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BETWEEN THE DESERT AND THE SEA

**BETWEEN THE DESERT
AND
THE SEA**



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FOREWORD.

IT is stirring after an age-long sleep, this land framed in between the gold of the desert and the azure of the sea. Fifty years back it was hardly known except to the French officials and colonists who were bravely reducing it to order. Fifty years back again, and it was a Corsair State, living in medieval conditions.

Suddenly, since the war days closed, the surrounding lands have also awakened to the fact that it may have a future as well as a past. Tourists have realized that it is only twenty-eight hours from Marseilles, and the nearest viewpoint for an Eastern setting. Explorers have discovered that it is a rare starting-point for the penetration of the Sahara and its secrets. And the Church of Christ has begun to see that it is not an agglomeration of backward Moslem races, but a strategic centre.

So we ask you to come and look at it. The colour pages and the letterpress are with one and the same intent—to make you see. Many things begin with seeing in this world of ours.

Algiers



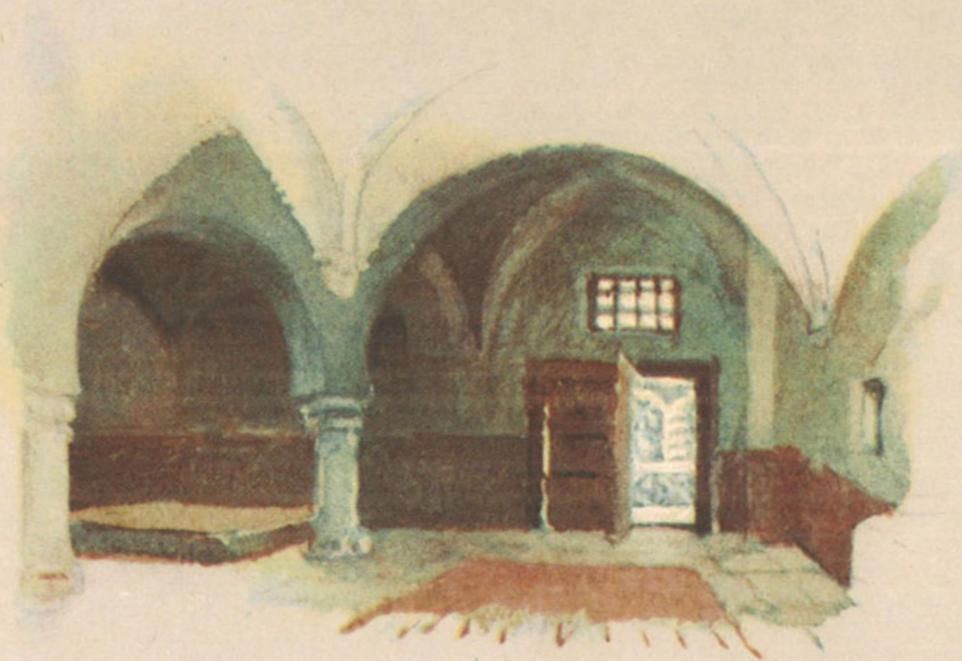
The bay of Algiers.



Little human handles

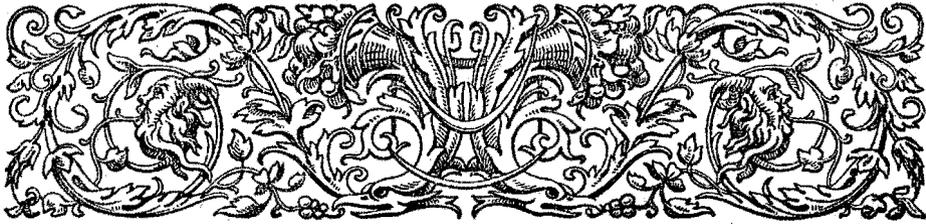


A corner of the roof



A corner of the crypt —
(in an empty condition)





CHAPTER I.

THE REMAINS OF THE PIRATE CITY.

ALGIERS itself is delightful to the visitor who knows no better, and truly nothing can spoil the perfection of the bay's contour, with the snow crown of the Kabyle mountains across its further shore. There to our minds its beauty ends. Modern Algiers might be anywhere on the Riviera.

All that is not European is shrinking apace. Our first sight of the native town, in the latter 'eighties, showed it standing windowless, massed in cream-white against the dead blue of the sky, the breadth and height broken only by a cypress spire here and there. Now it is interlaced by streets of a nondescript type, and the untouched life of the East flickers but in corners. We will take you to them while the embers are still aglow, for the world will never find them again when its progress has smothered them.

Our right of way, in bringing you thus far into their inwardness, is by reason of old friendship. Guide-books can tell the outward conditions of the city: guides can take you to

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a caricature of its household setting—it needs love and trust to give entrance to the normal life of the homes.

We go up one of the paved staircases that serve as streets. The steps are wide, irregular, edged with cobble stones. The walls are recessed by a cubby-hole here and there. An Arab tailor sits in the first, crosslegged, weaving the braid in some juggler fashion with his toes while he sews it on with his fingers : the next is a colour scheme of flame-tinted oranges, pale lemons and copper-hued dates, gleaming out of the dusk. Dusk it is always, and an airless dusk, with odours manifold, for the sun has never shone into it since the cobweb-like maze of streets was built. The houses nearly meet overhead on their first storey, on slanting props of *lignum vitae*, with the intent, so men say, that they may buttress each other in case of an earthquake.

Between the tiny shops are doors, heavy, nail-studded. In the generation that is passing, these doors severed irrevocably between the world without and the world within.

Even now, you do not think of knocking, for no one would come and open to you in a town street. You push the door ajar, and it swings back behind you by means of a pulley and a heavy stone, and you go along a dim passage. It is tiled up to the spring of the stone vaulting, in ochre and deep blue and black, but for the break of little twisted pillars : between these

The Remains of the Pirate City

are stone seats, where the men of the household receive their guests when these are not of their family. At the end of this vestibule is another door, panelled in an ancient key-pattern. Here you call to the friend you have come to see, "O Aissha," "O Fatima," or some other name of the womenkind of the Prophet, and you pass straight into the marble-tiled, arcaded court, open to the sky. We pity the people doomed to a roof over their heads when we have grown used to these Moorish houses with their unhindered glories of sunlight and moonlight.

If your friend is among the elite of the house, it is from the wooden railing of the gallery that surrounds the court half-way up that a head looks over, draped in fringes and folds of blue, green and gold, or mauve and silver, and the word "Djouzi"—"pass"—sets you free to mount the winding staircase and find her. Others are there, in many-tinted short jackets and loose, flowing trousers, sitting scattered on the gallery floor, fanning ceaselessly the slow kindling charcoal in earthen fire-pots. We always think that there is a special providence for them in the fact that all their dishes take an interminable time in the preparation. It is a help to the cooped-up days, and brings a certain hushing of the tongues. And tongues are the bane of these Arab households : gossip, scandal, intrigue grow quickly from each other, with vivid imagination and love of scheming for

Between the Desert and the Sea

their soil, and they need but leisure to start them. All the piquancy of existence is to be found in these excitements and in worse, till the element of distrust shadows every heart, and the wonder is that any life can go on its even way.

“Talk to us,” they say, when we have got through the family news and the ailments of the babies. Their demand is not always of the easiest : sometimes the very air seems so full of spiritual wickedness that we feel numbed by it. Only just here and there in the group there will be a wistful face that draws us on and sets us free, or a breath from God’s Holy Place clears the miasma. The very name of Jesus Christ our Lord is enough again and again to keep the hosts of evil at bay while a rift is being made in the darkness.

As you pass out, another phase of womanhood comes into sight, for these Algiers houses, on their ground floor, are mostly packed by Kabyles from the mountains, the aborigines of the land. Packing is no vague word, for sometimes three or four families from the same local tribe are herded in one room, each in a corner, well defined as if chalked off on the floor. Their regal-looking women, in picturesque, unwashed drapery, are of a wholly different type from the Arab chatterboxes overhead. They come from a race whose origin is shrouded in guesswork. They are an unconquerable stock, as any one will tell you who has had to do with them : the smallest girl will stand upright as

The Remains of the Pirate City

a dart, her well-chiselled chin in the air, and hurl defiance. The men are virile and industrious. When they get a chance of education they hold their own and more with the Arabs who overran the land in the past.

Of the real old aristocracy among the Arab people, few choose Algiers for a dwelling ; and where any of the last generation of wives and mothers survive, the old régime remains recognized, for they are a strong-willed race, these women of bygone day, and the laxity that is gaining ground is accursed in their eyes.

A few months ago you might have seen a funeral swinging along a country road ; swinging, because there is a forced cheerfulness in all that concerns the last offices for the dead. The faded rose-colour and tarnished silver of the pall were crowned with two satin shoes, without a sign of wear or stain : they were the shoes in which the old chieftainess, who lay beneath, stepped over her husband's threshold as a girl-bride, and it was her pride that she had never crossed that threshold again.

They gloried in their prison bars, those women of the past : their caging proved their status, and their value. They cannot understand the present-day tendency towards resenting the bondage. Resentment marks the limit of the pace towards liberty at present among Algerian women, for their contact with

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more progressive lands is small. Their babies, their clothes, the affairs of their neighbours, how best to pacify or circumvent their husbands, these matters leave no margin for other thoughts.

Religious belief is condensed into one little double creed, eight words all told, in the terse, rolling Arabic—"No God but God and Mohammed, God's Apostle." The words are a charm, or a battle-cry, a lullaby or a passport to the dying, as you will.

