins. For there are parallels between this southernmost province of Rome and the northern province of Britain, which help us to visualize the life and landscape of our homeland in Roman times. Both came under the rule of Rome in the first century of our era, both were frontier provinces, Britain being the most northerly territory to be subdued by the Romans and Tingitania the most southerly. Both were territories beyond which Rome was never able to penetrate, for beyond Britain were the Scottish Highlands and the Picts, and beyond Tingitania lay the Atlas Mountains and the unconquerable Berbers.

But it is in the more homely, intimate ways that one feels the affinity between the two. Look around Volubilis at the remains of the *basilica* and the *forum*, at the ruins of the houses—the House of the Dog, the House of Orpheus, the House of Columns, all of which show a certain love of comfort and art—look at the remains of the Temple of Jupiter, the baths, the wine presses and the oil mills, for all these things indicate a way of life which was once also common to York, Leicester, Cirencester and many another town in England, but of which the evidence, owing to the ravages of the English climate, has almost completely disappeared.

Little is left in England of the cities which the Romans founded and maintained for several centuries, but here under the hot, dry Moroccan sun, one can see the remains of such cities as they once were, that type of provincial city which the Roman raised in the barbarian lands which they conquered. Here is the evidence of a daily life, surprisingly more like the life in Britain in Roman times, than one can discover among the more imposing Roman remains to be seen elsewhere in North Africa.

It was to discover proof of more parallels between Volubilis and Britain that I walked over to the museum. Here I discovered two men examining a stone tablet. One was a young man wearing Arab dress, the other, in European clothing, proved to be the director, in charge of the excavations. This gentleman greeted me with a rapid-fire series of questions in French, and when I replied haltingly, exclaimed:

"Ah, then you must be English. Now this stone will interest you. Do you comprehend what it is?"

I replied that apart from the name Nestorea I could make little of the inscription.

"Nestorea was the centurion in charge of a group of soldiers at Volubilis," the director explained. "But you will be interested to observe that these soldiers came from the province of Britain, and were stationed here in the year one hundred and ninety."

"What about the lions which used to be exported from here to Rome?" I asked him.

"Why not?" he replied. "Certainly the lions had to come from somewhere—what would the Roman arena have done without them?—and it is known that lions were very numerous in this country in those days. Had you traversed *Maroc* on foot then you would have carried a sharper weapon than an umbrella, hey?"

He went on to explain that formerly the lion, the elephant, the giraffe, even the rhinoceros had been mentioned by ancient writers as existing in Morocco, but had disappeared since Roman times, and were now only to be encountered beyond the Sahara. Meanwhile the young Arab, who was toying with a trowel, was tapping his foot impatiently, so the director interrupted his discourse, and apologetically remarked that they were about to go and examine some excavations which had exposed a new building just outside the city. Anxious to gain some experience of field archaeology, I immediately offered to help them, and was invited to accompany them to the site.

A short time later I found myself squatting in a trench carefully shovelling piles of debris into a barrow, while the Arab—whose name was Ali—exposed part of a stone flooring with his trowel, and the director stood near by making a sketch of the site on a sheet of paper. It was warm and still as we worked in the trench, and though there was nothing very spectacular about the scene, I could not repress a feeling of exultation that I was actually achieving my ambitions to uncover something which had been buried from the sight of man for many centuries.

For me there is a peculiar fascination in visiting the sites of such vanished towns and settlements, whose buildings have sometimes disappeared so completely that hardly any trace of them is left. The mentality of the archaeologist is this, that he feels an urge to dig down into the ground, to clear away the covering of earth and disclose what lies underneath, the crumbling and hidden remains of a vanished *place*, and from this ghostly outline recreate, if only for a fleeting moment, something of the lives and loves and laughter of the shadowy inhabitants who peopled it so

many centuries ago, and then abandoned it to the wind and sun. This is one of the most satisfying and exciting forms of exploration still left to us, Exploration into Time.

After a time the director left us, leaving instructions as to how we were to continue, and the Arab and I continued to clear the stone pavement by ourselves. It seemed to be part of some building, and I visualized it as one of those luxurious Roman villas of which I had read, a many-roomed dwelling with a red-tiled roof, its projecting wings grouped round a central courtyard in which a fountain played. Ali was a reserved person, and though he was willing enough to demonstrate how the work should be done, how one should work carefully with the trowel here and a stiff brush there, so that the stone surface should be exposed cleanly and without damage, yet otherwise he remained uncommunicative, engrossed in his own thoughts.

Presently he remarked that he was thirsty, and without inviting me to accompany him, he walked off toward the museum. Left alone, from my vantage point on a wall I looked over Volubilis—for we were working on the outskirts of the city—and thought of the scenes which must have taken place there centuries ago. It was the French archaeologist Tissot who, in 1874, identified the ruins with the Roman city of Volubilis. Before then, for several centuries, the site had served as a quarry for anyone who wished to erect a building in the neighbourhood. Its carved stones and columns were taken away to help build the holy city of Mulai Idriss which crowns the summit of a nearby mountain, others were removed by the Sultan Mulay Ismail to build the walls and gates of his imperial city of Meknes.

Yet Volubilis as an inhabited place had lasted a long time. In Roman Britain the life of the cities, with a few exceptions, appears to have come to an end about the beginning of the fifth century, with the coming of the Anglo-Saxons, but here in Morocco, in spite of interruptions and changes of ownership, the life of the cities went on. After the fall of Rome it is likely that Volubilis became a Vandal city, and after that a Berber stronghold, and a Berber stronghold it appears to have remained until the sixteenth century. As the principal city of the Roman province of Mauretania Tingitania, with a population estimated variously at from fifteen to eighty thousand inhabitants, it must have appeared a charming place, knowing a quiet prosperity based on trading in timber, wild animals, oil and wine. By 1915 it was a complete ruin, and only the efforts of the Services des Antiquités, which has carried out extensive researches and excavations, enable one to visualize the original appearance of the city.

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A feeling of hunger made me realize that it was time to have something to eat, so, seeing a clump of trees by the banks of a small stream I made my way there, and seating myself in the shadow of the branches looked into my pack to discover what there was to eat. Some rough maize bread, a hunk of cheese, and some tomatoes, constituted my meal, washed down with water flavoured with red wine. Afterwards I stretched out at my ease on the river bank and in my mind's eye pictured Volubilis as it must have looked in Roman times.

There it would stand, on that sunny plateau, with the great highway from Tangier leading straight to the forum, lined with shops, houses, offices and other buildings. Some of the buildings would be of massive stonework, the equivalent of our town halls and government departments, fine buildings containing tessellated pavements and central-heating plants. There would be people walking along the streets—soldiers looking for a pretty girl or a place where they could get a drink, housewives or tradesmen, out shopping or gossiping or on their way to the baths, there would be local Berber landowners riding in from their country estates, or native chieftains from the Zerhoun or Atlas ranges, gazing wide eyed at this visible evidence of the superiority of the conquering power from across the sea.

I must have fallen asleep, for I awakened suddenly to the realization that it was late afternoon. Walking over to the site of the excavations I found Ali and another Arab clearing away the soil from another section of stonework, and the director seated near by drawing a plan of the site. They greeted me without surprise, and while Ali sat on the edge of the excavation and rested I took his trowel and proceeded to clear part of the site ready for photographing. I was dismayed, however, to learn that instead of the palatial Roman villa which I had believed we were excavating, the place was probably only a storehouse or some other farm building. But, reflecting that any opportunity of acquiring knowledge of the technique of field archaeology was useful—for hitherto books had been my only instructors—I continued to toil away quite cheerfully.

CHAPTER IX

A NIGHT AT B'NI AMAR

WHEN nightfall approached I was again faced with the problem of finding a place to sleep. The director assumed that I was staying at the Zerhoun Refuge, and I did not disillusion him, but I had no desire to spend another night under its roof, and resolved instead to find shelter near the ruins. The weather was so warm that a night spent in the open appeared to involve no hardship. I had already discovered a convenient little cave that appeared dry and comfortable and here I established myself at sundown. Spreading my sleeping-bag on a mattress of straw and rough grass I lay my hiking cape on top and snuggled inside to watch the sunset fade.

There seemed to be more of a chill in the air than I had anticipated, and I was glad to put on all the spare clothing I carried. A chill in the air, did I say? Even my worst expectations hardly came up to reality. It became so cold that I awakened about midnight to find myself shivering violently. I was chilled to the bone. My goodness, it *was* cold! I packed all my spare clothing about me in a desperate endeavour to retain a little warmth, but all to no purpose.

Outside the cave all was dark, black as only an African night can be. Clutching my electric flashlight I crawled outside and proceeded to perform various physical exercises in the hope of getting a bit warmer, but did not succeed very well because I could not go far beyond the feeble, flickering rays of the torch. Then I crawled back into my sleeping-bag again and hoped for the best. And still I could not get warm. So the hours passed while I huddled there, numb and shivering, till the first grey streaks of dawn enabled me to don my rucksack and wearily take to the road again. Half asleep, I crawled miserably along the highway, looking for a comfortable place where I could rest, but I failed to find one.

Thunder rolled sullenly across the heavens, and then it began to rain. Seeing a sheltered place by the roadside I collected some dry sticks and lit a fire; a short time later, my stomach filled with porridge and a can of hot black coffee in my hands, I felt considerably better. Then I had a wash and a brush-up and walked back to Volubilis, in the hope of being able to do some more

excavating. But when I arrived there I learned that no digging was being done that day, as the director was driving into Meknes. I, therefore, decided to continue my journey to Fez. The direct route was by the main road over the Zegotta Pass, but the director had another suggestion.

"Why not cross the mountains by the—what do you call it?—short cut, to the village of B'ni Amar," he suggested.

"Is there a place where I can sleep?" I asked, thinking of the two uncomfortable nights which I had experienced.

"But yes," he replied. "There is a little inn of the most comfortable."

A track over the mountains appeared more promising than following the hard motor road, so I accepted his suggestion and started out for B'ni Amar. He had not told me that the way lay through the holy town of Mulay Idriss so it was with some surprise that I discovered that the track was leading straight up the face of the precipice above which rose the houses and minarets I had seen from afar a couple of days previously. The rocky heights on which the city stands must rise nearly a sheer three hundred feet above the plain, so that I was almost out of breath by the time I had climbed to the top and passed through the main gate.

The road I was following passed right through the town and out the other side, so that I saw little of the place. It was still early morning, and few people were astir, in fact, I hardly saw a living soul as I passed through. It is still one of the most fanatical towns in Morocco, for in the mosque is the tomb of that Mulay Idriss, descendant of the prophet Mohammed, who founded the Moslem dynasty in Morocco, and for this reason the townspeople are still hostile toward Christians, and do not like them to remain in the town. Photographers, in particular, are likely to have a rough time of it.

It was one of those rollicking, windy days which I love, with a chilly nip in the air and the mountains wreathed in mist, so that shafts of sunlight played hide and seek among the hills; less to my liking were the heavy rain clouds which showed to the west, but fortunately they lay behind me. I overtook shepherds driving flocks of sheep to the higher pastures, and lean, brown cattle-drovers who looked as wild as their charges. The mist faded away and I found myself tramping across a bare, sun-scorched plain, with a jagged mountain range towering in the blue sky on either side. There were no houses, no vehicles, no people; just a stony track leading me higher and higher.

A windswept pass led into a green valley where a red house

stood on a hilltop. When I drew nearer I saw that it was not a house but a large communal cattle-shed, and here I found a fire burning, so took the opportunity to boil a dish of porridge and have a meal, conversing by signs with some cattle-drovers who were on their way to Rabat with a herd of black cattle. By now it was getting hot, so I lay down on my cape and had a much-needed sleep, wakening in the afternoon.

After tramping for some time I came to a place where the track divided, and not knowing which way to go, asked a passing shepherd. The grin with which he pointed in the opposite direction to which I fancied made me wonder if he was deliberately putting me on the wrong road. The track grew rougher and rougher, and then it finished altogether, and I saw before me the walls of B'Ni Amar.

Crowning the summit of the ridge was a typical *ksar* or native Berber stronghold, a collection of stone houses surrounded by a high wall and guarded by a large gate. There was no sign of an inn or of anything European. Had the director at Volubilis made a mistake? Few travellers know what goes on inside a native *ksar*, for infidel visitors are not encouraged. But it was too late to seek a lodging elsewhere, so, putting on a bold front I went forward. You do not enter a walled village without permission, so I knocked on the gate, and a watchman somewhere above called a messenger who took me to the *Kaid*, or chieftain of the place.

Heaven deliver me from being exiled in such a place as B'ni Amar. Grouped in higgledy-piggledy fashion inside the walls were big, crumbling houses with low doors, all scattered about anyhow so that the streets were the accidental result of space being left between the houses rather than of planning, streets moreover that were not level for three feet in succession, but which climbed up and down and round about, and were blocked by boulders and knee-deep in dung and rotting refuse. Add a crowd of caped and hooded figures who drifted about like ghosts, a stink so penetrating it was almost visible, and you can visualize the appearance of B'ni Amar.

I found the *Kaid* sitting on a stone seat outside his house. He was a dignified if grim-looking old man who greeted me politely, although clearly puzzled by my sudden appearance, and indicated a seat opposite him. Other men appeared, who respectfully kissed the *Kaid's* robe before seating themselves. Then came a bespectacled youth who spoke French fluently, and he explained that I would be given food and a sleeping place, and guides to escort me on my way in the morning. Presently a servant appeared with a tray containing glasses of mint tea, and when this had been

consumed the *Kaid* indicated that the audience was at an end.

The bespectacled youth, who rejoiced in the name of Abdeslem Ben Mohammed Ba Azizi, escorted me round the *ksar*. I was struck by the disparity between the dirt and squalor of the village and the clean clothes and quiet manners and conversation of its inhabitants. In such a place one would have expected uncouth barbarians, but no, these men knew of Paris and London, had an appearance of prosperity, if not of wealth, spoke of recent events, of Mussolini, Hitler, the war in Spain; Ba Azizi had only recently returned from a visit to Paris.

If the *Kaid* represented the old patriarchal way of living then Ba Azizi represented the new, for he wanted to emulate a friend of his who had gone to Fez, bought a motor lorry, and was now conducting a profitable haulage business. B'ni Amar it seemed, was too quiet and slow for a man of his ideas and capabilities. All this he told me as we squatted in his little ironmonger's shop in the market place—surrounded by tin buckets, paraffin, candles and such like—sipping hot coffee and watching the inhabitants go about their lawful occasions.

At sundown a servant of the *Kaid* escorted me to the guest house, a bare, stone, white-walled apartment containing only reed mats, a mattress, some cushions and a quilt. While I was pulling off my boots two youths entered, one carrying a loaf of bread, the other a large earthenware dish filled with baked beans, hot with spices. They placed these in front of me and then went out, returning a few minutes later with a mug of water and a glass of hot coffee. I did more than justice to the meal, and very regretfully had to stop with some of the beans still left in the dish.

After I had eaten I sat in the doorway and watched a mode of life which appeared to have changed but little since the days of Abraham. The flat roof top outside the guest house was apparently the *djemaa* or village meeting place, and here the local worthies congregated. Disputing tribesmen knelt before the *Kaid*, kissed the hem of his robe, and stated their complaints. He listened to each case in turn, reflected a few minutes, and then gave judgment.

Afterwards amusement was provided by the village idiot who went into hysterics when a trumpet was pointed at him, believing it to be a gun. The crowd kept the poor wretch on the run, tormenting him by dropping lighted matches down his back or burning his finger-tips, laughing uproariously when he screamed or tripped over a stone and fell sprawling. Finally, he managed to make his escape.

Although I do not smoke myself I always carry a supply of cigarettes with me on my travels, as they are a useful form of

currency, and it is possible to offer a man cigarettes for some service performed when the offer of money would offend him. This time I offered the *Kaid* a cigarette, and to my surprise he accepted it. The Arabs call smoking 'drinking the shameful', and I would have expected the *Kaid* to have stricter principles. But among the Berbers in the mountains Arab influences are less evident than on the plains.

A *Mokhazni*, or native policeman, in a yellow turban, who looked as though he might have come from the north-west frontier of India, also accepted a cigarette, and told me that he had served in France, Algeria and Tunisia. In the midst of our conversation, without a change of expression, he said: "*Sprechen Sie Deutsch?*" but I merely stared at him blankly and replied that I did not understand. Later I was to learn the reason for that unexpected question.

At last the meeting broke up, the cattle were driven inside the walls, and the gates of B'ni Amar were shut for the night. I went to bed—but not to sleep. Fleas! That mattress swarmed with them. They crawled into my sleeping-bag with me, they played five-finger exercises up and down my spine, they held jumping competitions on my legs and lost themselves in my hair. Sleep was out of the question, so to make the long hours pass I recited all the poetry I knew.

I must have dozed off eventually, for the next thing I recollect was springing up violently as something scampered over my chest. It was a rat, and it started to explore my rucksack so I heaved a stone at it, whereupon it retreated into a corner and proceeded to make peculiar crunching noises which effectively kept me awake until dawn. Never was daylight more eagerly welcomed, and as soon as it was light I dressed and packed my rucksack. Then the door was flung open and the *Kaid's* servant entered, sat down, and stared at me solemnly.

The night before I had been unable to dodge this man at all. Where I went, he went, close at my heels, and as I wanted to perform a certain natural function I found this close attention embarrassing, as public lavatories were apparently non-existent at B'ni Amar. I thought at the time that this was an example of Moslem etiquette, which decrees that a guest must never be left alone, but soon I was to be rudely disillusioned.

Presently another servant entered, carrying a glass of hot coffee and half a loaf of bread cut sandwich fashion and spread with the most delicious, creamy butter I had ever tasted. The *Kaid* himself stood in the open space below, directing the movements of a string of mules. Early as it was the villagers were

already at work, and the streets were almost impassable with freshly dropped mule dung.

Although I had risen early there were various delays, and the sun had risen high before I started out on the road to Fez, accompanied by three of the *Kaid's* retainers who had been ordered to show me the way. I disliked their leader from the first, for he was a brown, wiry-looking Berber of medium height, with a grim face which never smiled. Being the possessor of a keen sense of humour myself I am always on my guard with persons who cannot laugh.

We started off in the opposite direction to that I wanted to go, but knowing how the track twisted and turned I did not argue, expecting that we would reach the right road lower down the mountainside. But when we left the track and started cutting across open fields and moorlands, and there was no sign of any road at all, I wondered whether my guides were making a mistake. The sun was behind us when it should have been in front, but as we were continually changing our position it was difficult to judge.

When I asked them: "Is this the way to Fez?" they all exclaimed: "Yes, yes!" and I reasoned that they ought to know more about the matter than I, and that probably they were taking me by a short cut which would cut a few miles off our journey. But as we plunged into wilder and still wilder country, and still there was no sign of the road, I became uneasy. Surely it was not necessary to travel by such a roundabout route? At the most the road was not more than a mile or so from the village, and we had already covered three or four.

The sun was still behind us, and though I did not know exactly where we were, my sense of direction told me that the road to Fez also lay behind us. But my guides pointed forward, crying: "To Fez! To Fez!" and, still doubtful, I went on. At last we came to the road, and with broad grins they pointed to it triumphantly, making me feel rather foolish. I thought, well, this just shows what imagination can do to a chap. But this emotion was short-lived, for as we went on my sense of uneasiness returned. There was no doubt at all that we were travelling due west when we should have been going east, but as the road was not marked on my map and there might even yet be some logical explanation I waited a bit longer, though I was nearly certain that we were travelling in the wrong direction.

I wanted to be certain of my whereabouts before having matters out with my three guides, so I tramped on. When they wanted me to turn down a narrow path leading into a chaos of rocky peaks and gorges I refused, and the sinister growl in the

leader's voice as he commanded: "Allez!" added to my uneasiness. If it came to a fight I would be no match for the three; and I regretted that my knife was in the pocket of my rucksack, and that to reach for it might precipitate matters.

A turn in the road brought matters to a head, for there was the camp of the cattle-drovers where I had eaten a meal the day before, and a white kilometre post beside it clearly stating the fact that I was quite definitely not going to Fez but back to the holy city of Mulai Idriss. For some reason or other my guides had been deliberately misleading me. Why? What sort of underhanded game they were playing I could not imagine, save robbery or kidnapping, and I more than ever regretted that I could not reach my knife.

It was time for a showdown, so I stopped, pointed to the sign-post and said: "Fez is not this way—Fez is over there," and without stopping to argue I turned about and started back along the road we had come. What I expected them to do I cannot say, but the next moment I heard shouts and the patter of feet on the stony road. Then they were in front of me, gesticulating and shouting, making it clear that I was to go the other way. If I had felt uneasy before, I now felt downright nervous, but putting on a bold front I tried to argue with them, talking as quickly as possible in a mixture of French and Arabic.

The next instant one of them had seized my rucksack and swung me round by the shoulder, while the other grabbed at my long hiking cape. I slipped both these objects off my shoulders, and tripped one man up, kicking off his loose Moorish shoes so that he would be unable to run far—I hoped. Then the others caught hold of me, dragging me back and shouting angrily, so that I did the only thing possible and punched the leader on the chin, sending him staggering.

If this was fiction I would tell how I knocked out the three men in turn and then went on my way unmolested, but it did not work out that way. Although in fiction one Englishman may be the equal of three Arabs, in actual fact I got the worst of it, for they all sprang at me at once. They were clearly determined that I should not go to Fez. I had heard tales of what happened to men taken prisoner by the mountain Berbers and did not want to undergo that experience myself, so remembering the old adage 'He who fights and runs away . . .' I kicked all three of them on the shins with my steel-tipped hiking boots, and ran off down the road as fast as I was able.

I looked futilely about me for help, but there was only a desolate valley devoid of life, hemmed in by forbidding-looking

mountains. I had the feeling that this sort of thing did not happen in real life, only in story books and nightmares, that it could not really be happening—but *it was*. Which way should I go? Miles to the west was Mulay Idriss, unknown miles to the east was the route to Fez—if I could reach it.

A hill appeared in front of me, and I went up it quicker than I would have believed it possible for a man with a crippled leg. Looking back I saw my three pursuers standing by the roadside, one of them holding the rucksack which I had abandoned. They appeared to have given up the chase. Vain hope! A peculiar whistling call echoed across the valley, and turning my head, I saw three horsemen riding toward me. They spread out in a semi-circle, cutting off my retreat, and came charging down upon me. I had no desire to be cut down by their horses' hooves, so there was nothing for it but to hold up my hands in token of surrender.

In a very crestfallen mood I returned to where my three captors stood waiting, picked up my rucksack, and started walking along the road to Mulay Idriss. The three Berbers walked beside me, and with one horseman riding in front and the other two behind, in case I should try and run away again, so we followed the stony mountain road. Hour after hour we travelled across that burnt-up land under the blazing sun, with my companions striding tirelessly along, never resting, ever vigilant, till at last when the weight of my pack had become almost excruciating and I was almost ready to forgo my pride and plead for a rest, we sighted the walls of Mulai Idriss.

We did not enter the city, but turned aside along a track leading to a building which proved to be the *Bureau des Indigènes*. These *Bureaux des Indigènes* are to be found at regular intervals all over Morocco, for they are the centres from which the French civil and military authorities maintain law and order, administer justice, and generally make their presence felt among the native tribes. Each bureau acts as the administrative centre for the area in which it is situated.

My captors motioned to me to sit down on a bench in a walled garden while we waited to see the officer in charge of the post. The rest was welcome, for my legs felt as though they were nearly dropping off. Presently I was escorted into a large room where a French officer looked at me in some surprise. The Berbers broke into an excited chattering, gesticulating towards me and uttering a word which I recognized as 'German' several times.

"So you are a protégé of our 'Lady-in-Red', monsieur?" remarked the officer, in excellent English.

"I do not understand," I stammered in reply.

"Have you not heard of our 'Lady-in-Red'?" he went on. "We are very anxious to make her acquaintance—and that of her friends."

I remembered a curious story I had heard in Meknes, of a mysterious personage known as the 'Lady in Red', who was helping men to desert from the French Foreign Legion and escape into Spanish territory.

"There has been a mistake," I said. "If you will examine my passport you will see that I am just a harmless traveller."

While he examined my passport it dawned upon me what had happened. The *Kaid* of B'ni Amar, puzzled by my sudden appearance in his village at sundown, had believed me to be a spy or a deserter from the Foreign Legion. He had told his men to bring me to this French military post and hand me over to the authorities. But instead of explaining this to me, his men had pretended to be escorting me towards Fez, and, when I had discovered their deception, I, in turn, had naturally become suspicious of their motives. I had thought they were robbers; they had believed me to be a spy. The fact that I was wearing shorts might have helped confirm their belief that I was a German, for apparently this garment is associated with that race, which just shows how careful about one's clothing one has to be when travelling abroad. (Wearing a red shirt had once got me into trouble on the Finnish-Russian frontier.)

"I see a mistake has been made," the officer said, handing my passport back to me. "Accept our apologies, monsieur. It was a misunderstanding on the part of the *Kaid* of B'ni Amar to send you here. *Bon voyage*."

I found myself out in the sunlight again, a free man. I had just undergone one of those experiences one sometimes reads about in novels and then only half believes, and I had no wish to undergo it again.

I was so tired that it was impossible to travel farther until I had had a rest, so I looked about for a place where I could find shelter. Thanks to the *Kaid* of B'ni Amar I would now have to make a two-day detour round the mountains in order to reach the road to Fez. As I could walk no farther for some hours I used my last strength to stagger as far as the Refuge de Zerhoun, where I had had the unpleasant experience with the rats two nights previously, and fifteen minutes after my arrival was in bed and asleep. I had not fancied sleeping there a second time, but as the next inn was twelve miles farther on there was no alternative.

It was late afternoon when I awakened, had a meal, and took to the road again, with the intention of reaching the Zegotta Pass

before dark. As I passed the ruins of Volubilis again, I saw the director coming along the road from the museum, so I stopped to tell him of my recent experiences.

"An adventure most exciting," he said. "But why did you go to the native town of B'ni Amar?"

"I was looking for the comfortable inn you told me about," I replied.

The director looked startled.

"*Mon Dieu!* I forgot to tell you. There are two settlements at B'ni Amar; one European, one Berber. I should have told you that the inn was *at the European settlement!*"

CHAPTER X

ON THE ROAD

THE road led me on across wide uplands where cattle grazed in unfenced pastures, and beyond a few herdsmen here and there, there was no sign of human existence. It was a vast, empty and silent land with only the sighing of the wind to listen to. No other travellers were passing along the road, but, refreshed by the long sleep I had had, I strode out resolutely and did not notice the lack of companionship. The people of the Zerhoun are pastoralists rather than agriculturalists and, European vehicles excepted, you meet no wheeled traffic on Moroccan roads. The Moors or Berbers travel by horse or mule, or, farther south, by camel. I passed a *n'zala*, or compound, walled in with hedges of thorn bush and cactus, and occasionally white-walled, two-storeyed watch-towers marking wells.

At Zegotta was the world's end, a vast, deep trough in the mountains, hundreds of feet deep, like a gigantic canyon. At sundown this great gulf in the mountains presented an unparalleled spectacle of gorgeous colouring. At Zegotta, at the inn, I spent the night sleeping on two tables pushed together, with a mattress on top. It was surprising to learn that the people at Zegotta already knew of my misadventure at B'ni Amar, and as I followed that road in days to come I was to discover that each place reached in turn knew all about the affair. How quickly the news had travelled.

