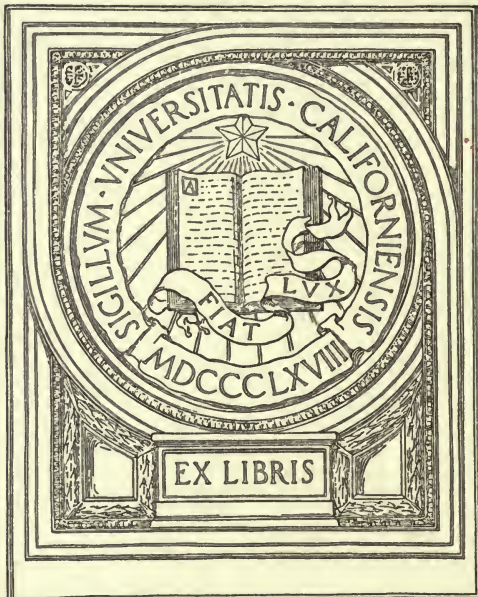


THE ARABS IN TRIPOLI



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THE ARABS IN TRIPOLI



ALAN OSTLER.

Sketched by H. Seppings Wright, at Ain Zara, November, 1911.

THE ARABS IN TRIPOLI

By ALAN LOSTLER

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
SPECIALLY DRAWN BY H. SEPPINGS WRIGHT

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

LONDON :
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

1912

DT 220

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PREFACE

IN writing this account of events in the Turkish and Arab camps, during the first five or six months of the Tripoli campaign, I have in no way attempted a military critic's report of the fighting that took place. I do not wish this to be considered in any sense a history of the Turkish-Italian war, or even of a part of it. It is simply an attempt to give a picture of a strange people amongst whom I have lived for some time. The Italian campaign in Tripoli, having attracted some notice—but not much—in this country, serves me better than any other background for my attempts to portray Arabs amongst whom I have lived. Had I not gone through a part of the Tripoli campaign with the Arab and Turkish forces, I might have chosen, as a thread on which to string my beads, Mulai Hafid's revolt against his half-brother, Abdul-Aziz, four years ago; or Bu Hamara's rebellion against Hafid, with its terrible ending; or the general uprising during which Fez was besieged, and relieved by the French troops last year.

In none of these cases should I have been attempting a history of a war, but only seeking an excuse to try my hand at describing strange people and strange lands. And that alone has been my aim in writing about and around the resistance offered by the Arabs and Turks to the Italian army invading Tripoli.

To picture Oriental life to an English reader so vividly that the reader can see the bare-foot, hooded people, hear their harsh accents, smell the reek of their camel-trains and foul courtyard fonduks, and feel the stinging desert wind, the lash of the rain, the beating of the sun's heat on his head ; and yet not have a misconception of the febrile Arab temper ; that is a task, I fear, beyond most writers. Of all that have attempted it, one only, who has known the Arab to the bone, has contrived to impart his knowledge. I do not know the Arab as Doughty knew him ; and if I did, I have not the pen that wrote " Wanderings in Arabia Deserta." Mine is, at best, only an attempt to draw in outline. I cannot hope to fill in shades and colours.

Had I not been so absorbed in the attempt to depict the Arab life of the camps, I should have dealt more elaborately with the Turkish officers to whose kindness I owe so much ; and must have introduced as well some of the Europeans—there were a few—who came as

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artists, volunteers and correspondents to the Turkish side. Chief of these was Mr. Seppings Wright—Hadji Wright, the Turkish staff affectionately named him. For thirty years he had seen war in every corner of the earth. On packing-cases, knapsacks, drumheads, up-turned buckets, he made rough outlines and sketches which afterwards became the pictures in this book. We travelled much together; each trying, in a different way, to picture what he saw. I should like to think that my attempt has been even half as faithful and convincing as has his.

ALAN OSTLER.

September, 1912.

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THE ARABS IN TRIPOLI

I

A BITTER wind blows unceasingly over the barren belt of desert-land where the frontiers of Tunis and Tripoli meet. It piles the drifting sand against the wall of the little stone fortress of the Spahis, who guard the French side of the frontier; and moans through the lean whin-bushes and scanty scrub of box and myrtle, on whose thorns grey butcher-birds impale big beetles and little lizards. Save for the stunted growth of scrub, the land is bare on either side as far as the eye can see; a brown expanse of windy wilderness, streaked here and there with the yellow of the desert sand. Yet these nearly featureless wilds are clearly and unmistakably divided. You can see the boundary line that marks off the territory of France from that of Turkey as surely as though a barbed wire fence extended its menacing ugliness from north to south between the two. For, westward from the gate-way of the wind-scoured fort, there

runs a level high-road, straight and broad to Ben Ghardan and thence to Medenine, Gabes, Sfax and Soussa. By this road, motor cars scour across the plains, carrying French officers in uniform from post to post; and the desert people, travelling on camels, horses, asses, or afoot, make way at the sound of their horns almost without alarm. And by the roadside here and there are fields of maize and wheat and barley, with straight-lined boundaries, neat and orderly. This is the country under the sway of people civilised after the European fashion.

But Eastward of the Spahi frontier post, the world is bare of any evidence of the handiwork of man. The very caravan road ceases to be one broad and beaten highway. It frays out into a maze of devious narrow tracks, aimlessly wandering now eastward, now due south. It is a road fashioned by the appetites of beasts of burden, browsing as they go; not drawn from point to point by human need of haste. Throughout North Africa—in all the camel lands, indeed—such desert highways tell the tale of a people whose travel is never hurried, who have no need for the hard, straight, rapid path of European commerce. There are no straight roads in the East; not even over sandy wastes where nothing grows at all.

Over the ways of civilised speed, by steamer, railway train and motor car, I had travelled

from England to the frontier of Tripoli in seven days. I had crossed the Channel, the whole of France, the Mediterranean Sea and all the coast of Tunis, from Tunis town to Ben Ghardan, with hardly a halt ; and from Ben Ghardan a two-wheeled cart had brought me to the frontier. Now—it was a bitter cold November morning—I was at the threshold of the land of many unavoidable delays. Hereafter, I should travel hardly more in seven days than hitherto in one.

I sat upon my boxes outside the fort, and the wind scourged me with stinging sand. The half-Europeanised Arab lad who had driven me thus far in the little waggon, and had been hired by me to take me over the frontier as far as the nearest outpost of the Turks, was disappearing in the yellow dimness of whirling sand along the road to Ben Ghardan. A little group of Spahi guards sat not far away, their backs against the wall of the courtyard. Their blue cloaks shrouded them to the eyes against the flying sand. They eyed me askance, muttering together in Arabic, and spitting. Under the lee of the wall, their horses stood with trailing bridles, and scarlet, high-peaked saddles loosely girthed. They were not good horses save for one, a mouse-coloured stallion almost too young for riding, whose flanks were scarred by the cutting-edge of the great shovel stirrups.

The men were surly and half-defiant. Their leader had cast off the mantle of Arab courtesy which he had worn the night before, on my arrival. He was angry with me because he had played a trick upon me, and because my way of taking it puzzled him. I had, so far as I could, imitated the manner of an Arab in the business, and he had looked for the behaviour of a European.

It had been late when I had left Ben Ghardan the night before. There was an Algerian Frenchman newly settled there, and I had arranged with him for the hire of the little waggon and the Arab lad to drive me in it to the Turkish outposts in Tripoli. Because of the badness of the road, which was watched by bands of marauders (who sought to profit by the confusion of the war in harrying weak caravans that might cross the frontier), this Frenchman was at first unwilling to hire his waggon to me at all. He was none the more ready when I could not tell him whither I wished to go, beyond that I must travel eastward till I should fall in with a Turkish force, which would, (I hoped), escort me to the head-quarter camp. I did not know, nor could anyone tell me, how many days I must travel before falling in with such a force. But in the end, having paid in advance a sum such as would cover the loss of the waggon, I per-

suaded the French colonist to a bargain ; and he very kindly undertook to hire for me as driver an Arab youth who was in his debt, and otherwise would not for any consideration have taken the risk of accompanying one dressed in European clothes across the desert beyond the frontier. He took with him a bell-mouthed horse pistol made in Milan a hundred and fifty years ago.

At about the hour of sunset I set off from Ben Ghardan and travelled in the little springless waggon for five hours, down the road to the frontier. The stars came out, not feeble points of light, but brilliant blazing suns in a sky of the blackness of polished steel. Mars, low on the horizon, glowed like a camp fire. From time to time we passed real camp-fires, and caught the keen smell of aromatic brush-wood mixed with dried camels' dung. Voices cried to us from the darkness, asking in a dialect of Arabic new to me, who we were and whither we were going.

The clear black sky and silvery wastes of sand, my heavy wrappings, and above all, the jolting car and jangling bells upon the horse's collar, made it seem impossible that I should be travelling over an African desert. Never, until then, though I had travelled for months with Arabs in another part of North Africa, had I seen the desert people use a cart of any kind. Their burdens are always heaped upon the

backs of their beasts. The creaking wheels and jangling bells made me imagine that I was not in Africa at all, but in some part of Southern Russia, crossing an unpeopled, snow-dusted steppe.

The Spahis who suddenly galloped up out of the darkness and formed a half circle before me might have been Cossack riders. Their high, rope-bound turbans looked like huge fur caps, and their cloaks were wrapped close about them. Their horses, standing dead still, with hanging heads and steaming, long-haired flanks, were very like Tartar ponies. The stone walls of the fort showed palely behind them in the starlight.

By now I had been travelling for about five hours, and the sorry little horse that drew the cart was tired. I was not indisposed to halt for the night, and hardly needed the Spahi troop-leader's appeal to go no further.

We spoke together in French, for amongst his men was an orderly who spoke that language well, being employed as body servant to the French officers who visit the fort at certain times. I could understand very little of the dialect of these Tunisian Arabs, because I learnt what Arabic I have in Morocco. The difference between Moghreby Arabic and the dialect of Tunis and Tripoli is greater than the difference between those, say, of Devonshire and

the West Riding of Yorkshire, but not so great as that between Spanish and Italian. So we spoke in French through the medium of Ibrahim, the interpreter.

Ibrahim was young and pallid, with servile manners and abounding tact. I fancied that the muffled troop-leader of the Spahis begged me to forgive him for detaining me, but said that he could not let me cross the frontier until next day. But Ibrahim translated this into a purely hospitable invitation; saying that my horse was tired and my driver sleepy, and that marauders were in the neighbourhood, so that it would be dangerous to travel further before dawn.

I accepted the version of Ibrahim, and my horse was unharnessed. The Arab lad who drove me—I forget his name—curled down at once in the cold sand under the waggon, and slept, wrapping his head in his cloak.

Near to the fort stands an old hut of mud and wattle. It was lighted by the burning of strips of ravelled rag floating in a bowl of melted grease. A rough, untrimmed pole upheld the roof, and, like the house-tree of Ulysses' house, made a cornerpost for a great raised bed. Here I lay all night, fully dressed.

And when I rose early to go on my way, I found that the interpreter, at the order of the Spahi leader, had telegraphed from the fort to

the French Chef de Bureau at Ben Ghardan, saying that a man had been stopped on the frontier last night, and had given no explanation of his presence there beyond saying that he was English and meant to travel in Tripoli. Now Italy was already snarling at France because Turkish officers coming from Europe into Tunis had got across the frontier into the theatre of the war. The Chef de Bureau at Ben Ghardan, not knowing anything of me, and thinking it possible that I might be of the Turkish army, nevertheless did not wish to be drawn into what might seem to be mere officious meddling with a harmless traveller, as I might prove after all to be. So perhaps he was pleased with the plan he hit upon.

Hearing that I brought a cartload of baggage with me, and was dependent for guidance upon a Tunisian Arab, he gave order by telegraph that "on no account must the English traveller be molested. He was free to go where he might choose. But his servant, a French subject, must not cross the frontier without a special permit." This was to force me to return to Ben Ghardan in order to take out such a permit, and in doing so, submit myself to tactful scrutiny from the eyes of the proper authorities. And so sure were the Spahis of the success of their ruse that my horse was harnessed and all ready for my return.

“ It means only the delay of a day, or perhaps two,” said Ibrahim, watching me from the corner of his eye.

I was very angry, but kept my anger hidden, except that I complimented the troop-leader somewhat bitterly on his knavish cleverness in beguiling me to stay the night. At that he smiled indulgently, and said that I had only to return to Ben Ghardan, where all would no doubt be made easy for me.

“ And,” I said, “ if I do not choose to go back, what shall you do ? Will you hinder me from going on ? ”

“ By no means,” said he, smiling in a jeering way. “ Monsieur is free to go where he likes. But Monsieur’s servant and the horse and cart must return to Ben Ghardan.”

He was confident that I could not take my baggage and would not leave it behind. Also he knew that I had no horse to ride, and did not know the roads. It was impossible that I should go on alone.

I said to the Arab lad, “ Take out all my baggage from your cart ”—which he did, and dumped it in the sand—“ and go back to Ben Ghardan. I shall stay here.”

Then I sat down on my boxes in the wind ; and the Arab boy drove off ; and the Spahis, puzzled and angry, talked and spat together, eyeing me askance.

II

I HAD no better plan in my mind than to join the first caravan passing eastward ; and neither the anger at the trick played upon me, nor the determination to outwit the tricksters, quite blinded me to the danger of this course.

Ordinarily, I am somewhat contemptuous of those silly scaremongers who are forever harping upon the "fanaticism" of the desert people, and have succeeded in portraying the Arab as a kind of murderous bigot whose hand is against all who are not of his persuasion. That he has small love for the ordinary run of Europeans I cannot but admit. Indeed, partly from tradition and partly from the unalterable contempt for all people whose speech and customs are not his own—(that same spirit in which the Semite has always viewed the Gentile and has kept stubbornly aloof)—the feverish Arab mind is, beyond doubt, readily inflamed against all Christians.

And there exists in the mind of every ignorant Arab a preconceived notion of what a

Christian is like. It is a fancy portrait, as unlike the original as the inhumanly ferocious desperadoes of a solitary spinster's imagination are unlike the burglars of real life. Yet it seems to be against Christianity in the abstract, rather than against individual Christians, that the religious intolerance of the Arabs is directed; and I have always found that the individual, walking circumspectly, and knowing certain points of Eastern etiquette which must be observed, can dwell or travel safely with most Arabs.

Nevertheless, to cross the Tripoli frontier at this time, in the company of a chance-met caravan was beyond question a dangerous thing to do. To begin with, I did not properly understand the speech of the people, and had no interpreter. And at that time, the massacre of Arab non-combatants, women and children, by the Italian troops in Tripoli had embittered the Arabs beyond the ordinary against all Christians. Worst of all, this desert belt divided by the frontier is at all times a notably bad land, the refuge of outlaws and robber bands and homeless men. The camel men themselves, who crossed almost daily with wheat and barley for the Turkish camp, bore the reputation of desperate, wicked fellows. I had been gravely warned against their company.

But there was now no help for it, if I was to

go on. So there I sat and endured the buffetings of the dry storm as patiently as I could, until at last there came in sight a caravan of thirteen camels, bearing sacks of grain ; and five men striding at their tails.

One of the men hailed me as they come up ; and I answered him, “ And to you the peace ! ” in a condescending tone of voice, as though I thought him and his gipsy company a little beneath my notice. He asked me who I was, and whither I was bound—questions which I understood easily enough, because they are the first upon the lips of all wayfaring Arabs after the Salaam has been given and returned. Then I waved my hand toward the Spahis, telling him to find out from them what he wanted to know, and saying that I was English, and did not understand Arabic. All the camels halted at the fort, and the men chatted with the Spahis. I do not know what the Spahis told them about me, beyond that I was going into Tripoli ; but this they must have learnt, for presently coming to me, the man who had greeted me asked whether I was bound for the camp of the Sultan’s soldiers. “ Well,” I said, “ if God please, I shall go there. I go into Tripoli. I am English,” I added, “ and I am not a friend of the Italians.” “ The Italians are Jews, dogs, children of damned fathers,” he answered readily, when he had understood me. “ But,” said he, laying

his two forefingers side by side, "the Ingles and the Sultan are friends as close as that. The Ingles are little uncles of the Sultan."

I said, "Yes."

"By my God and thy head" ("Wullahi wa rasek!"), he cried, "if the Ingles should come to govern Tripoli as they have Egypt, no Arab would rise against them. They would be welcome."

"And if it were the French?" I said.

"You talk like a Moghreby," he answered. "How is that?"

"Because I learnt to speak Arabic in Morocco. But how if the French were trying to take Tripoli?"

He glanced at the Spahis, and did not answer. One of his companions said that the French were good.

"In Morocco," I said, "the Arabs hate them and fight against them."

"Aye, by God," said this second, "the Fransis are all dogs, too. They shall be driven From El Moghrib as the Italians from Trablis, in sh' Allah!"

"The French are good friends of the English," I observed.

"True. They are both good. But the Ingles are best," said he. For a Frenchman he would have damned the fathers of the English and lauded the French; such is the rude diplomacy of the desert.

I made no answer. Presently they questioned me. How did I mean to reach the camp of the Turks? Where were my horses and my servants?

“They will come,” I answered carelessly.

The man with whom I had spoken at first began to talk in an undertone; but I did not understand clearly what he said. He was in some way warning me that few men could be trusted to guide and serve a stranger in that desert.

He said that four camels of the thirteen belonged to himself and his brother. The other three men were perhaps servants of some merchant whose camels they drove.

Khalil (the man who spoke with me) showed me his weapons, and drew attention to those of his companions. They meant to join themselves to another small caravan bound for Rigdalin, where the Turks had made a refuge camp for the fugitives from Zuara, after the bombardment. Thus, travelling with them, I should have the escort of half a score of honest, well-armed fellows; and my baggage could be packed upon the camels.

I did not at all like the look of Khalil; nor of Hammo, his dirty brother; nor of any of the company. Khalil was tall and young and strong, with a wry mouth and scabby, ill-shaved head. He fidgetted, and his fingers twitched, while he

spoke, opening his eyes wide and hushing his screaming voice as he said that for a little money, a very little, they would conduct me safely to the Turks.

For thirty francs—an exorbitant fee—I was to accompany them. I made the Spahis take note of Khalil, and write down his name. Then came the business of paying in advance a part of the sum.

This is inevitable in any money-dealings with the Arabs. No matter what their bargain, their greedy hearts must be comforted by the payment of some of the money before any of it has been earned, and they have a thousand dirty and aggravating tricks for getting the best of the deal. They will agree upon the price and receive their moiety in advance; but then, thinking it easily got, and wishing that they had asked for more, they will refuse to start until more be given. Thus they hope to trade upon the Roumi impatience of delay; and I have known them, after being well started upon a journey, halt their beasts and swear to go no further unless a greater price than that agreed upon should be forthcoming. Khalil now said that only on receiving twenty francs would he make a start. But to this I dared not agree, because I was afraid that having so much in hand he would in case of danger, or of a quarrel, be content to leave me alone half-way upon the

road. I would give him no more than ten francs at the start. And when I had won this point and was ready to pay over a gold piece, there was a fierce quarrel between the brothers as to which should carry the money.

Like so many greedy birds the ragged desert men screamed and clawed the air before me with avaricious hands. If you have never seen it you cannot conceive the ecstasy of shrieking greed that consumes the poor Arabs in all matters of money. Money! “Flûs!” They cannot name it without emphasis. “Aat', aat', aati 'l flûs!” (Give, give, give me the money!)—that was the cry of a shop-keeper lad of whom later I bought an earthen fire-pot; and he danced impatiently, clenching and unclenching his hands in a fever to be handling his pennyworth of greasy flûs. So now these two knavish brothers, neither trusting the other, jigged and screamed before me in the whistling wind, and reviled their common ancestors; and their companions, hoping ultimately to share the spoil, now held them apart, now cursed amongst themselves.

But at last, my boxes upon one camel, and myself perched on a sack borne by another, we went forward into the teeth of the wind, and crossed the frontier.

III

PRESENTLY the little fort was out of sight and we came to the shores of a desolate, marshy shott, a lagoon whose salt waters are so shallow you may cross in places dry-footed, over a bed of dry, cracked mud encrusted with white salt-crystals. But now the winter rains had swelled its bitter waters, and though in its narrow places the shott would still be fordable by horses, the Arabs would not risk their camels over the mud. For the spongy feet of camels that bear the awkward beasts so well across the sand, are almost helpless upon mud. I have seen a whole caravan slip and slither over clayey ground when rain has softened the track, like drunken monsters in a nightmare pageant. And so we went northward along the marshy shore, over a narrow desert strip between the shott and the sea; and presently the wind dropped a little and a dismal rain began to fall.

Travel is slow with pack camels. The many tracks of the mazy road meander hither and thither, now parallel, now interlacing; and the

slow brutes follow them at will, browsing as they go. The men urge them on with strange cries, but seldom with blows, only beating off now and then some greedy laggard that stays to browse too long upon a thorny tuft. It is the dry and withered herbage on which the camels choose to feed ; they pass the green stuff by, unless it be the juicy cactus, turning their slow heads from side to side in search of sapless twigs and dried-up spiny scrub.

Arabs have different words for the exhortations of different beasts. They will urge a horse on with one word and a mule with another, and have a strange gasping cluck for the encouragement of donkeys. But strangest of all are the cries of the camel-men. "Zahn!" they cry, "Zahn, Zahn!" with a singular pectoral accentuation ; and sometimes they snore at the camel, inhaling through the nostrils. To make them kneel, they cry "Akh-kh" and "Ksh-sh!" with a sound like clearing the throat, pulling downwards at the camel's neck, and kicking his knees. They will curse an animal, or expostulate and argue with it, as though it understood their speech ; and indeed, they do believe that all beasts understand Arabic, and can speak it if they choose. Much of the Arabic tongue, particularly as spoken by poor wild country people, is so harsh and rough that the snarl of a dog, the bitter groaning of a camel, or the noise

made by a horse blowing out his nostrils, would pass amongst them for almost intelligible human speech. I have known a Moor who heard in the lowing of cattle a chorus of super-human voices calling upon "Ullah, Ullah, Ullah!"

The rain pattered steadily down, filling the desert with the faint noises of a multiplicity of little plashings. Rarely even on a summer's noon, or at night, is the void wilderness entirely silent. There is a wavering, sussurrant shrillness in the ears, faintly audible as the flickering of hot air above the sand is faintly visible. When rain falls, sounds carry less clearly through the moisture-laden air, but in dry times the voices of men talking equably together can be heard at incredible distances. The cries of goat-herds, and the yapping of dogs are audible when no living thing is in sight.

Our company moved generally in silence through the veils of rain. We overtook and joined the other caravan, of which Khalil had told me, and there were greetings, and some questions asked about myself. The men would have asked me a great many things about the war—whether the English meant to come to the help of the Turks; if it were true that English soldiers were already on the way, and whether I myself were not one of them. But I felt very little inclined to talk, and professed hardly to understand a word of what was said.

Amongst the men of the caravan to which ours was now joined was a child of perhaps twelve years, girt with a leathern belt and pistol-holster. There was no pistol in the holster, which was worked with faded scarlet thread ; but he had the haft and half the blade of an old knife in his belt ; and carried also a little bag of shot. He was akin to Khalil, and viewed me with shy curiosity, keeping always by the side of my camel.

This boy, with Khalil and Hammo and myself, camped a little apart from the rest that night. We had no shelter, save that we piled the sodden sacks of grain in the form of a low rampart, crescent shape, and covered within its curve. As night came on, the rain fell faster. It lashed upon us in torrents, soaking all to the very bone. I had no tent with me ; and though I set up a folding bed on which to sleep, I soon abandoned it ; for the canvas was water-proof and held the rain ; so that shortly I was lying in a shallow bath. I wrapped a thick white woollen haik about me, and crept in amongst the Arabs for warmth. Never have I suffered more from cold than in an African desert. The ground beneath us was cold and soft and wet, like the primeval slime.

I gave out cigarettes, and we smoked them held in the hollows of our hands against the rain, shivering. The boy coughed pitifully.

From time to time we dozed a little, and now and then a moist, uncomfortable warmth crept over us; and sometimes cramp seized us. Morning came at last, with little gusts of chill wind, and the rain ceased. The light came quickly, as light always comes or goes in that latitude. With its coming my companions broke into light chatter. They rose, lithely enough, and set about making a fire from drenched brushwood. Like the gipsies, these people are clever at making a fire of twigs and bits of broken branch, no matter how sodden the wood may be; and their fires, burning hotly, with furious crackle and (in the desert) with the pleasant pungency of aromatic wood, leave only a small grey circle of wood-ash when all is over.

The Arabs dried their clothing over this fire, standing against the flame as the wind blew it, and holding their loose robes wide. It was now that I envied them their light voluminous garments, for they were quickly dried; but my civilised attire could only dry when taken off.

Khalil had a little wheat-flour, and there was water in plenty in the pools. He mixed a fair-sized lump of dough, and kneaded it in a skin bag, which he twisted and rolled and pounded on the ground. He spread the dough out into flat cakes and burned them awhile in the red

embers. We ate them hot, and drank cold rain-water from the pools. I had biscuits and wine with me, but did not touch them.

We started late, for the rotten canvas of the barley sacks was sodden in the rain, and two of them burst. Hammo stitched them with a great iron needle that he carried in his belt.

We met that day six men driving seven camels that carried no packs, and they did not answer our greeting civilly. I do not know what passed between them and my companions; but the boy, Khalil's kinsman, made it clear to me that they were evil people. But that we were more numerous than they, and all armed, said he, they might have attacked us.

It seemed that even now that danger was not past; for Khalil came presently and said that he risked his life in travelling with a Nasrany. He feared that these men whom we had passed might get help and return to fall upon us. Our caravans must now hurry forward, and all his mates cursed Khalil.

“For this,” said he to me, “thou’lt pay me more than thirty francs, eh? See, Ingleesi, what danger I run. The lads all quarrel with me on thy account. By God, if I were not here to stand by thee, I think they would cut off thy head for thee. Ah yes, indeed, I am thy only good friend. Say now, how much more shall I have?”

“Ma ’anarf,” said I. “I do not understand.”

“El flûs, el flûs !” cried he. “What money shall I have ?”

“That which you have already, and what I have promised beside.”

“So little, then ? No, I must have more. I am thy good friend.”

“Ma ’anarf,” said I again.

“Ma ’tarf !” he said bitterly. “Thou dost not understand ! But thou dost. Thou understandest very well, wullahi ! Say then, how much more ?”

We quarrelled upon this. We woke during the wet night that followed to discuss the matter.

“What if we kill thee and say the robbers did it ? Who could know ?” said Khalil. His mates gibed at him because he could drive no harder bargain with the Nasrany.

At noon on the third day we came in sight of the palm-groves of Rigdalin. Khalil came to my camel’s side, hand in hand with his little kinsman.

“Speak well of us to the Turki Bimbashi,” said he. “We brought you safely, and would have fought in your defence if need be ; and did we not give our bread to you ? And the boy loves you, too. Give me as much as you can, for his sake.”

The lad said : “ Give me money to buy a six-cartridge little gun like thine, dear friend. When I am a man I shall be a good friend to all the English. Give, dearest, in God’s name, give a little.”

IV

HAMMO went ahead to the refuge-camp in the Rigdalin palm-groves. He was to announce my coming and exaggerate my importance, after the Eastern fashion. I have learnt that it is profitable to be heralded in this manner in any Arab town or village in which one means to stay. For thus curiosity is aroused, and a great crowd of people will assemble to see the stranger's arrival; and the sheikh of the place, and all the notables, will be on their mettle, knowing that their people are there to see, and to say afterwards, if the matter has gone off well, "Wullahi, but So-and-So is well fitted to give welcome; aye, even if an Emir should come amongst us. Didn't you see that the stranger took note how he bore himself?" And these things tickle the vanity of the grave elders; so that they are pleased with themselves, and pleasant to deal with.

It was not, however, by Arab elders that I was received at Rigdalin; but by a Greek

doctor, who was apparently in charge of the camp. The square courtyard of the old caserne was in a state of extraordinary confusion ; for there were bales of goods, chairs, a bedstead or so, sacks of barley, saddles and all manner of household goods, amongst which sat the women and children from Zuara. There were a few stolid Turkish soldiers on guard, but no officers other than this military doctor; and no one who understood English. The doctor spoke a little French and Italian. I drank coffee with him, and showed him two letters which I had from the Turkish Embassy—one a general letter of introduction, and the other addressed to Neshat Bey, the commander-in-chief. He furnished me straightway with a horse to ride, and an escort of two soldiers, to take me on to Zuara. It would hardly have been possible for me to have stayed in Rigdalin ; and indeed, I was anxious to go forward as soon as possible. Zuara is only a few miles away from Rigdalin ; and it was to the commanding officer there that I must apply for an escort to take me to the head-quarter camp outside Tripoli.

I rode through a wood of date-palms, whose pale yellow fruit was hard to bite, and acid, not being ripe ; but I flicked down some of the low-growing sprays with a whip-lash, and found them good against thirst. The Arab gardeners mount the scaly palm trunks as one climbs a

stairway, stepping from one excrescence to another; and prune their tops with long thin saws. But nearly all these fertile gardens were deserted; and here and there the ground was torn, and fragments of shell lay half-buried in the sand. Khalil came running to me with such as he found, chattering in monkey-like excitement. He saw in every neglected tumble-down hut the work of the Italian gunners. His lively Arab mind reconstructed a score of bloody battles where no Italians had yet set foot. In strong contrast with the febrile vivacity of the Arab was the ox-like stolidity of the Turkish soldiers. They trudged ahead of us, neither interested nor amused, exchanging queer, clucking monosyllables from time to time.

They led me to the barracks which stand among the sand dunes just outside the now deserted village of Zuara; and here I was taken into the presence of the Bimbashi, Musa Mehemet.

The Arab officers of the Ottoman Army, educated in the Turkish military colleges, were a type quite new to me; and this Musa Bimbashi was the first of them I ever met. He looks at you with sombre eyes out of a dark, high-featured face, and the face is that of autocrat and aristocrat both. An aristocrat, for Musa Bimbashi is of the oldest and purest blood of the Yemen; and an autocrat in the high bred

Arab manner. I could describe in this man almost every Arab gentleman I have ever known; yet he was unlike any of them. He was arrogant yet infinitely courteous, full of restless energy, never sleeping, yet generally seeming to be half asleep; for he had all the languid, blasé air of his kind. In his moments of ease one would have thought that nothing would ever rouse him to action. Then he reminded me of Eastern chieftains such as I have sat with in their painted tents, seeing them finger their rosaries and dreamily watch the ascending smoke of cigarettes, while the moment for decisive action passed unnoticed by. And in his stressful times one could not picture him as ever being calm. Not that he gave rein to curses or gestures, but his whole bearing, the harsh curt accents that replaced his ordinary gentle speech, and the general aspect of a hawk suddenly unhooded, made one doubt that such a man could ever sit in idleness, regarding the world through half-shut eyes.

This mask of indolence is general in the East amongst the well-born, who thus conceal the excitability of their real nature. What marked off the Bimbashi from others that I had known was that, though Oriental enough in other respects, he was in military matters a scientific modern soldier. And yet he was more than that. He was not as other Arabs, to whom war is still a

purely emotional business ; a mixture of religious exaltation and glorious pageantry. Nor was he as our modern military scientists of Europe, to whom the conduct of a war may be as void of any sentiment as the solving of a quadratic equation. Musa Bimbashi stands between these two extremes ; or, perhaps, he includes them both. I mean that, while his brain can view the war merely as so much strategy and tactics, his soul still burns with merciless hatred of the enemy against whom he fights. I think that spirit has been dead a hundred years or more amongst our soldiers. I doubt if, even in the days of Napoleon, when our soldiers and sailors were bred up to hate a Frenchman as the devil, there existed so fierce an animosity against their foemen.

Certainly, no modern English gentleman would thirst after the blood of his foe as does the Arab. Musa Bimbashi wants to kill Italians—many of them. He would almost sooner slay a hundred than out-manceuvre ten thousand. It is the spirit of Elizabeth's seamen who fought the cruel Spaniard, and has been the Arab spirit in war from time immemorial. In the past it has cost the Arab many battles ; for battles are won by the ability to kill, not by the desire to do it. But in the future it shall win him many ; for Musa is one of a great number of men who strongly and honestly desire to kill, and yet

have the patience and restraint to learn how to do it by other methods than those of flinging hordes of recklessly brave men against quick-firing guns.

But until I met this officer I could not have believed the Arab nature so capable of self-discipline and steady application to the drudgery of military routine. Seeing the Bimbashi at work organising drilled troops from the raw Arabs of the country-side ; receiving the reports of his scouts from every quarter of the area under his control (he had so perfect a network of pickets and patrols that not a stray camel could cross the frontier without his knowing it) ; deciding upon the affairs of the refuge camp ; organising a constant supply of provisions for the headquarter camp ; and keeping an unfailing outlook for Italian cruisers along eighty miles of coast-line—seeing all this, I should have thought Musa Mehemet an exception to the rule of Arab intolerance of routine : but that afterwards I met others like him.

V

THE Bimbashi took my hand in both of his, after the caressing manner of Arab courtesy, and led me to a room in which were a settee and cane chairs and a square table. There was a cheap colour-print portrait of the Sultan on the wall ; also a print of a Turkish battleship ; and one or two grass fans, such as the Arabs use for fanning charcoal in their braziers. Coffee was brought in delicate small cups, and the Bimbashi produced a box of good cigarettes, tipped with long cardboard tubes. We sat exchanging compliments awhile, though with difficulty. He spoke the pure Arabic of the Yemen, and also Turkish, but no French ; so we conversed together in Arabic much as an English aristocrat and an East End foreigner knowing only our Cockney dialect might converse in English.

First, I must tell him of my journey across the frontier ; and at mention of the nights spent in the wind and rain he sprang up at once, with some appearance of satisfaction, declaring that I should change my clothes forthwith.

This I was ready enough to do, and also to wash, though I was rather surprised that he should stand a little way off from me, eyeing me in a strange, calculating way, as he spoke. He led me to his own sleeping room, and gave some instructions in Turkish to his orderly, who presently brought me a stiff, starched dress-shirt, and a complete Turkish uniform.

“But,” said I, “I have other clothes of my own.”

The Bimbashi came to me, holding out the shirt.

“I beg of you,” said he, “wear these, and keep them—a gift.”

I was bewildered, unwilling to offend by refusing, but feeling a keen disinclination to prison that horrible shirt-front next my bosom beneath a tight khaki tunic, or to encase my legs in those rasping, tubular trousers. I thought longingly of a soft shirt and loose, easy Norfolk suit that lay in one of my boxes.

The Bimbashi’s face fell a little.

“Look—English!” said he. Sure enough, there was an Englishman’s name in marking ink on the collar of the dress shirt.

“Then I must wear a black coat with tails,” I said, and began to get out my dress suit. But he would not have it.

“Nay,” he said, “wear the dress of a Turkish soldier. I give it you, for your own.”

I gave up thoughts of comfort. The orderly fell to work at once, pulling off my mud-stiffened riding boots ; and then both he and the Bimbashi turned away, with the delicacy of Orientals, while I disrobed. I could not but remark the relief with which the Bimbashi viewed me clad in that most ill-fitting and uncomfortable uniform. He gave me a tarbûsh trimmed with imitation astrachan, and a dove-coloured military great coat. But soon he saw that I was ill at ease, and began at last, somewhat diffidently, to explain.

“The Arabs here,” said he, “are many of them poor and ignorant people, unable to distinguish their friends from their foes. No one knowing you to be English would raise a hand against you, or speak an unkind word. Only, wearing the clothes of a Christian, and, above all, a hat or a helmet, you run a great risk of being taken for an Italian, and so, for your safety——”

I assured him that I felt it an honour that I should be allowed to wear the Turkish uniform ; and thenceforward, for many weeks, I did wear it, and, to the end of my stay in Tripoli, never wore again a wide-brimmed hat or helmet.

Whether the wearing of hats be forbidden in the Koran I do not know ; but certainly throughout North Africa there is a strong prejudice against all hats of felt, or cloth, or canvas ; though the soil-tilling Arab and Berber

peasants wear huge straw hats, like those of Mexican peons. No true Moslem will wear the headgear of a European ; he would regard it as the final badge of a renegade.

“Ai, billah!” said an old sheikh of Dukala once to me. “Our men of the coast towns are no longer true Moslemin. Another five years and you may bring them all Roumi hats for their pates.”

I stayed for four days at Zuara, whilst the Bimbashi, having telegraphed news of my arrival to headquarters, awaited a reply that would permit me to go forward. On one of the days there was a great assembly of the Arab levies, about two thousand of whom, well armed, albeit without uniform, drilled and marched well. And on another day, early in the morning, Tewfik Effendi, chief of Scouts, pulled up his chestnut stallion in a flurry of dust in the sunlit courtyard, and reported that a steamer, possibly an Italian cruiser, had been sighted, heading west along the coast for Zuara. Whereat the whole fighting force doubled out and took up their positions among the sand-dunes, ready to repel any possible landing of the Italians.

The belt of dunes between the barracks and the sea afforded a beautiful theatre for any fighting of this kind. Nothing will stop shells better than loose sand, and among these yellow, breast-high hillocks, the Turkish soldiers would have

been almost as safe, in case of bombardment, as though they were a score of miles inland. Yet they commanded all points at which it would have been possible to disembark troops; and (though on this occasion there was no fight, for the vessel happened to be one of the Messageries Maritimes) they proved afterwards again and again that they were able to hold their ground in face of overwhelming odds. Indeed, nearly seven months later, when sixteen or seventeen transports, with four warships, lay off Zuara, Musa Bimbashi and his men defeated every attempt at landing, and the Italians were forced to disembark their men full thirty miles away.

VI

THERE came to me a dusty, grizzled Arab guide in the early hours of the morning, and bade me hasten, for "The bed," said he excitedly, "is ready for thee this hour past."

And I, being somewhat short of temper, because the loading of my goods on pack-camels had been a long and very noisy business, answered him shortly.

"Fool! Do you think I ride in a bed? Away with you; saddle me the horse."

"There is no horse" (he used the word "hasan," meaning a stallion). "Come now, there are no stallions to be had. You must ride a 'bed'; and first, pay me the money for the hiring of it."

"I tell thee I will ride on the back of a beast or not at all," said I; whereat he stared at me in perplexity.

"Why, sure," he broke out, "it is a beast I speak of—a ferrash, and a good one. Come and see."

So I went out, and there, saddled and bridled

in gaudy Arab gear, stood a pitiful, bony little mare.

“That is thy ferrash,” said he. “It shall be thine for four days, when I have the flûs in my hand.”

Then I understood. The man, either because he lisped, or because of a peculiarity of his dialect, had pronounced the word “feras,” which means “mare,” as though it were “ferrash,” which means a bed. I told him so.

“Shall an Arab learn his own tongue from a Nasrany?” he scoffed. “Call the beast feras or ferrash as you will; only give me my money and let us go. The camels have started.”

So I mounted the miserable nag and started on my four days’ ride from Zuara to Ain Zara, the desert headquarters of the Turks.