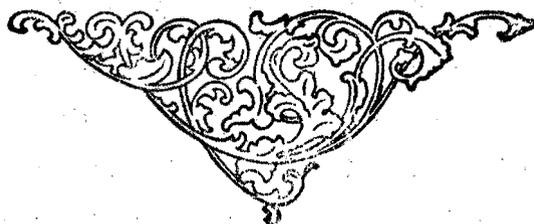
Friday is the sacred day of the week to the men. If the woman is old and ugly she may go to the latticed gallery in the Mosque, otherwise she celebrates it in the cemetery.

This is not so dreary as it sounds. Practically it is her one healthy outing and of the nature of a picnic. The ancient graveyard of Algiers slopes down to the valley where the escaping galley slaves used to hide in the old pirate days. All is quiet there except on Friday, when women and children come trooping among the gnarled olives with great bunches of yellow narcissus and dark lentisk leaves from the hills to lay on the, for the most part, nameless mounds and on the blue tiled monuments. For the dead live, they say, by sweet odours, as did Adam before the fall, and on Fridays they come from Paradise and sit on their tombs and must be met and regaled. And here ends the observance of the holy day.

We watch these Arab women with their keen intelligence

The Remains of the Pirate City

fettered, cramped in their untried capacities for doing, hindered in all they might become with their powers of loving and enduring and we recognize that the slavery days of Algiers are not yet ended. Nor will they end while the Redeemer and His ransom price are unknown.





CHAPTER II.

BEHIND BLIDA.

DO kaleidoscopes still exist? or do they belong to the era of middle Victorian childhood? There used to be a focus, a swift little twist, and all the chips of glass, orange and blue and green, would go as if by enchantment into a new design.

Something like that happens as we move from one region to another in this land between the desert and the sea. We have the same races, the same traditions, the same religion, the same customs—falling evermore into different groupings.

Turn the kaleidoscope of Algiers conditions only so far as to bring into vision the life of the mountains that form her background. They stand china-blue in winter, and they shimmer silver-grey through the summer days above the fold of the sunburnt plain. It is when you climb them in springtime that they are at their loveliest, for then the cedar forest that crowns them is carpeted with violas and clusters of orchis—bee orchis, fly orchis, Venus' looking-glass and others, pink-sheathed or white-spurred, and here and there the tulips open golden-hearted and slim, from buds of madder and bronze.

Blida



A village hut



& a Blida street



Almond Blossom



Specimens
of the
guides



The Chenoua
from our windows

B e h i n d B l i d a

Human existence, in those hills, depends on water supply : wherever a spring has force enough to flow the year round you will find a ravine terraced with fig and pomegranate and apricot, and if your eye is practised in the search you will discern among the foliage bits of thatch or weatherbeaten tiles, and towards evening the lingering of a few blue wisps of smoke, showing that scores of lives are being lived out in that chink, primitive as when the Christian era began. The very folds of the women's red woollen drapery, looped on the shoulders and girdled at the waist, are a replica of an old Roman statue. Their heads have a poise in keeping through bearing from girlhood earthen pots in which the Roman outline and proportion still survive.

It is as a rule only on the path of boulders leading to the water-trough that the women are to be seen, for they are safeguarded in their hamlets, as are their sisters of the city within its white walls. Here the fortress consists of a hedge of prickly pear, massed, a yard in diameter, the thick sage-green shield-leaves, each the size of a battledore, and set with long and poisonous spikes.

As a rule this hedge has but one little entrance lane to the hamlet, and that is guarded by two or three of the white, wolf-like dogs that are the bane of country visiting from our point of view. The only hope, unless you have met a friend outside, is to stand at a distance—a safe distance is a questionable point—and clap

Between the Desert and the Sea

your hands till somebody comes out. It would be terribly bad manners to call any one by name.

The response will generally be in the form of some such dear morsel of humanity as these two picture pages show. The little ones were sketched in pre-war days as they tumbled about our Mission station on the edge of the town of Blida below. The requirements of Government schools in our surroundings there have now made hats and pinafores the fashion. Up among the hills the children are still left to themselves—and to us if only we could follow up our chances.

They hurl a few stones to clear off the dogs, then seize our hands and drag us along triumphantly. A still fiercer dog will be chained outside the hut to which we are being led, and we notice somewhat anxiously that the links terminate with a bit of rotten-looking rope, at which he is straining hard. However, a grandmother comes out, her white hair stained orange with henna, and she calmly sits down on the creature's head till we have passed in.

The long, low room is soon crowded with neighbours, for it is a delightful break in the monotony of their world. Try to imagine an existence dependent on finding the three requirements of water, wood and wool. If the mountain woman can supply these to her household in a ceaseless round, well and good, the interests of life go no further, unless on the occasion of a

Blida Babies



Open doors



"Wait"



"finished"



Man is Master already



What odd people!



"come"



B e h i n d B l i d a

birth, marriage or death in the village community. So the advent of other women, wearing strange clothes and talking about strange things is a chance not to be lost and they pull us from one hut to another, the children following like a flock of starlings in the shrill chatter of their little tongues. "Talk to us," "Sing to us," is echoed as in the seacoast streets below, till we have no voices left. When a stop comes from sheer exhaustion we have been offered a copper, or an egg has been dropped by a girl into our lap, saying, "Now go on."

The man's side of life's responsibilities is represented by the huge clay jars built against the wall at one end of the room. They stand over six feet high, tapering towards the top and crowned with notched rings moulded while damp. Below, a foot or two from the floor is a round hole the size of your fist, and closed with a wooden plug. Thence the woman draws her supply of barley or dried figs or millet : the man's part is to keep the row of pots stored from the top. For flavouring he will add onions from his garden and oil produced from his olive berries by crushing them in a double mat, which is for shape and size like a round chair cushion. If the harvest is prosperous all goes well : if not, the women look pinched and the children droop and typhus sets to its deadly work.

For the most part the mountain man is nearly as far back as the woman in his outlook on the world. Contact with civilization

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comes with his visit to the nearest weekly market of the plain. There, the first ripple of its tide breaks at his feet ; it concerns him just so far as it dawns on his slow brain that it suits his convenience. A few years ago he looked askance at the motor bus, doubting whether there might not be some demon concerned in bearing it along with no apparent means of motion. Now he watches for it as it passes the mouth of his valley, and finds that it goes quicker than his mule, and that no evil power has laid hold on him.

Other surprising things are around him in that market town ; the scribe, crumpled up in his den, is getting superseded by telegraph and telephone. " Wonderful " is the one thought that has lodged in the sender's mind. But he will tell nothing of these strange novelties to his women folk. " How should they understand—they are but as cattle." Neither will he impart to them the few French nouns and verbs that he has picked up and uses with Arabic prefixes or terminations. " Such knowledge is not for women."

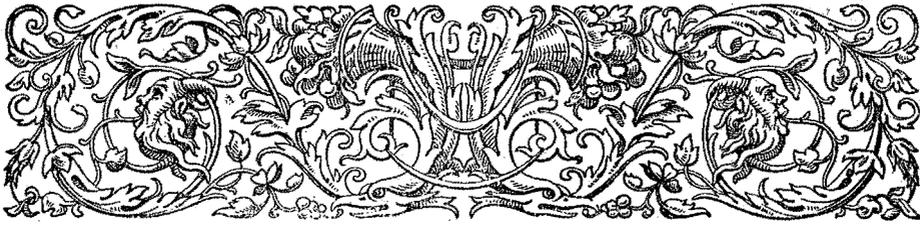
Take a last look at it, this land of the Blida mountains. The afternoon sun has gone behind the deep purple bloom of their hollows, and catches the translucent " mouse-ears " as the Arabs call them, of the budding fig leaves in the middle distance, and enamels in tenderest rose colour the thick cloisonné of the apricot blossom. Then it steals round and lights with a last

Behind Blida

beam a bit of pasture land among the distant shadows. It stands out in emerald, or more exactly, like the peacock-tinted wing of some gorgeous insect in the dusky setting of the olives.

Then night falls, as it will fall soon on the lives that are folded in those countless ravines, the night for them—and for us—when no man can work.





CHAPTER III.

AWAY WEST.

SUNLIGHT and radiant colour are still the setting of human life in hills and valleys, uplands and plains, as we pass westward, for we follow the mountain trend of the chain that knits into its backbone the foothills from Tunisia to Morocco. And all along the line that human life harmonizes outwardly and has a certain beauty in its simplicity, archaic though it be.

Civilization is for ever pushing the simplicity from its main line of traffic : a little way back you will still find these girls of the time of Queen Philippa in their peaked caps, with the veil dangling behind over the long flowered robe.

It is a fair land outwardly. The time to go through the plain is when the glory of Easter lies along it. The pastures are shot, now with gold and silver, now with copper and purple, now with pale rose and sea-green as the flower carpet changes, playing a treble melody to the bass of the solemn hills of the horizon.

Later on come other beautiful things, as the sketches show : the seeding of the hemlocks and the silver-gilt of the barley fields.

Relizane



Stone quarry & Oleanders
Bou Hanefia



"White to harvest"



Relizane girls

Bou Hanefia



Looking towards Bou Hanefia



The cistern.



Coaxing.