Any enterprising reader of this chronicle who chances to consult a road map of Morocco will probably be struck by the small number of miles I covered daily. In fact, it will almost seem on some days as if I deliberately tried to cover as little distance as possible. And he (or she) will not be so very far from the truth. I made this journey for my own pleasure and comfort, and mere mileage was not my aim. Let those who will tramp their twenty or thirty miles a day, but such tramping is not for me, why, I would as soon be a motorist!

I like to saunter along, with an eye open to what is happening about me, and a word for anyone who cares to stop for a chat. I like to stop to read a book or cook a meal, or study the changing colours of the sky, or think the most exciting thoughts, or scribble passing fancies (such as these) in my notebook. Then, too, I like

turning down alluring byways to see where they lead, or exploring old ruins and caves and other intriguing places. And so I may have walked all day and added few miles to my score, so few that I cannot point to the map and say: "Today I walked from so-and-so to such-and-such a place."

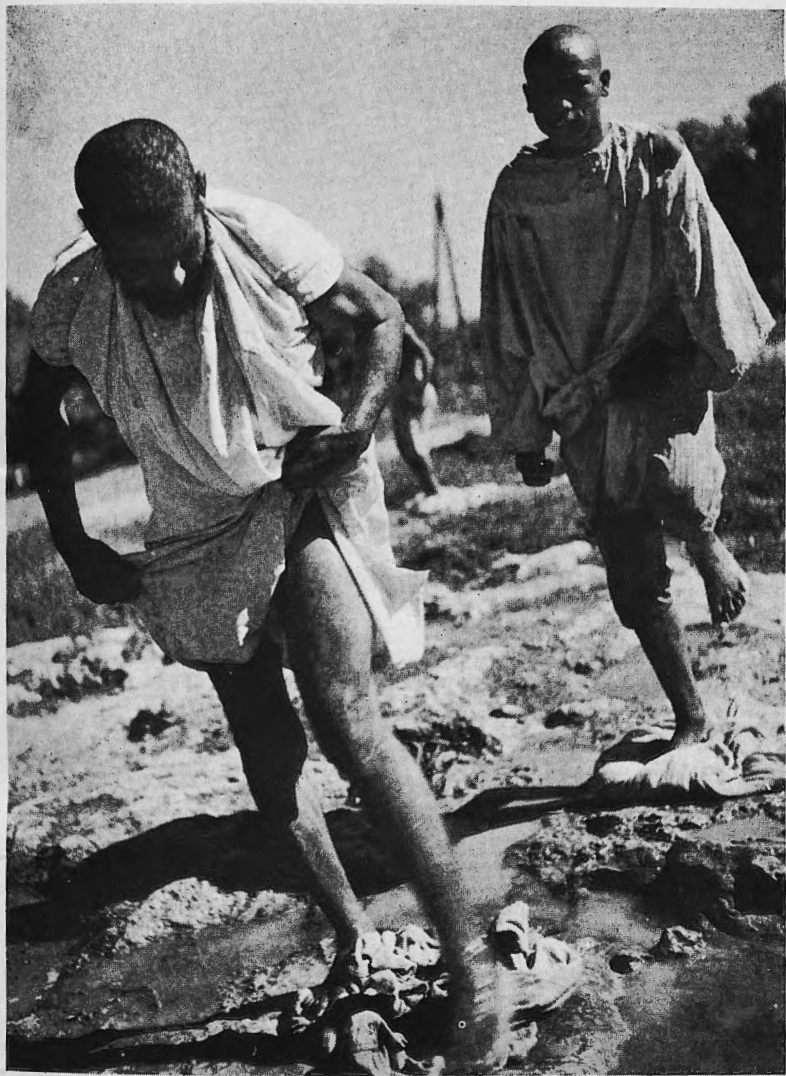
My other memory of Zegotta is of the proprietor's unshaven face. Old man, I thought, it's time you had a shave, but happening to catch sight of my own scrubbly chin in a mirror I wondered whether it was *he* who needed one most.

After breakfasting on coffee and rolls and some excellent creamy cheese similiar to that which the *Kaid* had given me at B'ni Amar, I started out at a quarter past six. Over the pass I went, and down into that great gulf below, down, down, down into a sea of mist above which a few stray mountain peaks rose like islands. The sun was shining brightly, but without heat, and in that clear, crisp air I felt capable of walking miles. And I did.

I fell into a quick, rhythmic stride which was exhilarating, so that the kilometre posts marking the route fell behind me uncounted and unheeded. There was pleasure simply in walking, singing a song, without heeding the scenery or the distance. After walking three or four hours I came to a canteen, where I stopped for a cup of coffee. Here I encountered yet another type of cheese, made of goat's milk, so light and fragile that it crumbled at the touch, and was eaten with salt and black pepper.

By now the sun was quite hot, but I resumed my tireless, swinging stride, covering mile after mile. I tramped along like an automaton, thrusting each foot forward with machine-like regularity. Yes, I was indeed road hungry that day, and it seemed that I could go on and on and on. I was completely unconscious of the heavy pack on my back, which was balanced so lightly that I felt sure it ought to weigh more, felt that I must have left something out, so, believe it or not, I sat down by the roadside and carefully examined the contents to see if anything was missing. But no, it was all there, so I went on again.

Hotter and hotter it grew, but I decided to defy tradition and tramp on through the hot portion of the day, when any sane person exerts himself as little as possible. I tramped on steadily, oblivious to my surroundings, till the sudden barking of a dog roused me with a start, and I realized that I must have dozed off while walking. The sun was now blazing down cruelly upon the parched semi-desert land, and as it was foolish to expose my bare arms and legs to its burning rays any longer I abandoned my intention of walking through the heat and looked about for a place to shelter.



Courtesy: Chemins de Fer du Maroc

Berbers washing their clothing in the traditional manner

DARLINGTON
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Berber horsemen

DARLINGTON
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'Fantasia', or mock battle charge

Courtesy: C. Durand

Ahead of me I saw a well, beside which stood a white-walled, two-storeyed tower where the well-keeper lived. In this arid land wells are of the greatest importance, and as the Arabs respect a man who digs a well in the desert the French were not slow to solicit the Arabs' goodwill by establishing new wells along the roads. I passed the afternoon squatted under the shade of my umbrella beneath some trees, sleeping part of the time and drinking tea with a party of native road-menders.

When it was about half past five, and still hot, I started out for a canteen which the well-keeper said was a few miles farther on, which I planned to reach by sundown. After tramping a mile or two I was overtaken by a military lorry, and a French officer demanded to see my passport, returned it with a polite bow, and informed me that the canteen was a good twelve miles farther away. I tramped on, and presently came to a country market-place, an open stretch of ground by the side of the road, where neighbouring tribesmen bring goods to sell on appointed days.

All about me was a bare, sun-scorched, almost desert-like countryside, surrounded by bleak red hills, where the very earth looked seamed and cracked as if by great heat. Two lean, bronzed men who were erecting a tent greeted me with a cheery: "*Bon jour, mon enfant,*" and learning that I had nowhere to sleep promptly invited me to spend the night at their camp. They were from Sicily, Carlo a big, laughing man with twinkling eyes, Caesar of a more thoughtful disposition, one who saw that things got done.

"*Ah, so the Senor thinks the Italians a remarkable people?* Ho, Carlo, bring buttered bread and hot tea for the stranger. *And Mussolini, now, a most remarkable man, hey?* Oh, Carlo, open a tin of sardines for the Signor. *A great country Italy, eh?* Carlo, open a fresh bottle of wine—our guest is of greater distinction than we thought."

The Italians told me that they were in charge of a party of Arabs who were quarrying material from a neighbouring hillside. This material, so far as I could make out, was a red, shell-like substance which was used for surfacing tennis-courts, and was shipped to America in large quantities.

As the light faded I sat gazing through the doorway of the tent at that stark landscape, which, a blazing inferno by day, presents the most gorgeous sunsets and dawns. Behind me two acetylene lamps lit up the interior of the tent, showing Caesar frying eggs in a pan over a charcoal fire and Carlo squatting on an improvised seat by a small table, while the Arab labourers crouched on their mats in the background. After drinking a glass of *anisetto gras*, and then a couple of glasses of water to get the

taste out of my mouth, and then a glass of white wine, and then several of mint tea, my stomach began to wonder what was happening. Drowsily I became aware that an argument was in progress.

"If only we had some women," hiccoughed Carlo. "Now in Taormina——"

"Syracuse is the place for pretty girls," Caesar observed ponderously.

"You are not suggesting, are you, that the girls of Syracuse are prettier than those of Taormina, are you?" demanded Carlo.

"Dear man, there is no comparison," hiccoughed Caesar. "Now I know a girl in Syracuse. . . ."

They were still arguing sleepily when we stretched ourselves out on the dusty mattresses which served as beds, and prepared for slumber. Slumber! I scratched, the Arabs scratched, but those two Italians slept on undisturbed by heat or fleas or my muttered comments. For a long time I lay there sleepless, watching the stars blazing in the sky, and listening to the piping of innumerable bullfrogs and the *chrrp-chrrrp* of the crickets, which sounded for all the world like a watch being repeatedly wound up. When I tired of listening to these sounds I listened to a baby crying, a dog barking, and a cat mewling, instead.

I awoke before dawn and found a servant lighting the charcoal fire. A faint tinge of pink in the sky marked the rising sun, though a sickle-shaped moon still hung low in the sky, yellow as old gold. Ahmed, the servant, brought a mug of warm water and solemnly poured it over my hands; this, in the Moorish estimation, constituted the morning wash. Later he brought the inevitable mint tea, and when I had drunk the usual three cups I decided to be on my way. I called out farewells to the two Italians, receiving only unintelligible grunts in reply, picked up my pack, and started off down the road.

It was cold, bitterly cold, and I was glad of the two woollen pullovers I was wearing. In an enchanting book called *The Forest*, by Stewart Edward White, I had read that a jacket is often unnecessary on a tramping journey and that an extra pullover is more useful, so acting on this advice I had left my jacket back in England. Somewhere else I had read that in hot countries it is essential to keep the stomach well covered to prevent the liver being upset by sudden changes of temperature. So you must picture me marching along muffled up in a thick woollen garment, even on the hottest day, and I was to discover that the men of the Foreign Legion marched in their overcoats. And I may add that throughout my long journey nothing ever went wrong with

me, though on some occasions I had to drink ditch water which was brown and stagnant, and I finished the expedition as fit and healthy as when I started.

But this morning!—ah, where was the lightness of foot, the swinging stride, which I had rejoiced in yesterday? Why, here it was only the fourth kilometre post and already I was conscious of the weight of my infernal pack. My feet felt as heavy as lead, and I found it difficult to concentrate on walking in a straight line. Could it be?—no, surely not!—that I had had a drop too much to drink the night before, and that this feeling was what is known as a 'hangover'? Sure, they had been a couple of nice fellows, Caesar and Carlo, but I just had not got their capacity.

Whatever the cause, I certainly did not feel like walking far. But walk I must, for there was not a house, a tree, or a shady spot in sight anywhere, only the eternal road winding its way through that bleak, parched, sun-scorched land. What! Was I already looking for a resting place? Why, the sun was only just risen. Come on, put your best foot forward; one-two, one-two, one-two. What was the old tramping song: "Oh, I ain't got money and I ain't got folks, I ain't got nothing *at all*. . . ." Keep moving, fellow, that's it, keep moving. My map showed only semi-desert country for the next twenty miles, without habitation, so I must keep moving.

My brain was so tired, perhaps from the drinks of the night before, perhaps because of the fleas and the lack of sleep, so that it seemed to take me ages to cover a single kilometre. With incredible swiftness the sun climbed high in the sky, already its rays were red hot and searing, soon they would feel as though they were stripping the flesh from my bones. And still there was only the long road and the sun-scorched hills and not a glimpse of shade anywhere. A metal road sign cast a couple of yards of shadow, and here I rested for a few minutes until the heat and flies drove me on again.

On and on I trudged until my pace became that of the proverbial snail. This was the most awful, God-forsaken land I had ever seen, with the air hot and windless, so that the scorched, cracked earth threw the heat back into my face. At last I stopped, and not for the life of me could I move a step farther. I just stood there feebly, propped up against a kilometre post, dead beat. That desolate countryside had beaten me.

Some time later I heard the sound of an approaching vehicle, the first I had seen that day, but it had come and gone before I could weakly signal the driver for a lift. Knowing that events usually happen in pairs, I waited, and sure enough a few minutes

later a heavy motor lorry came roaring along the road. My brain was working so slowly that before I could raise my arm to signal to the driver, the second vehicle had also reached and passed me, so that I could only stare after it dumbly. But it travelled only a few yards and then came to a halt, and the driver and his Arab assistant descended and came toward me.

I grinned weakly at the driver, a big, stout man wearing enormous spectacles, but he wasted no words, only helped me into the cab of the lorry. The Arab jumped in alongside me and off we went. Of events after that I have only a confused recollection, of arriving at a white house among some olive trees, of being shown into a dark, quiet bedroom by a buxom, friendly woman who proved to be the lorry driver's wife, and of sinking into a deep, dreamless sleep.

Early the next morning I thanked the buxom woman for her kindness, scrambled into the lorry beside her husband, and rode with him as far as a cross-roads from which, he told me, it was a walk of but two or three miles to Fez. He would accept nothing from me but a couple of English cigarettes, and wishing me good luck, drove off again. Less than an hour later I saw, rising above the dusty, reddish landscape, the walls and towers of the city which had fascinated me so much when I had first sighted it the year before—Fez! It was fifteen days since I had marched away from Salé on the first stage of my long journey to Tafilet Oasis.

As I entered the city a motor-car parked outside a building appeared familiar, and so did a man emerging from it—for it was Mr. Dixon of *Au Coin du Londres*, who had given me a lift part of the way to Volubilis, and had been the last person I had seen when leaving Meknes. We were both surprised to meet again in this unexpected fashion, and he listened with interest to my hasty account of the various experiences which had befallen me.

It is a difficult matter to decide whether the fascination with which one approaches some new and exotic place filled with the pleasurable anticipation of discovering new sights and undergoing new experiences, is or is not equalled by the equally pleasurable delight of returning to that same place armed with a knowledge of its familiarity. Certainly in my own case Fez, which had proved so delightful on my previous visit, proved equally delightful when I saw it for the second time. It was just as exciting to walk by its gates and ramparts or prowl about its narrow streets which were now so familiar, as it had been exciting to explore them the previous year when they had been new and unknown.

This time I made my way without hesitation to the little hotel conducted by Mohammed the Arab where I had stayed the previous year. Hotel, Mohammed, and Fatima his wife were still there, unchanged, and welcomed me back with what appeared to be genuine delight. Once more I found myself installed in that airy room, from whose balcony I could look down into the narrow street along which veiled women and hooded men were continually passing by. Nothing seemed to have changed since my visit of the previous year.

My most urgent desire was for a hot bath, so having ascertained the whereabouts of the *hamman*, or Moorish baths, I made my way there and arrived precisely at opening time. When I entered the building, however, two burly natives seized me by the shoulders and hustled me outside again. It was the women's day, it appeared. Men and women bath on alternate days, and I had come a day too soon.

The next day I tried again. Inside the door a dignified old Moor sat at a desk collecting money, so I banged down a franc and walked into an inner room where one undressed. Standing around in my underpants exposed to the solemn scrutiny of a circle of unsmiling Moors gave me an inferiority complex, so I draped a towel about my shoulders, folded my arms across my chest, and adopted a Napoleonesque attitude. Then a small Negro with a glistening black body beckoned to me to follow him.

Huge doors gave entrance to a cavernous place filled with steam. I walked through into a smaller room, even hotter and steamier, and almost in darkness. Then the mist cleared a bit and I saw before me a big Negro, tall and muscular and black as shining jet. He looked at me, and then looked at his confrère, and then he grinned. "Ah-ha!" he exclaimed, in his own unintelligible lingo. "Can't answer back, eh? Splendid!"

Before I realized what was happening the undersized Negro had grabbed hold of me and flung me toward his colleague, who caught me by the shoulders and lowered me with a thump on to what appeared to be an uncommonly hard marble slab. My protests were stifled while they lathered me all over with soap, while I could only lie there sweating and panting. Each time I attempted to rise my captors pushed me down again. Even yet I am not clear about the processes which followed.

At one time I thought it was their intention to murder me outright, then followed what appeared to be a wrestling match, with me very much on the defensive and the other two punching and pummelling me and turning me over like a grilled herring each time I attempted to rise. Then they laid me down again and

held a consultation over me, like two doctors arguing over a corpse when an operation has failed. Then they carefully examined me again, probing and pinching my skin, and I had the horrid suspicion that they were removing sundry livestock which I had acquired on my journey, though how such creatures could have survived the treatment I had just undergone was difficult to imagine.

Finally, I managed to make my escape and reach the outer room again, where I donned my clothes and sat down among the circle of unsmiling Moors to drink a cup of mint tea and get my breath back. And I am still puzzled to know whether those Moors were laughing at me behind their faces. When I finally ambled outside again to follow the winding street back to my lodging, did I feel better? My goodness, I did! For a real reviver when you are tired I recommend a Moorish bath—conducted in the real Moorish style!

* * * * *

Fez reached, the next task was to try and earn some money. I went round to the building which housed Ben Slimane's office, where I had worked the previous year, but he was away, and nobody could tell me when he would return; nor was there any sign of Mulai Youssef, his nephew. My experiences at Tangier, Salé, and B'ni Amar could be capitalized, I thought, if I wrote some articles about them and submitted them to newspaper editors in England. So I started tramping round Fez seeking for somebody who would lend me a typewriter, and in doing so, became acquainted, one by one, with the little coterie of British residents who lived in the city.

Among these good people were a Dr. Mellersh and his wife, who lived in a pleasant flat near the British Consulate, who took pity on this stray wanderer who had appeared so suddenly in their midst, and made me feel at home. Other people also proved friendly, and, in fact, Fez appeared such an hospitable place that I felt I could have made my home there for some considerable time. As it was, I remained ten days, writing stories.

While in Fez, as a loyal British subject, I attended the coronation ceremony at the British Consulate, where, standing amid a colourful crowd of local residents, Moors, Negroes, Indians, and men of the Foreign Legion, I drank the health of King George VI in lemonade—to prevent the religious susceptibilities of the new king's Moslem subjects from being offended, for strong drink is forbidden to them.

This episode had an amusing sequel, for I drifted into conversation with a *légionnaire*, a conversation which was ended abruptly by the *légionnaire* having to return to his depot suddenly. He had been telling me an exciting, if somewhat improbable yarn about life in the Legion, so in order to learn how the story ended, I walked over to the Foreign Legion depot to ask him about it.

Arrived outside the depot I somehow missed the official entrance with a sentry on guard, and blundered on until I came to a patch of cabbages. Realizing that I had gone wrong somewhere I did not retrace my steps, but struck out toward some buildings in the distance. Now about this time a French officer chose to go for an evening stroll and, ambling along, was astounded to observe somebody—and a *civilian* at that—performing some curious manoeuvres in the middle of the regimental cabbages. When he had recovered his voice he bawled out to a couple of *légionnaires* who were passing by, ordering them to rush to the defence of the cabbage patch.

They did so, and seized hold of the intruder, and a few minutes later I found myself being escorted to the guardroom, charged with I do not know how many misdemeanours. A dilemma now arose, for neither the gallant officer nor his *légionnaires* could speak English, while my French was such that it was beyond their comprehension. So we waited awhile, until a *légionnaire* who could speak English was summoned, and to him I explained that my intentions toward the cabbages were entirely honourable, and that I had merely overlooked the sentry at the gate. This reply reduced the officer to a stunned silence, for it seemed that never before in French military history had an army depot, complete with sentry-box and sentry in front, been slighted in such a fashion.

The officer began a long dissertation about the necessity of having sentry-boxes in front of depots, and the equal necessity of passers-by taking notice of the said sentries, suddenly realized the hopelessness of talking to a man who could not understand a word of what he was saying, waved a hand vaguely in the air, and told the *légionnaires* to get me out of his sight before he exploded completely. I have a vague recollection that his last remark was some words to the effect that there must be something radically wrong with my eyesight, which was of course, quite true.

To tell the truth, I was in no hurry to leave, for the sight of the *légionnaire* whom they brought to act as an interpreter fascinated me. To begin with his tunic was crumpled and unbuttoned, and he may have shaved the day before—or he may not; but it

was the airy manner in which he addressed the officer which intrigued me, for it appeared quite comradely. Now I did not know a lot about the ways of the British Army, but I had an idea that for a man to appear before a British officer in such a fashion would have caused considerable heartburning—or I don't know a British sergeant when I see one!

But before I could speculate further about this I found myself being escorted to the gate and deposited outside.

CHAPTER XI

IN THE MIDDLE ATLAS MOUNTAINS

IT was a cold, wet, windy day when I left Fez and took the road to the hills. A more unpleasant beginning for a journey it was difficult to imagine, but I was fresh and well fed and eager to be on my way. One could at least walk in the rain, I argued, whereas if the sun was shining it would probably be too hot to move. So I put my best foot forward and mile after mile of glistening black roadway fell behind me.

A most depressing landscape stretched about me, of flat corn-fields gleaming dully in the rain, of sodden meadowlands, with an occasional house here and there. But, like a dog unleashed, I was so glad to feel the road under my feet once more that nothing could spoil my good humour, and I even ventured to sing a silly air about the joys of the open road. Somewhere ahead rose the mist-enshrouded peaks of the Middle Atlas Mountains, and beyond them lay the great road known as the *Route Imperiale*, along which I planned to march southward to the desert. On my back was a forty-pound pack, for I did not know whether it would be possible to buy food or not.

After a time I seemed to hear somebody singing in reply, but what with the wind and the hissing rain I could not be certain, so stopped to listen, and—yes, very definitely somebody else was singing in the rain, quite a few somebodies, in fact. A French song it was, but one which I seemed to know, a jaunty, rollicking, defiant, marching song. Then out of the mist there came into view a body of khaki-clad men, all singing lustily—a company of the French Foreign Legion on the march.

Column after column passed me by, the men muffled up in their overcoats, a mounted officer in front and mules and horses carrying guns behind, and away back in the rear several wagons loaded with gear. So they passed me, singing lustily, only to falter and break off altogether when they beheld striding toward them the first specimen of the genus *hiker* most of them had ever seen. Sacred name of ten pikes! Just think of it; they, the celebrated Walking Cavalry, were actually seeing somebody *walking* across Morocco—just for the fun of it. Shades of *Beau Geste*!—there'll be blooming youth hostels in the Sahara next.¹

¹By 1951 a number of youth hostels *had* been established along part of the route the author followed in Morocco.

The sight of me in shorts and carrying a rucksack proved too much for discipline. "Here's another *légionnaire*, pack and all, marching by himself!" they called out; and so, to the accompaniment of laughter, shouts, and cheers, the khaki column passed me by. Soon I had the road to myself again, and of their passing only the echo of a song remained.

"Partout où ils ont passé,
Partout où ils sont tombé,
Ils ont semé de la gloire."

On I went, mile after mile, and still the rain came hissing down. My goodness, how it rained that day! At last it began to dampen even my spirits, literally as well as metaphorically, for my clothing was soaked, so that my song ceased, my pace slackened, and I began looking about for a place where I could rest. There wasn't one, not a single solitary house, canteen, store, farm, barn, shed, shack, kennel or cave. Of all the desolate, habitationless, God-forsaken spots on this green earth that landscape topped the list.

So I started to walk again. There was nothing else I could do, for it was the only way to keep warm. Then the clouds parted, and for a moment I had a glimpse of the ten-thousand-foot summits of the Middle Atlas Range ahead of me, cold and remote. The view vanished as the clouds settled down again. The puffing of a steam-roller aroused me from the stupor into which I had fallen, and looking up I saw a gang of Arab labourers mending the road, and, joy of joys, a big wooden shed not far away.

How I cherished that wooden shed, with its draughts, smells, muddy floor, fleas and all. In a couple of minutes I was inside and taking off my wet clothing, in a couple more minutes I was helping the cook to make the fire burn brighter, and when this was accomplished I got out my blackened, battered billy-can and made myself some porridge. Porridge was my standby for such moments when I was cold and tired, though readers of this book who sit comfortably by the fireside at home may marvel at my partiality for this dish. Still, where would Scotland be were it not for porridge?

My, how good that particular lot of porridge tasted, how it went to the right spot, how I enjoyed it! Then, wrapped up in my cape I squatted down to wait for the rain to stop, but it didn't stop. Hour after hour it continued to teem down, till the whole landscape was sodden and steaming. Outside, oblivious to the rain, the road-menders went about their tasks, while the steam-

roller *chug-chugged* incessantly up and down the strip of road they were repairing. Meanwhile, I sat by the fire-bucket, grateful for its warmth, till the road gang came in for a meal.

They kicked off their shoes as they entered and squatted cross-legged on mats about the communal dish of boiled beans. They invited me to join them and made a place for me on a mat, and there we sat picking out boiled beans with our fingers, and soaking up the juice with lumps of coarse black bread. Then came the usual mint tea, and, hunger satisfied, a flood of questions, for the Arabs were always astonished at the idea of a European walking across their country; apparently such a thing had not been known to happen before.

They told me that I need not fear being robbed, for my appearance and the fact that I was walking made it obvious that I was extremely poor. Omnibus travel in Morocco is very cheap, but apparently I had not even the few francs required to pay my fare. Moreover, I could only afford half a pair of trousers, and I had no woman to cook my food!

"English, eh?" asked the foreman. "The English and the French are friends?"

"Yes," I replied.

"And the Americans and the French are friends?" persisted my interrogator, and again I replied that this was so.

"And the Germans and the French are friends?" was the next question.

"No," I replied, and there was a nodding of heads and a low murmur of approval all round.

The meal over the men rolled themselves up in their cloaks and went to sleep, and, feeling tired, I followed their example. A tickling sensation along my legs informed me that some variety of livestock had already discovered my presence, but I heeded them not. It was late in the afternoon when we arose. The rain had stopped and the sun was trying to shine, so I said good-bye to the road gang and started to walk on to Sefrou where I planned to spend the night.

Did I say *walk*? It wasn't walking, it was murder, a continual scramble through thick red mud which clung to my boots till they felt as heavy as a couple of suitcases, and the mud was so sticky I just could not get rid of it. I overtook an old tramp, trudging along with his worldly possessions on his shoulder, straw bag, battered tin can, pottery water-bottle, and for the next few miles we were continually passing and repassing each other. Sefrou was not visible until we had almost reached it, so surrounded by the trees and vegetation is the town. Indeed, the

scenery round Sefrou was very like an English landscape, park-like and pastoral.

Finding a sleeping place in Sefrou proved difficult, for the hotels were too expensive for my pocket. By now I was feeling tired, for I had walked twenty miles under somewhat trying conditions, but I heard of another inn where I might have better luck, so trudged away from the town along a road leading through a dark, windswept ravine which was little more than a narrow trench hemmed in by sheer walls of rock. Then it began to rain again, in torrents, so I took shelter in a cave for a few minutes, but as the rain showed no signs of stopping and the smell of human excretions was overpowering, I was forced to trudge on through the rain.