And now, for the greater part of my journey, I rode, not across barren wilderness, but through grove after grove of glorious palms, with short, sweet grass as smooth as on an English lawn between their stems; and here and there a shallow pool in which their slender beauties were reflected. Here and there the tall white shafts of draw-wells gleamed amongst the trees, and we passed the fig gardens of rich men, and the tiny plots of poor ones, set about with banks and walls of cactus. The whining of the pulley-wheels above the wells made constant dreamy music; and ever and anon one came upon groups

of women, clad in robes of blue and brown and russet, each with her shapely jars of red earth supported on her head by a brown arm gleaming with bangles, or bound with ropes of twisted grass about her shoulders. Even the poorest Arab lass must have her crude jewellery of the desert—a circlet of white metal, roughly graven, set about her wrist; or a necklet of beads and tiny charms round her throat. And in these charms I have often seen what I take to be evidence of the pre-Islamite religion of North Africa; for there is not only the Hand of Fatima (a tiny piece of metal fashioned in the shape of a palm with five fingers outspread), but also, on every torque and chaplet, the secret symbol of the Christian faith—the fish. I think this emblem must date from the days of Nestorian monks and desert hermits, who took it as the badge of their faith because the Greek word *ἰχθῦς* gives, letter by letter, the title of Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour. The Christian hermits, even in the time of Mahomet, still had their cells and austere monasteries in these deserts, and carved the Sign of the Fish on rocks and on the rims of wells; and thus, perhaps, it is that to this day the token survives; as, amongst the Berbers of the Sûs and of Morocco, many relics of a long-forgotten paganism live in the speech and dress and customs of the people.

Such survivals linger almost imperishably in the unchanging life of the desert.

“God send thee to Malta!” screamed a withered beldame after me, because my horse in passing overset her jar of water; and it took me some time to understand that her curse had reference to the days when the Knights of Malta bore a name wherewith to frighten naughty children in the Moslem harem.

I passed through Zawia, the greatest township of this fertile belt, at about the hour of full market on the second day of my journey; and, riding through amongst the crowd, saw all the commerce of the busy Arab world laid out beneath my eyes. Here sat the travelling blacksmith—a Jew—his head enveloped in a birdseye kerchief of blue and white. A little lad worked the forge, blowing two tiny bellows alternately one with either hand, whilst the smith, a fairy anvil on his knees, hammered out shoes for horses and asses, or made a makeshift lantern from a biscuit box of tin.

The butchers sat apart in their own quarter, with sheep and goats ready killed, and others, drawn and quartered, hanging upon posts and much beset by flies. The sellers of sweatmeats and bread sat with their wares disposed upon handkerchiefs spread before them; and from group to group of these there skulked a thievish, lean, young pig, to steal flat loaves from

those who did not keep a keen look-out. There were fruits and spices, leaves of dried tobacco, cloths, earthenware, salt and nails and tea and coffee, and sugar in great pointed cones, whereof the merchant would chip off small bits for those who could not buy the whole.

The Arab rustics come in twos and threes to buy, holding each other by the hand, and proffering chickens, eggs and garden produce against such luxuries as coffee and tobacco. They go in fear of the sharp tongues of the salesmen, and will blubber at the scoffing railleries of the waggish townsmen. Yet once away from the Sûk, with all their purchases slung on the shoulders of their wives and asses, they go their ways homeward boasting of how they outfaced such-and-such a seller of tea, and got, in return for seven eggs, as much sugar, wullahi! as would suffice for more than seven days.

I fell in with two Turkish officers from Stamboul hastening to rejoin their regiments outside Tripoli; and at this town, Zawia, we three were feasted by the Kaimakam (the chief civil authority) in a cool darkened room; drinking coffee and eating spiced fish, eggs in oil, and gobbets of stewed meat, while our horses, tethered to the prison window-bars, snuffed at the hands of the poor prisoners and made their hoofs ring upon the paved courtyard as they stamped at the flies.

The Kaimakam must try some question of the removing of landmarks whilst we sat over our coffee ; so that for a time the room was full of the noise of cursing and shouting. I said to him, when judgment had been given and all was quiet again, " If, in my country, one who came to a magistrate should so raise his voice in the presence of his judge, he would be sent from the room at once, and made to wish that he had behaved more soberly."

" Ah, but we have hearts," the Kaimakam replied, laying his hand upon his own. " See now, that poor fellow has suffered a great wrong. How should he hush his voice in speaking of it ? If he would have justice he must surely cry aloud for it, or justice may be deaf and never hear."

VII

It had been my intention on leaving Zouara to ride hard, with as few stoppages as possible, until I should reach the main Turkish camp at AinZara. But for two reasons I could not do this. For one thing my mount was the weediest, poorest little screw, and though two changes of horse were arranged for me at different stages, these arrangements fell through, and I had to ride the same horse all the way. Indeed, that she should have carried me so well as she did was more than one would have expected from her looks. She must have averaged nearly thirty-five miles a day for four successive days.

The weakness of my horse, then, was one cause of delay. The other was my companionship with the two Turkish officers. They were Mahmoud Bey, a long, loose-limbed captain of cavalry, and a little gipsy-like lieutenant of artillery, whose name, I suppose, one should spell in our character as Zechni.

Now these two, though they were the most

charming fellow-travellers imaginable, were very thoroughly Turkish, in that they could no more hurry to arrive at the theatre of fighting than they would have run to get out of it. They were riding to join their regiments on active service, and they were young men both, full of high hopes of glory, eager to take the field by the side of those comrades of theirs whose names were already on the lips of the countryside Arabs. They had made a difficult journey, having been, I think, twice turned back by the French authorities on the Tunisian frontiers. When I fell in with them, and heard their proposal that we should leave our baggage to follow us at the pack-camels' pace, while we pushed on as fast as might be, I conceived a vision of all-night rides, of meals eaten in the saddle, and of an arrival in camp on spent horses from whose backs we should be lifted, cramped and torpid with fatigue.

And yet, though we started early, and at first rode hard while the wintry sun rose over the rim of the desert; though we took it by turn to set the pace, now trotting, now ambling—(and the ambling gait of Eastern steeds is fast)—now breaking into a swinging canter, yet by nightfall we were never more than two hours, or perhaps three, ahead of our baggage caravan. Finally we reached camp a bare half day before it, for that which we gained by riding fast, we

lost by tarrying on the road ; and such delays were not to be avoided. At Zawia, Zanzour, Fonduk Touar, were Turkish outposts whose officers were old comrades of my two companions ; and they would by no means let us pass with a hasty word of greeting. So that at every station, camp and outpost, we must dismount, give news of the road and hear it, drink hot coffee, and, on rising to depart, learn that a meal had been prepared, to leave which untasted were a slur upon good fellowship.

How many hours we spent in this way on the road I do not know ; but I know right well that they were very pleasant hours, for they gave me the acquaintance of the most courteous and hospitable men alive. I think there can be no more gracious host in all the world than the Turkish gentleman, be he soldier or civilian. The Turk has all the politeness of manner of the high-bred Japanese ; and beneath it all a greater warmth of heart. His manner is that of the best type of Englishman, but with a more alert and attentive courtesy. His hospitality is royal, no matter what his circumstance. At this time, in the early days of the war, the ordinary necessities of life, such as mutton, chicken, flour and eggs and rice, were plentiful enough ; but delicacies beyond these were scarce and often hardly to be had. For tobacco and for cigarettes, indeed, one might offer monstrous

prices and might hardly buy one mildewed packet. Yet on our arrival amongst any Turkish company, the place would be ransacked for every bean of coffee and every shred of tobacco; and men would be sent to scour the markets for fine dates—then very rare—citrons and oranges and the tenderest meats; and of these we must partake as heartily as though the land were abounding in plenty. And at parting, after the company that rode out to see us well upon our way had turned back, we would often find that generous gifts had been furtively thrust into our saddle-bags—now packets of tobacco, now oranges, now sweetmeats wrapped in cool, green leaves.

The last stage of our journey was a short one—some twenty-five kilometres of utterly barren sand, lying between Fonduk Touar and the great camp. We had lain overnight at Fonduk Touar, eight or nine of us sleeping fully dressed upon sheepskins in a small bell tent, after a meal of rice and mutton eaten with our fingers from a huge iron bowl, round which we sat upon the ground. We rose early, drank the Turkish morning-cup of coffee (but ate nothing) and were escorted on our way by three of the officers from the outpost. I remember that I rode ahead with Mahmoud Bey, and was telling him of aeroplanes and of a flight in one which I had once experienced. And suddenly, as we talked,

there came a thunderous crash behind us, and a frantic drumming of hoofs. On looking behind us we saw the half of Fahret Din Effendi's iron-grey stallion protruding from the earth, with himself still firmly in the saddle. The horse had crashed through the top of an old well, covered in by drifting sand, and now strained wildly, with beating forefeet, widening the chasm at every movement. Fahret Din's teeth showed in his beard as he smiled grimly at us, and his face was a little grey, for he could not dismount. We heard the sand dislodged by the horse's hind feet rumbling down into the abyss. We dismounted and approached warily, for no one could tell where next the earth might open beneath him.

Fahret Din sank a little lower, and his horse began to scream. Then someone gripped it by the bridle and mane, and another gave a hand to the rider and dragged him headlong on to safer ground. The horse, freed of his weight, and aided by a firm pull, gave a mighty bound and came up from the gulf in a cloud of flying yellow sand.

It stood trembling awhile; and the Arab guide, patting its withers, said, "Did They tell thee of any treasure hidden below, then?"

Fahret Din walked to the edge of the hole and stared down fixedly for a moment. Then he

spat contemptuously, swung himself into the saddle, and we rode on.

By noon we heard the thunder of guns, and saw, far away, Turkish cannon debouching from a dried water-course. And a little later we rode over the crest of a little hill, and saw beneath us the tents and fires of the Ain Zara camp.

VIII

THERE was a short street of tents along the side of a sandy hollow. Horses, tethered in a line behind the tents, snuffed the ground for stray grains of barley. Most of them were saddled, with the saddles twisted awry from rolling; and there were patches of yellow sand upon the hides of many.

At the bottom of the hollow, disposed in a sort of square, were barley sacks and camel-saddles, boxes of cartridges, and three light waggons taken from the Bersaglieri only a few days ago. They were commissariat waggons, with the numbers of their companies and the name of the regiment stencilled in white upon their sides.

A group of officers in rather worn khaki stood chatting in Turkish outside one of the tents. Most of them wore short beards, though it is a common fashion with the modern Turk to shave the chin. The head of one was enveloped in bandages, none too clean; and another carried his arm in a sling. A slender, dark little man was

talking excitedly, apparently relating some experience to a handsome young dandy, who stood with one hand on his hip, contemplating a passably well cleaned pair of boots. From within the tent came sounds of laughter, and presently a most jovial-looking old man, with a huge grey beard that hid half his chest, issued forth, swinging a white woollen Arab haik across his shoulders as he walked.

At sight of him Zechni-Effendi gave a glad shout, and the grey-beard, looking up, saw us as we topped the rise of the hill. For a moment he stared hard, and then came running, with outstretched arms, and his jolly face all creased with smiles.

Zechni dismounted with one movement, and the two clasped hands amid a hail of greetings.

At the same time the little knot of officers caught sight of us, and in a moment had surrounded us, shaking us by the hand, patting our shoulders, helping us to dismount, and questioning us all the while in—to me—unintelligible Turkish. Mahmoud Bey introduced me. His comrades stepped forward one by one and saluted as he named them.

“Abdullah Bey”—the handsome young staff-captain bowed—“can speak with you in German, if you like. He has studied in Berlin.”

“It is unfortunate,” said I, “that I cannot speak German.”

“By no means,” said Abdullah Bey, in French, “for I may now learn English.”

“Doubtless monsieur will soon learn Turkish,” put in the dark little man.

“Already, Tahar Bey, he speaks Arabic,” said Mahmoud, “having learnt it in a city well known to yourself—in Fez, indeed.”

“How, then,” cried Tahar Bey in Moghreby Arabic, “you have been in Fez? This is wonderful. Have you friends there? In whose house did you live?”

Tahar Bey had himself been an instructor in the Moorish Sultan’s army. We found that we had many friends in common.

“Come now,” said he, taking me by the hand, “sit in the shade of the tent, and give me news.”

The others cried out laughingly that he must not take the stranger all to himself. We went into the tent and sat upon camp-beds, laughing and chatting; and—how it came there I cannot guess—a bottle half full of excellent Irish whisky was produced for me.

“In Paris,” commented the wounded lieutenant, Seyyid, “the English drink only whisky-soda.”

He peeled an orange for me, and passed it across.

“Here are good dry dates,” said another, and, “I have tobacco for a pipe,” said Abdullah Bey.

The jovial grey-bearded commander of artillery came in and was introduced.

“ They take an interest, then, in England, in this war of ours ? ” said he. “ And which side will England favour ? ”

“ Why,” said I, “ it seems to me that the people for the most part favour the Turks ; because they are making a brave stand against great odds. But I think the government of England means to favour neither side.”

The chorus of remarks and questions which followed this statement showed plainly that most of the officers confidently expected active intervention on Turkey’s behalf by England. They were already aware of the wave of pro-Turkish sympathy which was at that time sweeping over England as a result of the news which had been published of the massacres perpetrated in Tripoli by the Italians only a short time since. They knew that practically all the English correspondents on the Italian side had withdrawn or been expelled ; and had even got some inkling—through Constantinople, I suppose—of the protests and stop-the-war meetings which had been held in England.

“ And then,” urged Tahar Bey, “ we are not sentimentalists, nor do we suppose that sentiment alone would make England risk a war ; but think how easy it will be, without fighting, for England to stop this—this act of brigandage.

For I don't call this a war. And think of her many sound reasons for doing so. England has how many Moslem subjects? Egypt and India, they say, are just now somewhat disturbed. What a fine stroke of policy for England to favour the co-religionists of her Mohammedan peoples in those countries. Such a policy would turn the sourest grumblers into the wildest of enthusiasts."

"Besides," added another, "England owes something, doesn't she, to the Mohammedans? It was they, in India, who remained faithful, and stood by the English during the days of the Indian Mutiny."

The Tobchi—that was the title of the old artillery officer—stroked his long beard and smiled.

"Aye," said he, in Arabic, for he spoke no French, "and we know the temper of the English. They are not ungrateful, and they will never permit the strong to beat down the weak. Look now, haven't they always stood up for the feeble when our old Sultan (to hell with his soul!) butchered them in Armenia and burnt their houses in Macedonia? Allah! The English are champions of all the world! They are good friends of the Turks, too; for though they rebuked the Turk when he was proud and did evil, they have stood by him in his time of need. Didn't they save us from the

Russ? Aye, and they'll save us again, in sh'Allah!”

And so confident were they all that the noble indignation of England would be loosed upon Italy, that I forebore to point out that chivalry is a card not to be played by party politicians unless it is absolutely certain to take a trick without involving risk. I was made more than a little uncomfortable by the remarks with which the Tobchi improved upon his speech.

“ See now,” said he, “ if our armies landed in Italy and set about shooting down old men unarmed ; if they bound the hands of women and cut off their breasts ; and filled the mosques and holy places of the Italians with the bodies of young girls and babies cut in two at the middle, as the Italians have filled our mosque yonder ”—he pointed in the direction of Bu Meliana—“ why then, wouldn't the English, aye, and all other peoples of Europe, become sharp swords in the hands of God to cut us all off ? Well then, the English are just. They will punish bad Italians no less readily than they would punish bad Turks.”

He glanced round upon an audience that obviously agreed with him ; and I was not sorry when an orderly appeared, and told me that the Commander-in-Chief, who, on my arrival, had been deciphering a message from Constantinople, would now be pleased to receive me.

IX

“As you see,” observed Fethi Bey, the Chief of Staff, “we live hard at present, and though we have plenty of food, it is possibly more nourishing than palatable, monsieur.”

He raised a rib of mutton to his lips with his fingers as he spoke, and regarded me whimsically.

“But at least,” said I, “the story that you live upon rats and lizards in this camp is not altogether true.”

Neshat Bey, the burly, bearded commander of the Turkish forces, wiped his fingers on a piece of thin camp-bread, and drank water from an earthen pitcher.

“No,” said he gravely. “Those stories are not true. We do not eat rats. I never ate a rat in my life, nor yet a lizard. We have food in plenty, *el hamdu l’illah*, though certainly we lack the sweetmeats.”

We were sitting at dinner in the Commander’s tent, squatting cross-legged on the ground, and eating as the Arabs eat, and as the ancient Romans did, with the fingers of our right hands

alone. Save for a few roughly fashioned wooden spoons, there were hardly any table-implements in camp at that time.

“No doubt it pleases the Italians to picture us as starving in the desert,” continued Fethi Bey. “But before they bring us to that stage, they must cut off our line of communication. And, as yet, they have not ventured inland beyond the range of their own naval guns.”

Indeed, as we sat at dinner, we were barely five miles from the walls of Tripoli itself, and at night the rays of the great Italian searchlights played full upon our tents. At one time an Italian outpost had occupied this very hollow; but the Turks had driven them back three weeks ago, and now held ground still further in, towards the East, at Sok el Juma.

The fighting had been for many days mere garden skirmishing amongst the groves and palm-plantations on the landward side of the town; and strange to say, the Turks and Arabs were always the aggressors in these little fights. For the Italians would not come out from behind their trenches and breastworks; and the raw Arab levies, bitterly contemptuous of such foes, made continual raids upon their outposts in the gardens of the suburbs.

On the very day of my arrival, a chipped and battered cottage piano came into the camp at Sok el Juma. Fethi Bey had told me the

story of its capture. Under cover of the dusk, some thirty of Sheikh Barouni's hill-folk—they are Berber stock with a strong admixture of Arab blood from the foot-hills—had crept through the narrow, high-banked lanes upon the outskirts of the town, until their ears were offended by the barbaric sound of Roubi music in a garden. The night-raiders divided their band, and, crawling on their bellies in the dust, went forward by two and threes, and surrounded that garden upon three sides.

The garden was that of a small white villa that had been turned into an outpost station. The slender muzzle of a quick-firer peeped out of the drawing-room window on to the lawn, where sat a little party of officers, drinking wine and eating biscuits, and listening to one of their number who played upon a piano, and sang.

From time to time all beat upon the little tables with their glasses, and sang loudly, all together. The garden was lighted by lanterns of coloured paper that hung in front of the house, and also upon bushes in the garden; and at a gap in the cactus-hedge stood a sentry, with a bunch of feathers in his hat—("like those we killed at Bu Meliana")—but his face was towards the singers, and he heard only the sound of the loud "musica." His rifle was leaning against the hedge; and he did not live to pick it up.

Some of the Arabs went a little back, to a clump of date-palms, and climbing, with their guns slung at their backs, esconced themselves amongst the feathery tops and fired from thence. But most of them, hot for plunder, dashed in at the gap in the hedge, trampling the body of the heedless sentry underfoot ; and others, having soaked their heavy woollen haiks in a pool, used them as shields against the cactus-spines—an ancient trick of Arab warfare—and thus burst through the hedge in other places, shooting as they charged, and raising the name of their God in a deafening shout.

They fell upon the revellers and slew seven, according to one report ; half a score, so others said. (“ Probably,” commented Fethi Bey, “ they killed three or four in the first onset.”) The rest of the Italians fled, taking with them the Maxim, which, had not the Arabs stayed to rifle the dead in the garden, should have been captured. But the “ musica ” was too heavy a thing for the Italians to take, and so the Arabs had it, and dragged it painfully to camp, unpursued.

They had the utmost contempt for their enemy, these Arabs. As yet, though there were rumours of their coming, the main bodies of reinforcements from Fezzan and the inner deserts had not arrived to swell the numbers of those who fought for the Sultan. I may not say, of

course, how many men were under the command of Neshat Bey, though there can be no harm now in admitting that, until the reinforcements came up, and the hollows of the desert swarmed with Arab camps, his forces were astonishingly small. When Europe knows how few were the men who for months kept the great and splendidly equipped Italian army cooped up, so that it hardly dared to venture forth from the town of Tripoli, and is even now confined to a very few miles of coast-line, the standing of Italy as a military power must surely be for ever lost.

At this time, and for some weeks previously, the garrison of Turks which had evacuated Tripoli, aided by only a few hundred ill-trained and undisciplined Arabs, had literally laid siege to the town to such an extent that even drinking water had to be brought in ships from Italy. Italian reinforcements, too, were constantly arriving, as we knew by the uniforms and caps taken by the Arabs. The Italian soldiers in the trenches were apparently spiritless, taking no interest in a war which had turned out so differently from their expectations; and when a sortie was finally made, the advance guards, at least, were entirely composed of new men. Those who had lain for many days in the trenches were broken in nerve and weary in body.

Sometimes we read letters—pitiful things

taken from the pockets of the dead—which told us how the peasants from Piedmont, and town lads from Milan and Brescia, and gangers and plate-layers, waiters and street hawkers, come back from foreign countries to fight for Italy, found this business of war by no means to their taste.

How many a poor Italian, I wonder, has set out to this war with hopes of achieving a glory that was to compensate him for a life of ignominy amongst the unimaginative, brutal races of the North and West (who have contemptuously denied the gallant son of Italy the standing of a man); has pictured his Italy taking her place amongst the mighty nations, and himself leaving behind the derision of street-boys and the inhumanity of overseers and ships-officers and customers of restaurants, to ride, with flashing eyes and bright sword, with a thousand ineffably gallant comrades, in the wake of scuttling Turks and fleeing Arabs. And then to find the sunlit, golden sands, and graceful palms of his fancy represented by a bleak, dull grey waste, scourged by bitter winds and lashed by merciless rain, with here and there dark groves of branchless, evil trees, that sheltered Turks who stolidly refused to scuttle, and pitiless, hawk-faced desert men, who ran like greyhounds upon their enemy, and laughed aloud as they cut him down. No wonder that

as they lay in their sodden trenches, the Italian soldiery prayed that the war might soon be over, and that they might spend *il giorni di Natale* in their native land ; or that they were driven into action more than once by officers who beat them with the flat of the sword.

“ It’s all very well for our officers,” said one of the prisoners whom I saw afterwards at Gharien. “ They are gentlemen and nobles, so of course they’re brave. O yes, our officers are as brave as lions ”—this, by the way, was generally admitted by the Arabs—“ but we are only poor devils and we think of our lives, and of the father and mother at home. And if they knew how well the Turks treat us, instead of believing the officers, who say they roast their prisoners and eat them, like chestnuts, why then, half the army would come to be made prisoners.”

As for the accusation of cruelty and bloody-mindedness which certain humanitarians have seen fit to make against the entire Italian race on account of the massacre in Tripoli, it is probably as untrue as most statements of that nature are. Neither the Turks, nor yet the Arabs, after the first indignation died away, accused them of anything but pitiful, ecstatic cowardice. It was because they were mad with terror that the Italian soldiers (and sailors) ran amok and butchered every defenceless person

on whom they could lay hands. In ordinary moments the average Italian soldier seemed to me, judging from the prisoners, to be a merry, goodnatured creature—but chicken-hearted.

But one must admit that, of a brave man and a coward, the coward is the more dangerous.

A Texan ex-bar-keeper of the bad old days of the Panhandle told me once that “It wasn’t the bad man as made the wust trouble ; not by chalks. The man to be skeered of was the yelpin’ sort o’ cuss that drew on ye if ye tapped him on the shoulder to offer him a drink. When a coward’s got a gun in his hand, you can bet there’ll be innocent citizens buried, just ’cos his nerves is jumpy.”

We sat chatting over the coffee after dinner, and Fethi Bey discussed with me the difficulties of establishing a press censorship. For many reasons, this was not an easy matter. In the first place, no one in the camp understood English, though most of the Turkish officers spoke French very well. There was, indeed, a military surgeon named Orhan, who had taught himself a little English from books ; but for him to censorise one of my dispatches would have been the work of a whole day. Also, he was not at Ain Zara, but in the barracks at Azizia, a day’s journey inland.

We finally agreed that I must be put on honour to translate faithfully what I had written

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into French, and give a copy of it either to Fethi Bey himself, or to Tahar Bey. Of course a censorship was highly necessary. Even if only from ignorance, I might have easily given information concerning the Turkish numbers and positions which would have been valuable to the other side. But this peculiar method of censorising did not work very long. For me it was irksome to have to copy and translate into French every message and letter, whether private or for the press, which I wished to send from the camp; and also, neither Fethi Bey nor Tahar Bey could always spare time to listen to my translations. For a short time, this delayed my despatches very considerably.

Also the postal service was naturally rather erratic—sometimes one could only send letters once in ten days. And there was a serious difficulty, too, in the actual transmission of my telegrams. Not only did none of the telegraphists understand English; only a few had any knowledge of French, and consequently did not recognise Roman characters except when they were printed in large, plain capital letters. I had to print every telegram I sent; and even then, many of them were hardly decipherable when they reached London.

From Ain Zara one telegraphed to Nalout, the nearest Turkish post to the French line across the Tunisian frontier; and from Nalout mounted

dispatch riders galloped over the frontier and put the messages on the wires at Dehibat, whence they were transmitted *via* Paris to London.

As I say, the censorship on which we had agreed did not continue for long. When I had got some understanding of the position of affairs, and knew what it would be safe and what it would be unsafe to say, Fethi Bey apparently decided that, if I could be trusted to translate faithfully, I might be trusted farther. My private letters were no longer inspected, and I was asked only to give the substance of my press messages. Before I had been two months in camp, even this restriction had been removed. Some of my articles were translated from the *Daily Express* and reappeared in the Turkish papers. Evidently they made a favourable impression. I was given an entirely free hand.

And they never even hinted that my dispatches should be favourably coloured on their behalf. The Turks had everything to gain by European sympathy; and they are, I think, even hyper-sensitive in their appreciation of friendly comment, or their distress at hostile criticism. Yet I was never once asked to make any report on hearsay; nor were messages in which I frankly stated that what I said might possibly be unpalatable, in any way tampered

with. In particular, when I subsequently wrote of sickness in the camp, and of the famine brought about by the war, there was no suggestion that it would be politic to conceal such matters as far as possible.

While we were talking about these things, there came into the commander's tent a tall, red-haired man, with high cheek bones and small, kindly eyes. He had the physiognomy of a Scottish crofter, and wore a black frock-coat and long riding boots. This was Ferhat Bey, the Arab deputy of the Zawia department; and, though I did not then know it, this man, with Sheikh Suliman Barouni, whom I had yet to meet, was almost entirely responsible for the resistance offered by the Arabs. Turkey owes much to these two patriots. But for them the Italian occupation of Tripoli would have been accomplished within three months of the declaration of war.

It seemed to me, even then, that each of those men, Neshat Bey, Fethi Bey, and the Arab deputy, Mehemet Ferhat Bey, was representative of a widely different type, but it was not on my first meeting with them that I understood how wide the differences between them really were.

Neshat Bey is a brave and courteous gentleman of the old Turkish school; religious, dignified, leisurely in speech and in thought,

and not much influenced by the European spirit. Of his military abilities I cannot say much, because, during all the time I was his guest, I never knew him to take action independently of the counsels of Fethi Bey. He was ordered from Constantinople to evacuate the town of Tripoli at the beginning of the war, and he did so. And if he had been ordered to hold the town in face of the Italian bombardment, Neshat Bey would be in Tripoli or under its ruins at this moment. Like most of his breed, he would suffer from a false impression of himself sooner than take the trouble to remove it ; and consequently for some time relations between himself and some of the Arab leaders were strained. The Turk is in many respects like the traditional Briton—undemonstrative, slow-moving, and disdainful of self-justification ; and Neshat Bey is essentially Turkish. When a word of explanation might have satisfied the querulous Arabs, he would probably withhold that word. As an instance, it was at one time rumoured through the camp that a quantity of tea had been bought for the Turkish soldiers, at a time when the Arabs were subsisting for the most part on flour-and-oil paste. How the rumour got about I don't know ; there are grumblers in every camp, and no doubt some discontented camel-driver turned soldier had set it afloat, as he cursed the hard fare which fell to his lot.

“Wullahi, lads, we must stay our bellies with beasts' meat, eh? The very horses of the Turcha cannon have better fare. Aye, and the Turcha themselves, who doubts, can gorge on the best, and swill their cursed necks with tea. Didn't I see the fat *chaoush* (sergeant) yonder boiling water on the fire? Tea he was making, I doubt it not. Ha! M'hammed, why dost thou sup foul water? I'll warrant they have good tea for all in the cook-tent.”

Doubtless in some such way the rumours got about. At any rate, it was wholly false. And yet, the eager Arabs who came to beg for tea, and their leaders, upbraiding staff officers with favouring the Turkish above the Arab soldiers, were given only the bald statement: “There is no tea.”

There was no attempt at a soothing explanation.

Neshat Bey, had he been of the type that makes soothing explanations upon all occasions, might possibly, by words, have won over the grumblers amongst the Arabs much sooner than he did. As it was he seemed content to go his own way, make short replies when accused of inaction (the Arabs could not at first relish the Fabian policy which he was forced to pursue), and suffer time to justify him in their eyes. At least, when I first joined the camp, there was a considerable breach between the Turks and

the Arabs ; and when I left, they were the closest brothers.

Fethi Bey is a young Turk, one of the prime instigators of the Young Turk movement ; a military attaché in Paris ; and, I believe, a brilliant soldier. It was commonly said that, though Neshat Bey was nominally commander-in-chief, Fethi Bey was actually so. Whatever may have been the case, there was never the slightest sign that the elder man resented the position, or that the younger presumed upon it. They seemed always to be upon the most cordial terms of friendship, and to act in perfect harmony together.

Fethi Bey is an Albanian, tall, dark, with a grave, melancholy manner and a remarkably sweet voice. Almost alone of the Turkish officers, he seemed to have no illusion whatever as to the chance of any European intervention favourable to Turkey, and seemed to find a certain quietly ironical pleasure in the reliance of some of his colleagues on the chivalry of the Christian Powers.

During my first few days in camp I saw little of him, for he spent most of his time directing operations from the Sok-el-Juma camp, and by utterly disregarding his own health—his orderly told me that for two weeks he neither undressed at night nor removed his boots—laying the foundation of the serious illness that came upon him shortly after.

X

FOR many days the Italians lay inactive in their trenches, waiting, apparently, until the constant booming of their heavy guns from fort and fleet should have frightened the Arabs away. I was at first convinced that fighting was afoot in some quarter or another, which I was not allowed to see ; for, often, from dawn till past midday there would be a ceaseless thunder of the heaviest artillery, such as, thought I, could only have been accounted for by the bombardment of our camp, or by Italian artillery repelling such charging hordes as Kitchener's guns cut down at Omdurman.

Yet I saw no newly wounded men ; nor did any shells, during the heaviest cannonades, fall within a mile of the headquarter camp at Ain Zara. Those which came nearest to us fell persistently in the neighbourhood of the hospital, just beyond our cavalry outposts, a good three kilometres to the north. The white walls of this old building offered a good mark to the Italian gunners ; and, though a white flag

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with the sign of the Red Crescent flew above it, it was shelled frequently. Twice, I think, an aeroplane circled above it, dropping bombs on one occasion whilst the wounded and sick were hurried out in stretchers to find a safer retreat. Fragments of shell, with quantities of shrapnel bullets, were picked up in the court-yard.

I was inclined to think at first that this bombardment of the hospital was accidental, and that the shells which came that way were originally directed upon the Turkish batteries. But this could hardly have been. The hospital for one thing was in full view of at least one of the forts held by the Italians on the outskirts of Tripoli ; whereas the dunes amongst which the Turkish batteries were esconced, and whence the old Tobchi, placidly seated on a broken-backed cane chair, directed the bombardment, were very much further to the north-west, so that the firing on the hospital was manifestly intentional.

Still, even the bombardment of the hospital could only account for a very small part of the continual thunder of the Italian guns, and so I came to the conclusion that fighting was in progress somewhere of which I had been told nothing.

I said as much to Tahar Bey ; and Tahar Bey laughed.

“ Come to-morrow with me,” he said, “ and

I will show you what the Italian gunners fire at.”

And so next day, having borrowed a mighty iron-grey artillery wheeler (for I had as yet no horse of my own), I rode out with Tahar Bey and two staff officers, and two orderlies. We passed the cavalry outpost, where the horses stood picketed at the bottom of a pretty palm-fringed hollow ; and splashed through a reedy marsh, till we came upon a belt of yellow sand-hills, and looked across a vast dry ocean of motionless billows to where the white walls and towers of Tripoli town showed palely through green trees against the sea.

Tahar Bey, who had led the way with the mysterious air of one about to make wondrous revelations, cocked a leg over the pommel of his saddle, and sat sideways, rolling a cigarette and regarding me amusedly.

“*Voilà, monsieur,*” said he, “the explanation.”

“I don’t understand,” I told him. “There seems to be no one there.”

“Exactly, monsieur. There seems to be no one there. But if, from the camp, you heard a furious bombardment” — “*bombardement d’enfer*” was the expression he used — “you would then suppose——”

“I should naturally suppose, Tahar Bey, that fighting was going on in that place.”

“Exactly, monsieur,” He seemed to be enjoying my mystification immensely.

“But,” I continued, “since there is no bombardment, and since there are neither Turks nor Arabs here besides ourselves, I don’t quite see why you have come here. For instance, there is heavy firing over there.” I pointed eastward, whence a dull rumble of cannon was borne on the wind from the direction of Sok-el-Juma. “Why don’t you take me there?”

“O, that,” carelessly, “that is nothing. Perhaps the Italians have seen one of our scouts on the skyline.”

I was angry that he should expect me to believe that the Italians would open fire from their batteries upon a single man seen on the skyline.

“But it is so,” said Tahar Bey, more seriously. “Now you shall see for yourself.”

He galloped his horse up a steep hillock, and we followed him, sitting in full view of the nearest Italian forts, of which that into which the old *École d’Agriculture* had been made was barely five kilometres away.

And hardly had we shown ourselves, when puffs of white smoke came shooting from behind the *École d’Agriculture*, and presently we heard the dull booming of the report; and a shower of sand skipped up from the face of the desert three hundred yards away.

“They are bad shots, but very vigilant,” remarked Tahar Bey, lighting his cigarette. “We will now descend, before they get our range. The bombardment will continue.”

And it did. From time to time, when the firing slackened, we galloped on to other ridges on the skyline. “*Pour les encourager,*” as Tahar Bey put it. There were five of us in all, and they blazed away at us till dusk. They spent enough powder on us to wreck a city.

“You see,” Tahar Bey explained, as we cantered home through the hollows, “to the imagination of the Italian gunners, the desert is alive with terrible enemies, constantly trying to approach the walls. If they see anyone, they fire. If they don’t see anyone, they get nervous. They feel sure that we are getting nearer, so they fire again, to let us know they are on the alert, or to frighten us away.”

“If we had stayed a little longer,” said one of the other officers regretfully, “the big guns of the fleet would have joined in. And it costs thousands of francs every time a big gun is fired.”

XI

I HAD been for some three weeks amongst the Turks before the Italians ventured out into the open.

It was on the fourth of December, and, as yet, hardly daylight, when I awoke to the sound of a furious cannonade, which seemed to me to have some special import.

How it comes about I do not know ; but certain it is that, at the appointed time, sounds often heard, sights often seen, are suddenly infused with a great significance. Night after night you may lie asleep in camp, and almost hourly the drumming of galloping hoofs will be borne to your brain without disturbing your consciousness. There is nothing strange in the sound of hard riding by night in time of war. And yet there will come at last some rider, the bearer perhaps of weighty news, or a galloper sent to bring help to a beleaguered outpost ; and the message beaten out by the feet of his horse will penetrate the inmost chambers of your mind, and bring you out of sleep with a certain knowledge of great things toward.

There is no mathematical scale whereby you may distinguish the rhythm and cadence of his hoof-beats from those of the sounds made by the rider's horse who galloped in last night to say that all was well.

And as with hoof-beats, so for me it proved with cannon-sounds. For many a night the noise of heavy firing had reached my ears and not disturbed my sleep; but now they bore a sharp significance, and urgent assurance that now, at last, there was a purpose in the roar of the Italian guns.

I sat up in my creaking camp-bed, struck a light and listened.

At first—nothing, save the confusion of dull sounds that bewilders the ears of the newly-awakened. Then the light patter of rain upon the canvas of the tent, and faint, innumerable scratchings, as the slow, huge beetles and creeping sand-beasts that sought shelter in my tent scurried from the light into their crevices and hiding-holes.

Then—"Boom!" And again, "Boom! Bang! Boom!"

Then a muffled noise of voices, and the distant sound of horses, ridden hard, and the creak and rumble of waggon-wheels on sodden sand, making cacophonous grace notes to a contrapuntal accompaniment of deep-voiced guns far away.

Through the wetted canvas of the tent I saw faint gleams of light ; and shapeless shadows moved upon its inner surface, as men without swung lanterns to and fro. Now and then, when the gusty wind dropped, there came, faintly, a rapid crackling noise, as of a walking-stick drawn sharply across a wooden paling, many miles away—the sound of some far-distant quickfirer.

The staff were gone. I dressed and hurried to their tent, but not a man was there. Up on the top of the ridge behind the tents a few dim forms worked in the streaming rain with spades and shovels, scooping out entrenchments, and piling up embrasures, breast high. And here and there stood groups of men peering through glasses into the silver haze of rain and the grey mists of morning towards the north, whence came the sound of guns.

A vagabond Syrian Arab, a camp-follower speaking broken fragments of many tongues, came down the hill-side past me, seeking for shelter. His wet rags clung to his thin brown shanks, and his slippers were shapeless bags of sodden leather, caked with yellow mud. I hailed him in Arabic.

“ Oh, Selim, hast thou any news ? ”

“ Much fight. Plenty big fight to-day, sah, ” he answered in English, and passed on to the tents.

Daylight came abruptly, and the rain ceased. I went back to my tent, and ate as much as ever I could. I ate eggs fried in oil, and potatoes and half-cooked meat ; and made thick soup from a tablet to drink instead of coffee. I crammed my wallets with the thin pancake-like bread of the camp, with chocolate, dried dates and broken biscuits. Also I made a roll of blankets and some little underclothing, and strapped it on to my saddle. And after that I saddled the big artillery horse that had been lent to me—the Turks, of their generous hospitality, would not suffer me at first to buy a horse—and rode northward to see the fight.

Beyond the ridge that shelters the greatest of the many scattered villages of tents, I came to the straggling encampment of the Arab women, children, and camp-followers. Here were the markets that supplied the army with fodder, meat and flour, and milk and eggs. Already the market was afoot, and the thoughtless Arabs chattered and haggled and brawled, heedless as ever of the rumbling guns ; though here and there upon the crests of the rolling dunes sat groups of men intently watching clouds and rings of smoke far to the north. At little distances, too, upon the ridges, sentinels in Turkish uniform kept watch upon the fight ; but in the hollows noisy Arab commerce ruled the day.

There appeared a little cloud of horsemen galloping hard, and at their head rode Sheikh Barouni, deputy in Stamboul, and war-lord of the mountain Arabs. Two days before he was Barouni Bey, in neat frock-coat and formal high târbush. To-day Sheikh Barouni, he flaunted the battle gear of the desert warrior, with snowy burnoose floating wide over the green and gold of his kaftan. His saddle glowed with scarlet and silver, and his bridle was broad with blood-red fringes. He carried a carbine, and at his wrist there hung a bull's-hide quirt. Into the market rode Sheikh Barouni, and reined his spume-flecked stallion back on his haunches; and without a word he fell to laying about him with his quirt. He backed his nervous beast into a stack of earthen pottery and sent the red dust flying up in clouds.

“Must I give my orders twice?” he cried at last. “Where is the sheikh of the Sôk?” And when the trembling elder of the market was brought, “Did I not tell you all two hours since to cease your peddling and begone?” roared Barouni, bending from the saddle and glaring round. “Away with you all, fools that you are.”

“A little, a little, lord,” quavered the sheikh-es-sok, “and we have sold our wares.”

“A little, a little, uncle, and thou hast sold thy life for the worth of a broken pot,” retorted

Barouni angrily. He struck with his kourbash on the sounding sides of a black hair-cloth booth, and a woman came out holding a corner of her shift between her teeth to screen her face, and with two children clinging to her knees.

“O shameless! ——” she began shrilly; and stopped on seeing who had called her out.