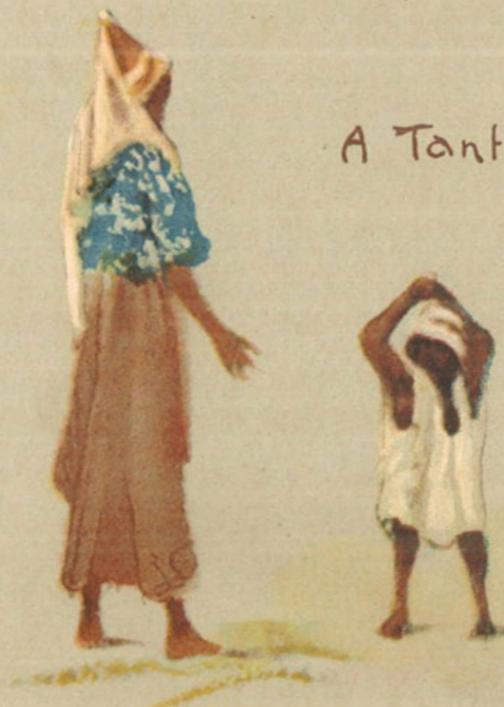


Senoussi boys

"We come from the Baths" ? ? ? ? ?



By the River.



A Tantrum

A w a y W e s t

Even the thistles are a joy : spring thistles bleached to old ivory, summer thistles whose stalks and leaves take every shade of peacock and ultramarine, great globes of navy blue that grow among the blossoming oleanders in the river beds, or border the tawny stubblefields.

But in this chapter we are here to see some of the shadows of country life. We will keep to the women's side, and we will keep to the lighter shadows. We are not telling you the worst sorrows from our standpoint, the soiling of the children's minds by the time they can walk and talk, the reckless sin and cruelty in the so-called homes—these things would make this book unfit for those for whom it is meant. We will look at but one of the troubles, the haunting of fear.

It is not on the outward risks of life that this lays hold : fatalism helps them there. " You do not mind that he has just been serving a term of imprisonment for murder ? " we asked a young widow not long ago, with regard to a proposed suitor. " *That* does not matter," was her calm answer. " There have been many murderers in my family." The horror of fear lies in the unseen, and it is the background of the woman's soul from first to last, shrouding its " joie de vivre " (joy of living) and growing only denser with old age. Our Lord's " Fear not . . . I have the keys of Hades and of death " has not reached them, and His angel guard is out of ken.

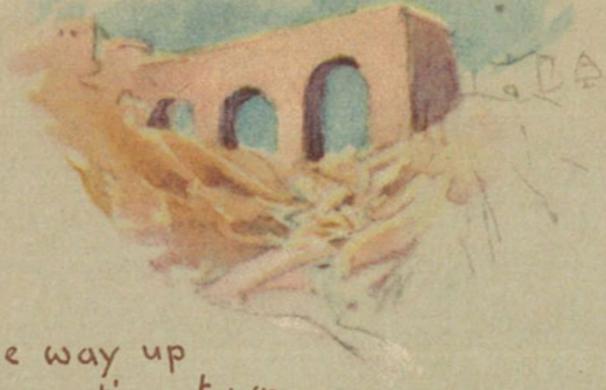
Between the Desert and the Sea

Animism, belonging to a time far back of Islam, is rife in these parts, an underworld peopled with jinns and affrites and ghouls who have all to be humoured. Trees that penetrate this underworld by their roots are sometimes so holy that they are covered with rags and votive offerings; wells and streams connect with it and are apt to be uncanny in consequence. But the special terror in Western Algeria is the "Tabia," i.e., "follower," a kind of double in the spirit world, who chases every mortal with unrelenting hate, wreaking evil on his health, his business affairs, his children, as the case may be, till death ends the pursuit.

It is present with the child's first breath, so they believe. At the same moment that the baby life comes into the world there is born, somewhere in the walls, the little demon who must incessantly be propitiated lest jealousy should be vented on its human rival—hence the mother's dread of an admiring look or word in the direction of her infant. When the human baby gets somewhat older, the ears will be bored to hold talismans against its Tabia, and they will be hung with old pieces of metal, bits of wire and common safety pins: and notwithstanding this protection "the follower" will be used as a torturing threat for the young soul.

As the girl grows towards womanhood, other terrors arise—sorcery, spells, worst of all, "possession." It is but slowly that

Mascara



The way up
to the native town



A runaway lamb



By the River
Bou Hanefia

A w a y W e s t

they let us into this shadowland. “ You would not understand ” is their fencing.

It is probably quite true : we do *not* understand. We cannot disentangle the interweaving of hypnotism and auto-suggestion with the direct action of wicked spirits from the unseen world, which are invoked to the help of their plottings.

It is best not to try to penetrate that darkest realm of evil : and stories of the brain drugs, the philtres, the slow poisons are again beyond putting into print in their details.

We will take a few of the less gruesome methods of working ill to your neighbour—they come from Mascara, where we are a wild crew.

If you want to separate between the hearts of parents and children, use pig’s fat and herbs, also earth gathered at four in the morning from an unbroken tomb : this will make their hearts dead one to another.

To separate between a husband and wife, take nail-parings and hair, or dust that has been walked on by one or the other, wrap it in some part of a garment that has touched the skin. Bury half and soak the other half in water with many herbs and give it to the woman to drink. Get a sheikh to write a charm with their names and hang it high on a tree where it cannot be reached. Each time the wind sways it, hatred will come between the two that you want to separate.

Between the Desert and the Sea

To kill a girl, take a live frog, stick it (living) full of pins, surround it by perfume and prayers written by a sheikh and carry it to some unknown spot. Little by little the girl will fade away, her hair will fall off and her strength will fail. If it is desired to kill a man, the same process must be followed, only using the heart of a sheep.

Sometimes the ill may take another form, with no magic alongside. Not long ago one of us found an old woman in great trouble. At last it came out slowly. "I brought up a little girl for a woman who had remarried. She became dear to me as my daughter. Then I married her. Lately her husband, wishing to take another wife, began to say to her, 'What hast thou? Thou doest strange things.' The constant suggestion frightened her. Then the neighbours began to whisper that she was possessed, till in alarm she fled to her mother, and there the husband divorced her. Now she is so possessed that her mother and neighbours are terrified. I may not go to see her, for the demons might come back through me to my little grandchild here."

Where lies the refuge? The pendulum swings to and fro between the animism of the old creeds and the fatalism of the present. Between the two, the word hope has been swung out of the language, so far as colloquial goes. Patience is its nearest equivalent.

A w a y W e s t

The dumb longing for light to come somehow, somewhere, is visualised for us as we travel on by the highway of the great Chelif plain that stretches west till it is barred across with the mountains of Morocco. Look seawards to the pink spurs of the coast hills enamelled with the blue-green of prickly pear that marks the hamlets. Every spur bears a little dome. Look landwards to the foothills of the plateaux that rise three thousand feet high between you and the desert—these saints' tombs, for such they are, rise on every crest, and they stand for all that these villagers know of shelter from the haunting of their fears.





CHAPTER IV.

A STRONGHOLD OF MARABOUTS.

CLIMB up the path of well-worn cobble-stones, bordered with sword-like aloe leaves. You will find the dome, that was all that caught the eye from below, crowns a cube of white masonry with an ear of notched brickwork at each corner and a couple of slit windows above the door. Within lies the dead saint, enshrined in a lattice of woodwork whose paint, red and blue and green, is faded and mellow with age. Faded also and tattered are the green and gold banners draped above—dustiness and mustiness hang heavily in the air.

He is called a Marabout, that dead saint. A Moslem means, by interpretation, one who is given over to the service of God: a Marabout, by interpretation, means one who is bound there. And these bound ones form an unseen hierarchy throughout the land and throughout the ages, producing a cult of saint invocation that takes a foremost place in the life of the peasantry.

The sainthood lies in a more or less ascetic life round which linger traditions of miracles wrought; queer child-play miracles,

A Stronghold of Marabouts

many of them without much spiritual meaning, or even much use to their fellow men.

The intercession of that Marabout, and the intervention by charms and amulets of his living representative, are the refuge from the dim and terrible shadows that flit around, and the only means of bringing help from the unseen—help in wreaking vengeance as much as in obtaining succour.

A candle two or three feet long with ornamentation in pinched wax may obtain the warding off of evil spirits, or the gift of a child to a childless woman. A few coppers may purchase one of the “writings” that will bring doom on an enemy. The guardian of the tomb is the family representative. He is called a Marabout by courtesy, but he had not necessarily a claim to sanctity. He may be just the guardian of the tomb, entertaining pilgrims, taking his dole of offerings and his payments for writing charms. He may, on the other hand, be a man of much local influence, for he knows the secrets of the family life throughout the tribe around and can enforce his charm with pronouncements for good or ill, and back all with hypnotic power—a power easily exerted among these imaginative people, ready to his hand as moist clay to the potter. He blesses their marriages and chants beside their dead—the mosques are far away in the towns—he is their only link upward.

But the Marabout system is a more powerful religious

Between the Desert and the Sea

factor than is shown in the countryside. To see it take full sway, you must come to a town where it dominates, and such is Miliana, one of the chief centres from the native point of view of Western Algeria.

Half-way between the summits of Blida and the tableland of Mascara, a mountain shoulder rears itself from the plain seaward, the Zaccar by name. Miliana stands on one of its terraces, 2,700 feet above sea level. Marabout influence reigns there, not in the individual aspect of the tomb-keeper, but in a concrete form as one of the four different developments of the religious life of the land.