Presently I found myself in a wild glen where high red cliffs draped with greenery dropped into unseen depths and the sound of falling water filled the air. It was a lonely and awesome spot to be in during a storm, and had there been any place in which I could shelter, be it ever so primitive, I would have stopped there. But everything was so wet and cold and miserable that there was nothing for it but to trudge on and on. I saw the vague outlines of a building through the rain, and, spurred by hopes of warmth and shelter, hastened to the door. Vain hope! The woman in charge looked at my bedraggled appearance, my big boots, my rucksack, and said, no, she could not let me have a room, and then hustled me out into the rain again.

By now, almost past caring what happened, my brain numb, my legs like lead, I struggled on through a dark, cold, wet world. And then a curious thing happened. Have you ever had the feeling that you must visit a certain house or speak to a certain person, unknown to you though they may be. As I passed a house I got an odd feeling that I simply *must* go to the door and knock. I did so. The door opened, and inside sat an elderly Spanish lady who, without exhibiting the slightest surprise, invited me within and asked what she could do for me. I told her, whereupon this admirable old lady clapped her hands and a native boy appeared. The old lady began calling out orders and then wrote something on a piece of paper, which she handed to me. When I was rested, she said, the boy would guide me to an inn in the native city where I was to give the note to the proprietor who would look after me.

I made as profound a bow as my tiredness would permit, said: "*Gracias, senora,*" and followed the boy out into the rain. A short time later I found myself installed in a comfortable little inn built into the ramparts of Sefrou. The day's surprises were not

yet over, for the room in which I was told to make myself comfortable had walls covered with gaily coloured wallpaper, a big, open fireplace where logs were burning, and a table with a portable typewriter on it. Later, after a bath and a meal, behold me seated at that table typing out some articles for magazines back in England, while the landlord of the inn—a dark-haired, genial Spaniard—fiddled about with the biggest radio set I had ever seen, trying to get one wave-length after another.

The following day I walked to the village of Bahlil, which had been described to me as a curious place inhabited by cave-dwellers who were descended from Christians. It was intriguing to visualize this little group of people clinging to their ancient faith, while the towns and villages about them succumbed one by one to the new, conquering Moslem religion, so that they remained at last a tiny island of Christianity in a sea of Mohammedanism. And the particular point in time when this last flicker of the Christian faith finally died out, and how it came to be finally extinguished, these unanswerable questions are also intriguing.

At Bahlil, while the sun shone and the rain fell gently, I sat under my black umbrella copying an address on to an envelope for the son of the native chief. After we had drunk the ceremonial three cups of mint tea, I walked back to Sefrou and spent the rest of the day typing out articles on the landlord's typewriter.

Soon after this I met with an experience which might have proved disastrous. I had noticed how frequently the Moors spat, and imagined, in my ignorance, that this was merely a national custom. One day I happened to spit just as an Arab was passing, and was astonished to see him whirl round and come rushing toward me. Thrusting his rage-distorted face close to mine he spluttered out a stream of unintelligible phrases. They sounded uncommonly like threats and curses, so I tapped him lightly on the chest as a warning to keep his distance. But he continued to screech at me, and within a couple of minutes a crowd of Moors blocked the road from wall to wall, all looking very unfriendly. Deciding once again that discretion would be the better part of valour I stepped backward through an open doorway into a tree-shaded courtyard, hoping that, as Arabs are great respecters of private property, the mob would not follow me.

My luck held, for when the owner appeared, demanding the reason for my intrusion, he proved to be friendly disposed toward the English, and kept me by his side while he sent his servant to find out what the trouble was. The explanation I received was that, among the Arabs, spitting is a means of expressing contempt.

It is not safe to spit on their French conquerors, however, so they spit on their shadows instead. By expectorating on the old Arab's shadow, therefore, I had unwittingly offered him a great insult. (This attitude of the Arabs toward the French, by the way, culminated a few months later in an abortive uprising in Fez.)

My memory of Sefrou is of a little walled mountain city with a river running through it, beside which Jewish women in gaily coloured clothes stood rubbing the family laundry.

The next morning the rain had stopped and the sun was shining brightly when I strode out of Sefrou along the road to the south. My route led across lonely moorlands, with low, grass-covered hills rising here and there. The road crossed a number of rushing brooks whose waters had been carefully diverted so that they ran in narrow channels along the hillsides to irrigate small fields. Now and again I passed Berber tribesmen, afoot or on horseback. It was a satisfying day's walk, with nothing exciting about it, yet to an observant eye, one filled with little interests and amusements.

During the heat of the day I camped among some juniper bushes, improvising a tent with my umbrella, cape and a length of rope. For several hours I slept, read, or simply loafed. I lit a fire and cooked a meal—fried eggs and tomatoes and corned beef—and about five o'clock I started out for Annosseur, which I reached two hours later. I passed a native stronghold on a hill and came to the last kilometre post on the road. Beyond that there appeared to be nothing. Annosseur, it seemed, was only a name on the map.

The only habitation I could see was the fortified farm of a French settler, a white house, which, with its servants' quarters and outbuildings, was surrounded by high walls. A pleasant-faced man greeted me, explained that he and his family were just on the point of leaving for Sefrou, but I was welcome to stay the night at the farm. A few minutes later he and his family departed noisily, and I found myself, in my stockinged feet, sitting round a circular table among a little crowd of very clean-looking Arabs, sharing a meal of *cous-cous*—grain, meat and vegetables all mixed together—and some of the best Arab bread, in brown, flat loaves, I had ever tasted.

After sundown it got bitterly cold, and I was glad to sit by a glowing charcoal fire-pot sipping cups of mint tea. The farm, I discovered later, was situated well over two thousand feet above sea level. Afterwards they made me up a bed on the floor and there I slept soundly until morning; it was a somewhat cold couch, but free from fleas. In fact, those natives were the cleanest

I had ever seen. They washed before meals and they washed after meals, they washed the glasses afresh each time before serving tea, and the first thing I saw them do the following morning was wash—with hot water and soap, too.

The next day passed very much as the preceding one. After rising early in the morning and washing in a bucket of cold water—ah, the sting of it against my bare flesh!—breakfasting on bread and butter and the most delicious milky coffee, I bade farewell to my hosts and started south again. The land appeared even more desolate, just wide, bare plains dotted here and there with the black tents of the Berber nomads. And though I had now reached an altitude of between three and four thousand feet, still the massive peaks of the Middle Atlas Range towered ahead of me, seemingly as remote as ever.

About this time I began to experience some confusion in deciding which way to go. No road led south, only a mule track which seemed to wander all over the plain without arriving anywhere in particular. I had two road maps, but as neither of them showed a route which corresponded with the track in front of me, they were not very helpful. So far as I could make out the mule track continued straight south over the mountains to the Moulouya Valley. This was unknown country, and by what sort of pass the route contrived to traverse those towering peaks was more than I could imagine.

I plodded steadily southward, growing more and more perplexed, and then suddenly the track divided into two branches, neither of them leading in the direction I wanted to go. After some hesitation I chose the right-hand branch. I had not gone a mile or two before the conviction grew on me that I was going in the wrong direction, but as there was no other course open to me, I went on. The mule track, I reasoned, was bound to lead to somewhere sooner or later, while if I abandoned it and tried to strike across country I might soon be completely lost.

In Morocco the roads are of two kinds. Spanning the country like a network are the fine new tarred roads constructed by the French. They connect the chief centres of European settlement and may be regarded as a revival of the Roman road system. These new French roads are quite magnificent affairs, and enable motor vehicles to travel swiftly from one city to another. The other road system is that of the native mule tracks which were the only means of communication before the coming of the French. These mule tracks are to be encountered everywhere, meandering across the plains and clinging to the mountainsides, their only signposts clumps of trees or bushes or occasional wheel tracks. It

would appear that a mule track can never go far in a straight line if it is at all possible to zigzag, so consequently walking along them is often an exasperating business.

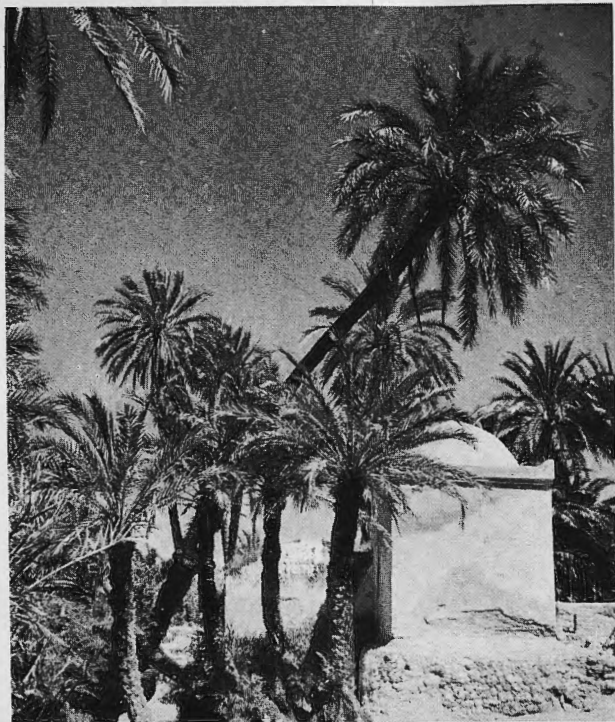
The country was mostly pastoral, and I often passed herds of cattle and flocks of sheep. At times the savage shepherd dogs proved a distinct menace, for they would come rushing at me, snarling and snapping their teeth. The shepherds usually escorted me through their flocks when they saw me coming, but when they did not I had to fight off the dogs with stones, or sharps jabs from my umbrella. Usually the tribesmen would give me a careless look, and then take no further notice of me.

A feature of the landscape was the streams, which had been diverted at their sources and compelled to follow artificial channels ingeniously contrived to follow the hillsides round and round, down and down, irrigating the little fields so that not a drop of the precious life-giving water was wasted. The dry beds of the streams had been patiently levelled by the labour of generations of husbandmen and converted into small well-cultivated fields of rye, beans or millet. Here and there I saw men ploughing, with a donkey or mule hitched to a primitive wooden plough.

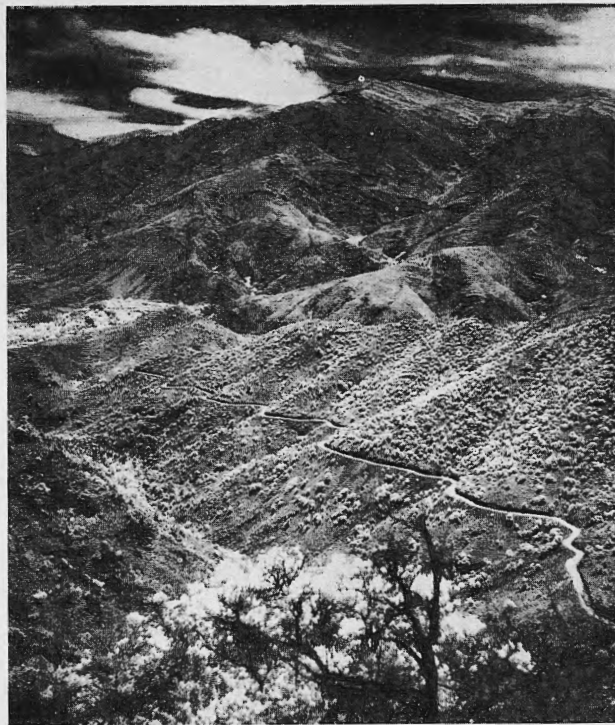
After crossing a wide, stony expanse where nothing grew, I entered a patch of woodland, where I improvised my tent again and camped for the midday meal. When I had first begun my tramp I had found the long midday halts decidedly boring, but later on, when plentiful supplies of firewood became available, I actually came to look forward to them, as they enabled me to test my abilities as a cook. One day I achieved a five-course dinner. So what with cooking, eating, reading, writing, sleeping and loafing, the enforced halt during the midday heat passed pleasantly enough.

It was clear now that I was going in the wrong direction, for the track was now descending toward the plains which I had traversed the day before. After walking twenty miles I saw buildings ahead of me and guessed them to be a place called Immouzer. Remembering my disappointment at Annosseur I wondered what Immouzer would prove to be like—a walled town like Sefrou, perhaps, or a native settlement like B'ni Amar, or perhaps another solitary farm. In fact, it proved to be neither, but a very modern little French settlement, so modern that when I passed two or three Arabs I wondered what they were doing there.

After haggling with the Greek owner of a small hotel I got a room for ten francs and luxuriated in a bath. Next morning I went shopping. Fortunately for my slender resources Morocco proved to be a very cheap country to travel in. Bread was two-



A saint's tomb, Tafilet Oasis



Courtesy: Chemins de Fer du Maroc

Tichka Pass, High Atlas Mountains



Fort Rissani, Taflet Oasis

DARLINGTON
PUBLIC LIBRARY.



Courtesy: French Railways

In Taflet Oasis

pence a loaf: cheeses cost fourpence each: while fourpence half-penny purchased four eggs, two pounds of potatoes, a couple of oranges, and a pound of tomatoes! Strawberries were threepence a pound; cherries were slightly cheaper, and good red wine was available at twopence a pint. Often my expenses amounted to only sixpence a day.

At the hotel I met a fat little man from Cyprus, whom I had encountered during the coronation ceremony at the British Consulate in Fez. When he heard that I planned to walk over the mountains to a Berber town called Azrou, he warned me against it, saying that 'bad mans' lived in the hills and they might try and rob me. The thought immediately came to me that the obvious thing to do was to march through the night, when the 'bad mans' might reasonably be expected to be in bed and asleep. When the Greek hotel owner heard of my decision he was so upset that he refused to present his bill, saying that he was honoured I had accepted his hospitality.

After sleeping all afternoon I rose, had dinner with the Greek who tried to dissuade me from my foolishness, slung my pack on my shoulder, and started off just as the moon was beginning to rise. There is something strangely fascinating in the thought of leaving a town when everybody else is going to bed, in turning your back on human habitations and their occupants, and going *tramp-tramp* off into the night and the unknown. I left the last houses behind and the last tents, and looked across a rolling plain to where a black line marked the distant mountains. Above me the moon hung in the sky, yellow as a ripe cheese, and gradually waned until it was only a faint gleam in the sky.

Dawn came and found me still walking. At first the sky was still dark, then not so dark, then a little less than dark, then finally it was light, then a little lighter, then quite light, and lo, another day had arrived. As yet there was no sign of the sun, which still lay hidden beyond the mountains, but a finger of fire began to travel slowly along the peaks, it turned to a golden yellow, and suddenly there was the sun, resting on the summit of a ridge.

All this time I had been tramping steadily along between hills covered with forest. The track was easy to follow and even during the darkest part of the night there was enough light to observe dips and hollows in the ground into which I might have fallen. Of the 'bad mans' against whom I had been warned there was no sign whatever; probably they were very sensibly asleep in their beds at home. Be that as it may, for eight hours I marched through a dark and silent land with only my thoughts for company.

In the early morning I reached the shores of a lake, a wide, oval-shaped sheet of water whose still depths reflected the truncated cone of a high mountain rising on the farther side. By the shore somebody had fashioned a concrete basin to catch the rushing waters of a spring, and planted a few trees around it for shade. The place positively called out to you to stop and light a fire and cook a meal. While eating I noticed what appeared to be a deserted house a little distance away, so when the meal was over I walked across to examine it.

The house was in a very delapidated condition, with the walls crumbling and the door hanging awry, but as a storm was threatening I decided to camp inside the building and sleep there during the day. With an improvised broom I swept the concrete floor clear, made a mattress of straw and dried grass, laid in a stock of firewood and water, and then got into my sleeping-bag and was soon asleep.

I do not know how long I slept, but hours later I was awakened by something striking me on the chest—it was a tile off the roof. I sat up, startled, and heard the sullen rumble of thunder outside. The house shuddered and shivered and a long crack appeared suddenly down one wall. I realized that the building was about to fall apart at any moment, and all desire for sleep left me. Wriggling out of my sleeping-bag, I thrust my improvised bed and rucksack outside, and then scrambled after them.

It was raining heavily and nearly dark. Sheltering under some trees I packed my rucksack as best I could, and looked about me for a better place to shelter. I was just turning to take another look at the house when the roof sagged and collapsed with a crash. A flash of lightning lit up the scene for a moment, and then everything was dark again. I made some rude remarks, shouldered my pack, and started out along the track, bound for I did not know where.

The storm was getting worse, and it was evidently going to be a bad night to sleep out, even if I could have found somewhere to shelter. After trudging through the forest until it was almost too dark to see, I spied the outlines of some buildings ahead of me. A signpost informed me that it was a forestry *poste* so I lost no time in knocking at the door and asking the Frenchman in charge if I could have shelter for the night. He scratched his head at my sudden appearance, invited me inside, and then departed on some mysterious mission.

Later he returned, and explained matters. It seemed that my request had put the worthy man in a dilemma, for the *poste* boasted two types of accommodation for travellers—comfortable

rooms for official visitors, and primitive huts for passing Arab labourers. Not knowing in which category to place me he had telephoned to headquarters for instructions as to what should be done with a 'foreign writer'. Back came the reply of authority: "A foreign writer is as good as an Arab labourer any day. Put him with them!" So he did!

The hut in which I passed the night was quite clean and the hard floor not too uncomfortable, and as I was glad to have any sort of a roof over my head on such a wild night, I bore the ranger no ill will but contentedly completed the slumber which had been so rudely interrupted at the deserted house. In the morning an Arab servant brought me breakfast, a bowl of coffee and some bread and cheese, and when the time came to depart the forest ranger was waiting to walk with me part of the way and put me on the right track.

All that day I marched through forest, thick woodlands of pines and evergreen oaks, with an occasional cedar. It was magnificent walking country, with the air not too hot, for the altitude was nearly a mile. How different was this forest country from the bare, treeless plains which I had traversed on the way to Fez; it was a new Africa, almost a different country. Although there are other forests in Morocco there are none to compare with the dense woodlands of the Middle Atlas Mountains, the largest in North Africa.

At midday I reached a shallow valley walled in by crumbling, low cliffs, and here I camped for a few hours. I constructed a little stone fireplace, complete with oven, boiled some potatoes, fried eggs and tomatoes, cooked some pancakes, having thoughtfully remembered to bring a lemon with which to flavour them. After I had cooked the meal and was sitting down to enjoy it leisurely I became aware that something was amiss. The valley was ominously quiet, the sky had gone black, the birds had stopped singing.

Then down came the rain, and instantly my camp was engulfed. *Psssh*, went my fire, and died out. I crammed a pancake into my mouth (and paid for it later with indigestion), thrust everything into my rucksack. It was but the work of a few seconds to wrap my cape round me, yet in those few seconds I was drenched. Meanwhile peal after peal of thunder was rolling down the valley while the lightning played xylophone exercises from rock to rock. I was scared, for I had read of these sudden African storms and did not fancy being out in one.

My one desire was to get away from those trees and rocks, but that was what I could not do, for there were trees and rocks

everywhere. As I hurried along the track, my head bowed to the storm, I saw two Berbers sitting under a bush, and my panic left me, for I reasoned that if there was any danger they would not shelter there. So I crouched under the bush beside them, put up my umbrella, and there we sat watching the rain teem down. Then, rain or no rain, the bare hillsides suddenly swarmed with Berbers who came streaking toward us with their long night-shirt affairs streaming behind them, as though a bush in a thunderstorm was just the proper place for a meeting. Among the queer memories of my life, sitting under my umbrella with a lot of Berbers waiting for the storm to pass, was surely the oddest.

Then the rain began to lessen and all the Berbers dispersed back to the hills and I still do not know what it was all about. I went on along the track. But the lull in the storm had been only a trick to lure us out into the open again, for hardly ten minutes had passed when it started to hail, and in an instant the track was blotted out of sight by whirling pellets. They lashed my face and bare arms and legs, and went *pomp-pomp-pomp* against my hastily unfolded umbrella. The air turned very cold, the whole landscape was white with fallen hail, but suddenly the sun came out and for a few moments I walked through a scintillating world. Then it had all melted away leaving the track a quagmire.

On through the red mud I trudged, alternately scorched and frozen, till at last I came to a road construction camp, where I warmed myself by the blacksmith's fire, and the chief of construction revived my frozen limbs with a mug of hot coffee. Later, I walked on to Ifrane, a village which the French were developing as a summer resort for tourists. It was a sprawling, half-built place, with various modern buildings in course of construction. Just how modern the place was I discovered when I inquired the price of a room for the night. I hastily retreated, walked along an unfinished street and stopped a party of French workmen and asked them if they knew where I could find cheap lodgings.

One of them took me to a canteen patronized by lorry drivers and workmen, where a plump, motherly sort of woman promptly took charge of me and gave me a bowl of hot coffee. A wooden bunk formed my bed that night, and in the morning I started out for Azrou, passing a group of convicts repairing a road under the watchful eye of an armed guard. The road wound sinuously between bare hills devoid of shade, and it was so hot that I could not take my thoughts off the cooling drink I expected to obtain at the next place reached.

I grew so tired and thirsty that it was only by forcing myself to keep going that I continued to the next Berber settlement. The

inhabitants proved hostile, for when I asked to rest they indicated that I must go on through the heat, and when I asked for water they offered me a mug filled with a brown liquid obtained from a nearby ditch. There was nothing for it but to tramp on to Azrou, and a long, scorching tramp it was, with the burning sun sucking every particle of moisture out of me. I arrived there feeling dead-beat, in fact, it was not a man who arrived at Azrou, but a thirst on two legs, with a feeble voice which called out *wine, wine, wine*.

Azrou consists of two settlements, the one a Berber village of flat-roofed houses rising in tiers one above the other and dominated by a castle with four square towers; the other a European settlement consisting of a few hotels, houses and shops. Azrou was becoming known as a winter sports centre, for the snowfields of the Middle Atlas provided good slopes for ski-ing. At Azrou, perhaps more than at any other place I had visited, one was conscious of the clash of cultures, between the penetrating western civilization with its internal combustion engine, radio and emphasis on speed, and the age-old leisurely culture of the Berber mountaineers. Tribesmen in traditional costumes mingled but did not mix with smartly dressed Europeans travelling by fast car or motor-bus; one wondered what the outcome of it all would be.

I soon discovered that Azrou was a dear place for wanderers with little cash, but that forced march through the heat seemed to have upset my lame leg, so I decided to take it easy for a day before proceeding southward. Azrou was an interesting place in which to spend a day loafing about, for it is picturesquely situated among high mountains. Azrou is the Berber word for 'rock' and the place takes its name from a high rocky peak rising above the village. I passed a pleasant day watching the tribesmen of the Beni M'Gild go about their various errands, and in between whiles, popping into some shady place for a cooling drink.

CHAPTER XII

ALONG THE *ROUTE IMPERIALE*

IT was a few minutes past six when I left Azrou and started south again, along the road known as the *Route Imperiale*. It is a truly wonderful highway, taking the Middle and High Atlas Ranges in its stride, and sweeping thence over the desert to the great Saharan Oasis of Tafilet. Up, up, up climbed the road in a series of staggering curves, and the first five kilometres threatened to break my heart, so slowly I progressed. At six thousand feet the road levelled out and the going became easier. Now I began to enjoy the tramp, and the next fifteen kilometres passed happily.

The chief delight of the journey was the forest, as for several miles the road led through thick woodlands with giant trees towering above me on either side. First came a forest of tall evergreen oaks, some of them ninety or a hundred feet high. Farther on the cedar was king, with huge trunks six feet thick and a hundred to a hundred and thirty feet in height. They towered skyward like the columns of some gigantic temple. These cedars resemble those of Lebanon, and are only met with at altitudes of six thousand feet and over.

These are the cedar forests which the Romans heard about but never reached, though logs of wood bought from native lumbermen were used in their houses and public buildings. Today the scented oil from the cedars is used in making perfumes; the wood has a sweet, pungent smell about it. I could well imagine the delight and astonishment of the first French soldiers who penetrated into this region after the First World War, for here was a new Africa differing greatly from the usual conception of that continent. No French or English forests, I was told, could compare with these great forests of oak and cedar.

Though I did not know it at the time wild animals still roamed the cedar forests. Panthers make their home there, coming out to prey upon the flocks and herds grazing on pastures lower down. Two were killed in 1937 and that same year a wild boar charged the car in which the Marquis de Ballincourt was travelling. The sudden onslaught nearly caused the car to turn over, and damaged one of the wheels; the boar stalked off, uninjured. Deer are also to be found in the forests.

Some people may wonder why I did not carry a gun with me

on my travels, but it is something I never thought of taking. My rucksack was burden enough, without the additional weight of a rifle or pistol. Besides, if you carry a gun it means you are prepared to shoot, and the other fellow may be a trifle quicker at the trigger than you. When travelling among wild tribesmen the possession of a gun makes you a quarry worth robbing; if they think you are not carrying much of value they will leave you alone, but a rifle is so valuable it is worth slitting your throat for.

But the most important point is that if you go as though prepared to fight your way across a country you will not get very far without trouble, and you will certainly not encounter those friendly contacts upon which the success of a tramping trip so often depends. You are a wanderer, remember, a friend of the world, not a soldier on campaign.

The forests fell behind me, and I entered a region of bare hills, devoid of trees, grassy plains which served as the pasture lands of the Beni M'Gild. I came to a couple of tents pitched by the roadside, where a black-haired cheery-faced European-looking Arab (he proved to be an Algerian) dressed in blue shirt and trousers, greeted me with the words: "Hot, eh? I'll get you a drink," and handed me a mug of cold water. His companion, a man in the traditional Arab dress, was baking small loaves of bread in a primitive oven of earth. He slashed one in half with his knife, thrust a lump of butter inside, and handed it to me.

The two were engaged in carrying cans of water to a road gang working a few miles away, so the Algerian lashed my rucksack on to the back of a mule, motioned to me to mount another, and for several hours we travelled together across a hot, arid wilderness. We found the road gang sheltering under an improvised tent by the roadside, and here we dined on hot corn-bread, dates, and mint tea. Afterwards a pipe with a long stem and a tiny bowl was passed solemnly from man to man. The pipe contained *kif* (a form of hashish), for there are many *kif*-smokers in Morocco. The use of this narcotic is strictly prohibited and it means a month's imprisonment, if one is caught. I tried a pipe myself, but beyond making me feel sleepy, it appeared to have no effect.

After sleeping in a ditch for a few hours I tramped on to Timhadit, a settlement which consisted of a single building which served as a canteen-cum-rest-house for the convenience of lorry drivers, soldiers and other travellers passing along the road. It was cool and shady in there and I was glad to sling my pack on to the floor and call for a drink. I had walked nearly twenty miles,

climbed to over six thousand feet, the hardest day's tramp yet accomplished.

Timhadit is remembered principally for two good-looking girls—Harriette and Henriette—whose acquaintance I made there. They were a laughing, jolly pair, and although their English was about as good as my French this did not prevent us getting on well together. A young man walking unconcernedly along this road, bound from—goodness know where!—and bound for—the Sahara, of all places!—such a thing had never been heard of before in their young lives. But then, you know what the English are!

And yet Timhadit is an interesting, even exciting place, for it is perched beneath the rim of an extinct volcano and below it the Guigo River plunges seaward through a gorge walled in by cliffs of lava and black basalt. Crowning the crater's rim is a French military outpost, guarding the road below, an outpost often isolated by snow in the winter months when it can only be reached on skis.