“Strike the beyt-es-shaar (the “house of hair”) woman, and begone,” cried the Sheikh. “Or will you have your children eaten by the Italian askar; and yourself, maybe, given to their captains? Though, wullah!” he chuckled, “I think they’ll not quarrel for thee, mother of many.”

There was a laugh, and the harridan dared some sharp retort that seemed to tickle the Sheikh.

“Away, now, away,” said he, more good-humouredly. “And leave the road clear for the coming of the Turks.”

“Do the Turks give back then, Barouni Bey?” I asked him.

“Needs must, on the left,” said he. “Stay here awhile, I pray you, and you shall see. The Italians have come against our left in thousands; but on the right we still hold them back. I go to Sôk-el-Juma.”

He spurred his horse with the corner of his great silver-plated stirrups, and it bounded forward, snorting.

The Arab market broke up, and I, riding to a little eminence some way off, watched from thence the progress of the battle.

The Italians had come out in great force, in roughly crescent-shaped formation; and the right horn of their crescent, being opposed to the Turkish batteries, was evidently by far stronger than the left. There were battalions which we had thought to be engaged at Derna and at Khoms; and from the booty taken by the Arabs in and after the fight, we figured later that the following regiments, 15th, 18th, 40th, 50th, 52nd, 80th, 85th, 93rd, and a regiment of Grenadiers, were all new blood, used on that day for the first time against the Turks.

Our men gave back slowly during the morning. They could not drag the guns across the loose sand; and so they buried them deeply; and afterwards, when we recovered Ain Zara, some at least were discovered, though I believe the place where two were cached was betrayed to the Italians by spies.

Nearer and nearer came the fight. Now one could see through glasses brown lines of tiny men, like ants, as they moved from hollow to hollow, fighting desperately in the billow-like dunes. The crackle of the rifle fire grew more and more insistent; and the explosions of the big guns, growing ever louder, shook the air. The pliant stems of the young palms above the

old cavalry pickets quivered with the incessant concussions. Overhead, the bursting Italian shells rained metal splinters almost on the tents of the Turkish staff. They burst in the sky like scarlet-yoked eggs flung against a sapphire wall.

By mid-day the little hollow was become a channel for wounded men and fugitive Arab women and children—their departure had been long delayed. Some Turkish artillerymen came through, their horses still drawing the captured waggons of the Bersaglieri; and the head-quarter camp was struck.

I was quick to hire a camel, and to have my baggage loaded on him. Beasts of burden were scarce that day, and had I waited half an hour longer my tent and kit must have been left behind, as were so many more.

The staff came last of all. First Tahar Bey rode in, on a rampant young chestnut, white with lather. He gave a curt nod to me, swung out of the saddle and dived into his tent, whence he presently emerged, stuffing a tin of sardines into his pockets, and biscuits into his mouth. It was his first meal that day.

“Whither now, Tahar Bey?” I called to him.

“To Azizia,” he answered, with his mouth full. “But we halt by the way at Fonduk Bu Geshir. Be there at midnight for the supper.”

Neshat Bey, sedate and unconcerned as ever,



BETTER THAN FLEET
AFTER AIN ZARA
ADJ. C. PEPPERS WRIGHT. 1918
SAND. BLOWING ABOUT.

RETREAT FROM AIN ZARA.



sat on his horse and watched the striking of the camp. He glanced now and again at the shell-starred northern sky with an air of tolerant good-humour.

“They will not follow far,” was all he said.

I stayed awhile, to watch the setting up of hospital tents for those wounded who could go no further. Poles with white flags were set up before them, and the Red Crescent floated over them; “Though,” said Beshir Bey, the doctor who voluntarily stayed behind, “I think, truly, those flags will be a target rather than a safeguard.”

Beshir Bey was a volunteer from Beyrout, and not a military doctor at all. He was a sturdy, shock-headed little man, strong as a bear, and had the sunniest smile I ever saw. The Arabs worshipped Beshir Bey, for it was he who, when their wounded would not come to him, would find time (when he should have slept) to go amongst the Arab tents, and enter those from which he heard the stifled groans and mutterings of men who would have concealed their hurts. These men, regardless of their protests (“Nay, sidi, it is nothing. A scratch only, b’illah!”), he roundly scolded for their heroism. It was he, too, who raged, as none other would have been permitted to do, amongst the butcher’s market, when fly-blown meat and filthy offal were exposed, in the dust,

for sale ; and beat with a cleaning rod such butchers as did not hang their wares on bushes or on posts.

I said "good-bye" to him, half sure that I should not see him again ; and, indeed, though he got away with his life he lost all else that he possessed that day.

The retreating columns marched across sands now glowing rosy in the sunset. Belated Arabs straggled beside the ranks of marching Turks. Arab women, carrying huge loads, staggered wearily through the loose sand, but would not bate a whit of their burdens. One passed me bearing on her head a shallow wooden dish of mighty size, inverted, hat-wise. There were tiny children, hardly old enough to walk. I saw a pair of new-born calves, yoked together at the neck. Frail as they were they must bear some household burden ; and even sheep and goats had packs and nets of fruit on their backs. A fainting rabble followed in the army's wake, and the desert way for close on twenty miles was strewn with discarded horse-gear, cooking pots, a chair or two, and miscellaneous litter from the Arab tents.

x And overhead, against the golden sunset, there hovered always a whirring speck of black, no greater than a swallow.

It was one of the Italian aeroplanes, hanging over the retreating army, watching it as vul-

tures watch a wounded beast trail itself to its lair to die.

Night came on, with a brilliantly clear moon that silvered the desert's face, and threw our shadows black as ebony upon it. Never have I known such brilliant nights as those of Northern Africa, where the moon, no longer a flat white disc, hangs like a globe of old ivory, a little cracked and discoloured, but calmly, steadily luminous.

It seemed as though a hush came over the ebon and silver pageant marching in an endless column towards the dim line of mountains in the south. Now and then hoarse cries flitted up and down the line; now there was muffled jingling of harness; and ever the soft pad-pad of camels' spongy feet. A rider, holding a lantern on high, came seeking someone in the ranks; and shadows danced grotesquely to hide from the yellow flare as he came.

We came, near midnight, to the Fonduk Bu Geshir. Already many hundreds of horses and camels stood or couched on the plain, and men slept amongst them, wrapped in coat and blankets.

The officers of the Turks, and some of the Arab notables, were sheltered in a line of narrow hovels built about three sides of a dirty courtyard. Entering one low and narrow room I found it lighted at one end by a solitary candle.

Round it sat the commandant and Fethi Bey, with many of the staff, writing dispatches and poring, in that forlorn light, upon a map.

A little while later food was found, and we ate sardines with our fingers from the box, and stale dry bread. And those who still had water in their flasks drank it, sharing with the rest.

Scouts went back towards Ain Zara, and I, having rested for an hour, and having transferred my saddle to a fresher horse than that which had carried me all day, set out in the wake of the army which had already started on the road to Azizia, and riding hard, came in before dawn, at five o'clock.

XII

ONE solitary sugar-loaf hill rises abruptly from the desert, crowned by the white dome of a n'sala—the tomb of a saint—that forms the only landmark in that mournful wilderness. The hill is of volcanic origin. From its crest a broad, uneven, black pavement that was once a stream of boiling rock, runs down the eastern face, and is engulfed in sand. Asphodel and thorny box-wood shrubs with glossy leaves, grow sparsely on the slopes. There is a stunted, wind-writhed tree close to the old n'sala ; and on its branches Turkish sentries, posted to keep watch over the desert from the hill-top, were wont to hang their tattered shirts, new-washed, to dry them in the wind. And now, all the upper slopes are thickly terraced with rough graves of those who died of typhoid, cholera and untended wounds. They are low, oblong mounds of fresher earth, with piles of stone upon them ; and every one that marks the burial-place of an Arab has a broken potsherd, an oil-cruse or a lamp laid on it.

By day the ceaseless wind piles drifting sand upon these sorrowful terraces ; and the sand is figured with the delicate tracery left by the feet of beetles, lizards, and the smaller desert birds. The pied wagtail leaves a clear-cut cuneiform inscription on the sand. The passage of the beetles is marked by parallel lines of dots and tiny dashes ; and where you see two lines of fairy hand-prints, one upon either side of a sharp-drawn line, you may know that a lizard has scurried fitfully across the open, and you may track him if you please to the foot of some bush, or to a cranny in the rock.

By night lean dogs, white, bushy-tailed, and indescribably stealthy, prowl warily amongst the graves, snuffing the ground near those most lately made, and, if undisturbed, falling to swift diggings and disgusting meals.

There is a large white building, once, I think, a school, and now a hospital, standing a little way from the foot of the hill upon its western slope. Opposite to that, a large barracks, with battlements, and rooms built round three sides of an open square, A compound for horses adjoins the barracks, and the rickety, small, foul shops ranged under its outer wall form one side of a wide, uneven street, whose opposite side is a mass of sand-mud hovels, tunnel-shaped and roofed with domes of dirty white.

And that is Azizia, for long to be the head-

quarters of the Turkish army in Tripoli. The outposts and the greater Arab camps lay far out in a fan-shaped line towards the north ; and from these there still rode out small raiding bands to skirmish with the Italian outposts. Save that they had occupied Ain Zara, and had there established a camp of tents and wooden sheds, with a palisade and trenches round it, the Italians advanced no further into the desert than at first.

Neshat Bey, to draw them on, would have made his headquarters in the mountains, at Gharien. From that inaccessible stronghold he could have harried the Italian advance into the desert with perfect safety, and, since the fleet could give no help, and to transport big guns over the shifting sands even to the foot of the first mountain pass would have been a work of enormous difficulty, he might in time have faced the Italians on almost equal terms.

But the Arabs would not have it so. Even to have retired so far as Azizia was galling to them. Their impatient minds could hardly conceive a policy of waiting for the enemy to come on. They must attack, and ever attack. From the innumerable petty skirmishes their raiding parties won booty enough to make them well content with the progress of the war. Little they cared for ultimate issues or for big decisive fights. Each thriftless nomad that now had food

in plenty for his horse and self, cartridges doled out to him, and the promise of pay at the rate of a piastre daily, was satisfied that war was good. Their leaders knew well that, more even than a desire to keep their land inviolate, or to avenge the murder of their kinsfolk, it was the hope of booty that kept the Arabs together. A ring from a dead Italian finger, a purse of money or a cloak stripped from the slain and brought to camp, bred stories of rich plunder that would fetch men up from Egypt and the Barbary coast; from Tunis and Lake Chad.

Fethi Bey went up to Gharien. Cannon were posted at the heads of those awful mountain passes, and some little baggage of the army was already sent. But Arab vehemence overbore the general's design. It was but too evident that, should he withdraw, to await an opportunity of harrying the Italians in the desert, the army that was now increasing daily would melt away like breath from the face of a mirror.

Certainly the army grew apace, and all day caravans came in from Tunis and the south to feed it. By all the roads converging on the lonely little hill came flocks of sheep and herds of goats, lean, dusty cattle, men on asses bringing poultry, eggs, and garden-stuffs, and camels, camels, camels, laden high with sacks of barley, wheat, and flour, dried Fezzan dates, rice, fodder, and dripping skins of water from

the desert wells near by. The oven fires blazed day and night, and the flat, hot loaves passed from the bakehouses in endless streams.

The arched entry to the courtyard of the barracks was thronged by shouting men and groaning, jostling beasts. Horses, half-wild with terror in that narrow entry, reared madly, screaming, and struck at the ever-pressing throng of camels with fore-feet plastered thick with mud and garbage. The stamped earth of the courtyard softened into knee-deep mud, that caked the hairy flanks of camels. Beasts that had lain there overnight rose with a smacking noise, as bisons from their wallows, and the clinging mud dried hard in pellets that fringed their bellies. Horses, from contact with the camels, caught a mangey disease of the skin, and the hair fell from them, leaving raw red patches that grew and grew, and must be rubbed with paraffin, then all too precious for such use.

And every day came more and more new fighters for the Sultan's cause. There were lean, ascetic shepherds from the foot-hills, bearing six-foot fire-locks bound about the stock with wire. Some carried horse-pistols, bell-mouthed and wonderfully inlaid with silver. There were many who came with knives lashed to the end of staffs of polished olive-wood, and some had sickles in their belts.

Soon men began to come from further south.

I remember the arrival of the vanguard of those from Fezzan, men who had been a month upon the road. They came in chanting to a savage roll of desert drums and the squealing of a goat-skin bagpipe. There were negroes with them, with shocks of fuzzy hair outstanding from their temples; and their corded legs, coated with dust, were grey and silver in the sunlight.

At their head a huge Arab sheikh sat a white stallion, singing as he rode, and brandishing a little lance. He threw his hood back from a savage, war-scarred countenance, broad-nosed, full-lipped and with a sparse and curling grizzled beard; and gazed from under heavy lids with an incomparable haughtiness. A minstrel in the ranks broke into quavering song, and the men, shaking their weapons in the air and stamping till the earth shook, broke into a mighty chorus.

“*Oulad 'bu zin!*” they shouted, “*Oulad 'bu zin!*”

And the cry, meaning, roughly, “We are sons of mighty fathers!”—(“Chips of the old block” would be a sound equivalent in English of this desert slang)—ran through the camp like fire, and became the catch-word of the army.

There were Berbers, viper-faced, with broad cheek-bones and narrow, pointed chins, and cold, pale eyes with an intolerable glitter in them. There were Shamba Arabs, and slave-



TUAREG MEHARI-RIDERS COME IN FROM THE SOUTH.



raiders from far south of the Libyan deserts ; Kabyles from the Algerian mountains, and a few Hoggar Tuaregs—forbidding giants, swathed in black, and veiled till only their long cruel eyes were seen. They rode the splendid mehari camels, the racers of the desert, that can cover seventy miles a day, unwatered and unfed for a week. These men sat upon iron-framed saddles covered with stamped leather, and having cruciform supports on pommel and cantle. Their saddle wallets swung at the camel's withers, red barred with black, and fringed with leathern strips and tassels of dyed wood. The camels were branded with the letters of the Tamahaq, the ancient (Phœnician ?) desert script. Some were daubed with tar against the mange. I saw one with blood-red eyes painted on its cheeks. Many, upon arrival, were weak and ill-nourished, their lips and gums pale amber colour from lack of food, and their feet torn by the sharp stones of the mountain paths. Yet, such is their recuperative power, two days of rest and good feeding had restored them again to their full strength.

There is often a curious, deliberate malice in their attacks upon one another. You may see one walking behind another on the march slowly inspect the quarters of the beast before it, and, picking out the place, bite carefully but with the utmost force.

Once, finding the tucked-up legs of a camel in my path, I nudged the creature under the knee with my foot to make it move. It pressed its leg down on my foot, pinning me, and chewing the cud without in the least regarding me, seemed scornfully to enjoy my predicament.

By day the square re-echoed with the shouts of drivers and the roaring of the camels. At times some great love-mad male would pace the yard on three legs (for they are hobbled by the doubling up of one fore-leg tied with thongs), gurgling savage challenges to all the rest. A bloated, swollen mass like the wattles of a turkey cock would bubble from his mouth, and as he limped to and fro he shook white foam continually from his lips.

The stallions fought and screamed in their compound at night. Sometimes the clatter of hoofs, the dull thud of blows, and protracted angry squealing told how some beast had slipped his shackles and raged amongst his helpless fellows. The horses were fed on barley and on straw. For those that had no torbahs (the striped nosebag carried on the saddle) the feed was piled before them on the ground. They strained and fought to rob one another. Many horses of new arrivals, finding no place in the compounds, were picketed in the open. Such as

were not close by their owner's tents were stolen—by Italian spies, it was said.

In a few weeks a population had arrived that overflowed the tiny village and spread strange dwelling-places in the desert round about. The sheikhs and kaid and greater Arab leaders set up their painted pavilions in the asphodels beside the road. Black hair-cloth tents, the nomad beyyut-es-shaar, were ranged here and there among the sandhills. Some were fringed and broadly striped in lines of black and dull grey, and had curtains shutting off the quarters of the harem; and others, tattered and patched, were stretched on chance-found branches—mere shelters from the wind and rain. The coarsely woven fabric of the beyt-es-shaar leaks to the sunlight. Fine beams spilling through the sides and roof draw fairy lines of light across the gloom and make a dim shifting pattern on the shoulders of those who sit within. The "house of hair" is low and long. One does not stand within, but sits or lies on carpets spread on mats of grass. Forked pegs and heavy stones hold down the sides against the wind; and, insecure though they may seem, the strongest gusts will not avail to tear them from their moorings on the loose, soft sand.

Some of those who came from the farthest south built huts of palm leaf wattle daubed with mud, and cowered in their lee; and there

were scores who scooped out hollows in the sand dunes' sides, and slept there covered only in their ragged mantles.

By night the glow of innumerable tiny fires lit up the desert, and wild strains of Eastern music mingled with the harsh, rattling monosyllables of Turkish orders, the groanings of camels, and the yelp of dogs. One night, when a company of Fezzanis had just come in, I rode into their new encampment, drawn irresistibly by the rapid monotone of pulsing drums and the shrilling of the pipes.

The men squatted, many deep, in a great half-circle before a fire of thorns that threw a flickering light upon their white teeth and rolling eyes. Two negro lads beat with thumbs and finger-tips on little egg-shaped drums that hung from their necks. As they thrummed they sang in high, whining voices, throwing back their heads like howling dogs, and sending forth the long-drawn notes quaveringly. Between them sat the player of the pipes. He wore a plaited cap of grass, like those of the western Saharawin, who came in sometimes from the desert to the Southern Gate at Marrakesh. He blew lustily, frowning, with fixed eyes and distended cheeks, and his fingers flew over the stops of the pipe. The mouthpiece was of carven bone set with silver; and the kid-skin bladder of the instrument was decked with coins and metal

charms. Ceaselessly, rapidly he played, now loud, now soft, now with a slightly changed accentuation, but ever the same odd, jerky trill, with unfamiliar intervals and unexpected breaks. He leaned his shoulders against the wall of a wattle cabin, and his face, as the fire-light waxed and waned, shone and grew dim like an incandescent mask.

Suddenly a woman stepped into the fire-light from the hut and began to dance, slowly at first, with stampings and balancings to and fro. The Arab dancers, like the Spanish, hardly lift their feet from off the ground. Slowly as her body moved, her feet spun faster and still faster. Her anklets of white metal, coarsely graven, flashed and tinkled as she moved. There is something mesmeric in the Eastern dance. The swiftly moving feet on which the body seems to float almost without motion, the slow, strange writhings of the arm and bust, the shifting, shining flecks of light on wrist and ankle, and the ceaseless monotone of rhythmic music, have a purpose hardly known to us in Europe. Our music is emotional—designed to thrill and rouse us, to lift us for a time beyond ourselves. We look, in spectacular dances, for grace and liteness, and the expression of a sense of joy and vivid beauty. To the Arab and the Turk music is largely a narcotic; its insistent cadence beats against his brain, and overwhelms his

consciousness in its reiteration. The shifting feet and floating henna-dyed hands hold him as the passes of the hypnotist hold feeble wills. And as a hen or a canary bird, once held beak-down upon a chalk-line, stays there motionless, so sits the Eastern, his mind bemused by many-twinkling feet, his understanding stunned by the merciless, unending monotone of flute and drum.

Eastern music stops sharply, unexpectedly. One has a strange, dazed feeling of returning consciousness, as when a train emerges from a tunnel. It is as though the world has stood still and all ears were filled with the watery roaring of a mighty cataract; when suddenly the sound of rushing water ceases, accustomed noises take their place again, moveless figures come to life, and the busy world goes forward as before.

The dancer sank in a heap upon the ground as the music ceased; then, rising, lifted her arms above her head, stepped quickly backward in the darkness and was gone. She was one of many who came up from beyond the desert with their men—women of slightly negroid face, and of a richer hue of brown than the northern desert folk. Some wore the skins of leopards, and had collars of panther's teeth. Afterwards, many went into battle with the men. One led the first attack at Gargaresh.

Some of the nomad women have a shy, wild beauty ; but the most of them, save that they have very lovely eyes, are not well favoured. They dye their finger-nails with henna—red astringent stuff that gives their slender hands a bloody look. They tattoo their chins and brows with lines of blue, and rub dark pigments underneath their eyes. Many paint their eyebrows longer, holding that, for true beauty, they should meet above the nose.

Commonly, their type is gipsy-like, or rather, Jewish (for, indeed, the Arab is nothing but the untamed brother of the Jew) ; but I have often seen, too, faces of strangely European expression. Passing the camp of some nomad herdsmen once, I halted, and cried out to know if they had leban (sour milk) in the tents. And, bearing in her hands a wooden bowl, there came out from the beyt-es-shaar a woman at whose face I stared astonished. For she was ruddy-haired, grey-eyed, with a tilted nose and clever well-cut mouth. It was the face of a well-bred, delicate lady, with a sense of fun in her, and a ready but not a sentimental sympathy ; certainly not that of a savage goat-herd's wife. Miss Ellen Terry, garbed in blue baft, might look much like this Arab woman. I half expected from her face a witty, charming conversation. But instead she rated me because I tendered her a Turkish coin, and scolded

shrilly when I could not give her copper flûs instead.

The poorest sort of country Arabs will hardly accept silver coins of more than a half-franc's worth, even though it be in good Turkish money. Such pieces are often hard to change in the market place, and the poor man gone to buy a pennyworth of ground coffee, or a pinch or two of tea, knows that the sight of a silver mejidieh knotted in his handkerchief will raise all prices against him. Then, too, he must lose some fraction in the changing, as like as not ; for the merchant will cast a doubt on the value of the coin, and hold back perhaps a half-piastre.

In changing gold money—whether French or English—I have had often to suffer a loss of one and a half, or even two francs in twenty, though the Tunisian Arabs with whom I dealt knew well enough the value of the coin, and had no fear of losing when they should return to spend it in Sfax of Ben Ghardan.

Tunisians and Algerian Arabs, better instructed, from contact with the French, than the ignorant Tripolitans, reaped great harvests during the war. Some—but this was not at first—brought caravans across the frontier, laden with biscuits, conserves, shirts, hosiery, chocolate, paraffin lamps, glassware and crockery, canned goods, small mirrors, knives, and handkerchiefs, which they sold in the needy

camp at huge profits. But even greater were the gains of certain Tunisians during the early weeks of the war. For their more ignorant brethren of Tripoli, finding in the pockets of dead Italians thin sheets of paper, coloured green and blue and pink, and curiously inscribed, took them to the Tunisians, wondering what they might be. Thus it came about that one fat fellow from Gabes, who had left the shaving and hair-dressing of French officers for more profitable gleanings in the war-area, bought notes worth 1,500 lira for a few coppers ; and others, I was told, did even more.

And when this kind of news came to the ears of Ferhat Bey, and other Arab chiefs, they warned their countrymen that such papers were Christian money. The news spread fast. I have often been pestered by Arab soldiers who have sought to sell me pornographic post cards, and even cigarette papers taken from Italian pockets, under the impression that they were worth gold.

Once, too (this, I think, was after the fight at Gargaresh), some Arabs came to Beshir Bey, carrying tins of preserved meat and fish.

“What is this?” they wanted to know, “and what is it worth?”

Beshir Bey grinned roguishly at me. We had been living on rice and stringy mutton for many days. He turned a severe face to the Arabs.

100 THE CAMP FOLLOWERS' MARKET

“That,” said he, “is swines’ flesh, such as the Christians eat. Its value to a Moslem is—that!” He sent a tin of salmon bowling over the ground to where some mangy dogs were hungrily prospecting.

“Wullah!” cried one, “it is pig-meat indeed. Look!” He pointed to a label, whereon the head of a boar was painted. They flung their booty contemptuously down, and went off, shaking their polluted mantles.

Beshir Bey supped well that night.

The market of the army was now held in open desert behind the barracks, and was, of course, a greater one by far than that of Ain Zara had been. Now, too, there were sometimes chances to buy strange Arab and Berber wares from the hills, and from the southern deserts. For often volunteers from a great distance would sell or exchange goods brought from their own countries—leopard skins, strange crooked knives, stamped leather wallets, or tufts of mewed ostrich feathers. So that, in the idle days, I frequented the *sôk* in the early mornings, partly in hopes of buying some rare thing, and partly because I had nothing better to do.

Behind the booths of the sellers of onions and garden stuffs, I came one day upon a soothsayer squatting by his tray of silvery fine sand, whereon with his forefinger he drew strange signs. By his knee, and kept from the wind by

a great stone placed upon it, he had a sheaf of closely-written papers. Other paper, blank, and ready for the inscriptions of charms against ill-luck, ill-health, devils, wounds, and all manner of evil, lay beside him.

For tenpence he would tell my fortune ; and having paid greater sums to less likely-looking seers in drawing rooms and church bazaars at home, I gave half the money in advance.

“ Ask, then, some question,” he began ; and so I asked him.

“ Tell me when I am to return to my own country.”

The warlock swept his hand across the tray of sand, and wiped out all the signs upon it. When it was smooth and blank, he drew a pentacle upon it, flanked on either side with lines and dots.

Now he took up a handful of sand, and put it in my palm, and closed my fingers on it.

“ Grip,” said he, “ and meanwhile fix your thoughts upon your home. Think of your return.”

It was about Christmas time. I thought I should perhaps spend Easter in England.

The old man took the sand from me, and scattered it over what he had drawn. Then, with his two forefingers, he filled the tray with parallel lines and dots, and immediately afterwards began, apparently at hazard, to join together

certain of those dots by short lines, so that soon he had a singular pattern of dots and dashes on the sand before him ; and fell to studying it intently.

“Well, now,” said he, “you must go away for a little while, to walk about and distract your mind. Come again in the half of an hour.”

So I did ; and when I got back he had a new scratch or so on the sand, and a rapt expression.

“Your mind is full of many mixed hopes,” he told me. “You will not be able to go back yet awhile to your country. Your country is far away. You are not Turk, nor French—no, you are English.” (Any of the hangers-on of the army might have told him that much ; and no doubt one had.)

“Well, then,” pursued the warlock, “don’t look to go home yet. But don’t fret either. All goes well in your fine house. You think much of a young boy who is beginning his travels in the world. All is well with him. Also, a girl-child is much in your mind. Be happy, All your children”—(I have none)—“are well. A great joy concerning the boy will come soon to your house. Your friends think often of you, and your wife”—(I have no wife)—“looks well after your affairs, and is faithful. There is a tall man, very pale, who works much in your interest. Yes, he is tall, and very pale. He has light hair, I think.”

Then he paused a little and fingered his beard reflectively.

“ Ah! ” he broke out, “ a letter comes for you. It is opened by another. I see him tear it. But be easy. Yours is a future that may well be left to God. Do not trouble your heart because you cannot go soon to your country. The waiting is full of profit.”

On the outskirts of the market I came upon a ragged woman picking scattered grains of wheat and barley, grain by grain, out of the dust, with the rapid dexterity of a fowl. Beyond marveling at her Arab thrift, I paid scant heed to her then. But before very long the memory came to have a significance for me.

XIII

I AWOKE one morning to see the sun rise, lemon and vermilion, over the rim of the desert, while the full moon, in a ghostly halo of pearl grey, was setting. That day a thick dun-coloured fog of sand hid all the horizon and shut out the blueness of the sky. Such furious sandstorms seem to come with the first few days of every month, lasting for three or four days together. At the end of January there set in the Kurret-el-Anss (the Tempest of the Goats), which coated all the world with flying sand. Riding out, one became enveloped in a fine mail of stone dust, so that to rub the skin of one's face, even, became painful. Sand filled the eyes, and trickled in tiny streams from the folds of men's clothes as they moved. The ears of horses became filled and caked. When the beasts sweated they were streaked with thin mud.

On such days I stirred abroad as little as might be, waiting until nightfall, when the winds would generally drop. I would go out on horseback or afoot to enjoy the calmer air of

the desert by moonlight. Once far from the camp the stillness of the night was almost fearful. I walked one night along the many-ribbed track towards the mountains. In the moonlight the tangled thorn-bushes and clumps of flowering asphodel looked like the copses and thickets of an English woodland. Walking towards them, I could fancy myself approaching the fringes of some silent park; but at night distance and dimensions are confused. What looked like thick tree-growths a good way off would quickly turn into some meagre scrub or tangle of thorny, leafless twigs only a few score yards away.

The desert is a mighty sounding-board. Three miles away from camp I could hear faint shrillnesses, as though the ants above whose fortresses I walked bickered in their subterranean tunnellings. Only when I had more than doubled the distance, and had come upon a wilderness of stone and sand where nothing grew, was there the uttermost silence. It seemed, in that chill, fantastic landscape, as though I walked the deserts of the moon, amongst the gullies and craters of a disused world.

For a time there was complete stillness. I could hear the coursing of my blood, and the rasping trickle of fine sand-streams set in motion by my footsteps.

After awhile the silence was broken. Very,

very far away, I heard a hoarse, disjointed murmuring. A train of camel-men was coming from the hills. Long before I saw them I could hear the words they said. Lest I should startle them, which might be dangerous, I walked smartly towards them. They loomed at last before me, high, fantastic shapes upon their slow-going camels, and at sight of me one unslung his gun, and called hoarsely to the man nearest me, “ *'Sh kain hua ?* ”

The rider near me sat a fine white she-camel. He craned down and looked at me as he passed.

“ *Askari,*” he said briefly, and wished me peace. I gave him the customary answer, and they passed on. After they had passed out of hearing, the silence of immense space settled over the desert once again, so that at last I became afraid of it, and turning back, made for the asphodels and Azizia. One can become afraid of silence, if one remains in it too long, as children are afraid of darkness. The least sociable of men, I fancy, straying into one of the vast empty rooms of this great House we live in, must stand appalled at its bare floor and naked walls, and the dust-laden quiet of its solitude. Then he will think kindly of the little crowded chambers where his kind sit by the fire, and chat or quarrel in companionship, and back he must go.

As I neared the village and passed among the camp fires of the Arabs in the desert, I felt

thirsty ; and decided, first, to buy tea at a hair-cloth booth of the camp-followers ; then to call upon some friend, and have both tea and talk more pleasantly.

Ferhat Bey was awake. I went to his house ; and as I passed beneath the dark arch and told my name to the sentry, I realised quite suddenly that this alone, to those who know only the customs of Europe, would almost be adventure—to turn from the high-road, into a narrow archway, stepping amongst kneeling camels and picketed horses ; to beat with flat hands softly on an iron-sheathed door, and, being told to enter, pass into a dimly lighted room, where men in robes of white sat on the floor before a charcoal brazier on which was simmering a pot of tea. I thought, as Mehemet Ferhat rose and took my hand in both of his, and as I mechanically saluted him, how, to untravelled friends at home, the whole of this everyday performance would seem like showing off some strange theatrical accomplishment. And those friends I had often wished to have with me, that I might show them a strange and wonderful life, so different from their own ; yet, I knew suddenly, that, could they have come, their presence would, indeed, have much embarrassed me. I should have to be forever apologising for their rude and ignorant behaviour—apologising for them to men who ate their dinners with their

fingers, and spat with less compunction than we cough.

We talked of horses : about a thin, brown filly I had seen in the outpost camp at Senati Beni Adhem ; and about a splendid iron-grey from the district of Nalout. Ferhat told me of a wonderful young horse at Zawia—a chestnut colt, as yet unbroken. We sent word to have it brought that I might buy it ; for I was now determined to have a horse of my own.

We put chips of sweet-smelling wood upon the fire from time to time ; and tea was handed round in tiny glasses. Green tea, made syrupy with many lumps of sugar in the pot, is the commonest refreshment of North Africa. The people of Morocco put green mint in it, and sometimes leaves of verbena. It must be drunk in noisy sips ; and courtesy commands the emptying of three glasses.

Squatting on the floor, or on cushions, the guests form a circle about the brazier. The tea-maker, cleansing first his pot and every glass with scalding water, puts in his pinches of leaves, with solicitous care that enough shall go in to colour the fluid to a delicate amber-hue, but not so much as shall give a bitter taste. Then the sugar, brayed with a little mallet or a lump of stone, is put in till the pot be nearly filled.

With his left hand he has fanned the charcoal,

or has blown it to a glow with his mouth, until the water-kettle gives off threads of steam from spout and lid-hole ; and now the boiling water is poured into the pot, and poured straight out with a high action of the hand. Only one glassful is at first poured out, which the tea-maker sips, to try its quality, and then pours back into the pot. Then, having shaken well the pot with a rotating motion, he will stand it for awhile upon the brazier and at last pour out for all. But he himself takes none ; or at least, not until strongly urged. The greatest worthies take their glasses first, with many protests—"Nay, *billah*, drink first, my uncle. Thine the first cup."—"No, no, to thee the first, I pray."

And often some great one, passing his untasted glass out into the circle of humbler ones who sit behind, enjoys the whispered praises and ejaculations at his graciousness ; sitting with downcast eyes and very open ears.

Ferhat Bey would talk with me in French, being anxious to improve his knowledge of that tongue, and doubtless having a harmless pride that his Arab friends should take note of their deputy's accomplishment. Having chatted awhile in French he would translate into Arabic what we had said ; and listening closely, I learned much of the difficult Arab language thus.

As we talked, Sheikh Mohammed El Sôf

struck in, asking me, “Do the Inglees, then, use the speech of the Fransis ? Or have they, too, their own tongue ? ”

“ Surely,” I answered, “and not in the least like the speech of the Fransis.”

“ Say then, some words in Inglees. How do you greet or thank a man—what words have you for that ? ”

They began to ask the English names of animals and common things.

“ ‘ Cat,’ then, is the same with the Inglees as the Arab ? ” said the Sheikh. “ We too call the creature ‘ Kat ’ and ‘ Keti,’ which has much the same sound.”

“ We also call him ‘ puss,’ ” I said. “ We call ‘ *ernub* ’ (the hare) ‘ puss,’ too.”

“ Well, ‘ puss ’ is good for the cat,” he replied. “ But it is not a good name for a hare, I think. And, for the cat, we have another word, ‘ *mish*.’ ‘ *Mish* ’ is good. It sounds more like a cat than ‘ puss ’ does, eh ? ”

Somehow or other, that syllable, ‘ *mish* ’ does seem to me just the right word for a cat. I don’t know why.

I find it hard to render the phrases of the Arabs into English. I do not like the barbarous pseudo-Elizabethan jargon so commonly put into the mouths of Orientals by the English writers. It so happens that the finest translation into English from an Oriental language was

made at a time when Elizabethan was the speech of England ; and so well did its stately periods accord with the phrasing of the ancient Hebrew, so glorious a vehicle was it made for Eastern thoughts and phrases, that almost every writer dealing since with Semitic spoken words, has thought he could not set them into better English language than that of the Bible.

But there are drawbacks.

It is not everyone who can write the English of the Bible. Nor, even were that possible, is the English of the Bible suitable as a translation of all forms of Eastern speech. The Arabs, despite a tendency (much exaggerated in the portraits drawn by Western scribes) to the use of metaphor and imagery, no more employ the stilted verbiage ascribed to them than English labourers employ the periods of Shakespeare's Hotspur, or of Henry V. at Agincourt.

The desert speech is full of slang and catch-phrases. It is quick, flexible and vivid. To translate it into English form that shall give a real idea of its original character is very hard. One must use the obsolete second person singular ; yet the employment of "thee" and "thou" and "ye," has been so misused that, save in dialect, it stamps all speech as theatrical or sham-archaic.

One might, indeed, render the speech of the Arabs into an English dialect, such as those of

Lancashire and Yorkshire, where “thee” and “thou” are used familiarly; but then one would imply that Arabs are like the people of Lancashire and Yorkshire in thought and turn of mind; whereas they are not so in the least.

Shakespeare’s slang—the slang of Falstaff and Prince Hal; the homely speech of Dogberry and the Grave-diggers, would be better. Better still would be the language of Sir Thomas Urquhart’s translation of Rabelais, with its rollicking, rolling tide of words, its coarse virility and bubbling repetition. At any rate, it would give a finer conception of Arabic turns of speech than the Babylonish dialects commonly employed.

XIV

“RIDE with us to the Arab camp at Senati Beni Adhem,” said Ferhat Bey, “and we shall surely find a good horse there at a cheap price.”

Senati Ben Adhem is perhaps twenty miles to the north of Azizia. We rode thither next morning. I took with me a camp-bed and some clothing. Ferhat brought a camel-load of goods. He had a splendid painted tent, with carpets for its floor; and a negro lad on an ass carried cushions and a huquah. Two servants came to cook, and camel-men, and lads to see to the horses.

We halted at the first well to water our beasts. The well stands in an old, disordered garden. Two upright shafts of whitened stone go up from the mouth of the hole, and between them is an axle with a pulley-wheel upon it. And so deep is the well, as many in that desert are, that those who pull the rope must run down a cutting in the earth for almost eighty yards. Oxen are often harnessed to these well-ropes; but for the most part, the impatient Arab spirit will not

tolerate the slow movements of these beasts ; and men, women, and children catching at the line, run headlong with it. The pulling makes a loud and rather musical whine as the ropes come up with the buckets, and full, dripping skins at their ends. Troughs of stone and hollowed palm-trunks lie by the mouth of the well. The soil all round is poached and trampled into mud for many yards about.

The Turkish soldiers, guardians of this well, filled up the troughs for us, and our horses drank, with bridles off and girths unloosed. For a good while afterwards we went at a slow pace. Ferhat Bey told me of yet another good horse that might be bought. It was the property said he, of a zeptir—an Arab gendarme—and such was its pace that, chased by a posse of Italian cavalry, its rider had made a circuit, and coming in on his pursuers from behind, had fired on them, and after got easily away.

“ A good beast,” said Ferhat, “ but the man will ask a high price.”

I saw the horse when we arrived. It had a jaded look, because in four days it had not been unsaddled. Yet it was a splendid creature, with fine clean legs and a good head well set on. I would have bought it, but the zeptir's greed annoyed me. For, when I had consented to the price he asked at first, he thought he might with a little trouble have more from me. And so, on

the morning after I had spoken with him, he went away on his horse to Zanzour, and left a message that he could not sell it for so little after all. He must have twenty francs more. This, of course, he said because he knew I wanted to have the horse. He thought I should not get another.

But that day I had gone into the cavalry camp of the Turks; and at the door of the commander's tent I saw a splendid stallion. He was a bay, tall and of a very Irish look. He stood well over sixteen hands, and his shoulders and his quarters had strength in every line. Save that his chest was a little narrow, he showed no noticeable defect.

Nazmi Bey, the Turkish cavalry leader, made me very welcome in his tent. He told war-stories of campaigns in Albania, and many officers came in to chat. Nazmi Bey had coffee for us all, and cigarettes and fruit and Turkish sweet-meats. Of all the hospitable Turks, this long-limbed, narrow-waisted cavalryman was the most vigilantly hospitable. Neither sup nor bite would he touch till every guest was well supplied. His tent was always filled with friends; and new arrivals in the camp, whether Arab chief or Turkish officer, must taste the best that Nazmi Bey could give.

He had heard that I was seeking a horse.

“ But why, my friend ? ” he cried. “ Are you

not our guest ? While there are horses in our camp there is always one for you."

I told him that I felt ashamed to borrow always from my hosts.

"And," I added frankly, "to ride another man's horse is a little better than to kiss his wife. I want a horse that shall be mine, to take back with me, if I choose to England."

He nodded, being a man with a passion for horses himself.

"I have a horse," said he thoughtfully, "and I will sell him cheaply ; but not to you."

"If it is the bay stallion outside the tent—"

"Yes that is the horse. I want to sell him. But——" he hesitated, "he is not a horse that I should like a friend to buy."

"O," said I, "as to that, there are no friends in horse-dealing. If I may try the horse, I will tell you what I think him worth."

He questioned me directly.