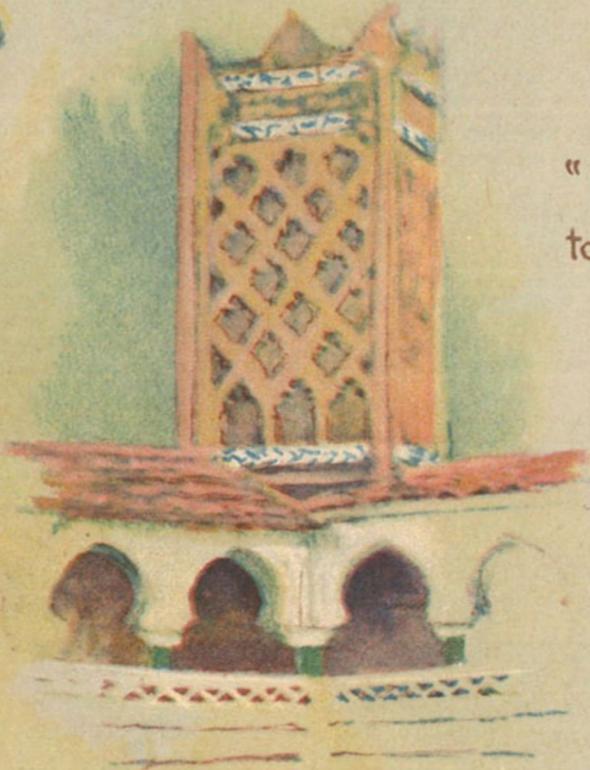
These four developments are as follows : the old-time Koranic orthodoxy, the great Brotherhoods of the Mystics, the Marabout dominance and the class of state-paid religious functionaries. This last development is confined to Algeria and has but little hold on the mind of the people. Its representatives are supported by the Government from funds derived from old ecclesiastical holdings of Islam named Habous. They keep up the mosque services and the religious ceremonies and represent Islam of the respectable, well-regulated type, some of them without special scholarship or great enthusiasm.

The two first developments, i.e., the orthodoxy of the Ulemas and the weird excesses of the Brotherhoods, will be touched on in later chapters. The call of the mystics to an inward

Osman

Miliana

a stiff little
Moslem



"We have come
to see a picture"



A Student.

Getting ready for the Spring.



PLATE D.

A Stronghold of Marabouts

path was the reaction of the human heart from the chill of that orthodoxy and it threatened to break with Islam altogether. But in the eleventh century there arose from among a Brotherhood in Baghdad a man of genius, Ghazzali by name, who contrived by a *tour de force* to adjust the teaching of the fraternities with that of the Koran, and to bring back the wavering lines to the main army. The far-down result of this assimilation may be found in Marabout centres like Miliana. It comes in our path now, before we see in Tunisia the fossilized creed of the past on one side, and on the other side, in the desert where it has room to expand, some outlines of Brotherhood life.

In a town like Miliana, the Marabout system takes on a different trend from that of the country around. The influence is not here on the family matters : it is an appeal to that solidarity which is an intrinsic element of Islam. For this there must be a centralizing, a massing of the forces, and the outcome is in the Moslem fetes that are Miliana's chief feature.

The rallying point is the four-hundred-year-old shrine of its chief saint, Sidi Hamid ben Yousouf el Miliani. The only "miracle" concerning him that has come to our knowledge is that he brought to life a cooked monkey that had been served on his table by evil-minded men. His cloister suggests a place of learning ; but we are not a scholastic set on the seaboard, and Miliana cannot rank as a student town. The *raison*

Between the Desert and the Sea

d'être of the shrine through the autumn is as a religious picnic ground.

The pilgrimages arrive in regular rotation from the chief centres of the districts around, each with their separate brotherhoods grouped round their standards. Every band brings gifts of cattle, grain and fruit, and contributes the great candles mentioned above. These are sold by auction in the shrine precincts and the price goes to its authorities. Fruit is put up for auction also, and even a pear thus sold may fetch a large sum.

The profits are divided before witnesses by the Oukil of the shrine, and are distributed to the descendants of the saint, even down to babes in arms. More than two hundred put in their claim, and even his namesakes come in for gifts. Other offerings go to the poor of the town and to the entertainment of the pilgrims; sheep and goats are killed by the score for this purpose in a field close by, the slaughter going on to the sound of a drum among crowds of boys running and turning somersaults with excitement.

These boys are our joy, scamps though they are, in Miliana as everywhere else. In Miliana they are artist born. From the old days of illuminated manuscripts produced in a town of this stamp there must have come down to them an untiring zest for colour schemes, and such colour schemes as fill us with wonder when we see them being produced by untrained imps of seven

A Stronghold of Marabouts

or eight with scrubby paint brushes and hard paints. Lend the boys these after the class with outlined texts in their own script and they will ask no further reward for good behaviour from one month's end to another.

But to revert to the shrine and its worshippers. Worship, according to the prescribed rule of the five times of prayer, has its place as Ghazzali intended—the Koran is expounded in accordance with his interpretation with much of metaphor to bring it into line with mysticism. Then off they scatter, those crowds, with enthusiasm rekindled, and the sense of community life re-knit, to be succeeded by a like pilgrimage from another district, while the first pilgrims go back to the little tomb on their own hillside as their link with heaven.





CHAPTER V.

SOUTH BY EAST.

AND now our picture pages turn back from the stretch of lands that lie westward towards Morocco. Facing eastwards from Algiers we come into another atmosphere, far less heavy with superstition. For as soon as the line swerves landwards it begins to skirt a bit of country where all is again in a totally different setting. We spoke of the Kabyle women in Algiers; and this tract of mountain-land, no larger than an average English county, is their home and that of their sons; and these sons of theirs, specially since the war, are striking out into a line of their own. Independent they have always been since the Arab invasion drove them up into those crags, and that independence is shown as you pass along their borders in the very way that their villages stand perched on the spurs, fearlessly on the look out, rather than hiding in the ravines as do the Arabs. In these last years the younger generation of Kabyle men has poured into France for employment, for they are an industrious race, and they come back with a ferment of new thoughts seething with a communist

On the Way South

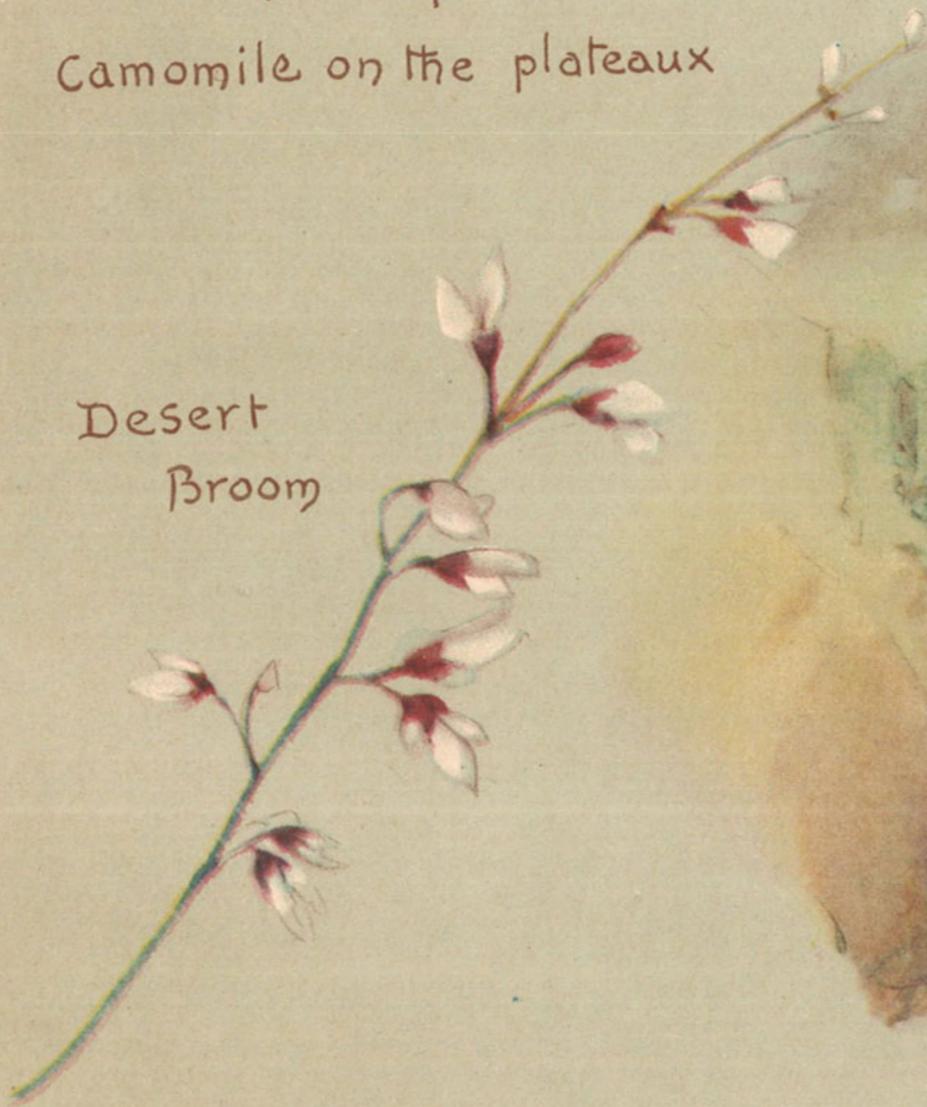


Algiers from Hussein Dey



And a field of wild
Camomile on the plateaux

Desert
Broom



The gate of the
desert



A Tent Child



A Feriana Man

South by East

tendency and often with French wives. They and their history, their ways and their prospects must be left to others to tell, for we have far to go in this chapter's journey.