A few miles farther along the track, perched atop a nine-thousand-foot mountain peak, is the isolated fort of Bekrit, whose history is one of the stormiest and bloodiest in Morocco; several times it has been besieged, and relieving columns have had to fight their way through to rescue the garrison.

The extinct crater of Timhadit marks the beginning of a weird and fascinating scenic area which has been described by some French writers as 'the landscape of the moon'. And Mountains of the Moon is certainly an apt description, for the similarity to photographs of lunar landscapes strikes one immediately, a landscape dominated by dead volcanoes and seamed with ancient lava flows. There is a peculiar atmosphere about this region which impressed itself upon me while tramping southward the following morning, an atmosphere of utter lifelessness, as though man had no place in this bleak volcanic country, an atmosphere of complete timelessness, so that it might have been but the day before yesterday when the red lava broke through the earth's crust and flowed in turgid streams over the land.

Hour after hour I tramped steadily southward, resting five minutes in every hour, glad to squat beneath my umbrella in the scanty shade of ditches and rocks. Though I did not know it till later, this sun-scorched pass over seven thousand feet high was the Col du Zad, and from thence onward there was a steady descent to the Moulouya Valley; my ambition of tramping over the Middle Atlas Mountains was achieved. But at the moment all I was conscious of was heat and thirst, and my main concern

was whether there was a canteen between the pass and the settlement of Midelt, fifty-five miles away.

For miles the road was under construction, and I passed innumerable road gangs and their improvised tents. It was a hot, parched land, without shade or habitation, and I did not envy the labourers their lot, scorched by day and half frozen by night, the only means of quenching their thirst being water brought in petrol tins from streams some miles away. The hardships of their existence did not affect the workmen's good nature, however, for they never failed to invite me to stop for a drink, or to wish me "*Bon voyage*" when I tramped on. On this journey, as on other journeys, I realized that a man tramping with a pack on his back draws out the sympathetic side of people's natures, and that from their hidden reserves of goodwill they will proffer some kindness to help him on his way.

I came to the fortified post of a Berber road guard, a square tower and courtyard on a hillock some distance away from the road. The guard and his kinsmen invited me for a rest, and offered me tea and warm maize bread. They were strict Moslems apparently, for they refused cigarettes, but the guard accepted some olive oil to rub on his small son's sunburnt legs. While I was rubbing oil on my own scorched legs I heard chuckles of laughter behind me and turning my head, discovered a dog licking the oil off as fast as I put it on. And yet I had heard it stated that Berbers had no sense of humour.

Toward sundown I reached a canteen, a wooden building by the roadside, and there spent the night. A French family named Strauss kept the place and they were all seated at a big table in the centre of the main room when I arrived, a table that fairly groaned beneath a load of good things to eat. No; do not ask me what there was, for I cannot tell you, but I do know that within a very few minutes I also was seated at that table eating an enormous meal. I just had enough energy left to stagger to my bed, fling myself upon it, and almost immediately fall asleep.

In the midst of this bleak, volcanic country is a scene of beauty where the Lake of Sidi Ali lies blue and tranquil within its encircling mountain walls. I had heard of this big crater lake, occupying the interior of a six-thousand-foot volcanic cone, so the following morning found me tramping over the reddish, lava-scarred countryside to its shores. A little lakeside resort was coming into being, for a few tents were pitched on a grassy bank above the water, and a canteen was being constructed near by. Several motor-cars were parked somewhat incongruously beside half a dozen supercilious-looking camels.

A blue-cloaked *Mokhazni*, or native policeman, carrying a rifle tucked under his arm, came up for a chat, and under his watchful eye I undressed and had a bathe. The water was cold, so I did not stay in long; the lake is said to be several hundred feet deep. Some men were fishing from boats farther out in the lake, for the place was the resort of French officers with a penchant for angling.

Another day of tramping across desolate lava-strewn country followed. Every so often forts could be seen crowning the hill tops, and men seemed to carry rifles as a matter of course. As the road descended to the six-thousand-foot level it passed through a belt of cedar forest corresponding to that on the northern side of the range. Once again it was a joy to see these big trees towering up into the sky; a forest of such trees is, I think, more impressive than anything made by man.

For miles the road followed a tortuous course through rocky gorges, which were, in places, thickly wooded. It was a grand walk. In the afternoon I came to a partly built canteen, where a girl showed me two freshly caught trout. She grilled these, and, washed down with red wine, they made an excellent meal. It was baking hot under the corrugated iron roof of that wooden hut so, seeking a place to rest, I walked as far as a shady tree. Stretching myself out on my cape I went to sleep, with rucksack for pillow, and the next thing of which I was aware was of finding myself suddenly awake with a smart-looking young French officer speaking to me.

"I am Lieutenant Louis, of Itzer *poste*," he was saying. "Who are you, please, and what are you doing here?"

When I proceeded to explain, Lieutenant Louis, who spoke excellent English, informed me that the official in Fez who had granted me permission to enter the 'Zone of Insecurity' had acted without the necessary authority; it was impossible to allow me to travel any farther on foot. The lieutenant explained that he would take me with him to Itzer *poste*, and that in a day or two's time I should be able to continue my journey to Midelt—by bus! So my tramping trip ended abruptly; since leaving Fez I had been fifteen days on the road.

It appeared that Lieutenant Louis was there to deal with a dispute which had arisen between the local *Kaid*, or lord, and some of his subordinates. The *Kaid* had started out to teach his erring tribesmen the folly of their ways, but had been intercepted by the lieutenant and his blue-clad cavalrymen. Having settled my affairs, the young officer then proceeded to interview the *Kaid*. I do not know if it was due to his eloquence or the sight of the

carbines which the *Mokhaznis*, or native police, carried, but the chieftain decided to arrange the dispute amicably.

When the matter had been adjusted to everybody's satisfaction the lieutenant told me to get into his car, the *Kaid* in his voluminous robes was bundled in beside me, and we whirled away at breathless speed until, out of the desert-like countryside, there appeared the walls and towers of the *Kaid's* private fortress. Inside the *ksar*, in a room whose only furnishings were a few mats and cushions, we were served with mint tea and almond-and-honey cakes, by fierce-looking Berber tribesmen, who, if given the chance, would probably have cut our throats with the utmost joy.

The meal over and salutations exchanged, Lieutenant Louis led the way through the crowd of black-visaged Berbers back to the car waiting outside the gate; the cavalry escort formed about us and off we went again. As he drove, the lieutenant asked why I had chosen to walk across such an inhospitable and little-known countryside as the Middle Atlas Range, so I told him of my ambitions to be an author, explorer and archaeologist, and of my mad ambition to walk to Tafilet Oasis and the 'Land of Mud Castles'. He listened, nodding his head, or asking a question now and again.

"You can stay with us a day or two if you like," he suggested, and laughed away my thanks at this open-handed hospitality.

Ahead of us walls and towers began to take shape in the sunlight, the fort of Itzer, or, to give it its official designation, the *Bureau des Indigènes de Itzer*. The lieutenant explained that it was one of three *postes*, or forts, controlling this section of the Middle Atlas. All three *postes* were under the command of a French major, and were garrisoned by *Mokhazni* cavalrymen, recruited from local tribes. These *Mokhaznis* combined the duties of soldier and policeman, and in their flowing blue cloaks they are a familiar sight in the newly pacified districts of Morocco. They patrol the roads, maintain order in the market-places, quell intertribal fights, and in the same way as this recently conquered zone of Morocco corresponds to the North-West Frontier of India, so does a *poste* of the *Affaires Indigènes* correspond very much to an Indian police post.

We drove past the riflemen on guard at the gate and entered the wide courtyard inside the fort, which was surrounded by various buildings; the administrative block on one side, and grouped about it barracks, storehouses and stables. The car stopped outside a building which the lieutenant explained was his own quarters. I followed him into the cool, dark interior, was

shown into the room where I was to sleep, and was told that there was time for a wash before the evening meal. Afterwards I walked into the living-room—decorated with curious carvings in wood, the work of a local Berber artist—and was introduced to the lieutenant's wife, who greeted me with the remark that I would probably be ready for something to eat.

The presence of a white woman at this outpost was an example of the wide divergence between French and British modes of thought; for I was told that in India officers' wives were not permitted to stay with their husbands at isolated forts, but that in French possessions the opposite was the case, women being encouraged to join their husbands. French officers serving in such countries as Morocco thus did not suffer from lack of feminine companionship, as did their British counterparts in India or Africa.

The colour bar was another example of the difference between the way the French and British looked at things, remarked the lieutenant, for in Morocco, even in the military zone, Berbers and Arabs could mix freely and on equal terms with the whites. A native could enter any hotel or bar for a meal or a drink, and, provided he had the money to pay for it, received the same treatment as a white man. This fact probably explained why I had been greeted in such a friendly and hospitable fashion by the various road gangs and native workmen I encountered, for they saw no reason to regard me as different from themselves.

Itzer *poste*, where I spent the following two days, boasted a number of modern amenities—a landing field for aircraft, electric light, radios, a tennis-court and a swimming pool. Shades of that celebrated novel *Beau Geste*! And yet the most interesting aspect of my stay there was the opportunity it afforded of learning something of the sort of life led by the French officers of the institution known as the *Bureau des Affaires Indigènes*. I have read that there is no exact equivalent in other colonial possessions of the *Bureau des Affaires Indigènes*, which, although a military administration, is concerned with all the local problems affecting the native tribes in its territory; agriculture, tribal organization and justice, health and welfare, the maintenance of law and order, are all the concern of the *Bureau*, so it will be readily seen that its officers lead strenuous and often exciting lives.

Officers of the *Affaires Indigènes* start work early, and it must have been about seven o'clock the following morning when Lieutenant Louis told me to get into the car beside him, if I wished to go with him on a tour of inspection round the district. His first task, I learned, was to inspect some of the irrigation

canals several miles away. Elsewhere I have explained that a familiar sight in the Atlas Mountains are the numerous canals which wind their sinuous ways around the mountain sides, the natural streams having been diverted so that their waters flow along artificial channels to the places where they are most needed. Villages on the lower slopes of the mountains are often at the mercy of villages at higher altitudes, whose inhabitants can cut off the water supply and leave the people of the lower settlement to go thirsty.

Interference with water supplies was one of the commonest forms of intertribal warfare, and one of the duties of the men of *Affaires Indigènes* was to see that no canals were diverted, as otherwise bloodshed might ensue. When the car stopped, some time later, and the lieutenant got out to discuss the question of water rights with a group of Berbers who were waiting to meet him, I climbed up a rocky bank for the sake of the view beyond. And what a view it was!

For miles in front of me the ground dropped away steadily to the south, so that one looked across an immense expanse of countryside. The impression I received was of a vast, dusty, tawny-coloured desert, hot and devoid of shade, stretching far away.

But it was the view beyond the desert which caught and held one's gaze, for there, stretching for miles in every direction and towering up like a wall to over twelve thousand feet, were the serrated peaks of the High Atlas Mountains. As far as the eye could see stretched this line of glittering peaks, their upper slopes still white with the snows of the previous winter; it was one of the grandest views imaginable. In wave upon wave, peak beyond peak, they stretched away to the far horizon.

The sky was clear and blue, so that there was a fine view of the giant Djebel Ayachi, which was long reckoned to be the highest mountain in North Africa. 'The Mother of Waters', as the Berbers term the mountain, towers up to about fourteen thousand feet, and was first climbed in 1900 by the Marquis de Segonzac, who found snow on the summit in July. Later exploration has revealed that Ayachi is exceeded in height by Mounts Toukbal and Likoumount, south of Marrakech.

I heard Lieutenant Louis calling me, so hurried back to the car, and we drove on across the tawny countryside. Geologically this region was quite different from that on the northern side of the range. This was a desiccated, waterless land, the *garas* region as it is known, a curious area with weird-looking isolated hills rising like immense tables or pyramids above purple canyons and

gorges, appearing like the countryside which features in so many Wild West films, except that here there were no cowboys in their picturesque regalia. And instead of cattle ranches, there were only blank-walled Berber villages clinging to the flanks of the hills.

For the rest of the day, as we travelled about the countryside, I observed various aspects of the work of an officer of the *Affaires Indigènes*. We visited a *souk*, or native market, a bustling place filled with men and beasts, where the lieutenant stopped to talk to various local worthies: we stopped to chat with the members of a road-construction gang who were levelling out the course of the road: and in a number of other places we stopped to listen to the gossip, complaints and woes of sundry Berber tribesmen. Lieutenant Louis would squat down wherever we happened to be and listen patiently to all that was said, occasionally indulging in a few pithy remarks in the Berber language, which he, in common with all his fellow-officers, spoke and understood fluently.

Watching these various scenes that day I gradually came to realize that the tasks and powers of these French officers were all-embracing, for not only did they act in the capacity of father and friend, counsellor and judge, guide and confidant to the local people, but they must always be prepared at any moment to stop whatever they are doing to settle some problem which concerned their flock. And all the time, quietly and unobtrusively, they must spread the gospel that for the Berbers, life under French rule is infinitely better than the bad old days of the native rulers.

These tasks call for the highest qualities in these officers, for it is a man's personal character which most impresses the Berbers, and the wrong type of man might easily undo the patient work of years; therefore the officers of the *Affaires Indigènes* are all carefully selected for these positions of responsibility, and I was able to observe for myself, at the various *postes* which it was my good fortune to visit, what a fine type of man was chosen.

So successful was this policy of indirect propaganda in support of French policy that when a revolt broke out in Fez in the autumn of 1937, and the revolutionary leaders called upon the Berber tribesmen to join them and help drive out the French, instead, the Berbers remained loyal to their new masters and promptly volunteered to help the French crush the revolt.

"The Berber makes a first-class soldier," explained the lieutenant. "Fighting is meat and drink to him. When the Spanish Civil War broke out last year I had great difficulty in preventing some of the local tribesmen from departing *en masse*. They did not care which side they joined provided there was somebody to fight."

There were considerable differences between the Arab tribes and the Berber tribes, he went on. The Arabs, descendants of the nomads who reached Morocco from Arabia nearly a thousand years previously, preferred to live in tents or thatched huts; the Berbers, the aboriginals of Morocco, lived in buildings made of *tabia*, or native concrete. The Arabs sported flowing beards and moustaches; the Berbers shaved the face, leaving only a short, pointed beard, and also shaved their heads. The Arabs wore the *jellaba*, or hooded cloak closed down the front, resembling a South American *poncho*; Berbers wore the *chamire*, a shirt-like garment reaching from neck to knee. The Berbers wore white turbans on their shaven heads. Arabs liked wearing belts and sashes; Berbers liked their limbs free and unencumbered.

Although most of the tribes among whom I would be travelling were Berber, he went on, farther south, in the Sahara, I would encounter such Arab tribes as the Ouled Yahia, Ait Atta, Shorfas and Maakil, who lived much as their ancestors had done for generations before them.

I asked him if it was true that one of the tasks of the *Affaires Indigènes* was to keep a check on foreigners travelling about the country, in order that they might not disseminate undesirable political propaganda among the Berbers, and he replied that this was true, and he would send a message on ahead of me so that officers at other *postes* would know who I was and my reason for being there; I thanked him for his kindness, for this would make my journey much easier.

A day or so later I stood by the roadside waiting for the arrival of the bus which was to take me to Midelt. It came into view, paused for a couple of minutes to pick me up, and then went roaring on again. Itzer quickly vanished from sight as the road dropped swiftly toward the Moulouya Valley, which separates the Middle and High Atlas Ranges.

Midelt itself proved to be an uninspiring place, just some scattered buildings set down in the midst of a hot, dry, dusty plain, with a native fort surmounted by four high towers a short distance away. As soon as I arrived there I set to work to discover how soon I could leave the place. A man at a garage told me that he would be leaving with a *camion* or heavy lorry early the following morning, for the journey over the High Atlas to the town of Ksar es Souk, and agreed to take me with him. He informed me where I could secure a bed for the night, and by the time this transaction was completed night had fallen, and a silence as of the grave settled over the dingy settlement of Midelt. So lifeless did the place appear that there was nothing to do except go to bed.

CHAPTER XIII

I REACH THE SAHARA

ALTHOUGH I presented myself at the garage early the following morning the driver said he was not ready to leave, so after waiting for some time without any signs of a start being made I became impatient and told him I would start out on foot and he could pick me up when he overtook me. Midelt was such a dusty, depressing place that I was anxious to be away from it, and making my way toward the High Atlas whose towering peaks stretched across the horizon to the southward. Those gleaming mountains, and the thought of the colourful desert lands which lay beyond them, drew me on as a magnet draws iron.

The road I was travelling was a memorable one, for it had been known for centuries as 'The Imperial Road'. Along it, from times immemorial, caravans had journeyed from the Niger to Tangier. Along this road the French colonial army had fought its way over the Atlas Mountains to the great Saharan Oasis of Tafilet. From the royal city of Meknes the road ran southward for over three hundred miles to the last desert outposts. Until 1934 caravans had only been able to pass along it once every ten days, and then only if protected by armoured cars and patrols of native cavalry.

Morocco, it should be remembered, is really two countries. Northern Morocco, across which I had tramped from Salé to Fez, was first occupied in 1912, and has all the amenities of modern civilization; fine roads, hotels, schools and spacious towns. Southern Morocco, only completely conquered by 1934, was still controlled by the military authorities and classed as a 'Zone of Insecurity'. Few foreigners had been allowed to enter it. Travelling southward one experienced the sensation of journeying into a land which belonged to the tenth century, rather than the twentieth, into the world of a thousand years ago with all its colour and barbarity.

The dusty plain about me was chequered with the black-purplish tents of the Zaaïn tribesmen, who had fought against the French for years. As the sun rose higher in the sky the air in that deep mountain-walled valley became even more parched and stifling, so that I almost regretted not having waited for the lorry to start. I squatted down by the roadside under the shelter of my

umbrella for a short time, but this brought me little relief, so presently I plodded on again. Only the sight of the mountains ahead of me kept me moving.

After what appeared an age I heard the welcome sound of an approaching vehicle behind me, and turning my head, saw the lorry whose arrival I had been expecting. The driver grinned as he slowed to a halt beside me, then I was seated in the cab beside him and we were moving on again. Convoys of these lorries are now replacing the old-time camel and donkey caravans.

The driver of the lorry was a French ex-Service man, and he enlivened the journey with accounts of various persons who had been killed while travelling along this road. This *Route Imperiale* has truly been termed a road of blood and bullets, for backwards and forwards along it as the tide of war ebbed and flowed moved the men and machines and munitions without which the conquest of the Moroccan Sahara would have been impossible. For a period of nearly twenty years the road was the lifeline by means of which the French Army maintained a precarious hold on their desert outposts.

"There was a friend of mine, you understand," remarked the lorry driver, "who was instructed to convey a colonel along the road in his *camion*. My friend was driving fast for he was not anxious to linger in the defiles of the mountains. It was near a village called Foum Kheneg that he felt the colonel's head resting on his shoulder, as though asleep. But when he looked he perceived a bullet hole in the back of the colonel's head. Ah, yes, he was dead—the Berbers are good shots."

As he talked the road had been mounting steadily upward, climbing higher and higher in gigantic curves. About us curved the grey, shaly walls of a deep gorge, twisting and turning through the mountains. We could no longer see the towering peaks above us now, though I knew we were crawling like some insignificant beetle along the eastern flank of Mount Ayachi. At one point the road doubled sharply back upon itself so that by craning my neck I could look straight upward toward the Telrhemt Pass, over seven thousand feet high, one of the oldest trade routes in Africa. The glimpse of that great mountain defile was an exciting and an alluring one, for only a person with very little imagination could fail to be thrilled at the thought of the scenes which had taken place along it.

Along it, in days gone by, had come the great caravans from Timbuctoo, thousands of camels laden with gold, slaves, ostrich feathers and ivory, guarded by companies of archers, spearmen and swordsmen, ever watchful for attacks by the veiled fighting

men of the central deserts. Along it, from out of the southern deserts, had come great armies of fanatical men, filled with the lust to convert the world to the Moslem faith, their leaders bent on conquering Morocco and making themselves rulers of the Faithful (and sultans of Morocco, in due course, many of them became). Along this road marched the French Army to complete the conquest of Morocco, and bestow the benefits of civilization upon the peoples of the Sahara—whether they wanted them or not. Along this road they had all passed; men of the French Foreign Legion striving to bring civilization and men of the desert tribes who strove with equal energy prevent its coming, white explorers such as Harris and Caille, travelling in disguise and often in danger of their lives, sultans and would-be sultans, great lords and desert sheiks, traders, priests, bandits and beggars.

Years after one has travelled and visited many strange countries a few vivid impressions still remain etched in one's memory, and of all the places I have visited the one which I remember most vividly was that crossing of the High Atlas Mountains. Even yet I retain my first recollections of the breath-taking cliffs and canyons which overshadow that amazing road. Recollections of the lorry breaking down in the bottom of a titanic gorge, of fantastic towers crowning mighty cliffs, of the famous 'Tunnel of the Legion' where the road suddenly disappears into a mountain, and over the entrance are carved the proud words: "The mountain barred the way: the order was given to pass: the Legion carried it out."

Beyond the pass lay the valley of the Ziz, that strange African river which, rising amid the snows of the High Atlas, is fated to perish amid the thirsty sands of the Sahara and never reach the sea. French outposts appeared at long intervals, rectangular blocks of red *tabia* buildings, surrounded by battlemented walls and barricades of barbed wire. At one of these, where we stopped for a drink and to stretch our legs, we were joined by several other lorries, so that we were travelling in convoy when we started to traverse the Ziz Gorge.

This gorge is Morocco's Khyber Pass, as hostile riflemen hidden among the rocks could render the road impassable to traffic, which was why, until a year or two previously, caravans had only been allowed to travel along the river accompanied by patrols of cavalry and armoured cars. Through a series of spectacular canyons, walled in by high cliffs and defended by block-houses and barbed wire, the Imperial Road winds its way through the wine-red hills. For twenty miles a continuous line of forts and watch-towers guarded the way to the desert, whose hot breath one could already feel.

When this country is opened up to the world so that tourists may visit it, the Ziz Gorge will be one of the most spectacular sights of the tour. The scene is one of fantastic beauty and grandeur, with the blue river, fringed with waving palm trees, flowing between red walls of rock towering skyward for hundreds of feet. The colour of the cliffs ranges from blood red to purple, mauve, yellow and grey, and the rocks themselves are worn into fantastic shapes. Rising sharp and jagged in miniature mountain peaks, carved by the desert winds into shapes resembling the towers, walls and bastions of some immense castle, the great cliffs of the Ziz attract and hold you spellbound.

As well as the river and rocks, the battlemented towers crowning the summits of the cliffs also attract one's gaze, for these are the first of strongholds in the 'Land of Mud Castles' which we have come so far to see. Looking across airy gulfs as the road twists and turns, the native *ksars* or strongholds can be seen perched on the summits of the crags, remote and seemingly inaccessible. Their towers and battlements stand clear-cut in the sunlight, the masonry seemingly built into the very cliffs upon which they stand. You look at them, speculating upon the secret life lived by the inhabitants within their walls, much as you would look at the homes of dwellers upon another planet, with whom it is impossible to establish any form of contact.

This was historic country which we were traversing. The French troops had first advanced down the Ziz in 1917 and built the new settlement of Ksar Es Souk. They reached Tafilet Oasis and built a fort at Tighmart, though not without having to fight a series of battles with the tribe of the Ait Atta, who occupied the Ziz Valley. A holy war against the French was then launched, Tighmart was destroyed by the tribesmen, who swept victoriously along the Ziz Valley, destroying every settlement as they passed. The French, needing every man they had for the greater war raging in Europe, were compelled to retreat over the mountains to Midelt. The Ait Atta and other fighting tribes were able to lord it for a year or so over the smoking ruins of the French settlements.

Not for long, however, for in 1918 French troops again advanced over the High Atlas, fought their way down the Ziz Valley, and built a new settlement at Erfoud, twenty kilometres north of Tafilet Oasis. Tafilet itself, and other areas of the southern desert remained unconquered, with the Berber chieftain Belgacem N'Gadi bidding defiance at the French from within the battlemented walls of his great castle in the oasis.

So matters remained for over a dozen years, with the French

in their fortress at Erfoud confronting the Berber chief in his fortress at Rissani. Scarcely fifteen miles of desert separated them, but they were blood-stained, unconquered miles, and each one of them had cost the lives of many brave men on either side. Then, in 1931, after waiting thirteen years, the French began their final campaign for the conquest of Morocco. One by one the inhabitants of the oases south of the High Atlas were compelled to make their submission, and in January of the following year motorized columns and squadrons of aircraft attacked Belgacem N'Gadi's fortress.

In spite of breaches made in the walls, the defenders of the Berber stronghold fought valiantly, but were finally overwhelmed and compelled to surrender. Belgacem N'Gadi himself escaped capture and managed to flee through the French lines and take refuge in the Anti-Atlas (or Little Atlas) Mountains. It was in this area that the Berber tribesmen made their last stand, until the final battles, fought in February 1934, caused their utter defeat and brought the fighting to an end. The conquest of southern Morocco, from beginning to end, had lasted eighteen years.

For eighteen years this countryside had known little peace. Raids and forays, sieges and counter-sieges, wars and rumours of wars, being the order of the day. Even after the bulk of the population had submitted and settled down to a peaceful existence under French rule, a few diehards remained who refused to acknowledge their new masters and continued to fight on. And even when they had been compelled to yield or die, and their castles had been reduced to crumbling ruins, even then there remained a few solitary figures who continued to wage one-man wars against the French, preferring existence as a *Djech*, or raider, to the duller and more peaceful life of a shepherd or farmer.

The great defile of the Ziz Gorge ended at last, the mountains were left behind, and there before us stretched the Sahara. In an exultant mood I looked out across the desert, not a desert of sand dunes such as I had expected, but a stony desert surfaced with boulders and gravel, which looked considerably less romantic. Still, it was the Sahara.

The lorry deposited me at Ksar es Souk, a new French settlement not yet twenty years old. Ksar es Souk was a depressing place, for it consisted only of a number of wide, dusty streets set at right angles, enclosing rectangular blocks of red-walled buildings made of native concrete. The African sun beat down upon it making the place fiercely hot, there was not a scrap of shade anywhere, and a species of sandstorm seemed to be perpetually

whirling along the streets. There was hardly a sign of life anywhere, for most of the population stayed indoors during the heat of the day.

This, the first Saharan town I had reached, proved a baffling and perplexing place. Wearily I trudged up one sand-filled street and down another, trying, first, to find a bus or lorry which would convey me to Erfoud, about sixty miles farther south; but I failed to locate a garage or a vehicle or anyone who could provide me with any information, so in desperation I started trying to secure a bed for the night and something to eat. Even this proved difficult, for the few persons I encountered appeared to have succumbed to a dreadful languidness, which made it difficult for them to take any interest in anything.

By the time I had found a place which would provide me with something to eat and a room in which to sleep, I felt so weary and languid also that I flung myself down on the bed and slept for hours. My room was a square apartment in one of the rectangular blocks of buildings; the door opened straight on to the street, there was no window, only a small grating which let in a little hot air and no light. One had to grope about in the darkness inside with the aid of a bit of candle. I was to discover later that many Saharan rooms are constructed without windows, to render them cooler.