"Are you a good rider ? Are you clever with a horse ?"

A Turk would have answered him as frankly as he asked the question. They are singularly frank in some matters. Thus one young officer told me once, without in the least boasting, "I am very brave by nature, only I am stupid, and on that account not a good officer." He said "I am brave" as naturally as he might have said "I am five feet eight inches in height." So, if I

had been a Turk, I should have answered Nazmi Bey by saying either that I rode extremely well, or that I could not ride well. As it was, however, knowing that I cut no such figure on a horse as himself (I never saw a more graceful rider), and yet being conscious that I ride well enough, I answered him: "I can ride quiet horses."

"Ah," said he, "but can you mount wild ones? For my horse will not let you mount if he can help it. He is vicious. He both kicks and bites. Before I had him, he blinded a soldier with his fore-foot; and he has bitten a great many."

"Let us go and look at him," said I—and we went out to the horse.

"Has he any other fault, besides his bad temper?" I asked; and Nazmi Bey said "No."

The stallion stood very still, looking wicked. But he let me catch him by the nostrils and look at his teeth. I saddled him. He winced and kicked at the pull of the girth; but his shackles held him.

Then I unhobbled him and went to mount. Instantly the horse became a raging devil. He reared on end, and struck out like a boxer. His yellow fangs were bare; he screamed horridly. I think no beast has a more terrifying air than an angry stallion.

When I ceased trying to mount, the horse

quieted. Gradually he let me pat his neck and pull his ears, but he disliked my caresses. He knew that I was trying to lull his suspicions to sleep : and when again I dived for the stirrup he was ready for me.

At last I mounted while an orderly held the brute fast by the head : and once I bestrode him he accepted defeat. Never had I ridden a more comfortable mount. He had a lovely stride. He could trot, canter, or gallop with perfect motion ; and turn at as sharp an angle as his rider pleased.

I dismounted and asked Nazmi Bey to ride him that I might watch ; but Nazmi Bey said, " Since I know the horse I may show him off a little too well. I do not wish to make you think I am trying to sell him to you."

So a Turkish trooper mounted and put the horse through its paces ; and I became determined to buy it, if Nazmi Bey would sell it at a proper figure.

Nazmi Bey named a low sum enough—far less than that demanded by the zeptir for his chestnut.

" He is a good horse," said Nazmi Bey, " but he is not much good to me. I see myself killed because of him. We go out scouting, and perhaps I dismount a while. The Italians come upon us, and I cannot leap into the saddle and ride because I must first wrestle with that devil. He

is not a good war-horse, so I will sell him cheaply.”

So I bought that horse, and called him Bimbashi, which means Major; and I spent quite a lot of time in trying to tame him. I fed and watered him myself; and after many weeks I found that if he were loose he would follow me like a dog—with intent to bite.

XV

THE Arabs made up a great war-party and rode out under Tahar Bey. Tahar Bey had ten Turkish troopers with him ; all the rest of the party were Arabs. It was an expedition that pictured a vanishing phase of war. Only in North Africa and on the desert hills of Eastern countries do the hosts ride forth to war with lance and sword, with scarlet saddle-cloth and deep fringed rein, with neighings and prancings of war-horses, loud shouts and savage song. As we went out I could have thought I rode with Saracens against the mail-clad warriors of the West. Bright pennons danced overhead, and the tails and manes of horses streamed in the wind. I saw men armed with straight two-handed swords, such as were taken from the dead Crusaders near a thousand years ago. To this day, in the deserts of Africa where hide so many lost things of the past, men fight in hauberks, helms and corselets wrought by the armourers of knights whose hearts were stirred by Peter the Hermit.

And long, straight swords, maces and battle-axes are still forged by desert smiths upon the model of the arms of mediæval Europe. There were even lances in our party—not the fine, wavering shelfa of the Arabs of the Yemen, but strong, short, stabbing spears, with leaf-shaped, fluted blades. One, carried by a Shamba chief, was inlaid upon the haft with gold, and was, in some sort, sacred. I offered him a Spanish sword against his lance, but could not get it. He would not give it, so he said, even for a setashra, by which he meant a magazine-rifle firing sixteen shots; “But give the Spanish sword, dear one, for love of me; and thou shalt be like my son to me in my own house for as long as thou wilt.”

The morning was keen and bright, and all horses full of spirit. We rode out past the butchers’ market, and the horses leapt and bounded sideways at the smell of fresh blood. One, that had little whistles in his nostrils, made a noise like that of an exhaust-whistle upon a motor-car.

Women came out of the tent-doors as we passed, and sent up shrill, wild ululation; and at that moment, as my feverish stallion footed it like a dancer amongst the pools of blood, I understood with every fibre of my being the maddening exaltation of that cry. I understood the frenzy that stirs in the souls of the desert

fighting men. Never, surely, do their women-kind seem more desirable to the Arabs than when, at the opening of the beyt-es-shaar, they stand with slender, outstretched arms, on which the bangles gleam, and send forth their passionate exhortations ; for their cry is exultation for the victory to come, and keening for those who are to die, and a hint of raillery for any whose courage may falter ; and in smiles and shy glances lurks promise of a tender welcome for those who shall come back wet with the enemy's blood, and heavy with the plunder of his tents.

“ Stamp out their hearts into the earth. Bring back their women that we may beat them and have them for our slaves, and their children that we may rear them up to spit upon their fathers' names. And see no such fate shall fall on us, nor on your children.”

I said to the old Shamba at my side, “ If I were really thy nephew, little uncle, I would try to do big deeds to-day.”

“ Ai, ai, to be young, as thou art, O my soul,” he returned. “ Ai, the beard-strokings and soft words after the fight ; the whispers under the tent-curtain and the sidelong looks ! God twist thy legs and rack thy belly with pains.” (This to his horse.) “ Hast not learned yet that a soberer gait better suits my old body ? ”

“ Old like an old mountain,” I quoted, from a Tunisian love-ballad. “ Old as the rocks grow old, and stronger every year.”

The sheikh chuckled gleefully at the compliment, shaking his head in mock reproach that I should know that song, which, in truth, is none of the daintiest. He began to tell me stories of a pronounced naughtiness as we rode along. I have heard some of them in London club-rooms, and one, at least, was known to the Athenians who applauded the “ Ecclesi-azusae.”

I in my turn put on that air of deprecation which, in such circumstances, everyone assumes and nobody sincerely feels; and the old man laughed.

“ Eh, I’m a bad old dog, that I am,” he confessed, “ but I fast through Ramadan, wullah bullah, like a starving camel, and utter more than a hundred pious words a day beside my prayers. What of it, then ? ”

An Arab on foot, with two guns at his back, trotted at my stirrup, and, looking up, asked : “ What says the old goat to make thee laugh so, Nasrany ? ”

The sheikh bent upon him a glance of cold severity.

“ Away, dust-scratcher,” said he. “ Thou Tail-in-the-Sand, thou ; matters of religion, such as we discuss, are above thy unclean mind.

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Shuffle away, lad." Then, as the other only laughed, "Loathly beast," said he, "thou hast pig's ears."

A minstrel in the ranks began to sing, as Taillefer sang at Senlac to the Normans, and the war-party chorussed his whining chant with harsh, staccato shouts, brandishing their weapons the while. Presently we halted in a dried up water-course, whose steep banks hid our band entirely. The dried mud underfoot was cracked in flakes that curled up at the edges, like scales on a crocodile's back.

Tahar Bey sent scouts to ride out wide on either wing. We turned a little to the east, and rode up past Fonduk Magoussa, where an outpost of the Turks is stationed. Then, far ahead of us, a black speck showed against the sky. Slowly it grew and mounted in the sky, until at last it was black no longer. It was a scouting monoplane of the Italians, and passed over our heads high up, the sunlight gilding its broad vanes, far out of reach of the spattering volleys of the Arabs.

The Arabs called an aeroplane "tiara" in their camp slang. The word means "flier" simply; and they did not, in any special sense, look upon flying machines as devil-work. Or at least they made no more of them than coast Arabs do of steamships. Very wonderful things, no doubt; but then, it is permitted to

the Christian to work many miracles in this world, as an offset to the torments he must suffer in the next. And after all, what is a miracle more or less? You cannot expect men who know that black devils with the snouts of swine live in the earth; who see enchanted cities and palm-groves fade at the approach of mortals; who hear their pack-beasts talking Arabic in low tones, furtively, yet articulately—you cannot expect men, to whom wonders such as these are things as commonplace as the delivery of the morning milk, to be lost in astonishment because they see men as birds flying. Their very ignorance prevents them from surprise. Familiarity with wonders not understood blunts any man's ability to see a miracle. For instance, I, myself, understanding nothing of mechanics, yet familiar with the sight of engines working and of motors running, might see a motor-driven sledge on runners (supposing anyone could devise such a thing) without much comment, whereas an expert mechanic would be struck at once by the strangeness and the novelty of the thing.

The aeroplane circled awhile above us, and then turned northward, flying in a straight line for the towers of Tripoli. We, too, drew nearer to the town, until at last we were scarce four miles from it. We lay in clumps of wiry bents, peering through glasses at the white walls and

towers. The sea was rough : we saw no ships. After a little while of watching thus, the Arabs grew impatient. Riding from crest to crest among the dunes, they showed themselves purposely upon the sky-line, hoping to draw their unseen enemies out. But there was no sign at all from behind the Italian fortifications. We turned back, riding towards Ain Zara. Presently we could see the wooden palisading and what looked like corrugated iron roofs of huts. And here at last we sighted some of the enemy's cavalry, whom our vanguard hotly followed, but in vain. For the Italians scampered off across the dunes and only halted safe inside their camp.

Let him see his enemy on the run, and the Arab can hardly contain his eagerness for battle. I do not mean that he shows no readiness to fight a foe that stands his ground ; but that his lust for fighting when he is in pursuit is a thing that overpowers him.

No sooner had the Italian squadron run from us than all the Arab leaders cried at once that now was the time to retake Ain Zara. The plan, with so few men, would have been madness. Yet I did not envy Tahar Bey his task of saying so. I saw him in the centre of a knot of men who argued, shouted, taunted and screamed at him until their voices broke. He showed them that the enemy had cannon and

quick-firers, that they were well entrenched, and knew of our coming. Hardly one man in twenty could live through the fire that would belch from behind the palisades. Certainly not even five times as many men as had come out that day could hope to rush across the space of shelterless desert and retake the camp.

The Arabs, though convinced, were sulky still. Some few went obstinately forward, to take pot-shots at any heads that showed behind the fence ; but the majority, sitting on their horses on the tops of dunes and mounds, waited awhile in hopes that the enemy might come out and fight them.

But there was no sally. Perhaps the enemy feared a trap, thinking that greater numbers than the men they saw were lurking in the desert. So that at last, disappointed of a skirmish, we had to turn our horses' heads and ride back homeward to the camp at Senati Beni Adhem.

That evening I again went over to the tent of Nazmi Bey. As we sat chatting over coffee, a captive was brought in—a shaven Arab in the blue uniform of the zeptirs. This was a spy, who had been sent by the Italians to prowl amongst the Arab tents and offer bribes to the men, to make them desert the Turks. He stood between two Turkish soldiers, his arms bound with cords upon his back. Nazmi Bey and

other officers asked questions of him. Beshir Bey, the little doctor, took a candle and held it up before the prisoner as he scanned him. The man blinked at the candle light, and his nostrils twitched.

They hanged him to a telegraph pole at dawn. The Turkish soldiers formed a hollow square round the pole, and there was a barrel at the foot of it. The rope, dripping with black grease, hung in a double noose from the pulley.

The prisoner was brought, his arms still bound as I had seen them on the night before. His feet were bare. There were patches of sand upon his trousers, and there was sand on his nose and on his forehead, for he had been praying, face pressed to earth, and could not wipe away the dust that clung to him.

Nazmi Bey stepped into the square, sad-looking and stern, and his voice rang out the clanging sentences of classical Arabic as he read aloud the death-sentence. The crowding Arabs round the Turkish square cheered when they heard the traitor's doom. Then the prisoner was pushed forward, moving clumsily. His legs were shaking, but he frowned stolidly at the telegraph pole, and his face showed no sign of fear.

They took off his blue uniform, and he stood in white shirt and under-trousers at the foot of the gallows. He shivered a little, wetting his

lips with the tip of his tongue. Two soldiers lifted him on to the barrel, and placed the rope over his head.

Quite suddenly the barrel was knocked away. His eyebrows went up in a grimace as of astonishment, and streams of grease from the rope trickled thinly down his bulging neck and across his breast.

The jolly little doctor Beshir stood looking at him attentively, a cigarette between his strong, even teeth. Presently he smiled slightly and gave a sign. There was a dismal screech of the pulley, and the hanged man slowly ascended, and there hung against the pole, nostrils distended, eyes blank lozenges of white, and mouth a little open, with saliva dropping from it. The Turkish soldier next to me trembled like a frightened horse. Suddenly the hanged man jerked and twisted in convulsions for a few seconds, and then was quite still. They pinned the death sentence on his bosom with a brass safety pin.

A woman on a little hill raised a shrill, mocking "Ululu." Then a draped Arab, having in his hand a short spear, walked into the square, and, facing the dead spy, shook his spear in the air. All the Arabs shouted. An old man followed this spear-bearer, and he too stood before the corpse, and began to sing as the minstrels sing upon the march.

“A-a-a-h! what is done to our enemies; to the Sultan’s enemies? They hang high. They are strangled with cords.”

“Ullah, Ullah!” chorused the crowd. The singer held a kerchief before his mouth, and modulated his long-drawn notes by removing and replacing it. He wagged his forefinger reprovingly at the dangling corpse, and cracked jokes at which the people laughed.

The dead man, head upon one side as though hearkening, grinned back derisively at the singer and at all the people.

XVI

THERE was a Circassian officer, Talaat Bey, son of a favourite of the old Sultan, and exiled by the Young Turkish party into Tripoli. And when the war broke out, this Talaat Bey, having been expelled from the army and degraded from his rank, re-enlisted as a common trooper to fight against the Italians. The fallen aristocrat lived amongst his mates, sleeping in a tent when there was one to be had, and in the open desert when no shelter could be got ; grooming his own horse, cleaning his own kit (for he was by nature somewhat of a dandy) ; singing plaintive Circassian tunes by the camp fire, riding with despatches, and in all things bearing himself as a contented and thoroughly efficient soldier. So that at last, having distinguished himself in some outpost affair, he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant, and came to be entrusted with matters of importance.

One morning he came and told me that he was to go into the mountains, up to Gharien.

“ And if you would like to escape from this

desert and see good country again," said he, "ride with me."

So I told Emin, the orderly assigned to me, to saddle the Bimbashi and his own horse, and to fill the torbahs with barley. And, having strapped blankets and a few clothes to the saddle, I mounted and rocketted out under the archway, as though clinging to the back of a heraldic lion rampant; and went down the southward caravan road after Talaat Bey. Talaat Bey had with him two Arab zeptirs as guides, and his orderly. There was also a Tripolitan in European clothes, riding a fine ass, which, at an ambling gait, left all of us on horse-back far behind. This man was a civilian, somehow concerned with the organisation of the caravans. He said to me, "You travel, God bless you, like a soldier. Your cloak is to be your bed and your house, eh?"

"Well, now," said Talaat, "take little, have little, lose little. The man is happiest who has all he may need in one wallet. If you would take your house and carpets and pots and pans, you must go at the gait of Him-in-the-Horn" (el fi-karūn, the tortoise). "You have food for your horse, food for yourself, a little tobacco and paper, doubtless, in your pocket, and a warm wrapping for the night. Who in all the world would need more?"

"Ay, but, had you needed to bring your tent,

your boxes, and even a chair to sit on," said the other to me, "you had only to tell me, and camels, ay, by God, ten of them if need be, were at your service."

"No need." I said. "They say at Senati Beni Adhem that Fethi Bey has worn his boots for a week; and slept under the lee of a well-rim. And I don't want to lie softer than the best among you."

They were pleased at this; and Talaat Bey began to tell of campaigns in Armenia as we rode along. Towards the close of the afternoon we halted awhile at a mud-built fonduk to water our horses and drink tea. We sat upon our rolled-up blankets on the roof and looked across the desert.

"Soon," said Talaat Bey, "the sun will set. Let us rest here for an hour after that, and then the moon will rise."

There was a patch of rank herbage fringing a shallow rain-pool wherein the sunset was reflected.

"Eh, for the spring to come," said he, pointing, "and turn the bare world green again like that. I shall be glad indeed to be amongst the hills again."

He began to croon strange Circassian airs as he sat there clasping his knees, and staring absently at the line of purple mountains towards which we had been riding.

I heard growls and snarlings that seemed to come from underground. I walked to the edge of the flat roof, and looking down, saw a deep pit near the house-wall; and in the pit were gaunt, savage dogs, that glared up with yellow eyes, and showed their fangs, and leaped up against the sides of their prison. Here they were kept all day, being lowered down with ropes; and after nightfall they were drawn up and turned loose to guard the place. At sight of me they became frenzied, and made huge bounds to get out, till a lad ran to the edge of the pit and rated them. He threw stones down at them, and they, dodging hither and thither, growled, as in surly protest.

We rode on when the moon was up. The desert sand gave place to stony ground, and the mountain wall towards which we rode no longer stretched out flat and straight across our path. It seemed to throw out arms on either side of us. We crossed a boulder-covered watercourse, and saw in front of us a deep ravine whose sides were thickly fringed with date palms; and there were houses among them. And now it seemed as though we were riding in the bottom of a vast black bowl, except when, looking back, we saw the wide, shadowless silver plain on which we had ridden all day. The ground sloped upwards, gently at first, and then abruptly towered like the face of a cliff; and

before us was a huge stairway of rock up which we were to climb.

There was a fonduk at the foot of the stair, at which we had thought to pass the remainder of the night. But, coming there, we found it filled. There was not even room enough for those already there; for the enclosure was thronged with camels, and barley-sacks and heavy bales were piled high here and there. Many camels lay outside the enclosure, and we stumbled amongst them in the dim light. It was a great train come over the mountains from the greater desert beyond. Men squatted over braziers in the two small rooms of the building, and lay asleep on the banked earthen dais that ran round the walls.

“No night quarters here for us,” said Talaat. There were loud protests from the hospitable folk.

“Nay, nay; but come in, my captain. Sit, then, sit, sit. Here is a carpet. See now, my dear, we have tea.”

“Press, lads, press. Huddle your loutish bodies up and give a place for the soldiers. Eh, now, that such lubbers should fill the room, like toads in a mud-hole!”

“Toads, billah! And thou with thy great rump covering the half of a carpet! Stir him with that sword of thine, little soldier.”

“No, no,” said Talaat. “We go higher. Tea?”

Aye, and God bless the giver. But we sleep under the sky ; and only for an hour at that."

We drank tea, and the camel-drivers gave us news. Talaat told them of the war. They listened, with the constant ejaculations of the Arabs.

" Mashallah ! "

" Allah, wullahi ! "

When we left, we decided to struggle as far up the ascent as we could, and then make camp until the dawn. The moon shone down now into the mighty bowl, and showed the road clear before us.

And what a road ! It zig-zags up the mountain face, with twists and turns and shelves of rock, and ledges whence one standing on the brink looks down and sees his follower's heads and horses' backs in plan beneath his very feet. In places, even a man must scramble with hands and feet ; for boulders bigger than a tram-car block the road. There are rocks of black basalt, and granite boulders, vast grey slabs of limestone, sandstone, and a world of pebbles, that slip and twist beneath the feet. Bushes with cruel thorns grow thick amongst innumerable crevices. Sage and wild thyme, crushed under-foot, fill the air with delicious fragrance, and everywhere are tiny, star-like blossoms peeping amongst the stones.

Our horses—even mine was docile now—

stumbled and scrambled at our heels. Wonderful indeed are the beasts of burden of the Arabs. Even the pack-camels, if men walk beside them, bearing up the loads with their shoulders, make their painful way up and down this road, despite the fact that theirs are feet for sandy ground, and very ill-suited to climbing. And the horses truly climb like cats. I have ridden Arab horses up ascents which an English one could hardly face when led. And up this road, in places where to hold the bridle as one climbs is hard, one may gather it up on the horse's neck and leave him to himself. Then with ears pricked and wise eyes spying out the surest foothold, he will come after, treading as delicately as though on eggs.

Wherever you can climb unaided by your hands, your horse can follow you, if you will give him time.

We stopped at last, and made our horses fast, and fed them. We built a blazing fire of twigs whose burning smelt like incense; and wrapping ourselves close in our blankets, slept with our saddles underneath our heads till dawn.

And when the day came, fresh and bright, and very cold, we rose, a little stiffly, and looking about us, found that we were already a great way up, and had little further to climb. Our path stretched sheerly down below us to the plain, and wound away, a strip of paler

fawn colour across the desert into invisibility. The shadows of the mountains lay, deep purple on the level sands, as though a giant had flung his cloak there. And, still in shadow, at the stairway's foot, there lay the fonduk underneath our feet, and the pleasant palm groves, their greenery showing mistily through grey vapours. Wee, gnome-like men, clear and distinct like people seen through the wrong end of a telescope, were busy about the loading up of tiny goblin camels. Now and again a faint cry reached us on our ledge.

A pair of burnished ravens, glossy black in the sunlight, came flying slowly overhead, and one cried, with a deep, most musical note, to the other as they went by, tilting brilliant wings against the strong, fresh breeze.

As the light grew, the grey sides of the mountains showed streaks of tender green among the clefts and gorges. One peak, that looked very like an old crater, was still half-clad in steel-coloured clouds. The desert began to glow with a richer, warmer hue of orange; and a white crumb far to the north was Azizia.

As we climbed upward, Talaat Bey halted once, and fired his revolver four times in the air. And at once the silence was shattered by a score of clangorous echoes. The sounds rang and rebounded from those cliffs and rocks as though a battle were in progress.

“ How will it sound,” said Talaat Bey, “when the Italians, if ever they come so far, are trying to climb up here, with our mountain batteries firing from the top, and their big guns roaring like lions down below there, and every rock and bush and boulder sheltering an Arab with a rifle? Though, indeed, almost without rifles we could defend this place, rolling down stones. A hundred men could keep back all the Italian army in this place; and even should they ever reach the top, another climb, almost as hard as this, and longer, lies between them and Gharien.”

At last we came to the top, and looked out from a lovely plateau thick with olive-groves, upon a world that seemed immense. Even in the deserts of North Africa, the vast uninterrupted view gives an idea of the hugeness of this earth that overawes a lonely traveller. But high upon the mountain tops, with vistas stretching immeasurably out on every side, one is fascinated as though one viewed all space.

Amongst the hills it was as Talaat Bey had said: we were back again in a pleasant, habitable land after our sojourn in the empty desert wilds. There were groves and thickets, meadows blue and white with wild crocus; deep gullies and channels sheltering silvery thread-like rivulets; and little farms, where ploughing was toward. Men walked at the tail

of clumsy wooden ploughs—some a mere crooked branch to scratch the soil—to which were harnessed camels, women, asses, oxen. Camels take unkindly to this distasteful draught work, and, with their scornful heads raised high, blow out their sagging lips, and curse their drivers and their yoke-fellows in hollow, rumbuling protests from the bottoms of their malignant hearts. The women go often laughingly about their work, calling to one another across the fields: “Pull, thou she-camel. Strain at the rope. Pull, naga, pull.”

Flocks of goats go about amongst the olive trees. Leaping upon the squat, gnarled trunks, they climb out upon the branches where there is a foothold, to nibble at the green young shoots. Often you will see a circle banked about the roots of olive trees, and a depression made within it, to the end that water may accumulate in plenty.

How strongly certain scenes of Arab life recall conceptions of the classic age of Greece! There was a little hamlet whose whitened buildings showed amongst the olives by the roadside. Under a tree near by, a little goat-herd sat, his back against the knotted trunk. He had sandals on his thin brown feet, and his white woollen robe was belted with a belt of woven rope. And he was playing, fitfully, dreamily, as though trying to recall a forgotten

tune, upon a slender, two-stemmed pipe. A pair of black kids leaped and butted one another, with jerky friskings, fighting for possession of a boulder-top. And at my hail, a girl came out and brought an earthen amphora of sour milk, and stood looking fearlessly and frankly at us while we drank, as women of the hills, where the Berber freedom for women prevails, are not afraid to do. At the top of the hill behind the village stood a ruined altar—a slab of roughly dressed stone that had been supported by pillars, relic of some pre-Islamic faith.

We rode by many hills that were crowned with strange stone towers, like those of the ancient Irish. And now, being come into the country of the Troglodytes, we began to see many of the wonderful underground houses, with tunnels and galleries and cavernous chambers, in which the people live to this day.

Wonderful indeed are these subterranean towns, whose houses (mentioned by Herodotus, I think) are surely the oldest type of artificial dwelling known to man. I stabled my horse in one of them, near Gharien, and so came to know its construction thoroughly. And I often wondered whether the commonest type of Arab architecture is not directly evolved from the house of the Troglodytes. For the Arab house encloses a square courtyard, open to the heaven.

Its rooms open upon this courtyard, and as the sunlight drenches one side with light and heat, the occupants of the house move over to the opposite side, and sit in the cool shade. The house is usually two-storied, with a gallery or balcony running round inside; and the roof is flat. Folk come up and sit upon the roof in the early morning and in the cool evening, to enjoy the view and the pleasant freshness of the air.

And, save that it is dug out of the ground, instead of being built above it, the house of the earth-dwellers is just the same. The open courtyard is a great square pit, forty feet deep and often much more; and of about the same length on every side. Its faces are smooth and straight, and often beautifully dressed, as though with small adzes. The entrance is a long, sloping tunnel, often carefully twisted and with ambush recesses at its sides; and though you may walk erect down most of its length, it is sometimes so made that just before entering the central pit you have to crouch. Its outer entrance is shored with wood. Rude porches made of untrimmed boughs and having a drip-board roof are entries to the most pretentious. Others are merely holes in the earth.

There are chambers on every side of the main pit. The blackened walls of some show where fires have been built for cooking in wet weather. All round the walls are recesses and shelves, in

which stand lamps and household implements.

It is astonishing how much light filters into these windowless caverns; or rather, how quickly the eye becomes able to see through the dusk.

The floors are stamped hard, and sometimes crudely paved with flat stones. Sometimes the entrances are closed with doors, but these are mainly store-rooms wherein grain and fruits are kept; or stables for horses and cattle. The sleeping rooms—one cannot call them living rooms, since they are hardly ever used except at night—are commonly left open to the square.

Only the greatest and most elaborate of these dwellings have two regular storeys; for the ceiling must be of such a thickness that not even the heaviest rains can percolate. But nearly all have one or two upper chambers.

In the greatest heat, these places are always cool. In winter, they are warmer by far than the houses standing on the surface of the earth.

Throughout the mountains these strange dwelling-places abound. There are even a few in the desert; but these, for the most part, are store-houses only. The mountains, the strongholds of the Berbers, are the true home of this non-Semitic fashion of architecture.

XVII

I AM much intrigued by the Berber problem. Who are these people ; whence did they come into the North African mountains and least fertile deserts ; why does their race, so scattered and so broken, still keep for the most part aloof and distinct from its Arab vanquishers ?

The position of the Arab population of Northern Africa is very like that of the Teutonic conquerors of Britain, when the Saxons held the fertile plains, and drove the Britons to the hills and fens. The Arab hordes, sweeping westward over Africa with the impetus of their faith, dispossessed the people who then held the land, and drove them up into the mountains and the heart of the Sahara. So that, to-day, the population of the great Atlas range is Berber ; Berbers (Kabyles) hold the mountains of Algeria and Tunis ; Berbers (Susi and Tuareg) are the scourge of the Sahara and southern Barbary states.

There is no doubt that all the scattered Berber branches — Riff, Djebala, Susi of

Morocco, Kabyles of Algeria and Tunis, Tuareg of the Sahara, and the hill-folk of Tripoli—belong to one and the same family. Their social institutions, their physique, their arts and crafts, and their language, all point in the same direction. But how great a race was that of which these people seem to be the only remnants, and over what territories it was originally spread, it is hard to say.

I have lived a good deal amongst Berber peoples—in the Djebala district bordering on the Gharb province (North Morocco), in the Haha and Shiadma countries of South Morocco, and in the Tripolitan mountain country round about Gharien, in which I passed a good deal of time as the war in the desert dragged uneventfully on. And I have had some dealings, also, with Riff mountaineers (in whom I suspect a strong admixture of late European blood), and with the Hoggar Tuaregs who joined the Turks at Azizia. And, in what I learnt of all these people, I have found always certain indications that lead me to think that their past history was not confined to Northern Africa.

What I know of the Berbers has so many points in common with what is known of the pre-Aryan population of Europe—or at least, of North-Western Europe—that I have come to believe it more than probable that it was against the ancestors of these very Berbers

that our Keltic forefathers fought for the possession of western Gaul, of Spain, and of the British Isles.

I wish that some high British authority upon ethnology would turn his attention to the Berbers. The study of the autochthonous races of Northern Africa—or at least, the study of the immediately pre-Semitic inhabitants of that region—would be, I fancy, a comparatively simple affair; for much of the material is still living and fairly free in many districts from the influences of the dominant population.

Compared with an investigation of the traces left by the aborigines of Europe it should be a very easy business; for our knowledge of the people who held Europe before the arrival of our own racial stock is limited in the extreme. Except in the possible cases of the Basques and the westernmost Irish (neither of whom are free from external influences) we have to rely on the very scrappy information handed down to us from the writers of antiquity, the majority of whom did not get their information at first hand. And investigations of Berber ethnological problems would, I feel certain, throw a valuable light on those connected with the pre-Aryan peoples of Europe.

I think, in the first place, that it might establish the fact that there are amongst the Berbers of Morocco, at all events, large numbers

directly descended from Europeans whose gradual retrocession southward and westward before the attacks of the oncoming Keltic hordes—the Aryan vanguard—was being conducted through western France and Spain and the Balearic Isles into Africa, at a period not much prior to, and possibly co-temporaneous with the resistance offered by Greece to the Persian pretensions in Eastern Europe. This retrocession was a slow process. We have no authentic records of the bitter and protracted wars whereby our fathers gained possession of Europe ; but it is more than probable that they extended over centuries. Even so late as in the time of Cæsar they were not over. Cæsar himself speaks of aboriginals inhabiting the centre of the British Isles, beyond the zone held by the Kelts who opposed him—and he distinctly terms these latter invaders from Belgium, and says that they were a more civilised people than the aboriginals, “Who do not sow corn, but live on milk and flesh, and clothe themselves in skins.”

We are left, however, to conjecture from the scantiest of data what manner of folk were they whom our forefathers, invading Europe, dispossessed. Some say that they were directly descended from the Neolithic cave men. Hazard identifies them with such variously situated people as the old Etruscans, the Ligurians, and

the Silures of Tacitus. Ornaments of gold, like those of the Etruscans, tunics and sandals of esparto grass, skin mantles, ornaments of shell, of jet and of boars' tusk, have been found in Granada, in the Sierra Nevada, and in other regions known to have been their later strongholds. There are grisly classic legends of cannibal cave-dwellers inhabiting the southern shores of the Mediterranean, and to these the cut and broken bones of children and young people found among the edible debris of the Iberians seem to lend significant colour. From these and other data one reconstructs, as the geologist reconstructs his fossil monsters, a small, dark, saturnine race; nomads or hunters for the most part; venerators of women, and frequently according to them the leading social positions; fire worshippers whose rites may still be traced in the Baal fires, Beltane fires, and midsummer and May-day practices of modern Europe; addicted also to human sacrifice; indifferent architects, capable, it may be, of erecting pile dwellings, but not above turning to account any good roomy cavern that might offer itself as a possible dwelling; stubborn soldiers when impressed, as the Carthaginians almost certainly impressed them (and also the North African autochthons), to serve as light-armed legionaries; shy traffickers with the Phœnician traders—and that is almost

all we can even deduct from historical evidence.

Of their language, one may say we know practically nothing whatsoever. If the Basque be an isolated remnant of it, the fact gives us little or nothing to go upon. Philology is a most dubious and misleading factor in an ethnic argument; and if the attempts now being made by German investigators to establish affinities between the Basque language and the various dialects spoken by the dispersed Berber races should ever be irrefutably successful, then those who are disposed to admit an ethnological value to philological assertions will find themselves face to face with a stupendous theory. For so far as any definite affinities can be said to have been discovered between the Basque and any other known languages, they tend (if allowed to have ethnological weight) to connect the Basque people with the Esquimaux and North-American families of mankind. Upon which our philological-ethnologist might proceed to establish some theory of an Iberian-Esquimaux-North-American-Berber ethnic substratum of the population of three-quarters of the northern section of the globe. Indeed, he might go further, by linking up the Hamitic-speaking Berbers with the ancient people of Akkad, whose eastward-going sub-divisions are held by some to have peopled central Asia and even China.

Such are the limitless morasses into which philology may lead the incautious ethnologist ; and in which, having got him well bogged, she is apt to leave him to flounder.

I will, however, risk one philological deduction here. One of the first features which strikes the student of the Berber tongue (or, at least, of the Shilhah spoken in southern Morocco and the Sus, and the dialect of the Djebala) is its deficiency in terms expressive of anything outside the circumstance of the most rudimentary civilisation. Speaking of the elements, natural forces, and primitive life in general, the Berber can use his own speech, unmixed. But when referring to the appanages of a more advanced civilisation—when speaking of commerce, architecture, arts and crafts, guns, the more complex human passions, and so forth—he must borrow from the Arabic.

From this I infer that the Berber-speaking people hardly rose unaided from the nomad hunter and primitive agriculturist stages of civilisation. Obviously, from what we can gather concerning the mode of life of the pre-Aryan Europeans, their speech, did it survive, would contain precisely similar deficiencies.

I have spoken of the "Berber tongue," relying on the assertion that the dialects of the Berbers of Morocco, the Kabyles of Algiers, and the Tuareg and other Saharan tribes, neither

Semitic nor negro, have now been proved to be merely variants of one language.

It is in comparison between what we know of the social customs and institutions of the pre-Aryan Europeans (whom I prefer not to refer to by the somewhat narrow term of Iberi) and those of the Berbers of the present day, that I find the strongest indications of a connection between the two races. And foremost, and quite the most important of these, is the singular social position of women—a position practically constituting matriarchy in either case.

An examination of the scanty and scattered evidence on the subject of the social life of the aboriginal Europeans, inclines one to the belief that, if not actually submitting to tribal government by women, they, at all events, accorded a remarkably high position to females. It is, I think, Professor Karl Pearson who points out the necessarily strong and authoritative influence of the mother in all primitive social stages. Notably in the nomad hunter stage of civilisation, it is round the mother, and not round the father, that the home group must have built itself. It was the mother, too, who gave the first impulse to rudimentary agriculture. The first harvests were doubtless those herbs which the stay-at-home female had leisure to cultivate round the cave mouth, what time

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the male hunted his quarry abroad. Ceres, Demeter, the Earth-Mother, was rightly sexed by the ancients ; and in their homage to her we see the relics of perhaps a very ancient religion whose essential was the Maternal Principle.

Scattered all over Europe we find traces of this ancient woman-reverence—a cult which outside religious matters, in which prophetesses, sybils, and vestal virgins still held influence, was destined to be lost or greatly obscured until the rise of chivalry.

Among the ancient Iberians, women were recognised as chieftainesses of the clans, and as heads of families.

As late as in the eighteenth century women inherited property among the Basques, to the exclusion of males.

The epitaphs of the Etruscans name only the mother of the dead—a significant tribute to the social standing of women.

I believe that I am right in saying that the Georgians—non-European inhabitants of the Southern Caucasus from time immemorial—admitted women until comparatively recently to their councils, and in time of war left the administration of the villages in the hands of female authorities.

Now, in the Berber world, woman holds a singularly high, if not the very highest, place. Her position is the more marked by contrast

with that of her Arab sister, who, as is the case throughout the Mohammedan world, is, at best, the most useful animal known to man. I have on more than one occasion visited Berber villages, particularly on the border-land that separates the Djebala territory from the Gharb, in the north of Morocco, and have been received and entertained, in the absence of the sheikh, or kaid, by his mother, who appears to be invested with full authority and responsibility for the village and people of her son. In one instance, calling at the village of Si Kassim, on the southern frontier of the Gharb, where the Berber element, even in the plains, is strongly marked, I was welcomed by the "chieftainess." The kaid himself was away at the time, but the old lady was manifestly capable and willing to administer during his absence, and obviously not sorry to have an opportunity of entertaining an unusual traveller. It happened that I was obliged to press on, and therefore to refuse the hospitality which she offered; and she, conceiving that I refused because I doubted her right to offer entertainment, brought witnesses to assure me that, in the absence of the kaid, his mother (or other elderly female relative) is fully authorised to act as chief of the community, and consequently as hostess to travellers who may visit her son's district.

In a purely Arab village the place of the

absent chief would have been filled by a council of old men.

The very title of a married woman amongst the Berbers is significant. In the Shilhah dialect the word is *tamghart*—the feminine form of *amghar*, which means sheikh, or headman. (*Tamdort*, the Djebala term for woman in general, is obviously the same word.)

Incidentally one may add the significant fact that amongst the Tripolitan Berbers all manner of mystic and occult powers are ascribed to women, and that in many villages they are the keepers of the unwritten tribal traditional histories.

In all Berber dialects of which I have learned any words the sun is feminine ; and the moon is her child. Tradition says that in the pre-Islamic religion of the Berbers the Creator was a woman—the Universal Mother.

The ancient religion of the Berbers (who, by the way, passed during the Dark Ages through a phase of Christianity) is a most interesting subject for investigation, and I would give a great deal to be able to make a scientific record of the innumerable superstitions of these strange people. Superstitious rites are almost invariably vestiges of lost or forgotten religious ceremonials—witness the May-pole, the mistle-toe, Flurry-days and harvest ceremonies, in which even the English rustic perpetuates the

phallic rites and saturnalia of antiquity. Under the somewhat loosely worn cloak of Islam, the Berber still cherishes a hundred half-forgotten beliefs.

I have both been told of, and seen for myself, the strange votive offerings—rags, shells, potsherds and cereal grains—made by barren women to the spirits of fertility which they believe to haunt certain trees. These offerings are variously made. In some districts they are laid, with scrupulous attention to order, in clefts and cavities in a trunk. In others, they are tied to the branches, with the exception of the grain, which is strewn round the roots.

I think that fire-worship must have been an important feature, if not the leading one, in the ancient religion of the Berbers. They have a ceremony closely corresponding to the North British Beltane fires (a direct legacy to us from the pre-Aryan Britons), in which they gather with song and dance round the midsummer fire. I am told that amongst the Djebala, despite the fact that fuel is often very scarce, this ceremony is frequently kept up for three consecutive nights.

Moreover, the Berbers are believers in fire as a healer. I do not refer to their cruel and ridiculous practice of firing their horses, and even their dogs, for every real or fancied ailment; but to a system of cure which, so I have

been repeatedly assured, both by Arabs and Berbers, they practise upon themselves. It is principally employed against broken bones, and such injuries as may be sustained by a fall from a horse. The patient is laid in a shallow trough, scraped in the ground; earth is piled over him, and on this a fire is built. An eye-witness of this treatment applied to a man who had fallen from the roof of a house, assured me solemnly that though the patient had "broken every bone," he rose at the end of an hour as well as ever he had been. "The strength of the fire," said my (Arab) informant gravely, "knits together the broken parts of the bones and drives the illness out of the body into the earth."

So far, I have endeavoured to forge what links I can from a comparison between what history (and guess-work) have to say on the subject of the pre-Aryan Europeans, and such features of the Berber people of Morocco as have most impressed me. I wish that I could supplement this rather sketchy comparison by a résumé of what classical tradition says concerning the forefathers of the pre-Semitic population of Northern Africa—the Gaetulians, the Numidians and the *Mağves* of Herodotus.