The line curves round the beautiful southern wall of their range, crosses the oleander bed of the river that bounds it to the coast, climbs the plateau and plods for hours across the one dull extent of the whole land, only broken by the silhouette here and there of a group of farm buildings and the grey stone huts of the labourers.

Come off the main line, for it is south by east that our road lies, and, as ever, when you get a bit away from the levelling of modern life, our kaleidoscope turns again. Cultivation disappears and the ground becomes gravelly, broken with the succulent shrub on which camels love to browse. Then the camels themselves come into view, herds of them, with their babies like woolly long-necked sheep mounted on stilts. Then come the brown tents of their owners, and behind again, the dimpled pink and blue hills of the south. You have stepped into the primeval life of the Bedouins as completely as if you were still in the century of the Arab invasion.

The women are all that you will find in the tents, and the question is if you will get so far past their dogs. They are a wild-looking set, these women, lank black hair floating from under their close-bound kerchiefs. These are likely to be of red

Between the Desert and the Sea

and ochre, patterned with black camels and peacocks, crossed behind and knotted in front with an inimitable twist, concealing the ears, for as they will tell you, "ears are not acceptable in heaven." Then comes a weather-stained calico robe, looped at the shoulders and girded and re-girded at the waist, the straight folds dropping again to the ankle. Beyond outward appearance we can tell you but little about these Bedouins, for contact with them is still a problem in the land. The only attempt at education is carried out by middle-aged Moslem teachers of the student class, who stay among them for a few weeks or months at a time, wandering with them as they wander in search of pasture, and then passing on to the boys of another group.

Camps of a very different order wake these southern plateaux to life in summer. Up through the defiles from the nearest desert come caravans, the camels gorgeous with their palanquins and trappings, bringing the aristocracy to higher ground, and their great tents lack nothing of luxury from the native standpoint.

Through those defiles we look down into the abode of another of these aboriginal Berber races of whom, in Algeria, the Kabyles form the most remarkable branch.

They are again a people to themselves, these Chawias as they are named. Their villages have remained unchanged,

South by East

men say, in site and construction since the Roman days. They are built for the most part on steep terraces among the mountains, with but a goat track approach, your neighbour's flat roof serving for the terrace in front of your doorstep. So shut away are they in their fastnesses that memories of that bygone age have not left them. Pagan Rome remains as elsewhere down south in the feast of the spring, when the women and girls flit about like gorgeous butterflies. "Yes, we have another feast," the Chawia women answered when we questioned them, "another feast of the old times. We call it the feast of the Lord Jesus : we hold it in mid-winter when the sun is at the lowest : we know no more." "No more" : the Mystery of the Holy Incarnation has been lost in the time waves.

On the further side, where it faces the desert, this range of the Aurès breaks down into limestone and sandstone cliffs with gullies of palms running up between them in rare beauty, and their people are among the most attractive of the land. But our way lies out now across the Tunisian border and they must be left aside.

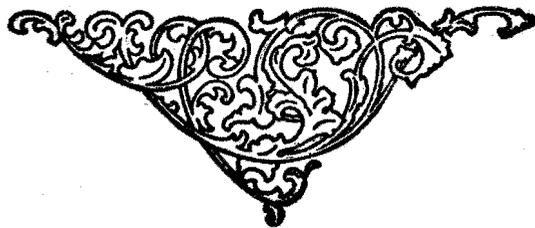
Only the note that they have struck rings on, along our trek of south by east, the double note of those old Roman days, the note of the soldier and the note of the saint. Their military roads may be seen and followed straight as a spear line. You can think you hear the ringing order and the clang of the changing

Between the Desert and the Sea

guard as you near the remains of their outposts. And then there are the other ruins where arch, apse and aisle tell of a higher warfare, checked when the Moslem invasion swung over the land. But of that we shall see more before the end.

Through the long expanse of moor and forest we pass into Tunisia and strike a mining railway. If we took the last turn south we should find ourselves dipping gradually down a river bed that cleaves a long deep chasm winding from the plateaux to the desert. Suddenly, as we draw near its end, a lateral valley shows a far-away sea-like horizon, and the South Land is there.

But Tunisia is a unique country that deserves its own chapter first.





CHAPTER VI.

A TOWN OF HARLEQUINS.

THE indescribable change of atmosphere that marks another land is to be noted as soon as the Tunisian border is crossed. Even at the frontier station of the railway you can tell it by the long silk tassel dangling on the shoulder from the fez of the smallest boy, instead of marking, as in Algeria, the dignity of the scholar. The Arabic pronunciation has suddenly become crisp and delicate ; outside in the station yard you will find the carts with shafts decorated in conventional flower designs, pale green, red, brown and vivid blue, slung on two huge wheels, equally decorated, drawn, it may be, by a camel. The clock of time has gone back a generation at least.

The track across Tunisia takes you through a monotonous stretch, with no feature but wonderful Roman remains here and there, till you reach the eastern shore. There is no mountain bulwark here as in Algeria, the land lies flat and sandy to the brink of the deep turquoise of the sea, rich only in its groves of olives, moon-grey with dark twisted stems.

The sense of gradual awaking to the movement of modern

Between the Desert and the Sea

life that has begun in Algeria, is hardly yet in the air except in the chief towns. Tunisia holds its head high as a Regency, with its own tariff and stamps and coinage. There are fears of new thought-currents from the east rather than hopes of progress from the west.

But if you want to study the land come away from its few railways and their touch with the more advanced elements of the world. You cannot watch its habits better than in the little coast town of Monastir. We had a temporary sub-station there specially with a view to language study ; it is left now for more pressing calls elsewhere, but the queer, obstinate old place lies near our hearts still.

Monastir as yet stands for the old world Islam, erect, inert—the Islam that was the only Islam we knew when we first landed, now to be found entrenched mainly in the remote regions. The Koranic teaching as expounded by the ulemas holds full sway, scholastic, venerable, stiff and cold with the chill and rigidity of death itself.

The town is built on a promontory, with crenellated walls, and its medieval-looking fortress juts out to the sea. It has, perhaps from its peninsular birthplace, a unique stamp, independent, conservative, self-contained.

The picture pages show you the individuality of its costumes : like harlequins and clowns are the men, all clad, as are the boys,



The last ray of sunlight

Monastir
& its men.



A
Country man



Minaret of Bab el D'erg



The beginning of the olivegroves



A stolen meal in the barley.



A Town of Harlequins

in coffee-coloured woollen jerkins, embroidered with cream braid, unless, indeed, it is some princeling with silken shirt, sage-green or claret colour, his delicate features contrasting with the sturdy ruggedness of the poor. But the women and girls are quainter still; their universal colour combination of dusky red and indigo is always divided longitudinally: why not, except that feminine custom with us prefers a lateral colour scheme?

Other things mark Monastir with a mind of its own. One is that its main trade is in tunny fish; these come every spring in immense shoals: an outlying island is given over to drying and canning them, and their great forked tails are nailed up over door after door as protection and good fortune: they take the place of a patron saint.

Another of Monastir's special features is its love of weddings: they are *en evidence* as we have never seen elsewhere. In Algerian villages they are announced by a few cartridges fired: in Kabylia by the ceremony of chasing the poor little bride over the threshold of her new home, where the bridegroom beats her to show his new gained rights. Here in Monastir the announcement is made by a string of mules, six, twelve, fifteen or more, and they parade the streets with the bride's boxes, brightly painted, slung across their backs—others bear the cushions and curtains of the new establishment, even the bride's best apparel hangs on view. Friends and acquaintances survey critically and

Between the Desert and the Sea

take mental measure accordingly of the ménage, counting the beasts as the tally of its status among them.

All that busy practical aspect of Monastir is one side : there is another. On Thursday nights we used to fling our windows open and listen. For from one of the cream-coloured minarets a stone's throw off, ghostly now against the indigo of the sky, will come a wonderful chanting from the mueddhin, broken now and then with the clear chime of boys' voices, going on and on for half an hour before the wild melody-making sinks away.

The life under the shadow of these minarets of Monastir is of another type from that of a Marabout shrine, such as we saw in Miliana. Here the college is pervaded by the scholarly element, and this is renovated by the perennial influx of teachers and students in vacation time, from Djemma Zitouna, "the Mosque of the Olive tree," in Tunis, which sets the pace for the Islamic study of the land.

When we consider what is meant to the Arab by a university course, we shall see that this student class necessarily stands by itself. It may interest some of us to know that, setting aside all ramifications such as the traditions and jurisprudence, etc., the Arab has something to do in mastering his own tongue. At El Azhar, in Cairo, they count twelve years to this alone. They reckon their vocabulary at 80,000 words to start with, and if you examine a dictionary you will believe it. Take the one verb,

Monastir & its women.



A palmstalk
hockey-stick



From
our
windows.



A young
aristocrat

Washing clothes in the bay



Bab el Gherbi

A Town of Harlequins

“to walk.” We have a folio French-Arabic dictionary in four volumes that gives it six pages—to walk in single file, for instance, or in a group, or briskly, or dragging one foot, would have each its own term. And each verb has up to ten forms of the infinitive, e.g., prepositional, causative, reciprocal, passive, etc., besides five others rarely used, and is conjugated in singular, dual and plural as well as masculine and feminine. And such is their respect for “the tongue of the angels,” as they name it, that a blunder counts as almost a crime. Twelve years is none too long!