At Ksar es Souk I first encountered that greatest curse of the Sahara—flies! They were everywhere, in their millions, they swarmed round you in great clouds as you moved, crawled over any expanse of your bare skin which happened to be exposed, settled on your lips and in your eyes, so that you had to be continually brushing them away. If you sat down for a meal or to have a drink, dozens of flies immediately gathered about you, crawling over your food, and committing suicide by drowning in your glass or cup, so that you had to remove a layer of their dead bodies before you could have a drink. Mosquitoes in Lapland I had thought to be one of the greatest plagues on earth, but these hordes of flies were almost as bad; I had certainly never encountered anything so irritating before.

It is only in the darkened rooms, devoid of light, that there is any relief from the flies, but I was to discover that remaining alone in a dark room for hours on end can become wearying. You cannot move about, or read or write, or do anything; you can only lie there sweating and panting and utterly bored. Even such a short sojourn in the Sahara was teaching me some of the disadvantages of life there; heat, flies, dust and boredom.

It must have been about midnight when I awoke, and after

lying there in the dark for several hours became so bored, that I dressed, stowed my kit in the rucksack, and walked away from Ksar es Souk, determined never to go back if I could avoid it. Giving up any idea of getting a lift on some southward-bound vehicle I tramped out of the town along the road leading toward Erfoud.

Away from the river the road led across a yellow sandstone desert, an ochre-tinted plain stretching to the horizon. The air was cool, there was sufficient light to see, and after my enforced inactivity of the past day or two it was good to feel the road under my feet again. I kept putting one leg before the other to such good purpose that I had covered a dozen miles or more before the increasing heat of the sun warned me that soon it would be too hot to move.

Mokhaznis, those familiar native gendarmerie in their blue cloaks, patrolled these desert roads, so when the outlines of a village showed ahead of me, to avoid questioning I took refuge in a cave in the rocks. I ate a leisurely meal, and then rested in the shade of my umbrella, looking out at the high cliffs of the Ziz, which here drop a sheer four hundred feet to the river. The Ziz flows through a palm-filled gorge, and from a cavern in a cliff emerges a spring known from its delicate colouring as the 'Blue Pool'. The 'Blue Pool' was a place of some renown, for because of its life-giving water, thousands of tribesmen had once given battle to the French.

Tramping along the road once more I was overtaken by a lorry which travelled a few yards and then stopped, so that I could see the driver's head staring out of the cab at me, as though he could scarcely believe his eyes. In all the years he had traversed the road, he explained later, he had never before seen a European strolling casually across the desert, as though it was merely the Bois de Boulogne. In a rapid-fire chatter of mixed French and English he begged, nay, implored me to accept a lift in his *camion*, an invitation I was glad to accept.

With brakes screeching the lorry began a fearful descent down the cliffs to the river, providing us with some grand views over the palm trees to the towering rocks beyond. The driver was still enlarging upon the folly of walking when it was possible to travel on wheels, when we came in sight of Aufous, a native fortress crowning a cliff, with red-walled houses rising in tiers below. The multi-towered stronghold housed a garrison of *Mokhazni* cavalry, whose task it was to keep the peace between the various tribes living in the district.

A little while afterwards we entered a region of yellow sand

dunes, looking just like a typical desert scene one sees in films of the Sahara. The dunes stretched away in wave upon wave like a sea turned solid, and the road was protected by wooden barricades to prevent it being engulfed by the sand. Travelling across this country gave one the sensation of being far out at sea, with scattered clumps of greenery appearing like islands on the wave-swept surface. Among the dunes it felt even hotter than ever.

I experienced my first sandstorm here, for a wind suddenly came out of nowhere, and almost without warning the lorry was engulfed in a blinding, stinging, choking mass of whirling sand. It drove into the cab of the lorry, so that we could not escape it. The wind seemed to come like the blast from a furnace, and the sand like a solid wall. The driver revved up his engine, making for the shelter of a rocky outcrop, and there we halted and sat huddled in the cab, waiting for the storm to pass. Time passed, how long I do not know, though my companion remarked philosophically that such a storm could blow for forty-eight hours without a break, completely altering the appearance of the dunes.

The wind died as suddenly as it had arisen, and the dunes were quiet again. Presently we left the sand behind and entered what appeared to be a veritable forest of palm trees. Ahead of us, through the greenery, I saw the battlements of a city wall, and a few minutes later we were entering Erfoud. The lorry rumbled through a high gateway and along a street lined with trees and buildings, came to a halt in a sandy open space, and there I clambered stiffly down from the cab and walked off to explore the town.

A Negro boy with a cheerful face, who had seen me arrive, handed me a cup of cold water without being asked, and then brought me a drink of coffee. Fortified by his friendliness I asked the way to the *Bureau des Affaires Indigènes*, where all travellers had to report upon arrival. At the *Bureau* I told the officer in charge that I was walking to Tafilet Oasis, and though he looked at me as though he obviously thought I was weak in the head, he granted me permission to continue. This matter settled, the old question arose of finding a place to sleep.

The buildings of Erfoud were architecturally suggestive of the Sahara, very different from the Moorish style prevalent in northern Morocco. The *souk*, or market, was a colonnaded structure built in an African style more typical of the Sudan; carpets, pottery, rugs and leatherwork were displayed for sale. About it were grouped rectangular blocks of blank-walled, flat-roofed buildings, the whole lot enclosed by high walls pierced here and there by curving, turreted gates. Though farther south than Ksar

es Souk, the heat did not appear so stifling as at the latter town, for the tree-lined streets gave some semblance of shade and coolness.

Colonies of Jews are believed to have existed in some of the desert valleys for over a thousand years, having arrived there long before the Moslem conquest of Morocco; some are believed to have reached this country from Egypt in the days of Moses. Erfoud has quite a colony of them, and most of the trade of the place seems to be in their hands. In my search for a place to sleep I interviewed several of these Jews, and eventually a room for the night was found for me, at a price I could afford. The clothing worn by the Jewesses was really remarkable, for they wore dresses of brilliant scarlet decorated with white flowers, and peculiar head-dresses comprising a yellow and red veil falling to the shoulders, which gave them a curiously medieval appearance.

The last thing I did before going to bed was to walk to the bank of the Ziz—for Erfoud is built beside the river—and gaze at the track leading southward to Tafilet Oasis, along which I planned to tramp the following morning. Gazing across the blue and tranquil stream at the yellow banks lined with shadowy palm trees, and the silent, sandy track leading into grey, illimitable distances, it was hard to believe that for nearly twenty years this peaceful countryside had witnessed scenes of fighting and bloodshed, the comings and goings of armed men and all the tragedy and heroism of war.

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The desert stretched before me, flat, grey and featureless in the pale, shadowless light of the pre-dawn. I had risen at an early hour and dressed by guttering candlelight, and then with my pack on my back and a water-bottle dangling from my hip, I had stolen away from sleeping Erfoud. Behind me I heard a bugle ring out from the military post, then all was silent again, and as I passed through the South Gate the only sound to be heard was the harp-like music of the wind in the telegraph wires.

In front of me the road ran straight as an arrow across the desert, marked at intervals by pairs of white posts, for in places shifting sand dunes had invaded the track, so that it was not difficult to wander off your course into the limitless open spaces which stretched all round. A faint wind blew fitfully, lifting the tops off the dunes and driving the fine sand into my face. I passed barbed-wire entanglements, half buried in the sand, and an

emergency landing field for aircraft where a 'wind stocking' hung dejectedly. Beyond it the desert stretched smooth and flat as far as the eye could see.

The sun rose over the sandy waste, and long, yellow fingers of light crept slowly over the sand. Far behind me, stark against the grey sky, were silhouetted the dull red walls of Erfoud. A little while later they were gone, and the sand dunes were gone, and a vast expanse of bare, red earth baked hard as concrete stretched all about me, with little ridges of rocks and boulders breaking the smoothness here and there. One must not think of the Sahara as composed entirely of sand, for there are great areas of *hammada*, or stony desert and, indeed, this is just as typical of the Sahara as the more familiar sand dunes.

The sun swept up over the desert's rim and set the world afire. Almost immediately, it seemed, the air was hot, burning hot, but I experienced no sense of discomfort and continued to walk steadily southward, mile after mile, hour after hour. I have called the route I followed a road, but it was not a road as the term is understood in civilized countries, being merely a few markings made by wheels and hooves across the bare expanse; a 'road', in such primitive places, is merely the distance or way from one point to another, without any regard to the surface across which one has to travel.

Some hours later I saw a native house, with high, windowless walls and a loop-holed watch tower, rising above a red rock some distance to my right, and near here I overtook a man and a boy who were also travelling in the direction of Tafilet. The man was in the act of offering the boy a drink from an earthen water-pot, and as I watched I saw the boy take a mouthful, hold it for several seconds before swallowing, take a second mouthful and swallow, and a third, and then gravely hand the pot back to the man. By now it was very hot indeed.

Tiring a little I sat down by the roadside for a time and sheltered under my umbrella, but it gave little protection from the burning rays of the desert sun. I moistened my lips with water and tramped on. After walking for several hours a green line showed up ahead, the outer fringe of the palm forests. More sand appeared, where the road seemed to have disappeared completely, and for a time I floundered about a shallow depression which might once have been a river valley, before I found the right way again.

Ruins of buildings, half buried in the sand, appeared about me, crumbling walls and gateways, the remains of towers, now little more than shapeless masses of *tabia* or native concrete. My

archaeologist's instinct was aroused by the sight of the ruins, for they were all that remained of one of Africa's greatest cities, Sijjilmassa, capital of Tafilét for hundreds of years. The Romans are credited with the founding of Sijjilmassa, though this appears extremely doubtful, but certainly for over a thousand years it was a prosperous and flourishing city, until it was destroyed by the Arab tribe of the Ait Atta in 1818. Now, of the once-mighty Saharan capital nothing remains except acres of crumbling ruins stretching along the River Ziz.

Yellow sand gave way to green palm forest, whose appearance of shade was only an illusion. Buildings appeared in front of me, rising sheer-walled out of the flat desert, and I saw people moving about. These things gave a semblance of life and movement to the place, and I knew that I had nearly reached my goal, Rissani, the modern capital of Tafilét. Then before me appeared a magenta-tinted fortress, a high turreted gate and high towers set in the angles of the walls, and several yellow-painted armoured cars drawn up outside. A short distance away was another fortress, yellow-walled, the castle of Belgacem N'Gadi, the Berber chieftain who had fought against the French for so long.

A feeling of exultation filled me as I walked across the last strip of desert. This was Tafilét Oasis, the last southern outpost which it was possible for anyone to reach who was not a member of France's fighting forces. The palm forests, the fortress of Rissani, the ruins of Sijjilmassa—objects which had appeared so remote and far away when first I started out to tramp to them from distant Salé, these alluring places were now materializing before my eyes. I had done what I set out to do; *I had got there.*

Native riflemen were guarding the gate when I walked up and asked to see the officer in charge of the *Bureau des Affaires Indigènes*. One of them escorted me inside the fortress, across a wide courtyard, and to a building which served as administrative offices. After waiting a few minutes I was invited to enter.

The room which I entered appeared to be in absolute darkness, so that for a moment or two I could only stand there and wait for my eyes to grow accustomed to the change from the sunlight outside. Then I observed that the room was not completely dark, for a small glimmer of light came from a desk, at which a man sat eyeing me curiously. There were other men in the room, the familiar blue-clad *Mokhaznis*, but it was the man at the desk who held my gaze, for I realized that he must be the commander of the fortress and the governor of the Tafilét district.

He stood up and came toward me, and I observed that he wore very baggy trousers and leather sandals. I suddenly became

conscious of my dirty, unkempt appearance, and wondered what he thought of being thus disturbed by the arrival of a strange, uninvited young Englishman who chose to arrive at his door on foot instead of by the more orthodox motor vehicle. But Captain Henri Brissaud Desmillet, for thus he introduced himself, appeared in no way disturbed by my unexpected arrival, and in excellent English informed me that a room would be prepared for me, and that if I cared to accompany him on a drive across the desert that evening, I would be welcome. At the moment I would probably like a drink and a cold shower, he suggested, so if I would excuse him, the servants would attend to my wishes.

I followed the native across the courtyard again to another block of buildings, and was shown into a bedroom, cool and dark, where I was to sleep. Dumping my pack on the floor I walked out into another room, comfortably furnished, with a bar in one corner and three high stools. The servant, who had disappeared for a moment, now reappeared, carrying a tray and glasses. He motioned to me to be seated, and then placed before me—oh, nectar of the gods!—an iced whisky. As I relaxed comfortably in a chair, my tiredness seemed to leave me and I was conscious of a feeling of quiet content. Captain Desmillet had proved himself to be not only a gentleman, but a sportsman as well.

CHAPTER XIV

IN TAFILET OASIS

TAFILET is the largest oasis in Morocco. Fed by the melting snows from the High Atlas Mountains the Ziz and Gheris rivers water five hundred square miles of palm forest; when these streams have been sucked dry by the burning summer sun then the acreage is considerably less, for only where there is water can there be vegetation and life. Once Tafilet was a powerful and independent Saharan kingdom, and its capital, Sijjilmassa, one of the great cities of Africa. Dynasties of kings and sultans ruled over Tafilet, strong and ambitious men who made their names known from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean.

For over a thousand years Europeans strove to reach the fabled land of Tafilet. The Romans tried, and were hurled back; the Portuguese tried, but whether they succeeded in crossing the mountains is doubtful, for history cannot tell us. Individually and in groups European soldiers, merchants, missionaries and explorers strove, fought, suffered and died along the road to Tafilet. From scanty records we can picture imperial Sijjilmassa at the height of its glory, its streets thronged with palaces, houses, mosques, its market-place thronged with merchants from the Niger and Tangier, and radiating from it through the great palm forests highways along which camel caravans were continually arriving and departing.

Now a conqueror strides across the scene, Mulai Reshed, King of Tafilet, one of those fanatics apparently produced by fate from time to time for the express purpose of chastening the luxury-minded rulers of Morocco. Tafilet fighting men, following the green banners of their lord, swarm over the Atlas, and one by one the cities of Morocco are surrounded and captured, till all Morocco is theirs. Mulai Reshed assumes the mantle of 'Commander of the Faithful', establishing a dynasty which survives to this day. Death comes to him as to all men, but no golden tomb in a Moroccan city is fit resting-place for the Conqueror; his remains must be borne in state back over the mountains to the place which gave him birth, and in a mud-domed tower he will lie. And that no hated infidel will violate the sanctity of this holy place, each sultan in turn will send his sons to be guardians of Sijjilmassa.

All this makes the task of the European explorer striving to reach Tafilet more difficult, and when the first white man does arrive—René Caille, travelling in disguise from Timbuctoo in 1828—Sijjilmassa is already only a memory, for it has been destroyed by the warlike Ait Atta, ten years previously. It is nearly forty years before another European, Gerhard Rohlfs, gets his first glimpse of Tafilet, and another thirty years after that before Walter Harris, correspondent of the London *Times*, arrives. And not until after the First World War and the pacification of Morocco by the French can the ordinary traveller hope to visit this half-legendary land.

I slept during the heat of the day, and toward evening a servant came with a message to say that Captain Desmillet and the car were waiting to take me round the oasis. A few minutes later found me seated inside the car, by the captain's side, speeding swiftly over the sun-baked surface of the desert. In a very short time, it seemed, the car, a new Chrysler, had covered a score of miles, so that the oasis was left far behind and there was only desert all round us. I think the captain enjoyed spending an evening speeding across the desert in this fashion, as a relaxation after being cooped up within the walls of the *poste* during the heat of the day.

It was a fascinating thought that I was actually on the route to Timbuctoo, a week or so's journey farther south. But I gathered that few caravans came by this route now, for due south from Rissani there is literally nothing for hundreds of miles, only the terrible desolation of the central desert known as 'The Land of Thirst'. The Ziz flows due south and is joined by another river called the Gheris, their combined waters being known as the Daoura. About a hundred miles from Rissani the Daoura flows into a big marsh called Sebkha ed Daoura, though long before this place is reached most of its waters have died away in the thirsty desert sands.

Back to Tafilet again, where in a white-walled, mud-domed tomb in the heart of the palm forest, I viewed the green-canopied sarcophagus containing the remains of Mulai Reshed, the conqueror of Morocco. Christians are not allowed to enter this holy place, but may peer at it through a narrow doorway. Several times in the history of Morocco men such as Mulai Reshed, followed by hordes of fanatical fighting men, have come swarming out of the desert like locusts out of a wilderness, pouring in a living flood over the Atlas passes and overrun and supplanted the reigning dynasty.

As the Chrysler came to a halt outside the *Bureau des Indigènes*

a crowd of natives who had been waiting outside the gate looked at Captain Desmaillet hopefully.

"They seek permission to go to Algeria to work," he explained. "The palm gardens are dying for lack of water here, and the people fear famine."

Tafilet struck me as a dying land. No rain, I learned, had fallen *for five years*, and the population had shrunk from sixty thousand to twenty-five thousand, many of the people having already departed to seek employment in Algeria. Hunger stalked through the countryside, and Captain Desmaillet was issuing a daily ration of food. He told me that he was gravely concerned for his gardens—kept alive by water from the swimming pool—and had ordered new wells to be dug. We saw one of the new wells, seventy-five feet deep, with frogs hopping pathetically about the damp ground round its mouth. Palm trees can live for two years without water, I learned, but they suffer.

"If the rain comes then the men will come back again," said Captain Desmaillet.

That evening we dined in a softly lighted room, with a small boy tugging at the long rope which moved a large fan suspended from the ceiling to and fro, creating a little current of cooler air. Through the doorway, against the darkening sky, the curving trunks of the palm trees stood out in bold relief, then the fire-tinted clouds gave way abruptly to the deep, velvety darkness of the African night. I was introduced to my hostess, Madame Desmaillet, then silent-footed servants served us with iced soup.

"Whisky or a cocktail?" Captain Desmaillet asked, when the meal was over. "You will have heard of my predecessor, I suppose, Henri de Bournazel?"

"It is impossible not to have heard of him," I replied. "Surely his must be one of the most romantic names connected with the conquest of Morocco? But how is one to distinguish the fact from the legend?"

Wherever you may travel in Morocco you will hear stories of Captain Henri de Bournazel, for even in his lifetime he became an almost legendary figure. He rose from the rank of ordinary trooper to become governor of Tafilet after its reconquest by the French, and was responsible for the establishment of this *poste* at Rissani. There is a marble bust of him in the courtyard of the fort. So often did he escape death by sword or bullet that he became known as 'the man they could not kill'.

He commanded a company of Goums, or native irregular cavalry, and received his nickname of 'The Man in the Red Tunic' because he always wore a bright red coat when leading

a charge. His commanding officer ordered him not to be so foolish, and to wear regulation khaki instead. Bournazel obeyed, but the first time he wore the new uniform he was killed!

Out of the sandy expanse which surrounded Rissani *poste* on all sides there arose, at a distance, the mud walls of other buildings, among them the high-turreted stronghold of Belgacem N'Gadi, from behind the supposed safety of whose yellow walls he had, figuratively speaking, thumbed his nose at the French for over a dozen years. Permission to visit the building having been granted I walked over to the place early the following morning, and, accompanied by a blue-cloaked *Mokhazni* guard, passed through the huge main gateway of the fortress. The structure showed little sign of the bombardment by aircraft and artillery to which it had been subjected five years previously, the breaches in its mud walls having apparently been repaired.

Afterwards I was to explore other native fortifications and found that, generally speaking, the same features applied to all of them. They are usually square or oblong in shape, with high towers at the angles, and often along the curtain walls as well; inside the walls there are usually high, keep-like structures, divided into numerous apartments. The gates are usually in-turned, so that attackers cannot rush straight into the street beyond. Inside the gate there is generally a patch of open ground, not a market-place, for that is held outside the walls on stipulated days. This open space is surrounded on three sides by buildings several storeys in height, consolidated into a high keep or donjon in those areas where the development of these structures has reached its highest development.

In less-developed forms of *ksar*, such as this one at Rissani, the various buildings are divided by a maze of twisting streets so narrow that the sky appears as a blue slit far above, separating a warren of gloomy, dungeon-like apartments housing as many as a thousand people. The houses can be four or five storeys high; windows and doors are small, wood being scarce and valuable. The windowless ground floors serve as stables, the middle storeys as storehouses, the upper floors for living and sleeping in. There are no staircases, sloping corridors taking the place of stairs.

The floors of the rooms are made of palm-tree trunks covered with dried mud, and, except in the upper storeys, loop-holes serve as windows. In the Dades Valley, where these mud strongholds have reached their highest development, lines of neat-looking windows, covered with iron grilles painted green, yellow or blue, break the monotony of the high, featureless walls. The towers, often seventy feet high and constructed without the aid of mechani-

cal appliances, are really a series of galleries one above the other, loop-holed to provide the defenders with flanking fire along the curtain walls. It will be seen that these structures perform the function of a small fortified town or village, a function inherent in the Berber word *ksour*, plural of *ksar*, which some authorities claim is derived from the Latin *castrum*, or camp.

'Mud castles' is a precise definition of these structures, for the material of which they are constructed is simply—mud, though the conditions under which it is used render it as solid and convenient as concrete, and 'concrete' is perhaps a correct definition of the native *tabia* of which the buildings are composed. Often when travelling about the countryside you see a group of men engaged in what appears to be a curious performance, preparing *tabia* for the erection of a new building. *Tabia* is literally mud—earth and water thoroughly mixed together and pounded with a wooden block until it reaches the consistency of dough, with lime and pebbles added to give it strength—which will rapidly harden into a strong and durable building material.

The outlines of the new building are marked out on the ground by parallel rows of planks, and into these moulds the *tabia* is poured and then pounded until it is almost solid. Lines of sweating Negroes and Berbers can be seen treading the mixture with their feet. When the foundations have set solid the planks are moved a little higher and more *tabia* is added, and when in turn this has hardened the planks are raised higher still, and so the process goes on until the walls have reached the desired height. Roofs are made of wood covered with brushwood, plastered with beaten clay. Unless kept in good repair *tabia* buildings crumble into shapeless masses of dried mud whose age and function it is impossible to determine.

My archaeologist's instinct had been roused by the sight of the crumbling ruins which were all that was left of the once-mighty city of Sijjilmassa, so after exploring the modern settlement of Tafilet I asked the *Mokhazni* to guide me to any portions of the ancient city which were in a tolerably good state of preservation. He looked at me as though such a question roused doubts in his mind concerning my sanity, as though asking what purpose there was in visiting the ruins, which, as every local inhabitant knew, were guarded by *djinns* or demons. The appeal of deserted cities upon minds such as mine is so strong that when he appeared half hesitant I would have started off without him, so with a shrug of his shoulders he came after me.

No demons barred our way as we walked along what had once been the streets of a great city, and only a low, moaning wind

which whipped the tops of the near-by sand dunes added a note of eeriness to the scene. For hardly anything is left of Sijjilmassa now save shapeless masses of *tabia*, half overwhelmed by the advancing dunes. Sijjilmassa is truly a 'City of the Dead'. My guide pointed out a *ksar* and a mosque, the only buildings left which are still in use, fragments of houses and towers, and told me that such ruins could be observed stretching for five miles along the Ziz.

Tradition ascribes the founding of the Roman city of Sijillum Massae here, on the site of a Carthaginian settlement. Later, the year 707 is quoted by Leo Africanus, who wrote: "At this time the oasis was a great emporium of trade, a number of Moorish and European merchants being settled there, while a king governed and took tolls at the *dounae*." It is much more probable that these 'Europeans' were really Moslem traders from the Near East.

As with other lost cities, there are vague stories of gold and jewels hidden among the ruins, the accumulated wealth of bygone caravans. But where the treasure lies or how it came to be hidden are questions to which only evasive answers are obtainable. Though such golden treasure might prove an illusion, it seems probable that there yet remains much material which would add to our knowledge of forgotten chapters of Saharan history. Archaeological excavation might reveal much, and anyone wishing to explore the Sahara in search of a 'lost city' might well consider a journey to Tafilet.

THE LAND OF MUD CASTLES

EARLY one morning I left Rissani on a lorry, one of four bound for a group of oases lying south of the High Atlas Mountains. This is the district which may truly be termed 'The Land of Mud Castles', for it is around the oases of Rheris, Ferkla, Todra and Dades that the Berber architecture reaches its highest development. A number of rivers, of which the Gheris and its tributary, the Todra, are the most important, rise in the High Atlas, and flow in a south-easterly direction to join the Ziz; separated from these streams by the high plateau linking the High Atlas Mountains with the parallel range of the Djebel Sagho, are the westward-flowing rivers which form the Dades, chief tributary of the Draa, the southern boundary of Morocco. A continuous route for vehicles along the northern fringe of the Sahara is thus possible, following the valleys of the Gheris, Todra and Dades rivers, and along this route *postes* of the *Bureau des Indigènes* have been established at strategic points.

I had been unable to obtain permission to walk this part of my journey, as Captain Desmillet explained that danger from *djech*, or lone bandits, still awaited the solitary traveller. That was why I was squeezed into the cab of a big French lorry, with a lean-visaged Belgian driving on one side of me, and a burly, half-caste Negro workman on the other. The temperature was already well over a hundred degrees, with the flat desert in front of us shimmering with heat haze. I took a last look at the magenta-hued walls and towers of Rissani, waved a hand at the group of figures who stood watching our departure in the shade of the circular gateway, and we were off.

Ksar es Souk was our first destination, to be loaded with supplies for the western posts, and while this was being done I walked to the *Bureau des Indigènes* to seek permission to cross the military zone to the new civil settlement at Ourzazate; but it was Sunday, the *Bureau* was closed, and as the lorries were about to depart there was nothing for me to do but leave Ksar es Souk without the permission of the military authorities, and trust to luck that everything would turn out all right. A short time later the convoy was once more moving westward.

For hours we drove across a flat, grey desert almost devoid of

vegetation. There was no road for the lorries to follow, so they travelled four abreast along a series of wide dusty tracks leading across the stony plain. Road here simply means 'way' or 'route', and traffic follows any one of several parallel tracks, running on either side of the actual line marked on the map. Such a 'road' may be anything from a quarter to half a mile wide, and when a number of lorries are travelling in convoy their presences is heralded by an immense cloud of dust which obscures everything.

Rheris was the first of four oases marked on the route to Ourzazate, and the greenness of its surrounding palm forest presented, if only in illusion, a delightfully cool appearance after seventy kilometres of desolation. Goulmina, the main settlement, consisted of three blocks of red-walled buildings, surrounded by barbed-wire barricades. From its hill top the square mud fort looked down over palm trees and green fields. We stayed only a short time to unload some boxes of supplies, and then continued across the desert, which was dotted with a grey-green, fungus-like growth which the lorry driver informed me was known as the 'Cauliflowers of Father Ananias'. Part of the route led across a region of wind-blown sand where even the tracks of wheels were quickly obliterated.

As we travelled along I could hear now and again a curious sound like a dog barking *woof-woof*, and then after an interval another *woof*, but there were no dogs out there in the desert, so I wondered if the noise was caused by the movement of the sand. 'Singing Sands' are to be found in various parts of the world, and later, near Aberdaron, in Caernarvonshire, I was to walk across the famous 'Whistling Sands', which do, indeed, make a musical sound as your foot passes over them.