Some definite knowledge of the queer Stonehenge-like circles and monoliths of North Africa might perhaps throw a light on the subject. I have seen more than one of these in the

Gharien hills ; and caravan-men from beyond Ghadames and Ghat told me that in the Tuareg territories the only landmarks are often tall stone posts, like obelisks, set up in the desert. I believe that to this day the Tuareg mark the graves of their dead with monoliths. And the Arabs may possibly have taken their custom of heaping up cairns of stone in honour of their saints ; for such cairns are common in all Berber regions that I have visited. They remind one strongly of the cairn-graves of Europe.

However, I am only too well aware that I am not qualified to pursue these speculations scientifically. I can only hope that, some day, some soundly instructed English scientist will be moved to do so. French and, I believe, German ethnologists have been at work upon the subject.

The very spirit in which I first became interested in the matter was a highly unscientific one, seeing that I permitted myself to be guided by a sort of intuition.

It was the physical aspect of an individual Berber, as he trotted at the tail of a pack-mule through the great argan forest north of Agadir, that seemed to reveal to me in one momentary flash more of the history and qualities of the Berber race than any reading and research could teach me. I had known that "the

Berbers are the ethnic substratum of the greater part of Northern Africa." But the knowledge was no more than just that dry, instructive phrase, until I looked into that strange, wild visage, with its light-hued, glittering eyes; and felt with a sudden shock that I was face to face with a type of perhaps the oldest of the races of mankind.

He had been trotting before me, tirelessly, with bent knees, and long arms hanging, ape-like. I had idly noticed his squat, yet small-boned frame, his slightly humped shoulders sparsely tufted with rusty brownish fell; his lobeless ears, faun-like and pointed beneath the shock of thick, coarse hair and the pale, dark hue of his skin. Then, unexpectedly, he looked back across his shoulder; his eyes met mine; and it seemed to me that, with a faintly uneasy qualm, I read at a glimpse the vast, forgotten history of his race. As those smallish eyes, of a chilling paleness, stared from above broad cheek bones into mine, my memory flew back at once to the misty western coast of Ireland. For there, where the last fragments of a race immeasurably old, pre-Celtic, pre-Aryan, still linger in the barren corner of a land once theirs from coast to coast (with many a richer land beside), I have stared uneasily into just such glittering inhuman eyes—eyes set in just such high-cheeked, narrow-chinned faces, peering

through just such a tangle of coarse black hair. And I knew my man at once for the blood-brother of those forgotten folk of whom Europe has lost almost all trace.

Being started by this suddenly awakened memory upon a certain train of thought, it was by a singular name that I identified my Berber, for I said to myself : " This is a Firbolg ! "

Now, the Firbolgs, in the hazy mythology of ancient Ireland, are the primitive people whom the first Celtic invaders found and fought with in Ireland. These early Celts, called in Irish lore the Tuatha Dedannan, were afterwards much harried by the Fomorian pirates from the black north, who may or who may not have been pre-historic Scandinavians, and were finally invaded and overcome by the second Celtic wave, the Milesians, long prior to the Christian era. But before these disasters befell the Tuatha Dedannan, they had fought many terrible battles with the Firbolgs, whom in the end they totally dispossessed, driving some westward into the barren land across the Shannon, where the remnants of their descendants dwell to this day ; and forcing the rest to flee clean out of Ireland, to the south.

Of the strife between Tuatha Dedannan and Firbolg, between Aryan invader and pre-Aryan holder of the land, the old Irish legends (which, after all, are history not ill remembered) speak

with a certain horror, ascribing magical practices and unclean, unholy customs to the dreadful Firbolgs. One pictures the struggle for the possession of the soil not as war between men and men, but as a fight wherein men strove to rid the land of noisome and rather fearsome beasts. I cannot at the moment call to mind anything in European folklore other than the Irish which may be taken as a memory or record, however obfuscated, of the wars between Aryan and pre-Aryan, as the waves of our forefathers rolled over Western Europe before the dawn of history. But I do not doubt that such records might easily enough be traced: and, further, I have a strange conviction that many of them would contain admissible references to this same inexplicable horror and loathing wherewith the Irish legends say that the Aryans regarded the foemen whom they dispossessed. Many centuries later, when the Hunnish hordes swept into Europe at the tail of Attila, the Aryan was destined to feel once more the very same passionate racial aversion: and of this, at least, we have in Gibbon and in the host of earlier historians upon whom he levied toll, unquestionable evidence.

For my part it pleases my fancy to ascribe the faint sensation of discomfort and disquiet which I, and other Europeans experience on meeting the glance of the Berber, to a dormant

hereditary memory, such as moves the long-domesticated horse to frantic terror when, in some quiet English lane, the scent of the larger carnivoræ is borne to his nostrils from the vans of a travelling menagerie. I can half believe that this vague repulsion is stirred within me by these harmless nomad tribesmen because of the intense dread and hatred which, countless generations ago, animated my ancestors against theirs. I picture to myself so vividly that I could almost say that I remember, the terrible prehistoric wars, prolonged, no doubt through centuries, during which isolated groups of Aryan settlers dwelt under the ever present menace of extermination at the hands of those whom they had driven to lurk in impenetrable forests and mountain fastnesses. The dispossessed became the Terror by Night (and hence, perhaps, in some measure, our childish fear of darkness), lurking ever in the neighbourhood of small and scattered outpost settlements, round whose folds and cattle-pounds and homesteads they prowled, beastlike, after sunset. They hid in the heather and the thickets, rising like shadows behind unwary shepherds and hunters, and killing their victims in dreadful silence with flint knife, stone-headed hammer, or often enough, by the grip of small, vice-like hands upon the wind-pipe, and teeth sunk in the jugular. Above all, they stole children, reserv-

ing them until the age of puberty for sacrifice with horrid rites to the God of Fire.

The Aryan settlers made organised expeditions for their extermination, killing every member of the hated race, regardless of age or sex, that they could come upon. They hunted them as they hunted beasts, finding them, like beasts, abnormally fleet of foot, and incredibly hard to kill when caught.

And the pre-Aryans retaliated as best they might and with bestial cruelties, no doubt—such cruelties as the Berber rebels practised during the revolt round Fez last year, upon captives whom I subsequently saw so haggled and mangled as hardly to be known for what had been men.

I believe, then, that the wars between Aryan and pre-Aryan bred such an intense and passionate racial antipathy that its vestiges lie dormant to this day, enabling instinct to recognise in the Berbers hereditary foemen whom science may never be able to identify. But, though she may never identify them, science has yet to prove that the Berbers are not the universal Barbarians, opponents of the advancing Aryan hosts in an age forgotten and long past.

XVIII

THERE is a mediæval Arab castle, now a barracks for the Turkish soldiers, perched upon an overhanging crag at Gharien. From its windy battlements, across many leagues of desert I have seen, on clearest days, the sea ; and by night we often saw the wavering beams of searchlights from the Italian ships. Yet the fortress does not overhang the desert itself ; for between it and the infertile sands lie many wild and jumbled mountain peaks, with narrow gorges, gloriously green in spring. Looking straight down, as though between one's feet, one sees the tops of date-palms and the roofs of poor farmers' homesteads in the valley at the base of the castle rock. The steep opposing side of the ravine is terraced into countless tiny plots and gardens, whose soil has been carried in baskets and ass-panniers up the slope, to cover the rocky ledges.

At dawn and sunset, I have seen strange sights from this eyrie. The rising sun draws ghostly mists up from the watered valley,

shrouding the mountains as in a delicate curtain; and suddenly the wind comes howling through the gorge, and rends the filmy veil in two, and whirls its lace-work hither and thither. Then, as though the hangings of a window had been torn aside, you look out upon clear distance through a narrow space whose either side is blurred and dim. So steep is the ravine that, on its western side in the new morning, a man may stand bathed in bright sunlight to the waist, while all below him is in shadow, as though he stood waist-deep in some impalpable dusky lake.

And in the evening, hanging in mid-air, the watchers on the towers look out over a magic land—a fairy region of soft gold and rose and water-green, whose colours shift and melt into one another, till the desert seems no longer solid earth, but filmy and ethereal, like a gauzy veil of many hues. The pansy-purple mountain-shadows creep eastward over the sand, and the rosy vastness darkens, while the sky, from sulky crimson, fades to orange, and from orange into palest gold, faint green, and then, at last, a pure and luminous blue, with silver fires whose brightness grows as the blueness slowly deepens.

The castle is old and partly ruined. It suits the Arab humour never to repair. Thus in the strange city of Fez I have lived in the half of a splendid palace, inlaid with loveliest mosaics,



OLD CASTLE
ARAB CASTLE
GHARIEN

ARAB CASTLE, GHARIEN.

with carven, painted cornices and windows guarded by fine traceries; and the other half, at one time no less magnificent, was crumbled to decay, unfit for housing even mules.

So with this castle here in Gharien, the outer walls showed bravely, but within the courtyard there were chambers whose roofs had fallen in, and corridors whose floors were heaped with fallen brick and rubble to the roof, so that all passage through was blocked. An archway, buttressed, and having a mighty iron-sheathed gate with spikes, admitted to the courtyard. Set in this great gate, there was a little panel-door fit for one man to enter by. A Turkish sentry stood within the arch, in a recess piled high with ancient saddlery and harness.

The courtyard had an old well in its centre, and was paved with huge uneven blocks of stone, in such irregular fashion that to walk it, even by day, was to court a twisted foot, and, in the dark, to risk a broken leg. There were one-storied chambers all around the inner walls, with unglazed, iron-barred windows, whereto horses stood tethered by the bridle. On the roofs of these chambers one might walk and sit in the sun. A most uneven stair of stone, with a broken wooden hand-rail, led up to them, and to the upper rooms on either side the arch. But there was yet another storey; for, on the northern corner of the square—that which over-

hung the deep ravine—there was a high tower, reached by tunnellings and twisting steps, which brought one out at last upon a battlemented platform of inconceivable windiness. It was from this windy tower that one seemed to look out over half the world.

I had a room in the outer castle wall—a long, low chamber overlooking a kind of fosse. And this had been, in ancient days, the women's apartment when, before the coming of the Turks, some Arab feudal chieftain held his court at Gharien. For the windows were close latticed, so that the sunlight filtering through the wood-work made criss-cross patterns on the floor. And under the windows ran a high raised dais, on which in times gone by the lord of the place had reclined with his painted favourites, hearing the music and watching the dancing of their attendants. Here I slept and ate ; but the most of my time, when not riding abroad, I spent upon the battlements.

There was one other big building in Gharien, and this was modern. Till the war broke out, this place had been a school ; but now its classrooms were made wards for sick and wounded. It was a hospital, in the charge of two immaculate, frock-coated Turkish surgeons from Paris, who at first found time hang heavy on their hands, but had afterwards more work than they could do.

Riding one morning by the walled yard of this one-time school, I heard laughter, not of the sly, appreciative Arab kind, but full-voiced, heedless mirth of Europeans. And, looking over the wall, I saw half a dozen men in most ill-fitting khaki, playing at quoits with heavy, rounded stones. One of them hailed me in Italian, which I do not understand, and seemed to invite me to join them in their game.

Arab and Turkish convalescents sitting in the shade of the wall watched their game. The Arabs showed a lively comprehension of the play and of the wagers made about it; and when some small dispute arose amongst the players, more than one Arab must needs have his unintelligible say. For such is the passion for meddling amongst these people that no man's quarrel is safe from their interference; but at the first note of dissension, all bystanders must rush in, with strident clamour and unrestrained gesticulations, to set the matter right. An Arab cannot watch you untie a knot, or buckle a girth, but he must thrust his hand over yours to show you how it should be done. And I have seen spectators at a game of chess, hopping on one foot after another, clawing their beards, and finally, no longer able to hold back, pushing away the players, to move the pieces in accordance with their own ideas.

The Turkish spectators of this stone game

watched with slow smiles and dully wondering faces. They are a heavy minded people, amiably stupid, and most pleasant to deal with, for they never interfere.

The players were, of course, Italian prisoners. They had been captured by an Arab skirmishing party soon after the October massacres; and, indeed, almost within sight of that mosque at Sok el Juma in which the bound and mutilated bodies of four hundred Arab women and children were discovered. Yet from the first they had been most kindly treated. They were brought on camels over the desert to Gharien, and their wounds—one of them had a shattered arm — having been carefully tended, they were practically allowed to go where they chose.

“And,” they told me through an interpreter, “we eat of the best, like the Turks themselves. The Turks have even allowed us to use their telegraph, to send home to our families the news that we are alive and well treated.”

“Gargano has had his wounded arm cared for,” said one, “as though he were an officer. And he has received money that was sent to him from his father in Milan.”

“And do you walk about here in safety?” I inquired.

“Why, yes. Even to the market on market days, to buy cigarettes. The Arabs know us.

Their children follow us about, and point us out ; but they do not hurt us."

This, it appeared, was true. Indeed, afterwards I often saw the Italians followed about by children, who carried their market purchases for them. Once I saw Turkish soldiers helping them to wash their shirts.

The kindness of their captors to Italian prisoners was unaccountable. In the case of the slow and more good-natured Turkish soldiers, it was not so hard to understand ; but that Arabs should crowd about a captive with kindly interest, and scarcely a hint of animosity, often puzzled me.

For instance, shortly after the skirmish at 'Bu Siddra, in which an Italian force was trapped and almost exterminated in a garden, some Arabs brought in an Italian trooper whom they had taken alive. He was taken to Azizia, and it was the old Tobchi, the commander of artillery, who first showed him to me.

It was near the hour of sunset, and as I sat on the edge of my camp-bed, doing nothing in particular, the Tobchi's orderly came in, and spread a praying rug beneath one of the eastern windows. Then the Tobchi came in, fingering his rosary ; and, kicking off his slippers, took his stand upon the rug, facing the east. He had not seen me at first, for I sat a little behind him in the dusk ; but presently his eye fell on me,

for he kept his eyes wide open as he prayed ; bowing, kneeling, and prostrating himself, and glancing absently about him all the while. His lips moved and pious formulæ lost themselves in his great beard ; but at the same time he managed to convey to me that he had something of interest to say to me as soon as his prayers should be finished.

I half rose, to leave the room, but he motioned me with a sidelong movement of his hand to wait a little. And at last, with a great sigh and a final whisper of the name of God, he stepped off the mat and said to me, all in a breath :

“ The peace upon you and what do you think now we have in the little room over the arch ? ”

“ And to you the peace, Sidi, but how can I know ? ”

“ Well then, my dear, we have caught another of them. Our clever lads have taken another. Yes, yes, like dogs catching a hare.”

“ What,” said I, “ is it a spy ? ”

“ No, indeed. No, thank God, none of our traitor countrymen, but a true 'Talian, as God lives. And six fine lances. I go to see him fed. He eats wonderfully. Come and see.”

The Italian soldier sat at his ease on soft cushions, with dishes heaped before him ; and Turkish officers, coffee cups in hand, sat in a circle round him, urging him to eat. They fêted

him as though he were a newly arrived brother officer.

The Tobchi led me in and found a place for me close by the captive, whom he patted on the shoulder.

“This is he,” cried the Tobchi. “Isn’t he a fine fellow? And yonder are the lances.” He pointed to a corner of the room where six iron lances of the Italian cavalry were stacked. They had been picked up by Arabs after the fight at ’Bu Siddra.

The trooper’s name was Nicola, and he was from the IXth Regiment. He told, for about the twentieth time, the story of his capture. It seemed that he had been one of a small scouting party which had been surprised by a force of Arabs between Ain Zara and Fonduk ’Bu Geshir. He had tried to jump a bank, but his horse was no jumper, and stumbling, threw him off.

“Then,” said Nicola simply, “my beast ran away after the rest, and the Arabs came and caught me.”

I asked him, had they not mishandled him at all.

“No,” he returned, “they did not hurt me. At first they rolled about with me on the ground, and when we got up all my pockets were inside out. They had taken everything they found; money, cigarettes—even my handkerchief, a blue and white one, nearly clean. But they did

not hurt me. They put me on a little donkey, and led me for a long way."

"Were you afraid?" I asked.

"No," he said. "I was not afraid."

"But I should have been very much afraid in such a case."

"Well, then"—he smiled engagingly—"I was. I thought I would be burnt alive; and certainly those who led me laughed, and made a show that I was to be hanged. I was very frightened. But after dark we came to some tents, and I was taken to a great man—an Arab—who put his hand on my head and said I was his son. And he gave me plenty, plenty to eat. I stayed one day in his tent, and then they brought me here on a horse. I have been very well treated."

And certainly he was. He was treated like a regimental pet. The Turks gave him cigarettes and cubes of sugar, and as much to eat and drink as he could take. He was at first still a little afraid to go out and show himself amongst the Arabs; but when he found that, though they crowded round, they meant no harm to him at all, he soon bore himself confidently enough. For a day or two, before they sent him up to Gharien, he was a notable figure in Azizia. I have heard children, strayed past the Turkish sentries at the courtyard door, point him out gleefully to one another.

CHILDREN FOLLOW THE ROUMI 173

“ See now, that’s he ! That’s the Roumi, God cut him off. Give me a penny, Roumi, for the love of God. A cigarette, then ? Ah, and another ? ”

He became liberal of cigarettes and sugar ; and the children, cursing his religion by force of habit and without thinking, followed him about, from cupboard love if not from real affection. He was a merry-faced, square-jawed Piedmontese peasant, with a faculty for enjoying himself in all circumstances. He told me that even camp life in Ain Zara had been bearable, and that despite the rain, Christmas was a happy day, with sweets and candied fruits sent from Italy, and music—a piano—to accompany the camp songs.

XIX

IT was my habit in Gharien to ride or walk abroad a good deal, sometimes alone, sometimes with a zeptir, and sometimes (when their duties left them free) with Rifaat Bey and Yusuf Zia Bey, the Turkish doctors. And in those hills I found many traces of civilisations long since dead ; and should, no doubt, have found a great many more, could I have gone a little further afield, to Gersa, Misdah, or Tarhuna. But for such long trips I had just then no time, and so confined myself to explorations of the strange deep valleys and the craggy peaks upon whose sides the Berber villages are perched.

It was a pleasant time, for already the spring was come into the hills, and wild crocus blossoms starred the meadow-lands with blue ; and the scent of wild thyme filled the air.

I found deep wells, with curious inscriptions on their rims ; strange ruined fanes and altars of crudely dressed stone ; old stone drinking troughs engraved with severe geometrical designs unlike any Semitic art that I have seen, and yet not like

old Greek or Roman work, such as the colonists from Europe might have wrought in classic times. Once, in a village market-place, a seller of lemons, changing a small piece of silver for me, gave me, amongst the handful of defaced flûs, an ancient coin of bronze, of the size of an English halfpenny. On one side it bore in relief the head of a goddess, Greek-visaged, with full lips, and nose and brow in one straight line; and on the reverse there was the figure of a horse, with wreaths, or ears of corn, so far as the defacement of the coin would let one see.

Asking the man what coin it was, I learnt from him that many such are found amongst the small change of these parts.

" True, they are not real flûs," said he. " We call them antica—a Roubi word—and lucky men have found them in the earth. But they may pass for flûs. Thou'lt not refuse to take it ? "

I did not; but afterwards, to my great sorrow, I lost it, during my illness.

One morning I took my horse and rode eastward from Gharien to the head of the second of those rocky, steep ascents that lie between it and the desert. It was a morning of bright sunshine, with a glorious freshness of the air, as after a heavy thunderstorm in June at home. Crested larks ran jerkily across the paths, or soared singing into the air; but though they

sang the same song as ours, it seemed to me, no doubt from old associations, that here the notes were out of place. The song of the skylark (somewhat over-rated though it usually is) is the expression in music of lawn-like English meadows, with huge elms in them, and placid cows browsing, and buttercups and daisies all a-blow. It seemed to me that day incongruous, as though, in the midst of desert war-songs to the roll of drums, a singer should break forth with "Barbara Allen."

As I rode among the olives I could hear the twittering of other birds, and once a flock of goldfinches flew by me, hunting I know not what. Goldfinches are common in North Africa. In Tangier, in the native town and markets, almost every merchant's shop will have its tiny bamboo cage and little prisoner with crimson mask and black wings barred with gold. Sleeping in a room whose door was never closed, I have been often awakened by their angry chattering as they fought for the water in my basin, quite close to the head of my couch. The Arabs make them very tame. I have seen a boy walk in the street with a goldfinch perched upon his thumb-joint.

I came to the head of the steep ascent, and looked down over a tumbled stream of grey boulders, amongst which grew spiny clumps and shrubs. This pass, though not so hard to climb

as is the first, because it runs over the shoulder of a hill instead of up the face of it, is none the less so steep and long, and cruelly set with sharp rocks, that no one would descend it for the mere pleasure of climbing once again to the summit.

Nevertheless, upon a peak some miles away, there stood a queer stone tower, of such unusual shape that I had long intended to examine it.

So now I stood at the top of that vile road, looking about to see whether I might not, without traversing it, get across the valley. And sure enough, I found a narrow track, a little steep, but fairly free from stones, which came up winding from the valley on the eastern side, as though it had led past the foot of this very peak to which I wished to go. Therefore, I set Bimbashi gingerly scrambling down it, propping himself with his forefeet, and now and then sliding, with snorts and angry squeals, a dozen yards at a stretch. And at last, after many flounderings, we came upon level ground, on the fringe of a thick and unkempt wood of olive trees, with many paths winding away amongst the trunks. Of these I rode along the broadest that went towards the mountain of the tower, now, as I judged, some three hours' ride away. But in a little while I found the path give out, and I was riding over thick short grass, unmarked by track or path of any kind.

Still, I could see my tower and mountain

through the trees, and so I set Bimbashi's head towards it, albeit with some misgivings; for I know that when a road does not go straight in such a country to its goal, there is generally a reason for its deflection, and that where there is no road at all, even in the desert, it is wisest to go warily.

Presently I realised that, rough and unkempt as was this wood through which I rode, it must have once been very finely ordered. In fact it had been a vast plantation, whose trees had been made to grow in long straight lines, with equal spaces in between, separating every tree from its fellows. For all the oldest trees, when one took pains to distinguish them, were thus arranged in artificial order. Where the old trees themselves were lacking, rotting stumps and fallen trunks still marked the place where they should be. And by green mounds, in circles and in squares about their roots, I knew that once this grove had been tended carefully by men.

At the further side of the wood I came upon open country once again—a vast rolling parkland, not fed upon by any herds of goats or flocks of sheep that I could see, and yet most evidently once a cultivated ground. For, on all sides, low mounds and banks of once bare soil, now clothed with grass, showed how the fields and gardens had been marked out long ago. In

places, the grass still faintly shewed the furrow-lines, like patterns drawn on watered silk.

And, all at once, much nearer than the far-off tower to which I had meant to go, I saw a steep bare hill that towered above the place where fields had been ; and on its very summit stood a ruined castle ; roofless, with wild shrubs growing on its battlements, and doorless entrances that gaped like toothless mouths.

I rode to the foot of the hill, and some way up its slope, until at last I must dismount and go afoot. I hobbled my horse, fore-foot to hind-foot, and took off his bridle, which I hid in the thick of a heathery tuft.

Then I began to climb. It was not an easy climb. If ever there was a road or path of any kind that led to the ruined fortress—as I suppose there must have been—it had been obliterated by rains and shifting boulders, and great blocks of roughly-dressed stone that once had formed a part of the outer fortifications. The sun shone with a pitiless, hammering heat that radiated from the rocks, whence basking lizards scuttled into cracks and crannies. I tore my hands and clothing, for in places I must travel on all fours ; and bruised my knees and shins incessantly upon the rocks. Until, at last, most wonderfully tired, and very much wishing that I did not wear clothes, I came upon the top ; and could have almost dropped a pebble on the back of

my horse as he cropped the grass four hundred feet below.

I went through what had been the great main gateway of the castle—the stone door-sockets were still there on either side—and found myself in a quite small earth-floored inner court, with nine door-holes opening upon it. Some led through tunnelled corridors to where great rooms had been ; some into long and narrow rooms, domed as to the ceilings ; and some into the space between the inner court and the outer fortifications. At one corner, a higher shaft of walls showed where a tower must have stood, for there were remnants of a flight of winding stairs against the inner side.

Bats flew forth, squeaking, from the tunnels as I went within ; and here and there on the walls and mounds of fallen masonry I found owl-pellets, with the bones of dead young mice, and bronzy shards of beetles. Once, quite unexpectedly, I came upon a little stone-grey owl perched on a broken door-jamb ; and he after blinking in the galvanic manner of startled night birds, flew suddenly over my head, with an angry, wheezing note.

From what had been the battlements I looked over all the once cultivated domain of this castle's lords. Now, more clearly than before, I saw where fields had been, and how the water had been made to run through tiny aqueducts

banked upon either side with clay. There were even, at the foot of the hill upon the side till now hidden from me, vestiges of long fallen houses, their plan still shown by crumbling lines of wall.

The castle itself, up to which peasants on the feudal lords' estate had doubtless often fled for refuge from raiding enemies, had once been large indeed. For now I saw that it had been built upon the Ring-Burg plan, ring within ring of fortifications, like the castles of the Goths. I fancied that I counted four such circles. Never before have I seen Arab castles built on such a plan; and yet from other features I felt sure that Arabs had indeed once lorded it upon this hill-top.

I went into one of the chambers with the domed ceiling, and then, astonished, carefully explored the rest. For I had found two sturdy, well-bricked arches, such as the classic Romans might have built, and, very likely had. For certainly the Romans knew these hills, and there are still to be seen not far from Gharien traces of a square-formed camp with fosse and vallum that could hardly be the work of any other race. And along many of the caravan-roads from the Mediterranean to the Great Desert are ruins, roughly equidistant by a day's march, which I think in classic times were Punic trading posts, and later, Roman (Byzantine) stations.

And so, perhaps, this ruined fort was first a Berber stronghold ; and then, perhaps, Greek colonists from the islands came, and Roman legionaries, leaving each their mark, until the warriors of the Yemen conquered all before them, and some war-weary chief, finding the country good, and an eyrie ready made, made this his home, and from it ruled the country round about.

Or, perhaps, when the power of Byzantium was on the wane, the Berbers held the castle once again, and made it a stronghold against the conquering Semites till the land was wasted on all sides. There are countless ruins such as this among the hills of Tripoli ; each with its message for those trained in the reading of such sermons in stone. But the archeologist has ventured little into Tripoli, where these strange records have so long been lying.

XX

As I rode back towards Gharien, I was aware of an old man who stood upon a point of rock, shouting to me, and waving his hands; and as I continued to advance, he leapt down and ran towards me. It was a henchman of Sheikh Abdullah el Sôf, a wealthy man of those parts, sent to waylay me with hospitable invitations to a feast. This Sheikh Abdullah was an old man, fattish, with a warty, genial countenance, and eyes the colour of blue porcelain. His runner delivered the message.

“The Sheikh prays that you, Nasrany, will sup with him to-night at his house; and I am to bring you there if you will come.”

“I’ll come,” said I, “and gladly. What’s for dinner, uncle?”

The old fellow wagged his head and patted his stomach.

“Dishes in the Roumi fashion,” he began, “on which Larbi, our cook-lad, has been busy half the day; and a lamb, too—I killed it with these five” (holding up his right hand)—“and

soups and sweeties, and kiftat (rissoles) and sfinaj (fritters)—Oh! a table to bring water in the mouth.”

We went together, he holding the stirrup, and babbling unctuously of the broken meats that would fall to the share of himself and his fellow servants after the guests had fed.

“Not that we feed ever less than well in the house of El Sôf,” he explained, “but here comes a dinner in a hundred.”

He told me how he had been down to the village—the Sheikh lived well outside of Gharien—to find me, and had learned that I had ridden off alone early in the morning.

“And art thou not afraid to go about so? Wullah! I think I see thee killed by some of our wild ones. Some ill fellow lies behind a bush for thee, and as thou ridest by, hé! his gun is fired, and down thou comest toppling.”

“Not I!” I answered. “A shot so fired would go astray. And then your ambusher goes running for his life, and I at his tail.”

“A lion, truly, thou art a lion,” he cried pleased by the bragging speech. “But even a lion falls to the hunter.”

I tried him with the fatalism of his own belief.

“O aye,” said I, “when God wills it.”

“True, true. Nothing withstands the will of God.”

He fell into pious platitudes.

We halted at the gate of Sheikh Abdullah's country house; for besides this one, being a wealthy merchant and great landowner, he had a house in Tripoli. The Sheikh was sitting on a cane-bottomed chair, with many friends, all beautifully dressed in robes of white, and silken kaftans of green and gold and scarlet. He rose to greet me courteously, and made me known to his companions. The old servant joined the group in most familiar fashion, telling of his difficulties in finding me. He recounted how I had a habit of riding unattended where I pleased.

"He fears nothing, wullahi!" said the old fellow. "Look now, 'How if you are shot at from behind?' I ask him. 'O,' says he, 'God will send the bullet wide.'"

They murmured approval.

"But," said the Sheikh, "it is not wise to go unarmed. Take with you a little gun when you go out, my dear. Thus you will be prepared, and also the world will see, if your weapon is good, that you are a gentleman."

I lifted the skirt of my coat and showed him a Webley .455, and a belt of cartridges. The big revolver passed from hand to reverent hand, amidst ejaculations of admiration and wonder. Nothing so delights an Arab as the handling of fine weapons.

"But never wear it so," urged one. "Rather display it, as so fine a gun deserves."

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“ Why then, so I will,” I promised, “ but not when I come visiting my friends.”

Whereupon all laughed, and the Sheikh, patting my knee, paid some compliment to my discretion.

We began to talk about weapons, and the company were interested in automatic pistols, which some of them had seen ; for one or two of the Turkish officers carried them. They asked me to explain the mechanism, and this I tried to do by means of diagrams ; but to the unaccustomed eyes of Arabs, even our pictures are for the most part unmeaning. Line drawings, to be sure, they can make shift to comprehend ; but photographs and wash-drawings are to them mere wild, irregular patterns of light and darkness. Their unmechanical minds cannot conceive the meaning of an engineer's design, or of the house-plan of a modern architect. I could not explain to them the automatic pistol thus, and so compared it to a little magazine rifle, and promised, at another time, to bring a Mauser pistol to show them.

Presently we stepped into the house ; and, behold, the meal was laid in European style, upon a table with white cloth, and knives and forks and chairs. And the bare simplicity of wall had been spoiled in my honour, by the hanging up of cheap and gaudy prints, an almanac, an advertisement for a typewriter, and coloured

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balls of glass, such as our children hang on Christmas trees.

All this, of course, I praised most lavishly, to the good man's great content. He said :

“So then, we Aarab are, you think, not altogether a rude people? We have some little of the civilised arts, eh, even in this poor country?”

He told me that it was to the wife of Barouni Bey, the mountain deputy, that his own housewives owed the knowledge how thus to dress their house. For the wife of Barouni, having never before left the wild Berber town of Yefren, was, on her husband's election, transported straight to the wonders of Stamboul, where she lived in a house hung with pictures, and had light and water at the turning on of taps, and drove out through streets, each one of which was bigger than a village, in a smooth-rolling carriage drawn by two fine horses, and filled with soft cushions. At first, poor soul, she thought herself in a land of the Jann; but the enchanted life so held her fancy that when Barouni wished her to revisit Yefren, she sobbed and wept, and even took drugs to make herself ill. For she was afraid that, once she quitted fairyland, the gates would shut behind her forever.

Still, she did not forget her mortal friends, amongst whom were counted the household of Sheikh Abdullah el Sôf; and hence it came

about that, with presents from Stamboul, and directions as to how they must be used, the house of El Sôf was made, in some sort, like a palace of the Jann.

The chairs on which they sat were void of comfort to the guests, though Sheikh Abdullah, long inured, sat his with ostentatious ease. Yet not even he could altogether hide his awkwardness with knife and fork.

And at last, laying mine aside, I helped myself with my fingers to the leg of a chicken from the dish.

“Pardon, sidi,” I explained, “but I have come to love the Arab style of feeding better than my own. God gave ten fingers. Then wherefore knives and forks ? ”

And henceforward the dinner went on merrily. A servant-girl came after every course, to wash our fingers with rose-water in a brazen bowl, and dried them on a purple-broidered napkin. She had silver fillets in her hair, and tinkling anklets on her bare brown feet, and the skirts of her kirtle were pulled up through her broad, painted belt. She giggled, and hid her face against her sleeve at the roguish jests of the feasters.

When she brought us tea, I took my cup, and, half proffering it to her, after a Moorish custom, drank three sips and then returned the cup.

“Put it from thee, Ferideh, put it from thee,”

chuckled the Sheikh, "or by Ullah——!" He turned to me. "Ah, thou rogue, thou devil, thou joker. Who taught thee that pretty trick?"

They laughed hugely, pretending that I was sick for love of the slave, and kept the joke up till I wearied of it.

The Sheikh's young son, a lad of twelve, most beautifully dressed in a golden kaftan, with rose-coloured baggy serwal, and slippers worked with silver thread, came in and stood shyly, holding his father's hand. Presently, gathering confidence, he told me how he longed to have a horse and sword and gun, so he might go to war against the Italians.

"So thou shalt, my little heart," his father said, "but first become a man. Time enough for thee to go a-warring when the Italians are come to the foot of our mountains—if, indeed, thou'rt not by then an old white-beard, too old for fighting."

Sheikh Abdullah showed us his horses and arms and treasures. In one stable was a yellow jenny mule, the fattest that I ever saw.

"A wise beast she is," said the Sheikh. "She kills the rats in the stable—bak ! bak ! not one escapes her hoofs."

Together with one of the guests, a pale young dandy of Gharien, I spent the night in Sheikh Abdullah's house, and rode to Gharien with my fellow guest next morning.

XXI

THERE was a young Syrian Arab, an officer in the Turkish army, fresh from one of the Military Colleges of Constantinople ; and his name was Emin. He was tall and lithe, heroically handsome, and the idol of the Arabs. For he bore himself with reckless bravery in every action, was never content to remain in camp, but must be always away scouting and skirmishing, or else visiting in rotation the remotest outposts. Emin Bey was the only son of his mother ; and he was not yet twenty-one years old. He dreamed of heading a victorious attack upon the walls of Tripoli, and would have been content to be shot down in the charge, so that he were the first man to set foot in the recaptured town.

When I went down again from the mountains, some whim took me to the outpost at 'Bu Geshir, and I was sitting in a garden, chatting with certain Turkish officers, when Emin Bey came into camp. He wore over his shoulders a shaggy mantle of sheepskin, and a little Albanian cap was set jauntily upon his head. His

brother officers welcomed him with loud shouts and warm hand-clasps, and he sat down, with a very becoming modesty, to take tea with us all.

I asked him where he had been of late ; for since Ain Zara, I had not seen him. But in the presence of his senior officers the young man was shy of talking ; so that presently he and I left the group, and walked together up and down the broad pathways of the garden. He began to tell me of his hopes and high ambitions.

“ I dream at night,” he said, “ of the day when we shall retake Tripoli. And when that day comes—ah ! you shall see, my friend, no one shall go before me. I will run to the Italian guns like a bird flying to its nest.”

I asked him, “ Do you think you will be killed ? ”

“ I’m not a coward,” answered Emin Bey. “ Sometimes—but never while we are fighting—I see myself stretched out dead ; and I don’t like the thought of that. There is the old mother, you see, who would die of grief. But then, I know that before I can be killed I shall do great things, and I would die well.”

He told me how he had been sent, early in the war, with a flag of truce, to the Italians, to demand their surrender.

“ I walked up to their post,” said he, “ with four Arabs, carrying a white flag. The Italians

were in some villas in the suburbs not far from Sôk el Juma. So I went up, across open ground, and at first they fired on us. Ho ! I did not like that. The bullets kicked the sand up all about us, and I thought ' Shall I go back now ? It is useless to go on, if I am to be shot without delivering my message.' But all the time I was thinking that, I walked forward. Then the firing stopped, and I shouted in French to the Italian soldiers that I had a message, and was unarmed. They would not let my men come any further, but they blindfolded me, and led me past their defences into a house and up some stairs.

" I sat on a chair and waited there, in the darkness, for a long time. No one came. I heard shots, and men shouting and running to and fro. It was not pleasant there in the dark. ' Perhaps,' thought I, ' I shall be made a prisoner. But I shall not give my parole. I will escape.' When we sent a doctor with a flag of truce to the Italians, they kept him a prisoner, and said he was a spy, who only pretended that he had been sent to ask for drugs and medicines. We had no medicines then, and we thought the Italians might perhaps allow some to be sent to us if we told them how badly off our sick and wounded were. Civilised men don't make war on the sick. However, we never saw our doctor any more ; and now I thought that perhaps I, too, was to be kept.

“ I began to shout for some one to come, and at last the door was opened and I heard three or four men come into the room.

“ I said in French, very politely, ‘ Will you let me take this bandage off my eyes while I am in the room ? ’

“ So they took it off, and when I asked them if they would surrender to us, they said ‘ No.’ So I said, ‘ No need to stay, then. But why did you shoot at me when I came with a flag of truce ? ’

“ They laughed, and one of them said, ‘ You are quite mistaken. We did not shoot at you.’

“ I said, ‘ Well, but there was no one else to shoot at ; and bullets came close to me.’

“ Again they laughed, and said, impudently, ‘ Oh, no ; we did not shoot at all. Only Arabs disregard a flag of truce.’

“ I was very angry, because they knew that I knew they were lying, and they did not care. But I kept my temper, and said, ‘ Now, if you will bandage my eyes again, I will go back.’

“ Some of them laughed all the more at that, and to provoke me said, ‘ But how if we do not let you go back ? ’ And for some time they continued to talk like that, which is not an honourable way to behave to the bearer of a flag of truce. But I did not show that I was angry, and at last they blindfolded me and I was led out again to where my men were waiting.

“ We walked away, and before we were out of range the Italians shot at us several times. My men wanted to take cover, but I said ‘ No, let the dogs shoot. Theirs the shame.’ I think, this time, they did not aim to hit us, but only to see if we would hide or run. They are dishonourable fighters, don’t you think ? ”

“ Yes,” I said, “ I think so.”

“ You have seen the French fight.” he said. “ Tell me, are they soldiers? How did they do in Morocco last year ? ”

Then I told him how I had camped with some of the *Légion Etrangère* at Dar ’d-Biba, and had marched with them to Mekines, when they fought in the woods with the Berbers of Mulai Zin, and finally blew in the Bab el Hadid, the great Iron Gate of Mekines. Mulai Zin came out in robes of state, with all his councillors, dressed as for a fête, and said to the French general, “ That was a great fight. Now I will go with you to Fez, and make my peace with Hafid, my brother.”

Emin Bey could not have enough of such tales. I told him of the ride of seven hundred Shawia horsemen through the Gharb province to the relief of Fez, and how the Djebala Berbers under Bel Arosi trapped us on the Warga ford, and held us there five days, burning all the friendly villages round about in mockery of us. One morning at dawn, after the burning

of the village of Dar Kaid Krafis, a flying column two hundred strong went out to help the villagers, but when they came upon the scene the rebels fled up into the hills. There was nothing left but smouldering black heaps, and masonry all battered down. Storks' nests that had stood upon the thatches were lying broken open on the ground, with young birds dead, and the old ones flapping wildly over them. Old men, and weeping women, and scared children, sat amongst the ruins, crying on us to avenge them; but we could do nothing, for our horses could not climb the hills.