And with all this wealth of expression there is no word for holiness as we understand it—only the word “house” for “home”—nothing in common parlance for humility. Do not these dumb notes speak? “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

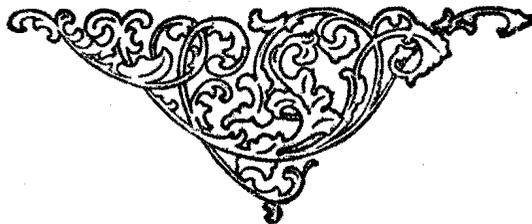
A town like this is well drilled in other than scholastic matters. Take the one item of the yearly fast of Ramadhan, when for thirty days no food nor drink may pass the lips during the hours when you can tell a white thread from a black. Children like those pictured already join in. The age for them to start fasting is when a cord passed round the head above the ears will no longer meet when passed round the chin to the crown. The first year the child fasts every third day, then on alternate days, then daily, upheld by tempting little presents for the boys, while the girls have the charm of a tiny earthen fire-pot,

Between the Desert and the Sea

which they will fan for hours, with a morsel of the future supper of the family in its saucepan : this family supper will be a dainty and abundant one, for all are famished.

The children are proud of their promotion, though the days must seem endless, and it is a matter of real stoicism when the fast falls in summer, for the thirst is far harder to bear than the hunger.

It is one of the master strokes of their prophet, this binding them in a common endurance. You watch the day-old crescent of the Ramadhan moon sinking into its bed of opal and saffron in perfect peace, but you know it sends a rally call round the whole world of orthodox Islam, and orthodox Islam stands against the shocks of to-day and shows a firm front still.



Tozeur

Hamidou -
our first Gibeonite



The Head
of the
Springs



Mates



Saduc's
goodbye gift -
wild dates

The first
palm of the oasis





CHAPTER VII.

THE LAND OF PALM BRANCHES.

SUCH, being interpreted, is the name of El Djerid, the district on which, if we wind back by that mining line, the desert land opens.

It gives its own picture. How many of us, I wonder, still carry about mentally our childhood's idea of an oasis—half a dozen scraggy palms and a well? As a matter of fact the one oasis of Tozeur measures eighteen or twenty kilometers in circumference and is reckoned at a million trees. This means a forest of waving fronds sheltering an undergrowth of apricot, fig and pomegranate in a paradise of beauty.

The world is again an utterly different world from Monastir: but for the one link of language, it might be a different continent. Instead of the sturdy fisher folk you have a tall lithe race of men in long white robes, their heads swathed in Madonna-like veils, and the towns and villages are built of sun-dried brick with facades peculiar to the Djerid, better seen in the sketches than described. No one would believe the colours these clay houses will take on in different lights: they are rosy at sunrise, mauve

Between the Desert and the Sea

or cinnamon at midday, according to the clouds, old gold at sunset, and a strange ashy primrose, if such a thing can be, against the evening sky. You grow to love them and to feel that the white houses of the coast would glare cruelly in the keen sunlight. Even the Mosque dome as you come into Tozeur is tiled in a glaze of soft peacock, echoing the palm fronds, and the town lies in horizontal lines, repeating those of the desert. All falls into a new harmony.

The market place is the hub of the town and has also its own features. You are likely to find on a butcher's stall part of a gaunt shank of camel, sinew and bone predominating over flesh, and black with flies. To comfort your mind, alongside on the ground will be great masses of wild dates, hard as acorns, golden tinted, on branches and twigs of vivid orange. Then comes a nondescript stall, also spread on the ground in front of a palmstalk booth—cheap little bottles of musk and attar, inch-square pouches of red leather on a thong to match, with a charm sewn in, sunburnt bits of pomegranate rind for producing the brilliant green dye beloved of the Moslem, perhaps a little old book or two in beautiful script, alongside a pile of indescribable rubbish. A yard or two further you will come on a few heaps of grilled locusts that taste, they say, like shrimps. The Government cleverly offers gratis the requisite salt for preparing them for the market : without this impetus the invasion might be

The Land of Palm Branches

looked on as decreed by Providence and allowed to pass unmolested to the more productive lands further north.

The same nonchalance can be noted even in this would-be busy market scene : the men saunter vaguely and the sellers look on in dignified silence—they will sell or not, as heaven chooses.

Twice a year the Djerid exerts itself : in the spring when the clusters of palm blossom, like carved ivory, break their great bronzed sheaths and wait to be fertilized. Again in the autumn the land awakes, for the dates are ripe. Lads and men climb as nimble as monkeys up to the spring of the branches and cut and let down gently the huge golden brown sheaves and pack them for the coast.

In between, the men can lie in the sun or the shade, according to the season, talking and smoking, for all but a couple of hours in every fortnight. In that space of time the Djeridi expends his saved-up energy : for the utmost must be made of it. In those two hours a runnel of water (paid for by the handbreadth to the authorities) is his to do with as he will. His plot of the oasis is walled in by a low sandbank, where his wolfhound stalks on the beat like any policeman, and the ground is crossed and recrossed with ditches that pass in circling sweep round each palm. A short broad hoe and the man's two feet are in quick motion now, damming the current with earth clods here, opening it there, that each tree and each square of carrots or

Between the Desert and the Sea

lettuces may have its full draught. Whether his turn comes in broiling midday or at the darkest hour of the night, your desert Arab is there at last, every bit of him.

The camel and the date palm—they are the two treasures of the south land.

The camel serves not only for transport, and that with an infinity of growling patience, but it gives the native material for his tent-cloth, milk for his children, ropes for his baggage, meat for his feasts. The palm tree's uses are numbered at seventy, so we can take but a few. Besides the dates for his food (again numbering seventy varieties) they supply pillars for his house, laths and thatch for his ceilings, baskets and cords, cradles for his babies, hockey sticks for his boys. Skilfully managed, the great withered fronds serve for fuel, using the leaves first for paper, then the leaf stalks for sticks, then the club-like ends for coal. Each stage must burn red hot before you put on the next or the fragrant black smoke will be suffocating. And when the tree's own life is ended, its last gift to its owner is a draught of palm wine, from the cabbage-like tuft on the summit of the withered trunk that will yield no more.

The floors of the palm forest and the sand dykes that mark its holdings are peopled by a world of insect life all its own. Lumpy beetles with white spots ; beetles like scraps of Etruscan ware, patterned in terra cotta and black ; beetles like green peas that



from the Aali
i.e. roof-room



Bedroom crocks.



The Porch



Magedshe sampling
a biscuit

Miriam the Washerwoman



from the roof - evening
looking east



The proper way to keep
roses - when not behind
the ear!



& looking west

The Land of Palm Branches

draw in their feet and roll down the banks; and many another.

The least attractive feature of the land is its womankind. They are unawake, these women of the Djerid, heavy featured, contrasting curiously with their quick-witted sons. We never seem to get any close touch with even the little wild, long-robed girls: they flit in and dance out again, Undine-like, not having yet found their souls. The hold in these desert towns is among the men, in the Brotherhoods of the Sufis, so called from the white woollen robes that marked them long ago. These represent a leverage point in the Moslem world that the Church of Christ has been strangely slow to see. Among them, at long last, we reach a people where the deadly self-satisfaction of Islam has no place.

We must leave to another chapter the telling of this inward life that is developed among the sons of the south.





CHAPTER VIII.

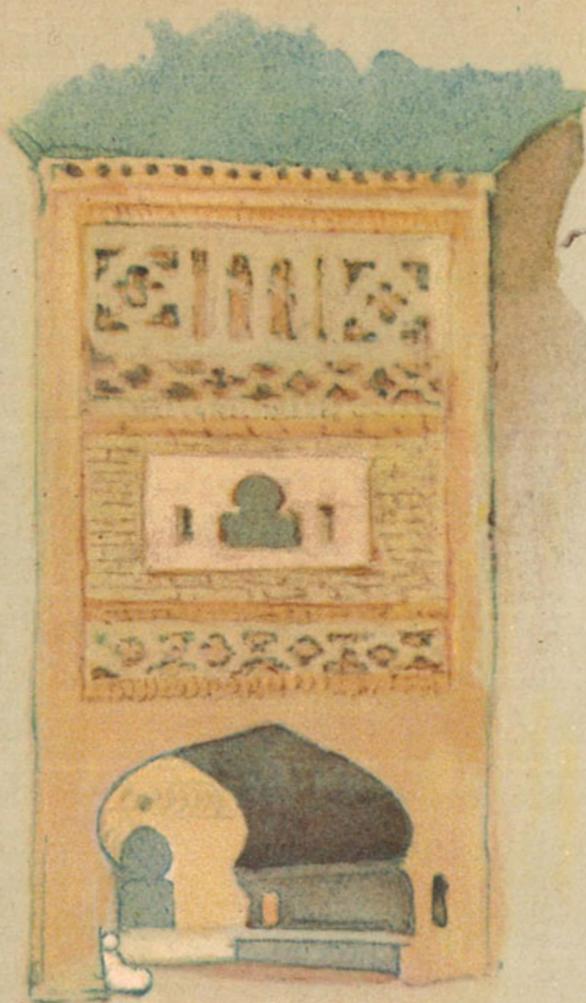
MOSLEM MYSTICS.

THESE North African towns seem to lie sometimes in pairs, the commercial and the religious elements dominating in one or the other. As with Blida and Miliana in the north, so it is again down here with Tozeur and Nefta. For though the religious life of Tozeur is still Brotherhood life, the thoughtful class and the readers find things out of gear now with a terminus, hotels and tourists ; and they are drawing back into Nefta.