Some time later we saw, rising above the palm trees by a river, the domes and towers of a fantastic-looking place, the great *ksar* of Tinjdad, chief settlement of Ferkla Oasis. The convoy splashed across the shallow Todra River into an alluring landscape of red rocks and palm trees and high mud towers and mud-domed market buildings, with, for background, the faraway peaks of the High Atlas Mountains. About this kaleidoscopic scene moved a crowd of colourful characters, Berber tribesmen in dull brown costumes, white-robed Arab merchants, blue-clad *Mokhazni* riflemen, half-naked Negroes with glistening black bodies. It was an animated and noisy scene, and with the exception of the rifles and the barbed wire, one that was purely African.

We went on again across a grey, stony desert where salt lakes and mirages appeared deceptively in the distance. Once we passed a caravan of donkeys plodding along, but otherwise the

landscape appeared devoid of life. Inside the cab of the lorry it grew so hot that to touch any metal with one's bare flesh was to sear it as though with a lighted match. The hours slowly passed as we stared at the seemingly endless stretch of desert in front of us, one mile and one hour following the other with nothing to break the monotony of time and distance.

At sundown we came to the town of Tinerhir, in Todra Oasis. As our heavy *camions* zigzagged down the basalt cliffs into the oasis a group of armed *Mokhaznis* rode forward to meet us. Khaki-clad soldiers were drawing portable barbed-wire barricades across the road, and we noticed that in the watch-towers on the fringe of the settlement riflemen were already on guard. A curfew is enforced after sundown at all settlements in the 'Zone of Insecurity'; all roads are blocked and all traffic has to stop and may only proceed on its way the next morning.

I climbed stiffly down from the lorry and looked about me for a place to sleep. Then I stared, hardly believing what I saw, for here was one of the loveliest and most fascinating places in Morocco. In front of me was a big fort with a square tower at each corner, and the usual yellow-painted armoured cars parked outside. To the north towered another huge stronghold, and above the green tops of the palms showed more towers and turrets. Between the river and the fort was a fantastic kaleidoscope of red rocks and green palms, of African-looking buildings surmounted by beehive-shaped domes which reminded me of pictures of Negro architecture in the Sudan.

A local legend declares that Negro tribes from the Sudan, migrating across the Sahara, turned up the Todra Valley by mistake, instead of going on to Morocco, and founded Tinerhir, and this appears a likely explanation of the Sudanese type of architecture to be observed there.

A small building some distance away from the fort proved to be an inn, and there I was able to secure a room for the night. The inn consisted of little more than a big room containing a bar, against which a number of soldiers were leaning, with two or three bedrooms at the back. I had just placed my rucksack on the floor and was about to have a much-needed wash and shave when the landlord's wife, a very fat woman, came lumbering and wheezing into the room, and gasped out something about Monsieur le Commandant wishing to see me. My thoughts immediately turned to that little matter of a military pass, which I had been unable to procure, so I walked outside where I found a stocky, grey-haired man in the early forties waiting for me.

"Good evening," he greeted me. "I am Captain Paulin of

the *Affaires Indigènes*. I heard that a young Englishman had just arrived in Tinerhir, so thought I would call and ask you to dine with me. We do not get many English visitors in this isolated spot, so it would be a pleasure."

"Thank you very much," I replied. "I shall be glad to accept your kind invitation. I thought you wished to interview me because I arrived in your district without a military pass."

"Leave that matter to me—I'll soon put it right," Captain Paulin replied assuringly. "We know most things which go on in this country, you know. Are you a Boy Scout?"

"No; why do you ask?"

"That belt you are wearing. It looks like a Boy Scout's belt. A fine organization—it interests me very much. What part of England do you come from?"

"I was born in Manchester."

"Manchester, eh. Do you know Eccles?"

I replied that I certainly knew Eccles.

"A good friend of mine lives in Eccles. Ah, but we can talk later. I will let you get on with your wash and shave. When you are ready just stroll along to my place and we'll have a drink. *Au revoir*."

He strode off, leaving me to ponder over this unexpected encounter with a friendly French officer, who not only knew Manchester, but knew Eccles, the place where the cakes came from. I would have remarked that it was a small world, but this phrase may have been used before.

By the time I had washed and shaved and put on a fresh shirt it was dark, but the inevitable *Mokhazni* was waiting outside to escort me to the fort. We passed through the big central gateway leading into a wide courtyard and I saw Captain Paulin waiting for me on a veranda.

"Will you have a drink?" he invited, leading me into a room equipped with a bar and several high stools. "Dinner will be served soon. You know the English Lake District, I suppose?"

Over a glass of wine I learned that he had visited the Lake District several times, and we were just discussing Keswick and Borrowdale when a servant in a white uniform informed us that dinner was ready. Of the meal which followed I have little recollection, for Captain Paulin had an intriguing manner of suddenly switching from one topic to another so that you needed your wits about you to follow the trend of the conversation. He mentioned that an English author and his wife had passed through Tinerhir some time previously, and I wondered who this might have been. Two other persons were present at the

meal, a subordinate officer who appeared to understand little English, and a lean-looking priest who spoke only a word or two during the meal, so the conversation continued almost uninterrupted between the captain and myself.

"It is very quiet tonight," he remarked suddenly. "When I first came here you could hear rifles popping in the dark every night. Have you heard of Zait ou Mohammed?"

"Never heard of him," I replied.

"Zait ou Mohammed worked with a road gang, and it is said he was struck by an officer, which may be true—or it may not. Anyway, he took to the hills with a rifle he had stolen, and for several months he was an exceedingly great nuisance to us. A killing here and a killing there, with a little robbery and rape as a side-line, oh yes, he did quite well for himself did Monsieur Kait ou Mohammed—while he lasted."

"You got him in the end?" I remarked.

"Yes, but he got us first," was the reply. "He got through the barbed wire one night and shot dead three *légionnaires* who were drinking at the bar. One moment there was just a quiet peaceful night—such a night as this—and the next moment *bang-bang-bang*—and three of my men have gone to—well, wherever good *légionnaires* go to when they die.

"The difficulty was," the captain continued, "that his fellow-tribesmen refused to betray his whereabouts. He was able to do pretty much as he pleased, and as he was continually on the move we never knew in which direction to look for him. And how he boasted of the one-man war he was conducting against the dogs of infidels—us."

"But you got him in the end," I repeated.

"A woman was his downfall, as of many other men," was the reply. "One of the women he had discarded told us where he was hidden. Our soldiers surrounded the *ksar* and blew holes in its walls with explosives, and then set fire to the place. There was nothing for Monsieur Zait to do but come out, which he did—fighting. And he went down fighting—and that was the end."

"When did all this happen?" I asked.

"Not so long ago, New Year's Eve, to be exact. And do you know? That bar where the *légionnaires* were killed—it was no longer attractive after that—no, not for some time."

It seemed to me that with men like Zait ou Mohammed prowling about the bar might well lose its attraction!

"If you want to look round the oasis tomorrow I'll send one of my men to escort you," Captain Paulin remarked, as we walked

back through the darkness to the inn. "The *ksour* are splendid specimens of native architecture. Mind that barbed wire. We put it across the roads at night."

"Why?" I asked innocently.

"Oh, to keep out—visitors," was the reply.

We halted near the veranda of the inn, listening to the sound of men's voices inside; part of the garrison of Tinerhir appeared to be enjoying themselves in no uncertain fashion.

"I will not come any farther with you," the captain said. "In case I should see something I do not wish to see. Good night."

He walked away into the darkness, leaving me to reflect upon the sagacity embodied in that last remark of his.

Dawn over Tinerhir the following morning was an unforgettable sight. First was the pale greyness of pre-dawn, with rocks and fort and castle towers silhouetted sharply against a sky as yet dark, but paling rapidly into an indefinite blue. During this period of shadowless light, and of that intense stillness which comes when all the world is asleep, there is a timeless quality about the landscape. But very rapidly this cool and silent world of half-tones gives way to one of heat and colour and sensation. The first long fingers of sunlight creep over the land, turning the grey sand yellow, tinting the rocks and castle walls first pink and then fiery red, and now also the palm trees change from dark and shadowless shapes to living forms of green foliage and red-brown trunks. Then suddenly, it seems, the whole world is awake, cocks are crowing, cattle bellowing, people are going about their daily affairs, and the sun is hot, very hot, with about it already that touch of searing flame which characterizes the Sahara. Soon the heat haze will dim the outlines of the scene, and so it will remain until the coming of evening.

I had arisen early to watch the sun rise, and discovered a *Mokhazni* (who answered to the name of Mohammed) squatted outside the inn, his blue cloak swathed about him, a rifle across his knees. Perceiving me he rose, a tall, lean man, with a sharp nose and deep-set eyes, a rapacious looking sort of face, a Berber with muscles of steel and the eyes of a hawk, capable, I had heard, of walking sixty miles a day without fatigue. "To the *ksar* we go," he stated without preamble, and we walked along the dusty road toward a towering structure whose high turrets could be seen rising above the tops of the palms.

The structure into which he led me resembled in many ways the one I had investigated at Rissani. The interiors of these strongholds are all very much alike, a warren of closely packed dwellings; it is the exteriors which are the chief delight of this

form of architecture. With their thick walls and tapering towers, their massive keeps and barbicans, they appear to possess affinities with Egyptian, Babylonian or Carthaginian fortresses. Although I call these structures castles, it is only because there is no actual word in the English language which describes their function; 'castle' is merely a translation of the Arab word *kasba*, but the Berber word *ksar*, meaning 'fortified village', is more exact.

A *ksar* may be correctly described as a fortified communal storehouse. In desert country life can only exist where there is a water supply, so it is only by the wells and the water-holes in the dry river beds, with their oases of palm trees and little fields of maize, barley and millet, that human existence is possible. The Berber and Arab tribes living in the Saharan valleys (many of whom spend half the year as agriculturalists and the other half as pastoralists), require strong buildings in which to store their possessions and foodstuffs; the *ksour* are the result of this need.

The inhabitants of these fortified villages formerly had to be always on their guard against attacks from neighbouring tribes. As in Albania, the North-West Frontier of India, and elsewhere, blood feuds existed from one generation to another, so that should one man kill another then the nearest kinsmen of the slain man was, in honour bound, compelled to find the slayer and kill him, knowing that he himself would in turn be killed by the kinsman of the man he had killed. Thus a feud could continue until no male members of a family were left, and I was told that before the coming of the French it was common for a tribesman to wait in one of the towers of his *ksar*, often for days on end, waiting the opportunity to take a pot-shot at a man in a neighbouring building, because the ethics of the blood feud demanded it.

Later in the day I continued my journey to Ourzazate in the lorry. West of Todra Oasis the road crosses stony desert chequered with sidra, or thorny mimosa bushes. Save for oases in the dry river beds this country appears absolute desert, for owing to the fact that the rivers have carved deep canyons below the surface, the oases with their fields and villages are, as Walter Harris discovered on his journey in 1893, invisible until you have reached the cliff edges and can look down upon them. "Upon the width of the strip of irrigated land lying between the cliffs bordering the river, depends the largeness and smallness of the population," he wrote.

The amount of water to be encountered in these desert streams varies considerably at different times of the year. In the autumn the Ziz, for example, is from fifty to a hundred feet wide, and sometimes a yard deep, but when on stipulated days the water is

diverted into the irrigation channels, or during the summer heat, the river becomes almost dry and only isolated water-holes are left. Therefore the oases located along this northern fringe of the Sahara vary greatly in size, some being large enough to support only a single *ksar*, others being sufficiently irrigated to maintain a population of several thousand people.

A stony watershed six thousand feet high separates the basin of the River Gheris from that of the Dades, main tributary of the Draa. The latter stream acts as the boundary of Morocco, separating it from the little-known Spanish colony of Rio de Oro.

The road climbed steeply up between high mountains, red hued like gigantic cinder heaps, to a windswept wilderness where the heat was like that from a furnace. The white bones of camels could be seen lying alongside the track, and big vultures hovered lazily overhead scanning the desolation for any dead objects which they could eat. This plateau links the High Atlas Mountains with the Djebel Sagho Range, whose high peaks rise up like a wall for nearly a hundred miles south of the River Dades. Among these red, sun-scorched heights some of the fiercest fighting took place during the last phase of the conquest of Morocco.

The peak called Djebel Bou Gafer was the scene of the last stand of Asso ou Baslam, and eight hundred followers, in January 1933. Amid a storm of snow and hail French troops launched attack after attack, but the Berbers clung grimly to their mountain top, despite the destruction caused by artillery, machine-guns and bombing planes. At last the French military authorities gave up the idea of a direct attack, and decided to starve the Berbers into submission. Asso ou Baslam held out for another month, and then, with food and water supplies cut off and half his men dead, he was compelled to yield.

Along the hundred miles of the Dades Valley the architecture of the Berber castles reaches its highest development. From the dry river-bed the *ksour* rise tier above tier, in an almost continuous line of battlemented towers. Sight of them inevitably compels comparison with the 'skyscraper' cities of the Hadramaut, in Arabia, explored between the two world wars. The same compelling needs of security and water supply which produced the towering Hadramaut structures, also produced these Moroccan 'skyscrapers', of which those at Ait Ben Haddou or El Kelaa M'Gouna are the most impressive.

How old are these astonishing buildings? The age of native African architecture is always difficult to estimate. Some Arab fortifications which look fairly new are known to have existed for several hundred years, while others, which look extremely

ancient, date only from the nineteenth century. Yet even when a building appears comparatively modern it is probably a reproduction of the building which occupied the site before it, so that the appearance of the original ancient structure is retained.

The question of how this type of architecture evolved in this remote, trans-Atlas region has yet to be answered. It seems likely that it is an early type of Arab fortification based on Byzantine models, for Arabo-Byzantine contacts resulted in something very like an indigenous Arab style. The Arabs adopted from the Byzantines the technique of building keep-like castles with light walls and square towers to provide flanking fire. They also adopted the device, Egyptian in origin, of the inturned entrance, a means of preventing a gate from being rushed. Such features had been familiar to the Byzantines since the sixth century, and were quite suited to the conditions of early feudal warfare, when attacking forces were small and siege tactics not yet fully developed.

The first castles built in Morocco by the Arabs after its conquest were probably of this type. During succeeding centuries the art of fortification developed considerably, due to such influences as the Crusades, the invention of gunpowder, the developments in siege warfare. The keep castle was replaced by the concentric castle, round towers replaced square ones, and various refinements such as barbicans and machicoulis were added. Later Arab fortification illustrates these developments, but south of the mountains where Arab influence was never so strong the original style probably persisted. That is, at least, one hypothesis, though it may yet be proved that the *ksour* are a native Berber architecture, modelled perhaps directly on original Byzantine castles.

Boumalne, in Dades Oasis, appeared a fascinating place after the forty-mile crossing of that dreary watershed. Shut in between high yellow cliffs fretted with caves used for storing grain, and the winding blue river, was a labyrinth of narrow, twisting lanes, the towers of innumerable *ksour*, and little fields of barley and wheat shaded by walnut trees. To the north showed the long line of the High Atlas peaks reaching up to fourteen thousand feet, though at this elevation they lacked the impressiveness which such an altitude suggests. And yet they are one of the great mountain ranges of the earth, stretching for fifteen hundred miles across North Africa.

With recollections of my journey the previous year along the northern slopes of the Atlas ranges I reflected how well they served as the great dividing range between two completely contrasting worlds, the Mediterranean landscape to the north, and

the Saharan landscape to the south. Northward the slopes of the Atlas are fertile and wooded; southward lies a series of vast plateaux, bare and arid, where life exists only with difficulty. Although there is little evidence to support the view that earlier civilizations—Carthaginian, Roman, Vandal, Byzantine or Portuguese—ever penetrated over the mountains into the Saharan valleys, local legends tell of such exploits of earlier travellers as the building of a castle by the Portuguese near the Todra River, even of a lost Christian monastery whose ghostly bells can be heard ringing in the night.

The first part of the day's journey had been delightful, for we had the sun behind us so that its slanting rays painted the desert red, and from the seat of honour beside the driver I watched the mountain ranges to the north and south draw closer and closer, the *ksour* appear more elaborate, with crenelled walls and geometrically ornamented keeps. A fantastic region of huge boulders, some as big as a bus, appeared in front of us and faded into the rear; at one point I noticed a crack in the earth, about ten inches wide and looking very deep, zigzagging across the plain, and wondered whether it was the result of an earthquake. The natives had already learned the art of hitch-hiking, I noticed, and would stand by the roadside with outstretched hand whenever a vehicle appeared.

Watching the speedometer I observed that we averaged about forty miles an hour, occasionally reaching fifty when crossing the wide, treeless plateaux. We were travelling at a good speed, enveloped in the usual cloud of choking dust, when the lorry suddenly plunged over a low bank into a dry river-bed. The big vehicle went skidding round, a bank of sand loomed ahead of us, and though the driver wrenched his wheel round he was not quick enough—we crashed head-on into the dunes. He tried to jump sideways while I curled up into a ball and was flung against the windscreen, but when we picked ourselves up a couple of minutes later we had escaped with only a few scratches and sore heads.

My companion could not get the engine going, so for some hours we sat by the wreck with our tongues hanging out waiting for another vehicle to come along and pick us up. All about us was desert, bare, bleak, stretching away in every direction as far as the eye could see. I wandered off along the dry river-bed to investigate some geological formations, but it was so hot that I was soon driven back to the scanty shade cast by the lorry. At last another *camion* arrived, loaded with people and boxes and bales, but room was found for us.

A malignant fate seemed to be controlling the road that day, for we had hardly gone a few miles when an automobile came rushing round a bend. Another head-on crash seemed imminent, but our driver, with a curse, swung his heavy vehicle off the road into a shallow ravine. Again there came the frenzied crunch of wheels biting gravel, the heavy jolt as we left the road and hit the sand. The driver of the automobile yelled derisively as his vehicle hurtled by, and without stopping to see whether he had caused any damage he went on out of sight.

CHAPTER XVI

CAMPED IN THE DESERT

WE got the lorry on to the road again and continued to Ourzazate. The native town is a sort of African Carcassonne, a little medieval stronghold surrounded by a double line of walls and towers. To see its massive gates and towers, slitted for archers to shoot through, is to see the Africa of a thousand years back. Within the central keep lived my Lord Hamadi El Glaoui, like an Italian feudal prince of the fifteenth century. He ruled this border country for his brother, overlord of the Glaoui clan; of the three native chieftains who rule the High Atlas the greatest is El Glaoui, whose lands constitutes a fair-sized kingdom.

The position of these Grand *Kaids*, or 'Lords of the Mountains', corresponds to that of the native princes of India, though they lack the immense riches enjoyed by the latter. Though they voluntarily allied themselves to the French, they continue to govern their territories with little interference.

A mile away from the native town the French have built a new European settlement and a fort of the French Foreign Legion now crowns the flat hill top where once stood the ancient Berber 'Fortress of the Kings'. At the foot of the hill, straggling along the dusty roadside, are the buildings of the civilian settlement, a few offices and shops, one or two cafés and nondescript shacks, enveloped in a cloud of choking dust so that my immediate impression of Ourzazate was that it was a good place to get away from.

For three days I had been trying to post some letters to England, having overlooked the fact that in a military area there would not be any post offices. So I walked along the road looking for a post office in Ourzazate, and encountered a sergeant of the Legion and a dark-haired man in grey plus-fours, of whom I inquired the way to the *Bureau des Indigènes*.

"Up the hill," the man in plus-fours replied briefly in English.

I began to tell them of my experiences, tramping from Salé to Tafilet.

"Let's have a drink," suggested the sergeant, so we went into the nearest bar and ordered three whiskies.

"So you are a writer," remarked the dark-haired man. "Why not come and stay at my camp for a few days? Marrakech, Fez,

Ourzazate—those places are not Morocco. It is in the *bled*—the country, that you will find the real Morocco.”

He explained that he was employed by the *Mission Hydrologique des Travaux Publics*, and that in his capacity of hydrological engineer he spent much of his time investigating the watercourses in the Saharan valleys, as one of the first tasks of the French authorities after the conquest was to attend to the provision of adequate water supplies for the local population.

“We are waiting for a car to take us to the camp,” said the sergeant. “You go and post your letters and then come back and join us.”

I climbed the hill to the fort, was challenged by the sentry, stated my business, and was allowed to enter. Reflecting that it was the oddest post office I had ever encountered I prowled about until I discovered the right person to hand my letters to, and then departed down the hill again. From the summit there was a fine view over the Draa Valley, lined with little fields of maize and millet and orchards of almond and pomegranate trees.

When I got back to the café the expected vehicle had not yet arrived, so we ordered a meal. Still the car did not come, so we ordered a bottle of wine. No car, so we ordered coffee. Still no car, so we ordered beer. Various *légionnaires* drifted to the bar, and made sarcastic remarks about my equipment and walking powers, hikers in shorts with rucksacks on their backs not yet having made their appearance in Morocco.

“Twenty-five miles a day!” scoffed one man, who, passing the open window, had thrust his head through to join in the conversation. “Huh, we do forty-five miles a day. And you carry a forty-pound pack. Why, we *légionnaires* carry ninety! However, persevere, my son, persevere, we may make something of you yet.”

“What is this thing?” asked another *légionnaire*.

“That,” I replied with dignity, “is an umbrella.”

“An umbrella, eh. I’ve read about these things in books. A gadget like this can be right-down dangerous. You want to be careful when you carry a thing like this round with you.”

“Guess we ought to apply to the quartermaster’s department for an issue of these umbrellas,” said the first *légionnaire*. “I reckon we ain’t fully equipped ’less we got one of these gadgets.”

The dark-haired man suggested we walk along the street and look for the missing car. We had not gone far when a corporal of the Legion came roaring down the street on a motor-bicycle and stopped beside us. He insisted that we follow him to the nearest bar for a drink. A few yards farther on my companion stopped

to purchase some bread, sausages, Camembert cheese, and bottles of beer. He dumped these into my arms, told me to take care of them, and then ambled off in search of a place which sold potatoes. I followed some distance behind, realizing that my life would be of little value in that thirsty land if I dropped those bottles of beer!

At each building, as we passed, genial men hospitably invited us inside to 'have a quick one', and as the street was fairly long and the number of buildings considerable, by the time we reached the end of it it seemed to me as if the world was revolving slowly round and round, and how I managed to cling to my miscellaneous collection of foodstuffs was more than I can tell. In summer, by the way, the afternoon temperature at Ourzazate reaches a hundred and twenty degrees!

With a start I realized that the 'car' had arrived, only it wasn't an automobile, it was a big motor-bus, crowded with *légionnaires* and long wooden cases containing rifles. Room was made for me, somebody carefully removed the bottles of beer from my failing grasp, and almost immediately we started off. I dimly realized that I had not the slightest idea how far we were going, nor in what direction, but when I drowsily asked my companion he replied: "Oh, not far—about eighty miles."

Somebody else mentioned the name 'Djebel Sagho'; this, of course, was strictly out of bounds for a foreigner such as myself, but anybody who has chosen for his guiding rule in life that dangerous phrase 'Never reject an experience' will understand why, having hardly entered Ourzazate, I now found myself leaving it again, bound for an unknown destination with a man whose name even I did not know. There had been no time to interview the military authorities, so trusting that the enterprise would turn out all right I dropped off to sleep.

Most of the journey passed in an alcoholic daze, though once I awakened to find that the bus had stopped and that a barbed-wire barricade was drawn across the road. Behind it stood a Berber rifleman who declared that under no circumstances would he allow our vehicle to pass. No argument would cause him to change his mind, and not until an officer had been summoned from a neighbouring fort were we allowed to proceed. Some time later we came to a construction camp where members of the Foreign Legion were repairing a road, and here the cases of rifles were unloaded.

After the *légionnaires* had clambered out of the bus and departed noisily into the darkness singing ribald versions of popular songs, the dark-haired man and myself appeared to be

the only passengers left. I was only half awake when, some time later, the bus stopped in an oasis. My companion called out that we had arrived and helped me down. Men materialized out of the darkness, collected our luggage, and then vanished into the darkness again.

Fatigued though I was my tiredness was not too great to cause me to miss the look of consternation on the Berber servant's face when he was confronted with a rucksack for the first time. First he tried carrying it in front of him, then under his arm, and then he solved the problem by carrying it where it should be carried, on the back, but not in the manner intended, for shoulder straps meant nothing to him. I believe that eventually he tried putting it on his head and carrying it that way.

A track led us to three tents grouped round a camp fire under some walnut trees. An oil lamp cast its rays over the scene, exposing a small, spotted dog who was whining frantically at its master's return. "Make yourself at home," invited my companion, calling to the servant to place my rucksack inside one of the tents. Presently we sat by a small, green table inside the tent which served as a mess-room, eating sausages and mashed potatoes and washing the mixture down with red wine. The meal over, I just had strength left to walk to my tent, stretch out on the camp bed and pull a blanket over me. I was asleep almost as soon as my head touched the pillow, and motor crashes, fatiguing journeys, late meals, whisky, wine and beer were as naught.

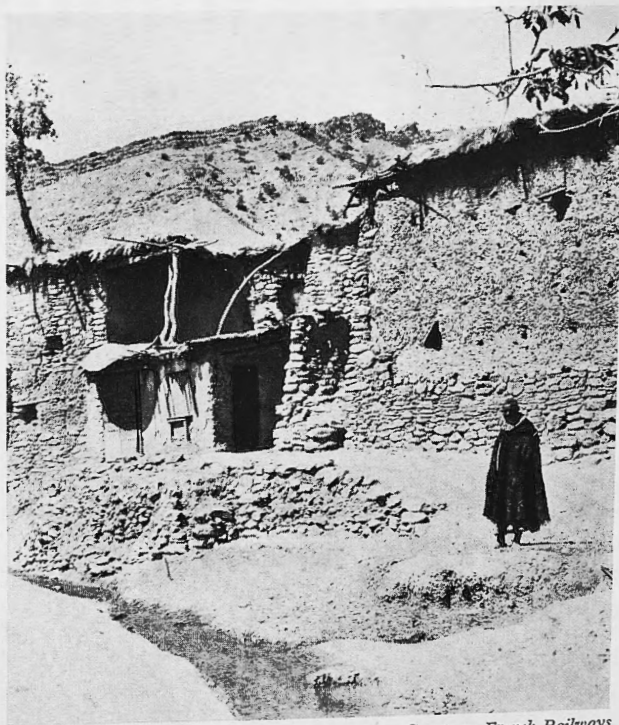
After sleeping for ten hours without a break I was aroused late in the morning by a servant bringing a glass of hot coffee laced with rum. Later I arose, and as there was no sign of my host, breakfasted alone on coffee and rolls. André Etienne (for thus my companion introduced himself when he returned for a meal) was working some distance upstream, surveying part of an old watercourse. I started off in search of him, following the dry bed of the river, which was lined with little fields of maize and barley. The landscape appeared green and flourishing, for though palms were absent, there were plenty of other types of trees and bushes. At this altitude, about six thousand feet, the winter weather is too severe for palms to survive.