The Berbers, arm linked in arm, had tramped backwards and forwards among the wheat, or driven cattle through it, ruining the greater part. But some few patches here and there still stood. And suddenly a rider by me fired into the heart of one such patch. A man leapt waist high out of the wheat, and then fell back again; and the Shawia Arabs galloped into the corn, swinging their long-barrelled guns about their heads, as though at polo. They drove out the man who had been hiding there—a wounded Berber of the last night's raiding party, who was shot in the knee, and who had hoped to stay, safe hidden till nightfall, in the wheat.

He scrambled out, his hurt leg trailing uselessly; and for all his lameness, he was active

as a goat, dodging the blows of the laughing Arabs. They formed a circle round him, and sat on their horses, mocking while he ground his teeth and glared about him, unafraid, but frenzied with rage.

Then the women and children of the village burst through the ring, screaming horridly, and fell upon the man with sticks and stones, sickles, and teeth, and nails. They battered in his skull, and tore his flesh to bloody rags; and flung the body backwards across a boulder at the foot of the mountain path, so that the raiders, should they come again, might find it.

“Hé!” said Emin Bey, “to have seen all that! That is how war was in the old days. Now our Arabs learn to make a business of war.”

I asked him how.

“O,” he answered, “you shall come with me and see. We no longer go forward in a blind rush, fire off our guns, and then run back to re-load. Even the wildest Arabs practice traps and ambushes. Five days ago, I rode with fourteen Arabs from west of Zawia, and we fell in with a dozen or so Italian cavalry, scouting. Well, now, all was arranged in the flash of an eye. Four of our men went on ahead; the rest hid themselves. You have seen how Arabs can hide. One minute you are looking at an empty waste. The next, a score of men spring out of hollows that you did not know of. Our ambush

party made a few steps to right and left, and, behold! they had vanished. As for the four, they went forward stealthily, unseen by the Italians, and planted themselves right in the line of their advance. Then they allowed the Italians to come on them suddenly, and dashed off as though taken by surprise. They ran on foot, and the Italians, being all mounted, gave chase. But you know how an Arab runs. It is like a hen partridge when you chase it—it never seems to go quickly; but, catch it if you can. And so the four came, running lightly towards us, with the horsemen pounding behind. Three of the Italians saw the trap in time and got away. The others—la, la!”

“It is true,” I observed, “that the Arabs now seem more disposed to fight with caution than before. They will take cover, and shoot from behind it, whereas their usual mode of fighting, as our soldiers found in the Soudan, is to carry all before them in a rush.”

“Aye,” said Emin Bey, “and I think, though military science counsels strategy, that to fight openly, man to man, in the old style of desert warfare, is still the cleanest way of having battles.”

“Well,” said I, “there is something to be said for a form of war (if war must be) which exercises the wits a little more than that.”

“True. But then the shrewdest men come

to the top, and not the most valiant. Now, did you hear how—(he named a certain warrior whose name I do not care to give)—“won a skirmish near to Gargaresh? He has no stomach for an open fight, unless the odds are greatly on his side. And so, when he was caught, or nearly so, by a greater Italian force, what does he do but hide a little force of his men in a hollow of the sands, and gallop off with the rest, a mile or so back. Those whom he had left must open fire on the Italians, taking no aim, but letting off their rifles as quickly as they could do so, and reloading. And then, while they hesitate, up comes — Bey, galloping at the head of a band of men, and showing up on purpose on the sky-line. But instead of coming up to help the firing party, round they go under the bank of a watercourse, and then show up again on the same ridge as before.

“So the Italians say ‘Here come reinforcements!’ and they fly for their lives. Thus there is no fight.”

“Well, but,” I said, “that was a clever trick. What better would you have?”

He answered: “I would charge right at them all, though they were ten to one. Every Arab carries the death of more than a score of those vermin in his belt.”

XXII

EMIN BEY set out after dark with thirty mounted Arabs from Ajellak, and they rode all night through the dunes between Zanzour and Gargaresh. And at dawn they were near to Gargaresh, and saw about a hundred horsemen and some sappers of the Italians amongst the palms. The sappers were digging trenches and throwing up breastworks; and some of the horsemen rode away east towards Tripoli, and came back presently with many columns of infantry and some batteries of artillery.

Since it was clear that the Italians now meant, if not disturbed, to occupy Gargaresh, Emin Bey and his thirty scouts opened fire on them, and purposely exposed themselves from time to time. They fired on the Italian cavalry, which was nearest to them; and the cavalry fled back to the infantry. And presently, that for which the Arabs had hoped came to pass. The Italians opened fire on them with artillery; and the roar of the heavy guns went over the desert to the camps at 'Bu

Geshir and Senati Beni Adhem, and said, as plainly as a messenger could have reported it, "The Italians are out at Gargaresh. They are there in great force, for their guns are with them. But they have not yet made good their footing; for some of our men have already attacked them, and are now waiting for our help."

The camps awoke and were all astir in a moment. Men ran to the pickets where their horses stood, ready saddled. Women and children clustered at the doors of tents, or ran to the tops of hillocks, to watch the departure of the war party. The wells amongst the palms at Senati Beni Adhem were the scene of furious activity. Pulleys whined ceaselessly, and the dripping skins and buckets came up, all too slowly, for the crowd of waiting horses. Women came and helped at the watering. A young roan stallion broke loose, and dashed, bridleless, to and fro on the outskirts of the throng.

I watered Bimbashi sparingly, for it is not the custom of the Arabs, in ordinary circumstances, to water their horses in the desert before mid-day. In the crowd, horses, infected with the furious excitement of the riders, became almost unmanageable. The air rang with shrill squeals and neighings, and with the shouts and curses of the riders.

Already a great many unmounted Arabs had

started off at the swift jog-trot of the desert men. Riding hard to overtake the foremost band I passed many such runners, and heard their jokes and laughter as I came through their ranks. They would not leave the track, nor yet look behind them, but pressed forward like hounds on a hot scent. How it was that many were not overridden by the mounted men, who came galloping as hard as their horses could lay hoof to ground, I cannot say. I did not see any that were knocked down, though they seemed to be for ever under the feet of the horses. Many ran holding by the stirrups, or the horses' tails, of their mounted companions. Two clutched at my stirrups, one at either side, and even after I had spurred my horse to his utmost speed, to shake them off, they still held on for a long time, running with great leaps and bounds, and shouting all the while like men possessed.

Dust rose in clouds from the track, and the world seemed full of brown-faced, bearded men, on horses and on foot, running and riding through a yellow haze.

Presently I overtook a body of cavalry, more than 300 strong, who had settled down to a business-like, steady gait, lest their horses on arrival should be over-tired. Izaak Bey, a Turkish cavalry officer newly arrived, was with them, and he, with three Arab leaders, rode at

the head. The Arabs were Sheikh Mohammed Lawi of Zawia, Sheikh Sôf (brother of my host at Gharien), and Sheikh Arabi of Djebel.

Ahead of us we see a little cloud of dust, with a black speck moving in the midst of it, coming from the direction of Fonduk Magussa. The cloud comes nearer at a tremendous pace, with the sound of drumming hoofs; and there is Lutfi Effendi from the Fonduk Magussa outpost, with two orderlies and an Arab zeptir. They rein their lathered beasts back on their haunches, and Lutfi, wiping away the sweat that glistens on his forehead, smiles widely, and greets us in the name of God. He has been sent to turn us a little aside, so that we may come up on the left flank of the Italians, who are still exchanging shots with Emin Bey and his thirty.

"We have them, we have them," he cries excitedly. "Their ships have not come up. All their cruisers are east of Tripoli, trying to get steam up; and the sea is very rough."

"Then we will drive them into it, in sh' Allah," answered Sheikh Arabi.

The Turkish officers and Arab sheikhs held a consultation as we rode along.

Somehow it seemed to me a very proper day for a battle. Now that the morning mists had cleared away, the air was fresh and keen, and the sun rode up the eastern sky and cast long

shadows on our left. Behind us, clouds of rolling dust marked the coming of the Arab army, and now and then a shot was fired in answer to the ever-nearing crack of rifle fire ahead. The Arabs are most wasteful of their ammunition, and utterly careless of the direction in which their bullets fly. More than once men were wounded in powder-plays in the Arab camps, and I know of one who, shot in the calf by some chance bullet fired in wantonness, made light of his hurt, since it did not come from an enemy. "A stone from the hand of a friend is an apple," says the Arab proverb; and though this does not usually accord with the Semitic nature (since one from whose hand stones fly ceases usually to be a friend), the proverb was on this occasion proven. The Arabs made war, in Tripoli, at least, with a far higher humour than common with them, for, in general, theirs is a somewhat touchy, irritable spirit.

When we had ridden a little more than two hours, a great burst of firing broke out to the east, and the boom of cannon began afresh with terrific din. We were now riding nearly due west, parallel to the sea, and this that we heard was the sound of those Arabs whom we had passed on the road, joining battle on the left flank of the Italians.

From the tops of the dunes we could soon see

the progress of the fight. Green palm-groves near the shore hid the Italian batteries from view ; but there were rows of trenches in front of the groves from which their riflemen kept up a continuous fire. But though we could tell their whereabouts by ear, we could not see the main body of the Arabs, who, on the east, were held back by the Italian cannon fire.

Izaak Bey, with a small body of men, galloped away still further west, and we lost sight of them for awhile.

I stayed with the three sheikhs and their men. The sheikhs exhorted their reckless followers, bidding them have patience till the moment should come to charge in at the trenches. The men, riding as far as they could without being seen, dismounted and crawled forward, murmuring hoarsely to one another, and glaring with all their eyes at the thin brown streaks that marked the lines of trenches.

“Patience, lads, patience,” counselled the sheikhs. “Hot head, cold carcass. Wait yet a little while, till those on the right come up.”

The cannon fire was still thundering towards the east ; but presently there came a lull, and then, quite suddenly, the yellow hummocks on our right gave up a crowd of men, running furiously upon the trenches. So far away were they, that the tiny figures looked hardly bigger

than ants. Yet we could hear the high, windy noise of shouting that they made as they came on. Through my glasses I made out a single figure clad in russet, that led one body of men, waving, as it seemed, a carbine in the air, and turning now and then as though to shout encouragements to those behind.

The Italian cannon banged away more heavily than ever, and the men in the rifle pits joined in. I saw the brown figure stumble on hands and knees, and then scramble up and still go forward. Here and there in the oncoming ranks, men fell and lay quite still; or, if not killed at once, struggled to their knees and fired their rifles off.

And then I heard a terrific shouting quite close to me; and the men with whom I had come were on their feet and charging down, as hard as ever they could run, to the nearest line of trenches. They ran dispersedly, in widely scattered order. They yelled aloud like a pack of wolves, and the sun glinted on the barrels of their rifles. Then, from far away upon the left, there came an answering shout, and there were the horsemen under Izaak Bey, riding like a whirlwind down the wet sand of the sea shore, and firing as they came. Their loose white robes fluttered in the wind, the manes and tails of their horses streamed behind them, and I could see the men, some standing, some crouched

low upon the withers as they fired, flinging the reins upon their horses' necks.

Their furious, unexpected onset was like a stone flung into the middle of a covey of partridges. Little grey and khaki figures went stumbling and scrambling out of the first line of trenches and ran confusedly towards the trees.

A few moments more and the Arabs on the right had driven back their opponents too, and swept on, their russet-clad leader still at their head, into the trenches themselves. I saw the leader leap upon a breastwork, and stand there, one hand upflung and head thrown back, in a splendid attitude of triumph. And suddenly, from some peculiarity of gait or motion, I felt sure that this was no man, but a woman. In another instant she had leapt down into the trench, with a hundred shouting Arabs at her heels, and I did not see her again till next day; but later in the fight news of her doings was borne round to our side of the battle, and confirmed my guess at her sex.

The Italians fled back to their second line of works; and our men, occupying the deserted trenches, found twelve dead men in them, and a great deal of blood soaking into the earth. This first line of trenches had been dug that day, before the reinforcements had come up. The others—there were three more lines in



IZAAK BEY'S CHARGE AT GARGARESH.



front of the palms—had been made the night before.

The second line was carried with a general rush after an hour-long duel of rifle fire. The heavy guns still blazed away with bursting shell, but did no harm to speak of. It was from the quick-firers that the Arabs lost most heavily when they charged. There was an open space of perhaps three hundred and fifty yards between the first line and the second, and in crossing this open space the Arabs suffered great losses. Before the final common rush, three separate times small bodies of men dashed out and tried to get across, but could not face the frantic hail of bullets sent into them.

I think the Italians did not believe that we could gain their second defence; for when the Arabs did get in they found there cartridges and clothing, boots, boxes of biscuits, and some wine. It was as though the nerve of the Italian soldiers had suddenly broken, for they maintained a fairly steady fire for a good while; but when, instead of going back, the Arabs raised a great heart-shaking shout, and dashed resistlessly in, their enemies jumped out and ran like rabbits, leaving everything behind them. Many were killed in the trenches, and many more shot down before they could reach cover.

The fighting went on all the afternoon, and only ceased at sunset. In the night, the Italians evacuated Gargaresh, and went back by the sea to Tripoli. Their searchlights sent long rays wavering across the desert through the dark, and all night long the Arabs sang and talked the battle over in their camps.

XXIII

NEXT morning, as I walked among the Arab tents, I heard a loud, harsh voice, of an unusual quality, chanting some savage song, of which I could not understand one word in ten. From time to time more voices joined in chorus, and there were loud shouts as of approval.

A negro, limping on lean, dusty shanks, pulled me by the sleeve, and jabbered unintelligibly in my face, grinning and nodding his head till the bone rings in his ears swung to and fro. I followed him through a quarter of the camp in which I had not been before. Here the Fezzanis had set up their tents and lean-to shelters. Negresses were washing blue-dyed shifts in troughs of hollowed palm trunks, pounding the cloth with stones or wooden beetles. Naked children, covered with dust and vermin, played at the doors of booths, and hens walked in and out inquisitively, with hard, prying eyes searching out every crack where grains of barley might have fallen. Date stones and orange-rind and bones were strewn about

the doors of tents, and dogs slunk about the heaps of garbage. In camp or village, every dog has his own pitch or beat, and will defend it to the death. An intrusive stranger will be set upon by all, and killed. As for the dogs in whose beat lies your tent, you may stone him or shoot at him, but, while he lives, he will not go elsewhere. At night, close your tent as tightly as you will, he will yet find some way into it, and sniff cautiously about the floor for any scraps that may have fallen from your table. So famished is he often that leather, or paper whereon grease has fallen, makes a meal for him. And, since you cannot make him go away (for hunger is stronger even than fear), it is better to be good to the poor beast, and throw what scraps you have to him. He will soon learn that to intrude upon you while you feed means only to be beaten, and will wait with what patience he can, until the broken meats and crusts are thrown out. And in return, he will most surely guard your tent. No stranger, whether dog or man, will come into your tent or meddle with your horse while he is there. He is grateful; yet he will not suffer you to pat or touch him. Even if he would, it were unwise to do so; for he harbours other things than gratitude. The Arab dogs in Tripoli are white, with bushy tails. They are like the dogs of the Esquimaux.

I followed my limping negro through the tents, until we came upon a little procession, at whose head a woman strode, chanting. It was the heroine of Gargaresh.

Her russet cloak had once been red, and barred with black ; but rain and sun had turned it to the rich deep brown of a trawling smack's sail. The face beneath the hood was nearly black, square-jawed, with heavy, frowning brows, and short, broad nose. The mouth was square and tight-lipped, with deep, decisive lines about it, and strong, even teeth.

She wore about her throat a white metal torque, and a collar of panther's teeth hung on her broad brown chest. Her arms were bare, and had broad bracelets on them, and one—her left—had been wounded and was roughly dressed with rags. In her right fist she gripped a polished staff of olive-wood. Her muscular legs and broad, horny feet were bare.

There was nothing feminine about this woman. She strode up and down with huge strides, brandishing her staff and half chanting, half reciting, in the deepest tones I ever heard from the throat of a woman. Save when it leapt into a wild, ringing yell, there was nothing of shrillness in her voice. I could not understand the words she sang ; her dialect was strange to me, albeit I recognised it as some kind of Arabic. The crowd delighted in her

violence and prowess; and watching her as she swaggered backwards and forwards, I wondered whether Joan of Arc, perhaps, were not some rough-voiced swart peasant woman of mediaeval France, with a sheepskin belted about her middle, and bare, miry legs—an indomitable, strapping virago, who swaggered amongst the shock-headed men-at-arms, and capped their broad jests with broader still—instead of the delicate, vision-seeing maiden, flower-faced and slender-limbed, whom poets and painters have depicted for us. If she had half so daunting a mien as had this warrior woman from the southern deserts, I wonder not that Englishmen gave back before her.

The woman seemed to be still drunk with battle. Her eyes were half-closed—though now and then she opened them with a terrifying stare from beneath her hard-bent brows. I guessed that she was acting over again her deeds of the day before. She had followed the men to Gargaresh, along with many other women, and had at first remained with her own kind, screaming and cheering on the men. She had said :—

“ He that turns back, sisters, we will paint his face red with our nails. He shall be a drudge, and live in the tents among the children.”

When the great charge began—and doubtless her wild cries accelerated it—she could contain

herself no longer, but dashed in, unarmed save for her camel stick, and got to the head of the column. She was hit by a fragment of shell ; but she ran on, shaking her bleeding hand in the faces of the men, and bidding them earn glorious wounds like hers.

She was amongst the first to leap into the trenches, and there, dipping her right arm to the elbow in a pool of fresh blood, she stood upon the breastworks, ravening like a very goddess of African battle.

“ Well for the Italians that they had fled,” said a bystander. “ Mashallah ! She’d most certainly have cracked a skull or two with her staff.”

She walked straight up to me, whom from my uniform, I think, she took to be a Turkish officer, and hailed me. I held out a hand, and she gripped it till the finger-ends were purple, staring intently at me.

I said, “ Praise to thee. God be upon thee, slayer of men ” (for “ slayer of men,” besides being a compliment to her valour, is periphrasis for a fascinating girl). “ But thou would’st win thy way more surely to Italian hearts if thou hadst a gun instead of that thick stick.”

Someone translated for her, telling her at the same time that I was English, and not an officer of the Turks.

She responded instantly, "God send me a gun, and for every cartridge an Italian woman shall go husbandless. Allah cut them all off! But why do not the Torcha give me a gun? Or maybe thou'lt give me one?"

I tried to talk to her, to ask her about the battle; but she was like one intoxicated, and only raved and chanted in reply.

At last, with a great following, she marched across to the Turkish officers' tent. Tahar Bey and Nazmi Bey were there and many officers. The Arabs, speaking all at once, told her tale for her. Nazmi Bey put a question, and the woman answered, yelling and gesticulating like an inspired sibyl. They were interested and amused, and at last, I imagine, a little weary of her, for the sound of her voice was like the ceaseless clanging of an iron bell. She said that she must have a gun.

"Give her a rifle, then," said Nazmi Bey, "and let her go. Here, mother, here's a gun for thee; a good one. See that thou keep it clean, and use it well."

The heroine took the cavalry carbine that he offered, and kissed it, with a loud smack, on the stock. Then, holding it high above her head, she howled like a wolf, and all the Arabs shouted.

"Away, away," cried Tahar Bey, good-naturedly, for she was again at the beginning

of her battle hymn ; and an orderly, taking her by the shoulders, pushed her gently out of the tent. She went off, brandishing her treasure high, and savage song broke out anew among the tents of the Fezzanis.

XXIV

IT was two days before all the spoil of the battle was collected together in the camp markets. Then, for a time, there was a brisk sale of Italian kit and weapons. From the trenches and the buildings at Gargaresh, the Arabs brought in all thirty-six camel loads of plunder. And over this there was much quarrelling amongst the men. For it often happened that before a battle, little bands of three and four and half-a-dozen men would agree to put all loot that each might get into the common pool, and then divide the proceeds equally. But it generally happened that each individual would take a fancy to some article—perhaps a ring, a cloak, or a rifle—and would conceal it, or in some way try to keep it for himself. Mutual trust, even between brothers, lies not in the Semitic nature. I have known two men, farm-partners, walk eight miles to a market with three scrawny hens to sell. Both must needs go, for neither would trust the other not to cheat him in the price, if he were not there to see.

Thus these little looting companies had frequent strifes, in which the purchaser of any article was usually involved.

Lifting a pair of fine Italian shoes from a heap, I asked their price of one man, and was told "so much." Whereupon up comes another, and protests passionately :—

"Nay, but the shoes are mine. Shall I not fix the price? Look, Ingleesi, what fine shoes—soft as cloth, and hardly worn. Say, rather, 'so much.'"

And then the first salesman falls upon his companion, and rates him soundly for his greed; and I, despairing of a hearing, fling down a fair price, and go away with the shoes.

In the evening there comes a man to my tent.

"Did'st thou not buy a pair of shoes from Hafid el Sfaxi to-day?"

"I did. And paid."

"Aye, but not half enough, sidi. Hafid, curse him, has no say in my affairs. The shoes are mine. I risked my life, by God, to take them. Then give a little more."

And so on. Few things are more trying than commercial dealings with the Arabs. Therefore, the plunder-market was the scene of much noisy strife, since salesmen quarrelled amongst themselves as well as with their customers.

Purchases chiefly sought for by the Arabs

were good guns. There was a type of light cavalry carbine with a folding bayonet which was in great demand. Those who had got them, and had patience to withhold them for the first few days, were sure to sell them at a good price. Shoes and cloaks were also quickly bought; but the traffic in picks and spades and mattocks, taken from the Italian sappers' huts, was slow. Arab soldiers mocked those of their companions who had been at pains to carry such things away.

Judging from such of their equipment as was sold in the desert markets, the Italians were wonderfully fitted out. Their weapons, implements, and clothes were mostly new and of a costly make. It seemed that every company of ten or twelve men was fitted with a splendid Berkenfeld filter, worth at least five or six pounds. The Arabs did not know what to make of these, thinking that they were some unholy musical instrument; but the Turkish doctors took them eagerly.

I met Ferhat Bey in the market. He sat on horseback, thronged about by Arabs, who had come to learn from him the value of the things they bought or had to sell. He asked me, would I come and help him; and afterwards we would go together to Sheikh Barouni's tent for coffee and a chat. And so I sat with him, and tried to satisfy the childish questions rained upon us.



SPOILS OF WAR.

“ Say, now, Ingleesi, is not this some broken spy-glass ? ” said one, and held an automatic pistol out to me. He did not give me time to tell him what it was, but chattered on with tireless Arab loquacity.

“ I have looked through it, both ends, but there's nothing but darkness. Yet I know it's a spy-glass. Mashallah, I'm not ignorant. Haven't I looked through the glasses of the little Emin ? What will you give, then, for the broken spy-glass ? You Nasranies are all clever ; doubtless you can mend it. Come now—the price ? I'll ask a little only. Say three francs. Isn't that a fair price ? ”

“ No,” I said, “ that is not a fair price.”

“ Well, then, what you will. What do you say it is worth ? ”

“ Perhaps thirty francs,” I answered.

“ Nay, nay,” he protested. “ But don't joke. I'm not ignorant, wullahi, and not a cheat. The glass, I tell thee is broken.”

“ This is a gun,” I answered, and, slipping down the safety-catch, fired it three times into the air.

The man snatched it rudely from me ; but I had slipped up the catch again, and now he could not fire it. He shook it, and poked twigs into the barrel.

“ Come, now,” said I, “ how if it is a gun that only fires in the hand of an unbeliever ? ”

Will you not sell it cheaply to me, seeing that you cannot use it ? ”

“ Nay ; thou hadst thy chance. Eh, what a fool to tell me its real worth. Aha, thou wert properly fooled then, Ingleesi.”

He had no gratitude for my honesty ; and the bystanders clearly thought me a great fool. Nevertheless, they relished my folly, and praised me impudently for it. I showed the man how to work the strange pistol, and he went away, to return with friends, to whom he said privately :—

“ Take all you cannot understand to the Ingleesi. He is a great fool, and very truthful.”

Afterwards, going to a booth to have some coffee berries ground, I found this man again ; and, doubtless at his instigation, the coffee-seller must needs try to overcharge for grinding. He was to have been paid, not with money, but with a little of the coffee ; but asked me thrice as much as was his due. We disputed about this awhile, and then I took away my berries unground, and said that I would go elsewhere. Presently, the fellow who had thought an automatic pistol was a spy-glass came after me, and told me that his coffee merchant friend would, after all, be glad to grind for me at a fair price.

“ He did but try to get a little more because

I told him how simple thou wast in that matter of the gun," added he.

Such is ever the way with Arab salesmen. They have no fixed price for their wares, and count no time ill-spent in haggling. Nor do customers waiting their turn seem to resent the delay over the purchase, say, of half an oke of coffee, or a basket of charcoal. To them the chaffering affords good sport; and though the second comer is to buy exactly what the first has had, the price paid by the former has no weight. Hassan may buy his charcoal for one half-franc; Mohammed, coming next, will try to get the same for less, the seller seeking to charge him more.

"Why," said I once to a merchant, "do you not sell at a set price to all alike?"

"But why," said he. "If I can get but half a grûsh the more from one of them than from another, is it not gain?"

"But that wastes time; for while you bargain with one you might have sold to three. They say with us, time is money."

"O, folly," he retorted, scornfully. "Time is God's, and given freely to all men, so that all have it alike. But with the flûs, one has much, another none, and you must take what you can get."

I spoke of this to Ferhat Bey, who was of a more liberal turn of mind than most Arabs;

and he agreed with me that fixity of price would vastly better petty commerce. But when I said that, in such matters, open honesty and fair dealings must pay best, he shook his head.

“Not with the Aarab,” he declared. “The simple-dealing man is fleeced on every side.”

“I think not,” I said. “Look, now, how they take my word in the matter of values; since I told one man the truth about a pistol which he did not understand. If, now, I bought or sold amongst them, I might price my wares how I chose; and I should be believed, in saying that the price was fair.”

“Perhaps,” said Ferhat Bey; “but still you would not get the price. They would not wholly trust you; but would say, ‘Ha, he sets a trap at first to make men think him simple: so now we must watch him well, or he’ll overmatch us.’ And besides, in any case, they would beat you down, whatever price you asked.”

Ferhat Bey was right. An Arab can be lordly generous in giving, but in bargaining he will never be content that the affair shall merely be exchange of cash and goods. It is a war of wits, wherein one or the other must be bested.

XXV

BAROUNI BEY had set his tent upon a hill, and the tents of friends and lesser chieftains than himself were pitched in a circle round about it. Thither with Ferhat Bey I presently went, and it seemed that we intruded upon a council. The mountain deputy, in grey frock-coat, tarbûsh, and riding boots, sat cross-legged on the carpet, surrounded by a group of bearded elders, all in Arab dress, talking earnestly, yet with a certain animation. I would have made excuses and gone out, but Ferhat, laughing, haled me in and bade me sit; and Sheikh Barouni, rising to his feet, threw round my shoulders a splendid Italian cavalry cloak, of thick grey cloth.

“That gift has waited for thy coming these two days,” said he, and scolded me good-naturedly because I had not come to his tent before. I thanked him heartily for the gift.

“But,” I said, “it seems to me that you have some affairs to debate upon. Let me come later in the day, when light matters, suited to my understanding, are afoot.”

“Rather stay here and help us,” said Ferhat Bey in French; and when I protested that no help of mine, surely, could be useful to them, he pressed me seriously, and answered that I could very greatly help them if I would.

“Here,” said he, still speaking in French, which no one in the tent except myself could understand, “are some notables of the Arabs of this district and of Zawia, who were at first reluctant to take up the war, or urge their people to do so. They thought that if they made terms in the beginning with the Italians, and neither helped the Turks nor fought against them in this war, they could not suffer much, no matter how the business should turn out. They had hoped to stand well with both sides, and yet throw in their lot with neither. And we had hard work to persuade them to fight at all. After the Turks were driven from Ain Zara, these men had almost given up the fight; but now, after our successes, they are keenly on our side; and so, to-day, Barouni Bey has brought them to his tent, and he and I will fan the flame of their enthusiasm.”

“Yes, but,” said I, “I do not see what I can do to help you.”

Ferhat Bey laid his hand on my arm and approached his mouth almost to my ear. There is, amongst the Orientals, no breach of etiquette when two thus whisper together, to the ex-

clusion of the rest of the company. Even in the midst of a conversation with some Arab gentleman, I have known him bend down to hear what someone, whispering behind his hand, has come to tell him ; and then resume his talk with me, without apology, and unembarrassed. So Ferhat Bey now whispered with me, with ostentatious secrecy ; and the rest of the company were not at all offended.

“ You can help, if you will, in this way,” he said, “ by praising the courage of those who defend their homes against invasion ; and saying how, in your country, such conduct is admired. For, let me tell you, even your presence here is taken by the Arabs as a sure sign of sympathy in England with our side. And any words of praise that you can say will, I assure you, make these men feel heroes ; and they will resolve to fight as long as there is an Italian left to shoot at.”

“ Very well,” said I, “ I can easily applaud patriotism ; and so I will, if it is not out of place for me to speak in the presence of my elders.”

“ Do I not tell you it is not ? ” he urged. “ But mark, first of all, how we—the Sheikh Barouni and myself—will stir them up. I am a noted orator,” he added, with frank pride. “ I can make men weep or laugh as I choose ; and when I was a young man, people learnt

parts of my speeches and repeated them in the villages round Zawia."

He turned to the company, and addressing them all, began to speak in homely Arabic. He rallied them upon their former diffidence, and compared it with their present elation.

"See now, didn't we tell you, Suleiman Barouni and I, that if all stood together, and faced the Italians like men, they would be as nothing against the Aarab? Aye, but you wouldn't believe it. No, you must make your peace with the enemies of God. And now, how have they fared at Gargaresh, when we went at them with a good heart?"

"Ullah!" cried one. "They fled like sheep from lions."

"Aye, aye, we're all lions now," the deputy retorted. "But where will your courage be to-morrow? Do you think the Italians will give up the war because we beat them once? No; nor yet if we do it ten times. And when matters don't happen to go quite so well, what will you do? Why, you'll want to slink back to your homes."

They all protested extravagantly. They would keep the war alive, billah! as long as a man of them were left to fight.

"Then, see to it that you do." It was Sheikh Barouni who now spoke. "For, look you, this war costs every day to the Italians

more than all the money that the richest amongst us has. And if they win our country, who, think you, shall pay them back their loss? Who but the poor Aarab?"

"A-a-ah! Mashallah, what robbery!"

"Nay, the loser must always pay. But, if we stand well to it, how can we lose? Look, now, we have fought them for a score of weeks and more; and they have big guns, balloons, fine weapons, good food, good clothes; while our men fight in rags and live on horse-food. And yet, what have they gained? Ullah! They cannot even yet come inland to our deserts to fight us. They must huddle close to their ships; and when they fight without them—eh, well, how did they fare at Gargaresh?"

They were manifestly elated. "True, we were fools when we thought to hang back," admitted one; "but, see now, we feared to lose all. And, you know well, Mehemet Ferhat, that we have not thriven so well under the Turk in the past that we would risk everything to keep his rule instead of the Italian's."

"Thou hast the wit of a bird, 'Bu Bekr," said Ferhat Bey, turning upon this last speaker. "True, the Turk was not the most just of overlords in the old days, and I myself have suffered under his misrule. But that was in the days of the old Sultan, when taxes were cruel, and there was no law. But all that has been changed;

and I tell you, if the Italian should come to Tripoli, you will change stale bread for stone. If it had been the French, or the English, then there had been some sense in welcoming them, for we know how things have gone in Tunis and El Masr. But the Italians—bah! The Italian is not like the other Roumi. A Frenchman, or an Englishman, will not till his own fields. He must pay an Arab to do it for him. But the Italian has no pride. All the world over he will live like a starved dog and work like a camel. So, when he comes here, out goes the Arab from the fields into the desert.”

“And if you had not fought,” urged Sheikh Barouni, “nevertheless the Italians would not have spared you. How many did they shoot down in Tripoli who never bore a gun?”

“True, true. And you did well to counsel us to fight. Fools we were; but in time to come, all the Aarab will bless every hair of the beards of both of you,” cried a villager from Zanzour; and Ferhat Bey replied:—

“Aye, and there is one thing more. Fight well, fight bravely, and you will win friends who will maybe see to it that the Italians do not make hard terms when the war is done. If the Aarab had made no fight, then the English and the French and all the Christians would say, ‘See, the Aarab are content that Italy should rule. Then let Italy have Tripoli.’

But now they say, 'See how bravely the Aarab fight for their country. Wullah! it were a sin that they should be robbed of it.' "

He turned directly to me, and said, "These are matters above the heads of poor ignorant men. But is it not true that in your country there is admiration for those who fight well?"

I said "Yes"; and, in response to his urging, stammered out in bad Arabic some copy-book platitudes on patriotism, and tried to say how sincerely I admired the courage of the Arabs.

"If I were the son of any of you," I added, "I should get a horse and a gun, and think of nothing else but war so long as an Italian soldier were alive in Tripoli. I know the blessings of the Roumi style of life which the Italians have said they will bestow on you, and, were I an Arab, I would be cut in pieces sooner than submit to them."

Then Ferhat Bey made a long and very eloquent speech, and at the end of it he cried out:—

"Up, take your horses. We will ride through the tents and fill the hearts of all the men with courage. Come, let us ride the camp. You shall see," he added, turning to me, "how they will receive us."

And we rode down from the hill on which Barouni's tent was set, and made a progress through the Arab camp.

XXVI

AT the coming of the deputies, men turned out from the tents and shouted a welcome. They rode, at first, slowly, side by side, with that in their bearing which spoke unmistakably of a great occasion. Some strange telepathic force seemed to spread itself through the tents, making all aware that a demonstration was toward ; for, though either of the deputies, or both together, might be seen riding to and fro in the camp a dozen times a day, there was now an unusual, tense feeling of expectancy ; and though at all times they would be greeted as befitted their rank, with blessings shouted after them, and now and then a man to run forward and snatch at their hands or kiss their coats, the welcome that now came from the black hair-cloth booths, and canvas tents, and huts of palm-branch, was one of loud general shouts, and fervid cries of admiration.

Barouni Bey and Ferhat Bey rode slowly down from their hill, sitting stately in their saddles, with that council of elders whom they

had just exhorted riding behind them. If they passed the tent door of any notable who had not yet come forth, they would draw rein and hail him, and, coming out with hasty effusive greetings, he would mount and ride with them.

Men on foot and also women, joined the train behind us, and gradually the pace increased. Soon we were riding at a rapid trot through the outskirts of the camp, with loud shouts, and snatches of war-songs, and cries of “Oulad 'bu zin ! ” From every tent and shelter men came out, snatching up rifles as they ran to join the throng, and soon the camp was swarming like a hive of bees in summer.

Then suddenly Barouni Bey stood up in his stirrups, swung his rifle round his head, and with a mighty shout dashed forward at his horse's utmost speed ; and Ferhat Bey went thundering at his heels. The horses flew along with outstretched necks and bridles hanging loose, along a straight course of about a hundred yards. Then the riders discharged their rifles in the air, swept their horses round by pressure of the knees alone, and galloped headlong back. And as they turned, four riders, going knee pressed to knee, came down the course behind them, guns spinning over their heads, and garments fluttering loose. And after them came four more men, and four again, and yet another four, until no man in all the throng who rode a

horse had not sped furiously over the course. Now those who were afoot had ranged themselves in ranks—a vast long avenue of close-pressed, shouting men, who followed every trick of horsemanship with keen excitement. There were riders who laid low upon the withers as they charged their invisible enemy, firing with rifle-barrel laid along the horse's neck. Some stood erect upon their saddles, brandishing guns aloft, and firing while they whirled them round their heads. A band of eighty or a hundred men set off at breakneck speed, riding as hard as horse could set hoof to ground, wheeling and yelling like a flock of screaming gulls. When at top speed they would pull up in an instant, as though confronted by an invisible wall, wheel sharp about, and then set off again.

Yet, wonderfully graceful as their riding seems, the Arabs have been rather over-rated as a race of splendid horsemen. True, there are few who have not from their earliest years been used to horses. They sit confidently and have sure mastery over their steeds; but in their seat and handling there lies less virtue than at first appears. The great high-peaked Arab saddle, with its roomy, short-hung stirrups set far back, is almost like a chair. One sits in it with little need of grip, though, with their short-legged seat, the Arabs do not ride so much on poise and balance as the Western Americans.

And their cruelly repressive bits, with rings instead of chain-curb, and often with great metal tongues upon the bit to force a horse's mouth wide open, give little scope for the light handling of a tender mouth. There is indeed but little delicacy in the Arab horsemanship, such as an Englishman upon a fretful blood-horse needs to use. All is brute force, and, after all, it is not supreme skill to rely upon a bit whose cruelty and strength might stop an elephant. And also, although quarrelsome and sometimes vicious, the stallions of the desert lack the spirit of our horses. They, like the horse on which the cowboy performs his feats, are not fed or cared for like the pampered hunters of an English stable. Also, the Arabs, either from necessity or from impatience, begin to break their horses in, and ride them all too soon. I have seen mere foals, with tails still woolly, forced to carry full-grown men, and often heavy packs as well, and do twenty, twenty-five or even thirty miles in a day.

It is, after all, by his care for his horse that a true horseman is known, quite as much as by his skill in riding it; and, judged from this standpoint, most Arabs are the worst horse-masters. And those of Tripoli are, I have found, notably careless of their horses. They will start upon a lame horse on a long journey, and ride him hard. If he should lose a shoe, he may go

for days unshod over the stoniest mountain tracks. Night after night the wretched brute, close hobbled in that foolish Arab fashion that makes narrow-chested horses, must stand with saddle on and girth not loosened; and, though his feed is usually but straw and barley, given once a day, even that is often omitted, from mere unthoughtfulness, as likely as not. Often, at the end of a long day's ride I have seen pathetic lines of horses, weary, hungry, with hanging heads, and hair of flank and back all matted with sweat, waiting for the feed which they had done their best to earn, but could not get; longing to roll and cleanse their hides in the sand, and yet unable with the saddles on their backs. I have not seen in Tripoli such ghastly wounds and open sores and rope-galls as the pack-beasts of Morocco get; but that is only because in Tripoli the camel is the carrier of packs.

The Arab is not, by our standards, by any means a perfect horse-master. Yet he looks very well upon a horse. But in that he is helped out by his weapons and his floating robes; and he is at least innocent of one of the cruelties whereby we help to detract from the spectacle of a mounted man; for he never docks his horse's tail; and does not, usually hog its mane.

The Arabs fire their horses lavishly, as a cure, as a prevention, and often as an ornament; so that you may often see a horse with scars in

herring-bone designs from shoulder to knee. They singe the hair of their horse's tails when young, to the end that they may be thick and long and flowing.

Despite their callous carelessness, they talk much about horses, and think highly of a good one. "The Arab's Farewell to his Steed" may be over-coloured as to diction, but the spirit of the poem is true enough to life. I have more than once seen men shed facile tears on parting with their horses. Selling to you a beast that he may have loved, and has certainly neglected, an Arab will declare that it is more to him than a child, and will beseech you to be tender with it. A man that sold me a young grey horse at Fez, came back after having walked off a little way, to kiss the creature on the neck.

Some desert men from beyond the mountains joined in the powder-play, riding upon fine racing-camels, which they urged forward with shrill cries and curious clucking noises. The camel runs with neck outstretched and head forever moving like a piston. At their fastest gait, these meharis from the southern desert could almost equal the hard gallop of a horse over a short course. Over twenty miles, they would leave the best horse behind, and cover in one day more than most horses can in three.