Twenty kilometers or so of desert separate the two, and then the further and more beautiful city of Nefta is reached. It is an amphitheatre of sandhills crowned with small towns, seven in number, encircling a deep basin of palms a kilometer across.

Corners of these towns can be seen in the sketch pages, and specimens of their dwellers. The little maidens are more friendly than in Tozeur, and have a delightful fashion of making clay dolls with flat triangular heads and bits of palm leaf for arms and legs. The boys go to the school of the Kuttab and recite interminably in a monotone. A mistake is apt to be punished

Nefta.



A Nefta Street

beginning to harden.



The Market Place

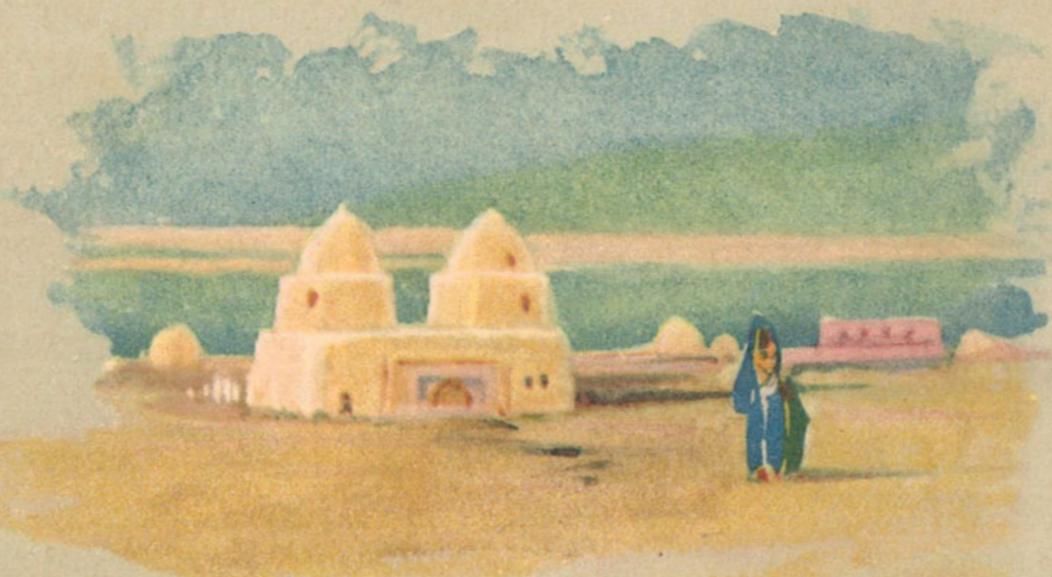


A Nefta girl



Tayeb

Another would-be reader



A Strong city

Moslem Mystics

by date stones being inserted between the fingers and the small hand squeezed hard.

But it is with the men that we have now to do, and that no longer in the outward aspect of life, but turning to the inwardness below; an inwardness as elusive, as unknown, as their far stretching horizons, half reality, half mirage.

We cannot call it all dark, this underlying background of the men of the desert, for it has in it the elements of a true search for God, but it is pathetically dim, chasing many a fantastic ideal, and chasing with an eagerness and a persistence that put us to shame.

For the North African desert is, *per se*, the land of the Moslem mystics, though they have ramifications all over the country, and they form the chief missionary element in the spread of their creed. In Miliana we saw only their far back formative touch in the Marabout system with the life pulse gone from within, and the glimpse of reality lost in a fog of superstition. In the desert the mystics might be studied in something very near their pristine form of faith and of fraternity, if only they would let us get near enough to them to study them. Here is the difficulty. The very expression of these Sufi men is inscrutable, with dark unfathomable eyes, and there is an aloofness of manner that holds the questioner at a distance. Till you show by some word that you understand them and care for them and

Between the Desert and the Sea

are "reaching forth" also to "the things that are before," they will remain within their shell : and they will withdraw into it in a moment if they think you may ask some of their state secrets. For each Brotherhood has its own initiatory rites and formulas, as jealously guarded as any freemasonry.

Even their speech, when it touches on the inward life, is a thing apart, in sharp contrast to the dearth of spiritual expression in ordinary Arabic. The need for something deeper has created a supply, and that a rich and beautiful one. The mystic has his own terminology but dimly understood by those outside.

Many influences from the past have gone to the moulding of him. The monks of the Thebaid, the Neoplatonists of Greece, the Buddhists of India, the Satians of Persia have been each welded in.

The product has been of a twofold order. The development that comes into public view is that associated with the name of dervish, recognisable as a rule by clothing, tattered and patched to the last degree. This patched garment is bestowed on those who have reached a certain point in the stages of the inward life and is an important feature. So important is it that one of the old Sufi books contains a disquisition as to whether the patches should be sewn on neatly or at random—literally, "wherever the needle lifts her head." One saint is mentioned in the same passage

Moslem Mystics

who sewed them so thickly one over the other that scorpions hid between the layers.

But it is when they get together that these dervish brothers show the Sufi system at its worst. They meet regularly for prolonged times of prayer, called the "dhikr," i.e., the "mentioning" of the names of God in continuous chanting repetition. That forms the long introduction: the ultimate aim is to produce so-called ecstasy, and this is brought about by drugs, auto-suggestion, hypnotism and other weird processes, till they reach together a frenzy of mental intoxication where they imagine themselves beyond all landmarks that separate the lawful from the unlawful. The result and the reaction may be imagined.

In the other class of the Sufi devotees we find the souls who seek approach to God, not from the emotional side, but from that of philosophy, mental analysis and intricate metaphysics. The world is a fiction, they say; its forms are an emanation of the Divine essence, which will vanish and leave only the radiancy from which it came. Into that essence they seek to be united—united, not absorbed as in Buddhist mysticism; and this union is to be brought about through a succession of seven spiritual stages of asceticism to be attained by effort, and seven spiritual states to be bestowed by God. All is sought under the guidance of a director and in blind obedience to his bidding. They entrust

Between the Desert and the Sea

themselves to him, to use their own metaphor, like the corpse in the hands of the washer.

Between these two extremes of the adepts sways the lay brother element, receiving its religious impulses from one and the other in varying force and kept in the path of sanity by having to work for daily bread.

There are crevices where heavenly dynamite is being lodged, for we hear now and again of little groups of these "brothers" who meet and read together the scriptures, and anything of Christian literature that comes their way. Who can foretell the issues of a spark of God's fire?

If, on the other hand, we ascend the scale in the organizations (and it is a highly developed scale) we shall find that among the upper circles of the fraternities are those whose chief outlook on the brotherhood life is as a vehicle for ambition, power and political intrigue. These cause much uneasiness in the colony, and with reason. Each Brotherhood is self-governed and has unlimited authority and can set wide currents in motion. Each is an elaborate system on the same outline, from the hierarchy of the initiated down to the unlettered fellah who hopes in some way to reach God through the mazes of the dhikr. There are large funds at its disposal and immense hospitality is available in the Zaouias, as the fraternity houses are named.

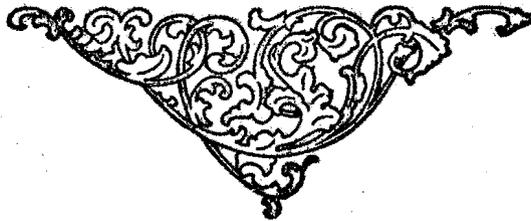
Two or three of the chief Brotherhoods have Sisterhoods

Moslem Mystics

recognized and attached : these organizations are worked by the women themselves. All is carried on, as in the case of the Brotherhoods, without a break in the home life, except for periods of retreat. Celibacy has no place in the system.

It is among the rank and file that lies the strategic point for the new message. They have enough to awake a thirst for the unseen, but never enough to satisfy it, for all is subjective. As has been well said, " Their need is objective, verifiable and divine revelation." It is for us to bring them this in the revelation of Jesus Christ. Then will be fulfilled the word by Isaiah the prophet, " the mirage shall become a pool " (Isa. xxxv. 7. R.V.).

Our dream is of a future where the Christian mystic shall go after the Moslem mystic, and that thus these Brotherhood men, when their thirst has been quenched by the living water, may be drawn into their own development on Christian lines, and bring into the compacting of the Church an element that no others can offer.





CHAPTER IX.

THE LAND OF THE BURIED RIVER.

OUT and away west again go our sketch-book pages on their circuit through the land. Another group of oases has lain hidden there from the view of the world. It is only within these last years that Citroen "caterpillar cars" have found that they can compass the sand dunes and reveal them.

We will take the old camel track as in former days and go slowly enough for the silence to sink in.

That silence falls as soon as Nefta is left behind. We skirt the frosted silver of the chott, as the salt marsh is called. It meets the blue-grey horizon, hiding many a quicksand: on its further shore lie a few scattered villages, then come nomads and the tribal centres of the Touaregs; nothing more till the Niger is reached.

Next day the way lies to the right, across a wilderness, gravel still, where shining slabs of mica catch the sunlight like little pools of water, and the first dunes cluster along the skyline in front of us. If we get to them by evening we shall find a strange



Tozeur



Girls in a new village
"Are they women or are they men?"



The heath of the desert
and the palms of the watercourses



"Everything
shall live, whither the river cometh"

The Land of the Buried River

cool breath, for the sand radiates the heat away and grows almost icy to the touch after nightfall.