My wandering footsteps led me into a labyrinth of narrow, winding lanes bordered by walls of brown mud; above the foliage could be seen the turrets and keeps of four castles. I was some distance upstream (if one apply this term to a river which was without water), when black clouds suddenly blotted out the sun, and the low growl of thunder sounded to the westward. Realizing well enough what that meant I hastened back to camp, and had



Moroccan 'skyscrapers', Dades Valley

DARLINGTON
PUBLIC LIBRARY.



Courtesy: French Railways

A village in the High Atlas Mountains



Castle of Ounila, High Atlas Mountains



Courtesy: Chemins de Fer du Maroc
Koutoubia Mosque, Marrakech

just reached the shelter of the walnut trees when the rain came.

And how it rained! The heavens opened and released a flood, pouring in torrents which threatened to sweep the camp away. With the rain came the cold, bitter and piercing, compelling me to delve in my rucksack for a thick woollen jersey, and then for another one, and finally for a warm woollen scarf which I wrapped around me. Still I was cold, so presently behold me, muffled up in this fashion, crouching over an oil stove endeavouring to keep warm. For hours the rain teemed down while I remained curled up in my sleeping-bag, till a sudden cry from André brought me leaping to the door of the tent.

"Snow!" he exclaimed, and, sure enough, it *was* snowing! The white flakes came whirling down, melting almost as soon as they touched the ground. I watched fascinated. Snow in the desert—in June! We were experiencing one of the terrific changes of temperature, common to Morocco, when the thermometer may show one hundred and twenty-five degrees at midday and fifty at night.

Later, out of the rain and the night, came the lean, brown form of a desert sheik, bringing a present of a bowl of milk for André, and an invitation to visit the sheik's castle the following day. The milk was very welcome, for there are no shops in this outlandish part of the world. Buying food is, indeed, a real problem. Our bread and wine came from the military post ten miles to the east, cheese and tinned goods from Ourzazate eighty miles to the west, the potatoes from distant Marrakech.

The following morning my wanderings led me along the dusty road to its junction with a side road where a signpost clearly stated in French 'Entrance Forbidden'. Following this forbidden road I climbed up out of the valley, and standing beside a ruined watch-tower on a hill, paused to count, in idle curiosity, the number of native castles in sight. When I had reached twenty I stopped and went on along the road.

Before me was only flat, featureless, grey-brown desert. Northward, the serrated peaks of the High Atlas gleamed white and purple in the hot sunlight; to the south the splintered ridges of the Djebel Sagho loomed black and forbidding, seemingly only four or five miles away. A turn of the track, and I looked down upon the winding green ribbon which was the Dades Valley, enclosed by the red-brown walls of desert. The sunlight gleamed on the grey-blue gravel and boulders which marked the dry river-bed. Far below me figures were moving across an expanse of sand and pebbles, and sunlight glinted on polished metal which I took to be André's theodolite.

I went on over the desert. The sun was pleasantly warm and there was a refreshing breeze. I felt in a mood for loneliness, and this lonely land fitted in with my thoughts. So I went on, and while circling a cliff in order to look at a ruined tower on a hill top, suddenly realized that I had lost my way. Deceptive was the only word which could be applied to distances here, and the tower was much farther away than it had appeared, and when at last I reached it it proved to be of little archaeological interest.

Starting back in the direction of what I believed to be the main valley, I found myself instead in a desolate area of bare, sun-scorched hills. Somewhere I must have taken a wrong turning. All the features of the landscape looked very much alike, and, even more confusing, there appeared to be no route leading north. At first there seemed to be no cause for uneasiness, but as time passed with no sight of the valley I was seeking I became worried, then frightened.

Ahead of me rose a line of splintered cliffs, the foothills of the Djebel Sagho range, where the Berber diehards had made their last stand. There was something about this place which filled me with a feeling of dread. The cliffs and gorges must be filled with their unburied bones, I thought, perhaps their spirits haunted the place as well. Scrambling down a rocky bank I felt my hat plucked off my head by a thorn bush, and the fierce sunlight seemed to strike my unprotected neck with stunning force. My big black umbrella, which accompanied me everywhere, was promptly raised, and though by now its fabric was in a very dilapidated condition it afforded some protection.

A shallow valley seemed to lead north, and following it for some distance I reached a point from which I could look down into the main Dades Valley. I had been walking for over three hours. As I descended toward the dry bed of the river I saw figures moving about and caught the flash of sunlight on metal instruments; it was André patiently revising the map of the district. The track continued to lead down and down, from a region of twisted red rocks into the greenness of the oasis.

"Slow work," I remarked to André, as I approached.

The servants began folding up the instruments.

"I go to the sheik's house," he informed me. "Come with me."

We walked along a narrow road bordered by fig trees. Above the greenery towered the square keep of the sheik's castle. We entered through an arched gateway. The men lounging about the cobbled courtyard within the gate greeted us pleasantly, and their leader came forward and shook hands. Presently the sheik appeared. He was lean, brown and tall, with not an ounce of

surplus flesh on him, with a lean, narrow face and sunken eyes, which looked oddly whimsical when he laughed, and this was often.

"He's loyal to the French," André whispered. "A very steady man, and very trustworthy."

The sheik led us across the courtyard and up a sloping ascent to a flat roof top where other men were seated on reed mats. Servants brought in glasses and a gleaming brass samovar. Presently we were served with tea and hot barley bread. Arab influence was evident here, for no women were visible, though we could hear their voices chattering behind a curtain. The top of this keep-like building was about fifty feet from the ground, though the angle towers rose higher still.

The old patriarchal mode of life prevailed here, and as we watched we could see the herdsmen driving the cattle into the courtyard below for the night, and then the gate being closed. It was a big wooden gate, and was barred by heavy blocks of wood. I asked the sheik if the building was very old, but like most people unacquainted with writing, he was hazy about its age.

"The sheik's youngest son has taken a fancy to your umbrella," Etienne remarked. "He has never seen such an object before."

I looked at my umbrella, observing that it was no longer the staunch, resplendent companion with which I had embarked upon my journey to the desert; now it was bent and rusty, its black fabric—what there was left of it—torn and bedraggled, showing the honourable scars of fifteen hundred miles of travel over plain and desert and mountain. In short, my umbrella's working days were over, for it afforded protection from neither rain nor sun. Since it was practically useless there was little point in carrying it any farther.

"Tell the boy he can have it," I exclaimed. "It is his."

And the last I saw of my umbrella it was being solemnly borne on the shoulder of this small brown imp of a desert boy, who was solemnly demonstrating to an attentive audience of children what lengths an Inglizi went to to keep a little rain off his head.

As we walked back to the camp thunder rolled sullenly across the valley, and lightning flash after lightning flash stabbed the darkness with lines of fire. I fell asleep that night to the pitter-patter of raindrops on the fly-sheet of the tent, while from the adjoining tent came the tinkle of a mandolin.

They were pleasant days I spent idling at André Etienne's camp, with nothing to do but wander as I willed, or eat, or sleep. The ability to make himself at home in other people's dwellings is an essential part of the vagabond's make-up, and it is casual

invitations such as Etienne had extended to me which add to the pleasure of wandering.

Now that my ambition to visit the 'Land of Mud Castles' had been accomplished it was time for me to think of returning to England, for I had very little money left. Yet there was one last place which I wished to visit before I turned homeward, and that was a desert city called Tiznit, situated far out in the Sahara beyond the Atlas Mountains. The attraction of a journey to Tiznit was that only there could one encounter members of that mysterious race of veiled fighting men known as the 'Blue Moors', who were the last Berber tribesmen to hold out against the French forces.

Tiznit could only be reached by way of a route passing through two cities called Agadir and Taroudant. Taroudant, like Ourzazate, was situated in a valley south of the High Atlas Mountains, but communication between the two valleys was not possible because the ten-thousand-foot barrier of the Little Atlas Mountains blocked the way. So, in order to reach the road to Taroudant and Agadir I should have to return to Ourzazate, cross the High Atlas Mountains to Marrakech, and then go south over the mountains again to Taroudant and Agadir. This journey would involve two crossings of the High Atlas Mountains, and an additional four hundred miles of travel across rough country.

Whether I should ever reach Tiznit, and whether, having reached there, I would be able to get back again, were questions which only the future could answer. But to reach a little-known city and meet a mysterious race of people I would have risked much, and anyway, I had been taking risks all my life. Such is the call of the open road, so that even the appeal of home and kindred sounds faint in comparison.

The roseate hues of dawn were spreading over the yellow sands as I waited by the roadside the following morning for the motor-bus bound for Ourzazate and Marrakech. Soon the bright orange bulk of the approaching vehicle could be seen in the distance, it slowed to a halt beside me, and with a gesture of farewell to Etienne I clambered on board and was whirled away to the west. It did not seem so very long before we were once more passing Ourzazate, first the exotic-looking Berber fortress-palace, surrounded by its high walls and towers, then the modern French settlement with the military *poste* crowning the hill top. We stayed for a time to pick up some passengers and various sacks and bundles, and then turned northward toward the High Atlas Mountains whose serrated peaks could be seen blocking the way ahead.

It is an amazing road which crosses the High Atlas from Ourzazate to Marrakech, following one of the oldest trade routes in Africa. In a series of gigantic curves and bends the road climbs steadily upward toward the eight-thousand-foot Tichka Pass, and, the summit achieved, descends just as precipitously toward the northern plains on the other side. I did not enjoy the journey. Reaction must have set in, for as one hairpin bend followed another, with views over precipices hundreds of feet deep, unpleasant memories came back to me of that crash in the desert which we had experienced several days previously. Every nerve in my body seemed to be quivering.

A dozen times I could have sworn that we were going over the edge as some other vehicle came crawling past us at some difficult turn. For much of the time I just crouched in my seat, feeling sick, eyes closed, hoping that the journey would eventually end. Once or twice I thought of asking the driver to stop, saying that I would get out and walk the remainder of the journey (about sixty miles), but the prospect of being set adrift amid those awful mountains which towered so high above us that the bus might have been some minute insect toiling with infinite slowness along the wall of a house, this prospect was almost as alarming as remaining on the bus. So, pulled two different ways by fear, I remained crouched in my seat until a sight of the high Kutoubia minaret told me that we were approaching Marrakech.

More knowledgeable brains than mine can explain the fear I experienced on this mountain crossing, for I had never felt that way before nor have I ever experienced it again.

TO THE LAND OF THE BLUE SULTANS

No seasick voyager ever set foot on solid ground more joyfully than I descended from the bus in Marrakech. Yet in spite of my fatigue the lure of this great African city gripped me once more, as it had gripped me on my first visit a year previously. It was so utterly different, alien and alluring, from anything one sees elsewhere. Surely all of North and West Africa seems to meet and rub shoulders in the great square of Marrakech; snake-charmers and troupes of dancing boys, witch-doctors from the Niger country and holy men from the desert; story-tellers, scribes, soldiers, Jews in coloured robes, Negroes from Senegal. And all the time there is the throb of drums, African drums incessantly beating, which either delight or madden you, according to your temperament.

For ten hours I slept in the hot, airless room in the small hotel which had been the cheapest accommodation I could secure. Awakening the following morning I felt much better, but ravenously hungry. As in Fez I ate at the *kabob*-stalls, or quick-lunch counters, Moorish style, where for a halfpenny one could buy a handful of wooden skewers with pieces of meat, suet, garlic, or pimento impaled upon them, which had been slowly grilled over a charcoal fire. Other stalls sold a sort of hot, doughnut-like cake, or roasted corncocks, boiled eggs, fried fish and hot bean soup. Sixpennyworth of such comestibles made one feel full.

Now that I had slept and eaten I was eager to be away from Marrakech. Stark against the sky to the south of the city showed the sombre heights of the High Atlas, and it was time to be travelling southward again over them to Agadir and Tiznit, the other desert places I had resolved to visit. This involved a third crossing of the mountains, for the only road south to Agadir led over the seven-thousand-foot pass of Tizi n'Test, and I was determined to accomplish this route on foot. A French official to whom I applied for information about the mountain crossing looked at me as though he obviously thought I was weak in the head, and informed me that the road was open to travellers.

Twenty miles separate Marrakech from the foothills of the High Atlas, and as one trudges along the dusty road which leads due south from the city the high peaks which can always be seen just a little way ahead appear to tower skyward from out of the

tawny plain. Not that there was much trudging across that dusty plain for me, for I had scarcely walked three miles when a car stopped alongside and a friendly voice called out to me to occupy a vacant seat. It was an artist and his wife driving to one of the Atlas villages to paint pictures, and so the next twenty miles were passed seated comfortably beside a big black dog of indeterminate breed.

Alighting from the car the Berber village of Tahanaout confronted me, its flat-roofed, brown-walled dwellings blending into the tawny hillside behind them, so that from a distance they were almost invisible. The waning sunlight gleamed redly on the crumbling walls of the old stronghold as I walked on past groves of ash and cherry and pomegranate trees along the road to Asni, seeking a place to sleep. The village stands at a considerable altitude above the plain so that looking back I could see the countryside which we had just traversed spread out below like a map.

The floor of a ruined building, whose roofless walls promised to provide shelter from the wind, formed my bed that night, but it was a cold and cheerless place, and after spending several uncomfortable hours there I arose at an early hour and went on along the road again. The proprietor of a wayside canteen, astounded at seeing a European walking casually over the mountains, invited me in for a drink, and wrote down on a piece of paper the names of places where lodging might be obtained, and how far away they were: Asni, twenty-five kilometres, two hotels and one canteen; Izoukak, seventy kilometres, one hotel; Talaat n'Yakoub, one inn; Tizi n'Test, thirty-five kilometres, one inn; Oulad Rehil, thirty kilometres, and the possibility of securing lodging. Seeing these names written down on paper gave some semblance of humanity to those stark, cold mountains towering up ahead, they made the region seem less of an unknown wilderness. Later I was to discover that the distances were all wrong, and that some of the place names were unknown on any map, but meanwhile, cherishing my illusions, I had covered a considerable portion of the journey.

The road led upward and onward past the holy city of Mulay Brahim, which Moroccan pilgrims are supposed to visit before leaving for Mecca. Later the whole skyline was blocked by the vast bulk of Mount Toubkal, which was then believed to be fourteen thousand five hundred feet high. A most impressive sight it presented this 'North African Giant' (as the highest summit in North Africa is called), its upper slopes streaked with snow, its lower slopes chequered with cornfields and orchards, and woods

of sandarac and ilex. Little mud-walled villages clung precariously to the mountain sides, and were difficult to distinguish because they resembled the colour of the earth behind them. Berber tribesmen living along the road proved friendly, allowing me to rest in their houses during the heat of the day.

That day's march brought me to Asni, a small place which the French were developing as a mountain resort; I spent the night there at a canteen run by an Italian named Luigi Bernadetti. The following day found me properly in the mountains, with the road climbing steadily all the time. Out of winding valleys filled with scrub-oak the mountain sides swept skyward at terrific angles, vast expanses of bare rock and shales tilting upward to where the white snow showed. Now the road led through deep gorges, where owing to the numerous sharp bends I was in danger of being run down by approaching vehicles. Once an avalanche crashed down the mountain side close by, giving me a bad couple of minutes.

Another day's tramping brought me to Talaat n'Yakoub. This is a place renowned in Moroccan history, for on a neighbouring hillside can be seen the grim castle of Kasba Goundafa, whose high square towers and battlemented walls seem to frown down upon travellers passing along the road. The castle was formerly the home of El Goundafa, the 'Grand *Kaid*' who rules this central portion of the High Atlas, but now that he preferred to live in a comfortable house in Marrakech, the castle was deserted except for a few Negro retainers.

In this stronghold generations of lordly *kaid*s lived as arrogantly as any old-time chieftains in the Scottish Highlands, and, indeed, in essentials, there was little difference between the way of life of such Berber lords and men such as Campbell of Argyll or Cameron of Lochiel. Before the coming of the French, Berber lords such as El Glaoui, El Goundafa and El M'Tougui controlled the Atlas passes and levied a toll upon all who passed. Men from the Kasba Goundafa often waylaid travellers who passed along the road to Taroudant and Agadir, but such things do not happen now and I can pass in peace.

For much of the time the road was deserted, no cars or lorries passing, and the winding way led by gorgeous red cliffs, with purple mountains stretching wave upon wave beyond. Resting in the shadow of some trees I watched four horses circling round and round on a threshing floor, while their sweating driver belaboured them with a whip. Toward sundown lights began twinkling in the little settlements scattered along the mountain sides. People squatting in the doorways of their mud huts greeted me courte-

ously as I passed. The gleam of little lanterns lit up the interiors of the huts behind them, providing glimpses of coloured leather-work, brassware and reed matting. In the quiet of the evening I came to a canteen.

Next morning found me still tramping steadily upward toward Tizi n'Test, the seven-thousand-foot pass, leading to the Sous Valley and the ancient walled city of Taroudant. Ahead of me the mountains seemed to be piled up higher than ever in sky-reaching masses. What a range is the High Atlas, stretching a full five hundred miles across Morocco from the Atlantic to Algeria; its northern slopes rising green and wooded, its southern slopes scoured by the hot desert winds. And in all those hundreds of miles only three passes by which a motor road can cross. The first of these, by the Telrhemt Pass and the Ziz Gorge, I had followed while journeying from Fez to Tafilet; the second, Tichka Pass, I had traversed in the bus from Ourzazate to Marrakech; the third, Tizi n'Test, I was following now.

My own attitude toward mountains has always been that, not of the climber seeking a way to the top, but of the engineer seeking a way through. How to get to the other side, to find a way through, to make a route, a road, surely the horizontal rather than the vertical aspect of mountains is more satisfactory? For to find a way through implies that there is something on the other side which is more alluring and worth reaching, since mountains in themselves possess no particular merit.

Toiling up the zigzag road which writhed snakelike toward the summit of the pass I became conscious of a pain in my leg, and the farther I walked the greater the pain became. Nemesis had caught up with me at last. I had been born with a crippled hip, and though I had been able to dodge the fate foretold for me (of being bedridden all my life), from time to time pain in my leg compelled me to stop whatever I was doing and spend some time lying flat on my back. On this present journey I had sometimes marvelled that my legs had continued to convey me with a minimum amount of discomfort across so many hundreds of miles of country, and I had attributed this immunity from pain to the remarkably dry and healthy atmosphere of Morocco.

Later the pain became so great that it was evident that walking would soon be almost impossible, and that I should have to appeal to the driver of some passing vehicle for a lift. But in which direction should I travel; forward to Agadir and an uncertain future, or backwards to Marrakech and the route home to Gibraltar and England? I do not think I even gave the question a second thought, but simply signalled the driver of the first lorry approaching in

the direction of Agadir, clambered painfully into the seat beside him, and so had my first view of the Sous Valley through a glass windscreen.

Looking down thousands of feet we could see a vast, hazy, blue valley whose farther limits were only vaguely indicated by a purple-hued escarpment. As our lorry descended the winding road leading down from the pass the appearance of the valley changed, so that upon the surface of this wide, sandy-looking mauve plain there appeared such details as groves of palm trees and thickets of cactus, and little woods of argan trees, which look like a blending of a hawthorn and an olive tree, with mud-walled villages here and there. Seven thousand feet below the pass, whose rugged walls, all coppery-green and purple, now loomed skyward above us, we found ourselves following the meanderings of the River Sous, which reaches the Atlantic near Agadir.

We passed through Taroudant with scarcely a pause, so that I had only a glimpse of this ancient walled city surrounded by groves of orange and lemon trees. Our goal was Agadir, at the seaward end of the Sous Valley, and we arrived here late in the afternoon. With my mind filled with thoughts of the desert city of Tiznit this Agadir did not seem much of a place, just a small Europeanized town located beneath the walls of an Arab fort on a hill. A bed for the night being the first necessity, I visited in turn various structures euphemistically labelled 'hotel', and eventually managed to secure accommodation at a price I could afford at a canteen-cum-café patronized by lorry drivers, men of the Foreign Legion, and various nondescript characters.

The pain in my leg had subsided enough for me to walk short distances, but I was, nevertheless, beginning to be worried about the future. There would be little more walking for me, and the sensible thing would be to return to Gibraltar, and try and work my passage back to England on a ship; to attempt to travel to Tiznit would be the act of a madman, and yet—I could not turn back. What did it matter if I was in pain and half starved, if I was ragged and dirty with my boots beginning to fall to bits, if I had only a solitary pound note left in my pocket? Now there was a kind of desperation about life. I *must* go on—I must—I MUST!

Some idea of how I felt can be gained from an entry in my diary for 19th June, 1937: "I cannot settle down to read or write. I want to get away from my own thoughts, I want to take my mind off my circumstances. A weight seems to be pressing down on my brain. There are so many difficulties. Ever seen a fly caught in treacle, or a bound man struggling in the water? Well,

I can understand their feeling. The feeling^{*} of helplessness, of having the whole world against you, of having to fight tremendous odds. I want somebody to talk to, to keep my mind from dwelling on the future.

"Thoughts, thoughts, thoughts! They crowd about me and won't let me rest. I cannot get away from them. I walk and I walk, but I do not know where I walk, with those grim thoughts for company, sorry companions. 'What will happen to me, what will happen to me?' 'Don't be a fool,' says an inner voice. 'You've been in worse jams than this and got out of them. Sing, man, sing. You've got food and money, a passport, everything you need. As for the day after tomorrow—things will turn out all right. You'll live to look back upon this experience and laugh about it.' "

The world can seem very black and lonely when one is twenty-four, and several thousand miles from home.

Several *légionnaires* were leaning against the bar of the canteen when I drifted in for a drink. One of them called out to me to join him, and I learned that he had just completed five years' service and was signing on for another five. He liked the life. He was a Londoner, Kenneth Petrie, of an address in West Acton: Strauss, his companion, had also served five years: René Helier, appeared to have two addresses, one in Barrow-in-Furness, the other in Le Havre. Talking with these soldiers took my mind off my own troubles. Curious to hear some facts about the Legion I asked about discipline, remembering certain highly coloured incidents in *Beau Geste* and other novels.

"Rot! it's no tougher than the Indian Army," I was told. "Any officer who ill-treated his men would meet with an accident on a dark night. It is a pity you people only get your ideas about the Legion from novels and films—or from the far-fetched yarns told by deserters."

The truth about the Legion would seem to be this; that the initial period of training is hard, but the man who is keen does not have a bad time of it. The man who is lazy, stupid, or mutinous has a rough time of it, as, indeed, he would in any army. If a man specializes in some sport or activity, such as boxing or playing a musical instrument, then he has a better time of it than the ordinary private.

The real hardships are the monotonous routine under the burning African sun, with few opportunities of relaxation in leisure hours. One needs to be bi-lingual to make good in the Legion, and as the English and Americans are bad at learning languages, it is usually they who get bored and desert.

"We do not get much fighting nowadays," said Petrie. "It is a couple of years since we had a decent scrap. We spend most of our time nowadays making roads."

Young fellows who joined the Legion seeking romance were apt to be disappointed, he continued, for there were no handsome Arab sheiks around, no glamorous blondes waiting to be rescued, no death-or-glory battle charges with the bugles sounding and the flags flying—none of the usual set-up of a Foreign Legion film or novel—just heat and flies and road making. So if you don't like making roads don't join the Legion!

Fortune favoured me in a rather curious way, for after chatting with the *légionnaires* I walked along the street looking for a place to change my last pound note into French currency. Suddenly I realized that two big men who had been walking along the pavement had now fallen into step one on either side of me.

"If you would just step across the road one moment, monsieur," remarked one of the men politely, "our chief would like to have a word with you."

Mystified, I accompanied them across the road into a building; a quicker-witted person might have guessed at once that they were detectives. In an inner room a suave, dark-haired man sitting behind a desk questioned me, studied my passport, and listened to an account of my walking tour across Morocco. "Have you any money?" he asked, but I had hardly time to draw my wallet from my pocket so that he could see the green of the solitary pound note inside when he laughed and said: "That is all right—this is just a routine check, you know. Sorry we troubled you." Apparently I was free to go, but I had a sudden inspiration that the incident might be turned to my own advantage.

"May I have a pass for Tiznit, please?" I asked.

"But certainly," replied the dark-haired man. "If you will call back in a short time it will be ready for you."

The permit which I collected an hour or so later granted me permission to enter the '*Territoire autonome des Confins du Draa*'. The desert city of Tiznit lay about seventy miles southward, and this glamorous place I was destined to approach by prosaic motor-bus. We started out early the following morning. My companion on the journey was a dark-skinned woman wearing sun-glasses, who smoked a cigarette and between puffs asked where I had come from and where I was going (the commonest questions asked of a traveller in Morocco).

Journeying south from Agadir the High Atlas Mountains are left behind and almost immediately travellers find themselves out in the desert, a bare level plain coloured a brilliant red. For close

on seventy miles the road runs almost due south across a countryside which has a forlorn and abandoned look about it, and whose principal features are an occasional *ksar*, or a block-house, mute reminders of the final military campaign in the conquest of Morocco, which had taken place three years previously. For this desert country was the last piece of Moroccan territory to be conquered by the French, and to its inhabitants, the veiled tribesmen known as the 'Blue Moors', belongs the distinction of holding out longest against advancing civilization.

From boyhood I had been fascinated by accounts of these 'Blue Moors', who had for centuries led a wild nomadic existence in the vast desert spaces of the western Sahara. Fiercely independent, they had long resisted the attempts of European explorers to penetrate their territory, and under the leadership of Meribbi Ribbo—known as the 'Blue Sultan'—had held out against the French for years, until the introduction of tanks and armoured cars to desert warfare brought about their defeat in 1934. Those who managed to escape retreated into the unconquered wastes of Rio de Oro, from whose solitudes they even now swoop down to rob and slay.

The short-lived dynasty of 'Blue Sultans' contributed a dramatic and little-known chapter to the history of Morocco. The big, wealthy, fertile kingdom lying between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean had ever been the goal of ambitious men from the stark and empty solitudes to the south, the loadstar of the poverty-stricken desert dwellers. To Blue Sultan Number One, a fat little man with a pock-marked face, Ma Ainen by name, living in a mud *ksar* on the edge of the Sahara, there came dreams of conquest. His first move was to lead an army of veiled fighting men northward and occupy the desert city of Tiznit. In 1912, his son, El Hiba, who had become Blue Sultan Number Two, decided the time was ripe for something more audacious, nothing less than a claim to the throne of Morocco. Sultan Mulai Hafid was the legal heir to the throne, but he was unpopular. El Hiba proclaimed himself Sultan of Morocco, led an army northward to Agadir and then to Marrakech, where he hoped to win the populace over to his side.

But 1912 was an eventful year, for on 30th March the French declared a protectorate over Morocco, and despatched an expeditionary force against the Blue Sultan. El Hiba was compelled to retreat southward over the mountains to Tiznit, and after a number of unsuccessful battles against the French he died in 1917. The mantle of Blue Sultan now passed to his brother, Meribbi

Ribbo, who from the security of the unconquered desert continued to harry the French for seventeen years.

French troops pressed southward from Agadir to Tiznit, which remained an outpost of civilization surrounded by hostile tribesmen. Meribbi Ribbo, as Blue Sultan Number Three, established a new headquarters in one of the desert valleys, sending out raiding parties to attack villages and plunder caravans. Meanwhile France and Spain between them carved up the western Sahara; to France went the lion's share, most of Morocco and the vast, little-known territory of Mauritania, to Spain went the tiny district of Ifni and the larger region known as Rio de Oro. Yet it was occupation in name only, for apart from Tiznit and a few other French outposts, and a couple of Spanish forts on the coast of Rio de Oro, the interior of the country remained unconquered and unknown. Conditions similar to those in northern Morocco before its occupation by the French prevailed, with constant warfare, robbery, rape, torture and blood feuds.