Horses—stallions that is—do not relish the company of camels, but towards the ordinary

pack-camel their demeanour is rather scornful than violently hostile. But of these desert racers, the long-limbed, fine-coated meharis, one might say that the horses could not abide the reek of them. For, at their approach, the horses often reared and screamed, striking out with their forefeet, laying back their ears, and showing every trait of equine devilishness; while the meharis, with a slower and more deliberate malignity, reciprocated to the full this animosity. I have seen a camel of this breed unexpectedly let fly with its horny off-hind-foot, and catching a good sized war-horse fairly in the breast, positively lift the creature off its own forefeet. After which the camel-rider jabbed his own mount savagely in the brain-pan with an iron spike, in such fashion as would have surely killed a beast of any other species; but the camel, flicking his twisted ears, went on contentedly with the browsing of dry twigs.

So now, the coming of the riding-camels amongst the horses ridden in the lab-el-barod, as the Arabs call their powder-plays, soon brought about the wildest of disturbances. But all were in holiday mood, and the curses of the riders as they tried to check the strife among the beasts were but perfunctory. And now Barouni Bey, who rode a huge Italian gelding, an artillery leader captured from the enemy, managed to turn the turmoil to a good account.

He cried out laughing, that the animals and the horses of the Arabs, being all steadfast Moslem beasts, were thrown into confusion by the presence of a Nasrany horse amongst them, and, dismounting, sent his gelding back, and took instead a ramping stallion.

The incident gave Ferhat Bey an opening. Here was his audience, all drawn up, the mounted men now resting from their sport, and those on foot still standing in their lines to see it recommence. The occasion was that for which the good deputy had waited, and, rising in his stirrups, he held up his right hand, in token that he was about to speak.

Save that there is not, perhaps, so much preliminary coughing, an Arab crowd is just as slow to settle down to silence as a European one. There is the same shifting of feet, faces take on the same strange wrinkled expressions of the listener who is resolved to miss no word; and the same sibilant "Hssh!" sound is made by those already composed to listen, to those whose murmurings have not yet died away. Ferhat Bey lifted up his hand, and for a moment the crowd swayed and seethed and murmured as it composed itself to listen. And then, just as all was becoming quiet, some fervid soul cried out:

"God's blessing on thee, Mehemet Ferhat. God give thee happy days. The peace of Ullah

ever upon thee, Ferhat. Thou standest always for the Aarab."

Whereupon there broke out a cordial chorus, and, for a moment, I was unkind enough to wonder whether the good Ferhat had not primed this speaker to make some such praise of himself, to the end that the rest might join in ; for I have known in England cases when the intention of him who first cried out "Three cheers for our candidate!" was not entirely unknown to the candidate himself ; or, at least, to his agent.

But in this instance, although the deputy was now addressing a large number of his own constituents, there were no grounds for thinking he had stooped to such a trick. For Ferhat Bey was truly loved and venerated by those for whom he spoke at Constantinople ; and he had no need by trickery to stimulate their enthusiasm.

Now, with his Scottish-looking features wreathed in kindly smiles, he made a speech to them in simple desert phrases that bore out his naïve boast of powers of oratory. He was indeed a very clever speaker, and affected, not the flowery rhetoric with which most educated Arabs love to bedazzle their hearers (as the young Cairene advocate will plead his client's cause with tedious, elaborate passages from Persian poets) ; but rather the phraseology of

byre and camel-track, and the lively street-slang of the Arab townsman.

He spoke of the success at Gargaresh, and the crowd rocked and shouted with delight as he described the Italians fleeing from their entrenchments, with the Arabs after them. "Wellah, like hounds after hares." Then he urged them never to be faint of heart.

"Have not the Italians all things save courage, and we courage only? By God, lads, so it is; for I have it from the lips of Roumis that never did a Roumi army fight so well equipped as these Italians. They fly in the air, they float on the sea, but, God be praised, the earth is the last home of them all. What though now and then they win a small victory in the future? Let us be only steadfast, and the final victory is ours. They cannot hope to fight us Aarab in the Khala (the waste-land; the desert) for how can they advance in great numbers when we fill in all the wells before them? They must bring their food and water with them; and across these shifting sands their biggest guns can hardly come.

"And what must it cost them, then, in guns and lives, and money, to win this poor country of ours? A little while, and they will pay away on war more than the worth of Tripoli, if they had bought it fairly. Let us but face them bravely, and they'll surely find that they can

make no headway, and will give up war against us."

He stimulated their excited minds with these and many other cheering arguments.

"And then," said he, "if they are once assured that, sooner than give up our homes to them, we mean to fight them to the death, and at the last, to burn our own homes down, and fell all trees, and sow the fields with stones, and go to live in Tunis or El Masr, then they will understand that their enterprise is hopeless, and we shall enjoy peace."

"What have we to fear from them?" he cried. "How can they hope to face us? Did not the negroes, men whom our fathers enslaved, defeat them utterly a few years back? But, mind you, these Italians are very like a pack of snarling dogs. Face them unflinchingly, dealing them hard blows, and, billah, they will yelp and run away. But show one sign of fear, and they will fall upon and rend us, every mother's son."

When he had spoken, others took their cue, and exhorted the camp vehemently for a long while. And when the speeches were done—it was a long while, for the Arabs are great lovers of eloquence; and hardly had one speaker ended when another claimed his place—the powder-play and coursing began again.

Now we had races, matching horse against

horse; and, pitting my Bimbashi against a zep-tir's grey colt famous for its pace, I lost, over a course of half a mile, by some three lengths. Yet I was pleased enough, because the Arabs handsomely praised my riding, claiming that to sit quite still upon the saddle with the rein drawn fairly tight, was better in a race than, as the zeptir had, to roll about, and let the rein hang loose. That this was not the glozing flattery of the Arabs I had later proof, for twice, chiefs came to me, and, having wagered heavily upon their horses, asked me to ride for them.

I would not ride with Arab saddle and gear, but used instead my own. One of the sheikhs, craving first permission, examined my saddle, and finally, mounting, rode upon it, but he did not like it.

“Nay,” said he, “with stirrups so long, and with so small and smooth a seat, no man can sit in comfort on a horse. Sooner by far I would ride on the bare back.”

We executed all together a kind of figure-riding, something like a country dance. Two ranks of horsemen lined up facing one another, and, at a given signal, one rode out from either side, whirling his gun aloft. The pair encountered in the middle of the lists, and there performed some mimicry of combat, and then, wheeling and returning to their places, were replaced by

other two. And meanwhile, those in line kept up a rhythmic, barking cry. "Ha! Haha-how, haha-how!"

The man who rode to meet me in the dance came out from his ranks standing erect upon his saddle, and had a scornful smile for the Roumi who could not emulate this circus-feat. But his milder steed shied before the onslaught of my savage Bimbashi, who came on, unchecked by me, with teeth bared, and ears laid flat against his head. And, slewing unexpectedly aside, the other horse upset his rider's poise, whereat the man came down ungracefully from his perch, and rolled beneath his horse's feet. And the Arabs, who delight in "showing off" and yet are merciless in mockery of one who thereby comes to grief, gibed at the fallen cavalier until I thought he would have wept.

And, had he done so, it were no unusual thing; for I have seen tough camel-men, on whom the cruellest blow could hardly take effect, blubber outright when overmatched in raillery or treated with contempt.

When all the camp was at its highest pitch of wild enthusiasm, one reveller cried out that they should ride off in a body to the tents of the Turks, and let the officers see how well this war accorded with the humour of their allies.

Instantly, all fell in with the suggestion, and a race began, hotter than any that had gone

before. For every mounted man resolved to be the first to gallop shouting through the lines of Turkish tents. So off they sped, across the plain now scattering clouds of sand, now plunging through the asphodels whose trumpet blooms reached to the stirrups of the riders. And, having started with the first, and ridden hard, I came in good time to the tent of Nazmi Bey, before whose door the crescent standard drooped against its pole; and saw the Arab army thunder past with shouts and multitudinous trampings. The Turkish officers came out and saluted the column as it passed; and afterwards I went in with the deputies, and dined with Nazmi Bey.

XXVII

THE Turkish cavalry commander gave me interesting news. We had long known that there was on its way to Tripoli a German medical mission, sent by the German Red Cross Society to help the wounded Turks and Arabs. The doctors of the Turkish Red Crescent were already come to Azizia ; but these, being few in number, and being short of drugs and stores and tents, by no means filled the want of doctors' aid. The ship in which a second party of their surgeons were bringing great stores of medicaments, was captured by the Italians off the coast of Tunis ; and the coming of the German mission was, for all in camp, an interesting theme.

“ And now,” said Nazmi Bey, “ they have at last arrived. They came to Azizia last night, with tents and nurses, instruments and drugs in carts and on the backs of camels—enough for us, they say, though every man of us got some wound.”

He told me that the Germans brought with them twenty light waggons, and that a train of

three hundred and sixty camels brought their medicines across the Tunisian frontier. They were to go, he said, to Gharien, and there fit up a base hospital; at which I wondered. For, having been myself to Gharien, I could not conceive how anything on wheels could be taken up those rocky passes over the mountains. Yet Nazmi Bey was positive in what he said. The waggons, he declared, were brought, at great expense and with tremendous difficulty, across the desert dunes, because they carried apparatus which could not be packed upon the backs of camels. They contained filters, stoves, sterilisers, refrigerators and so forth, all of which must certainly arrive somehow in Gharien.

“Well then,” said I, “if they have undertaken to carry all those things up the mountains they will certainly try to do it; and, for my part, I am going to watch them. If they succeed they will perform a miracle.”

They did. It was a feat which great Hannibal—possibly not unfamiliar with that country—might have envied; and it took them four days to make that journey, which is counted one day’s ride from Azizia. But the end of it was that they got their carts and camels up those incredible ascents, and there, in the heart of those wild hills, established a hospital as neat and orderly as Berlin itself.

I left Senati Beni Adhem at once, and rode

to Azizia ; and there, a little way beyond the sugar-loaf hill, I found the German camp, with tents and carts and packing-cases strewn over six good acres of the asphodel-starred plain.

It was night when I arrived, and I halted to put my horse in the compound and watch him fed—for I never dared trust either callous Arab or slow, forgetful Turkish soldier to see to the feeding of my horses—before I went to introduce myself to the Germans. And as I neared their tents, and saw lanterns moving to and fro, creaking on their rings as they swung, and smelt the appetising odour of cocoa and hot soup from their kitchens, there came to my ears the sound of a guitar, and the voice of some deep-chested Teuton, singing a simple, sentimental German ditty. And I realised, quite suddenly, that for more months than I cared to count I had not lived amongst people of my own kind or heard music such as pleases us, or walked in the woods and fields and pleasant dales of Europe, whose charm seemed to be embodied in the lilting song that now I heard in the darkness of an African night in Tripoli. I stood a good while, listening, and heard jolly shouts, and the clink of glasses, and chorus-snatches lustily delivered in the down-right German tongue, that sounds, when indistinctly heard, so like the broad dialects of the North of England. I felt homesick.

But at last I walked forward to the long tent whence came the pleasant sounds, and, having stumbled over many hard objects on the way, stood at last at the entrance, and struck my riding whip upon the canvas, knocking for admission.

They took me in, and gave me German wine to drink, and heaped my plate with unaccustomed dishes. They gave me news from Europe and told me of their amazing journey. Only two, Herr Professor Guebel and his second-in-command, Herr Doctor Fritz, had ever seen the shores of Africa before. Most of the rest—there were about a dozen of them—now for the first time found themselves outside their native land. And they were full of the wonders they had seen, relating with frank simplicity their experiences in the land of camels and palm-trees (on which grew dates!) and strange ragged men, who bore long guns upon their backs and rode on wild, long-tailed horses with the speed of the wind. They showed the curios they had collected on the way—rusty daggers, old horse pistols—(“ Did he cheat me when he made me pay twenty marks for that ? ”)—beetles, lizards, chameleons, gazelles’ horns, and Heaven knows what ridiculous oddmentries—all to be carefully stored and carried back to wondering relatives at home.

Then they talked and sang German student-

songs and old folk-tunes, and toasted the Kaiser, and our King, and the Sultan of Turkey, and one another, and myself; and the air grew blue with the haze of good tobacco smoke. And then Fethi Bey came in smiling and demurely debonair, and someone toasted him in execrable French; and the good Professor tried him with Egyptian Arabic (for Herr Guebel had lived in Cairo thirteen years ago). Doctor Fritz told stories of the campaign against the Hereros; and, illustrating a remark, made me sniff at a pungent-smelling burning twig of desert scrub. "Der Hottentots, dey schmells like dot," said he.

I asked them, would they let me ride with them to Gharien; and they welcomed me joyously. So I slept that night in their camp (whereby I had next morning a breakfast of bread and jam, and hot, wholesome cocoa), and, on the afternoon of the next day, started off with them.

They had meant to make an early start, and reach the foot of the hills by sunset. But, unfamiliar with the manifold delays of the East, they had not struck their camp till nearly dark. First, the horses from the Turkish artillery, which were to drag their waggons, could not be ready at the time appointed; and when they did come, many took most unkindly to the task of hauling waggons. The Arab guides

and Turkish escort went astray, and time was lost before they could be found. And when at last the column started off, the sun was low down in the Western sky, and long black shadows marched on our left hand.

Ten Turkish troopers came as escort with us, commanded by an old, long-bearded officer from Turkistan, who had the features of a Kalmuck Tartar. He knew Siberia, and had travelled much in Central Asia. Frosts of many winters had bitten into the old soldier's bones. His joints creaked with rheumatism, and after having sat, he rose again with difficulty. He asked me privately, whether I thought the German doctors knew a cure for his ailments, and, when I said that probably they did, he sighed, straightening himself painfully in the saddle, and sought to devise some innocent beguilement that should cause them to look favourably on him.

The Turks knew little of the road we had to traverse, and the Arab zeptirs, riding together at a quicker pace than could be taken by the waggons, were presently lost in the darkness far ahead. There came a confusion amongst the waggons. Dr. Fritz, riding slowly back and forth along the line, would call a halt at intervals, lest stragglers should be lost. Often it seemed as though laggards for whom the vanguard waited never would come up.

After the sun had set, impenetrable velvet darkness settled on the desert—that almost palpable blackness of African night, before the rising of the moon. Then, after one interminable halt, someone ahead cried back to know “Where was the track?” For here the road was very faintly marked.

The shifting sand and rapid-growing desert weeds in spring will often, in a few short days, blot out all trace of many miles of road. And now it seemed that, unnoticed, the column had wandered in the darkness from the elusive track. No one could say in which direction we were going, and the zeptir guides, who could have set us right (for even in the blackest dark, the nomad Arab will not miss his way across the trackless desert), were gone ahead, and, in their heedless fashion, would no doubt ride on for many a mile, without noting, or caring, whether they were followed.

The train of waggons halted. Voices cried confusedly in the darkness, and the leaders held a council. Turkish troopers riding in wide circles, cast about to re-discover the track, and could not. Neither were those who rode back on the line by which we came successful; but one, that had gone ahead for near a quarter of a mile, came galloping back to say that he had come upon an Arab village. He was a Turk from Anatolia, and could not understand

the Arab tongue. At sight of him, he said, the people whom he saw had betaken themselves within doors, and left him to hold speech with their dogs.

Some of us rode on to this village—if two mud houses and a well can be so called—and tried to hire a guide to put us on the track. But the desert-folk are often suspicious of bands of men that ride abroad by night. They would not undertake to come with us one mile until the moon should rise.

“And, billah!” said one, “when the moon comes, what need have you of guides?”

The moon we reckoned would not rise for full five hours yet. And so at last the Germans resolved to halt and build a fire, and spend the dark hours as comfortably as they might, until it should be light enough for them to find their way.

Keen-smelling fires were built, and we sat round them, cross-legged. I wrapped myself in the Arab haik I carry, which is better than three blankets, being thick and soft and warm, of white, loose-textured wool; and curling by the fire, my head upon my saddle, disposed myself to sleep. The old, high-featured Turkish officer sat opposite, his Kalmuck visage mournful in the firelight, as he peered with filmy eyes into the smoke. He began to sing, in a plaintive, crooning voice; and, as I looked at him,

and at the line of low, long waggons that leapt from the darkness and vanished again, as the flames sprang up and died, it seemed to me that, centuries ago, the Hun and Tartar hordes that rolled from Asia westward into Europe must have furnished many such a scene as this. It needed only that the creaking waggons should be hooded with black felt, or horse-hides stretched upon osier-hoops; and that the wheels, instead of having spokes, should be just cumbrous wooden discs. The squat-faced Turkish troopers should have worn the looser robes of their forefathers; should have carried painted bows instead of rifles and have ridden shaggy pony-mares instead of Arab horses. They would have milked those mares, and drunk the milk from pointed cups of birch-wood hanging at their girdles. All day the creaking waggons would have rumbled, as had ours, across the arid steppe, and when night came, round such a fire as this, the taciturn warriors would sit silent, like these Turks, save for the crooning of some wild and wavering air, or the occasional interchange of harsh, croaking monosyllables.

And at the other fire, in jolly circle, sat the descendants of those men with whom the Hun invaders fought so furiously. One of them—I saw him clearly in the firelight—was a huge red-bearded giant, lying all asprawl beside the fire,



A NIGHT HALT IN THE DESERT.

his face burnt brick-red by the sun, and peeling off on nose and brow. But his right hand clasped a mug of steaming cocoa, where it should have held a horn of ale; and his nose was bestridden by a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles. It would need many a change in him to reconstruct the type that fought Attila; and the beardless, spectacled young students, for all their sword-scarred faces, did not recall the skin-clad, long-haired Teuton heroes of the dawn of Europe's history. Indeed, the European has left his ancestors full far behind. Our bodies do not do the work their bodies did; and our minds no longer work upon the lines of theirs, and so our countenances and our bearing have entirely changed. The Turkish peasant, like the nomad Arab, has not changed the tenor of his life in much, throughout the centuries.

Gunpowder came into the Eastern's life, and straightway seemed as though it never had been absent.

I cannot picture to myself the Patriarchal days, but I see visions of the Israelites as white-robed Arabs, bearing long guns upon their backs, so closely has the rifle grown into the desert life. I picture to myself the flight into Egypt; and there is Yûssuf, riding on his ass, with dangling heels, beating mechanically on the creature's rump with a knotty branch. His

head is shaven, and his beard is grizzled with dust ; and at his back he has the six-foot gas-pipe flintlock. To me it were an anachronism if he were pictured lacking in it. Behind comes Miriam, the Blessed Virgin, stumbling afoot, with little Aissa cradled on her back, with cooking - pots and charcoal and flat loaves.

Tobacco, too, is firmly bedded into the life of the East, as though it had been always there. I cannot picture Solomon without a nargileh, and David, in my fancy, sucks at a slim stone-headed galliun, and gropes within his wallet for stray crumbs of tobacco as he matures his plans against Sheikh Saul. Yet who can fancy Cæsar with a briarwood pipe, or our great Alfred dreaming over a cigarette, what time the housewife's cakes are burnt ?

I fell asleep upon these thoughts, and woke to find the Tartar-faced officer stretching out to me a hand that held the half of a toasted cake. The moon was up, and all made ready to begin the march again.

“ Eat, then,” said the captain of the escort, proffering me his bread. “ We are to ride till dawn, and it will be cold. An empty belly is not good against the cold.”

I ate the bread, and gave him in return biscuits and chocolate, and, having brought with me a Thermos flask, poured out hot coffee

from it. The old man took the steaming cup with faint surprise.

“A wonder, a wonder,” he murmured drearily. “Is there then fire beneath the bottom of the flask; or how are you able to get hot coffee from it?”

We rode till dawn, the waggons creaking slowly over the waste that glistened like tarnished silver. The Germans sang their homely choruses—“The Lorelei,” and “Tannenbaum,” and thunderous patriotic hymns about the Fatherland. The Turkish escort, and the Arab zeptirs (who rejoined us when the bonfires were well alight), were astonished at the unfamiliar style of singing. No doubt to them, harmonious second parts seemed, since their ears were not accustomed, as though some of the singers had one tune, and some a different one altogether. One of the hospital nurses, a strapping Bavarian countryman, slapped an Arab on the shoulder, and bade him join in the song. The man stared wildly, half afraid and half resentful, not understanding what was said, and only half reassured by the boisterous laugh that accompanied the blow.

“He says, ‘Sing with us,’” I told the Arab; and he, with the air of a wise, indulgent elder stooping to the folly of children, smiled maliciously, and said that I might tell them, if I chose, that he had not the voice of a braying ass in his throat.

I mistranslated "braying ass" as "bull," and the German songster, pleased with what he took to be a compliment to his virility, laughed uproariously, and insisted on shaking hands with the zeptir, who submitted with resigned grace to have his fingers gripped and arm wagged senselessly. His companion laughed at him; and, to soothe his own wounded vanity, he began to sing a scurvy song about the folly of the Germans, improvising as camel-men do upon the march, and as sailors before the coming of steam made up their chantey-verses at the capstan. To the Semitic understanding of the Arabs, it is exquisite wit to say or sing offence in the uncomprehending face of one who does not understand their tongue. Servants and camel-men and muleteers, hired on a journey or campaign by hitherto untravelled Europeans, delight in the singing of lampoons upon their masters as they ride along, and in replying to orders with covert insults and revilings uttered with smiling, deferential face.

We rode till dawn, and when the sun was up, slept in the warmth at the foot of the mountains until nearly noon. The journey had been tiring, as all journeys at a slow pace are, both to man and beast; and we had not yet begun the difficult part of it.

There lay between us and the first ascent a

strip of channelled, scrub-grown boulder-ground ; bad going enough for even a mounted man, and promising all manner of disaster to wheeled vehicles. Often the rate of progress here was not a mile an hour. Now the waggons, jolting madly, had to skirt a pile of giant boulders ; now to crash through stubborn scrub, and now, with men's hands tugging at the spokes, to make the perilous ascent of some dried water-course's bank. Often for scores of yards a regular road must be made, with mattocks ; and the pink, sun-blistered Germans sweated copiously as they toiled.

Once, seeing far away upon the plain the hair-cloth booths of some nomad Arabs, I galloped off towards it, and came back, after much haggling, with two red earthen crocks of sweet, cold ewe's milk, corked with plaited grass. Then, coming back to where the Germans gasped and laboured under the burning sun, I passed the welcome, wholesome drink round to them, and received in pay most heartfelt thanks in broken English, and in strange incomprehensible German patois. Doctors, students, nurses, one and all flung off their coats and toiled at the wheels ; and so infectious was their energy, I got down from my horse and pushed and tugged and panted with them all the afternoon. Yet, when the night came on, despite our strenuous

labour, we had to leave the waggons at the foot of the ascent.

We rode into Gharien, and on the next day, very early, back the Germans came, and set to work. I would have gone with them, for this conquest of an incredible difficulty, set about in such a manly fashion, stirred me strongly, and I wanted to be able to say that I, too, had had a part in accomplishing what seemed impossible. But the kindly Germans would not rouse me from my sleep when they set out, and, undisturbed, I slumbered on till noon; and, even after that long rest, woke stiff and sore from yesterday's exertions.

That day, by dint of Herculean toil, most of the carts were dragged unbroken to the top of the first ascent. The Germans hired some forty Arab villagers out of Gharien, who came with ropes and levers to the task, and shouted manfully at every heave and strain; and stole the boots of a Turkish trooper, and a German student's coat. Sometimes the waggons, their horses having been unharnessed, were drawn up sheerly with ropes, dangling in mid-air from one rock-ledge to another. One fell back, carrying with it two horses and a German student clinging valiantly to their heads, to the very edge of a seventy-foot precipice. A boulder caught against the axle, and stopped it just in time. Men threw themselves down after bouts

of struggling, gasping like dogs for breath upon the hot rocks. A horse, straining violently, snapped a tendon in its leg. The Turkish troopers, when a stretch of level ground afforded opportunity, harnessed their horses also to the shafts, riding, postilion-wise, on them as they tugged.

It was found, when the ascent was gained, that two of the waggons had not been seen since mid-day on the day before. On the next morning, therefore, Doctor Fritz went back some way along the road, and spied out from the hill-tops with field-glasses, scanning the desert in vain for the lost carts. I was proud that he accepted my offer to ride down into the desert and look for them. They contained important apparatus. One, indeed, carried a huge and complicated filtering apparatus, without which hospital work was not to be begun. In the other was a refrigerator.

I took with me two Turkish soldiers and an Arab zeptir ; and the old captain of the escort, having, it seemed, a fancy for me, patted my arm approvingly when I volunteered to go, and presently declared that he must go as well.

I arranged with Doctor Fritz that as soon as I found the filter I should send to him for help, for it must be taken up to Gharien as quickly as possible. Then I would go on and look for the cart in which was the refrigerator.

But having unexpectedly come upon the filter after a three hours' ride, stranded in a dry gully, not far from the foot-hills, with its Turkish drivers placidly awaiting help, I conceived a better notion. I determined to carry the filter, without help from the Germans, into Gharien ; for I thought that, by dint of money and coaxing, I could hire Arabs from a village not far off, to carry it on camels by a shorter, albeit steeper, road, to where the hospital was being set up.

It was now about two o'clock of an exceedingly hot day ; and I had eaten as yet nothing but two hard-boiled eggs. I was tempted to ride back, after all, and let the Germans take their filter up themselves, while I might rest and eat. But I wished to do even better still than they had done, if it were possible.

So first I asked the captain of the escort to ride on with one soldier, and search for the one cart that still was missing. I wrote on the back of an envelope a note to Dr. Fritz : " I have your Wasser-steriliser. I shall bring it myself by a short road into Gharien. I shall arrive to-night." And then I sent my remaining Turkish soldier back across the mountains with this note.

There was a shepherd-lad, who had left his flock on the hill-side to come and look at the strange carriage of the Roumi. Him I sent to

the village, bidding him to bring a carpet, and a beradda of milk, and the headman. I broke open the packing case that held the filtering apparatus, and, having sketched its parts in my pocket book, took the apparatus to pieces as well as I could. Thus separated, the parts made bulky loads for two strong camels; and when the shepherd-boy returned, I lay upon the carpet he had brought, and drank the milk, and chattered with the headman for the hire of camels. The headman had not come alone; and both he and those who came with him protested at first that it would be madness to attempt to carry such loads upon the backs of camels up the shorter road to Gharien. But I overbore them, helped to load the camels up myself, and charged a man to walk at either side of each, to bear the pack up with his shoulder, in the worst places. The Arabs were unwilling; but I joked with them and cursed them, dismounted from my horse and helped them, and by sunset got to Gharien after a most wonderful ride, up terrible hills, through dark, echoing gorges blooming with lovely flowers, up the beds of mountain torrents, and finally over a kind of Giant's Causeway of slippery basalt, where I quaked at every step the camels took, and suddenly realised my folly in endangering a valuable instrument which was not mine. To add to many difficulties, my horse, who for two

days had been unusually well-behaved, knocked down the Arab who held him while I was helping the camels over a very bad place ; and, kneeling on him, would have savaged him, but that I hit him in the face with a lump of granite as big as a hat. The Arabs halted and insisted on turning back ; and it took a quarrelsome half-hour to make them go on. The mountain walls gave back the sound of words, and even of footsteps, like pistol-shots. We passed through strange Berber villages, each peopled by a single family of thirty or forty beings. In one pass I saw thousands of tufts of grass all tied with knots. This is done by a holy man of the mountains. Each knot is a prayer.

I beat the Germans into Gharien ; and when they came they thanked and praised me till I blushed. That night there was a glorious dinner of rejoicing. They had every right to feel pride in their accomplishment, for the bringing of the German hospital to Gharien was a feat worthy to be the theme of an Epic.

XXVIII

BACK again once more in Azizia and the outpost camps, I gradually became aware of a tragedy which had been enacted for many weeks, unnoticed by me. Once, on the outskirts of the market, I had seen a wretched Arab woman crouching in the sand, picking up, grain by grain, the barley that had spilt from bursting sacks and horses' nosebags. With fingers quick and dexterous as the beak of a fowl, and eager eyes roving everywhere in search of her pitiful spoil, she would gather in an hour perhaps four handfuls. And as she gleaned, she muttered gutturally to herself ; and now and then sprang up, with fluttering rags, bewildered, knowing not which way to turn before the feet of some hard-ridden horse, whose rider cursed her as she scrambled from beneath the flying hoofs.

The sight was pitiful enough, yet, at the time, it irritated rather than moved me to pity. I set down her action to the petty avarice of the Arabs, who think nothing unworthy to be taken, so it can be got for nothing. So bitter

poor are these thriftless nomads that the wastage of the more fortunate folk will make their treasures; and they will cumber themselves upon the march with broken bottles, bits of useless rope, and any odds and ends that they find upon the road. Often they carry such ash-heap pickings as these until, with bodily fatigue, there comes the limit of their little patience. Then they reluctantly discard their silly burdens; and another picks them up the next day.

Well, I thought this woman moved merely by this short-sighted greed of anything for nothing; but, in time, I found that I was wrong. At 'Bu Geshir one night, as I lay on my camp-bed, trying to sleep, I heard my bad-tempered horse outside plunge in his pickets, and then fall to angry snorts and squealings. On the heels of that there came a stifled cry, and then a sound of whimpering. And I concluded that some horse-thief spy had made the worst selection possible, and, trying to steal and ride away upon Bimbashi, had been kicked or bitten by the horse.

So I went out, with a pistol, and caught a ragged figure that was struggling to rise from the ground, almost within reach of the vicious beast who strained and struggled with his heel-rope. I pushed the revolver-muzzle melodramatically against my captive's cheek,

saying, "Well, now, thief; shall I shoot thee now or keep thee for hanging in the morning?"

Upon which the thief became revealed as a thin, ragged, young woman, hollow-cheeked and stammering with terror, who knelt in the sand, patting my knees and feet, and protesting incoherently that she had not come to steal.

"Not to steal my horse, perhaps," I said, astonished, and also embarrassed by her frantic attempts to embrace my scantily clad knees. "But thou wouldst have robbed the horse, eh? I'll have thee hanged. This is not the first time my nose-bag has been stolen."

"Ai-ai-ai!" she lamented. "I did not come to steal, sidi; I did not. I'm not a thief, no, believe me."

"You would have robbed my horse of his barley," said I, "and I shall take you to the sentry."

"How rob thy horse?" she said, indignant and yet terrified. "All I would take, see now, is what falls to the ground." She declared she had come to pick up the fallen grains, and that while she did so the horse had knocked her down. "So that, ai-ai, all the little that I had is spilt and lost again. And he would have trampled on me."

I did not believe her, and said so. I said:

"Who would come in the darkness for such poor spoil as dropped horse-food; to be picked up as birds pick their food?"

“Thou,” she retorted; “aye, billah, thou wouldst, with my hunger in thy belly, and children to feed beside. Ah, to grudge to the poor what horses do not eat!” She began to weep again, saying that she was not always poor; she had had a house near Zanzour, and food, plenty, so that her children were fat, before the Italian ships, with their bombardment, drove all the people out into the desert.

Perplexed, I loosed my hold upon her shoulder, and she got cautiously to her feet. And then, in an instant, before I could stop her, or say another word, she was off, running like the wind, and disappeared in the darkness. And I went back to bed, wondering whether what she said had any truth in it, or whether it was only the artifice of the cunning desert thief.

But not long afterwards, at Azizia, I saw again, upon the outskirts of the market, that human fowl whom I had first observed; and when I asked her why she made this painful gleaning, at first she made no answer, being suspicious of mockery. Then, in the true whine of the Arab beggar, she besought me to give her a little charity.

“Well, then, I’ll give thee a penny (“a tenner” is the Arab slang for what is nearest to our copper coin), only tell me first why thou scratchest in the dust, billah! like a hen, for barley-grains.”

She looked doubtfully at me, as though unable to believe that I should ask the question seriously.

“Is it to sell again?” I asked, “or dost thou, perhaps, keep a goat?”

“Hé!” she retorted scornfully; “and who would buy so little as a day’s gathering brings me? And, for a goat, who gives barley to a goat? Can’t he find more, and quicker, for himself than I? No, we shall eat this; I and my little bint.”

“Where is she then, the little bint?” I asked.

The woman pointed to a terribly emaciated little girl of five or six, who sat at the courtyard’s archway, droning ceaselessly in the tearful beggar’s whine, high unintelligible prayers to God and man for charity.

“There she sits,” said the mother. “She has a sickness of the eyes, or she would help me to seek for grain. Give me now the ‘tenner.’”

I gave her—well, more than she had asked for. Instinctively she knotted it away in some corner of her dress. Then, “Why?” she demanded, frowning and suspicious. And, looking more closely at her, I perceived that, but for rags and hunger, she might still suppose herself to be possessed of charms.

“O, for God’s love,” I said; “and pity for the little bint.”

After that my eyes were opened. I began to see, hidden in corners, sleeping upon refuse-heaps, slinking like hungry dogs about the tents and barracks, gaunt, ghastly forms of starving people—women, children, cripples, and old men. For nearly all the able-bodied men were fighting, and they, at least, had rations from the Turks for both their horses and themselves. These famine-stricken spectres that I saw had been the wives and children of the people of the fertile coast-belt ; small farmers, gardeners and cultivators, whom fear of the prowling Italian warships, which went up and down the coast continually, bombarding the harmless mud-built hamlets, drove into the desert.

Knowing that rations were doled daily to the fighting Arabs, I had not suspected that their women went hungry ; yet, so it was.

They had crossed the deserts in famished hordes, living on roots and lizards, and had hung timidly about the camps, picking up refuse, living as they could. Many, of course, who washed, and cooked, and did the work of the tents, lived with the army, and were doubtless cared for well enough. But mostly these were women who accompanied their men from distant regions ; and there were hundreds of poor starving creatures who were homeless, shelterless, and without food.

The men who defended their country must

be fed. The horses that carried them to battle must be fed ; and the rations given to one man were not enough to share with wives and children. Nor did the latter claim it. Hard as I found it to believe, they held aloof, and starved as best they might, that their defenders should be strong and full of meat. They lurked furtively in the neighbourhood of the camps, only seeking scraps that otherwise the dogs would have.

One night, in Azizia, a great white camel, blundering in the darkness of the courtyard, snapped its shank across the tail of a gun, and filled the air with groans and desolate bellowings. It was killed, and cut up into pieces, and the Turks gave out that this meat was to be distributed among the poor. The news spread quickly to the sorry huts and hiding-holes of the famine sufferers, and a great crowd of women and children gathered at the gate of the caserne, and sat there with a mute expectancy, unlike the ordinary tumult of an Arab crowd. There were lean and withered women of fourteen ; old, wrinkled hags, with features hunger-pinched and skins like dirty parchment, all too tightly stretched on bony frames. There were old, harsh-featured men ; and worst of all to see, children, that should have been fat, brown babies, and now looked like shrivelled monkey mummies. I saw one child whose only clothing

was a faded red tarbush, that came down almost to his shoulders. His shins were sharp-edged, thin, curved sticks, the fleshless knee-joints seeming far too large; and every rib stood out, with deeply channelled hollows in between, and great pits at the base of his pitiful thin neck.

Some of the women wore clothes that told of a former prosperity; russet barred with black; or indigo, or faded, tattered shifts of blue. Many, despite their poverty, had still their necklaces and charms or bangles; but these in camp, at least, are not a saleable commodity.

There was, in this first dealing out of meat, no real attempt to organise the crowd. They crowded round, clawing and fighting, and the Turkish troopers, having seen anyone receive a piece of meat, beat that person away with sticks. There was the usual Arab trickery—now understandable, and pitiful enough to see—on the part of everyone to get more than a fair share; and much weeping importunity. Some got little more than bones; others, more clever in deceit, or else more lucky, carried off succulent lumps of camel-meat in the folds of their robes.

Meat, and especially after such long fasting as had been enforced in this case, is not a wholesome diet for the desert Arabs. Mostly their food is flour and oil, or lentils; and an

overdose of meat brings dysentery and bubonic spots amongst them.

I saw a hideous cripple, with shrunken, twisted legs, who swung ape-like, on his hands. He could not rise to fight for a place in the crowd, but bit and screamed amongst the legs of the people struggling for the meat. A Turkish trooper spied this creature out, and proffered him a good-sized lump of meat; and the cripple, taking it like a dog in his jaws, devoured it raw. The Turkish soldiers laughed, and kept tossing tit-bits to the cripple. He flapped and dived about in the dust after them, snapping up raw gobbets, and cursing the Turkish soldiers with his mouth full, because they laughed.

After the day of this ugly camel-feast, the Turks arranged a daily dole for the poor, of flour and oil; and steps were taken that it should be properly organised.

It was the saddest of sights to watch this daily distribution. The crowd that waited every afternoon for food might have acted as chorus in some gruesome Tragedy of Want. Many came most reluctantly, driven by sheer starvation to beg. For though even your wealthy Arab can be on occasion a shameless beggar, there is still the pride of caste. Decent women, of good former standing, thought it bitter shame that they must take their bread from the hands of the Turkish soldiers, waiting their turn with

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desert gipsy-women and the wives of nameless wandering camel-men. Such as these could not endure the rough, good-humoured jests of the soldiers, to which the lower-class women and jolly negress camp-followers replied mirthfully in kind. They made piteous attempts to veil their haggard faces, and, taking their portions silently, with downcast eyes, hurried away as quickly as they could.

Often I was struck by the stolid patience and rough kindness of the Turkish soldiers dealing with those exasperating crowds. The women pushed and fought and made all confusion possible, each hoping to profit thereby. Having received their portions, they would hide them, and then try to get more. The Turks had sticks for keeping order; but they rarely used them, pushing with them to keep back the crowd at most, and never striking.

I saw one, on a very busy afternoon, who brandished his cudgel, scowling ferociously at the restless, disorderly crowd. Two little girls of seven or eight, terrified at first, soon realised the monster's harmlessness. They laughed in his face, and ran away. He chased them, flourishing his stick, and brought it down with a resounding bang; not on their shoulders, but upon a sack of barley. They laughed the more, and teased him, making faces and sticking out their tongues, as well-bred little girls in England

sometimes do. Whereupon the soldier made a sudden dash, and caught one by the ankle with the crook of his stick. Grinding his teeth, and rolling his eyes, he carried her off to the bakehouse, "to be roasted, by my head! when thou art fat enough."

Gallantly as the little Turkish force has tried to stem the famine, however, it was not to be hoped that they could reach all, nor even the greater part of the sufferers.

Money was raised in England in response to an appeal which I made on behalf of these poor creatures; and with what was sent, Fethi Bey clothed and fed scores who must have died from hunger and exposure. But I do not think a hundred pounds in all was raised before the end of April; and still, as I write this in August, there are starving, homeless wretches in the desert, unable to return to their ruined homes because a civilised nation has made war upon their men.

If Turkey had made war on Italy; if Italian peasant women and children were starving through the country-side, not daring to venture near their homes because they knew that women and children would be caught and bound and tortured, as Arab women and children were caught and bound and tortured by Italian soldiers last October—why, then, I fancy that not only unofficial charity would come lavishly

to their rescue, but that even cautious statesmanship would venture on a protest.

I have made little mention of the ugliest side of Italy's campaign. No one in Europe doubts the truth of revelations concerning the massacre of the unarmed Arabs, which were made by unbiassed foreign correspondents; and, evidently enough, despite the passing disgust which they aroused, nobody seriously cares. But when I remember the zeal with which, in this country alone, huge sums of money were subscribed for the sufferers by the Messina disaster, I almost venture to hope that, if only the awful sufferings of the Arab women and children could be realised, something might yet be done in England to help these innocent accomplices of the men who are daring to stand in the way of glorious Italian progress. The men—the Arab fighters and the Turks—need help from no one. Italy, indeed, needs help against them; and, having realised her desperate case, now tries by every wile to gain an intervention favourable to herself. Probably she will get it. Our own England, no doubt, having so many traditions of successful championship of such oppressed as could reward her, cannot, surely, permit a friendly nation's attempt at robbery to result in humiliating and ruinous defeat.