In the morning you are again in a new world : taller and taller grow the dunes as your path leads on, till they stand in billows sometimes sixty feet high, stretching endlessly to the horizon. The sand is almost impalpable in its fineness and the colour of rich cream, and it has once again its own inhabitants. There is a lizard about five inches long, called by the French the porcelain lizard from its delicately tinted glossy scales : it dives below the surface like a fish into a pond, leaving only a little ring to mark its entrance. When the real spring heat begins the horned viper may hide too, just out of sight, giving no sign but two tiny prongs that strike death into a bare foot set down on them. Then, once you have reached this, the true desert, you will know yourself there by a flute-like whistle, three times repeated, and again higher and higher, at intervals of a minor chord. It is the "mokkar" bird, beloved of all who know it.

Five days, if you take the journey Arab fashion on baggage camels, bring you to the first villages of the Oued Souf, and they are as unique as their surroundings. The dwellings suggest nothing but pale grey beehives, all just the same size, and to be numbered by the score, or further on, in the towns, by the hundred. No oases are visible, just tufts of palm in the level

Between the Desert and the Sea

spaces. As you come nearer you find that these are but the heads of the trees showing above the surface, and that the trunks go down into a pit some eighteen feet deep and may be three or four times as much across. That pit makes the Souf men as truly as the Souf man makes the pit. Instead of bearing any likeness to his neighbours in the beautiful Djerid, he is as strenuous a fellow as you would wish to see. The stream running through a garden that can be "watered with the foot" as in Egypt of old, is no longer here, and all is one long battle with the sand. To dig but a small palm pit and to keep it from being smothered is a life's achievement, for the dunes that look so peaceful can work themselves up into a terrible enemy when the wind rises.

The heading of our chapter explains the pits. Trace the succession of palm crests that show over their brim and you detect that they fall into a sinuous line that winds in a rather inconsequent way among the lower sandhills and across the spaces between them.

"Yes, the river is buried," the natives will tell you, adding in an injured tone, "it was buried by the Christians in the early time." If this were so, it would have really been an extremely good and sensible deed on the Christians' part, even if somewhat troublesome, for unless buried out of reach of the drift, it would have been choked long ago. Examine the pits and you will verify. Their sides are loose sand, shelving to the

Out & Beyond



Tolga walls, & its people



Date Blossom



& its hills



A Touggourt street



a village



Waiting her turn.

In the dunes of Oued Souf



A building stone!
(1/2 size)



The Land of the Buried River

floor and for ever needing to be shovelled up over the palm leaf fence that edges them ; but the floor is solid, and under it the water flows, cool and pure and sweet, and it may be drawn at will in their leather buckets, through wells marked by a Shadoof, so deftly poised that a child can manage it and tend the lettuce beds around.

There is nothing wonderful in all that ; the wonder lies in the floor itself. It is a layer of crystallized gypsum, several feet thick, that underlies the sand of this district, and serves the land for all building purposes. You will see scattered along every roadside and built into every wall, these beautiful crystals, several inches across, imitating flames of fire, or crysanthemums, stars or roses, as the case may be, and calcined and powdered they form the cement into which they are embedded. From the Arab standpoint they are just " stones " and very useful.

For the roofing each room is separate, a square some eight or ten feet. Before the wall dries the top is set thick with palm rods, then these are brought together into a dome and plastered thickly inside and outside with this same cement : the wildest sandstorm cannot harm it, for all slides off.

Grey and monotonous are the little houses from the street, and in the towns the interiors are uninteresting—in the villages they are delightful. For these poorer houses cannot afford cement floors, and are built straight on the sand ; and the sand

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has a bad way of burying instantly and irretrievably whatever falls into it, so all household appliances hang on the wall out of harm's way. Goat skins and kid skins, cat skins and even lizard skins, dyed in brilliant shades, hold the stores, and among them are arranged in patterns, as you would arrange trophies, tiny flowered coffee cups, plates bisected in sage-green and yellow, long knives in red leather sheaths and endless other small articles. All the lighting comes through a small round hole or two, a foot from the ground, giving back reflected sunshine.

It is out in the villages, too, that you should see the women ; for the indigo cotton of their drapery is perfect in tone against the cream tint of the sand, with a flash of flame colour, or pale peacock or apple green from some underfold at neck or shoulder. Of all the peasant women of the land their ways are the most full of grace and there is a frank sweetness about them that is all their own.

It is a dear, brave land, this land of the buried river ; it wins our heartstrings in our rare visits, and it keeps them. We leave it with you as our last vision of the south, for our way leads across another tract of dunes that brings us to the Algerian railhead and thence back to the coast.



Tipaza



A corner of the Forum



Castiglione



Scilla Maritima
in flower



Basilica of Santa
Salsa



The Sarcophagus of the
Good Shepherd



The chief Basilica



CHAPTER X.

RETRIEVAL.

WE have been to the edge of the desert: let us come back before we close to the edge of the sea.

The sea has turned to ultramarine now, for its waters lie deep around this headland, and the old Roman ochre glows out in relics of forum and chapel and basilica scattered among the dark green of lentisk shrubs. If it is summer they are broken by great enamelled spires of Scilla Maritima.

Beyond the beauty of colour there is nothing remarkable in these ruins of Tipaza, twenty miles out of Algiers. Far more stately ones lie scattered through the land, the remains of the 574 bishoprics held by the church of old throughout its borders, from Carthage at the head. But we happen to have these reminders of a village parish and they happen to have a story or two wherewith to close, echoes of the greater battlefields.

The first story has no word-record. It lies carved in stone by a hand ages ago gone to dust. The sarcophagus below on the page belongs to the time when Tipaza was still making its history.

Between the Desert and the Sea

The man who worked at that sarcophagus knew Whom he had believed. The shepherd in the centre is but the likeness of a native boy in his linen tunic. Was it that the sculptor felt that he could never picture Him Who is "fairer than the children of men"? or did he fear that some heathen insult might be flung at the representation if it bore its full meaning? Anyway, there stands the shepherd lad, and he and the lamb and the mother sheep are equally fearless of danger. Lions are close by, tearing their prey, but they are on the other side of the wall of waved lines that signified in these old sculptures the waters of baptism. "The waters were a wall unto them on their right hand and on their left"—so it is written of Israel of old when "they were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." None the less in severance were the baptismal waters for those first confessors to whom they meant the closing of the old life and the opening of the new, taking their place with the Good Shepherd, fearing no evil, for He was with them. Away in the basilica on the hill you can still see the baptistery into which that stone carver stepped. It looks but a fern-grown well now. It meant a crucial choice then.

The village girl of our second Tipaza story, Salsa by name, probably never got so far as that rite of baptism, for she was but fifteen or sixteen, so tradition says, and her parents were still heathen. It was the fourth century and all was yet dark. An idol

Retrieval

festival was planned in the outskirts half a mile away. Unheeding her protests, Salsa was forced into attending it with her family. While the worshippers slept that night, camped out in the open, she set about her bit of retrieval. Without arousing any one she managed to wrench off the dragon's gilt head. Full of hope that she could pull the remainder to the edge of the cliff and fling it down, she tried again. This time an accidental noise woke the sleepers. Salsa was stoned to death and thrown into the sea with a curse on whoever might bury her. But she was beyond their reach: peacefully her body floated and peacefully it was laid to rest on the headland where she had given her life, by a fisherman who drew her to shore: and a century later a chapel was built by her own family over her tomb. Its arches are still standing.

Another two centuries of outward development with which the inner life of the Christian communities kept pace but lamely, and then the crash came. The old churches of the east held up against the shock of Islam's assault—the church of North Africa went down utterly before it, and was swept away from Tunis to the Atlantic: a worse defeat than the wresting of the Holy Sepulchre.

Tipaza shows that the land held good soil. If you turn back to the Algiers sketch-page you will see that even after centuries of smothering by Islam, the germinating power had

Between the Desert and the Sea

not left it. The story of Geronimo is too long to tell in detail, but here in Algiers lies another martyr in effigy. Effigy hardly describes that plaster-cast, for the life-touch is so near it. It was drawn carefully, in the early days of the French conquest, out of the hollow into which it had been run. That hollow containing a few bones had been accidentally found in the concrete wall of a fort that was being demolished. Tradition had lingered that a native convert had been built alive into that fort in the sixteenth century by liquid cement poured over him. The tale was all told now, the ligaturing of the cords, the knotted veins on the forehead, the broken rib, the compressed lips, spoke and speak still of faithfulness unto death.

The early teaching that won him for Christ was given Geronimo before he was seven by some Christian fathers on the coast. If the land yielded these fruits while the spring sun was still low on the horizon, it is time that it had another chance.

The chance has not yet come. These pages are written expressly to tell you what is not being done : it is there that the call lies, the call to the true crusade.

It is not the question of the retrieval of an empty sepulchre for Christ, but the retrieval of a living temple among those for whom He poured forth His soul unto death. "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?"

Clear and strong stand out among the Tipaza stone carvings

Retrieval

the two old Greek monograms, "Kai Ro," "Alpha, Omega." "Christ the King"—"The First and the Last." Unbroken, unworn, they have lasted through the ages of the usurper. It is for us, in this age, to translate them into fact. And when we, on our side, rise to the call that the time has come, it may be that we shall see yet another timing from the heavenly side.

For as yet the Moslem world has known no share in those sudden mighty manifestations of God's Spirit that have been seen since Pentecost throughout all ages and in all lands. It may rest with our faith to set free in the land where God's cause has been put to shame, this final victory.