To the French *postes* came vague reports of uncharted mountains and oases, of towns and villages peopled by fierce tribesmen, ruled by sheiks and emirs unknown to the outside world. Yearly the Blue Moors grew more hostile, and the fate of any European who fell into their hands was either instant death, to be sold into slavery, or held to ransom. The names of such unknown cities as Smara and Tenduf tempted explorers, but the odds against reaching them were great. Pilots of the *Compagnie Générale Aero-postale*, inaugurating the pioneer postal service to South America, had unpleasant contacts with the peoples of the forbidden lands, for the crews of any aircraft forced down in the desert were promptly taken prisoner.

In the early 1920s an aeroplane navigated by Pilot Gourp, carrying two passengers, crashed and was captured by the Blue Moors. Gourp was tortured, and one of the passengers killed. Later, two other airmen, Erabe and Pintado, had been killed, while their companion, after being tortured, was tied to a camel and driven out into the desert to die. Air pilots were usually held to ransom after the Blue Moors had discovered that a man in possession of his ears, eyes and nose was worth more than when these had been removed.

Meanwhile, what of the Blue Sultan, Merribi Ribbo, and his warlike followers? Their raids into Morocco still continued, almost to the gates of Tiznit, so in 1934 the French military authorities decided that the power of the Blue Sultan must be broken once and for all. An army of thirty-five thousand men, comprising units of the Foreign Legion, artillery, cavalry, mechanized groups, and

the French Air Force, was assembled at Tiznit and the final conquest of the western Sahara commenced. While the main body of infantry and cavalry moved steadily southward toward the River Draa, driving the Blue Moors before them, mechanized units and aircraft made a flank attack over the Little Atlas Mountains cutting off any hope of escape in that direction.

The Blue Sultan, steadily fighting a rearguard action, had no choice but to retreat into the desert. To the Moors' dismay the armoured car column continued to advance to Tendouf, a desert town hitherto inaccessible owing to the warlike attitude of its inhabitants. Escape in that direction also being cut off the Blue Sultan retreated into the nominally Spanish territory of Ifni, south-west of Tiznit.

This also had been previously unoccupied owing to the hostility of the Blue Moors, but now a Spanish expeditionary force had been landed to co-operate with the French, so escape in that direction was now out of the question. It was the hour of destiny for Merribi Ribbo, Sultan of the Blue Moors, whose followers, their fighting spirit subdued by artillery fire and bombing, were deserting to their conquerors; the only course open to him was to surrender. So ended the independence of the Blue Sultans, and a remarkable chapter of modern history.

* * * * *

Visiting a succession of Moroccan cities one feels in turn that each is more romantic and exotic than the last, and yet of them all Tiznit is perhaps the most fascinating. Seventy miles out in the desert rise the red walls and towers of this frontier town, where daily the drums proclaim the glory of the sultan, and only a short time ago vigilant riflemen guarded the gates against the attacks of the veiled fighting men of the desert. The road sweeps in a wide curve up to the great gateway leading into the city, and once through that gateway you have left Europe behind and are in the real Africa.

Tiznit is a purely African city of flat-roofed, rose-coloured mud houses lining narrow sandy streets, of mosques with cone-shaped domes reminiscent of the Sudan, of bazaars where you can buy curved *kumias*, or daggers with sheaths of carved copper or silver. Swaggering, arrogant-looking men on horseback or camel ride haughtily by, the followers of the Calipha, or governor of the city. About the whole scene there is a feeling of age, or alienness, and yet though Tiznit looks an old, old place it was founded only

in 1882 by Sultan Mulai Hafid in order to keep the warlike desert tribes in check.

Tiznit is the most northerly market frequented by the Blue Moors, and I was lucky enough to watch the arrival of one of their caravans. Out of the desert came a line of camels, ridden by men clad in robes of indigo blue, with veils over their faces so that only their eyes were visible. I wondered from what strange, little-known places in the desert they had come.

They are known as Blue Moors because they dress in blue garments, and wear blue veils over their faces. The dye comes off and stains their skins, hence the name *les hommes bleu*, or 'carbon-paper people', given to them by the French. Actually they are not Moors at all, but Berbers, and belong to the Sanhadja tribe which gave its name to Senegal. They are kindred to the veiled Tuareg of the central Sahara, though with them the *litham*, or veil, is worn for hygienic and not for religious reasons. Peaceful now, because the might of France compels them to be so, their main occupation until 1934 was raiding villages and pillaging caravans.

THE ROAD BACK

WITH my final ambition now accomplished, with memories of Tafilet, 'The Land of Mud Castles,' of Tiznit and the 'Blue Moors' to console me when I should grow too old and lame to travel, the time had come to turn back. I had accomplished all I set out to do, and had reason to feel proud.

The problem which now faced me was how I was to reach Gibraltar, about seven hundred miles to the north, from where I hoped to work my passage back to England on a ship. With less than twenty shillings in my pocket I was optimistic enough, for I had overcome greater odds on previous journeys and I would do it again. But on the long journey northward to Gibraltar my optimism gradually faded, for this was to prove the most terrible journey of my life.

Yet it began in a very promising fashion. The journey back from Tiznit to Agadir proved as uneventful and uncomfortable as a bus journey across a sun-scorched desert in midsummer can prove to be. Arrived in Agadir I was successful in boarding the bus for Mogador, a hundred and twenty miles to the north. We arrived there shortly after midnight, and I was just in time to board another bus which was leaving for Mazagan, another hundred and fifty miles farther to the north. At Mazagan yet another bus was waiting to convey me on to Rabat, a hundred and twenty miles farther north still. All these vehicles seemed to be running to time-tables specially designed to suit my convenience. It was all very gratifying. Thus far fortune had favoured me, and as hundreds of miles dropped behind the speeding wheels I experienced a feeling of exultation. I *was* going to accomplish the journey without much difficulty after all.

But the observant reader will have spotted several snags. Although it was gratifying to cover nearly five hundred out of the seven hundred to Tangier in such a speedy fashion, it was also very wearying. In fact, it proved more wearying than it is possible to imagine, for there was little time in which to eat or sleep. By the afternoon of the second day I was almost falling asleep on my feet with tiredness, and I was so hungry that had there not been some scraps of bread and cheese left in my pack, with which to stave off the worst hunger pangs, I would have had to

abandon the journey in order to go searching for something to eat.

At Mogador disaster nearly overtook me. Arriving there shortly after midnight I left the bus which had brought me there from Agadir in order to board the bus which was to convey me to Mazagan—and it was then that I discovered that my passport had fallen out of my pocket. It must have dropped on to the floor of the bus I had just left, but when I went back to retrieve the passport the bus was gone. So there I stood in a strange, dark, silent town (for most of the inhabitants of Mogador were asleep in their beds) wondering how one could manage without that vital document, and without which it would not be possible to cross Spanish Morocco to Tangier.

As I stood there a big Negro came up and asked in good English what my trouble was. When I explained, and added that I had but a few minutes in which to board the bus for Mazagan, he grasped my hand, said: "Come, master, come," and we set off at a run through the dark, deserted streets of Mogador. At last we came to an open space where lights showed, and there was the bus from Agadir which I had vacated a few minutes previously. The Negro uttered a cry, and the bus slowed down as it came alongside us. I called out that I had lost my passport, and after a muttered inquiry among the passengers inside, somebody picked it up off the floor and thrust it into my hand. Then the Negro and I were dashing back through the dark streets again to the place where the bus for Mazagan was waiting. And catch it we did!

So these places I mention—Agadir—Mogador—Mazagan—Casablanca—of them I have little or no recollection, only blurred impression of groups of buildings and people which appeared suddenly out of nowhere, as it were, and after a brief interval, disappeared again. And so, late on the afternoon of the third day after leaving Tiznit, I descended stiffly from a bus and once more found myself in the bustling city of Rabat, looking across the blue waters of the Bou Regreg River at the walls of Salé, on the opposite shore, Salé from which I had started out on foot for Taflet Oasis, so many weeks before. I had no money left now, and it was my intention to call at the missionaries' house in Salé—I prayed that somebody was at home—and solicit their help in traversing the remaining two hundred miles which lay between me and Tangier.

Yes, I had no money left now—not so much as a halfpenny to pay the ferryman's fee across the river—but my optimism was still unshaken. (It was as well I did not know what fate had in

store for me.) So there was nothing for it but to walk two or three miles upstream to where the river was spanned by a bridge, and then walk back along the bank to Salé. What a rough, tough customer I must have looked, as I lurched, dirty, unshaven and bleary-eyed, along the road leading out of Rabat, and curious glances were directed at me as I passed.

I entered Salé once more, passed through the Water Gate and along the narrow street, reflecting, as I walked, how many experiences had befallen me since last I passed that way. There again was the familiar wall and gate of the missionaries' house, where, if fortune favoured me, I should encounter a friendly atmosphere and receive help. What better person could I turn to for aid than a man whose life was spent in preaching the word of Christ? A little money would be useful, but what I craved most were a bath and a meal and a friendly word.

At my summons the gate opened and a familiar figure confronted me. Omar the Moor, his face smiling, greeted me and took my hand. Inside the garden, in the shadow of the house, stood a table and around it, in comfortable chairs, sat three people, two women and a man. The table was laid for tea—the old familiar things, tea-pot, cups, a plate of biscuits—as though it was tea time on the lawn in some garden in England.

At my approach the man rose, the missionary, I guessed, and asked what I wanted. When he heard of my predicament, that I was hungry, that I had no place to sleep, and no money, he seemed to withdraw inside himself. He began making a variety of excuses, and as I listened I gradually came to realize how foolish I had been to expect help from people like these. There was little charity here, little of the warmth of Christ's teachings. My hopes of a bed for the night, of a meal even, vanished, and I began to wonder if they would even offer me a cup of tea. But presently, after considering the matter, the missionary poured out a cup and passed it to me, together with a biscuit.

As I drank the tea I gathered that one of the women was the missionary's wife, the other his mother, but any hopes I may have entertained that they might take pity on a tired and hungry wanderer were to be rudely shattered. For when the cup of tea was drunk they made it clear that they were anxious to be rid of me. All three prepared to walk off into the house, and the old woman terminated our conversation—which had consisted mainly of questions about myself—with the remark:

"Do you know—you *smell*!"

Dear Lord, I thought, who would not smell after travelling nearly five hundred miles non-stop from the desert, with no

chance to wash properly, or eat a meal, or sleep in a bed. And was it necessary to remind me in so brutal a fashion? I realized that my distress had left these good Christian people indifferent, and the sooner I left, the better. I picked up my pack, thanked them for their hospitality and apologized for troubling them, and went out into the street.

Not until I was several yards away did the pride which had sustained me now desert me, leaving me tired and worn out and almost without hope. For what was to become of me now? Darkness was falling over the tangle of narrow streets in the walled city, and I literally did not know what to do next or which way to turn. The shock of being rejected by people of my own race and creed filled me with anguish. My brain was numb, and I stumbled along the darkened street which led—anywhere—anywhere. Then I heard the shuffle of Moorish slippers behind me, and a voice called out: "Ya—Sidi, Sidi!" and the next moment Omar the Moor was by my side. He took me by the hand and led me by several turnings to a big, arched gateway.

The gateway led into a *fondouk*, or Moorish inn. A square, cobbled courtyard was surrounded on three sides by low, one-storeyed buildings, rooms which the traveller might hire for the night while his beasts were tethered in the yard outside. No food was provided, only room and stabling, but travellers could cook their own meals over charcoal fires. A tall, gaunt Moor with a long white beard challenged us; he was the gatekeeper, and he and Omar held a whispered conversation. He handed Omar a rusty iron key and pointed to a room on the opposite side of the courtyard. And then I realized what Omar had done. He, a Moslem, in a city reputed hostile to Christians, had rented a room in the inn for me so that I should have somewhere to sleep that night. Where my fellow Christians had failed me a Moslem had proved kinder.

"Sleep well, *sidi*," said Omar. "In the morning I will come again for you. There is a British Consul in Rabat. Surely he will help you?"

He departed, but presently the old Moor came along bearing a dish of steaming food. It was not for me to inquire into its contents, so I wolfed them down, spread my sleeping-bag on the hard earth floor, and almost instantly fell asleep. What bliss it was to stretch out at full length once more.

When I awoke another day had dawned, and I felt much better. I washed and shaved under the water tap, sewed some rents in my tattered clothing, and generally prepared myself to call on the British Consul. The old Moor proffered some hard

maize bread and dried dates, and as I was eating these Omar arrived. The first thing he did was to produce a new lock and chain to fasten the door of my room.

"I know my countrymen," he observed. "Your belongings will be safe now until we return, Sidi. Now let us go."

We walked down to the river and a tall Moor ferried us across. Omar paid. A few minutes later saw us walking through the streets toward the British Consulate. My hopes revived, for surely the consul would help me? But again I was to be disillusioned, for when, after a considerable wait, I was able to interview that august personage he soon dashed any hopes I had of receiving assistance.

"Help you—why should I?" he declared. "Oh, I know you are a British subject—but it is not my job to assist any Tom, Dick or Harry who comes here begging for help."

"But I have no money," I pleaded. "What am I to do?"

"That is your problem and you must solve it yourself," was the uncompromising reply. "Go to Tangier—the consul there may help you."

Tangier was about two hundred miles away, and how I was to reach the place without money appeared an insoluble problem. To complicate matters travellers were only allowed to cross Spanish Morocco by train. The consul agreed to secure a transit visa for me from the Spanish military authorities, as without this it would be impossible to cross their territory, so I left my passport and arranged to call back for it that afternoon. Omar had returned to Salé, so I spent the hours of waiting resting in some beautiful gardens overlooking the sea. When I returned to the consulate a cheery-faced young Englishman handed me my passport, and as he appeared friendly I asked him for the loan of half a crown. Without hesitation he slipped some coins in my hand and wished me luck.

Imagine my joy when, going round to the railway station, ostensibly to inquire about fares but actually to observe the chances of stealing a ride on a train going across Spanish Morocco, I learned that one could actually travel fourth class to Tangier for the incredibly small sum of two shillings. Feeling like a prisoner who has suddenly been retrieved from the death sentence I promptly bought a fourth-class ticket, and spent another sixpence on a litre of wine and some bread and cheese. The train was due to leave at sundown, so I should be sure of somewhere to sleep that night.

I hurried back to the *fondouk* to collect my rucksack and pay Omar the few coppers owing him, but when I arrived there he

was nowhere in sight, and as the door of my room was locked and he had the key I could not get my rucksack. Time was passing, and I was afraid that the train might leave without me, so hurried round to the missionaries' house where Omar worked, hoping to find him there. He was somewhere in the town, it seemed, but his wife Fatima said she would guide me to him.

I had to wait while she put on her outdoor clothes, which included the white veil required by Mohammedan law. For a white man to have been seen in the company of a veiled Moorish woman would have been to arouse the anger of the townsfolk, so we arranged that she should walk on ahead and I would slink behind in the rear. At last we located Omar, who went with me to the railway station, where I was just in time to board the train bound for Tangier.

The carriage in which I found myself proved to be filled with a noisy crowd of Frenchmen and Spaniards, who shared a partiality for garlic and an aversion to having the windows opened. So I passed on to an adjoining carriage, which was empty save for a dignified old Moor and half a dozen veiled figures who were, I presumed, members of his harem. They were all reclining luxuriously on mats and cushions on the floor, around a big, brass tray containing cups of mint tea. The Moor was quite clearly not pleased at my intrusion, but could not apparently think of any means of getting rid of me, and for my part I was so pleased at the prospect of stretching out comfortably on the floor that I took no heed of his remarks.

I chose the corner farthest away from the family group (there are no seats in a fourth-class carriage), spread my sleeping-bag and cape on the floor, placed a tin of food beside me, and made myself comfortable. Then I swilled nearly a quart of red wine, and of the remainder of the journey I remember nothing, except that I was awakened once by the touch of a hand on my shoulder and a voice saying: "If the *senor* would be so kind—your passport." I guessed it was the frontier of Spanish Morocco, so I sleepily handed over my passport, had it stamped, and handed back to me. Some time later the performance was repeated. We had crossed the frontier again into the International Zone of Tangier; about six o'clock in the morning we arrived at Tangier city.

The train deposited us at the new railway station (which had been completed since my last stay in Tangier) which stood by itself in a windswept region of blown sand. The air felt fresh and cool as I tramped along beside the sea, and across this sandy waste toward the palm-bordered promenade leading into the city. My first task was to discover when there was a ferry steamer

leaving for Gibraltar, though how I was to secure a passage on it without any money in my pockets was a problem which remained unsolved. Still, I had actually reached Tangier, which was something; there had been moments when I had begun to doubt my ability to do this.

But when I consulted the sailing list outside the shipping company's office my hopes sank again, for the steamer did not leave for Gibraltar until three days' time. How was I to exist in the meanwhile? There was but one course open to me, and I took it. I made my way through the narrow streets and alleys to the house called El Delirio, and was soon pouring out my troubles to old Pablo and his wife. Were they dismayed by the fact that I had no money? Not a bit.

"If the *senor* has no money then it cannot be helped," Pablo remarked philosophically. "One must still eat. Remain here with us, *senor*, and one day perhaps, you will get some more money, and then you pay us back, eh? You will have your old room—it is empty."

In the privacy of my room I stripped, swilled myself down with a couple of buckets of water, dressed, and feeling refreshed, went downstairs to partake of the meal which Maria had provided. Then, fortified in body and mind, I went out into the bustling streets of Tangier, to discover some means of crossing the thirty-five miles of water which separated me from Gibraltar, and, as I hoped, the ship on which I would be able to work my passage back to England. Although I had been disillusioned a number of times I still retained a touching belief that, in real story-book fashion, something would happen which would get me out of my difficulties.

And sure enough it did. For as I walked along the street I saw a man coming toward me, a tall, pleasant-faced man dressed in a light-coloured suit and a Panama hat. A voice inside me said: "Go on—speak to him—he'll help you." So I spoke to the man, told him something of my difficulties, and in a pleasant American voice he told me to come along with him to his hotel. This was a big, modern structure of glass and concrete overlooking some gardens beside the sea.

In a big room with windows looking toward the blue waters of the Strait of Gibraltar I was told to make myself comfortable in a chair, and while my companion hunted round for a clean shirt he listened to an account of my adventures in Morocco and the desert. Douglas Merritt was his name, he told me, maybe I had read some books by a cousin of his named Abe Merritt—*Dwellers in the Mirage*, and *Burn, Witch, Burn*—and yes, he'd done

plenty of exciting things himself, including breaking his neck in an air crash, a proceeding which he couldn't recommend. Then he grinned, and said:

"Do you like pumpkin pie? I know a man who claims to make the best pumpkin pie in Africa. Come along."

We left the hotel and walked along the promenade until we reached a wooden shed which bore a big sign saying: 'Ambrose's—come here for Pumpkin Pie'. We perched ourselves on high stools and were presently served with huge slabs of pie by a big Negro whose face almost split from ear to ear when he grinned. With the easy familiarity of the experienced traveller Douglas Merritt spoke to various persons there, and then he turned to me and said:

"Here is ten shillings. A bit of money in the pocket is always useful. I came over from Gib myself to spend a few days here, but I don't want to go back yet. So you can have my return ticket. That will get you across the water. How's that?"

I stammered something about it being very good of him.

"Forget it, pal. If you can't get a job on a ship to England, just hang around for two or three days until I come over—then I'll pay your passage back home for you."

He cut short my thanks by jumping off the stool and suggesting we go somewhere in search of a drink.

As a result of his generous offer I now anticipated little difficulty in reaching Gibraltar, and England. But I still had to learn that fate, ever capricious, is fond of raising our hopes only to dash them down again. After spending three days very pleasantly in Tangier I boarded the steamer for Gibraltar, which was reached without incident a few hours later. Now that most of my difficulties had been smoothed away in such a miraculous fashion I looked forward to seeing Gibraltar again because of the friendliness experienced there on previous visits. This time I was to be brutally disillusioned.

As I stood by the gang-plank waiting my turn to go ashore an official took my passport and asked to see the steamship ticket to my next destination. I explained my lack of a ticket and my hopes of working my passage back to England on a ship. He frowned at this, and called a policeman, who declared that he would have to take me to the police station. Arrived there I promptly found myself undergoing a cross-examination; where had I come from, what was I doing, how did I earn a living? Then came the question which I had been dreading; how much money had I? When he saw the few shillings left to me the police officer's manner became even more curt.

"We don't want your sort in Gibraltar," he declared. "You will have to go back."

"Back," I stammered. "Back where?"

"Back to Tangier, of course," he replied. "You will not be allowed to land here."

At these words my heart seemed to stand still, for this was almost like hearing the death sentence. For days I had been struggling, with all the determination possible, to get away from Africa, now all my desperate efforts were gone for nothing, and I was to be sent back. There was nobody willing to help me there, and what would become of me I did not know. I knew despair such as I had experienced when turned away from the missionaries' house in Salé. I pleaded with the officer to be allowed to try and get a job on a ship going to England, but he remained adamant. No; I had committed an offence in landing in Gibraltar with no money and no steamship ticket. Wanderers like myself were not wanted, and the sooner they moved me on to somewhere else, the better.

A difficulty now arose, for the steamer was not returning to Tangier until three days' time. I should have to remain in custody, but as there was no prison accommodation available the police officer did not know what to do with me. Finally, it was decided that a tender moored alongside the quay should constitute my prison, and I was ordered to remain on board this until I could be conveyed back to Tangier. Policemen patrolling the quay were ordered to see that I did not leave the tender.

I remained on that tender for three days, three of the weirdest days of my life. No provision had been made for me to eat, and had not the crew shared their meals with me I should have starved. There was no place for me to sleep, so I spent my time in the saloon, a big apartment with leather-covered seats along the walls. On one of these seats I used to lie down when sleepy, to be awakened suddenly in odd hours of the night to find the saloon filled with a noisy, excited crowd of people. For the tender had to steam out to the liners anchored in the roadstead, collect all the passengers wishing to go ashore, and convey them to the quay. For a little while I would have this excited, chattering crowd thronging round me, then they would all be gone and I would be left alone in the silent saloon.

Once I tried to escape off the tender unobserved, but I had hardly set a foot ashore when a voice bawled out: "Hey, you, get back on board!" and I looked and saw a policeman coming toward me. Then I tried another plan. The engineer of the tender told me that there was a chaplain to the local seamen, and that he

might be able to help me—if I could reach him. I tried to send a message to him, but received no reply, so resorted to subterfuge. Summoning the policeman on guard on the quay I requested permission to go into the town to get a haircut. After the request had been conveyed to headquarters I duly received permission to leave the tender for the space of one hour. And, oddly enough, I was allowed to go alone.

Once out of sight of the police station I wasted no time searching for a barber's shop, but set out for Morello's Ramp, where the clergyman lived. A passer-by pointed out the house where the Rev. James Johnston lived, and a few minutes later I was telling my story to a friendly looking man in clerical garb.

He listened, asking questions now and again, invited me to have a cup of tea, offered me half a crown, but confessed that he was unable to help me. He explained that the police were having enough difficulties with all the refugees who had sought sanctuary in Gibraltar after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, and that they simply could not relax the regulations to allow stray penniless wanderers to land. He suggested that the British Consul in Tangier might be able to help me, but after the rebuff I had received at the hands of the consul in Rabat I had no hopes of obtaining help from such officials.

There was nothing for it but to return to the tender, defeated. I stopped at the police station to report my return, and make one last effort to persuade the officer in charge to relent, but it was a wasted effort. No; I must go back to Africa. That was final.

"What will become of me?" I wailed.

"That is nothing to do with us," was the reply. "It is a job for the International Police in Tangier."

This reply was not calculated to make me feel any happier, for I could foresee the same situation arising the moment I set foot in Tangier; they might not allow me to land there again. The irony of the situation was that by not allowing me to remain in Gibraltar they would prevent me meeting Douglas Merritt when he returned there, so that he would be unable to help me secure a passage back to England, as he had offered. I explained all this to the chief of police, but he was sceptical of my story and hinted that perhaps this philanthropic American existed only in my own imagination.

So there was nothing for it but to go back to Tangier, and as I leaned against the steamer's rail and saw for the third time that white-walled city rise out of the sea, you can imagine that my thoughts were bitter ones. For this time I was being forced back to a place to which I hated to return, and was almost without

hope. I had an idea that I would be committed to some sort of concentration camp, maintained to prevent such riff-raff as myself who had no place in organized society, from mingling with their betters. I knew absolute despair.

And yet I need not have despaired, for the wheels of officialdom had already begun to move on my behalf. Messages concerning this desperate character Jim Ingram must have already reached Tangier, for when the steamer docked two blue-uniformed policemen were waiting to take charge of me. They escorted me to the British Consulate, where I was formally handed over to the representative of His Majesty's Government.

My passport was taken away from me, and in the same spacious room in which I had asked the consul's assistant for a visa to cross Spanish Morocco several months before, I now explained my story. My fears that this would prove a repetition of the interview with the consul at Rabat proved groundless, for these people proved kinder. Once the formalities were over the atmosphere became friendly, and I was informed that I should be conveyed back to England as a distressed British subject. A liner bound for Gravesend was due at Gibraltar in a few days' time, and as two other men were also waiting in Tangier to return as D.B.S. we could all travel together.

So the last difficulties were cleared away, and what a relief it was to know that at last I should be able to return home. The consul's assistant asked if I would like to move into a better hotel, or needed any money to pay my bills, but I had no wish to forsake *El Delirio* and its kindly occupants. I lost no time in returning to tell Pablo and Maria of my good fortune and to pay them the money I owed them. (If you return D.B.S., by the way, the government retains your passport until you have refunded the money which has been spent on your behalf; until you have done this you cannot have your passport back or go abroad again.)

As a fitting conclusion to this fantastic sequence of events I spent my last days in Africa, alternatively in that little Spanish inn filled with disillusioned Communists, and drinking cocktails with Douglas Merritt and his acquaintances in the fine hotel overlooking the sea.

A few days later, from the deck of the fifteen-thousand-ton *Ormonde*, of the Orient Line, I took my last look at Africa. Gradually the smoky red hills of Morocco dissolved into the blue distance, only the vague outlines of the African shore were left, and soon that also had dropped astern and was gone.

A feeling of pride came over me as I stood there. Although I

was ragged and nearly penniless and my future was uncertain (actually I was destined to spend a year at Fircroft College, Bournville, studying economics and philosophy), I had done all I set out to do. I *had* followed the *Route Imperiale* over the mountains to Tafilet Oasis, I *had* reached 'The Land of Mud Castles', and seen with my own eyes those fantastic, multi-coloured strongholds, I *had* seen the desert cities—Erfoud, Tinjdad, Tinerhir, Ourzazate, Tiznit—which few of my race had seen. In spite of the pain and discomfort and danger which I had undergone the journey had been well worth while, and I had memories which nothing could ever take away from me.

I was content.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to thank the 'Chemins de Fer du Maroc' and French Railways (National Tourist Office) for their permission to reproduce the various illustrations in this book.

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