But, at any rate, the Turkish and Arab fighting forces, until their cause is ruined by

unfair intervention, can continue to take care of themselves. But their women and their children starve—starve in a degree impossible to the poorest of our English poor. For, to the most destitute of strikers' families and widows and orphans of the sailors of a wrecked ocean liner, there still remain workhouses, soup-kitchens, shelters.

But the Arab destitute go naked in the sand-wastes, and they die there of hunger, because it is the duty of a Christian Power to spread civilised blessings in the desert.

XXIX

MORNING in the camp at 'Bu Geshir. Last night the coming of two hundred mountain men, self-styled " Oulad bu Sif " (Sons of the Sword), had swelled the Arabs' numbers and had filled the already crowded tents to overflowing. They came in with a storm of rain (which none the less, could never dash their spirit, for they sang and danced through half the night about the spluttering watch-fires). And now, the raindrops of last night still hang upon the leaves of orange and citron trees in the garden where my tent is pitched ; and horses' flanks are caked with yellow mud ; and in the early market, men pick off with slender wheat-hued fingers the drying mud that cakes upon their feet and on the edges of their haiks.

Morning at 'Bu Geshir, with the sun new risen, and the clouds not yet decided whether to let his face be seen. Looking, as I lay on my bed, through the open door of my tent, I saw a great cloud-face staring down with sulphurous yellow

eyes. I have often before traced human faces in the clouds, but never so distinct a one as this, which showed full face, whereas most cloud-faces are in profile. It was a storm-cloud, swollen and purplish, and the face, seeming to wear a cruel smile, hung in mid-air, flushed by the rising sun, like the evil, brutish mask of a negro god—the face of the cruel God of Africa, leering upon the Turkish camp.

Others, beside myself, observed this face; and Arab superstition, likening it to the countenance of a triumphantly smiling African, saw in it a cheerful omen.

There came from the north-east, a faint, distant spitting of irregular rifle fire, that swelled and grew, like the snap and crackle of twigs in a newly-lighted camp-fire, until at last, as the Arabs in the camp began to shoot, it came from all sides. With it there sounded, steadily louder and louder, a deep musical droning sound, like the humming of a giant bee. An Italian monoplane, circling high out of reach of the hastily delivered Arab rifle-fire, flew over the outpost camp. The thing seemed like a bronze dragon-fly. The aeronaut passed across the camp and back again; and as he flew, he let fall a small object, which at first I took to be a bomb. But, without explosion, it fluttered into scores of downward-whirling white specks, as though a snow-cloud had been

rent suddenly open. Through my glasses I saw the leather-clad aeronaut, a glistening brown figure in the sky, bend down to watch the falling of his missives, then, gripping bars and levers, swing up higher through the air, and slowly head away for Tripoli.

The shower of leaflets slowly fluttered to earth, and many ran to pick them up. They were square paper pages, on which a long appeal in Arabic was printed. Of those that picked them up, not one in ten was skilled enough to read the message; but all clustered round the lettered few, who read the classic Arabic aloud, and put its meaning into homelier terms.

The letter was well worded, and made keen appeal to Arab greed and credulity; but, like all Italian enterprise, it came too late in the war. No one knowing the state of affairs at the beginning of the war, the fewness of the men, and the somewhat doubtful relations which at first existed between Turks and Arabs, would have doubted that appeals of this kind would then have had some measure of success. But now the seed was sown on purely stony ground. Scoffing comments punctuated the reading of the letter.

Italy had come to rescue the Arabs from the misrule of the Turks, and to confer on them huge benefits, that Turkey could not give.

In one of the groups, a fat-featured, kindly

looking scribe, a writer of letters and of charms, read out this passage, and the crowd guffawed.

“ Ullah, they so love us that they’ll shoot us all dead if we will not come to their arms ! ”

“ They’ll save us from the Torcha ! Aye ; the law of the Torcha will never again trouble those hundreds whom the Italians shot down in Tripoli. That’s true enough.”

The reader went on. The letter, he said, declared that the Italians had punished only those who took up arms against them.

“ So, then,” commented one, “ our wives, and the children at the breast, were slaying Italians in Tripoli ! ”

“ It says,” went on the reader, “ that the Arabs are fools to let the Turks gull them into fighting. It says the Turks never fight, but send the Arabs to the front while they themselves lag behind.”

“ Ha, that was a clever lad that wrote that. Has he heard the Torcha curse us, then, as they did at ’Bu Siddra, when our hot-headed ones dashed in and scared the better part of the Italians away ? Aye, the Arab went in front there, true enough, because the Torcha couldn’t hold them back. But for that, we’d have eaten up the lot.”

The reader, pleased to be thus the centre of attention, and gratified by frequent ejaculations —“ Mashallah ! Billah ! a very learned one !

Wullahi ! Well read, little uncle," and so forth—read on, rolling the rich phrases on his tongue, and glancing about pridefully as he proceeded to construe them. The crowd listened intently, interested, but not in the least won over by the specious arguments.

Suddenly a ragged, waggish fellow elbowed through the crowd—a loose-limbed Tripoli townsman, with beardless pallid face, flexible mouth, and a long, humorous nose. He stood behind the reader, squinting down his nose, grimacing with distended cheeks and wrinkled eyebrows, and pretending to read over the other's shoulder. The crowd laughed, and the dignified scribe, unable to make his voice heard, glared angrily at his mimic.

"Silly lad!" he said. "Ignorant buffoon!"

The other wagged a lean, dirty forefinger in his face.

"Ah, cheat!" he cried, "Ah, barefaced swindler!" He turned to the laughing crowd. "Fools!" he cried, with an exaggerated attitude of scorn. "How easily you are deceived. This fellow, billah, reads no more scholarly than I myself!"

The scribe, taken aback by the impudence of the assertion, gasped indignantly and began to protest.

"Hear me," he bawled. "This liar——"

But the other, snatching the paper from his

hands, flung out his arm with a grandiose gesture and began to make pretence of reading.

“Wurra wurra wurra wa wa,” he jabbered. “And that, beloved ones, is as much as to say : ‘In the name of the Sultan of Italy and all his spawn !’ ”

The crowd were convulsed ; for indeed, the aspect and tones of the fellow were intensely comic.

“Go on, little uncle, go on. Tell us what thou seest in the paper,” they cried.

“Hear, then ; and don’t interrupt a learned man with your silly talk. There was a man who thought to snatch a bone from a dog ; so he takes a good thick staff, and goes into the yard where sits the dog, chewing his bone in peace.

“‘Thy bone,’ says he, ‘at once give me thy bone ; and take thou that, and that.’

“And thereat he delivers two thumping whacks at the dog. But the dog is no common dog ; no, billah ! He avoids the blows, quick as a bird, and then, deh ! he has bitten the stick in two, and is running at the man.”

He told his tale with a wealth of grimacing and gesticulation, now mimicking the attacker, now the dodging, snarling dog.

“Well now,” he went on, “the man is chased out of the yard, and begins to think the job a harder one than he at first believed. So now he

makes another plan. He takes a bit of old camel-meat in his hand ; and goes again to the dog.

“ ‘ O Sultan of dogs,’ ” he says. “ ‘ O thou possessor of beautiful teeth, see how thou hast wronged me ! I came, by my head, with a tit-bit to give thee. See here, sniff at it. Isn’t it delicious ? Fresh killed kid, by my God.’ ”

“ But in his other hand, behind his back he grips his cudgel.

“ ‘ Aha,’ thinks the dog, ‘ that’s to crack my skull when I come to sniff the meat.’ ”

“ And since he is no common dog, but a clever, brave, wise little Arab of a dog, he rushes at the man again, and sinks his fangs in his leg.

“ Ah ! ha ! ha ! how ! Yonder goes the man, limping and yelling ; and the dog goes back to his bone.”

All were pleased with the parable and the lively manner of its delivery. As in the days of Christ, so at the present in the East, the people are more readily swayed by stories than by arguments. Several of the Sheikhs, taking advantage of the impression produced, gave orders that all sheets of paper that could be found should be gathered up and taken to the Turkish commander ; and this was done at once.

XXX

I HAVE a memory-picture of Ferhat Bey, sitting in his tent at night. The flame of an earthen oil-lamp throws a strange, wavering light upon the deputy's rugged face. He sits cross-legged upon cushions, sucking at the tube of his nargileh. The interior of the tent is gaily decorated. Texts from the Koran, cut from coloured cloth, are stitched upon the canvas. Strange geometrical designs, in yellow, black, and red, radiate from the centre of the roof.

There is little harmony in the colours of Arab house decoration. Harsh greens, crude yellows, savage, blinding reds, are used in clumsy daubs to paint the cornices and friezes of their walls, and the inner linings of their tents; and yet, to accustomed eyes, the effect is not entirely inharmonious. In line and form and symmetry, the arabesque designs are always perfect; and, viewing at first the clashing colours with distaste, one realises that when the design is looked at as a whole, and not in detail, the war of tones is lost in the general conception.

Ferhat Bey smoked his nargileh, staring at the lamp. I, on my bed—I camped with him that night—smoked cigarettes, and stared up at the ceiling of the tent.

Suddenly, taking the mouthpiece from his lips, the deputy blew an upward cloud of smoke, and said abruptly :

“ Do you believe there is a God ? ”

I said instantly : “ I am sure of it.”

“ Most of the officers on the staff say there is no God,” he said, in an awed voice. He peered at me wistfully across the lamp.

“ They say that no one who is educated believes there is a God,” he went on. “ And they say that all educated Europeans laugh at the idea.”

I quoted the first sentence of Bacon’s essay on atheism ; and Ferhat Bey approved highly of it. He repeated it to himself a great many times, as though trying to learn it by heart. After a while, he said :

“ It is terrible that so many of our young men should have no faith. How can Turkey be great ? How can she win her battles, if we don’t trust in God ? ”

“ Oh,” I said quickly, “ I didn’t mean to say that I believe in a God who looks something like a glorious man, who will reward me for doing right, and punish me for doing wrong.”

“ Ah ! ” said the deputy, sadly. “ I thought

you did." He sat silent for some time. Then he sighed, and began again.

"The young officers who have been educated in Paris tell me there is no God; and ask me, how can I prove that He exists. I am not clever, as they are, so I can't answer them. They make all my arguments seem foolish. But how do they know there isn't a God? There must be Someone to have made the world."

I did not want a theological discussion with Ferhat Bey, partly because I did not wish to forfeit his good opinion of my character, and partly because my own views on the subject were so exceedingly vague that I did not see how to explain them to him without offence. However, he pressed me hard.

"You don't say there is no God?" he said.

"No."

"Well, then, what is the God whom you believe in like?"

"I don't know, Ferhat Bey."

"Well, but,"—he was honestly puzzled—"you can't believe in something and not know what it is."

I had nothing to say.

"And," he pursued, "don't you believe that God punishes and rewards, according as men do right or wrong?"

I looked at the serious, kindly face of this old Arab gentleman, and wondered whether, without

giving him offence, I could try to define my very nebulous opinions. For one reason I should have liked to continue the discussion; for I have often wondered what the Arabs' true conception of the Deity may be. But, pious in all their words and superficial deeds as all the Arabs are, I had never encountered one who was in any way inclined to discuss the attributes of his God, least of all with one upon whom he looked as an unbeliever.

However, the Zawia deputy was an exceptional man, and a very exceptional Arab; and at last I decided to take some risk.

“Look, Ferhat Bey,” said I, “I don't know rightly what I do believe. I don't deny there is a God, because there seem to me to be so many things which go to prove there is. But I don't know what He is like, and most certainly I don't believe that He will punish or reward me according to any human scale of justice. God doesn't punish me for theft or murder. Man does. But if I over-eat or over-drink, or commit any excesses of that kind, why then man doesn't punish me; and since someone or something does, I suppose that must be God.”

Ferhat Bey reflected.

“Well,” he said at last, “you don't at least deny that God exists.” He sat awhile, musing, while the water in the nargileh gurgled comfortably. At last :

“I think,” said he, “two ants might talk about men much as we talk of God. Look now, here is an ant-hole in the earth. An ant came out, and walked about, and crawled all over my slipper, inside and out. He went back into the ant-hole, having seen and learnt much more than any of the other ants. And yet he knew no more than they the meaning of all that he had seen. He might crawl and explore for ever in that slipper, but he would never conceive its use.

“Now, if, when he goes back, the other ants ask this much-learned one, ‘Is there a God?’ he might reply, ‘All the wonderful things I have seen in my travels give me no evidence of the existence of a Greater Ant. I do not believe that such a thing exists.’

“Well, that’s the kind of answer that your clever, learned men give. They have explored the skies, they have acquired all manner of scientific knowledge, but, all the same, they are only men, and so they can only understand as men. Don’t you think that the things they understand in one way (just as an ant could understand a slipper in one way, and take back a detailed account of it) may have some other meaning? At any rate, we are surely wrong to say, as though the fact were proven, that nothing greater than ourselves exists in all the worlds.”

XXXI

ONE day upon the road from Senati Beni Adhem to Azizia, I had a strange proof of the vastness of the area whence Islam draws recruits in time of war. I had halted on the road to rest my horse and drink hot Arab tea ; for half way on that road there is a little hut at which, since there are wells near by, it is the custom of travellers to rest awhile. The hut is a desert emporium, where tea and sugar, wool, barley, oil, tobacco, lamps and cartridges are kept for sale. There are big red earthen jars of oil, and bundles of hides, and little boxes of spices in holes in the wall.

I sat inside, looking through the open door across the roughly thatched verandah, while the merchant fanned the tiny charcoal brazier on which the tea was perched. The man sang dreamily to himself as he mechanically fanned. It was warm within the hut, and bitter cold that day outside. I remember that a black kid was tethered to a corner-post of the verandah. The wind ruffled its long hair. Fine streams of

sand came filtering in between the door-chinks, and the smoke of cigarettes eddied in faint blue spirals about the hut.

My Turkish orderly, to whom I offered tea, took it bashfully, and drank, turning his back, as though ashamed to let me see him do it. He sat at the door of the hut, keeping an eye on the horses, who snuffed about the old stone drinking-troughs by the well-rim.

“Hai!” he said suddenly, as in surprise, and, standing up, appeared to stare along the road.

I could not tell what had attracted his attention, and could not speak to him to ask him, for he spoke no Arabic, and I only such words of Turkish as are necessary for giving orders to a camp servant. And I did not wish to manifest any undignified curiosity by walking to the door and looking out. So I sat still and waited.

And presently the square of light made by the open door was filled by the frame of a huge, broad-shouldered man, who stood there for a space, a hand on either jamb, looking at me with a frankness that bordered on the impertinent.

He spoke in Turkish to my orderly, and, on getting an answer, nodded to himself, and then continued gazing on me in silence.

“Salaam alik,” said I at last, a little nettled by the man’s cool, silent scrutiny. “You fill

the door-hole well enough ; and stop the wind. Yet I don't know why you stare at me as though I were a devil."

He took a stride into the hut, and held out his hand. "How do you do, sir?" he said in a deep, manly voice.

I was much taken aback, and absent-mindedly muttered in English the usual banalities that constitute a reply to that enquiry.

"You are English, yes?" queried the big man, squatting on his heels and looking me full in the face. "I know the English. I know India. Will you give me a little tobacco?"

I gave him some, and he rolled a cigarette and lit it at the brazier. Then he began to talk again, this time in Arabic.

"I knew that I should find some Englishmen here," said he. "Always when there is a war you find the English. I was at Mecca when I heard of this war; so I came, and behold, as soon as I arrive, I find an Englishman."

I had noticed, now that he had come into the hut, and I could see his face and dress more clearly, that he wore a turban of unusual style, and carried a huge, triangular knife, unlike any Arab weapon, in his broad scarlet sash. He was a remarkably handsome man, straight-nosed, level-browed, and with a fan-shaped, thick, black beard spreading over his chest. His strong even teeth gleamed through the beard as he

smiled at me in a very taking manner, without the slightest hint of self-deprecation. He spoke good Arabic, but with a peculiar accent.

I asked him who he was, and whence he came.

"A wanderer," said he, "from Afghanistan. My father was an Afghan, and my mother a Persian. My people are at peace now with the English—though this knife, in the hands of my father, and of his father before him, slew plenty of them. No ill-will, eh?"

He glanced humorously at me, and I, smiling, shook my head.

"None at all," I said.

"Good, good," responded the mountaineer, heartily. "A fair give and take. See the knife now. Look at it well. Isn't it a fine one? Ho, I'd rather fight with that than with the best pistol ever made. Feel the balance of it, sahib. Run your thumb along the edge."

He had drawn the knife from its stamped, leather scabbard, and passed it to me—a fearful weapon, astonishingly heavy, and sharp as a razor. It was inlaid with gold in a curious device on the broad part of the blade, close to the massive horn hilt; and he kept it bright and from rust, with a coat of mutton grease.

When I returned it he swung it twice or thrice with a venomous hiss through the air, and said that with it he could cut a sheep in half.

"Aiwa," said I, "I well believe it. But tell me

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how came you so far from Afghanistan to a fight which is none of your people's ? ”

“God's battles are the battles of all Moslems,” said he, “and I am a Moslem. It was at Mecca, as I told thee, that I heard about the war ; and Mecca is half way here from my place. So I came on. After passing the border of Egypt I fell in with a caravan for BENGHAZI. We had good fighting there, but the Italians would not come out against us ; so I came here.”

I asked him whether he knew of any others who had come as far as he to join in the war.

“No,” he answered, “but there are men already here from Fezzan, down to Bornu and even Tibesti ; and there are others on the road.”

I asked him did he always go afoot.

“Mostly,” said he, “but I'm a clever thief ; and, who knows, I may steal a good beast some dark night. There's a fine bay stallion out there, now. Perhaps, when the Turkish soldier's eyes are off him——”

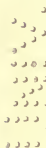
“My horse.” I said.

“Eh, well”——he rose and stretched himself——“guard him well at night, sahib. Now I shall go on to the Arab camp.”

He swung out of the hut, and swaggered off down the road with a gait which marked him out from desert men. I never saw him again, but afterwards I heard that he had risen to some eminence amongst the Arabs.



A MOUNTAIN ROAD.



XXXII

THERE came spells of hot, dry weather, and many in the camp fell sick of a mysterious "migraine." Save the commander, Neshat Bey, not an officer upon the Turkish staff escaped its ravages; and many of the doctors, too, were struck down. Fethi Bey lay very ill for more than a month, and as soon as he was well enough to move he was taken up to Gharien, to get well in the purer mountain air. Going up to Gharien, more to escape the tedium of the desert than for any other reason, I found him in the lattice-windowed room of the old castle, mournfully playing cards with the two doctors. The game, he told me, was an English one called "Mouse," and how he came to know of it I do not know.

While I was still at Gharien, one of the doctors, Rifaat Bey, fell ill. He told me, one morning, as I rode out, that he was suffering from influenza, and should be well again in a few days. But when, that night, I came back to the sleeping room we shared together, I found Rifaat Bey in

bed with all his clothes on, purple as to the face, and with protruding eyes. He was delirious, muttering incoherently, and picking busily with his fingers at the blanket.

Rifaat Bey had been stricken with typhoid fever, and he had it very badly indeed—so badly that he almost died of it. And I, having shared his rooms with him, sleeping in a bed whose side touched the side of his, was infected with the same disease, though I did not know it then. I rode down again to Azizia, all unconscious of impending illness, but wondering vaguely why the heat gave me such a feeling of lethargy, and why I could not eat anything.

One morning I sat just within the door of my tent, feeling extraordinarily lazy, and looking forward to a draught of fresh milk, which I had sent 'Bu Bekr, my Arab cook, to try to buy in the market. Milk was scarce and hard to get. Such supplies as the country Arabs brought in were eagerly snapped up in the early morning, before they had time to turn sour. Even so, this milk was never very wholesome. The men brought it in glass bottles, stoppered with a screw of paper; and the bottles, being never scalded clean, tainted the freshest milk as soon as it was poured into them. These milk sellers would not part from their bottles. If you bought from them you must have a receptacle ready for the milk; for, once emptied of milk, the bottle

was a source of profit to its owner, who could fill it with fresh water from a distant well, and peddle cooling sips to the thirsty market crowds and soldiers. All drinking water came from the wells in the desert at some two or three miles distance from Azizia, for the Azizia wells were all foul, and gave dysentery to those who drank from them. And since all water must be thus brought in in tanks, and skins, and barrels on the backs of camels, it was a scarcity, and a countryman with a bottle or two on his back could drive good bargains on a hot day for even a mouthful of it.

As I sat in my tent, hoping that 'Bu Bekr would find milk, and that it would be drinkable when he brought it, there came a very old man, leaning on a staff, to the door of the tent, and he sat down painfully in the shade and began to fumble in his wallet.

I said to him : " What do you want ? "

He paid no attention, but presently drew out of his wallet a bone or so, and a crust of bread, and the ends of one or two cigarettes. I watched him as he mumbled the bones in his toothless jaws, and thought to myself how dreadful it must be to be old, and shaky in the limbs, forced to be content with peace in life, and happy to get even that ; to be glad of mere colourless content and never any more to know the high elation of rejoicing.

The old fellow gnawed his bones and crusts with never a word after his first "Salaam alik," but he kept an eye on me, watching sideways as he made a pretence of eating. From his covert observation of me, so different from the dreary indifference of merely tired old eyes, I understood that he was begging in that superior style which disdains a direct appeal, and seeks to gain its end by a show of silent, uncomplaining suffering.

Presently, as though he had just got sight of the pan of dirty water in which 'Bu Bekr had washed my supper things last night, he asked me, might he dip his crusts in the water, to soften them, "and maybe give them a somewhat sweeter taste?"

I nodded, but, having availed himself of the gracious permission, the old man, after a nibble or two, sighed heavily.

"I have no heart to eat," said he. "Only a month ago, sidi, I was rich—aye, billah, and Kaimakam of a great village. Then I ate cakes, and fish in spices, and lambs cooked whole and stuffed with raisins and chopped dates. Now, ai, ai, poor as a dog, I eat what I find."

Beggars of the East will usually tell of former greatness, holding that nothing can more move the hearts of the humane than the spectacle of fallen prosperity.

"Eh, a hard lot," went on the old man.

“But I do not complain. I ask only a seat in the shade, and a crust to gnaw.”

I had not the passive cruelty to put the poor old creature through all his paces. Instead, I smeared two biscuits thickly with condensed milk, and held them out to him.

He made a fine show of pretending to refuse.

“Nay, nay, billah, I am no beggar. I did not ask.”

As he spoke his gnarled hands closed on the sticky biscuits. He licked his fingers, and a grin of slow delight spread over his features.

“Ullah !” he croaked, and slowly sucked at the sweet, unfamiliar dainty.

I wondered hazily, whether pleasure such as he now felt stood in the same ratio to old age as, say, the glory of an early morning gallop, or the exhilaration of a hard-fought football match stands to youth. I asked the old fellow—and got a blank stare in reply.

It seemed to me vitally important that I should make my meaning absolutely clear. I found it difficult, partly because my Arabic was never adequate to the discussion of abstract questions, partly because of a singular mental inertia, which prevented me from defining clearly in my own mind what it was I wished to say. I persevered. I found myself talking at an amazing rate to the old man, who stared apprehensively at me without a word.

"This is rather like what George Borrow would have done," I observed. "He seems to have had a mania for discussing philosophical problems with unsuitable mendicants." And I began to ask the old man what he thought of "Lavengro."

The old beggar scrambled to his feet and went away. I realised that I had been shouting at him, and was sorry to have scared him.

"And of course he didn't understand a word," I reminded myself, "because I spoke mostly in English."

Quite unexpectedly, I found myself continuing the discussion with one of the Turkish doctors of the Red Crescent Mission. I was in bed, lying on my back, and the dark, Spanish-looking face that looked gravely down at me, seemed now of monstrous size, now smaller than the head on a penny.

"I am glad to talk to an educated man," I remarked, "though I doubt if even you have read 'Lavengro.' I don't suppose Borrow ever translated any of his works into Turkish though of course you may have read him in French."

It was annoying to find that, for all his courteous air of attentiveness, the doctor made no answer. I tried again, but in a little while I realised that I was talking to him about people whom he had never heard of. So I gave it up, and

talked instead to myself for a great many days and nights.

I do not remember the arrival of the doctors and nurses of the British Red Crescent Mission, nor yet much of what happened to me between the time of their coming and the time of my falling ill. I had been delirious for five or six days when they came, and only came back at intervals to this world from a black void of inexpressible misery. Once I awoke to find two Turkish orderlies holding me down, whilst a man whom I did not know in the least was pressing what felt like a red-hot branding-iron on my chest. The Turkish doctors, it seemed, had decided to relieve the pressure on my lungs—I had been gasping painfully for breath—by cupping me. Poor fellows, so hard-worked were they that it was often impossible for them to superintend personally all the treatment they prescribed for their patients, and I presume this cupping business had been left perforce, in inexpert hands. The method was simple, and, when the operation was not carefully performed, exquisitely painful. The cups were something like a metal egg-cup, and were clapped over a ball of cotton-wool which, having been drenched in methylated spirits, was lighted and laid upon the patient's flesh. If all went well the cup acted as an extinguisher, and a vacuum was formed under it which exerted powerful

suction on the flesh, so that the cup stuck on even though the patient struggled up into a sitting position. But, on the other hand, if owing to careless application, or the struggles of the patient, some channel was left between the rim of the cup and the person of the patient, the little wool-fire, fed by streams of air, burnt merrily on, causing the edges of the cup to become red-hot, and most forcibly reminding the patient that he was still capable of suffering.

I remember occasions such as this, and I remember feebly thumping the face of a Turkish nurse, because I thought its expression too silly to be endured. I remember, also, being carried through blinding sunlight, in a stretcher, from the caserne to the hospital, where I was laid upon a mattress in a ward full of sick and wounded Arabs of the better class. The man next to me, a young sheikh's son from beyond Ghadames, had been shot in the chest; and drawing back the striped robe from his bosom, revealed a ghastly, bandaged wound which he said would soon be well.

The less seriously ill of the patients smoked cigarettes and played at cards. A white-clad negro lad stood by my side, flapping away the crowding flies with a towel; and in response to my entreaties he gave me lemons to suck, until the doctor forbade it.

In one short spasm of consciousness I felt great concern for my horse. "For," thought I, "the poor beast is bad-tempered, and nobody ever liked him but I; so I suppose he never gets fed or watered."

But I learnt that good Nazmi Bey had seen to the care of Bimbashi, and had stabled him with the artillery horses. And Bimbashi, waxing fat in idleness, fell upon a harmless, artillery horse and kicked it so that its leg was broken, and it had to be destroyed.

Twice in insane intervals I tried to kill myself, having come to the conclusion that I must inevitably die in that awful place, and wishing to be done with the business. I had some idea that, once dead, I could go home. So one night I broke a drinking glass and tried to cut my throat with its edge—a method of suicide which I lacked the fortitude to carry to the end. And once, waking from unconsciousness in the middle of the night, I saw a young Arab, Erhuma by name, squatting by me, and I laid elaborate plans to get his assistance for finishing with life. I began by asking him whether he knew where my bags and boxes were.

"There," said he, pointing to a corner of the room; and there, sure enough, they were. Erhuma himself, with the help of my cook, had packed them.

“ My pistol, then,” I said. “ Is it there ? ”

“ It is there,” he answered. I feigned an incurious desire to see it.

“ Give it to me, and I’ll clean it,” I said.

Erhuma shook his head. I offered him money. He sat on, smoking, and I thought he took a malicious pleasure in tormenting me.

“ Ah ! ” I said, “ now I am helpless you will do nothing for me. When I am well you come running like a dog if I smile at you.”

Erhuma got up and walked out of the door.

And then, long afterwards, I awoke one morning to find myself in a tent, with the noise of the camp sounding afar off ; and a young man whom I had never seen before stood at the door of the tent, with a sun helmet on his head, and hands in his trousers’ pockets. He stood with his back to me, and I called out to know who he might be.

“ Well,” said he. “ Feel better, eh ? ”

He spoke in English ; but at the sound of what he said I had already forgotten what I had meant to ask him, so I asked for a cup of water, and then fell asleep.

The doctors of the British Mission had found me apparently dying in the Azizia hospital ; and despite the protests of the Turkish doctors, who believed that such drastic treatment must kill me, they took me away from the camp and put me in an open tent in the

desert, where I lay delirious for eight or nine more days.

This mission had come out under the auspices of the All-India Moslem League ; though I hope that some of the money spent upon it came from purely British pockets. Dr. Bernard Haigh was the head of the mission, with Dr. C. E. H. Smith as his second ; and Captain Dickson-Johnson accompanied them as manager. There were also two assistants and two male nurses. They were to go into the hills beyond Gharien, to establish a hospital there, and had found me on their way through the camp. I was too sick to be taken with them, so they drew lots as to who should stay behind to nurse me, and the lot fell upon Dr. Smith.

He had me removed as far as was possible from the camp, and with only one Arab servant, and a Turkish sentry to keep guard, stayed in the desert with me, sleeping, not in the tent, but outside, at the door of it, till I could be taken up to the hills.

It was windy weather, and even in the tent the sandstorms filled the air with whirling, yellow dust. Outside it must have been miserable indeed, yet the young English doctor, sleeping unsheltered, cooking most of his own food, and rising at all hours of the night to attend to his tiresome patient, seemed invariably to be in the cheeriest of spirits.

When I grew well enough to sit up in bed we played cribbage together ; or he listened with incredible patience to monologues on the subject of what I would have to eat when I was once more allowed a square meal—typhoid convalescents are surely the most unashamedly greedy of all people—and I had many kindly visitors from the Turkish and Arab camps.

At last I was strong enough to be carried in a stretcher, borne by four Arabs, to the hills, and a very wonderful journey it was. The desert athletes, four of them taking each a pole of the stretcher on his shoulders, trotted steadily across the sand ; and, despite the weight they carried, laughed and joked, and chattered incessantly.

They told all passers-by that they carried a Roumi, one who had come from the Belad el Inglees to see the war, and had been sick with the “ hot-and-cold,” for so the Arabs term all fever.

“ This one should have died,” they said ; “ but, no ! he grows strong again ; and, Ullah ! but he’s heavy as a bull.”

The sound of their constant chattering irritated me ; but they laughed at my peevishness, and took all as a joke. Now and again they rested, laying the stretcher carefully on the ground, and it took them a little more than two days to accomplish the journey. On the

first night we halted in the hills, and the tent was set up in the darkness ; and on the next day we climbed that perilous ascent whereby I had once carried a German filter into Gharien. It was at the German hospital that I lay that night, and for two days more, in order to recover from the journey ; and right well did the kindly Germans repay the little help that I had given them when first they came.

And then at last, after one more stretcher journey, through olive woods, and high-banked lanes that ran through pleasant fields of young green wheat, I came to where the tents of the British Red Crescent Mission showed amongst the foliage of a thick grove of olives.

The British Mission took in out-patients from all the countryside, unlike the other hospitals, which treated military invalids only. Daily the little tents were thronged with sufferers from ophthalmia, and sores, and old diseases, serious from long neglect. Mothers came, bringing ailing children ; men, who had suffered long without hope of ever being cured, came every morning, confident of help, and always had it. They lost their terror of the knife when, in the surgery tent, they saw tumours and ulcerous growths removed without a sign of pain. Against ophthalmia, the curse of all lands wherein dust and flies abound, the English

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doctors waged a mighty war, and many who had hardly known daylight from darkness, blessed them for the gift of sight restored.

I think it would be neither very difficult nor very costly to minimise, if not entirely to drive out this commonest of Eastern maladies. The dreadful eye diseases from which so many lose their sight are entirely due to dirt and neglect. Sand, getting into the eyes, day after day, causes irritation, which the pestilent flies augment. Yet, from the success of the English doctors in treating out-patients for such cases, I feel sure that, given clear definite directions, and simple, cheap lotions to be used in good time, the desert nations would speedily free themselves from their plague. It is with difficulty that the Arab adopts any new custom; but, having once adopted it, he clings to it, and will observe its performances as scrupulously as though they were religious rites.

Surely it would be possible, at very little cost (compared to the benefits which would ensue) to establish First - Aid - to - the - Eye medical centres in the large towns of North Africa, Syria, and Arabia; and here and there at the great caravan-road termini. From such, boracic acid and permanganate of potash, and such disinfectants, might be dispensed cheaply, with lucid, definite instructions for their use. Were such a system instituted in a manner

suitable to the Arab temper, I know well that in a very few years every nomad household would have its chemically suitable washes for the eyes; and the use thereof would be a ritual.

The military patients of the hospital came thickly after a while; and many, notably amongst the Turks, arrived in piteous condition. For there were no stretchers to bring them over that awful journey to the hills. The sick Turkish soldier would be mounted on a camel, with an Arab sitting behind him, to hold him in his place. So he must travel in the splitting heat or howling wind, never for less than two days, often over three. Some that arrived, their heads rolling on their shoulders and their eyes fast closed, had eaten nothing since they started, already half dead from fever or dysentery, on their journey.

Many, as soon as life began to come back to them, were most unwilling to remain in hospital. They were ashamed, they said, to be so kindly treated; and before they could stagger to their feet would beg to be allowed to rejoin their comrades in the camps. Such treatment as they had got, they said, was not for common soldiers, but for officers.

To mitigate the sufferings of the invalids on their way to the hill hospitals, Captain Dickson-Johnson devised a form of stretcher, two of

which could be borne by a camel, one upon either flank. With a model of this we experimented on camels at the Zoological Gardens in London after my return, and I believe that a good number were promptly made and sent out to Tripoli, where, I hope, they are still in use.

The hardier Arab patients were less unwilling to accept the luxury of clean beds and good food in the hospital. They are a people vividly interested in all forms of medicine; and perfectly healthy men will implore drugs of any European whom they suspect of possessing any. Effervescent salts they particularly relish, holding that there must certainly be great potency against any form of disease in powders which cause water to boil without the aid of fire.

Their gratitude to the English doctors for the treatment they received was unmistakable. Dr. Haigh on one occasion extracted a bullet from the thigh of an elderly negro who had limped forty miles to hospital.

He asked the man, jokingly, "What will you give me for this bullet?"

The old man obviously wanted to have the bullet for himself. It would have made a potent charm against all further accidents, but:

"Wullahi! Keep it, thou," said he, "and ask of me also anything else I have. Aye, billah, say what I can do to please thee, and it shall be done."

The hospital lay not far from the high-road into Gharien. Up it came patients from the desert camp. Down it, with shouts and noise of drum and pipe, there still poured, almost daily, streams of men who rode and ran to join the war, having come up out of the arid heart of Africa. Sitting by the roadside, I would watch them pass, and wish them all good fortune in the war. They are not a stamp of men that I should like to see degenerate into the servile, vicious townsmen of a European scheme of civilisation. And, as I saw them swinging down the mountain passes, carrying poor weapons but very valiant hearts against the might of civilised, scientific warfare, I hoped that, to the end, they might prevail against their coward enemy as gloriously as they had done then for six long months.

XXXII

It was at Ajellak. I was on my homeward way, very near, now, to the Tunisian frontier, and the end of my desert journey. The Kaimakam of Ajellak had given a dinner, and all the Arab notables of that district were assembled. It was a dinner on the Eastern scale, with innumerable dishes—pilaf, cous-cous, fish, eggs in oil, small birds, a lamb cooked whole, and countless fruits and sweetmeats. Then came black coffee, served in tiny cups, and we smoked cigarettes and talked about the war.

The Italians had again bombarded Zuara ; but, when they tried to effect a landing, Musa Bimbashi fought them off, for perhaps the sixth time ; and all were in high cheer over the latest success.

“ They brought out air-ships and dropped shells from them,” the Kaimakam informed me, “ but they have little luck. One of their shells fell upon a tent, and bounded off, doing no harm. Others fell amongst a flock of goats, and some of those were killed. All the women

and children who were left are hiding in the palms round Rigdalin ; but it will be as it was before. Musa Bimbashi drives the Italians away, and then the people come back slowly, and put their houses in order, if they can find them. If not, they must go to the desert. So the women and the children suffer ; but the fighting men are not at all affected."

He described the Italian fleet of transports and warships that had made this latest attack upon Zuara.

"They tell me that it costs a thousand francs and more, each time a big ship's gun is fired. Ullah ! What waste ! What expense ! And who pays ? "

"The Italians hope that when they win, the Arabs and Turks will pay," I answered.

"Aye, but in the meanwhile ? " asked the Kaimakam. "Every day so many thousand francs, to pay the soldiers, and to fire the big guns. Whence comes all the money ? "

"Why, from the pockets of the Italian people."

He chuckled gleefully.

"Ah, the fools," he murmured. "If only they could know for what they pay it ! Look now, sidi, you have travelled. Save for a few small patches here and there, did you ever see a poorer, barer land than this Tripoli of ours ? "

"No," I said, "I never did."

“ And yet the people in Italy must pay, pay, pay, and send their sons out to be killed, for what ? For the chance of winning this desert from us. And even if they had it, what would it be worth ? The Turks may make peace some day ; they may be forced to do it—though that, indeed, would cause bad trouble in Syria and the Yemen. But the Aarab ! Why, even if the Turks make peace with Italy to-morrow, the Aarab will go on, for ever and ever, killing Italians as fast as they can catch them. And for that, in the hope of bringing that about, the people of Italy pay money ! ”

As I crossed the frontier two days later, the caravan-road, forward and behind, as far as eye could see, was black with camels, walking four and five abreast. How many thousand of them I saw that day I cannot estimate. I should not have thought there were so many camels in the whole of Africa. They crossed with empty pack saddles to Tunis ; and not one of them but had set out for Tripoli a week before, high-loaded with food and merchandise for the army. In another day or so they would be back again, bearing more supplies into the desert ; for this was one of those vast supply columns which Italy can never intercept.

Outside the court-yard of the frontier fort at Shusha, a well-dressed Arab drew me by the sleeve aside. He was a young man, well-

made, and of a prosperous aspect, and, I learned a little later, was the son of a wealthy merchant of Gafsa.

He said to me: "Engage me as your servant, and take me with you into Tripoli."

I said: "I cannot. I go to Europe, having just left Tripoli. Nor do you seem likely to do a servant's work."

"Not I," he answered. "It shall be a pretence only—no work for me and no pay. Nay, I will bring my own horse, and pay for my own food; but let me seem to be your servant, and give me a writing in French to say that it is so."

"I tell you," said I, "that I have left Tripoli, and shall not return. And why should you wish to go as my servant? Go alone: the road is easy."

"I cannot," he replied. "The French will not allow it. There are many who would cross from this side to fight against the Italians; but the French have stopped all that. Without a special paper, none may cross, unless he is engaged by some Roumi as a servant, and can show a paper to prove it."

"Well," said I, "I can't help you. But, for a clever man there should be means to cross."

"Aye, and be sure I'll find them," answered he. "Spite of the French, some of our lads get over every day. I'll not be behind, when

there's a war against God's enemies not five days' ride away."

He wished me peace, and, flinging a corner of his haik over his shoulder, stepped through an archway of the court-yard and disappeared.

I stood on the battlements of the fort as the sun was setting. A chill wind blew from the east, and the endless train of camels moved through a golden haze. I could hear, indistinctly, the cries of the drivers to the slow-moving beasts, and now that I was back again upon the fringe of a civilised land, the hooded figures of bare-footed men, and the uncouth, fantastic beasts beside which they walked, seemed creatures of another world.

Ibrahim, the pallid young Spahi interpreter, came up and stood beside me, looking across the desert towards Tripoli.

"Well, Ibrahim," I said, "what do you think will be the end of it all over there?"

The Spahi smiled quietly, looking down at the host of his untamed brothers marching by their camels.

"No end, monsieur," he answered. "Only war; always war."

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